

Collaborative practice and networks across schools: What we know about the effectiveness of Kāhui Ako

In response to a request from the Minister of Education, in March 2025 the Education Review Office (ERO) provided a short paper on what is known about the effectiveness of Kāhui Ako | Communities of Learning.

The information in this short paper was based on:

- published ERO and Ministry of Education reports (2017-24)
- ERO School Improvement Framework data
- Ministry of Education attendance and NCEA data
- insights from ERO Evaluation partners in its ongoing work with schools
- international evidence on collaborative practice and communities of learning.

The paper did not involve a formal evaluation of Kāhui Ako. ERO noted that there were limitations in the availability of empirical evidence. As a result, unlike other ERO evaluations, this short paper does not contain recommendations for action.



Information Update: What we know about Kāhui Ako

To:	Erica Stanford, Minister of Education		
Date submitted:	4 March 2025	Deadline:	
Security Level:	In-Confidence	Tracking Number:	M25-09
From:	Ruth Shinoda	9(2)(a)	
Attachments:	1. <i>Collaborative practice and networks across schools: What we know about the effectiveness of Kāhui Ako</i>		

Purpose

1. In February 2025, you requested a short paper containing ERO's independent advice on the effectiveness of Kāhui Ako. This briefing and attached paper outline what ERO knows about Kāhui Ako.

Background

2. No formal evaluation of Kāhui Ako has been conducted and there is a general lack of empirical evidence about the implementation of the policy. The judgments in this paper are based on:
 - existing published ERO reports,
 - ERO School Improvement Framework data,
 - Ministry of Education attendance and NCEA data, and
 - insights from ERO Evaluation partners in their ongoing work with schools.

Summary

3. Kāhui Ako were established in 2014 to raise educational achievement through greater collaboration between schools. Approximately \$1.43 billion has been invested in Kāhui Ako over the last 11 years.
4. We have assessed Kāhui Ako in terms of:
 - the design of the policy against international evidence on the key areas of effective practice,

- implementation, and
- outcomes achieved.

Design

5. Networks of schools can raise the quality of teaching and learning by sharing resources and expertise and strengthening educational pathways. There is a wide range of international evidence on the components of effective networks. From this we have summarised the following key areas that are essential for collaborative practice across schools:
 - Collective responsibility and shared purpose
 - Effective leadership
 - Shared knowledge and resources
 - Accountability
6. The first three areas are recognised as important and are present in the design of Kāhui Ako. However, accountability, is only weakly present. Almost all formal accountability for improving learner outcomes remains with individual schools Boards of Trustees, rather than Kāhui Ako themselves.

Implementation

7. **Shared knowledge and resources** is the area where implementation is strongest, especially the delivery of shared Professional Learning and Development (PLD) to schools within Kāhui Ako.
8. Implementation is mixed and variable across the areas of **collective responsibility and shared purpose**, and **effective leadership**. Having shared purpose across primary and secondary schooling contexts has been a challenge in some Kāhui Ako, and early learning services have not been included to the extent originally intended. Kāhui Ako leaders are more effective when they lead through influencing others and build strong connections across schools. The training and support for leaders to enable this type of leadership has not been strong.
9. **Accountability** is weak to non-existent in practice. There can be a reluctance from some schools to share their data, especially when there are differences in size and performance across schools. There is limited Kāhui Ako involvement directly with parents, whānau and the wider community.

Outcomes

10. Available data suggests that Kāhui Ako have **not led to improvements in regular attendance, NCEA Level 2 achievement, or performance against the domains of ERO's School Improvement Framework**. Controlling for other school characteristics – school type, roll size, equity index and isolation index – schools in Kāhui Ako perform similarly or slightly below schools that do not belong to a Kāhui Ako on these outcomes.

Alternative models

11. Kāhui Ako are not the only model of collaborative practice across schools in New Zealand. Kahukura Community of Practice set up after the Christchurch earthquakes provides one alternative example of cross-school collaboration, which was unfunded. There are also other models of wider collaborative networks focussed on a variety of areas including Mana Ake, the Learning Support Delivery Model, Grow Waitaha and Subject Associations.

Overall judgment

12. Overall, despite the sizeable investment, there is limited evidence as to how well Kāhui Ako are working to improve educational outcomes by increasing the quality of leadership and teaching through collaboration across schools.
13. After controlling for other school factors, on attendance, and on ERO's School Improvement Framework's Learner Success and Wellbeing domain, Kāhui Ako schools perform slightly below schools who are not in Kāhui Ako. On NCEA Level 2 the outcomes are similar. If Kāhui Ako were, in aggregate, effective in raising achievement after more than ten years of implementation, some visible difference in outcome data could reasonably be expected.



Ruth Shinoda
Deputy Chief Executive

04/03/2025

Hon Erica Stanford
Minister of Education

____/____/____



Collaborative practice and networks across schools

What we know about the effectiveness of Kāhui Ako

This short paper provides an overview of what ERO knows about the effectiveness of Kāhui Ako. These judgments are based on existing published ERO reports, ERO School Improvement Framework (SIF) data, Ministry of Education and NCEA data, as well as insights from ERO Evaluation Partners in their ongoing work with schools and early learning services.

We identify the key areas that support effective collaborative practice and assess the design and implementation of Kāhui Ako against these. We compare schools that are members or not of Kāhui Ako with respect to ERO's SIF domains, rates of regular attendance, and NCEA Level 2 achievement. We also identify alternative models of cross-school collaboration.

Executive Summary

Kāhui Ako were established in 2014 to raise educational achievement through greater collaboration between schools. This is a big year for schools with the implementation of new curricula. It is timely a decade later to look at how Kāhui Ako might be used to support these changes.

Networks of schools can raise the quality of teaching and learning by sharing resources and expertise and strengthening educational pathways. This paper is intended to give an overview of what ERO knows about Kāhui Ako and how well they are working across what we know about effective collaborative practice.

Design

Evidence states that the following key areas are essential for collaborative practice across schools:

1. Collective responsibility and shared purpose
2. Effective leadership
3. Shared knowledge and resources
4. Accountability

The first three areas are recognised as important and are present in the design of Kāhui Ako. However, accountability is only weakly present. Almost all formal accountability for improving learner outcomes remains with individual schools' Boards of Trustees, rather than Kāhui Ako themselves.

Implementation

ERO has previously reported on early implementation of Kāhui Ako, but no large-scale formal evaluation of the impact of Kāhui Ako has been completed, and empirical research evidence about implementation is limited.

Through ERO's ongoing engagement with schools, what we do know is that the focus and functionality is variable across Kāhui Ako. Given weak accountability mechanisms, effective leadership through influence, rather than hierarchy, is an important determinant of Kāhui Ako strength. Additionally, Kāhui Ako shared practice is stronger where they have built on existing network connections.

In general, sharing knowledge and resources is the domain where practice is strongest, especially the delivery of shared Professional Learning and Development (PLD) to schools within Kāhui Ako.

However, accountability is weak to non-existent in practice. Without shared lateral accountability, there has been a reluctance in some Kāhui Ako to even openly share assessment information. Developing and maintaining shared purpose across primary and secondary schools is a challenge, and early learning services are much less involved than schools. Kāhui Ako priorities have not necessarily realigned to be consistent with Government priorities when these have changed over time.

Outcomes

Available data suggests that Kāhui Ako have not led to improvements in regular attendance, NCEA Level 2 achievement, or performance against the domains of ERO's School Improvement Framework. Controlling for other school characteristics – school type, roll size, equity index and isolation index – schools in Kāhui Ako perform similarly or slightly below schools that do not belong to a Kāhui Ako on these outcomes.

Alternative models

Kāhui Ako are not the only model of collaborative practice across schools in New Zealand. Kahukura Community of Practice set up after the Christchurch earthquakes provides one alternative example of cross-school collaboration. There are also other models of wider collaborative networks focused on a variety of areas including Mana Ake, the Learning Support Delivery Model, Grow Waitaha and Subject Associations.

Conclusion

Overall, there is an absence of measurement about network impacts and a lack of clear evaluative evidence on the effectiveness of Kāhui Ako over the last decade in respect of their core goal of raising achievement. The design of the policy gave due weight to most of the key domains that support effective collaborative practice but did not put in place accountability levers. Actual practice is variable and comparing available outcomes data between those schools that are and are not part of Kāhui Ako, Kāhui Ako have not raised achievement as intended, after more than ten years of implementation.

Background

Collaborative practice across school networks

Research has shown that collaborative networks play an important role in enhancing teacher practice, and therefore increasing student achievement¹. Evidence suggests schools improve faster and more effectively by working together.

Effective collaborative practice can:

- Develop teacher skills
- Foster strong relationships
- Provide ownership and opportunities
- Support disadvantaged schools².

In effective collaborative networks, responsibility for the success of all students is shared among all members of the network. There is sufficient provision of support time and resources to enable teachers to work collaboratively to understand learning needs, decide what to focus on, plan effective programmes and teaching, and monitor and evaluate progress^{3,4}. Effective collaborative networks require a system wide approach and a transformation of the culture of an entire system, not just individual schools⁵.

There is strong evidence on the impact of collaborative networks on the building of collective capability, knowledge, expertise and practice of teachers and school leaders^{2,6,7,8}.

Kāhui Ako were established to raise educational achievement through collaboration

Kāhui Ako were established in 2014 as part of the Government's Investing in Educational Success (IES) initiative. The aim of IES was to raise educational achievement by increasing the quality of leadership and teaching by promoting collaboration between schools, dedicating resources to support capability improvement and strengthening educational pathways⁹.

Kāhui Ako were designed to enhance teaching practice and leadership by providing opportunities for collaboration, knowledge sharing and extending career pathways for teachers through three new roles: Kāhui Ako Leaders (or Principal Lead), Across School Teachers and Within School Teachers. The new roles were set up to enable collaboration with the network to support and share effective teaching and leadership practice⁹.

Kāhui Ako is the most widespread initiative in New Zealand intentionally promoting cross sector collaboration¹⁰. As of 2025, there are 220 Kāhui Ako across New Zealand including approximately 1,950 schools and 1,500 early learning services.

A range of resources are available to Kāhui Ako

Schoolsⁱ who are members of a Kāhui Ako receive ongoing operational funding and staffing support to enable their involvement in a Kāhui Ako. Private schools and early learning services can be unfunded members¹¹.

The Ministry of Education offers a range of supports to Kāhui Ako totalling approximately \$130m per annum, an investment of approximately \$1.43 billion in Kāhui Ako over the past 11 years. Specific resourcing currently available to schools participating in Kāhui Ako includeⁱⁱ:

Boards of Trustees

- \$1,000 when it joins a Kāhui Ako, and then \$1,000 per annum to help with costs related to maintaining their involvement in the Kāhui Ako.

Kāhui Ako Leader

This role is for a lead Principal to support the collaboration and growth of member principals and teachers. To support this role the employing board has access to:

- 0.40 full-time teacher equivalent (FTE) release time,
- between 90% and 140% of a rate 2 travel grant, and
- a \$1,000 per year induction and networking allowance

Across School Teacher

This role strengthens teaching practice across the Kāhui Ako and is eligible for:

- 0.40 FTE release time, and
- between 85% and 140% of a rate 1 travel grant and a \$750 per year induction and networking allowance.

Within School Teacher

This role promotes best teaching practice with schools and is eligible for:

- 0.08 FTE release time, and
- a \$400 per year induction and networking allowance.

In addition to the specific operational costs involved with Kāhui Ako, there are also substantial investment and transaction costs for schools to work together, for instance time attending Kāhui Ako meeting

Kāhui Ako collaborate to address collective achievement challenges

Each Kāhui Ako sets shared goals, or achievement challenges, based on the needs of its community. Each network must collectively agree which achievement challenges it will focus on, basing its decisions on an analysis of data, and then develop an action plan to address this⁹. The guidance available to schools on what achievement challenges should be focused on and how to

ⁱ State, state-integrated, schools and kura.

ⁱⁱ While originally funded, inquiry time is no longer available for Kāhui Ako.

set and refresh these has not been updated, or realigned to changing Government priorities, since Kāhui Ako were first implemented.

Promoting collaborative practice is not unique to Kāhui Ako

Incorporating collaborative practice within schools was not a concept unique to Kāhui Ako. The Ministry of Education has previously promoted collaboration between schools through initiatives such as Building Evaluative Capability in Schooling Improvement, Kia Eke Panuku Building on Success, Extending High Standards Across Schools, and Learning and Change Networks¹².

What do we know about Kāhui Ako?

Following the implementation of Kāhui Ako in 2014, a series of reviews and evaluations of early implementation were completed by both ERO and the Ministry of Education. However, since then there has not been a systematic evaluation of Kāhui Ako and their effectiveness and impact on raising student achievement. Empirical evidence about Kāhui Ako practice is limited^{13,14}.

Key areas for effective collaborative practice and networks across schools

From a range of international evidence, ERO has identified several key areas that facilitate effective collaborative practice across schools.

These are:

1. Collective responsibility and shared purpose
2. Effective leadership
3. Shared knowledge and resources
4. Accountability

The following sections provide an overview of available evidence in the design and implementation of Kāhui Ako across each of the areas.

1. Collective responsibility and shared purpose

Collective responsibility and shared purpose are incorporated into Kāhui Ako through the development of achievement challenges and working collaboratively to address these. Strong relationships facilitate this, but it can be challenging for secondary and early learning services to buy in to the shared purpose of a Kāhui Ako.

What does good practice look like?

- Effective collaborative communities have a clear goal and focus which is well understood and clearly articulated across all members of the network.
- There is collective responsibility for educational quality and student outcomes across all the schools in the network.
- There is a shared understanding of the priorities for action and the best way to address them.

How were Kāhui Ako designed?

- Kāhui Ako bring together schools and services from within a network from early learning through to secondary schools. While engagement with early childhood learning services is not a prerequisite for Kāhui Ako, engagement is strongly recommended by the Ministry of Education¹¹.
- Once established, Kāhui Ako collectively agree on and set three to five 'achievement challenges'. Achievement challenges are based on key priorities from across the network that Kāhui Ako represents.
- Kāhui Ako work collectively to make progress against these achievement challenges.

What do we know about implementation?

Relationships helped to facilitate a shared purpose or hindered progress where they didn't exist

Kāhui Ako were often formed amongst schools where there were already established relationships, which helped to enable shared understanding and expectations of working together. Conversely, Kāhui Ako were less effective when there was no joint history, and where there was a lack of clarity in terms of shared purpose. When there was not an established relationship Kāhui Ako took longer to get up and running and to be effective¹².

Involvement in Kāhui Ako is challenging for early learning services

In order to include the end-to-end education pathway, the intention was for Kāhui Ako to include early learning services. However, their involvement has been limited due to being unfunded, a tendency for meetings to be held during school hours, and the diminished relevance of achievement challenges for an early learning setting.

The involvement of secondary schools is challenging

It is a requirement for Kāhui Ako to include at least one secondary school. However, this can be problematic due to their size and dominance creating a perception by primary schools that they are "taking over"¹². Conversely, secondary schools can also be dominated by the larger number of primary schools in a Kāhui Ako. There can be limited overlap for professional development needs and approaches between primary and secondary schools, making developing a shared purpose, collective responsibility and buy-in for secondary schools more difficult.

2. Effective leadership

Effective leadership is a critical determinant of successful across-school collaboration. Kāhui Ako leaders are more effective when they lead through influencing others (leading leaders) and build strong connections across schools. The training and support for leaders to enable this type of leadership has not been strong.

What does good practice look like?

- A defining characteristic of successful collaboration across schools is having leaders who model effective practice, facilitate learning and leadership in others, support investigation of new possibilities, and sustain improvement.

How were Kāhui Ako designed?

Kāhui Ako are led through the three roles of:

- Kāhui Ako Lead – This role is to build collaboration with the network, facilitate ongoing development and implementation of the achievement plan, and support professional growth of leaders and teachers.
- Across School Teacher – These roles involve mentoring effective teaching practice across schools in the Kāhui Ako.
- Within School Teacher – These teachers act as mentors and advisors to share good practice within a school.

What do we know about implementation?

Leaders who have influence are the most effective

Leadership is important for driving and sustaining change within Kāhui Ako. The leadership of both the Principal Lead as well as the across and within school leads play an important role in Kāhui Ako and their effectiveness. Principal Leads have tended to be leaders in earlier networks who have the confidence of their colleagues and board to carry out the role. Kāhui Ako leaders who are most effective are able to:

- influence rather than assert authority,
- network at the different levels of a Kāhui Ako,
- be flexible and responsive,
- think innovatively about how they use available resources for example through roles in professional practice or evaluation, and

see the reciprocal benefits in terms of building management capability within their own school as well as across the Kāhui Ako.

Training and support has not been strong

While some leaders are able to work effectively as noted above, leadership across Kāhui Ako has not been as effective as it could have been due to a lack of clear and specific training. Leadership within a Kāhui Ako differs from institutional leadership and for some leaders there is a need for more training and help to be able to shift their focus to work collectively and responsively across a Kāhui Ako.

Kāhui Ako can be a valuable support especially for new Principals

An evaluation by ERO on preparing and supporting new principals found that involvement in a Kāhui Ako was a valuable mechanism for providing support for new principals. Collaborative groups such as Kāhui Ako helped support new principals by providing opportunities to step back from day-to-day tasks to reflect on the bigger picture¹⁵. This was not a core intent of the original Kāhui Ako policy but is to some extent a desirable unintended outcome.

3. Shared knowledge and resources

Working collaboratively across schools requires sufficient time, resources and focus on consolidating professional practice. In general, sharing knowledge and resources across schools, communicating, planning and working together is an area of comparative strength for Kāhui Ako.

What does good practice look like?

- Members of highly effective groups interact frequently among themselves, focusing on sharing knowledge and developing, refining and consolidating professional practice.
- One of the most crucial components for successful collaboration is ensuring there is time to invest in the network and its goals through joint planning, collaborative inquiry and professional learning within and across the network.
- Sharing of resources that is aligned with the network's vision, goals and targets.

How were Kāhui Ako designed?

Kāhui Ako were designed to:

- enhance teaching practice and leadership, by providing opportunities for collaborative enquiry and knowledge sharing across Kāhui Ako,
- allow schools from across a Kāhui Ako to use resources available collectively from across a network to ensure that teaching and learning meets their needs, and
- make it easier for teachers and leaders to share and grow their expertise together.

Kāhui Ako are able to work in whatever way makes the most sense for them. There is no prescribed way to share knowledge and resources, and limited guidance.

What do we know about implementation?

The sharing of knowledge and resources and effectively building collaborative practices across schools is the main mechanism through which Kāhui Ako effect change. Some Kāhui Ako have been effective at:

- utilising time as the most critical resource and enabler for effective collaboration,
- aligning resources with their achievement challenges and creating opportunities for members of the Kāhui Ako to plan and work together on collaborative inquiries and access relevant professional development, and
- strategically allocating available resources for example ensuring that more resources are available for priority areas rather than being equally shared.

ERO Evaluation Partners identify that effective Kāhui Ako:

- have developed clear communication channels,
- have addressed inequities by pooling available funds, and accessing expensive PLD across a Kāhui Ako, and
- have built strong relationships and networks. This is especially valued by rural schools who might otherwise miss out on or be excluded from face-to-face interactions.

However, practice varies considerably between Kāhui Ako, and while Across and Within School Leads may be actively participating in the Kāhui Ako, teachers within schools are not always aware of the Lead's role or how it relates to them. As a result, improvements in teaching practices are not consistently reaching teachers in all schools.

Evaluation Partners also note that making time to actively participate in Kāhui Ako activities is increasingly difficult.

Kāhui Ako can support the implementation of new initiatives and curriculum

There is some evidence that Kāhui Ako can play an important role in supporting the implementation of new initiatives and curriculum. For example, an ERO report on the implementation of Aotearoa New Zealand Histories and Social Sciences learning area¹⁶ found that the across school collaboration that Kāhui Ako enabled was one of the most useful supports for understanding, developing and implementing curriculum content. We also found that implementation was going better when schools worked together within their Kāhui Ako as it enabled them to draw on the knowledge and skills of other schools, and access curriculum design experts.

However, the delivery of PLD for the more recent priority of Structured Literacy has not been systematically through Kāhui Ako, except where Structured Literacy was a pre-existing focus for a particular Kāhui Ako.

4. Accountability

Ensuring there are processes and mechanisms for both internal and external reporting and accountability is crucial, however there are limited mechanisms for accountability built into the Kāhui Ako model with individual schools responsible for establishing governance, oversight and monitoring progress. Almost all formal accountability remains with individual schools' Boards of Trustees, rather than Kāhui Ako themselves.

What does good practice look like?

- There is internal accountability where network members are clear about what they are aiming to achieve, monitor progress and outcomes, and make changes as necessary.
- There is assessment of the impact being a member of the network has on individual schools and the contribution they are making to the overall network.
- There is external accountability through reporting and visibility of progress towards achievement challenges vertically at a system level, as well as horizontally between participating schools to Boards of Trustees, parents and whānau, and the wider network.

How were Kāhui Ako designed?

- Kāhui Ako were designed to be responsible for monitoring and evaluating their own progress, development and use of resources.
- Each Kāhui Ako is expected to establish its own operating structure to provide governance and oversight.

- Kāhui Ako are expected to review and refresh their achievement challenges every two to five years or when a new lead Principal is appointed. Achievement challenges originally needed to be endorsed by the Director of Education and were published on Education Counts.

What do we know about implementation?

Internal Accountability

ERO's review of the early implementation of Kāhui Ako identified that accountability for learner outcomes was an area that needed strengthening across Kāhui Ako¹².

There are no instruments in the design of Kāhui Ako which enable members to hold each other to account (lateral accountability). ERO Evaluation Partners identify that there can be a reluctance from some schools to share their data, especially when there are differences in size and performance across schools.

External Accountability

In 2019, the requirement for Kāhui Ako achievement challenges to be endorsed by the Ministry of Education was dropped. There are now no formal accountability levers for the Ministry of Education for Kāhui Ako (outside schools' individual accountability). This also means that achievement challenges have not shifted to align with Government priorities when these have changed.

The degree to which Boards of Trustees are involved in Kāhui Ako varies. There are early formalities that require board approval, so they are often most involved and well informed at the establishment stage. We found evidence that most Principals kept Boards informed at a basic level about what is happening through their regular reporting channels, but there is limited wider involvement¹⁷ limiting Boards' role in accountability.

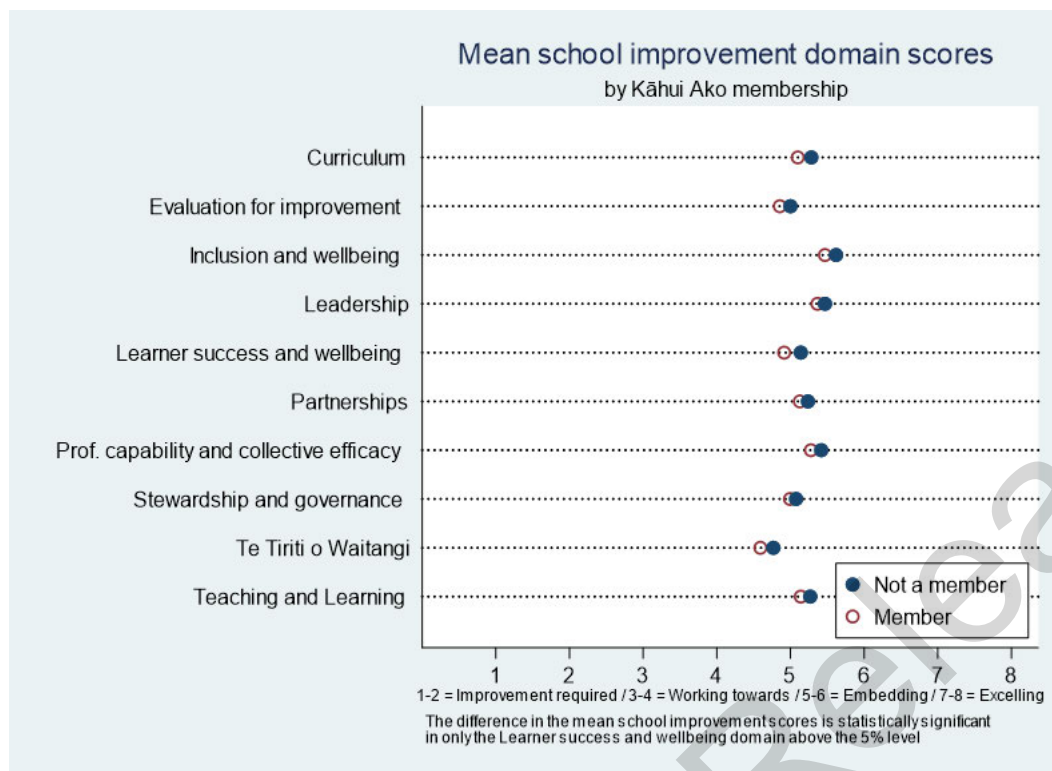
ERO Evaluation Partners identify that there is limited Kāhui Ako involvement directly with parents, whānau and the wider community and in some instances teachers within a school had limited interactions and understanding with the wider community. However, a growing number of Kāhui Ako are actively using Kāhui Ako as a vehicle to engage with their local iwi or rūnanga.

What do we know about the achievement outcomes of Kāhui Ako?

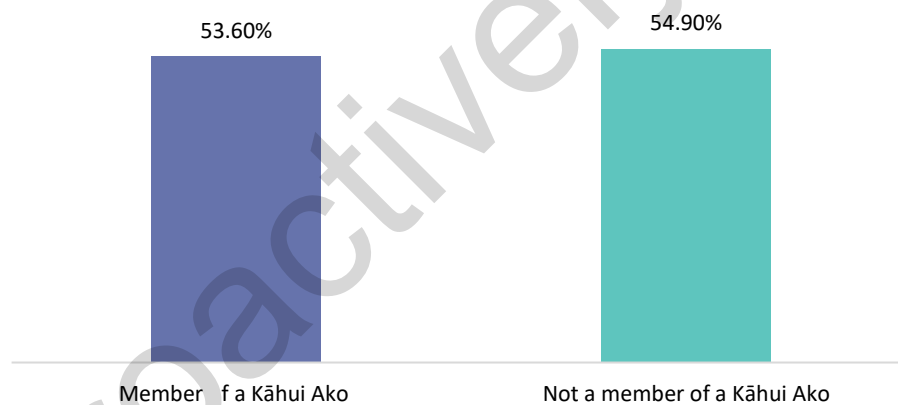
Data shows Kāhui Ako schools do not achieve better outcomes than non Kāhui Ako schools

ERO reviews schools across ten domains in our School Improvement Framework (SIF)¹⁸. On average, across all School Improvement Framework domains, schoolsⁱⁱⁱ that belong to a Kāhui Ako score slightly lower than schools that do not (see Figure 1). The difference is statistically significant at the 5% level for the SIF domain of Learner Success and Wellbeing after controlling for other school factors: equity index, school type, roll size, and isolation index.

ⁱⁱⁱ Schools who teach in English only – this excludes schools who teach all or some of their students in a Pacific language or te reo Māori

Figure 1: Mean school improvement domain scores by Kāhui Ako membership

Similarly, those schools who belong to a Kāhui Ako reported statistically significant lower rates (1.3 percentage points) of regular attendance (see Figure 2) in Term 2, 2024.

Figure 2: Term 2, 2024 regular attendance by Kāhui Ako membership

*The difference in regular attendance is statistically significant at the 5% level

Controlling for the same set of school factors, there was no statistically significant difference for NCEA Level 2 achievement between (secondary) schools in Kāhui Ako and those that are not.

These data are not sufficient to make a broad conclusion about the effectiveness of Kāhui Ako, but they show that schools that belong to a Kāhui Ako do not have clearly better outcomes than schools who are not in a Kāhui Ako. We acknowledge that we cannot control for all other contributing factors, and there is a paucity of achievement information (especially in primary schools). However, after more than ten years of implementation, the lack of a clear difference between those schools that are and are not in Kāhui Ako, suggests that goals of raising achievement have not been realised.

Alternative models of collaborative networks across schools

Not all schools are part of a Kāhui Ako and there are examples of collaboration across schools outside of the Kāhui Ako model.

Kahukura Community of Practice

Kahukura Community of Practice (Kahukura) is a collaboration of seven schools based in Christchurch. Kahukura was established through strong connections and the proximity across the schools and then solidified following the Canterbury Earthquakes. Kahukura is characterised by:

- cooperative leadership rather than a single Lead Principal
- collective focus areas rather than collective achievement challenges allowing each school autonomy to set their own targets to meet their school's individual needs, and
- a self-funded model where resources are pooled to access resources and expertise locally and internationally.

An evaluation of the model by ERO found that it¹⁹:

- has substantially impacted teaching practices and supported rapid adoption of innovation and change,
- supports and builds collective improvement through 'focus areas',
- clearly adds value through sharing and building knowledge and facilitating innovation, and
- has set up a sustainable model through lead teachers and strong leadership.

Other models of collaborative networks

There are other models of collaborative networks across the education sector in New Zealand focused on a variety of areas including, learning support, wellbeing, and learning and practice for example:

- **Grow Waitaha**²⁰ – A multi-year collaboration between schools, Ministry of Education and Ngāi Tahu established to support schools in post-earthquake greater Christchurch. Supports and promotes schools to collaborate and learn from each other by fostering self-sustaining networks of schools to create better outcomes for learners.
- **Learning Support Delivery Model**²¹ – This model brings together local clusters of early learning services, Kōhanga reo, schools and Māori medium kura to work collaboratively to

identify and respond to learning support needs. Working collaboratively across areas is a core operating principle of the model.

- **Mana Ake**²² – NGOs employ Mana Ake to work collaboratively with schools to understand their needs and to design and deliver programmes to improve wellbeing outcomes for children. Mana Ake works with school clusters and brings school leaders together to share innovation and learn from each other with a strong focus on building sustainability.
- **Subject Associations**²³ – An important source of professional learning for secondary teachers. Run by teachers for teachers, subject associations enable the sharing of skills and knowledge, discussion of matters of common interest, and engagement with government officials about current projects.

There are also international examples of collaborative networks, such as:

- **Communities of Practice, Victoria, Australia**⁷ – These communities are focused on sharing resources and knowledge, and building a strong culture of transparency for regular sharing and analysis of data.
- **School Partnership Programme**² – This programme is intended to build capacity and capability across school clusters in the UK so they can gradually take more responsibility for their own development and maturity and lead their own improvement.
- **The Connection**⁶ – A collaborative leadership development network in Australia aimed at building and sharing expertise, knowledge, resources and practices for system-wide improvement of student outcomes.

Conclusion

Overall, despite the sizeable investment, there is limited evidence as to how well Kāhui Ako are working to improve educational outcomes by increasing the quality of leadership and teaching through collaboration across schools.

The design of the policy gave due weight to most of the key domains that support effective collaborative practice, but did not give due weight to accountability.

Actual practice is variable. Kāhui Ako are more effective when leadership is strong, and the network has developed good relationships and models for collaboration. Sharing practice and accessing shared PLD are the main areas of strength. Having shared purpose across primary and secondary schooling contexts has been a challenge in some Kāhui Ako, and early learning services have not been included to the extent originally intended.

After controlling for other school factors, on attendance, and on ERO's School Improvement Framework's Learner Success and Wellbeing domain, Kāhui Ako schools perform slightly below schools who are not in Kāhui Ako. On NCEA Level 2 their outcomes are similar. If Kāhui Ako were, in aggregate, effective in raising achievement after more than ten years of implementation, some visible difference in outcome data could reasonably be expected.

References

- ¹ Hargreaves, A (2019). *Teacher collaboration: 30 years of research on its nature, forms, limitations and effects*. Teachers and Teaching, 25:5, 603-621. https://hub.mlrc.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Andy-Hargreaves-2019-Teacher-collaboration_30-years-of-research.pdf
- ² Education Endowment Fund (2023). *Schools Partnership Programme: Evaluation Report*. <https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/SPP-Evaluation-report.pdf?v=1739863804>
- ³ Hattie, J (2015). *What Works Best in Education: The Politics of Collaborative Expertise*. London: Pearson.
- ⁴ Kamp, A (2019). *Kāhui Ako and the collaborative turn in education: Emergent evidence and leadership implications*. New Zealand Annual Review of Education, 24, 177-191. <https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/nzaroe/article/view/493/5636>
- ⁵ Fullan, M. (2006). *Leading Professional Learning*. The school Administrator. <https://michaelfullan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/13396072310.pdf>
- ⁶ Singhania, A., Hard, N., & Bentley, T. (2020). *Unleashing the power of the collective in education: The impact evaluation of SVA Bright Spots Schools Connection*. RMIT University
- ⁷ Victoria State Government Department of Education (2021). *Purposeful collaboration for excellence through Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice*. <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/professionalpracticenote17.pdf>
- ⁸ Prenger, R., Poortman, C. L., & Handelzalts, A. (2019). *The Effects of Networked Professional Learning Communities*. Journal of Teacher Education, 70(5), 441-452. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487117753574>
- ⁹ Ministry of Education (2017). *Uptake and early implementation: Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako*. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/181551/Uptake-and-early-implementation-Communities-of-Learning-Kahui-Ako.pdf
- ¹⁰ Kamp, A (2019). *Kāhui Ako and the collaborative turn in education: Emergent evidence and leadership implications*. New Zealand Annual Review of Education, 24, 177-191. <https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/nzaroe/article/view/6493/5636>
- ¹¹ Ministry of Education (2024). <https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/schools-year-0-13/administration-and-management/kahui-ako-communities-learning>
- ¹² Education Review Office (2019) *Collaboration in practice: insights into implementation*. <https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/collaboration-in-practice-insights-into-implementation>
- ¹³ Williams, T (2024). *Bridging: Supporting factors of collaboration across sectors in one Kāhui Ako/Community of Learning*. New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work. 21:1, 75-90. <https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/teachers-work/article/view/620/714>
- ¹⁴ Constantiades, M., Eleftheriadou, S. (2023) *The Role of Leadership in Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako: A Systematic Literature Review*. New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies. 58, 341-359. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40841-023-00295-2>
- ¹⁵ Education Review Office (2023). *Everything was new: Preparing and supporting new principals*. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/towpef5r/everything-was-new-preparing-and-supporting-new-principals.pdf>
- ¹⁶ Education Review Office (2024). *Teaching Histories: Implementation of Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories and the refreshed Social Sciences learning area*. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/teaching-histories-implementation-of-aotearoa-new-zealand-s-histories-and-the-refreshed-social-sciences-learning-area>
- ¹⁷ Education Review Office (2017). *Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako in action: What we know so far*. <https://ero.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-05/Communities-of-Learning-Kahui-Ako-Action.pdf>

-
- ¹⁸ School Improvement Framework. <https://ero.govt.nz/sites/default/files/media-documents/2024-07/SIF%20Explainer%20Excelling%20School%20-%20final%2017.6.24.pdf>
- ¹⁹ Education Review Office (2021). *Exploring Collaboration in Action: Kahukura Community of Practice*. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/sqcn1mwp/ero-19864-mm-kahukura-report-final.pdf>
- ²⁰ Grow Waitaha (n.d.). *Grow Waitaha – Educational transformation through a co-designed collaborative approach in a complex public sector context case study*. <https://www.growwaitaha.co.nz/media/1506/grow-waitaha-case-study.pdf>
- ²¹ Learning Support Delivery Model (n.d). <https://hepikorua.education.govt.nz/how-we-work/collaborative-teaming/>
- ²² Mana Ake (n.d). <https://manaake.health.nz/>
- ²³ Subject Associations (n.d). <https://www.ppta.org.nz/communities/subject-associations>