

PRESS RELEASE

STUDY REVEALS HOW KIWIS PARENTS FEEL ABOUT SCHOOLS IN THE NEW AGE OF EDUCATION

New Zealand parents want to give their kids the best start in life and that means giving them a great education. A new study sheds light on what matters most to parents when choosing a school.

Auckland, February 2022 – Kiwi parents have different views on what makes one school better than another when it comes to preparing their kids for the real world, especially now that education looks different to how it did prior to the pandemic. According to a new study by life insurance company, OneChoice, there's a variety of factors that come into play when parents are deciding what school to send their children to.

The new *Kiwi Education Report*, commissioned by OneChoice, explores the state of schooling in New Zealand with a deep dive into Kiwi parents' preferences for private and public schooling, sentiments on co-ed vs single sex, zoning rules, bullying concerns and moving on into tertiary education. Based on a survey of 1,010 Kiwi parents with children under 20, the research reveals how important finding the right school is to parents, with 1 in 3 even starting to think about schools before their kids turn three (34%).

The top deciding factors when parents are evaluating schools for their children are academic achievements and reputation for artistic, creative and environmental endeavours. Other key considerations are where siblings go or went to school, whether it's a co-ed or single sex school and what special program scholarships are available.

Most parents feel co-ed schools provide greater opportunities for socialisation (63%) and better prepare students for the real world (57%) than single sex schools. On the other hand, two of the top perceived advantages of single sex schools are that they tend to be more focused on achievements (25%) and allow students to concentrate on their studies more (35%).

Over a third of parents revealed they prefer public schools (36%) over private schools (26%), with some even saying that private schools are overrated. Some of the key concerns regarding private schools are affordability (68%), social pressures (56%) and elitism (47%). Parents also feel public schools have the same high standards (84%), offer more diversity (90%) and prepare children for the real world (83%).

However, private schools are thought to have their advantages too. The top five perceived benefits are strong academic results (49%), the standard of facilities (46%), greater individual attention with smaller classes (40%), quality of education and teachers (39%) and the ability to choose a school without being constrained by zoning rules (37%).

Parents also believe private schools provide other life advantages — such as offering greater career opportunities (39%), instilling values, morals and character (31%) and creating better social networks (24%).

Despite their preferences, 8 in 10 parents don't feel they can afford to send their kids to a private school of their choice (81%) and half the parents who would like to send their kids to a private school say they can't afford it (51%).

Professor Peter O'Connor from The University of Auckland comments: “The results of the survey aren't surprising. What is clear is that New Zealand parents feel very deeply and strongly about their children's education and worry about making the best possible choice for them. Parents seem to have caught the complexity in the private versus state schools debate; they realise there are pluses and minuses in both systems. However, a strong public education system that is well funded is an expectation of all New Zealanders. Successful lives, however you might define that, are led by both private and public school graduates.”

Meanwhile, 7 in 10 parents feel their public school options are limited due to zoning rules, which guarantee children who live in the school's area a place at their local school (70%).

Half the parents who are looking to send their children to public school said they're planning ahead to escape zoning restrictions before their kids start school (58%). According to the *Kiwi Education Report*, parents are either already or likely to consider moving to a different location (49%), spending more on property (43%) and attaining special programme scholarships to schools in other zones (44%), among other plans.

One of the biggest concerns for parents over the last two years has been how the pandemic would impact their children's learning. 57% expressed having either some or very strong concerns about their children falling behind in their education due to lockdowns (87%).

About one-third of parents feel COVID-19 lockdowns have had a solely negative impact on their children's education (29%), while more than half believe the impact has been a combination of positive and negative (53%). On the other hand, about 1 in 5 parents said the lockdowns have been nothing but positive for their kid's learning (18%).

In addition to concerns over children falling behind in their education, a third of parents don't think the current school curriculum is equipping kids with the skills they need to thrive in a professional working environment (34%). A further 1 in 3 are unsure about this (32%).

On the other hand, one-third of Kiwi parents feel that their kids are being prepared to succeed in a professional environment. Plus, an overwhelming majority believe their children are getting the right education for jobs of the future (93%).

However, over half the parents (55%) think too much pressure is placed on children to choose subjects when they may not have decided on their future career path.

Disappointingly, the research found that bullying is still prevalent both at school (89%) and online (91%), according to the vast majority of Kiwi parents. Unfortunately, over half of the parents surveyed said their children have been bullied at school (58%), compared to a quarter of parents who are aware of their kids being bullied online (25%).

The effects of being bullied, whether online or offline, have been devastating for families. Over half the parents said bullying had a considerable or immense impact on their children — making them want to avoid school, triggering anxiety and damaging their self-esteem.

Sadly, most parents who tried to work with their children's school to stop the bullying felt they didn't get the assistance they needed, whether they were reaching out about bullying at school (55%) or online (64%). Over half aren't happy with the efforts of social media companies either, saying they're not doing enough to address bullying (51%).

Professor Peter O'Connor from The University of Auckland comments: “New Zealand was the only country in the OECD to focus on wellbeing and the mental health of children post COVID lockdowns. There was a real desire in primary schools to catch up on

relationships rather than lost work. However, COVID-19 has realigned learning in New Zealand schools in ways we still do not fully understand. The effects will be long-lasting and significant. COVID-19 highlighted inequities in the system including the digital divide.”

Further findings from the research

Private schools are financially out of reach for most parents

- 1 in 4 (27%) parents who send their children to private school admit that they are paying more than 20% of annual income of private school fees.
- Sending children to a private school is a priority for some with many starting to save early (47%), get financial help from family (28%) or taking on a loan (23%).
- Almost half of parents (42%) have had to or anticipate having to decide which child received private education – mostly due to questioning the value or financial constraints.
- 1 in 2 parents said they are influenced by their own school experience for their preference on schools (49%) and 1 in 3 would even like to send kids to the specific school they attended (35%).

School zoning plays a major part in school choices

- Over half (52%) of parents think that zone boundaries should be allowed to be changed to accommodate population change.
- 65% of parents feel that zoning exceptions should be made to allow siblings to go to the same school.
- Despite no major earthquakes in almost 10 years, 45% of parents say they would not send their kids to a school located in an earthquake-prone area.

Concerns about the effects of COVID-19 on children's education

- Only 1 in 3 (31%) feel the government has done enough to support them through these challenges whereas 2 in 5 (40%) felt the government had not done enough.
- 1 in 2 parents feel COVID-19 has impacted decisions around school choice (48%).

Bullying is still a top concern for parents

- 63% of parents rate bullying in their top 3 concerns for their children.
- Over half of parents (58%) report that their child has experienced bullying at school (8% repeatedly and 18% at least once) – typically mental (70%) social (52%) or physical (47%).
- 19% of parents report bullying has an immense impact on their child and 35% a considerable impact (making them want to avoid school, making them feel anxious, and damaging self-esteem).
- Almost half (47%) said that the school's response to bullying was minimal or not at all.

- About two-thirds of parents said that they followed up with the school to ensure action was taken if their child was bullied.
- In the case of online bullying, parents were more inclined to follow up with the bully's family (42%) or counselled their child about dealing with online bullies in the future (49%).

Tertiary education is important for future employability

- 7 in 10 think university degrees will be important for jobs of the future (70%).
- Half believe their children's job prospects will critically rely on their formal tertiary education (53%).
- Nearly half (41%) of parents would be willing to get into over \$30,000 debt to fund tertiary education for their children.
- On the flip side, 91% of parents thought universities can learn a lot from apprenticeships and institutes of technology or polytechnic colleges in providing more practical or vocational skills.
- 87% also thought that what you learn on the job is far more valuable than anything learned from traditional education and 77% said too many people go to university for the sake of it.

— ENDS —

For media enquiries, please contact:

Megan Sutherland
New Zealand Communications Consultant
Hill+Knowlton Strategies
M: +64 278 939 960
E: meganjanesutherland@gmail.com

About OneChoice

We're all about helping Kiwis through trusted insurance products that take the stress and confusion out of the buying process. Backed by award-winning partners, OneChoice launched in 2020 with the goal of bringing simple life insurance to New Zealand. We set out to be different by providing cover that's easy to understand, easy to manage, and even easier to rely on.