

**NZEI
TE RIU ROA**

KŌRIPORIPO

**Early
Childhood
Education
Parents and
Whānau
Survey Report
2026**

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FOREWORD

In the early years, more than a million synapses are estimated to form every second, making it a critical time for cognitive, emotional, and social development.¹ This report reinforces the essential role that early childhood education teachers play in setting tamariki up for life – and the importance of *qualified* teachers in creating high-quality education.

As a parent, I'm delighted to add my voice to the hundreds of others in this survey advocating for quality early education and support for teachers so that our children can thrive. The current direction the Government is taking when it comes to early childhood education and care in Aotearoa New Zealand is both shocking and bewildering. Less than one in five parents see it as positive, according to this report.

This is perhaps not surprising when reforms such as FamilyBoost – a tax rebate which replaced 20 hours free early childhood education for two-year-olds – are not cutting through, and when promises made about alleviating costs for parents have not resulted in any material change for whānau.

Earlier this year, I attended a summit on early childhood education where Massey University's Professor Emeritus Paul Spoonley pointed out the immeasurable benefits of quality early education:

"Research repeatedly shows that the quality of a child's early childhood education will stay with them for the rest of their schooling and potentially for the rest of their lives, especially as it takes place during the crucial first 1,000 days of children's brain development. Funding for quality, low-cost or free early education, where all the teachers are fully qualified, makes a huge difference in preventing social problems in the long run and creating a thriving, healthy society."

The report shows that parents support this – with 92% saying they would support the establishment of a public early childhood education system that's free to attend, just like schools.

However, the issues teachers and parents are facing go deeper than just cost. Not only is early childhood education far too expensive, but decisions by those in government right now are actively chipping away at the quality and safety of education available for our youngest learners.

Yet, what are the top two considerations for parents and whānau when choosing an early childhood education service for their tamariki? Quality and safety.

1. Thompson RA. Early brain development and public health. Delaware J Public Health. 2024;10(4):6–11. doi:10.32481/djph.2024.10.03



At the summit, Australian MP and whistleblower Abigail Boyd spoke about the downfall of early childhood education in New South Wales, where profits were put before children's education and wellbeing:

"What we have seen in Australia is when you pursue a market-driven approach to early childhood education, you set off a race to the bottom on quality and safety. The corporatised sector cuts staffing and experience in pursuit of profits, which creates the conditions for abuse, neglect and assault, failing children, staff and families."

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the current ECE Funding Review proposes changes that undermine teacher pay and funding for qualified teachers – attacking the very things that parents and whānau see as key to their children's education and future.

Teachers and parents have a lot in common. Parents see the positive difference early childhood teachers make to their children's lives every day. Teachers understand what's needed to make quality education a reality. Both want the best possible learning environments for tamariki.

The simple truth: by standing up for teachers' pay and working conditions, you're standing up for better learning conditions for tamariki too.

Whatever the political outcome this November, it is vital that we continue to advocate for and support the rights of our children to the high-quality early childhood education they need and deserve.



Katie Morrow

Parent and survey participant

FROM THE NATIONAL SECRETARY

It's heartening to see the phenomenal turnout of parents and whānau voicing their support for early childhood kaiako and kaimahi and affirming the immeasurable value of their mahi in our *Kōriporipo* survey this year.

Importantly, almost everyone responding to the survey supported a completely public, free system of early childhood education – a direct contrast to the unaffordable market model that dominates in Aotearoa New Zealand. Currently, around 70% of the early childhood education sector is made up of private, for-profit providers.¹

Parents and whānau clearly recognise the danger inherent in the current path early childhood education is on – with our current government pushing through reforms that prioritise profits by trading off quality and safety against cost. They are very clear about where the focus should be: creating safe, affordable, and effective learning environments for our youngest members of society, staffed by professional, qualified teachers.

But how do we create the change we want and so desperately need? It's only when teachers and their unions work together with their communities to fight for the system shift that would allow every child to thrive in their early years that we can win. Our task is to build our movement with kaiako, kaimahi, and caregivers united to push for the change our tamariki need.

Ko te tamaiti te pūtake – let's put children, not profit, at the heart of all decisions about early childhood education.



Stephanie Mills

NZEI Te Riu Roa Korimako Tangiata | National Secretary

1. Mitchell, L., Botes, V., & Kamenarac, O. (2025). Early childhood education as a public good: Challenges and possibilities. *Early Childhood Folio*, 29(2), 8–14. <https://doi.org/10.18296/ecf.1158>

INTRODUCTION

This is the third and most successful year of the *Kōriporipo Early Childhood Education Parents and Whānau Survey* so far – an ongoing national survey by NZEI Te Riu Roa of parents and whānau with children attending or who have attended early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand.



Welcome to the NZEI Te Riu Roa *Kōriporipo Early Childhood Education Parent and Whānau Survey Report* for 2026.

This survey began as a small initiative two years ago alongside our workforce survey of early childhood education kaiako and kaimahi.

We were blown away by the response and heartened to see that parents and whānau really backed educators and staff working in early childhood education – and the survey has continued ever since.

This is the second time we have presented the results as a stand-alone report – in large part thanks to the impressive number of parents and whānau who participated, with more than 800 responses from across the motu.

This year's results reinforce that health and safety is paramount, and quality education is critical.

Parents strongly support pay parity for early childhood kaiako, and they also want greater public provision of early childhood education. They indicated that they do not believe the early childhood sector is on the right path under the current government.

You won't see any additional interpretation or discussion in this report, as we think the results speak for themselves. And while we encourage you to read them all, here are a few to set the tone:

- 98% of respondents agree that 'Early childhood education is critical in setting tamariki/children up well for education and for life. High-quality early childhood education should be a non-negotiable right in Aotearoa. It should be publicly funded, accessible, low cost, culturally appropriate, and meet the individual learning needs tamariki have.'
- When asked to rank the most important aspects in choosing an early childhood education service, the safety and well-being of tamariki came top. This was followed by having high-quality early childhood education with a minimum of 80% qualified teachers in place.
- 92% of parents and whānau would support the establishment of a public early childhood education system that's free to attend, just like schools. This is up from 78.2% in last year's survey.
- 97% of parents agree that experienced and qualified teachers are critical to the provision of high-quality early childhood education.
- 97% of parents think that early childhood teachers deserve to be paid at least the same as primary school teachers.
- 98% say learning support needs should be identified and addressed at the earliest possible point in a child's education journey.
- 87% say capping fees would help whānau with children in early childhood education.
- Respondents reported on the fee levels they have heard about from other parents, with many quoting fees for a single child at \$600+ per week. Some respondents reported fees that were even higher.
- The majority of parents and whānau say the Government's FamilyBoost tax rebate has not improved the affordability of early childhood education for their whānau.

- 92% would have concerns for their child's safety if the number of qualified teachers dropped.
- Only 19% of parents and whānau think the current government is taking early childhood education in the right direction.

We also asked parents and whānau what they value most about their child's early childhood teachers and support staff, and what they have struggled with in accessing learning support for their children.

A selection of their quotes appears throughout the report and in the final section to illustrate the strength of feeling in their responses.

It is truly heartening to see how strongly aligned parents, whānau, and the early childhood workforce are in their desire to see the development of high-quality, affordable early childhood education for all tamariki.

Again, ngā mihi maioha to all who took time to complete the survey.

We encourage you to share this report with your friends and whānau, as well as to keep an eye out for next year's survey.

"What do you value the most about your child's early childhood teachers and support staff?"

"They are so knowledgeable about tamariki and development; they have taught me how to be a better parent."

"They are genuinely invested in each family, and this helps children feel safe and supported when in childcare. They foster a creative spirit and provide opportunities for children to express themselves through different mediums and forms of communication."

RECOMMENDATIONS

We need a bold vision to turn the current direction of the sector around. Valuing qualified teachers, ensuring good ratios, and providing high-quality, low-cost or free early childhood education for all tamariki needs to be the top priority.



Parents, whānau, and the early childhood education workforce are strongly aligned when it comes to the change that needs to happen to create a new future for early childhood education.

We need a new vision that prioritises quality education and places children's and teachers' wellbeing at its heart.

We need a bold vision, and a government with both the conviction and moral clarity needed to turn around a sector currently marching away from quality early education.

We need to see a genuine commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi to ensure tamariki Māori can access immersion services wherever they live. Those services must also be supported with the teachers and resourcing needed, and with barriers to access removed.

We call on current and future governments to:

- **Toitū Te Tiriti.** All children need to see themselves and their cultural identity reflected in their education. Honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi and our world-leading curriculum *Te Whāriki* by prioritising culturally responsive education for all tamariki.
- **Save and expand the pay parity scheme.** A teacher is a teacher is a teacher – regardless of the age group they teach. Early childhood teachers should be paid the same as their colleagues teaching in kindergartens and schools.
- **Fix ratios for good.** Minimum ratios of 1:5 for under twos and 1:10 for over twos aren't safe and can't provide quality education. Improving mandatory minimum ratios would mean a higher standard of education across all services.
- **Value qualified teachers.** Qualified teachers are key to quality early childhood education. Retain the 100% qualified teacher funding band, and restore pay parity rates for new, fixed-term, and relief early childhood teachers.
- **Invest in early childhood education.** Early childhood education is a public good. Scrap the proposals that undermine quality education in the ECE Funding Review. Invest in qualified teachers and improve funding for learning support in the early years.
- **Cap fees to provide low-cost or free early education for all.** Children need to be at the heart of all decisions about the future of early childhood education. Make early education affordable and available for all whānau and their tamariki.



“What I value the most is their critical, professional, and qualified support when teaching my child.”

WHAT THE SURVEY TELLS US

Quality and safety are at the forefront of the choices that parents and whānau make about early childhood education. Nearly all agree that tamariki have a right to quality education and care – yet only 19% believe the current government is taking the sector in the right direction.

The most important aspects in choosing an early childhood centre

Parents ranked the most important aspects in choosing an early childhood education centre from the most to least important.

- ‘The safety and wellbeing of my child/children’ was seen as the most important aspect.
- ‘High quality: 80% or more qualified staff in all early childhood education settings’ was second.

Most important aspects of choosing a centre	Rank
The safety and wellbeing of my child/children	1
High quality: 80% or more qualified staff in all early childhood education settings	2
Good ratios of teachers to tamariki	3
Low cost/affordable and accessible for whānau – location, hours and cost	4

“100% qualified teaching team who are extremely experienced. Their team culture is fantastic, and you can see this in the way they work as a team. I cannot express how important this is coming from a private daycare where teaching staff were not all qualified, the culture was poor, and staff turnover was high. It had a huge impact on my children when [the] teachers were different every day.”

“Their relationship with my child and me. Their ability to see how special my child is – even when he is being difficult – and providing learning opportunities for him in their setting.”



Affordability of early childhood education

- 87% of parents agree that ‘Capping fees at \$10 per day per child would have a positive impact for parents/whānau with children in early childhood education services.’
- 92% of parents and whānau would support the establishment of a public early childhood education system that’s free to attend, just like schools. This is up from 78.2% in last year’s survey.
- 56% of parents and whānau say that the Government’s FamilyBoost tax rebate has not improved the affordability of early childhood education for their whānau.
- Respondents reported on the cost of fees they have heard about from other parents, with many quoting fees for a single child in for-profit ECE at \$600+ per week. Some respondents quoted fees that were even higher.

Teachers and quality

- 97% of parents agree that experienced and qualified teachers are critical to the provision of high-quality early childhood education.
- 97% of parents think that early childhood teachers deserve to be paid at least the same as primary school teachers.
- 99% of parents believe that early childhood education is not just ‘babysitting’ and that the education component is essential.

Learning support

- 98% of parents say learning support needs should be identified at the earliest possible time.
- 17% say their child has additional learning needs, and/or requires learning support. This is up from 14% in last year’s survey.
- Of this group, 64% say they have not found it easy to access support for their child.



“I appreciate how they create a safe, nurturing environment, communicate openly with families, and support each child’s learning, confidence, and wellbeing while respecting their culture and individuality.”



Health and safety

- Almost 100% (99.6%) of parents think it is important that their child is in a safe environment (e.g. bookshelves secured to walls, appropriate door handle height).
- 92% of parents would have concerns for their child's safety if the number of children to teachers was increased.
- 84% of parents would have concerns for their child's safety if the number of unqualified teachers relative to qualified increased.

Values

- 98% of respondents agree that 'Early childhood education is critical in setting tamariki/children up well for education and for life. High-quality early childhood education should be a non-negotiable right in Aotearoa. It should be publicly funded, accessible, low cost, culturally appropriate, and meet the individual learning needs tamariki have.'
- Almost 100% (99.6%) of parents agree that all children should have a right to quality education and care.
- Only 19% of parents and whānau think the current government is taking early childhood education in the right direction. 80% disagree.
- 70% of parents disagree that we need to be testing children enrolled in early childhood education, up from 59% last year.

Parent choice

- 91% of parents agree that having their child in early childhood education allows them to work.
- 87% of parents have children at their first choice of early childhood education centre.



“They are kind, trustworthy, and are well qualified in both educational and emotional wellbeing. They are incredibly well organised and thoughtful in their planning of curriculum; they also support each child in their individual play/education and needs.”



The sample

Demographics

- 827 parents completed the survey, 627 of whom currently have at least one child attending an early childhood education service.
- 85% of respondents' children were over two; 15% were under two.
- Most children (60%) were in the three- to five-year-old age group.
- Every region in Aotearoa New Zealand was represented in the sample.
- Parents from Tāmaki Makaurau – Auckland were the largest group at 23%, followed by Te Whanganui-a-Tara – Wellington at 10.5%.
- Waitaha – Canterbury made up 9.7% of the sample, Waikato 4.8% of the sample, Manawatū-Whanganui at 4.2%, and Te Moana-a-Toi – Bay of Plenty at 4.1%.

Service type

- 65% of parent respondents had children attending kindergarten services.
- 19% had children attending private education and care services.
- 7.5% had children attending community-based services.
- 4% had children attending playcentre.
- 2% had children attending kōhanga reo.
- 1% had children attending puna reo.
- 1% had children attending another language immersion service such as a Pacific language service.
- 0.5% had children attending home-based services.

Time in early childhood education

- Children were in early childhood education services from as little as 0.5 hours per week, up to more than 40 hours per week.
- The most common time spent in a service for an average week was between 26 and 30 hours, at 30.5% of the sample.
- 70% of children attended for between 16 and 30 hours per week.



“That my child is genuinely cared for and their teachers pay close attention to their skills and learning experiences. That they communicate freely on my children’s growth and development. That they are 100% qualified.”



About the *Kōriporipo Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey*

The *Kōriporipo Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey* runs parallel to this parent and whānau survey and has been going for three years.

It is the largest survey of early childhood educators in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In 2025, more than 2,000 educators took part to make their voices heard on the issues that matter to them and why they do the mahi they do.

You can find the full report [here](#). A summary of some of the key findings follows.

Learning support needs increase

- 96.1% of workforce survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that in the last few years children have needed more social, emotional, and learning support, showing a clear upward trend from 92.1% in 2024 and 89% in 2023.
- 91.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it has been more difficult to access learning support for children who need it, with 75% strongly agreeing.

Kaiako and kaimahi looking to leave the sector

- 32.8% of workforce survey respondents said that in the past six months they had frequently thought about leaving the sector, while 28.6% of respondents said they occasionally thought about leaving the sector. This is consistent with our findings in 2024.

Private sector results continue to be worse

- Respondents from the private sector were more likely to regularly think about leaving the sector. 37.7% said they frequently thought about leaving, compared with 30.7% for community-based respondents.
- 24.7% of private sector respondents said that when they wake up, they feel excited about going to work, compared to 36.5% for community-based respondents.



“They are highly educated, professional ECE teachers who take the necessary steps to provide a safe, secure, healthy, creative, and fun learning environment for the children and parents. I feel welcome, cared for, respected, and valued.”



Kaiako and kaimahi are overloaded

- Respondents continue to spend their own unpaid time completing the requirements of their role. In the month before completing the survey, 61.9% of respondents were spending more than an hour each week doing unpaid work. 21.3% were doing more than an hour each day.
- Respondents also overwhelmingly agreed that increased workloads have caused educators to be more stressed at work, with 92.4% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this.

Ratios an ongoing concern

- 93.3% of workforce survey respondents agreed that current regulated minimum ratios do not enable the best quality learning environments for tamariki. This is consistent with previous years of the survey.

Improvements to non-contact time honoured

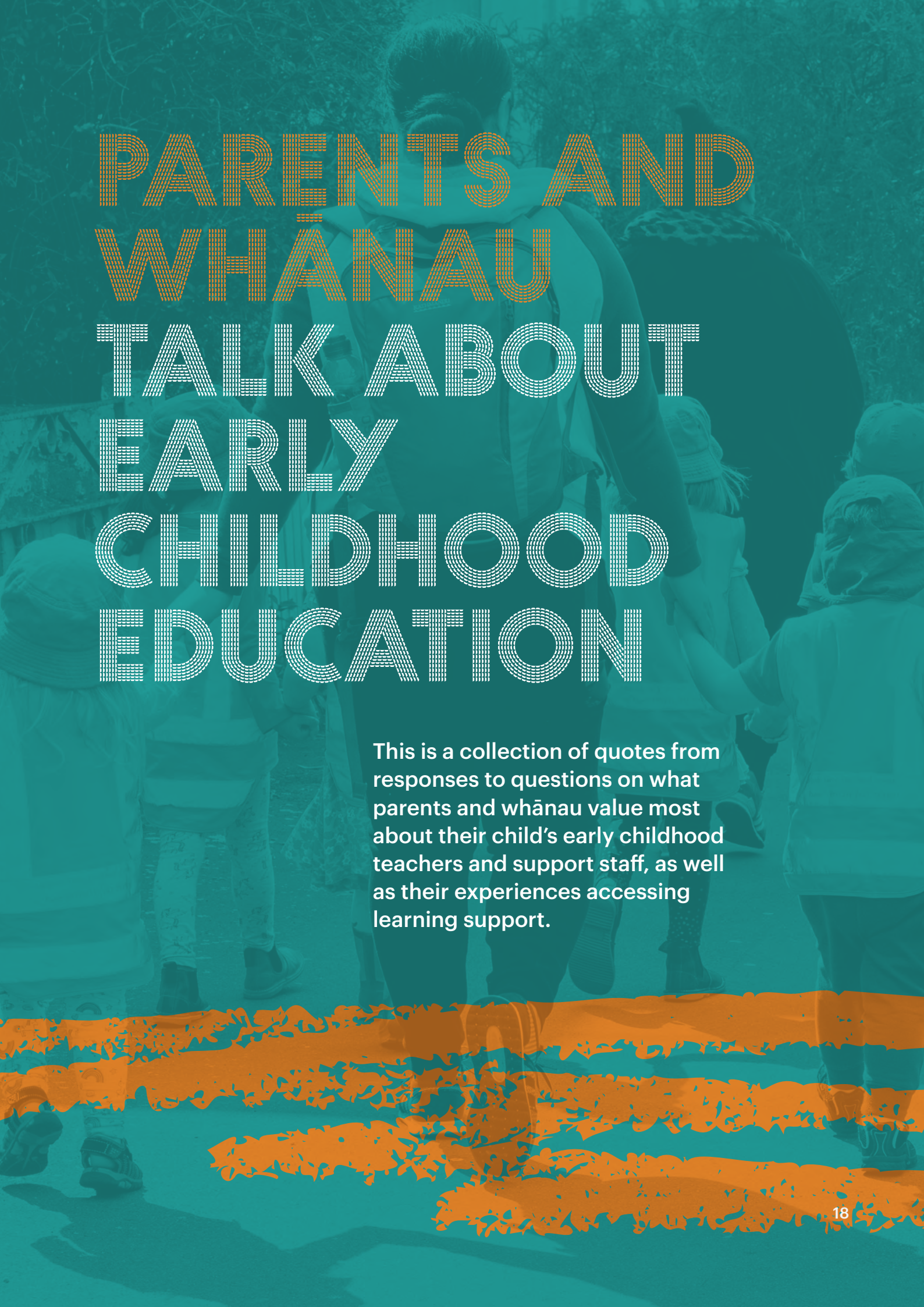
- While respondents reported that working conditions seem to be getting worse, one area that bucked the trend was around employers honouring non-contact time entitlements.
- Non-contact time is time 'off the floor' that allows kaiako to plan and assess learning, for example by engaging in individual child observations or producing learning stories.
- 46.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are able to take their current entitlement to non-contact or professional time every week. This builds on 41.8% in 2024 and 33.5% in 2023.



“They have helped me raise and nurture my baby into a thriving, curious, and resilient preschooler. This isn’t by accident. She comes home every day with a new fact, thought, or reflection. But best of all, she comes home feeling safe, loved, and supported. In a world where we have to work, they are our village – our second family.”



“Whānau-based approach, supportive, Te Tiriti o Waitangi [and] te ao Māori concepts are valued, meaningful, and visible.”



PARENTS AND WHĀNAU TALK ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

This is a collection of quotes from responses to questions on what parents and whānau value most about their child's early childhood teachers and support staff, as well as their experiences accessing learning support.

What do you value the most about your child's early childhood teachers and support staff?

"I am extremely happy with the care that one of my children receives at kindergarten, where there are qualified teaching staff. Unfortunately, there are limited spaces at kindergarten, and my other child attends an early childhood centre with a mix of qualified and unqualified staff. I by far prefer the kindergarten ethos, and the fact that kindergartens are fully staffed by qualified teachers. The difference is night and day."

"ECE staff are highly skilled, diligent, and effective practitioners – they look after our precious taonga and help whānau to raise the next generation. They deserve much more than praise and kind words – pay parity is an absolute must for this community and should be acted on with urgency and prioritised as such."

"I don't have a village, so they are my village. They have helped empower me as a mother and as a person to be better for my kids."

"My little one's kaiako are all so incredibly overworked and underpaid, and I appreciate how attentive they are. They are the literal superheroes of our economy, and we couldn't function as a society without any of these amazing kaiako."

"They are so supportive of my son who has autism. The centre is amazing at catering for his needs and helping us (the parents) navigate what to do and where to go for support."



Is there anything you would like to tell us about your experience(s) accessing learning support for your child?

“There is no support for children under five with clear neurodivergent needs, unless absolutely critical. There is a lack of training in the current teaching curriculum/ knowledge.”

“It has been a positive experience for us. The waitlist was quite long. However, our child is only funded five hours of the 20 that she is at kindergarten. There is a massive gap in the support she is receiving and what she needs. This gap significantly impacts her experience.”

“My daughter stutters, which is affecting her ability to communicate with other children and teachers. She has been on a Ministry of Education waitlist for over six months.”

“My son has speech difficulties and getting a speech therapy appointment takes months.”

“Assessment is far too slow, and private assessment is far too expensive. Your child misses out on appropriate help while waiting.”

“She has no proper support. She’s falling behind, but they don’t have enough support and too many students in a class so they can only do what they can.”

“I have to pay for private speech therapy. The referral to the public system went through four months ago and I haven’t heard anything, so I’m borrowing money to go private to pay the \$115 weekly appointment fee and driving 1.5 hours one way to take her to the appointment. It’s financially challenging but hopefully means my child won’t have a debilitating speech issue.”

“I have had good support but then there’s a lack of meetings with my child to observe them throughout their learning. Instead, they have checkups only every three months.”

“Long waitlists or refusal of referral. Poor follow-up support.”



"Very limited resources and support for children on the spectrum. Wait times and staff availability not matching the demand and need."

"There are a lot of hoops for parents to jump through, and a lack of support and consistency to access support. Waiting lists are too long as well."

"My son is now in year 1 and there is no support/funding for him. He has APD and we had to pay for everything (test and hearing aids). It has cost thousands. I have been told there is no funding until they are at least a year behind at school. We are fortunate that we could pay for it, but not all families can."

"Needs more access and shorter waiting times to see specialists, doctors, and easier access to medication and teaching support too."

"CCS Disability Action has been providing good support for our family, but they are quite stretched with workload."

"By the time the help arrives, it's too late to have the impact and it's our children who suffer for their entire education journey. Early Intervention needs to be EARLY. We all know the first 1,000 days are crucial, yet governments won't fund it properly."

"Waiting lists are so long. When they get an education support worker, it is for minimal hours, e.g. one hour a day."

"No support at all for our ASD/ADHD child, despite trying!"

"Our kindergarten helped with our son's ORS application and it was accepted, which is something I'll always be grateful for."



**The wake of a
vessel on the water,
indicating where
it has come from
and that it is making
forward progress.**

*nā Paetahi Park,
Hereturikōkā 2023*