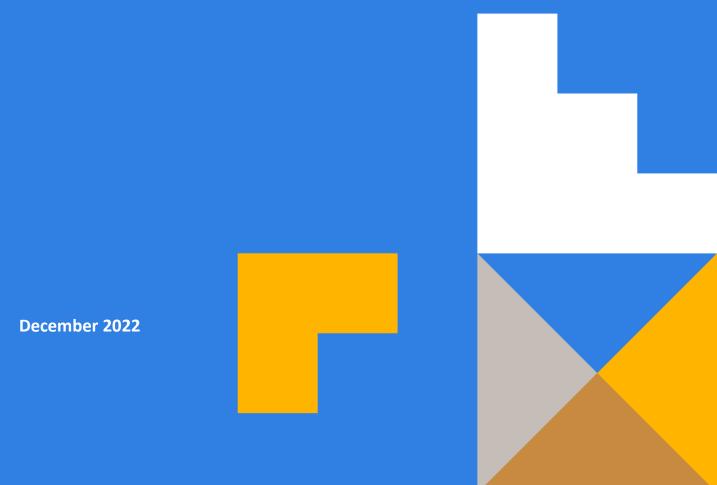# From Tokenistic to Authentic Inclusion

Including communities in school board decision making

A summary

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Acknowledgements

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This document outlines ways that school boards can be more inclusive in their approach to inclusion, moving away from tokenistic approaches. This is intended to support school boards and senior leaders to assess their systems and processes and ensure they authentically include diverse communities.

It is important for schools to include the diverse views of the groups that make up a school's community to ensure they authentically represent the interests of those the school seeks to serve. This requires a clear distinction between tokenistic and authentic approaches to inclusion, outlining practices that can help move toward improved community consultation and decision-making. This includes outlining the obligations that schools have as Crown entities of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Processes such as community engagement can be conducted more authentically when boards design engagement processes that are realistic, time effective, have accountability, are transparent, and are aligned with the Education and Training Act and other policy guidelines.

We welcome ongoing feedback on how you have used this resource and what suggestions you would like to contribute. For feedback and suggestions please email:

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Introduction

Opportunities to authentically include the diverse views of the groups making up a school's community are important to ensure that the school board understand and represent the interests of those likely to be impacted by the decisions made. The report aims to investigate the distinction between **tokenistic** and **authentic** approaches to the inclusion of school communities in the decision-making processes adopted by Aotearoa New Zealand school boards. To achieve this, the current approach to community engagement is analysed and suggestions are made about what a more authentic approach to inclusion could look like in governance-level decision-making processes.

The report is pracademic in nature and can be used as a how-to guide for school boards or a learning tool for those wanting to learn more about community engagement in the context of New Zealand school board decision-making.

Part One establishes the conceptual relationship between inclusion and community engagement. This is followed by an analysis of the current approach to community engagement required of Aotearoa New Zealand schools and the barriers limiting its effectiveness. **Part Two** draws on community engagement literature to outline what an authentic approach to inclusion could look like in the context of governance decisions made in Aotearoa New Zealand schools. This model is theoretical only. It seeks to overcome the barriers identified in Part One and provide a framework within which the views of the school community are more meaningfully included in the decisions made.

Parts Three through Five investigate what this approach could look like in practice. Each section is based on the framework established in Part Two and suggests tools that could be used to facilitate effective community engagement. **Part Three** investigates how school boards can ensure they are honouring their obligations as Crown entities of Te Tiriti o Waitangi by fostering effective partnerships with local hapū, iwi, and Māori organisations when making governance decisions. **Part Four** looks at how students could be more directly included in the decisions made by their school boards. Finally, **Part Five** focuses on how school boards can honour the unique identity characteristics of their student community when making governance decisions that potentially impact them.

Inclusion and community engagement

It is important that the definition of inclusion used when exploring the role of the school community in governance decisions is broad and centred around representing the interests of the diverse groups within the wider school community. In this report, inclusion refers to:

The principle and action of including a diverse range of views and opinions held by the wider school community in the governance decisions made by school boards.

This involves consideration of the views of specific interest groups within the school community such as students, whānau, school staff, and the local Māori community alongside consideration of ability, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, culture, and class in the decisions made. This concept of inclusion will be drawn on for the remainder of this paper to analyse whether current engagement approaches meaningfully include schools' communities in the decisions made and what an authentic approach to inclusion could look like for school boards.

Inclusion and community engagement are closely connected. Community engagement is one avenue through which the perspectives of diverse groups can be included in governance decisions. This relationship, applied to the context of school board decision-making, underpins the report.

Community engagement can be defined as (DPMC, 2021):

"Engaging individuals and groups from the community to participate in policy design and development – through: providing information; asking for feedback and reaction; involving people; collaboration; [and] empowering decision making and action."

Within community engagement, a focus on inclusion is important to ensure communities trust how their input will be used. This requires a focus on inclusion practices, defined by Kathryn Quick and Martha Feldman (2011, p. 272) in a study on planning education research, as practices that involve "continuously creating a community involved in coproducing processes, policies, and programs for defining and addressing public issues." Any engagement approach adopted should aspire to include relevant communities, in this context schools' communities, throughout decision-making processes. However, in practice, this is difficult with both sides facing barriers to implementing inclusive community engagement approaches.

An Overview

10 top tips for including the school community in governance decisions.

1 School boards should seek to understand the nature of their wider school community. This involves adopting an equity lens to understand the different facets of the wider school community, the power imbalances present, and any perceived or actual barriers to effective community engagement.

2 Identifying relevant stakeholders early in the decision-making process supports school boards in designing engagement approaches that meet the needs of these groups, therefore increasing their ability to participate in community engagement.

3 Community engagement approaches should be underpinned by strong principles that are understood and clearly communicated to school boards, staff, students, and the wider school community.

4 School boards should seek to foster strong, trust-based, active, and reciprocal relationships between the board and different facets of the schools' communities.

5 The design of engagement approaches is integral to the success of community engagement and should be decided early in the decision-making process.

6 The community engagement approach adopted and tools utilised should be scaled to reflect the scope of the issue(s) at hand, the capacity of participants to be involved, and the potential impacts of the decision(s).

7 School boards should understand their obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and adopt decision-making processes that support mutually beneficial partnerships with schools' local Māori communities.

8 Opportunities to include authentic student voice should be pursued beyond current legislative and policy requirements to ensure that no student would be adversely impacted by the decisions made.

9 Community engagement methods should support gathering input from the wide range of students that make up the student population. This involves adapting tools used to meet the needs of these diverse groups.

10 To complement the community engagement approaches adopted, school boards should have established accountability and transparency measures, clear communication channels, and monitoring and evaluation processes.

Part One: The Current Approach to Inclusion

Part One establishes the theoretical relationship between inclusion, diversity and community engagement, outlines the current engagement requirements for Aotearoa New Zealand school boards, and identifies the barriers currently impacting the efficacy of community consultation.

Aotearoa New Zealand school boards are required to facilitate consultation with their school communities when making certain types of governance decisions under the Education and Training Act 2020. These requirements mandate consultation only and do not include requirements about how feedback is to be used in decision-making. This can result in engagement efforts being perceived as "checklist items" rather than genuine efforts to include the school community in decisions that may impact them. To ensure that engagement approaches are effective school boards should consider opportunities to increase their accountability and transparency to the school community and work to build close relationships with the school community to understand how engagement approaches could be designed to increase their motivation and ability to be involved.

Top tips

- Ensure that board members understand the relationship between community engagement and inclusion.
- Ensure that boards understand when they are required to facilitate engagement.
- Ensure that boards understand their legal requirements when undertaking consultation.
- Review current accountability mechanisms for decision-making processes and how the board could increase their accountability to the school community.
- Review how the board communicates the engagement process with the school community, especially those involved in engagement, to increase transparency.
- Invest time into building relationships with all facets of the school community.

Part Two: An Authentic Approach to Inclusion

Part Two investigates community engagement literature and what an inclusive engagement approach should include. It then sets out what an authentic approach to community engagement could look like in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand schools.

An authentic approach to engagement for Aotearoa New Zealand schools

Certain types of community engagement will be more suitable than others. The approach chosen should reflect the scope of the issue at hand, its potential impact on the school community, and capacity of the school community to get involved. Potential types include:

- *Consultation* – Obtaining feedback to inform the school board's decision.

- *Involvement* – Working with participants throughout the decision-making process.

- *Collaboration* – Partnering with the school community to make a shared decision.

Alongside strong, trust-based, reciprocal relationships with different groups across the school community the following principles should underpin any engagement approach chosen (Ministry of Education, 2022; Public Engagement Principles Project, 2009):

- Fair and inclusive, with the approach adopted promoting equitable outcomes
- Locally focused, in terms of the capacities, circumstances, and cultures of participants
- Collaborative and encourage participants to work together with school boards
- Based on current information that is accessible for participants
- Well-supported and accessible for people wanting to participate
- Transparent and value clear communication between boards and participants
- Accountable to the school community, staff, and students (where appropriate)
- Responsive and flexible across all stages of the engagement process
- Based on trust-based relationships between school boards and participants

To support future community engagement school boards should evaluate the effectiveness of engagement approaches. This involves gathering feedback from the participants involved about the decision-making process to inform the design of future community engagement.

Top tips

- Once a list of stakeholders has been developed, this or another framework can be used to identify which groups need to be involved at which level.
- Identifying relevant stakeholders when scoping the issue can help boards select an appropriate community engagement approach.
- Develop a clearly defined and accessible evaluation rubric that addresses each of these factors. This can be redeveloped and reused following future community engagement.

Part Three: School Boards as Te Tiriti o Waitangi Partners

Part Three examines current obligations for school boards as Crown entities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Te Tiriti) before exploring what a more inclusive approach to decision-making could look like which represents an authentic commitment to honouring Te Tiriti.

School boards' obligations, as Crown entities of Te Tiriti, extend beyond legislative requirements as set out in the Education and Training Act and should inform all areas of boards' work. This includes building strong partnerships with schools' whānau, iwi, hapū, and Māori organisations, direct engagement when making decisions that may impact Māori ākonga, including how property is used, and honouring and validating indigenous knowledge, including across everyday practices.

When undertaking community engagement with schools' local Māori community, boards need to balance inclusivity with being pragmatic about the design of the decision-making process. Methods to support collaboration-based engagement with schools' local Māori communities include:

- Collaborative governance
- Co-design
- Opt-in e-panels
- Open spaces
- Future search conferences

Underpinning the success of community engagement are strong, reciprocal, trust-based relationships between school boards and whānau, local iwi, hapū, and Māori organisations.

Top Tips:

- All board members understand their obligations to Te Tiriti, including Education and Training Act requirements.
- When making governance decisions, ensure that they honour Te Tiriti and consider whether the decision upholds school boards primary objectives.
- Take time to identify all facets of the school's local Māori community.
- The partnerships established should be mutually beneficial.
- When scoping an issue and deciding whether to undertake community engagement, schools' obligations to Te Tiriti need to be considered.
- All relevant stakeholders should be invited to participate in community engagement and shared decision-making processes.
- Include stakeholders across all stages of the decision-making process – from design to implementation.
- The tools selected should support shared decision-making and reflect participants capacity to be engaged in collaboration.

Part Three: School Boards as Te Tiriti o Waitangi Partners

Part Four: Including Students' Voice in School Board Decisions

Part Four explores how students could be more directly involved in school board decision-making. Including students' voices in governance decisions would represent a significant step toward adopting an authentic approach to including students in decision-making processes. It also embodies school boards' obligations to their students.

Types of community engagement that can be utilised:

- *Involvement –* Maximises contributions from students by ensuring that their feedback is relevant, useful, and considered in the final decision whilst also being relatively easy to implement effectively.
- *Consultation* – With groups of students or the whole student body. This could be appropriate for younger students or projects with less projected impacts on students.
- *Collaboration* – For issues that can be co-designed with student leaders or small groups who represent the interests of the student body. This could be suitable if the potential impact of the decision is likely to affect current and future students.

The design of community engagement should be scaled to reflect the projected impact of the decision, the complexity of the issue, and the age of the students involved. Also, underpinning the success of engagement approaches is education for students about the issue at hand.

The role of the student representative (at schools with students Year 9 and above) is also discussed as a potential avenue for boards to support the inclusion of students' voices into decision-making. Student representatives could use their roles as both students and board members to build trust across the student body, potentially motivating students to be involved with community engagement.

Top Tips:

- School boards should keep students in mind when scoping the issue at hand.
- Decision-makers need to decide early in the process what type of engagement approach to adopt (should be scaled to reflect the projected impact of the decision, the complexity of the issue, and the age of students involved).
- Providing comprehensive, accessible background information is key to ensuring that the feedback gathered is useful and relevant.
- School boards should identify the points they want to discuss with students.
- Students should have an opportunity to share open-ended feedback.
- The approach chosen and the type of feedback desired should be scaled to reflect the age and capacity of the students involved.
- The approach chosen should be feasible for both students and facilitators.
- Engagement tools should be utilised early in the decision-making process.
- Students involved in community engagement should understand the nature of the issue, how to participate effectively, and why their participation is important.

Part Five: Honouring Students' Identities

Part Five investigates what an authentic approach to honouring students' unique identities in decision-making could look like. This involves acknowledging and seeking to understand the dynamics and intersections present within the student body and representing these when making governance decisions. It focuses on principles to guide effective, inclusive decision-making and the important of trust-based relationships between students and the board.

The following principles should underpin all stages of the engagement process to ensure that it is trusted by the student body. This may increase students' willingness to participate:

- Fairness
- Inclusivity
- Transparency
- Accessibility of information
- Accountability

Whether adopting consultation, involvement, or collaboration-based engagement approaches, strong relationships with the student body increases both parties' trust in each other and the decision-making process. Establishing these relationships represents a mindset shift by school boards from being responsible for solving the problem to being responsible for analysing what the problem means for the people experiencing it and including them directly in problem-solving and decision-making (Policy Project, 2020, p. 7).

Top Tips:

- When scoping an issue, decision-makers should adopt an equity-based approach, including consideration of how different students may be affected.
- School boards should identify relevant stakeholders early in the engagement process and invite them to provide feedback and share their views.
- Engagement processes should include accountability measures to maintain trust with the wider school community.
- Clear, regular communication about the issue at hand, the engagement process, and progress towards the final decision is important to promote transparency.
- School boards should invest time into fostering trust-based relationships with different groups of the student population.
- The type of engagement chosen should reflect students' ability to participate in engagement, the complexity of the issue, and the potential impact of the decision.
- The tools chosen should reflect the potential impact of the decision, the age and capacity of the students involved, the complexity of the issue, and be responsive to barriers that may affect students' ability to participate.

Conclusions

Community engagement provides school boards with an opportunity to include a diverse range of views in the decisions made. Current approaches often require consultation with the school community only, which has been shown to be a less inclusive approach as there are no requirements for schools to utilise the feedback gathered when making their final decisions (NZSTA, 2020). A more inclusive, less tokenistic approach to community engagement could involve more direct engagement with the school community, staff, and students through involvement or collaboration approaches. While it is more difficult to implement in practice in most cases, it could support school boards to engage more meaningfully with their school community when making decisions likely to impact them.

When integrating community engagement into decision-making processes, school boards should be pragmatic and realistic about their capacity to facilitate engagement, what they ask of their school community, and the time and resource cost. This is not to say that boards should not strive to implement inclusive community engagement, instead it highlights

> Community engagement needs to be built on reciprocal, trust-based relationships between school boards and their staff, students, and the school community.

the importance of designing approaches that reflect the scale and potential impact of the issue at hand. School boards should ensure that community engagement approaches are realistic to implement, utilise people's time effectively, have accountability mechanisms in place, are transparent, and are aligned with the Education and Training Act and other policy guidelines. Further, community engagement needs to be built on reciprocal, trust-based relationships between school boards and their staff, students, and the school community.

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