



# Learning in a Covid-19 World: **How school leadership rose to the challenge**

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has caused significant disruption to schools in New Zealand, with principals and school leaders taking on a lot of responsibility. The Education Review Office interviewed principals and board chairs and surveyed 1777 principals across the country from May through to September 2020 to understand how they have responded.

It is clear from this research that school leaders have gone above and beyond to meet students' needs and the needs of their whānau. The evidence shows that they have:

- brought communities together and strengthened connections
- supported teachers to do their jobs
- been resilient whilst shouldering more responsibility.

There have been significant challenges for school leaders to overcome. This short research excerpt shares the key findings and examples of good practice of how school leadership has responded across New Zealand to Covid-19.

## **School leadership has played a key role in bringing communities together to respond to Covid-19**

### *Highlights included:*

Eight out of 10 teachers felt their school had responded effectively. In a quarter of schools, leaders explicitly reported that they were proud of the way their communities had come together in a crisis and that the experience had had benefits in terms of building connections.

"Our caretaker dropped off desks and chairs to students that requested them with the tractor all around our village."

Teacher

### Leaders supported teachers through lockdown and afterwards and stepped in when needed to help resolve issues with their students

#### Highlights included:

Three quarters of teachers felt supported by their colleagues and seven out of 10 felt their school leaders had supported them to resolve challenges related to student learning.

In terms of leadership, the greatest challenge was how to make really good decisions for everyone... managing everyone's needs. Wellness, being kind and caring were a focus."

Principal

### Boards of Trustees supported principals to make the decisions they needed to make

#### Highlights included:

Three quarters of teachers felt their board had effectively supported the school during Covid-19.

"I think we were very fortunate with our board. We were all there supporting each other, and all decisions were collective decisions."

Principal

### Principals have been resilient, despite having to shoulder a lot more responsibility during the Covid-19 pandemic

#### Highlights included:

Two thirds of principals felt happy at work and when asked, in September, the majority of principals were feeling positive about the rest of the school year.

"Everyone is sitting on my shoulders so I can't afford to fall over or everyone falls over."

Principal

This summary is an early release from this research. ERO will release the full findings from its *Learning in a Covid-19 World* research programme early in the new year. This will include the impact Covid-19 has had on students, teachers and principals and the practical actions school leaders can take in 2021 to support students, whānau, and teachers with the ongoing challenges of Covid-19.



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