



# Learning in a Covid-19 World: A guide for supporting Pacific learners

We know that Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on Pacific learners and communities. This guide shares some ideas and strategies that have worked well to support Pacific learners, which could be useful for your school.

ERO's new report, *Learning in a Covid-19 World: The Impact of Covid-19 on Pacific Learners*, goes into detail about the disproportionately negative impact of the pandemic on Pacific learners' achievement, attendance, mental health, wellbeing, and education pathways. It uses a range of evidence to shine a light on challenges and share successful strategies.

This guide draws from that report, focusing on the practical actions that have been working well for leaders and teachers of Pacific learners.

## Effective strategies to support Pacific learners

To better understand the realities of teaching and learning in the context of Covid-19, ERO looked at a range of data (such as attendance and achievement data) and sought the voices of hundreds of Pacific learners and their families, teachers, and leaders, over the course of the ongoing pandemic.

We wanted to learn about what works and what sorts of strategies are in place in schools where Pacific students are well-supported to be engaged and successful in their learning.

These are grouped into four main ideas and are outlined in this guide. We've also included some questions to guide reflective discussions between leaders and teachers at your school.

### **What works: Having a school culture that celebrates Pacific identities and prioritises Pacific learners' achievement**

Schools where Pacific learners did well over the pandemic already had an embedded culture of building and maintaining strong, culturally responsive relationships with Pacific learners, their families, and their communities, as well as prioritising Pacific learners' achievement.

#### Strategies we heard about:

- Valuing Pacific cultures, through learner-led and school-hosted cultural performances and celebrations of language weeks.
- Including Pacific words and concepts in the school vocabulary, introducing Pacific language classes into the curriculum, and providing specific support and guidance for teachers on how to engage appropriately with Pacific learners and their families.

- For schools that have a 'Pacific Portfolio', allocating this to a senior leader, signalling the importance the school places on Pacific learner outcomes.
- Setting up a working group, including learners, parents, deans and senior leaders, to investigate and share successful strategies for Pacific learners.

### Some questions for reflection

- Are Pacific cultures visible and valued in our school environment and curriculum? How might we build on this?
- How could we provide more opportunities for our Pacific learners to take the lead?
- Are there links we can make between the school curriculum and our Pacific learners' cultural knowledge and their engagement in cultural activities?
- Could we strengthen our shared understandings of how best to engage with Pacific learners, families, and communities? (The resources at the end of this guide could help.)

### What works: Knowing your Pacific learners and supporting their learning needs

We can't assume that learners will let their school know when they are struggling. Schools where Pacific achievement was going well had a strong focus on building their relationships with Pacific learners and understanding their home contexts. This meant they were well-equipped to notice, and take action, when learners were having difficulties.

#### Strategies we heard about:

- Being proactive and persistent. Leaders and teachers found lots of opportunities to connect with families during periods of offsite learning – such as senior leaders personally delivering devices.
- Recognising that some learners have limited working spaces at home, or home contexts they weren't comfortable sharing with classmates. Teachers allowed learners to have their cameras or microphones switched off during video sessions for privacy, helping them focus on the learning at hand.

- Creating Zoom 'office hours' to encourage learners to seek support. Teachers found that some Pacific learners didn't feel confident asking for help in front of the larger group.

#### Some questions for reflection

- What do we know about the home contexts of each of our Pacific learners?
- What sort of things might be getting in the way of our Pacific learners engaging remotely in their schooling? What could we try, to make things easier for them?

### What works: Combining wellbeing and attendance and achievement

While the schools whose Pacific learners did well over the course of the pandemic had a wellbeing first approach, they often thought about wellbeing *and* attendance together, or wellbeing *and* achievement together.

#### Strategies we heard about:

- Carving out time at the start of the day to focus on connection with peers, before shifting focus to learning activities.
- Using intensive tutorials to help learners catch up. At one senior secondary school, tutorials held at distinct, advertised times provided opportunities to earn NCEA credits, encouraging both achievement and attendance.
- Facilitating tuakana-teina mentor groups to grow connectedness through the school and enhance wellbeing. Staff were attached to these groups as 'academic monitors', using data to support the tuakana and the teachers of the teina to provide targeted support for each learner.
- Having barbeques at the school every day, to provide opportunities for learners to reconnect socially. This also provided additional motivation to turn up to school and, for those in senior secondary school, to get NCEA credits.
- Holding 'Pacific Wānanga', with Pacific teachers and Pacific learners from all year levels, focusing on learners' academic challenges. Leaders found that this mirrored a village arrangement, creating connections in an environment that was focused on learning.

### Some questions for reflection

- What are our levels of achievement, attendance and wellbeing looking like for our Pacific learners?
- Could we find more opportunities to blend learning activities with wellbeing events?
- When do Pacific students, of different year levels, get to connect with one another about their learning? How might we as a school facilitate this?
- Thinking about the Pacific learners at our school – what do we know motivates them to attend and engage at school (or online learning)? How can we weave these motivators into the school curriculum?

### What works: Balancing learning and living

Pacific learners achieved well when schools recognised that it wasn't useful to make learners feel guilty about having work or family commitments that clashed with traditional timetables. Instead, they found creative strategies to support learners to manage both.

### Strategies we heard about:

- Providing multiple ways to engage. Learners could attend class, live-stream from home or access downloadable content. This meant they could complete their schoolwork at times that worked for them and their families.
- Having 'subject days' instead of covering multiple subjects in a day. Learners could then attend as much as they could, while minimising the impact of times they had to miss.
- Identifying which learners would benefit from the stricter routines of being back in the classroom, and proactively engaging with them to get them back to school.

### Some questions for reflection

- Do we know what other commitments our Pacific learners have, on top of school?
- How well does our timetable structure support our Pacific learners to engage with learning in and around their other commitments? How could we make things more accessible?

## Useful resources

You can find the full report on the impact of Covid-19 on Pacific learners, along with other reports on learning in the context of Covid-19, on ERO's website [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz).

- [Tapasā framework](#)
- [Best practice for teaching Pacific learners: Pacific Evidence Brief 2019](#)
- [Action plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030: Supporting research and community voice](#)
- [Research to understand the features of quality Pacific bilingual education: Review of best practices](#)
- [Language Enhancing the Achievement of Pasifika \(LEAP\)](#)

ERO is grateful for the time of all those who we surveyed and interviewed while conducting our research for this report. We would like to thank all the participating learners, teachers, and principals for generously sharing their experiences in dealing with the impacts of Covid-19. Your contribution enables us to shine a light on shared experiences of challenge and success, and to provide advice and support as we look ahead to an uncertain future.



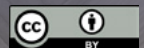
EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE  
Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga

[www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz)



**Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government

Learning in a Covid-19 World: A guide for supporting Pacific learners  
Published 2022 © Crown Copyright  
Digital: 978-1-99-103001-6 Print: 978-1-99-103000-9



Except for the Education Review Office's logo used throughout this report, this copyright work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand licence. In essence, you are free to copy, distribute and adapt the work, as long as you attribute the work to the Education Review Office and abide by the other licence terms. In your attribution, use the wording 'Education Review Office', not the Education Review Office logo or the New Zealand Government logo.