

New Zealand first in the world to prove NZ HPS approach drives significant improvements in student outcomes

Health Promoting Schools, a health and wellbeing approach funded by the Ministry of Health, delivers parental engagement and student well-being.

- In HPS schools, 60% of attendance improvements are explained by involvement in HPS
- 42% of decrease in student stand-downs and suspensions explained to involvement in HPS
- Students reading performance in HPS schools was 29% higher on average than in non-HPS schools.

New Zealand Health Promoting Schools (HPS), a national health and wellbeing approach used by 1565 schools, has proven its effectiveness in improving school attendance and lifting student achievement in reading, according to a [new study](#) commissioned by the HPS National Leadership and Co-ordination Service (Cognition Education) for the Ministry of Health.

What is HPS?

Rather than provide a 'one size fits all' programme, HPS in New Zealand guides schools to collaborate with students, parents, whānau, and the wider community to develop their own ideas and activities to improve the well-being of children and adults.

The HPS National Leadership and Co-ordination Service (NLCS) together with the HPS workforce (facilitators in District Health Boards) and school leaders developed this unique New Zealand HPS approach.

The New Zealand HPS approach was guided by St Leger's (1999) observation that "the health sector had largely ignored the vast literature on school organisation and improvement, teaching and learning practices, professional development, and innovation and dissemination...schools are complex places and the way forward in school health requires more sophisticated theoretical models which are based on both health and educational frameworks" (pg. 65).

The New Zealand HPS approach and theory for improvement was therefore based on sound evidence from both the health and education sector on how to improve health, wellbeing, and education outcomes in school communities. As an outcome of improving the health and wellbeing of students, the approach seeks to have measurable positive impact on student outcomes, specifically, learning behaviours and achievement.

Previous research has found that different aspects of students learning and performance have benefited from improvements in their health and wellbeing. Building on this research, this analysis was aimed at assessing the impact of the HPS approach on the targeted student outcomes of increased attendance and achievement, and decreased transience, suspensions, and stand-downs.

Independent analysis found NZ HPS approach is highly effective

The study found that HPS makes a significant contribution to achieving improvements in schools – in particular increases in attendance and reading achievement, and reductions in stand downs and suspensions. No other HPS service globally has been able to prove that the HPS approach drives significantly better education outcomes.

By comparison health promotion only in schools did not have an impact on student outcomes

In addition the comparative results showed that HPS schools who were participating in generic health promotion initiatives only (i.e., with health and wellbeing priorities only) did not have the impact on student outcomes. In fact, findings showed that there were little, if any, differences in student outcomes between these schools and non-HPS schools. Therefore, the report recommended that the New Zealand HPS approach should be adopted as an over-arching framework to support the implementation of health and wellbeing initiatives.

Waiharara School

Many schools from tiny rural district schools in the Far North or Southland to multi-cultural city schools in West Auckland and Titahi Bay, Wellington, have worked with HPS facilitators to review their school systems and processes from a whole of school approach, linking education priorities with health and well-being needs. Following the review, schools work with students, parents, whānau and others to develop and implement new actions that are aligned to the school's and teachers' goals.

In the Far North at [Waiharara School](#), which is 100 per cent Māori, the principal, Toni O'Neill, enabled students to lead a community-wide inquiry into hauora (well-being) and what it meant to them and their whānau. The school community, prompted by Josephine Nathan their HPS facilitator, identified the importance of physical, spiritual, family/whānau and mental health. The students made a video which helped them form a view of hauora and whānau support. Students and teachers collaborated with the community and whānau through meetings at the marae, to develop their approach to learning – which has included beach clean-up days, and a hikoi organised by their iwi about healthy people and healthy nature.

HPS is delivering for the school. See here for [TV3 showcase](#) of Waiharara School. It now has more than 90% whānau engagement from a low of 10% less than a year ago. Its roll has increased by 42% as whānau have new confidence in the school. Evidence is also appearing of accelerated learning for at risk students and Year One students achieving at or above the National standards after 40 weeks at school. Year Two students are at or above the national standard.

“The more that parents and whānau are involved in decisions about health/wellbeing and education the more their children will learn and achieve at school,” says Toni.

We are thrilled that a school receiving the HPS service was showcased on National highlighting the positive outcomes that are explained by involvement in HPS and the importance of developing educationally powerful relationships with parents/caregivers.

National survey of parents of school aged children in NZ

Our effectiveness research also shows that schools that successfully improve student outcomes have focussed on developing educationally powerful relationships with parents/caregivers. In July 2017 the HPS NLCS commissioned a survey of 1,000 New Zealand school parents/caregivers aimed at finding out what concerns they held about their children.

The survey found that:

- parents of children in low decile schools and non-Europeans are most concerned about the well-being and learning of their children.
- the health and wellbeing of children is an area of **great concern for parents**, and both physical and emotional are their top priorities
- parents recognize the efforts schools are making, but many **struggle to define specific initiatives or impacts** outside physical activity and nutrition. Importantly, initiatives to address mental wellbeing are not well known.

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