



Healthy Active Learning: 5 years of impact 2020 to 2025

July 2026

**Whaia ngā honongā
E kōtahi ai tātou.
Ākona, kia ako atu anō,
Tukua atu, tukua mai,
Hei poipoia te kaupapa,
Kia puāwai te oranga
Tihei mauri ora.**

Pursue the connections
That brings us together.
Learn in order to impart knowledge,
Give and receive,
Nurturing Healthy Active Learning,
So that we will flourish.
The breath of life.

Karakia written by members of the Healthy Active Learning Kāhui Māori, a safe space for members of the workforce that identify as Māori to connect with and succeed as Māori within the kaupapa, and to provide leadership and guidance to the wider workforce to ensure Healthy Active Learning delivers positive outcomes for ākonga Māori.

Foreword

Over the past 5 years, Healthy Active Learning has become a significant part of how we support the wellbeing of tamariki and rangatahi in Aotearoa.

Working alongside our partners in education, health and communities, this initiative is helping schools, kura and early learning services create environments where children and young people can participate, learn and feel they belong.

This work reflects a shared understanding that wellbeing, learning and belonging are closely connected – and that quality kai, physical activity and health education all play a role in setting young people up for success.

What stands out in this report is the scale of that impact. Healthy Active Learning is now reaching more than 1,000 schools, kura and early learning services, supported by a dedicated workforce and strong local partnerships.

Just as important is the nature of the change. This is not about one-off programmes. It's about building systems, strengthening teaching practice, and supporting schools, kura and early learning services to embed wellbeing into their culture, planning and everyday learning.

We know this approach matters, particularly for communities facing the greatest barriers. Equity has been central from the beginning and this report shows how that focus is supporting more inclusive, connected and engaging learning environments for ākonga.

This work depends on people. The Healthy Active Learning workforce, alongside kaiako, school leaders, whānau and communities, is central to the success of this kaupapa. Their commitment, creativity and deep knowledge of their communities bring this work to life.

Looking ahead, the focus will be on sustaining and strengthening this impact – supporting schools, kura and early learning services to lead change, respond to the needs of their communities and ensure all young people can be healthy and active.

This report highlights how far we've come and the strong foundation we now have for the future, as we continue to strengthen and evolve how we support schools, kura, early learning services and communities through Healthy Active Learning.

Raelene Castle

Group Chief Executive
Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa



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This impact report reflects on the first 5 years of Healthy Active Learning and celebrates the people who have brought the kaupapa to life. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative evidence, it highlights what has been achieved, what has been learned, and the difference made when education settings foster belonging for ākonga and whānau through quality food, drink and physical activity.

Reaching learners across Aotearoa



1000+

schools, kura and early learning services supported through Healthy Active Learning



For every **\$1** invested in Healthy Active Learning...

\$2.10 in social and economic benefits is generated, with the greatest gains in higher-deprivation communities



150+

dedicated health and physical activity kaimahi supporting learning environments across the motu

Ākonga are engaged, more active and more connected



Ākonga are spending less time sedentary and more time in light-to-vigorous activity during school hours



15% increase in social connectedness among ākonga since 2023



Average steps per hour increased from 1,096 (2021) to 1,143 (2025)

74%

of ākonga enjoy Physical Education (PE) at school

85%

of ākonga enjoy being active

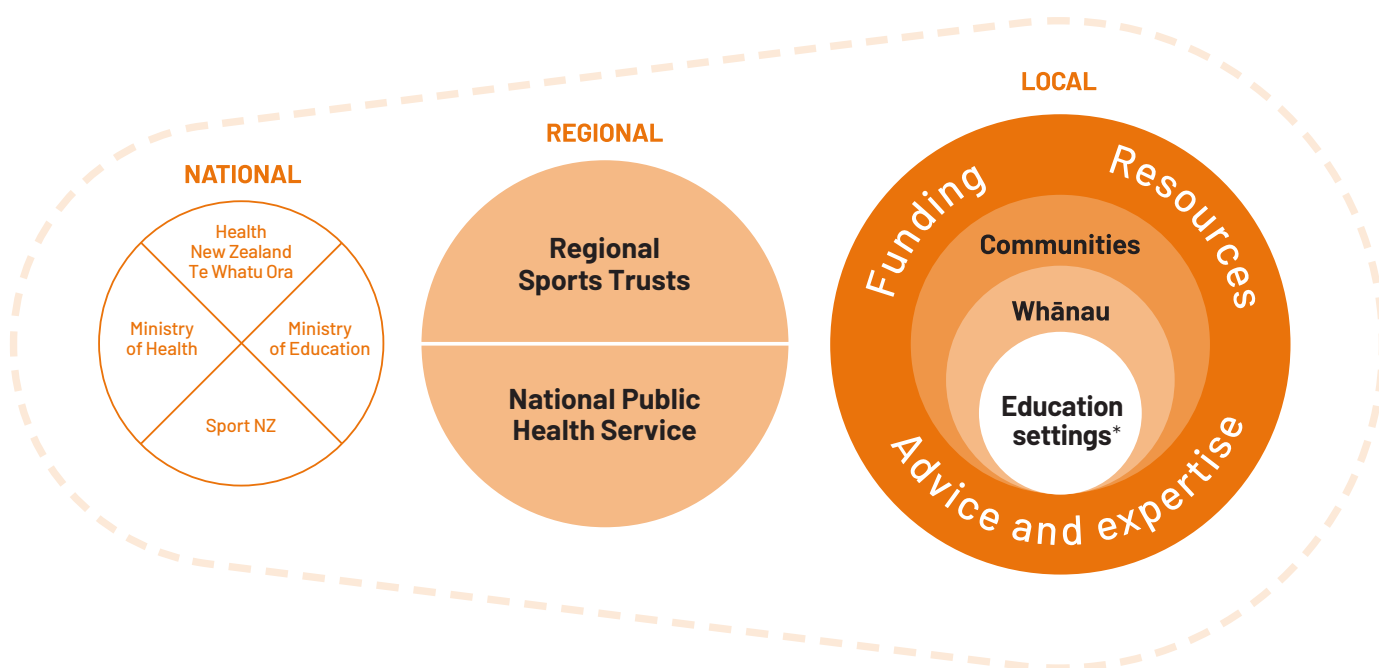


What is Healthy Active Learning?

Healthy Active Learning is a joint government initiative between Sport NZ, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Health NZ | Te Whatu Ora. It empowers schools, kura and early learning services to improve the wellbeing of tamariki and rangatahi through quality food and drink, physical activity and curriculum delivery.

Through funding, resources, professional learning and development, and a dedicated workforce, the initiative supports over 1,000 education settings (including almost 50% of all primary and intermediate schools) to create healthy, active environments. The mahi drives positive change, whether that is through strengthening community connections, mātauranga Māori, or delivering inclusive play, active recreation, sport, health and physical education (HPE), and physical activity opportunities. In this report we'll use 'physical activity' to reflect all the different ways tamariki and rangatahi are active.

How everyone works together



*Early Learning Services, Schools and Kura

Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi

As a health and wellbeing initiative, Healthy Active Learning recognises Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the partnership journey to date. We continue to reflect on and evolve governance systems and processes to best ensure equitable outcomes for all tamariki and rangatahi in Aotearoa New Zealand. Examples include the funding and the implementation of Mātaiao, the development of the Kāhui Māori and the introduction of a mātauranga Māori specific outcome to guide the implementation and focus of Healthy Active Learning. This is important because kaupapa grounded in mātauranga Māori supports tamariki and rangatahi identity, wellbeing, and Māori success as Māori.

You can find out more about these initiatives throughout the report.





Evidence and evaluation

Massey University led the evaluation of Healthy Active Learning between 2020 and 2025. Findings collected in 2021, 2023 and 2025 are the main source of quantitative data used in this report.

The report also draws on other evidence, including Sport NZ's Voice of tamariki and Active Bodies, Active Minds.

In 2023, evaluation findings identified 5 enablers of sustainable change within education settings.

- developing sustainable systems
- embedding whole-school approaches
- maintaining connectivity with leadership in education settings
- providing professional learning
- strengthening local communities of practice.

These enablers are reflected throughout the stories of impact featured in this report.





“Equity is at the forefront of everything that we do. We really don’t do anything unless it’s about improving health outcomes for disadvantaged communities. ”

Health workforce kaimahi

Our journey

The story so far

The origins of Healthy Active Learning can be traced back to the 2015 School Sport Futures Report, which shared the need for school sport and HPE to be re-imagined. Play.sport collaboratively worked to improve the quality of PE, sport, physical activity and play experiences in schools, as well as connection between schools and their communities. This important mahi helped shape the principles and partnerships that underpin Healthy Active Learning.

Healthy Active Learning began during the COVID-19 pandemic – a time that highlighted the importance of education settings in addressing inequities and supporting wellbeing. Ongoing challenges, including rising food costs, have made this work more complex. Evaluation findings show that affordability is now cited as a barrier to healthy eating by 41% of survey respondents.

5 years on, the initiative is achieving its intended short-term outcomes and is predominantly achieving its medium-term outcomes. While long-term outcomes are yet to be realised, positive shifts are emerging. Kaiako feel confident delivering quality health and physical education, and education settings increasingly recognise food, drink and physical activity as foundations for ākonga success.

These changes are contributing to increased physical activity in class time, and more inclusive, connected learning environments.

The impact from the first 5 years of Healthy Active Learning reflects the regional leadership and delivery by the National Public Health Service and Regional Sports Trusts.

Findings and impact

Across education settings, Healthy Active Learning is contributing to meaningful changes in culture, community connectedness, and physical activity opportunities, supporting ākonga to be more active and socially connected.

Changes in school culture



Physical activity and healthy eating and drinking are increasingly integrated into education setting strategies, plans and curriculum.



Schools, kura and early learning services consistently prioritise healthy eating and drinking as part of ākonga wellbeing and culture.



13%

increase in schools and kura including physical activity in their strategic plans



86% of teachers agree physical activity is a key contributor to ākonga wellbeing.



88% of school leaders see healthy eating and drinking as an important part of ākonga wellbeing.

Stronger teaching of health and physical education



The quality of HPE delivery strengthened.



Teacher confidence and practice in HPE and PE remain relatively stable, with Healthy Active Learning providing a strong foundation for ongoing improvement.

Ākonga are physically active



of ākonga enjoy PE at school.



Ākonga are taking more steps per hour (1,096 in 2021 compared with 1,143 in 2025).



of ākonga enjoy being active.



Ākonga are engaging in more light and moderate-to-vigorous activity during school hours.



Ākonga are spending less time sedentary

Ākonga are engaged in learning and more connected



Ākonga engagement in school remains high



Social connectedness among ākonga has increased by 15% since 2023

Stronger whānau, school and community connections



Schools and kura are seen as integral parts of their local communities.



Schools and kura have growing connections with mana whenua, iwi, whānau and community groups.

Valuing mātauranga Māori

Schools and kura are:

Actively embracing mātauranga Māori.

Strengthening culturally inclusive teaching practices.

Expanding opportunities for physical activity that reflect Māori values and identity.

These outcomes are supported by the components that consistently enable high-quality Healthy Active Learning environments – what good practice looks like. For more information read the [Healthy Active Learning national evaluation summary 2020-2025](#).



Reflecting on what we've learned

How to engage with this report

This section brings together 5 years of evidence and experience to show what consistently supports high-quality Healthy Active Learning environments. It introduces 6 connected components that describe what good practice looks like in action and how sustainable, equitable change is enabled for tamariki and rangatahi.

The components provide a shared framework to support reflection, learning and future decision-making, illustrated through real-world examples from across Aotearoa.

What good practice looks like (6 components)

1.

Empowering a national network of local kaimahi

2.

Promoting the pursuit of mātauranga Māori

3.

Strengthening whānau, school and community connections through a locally led approach

4.

Embedding change by strengthening culture and processes within education settings

5.

Equipping kaiako with the confidence and skills to be champions of the kaupapa

6.

Elevating ākonga voice to help address inequities



Success stories

Each good practice component is supported by success stories that bring the practice to life. The success stories reflect the real world change created by the hard work and expertise of the Healthy Active Learning workforce and the schools, kura and early learning services they partner with across Aotearoa.

“ Together, we have been able to design and develop initiatives that align with our school vision and will help us continue to grow as a Healthy Active Learning school – ensuring that physical activity, wellbeing and learning are woven meaningfully into our school culture. ”

Healthy Active Learning kaiako

Empowering a national network of local kaimahi

Te Ariā o Te Pōkare: A guiding whakatauākī

**Ko te hononga te tīmatanga
Ka pumau te hononga ka ahu whakamua
Ma te mahi ngātahi ka angitu Kaupapa
Ma te kotahitanga e whai kaha ai tatou**

Coming together is the beginning
Keeping together is progress
Working together is success
In unity we have strength.

This whakatauākī was written by Jack Chambers (Ngāti Porou) and gifted to the Healthy Active Learning workforce. It speaks to the effects of a ripple, and underpins the vision, kawa and tikanga of the meaningful impact of Healthy Active Learning.

“ We’ve been given the space to come together, to wānanga, to share kōrero from the heart. Through that, I’ve been able to stand strong in who I am, with a sense to reclaim and embody being Māori as I see it...it’s mine, grounded in my whakapapa, my tūpuna, and my wairua. ”

Healthy Active Learning Kaimahi, Kāhui Māori



About the Healthy Active Learning Kāhui Māori

The Kāhui Māori is a safe space for members of the workforce who identify as Māori. The kāhui provides leadership and guidance to the wider workforce, ensuring Healthy Active Learning delivers positive outcomes for ākonga Māori.

National snapshot

The Healthy Active Learning health and physical activity workforce is at the heart of the initiative. Made up of over 150 people, the workforce supports sustainable change in schools, kura, early learning services and communities.

Their roles include working with school leadership and boards to align Healthy Active Learning with strategic goals; supporting champion kaiako to strengthen health and physical education practice, building relationships with mana whenua and iwi, and leading professional learning for kaiako and ākonga leaders around quality kai, inu and physical activity.



Why this matters

Evaluation findings show that consistent, relationship-based support from people who are from, and know, the community they are working in is an integral enabler of sustainable change. The workforce model strengthens trust, builds kaiako capability over time, and enables rapid responses during periods of disruption, including emergencies.



Success stories

Partnerships enabled a rapid response to Cyclone Gabrielle

For the Healthy Active Learning team in Hawke's Bay, existing relationships with schools and their communities meant they were able to respond quickly to provide physical activity opportunities to support the wellbeing of those affected.

Fundamental to this coordinated response was the previously established Health and Wellbeing Partnership Group. The steering group, which includes representatives from Healthy Active Learning across physical activity, health and education, provides leadership and guidance for health and wellbeing initiatives within early learning services, schools and kura in the region.

“Collectively the power and the magic happens when you’ve got all of those organisations coming together. We all want positive outcomes for our tamariki and our rangatahi and the way to do that is by utilising the power and the skills of everybody.”

Mel Davis, Health Promotion Advisor



Building confidence to transform physical activity culture

At **Our Lady of the Assumption School** in Christchurch, long-term guidance from a Healthy Active Learning advisor helped transform the school's approach to physical activity.

At the whole-school level, they re-imagined physical activity as inclusive, enjoyable and student led. A popular play box – filled with moonhoppers, stilts and loose parts – is now in use every break time, managed by student physical activity leaders.

“Vicki, our advisor, has been an amazing resource. She’s taught us to trust and value ourselves and know that we can do this.”

Tumuaki



Using kai to support wellbeing, learning and connection

Across Healthy Active Learning schools, the health workforce has shifted its focus from influencing kai and inu policies to strengthening the wider food environment for tamariki and whānau. This recognises kai as both a wellbeing enabler and a powerful context for learning and connection.

The 2020 introduction of Ka Ora, Ka Ako – Healthy School Lunches Programme supported this approach, with Healthy Active Learning teams working alongside schools to transition towards sustainable, school-led food models.

At **Portland School Te Kura o Tikorangi**, the in-school kaitunu (cook) prepares shared lunches using seasonal ingredients and reflecting ākonga preferences. Kaiako and ākonga eat together, creating daily opportunities for kōrero about nutrition, culture and wellbeing.

“The smells from the kitchen often spark classroom conversations, reinforcing learning beyond the lunch table and strengthening engagement throughout the school day.”

Tumuaki

“Food wastage is minimal. Any food scraps are used in our compost heap for our garden and for another community member to feed their pigs.”

Tumuaki



2.

Promoting the pursuit of mātauranga Māori

National snapshot

Healthy Active Learning recognises that achieving positive outcomes for Māori learners requires approaches that are relevant for Māori, across both Māori medium and mainstream education settings.

A range of national, regional and local initiatives have emerged that celebrate physical activity, kai and inu as a vehicle to pursue mātauranga Māori. Together, these make it easier to offer opportunities and experiences that uphold Māori identity and wellbeing.

- 35% of school leaders report strong relationships with mana whenua and iwi and include them in decision-making processes (up from 24% in 2023).
- 56% of teachers feel confident in drawing on the cultural backgrounds and life experiences of ākonga to PE learning.
- 46% of teachers are integrating te reo Māori into HPE planning and teaching (up from 40% in 2021).
- Ākonga and Māori whānau reported seeing more culturally relevant physical activity opportunities being offered at their school or kura.
- Engagement in kapa haka increased by 12% from 2023.
- There was a 16% increase in teachers agreeing that ākonga often learn about games, dance, sports or movement from a range of cultures (eg, Māori or Pacific games) from 2021.



Why this matters

Evaluation findings show that culturally grounded approaches enable long lasting change that meets the needs of everyone. When learning reflects local knowledge, language and tikanga, ākonga experience stronger belonging, engagement and wellbeing, and schools are better positioned to address inequities for Māori learners.



Success stories

Mātaiao: A culturally distinctive approach to Healthy Active Learning

Mātaiao is a kaupapa Māori initiative that supports kura and kaiako to enhance the wellbeing of ākonga through the pursuit of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge). Funded by Sport NZ and delivered by kaupapa Māori providers, Mātaiao creates positive physical activity experiences for tamariki and rangatahi by strengthening connections to te taiao (the natural environment) and culture.

Through these connections, Mātaiao contributes to Healthy Active Learning outcomes by supporting kura to embed culturally grounded, place-based approaches to learning and wellbeing.

“ I have seen my classmates’ behaviour has changed and improved as well from learning outside rather than in a classroom. ”

Tauira

Launched in 2020 as the Tapuwaekura pilot and underpinned by the Atua Matua health framework, Mātaiao now partners with over 80 kura and wharekura across Aotearoa, with 50 receiving targeted support in 2025.

This happens through taiao-based wānanga for kaiako, alongside locally led, group-based, multi-kura activities (the kapa approach).



Mātaiao is evaluated separately from Healthy Active Learning using kaupapa Māori evaluation principles. Current impact findings are drawn from the 4 kura where Mātaiao is most fully embedded. While the programme reaches a wider group of kura and wharekura, these findings represent outcomes where implementation is most established.

Where Mātaiao is embedded, it contributes to:



increased physical activity and regular, integrated place-based learning in te taiao



stronger taiao literacy



higher levels of engagement in, and enjoyment of, learning



increased kura leadership capability and capacity



improved teacher practice, with greater use of mātauranga Māori and physical activity as contexts for learning



the development of curriculum approaches shaped by relationships with te taiao and iwi.

What difference Mātaiao makes

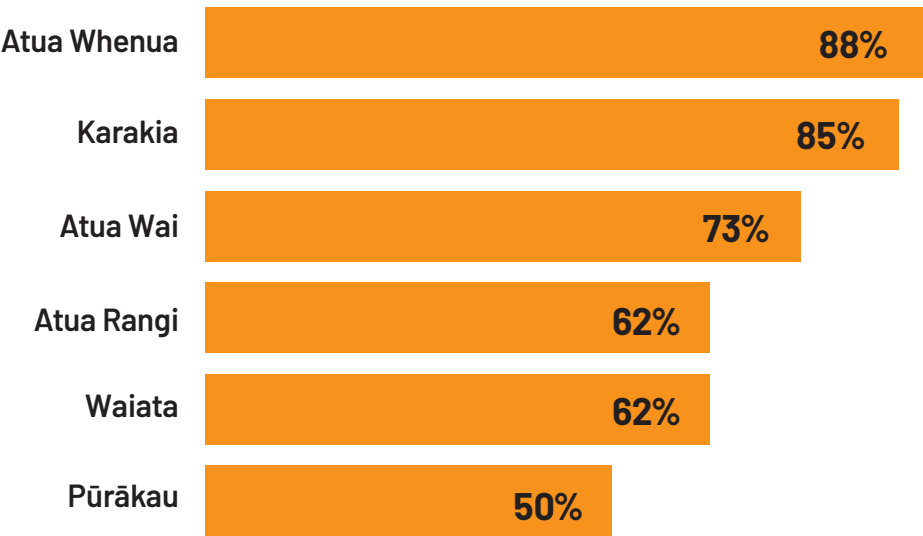
Where Mātaiao is embedded, the following impact is evident in:

Tauira

- More physical activity.
- Stronger taiao literacy and cultural connection.
- Improved engagement and enjoyment of learning.

Tauira knowledge gained

Key gains were in atua narratives, whakapapa connections and practical environmental skills reflecting the kaupapa and local contexts of kura. Learning in te taiao increased engagement and helped knowledge stick.



Supported through Mātaiao, **Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Tonga o Hokianga** has integrated local knowledge across its curriculum, with tauira (learners) learning through experiences such as climbing their maunga, visiting their marae, hunting, fishing and preparing hāngī.

Kaiako report that learning beyond the classroom has increased engagement and strengthened tauira identity and connection to their whakapapa and whenua.

The kura has also developed a more localised curriculum; each term they focus on values and mātauranga specific to a Hokianga context. This approach strengthens relationships with kaumātua and kuia and supports kaiako to lead learning that is grounded in place and culture.

Find out more about [Mātaiao](#).

“ Once you value your own, value yourself, value your language, value your tikanga, value your mātauranga, it’s a different ball game and that’s the platform where you develop people’s wellbeing. ”

Dr Wayne Ngata
Kaiwhakahaere, Mātaiao



Pūrākau brought to life through movement and learning

In the Rangitikei District, pūrākau (legends or stories) are being shared with ākonga through movement-based learning. Supported by the Healthy Active Learning team, kaiako work alongside iwi to learn local stories and bring them to life through physical activity.

By weaving pūrākau into movement and games, learning feels playful and engaging while strengthening te reo Māori use in the classroom. The approach has also deepened relationships between the school and local iwi, giving greater purpose to incorporating te ao Māori across learning.

Ākonga say they enjoy learning through movement and feel more connected to their culture and place – “It doesn’t feel like learning, it just feels like playing.”

“It’s that whole process of rauoratanga, bringing our stories back for our people and our community, to create an environment where our identity can thrive and contribute to our community.”

Rūnanga Chief Executive



Connecting ākonga to marae through physical activity

In South Auckland, Healthy Active Learning supported schools to strengthen their connection with Papakura Marae through tākaro Māori and shared kai. Through this partnership, ākonga and kaiako have gained greater awareness of the marae and the many services it provides to whānau, while developing a stronger sense of belonging.



“Each school has their own way of catering for the wellbeing of their tamariki but when the marae is involved it just takes it a step above.”

Tumuaki

3.

Strengthen whānau, school and community connections with a locally led approach

National snapshot

Healthy Active Learning is delivered through a locally led approach that recognises local knowledge and supports learning environments to reflect the values, aspirations and strengths of their communities.

The result is that schools and kura are seen as an integral parts of their local community (reported by 78% of whānau). This strengthens connections and partnerships with whānau, mana whenua, and community organisations.

69% of kaiako say their school or kura has physical activity opportunities that reflect the interests of whānau (up from 48% in 2021).

84% of school leaders agree that their school or kura uses community resources to expand the range of physical activity opportunities available to tamariki.

97% of schools in high-deprivation areas are working with external providers to provide kai programmes (up from 76%).

56% of schools involve whānau in kai and inu policy development (from 46%).



“ Our school has partnered with local sports clubs to offer regular after-school sports clubs where tamariki can try out different sports that are provided in our community. ”

Whānau member

Why this matters

Evaluation findings show that strong community connections are an enabler of sustainable change. Schools that partner meaningfully with whānau and community organisations are better able to respond to local needs, build trust and address inequities for tamariki and rangatahi.

“ We connect the Health and PE curriculum to whānau and communities – our whole school dances in the cultural festival. ”

Kaiako

Success stories

Manawakura: Localising Healthy Active Learning in Tairāwhiti

In Tairāwhiti, the approach to Healthy Active Learning is called Manawakura (the precious breath of wellbeing) and sees whānau working alongside whānau for tamariki wellbeing.

Community leaders, including the team at Whiti Ora who led the kaupapa, describe how the relationship-centred model reflects the dynamic and structure of its communities and iwi. This has led to stronger trust with kura and whānau and a responsive, ever-evolving model that resonates deeply with the community. One tumuaki said they valued Manawakura's willingness to "ensure we have local and homegrown talent coming into our communities to support what we are doing".

Find out more about [Manawakura](#).

“ Manawakura has put the right people in the right place. People who know the reality of our tamariki, who know the kōrero of our whenua, know our whānau and know the kura and how the community is ticking. ”

Tumuaki

 [Watch video](#)



Local knowledge bringing rural Southland communities together

In rural Southland, Healthy Active Learning supported a parent-led fishing initiative that brought whānau together in a community with few social or sporting opportunities.

With assistance from local schools, Fish & Game, community clubs and rūnanga (tribal council), families gained access to fishing gear and skills. What began as fishing trips grew into wider learning experiences, including wetland exploration and education on native fish.

Parents said the initiative helped build confidence, connection and belonging – particularly for those who had never fished before – and fostered relationships across generations.

[Read full story](#)

“ For many parents, especially the mums, not knowing how to fish has been our biggest barrier. Now we can take our kids fishing and muddle our way through. ”

Shona, parent



Celebrating kai and culture to strengthen school belonging

At **Kererū Park Campus** in South Auckland, Healthy Active Learning supported the school to reshape its kai approach to reflect its Māori, Pacific and Asian communities.

Shared lunches featuring culturally significant foods, such as taro, sapa sui and seafood chowder, and a māra kai (food garden) at the heart of the school, helped rebuild whānau engagement that had declined since COVID 19. Kaiako reported that ākonga felt more at home at school and more connected to learning.

The tumuaki described the changes as part of a deliberate focus on placing wellbeing at the centre of school culture and curriculum.

Embed change through strengthening school culture and processes

National snapshot

Healthy Active Learning takes a systems thinking approach, guiding education settings to embed wellbeing through policies, planning and whole-school processes rather than short term initiatives.

Across schools, kura, and early learning services, physical activity, healthy eating and wellbeing are increasingly embedded into strategic plans, policies and curriculum delivery. This approach helps ensure change is sustained over time and not dependent on individual champions.



“ Our board is seeing everything. They understand the same language that we are using in class and the same importance that we are giving to all the other activities. ”

Tumuaki

Schools value physical activity, HPE, and healthy food and drink



86%

of teachers report that physical activity is a key contributor to student wellbeing in their school or kura.

88%

of school leaders see healthy eating and drinking as a key part of student wellbeing.

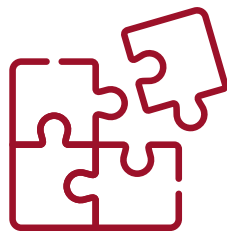
13%

increase in the visibility of physical activity in schools' strategic and annual plans (from 2021).

20%

increase in the schools and kura who uphold their policy to sell and provide healthy food and drinks for activities outside of school (eg, class trips, athletics day, school camp from 2021).

Schools integrate HPE into planning and curriculum



63%

of school leaders agree that HPE is integrated into other learning areas or themes at their school or kura.

50%

of teachers agree that they use physical activity to support teaching and learning in a range of curriculum areas (up from 44% in 2023).

Improvements in provision of quality opportunities



82%

of teachers agree that their school or kura makes sure events are inclusive for all abilities eg, changing the cross country to meet the needs of all ākonga (up from 68% in 2021).

Why this matters

Evaluation findings show that long-term change is more likely when wellbeing is embedded in school systems. Whole-school approaches create consistency, reduce reliance on individuals and promote enduring improvements for tamariki and rangatahi.



Success stories

Embedding values to strengthen whānau voice and learning

Paraparaumu Beach School began working with Healthy Active Learning in 2022. While kaiako already valued health and physical education (HPE) and physical activity as part of student wellbeing, competing priorities, heavy workloads and low whānau engagement made it difficult to embed this consistently.

With support from a Healthy Active Learning facilitator from Nuku Ora, the school refreshed its strategic direction. Leadership and kaiako aligned the school's vision and systems around 3 core priorities: growing community, building a growth mindset and achieving personal excellence. This ensured wellbeing, physical activity and learning were embedded across strategic documents, rather than treated as add-ons.

A major focus was improving how the school gathered and responded to whānau voice. This led to the development of opportunities for whānau to share their knowledge and interests through school events and physical activities. These initiatives are helping reconnect the school with its community and better reflect whānau aspirations in learning experiences. Evaluation shows that 80% of teachers at the school say physical activity now reflected whānau interests, a significant increase from 29%. Teachers also describe feeling more supported and less stretched, with clearer systems and shared direction reducing individual workload.

Daily tooth brushing habit strengthens kaiako practice and whānau relationships

Introducing the after-lunch habit of tooth brushing has helped one kindergarten address challenges around oral hygiene and nutritious kai, fostering new habits and conversations among whānau, kaiako and tamariki.

“It’s been awesome seeing the enthusiasm from our tamariki and whānau, Tamariki are asking to brush their teeth and feeling proud of their beautiful niho (teeth) and smiles. Whānau have shared how it is supporting tooth brushing at home too.”

Kaiako

At **Geraldine Kindergarten**, Healthy Active Learning is delivered through WAVE – South Canterbury’s longstanding health promotion in education programme. Working in partnership, they are supporting kaiako to have a deeper understanding of health and wellbeing for ākonga – whether through embedding public health policy, strengthening community action, or creating supportive learning environments – all while weaving it into learning experiences like tooth brushing.

To start, ākonga practiced on a mouth model and were invited to brush their teeth in small groups. Now, this is a daily routine embraced by most ākonga, and leads to wider conversations around quality kai and inu in both the classroom and with whānau.



Celebrating culture by making physical activity part of everyday learning

With increasing emphasis on numeracy and literacy across the education sector, senior leaders at **St Anne's Catholic School** in Woolston, Christchurch, were concerned about maintaining a strong focus on physical activity and HPE without adding extra pressure to kaiako workloads.

Working with their Healthy Active Learning team at Sport Canterbury, the school – which offers bilingual English/Māori and English/Samoan pathways – took a deliberate approach to integrating physical education across the curriculum. Physical activity was also intentionally embedded into everyday classroom practice to promote other positive learning outcomes

“ Healthy Active Learning has helped us rethink how we do things. ”

Senior Leader
St Anne's Catholic School, Woolston

“ We are now seeing our junior kids active every single day as part of their reading and maths rotations. ”

Senior school leader

Listening to ākonga was a crucial part of this work. The school created opportunities to better understand whānau and student experiences and values around physical education and physical activity. This included a focus group with less physically active ākonga, and tailored professional learning that guided kaiako to deliver quality health and physical education.

The result is that junior ākonga are now active every day, with movement woven into reading, maths and other curriculum areas.

More ākonga reported enjoying PE at school (71% to 83%), feeling included in PE (70% to 81%) and learning physical activities from a wider range of cultures.

Equip kaiako with the confidence and skills to be champions

National snapshot

72% of teachers are moderately or very confident to plan and teach HPE

Professional development delivered through the Healthy Active Learning workforce, and the development of national resources like MoveWell (a games-based resource), have strengthened the quality of HPE teaching across schools and kura. The impact of this support has been particularly noticeable in the confidence and capability of early-career teachers.

Teachers reported greater integration of HPE with other learning areas, as well as improved ability to plan physical activity sessions that respond to the diverse needs of their ākonga. Evaluation findings also show positive shifts in culturally responsive practice, with improvements particularly evident among Māori and Pacific teachers.

“Continuous professional development sessions have empowered me with ideas for quality health and physical education. They have also built my confidence and encouraged me in my teaching.”

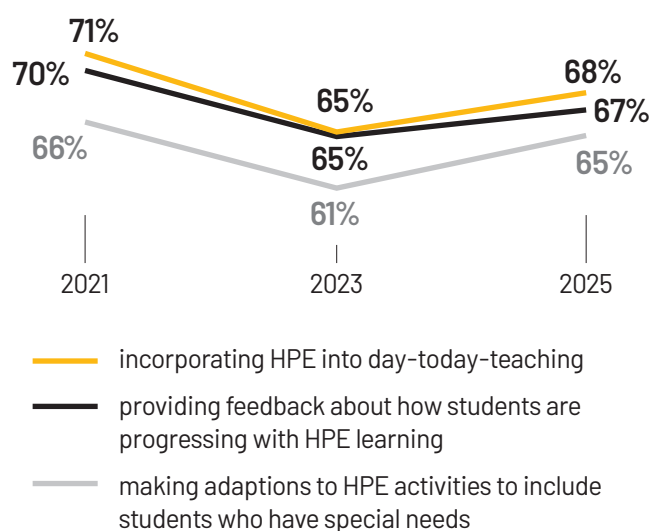
Kaiako

Maintenance of teacher confidence and practice

As teacher practice develops, it often follows a predictable, statistically recognised pattern. Confidence may start high, then dip as teachers gain a deeper understanding of what quality practice requires and strengthen again as competence and experience grow.

This pattern is reflected in the Healthy Active Learning teacher confidence data. Following a slight dip reported in 2023, teacher confidence in planning and delivering HPE increased again in 2025, returning to levels similar to those reported in 2021. This suggests that as kaiako have deepened their understanding of quality HPE practice, their confidence has improved.

HPE Teachers feel confident in:



Why this matters

Evaluation findings show that kaiako confidence is central to delivering quality HPE and physical activity. When kaiako feel confident, they are more likely to deliver inclusive, engaging experiences for all learners.



Success stories

Building confidence to teach health and physical education

Tori, a kaiako in the Bay of Plenty, says the support of Healthy Active Learning has transformed the way she delivers health and physical education and prioritises physical activity for her class.

Her experience of PE as a student had a lasting impact on her teaching. Having disliked PE herself, and concerned about replicating negative experiences for her ākongā, she was cautious about placing too much emphasis on it in her own classroom. As a result, physical activity was not something she actively prioritised or felt confident delivering.

Through her engagement with Healthy Active Learning, Tori's understanding of what quality physical education looks like began to shift. She reframed PE as more than learning specific sports skills. Instead, she came to see it as an opportunity to enhance wellbeing, inclusion and learning.

Tori also began integrating physical activity across other learning areas. Movement became a tool to enhance engagement and learning, rather than a separate subject competing for time. She says she now feels more capable of adapting activities, meeting diverse needs and creating positive experiences for all her ākongā.

Building teacher confidence leads to more ākongā active every day

Kaiako at **St Anne's School** in Newtown, Wellington, are more confidently delivering inclusive physical education and say more ākongā are taking part in sport and physical activity outside of school.

Supported by a Healthy Active Learning facilitator from Nuku Ora, kaiako at the school identified they wanted professional development to improve their confidence and build on their skills to plan and deliver HPE and physical activity. They also requested specific tools to adapt activities for diverse learners. Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa funding provided gear for a shared kete of resources used across the school.

Physical activity and HPE are now daily parts of all classes, and movement is integrated across other curriculum areas. Kaiako report greater confidence

“Healthy Active Learning has given me a more meaningful way to incorporate games and for it to be seen as health and physical education.”

Kaiako

in adapting activities, including for ākongā with diverse needs. School leaders said they could see how the mindset of kaiako had positively shifted to valuing HPE and physical activity.

“Every teacher in the school would be comfortable to run fitness, or run a PE lesson, or teach health and PE with their class.”

Senior leader

6.

Elevate ākonga voice to address inequities

National snapshot

Healthy Active Learning highlights that elevating student voice is an important driver of equity, access and inclusion, with increases in both quality experiences and student involvement indicating a strong connection between the two.

- Student involvement in promoting healthy food environments increased from 39% in 2023 to 52% in 2025.
- Teachers feel more confident incorporating student contribution into the movement activities, games or sports, based on student interests (70% in 2023, 77% in 2025).

74% of tamariki like doing PE at school.

85% of tamariki enjoy being active.

75% of tamariki feel included in physical activities.



More teachers now agree that:

- their school-provided sporting opportunities and events were inclusive of all abilities (67% in 2021 to 82% in 2025)
- their school/kura ensures that all physical activity experiences are suitable and meet the needs of all ākonga, including those with disabilities (from 65% in 2021 to 78% in 2025).

“ We learn how to build stuff instead of just sitting in class. ”

Year 3 student

Why this matters

When student voice is elevated, schools are better positioned to address inequities, improve inclusion, and strengthen ākonga motivation, leading to greater enjoyment and engagement in physical activity.



Success stories

Creating space for girls to be active in ways that feel right

- 35% of girls report “people watching me” as a barrier (vs 18% of boys).
- 48% of girls reported “being left out/having no one to play with” as a barrier (vs 35% of boys).
- Fewer girls thought they were good at PE, felt included, felt that they were making progress in PE, or liked doing PE at school compared to boys.
- Boys enjoy being active at playtime more than girls (71% vs 60%).
- More boys are engaged in physical activity before school (60% vs 47% of girls).

Evaluation of Healthy Active Learning and the Voice of Tamariki survey reveals that disparities between girls’ experiences of PE and physical activity and those of boys start as early as primary school.



“ Girls tend to stick to the sidelines, they don’t want to get involved, they’re very conscious about their bodies. ”

Kaiako

Across Healthy Active Learning, customised initiatives draw on insights and feedback from female ākonga to promote girls’ enjoyment of physical activity in ways that reflect their interests and comfort levels.

One of these is at **Waikōwhai Intermediate** in Tāmaki Māhaurau Auckland.

Waikōwhai realised it could be doing more to support its female ākonga to be active through gathering student insights with Sport Auckland’s Healthy Active Learning team.

This process included all 380 ākonga completing a physical education survey, a girl-only focus group, and a playground audit to see how play spaces were being used at break times.

The research revealed that although girls said they liked walking with their friends, they didn’t like getting changed into exercise gear to do it. As a result, the Wai-Walkers group was formed – an addition to the boys-dominated lunchtime runners’ group.

[▶ Read full story](#)

“ Being outside in the nature and not having to run and having a nice calm stroll is what I like. It’s a good way for students to keep fit in a way that works for them. ”

Ākonga



Empowering student leaders supports a whole-school physical activity culture

Unlocking the potential of student sport leaders has transformed **Pakuranga Heights School** in Tāmaki Mākaaurau, Auckland, into a student-led physical activity environment.

Previously, student sport leaders primarily set up equipment at lunchtimes and assisted during sport and whānau days.

With senior leadership committed to creating a system that enables students to lead activities, student focus groups were formed to gather their views on what physical activity should look like at the school. Now, student leaders actively collaborate with kaiako to plan and facilitate lunchtime activities, ensuring they are relevant and enjoyable for their peers.

The school has also established a group of Healthy Active Learning kaiako champions who, supported by professional learning development from Sport Auckland, create HPE plans for each term. As a result, 43% of teachers at Pakuranga Heights now feel they have time to plan and teach effective health and physical education, up from 22%. There has also been an increase in their confidence and ability to provide experiences that meet student needs.

Reflecting on this school-wide shift, kaiako report an increased emphasis on physical activity in the strategic plan, rising from 22% to 63%.

Supporting disabled ākonga to build belonging through peer support



Disabled tamariki in Aotearoa New Zealand are less active, enjoy being active less, experience higher levels of exclusion during physical activity in class, experience greater barriers to being active than their peers, and have fewer chances to do the physical activity they want to at school.

8% of tamariki responding to the Voice of Tamariki survey reported finding it a lot harder than their peers to do daily tasks and experience some level of impairment.

Committed to addressing inequities, Healthy Active Learning teams work with schools and specialist units to ensure physical activity opportunities are available to benefit all ākonga. This has included adaptive PE workshops with ākonga and kaiako, supporting interschool adaptive sport events across multiple schools and ensuring PE sheds are equipped with adaptive equipment.

“ I can help them and make them feel welcome for who they are. ”

Physical Activity Student Leader

As one example, Sport Auckland has been upskilling Physical Activity Student Leaders (PALs) in how they can best support ākonga from the specialist units to experience quality physical activity. This included helping at adaptive sports days, where ākonga from specialist units in the region came together.

The deputy principal at **Mount Roskill Primary School**, in Tāmaki Mākaaurau, Auckland, said this approach was creating a pathway for ākonga from the specialist unit to be included in games at break times and build a sense of belonging.

[Read full story](#)

“ Physical activity leaders are now understanding how to communicate with specialist school learners. It’s not a big scary thing anymore and it’s comfortable and natural to talk to the kids in the same way they would anyone else. ”

Tumuaki

Looking to the future

Healthy Active Learning holds a vision of an Aotearoa New Zealand where all young people have access to, and understand the value of, quality kai, inu and physical activity to support their wellbeing as they grow up.

As the report has shown, change is happening. Many education settings that were once actively supported by the Healthy Active Learning workforce are now thriving under the strengthened leadership of senior staff and champions who recognise how centring wellbeing across culture can boost learning and student outcomes. The initiative continues to mature and evolve, and the evaluation highlights a few trends which will continue to be monitored to inform future implementation.



1. School attendance

Increasing national regular attendance rates post COVID-19 is a nationally recognised priority. For this reason, it is exciting to see there is emerging evidence that Healthy Active Learning is contributing to school attendance. Healthy Active Learning schools in high EQI, urban areas achieved a 4.2% higher regular attendance rate during winter for older students than their non-Healthy Active Learning counterparts by 2024.

2. Supporting whānau to be wellbeing champions

Evaluation suggests that whānau perceptions of the importance of kai, inu and quality physical activity opportunities for their tamariki, and their provision, are becoming less positive. There has also been a drop in activity outside school time. Although possibly reflections of wider societal trends and economic challenges, working alongside schools to strengthen connections to whānau and community is a priority.

3. Continuing to shift the narrative around kai and inu

Over the last 5 years, while Healthy Active Learning has been operational, there has been a significant increase in the cost of food, coupled with rising rates of food insecurity. Evaluation suggests that while kaiako are comfortable talking to whānau about physical activity, they are reluctant to discuss kai and inu at the risk of seeming judgmental. There is a real need to change the narrative around kai and inu – to move away from ‘good and bad food’ to a more strengths-based view that removes any stigma. We want to encourage our young people to be curious and positive about kai and inu – where it comes from, how it makes us feel and the ways it connects us.



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