RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This report describes New Zealand parents’ beliefs about the capacity of the current education environment to meet the educational needs of their children.

Monash University’s Faculty of Education developed this report based on a survey of more than 800 New Zealand parents, grandparents and guardians. Of the New Zealand participants, nearly 350 were members of ASG and 500 were drawn from the general population.

The survey included 100 items in a questionnaire best summarised under two broad themes.

The first theme describes the educational environment as understood by parents. This environment includes:

- Educational aspirations such as motivations, homework and attention
- Educational resources such as finances, culture, infrastructure, social and quality curriculum
- Learning resources such as their child’s health, knowledge and skills, attention, goals and application that are exclusively used to support educational achievement.

Parents’ aspirations for their child’s higher education play a role in the educational environment of children. Both the educational and learning resources, as perceived by parents, have a basis in the research that describes the conditions for the development of academic achievement.

The second theme focuses on the challenges facing their child’s learning as perceived by parents. As well as asking parents to indicate the three greatest challenges facing their child’s learning, parents also responded to questions regarding their child’s use of screen-based technologies, and the problems their child faces at school.

Parents also provided demographic information such as their relationship to their child (mother, father, grandparent etc.), their child’s age, year level, school type (state, state integrated, private) and ethnic identity, among others.

After receiving email invitations to participate, parents responded to the questions using an online survey.

CONTEXT OF STUDY

Education continues to be an important issue for New Zealand parents. The role of parenting in the educational achievement of children, along with the increasing concerns about the impact of new technologies on children’s learning, continue to dominate debates centred on the future of education.

More broadly, educational policy continues to encourage school-parent partnerships. For these partnerships to be successful, our research shows that many parents need to feel valued and empowered. However, many schools simply do not understand the diversity of parents, not only in terms of cultural background, but also in terms of the differences between mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, and primary and secondary school needed to establish this sense of partnership.

At a national level, government continues to be concerned about falling standards as reflected by international tests of academic performance such as the Programme for International Student Assessment and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study. The simplistic solution has always been to allocate additional funding to education. It is clear that this solution is inadequate and ASG believes that when the challenges facing parents and their children are better understood, the existing resources can be better managed.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ASG Parents Report Card investigates the state of education using three indexes: aspirations, educational resources and learning resources.

The ASG Parents Report Card is the only report of its kind to provide a holistic snapshot of the current educational environment, as perceived by parents. While educators and policy makers can provide insight into the academic and political landscape of education, only parents have the ability to link the impact of home and school life with the learning success of their children.

As one of the most influential stakeholders within the education community, the report measures parents’ perceptions of the current learning environment for children.

Looking back, the 2015 ASG Parents Report Card revealed parental aspirations were the most important resource in their child’s long-term education.

Many parents are confident their child has access to enough resources to support their basic educational aspirations, however they would like to have more money to support their child’s long-term education.

Parents have high aspirations for their children, with many setting their sights on children’s higher education. In fact, some have earmarked a university for their child to attend.

The Learning Resources Index of 2.83 (out of a possible 4) indicates that parents generally agree that their children’s health, skills and knowledge and learning goals are sufficient to support their children’s academic achievement.

However, parents believe that their children could pay more attention to their studies (attentional) in order to achieve academically.

Parents feel time management is one of the three greatest challenges facing their child’s learning with three in 10 parents concerned with their child’s ability to balance time spent learning and time participating in extra-curricular activities.

The Educational Resources Index uses the following factors to measure how parents view their child’s educational environment:

- Families’ financial capacity (economic)
- Cultural value systems and thinking patterns (cultural)
- Social educational support from parents, teachers, peers and institutions (social)
- Infrastructure, learning technologies and physical resources such as those found in learning centres, schools and at home (infrastructural)
- Educational access, including access to quality teaching, best practice teaching methods and associated curriculum (didactic)

The Educational Resources Index for 2016 is 2.91 (out of a total 4). In general, parents agree that there is less school pressure on their children; they are more focussed with clearer learning goals and believe their children are more mentally and physically fit.

Clear learning goals by children and a motivation to succeed are key indicators of achievement:

- Parents feel time management is one of the three greatest challenges facing their child’s learning with three in 10 parents concerned with their child’s ability to balance time spent learning and time participating in extra-curricular activities.

- In comparison with Australian parents, a higher percentage of New Zealand parents agree that there is less school pressure on their children, they are more focussed with clearer learning goals and believe their children are more mentally and physically fit.

The Learning Resources Index uses the following factors to measure how parents view their child’s educational environment:

- Mental and physical health (organismic)
- Skills and knowledge acquired by a child (actional)
- A child’s approach and goals that allow for effective learning (telic)
- A child’s capacity to apply skills and learning in a given learning environment (episodic)
- A child’s capacity to attend to a learning task (attentional)
The ASG Parents Report Card measures the educational aspirations of parents for their children.

The ASG Parents Report Card found the majority of parents had relatively high educational aspirations for their children, and that aspirations was found to be an important factor in a child’s educational success (2.79 points out of a score of 4).

As you would expect, most parents want their children to aim high. Eighty five per cent of parents agree that higher education is important for their children, and more than seven out of 10 parents think a degree will help their child achieve their ambitions.

Aspirations by parents’ education level

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Parents surveyed also reported their highest educational level. Most parents were university educated (55 per cent), followed by 19 per cent of parents with vocational education and 25 per cent with secondary school education. A small number of parents reported their highest education as primary school. Not surprisingly, university educated parents have the highest educational aspirations for their children wanting the same life opportunities and experiences for their children.

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As you would expect, most parents want their children to aim high. Eighty five per cent of parents agree that higher education is important for their children, and more than seven out of 10 parents think a degree will help their child achieve their ambitions.

The ASG Parents Report Card also found that over a quarter of parents have earmarked a university for their child to attend, while over six out of 10 parents frequently talk to their child about higher education.

However, there is a sense of realism with 93 per cent of parents understanding that academic success comes from hard work. While high aspirations can foster great achievement when the goals are realistic, high aspirations that are unrealistic may negatively impact a child’s performance.

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HELPING CHILDREN TO SUCCEED

There are many studies that have looked at the role parents can play in motivating their child to succeed and the importance of teaching children to cultivate a healthy relationship with achievement.

Many parents instinctively default to praising their children for being smart, creative or intelligent. The psychology theory of having a ‘growth mindset’ says that parents should praise children’s effort and not their ability or outcome. The important thing is to make children feel successful; when this happens they are more likely to succeed (Dweck 2006).

Some strategies parents can use include:

- Praise efforts and persistence
- Talk to them about what they want to do and why
- Talk to them about learning from failure and seeing it as a springboard for growth and more learning.

MOTIVATION TO SUCCEED

It is generally accepted that motivation means having a reason for reaching the goals you want. Parents certainly agree with this notion with 71 per cent believing that their child has clear learning goals.

Parents’ desire for their child’s success and achievement also contributes to a strong motivation to succeed with nearly all (94 per cent) parents believing their child aims to do their best in their learning. Almost all parents (98 per cent) believe their child is happy when they succeed at a test of project.

Many parents also believe their children are high achievers (70 per cent) because they have the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed.
THE GREAT HOMEWORK DEBATE

While it's a universal fact that many children generally don't enjoy homework, our findings show that parents believe girls have the edge on boys when it comes to independent study.

In fact, completing homework remains a sore spot, even for the most motivated students; only four out of 10 parents (40 per cent) are confident that their child will complete their homework without stopping. This becomes even more obvious for parents with boys. Forty nine per cent of parents agree their daughters will not stop homework until complete, however this drops to 34 per cent of parents with boys.

For parents, being able to complete homework is an indicator that their child can focus on their schoolwork.
- Almost six out of 10 parents (57 per cent) have to continually prompt their child to study. For parents with boys, 63 per cent are in agreement, whereas only 51 per cent of parents believe they have to often remind their girls to study.
- Forty-eight per cent of parents with daughters tend to believe that their daughters are able to pay more attention on their schoolwork better compared to parents with sons (40 per cent).

PAY ATTENTION, DON'T GET DISTRACTED AND DO YOUR WORK!

According to the ASG Parents Report Card, 76 per cent of parents believe that their child can be distracted from their learning.

When asked what their biggest challenges were, many parents reported time as a major concern, including distractions from peers and extra-curricular activities.

Time constraints such as a child’s lack of time, due to a busy before and after school timetable, can interfere with the time set aside for completing homework and studying. New Zealand parents also signalled time constraints and stress as a barrier for their children not being able to hand in their assignments on time. However, parents also feel the pressure of not having enough time, which limits them from being able to fully support their children with homework tasks.

TOP STUDY TIPS

- Talk with your child about how they are going to tackle homework and set some ground rules. It is a good idea to work with the teacher to help your child develop a homework plan.
- Homework should have a clear purpose e.g. is the goal to reinforce their learning or help them from being able to fully support their children with homework tasks.
- Have a clean designated homework space and set a regular time for homework.
- Let your child do the homework, not you.
- Remember to praise your child for the effort they put into their work.
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TIME POOR PARENTS; TIME POOR CHILDREN

Three in 10 (31 per cent) parents feel that time management is one of the three greatest challenges facing their child’s learning. When explored further, one third (32 per cent) of these parents are particularly concerned with their child’s ability to balance time spent learning, and time participating in extra-curricular activities including sport, play and potentially part-time work for older secondary school children.

It is also interesting to note that while many parents feel their children may not spend enough time learning, some are concerned that their children are under too much pressure to learn, and struggle to find enough leisure time.

DOES MONEY MATTER IN EDUCATION?

The ASG Parents Report Card shows that money does play a vital role in the education of children. Over a quarter of parents (26 per cent) feel they must work two jobs to ensure a successful education for their child, while more than half (56 per cent) admit they cannot afford after school tuition if needed.

In addition, 85 per cent of parents wish they had more money to support their child’s education. Despite the financial pressure, many parents (63 per cent) say their child has access to a homework or study club to support their learning. This could be a resource provided by the school or one paid for by the parents.

When asked about their main challenges regarding resources, parents are more concerned with the lack of resources at their child’s school, rather than resources at home. For parents, there seems to be a link between a lack of resources at school and their child’s interest in their subjects.

STATE/STATE INTEGRATED VS PRIVATE: WHAT DO PARENTS THINK?

Many parents in New Zealand choose to send their children to state schools.* Parents sending their children to private schools believe that their children have access to a better curriculum than parents who are sending their children to state or state integrated schools. Private school parents not only tend to have higher educational aspirations, but also perceive that their children have better learning goals.

Parents generally agree that there are sufficient physical resources to support their child’s learning. However, parents of children attending private schools generally believe that their children have better access to physical resources compared to parents of children attending state or state integrated schools.

When analysing parents’ responses to their biggest educational challenges, financial resources are the greatest of their concerns.

For these parents, other factors related to the school environment and what happens in the classroom are of less concern. Parents also agree that their child’s social resources (interactions with peers, teachers, adults) are sufficient to meet their child’s academic needs.

*New Zealand Now: https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/living-in-nz/education/school-system
NEW ZEALAND VERSUS AUSTRALIAN PARENTS

The ASG Parents Report Card found some differences between New Zealand and Australian parents with respect to their children’s education and well being.

Most parents want their children to be happy and this is more important than their academic achievement.

Overall New Zealand parents think that their children are more likely to be happier at school in comparison to Australian parents. For example New Zealand parents feel their children face less school pressure, are more focused with clear learning goals and believe their children are more mentally and physically fit in comparison to Australian school children.

Fewer New Zealand parents (36 per cent) also indicated their children feel nervous and stressed about their schoolwork, which increases to 42 per cent for Australian parents.

Children’s mental and physical health are important contributors towards being happy and can affect a young person’s learning and success at school. Not only are New Zealand parents more likely to think their children are more physically fit, less than half of New Zealand parents (47 per cent) believe their child becomes angry because of things they can’t control in comparison to 57 per cent of Australian parents. Just over one fifth of New Zealand parents (21 per cent) agree their child’s health has affected their academic achievement in comparison to more than one quarter (26 per cent) of Australian parents.

In the first edition of the ASG Parents Report Card, we established that teachers and parents need to communicate more effectively and work more closely together to achieve a better educational environment for children. The 2016 ASG Parents Report Card also found more than half of New Zealand parents (57 per cent) had to remind their child to study in comparison to 62 per cent of Australian parents and fewer New Zealand parents (48 per cent) struggled to limit their child’s use of screen based devices which rises to 55 per cent of Australian parents.

The ASG Parents Report Card found parents generally think favourably of teachers with nine out of 10 (89 per cent) believing that their child’s teacher is very capable.

While most parents also think that their child’s teacher is highly educated (87 per cent), a smaller number of parents don’t agree. The concerns of such parents are related to their belief that teachers are sometimes unable to deal with children who show signs of behavioural issues, helping their child remain focussed and the capacity of the teacher to engage their child in learning subjects such as mathematics and other skills that are considered to be the basics.

This perception could be due to parental expectations of what they think their child should know at a particular stage in their learning.

Some examples of perceptions that parents have include:

- Teachers are not able to understand that every child has their own way of learning, hence not able to provide the right support.
- The concerns of parents could also highlight a gap in their understanding of what teachers do in the classroom.
- It is possible that involving parents more in their children’s day-to-day learning could change such parental perceptions.
- Certainly, more communication between teachers and parents would be highly beneficial for the child’s development.

WHAT DO PARENTS THINK OF THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM?

Both parents and educators have a high stake in a child’s development so it is a good thing that over eight out of 10 (84 per cent) parents are confident that the current school curriculum will help their children with their future career. Parents also believe that the current curriculum and teaching quality is ensuring that their children have the skills they need, including problem solving (93 per cent) and computing skills (79 per cent).

However, about one fifth (22 per cent) of parents believe that the current school curriculum is failing to motivate their child. In this instance, parents are concerned with the quality of teaching with some teachers perceived as being unable to handle individual differences in their students.

Some examples of perceptions that parents have include:

- Teachers are so bogged down in what is in the curriculum that it doesn’t leave enough time to teach the basics.
- Teachers should be better trained to teach children of both high IQ and autism.
- Teachers’ attitudes; some are so enthusiastic and encouraging and others less so.
- Teachers are not able to help in class when the child is facing problems with study.
- Teachers are not able to understand that every child has their own way of learning, hence not able to provide the right support.
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PARENTS RATE TEACHERS HIGHLY BUT HAVE SOME CONCERNS

84% PARENTS CONFIDENT CURRICULUM WILL HELP FUTURE CAREERS
ASG and Monash University’s Faculty of Education, Melbourne, Australia have been working together on various education initiatives since 2012.

The ASG Parents Report Card is the culmination of many months of intensive research and analysis by the two organisations.

ASG developed the concept of the index and the Faculty of Education at Monash University created the questionnaire instrument and research methodology.

The survey findings were analysed and compiled by ASG and Associate Professor Shane N. Phillipson and Associate Professor Sivanes Phillipson of the Faculty of Education at Monash University (see biographies below).

Sivanes Phillipson is Associate Professor of Family Studies at the Faculty of Education, Monash University Clayton Campus. Sivanes has diverse international experience and knowledge base in the broad field of early childhood and child development services. Sivanes has published over 95 pieces of work including books, peer reviewed journals, conference papers and book chapters.

Sivanes is the Routledge Series Editor for the Evolving Families Book Series. Her 2016 book published with Springer is entitled Engaging Families as Children’s First Mathematics Educators: International Perspectives. Shane’s co-authored book Learning and teaching in the Chinese classroom (The Hong Kong University Press) was published in November 2011 (and in February 2013 as a Chinese translation).


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