

100 conversations in 100 days

Community conversations about education systems change in Auckland, 2015

During January and February 2015, Learning Auckland Leadership Table members held conversations with families, young people, educators and community leaders about what people believed to be the urgent issues for Auckland to address so that all our children and young people succeed.

It's a crowded system and we don't really know what works

- People had enthusiasm and passion for ensuring all young people succeed.
- There are many different initiatives across the city; so many that it would be hard to map them and very difficult to get data on what resulted in long term change.
- The system is complex and not coherent; many people only had experience of one or two parts of it.

Strategies for change

- Raise our aspirations for all young people, particularly Maori and Pasifika who are most vulnerable. *See their potential, not them as problems*
- Increase cultural competence across the education system
- See culture and language diversity as strengths, not problems to be managed
- Involve families more effectively than currently happens
- Use communities to find solutions
- Focus on transitions, because that's where things go wrong
- Build in more flexibility (of funding and of initiatives and approaches) so appropriate pathways are created for all young people
- Join up and think Cradle to Career

Actions

- Raise the standard of educational leadership and teaching
- Take a whole of family approach; include literacy and numeracy and recognise the other challenges families face
- Increase cultural competence
- More learning in home languages
- Reduce bullying
- Smooth out transitions – every transition sets vulnerable kids back
- Drive collaboration, not competition
- Find part time work and employment experience for all young people
- Collaboration between funders
- Flexible funding for pathways for all young people
- 'High-touch' programmes for vulnerable children and young people that last long enough to get change
- Better quality data, with more analysis for specific target groups, sectors and communities

Key themes from our 100 Conversations

Aspirations

Raise expectations

- Make sure we all have high expectations of children and young people across the system, regardless of ethnicity or postal code; all children should have receive the same quality of education regardless of their school.
- Recognise Maori and Pasifika aspirations and change the public discourse. Stop seeing Maori and Pacifica as problems.
- Have a system that builds self-belief – that turns “I don’t know, I’m dumb” into “I don’t know yet but I know I can and will.”
- Kids need to believe they can achieve

Showcase young people as role models with a bright vision for the future

- Support children and young people to aspire to be learners, not just to ‘get a job’; prepare them for diverse careers.
- Have a flexible, learner-centred system with a pathway for all young people – be strengths-based.

Support families to know about and engage with their children’s learning

- Help families know about and understand the education system and how things work
- Support families to be confident to engage with and ask questions and support their child’s learning; strengthen what they know about supporting learning at home.

Grow cultural competence across system

- Ensure our educators are skilled to work with multi-lingual learners “*languages are under-recognised.*” Give Pasifika people a variety of pathways in their own languages
- Strengthen plural language learning
- Grow the number of bi & multi-lingual teachers
- Learning environments that reflect social and cultural interests and backgrounds
- Let our children see their own culture reflected in the system and in the adults children spend time with. They need positive role models.

Raise the capacity of the education system

- Come up with better ways to collaborate. There are too many organisations competing for funding.
- What is Auckland’s capacity to work collaboratively on education change. There’s competition within sectors and limited experience at real collaboration across sectors
- Raise the standard of teaching

Challenges

The impact of poverty and social factors on achievement

- Key importance of housing – poor housing stifles opportunity for kids and families. Poor housing = abuse. Not enough space, sleep deprivation, nowhere safe to eat.... Insufficient controls on the private sector and minimum standards.

Support across all parts of the system

- Transitions are the biggest challenge – particularly between primary/intermediate/secondary, where every transition sets some children back
- Secondary schools can't provide the necessary academic or emotional support to enable all low SES students to reach their potential (teacher views)

Resourcing and collaborations

- The lack of funding for substantial long-term support and intervention. Our youth strategies and support systems are convoluted and short-term
- This is not just about South Auckland – there are challenges in many communities
- Engaging businesses to contribute to the development of the workforce; it's hard to get them interested
- Does data tell us investment should be made? Substantial multi-year investment in selected individuals of promise? Or lower level investment across a much broader swathe of the population?

Opportunities for change

Reduce bullying (strong message from Learning Auckland student editors group)

Involve communities in developing solutions

- Develop effective community engagement as part of education clusters. Capture best practice: fast fail, fast scalability.
- Reverse ghettoization – support different kinds of housing and community development

Take a whole family approach and focus on literacy

- There's a direct line between literacy achievement and opportunity, between low levels of literacy, low level of basic life skill and the justice system
- Literacy projects are great but that's not the priority for a family struggling to put food on the table. Join up the thinking about health and housing, parenting, budgeting and financial literacy

Look for different kinds of philanthropic investment.

- Get funders to take a broader approach; look for several funders working in alignment; ask them to focus on the system, not just talented individuals. We need relatively extended timelines
- *The best investment comes from high touch, reliable programmes that last long enough to get change – “walk alongside vulnerable families*

Focus on quality teaching, transitions and particular high risk moments

- Secondary school readiness programmes at year 8, to ease the transition to high school (ones for Pasifika moving from school to tertiary are successful)
- Encourage Peer to Peer learning
- Effective education means opportunities to learn experientially and unfettered by pressure around just one concept of learning
- Hold Career events for aspirational students who don't have the confidence with spoken or written English needed to succeed at university.
- Shorten the length of time it takes to do tertiary (summer schools that include tertiary allowances)
- Increase the diversity of school boards – more Pasifika
- Increase the focus on entrepreneurship
- Find work experience for our kids

Data to help us look ahead

The Leadership Table needs more specific data to help with setting priorities and actions:

- Data analysed more specifically to understand the demographic nuances of Auckland; undifferentiated Pasifika and Asian data hides important issues
- Data by gender
- Understand the implications of population growth in particular communities
- Get much more data about children at key transitions. Track missing or lost kids – there are more than we think
- Understand more about attendance
- Local employment/Youth employment and workforce engagement
- School destination data- where are our young people going? What happens to them when they start work
- Qualifications completion