



TAAKARO ORA

Active Wellbeing

Journey to Date

March 2019 -
January 2020



Orion
Tautoru

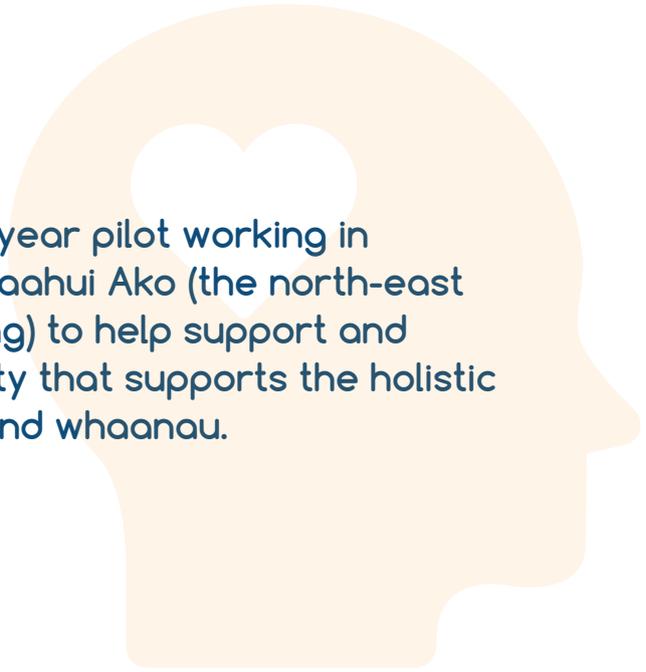


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INTRODUCTION

Taakaro Ora is an initial three-year pilot working in partnership with Te Pae Here Kaahui Ako (the north-east Hamilton Community of Learning) to help support and develop a connected community that supports the holistic wellbeing/hauora of tamariki and whaanau.



FIRST YEAR UPDATE

Our approach during the first year of the pilot has been centred on relationship building and data gathering. We have met with senior leadership teams and the teaching staff of each participating school to convey the vision of Taakaro Ora and to gather on-the-ground knowledge of the strengths, barriers, and preferred areas of support concerning student wellbeing and the provision of health and physical education (HPE) within each community. These opportunities have been highly valuable in ensuring any support Taakaro Ora offers will be tailored to the specific needs of each participating school.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

The information we've been given has shown us that although Te Pae Here is made up of diverse schools and communities, many of the concerns regarding the HPE curriculum and student wellbeing are the same. In particular, all teachers will benefit from HPE PLD, and regardless of decile, teachers are witnessing an increased prevalence of mental and emotional challenges amongst their young people – particularly to do with anxiety and lack of resilience. This has made it clear that the mental and emotional needs of students is a key priority for Te Pae Here and that Taakaro Ora interventions should support this need. Additionally, while schools draw on a range of outside providers to support various aspects of student wellbeing, it has been identified that deeper relationships with these providers would enhance effectiveness.

HOW WE'VE LISTENED

Our task has been to ensure that any support we give, and any recommendations we make, meet the holistic wellbeing outcomes of the Taakaro Ora pilot as well as the specific wellbeing needs identified by Te Pae Here schools, and contribute towards achievement challenges within the Te Pae Here High Level Plan. In order to support Te Pae Here schools and families to improve the rates of anxiety and lack of resilience increasingly exhibited in the classroom and at home, we have conducted extensive research. Consequently, we have drawn on explicit requests from Te Pae Here management and teachers, as well as domestic and international research and case studies, to provide you with the overlapping school/community interventions presented in this report.

THE NEXT STEPS

Te Pae Here and its schools are now in the position to decide which interventions will be explored in order to make necessary and meaningful improvements to student wellbeing and Taakaro Ora is poised to help action those decisions.

These efforts will be important for achieving Te Pae Here and Taakaro Ora's outcomes. Further, this partnership will positively contribute to the [Moving Waikato 2025](#) strategy enabling tamariki and whaanau to get 'out there and active', support community sustainability, and together lead and enable change.

REPORT

BACKGROUND

“Since the initial meetings to form [Te Pae Here], the principals have been steadfast in their belief that successful student learning and achievement has to be built on the physical and emotional wellbeing of all learners. Crucial to this wellbeing is the quality participation of parent/whaanau/iwi . . . We will all work to ensure that student wellbeing will be at the forefront of our actions and programmes to underpin success for all”.¹

This identified Te Pae Here as the perfect partner for helping to co-create the Taakaro Ora initiative, and mutually work towards the following outcomes:

1. Schools value health and physical education (HPE), physical activity, sport, mindfulness and play as vehicles to enhance tamariki wellbeing/hauora.
2. Teachers are confident and competent in the planning and delivery of health and physical education.
3. Communities are well connected and put the needs and wants of tamariki at the heart of what they do.
4. Tamariki are provided with quality opportunities for participation, support and experiences to improve their overall wellbeing/hauora.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

In order to build effective cultural relationships, we have adopted a non-prescriptive non-prescriptive approach that attempts to appreciate whanaungatanga, whakapapa, and kaupapa. This has involved taking our time to build relationships with Te Pae Here schools and communities, and adapting our relational approach to each school's context, constraints, and needs.

Rather than assuming knowledge, we have endeavoured to learn directly from each school and community. We have demonstrated this through a layered approach to gathering insights and information, including initial visits with senior leadership teams, whole staff workshops, meetings with parent teacher associations where possible, and staff and student surveys conducted independently by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER).

THE FINDINGS

Despite the diverse nature of the schools and communities within Te Pae Here, five key themes have surfaced:

1. Priority – The HPE curriculum has not been given significance and teachers identify that despite the removal of national standards, the local curriculum still marginalises HPE opportunities.
2. Professional development – Senior leadership and teachers identify the need for professional learning development within HPE, including specific support at the planning stage to help achieve balance across the HPE strands, explore cross-curricular integration, and reach alignment with school values.
3. Relationships – The improvement of communication and interactions between schools, families, outside providers, and the wider community are necessary for holistic change.
4. Mental and emotional wellbeing – Student resilience, anxiety, and related aspects of mental/emotional wellbeing are the significant wellbeing challenges that schools want to focus on. Education and support for parents in this area is also strongly requested.
5. Student autonomy – Students want more opportunities to be active, make decisions, and engage in activities that are culturally relevant to them

The first two themes fall within the HPE curriculum support avenue. Learning in the HPE curriculum helps students improve their personal and community wellbeing and “grow as confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners”.² Therefore, there is an expectation that all Te Pae Here schools will capitalise on this support via:

- Participation in the Professional Learning Group – The Te Pae Here network for growing and maintaining the quality of HPE in the kaahui ako.
- Staff HPE PLD (e.g. in teacher only days, staff meetings, syndicates, and one-on-one).
- The development of individualised action plans with each school.

With that work already ongoing, this report focuses on research and interventions related to the next three themes which are more related to the community space. We use the priority area of student mental and emotional wellbeing as a focal point for exploring all those themes throughout the rest of this report.

WHAT IS ANXIETY & HOW DO WE SUPPORT CHILDREN TO BECOME RESILIENT?

The New Zealand Health Promotion Agency³ and Anxiety NZ⁴ describe anxiety as a normal response to life stressors. It is a helpful and adaptive emotion that helps us notice dangers, react to those stresses, and help us adapt to the environment. These feelings typically settle, but when they don't, they can negatively impact our mental and physical health, causing distress or otherwise impairing "our ability to function in important areas of life such as . . . school"⁵. In 2014, citing results from the Prime Minister's Mental Health Project, the Mental Health Foundation identified that although "most young people are resilient, 20% of young people are likely to experience a mental health issue" and that anxiety is wide-spread; "almost one in five meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder by age 19".⁵ The Te Pae Here data supports the notion that these challenges are increasing.

Acclaimed Kiwi neuroscience educator and child development expert Nathan Wallis suggests that we can make important improvements to student wellbeing by enabling opportunities within our schools. He says that our focus on literacy and numeracy "limits children's creativity . . . emotional intelligence, and it makes them more vulnerable to anxiety and depression as teenagers".⁶ He even goes as far as suggesting that it is the major contributor.⁷ To combat this, Nathan suggests that children should be learning to problem-solve through play.⁷

Domestic and international research supports Nathan's assertions, demonstrating that play (especially when it involves risk-taking) within the formats of physical education, recess (i.e. break times), and active transport, is highly important for holistic student wellbeing. This wealth of research highlights that "play is a vital and fundamental part of the human experience . . . and is essential to [children's] healthy physical and mental growth"⁸. Indeed, the benefits of quality play on the emotional, social, and physical development of children are well established (see [further reading](#)).

As explained in the New Zealand State of Play survey, "play provides opportunities for children to be physically active, and enhances motor, social and communicative skills, cognitive abilities, resilience, wellbeing, and creativity".⁹ The provision of play "is uniquely placed to offer children the chance to learn about risk . . . and thus to help children equip themselves to deal with similar hazards in the wider world".¹⁰ Furthermore, play leads to deeper learning, providing the perfect environment for children to develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed and thrive academically and in adult life.^{8 11}

"I know it's difficult for adults to make that leap sometimes, but the kid spending three hours building their LEGO city, that is perseverance. If we want a child to sustain attention on a mathematical problem that is not easily solved immediately, the disposition behind that is perseverance".⁶

Playing is "multi-faceted, open ended, and creative"⁷ learning, that develops the necessary positive dispositions for learning itself. It is not surprising then that there is mounting evidence that increasing the time dedicated to physical activity (through play, physical education, short movement breaks, and timely recess periods) even if it includes reducing time spent in other academic subjects, has no negative impact on students' academic performance and in fact is likely to support improved academic achievement.^{12 13}

The initiatives that we have compiled, supported by this wealth of research, will not only contribute to the aims of Taakaro Ora and positively impact the student wellbeing needs identified by Te Pae Here schools, but also support the development of an environment within Te Pae Here "where learners feel empowered and have the skills to learn, succeed, achieve".¹ In order to provide the opportunities necessary for this development and for children to engage in self-directed activities that develop resilience and keep anxiety at healthy levels, there are three key requirements:

Children need the **time, space, and permission** (i.e. freedom) to play.

WELLBEING INTERVENTIONS

Taakaro Ora has investigated and/or developed a variety of wellbeing interventions to meet the needs identified to us. These focus on the mental and emotional needs of Te Pae Here students in addition to other complementary opportunities.

An overview is provided for each of the opportunities presented below, but all of them can be explored further and tailored to each individual school and community. Many of the interventions overlap with one another, creating opportunities to build on and expand initial projects into additional, larger, or more in-depth ones. Additional opportunities will also be explored with individual schools. However, because the themes these interventions tackle cut across all Te Pae Here schools, there is a unique opportunity for Te Pae Here to explore kaahui ako-wide interventions. In all cases the Taakaro Ora team are available to assist and support, either directly or connect schools with the right people and information.

To support your understanding and implementation of these interventions we provide links to further reading and additional resources. The interventions are presented alphabetically.

ACTIVE TRANSPORT

Work with parents, Hamilton City Council, and local businesses to enhance active transport opportunities, including educating students and parents on the value of active transport. There are several projects that can be explored independently or in conjunction with each other:

- [Road safety advice for families](#)
- [Walking/cycling school buses](#)
- Curriculum inquiry resources – [Feet First](#), [BikeReady](#), and [Active Travel Action](#)
- Street play initiatives (e.g. [Auckland's Pt. Chevalier school event](#), or [UK](#) and [US](#) examples)
- Movin'March Toolkit (from Greater Wellington Regional Council), includes:
 - [Walk or Wheel](#) incentive programme
 - [Parent Pledge](#)
 - [Super Safe Strider](#) (walking school bus)
 - [Park and Stride](#)

ALTERING THE SCHOOL TIMETABLE

As identified in this document, break times are integral for student health, learning, and behaviour. Careful consideration of the length, timing, and frequency of school breaks, such as eating after break times, for example, may be helpful. See a local example of [Waitakiri Primary School](#) in Christchurch or this [international toolkit](#) for implementing eating after play in your school.

COMMUNITY/SCHOOL GARDEN



Multiple Te Pae Here schools have expressed interest in a school/community garden and/or developing a [Garden to Table](#) programme to support student wellbeing. We have connected with Garden to Table who have a representative ready and able to come and run a

workshop for all interested Te Pae Here schools to support the development of school/community gardens and kick-start a garden to table programme.

GOOD SPORTS

Started by Aktive Auckland, adopted and being locally developed by Sport Waikato, [Good Sports](#) aims to create positive sporting experiences for Kiwi kids by supporting and educating the key adult influencers in children's sport: Parents, caregivers, coaches, teachers, and other sport leaders.

New Zealand and international research indicate that over the last decade, participation by children in organised sport opportunities has been gradually declining. The causes of this involve multiple and complex societal patterns that continue to change; however, the key point is that "many of today's sport experiences are no longer meeting children's needs as effectively as they could".¹⁴ To curb this decline and ensure sports opportunities are holistic and child-centred, Hamilton and Waikato sports/

clubs are beginning to work with Sport Waikato to adopt the Good Sports philosophy.

We encourage Te Pae Here schools to introduce and integrate Good Sports into the school and community landscapes. For example, modifying termly HPE planning to target more inclusive participation instead of the current heavy focus on interschool sport events that only meet the needs of a small number of students. We also recommend doing this as part of increased measures to support school sport volunteers and to help increase parent participation and retention in afterschool sport – a need identified in our findings. Taakaro Ora and other Sport Waikato teams are available to support in these areas.

HEALTH AND SAFETY SUPPORT

There is a disparity between Te Pae Here schools on their playground rules and health and safety information being touted. For Te Pae Here schools to be confident in enabling children's autonomy through, for example, more flexible play provision, clear guidance on health and safety with a focus on play is warranted. Support can include:

- Health and safety seminar for school management and/or Board of Trustees with a health and safety consultant skilled in sport and education sectors.
- The usage of risk-benefit analysis within school policies to account for the learning, development, and behaviour benefits associated with risk-taking and play (see, for example, [this risk benefit assessment form](#)).
- WorkSafe clarifications: A WorkSafe announcement back in 2016 explained the organisation's disappointment in hearing wild claims about health and safety requirements in schools¹⁵ and has clarified that schools are only required to manage risks rather than eliminate them. The [WorkSafe Mythbusting page](#) specifically addresses these school myths:
 - "A teacher can't stand on a chair to fix the time on a wall clock."
 - "We have to cancel school trips and outdoor activities because they are too risky and we'll get fined if someone gets hurt."
 - "School principals now have to put their homes into a Trust to protect themselves against potential financial penalties."

- "The school Board is liable for every accident that happens in a school playground."

- "It's too risky to let kids climb trees while at school."

Ultimately, Te Pae Here schools should be confident in increasing play provision for children as WorkSafe has made it clear that "it's not reasonable to expect schools to stop kids being kids and taking low-level risks".¹⁶

KIWISPORT DIRECT FUND

The [KiwiSport Direct Fund](#) is a payment to schools for spending on initiatives that increase children and young people's participation in sport. The fund is included in the quarterly operations grant given to schools by the Ministry of Education but is [not for normal operating costs](#). The fund equates to \$13 and \$21 per head for primary and secondary students respectively. A more transparent and/or [strategic use of this funding may increase sporting opportunities](#) for Te Pae Here students.

LET GROW PROJECTS

Let Grow is a US based organisation "creating a new path for parents, schools, and America itself – a path back to letting kids have some adventures, develop more independence, and grow resilient[sic]".¹⁷ They have three key interventions that they recommend schools and communities adopt:

- [Let Grow Project](#) – "Teachers tell the students to go home and ask their parents if they can do one thing they feel ready to do that they haven't done yet (e.g. walk the dog, make dinner, get themselves to school – alone or with other kids)"¹⁸. This project can be further explored via Taakaro Ora's HPE curriculum support.
- [Let Grow Play Club](#) – "Schools keep their gyms and/or playgrounds open till dinnertime for self-directed free play enabling mixed-age play and a long stretch of tech-free time"¹⁹. See also, 'Opening school grounds' below.
- [Let Grow Community](#) – "Creating a town where kids walk to school, play outside, run errands – and everyone's supportive"²⁰. This is a larger scale wrap-around project to progressively normalise (where necessary) these play and active transport initiatives.

LOOSE PARTS PLAY

Loose parts, a specific interest of Te Pae Here teachers, refers to child-led play using a myriad of loose materials (pallets, logs, PVC pipe, rope, tape, tyres, paint, rocks, kitchen utensils, tools, water, etc.). See for example, the Play.sport pilots in Waitakere and Upper Hutt that both developed school-based kits ([Magic Play Box](#) and [loose parts pods](#) respectively). Similarly, the Hutt City Council's [Build & Play trailer](#) provides play opportunities that are focused on construction and enable children to use tools and build things they get to keep. Taakaro Ora is currently investigating how these resources were developed and will work with any interested schools to support their creation and access.



MODIFY SCHOOL PLAYGROUND RULES

The University of Otago and AUT [Play Study](#) investigated the modification of playground rules and the effects on behaviour. Schools in the study realised that they had a default position of saying no (regarding children's play choices) rather than simply allowing children to play²¹. Swanson School became the poster school for the study and its principal at the time, Bruce McLachlan, [has spoken often of the huge benefits](#) it had to his school and students.

The Play Study researchers recommend New Zealand schools "reduce the number of rules children are exposed to during play, emphasising opportunities for increasing exposure to risky and challenging play" (e.g. mud/water/

rain play, climbing trees, rough and tumble, riding bikes/skateboards/scooters at break times) in order to reap the observed benefits of "better behaviour, increased activity, responsibility, cooperation and confidence" inside and outside the classroom.²¹

OPENING SCHOOL GROUNDS

Providing community access to school fields, playgrounds, and pools outside of school time would significantly magnify the number of accessible areas and opportunities for wellbeing, especially for our lower socioeconomic families who have reduced ability to travel. This could begin with the Let Grow Play Club and be expanded to include weekend and holiday usage of the school's community assets. There is potential opportunity to be a part of Hamilton City Council's Partner Pools programme, and WorkSafe has issued a reminder that [community access of school pools is achievable](#).

OUTSIDE PLAY

Outside Play is "an online tool to help parents and caregivers gain the confidence to allow their kids to engage in more outdoor play"²². This tool educates parents on the importance of risky play and how children's healthy development is interfered with by putting too many limits on them. The resource guides users on a journey of a) reflection on their own childhood play opportunities compared to their children's, b) possible play scenarios and how they would act when confronted with them, and c) creating a personalised action plan to help set goals of letting their children engage in more outdoor risky play. This could be a helpful parallel resource to the Let Grow Project and/or other projects like active transport and the parenting workshops below.

PARENTING SUPPORT

To complement and reinforce the messaging of the other projects there is the opportunity to provide support for parents regarding children's mental and emotional wellbeing. Specifically, we have the opportunity to have [Jenny Hale](#) (an ex-teacher, respected family counsellor, and speaker from the Parenting Place) run 2-3 parenting workshops around north-east Hamilton focusing on how parents can reduce their children's anxiety and support resilience and self-management.

SCHOOL HAUORA NETWORK

We are in the process of developing a 'school hauora network'. This has involved bringing together relevant Te Pae Here outside providers who contribute to various aspects of student and family wellbeing to connect with each other. The possible outcomes of this group are improved synergy between providers, improved communication with schools, enhanced objectives of having outside providers (as identified by schools – upskilling staff, role modelling, opportunities for students), and ease of access.

YOUTH WORKERS (FOR FULL PRIMARY/INTERMEDIATE/SECONDARY)

Connect with [24-7 Youthwork](#) to understand and explore potential opportunities to partner with a local church (or churches) to have a youth worker (or youth workers) in the school. The partnership and the duties of the youth worker(s) is based on shared outcomes and agreed upon practices.

Focusing on these outcomes will support students to be

RESILIENT

Confident

mindful
active

& successful members

OF SOCIETY

who are more in tune with their hauora/wellbeing and that of those around them.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Taakaro Ora is here to support Te Pae Here with an approach that will improve student wellbeing. At the close of this pilot in 2021, we hope to have built sustainability for schools to continue making progress beyond the life of the pilot.
 - Support will include HPE curriculum support (think in-school with teachers) and community support (think out of school with students, families, and outside providers).
- Te Pae Here have made it clear that they believe the physical and emotional wellbeing of students is the foundation of successful student learning.
 - Te Pae Here schools have committed to receiving Taakaro Ora support and gave feedback on their strengths, barriers, and wishlist. To date, this has come from SLT, staff, NZCER (staff/student voice), and some parents.
- The data received from Te Pae Here schools and communities has identified numerous wellbeing issues to address, with significant interest on initiatives that will support the development of mental and emotional wellbeing. SLT and staff would like to address, improve, and/or support:
 - Student resilience, anxiety, imagination, risk-taking, social skills, teamwork, student agency, fundamental (fine and gross) motor skills, behaviour, social media/device overuse, unwillingness to fail/try new things, over competitiveness, inclusion.
 - Education for parents and to improve school-home-community-outside provider connections.
 - HPE PLD, curriculum integration, more non-competitive and non-traditional activities.
 - Additionally, students like being active but are often inactive. They want opportunities to be more active and have more choice regarding their activities.
- Hyper focus on traditional academic subjects and delivery methods is a key contributor to the decline of student mental and emotional wellbeing. But, if students have the time, space, and permission to be independent through play (in a variety of contexts in and out of school) it has significant positive implications on student holistic wellbeing, particularly mental and emotional wellbeing, as well as their academic success.
 - Domestic and international research and case studies confirm that kids want to play and move more, play and move in their own ways, and that such playing improves the areas of wellbeing identified by Te Pae Here schools as areas of focus.
- The listed interventions support the independence of students, are advocated for by global and local experts because of their proven success, meet the desires of students, tackle the wellbeing issues identified by Te Pae Here, and can be actioned with support from Taakaro Ora:
 - Active transport and play street events, altering the school timetable, school-community gardens, Good Sports philosophy, health and safety support, opening the school to the community, loose parts play, modifying school playground rules, parenting support, and youth workers.
 - These can be supported by PLD in HPE, networking between schools (PLC), and improved outside provider relationships.
- There are numerous research articles and books that confirm and elaborate on the information above and provide ideas for implementing these projects (see [further reading](#)).

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