

Involving Pasifika families in academic conversations for improved Pasifika learner outcomes and building excellent relationships between student, teacher and family

A model of academic mentoring to support Pasifika achievement: An Exemplar

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Introduction

How does a school effectively and authentically engage its teachers, Pasifika students and their families in partnerships for Pasifika academic achievement and success? How can teachers better understand the motivation and desires of Pasifika students, parents and families and work with them effectively to plan positive futures for Pasifika students?

The exemplar featured in this report¹ describes how Otahuhu College², in an attempt to realise the vision of effective partnerships for Pasifika success, has developed an academic mentoring programme involving students, families and whānau³ teachers. At the heart of the model is the desire to work collaboratively in a three-way partnership, where all partners are informed and able to make evidence-based decisions that lead to improved Pasifika student outcomes. The observed outcome of the model is that Pasifika students become focused — they know what they want and how to get there — and Pasifika parents and families are involved and have a space and place in the school that is safe and affirming.

¹ This report is one in a series of three exemplar and three case study reports with a focus on school leadership practices supporting Pasifika student achievement and success. (One of the case studies features Otahuhu College). All six reports are listed at the end of this document (on page 25).

² Otahuhu College is a decile 1 year 9–15 co-educational secondary school located in Otahuhu, Auckland. The school has a roll of 1,342 students. The college caters for more than 15 ethnicities, with the majority of the students representing Pasifika ethnicities, including: Samoan, 32%; Tongan, 19%; Cook Islands Māori, 11%; Niuean, 5%; Indo-Fijian, 11%; and other Pacific, 4%. Other ethnicities in the school include Māori (14%), Pākeha (1%), and Asian (2%).

³ Within the Otahuhu College system, form teachers are referred to as whānau teachers, reflecting a school culture of belonging, acceptance, and, ultimately, family.

What was the challenge?

Prior to introducing its academic mentoring programme, the college was looking for ways to engage more consistently and systematically with Pasifika (and all) students. The aim was to develop students to become active participants in their own learning and outcomes.

For a number of years there had been inconsistent family engagement at parent–teacher report evenings and little opportunity for parental input into students' academic pathways, subject choices and/or career options. The highest number of parents attending report evenings was 54% — which occurred on just one occasion.

In the past, parents were given five minutes with each teacher and conversations generally focused around behaviour — whether the student was good in class. There was no time to give details of academic performance, discuss objectives and goals or how the parent might support the young person's learning. The conversation was driven by the teacher and did not necessarily encourage parents to ask questions or probe for more information.

Communication between Pasifika parents and teachers was difficult, especially when English was a second language. Because the student was not present at the parent–teacher interview, there was no-one to translate or explain what the teacher was saying. Consequently, Pasifika parents frequently left the interviews without a full understanding of the teaching processes and assessment systems in the college.

There are things about the design of that evening which means that [as a parent] you may not get where you want to go because there could be a long queue with one teacher and for whatever reason you may not get to see the teacher that you want to see. Five minutes to talk to a maths teacher ... [and] our parents sort of sit there and not a lot of engagement. [Senior leadership team member]

Furthermore, left to their own devices, students often chose subjects which did not provide a successful career pathway or support a positive future direction in higher education.

The administration system, the part of the school machinery which produces student outcomes data, was also slow. Teachers did not receive information in a timely manner to enable them to report back effectively to students and families.

We've got a huge administrative machine that is behind everything, that is very slow at spitting out the information that the key parties need to know, [such as] the asTTle data that you need to give to the learner. ... If you want the learner to be on the ball with knowing how many credits they have got, you've got to spit it out and give it to them [promptly]. [Senior leadership team member]



The beginnings of the journey

The rationale underpinning Otahuhu College's academic mentoring programme aligns with Starpath research⁴ (McKinley, Madjar, van der Merwe et al, 2009) which argues that academic counselling at secondary school is beneficial to connect students with their futures. It also brings to light students' academic mentoring needs, which are able to be responded to as early as year 9. The Starpath research project found that once students take part in academic mentoring, they develop more relevant course completions because they have a clearer focus.

The principal and senior leadership team realised that to improve results for their Pasifika students at all year levels, including achievement in NCEA levels 1 through 3, it was essential to obtain Pasifika family input into the student academic programme.

The senior leadership team (SLT) began to research how other schools engaged Pasifika families, and involved them in academic conversations. The SLT visited four other colleges already implementing an academic mentoring programme — Tangaroa College, Manurewa High School, Tamaki College and Rosehill College — to extract lessons learned from these schools' experiences of putting an academic mentoring programme into practice. From the conversations and observations undertaken, it was clear that there were benefits: overall, the SLT reported that feedback from the other colleges was positive and indicated that academic mentoring was a way to constructively engage Pasifika families in academic conversations about student progress and achievement.

As Otahuhu College was a participating school in the Starpath Project, the principal and senior leadership team also spoke with another Starpath school — Massey High — about the academic mentoring it had in place. In addition, the principal and SLT sought advice and guidance from the Starpath research project team in determining a suitable approach for their specific Otahuhu College context.

The senior leadership team believed the Starpath research data clearly demonstrated that academic counselling and/or mentoring supports student progress towards set goals and provides an opportunity for families to engage and have positive input into students' learning pathways.

Based on all the information gathered, the principal and senior leadership team developed a programme that suited the unique culture and needs of Otahuhu College.

⁴ The *Starpath Project — partnership for excellence* is led by The University of Auckland. Starpath aims to increase achievement at NCEA Levels 1–3 and participation and success at degree-level tertiary study for Māori and Pasifika students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Starpath was established in 2005 to undertake high quality research and implement an evidence-based intervention aimed at improving educational outcomes. In the early stages of the project, Starpath worked in partnership with Massey High School in West Auckland to evaluate an academic counselling and target setting programme designed by the school to raise student achievement, improve communication with parents and whānau, and provide appropriate advice to students on academic pathways based on their NCEA achievement records and aspirations for the future. Based on research conducted in partnership with Massey High School, Starpath developed a whole-school programme consisting of the following key strategies:

- establishing evidential databases
- tracking and monitoring of student learning and academic progress
- academic counselling to support students' progress toward set targets
- enhancing family/whānau engagement.

These strategies are the key elements of Starpath's data utilisation, academic counselling and target setting programme.

This is not a new concept. We have been modelling the three-way conference programme on the schools that we have been going to. I guess when you look at it, there will be a number of features that we have picked that other schools are doing, that Starpath has done ... [but] we're doing it in an OC [Otahuhu College] way, picking out what we think is manageable and what's important in terms of what is lacking in engagement. [SLT member]

During information-gathering (in late 2012) for this exemplar report, senior leadership team members, board of trustees members, and teacher participants indicated strong support for the decision to introduce academic mentoring into Otahuhu College to promote student achievement. Their reasons are summarised in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Critical reasons identified by Otahuhu College for introducing academic mentoring

Reasons given by the senior leadership team, board of trustees members and teachers for believing that academic mentoring is important are as follows.

- Relationships are key to achievement, and academic mentoring builds a strong relationship and connection between the whānau teacher, student and family.
- Students become active participants in their learning; they set goals, choose appropriate subjects, plan towards successful career paths, follow through on tasks, and understand the process of academic achievement.
- Learning becomes relevant, expectations are raised — what is required of students, families and teachers is made explicit.
- Pasifika students do better when their families are involved in their education and are able to take an active role in supporting them to succeed.
- Academic mentoring is a positive way to break down barriers that exist between school, families and community — eg, the programme promotes regular, personalised letters home, letters to employers explaining the need for parents to attend school report meetings, reminder phone calls to families, sharing food, and providing opportunities for parents to give feedback (including via feedback questionnaires on Survey Monkey).
- The desire of both the college and families is realised: to raise young people to be positive citizens who contribute to society, by promoting student responsibility and accountability for their own learning.

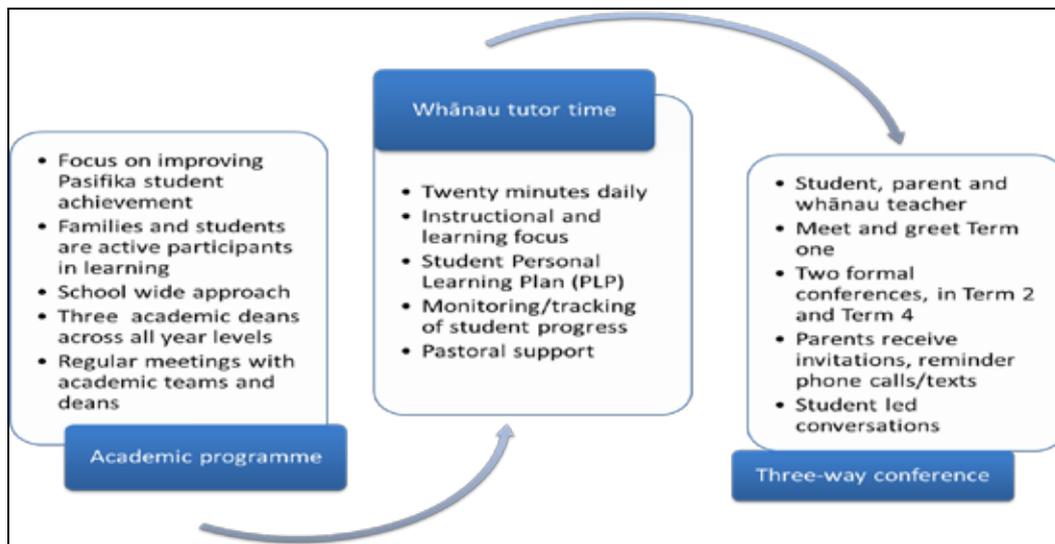
As shown later in this report, parents and students who participated in interviews for this project also expressed positive views about their experiences of the programme.



Description of the structure and key action areas of the academic mentoring model

The implementation model for Otahuhu College's academic mentoring programme is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The academic mentoring model at Otahuhu College



The academic mentoring programme involves two key areas of action: **whānau tutor time** and **three-way conferencing**. The programme was established to meet two clear goals:

- engaging families to support the improvement of student outcomes
- engaging students to be active participants in their learning.

The mentoring model is to better the relationship with the Pasifika [young person]. ... The better the relationship, the better they are going to achieve at school. [Whānau teacher]

Firstly we want to educate our parents on [understanding subject choice and career pathways] but we also want our students to really understand it, so that is the stuff that the whānau teacher is helping with and making those connections too. [The student needs to think] 'When I choose a subject this year it is connected to what I am going to do next year and perhaps when I leave school'. That's why it is important that we really think it through now while we still have the students. [SLT member]

Whānau tutor time occurs four days a week, between 1.10pm and 1.30pm, a total of 20 minutes on each occasion. During this time, students are mentored by their whānau teacher and supported to set academic goals for the year and to review their progress. They also learn communication and planning skills to support their study and help them make appropriate choices. During whānau tutor time, students complete entries in their Personal Learning Plan booklets (PLP). As well as being of immediate value for the students and teachers, these booklets are also used to guide the conversations with parents during the twice-yearly three-way conferences. The content of these booklets clearly shows parents where the students are at, and what the thinking and planning is behind what they are learning.

The sections students are required to complete in their PLP booklets during the year are outlined below in Table 2.

Table 2: Personal Learning Plan booklets used within the academic mentoring programme at Otahuhu College: the content that students are required to complete about themselves

Topic area	Content
About me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feelings about school Actions they plan to use to succeed Subjects they are good at Most challenging subjects Ways they learn best Positive/negative influences on learning
Rate yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a grade of 1–4 where 1 is excellent and 4 is poor, students are asked to rate how good they think they are at reading, writing, listening, speaking, geometry, etc. Students can add other subjects and rate those as well
My strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Within English, mathematics and other subjects, students identify areas of strength
My developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Within English, mathematics and other subjects, students identify areas of development (improvements)
My test results for the year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Test results are recorded in the booklet in February and November At each point students record where to next — what they need to do to improve
My personal learning goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify personal academic goals in subjects (eg, literacy/numeracy) Identify personal learning goals around behaviour (eg, self-management) Record reflections over the year
Academic mentoring conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record four formal conversations with whānau teacher and what was discussed Student and whānau teacher to sign
Attendance and punctuality reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Term attendance record and any issues
My year, 20xx	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges, and support to help overcome them
Where to now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> End of year plan— goals, actions, timeframe

Whānau teachers make use of up-to-date data to monitor and track students' progress. Students participate in evidence-based decision-making and develop their goals after they have reviewed their academic results from the previous year. Then, in partnership, the student and whānau teacher review subsequent assessment results, linking them back to the student's goals.

To improve the relationship — and partnership opportunities — between whānau teacher and student, whānau teachers are required to also teach their whānau class for at least one class period within each timetable cycle (eg, an English teacher who is also a whānau teacher will have their whānau class for a period of English within the regular timetable). This gives the student a 'safe harbour' when required.

My class see me as someone who is their security net — any question about any subject they would ask me. ... I see them for double the time. I have them for English and whānau time. I'm so much more familiar with them [now] and they know me quite well. In morning break time and lunch time, they still hang around in their whānau room which is the English room as well. I guess that's how they see me. [Whānau teacher]

Whānau teachers provide a conduit for other teachers within the school to communicate with the student and their family, and will often be the first port of call for staff to discuss any issues that arise with their whānau students.



To fulfil the second key goal of the college's academic mentoring programme, parents are engaged in **three-way conferencing** with the student and whānau teacher. This process occurs twice a year, once in Term 2 and again in Term 4, with an initial meet and greet for parents and the whānau teacher in Term 1. Parents are invited to the conferences by personal invitation, and receive reminder phone calls, texts and emails. In an attempt to break down further attendance barriers the principal has written letters to employers requesting time off for parents to attend.

The student, parent and whānau teacher spend 20 minutes together in a conversation that is led by the student, as they explain their goals and progress to date. The Personal Learning Plan (PLP) booklet is used as a guide to generate conversations.

To prepare for the three-way conference, students also have the opportunity within whānau tutor time to role-play the academic conversation with their peers, in an attempt to build confidence and familiarity with the process.

Our teacher will pair us up with our classmates. One would pretend to be the parents and the other will pretend to be the student and then we'll swap over and then she'll pair us up with the third group. One will be the student, one will be the parent and one will be the teacher and then we'll just swap again. ... It gives us confidence to do it better in front of our parents and teacher. [Junior school student]

Whānau teachers report student progress across all subjects from information supplied to them by the relevant teachers, and provide assessment results so that Pasifika parents have a clear understanding of how their child is performing academically.

All subject teachers write a report on each student and these reports are passed on to the whānau teacher. The information on the reports is collated by the whānau teacher, who records it on a separate sheet for the parents.

Within the three-way conversation, the student, parent(s), and whānau teacher discuss subject choices, career plans, and learning behaviours, and identify any learning gaps. At this time, the support and help that parents and the whānau teacher can provide to improve the student's outcomes is identified.

Directly after the three-way conferencing, the Pasifika parents/family members are invited to participate in an online survey to give feedback on the conference, and express their opinions of the process. As part of the evening, food and refreshments are provided by the college as a way of acknowledging and affirming parental input.

There are a number of benefits of the academic mentoring process, a key one being the way in which the process aligns with Pasifika student and family values.

Table 3 identifies the reasons (provided via survey feedback) Pasifika students and families gave for valuing academic mentoring at Otahuhu College.

Table 3: Why Pasifika students and families valued the introduction of academic mentoring at Otahuhu College

As evident from feedback provided, there is strong alignment between the college's goals for academic mentoring and the values of Pasifika students and families.

Students and their parents and families saw the academic mentoring programme as:

- being an *inclusive* approach which supports student achievement
- acknowledging the importance of *relationships* and *reciprocity*
- enabling students and families to become *active participants* in education
- privileging the voices of students and families in *determining* their future directions
- providing excellent guidance and support to build *academic success* in the future
- developing students' confidence to become active *decision-makers*
- respecting the knowledge, skills and expertise of the Pasifika students, parents and families.



How did the academic mentoring programme develop?

In 2011, Otahuhu College introduced the pilot academic mentoring programme to the year 9 cohort. Whānau tutor time within the year 9 cohort became an instructional time and a formal academic programme was put in place. In the past, whānau time had focused on administrative matters such as chasing up attendance and reading out daily notices. Year 9 whānau teachers were hand-picked in an attempt to give the pilot a high chance of success. Teachers skilled at developing relationships — a key component of the programme — were selected by the senior leadership team to be the newly established year 9 whānau teachers. Using a range of formalised test results, including STAR and asTTle mathematics and English achievement data, as the starting point, these teachers became responsible for guiding learning conversations with students in their whānau form class.

Three-way conferencing replaced the traditional teacher–parent reporting. Twice-yearly, each student, their family, and whānau teacher now met together for 20 minutes at an off-site location opposite the college. Initially, the three-way conferencing occurred over one full day.

We are working on the principle that one person [whānau teacher] knows this kid inside out and that is the one who is going to have that kind of conversation [with the parent/family]. We have set that up and put that expectation out there. We know that some teachers do it naturally, [that they] are very attuned to this and this is what they do, [whereas] others are not. [SLT member]

Whānau teachers received professional development — much of it around the administration of the programme and how the senior leadership team anticipated it running. The whānau teachers were encouraged to use available resources but were not directed to follow a set process. Instead, their experience and knowledge of the students helped whānau teachers determine the best approach for their whānau class.

We wanted to move our students from the passive to the active learner and I'm actually an active agent in this. This is the key thing and it's making it explicit in helping them to scaffold, I suppose. Just saying 'I want to get 80 credits at level 1 at the end of this year' is great, but how are we going to get there? What's that going to mean? So if you break it down to what that actually means, it is going to mean that 'At the end of Term 1 I get four credits in every subject'. That might be my goal then — so I've actually broken it down into something that is manageable and realistic, not just this huge overwhelming general goal. [SLT member]

At the end of 2011, a review of the pilot was carried out and a number of changes were made to the academic mentoring model. These included:

- developing three new academic dean positions to support form teachers across all year levels
- establishing academic mentoring teams, involving academic deans and two senior leadership staff members
- instigating weekly meetings to discuss what teachers need to know, setting deadlines for tasks such as students' completion of Personal Learning Plan booklets, and undertaking walkthroughs and observations of form class time on a regular basis
- enabling three-way conferences to occur over two full days rather than one day
- conducting the three-way conferencing during school time.

Based on the positive feedback from whānau teachers, students, parents and families, the pilot was judged successful and the project rolled out school-wide in 2012 to all year levels.

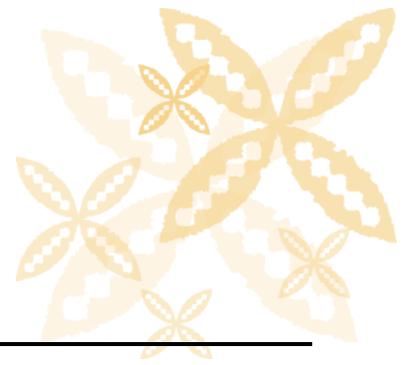
In terms of the tone of the school, the tone of the whānau classes, feedback from parents and feedback from staff — all of those positive indicators made us decide, 'Let's go full school'. [SLT member]

An important aspect of implementation was that the programme was introduced on the basis of clear evidence and piloted to test applicability and likely success. This approach ensured a smooth implementation process and gained buy-in from staff, as they could see the benefits from the first pilot year.

I think it is hard to bring things in too fast. ... I believe in gradual, incremental change and that it is not going to become undone. So I want it locked in so that we move up to the next level. That's the theory anyway.
[Principal]

In anticipation of the school-wide roll out, whole school professional development was provided. All staff were involved in goal setting, role playing conversations with parents, and mentoring and support workshops, as well as learning the administrative requirements of the new system. Whānau teachers from the year 9 pilot shared their experiences of what worked and why; this feedback was valued by other staff. Commenting on some of the valuable lessons learned from the pilot phase, a senior leadership team member stated:

[We found that] ... having more regular little reminders, and having an academic dean monitoring a bit closer, and getting a feel for whether the teachers are needing support or not [in the lead up] to three-way conferencing [is really important] — the teachers knew that he or she [academic dean] was just going to come and sit and listen to what is going on. So last year was a taster in terms of putting everything in place and now we can begin to drill down a bit more.



Assessment of the programme

The academic mentoring programme is continually reviewed. In 2012, following the first school-wide three-way conferencing days, comprehensive parent feedback was collected. Table 4 below documents the number of interviews and attendance percentages across year levels. What is striking is that an average overall attendance rate of 88% was achieved. (A number of whānau classes had 100% attendance by parents and students, or very near to it.)

Table 4: Parents who attended three-way conferences at Otahuhu College in 2012

Cohort	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13	Total
Number of students	278	266	273	238	222	1277
Number of interviews with parents completed	246	226	237	217	200	1126
Percentage parent attendance	88%	85%	87%	91%	90%	88%

Parents completed an online survey following the three-way conference in Term 2 of 2012. Results showed that the parents were in favour of the three-way reporting process. Parents, including Pasifika parents, felt the conference had led them to an improved understanding of their child's progress and learning goals. Parents reported feeling comfortable contacting their child's whānau teacher because of well-developed relationships with the whānau teacher. The majority of parents/families obtained their child's whānau teacher's contact details, which meant that the teachers were easy to contact. Most importantly, as the following Figure 2 shows, the majority of parents/families felt they had a good understanding of how to help their child's learning at home.

Figure 2: Extent to which parents felt they had a good understanding of how to help their child's learning at home since the introduction of the academic mentoring programme at Otahuhu College



The survey also gave parents/families the chance to suggest improvements to the conference process. Responses from Pasifika parents/families were overwhelmingly positive, with few improvements suggested.

It's good to know where our child is at the moment and to know where he needs to be by the end of the year. Also great to know that we can and will help our child in any way to achieve his goals. Thank you. [Year 9 Parent]

This is a better way of doing things than what it used to be in the past. Gives more time for parents to talk to teachers. Having honest opinions helps also. [Year 12 Parent]

Otahuhu College plans, acts, observes and reflects, making any improvements necessary for the ongoing success of the academic mentoring programme. This process is cyclic and continuous, as each year the college responds to current students and families and their changing needs.

From 2013, planned improvements to the academic mentoring model included:

- scheduling the first three-way conference to occur earlier in Term 2, such as week 2 instead of week 7, so that parents could have input into the goal-setting stage with students
- having whānau teachers stay with the same whānau class from year 9 to 13 to maintain stability and build even stronger relationships
- focusing on the mentoring/academic counselling role of whānau teachers, aligning that with the new school management system, KAMAR
- undertaking ongoing monitoring and tracking with the use of the evidential database to help predict student achievement.



The role of leadership

The senior leadership team, including the principal, all play an active role in the academic mentoring programme and provide overall vision, strategic planning, direction and monitoring of the process. The leadership approach is inclusive and support structures have been established to ensure the success of the programme. Whānau teacher expertise, experience, and knowledge of the role is critical to ongoing development and ensuring that students and family are served well.

In terms of trying to get buy-in with some of the parts that we are trying to put in place, we are including some of the people who are having to administer it — the whānau teachers — [in our planning discussions] and trying to get a structure working where everyone has got a voice. [SLT member]

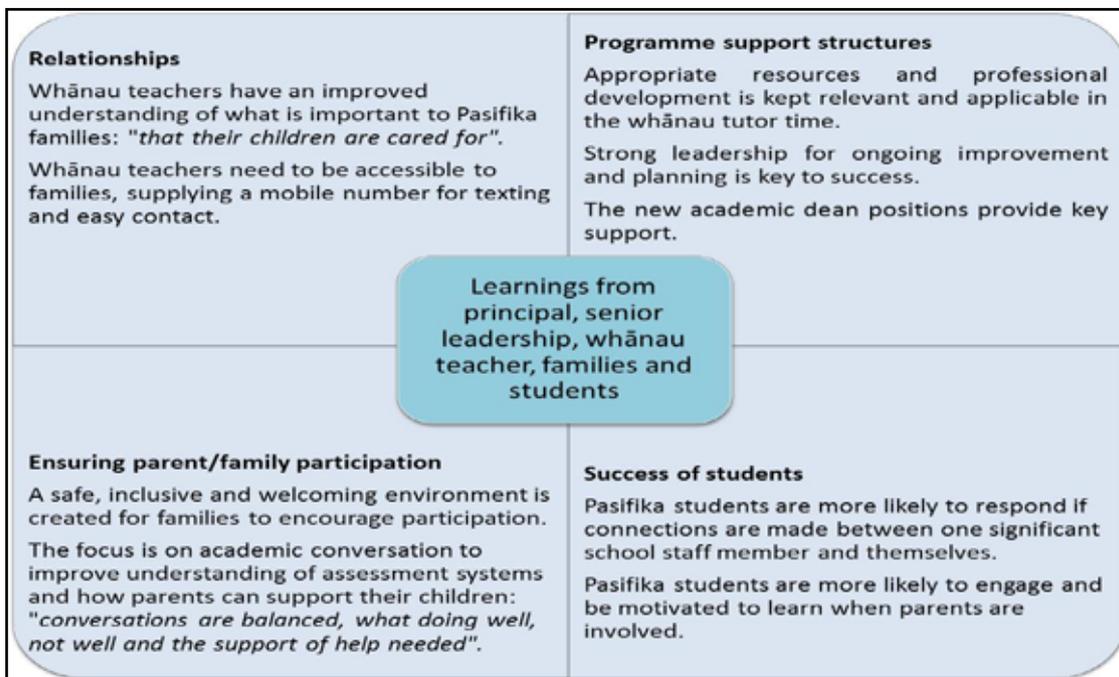
Senior leadership team members have provided professional development for staff, and also attended three-way conferences themselves to gain first-hand knowledge of the process and ensure that whānau teachers have the data they need to undertake their role effectively. The principal also acknowledges those whānau teachers who get 100% attendance from students and family at the three-way conferences with a small gift.

When it comes to three-way conferencing my job is to go walking and talk to parents to show an interest. I turn up to PD sessions around it [academic mentoring], not all the time, but when I can. ... If the staff are doing PD, I do PD with them. That's the best thing to do ... to be a part of it, not an absentee principal. [Principal]

Learnings along the way

Since its introduction, there have been some key learnings (Figure 3) and progress in developing the academic mentoring programme. Central to the success of the programme at Otahuhu College has been the way relationships have developed between teachers, students and families, and in particular between parents and whānau teachers. The programme has helped the school to develop a safe and inclusive environment for parents and families, where they feel confident to engage regarding their young people's learning. This has required appropriate programme support structures, resourcing and professional development. The school is clear that Pasifika students are more likely to engage when their parents are involved and believe the academic mentoring programme supports parents to engage in a positive and meaningful way in academic conversations. Figure 3 summarises notable lessons learned.

Figure 3: Key learnings from implementation of the academic mentoring programme at Otahuhu College





Benefits of the academic mentoring programme

The changes to the whānau tutor time and parent–teacher reporting systems have been significant. The school has moved from five minute ‘speed dating with a number of subject teachers’ to a 20 minute conversation between whānau teacher, student and family. These more coordinated, in-depth meetings support student-led academic conversations, and allow for family involvement in academic planning.

Changes in approaches to feedback and family involvement have resulted in some ‘early wins on the board’, as discussed below.

Improves support and guidance and encourages joint responsibility for student success

Pasifika students say they are provided with excellent support from both their whānau teacher and family. Guidance from Pasifika families has become more focused on the future and what is best for the student. Increased parental understanding of assessment processes also means that students are more likely to stay on task.

They keep asking ‘So, have you improved on this and that?’, and then ‘Okay, give me your results on the next test’. They’ll bug you about what you want to do in the future and what options have you set yourself. In a way it is helpful so you know you have your family support and your whānau teacher support. It is quite helpful.

[Student]

Whānau teachers know students better and are able to respond in a timely manner to any issues that arise. They can articulate the progress of each of the students, across subjects and in their personal lives.

Pasifika parents report they are encouraged to give their opinions about what their children are doing, their goals and plans for the future. The three-way conference supports all partners involved — student, parents and whānau teacher — to be accountable and responsible for supporting the student, including gaining a better understanding of what is needed for the student to progress.

Pasifika families are active participants, asking more questions of the whānau teacher, requesting to see results and checking in with their children about subject and option choices.

We can’t get anything from the kids if we don’t encourage them and see what they are doing. If they see you in there as a parent giving them encouragement [it helps them to succeed]. [Parent]

Parent involvement keeps you straight. [Student]

Parents find it better, they know what we’re doing. [It’s] good to talk because they understand more. [Student]

Families also understand the school systems better and can more clearly see how they can support their child to achieve success in school.

We changed his subject. What he wants for his future is not exactly what he is doing in year 9 and 10 subjects. So when we had the [three-way] conference [we found] my son was not doing subjects that were focused on what he wanted to do in the future. He didn’t have the right mix for what he wanted to do. It was good the teacher was able to nail down what he should be doing in year 11. He wants to be a physio [physiotherapist] but he was doing the wrong mix of subjects. [Parent]

More motivated and involved students who make informed choices about learning pathways

Based on the observations of whānau teachers, and feedback from the students themselves, since the introduction of the academic mentoring programme many students are now more reflective learners, more involved in conversations about their academic progress, and are able to make more informed choices about options and subjects that will lead to improved pathways in the future.

Students are making better subject and options choices that are more likely to lead to better pathways in the future. Students are more motivated and focused on where they are going and what they are trying to achieve because of the goal-setting that occurs in whānau tutorial time.

Students are making better choices. I had one student who was incredibly intelligent but [not going anywhere with it]. [But] she [has now] made a better decision to improve her life and to do a course which I think has been really good for her. [Whānau teacher]

They are willing to work more. They are willing to take responsibility for their own learning. I have kids in my class who would come back by themselves, without me saying anything, during lunchtime to complete an assessment. One thing that is important as well, is to be available. [Whānau teacher]

Effective mechanism for improved relationships between teachers, Pasifika students, parents/families and the school

Teachers report that the three-way conversation during conferencing supports them to engage with the student and family in a genuine way, so that they can offer the best guidance and support possible to develop successful Pasifika learners. Teachers also report increased job satisfaction and feel confident that they are helping to improve Pasifika learner outcomes.

If we are improving their lives, whether it be academically, emotionally, or physically, we are doing our jobs. [Whānau teacher]

Whānau teachers have established stronger relationships with Pasifika parents and have provided a reliable, regular point of contact within the college. Whānau teachers have been able to create respectful relationships with students, and as a result, students are more trusting that the whānau teacher will represent them in a positive light.

You've got to establish that trust. If they trust that you are not going to tear them down, then they are completely cool. [Whānau teacher]

Once I've seen Mum and Dad there is an instant connection. What we're trying to do is get rid of the gate, the barrier that the student keeps between us and their families. They don't actually realise that it is not that scary for Mum and Dad to know us. [Whānau teacher]

The three-way conferencing as part of the academic mentoring programme is also clearly having a positive impact on the relationships between the college and Pasifika families and students. Parents value the new three-way mentoring/conferencing approach as it enables them to contribute effectively to their child's educational pathway. One parent reported that:

What I say counts [in the college]. ... I can make a contribution and express what is not available. I can play an active role if I know what is required, just show me how.



[Previously], we reckon we once nearly got to 50% [parent turnout for parent–teacher interviews, but] most times it was 30 something percent, so it's more than doubled, on average. And [what we're doing now is] more meaningful and it's trying to get away from 'Oh, Johnny was a good boy' or 'Sione's naughty'. ... I try to hammer [home to teachers that] your job when reporting is to say what the kid can do, what the kid can't do, and what you [the teacher], the family, and the kid might be able to do [collectively] to deal with what they can't do.

[Principal]

Improves communication regarding the student and their learning

The academic mentoring programme has improved communication between student, family, whānau teacher and college staff. Whānau teachers are accessible and provide meaningful information to parents. Language barriers are broken down, as students are able to translate for parents where English is a second language.

The communication is really good and it starts with the headmaster. His communication with us is good.

[Parent]

They give us chances to sit together. So everything that we didn't know we will know from that meeting including what we want to say to the teacher about our kids. It's a good chance to talk together. [Parent]

The communication among teachers about the student has also improved, as information is shared more readily between the whānau form teacher and their teaching colleagues.

In addition, parent–student communication has improved, as students and their parents partake in the kinds of productive conversations that have not occurred in the past. Pasifika students are driving positive conversations about themselves and their achievements.

A lot of our children don't actually sit down and have a conversation with their mum and dad about themselves. I think that is what they liked about the whole [three-way conference] thing. They were able to come together on neutral territory and talk about their school. Parents are lovely here. They have to go to all the trouble to get permission from the boss to take two hours of the day and come down here, organise transport, baby-sitters. It's a real tribute to them. [Whānau teacher]

Leads to more effective school processes to support student outcomes

School routines have become more constructive and linked more closely to learner achievement and improving outcomes.

The newly established structures and routines for the academic mentoring programme provide continuity for students and parents. Whānau teachers offer 'one stop shop' contact, and deal with both academic and pastoral care.

I think the programme has made a huge difference in terms of the school, or [rather] the school family. The [whānau teachers] have got to know their kids a lot more closely. ... They have sensible conversations [with them] and when you get 88% [parent] turnout for something like [three-way conferences] you are really starting to hit home. [Principal]

At the end of the 2013 school year, the principal and senior leadership team expected to be able to assess how effective the programme had been in terms of the impact on NCEA Level 1 results, student options and subject choices.

Respects the characteristics and values of the school community

As well as the broader benefits of the academic mentoring programme discussed above, Pasifika parents and students, teachers and leadership staff, including the principal, identified a number of other factors that they felt were particularly successful within the Otahuhu College context. These are listed in Table 5.

Table 5: Further successful aspects of the Otahuhu College academic mentoring programme identified by Pasifika parents and students and college staff

Commenting on aspects of the academic mentoring programme they felt worked well with the college's Pasifika community, participants indicated that these included the following.

- The personalised approach taken by the college, which has led to high turnout by families and increased parental input. Letters for parents to give employers explaining why they need time off work to attend school meetings, invitations sent home, regular whānau teacher contact, whānau teachers giving out their phone number, reminder texts and emails, have all fostered this.
- Meaningful conversations between parents and teachers, where the parents' knowledge and expertise is acknowledged and valued — especially in the ways that they actively support their child's education.
- The planned effort to learn about each student's family, which helps to build trustful relationships between the school and family. This is encouraged through regular conversations, and open and transparent processes.
- Teachers facilitating conversations, using a respectful and strengths-based approach, by focusing on what the student is doing well, noting both improvements and support needed.
- Students being empowered to have an active voice in mapping out their and their family's futures. Families also being encouraged to have an active voice, and the college acknowledging their support or partnership as being critical to the success of Pasifika students.



In summary

The academic mentoring programme at Otahuhu College is proving to be a highly effective way to develop young Pasifika adults who are confident in leading their own learning. It equips Pasifika (and all) students with skills and knowledge needed to become effective, independent learners, and, in recognition of the importance of parental support, includes and involves parents and families in the process.

The academic mentoring programme also helps students — supported by their parents — to make well informed, evidence-based decisions about learning pathways, including appropriate subject choices, to help them prepare well for a positive future. One of the members of the senior leadership team summed up the difference the teachers are now seeing since the programme was introduced:

Based on my own observation and knowledge of Pacific Island learners [the focus needs to be on] what's in the future and how the future is connected to what I am doing right now. By making that very explicit they see a purpose and a connection. This is [now] happening at all levels in a way that it wasn't before.

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Research team

Based on the success of the *Rangiātea Case Studies and Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2011), Judy Oakden was selected by the Ministry to lead the project with the support of Kellie Spee. Pasifika cultural and research competence was then built into the project through the selection of experienced Pasifika team members — Pale Sauni, Dr Ruth Toumu'a, and Clark Tuagalu — whose input, involvement and presence in all key stages throughout the project provided the Pasifika lens required to ensure the project planning, data collection, analysis, and reporting were framed appropriately for Pasifika.

Kellie Spee was the lead researcher for this particular exemplar with the support of Judy Oakden, Dr Ruth Toumu'a and Clark Tuagalu.



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