

Starpath newsletter

The Starpath Project For Tertiary Participation and Success | Issue 7 | April 2014 | www.starpath.auckland.ac.nz



Prefects from Tamaki College, where a Starpath backed intervention has helped struggling students achieve NCEA.

'Blue children' thrown a lifeline

Soana Pamaka, the Principal of Tamaki College in East Auckland, describes her most 'at risk' students as blue children.

Like being starved of oxygen, they were at risk of not achieving NCEA and thus being starved of opportunities for the rest of their lives.

With the support of Starpath, the school was able to throw them a lifeline with a four-week intensive monitoring and mentoring programme run toward the end of the school year.

Deputy Principal (Teaching and Learning) Kathryn Moore says the school wanted to encourage and push these students to achieve more and gain further credits before the year finished.

"We believed it was better to work with students in that moment, rather than catch-up at the beginning of the year or wonder what might have been," she says.

The initiative was introduced in 2012 for a group of 110 'at risk' students in Levels 1, 2 and 3 who were identified as being danger of not achieving their respective NCEA levels.

Students were informed in level specific assemblies about the programme and process and why it was being undertaken.

"As a school we didn't limit the mentors to just the teaching staff, with significant number of support staff also taking part."

Spreadsheets were prepared for each year level and data (i.e. credit count) was monitored weekly. Mentors entered notes from each mentoring session on KAMAR (student management system).

Kathryn says the majority of staff and students

revelled in their mentoring relationship with many staff continuing to work with students after the initiative.

A number of students who were not 'at risk' even expressed their concern at not getting a mentor.

"For the majority of teachers the mentoring progress was very positive and indeed great care (and many hours) had been taken to match the students with the staff members," she said.

Given the students were on track to not achieve NCEA, the outcomes for the school and more importantly the students were very positive.

Following the initiative 41 percent of students selected achieved Level 1 from that year level, 80 percent achieved Level 2 and 68 percent achieved Level 3.

The initiative's successful methods were repeated in 2013 when the school took part in the Ministry of Education's ART (Achievement, Retention and Transition) programme, which focused on Level 2 students.

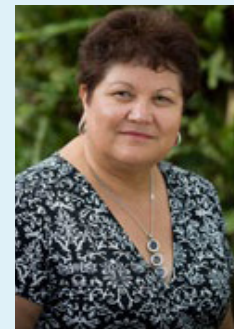
74 at-risk students were identified to take part in mid-August, and were again provided with mentors and weekly monitoring.

Student photos were placed on the staffroom notice board, with their weekly credit count recorded against their name. In total 58 percent of these students achieved NCEA Level 2.

"Many mentoring relationships have continued beyond the required period," Kathryn says.

Tamaki College is a family-oriented, decile one co-educational school which prides itself on its commitment to academic excellence. It has worked with Starpath since 2012.

From the Director



Professor Liz McKinley
Director, Starpath Project

The new Data, Evidence and Knowledge Division (DEKD) in the Ministry of Education, led by the new Deputy Secretary Lisa Rodgers, has been

extremely active in the last 15 months. They are the division responsible for the Education Profiles that were released last year. In my role as co-chair for the Benchmarks for Progress (BfP) group (a sub-group of the Ministerial Cross Sector Forum) we work closely with the Ministry personnel in this group.

At our last meeting I was heartened to hear of two new developments. Firstly, the SMS (School Management System) grouping in the MoE is to join this new division and, as a result, a coherent and comprehensive work plan is to be developed. A systematic approach to the identification of concerns schools have with their SMSs and working on solutions is long overdue. I will be supporting a wide consultation with the schooling sector itself.

Secondly, the MoE are considering adding another indicator to the education profiles they began last year. The new indicator would be focused on Years 9 & 10. The Starpath schools involved in the new Year 9 & 10 project are well aware of the difficulties presented in this challenge as we attempt to find some measure of progress across this crucial period of time for students. I want to once again thank all the Starpath schools for the learning the Starpath Project draws from all your experiences.

Date for the diary

The Annual Starpath Partners' Day will be held on Tuesday 1st July 2014 at the Ellerslie Event Centre.



Academic Counselling and Parent Student Teacher Review

Tips and advice

Many of our Starpath schools have implemented Academic Counselling (AC) and Parent Student Teacher Conferences (PST's) across all year levels.

Once the programme has been successfully implemented and embedded into the school culture, questions have been asked increasingly about quality, consistency and effectiveness of these sessions.

Starpath has been collating ideas from many schools and teachers about indicators that could be used for assessing this.

As all Starpath recommendations, these have to be modified to make sense for the school using them, so should be discussed and selected by all staff to be most effective for a self-review.

Questions to guide thinking for teachers

Teacher knowledge and performance

- Do you feel confident in your knowledge of NCEA to advise students and help them set appropriate targets?
- Do you see your student regularly and know the student well enough to be able to give quality advice and guidance?
- Do you feel confident using your school's SMS to access and interpret achievement data?
- Do you record all sessions undertaken in the SMS?
- Do you follow up on outcomes from each session?

Student knowledge and performance

- Can they identify their strengths and weaknesses in their academic performance and set appropriate, realistic goals to address these?
- Do they have a plan about how to achieve these goals?
- Are your students comfortable and confident to approach you about their learning and progress?

- Are your students actively involved with their data?
- Do they actively seek endorsements?

School structures and systems

- Do you have enough time to conduct your AC within time frames?
- Have you had adequate training to be an effective counsellor?
- Do you feel supported by the senior management for AC?
- Do you have quality data to inform your AC sessions?

Whanau Engagement

- Do you feel comfortable to contact your student's whanau if necessary?
- Do you pass on any referrals for whanau in a timely fashion?
- Do your students' whanau always attend PSTs?
- Do your students' whanau contact you if they have any queries about their child's learning?

Questions to guide thinking for students

Student perception of teacher performance

- Do you feel comfortable going to your academic counsellor for information about your learning?
- Do you feel comfortable contributing to the Parent Student Teacher discussions?
- Does your academic counsellor help you to set appropriate academic targets and personal goals?
- Does your family feel confident approaching your academic counsellor with any questions they may have about your learning?
- Does your academic counsellor have a good knowledge of what you need to do this year to succeed?

There are many other possible questions to explore. Thank you to all the schools that have shared their ideas with Starpath.

Implementation update

A busy year ahead

Joy Eaton, Deputy Director



The year 2014 sees the start of the wind up phase for the Starpath Project. In 2013, 16 Group A schools participated in the evaluation of their progress in the project.

These interviews and focus group discussions have been

transcribed and analysed, with the final write up completed and sent back to schools at the end of March. This data will form part of the final project report to be written in 2015. This has been a massive job for our researchers but we also want to acknowledge the huge support we received from schools in carrying out this work.

For the 18 Group B schools, the mid-point feedback reports have been returned. These schools are currently completing their professional development programme and will be involved in evaluation in term 3 or 4 this year.

Other strands of Starpath continue as 6 schools trial the Science test and the second round of literacy observations in senior maths, science and English classes get underway.

35 of the 39 Starpath schools have joined us to focus on Year 9 and 10 achievement this year. This Ministry of Education funded project is asking schools to consider the use of Starpath strategies in junior secondary school. Schools are keen to learn more about effective use of AsTTle data, as well as establish a means of tracking student progress throughout the year. There is also strong interest in subject specific literacy and numeracy strategies for Y9 and 10 classes.

Meanwhile our director, Liz McKinley, has been fully involved in developing the next stage for Starpath, that is, the collaboration with Te Kotahitanga and He Kākano. Action in this nationwide project is picking up speed as the first group of schools come on board and the project employs staff for the implementation phase. The University of Auckland is the lead institution for schools north of the Bays.

It will be another busy year.

Study looks at high-achieving students in low decile schools

Masters student Kylie Jenkinson shares an insight into the benefits and challenges of an Academic Mentoring Programme for high-achieving students in a low-decile school.

Calls by the Government for increased achievement, particularly in schools that serve low socio-economic communities, has resulted in a rise in interventions being run in schools to improve outcomes for diverse students. The Starpath Project is one such intervention.

Starpath's work in schools is centered around regular achievement-focused conversations with students, sometimes known as Academic Mentoring. Although Academic Mentoring is an initiative that caters for students no matter where their academic ability lies, often high-achieving students who are deemed to be succeeding academically in these schools receive less because they are largely self-managing.

As part of her Masters dissertation, Kylie Jenkinson examined the perceptions of a group of high achieving Year 11 students who took part in an Academic Mentoring programme. Another group of randomly selected Year 11 students also took part to provide comparison.

In particular, Kylie explored whether or not high-achieving students required differentiated content in their Academic Mentoring programme given that they showed the potential to achieve at or greater than the national average. Kylie also looked at the link between Academic Mentoring and resiliency, as resiliency was deemed by the 2009 PISA report to be an important factor for student success in low socio-economic areas.

Kylie's research highlighted two key areas of importance for students participating in Academic Mentoring programmes:

1. Effective Academic Mentors.

The students considered the relationship with their mentor as very important. If they felt they knew the mentor and their mentor cared about their achievement they were more likely to open up and be receptive to advice and guidance. They really appreciated having a teacher's perspective on their concerns as it supported them to make more informed decisions about how to approach different situations relating to their educational journey.

The students appreciated having one key person they knew they could go to for academic guidance, both during scheduled mentoring sessions and/or in-between mentoring sessions. Some flexibility in Academic Mentoring times enabled students to make timely decisions or resolve any concerns they had, resulting in a more positive outlook on their schooling. More importantly, Academic Mentoring empowered them to feel they were in control of their educational journey, not just a participant.

2. The quality of academic advice.

Although the development of the relationship was central, the quality of the advice and guidance was also of importance to the students. Many students felt they didn't know how to succeed and/or navigate NCEA and saw the support provided by academic mentoring as an important factor in their success.

The quality of the academic information was an important factor for the students. High expectations and future-focused feedback that



encouraged students to achieve beyond their own expectations was considered highly motivating. Information regarding course and certificate endorsements, university entrance information and advice and encouragement to see the people who could advise them about their career choices were influential in terms of encouraging the high-achieving students to continue to aim high.

'Effective Academic Mentoring encourages students to be resilient in the face of academic adversity.'

Overall, the high-achieving students really enjoyed Academic Mentoring and appreciated the fact the school had implemented it into their timetable. They wished to see it continue throughout their education at this school.

Effective Academic Mentoring encourages students to be resilient in the face of academic adversity. Resilience develops when a teacher engages in learning-focused conversations that assist students to develop academic fortitude in the face of failure and/or challenges, academic efficacy and self-management. Overall, no differentiated programme was required for these students, however, teachers who are mentors need to ensure they understand all aspects of NCEA to ensure they give accurate advice to those students who have the potential to excel.



Kylie completed her dissertation as part of her Master of Professional Studies in Education in 2013. Kylie was supervised by Professor Elizabeth McKinley and Dr Melinda Webber from the Starpath team. Kylie works for James Cook High School in Auckland. She is a House Dean and Maths teacher. Kylie will receive a Masters with first class honours in May, 2014.

Starpath receives backing to reach more at-risk students

Starpath is set to reach more students at risk of falling behind in education with backing from the Ministry of Education to be involved in two new projects in 2014.

Building on Success

The Government's \$31million Building on Success initiative announced earlier this year targets Māori students in up to 100 schools.

As the name suggests, it builds on the strengths of programmes which have already proven to be successful in increasing school achievement – including Starpath, Te Kotahitanga, He Kākano and Secondary Literacy and Numeracy.

Starpath director Professor Liz McKinley says this latest initiative is a strong and positive push to break through a national travesty of Māori students under-achieving.

"This will help create high quality, integrated and tailored professional learning programmes for

schools that, importantly, will be evidence-based."

The Building on Success programme will support school leaders and teachers in the delivery of the curriculum. It will distil the best from the identified initiatives to deliver an integrated package in schools of culturally responsive leadership, teaching and learning practices, and is expected to significantly raise achievement for young Māori.

Reaching younger students

In the past Starpath has focussed on the critical final schooling Years of 11 to 13. The Project has now received funding to expand its work to younger students in Years 9 and 10.

These younger students will benefit from Starpath's now considerable knowledge of improving student

achievement and increasing students' chances of gaining university entrance.

Liz says expanding the project to focus more on younger students will enable the students to better prepare for the transition to tertiary education. She says tracking student progress more closely at Years 9 and 10 may also provide an opportunity to find ways to track the learning progress of students who fall between National Standards and NCEA.

"If we can start looking at and advising students about pathways earlier then we are not just the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. Instead, the students can think about and plan ahead for their futures," Liz says.

Opinion: Get it right and everyone will benefit

Distinguished Professor Viviane Robinson on the conditions needed for the National Government's proposed leadership roles in schools to work well. Professor Robinson is director of the University of Auckland Centre for Educational Leadership, which collaborates with Starpath on research.

The catalyst for John Key's announcement regarding four new roles in the teaching profession is the longstanding problem of persistent and growing disparities in educational achievement in this country.

While I welcome an enhanced career structure for teachers and leaders, we should not lose sight of the fact such enhancement is not, and should not, be the primary purpose of this new policy. In responding to the announcement and contributing to its more detailed planning, we should be asking: "What do we know about the conditions under which such roles are more or less likely to succeed in improving achievement?" We have considerable negative and positive experience to help us answer this question.

First, lines of responsibility and accountability must be absolutely transparent. We know from numerous experiments in school clusters that putting school leaders together to develop a shared improvement agenda can be a colossal waste of time and money.

Clusters have failed because they lack appropriate expertise, because principals could not shed their competitive mind-sets, and most of all, because the cluster leaders are conflicted



Distinguished Professor Viviane Robinson.

and unclear about the nature and source of their authority in the group. Unless this is clarified in advance, the appointed executive principals, no matter how skilled, will struggle.

Second, we have had nearly 25 years of experienced principals, in the form of commissioners, going into schools which have been identified by ERO as failing in some respect. Yet despite that, many such schools are still at risk. What has been learned from this experience about the expertise required of such change leaders and of the regulatory framework that is required to support them? Has or will a systematic analysis of this experience inform the design of these new leadership roles?

Third, there is now a considerable body of evidence available about the expertise required by school leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. Unless they have encountered such research in recent graduate study, experienced principals have had very little opportunity to access and apply this body of knowledge.

This knowledge needs to not only inform the selection of executive and change principals, but also be made available to all experienced principals so that the leadership expertise of all our schools is enhanced and the pool of future executive principals can be developed and sustained.



The Starpath Project for Tertiary Participation and Success, is a partnership between The University of Auckland and the New Zealand Government. The Project works in partnership with schools to transform educational outcomes for students who are currently under-achieving at secondary school and, as a result, under-represented in tertiary education.