Targets and Talk: Evaluation of an evidence-based academic counselling programme

Starpath Project

The University of Auckland

Epsom Campus, Faculty of Education

Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142

starpath@auckland.ac.nz

www.starpath.auckland.ac.nz

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Elizabeth McKinley
Director, Starpath Project
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Section 1   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2004 the Starpath Project for Tertiary Participation and Success (Starpath) established a collaborative relationship with Massey High School (MHS), a mid-decile New Zealand secondary school. Since this time Starpath has worked with MHS data from cohorts of students at Massey High School, using this information to identify barriers to educational success for particular groups of students. Early on, the work established the need for detailed and accurate school achievement data in order to carry out analyses linking school initiatives or activities to student achievement, both for individual students and particular groups (Shulruf & Tolley, 2004). Other Starpath projects (Madjar, McKinley, Jensen, & van der Merwe, 2009; Shulruf, Keuskamp, & Timperley, 2006; Shulruf, Tolley, & Tumen, 2005; Smith, 2007) have shown that school subject choice or course-taking plays a major role in shaping educational opportunities for students, particularly at the tertiary level. The introduction of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) and its implementation in schools has become a major focus of Starpath and MHS, since it has given schools the ability to expand their subject options and the subject choices presented to students and their parents/caregivers. MHS decided to trial an intervention in 2007 that placed more scrutiny on student achievement data, individual student NCEA subject choices, and student aspirations and pathways.

1.1   Evaluation Outline

In early 2008, MHS invited the Starpath Project to conduct a formative stakeholder evaluation of the Academic Counselling and Target Setting (ACTS) programme, which had been in place for one year in the school and was designed to:

- increase the school's academic performance through a systematic, whole-school approach to student achievement;
- establish longitudinal data sets (academic profiles) for each individual student;
- encourage staff to work together on the academic performance of the school;
- help students gain strategies for achieving their academic aims;
- review their progress; and
- increase student retention.

The evaluation investigated the experiences and impact of the ACTS intervention on the 2007 Year 11 student cohort, their parents/caregivers, their mathematics, English and Form teachers, the school Deans, and certain other key staff. There were three aspects to the intervention:

1. Restructured parent-student-teacher meetings, in which parents/caregivers (along with their child) met with their child's Form teacher for an in-depth overview of their progress.

2. Academic counselling, which involved a meeting between each student and their Dean two or three times in the year to discuss their progress, aims, and plans.

3. Target setting, including the setting of school-wide achievement targets, as well as individual targets for each Year 11 student in their mathematics and English external achievement standards.

The study has used a mix of qualitative methods to gather data. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with significant staff (Principal, Deputy Principal, two Careers Advisors, Student Achievement Manager and Curriculum Manager); seven focus groups were held with teachers (mathematics teachers x2, English teachers x2, Form teachers x2, and Deans x1); and written questionnaires were completed by 139 parents/caregivers of the 2007 Year 11 students and 167 students who were in the 2007 Year 11 cohort (out of approx. 540 in the total 2007 Year 11 student cohort).

1.2 Key findings

- Target setting for the school has been successful in that eight out of ten school targets were achieved, and significant gains were made in the remaining two targets.

- Setting individual achievement standard targets for NCEA Level 1 English and mathematics significantly contributed to a positive effect on student outcomes, both in the quantity of credits and the quality of performance in those credits as measured by NCEA GPA. The gains were statistically significant[1] for:

  o males when compared to the national student body and the decile 6[2] student body;

  o Pacific students when compared to the national student body; and

  o the MHS student body when compared with the decile 6 student body;

- The majority of stakeholders – parents/caregivers, staff and students – supported the continuation of the Academic Counselling and Target Setting (ACTS) programme at MHS (77% of parents/caregivers and 63% of Year 11 students);

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[1] The 2006 and 2007 national NCEA Level 1 data used in these analyses were retrieved from the NZQA website on 1 April 2009.
[2] MHS was decile 6 in 2007 but in 2008 was redesignated as a decile 5 school.

- The restructured parent-student-teacher meeting resulted in a dramatically increased attendance (approx. 76% parent/caregiver turnout compared with 9-13% in previous years);

- There was resounding support from all staff for the restructured parent-student-teacher meeting despite the fact that the preparation for it increased teacher workloads;

- All stakeholders reported the whole intervention helped them establish better relationships with each other:

  a. Form teacher-parent/caregiver relationships improved because parents/caregivers identified one point of contact in the school that was able to give them a personalised and in-depth assessment of their child's academic performance, and teachers came to know the students and their parents/caregivers better;

  b. Dean-student relationships became more positive and focused on achievement rather than behaviour. This was particularly helpful in times of student crises as it immediately allowed Deans to construct their talk more positively;

  c. Mathematics/English teacher-student relationships improved with the discussion of individual targets for specific external achievement standards;

  d. Form teacher-student relationships improved as a result of improved relationships with students' parents/caregivers;

  e. Staff relationships strengthened as a result of working together to implement the programme and communicating more around student achievement.

- The building of comprehensive individual student progress and achievement information was time consuming for the parent-student-teacher meetings, but staff agreed the 'pay-off' made the effort worthwhile.

- Staff reported that access to student achievement information was useful. For example, the electronic availability of student records of learning allowed everyone (e.g. Form teachers, subject teachers, students) to access them easily and at any time (e.g. students viewing their credits in form time). The Principal also found access to individual student longitudinal data profiles useful, particularly when dealing with parents/caregivers and students;

- Staff reported an increased awareness of, and appreciation for, a school-wide approach to data management and academic performance. This was evident in

the amount of information they had as a basis for their discussions with parents/caregivers, and for academic target setting;

- Increased student engagement with their academic progress created a culture in the school in which students were aware of, talked about, and competed over their credit totals, augmenting the school's focus on academic achievement;

- Some students experienced confusion and concern, noticed by their parents/caregivers, in the academic counselling process. The exposure of the students to the consequences of school subject choices and possibly the focus of the parent-student-teacher meeting seemed to overwhelm some students. This is a new experience for the students and their concerns need to be noted and addressed;

- There appeared to be no difference in student retention in 2007.

1.3 Major implications

As well as being based on the evaluation of the implementation of the ACTS programme, the conclusions listed below are informed by earlier Starpath research (Tennant & Strauss, 2007; Madjar, McKinley, Jensen & van der Merwe, 2009; Shulruf, Keuskamp, & Timperley, 2006; Shulruf, Tolley, & Tumen, 2005; Smith, 2007) and international studies (Levin 2008; Zbar, Kimber & Marshall, 2009). They relate to school preparation; collection and management of longitudinal data; skill levels of staff working with data; resourcing; and sustaining the programme and improving it over time.

1.3.1 If schools wish to implement a substantial intervention there must be a climate in the school in which improvement is encouraged and supported.

It is important to note that while this evaluation did not explore school culture and climate, prevailing values and attitudes have been identified in the course of carrying out the research that seem to be an integral part of the environment that surrounded the implementation and contributed to the success of the ACTS programme. These included: strong shared leadership, teachers believing that they can make a difference to their students, the provision of a secure learning environment, and a focus on what matters – the issue of achievement. The school climate facilitated the professional learning and collaboration that resulted from the ACTS programme.

1.3.2 If schools wish to 'track' students' academic progress over their school life, and help them reach their potential, they will need to

collect detailed and well-documented longitudinal data and have well-developed systems for its storage, retrieval, and use.

Whole-school and individual student data were the key drivers in all parts of this successful intervention. The intervention deliberately targeted the collection, management and analysis of detailed, longitudinal student data which were systematically stored to build cohesive and comprehensive individual student profiles and identify patterns for the whole school and groups of students within it. However, the rich information that comes from such a collection of data is not easily obtained. There is a need for a highly-skilled staff member who can provide expertise and leadership in this area (see below), at least in the current stage of development of school data management systems.

Information systems in schools currently allow for cross-sectional analyses, but at present they do not easily allow for the longitudinal tracking of individual students or groups of students. This means that difficulties encountered by groups of students in their educational pathways cannot be identified accurately and addressed strategically, with the outcomes of the interventions being monitored. As a result, individual students or particular groups of students may fail to achieve their potential and leave school without formal qualifications, or without adequate preparation for further education, training or employment, without such patterns being evident to school leaders. A change in the types of databases available to schools and the accountability requirements set by the Ministry of Education would help to support a shift to an education system in New Zealand that is truly evidence-based and driven, and where the focus is firmly placed on ensuring that each student achieves his or her potential.

1.3.3   To be able to use data to drive improved academic performance of students and schools, schools' staff will need increased levels of skills in the identification, collection, management, analysis and use of data.

Until databases that allow the longitudinal tracking of students are developed for New Zealand conditions, and supported by the accountability requirements set by the Ministry of Education, the building of comprehensive student achievement data sets, and the analyses that enable patterns of achievement to be monitored will depend entirely on the skill set of the person chosen to identify, collect, manage and analyse the data. The MHS student management system, at the time of the evaluation, could not carry out the analyses required for longitudinal tracking of student achievement, so the school's ability to carry out such analyses was dependent upon the skills of the designated staff. In the case of MHS, the Student Achievement Manager is a mathematics teacher (senior subject statistics) who spent 15 months in The University of

Auckland, as a Starpath researcher, working with staff with advanced expertise in quantitative data analysis. At the same time, the Student Achievement Manager was working on her PhD research, supported by Starpath, testing the effectiveness of academic target-setting on student achievement, using historical and current individual and cohort data. Whilst some schools may have a staff member with similar skills, many will not, and it will require strategic thinking including long-term planning, possible collaboration with other schools and teachers, and professional development (e.g. university statistics courses) to build this capacity.

Tracking students' academic achievement over time sets up the conditions to improve the analysis and use of data and to build data literacy among school leaders and teachers. This intervention showed a way in which data could be systematically shared and discussed by staff, students and parents/caregivers at MHS. The results indicate that all school staff must be active in identifying data that contribute to the whole picture of student achievement. The high level of data literacy achieved by staff at MHS enabled them, first, to develop clear learning plans and targets for individual students that reflected their level of potential and to support students to achieve their targets, and second, to participate in discussions on the use of data to drive improvement in student achievement across the whole school.

Another area that needs consideration is that of pre-service teacher education. In today's environment, data literacy should be included in the Graduating Teacher Standards. However, while educating pre-service teachers is one way of increasing data literacy in schools, this can not be the only way.

1.3.4 To implement a substantial academic 'tracking' programme for each student requires targeted resourcing for teacher release and professional development.

The main resourcing required by MHS was in staff release time (Deans, the Student Achievement Manager, and a data entry assistant). In 2007, the school was able to ear-mark the funds needed for staff release. Additional, indirect resourcing came from Starpath who employed the school's Student Achievement Manager during 2006 (she returned to work at MHS in 2007), and which funded her doctoral research on target setting. The resources required by a school to support an ACTS programme are likely to be proportional to school size.

There are possible alternatives for the implementation of this intervention, but none will have zero cost. The model of teachers working alongside large research projects to increase specific data analysis and research inquiry skills is not new. This work can be

incorporated in teacher fellowships or the like, where staff members work on actual school data and projects and must return to their schools to implement data protocols and analysis. However, the release of staff to carry out student academic counselling several times a year and the teacher workloads involved in the restructured parent-student-teacher meeting also require some resourcing. Some of the costs may be able to be reduced, for instance through the development of a tool to decrease the time spent on target setting, or by outsourcing this aspect of the work to an external organisation.

Previous Starpath research has suggested that in attempting to enhance student achievement, schools do not deploy their resources strategically, often adopting too many 'clip-on' programmes outside the core curriculum that have not undergone rigorous evaluation against student outcomes. The ACTS Programme is different as it is at the heart of the school's curriculum and requires the involvement and support of the whole institution.

1.3.5 Sustaining the programme, and its impact, is important.

The sustainability of the improvements generated by the ACTS programme will depend upon the way in which the school community and stakeholders react to the intervention, its proven effectiveness and the time (and associated costs) it takes to embed the programme into the 'everyday work' of the school and classroom. Sustainability must always begin with the conditions set out in 1.3.1 as the foundation for the programme. However, the strategies to maintain and enhance the initial successes will centre on leadership, teaching and learning, professional development of staff, continued use of data to drive improvement, development of a school culture of shared goals and responsibilities, and tailoring initiatives to suit the school.

Section 2   INTRODUCTION

This report forms part of The Starpath Project for Tertiary Participation and Success that began in 2004 and was established in 2005 as a Partnership for Excellence between the University of Auckland and the New Zealand government. Starpath is a collaborative project that aims to enhance the participation and success in tertiary education of students from groups that are currently under-represented in degree-level studies. Working in partnership with schools and tertiary institutions, Starpath aims to deliver a detailed understanding of the barriers to tertiary success for students, particularly those from low- to mid-decile schools, and develop a strategic, evidence-based, outcomes-focused approach to enhancing educational achievement in New Zealand. The project currently works in partnership with one mid-decile and four low-decile secondary schools in Auckland and Northland, and two tertiary institutes.

In 2004 Starpath established a collaborative relationship with Massey High School (MHS), a large, co-educational, secondary school in Waitakere City. Since that time Starpath has worked with MHS staff to identify points in students' educational journeys at which the achievement of different groups of students diverge, by using longitudinal data from cohorts of students that have attended MHS. Shulruf and Tolley (2004) drew two main conclusions relating to this work. First, there was a need to have detailed and accurate school data collection in order to carry out analyses linking student activities to student achievement. This would enable the school to analyse the academic progression of cohorts of students, identify trends and patterns of achievement within particular groups and sub-groups, and allow the school to identify potential barriers to the progress of their students to tertiary education and degree-level study. And second, a need to build capacity within school staff in relation to data management and analysis was identified.

A meta-analysis of the literature on course-taking (Shulruf et al., 2006) and further research on the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) offerings carried out by Starpath (Turner, Li, & Yuan, in press) found that the differential course-taking and assessment opportunities provided by schools play a substantial role in student achievement. Starpath research (Shulruf et al., 2006) also found international studies that indicated that some groups of students, mainly students from minority and low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, were more likely to make poor subject choices that did not necessarily reflect their academic abilities. This inspired MHS to give a closer scrutiny to students' subject and course choices and was a contributing factor to the introduction of a Futures Evening to provide information and advice to students and parents/caregivers about NCEA subjects, tertiary courses, and careers.

The principal of MHS has reported that ongoing discussions of research findings between Starpath researchers and the school's management team and staff have had a significant impact on the school. He saw the greatest impact resulting from discussions resulting from the in-depth analysis of the school's data and the involvement of a key staff member in the Starpath research team for fifteen months. This enabled the staff member to acquire the skills required to analyse the data already held in the school and to pass on some of these skills to other staff. The up-skilling of the staff member resulted in an increased use of data in setting achievement targets in the annual plan for both the school as a whole, and for individual departments. Furthermore, the inclusion of a current teacher in the research team contributed to building the capability of Starpath members by increasing their knowledge of current school and classroom practices, and enabling them to consider more fully the impact of structural constraints.

Overall, the school decided to move towards developing an evidence-based approach to making decisions on teaching and learning, student outcomes, and academic initiatives. In 2007 MHS implemented an academic counselling and target setting programme involving all students and significant staff. The broad aim of this whole-of-school intervention was to advise students and monitor their achievement and subject choices over the course of each year of their school career, with the goal of ensuring that students were more aware of the implications of particular academic pathways at secondary school for realising their aspirations in the future.

The Project Overview
Starpath was approached by MHS to evaluate its recently implemented Academic Counselling and Target Setting (ACTS) programme. ACTS, which began in 2007, has a strong focus on school-wide and individual targets, subject choice, goal setting and the future plans of students. Whilst the whole school was involved with the academic counselling part of the programme and the school-wide target setting, in 2007 Year 11 students and their English and mathematics teachers were asked to work with specific academic targets set for individual students.

This evaluation project did not specifically investigate the effectiveness of the programme in raising student achievement (the subject of another major study),[3] although some comments on this are offered in Section 6.1. Rather, this study was designed to evaluate the overall impact of the programme on students, parents/caregivers, teachers and other participating staff members.

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[3] This is the subject of the MHS Student Achievement Manager's PhD thesis.

Within this broad aim, the evaluation addressed the following objectives:

a) To provide an independent evaluation of the experience and impact of the intervention on the stakeholders involved. The stakeholders were identified as:

- The 2007 Year 11 students;

- Parents/caregivers of the 2007 Year 11 students; and

- School staff, including the Principal, Deputy Principal (Achievement), Deans, Student Achievement Manager, Curriculum Manager, Careers Advisors, the 2007 Year 11 Form teachers, and the 2007 Year 11 mathematics and English teachers.

b) To provide contextual information on the impact of the intervention for the school's Student Achievement Manager, whose PhD research involved testing the effectiveness of setting targets for English and mathematics externally-assessed achievement standards.

c) To assess the appropriateness of including an academic counselling and target setting intervention in the Starpath Project toolkit as a possible strategy for other schools.

This report is organised in seven parts. Section 1 includes the Executive Summary; Section 2 provides this Introduction; while Section 3 contains the review of the relevant literature and provides the rationale for the project. The evaluation design and methods are presented in Section 4, followed by an outline of the ACTS programme as it was implemented in the school in Section 5. Section 6 contains the report of the findings of the evaluation under five headings: *Impact of Target Setting on Student Outcomes*, *Student Responses to the Questionnaire*, *Parent/Caregiver Responses to the Questionnaire*, *Teacher Experiences of the Implementation* and *Teacher Evaluation of the Impact*. The significance of the findings and their implications are discussed in Section 7.

Section 3   LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic counselling "generally refers to trained professionals counselling students on their academic plans, for course-taking while in secondary school as well as for postsecondary education" (Hughes & Karp, 2004, p. 3). Course-taking or subject choices and their relationship to post-school options are the main focus of the literature on academic counselling, much of which comes from the USA. Target setting, which establishes what students will aim to achieve in their courses rather than just which courses they will pursue, takes this form of educational planning a stage further to include the formulation of goals. The literature on academic counselling does not generally emphasise setting targets for student achievement, but it does contain frequent references to the potential for academic advising to enhance student goal setting and motivation. This suggests that these two processes – academic counselling and target setting – have a natural affinity and could readily be brought together, as has occurred in the MHS trial.

3.1   Academic Counselling

Schools provide academic counselling because students and parents/caregivers might not always have the knowledge necessary to carry out effective educational planning on their own. A large nationally representative study carried out in the USA with 5th to 11th grade public school students and their parents, for instance, reported that only 50% of all students, and 72% of parents, understood that students' career choices would be limited by not acquiring particular skills (Leitman, Binns, & Unni, 1995). The study also found that 40% of parents and 56% of students had a confused understanding of the prerequisites for particular course choices at secondary school. Furthermore, Latino, African American and Native American students were more likely than other students to experience these confusions. Many students also did not understand the prerequisites for tertiary study, particularly for degree-level qualifications. Such misconceptions can lead to a disconnection between students' aspirations and the academic steps they are taking to achieve them. Leitman et al. (1995) reported that 86% of students would like to go to college, but that large numbers were not on track to complete the courses needed to meet college entrance requirements. They also found that a substantial proportion of the students who said they planned to drop mathematics as soon as possible had a preference for studying scientific subjects in college and expressed interest in careers that require secondary and tertiary qualifications in mathematics and science.

In New Zealand, a major qualitative study undertaken by the Starpath project (Madjar, McKinley, Jensen, & van der Merwe, 2009) investigated how NCEA course choices are made in mid- and low-decile schools. The findings of this study indicate that parents/caregivers, as well as many students, lack a comprehensive understanding of the NCEA system and its implementation in schools, and often do not fully appreciate the implications of particular choices. Such difficulties are heightened because NCEA is both a relatively new qualification system and a very complex one, which offers schools and students a multitude of options that can lead to quite different endpoints. The study reported that although % of the students aspired to achieve university entrance, many of them made course choices that foreclosed this option: "Navigating through three or more years in the NCEA system is fraught with challenges and potential stumbling blocks for students (and their parents) who lack a detailed understanding of how the system works in practice, and who therefore rely on schools to set them on the appropriate path" (p.102). The study demonstrated that even academically able students can easily be diverted down pathways that make it difficult for them to fulfil their aspirations for future study and careers. The report strongly endorsed the need for adequately resourced academic counselling, coupled with the systematic monitoring of student achievement, course choices and goals, to be discussed with students and their parents at regular intervals throughout their school career.

Despite the literature showing the need for systematic academic advice in schools, a number of studies have suggested that many students receive little counselling of this type and carry out their educational planning haphazardly (Mau, 1995; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Scheel & Gonzalez, 2007). Mau (1995) found that significant numbers of American 8th grade students had not spoken to a counsellor or teacher while planning their high school programme. Similarly, Lee and Ekstrom (1987) found that in the 10th grade – the year after entering high school and making course selections – just over half of American public school students reported that they had not discussed the planning of their school programme with a counsellor. Furthermore, Lee and Ekstrom (1987) reported this was significantly more likely to be the case for minority students, those from less affluent families, students at small rural schools, and those with lower educational aspirations. They concluded that "it appears that students who may need such guidance the most … are least likely to receive it in their schools" (p. 287). This concern has been repeated elsewhere (Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling, 1986; Fallon, 1997). In the New Zealand *Competent Children, Competent Learners* study, 28% of Year 9 and 10 students and their parents said they would have liked more guidance when making subject choices (Wylie & Hipkins, 2006). This percentage was reportedly higher for Māori and Pacific students and those students whose mothers had a lower level of education.

The fact that many students do not receive academic counselling is no doubt partly a matter of its availability in schools. It may often be the case, though, that academic advising (in at least some form) is technically available, but that it is left up to students to self-refer for help. However, an examination of those students who access this assistance points to some problems. In a study that examined the relationship between the achievement goals of Australian Year 11 students and the sources that they consulted for information on subject choices and on the decision to leave school, Warton (1997) found that those students who were focused on learning were more likely to consult teachers and careers advisors, compared to those with a "work avoidance" orientation who were more likely not to consult anyone. Similarly, Scheel and Gonzalez (2007) found that amongst 11th graders at an American high school, students with higher academic self-efficacy and those who were more focused on future aspirations were more likely to seek out school counselling. The literature suggests that relying upon students to identify a need and seek out academic counselling can mean that those students who need it the most often do not receive it.

However, if this issue is addressed, there are indications that well-conducted academic counselling can be a very effective intervention. Effective academic counselling ensures that students do not find out too late that they have closed off their preferred options, and has the potential to increase student motivation and engagement. Dykeman et al. (2003) surveyed students at 20 high schools in the USA about their levels of participation in 44 types of career development interventions, which they divided into four categories (field interventions (e.g. job shadowing), introductory interventions (e.g. career aptitude assessment and career days), curriculum interventions (e.g. career information or skills infused into the curriculum), and advising interventions). They found that only the advising category, i.e. interventions that assist students with their educational or occupational planning, could be shown to have any significant effect on academic motivation. A synthesis of school-based career development literature by Hughes and Karp (2004) noted many positive findings for academic counselling, suggesting that it is effective because it helps students to understand the connections between their goals and the academic steps they need to take towards them. Scheel and Gonzalez (2007) also provide evidence that students who see their school activities as a good fit with, and contributing to, their future aspirations are more academically motivated. Working with students individually is likely to be particularly beneficial: two meta-analyses of career development interventions suggest that individual counselling interventions are the most effective (Oliver & Spokane, 1988; Whiston, Sexton, & Lasoff, 1998).

Conducting academic counselling with students, particularly one-on-one advising, also affords school personnel the opportunity to develop closer relationships with students, which can have many benefits. A meta-analysis of 119 studies found an association between positive teacher-student relationships and a range of positive cognitive and behavioural student outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007). Improving relationships in schools is the main focus of the Te Kotahitanga programme, now in place in 33 New Zealand secondary schools, which has been successful in raising Māori students' achievement levels. Māori students (and their families) who were interviewed in the initial stages of the project overwhelmingly saw the quality of their relationships with their teachers as the main influence on their educational achievement (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Other studies which have asked high school students for their views on what makes a difference to their levels of engagement in school have also identified good relationships with school staff as fundamental (Cushman, 2003; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005).

In fact, a study carried out in the USA using data on almost 15,000 students who were tracked over six years found that "A strong relationship with a teacher, counselor, or administrator in high school can help propel students to college or other postsecondary education" (ACT, 2003; Wimberley 2002). Students who formed good relationships with teachers or other staff had higher educational expectations and were more likely to be involved in post-secondary education two years after finishing school. Such relationships can help students take advantage of educational opportunities and develop beliefs in the value of education. Wimberley (2002) stresses that all students "need to know that an interested adult… is available to them and is one who understands their concerns, continually helps them consider and explore educational and career goals, and wants to help them pursue their education and career objectives" (p. 16).

That all students need to be supported in school by at least one adult who shows a genuine interest in their progress is emphasised in the *High Schools That Work* initiative, which has now been implemented in over 1,200 schools in the USA, and has demonstrably raised student achievement. The initiative is based on schools implementing ten key practices, one of which concerns improving the quality of guidance and advisement provided to students. The *High Schools That Work* guidelines recommend that all students should be assigned to an advisor who holds regular meetings with the student and periodically checks on their performance. They further recommend that each student, their parents and their advisor should meet before the student enters high school to develop a plan of study based on the student's goals, and

continue to meet at least annually to review this plan and the student's progress (Bottoms & Feagin, 2003).

Involving parents is also repeatedly recommended in the literature on academic counselling because it can help parents understand what their child needs to do in order to succeed at school, and how they can support them in doing this (Grubb, Lara, & Valdez, 2002). One of the Best Evidence Synthesis series commissioned by the New Zealand Ministry of Education concluded that parental involvement in school programmes which enhance their understandings of how to help their child educationally and that respect the dignity and cultural values of parents has a positive impact on student achievement (Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003). A recent ERO (2008) national report supports the importance of strengthening engagement with families and identifies particular factors which are critical to this, including supportive relationships, learning partnerships, good communication, school culture and commitment from leadership. Parent-teacher interviews are one means of involving parents in their children's schooling. However, it has been found that many parents find these meetings unsatisfactory, with miscommunication and conflicting agendas common (Walker, 1998; Power & Clark, 2000). Parents frequently find that the time allotted to speak to teachers is too short to be productive. Various alternative models for these meetings appear in the literature, most of which advocate involving the student in some way. However there is very little research on the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences (in any format) in terms of student outcomes, and that which does exist tends to focus on primary school children.

3.2 Goal setting

Working with students, alongside their parents/caregivers, to identify their long-term goals and to set out what students need to do in order to achieve them can have positive outcomes. The setting of achievement targets in individual subjects for individual students makes it clear to students and their parents/caregivers what level they need to achieve in order to reach their goals, rather than just knowing which courses are needed. Although much of the literature on goal setting comes from organisational psychology, it has also been extended into education, and goal setting has been shown to have a powerful effect in a wide variety of contexts. According to Locke and Latham (2002) there are four mechanisms through which goals affect performance. First, goals direct attention towards those activities that are relevant to the goal and away from those that are irrelevant; they have an "energising function" leading to greater effort being expended; they increase

persistence, prolonging effort; and finally, they lead the individual to find, select and apply appropriate knowledge and strategies.

Research on goal setting has identified those properties of goals that are most likely to activate the above mechanisms. These are categorised as: proximity, specificity, difficulty, and goal commitment.

- **Proximal** goals that can be achieved relatively soon generally result in higher performance than distant, far-off goals (Johnson & Graham, 1990). This highlights the importance of breaking down long-term goals into short-term ones to effectively mobilise effort and provide guides for performance (Bandura & Schunk, 1981, p. 587). Proximal goals also provide more opportunities for evaluating one's progress.

- **Specific** goals, such as the mark that a student will receive on a particular assessment, are more effective than general goals such as 'do your best' because they give a clearer idea of what is required and set an agreed standard against which goal attainment can be measured (Johnson & Graham, 1990).

- **Challenging** goals result in greater effort and achievement than easy goals (Masters, Furman, & Barden, 1977, p. 218). However, goals that are so hard that they seem unattainable to the individual will not be motivating. Also, for any goal, but especially for difficult ones that require more effort, the individual must be personally committed to attaining the goal (Locke & Latham, 2002).

- Goal **commitment** is an important issue that has been central to the debate on assigned and self-set goals. While some research has found that goals are more effective when individuals participate in setting them for themselves than when goals are assigned to them, other studies have found no difference when goal difficulty was held constant (Locke & Latham, 2002).

- Goals should be **clearly understood**. Further investigation found that if a purpose or reason for the goal was explained to the participant then goal commitment could be as high as in the case of self-set goals (Latham, Erez, & Locke, 1988). Thus, it would appear that if targets are to be assigned to students, it is important to explain the rationale behind them.

According to Locke & Latham (2002) there are two main factors that affect goal commitment:
- The importance of the goal to the individual, and
- The individual's belief that he/she can achieve the goal (self-efficacy).

Linking students' achievement targets to their future aspirations is likely to convince them of the importance of meeting these targets. Also, students might feel that attaining their goals is more important when they commit publicly or in writing to doing this. In terms of increasing students' sense of self-efficacy, the act of giving a student a challenging goal, and conveying the expectation that they are capable of achieving it, can help to do this. Helping students to develop strategies for achieving their goals can also have a positive effect.

3.3 A New Zealand Initiative

In New Zealand, relatively little work on academic counselling and target setting has been carried out. The Ministry of Education initiated the *Designing Careers* pilot project, aimed at strengthening school careers education, which ran for 18 months in 2005 and 2006 (ERO, 2006). A key component of this pilot involved Year 10 students in 75 participating schools completing a Learning and Career Plan (LCP) (a new resource developed for the pilot) during class time). The LCP had sections on "self awareness (interests, best subjects, skills, achievements, values), career, learning and personal goals, actions to reach the goals, a reality check, and subject choices" (ERO, 2006, p. 19). Classes generally participated in a range of activities leading up to completing the LCPs, designed to increase their self-knowledge and awareness of different pathways and careers. The staff and students involved in the pilot were generally positive about the process, and the evaluation found that, on the whole, the LCPs were useful in helping students to develop ideas about future plans and the course choices that could lead to these, increasing their understanding of the relevance of achievement at school to their aspirations for the future. However, the design of the pilot meant that the evaluation did not provide evidence about whether there had been any measurable impact on particular student outcomes such as future aspirations, motivation and school engagement. In addition, the quality of completed LCPs was highly variable, depending very much on the quality of guidance and information that the students had received. The pilot has been used to inform the current Ministry initiative, *Creating Pathways and Building Lives* (CPaBL).

3.4 Conclusions

While little significant research on academic counselling has been carried out in New Zealand, the international literature strongly upholds the value of academic counselling for secondary school students as a means to guide them through their academic pathways and produce improved outcomes. However, the international literature also indicates that making counselling 'available' to students and leaving it up to them to

engage with it or not, will not assist all students. In addition, it appears that the involvement of parents/caregivers in this process is a powerful addition to any academic counselling initiative. Furthermore, goal setting can have positive outcomes if goals are well designed and students are well supported in reaching them, with regular feedback to individual students and their parents/caregivers on progress towards the goals set in earlier discussions. Linking the processes of academic counselling (with parental involvement) and goal setting is likely to have synergistic effects as each reinforces the other, and promises to be most beneficial for students, parents/caregivers and schools.

Section 4   EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODS

Evaluations can be divided into two broad categories:

- *Summative* evaluations, which are concerned with measuring the effectiveness of a programme against some established criteria after the programme has been completed.

- *Formative* evaluations, which are carried out while the programme is still being developed in order to provide information on how it is progressing and on modifications that could be made to improve it (Bennett, 2003; Carnwell, 1997).

This study is a *formative* evaluation because it was carried out after the Academic Counselling and Target Setting programme had been in place for only a year at MHS. The evaluation was carried out with a view to informing decision-making about the future of the programme and how it can be continued and improved. For this reason, the study considered the impact of the intervention on all stakeholders as well as the personal and organisational resources needed to support it. Examining the implementation of the programme, particularly in terms of teachers', students' and other stakeholders' reactions, is important because without their support the programme has little chance of success (Charles & Mertler, 2002).

The evaluation was conducted by Starpath at the request of MHS. It is common practice for evaluations to be conducted by external researchers. An evaluation carried out by an internal group at MHS would have presented ethical concerns, as their ongoing relationships with staff and students at the school would have made it difficult to provide a neutral environment in which individuals felt free to decide whether to take part, and in which participants could candidly express their views. It was therefore seen by the school as appropriate that the Starpath project team conduct the evaluation.

The conduct of the evaluation by the Starpath team also helped to deal with a potential conflict of interest situation related to the Student Achievement Manager at the school who was also a PhD student, investigating the effectiveness of the academic target setting initiative. Following consultation with all concerned, and approval by the University Ethics Committee, the Student Achievement Manager did not take part in the conduct of the evaluation study. With participants' prior consent, she was later provided with de-identified transcripts of focus group discussions, and the transcript of the interview with the school Principal, in order to use this material as contextual data within her PhD thesis.

This evaluation is a case study of an intervention at a single site. Case studies, which tend to privilege depth over breadth, give a more detailed understanding and illuminate unique features of a case by paying attention to people's experiences and how they act in specific situations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

The following research question provided the focus for the data collection:

In what way has the Academic Counselling and Target Setting (ACTS) introduced in 2007 for the Year 11 student cohort impacted on the school and the various stakeholders involved in the intervention?

4.1 Data collection and analysis

Because this study is an evaluation of an implemented intervention the relevant participants were already identified – the staff who were involved in the 2007 implementation of the programme; the Year 11 students who participated in all aspects of the intervention; and their parents/caregivers. The key staff were identified as the Principal, one of the Deputy Principals, the Curriculum Manager, the Student Achievement Manager, Careers Advisors, Deans, Form teachers, and English and mathematics teachers.

A range of different methods and sources of information were used to gather a variety of perspectives on the ACTS programme. These were:
- Individual semi-structured interviews with key staff;

- Focus groups with Deans, Form teachers, and English and mathematics teachers; and

- Written questionnaires with students and parents/caregivers.

4.1.1 Interviews and focus groups

All interviews and focus group discussions were carried out by the Starpath research team using interview/discussion schedules with a list of key questions (and suggested follow-up questions) that covered the topics of importance to the evaluation. Researchers were free to alter the wording or order of the questions in order to respond to what was said and to seek more information on particular points. This format ensured that the data gathered from the participants were relevant and comprehensive, and facilitated comparison between the interviews, while keeping the interviews conversational and

allowing the interviewers to follow up on any unexpected issues and to probe participants for clarification or further explanation.

All interviews and focus groups took place on the school premises, and were recorded using digital voice recorders and transcribed verbatim. All transcripts were checked for accuracy. Analyses were done thematically by hand as the number of interviews was small. Two researchers worked on the analysis of interview data.

Individual semi-structured interviews

Six one-off individual interviews, lasting from 20 to 80 minutes, were conducted at the school with the key staff identified by the school's management team as having a significant role in the design and implementation and/or likely to have a unique perspective on the intervention because of their particular positions in the school. Individual interview participants were offered the opportunity to review and edit their transcripts and most took up the offer.

Focus Groups

Seven focus group sessions, lasting between 40 and 65 minutes, were held at the school with Deans, Form teachers, and mathematics and English teachers who had taught Year 11 classes in 2007. From two to ten people participated in each focus group. (Two is too small a number for a focus group but as some participants joined an earlier group it was important to include the two teachers who came at the appointed time in the study.) Focus group participants were not offered the chance to review and edit their transcripts in order to maintain confidentiality, as far as this is possible in a group situation.

4.1.2 Questionnaires

The final method of data collection used in this evaluation was a questionnaire given to a sample of the 2007 Year 11 students and their parents/caregivers. Questionnaires, which make it possible to compile and analyse large amounts of information relatively easily, were used to survey the views of a relatively large number of parents/caregivers and students.

Form teachers of the 2007 Year 11 student cohort (in Year 12 in 2008 when data collection took place) gave out the questionnaire to potential participants (students and their parents/caregivers) at the conclusion of parent-student-teacher meeting. The questionnaires took approximately 10 minutes to complete and respondents were asked

to place the completed questionnaires in a designated secure box before they left the school premises.

Using a simple random sample, 200 questionnaires were distributed to eligible parents/caregivers, and 200 to eligible students. (As 441 of the original 557 Year 11 (2007) students returned to MHS in 2008, this represented a 45% sample of the available students and parents/caregivers.) One hundred and sixty seven (167) students and 139 parents/caregivers returned a completed questionnaire. This represents 83.5% response rate for the students, and 69.5% response rate for the parents/caregivers.

Section 5   THE ACTS INTERVENTION

5.1   What happened at MHS before the Academic Counselling and Target Setting intervention?

Prior to the introduction of the ACTS programme, the monitoring of student academic achievement and pathways had been carried out in an ad-hoc fashion. Much of it took place informally. For example, Form teachers sometimes spoke to students about their aspirations, subject choices and what credits they needed. Year level co-ordinators were also available to advise students on subject choices. Careers Advisors spoke to all Year 12 and 13 students individually, as well as to students and parents/caregivers who sought them out, and ran a careers programme with Year 11 classes. The Year 10 Social Studies programme also included a unit on careers. The Deans' role in academic counselling was very limited; they were concerned mainly with discipline problems, speaking to students who were sent to them for 'bad behaviour' such as truancy, although sometimes they asked such students about their current study programmes and future plans.

Target setting was also carried out informally, but only with some students; for instance when teachers negotiated with particular students to aim for certain marks, or when they gave out assessment results to students and indicated that they expected them to do better next time. Students were also engaged in a self-review process, which involved them examining their internal exam results. This was introduced by the English department in the 1990s and extended to other departments when it was perceived to be the reason for raised student achievement in English. In the mathematics department, achievement targets were set for different classes, e.g. that all students in the top mathematics classes would aim for excellence in their assessments. In accordance with the National Education Guidelines (NEGs), the school also set some school-wide achievement targets, and documented these in the school charter.

5.2   Why was ACTS introduced at MHS?

The impetus for change came mainly from the Principal, who had been seeking a way to improve the school's NCEA results, particularly those of Māori and Pacific students, after having travelled overseas to study other systems. Furthermore, under the Ministry of Education planning and reporting requirements, schools were being asked to set achievement targets and MHS was also including participation and retention targets, particularly for their Māori and Pacific students. Starpath research had signalled to the

Principal that the subject choices and academic pathways of the students in his school needed more monitoring and guidance. While travelling on two Woolf-Fisher Fellowships, he observed various forms of academic counselling in schools that he visited in the United States, Canada, Finland and England. This led him to conclude that counsellors with an academic advising role, rather than a pastoral focus, were missing in New Zealand schools and could have a significant role in establishing a school-wide programme of change.

> *[I went] to Finland and wanted to know why they are the 'top-of-the-tree' for 15 year old achievement and again, institutionalised in all those schools are academic counsellors. So I felt we were missing something here in New Zealand so when I came back one of the things I wanted to institute was a programme of academic counselling. So that's where it came from.* (Principal)

In 2006, after returning from one of these trips, the Principal put the idea of implementing an academic counselling programme to key staff – Deans, Faculty Leaders and Senior Management – and then to all staff.

In presenting the idea to all staff, the Principal found that it was well received. There was concern among some staff that a significant number of students were not receiving the information and help they needed to make choices in school that related to their goals for the future. There was also an ongoing worry about how to get parents/caregivers more involved with the school and their children's learning, particularly as attendance numbers at parents-teacher interviews had declined to less than 10% in recent years. During the consultative process, MHS staff who had taught in the United Kingdom spoke about similar initiatives they had seen and/or experienced in schools there. General agreement was gained from the staff, and in 2007 planning and implementation began.

5.3   An outline of the ACTS intervention

Although no formal document describing the ACTS programme was written before it was implemented, the main objective was to increase the academic performance of the school through a systematic, cohesive, whole-school approach to student achievement. Both the Principal and the staff who were interviewed identified the following objectives of the programme:

- to get staff working together on the academic performance of the school,
- to get students to achieve their potential through setting goals, knowing how to achieve them, and reviewing progress, and
- to retain students

The ACTS programme was designed in three parts.

1. Restructured parent-student-teacher meetings, in which parent(s)/caregiver(s) (along with their child) met only with their child's Form teacher, for an in-depth overview of the child's progress. The Form teacher had a comprehensive academic profile of each student to discuss with the parent(s)/caregiver(s).

2. Academic counselling, which involved each student meeting with their Dean, two or three times a year, to discuss their academic progress, aims and aspirations, and how they were going to achieve them. These were reviewed, with the student, at regular intervals.

3. Target setting, including the setting of school-wide achievement targets for both whole Year levels and particular groups, as well as individual targets for each Year 11 student in his or her mathematics and English external achievement standards.

It is important to note here that although parts of the ACTS programme were separate, and the staff perceived them as such, the underlying thread was the work being done with whole-school achievement data and the building of longitudinal academic profiles of students.

5.4   Implementation

In early 2007 a staff member with skills in statistical analysis, who had recently returned to the school from spending 15 months with the Starpath Project, was appointed to the position of Student Achievement Manager. The Student Achievement Manager headed a small implementation team consisting of herself, two Deans, and one Deputy Principal, which was responsible for implementing the ACTS programme. A Senior Management Team that consisted of the Principal, the Deputy Principal (Achievement) and the Student Achievement Manager provided the overall leadership for the intervention. The implementation group held several planning meetings in which they established a new format for parent-student-teacher meetings based on a model used in the United Kingdom, and worked out how to prepare for the academic counselling initiative and carry it out with students and staff. It was decided by the Senior Management Team that the ten Deans would be best suited to carry out academic counselling. The Student Achievement Manager was responsible for developing and setting the whole-school targets as well as the targets for Year 11 mathematics and English external achievement standards, and communicating with staff about the target setting process. The working group continued to shape and adjust the mechanisms of the intervention throughout the year, with the Student Achievement Manager holding the overall responsibility for co-ordinating the programme.

An initial activity within the new programme required each student to establish a clear academic plan based on their goals for the future. All students were required to complete a long-term Personal Educational Plan (PEP). Students were given these in Form class, and were asked to discuss them at home with their parents/caregivers. The template for the long-term plan included sections on what students considered their skills to be; where they would like to be in six years time (i.e. the first year after Year 13 for Year 9 students); their career aims; and the school qualifications and subjects needed to reach these.

> *And the Year 9s got that the first day they turned up here and we told them that this was their homework, the first night, to go home and talk about it and sort out their plan. I think about 95% of them had it back the next day… amazing it was just amazing like that... they'd put a bit of thinking into it with their parents.* (Principal)

Students also developed a medium-term PEP, covering the following year, in which they set themselves targets for their academic progress, extra-curricular activities and some broader (e.g. attendance or work completion) objectives. Students completed these with their Dean as part of the academic counselling that was held with all students.

Academic counselling involved each student meeting two or three times a year with their Dean, either individually or as part of a small group. In these meetings, students' achievement over the year to date was discussed - students were asked, for example, where they were at with their credits, whether they needed to improve their performance in particular subjects, and if so, what help they needed to do this (such as extra tutoring). Deans discussed with students whether they were on track to achieve their NCEA Level 1, 2, or 3 Certificate by the end of the year, and if this would not be possible, when they would aim achieve this Certificate by (for example, a Year 12 student studying half Level 1 courses and half Level 2 courses would not be expected to gain NCEA Level 2 in that year, but could plan to reach this goal part way into the following year). Students' future career and study plans were also discussed and linked to what students needed to achieve and what subjects they needed to take while at school. Deans referred students elsewhere (e.g. to Careers Advisors) if they thought this was necessary, for instance if a student's plans seemed unrealistic or they did not know in what direction they wanted to head. Records summarising these counselling sessions, and their medium and long-term planning sheets, were kept for each student on a computer database.

The Deans and the Student Achievement Manager were central to the academic counselling part of the programme. The Deans were fully involved in the planning and underwent some professional development in the school; for example the Careers Advisors taught them how to use the career databases and other available information. The Student Achievement Manager timetabled all of the students' academic counseling

sessions with the Deans. These were sometimes scheduled around critical events, e.g. just before students made subject choices for the following year. To minimise disruption to their studies, an effort was made to pull students out of a different subject each time they attended an academic counselling session. After the first lot of academic counselling, the Student Achievement Manager sent a timetable of the subsequent sessions to all teachers so they would know when their students would be leaving the classroom and could plan their lessons around this. While Deans conducted the bulk of the academic counselling sessions, when it was felt that they were not getting through them quickly enough, the Student Achievement Manager, the Deputy Principal who was involved in developing the programme, and the Year 13 Level Co-ordinator also carried out some of the counselling.

An important objective of the intervention was to increase parent/caregiver involvement with the school, and to improve communication between the school and parents/caregivers about their child's learning. The past practice of parent-teacher interviews had involved five-minute meetings with each of the child's subject teachers and these evenings had been poorly attended. To increase the number of parents/caregivers attending, the school re-structured these meetings.

> *In terms of the parents' evening it's a model that was used in UK, certainly the UK trained teachers [had] experienced, so we pooled all the information that we had together about how that worked.* (Student Achievement Manager)

In the restructured parent-student-teacher meetings, all parents/caregivers were sent a letter that included a brief outline of the academic counselling programme and emphasised the reasons why the school wanted parents/caregivers to be involved in their child's schooling. These letters requested that they come to the parent-student-teacher meetings and allocated them a time to meet with their child's Form teacher. In addition, notices in different languages were put up in the local shops and a full-page advertisement was placed in the local community newspaper, encouraging parents/caregivers to attend and asking employers to release parents/caregivers from their work duties to attend the meetings at the time indicated in the letter sent to parents/caregivers. It was hoped this would raise community awareness of the programme. Form teachers were responsible for phoning and emailing parents/caregivers who had not responded to confirm whether they would be attending. Childcare was provided at the school during the scheduled meetings, free refreshments were available, and the school car park had been emptied so parents/caregivers could easily access parking. Students were released from their normal classes for one and a half days while the parent-student-teacher meetings were being held but were required to attend the meetings with their parents/caregivers.

Each meeting lasted 20-25 minutes, and parents/caregivers, along with their children, met with the student's Form teacher. At the meeting, the Form teacher discussed the student's report (and gave a copy of it to the parent(s)/caregiver(s)), and shared comments that each subject teacher had provided on how the student had performed in the last term, and how he or she could improve in the next. In this way general trends or key areas of concern that appeared across subjects could be examined. Form teachers also went through junior students' asTTle information and senior students' NCEA Record of Learning and Credit Tracker at the meetings. Attendance records and academic counselling records were also discussed. Parents/caregivers were given a pack including a magnet with four key messages from the Principal, a pen, a notebook, a plastic folder, feedback forms and a list of ways in which they could continue their involvement in their child's education. Following the meeting with the Form teacher, parents/caregivers and students could also meet with Careers Advisors, Guidance Counsellors, Level Co-ordinators, Focus Learning Department staff, and the Senior Management Team, and could request a meeting with particular subject teachers. Furthermore, parents/caregivers were encouraged to maintain contact with their child's Form teacher.

Form teachers were given a range of resources to prepare them for conducting the parent-student-teacher meetings in the new format. They received information regarding what they needed to do before the meetings, what to do on the days they were being held, and what they would have to do afterwards. They were also prepared for the kinds of questions that parents/caregivers might ask, the possible responses they could give, and they were given an example of how a parent-student-teacher meeting might be carried out. First year teachers were paired with experienced teachers for guidance. Students were sent home early on one day in order to give teachers time to complete the preparation for the meetings.

Although the ACTS programme was designed as a school-wide intervention, the individual subject (English and mathematics) target setting component of the programme was limited to the 2007 Year 9 and 11 students. Specific achievement targets were set for Year 11 students for every mathematics and English, externally assessed, Level 1 achievement standard in which they were enrolled. These targets were determined by the Student Achievement Manager on the basis of historical school data (i.e. data on previous cohorts of students) and each student's ability as determined by their MidYIS scores. They were designed to be challenging and set at the upper end of what students could be expected to achieve. It was hoped these targets would encourage students to aim to achieve to the best of their potential. Lists of students' targets were given to

mathematics and English teachers towards the end of Term 3. Subject teachers were allowed to raise (but not lower) the targets if they thought they were not set at an appropriate level for the student. They were then responsible for discussing the targets with students in their classes and encouraging them to strive to meet them. Individual targets were also used in academic counselling sessions, where academic achievement was discussed with students in conjunction with their aspirations for their future career pathways. Individual targets in English and Mathematics were also developed for Year 9 students (based on asTTle scores), and were shared with them by their English and mathematics teachers. This aspect of the target setting part of the intervention was not examined in this evaluation, as it was decided to focus on the experience of Year 11 students, their parents/caregivers, and their teachers and Deans.

The final aspect of the intervention was the setting of school-wide targets for student achievement. Targets were set for the percentage of students achieving NCEA Level 1, 2 and 3, and University Entrance (UE), as well as Level 1 Literacy and Numeracy requirements. In addition, specific targets for the proportion of male, female, Māori, and Pacific students achieving NCEA Level 1 were set. All of these targets were set quantitatively by the Student Achievement Manager in consultation with other staff and represented an improvement on previous years' results. These targets were set by using the school's historical NCEA data to establish targets before adding an element of challenge to them. Teachers were informed of these targets in a presentation the Student Achievement Manager made to staff.

The school committed substantial resources to implement the intervention, with staff time being the major cost. All Deans were released from one class of their teaching load for the entire year in order to create time for the academic counselling sessions. The Student Achievement Manager was also released from teaching two classes, to give her time for academic target setting, timetabling of academic counselling sessions, staff development, planning, and additional meetings. The Principal reported the staff cost of the intervention as equivalent to that of employing three teachers – approximately $150,000 for the year[4]. Additional costs included photocopying, employing a data entry person to log student targets on a computer data base, and new filing cabinets to hold the paperwork. The parent-student-teacher meetings also entailed some expense, such as for the phone calls to parents/caregivers, the advertisement in the local community newspaper, the "sausage sizzle" and other refreshments provided, and the packs given to parents/caregivers.

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[4] Using the Banking Staffing Formula.

Section 6   FINDINGS

6.1   Impact of target setting on student outcomes

As already discussed, two types of targets were set as part of the ACTS initiative – whole-school targets, and individual targets in English and mathematics for the 2007 Year 11 students. Of the ten whole-school targets, seven focused on Year 11 students while the remaining three looked at the school's overall achievement in NCEA Level 2, NCEA Level 3, and University Entrance (UE). The seven Year 11 targets focused on the attainment of NCEA Level 1 for the cohort as a whole, and for male, female, Māori, and Pacific students, and on achievement or non-achievement of the NCEA Level 1 literacy and NCEA Level 1 numeracy requirements (see Table 1 below). In addition, specific targets were set for each 2007 Year 11 student who sat externally-assessed achievement standards for English and mathematics.

6.1.1   Whole-school targets

Logistical regression analysis was performed on data from two cohorts of Year 11 students, with the dependent variable measured in terms of a binary outcome – achievement or non-achievement of NCEA Level 1. A comparison of performance in NCEA Level 1 was made between the 2007 Year 11 students who took part in the ACTS programme and the Year 11 students from the previous year who had had no exposure to the new programme. The analysis controlled for gender, ethnicity and a measure of prior achievement, in this instance a MidYIS score gained at Year 9 entry.

The findings of the analysis are impressive. When the effects of gender, ethnicity and prior achievement are controlled, students from the 2007 Year 11 cohort performed significantly better than students from the 2006 Year 11 cohort, such that the odds of the 2007 Year 11 students gaining NCEA Level 1 were 1.9 times better than the odds of their 2006 counterparts achieving the same qualification.

The targets were not set as predictions but at a value that took into account historical cohort data patterning, the school entry data from the cohort for whom the target was being set, and 'adding value'.

As shown in Table 1 below, the school reached or exceeded the Year 11 (NCEA Level 1) targets for the cohort as a whole, as well as for male, female, and Pacific students, and the targets for the achievement of Level 1 numeracy and literacy requirements. The

school also exceeded its targets in relation to the achievement of NCEA Level 3 and University Entrance.

Table 1: Whole-School Targets and Achievements

	2004 % achieved	2005 % achieved	2006 % achieved	2007 Target (%)	2007 % achieved
NCEA L1 (All)	53	55	57	62	64
NCEA L1 (Male)	50	58	50	59	61
NCEA L1 (Female)	67	55	62	65	67
NCEA L1 (Māori)	38	52	39	59	51
NCEA L1 (Pacific)	41	35	37	51	57
NCEA L1 Literacy	64	74	71	80	84
NCEA L1 Numeracy	81	94	95	95-100	97
NCEA L2 (All)	46	54	56	60	58
NCEA L3 (All)	49	53	51	55	60
University Entrance	42	48	45	50	52

The two targets that were not reached in 2007 were for NCEA Level 1 for Māori students, and NCEA Level 2 for all students.

- Considerable improvement was made in the proportion of Māori Year 11 students who gained NCEA Level 1 (from 39% in 2006 to 51% in 2007), but the target of 59% was not achieved.

- The NCEA Level 2 target of 60% was not attained, even though the proportion of 2007 Year 12 students that achieved NCEA Level 2 was 2% higher than for the 2006 cohort. It is unclear why this target was not met and more work needs to be done to investigate the underlying reasons.

6.1.2 Individual Targets

The measures used to determine whether the target setting was successful in English and mathematics externally-assessed achievement standards were the total number of credits and the grade point average (GPA) gained in the external assessments in each of the two subjects by each candidate.

English

The analysis indicated that, on average, the 2007 Year 11 cohort gained more credits and a higher GPA in English than the 2006 Year 11 cohort, when prior achievement, gender and ethnicity were controlled in the model. On average, the 2007 students gained 1.2 more credits and 6.0 more GPA points than the 2006 students[5]. These results were statistically significant.

Mathematics

The analysis of the externally-assessed achievement standards for NCEA Level 1 mathematics indicated that when prior achievement, gender and ethnicity were controlled, the 2007 Year 11 cohort performed significantly better than the 2006 Year 11 cohort. The 2007 Year 11 students gained an average of 2.0 more credits and an average of 7.4 more GPA points than the 2006 cohort.

6.1.3   Significance of results

Because there have been incremental improvements in both MHS and national NCEA Level 1 results over recent years, the significance of the school's improvements in NCEA Level 1 in 2007 was tested against the 2007 national data for all schools, and the 2007 data from all decile 6 schools[6].

- When the change in the MHS results between 2006 and 2007 was compared with the change in the national NCEA Level 1 results, the results for males (p-value = 0.016) and for Pacific students (p-value = 0.036) were found to be statistically significant. There was no statistically significant difference for females, Maori students, or for the Year 11 cohort as a whole.

- When the improvement in the MHS results was compared with the change in the NCEA Level 1 success rate for the national decile 6 student body, there was an overall difference (p-value = 0.008) and one for males (p-value = 0.009). There was no statistically significant difference for females. (It was not possible to compare the changes in the success rates of Maori and Pacific students at MHS and at other decile 6 schools, as the data needed to do this were not available to Starpath).

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[5] The GPA was calculated by multiplying each of the achievement standards' credit value by a factor of two if the standard was awarded at the achieved grade, by a factor of three if the standard was awarded at the merit grade and by a factor of four if the standard was awarded at the excellence grade, and adding each of these values together.
[6] In 2007 Massey High School was designated within decile 6, hence the comparison with other decile 6 schools. Currently it is within decile 5.

This suggests that during the first year of the trial, the improvements in the MHS NCEA Level 1 results were greater than what could be expected from general national trends alone.[7]

6.2   Student responses to the questionnaire

One hundred and sixty seven (167) students, out of a sample of 200, who were in Year 11 in 2007, answered the questionnaire (83.5% return rate). Fifty three percent (53%) of the students who completed the questionnaire were female and 47% were male. Most of the students who responded were Pākehā (56%), followed by "Other" (16%), Māori (11%), Samoan (8%), Indian (4%), Cook Island Māori (3%), and Tongan, Chinese, and Niuean (1% each).

6.2.1   Information on the ACTS programme

Although a third of the students reported that they had not received any information about the ACTS programme before it began, two thirds reported receiving some information. Close to a half of all students (45%) reported receiving "a lot" of verbal or written information, or both.

Most of the students reported that their information came from their Form teachers or from the Student Achievement Manager. Much smaller numbers (fewer than 10%) reported that their information came from subject teachers, Deans, or other sources.

6.2.2   What were their expectations?

Students were asked to recall what they expected would happen as a result of the ACTS programme. About one third of the respondents expected to have to discuss their studies with their parents/caregivers while a third also expected to be able to decide independently what they wanted to study. A quarter thought it would give them more choice in their studies, while a fifth thought they would be told what they had to study. Just under a third expected they would have to study harder while only 2% thought they would be able to put less effort into their studies. Seventeen percent thought it would not make any difference to them.

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[7] The 2006 and 2007 national NCEA Level 1 data used in these analyses were retrieved from the NZQA website on 1 April 2009.

6.2.3 Perceived effects of the ACTS programme

Students were asked how the intervention programme had affected them once it began. The most common responses were that it made them "confused" (44%) and made them "worried" (31%). This was an unexpected finding and possible reasons for it are discussed later in the report. Twenty nine percent of students indicated that it made them "think more" about their subject choices. One tenth said it made them work harder on their studies, and one tenth said it made them try harder to meet academic targets. A fifth of the students felt the programme had no effect on them.

Although the largest percentage (44%) of the students who responded thought that the programme had helped to improve their <u>academic performance</u> ("a little" or "a lot"), a sizeable minority (38%) were unsure if the ACTS programme had helped in this regard, and 16% thought it had not helped.

Similarly, although a third of the students reported that the ACTS programme had helped to improve their <u>motivation</u> ("a little" or "a lot"), 41% were not sure, and 22% thought it had not helped.

Students were also asked how much difference, overall, the programme had made to their studies. Forty six percent felt it had made some positive difference and 14% thought it had made a lot of positive difference. Although 31% felt it had not made any difference to their studies, only 3% felt that the programme's effects were negative.

Overall, the majority of students (63%) thought that the ACTS *programme should continue*. Twenty seven percent were not sure and 5% thought it should not.

6.2.4 Open-ended Responses

Students were asked the following open-ended questions:
- Whether they thought the programme should continue or not (with reasons)
- What changes should be made to the programme, if any, and
- What further comments they would like to make

Most students answered at least one of the open-ended questions but not all responded to each question. The following comments illustrate the ideas and issues raised rather than representing numerically significant findings.

Students were generally positive in their comments about the programme. Those that wanted the programme to continue frequently commented that the programme helped students to set and realise their goals, let them keep track of incremental achievements (standards completed, credits attained), and showed them where they needed to improve. Some commented that the programme helped to motivate them and got them to try harder. Others remarked that it helped them to decide what subjects to take, particularly in terms of what they needed for careers they were interested in, and helped them to think about what they might like to do in the future. Some students noted that it was good for parents/caregivers to be involved. Several students just made brief positive comments such as "it's great" or "it is helpful".

Of those that were not sure whether the programme should continue or did not think it should, some commented that the programme had not had much impact on them personally, but was useful to others. A couple of these students said it had not made a difference to them because they already set goals for themselves or had a clear sense of direction in relation to their studies and future careers.

When asked what changes they thought should be made to the programme, most did not answer or indicated that there should not be any changes. The most common change suggested was that the academic counselling sessions should be more frequent or more in depth. A few who had had group academic counselling indicated that they would have preferred individual sessions that would have provided greater privacy. A few commented that they would like to be given more help in choosing subjects. A few students said they would like to get more information on careers, such as by having the chance to experience jobs they were interested in, or having more frequent trips to the careers room or individual career discussions.

6.2.5 Discussion

Overall students were very supportive of the programme. Both those students who reported being helped by the programme and those who considered it helped others (even if they did not feel they were directly affected), agreed that the intervention addressed a real need for information, guidance and support. Nevertheless, there appears to be a small group of students who report having less need for academic counselling than other groups. This is not to say that they should be excluded, but the school may want to judiciously consider whether all students need the same number of appointments.

Unexpectedly, a significant minority of students reported some confusion about the programme and some worry about its impact on them. Students' responses to the open-ended questions did not help us to identify the sources of the apparent confusion but there seemed to be at least two issues. One area of confusion seemed to be around what the ACTS programme entailed. Although the students who took part in the survey participated in all three elements of the programme (having targets set for Level 1 English and mathematics standards; taking part in academic counselling sessions with their Deans, and taking part in the enhanced parent-student-teacher meeting with their Form teachers), it would appear that they needed a clearer explanation of how these elements fitted together. Another issue alluded to by students was that they became confused (and possibly worried) as they became more aware of the number of academic pathways open to them (and the importance of making the best possible choices), and the large number of career options available, but only if they made the right subject choices at school and achieved the qualifications needed for tertiary study or the career of their choice. Either way, the school needs to take note of these findings and find mechanisms to ensure that students do not feel overwhelmed during their initial introduction to the programme.

6.3   Parent/caregiver responses to the questionnaire

One hundred and thirty nine (139) of a sample of 200 parents/caregivers of the 2007 Year 11 students answered the questionnaire (69.5% response rate). Eighty one percent (81%) of all parents/caregivers who filled in a questionnaire were female while 19% were male. The breakdown of ethnic groups was: Pākehā (62%), Māori (13%), Samoan (9%), Other (9%), Indian (3%), and Tongan, Niuean and Chinese (1% each).

6.3.1   Contact with the school

Parents/caregivers were asked what contact they had had with the school in 2007. The vast majority of parents/caregivers appear to have had at least one kind of contact. Many had attended parent-student-teacher meetings: 9% had attended one and a further 45% had attended two or more. Thirty four percent (34%) had spoken to their child's teacher once on the phone, and a further 58% had done this more often. Just under half of parents/caregivers had had contact with the Principal or a Deputy Principal, either in person or on the phone. Four percent (4%) had email contact with the school and 5% had some other form of contact during the year. A surprisingly small number, one in five, indicated that they had received school newsletters.[8]

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[8] School newsletters are issued weekly and rely on students giving them to their parents/caregivers. They are also on the school's website.

While all parents/caregivers (bar one who did not answer this question) ticked at least one of the above options, 22% also ticked the option indicating they had had no contact with the school. This suggests that some parents/caregivers had a different idea of what constituted 'contact' with the school from what was implied in the questionnaire, or that they did not recall having certain types of contact with the school until reading the listed options ('No contact of any kind' was listed first).

6.3.2 Information about the ACTS programme

Parents/caregivers were asked about the amount and kind of information they had received from the school specifically about the ACTS programme before it began. Overall, 80% of the respondents indicated that they received "some" or a "lot" of either verbal or written information, or both. Close to two thirds of all parents/caregivers indicated they had received a "lot" of information from the school. Twenty percent of the respondents indicated that they had not received any information.

Parents/caregivers received information about the programme from a range of sources. Sixty percent had received their information from the school, half had received information from their child, and 40% from their child's Form teacher. Parents/caregivers were less likely to have been given information on the programme by another teacher (3%), the Student Achievement Manager (3%), or some other source (4%).

6.3.3 Parents'/caregivers' understanding of what the ACTS programme meant

Parents/caregivers varied in their understanding of the ACTS programme and what *impact* they had thought it would have on their children before the programme began. A substantial proportion thought that it would result in their child having more choice, either in their subjects (65%), their assessments (44%), or in deciding what they wanted to study (30%). In contrast, a third of parents/caregivers thought that their child would be told what they had to study. A fifth of parents/caregivers thought it would mean their child would be able to put less effort into their studies, while 4% expected their child would have to study harder. Eighteen percent of parents/caregivers expected that their child would have to discuss their studies with them. Twelve percent did not expect it to make any difference either to themselves or their child, and 13% did not know the programme had been introduced.

6.3.4   Perceived effects of the ACTS programme on the student

Parents/caregivers were asked *how the programme had affected their child* once it started. Sixty-two percent of parents/caregivers thought that it had made their child "worried" – twice the proportion of students who said that the programme had made them worried. One possible explanation for this is that if students spoke about the programme at home, some parents/caregivers might have interpreted this as a sign that their child was anxious about it. Many parents/caregivers (39%) also thought the programme had made their child "confused". Thirty seven percent of parents/caregivers thought it had got their child to "think more" about their subject choices. Thirteen percent reported that it had made their child try harder to reach set academic targets or more motivated to study, while 4% said it made their children unsure if they would reach the targets set for them. Seventeen percent of parents/caregivers perceived it had made no difference to their child.

Over a third of the parents/caregivers thought the ACTS programme had helped to improve their child's *academic performance*, while 28% were not sure whether there had been any such effect. A quarter thought it had not helped.

There were similarly mixed views on whether the ACTS programme had had any effect on students' motivation to study and achieve goals. Thirty eight percent of the parents/caregivers were not sure whether academic counselling had improved their child's *motivation*. A quarter thought it had not, and 22% felt that the programme had made a difference to their children's motivation.

Yet when parents/caregivers were asked how much *difference* academic counselling had made to their child's studies overall, over two thirds of the respondents thought that the programme had made "some" or "a lot" of positive difference to their child's studies, while only 16% thought it had not had any effect, and only 1% thought it had had a negative impact.

Over three-quarters of all parents/caregivers thought the academic counselling programme *should continue*. Thirteen percent of parents/caregivers were not sure if it should, and only 1% thought it should not.

6.3.5   Open-ended responses

In the open-ended questions parents/caregivers were asked:
  • Whether they thought the programme should continue or not (with reasons)
  • What changes should be made to the programme, if any, and

- What further comments they would like to make

Parents/caregivers that indicated they would like the programme to continue commonly stated that it helped to give students direction and focus. They felt that the programme encouraged students to think about their options for the future and helped students with decision-making regarding subject choices and possible careers.

Another common theme was that parents/caregivers thought that the programme helped to keep them informed and allowed them to be more involved in their child's education. Parents/caregivers were appreciative of the opportunity to find out how their child was progressing and commented that the parent-student-teacher meeting was "a great way to keep a finger on the pulse" and "the more involvement with school at this level the better". Some noted that this helped them to support their children in their studies and mentioned that it was good to form a partnership between parents/caregivers and the school.

Some parents/caregivers commented specifically on the format of the parent-student-teacher meeting. A few mentioned that it was good to have contact with their child's Form teacher, or that it was easier to meet with the Form teacher than having rushed meetings with different subject teachers, although some would still have preferred a meeting with the subject teachers as well.

A couple of parents/caregivers who were not sure whether the programme should continue commented that they had not seen any results that could be attributed to academic counselling, or that the ACTS programme had not affected their child. Some parents/caregivers felt that the programme would not have much impact on motivated students who were already achieving highly, but might be useful for other students. One parent/caregiver felt that academic counselling had put more unwanted pressure on her daughter, who already had extremely high expectations of herself, and suggested that the programme could be differentially targeted at high and low achievers.

When asked about changes they would like to see made to the programme, parents/caregivers often said they would like more frequent updates on their child, such as emailed interim reports, and more involvement with the school, while others suggested that students be given more information on careers, that academic counselling be provided earlier in the year, and that there be more follow up. Most parents/caregivers, however, did not suggest any changes and many indicated they were very happy with how the programme was being run.

6.3.6 Discussion

Overall, parents/caregivers were very positive about the intervention, with more than two thirds of the respondents reporting it had had a positive effect on their child. The vast majority (77%) wished to see it continue. In particular, they stressed that they liked the depth of engagement with the school on the *academic* aspects of their child's progress. Parents/caregivers appear to have been quite well informed through the school that the programme was happening but less well informed about what it actually involved. Parents'/caregivers' understanding of the programme and its implications, while reasonable, is an area that will require ongoing attention.

Like students, many parents/caregivers reported the programme had caused some concern and confusion for their child. However, a significant number also realised it was achieving what was intended, such as getting students to think about their academic pathways at school and the consequences of the choices they were beginning to make. Parents/caregivers were less sure whether the intervention had academic and motivational effects on their child.

6.4 Teacher experiences of implementation

6.4.1. The Restructured Parent-Student-Teacher Meeting

Teachers identified the new form of the parent-student-teacher meeting as an essential key to the intervention's success. Some teachers referred to it as a "strong catalyst" for strengthened interaction between the school and its community. The success of the restructured meeting was dependent on the strong organisational processes that occurred before, during and after the event (with subsequent follow-up by Form teachers being an important element in the whole process).

One of the most significant results of the restructured parent-student-teacher meetings was the <u>enormous increase in participation by parents/caregivers</u>. In previous years the attendance had been between 9% and 13%. In 2007 this increased to 76%. This meant that most of the teachers were meeting many of the parents/caregivers for the first time and finding them more interested in their children's schooling than they had expected. As expressed in some of the quotes below, the large parental turnout had a significant impact on staff, particularly on their perceptions of the parents/caregivers and the relationships they could build with them.

The teachers' overwhelming perception was that the parent-student-teacher meeting provided a means for cementing stronger and improved relationships between all parties. For example, one focus group participant commented on a conversation with a student following the meeting.

> *One of my kids said to me "oh you've really surprised me" and I said "why" and he said "'cause I thought you were just going to say bad stuff about me". And for him that was a change, you know, 'cause I didn't just say bad stuff about him, there was some good stuff. And it made, it made contact with the parents so much more immediate and so much more meaningful for us.* (FG03, p.25)

In most cases teachers reported connecting with parents/caregivers in a way that was very different from their previous experiences of 'cold hall', 'five minute', 'merry-go-round' parent/caregiver meetings with subject teachers. There is no doubt that this was helped considerably by the environment the school created, with refreshments, easy parking, child-care facilities, and information available in the hall – all of which was seen as positive. The meeting provided the opportunity for parents/caregivers to develop a tangible and identifiable partnership with their children's Form teachers. Together, they were able to increase their understanding of the student. Most staff gave specific examples of what relationships were enhanced and how they were improved.

The parent-student-teacher meeting, which began with parents/caregivers and teachers engaging together with the student's record of learning, provided a sound basis on which to change the nature of the relationship between school and home. Individual student portfolios the Form teachers created from information given to them by the students' subject teachers, Deans and other staff, provided a strong framework for the conversation with parents/caregivers and a clear overview of the student's academic progress and patterns that emerged from different classes.

> *Rather than one teacher saying one thing, another teacher saying another thing, you [Form teacher] got to look at those general trends for the kids as well.* (FG05, p.7)

One Form teacher went as far as to comment that the discussion during the meeting "lessened parent hostility towards teachers" because the teacher, student and parent/caregiver spoke for a good length of time, allowing participants to relax and not feel rushed.

Almost all staff interviewed commented on the strengthened triadic relationship of parent/caregiver, teacher and student, and the open and honest discussions that were able to occur.

> *… had the kid sitting there with the parent, so they couldn't play one off against the other. We were able to have a good look at their report and an honest talk about what it was and then parent, kid and Form teacher, were able to actually*

nut some things out and it wasn't confrontational. As a Form teacher, I was able to be more objective about, say, they did really badly in Music. I wasn't the Music teacher, so I didn't have an emotional investment, so I was able to say "What's happening in Music, why haven't you done well?" I just thought it was quite productive, 'cause it was more open, it was a lot more honest discussion going on. (FG05, p.6)

The discussion between the three parties also enabled teachers to see how the student interacted with his/her parent/caregiver, which provided additional insight for teachers.

Some Form teachers commented that the length of the meeting allowed for meaningful engagement, with parents/caregivers asking more questions than at previous parent-teacher interviews. As these meetings were considerably longer than the previous five minute ones, it is not surprising that a degree of rapport was able to develop. Some teachers commented on the insights they gained about parents'/caregivers' involvement with and concerns about their children, and spoke of the genuine pleasure they experienced spending time with parents/caregivers, coming together with a mutual interest in their children.

> *… it made me realise that sometimes you have an idea of what the parents might be like, and you can be completely wrong. I had one girl that said to me, "Mum doesn't care about stuff like that". And when I spoke to the Mum, I realised the Mum just completely cared… So, it made me aware of misconceptions that I had about the parents.* (FG06, p.10)

At the same time, the Deputy Principal commented on how the enhanced parent-student-teacher meeting reaffirmed parents'/caregivers' commitment to their children's education. Another teacher commented:

> *… this was the first time I'd ever met many, many, many of the parents and so it was really valuable for me, and I think it really created a triangle of support, you know, with the kid, the parents and me, and I felt that [was] really valuable.* (FG06, p.3)

Teachers perceived that some parents/caregivers found the school less formidable because of the initial teacher contact. Some Form teachers described initial hesitancy in contacting parents/caregivers, but this was soon alleviated by the positive desire of parents/caregivers to have contact.

> *Yeah the telephone calls made a big impact with parents.*
>
> *Yeah that's right.*
>
> *You know, they like to hear that the Form teacher from Massey High School, "your son or daughter's in my class". Like they like to hear [that] and they say, "Oh we are definitely coming" or something like that. Yeah not like sending a letter, I personally phoned them.* (FG01, p.7)

One Form teacher described the meeting as a process of breaking down misunderstandings between parents/caregivers and teachers. A Form teacher, pleased

that most of his predominantly Pacific Island parents/caregivers came to the meeting, felt that giving parents/caregivers an appointment removed a barrier to their attendance.

The length of conversation also enabled the teachers to ascertain what information and understanding parents/caregivers had about the school. Deans and teachers both commented on what they saw as a lack of parental insight into school information systems, particularly around assessment deadlines, homework expectations and gaining credits.

> *I mean, I had a Year 12 class, my Form class, and for some of the parents it was the first time anyone actually told them that their kids get sent home with a list of assessment dates. They didn't know that they actually could find out when all the internal assessments were. So, those sorts of things meant that some of those parents got more involved in making sure their kids were prepared for assessments across the board.* (FG04, p.9)

> *… the parents came in to those meetings, parents were given information that they understood, and they got on their kid's case, and it worked.* (FG07, p.13)

> *… it made them not just assessment numbers, all the internals when you're just spouting off "1295" and "12426" and all those numbers, you can tell the parents, "Okay, so they need to read an article of this length, and they need to write one practice essay and this is what it should look like". Because on the first day I wasn't prepared for all that, but on the second day, I went down and made photocopies of a whole lot of stuff we'd been doing and just gave it to the parents. Like "Okay, this is a model of what they should be doing". Stuff like that.* (FG04, p.9)

Overall, the main impact of the parent-student-teacher meetings was the trust and rapport developed between the school and the students and their families, and the sense of enjoyment many of the teachers felt as the result. The following comment captures this.

> *At nine o'clock at night people are grinning from ear to ear because you had had such a cool time with these people [parents/caregivers]. I mean there was one family that all of us were in tears, there was me, there was Mum, there were the kids, everyone was having a good cry because this kid was screwing up and we all just knew it, and it made such a difference.* (FG03, p.24)

English teachers felt that there was a good correlation in terms of the timing of the meetings in Term 2 and the necessary dissemination of information. Some of the teachers felt that "subject teacher interviews" – which were held in the conventional format later in the year – should have followed up more quickly from the Form teacher meetings in order to ensure that there was still enough time left for corrective action.

> *… half our parents didn't even understand what literacy was, particularly if they're Level 2, what the child had to achieve, because information wasn't getting home, but this way the information was there… but ["subject teacher interviews"] come so late, end of Term 3, and for a lot of students, many of those internal credits have been and gone. Half the internals are gone… So if they've mucked around for two terms, a lot of them can't recoup it.* (FG04, p.15)

One Form teacher reported feeling a renewed sense of accountability for the outcomes of her students' learning in her five-year relationship with her Form class.

> *And for me it brought it right back to the relationship that I had with them when they were little… like they're my babies, (laughter) when they were in Year 9 and 10, and it sort of made me feel a little bit more accountable for their achievement. Whereas sometimes when you're not teaching kids, you know, you think it's all up to them. It always did matter to me, but forcing me to have a day and a half of meeting the parents made me see the bigger picture, and realise that I can actually do something about it, as well.* (FG06, p.6)

Teachers felt that the stronger parent/caregiver-teacher relationship quelled behavioural problems at school. Some mathematics teachers, for example, observed that the parent-student-teacher meetings had a flow on effect on students' behaviour and work ethic.

While there was a general consensus that the parent-student-teacher meeting was a worthwhile process, teachers also alluded to the increased workload involved in the organisation and running of the event. Some teachers expressed reservations about the amount of work that would be involved, but in hindsight, most thought that the extra work was probably worth while. Some staff felt that the work leading up to the event could be streamlined and refined in the following year, such as by looking at time management and paperwork, but it was clear that these issues were not seen as insurmountable. There was a reasonably strong consensus that all the information disseminated to teachers before the parent-student-teacher meetings was clear and helpful.

A few Form teachers anticipated that getting parents/caregivers to come was going to take a lot of work, particularly when it came to contacting the parents/caregivers who had not responded to the letter asking them to confirm their appointment.

> *I didn't think it was going to be a good idea, I just thought "Oh this is just extra work that I do not need to do, with all the other stuff obviously that we all had to do. Oh, I've got to make 25 phone calls. Don't have a phone at home, going to have to stay late at school, or can't get hold of these people". You know, "God, it's just extra work", and it seemed like everyone I spoke to was like "Oh my God, this is just extra work for us". Sure, it might be a good idea, sure it might have good results, but really?* (FG05, p.8)

Some suggested it was a little difficult keeping track of phone calls if parents/caregivers did not answer the first time.

> *And half the time the phone rings and there's no answer and you have to remember to call them back again. So if someone could at least do that it would be a big help, the 'contacting parents' bit.* (FG02, p.19)

One teacher thought that some parents/caregivers felt a meeting was not necessary once they had spoken to the teacher on the phone.

> *In a lot of cases, if you're the Form teacher and you're contacting parents, then they just want to chat to you on the phone and then they don't see the point in coming in. So by the time you have a five minute conversation, ten minute conversation of "Hey how about you come in", you've almost sort of done… what you're going to do anyway.* (FG02, p.19)

There was a wide variation in how long it was reported the phone calls took to make and where they were made from. One teacher reported making 50-60 phone calls in total, while another reported that she got all of hers done within a single 35-minute period. Some teachers made all calls from the school, because they did not have a landline telephone at home, or because they did not want the children in their Form class to have their home telephone numbers (as numbers can be displayed at the receiver end). Another issue was calls to cellular phones, as some teachers did not want to ring from home and then claim back the cost of the call, and others were not sure if they could ring from school, although in fact they were able to. Others raised the issue that not all parents/caregivers have access to phones during work time.

The time invested by teachers in the implementation of the restructured parent-student-teacher meeting format varied according to the role they took in the new programme and how many classes they taught. Some referred to the inequity of variable workloads among teachers and wanted more acknowledgement of this.

> *… for those of us that were Form teachers, we had to make 20, 25, 30 phone calls to all these parents, and then there were these other teachers swanning around… 'cause they didn't have a Form class, and they got to do jobs like "I'll make you a cup of tea". And some people sat in their offices and just worked, and didn't even get involved in it, while the rest of us are sitting there for a day and a half talking to parent after parent, after parent… It felt a little bit unfair.* (FG05, p.9)

Other teachers commented that they saw non-Form teachers had jobs to do that were important in the larger scheme of the whole school making an effort to improve their relationships with parents/caregivers. It would appear some teachers taught all morning, received the information they needed, had a short lunch break, and then went into meetings with parents/caregivers and students and stayed there until late in the evening. These teachers would have preferred longer preparation time and suggested that two whole days, rather than a day and a half, might be needed to get through all the meetings. One teacher suggested that perhaps the days did not have to be in the same week.

6.4.2. Academic counselling

The Deans were responsible for carrying out the academic counselling part of the intervention. This component of the intervention involved students being taken out of

class, individually or in groups of two or three, and discussing their goals and academic targets and what they needed to do to reach them with a Dean. Some Deans saw their role as continuing to do what they had always done, with academic counselling as "extra work".

> *Our role hasn't changed, academic counselling is just an extra… So, we still do what we've always done, and we now do extra work with academic counselling.* (FG07, p.3)

Others recognised academic counselling as creating a more fundamental shift in their jobs as they came to realise that most of their previous interactions with students centred on disciplinary matters, and that this work provided a platform for change.

> *… what we've recognised from doing this is that the majority of our connection with the kids prior to this was negative.* (FG07, p.3)

> *…we get to meet…, there's kids that wouldn't normally be in our office and we get to meet all our students.* (FG07, p.3)

Deans indicated that the teaching release time they were given to conduct regular academic counselling sessions was perceived by other teachers, at least initially, as a perk or a privilege.

> *I think probably the first thing, some of the staff were like, "The Deans get more time again". (laughter) Yeah, there's a bit of negativity there, because it was seen as that we get another non-contact, but then I think the staff started seeing the positive outcome of it, and seeing the students were buying into it, and that we were actually doing something.* (FG07, p20)

Thus, with time, most staff changed their perceptions of the work involved in academic counselling and came to see this added responsibility in a positive light. Most staff were enthusiastic about the building of positive relationships between students and Deans in contrast to the Deans' previous roles in targeting poor behaviour where they tended to act as 'social workers'.

Deans used academic counselling to construct positive interactions with students.

> *So you're actually giving them something [Records of Learning] which showed what they've done, rather than telling them what they couldn't do or these other things.* (FG07, p.15)

It was the responsibility of the Deans to communicate to students individually or in small groups the belief that through target setting and serious study they could achieve beyond what some of them perceived as the limits of their academic ability. Most stakeholders supported and welcomed this changed role. Taking students out of class for academic counselling allowed Deans to reach the full range of students, including those who needed support in both their personal and academic development.

Most Deans felt that the opportunity to meet with students outside of a pastoral care situation gave them richer insight into students, especially where they might not otherwise experience this (e.g. with Year 9 students).

> *Another good thing was just meeting the kids… because I was able to sit down with them and look through what they were doing, and talk to them. So, for me, just fitting in and getting to know kids' names, and what they were doing was a great way to introduce that, and I think, that was one of the things we were a little bit reluctant about with maybe handing over part of it, was meeting the Year 9s right at the start of the year and talking about academic counselling. It was a great way to actually get to know who the new people are in the school.* (FG07, p.20)

There was personal satisfaction in being able to chat to students around the school positively about academic work rather than only about discipline and uniforms.

> *But what I quite like too is that you're academically counselling kids, you weren't teaching these kids, and yet you talk to them, out at the playground, you run into them and ask "Oi, have you got those credits for… Social Studies"…. so it was quite nice, so it was always orientated around academia, as opposed to "Oi, you've got the wrong socks on".* (FG07, p.19)

Some teachers were more sceptical about the Deans' academic counselling sessions with their students. Views ranged but there was general disappointment with the short time duration, with an analogy drawn with the "McDonalds" model in terms of quality and processing.

> *… sometimes students… just fill the forms,… give it to the Dean, the following day they simply forget what they have done… We had to remind them, actually I did that almost every other week, I reminded them that we all have targets like that. Otherwise they seem to forget everything and they just follow their normal work… [Having] one academic counselling [session] with the Dean one day did not make a big impact on them…* (FG01, pp.21-22)

There was also a view that the Deans didn't always work in synchrony with Careers Advisors and some issues around this needed to be resolved, although the Careers Advisors did not mention this (see below).

Relationships between staff also changed as a result of the intervention, through the fostering of communication and the sharing of knowledge. Careers Advisors and Deans reported stronger reciprocal communication channels. The Deputy Principal commented on the altered nature of her relationship with the Deans. Subject and Form teachers referred to a 'united front' in reference to academic counselling and they maintained more regular contact with the Student Achievement Manager.

> *And everybody was asking the same questions, that's what I found was so cool, because we were all repeating the same things like, "Well you've got those now what are you going to do, how are you going to get the next credits, how are you going to get this, where are you going to go, what are you going to do to achieve*

that?". And the Deans would say the same thing, when they went into the Dean's office the Dean would say "well, how you doing?" (FG03, p.12)

The availability of student profiles and records electronically proved extremely useful.

And the kids know, don't they, that everybody else knows about them. So they would know that their other teachers in other subject areas were reporting back to you and to their Deans, and it was all appearing on [the school's student management system], so it was real, it was real, immediate, feedback stuff. (FG03, p.12)

They'd come into my office at lunchtime and say, "Look teacher says I've got 45 credits, but I got 47". And I look on the database and he actually had 51 by the time, 'cause someone had handed them in.

(laughter)

It was almost like live time updating, and they were right into it, and this was the Year 11s, and mainly the Year 11s, which I think would've had our major gains, and the Year 12s to a lesser extent, but the Year 11s really bought into it. (FG07, p.15)

From a leadership perspective, the Principal noted that he could access student records at any time and find a comprehensive academic student profile that included student goals and their achievement to date, which was being systematically tracked. He found this extremely useful in his dealings with parents/caregivers and students. A number of teachers reported 'class viewings' of some records, and talked of the competitive element that had been introduced into the classroom.

Yeah well the 101s… they'd always come up to the computer and go "can I look at my credits, can I look at my credits?" and I used to have a line near the end of the term, like the last 10 minutes we'd go "okay, we can check your credits" and they'd line up and you'd have 10 kids wanting to look at their credits 'cause you get a pie graph (laughter). (FG03, p.11)

I had a Year 11 Form class last year and the same thing happened in Form time, I'd just say "who wants to know their credits", big line exactly the same thing. So it wasn't just, I mean it wasn't just English obviously... (FG03, p.11)

Some teachers saw the competitive element positively but it probably needs to be treated with some care.

Teachers reported that academic counselling has proved very helpful, especially where inappropriate NCEA choices were being made early in students' school careers.

The component of the course which requires the children to take a little bit more cognisance, if you like, of their own goals I think is wonderful. Because we do have students who haven't thought ahead to what subjects they want to take at Year 13 and therefore make bad choices at Year 10 and so on. And if it can help that sort of thing then I suspect that that is quite good. (FG01, p.20)

Towards the end of last year, I picked up so many kids who had chosen the wrong subjects for what they wanted to do, and this is mostly Year 10 students going into Year 11, and they don't see the Careers people, and there were so many of them.

They just make absolutely daft choices.

And their parents had no idea.

And I was able to put them on the right track for where they were wanting to go. (FG07, p.12)

Academic counselling also helped students understand the NCEA system and develop clearer focus, especially if they needed encouragement to do better academically.

But just in one year, look at the improvement in Pacific Island students' performance. I actually think that's down to academic counselling, almost totally, because they suddenly had somebody who understood the system that they were working within. What the credits meant. What the subjects meant. What you have to pass to get this, and get that, and someone was on their case. (FG07, p.12)

[Academic counselling is] a positive interaction with the students, and also I think what it does, it picks up those middle band students, who we need to push, that are just drifting along, and those are the students we never meet, they're just slightly under the radar, students we just never get to meet, and that is a good thing. I think they enjoyed having that connection with the Dean. (FG07, p.12)

6.4.3. Target setting

There were two parts to the target setting in the intervention – individual targets for the 2007 Year 11 mathematics and English external standards, and the whole-school targets. This section reports on both of these, with particular attention given to the focus groups with mathematics and English teachers, and the interview with the Student Achievement Manager (who set the targets).

Individual standard targets

The Student Achievement Manager set the targets for the individual standards in mathematics and English for each Year 11 student.

Creating the targets for… the English external and maths external was very, very hard. It took me months and months and months to work out a consistent repeatable way of doing it. (Student Achievement Manager)

To our knowledge, the setting of these individual targets is a process that has not been tried in New Zealand before. It required the Student Achievement Manager to develop a statistical model and apply it to actual student data, so the challenges were not unexpected.

There was a lot of comment about the levels at which the individual targets were set, with some mathematics teachers questioning whether "it was properly done" (FG01, p.3).

While teachers were generally aware that the targets had been based on students' performance in Years 9 and 10, with some mentioning they were based on MidYIS results, some said they did not understand how the targets were determined, particularly those individual targets that they thought were wrong. Both mathematics and English teachers considered that targets were set too low for some students, in some cases below the level at which they had been achieving throughout the year. A number of staff commented that the targets set for some students were unrealistically high. In both cases some teachers reported that for these reasons they were reluctant to use the targets with their classes. The Student Achievement Manager was able to reflect on her communication with mathematics and English teachers and why there might have been some resistance to the targets she set:

> *Just how I'd come up with the targets and things like that. I think I didn't really explain to the English and maths departments how I did it and I think that maybe something I could improve upon. Because as far as they know I just plucked the targets out of the air and I think they would question how I did it because they were sort of so high really. But you know, I spent a long time thinking about how, I didn't want it to be a prediction because predictions might be too low for some students so I had to make sure that it was something that was challenging and that they could aim for.*

There is a sense that a number of teachers felt that the target setting exercise challenged their professional judgement concerning what students should achieve, based on their classroom experience and knowledge of the students. In some cases, teachers felt that the targets were not unrealistic because students lacked the ability to reach them, but because of other factors and issues, such as social and family problems, truancy, substance abuse or lack of motivation. One teacher noted that this judgement could be wrong.

> *'Cause you do have that classroom experience and having said that, kids that muck around all year can then surprise you and then pass in the exams so I mean there's nothing hard and fast really.* (FG03, p.18)

One teacher also questioned the validity of trying to set targets, because she thought the difficulty of getting achievement, merit and excellence grades for particular standards varied substantially between years. This appeared to be connected to ongoing reservations some teachers have about NCEA.

There was some variation in how teachers used the targets set for individual students. Some simply went round their class and showed students their targets, and encouraged them to aim for them, or talked about what they could do to reach them. Some mathematics teachers experimented with different ways of using the targets. One teacher wrote down what they thought each of their students could get for each of the six external mathematics standards, asked the students to do the same for themselves, made a

spreadsheet comparing these two estimates with the targets that had been set, and discussed all three. Teachers also responded to targets that they thought were too low in a range of ways. One waited until after the practice exam to show students the targets. Others showed students the targets but said they thought they could get higher, or discussed with each student whether they thought the targets were appropriate, and if not they agreed to raise them. At least one teacher increased the targets for some students before showing them their targets. Mostly these initial discussions were the only time they discussed the targets with students, although one teacher referred to them later when going over the practice exam, asking students to compare what they got with their targets.

Some teachers clearly found it a struggle to make time in their classes to discuss the targets with students individually and described the 'juggling act' necessary to do this while making sure the rest of the class was on-task. Some reported spending two or three periods doing this; others did it in just one period. One teacher did not manage to get around all the students. While some said they were able to find time to have decent discussions, another reported:

> *I had a class of over 30 students, and I had to do it one period. So, I spent probably less than a minute talking to each of my students, and that's not going to have an impact on them, really.* (FG04, p. 6)

Others also felt it had been very rushed. This time pressure was heightened because of the time of year – just before practice exams, when classes were busy with revision or working towards assessments. In all of the focus groups, there was agreement that it would be useful for teachers to receive the targets earlier in the year.

Despite this, many of the teachers reported having positive experiences in using the targets with their classes. Some commented that they were surprised at how interested many of their students were in the targets, and how much classroom discussion the topic of academic targets generated. Teachers often saw the targets as another tool to reinforce their expectations of students and, at the same time, indicate to students their capabilities.

> *… as a teacher I had something, I had a tool, I could actually go up and say, "You're like this, but at the moment you're not performing".* (FG03, p.8)

Teachers were positive about talking with students about their academic aims, and showing them that someone believed they could achieve them.

Teachers did not report that their expectations of students changed as a result of having targets set for them. This is likely because they valued their professional judgement above the targets. One explained:

> *I mean my arrogance or whatever would be, I suppose, that if I didn't think there was any way that Johnny would get an 'excellent', I thought the target was wrong, not me… And I still feel that that was probably the case and there were some targets which were unrealistic. And I don't think therefore it changed my expectation of the student really. My observation of what they had done in class, and my suspicions as to what their potential were, were more significant to me than the targets.* (FG01, p.17)

Another teacher commented that the targets simply confirmed the expectations they already had of the students.

Overall, most teachers reported that target setting did not change their practice. Mathematics teachers in particular commented that they already had high expectations for their students and were in the habit of discussing with their classes the levels of achievement they should be aiming to reach. Some English teachers said that the targets had come too late in the year to have much bearing on what they did in the classroom. As one of them said:

> *"If we had it halfway through Term 1… pulling together the Year 10 results, looking at what was happening and start from there, I think it would have a lot more impact on what I did as a teacher, and how I interacted with the kids about their goal setting."* (FG04, p. 5).

Whole-school targets

There was not a lot of discussion in the focus groups of the whole-school targets that had been set, although teachers were clearly aware of them. Mathematics teachers in one focus group recalled being given information at a meeting on how the targets were set.

Not surprisingly, both mathematics and English teachers were focused most on reaching the literacy or numeracy targets for Level 1 students in their classes, rather than being concerned about the whole-school targets. One teacher voiced skepticism, suggesting that reaching the school targets may have more to do with 'playing the system' than enhancing student learning.

> *I mean we can increase our pass rate very easily by just entering more and more unit standards. And I suspect that that is possibly what had happened. Whereas I wanted the kids to actually become much more self aware about their own potential and their own direction, which is not the same thing at all as increasing the pass rate.* (FG01, p.11)

One teacher suggested that the whole-school targets had not had a large effect on the teachers, and frequent reminders of progress towards the targets were perhaps overdone.

> *It was nice to know that we had a target of such and such, but every cohort of kids is different and just to be honest took up a couple of minutes every day. It is nice to know, but the constant "hey, we're here, we're here, we're here", was probably a bit much.* (FG02, p.19).

The links between target setting and academic counselling were not always obvious to all teachers. English teachers in one focus group, for example, said that when the individual target setting was introduced, they assumed this was connected to the goal for Level 1 literacy, and did not link it to the other aspects of the ACTS programme.

The Ministry of Education requires schools to have targets for various groups (e.g. Māori students) and qualifications (e.g. NCEA Level 1). The Principal stated that with all the initiatives that were going on at MHS, the targets had been tracking upwards over the years. However, with academic counselling and target setting, the Senior Management of MHS hoped the improvements in the school's performance would be greater than in previous years. They decided to use a more robust procedure, using school data to set their whole-school targets. The main person who carried this out was the Student Achievement Manager:

> *Normally we do have to set targets every year but this time I actually used a process that I've developed…. I used MidYIS, I looked at the previous years' students in Year 9 and what they had attained two years later in Year 11 for the last two cohorts of students and then I added an element of challenge. 'Cause obviously if you have the same information as student bodies are like then you would get the same results. So I added a bit of, an element of challenge and that's how I came up with the total result or the target…. Instead of it just being like, last year we got 55% this year we'll get say 59[%]. Instead of doing that I tried to use data that I'd collected about the students from previous years to actually make that decision…. I actually put the target up to 62% so it was significantly different.*

The targets were presented to the Board of Trustees, Heads of Faculties and the staff. A number of targets were significantly higher than the teachers' expectations, however, the Student Achievement Manager had prepared for this eventuality:

> *One of the criticisms of that would be "well you can't really compare one student body with the next", and I know people say that to me "well you know this year's Year 11 are totally different from last year's Year 11". But actually in Year 9 I did an analysis to compare what the cohorts were like and they were very similar so I thought… it was justified in the way that I had done it.*

The whole-school targets were achieved with great alacrity. Of the ten whole-school targets set by the school, eight were achieved – and some were exceeded by

considerable amounts. In relation to the national averages of the measures for which they had set targets, MHS exceeded all but one (for the attainment of NCEA Level 2).

Discussion

Overall, staff members reported their experiences around the implementation of the ACTS programme in very positive terms. The evaluation data indicated that the majority wanted to support the aim of improved academic performance across the school. There was an expectation that the new programme would deliver in terms of increased student achievement and higher student retention, as well as ensuring that students were enrolled in the right courses for their career paths.

The part of the programme that attracted the most positive comments in terms of immediate and medium-term outcomes was the parent-student-teacher meeting. This was to be expected because it involved most of the staff in all of the focus groups. Staff appreciated the new format, which gave them the opportunity to meet (sometimes for the first time) and engage with parents/caregivers and students together in an in-depth discussion on academic matters. Although they reported an increase in their workload as they prepared for the parent-student-teacher meetings, teachers found that the benefits exceeded their expectations.

The opportunity for all staff, but the Deans in particular, to engage in in-depth discussions with students about academic matters was reported as an extremely positive aspect of the programme. Until then the main reason for meetings between Deans and students was some form of behavioural infringement or transgression, so that the tone of the meeting tended to be negative.

The focus groups with teachers of mathematics and English mostly discussed the individual target setting as this was the area in which these teachers were expected to make their contribution. There is no doubt that the individual target setting using historical cohort data and the entrance tests that the 2007 Year 11 students had done when they were in Year 9 challenged some of the teachers' professional judgements. The Student Achievement Manager, who was responsible for this work, might have underestimated the extent to which set targets would challenge the teachers' sense of professional competence. Upon reflection she concluded that some improvements in communication were necessary. There was some variation in how each of the groups received the targets, and how they were discussed and communicated with students. It appears that the English teachers were more positive in their approach. On the other hand, although

the mathematics teachers were more critical of the targets they were given, they described a greater variety of ways of using them in their classes.

6.5 Reported Impact of the Programme

Staff were asked about the effectiveness and impact of the ACTS programme from their point of view and responded in a number of ways. The examples given focused on teacher, parent/caregiver and student relationships; increased academic performance; increased student motivation; increased student awareness of the implications of subject choice; increased awareness of school data and its use; and staff personal learning.

Staff who took part in individual interviews reported that the greatest impact of the intervention came from the effect the parent-student-teacher meetings and the academic counselling had on staff, parent/caregiver and student relationships. Teachers who took part in focus groups agreed that communication networks within the school and between school and home were positively affected. For example, there was an active exchange of email addresses and phone numbers between parents/caregivers, teachers, and Deans. Emailing in particular seemed to be a useful conduit for strengthening communication channels. Form teachers reported parents/caregivers making further appointments and maintaining contact with them as a direct result of the parent-student-teacher meeting. There were additional 'flow on' effects.

> *It also gave the parents a point of contact for… what it is that a Form teacher does. If there's anything wrong, I get a lot of emails all the time because they now know if there's something going on with their kid, rather than going to the office or something, I'm there, I'm their person.* (FG05, p.7)

> *… after that [parent-student-teacher meeting], I found I was in constant contact with my naughty kids' (for want of a better word) parents, and it just made it easier to manage the behaviour and the academic behaviour of the kids after that.* (FG05, p.7)

Comments some parents/caregivers reportedly made at the second parent-teacher meeting held with subject teachers later in the year suggested that parents/caregivers had grown to expect more from school "interviews" so the shorter meetings parents/caregivers had with subject teachers did not receive the same amount of positive feedback.

Although some teachers reported that the target setting activity did not alter their relationships with students, because the targets came too late in the year, or they

managed to have only brief conversations with the students about them, individual teachers such as the one quoted below saw changes in their relationships with students:

> *I feel that this program is good, improving the student and teacher relationship. I see that this program is working quite effective[ly]… because when I'm teaching in class I tend to talk quite a lot just about maths material… So I didn't really have a personal type of contact with my kids. So that was quite good, that I have some time talking to them individually. I'm showing them I care and finding out more about how they feel about [what] they are doing in class as well so, that is one of the positive things.* (FG01, p.18)

English teachers, in particular, were optimistic about the intervention delivering an increase in the academic performance of all students. A most striking impact of the intervention, particularly the academic counselling component, was the English Department's adoption of an ongoing departmental approach that reinforced the school-wide ACTS programme;

> *I was sorting out the Year 11 English programme, and we'd foolishly decided that we'd get 80% literacy and we kind of had to do it. And so just after the parent interviews which were in May I think, I thought, "okay, we've got to have something that ties in with the academic counselling 'cause the kids are now starting to understand where they are with the credits and they can talk about it"…. And so for some of the classes, particularly the 102 classes… I took the kids out of class in small groups and gave them a goal setting exercise. So personally we decided as the Department that we were going to push this.* (FG03, pp.9-11)

Students were placed in small groups and asked to discuss and write down what they would achieve and how they would do it, and then they were asked to sign it. This way of working was attributed directly to the academic counselling intervention:

> *But it came directly from the academic counselling idea of talking to the kids in a small group or one-to-one basis and I couldn't do one-to-one, it was physically impossible, so it was small groups and I started with the 102 classes and then moved onto the 101 classes… The group thing did work and it was linked really tightly back to the academic counselling…* (FG03, p.10)

Teachers who worked with small groups of students found that this approach still allowed them to work closely with individuals, while also letting the students see that their academic performance was being treated seriously:

> *That's what I think is the bottom line, I think that's what the difference is, that kids need to feel like the adult dealing with them, ideally individually or in small groups, actually hears, not just, you know, not just filling in [forms]…. But not just their teacher either… someone [other than their teacher] had taken an interest in them… "someone actually cares about my achievement in school".* (FG03, p.10)

After this work in small groups, teachers could speak to each student by name and discuss their credits with them, and the students could answer with confidence. English teachers also commented that their students started to ask 'big picture' questions related to future plans such as university study earlier and more often than they did in the past.

Teachers varied in their assessment of the effectiveness of the target setting in raising student achievement. Some teachers thought it had been effective, particularly as it was in its first year, and that it had the potential to be even more effective in the future. Most agreed that the effectiveness of this part of the new programme was limited by the timing of the release of academic targets to teachers and students – the end of the third term:

> *Especially being that late, and some of the kids who hadn't managed to pass any internals so far being told that they were expected, or we were predicting they'd get achieves and merits in the exam. I mean, so many of the kids in my class just looked at it and went "Well, no!".... Whereas if we have had it delivered earlier, I think [we] might've turned some of them around.* (FG04, p.3)

Even though the lateness in the school year gave teachers and students limited time in which to act on the set targets, there were many examples of situations in which the targets had a positive impact. A teacher commented that for the top-stream English class, seeing that someone "predicted" they could get all "excellences" had been really motivating, and felt that target setting was very useful for all students, no matter what their ability. Other teachers provided examples of particular students responding positively to the challenging targets they were given, such as this one:

> *I had one girl in my Year 11 English class who came in and shone with her original results… She looked amazing on paper. And she had sat in my class for six months and done hardly anything except discover boys.... And I went up to her and showed her, I said, "Look this is where you were and look at where everybody else was on here, you stand out and this is the expectation for you for the end of this year, this is what we think you are capable of" and she literally sat back in her chair and her eyes opened and it was a jaw dropping moment. And she said, "How did you know?" and I said "well we know what you're like and we know what you can do and now you just need to show us" and she went on and she passed all her externals.* (FG03, p.8)

Some teachers considered that the target setting programme had been effective in "general consciousness raising" (FG03, p.8), by getting students thinking and talking about their goals, while others thought that specific targets could give students "a more concrete way of looking at their achievement" (FG06, p.14). The Student Achievement Manager suggested that regular reporting to the staff on progress towards whole-school targets was an effective strategy, making everyone aware of the use of student achievement data and the goals the school was aiming to achieve:

> *Yeah I think part of the success was just raising the awareness about the data, you know where we were. I stood up weekly, ultimately every day, and said how many kids we had got before we went to the exams that had Level 1 already, had numeracy, had literacy, had all that sort of thing.* (Student Achievement Manager)

As well as consistently saying that the targets should come earlier in the year, teachers made other suggestions for how the target setting intervention could be made more

effective. These suggestions included having targets for internal assessments as well as the external ones and being able to raise the targets during the year if students were meeting their initial targets, and having targets set in consultation with teachers and/or students. That said, teachers recognised that students sometimes set their goals very low, and that teachers also can have low expectations of students. Another suggestion was that the students' targets should be discussed with parents/caregivers at the parent-student-teacher meeting at the start of the year.

Teachers reported that both the parent-student-teacher meeting and the academic counselling sessions helped to establish a strong peer culture where students talked positively about their NCEA credits with each other. Form teachers reported observing a more competitive climate within the school as students taking NCEA courses compared the numbers of credits they were gaining and the level at which they were achieving. They referred to the 'fun' element of this new environment and suggested that students at all ability levels were 'switched on to' NCEA as a result.

> *It [academic counselling] got my students and my Form class really interested in "How many literacy credits have I got to go?" And it's like, "Oh have I got my numeracy yet?" every single day at Form time, looking it up.* (FG05, p. 13)

> *Well I found it had a huge impact on my kids in terms of their discussion around whether they had achieves, merits and or excellences and the direct impact of it was that mine suddenly became interested in the number of excellences they had, and the number of merits, as opposed to anything else… but then… that's what they should be aiming at, but there was a big shift...* (FG05, p. 13)

> *Whereas I've got a low ability Form class… And they got all excited about these numbers that were coming up on their Records of Learning, and that was cool, it was really nice to see that change, especially in those kids, only three of them got their Level 1 certificate, but most of them came really, really close.* (FG05, p. 14)

There was a general consensus that students began to have their own academic discussions as a result of academic counselling. Students were observed talking about 'little successes' and having in and out of the classroom conversations about NCEA subject choices and credits they needed to earn.

> *… kids… aren't just going "Oh, I can play the guitar. Sweet! I can do Level 3 music". They're actually thinking, "Now, hang on a second. Am I going to waste a whole course on playing the guitar? Or am I actually going to do something worthwhile that's going to get me somewhere?" And there's not so many kids making those weird choices, that is setting themselves up to fail.* (FG05, p.16)

Teachers reported students taking ownership of what they wanted to get out of school. This extended to students exhibiting a heightened awareness around failing NCEA assessments and having to "resit"; an increased awareness of the infrastructure of the school system; a noticeable readiness to access resources offered by the school and take control of their school careers; and a wider perspective on their school work, from

commenting on individual assignments to looking at their courses contributing to a possible career.

The Principal also noted an increase in awareness across the school of the benefits of the systematic use of student data. In his view, one of the most tangible changes was that staff now had access to records for every student that showed their goals and systematically tracked their progress. The Student Achievement Manager reported on the benefits of the whole school being behind the intervention as opposed to unstructured individual input:

> *Certainly at the whole-school level we know that Pacific [students] responded to the academic counselling really well. Their target was 51% getting Level 1 and 59% did, which is 20% more than last year. Only 37% got Level 1 last year… so that's a huge increase from them. They responded really well*. (Student Achievement Manager)

Finally, a number of staff reflected that they had learned a considerable amount during the implementation of the new programme. For example, the Deputy Principal said she had learned that newspaper advertisements were a very good way to communicate effectively with parents/caregivers and the community. Teachers reported their own awareness of the "big picture" for students – their overall performance and goals, rather than just how well they were doing in a particular subject – had increased. Deans and teachers also reported that their knowledge of what students need to study to reach their educational and/or career goals improved.

It is important to note that staff also made a number of observations about areas where the ACTS programme did not have a noticeable effect. The Student Achievement Manager and Deans could not see any differences in attendance, stand-downs and suspensions. The Deputy Principal felt that it was hard to say whether there was an improvement in behaviour and if so, whether it was attributable to the new programme, although she felt that if students were focused on their academic progress it was likely that behavioural issues would be less of a problem.

Section 7   DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   Discussion

The MHS Academic Counselling and Target Setting (ACTS) programme is a significant educational innovation that combines the setting of very specific targets for student achievement, and academic counselling processes through which student achievement can be discussed, monitored and reviewed with all stakeholders. The significance of the programme is supported by the evidence from the international research literature reviewed earlier in this report and, more importantly in the New Zealand context, by the research undertaken to measure the effectiveness of the programme in raising student achievement.

The stakeholder evaluation findings make it clear that there is strong support for this programme from <u>all</u> the key stakeholders. Overall, 63% of students reported that they thought the programme should continue. More parents/caregivers were positive about the intervention with approximately 75% reporting it had a positive effect on their child and a large majority (77%) of parents/caregivers wanting to see it continue. The staff also supported the programme's continuation. Despite some misgivings over the additional work involved in the parent-student-teacher meetings, there was a strong consensus that the extra work was commensurate with the 'payoff'. Staff believed the new programme could deliver in terms of raising student achievement, as well as ensuring that students were enrolled in the right courses for their educational and career paths.

Although it would be difficult to prove a causative link between the ACTS programme and improved student achievement, the attainment of eight of the ten school-wide targets for student achievement[9] and the achievement of individual targets in English and mathematics by many of the Year 11 students[10] supports the conclusion that there is an association between them. Other indicators of a perceived effect come from 32% of students who reported that ACTS helped motivate them to aim for higher academic performance and 44% of students who reported that it helped them improve their academic performance. It must be acknowledged, however, that parents/caregivers were somewhat less sure about whether the intervention had academic and motivational effects on their children. Based on experiential evidence, the Deans thought the intervention was particularly effective in picking up and motivating the "middle band"

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[9] See Table 1 (page 35) for the list of targets and percentages actually achieved.
[10] Personal communication from the Student Achievement Manager at MHS, reported separately in her PhD thesis.

students who were not usually noticed for their academic work. This observation could be significant since it is this "middle band" of students who have the potential to do well academically (to achieve UE and go on to tertiary education) but who might need clearer goal setting and closer monitoring to achieve their full potential.

The change attributed to the ACTS programme that received most the positive comment in terms of its immediate and medium-term impact was the improved relationships resulting from the parent-student-teacher meetings. Both the parents/caregivers and the teachers stressed that they liked the new depth of engagement with each other, and the focus on the child's/student's academic progress. The benefits teachers could see emanating from the experience made the effort and time involved in preparing for and engaging in these meetings worthwhile. There was an element of professional satisfaction that would be difficult to measure but which was nevertheless evident in how teachers spoke about the fresh outlook they were able to bring into their work with students and parents/caregivers. The greatest satisfaction for the Deans in particular came from the discussions on academic matters they had with students, which were reported as being extremely positive, in contrast to their previous largely negative engagement with students around behavioural concerns.

The mathematics and English teachers commented mostly on individual target setting. There is no doubt that the individual student target setting exercise challenged some teachers' sense of professional judgement and its place in making decisions about individual students' abilities and potential. Because the targets were set solely on the basis of student data, with no teacher assessment of the students' capability, a small but significant number of teachers felt aggrieved during the early stages of the new programme. It would appear that the Senior Management Team and the implementation team might have underestimated the possibility and the strength of such a reaction. Upon reflection, both teams have reached the conclusion that improvements in communication with staff are necessary, both in explaining how targets are determined and, more generally, in getting staff on side before presenting them with individual student and school-wide targets.

There was some variation between the mathematics and English teacher groups in how they received the targets, and how they discussed and communicated this information with the students. The English teachers appeared more positive in their approach and as a group extended the programme into a departmental version. The mathematics teachers were more critical of the procedure by which the targets were set, but described a greater variety of ways of using and discussing individual student targets in their classes. The

success of the target setting part of the programme suggests that it could be expanded to other years and subject areas (e.g. science), but for this to be feasible it would require a more efficient method of setting individual student targets.

Unexpectedly, a significant minority of students reported some confusion and worry around the ACTS programme. This concern had been picked up by their parents/caregivers as well. The evaluation did not identify the specific factors that contributed to the confusion, but there appeared to be at least two relevant issues. One area of confusion seemed to be around what the ACTS programme entailed and the students' concerns might have stemmed from inadequate understanding of what others (teachers and parents/caregivers) expected of them as the result of participation in the new programme. Parents/caregivers were not necessarily in a position to address this gap in understanding. Although parents/caregivers appeared to have been quite well informed through the school that the programme was happening, they were less well informed about its specific features and aims. Another issue, alluded to by students, was that as some of them became increasingly aware of the full range of academic pathways and how these related to the career options open to them, they felt uncertain about the decisions they needed to make and worried about meeting others' expectations (e.g. reaching the targets set for them). It is also possible that not enough attention was given to the emotional impact participation in parent-student-teacher meetings might have on some adolescents, as this involved meeting with two adults engaged in close scrutiny of their academic abilities, performance, and potential.[11] Whatever the underlying reasons, the school needs to pay attention to the impact the programme might have on some students and ensure that students do not feel overwhelmed during their initial introduction to it.

The increased contact and engagement Form teachers had with parents/caregivers in the parent-student-teacher meetings made them more aware of parents'/caregivers' frequent lack of understanding of the NCEA system and its implementation in the school. Some teachers used the opportunity provided by the parent-student-teacher meeting to give parents/caregivers information about NCEA assessment requirements and dates. There is certainly the opportunity to increase parents'/caregivers' knowledge of NCEA through this programme, but it would appear other initiatives might be also be needed. The findings in the *Towards University* Starpath report (Madjar, McKinley, Jensen, & van der Merwe, 2009) support the need for more extensive education in this area.

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[11] The impact of an ACTS programme on students is being investigated further by the Starpath team in other schools where the programme is being introduced, through observations of parent-student-teacher meetings and academic counselling sessions, and through focus group discussions with students.

Teachers, students and parents/caregivers noted that there might be students for whom academic advising is not as necessary as it would appear to be for other groups. Ambitious students who set very high goals for themselves might not benefit from the added pressure of specific academic targets set by others. This is not to say that such students should be excluded from the programme, but the school might want to judiciously consider some options, such as whether every student needs the same number of academic counselling sessions, or whether the tone of academic counselling should differ with some students. Overall, students appreciated the value of academic counselling, with some wanting more sessions, and others wanting one-to-one instead of group sessions. The strategic targeting of school resources to optimise the benefits of the ACTS programme needs to be considered in a number of ways: a redistribution of the currently available time, spending more time with some students than others; using fewer resources by cutting down on the total number of academic counselling sessions; or finding alternative ways of doing the academic counselling. Ongoing commitment to the comprehensive ACTS programme requires resources, particularly staff time (for data collection, management, and analysis; target setting and monitoring; academic counselling; closer engagement with students and their parents/caregivers; and additional attention to how each student is progressing in the classroom). To sustain the programme and its positive effects on student achievement, MHS will need to show ongoing commitment to it by giving it high priority and ensuring that adequate resources continue to be available to support the programme.

7.2   Recommendations

Overall, there is significant support for the continuation of the ACTS programme at MHS. The following recommendations are derived from the evaluation data and are suggestions for improving the programme:

- Set the individual and school-wide targets earlier in the year;

- Expand target setting across subjects and levels;

- Consider setting individual student targets for internal standards (in addition to external standards), and revise targets during the year if students are meeting their initial goals;

- Discuss individual student targets with parents/caregivers at the parent-student-teacher meetings;

- Consider following up these meetings with the conventional subject teacher-parent interviews more quickly;

- Ensure that parents/caregivers and students are fully informed of and have a clear understanding of the aims of academic counselling;

- Where possible, provide parents/caregivers with more frequent updates on the progress of their child e.g. emailed interim reports, phone calls;

- Give feedback to parents/caregivers and students on the positive impacts of the programme (including improvements in group and school-wide achievements);

- Where possible, tailor the amount and type of academic counselling to the needs of individual students. (Consider whether some students might benefit from having their parents/caregivers included in the sessions);

- Where possible, tailor the amount and type of career guidance counselling to the needs of individual students;

- Review and streamline ACTS-related teacher workloads in subsequent years;

- Trial inclusion of students' subject teachers in the parent-student-teacher meetings;

- Ensure all teachers have a thorough understanding of target setting and its aims;

- Include the ACTS intervention in the induction programme for beginning teachers, and other new staff;

- Provide opportunities for staff to share knowledge and expertise about target setting and its use in the classroom, monitoring of individual student performance, and the use of longitudinal student data to inform academic counselling and career advising.

7.3   Implications for schools

Following the stakeholder evaluation of the ACTS programme at MHS, a set of recommendations specific to the school and its particular environment (in addition to the recommendations listed above) were made and communicated to the school. There are a number of more general implications for other schools that might consider implementing the ACTS programme. The following list is not a 'blueprint' but consists of tasks that would need to be attended to if implementation is seriously considered. These include: school preparation; the collection and management of longitudinal data; the level of skills among staff in working with data; resourcing; and sustaining the programme and improvement over time.

7.3.1   School preparation

While the evaluation study did not specifically include any data collection on school conditions for change in any systematic way, there were a number of strategies that were evident and already in place in the school that clearly contributed to the success of this substantial programme of improvement. These included:

- A model of distributed leadership where opportunities are given to staff, such as the Student Achievement Manager, to show leadership in an area of expertise.

- Student achievement being a core priority in the work of the school.

- Teachers believing they can make a difference to their students' achievement and having high expectations of students.

- A learning environment that is stable and well-run, but which allows for change and for staff participation in shaping that change. This is important when getting staff to work together towards a common goal.

- A climate that facilitates professional learning and collaboration.

These contribute to the 'pre-conditions' that to a greater or lesser extent already existed at MHS and provided a platform from which to launch an ambitious new intervention.

7.3.2   Collection and management of longitudinal data

Data collection, management and analysis are essential to the introduction of the ACTS programme. The school and individual student data are the key drivers in all parts of the intervention – parent-student-teacher meetings, academic counselling, and target setting. With the whole programme based on student data, it can become embedded in the normal work of the school, and have a sense of cohesion and relevance in terms of immediate as well as longer-term impact, and in relation to individual students, groups and categories of students, and the school as a whole. In terms of its essential elements, the ACTS programme has to be at the centre of a school's life, rather than sitting as 'another clip-on' programme. School data need to meet a number of criteria before programmes like this one can be implemented. They are:

- The school must have detailed and well documented data that have been stored systematically and are able to be retrieved as needed. This includes entrance tests (e.g. asTTLe, MIDYIS, PATs, STAR, etc.) and NCEA data. The data do not have to be kept on any particular electronic system as long as records are relatively complete.

- To be able to serve as a basis for individual subject targets, the data must have been kept longitudinally over time, preferably for different cohorts of students.

- The school needs to identify a person with the skills, or who could gain the necessary skills, to carry out the mathematical tasks needed for target setting in particular, but who also understands the educational imperatives involved in the programme.

7.3.3 Preparation and planning

Preparation and planning is essential for successful implementation of the programme.

- Leadership: Leadership was a key to the success of this programme, as it has been in the school generally. A management team, made up of the Principal, the Student Achievement Manager and a Deputy Principal (Achievement), was established early to oversee the intervention. This team met regularly and had different leadership roles and responsibilities in the consultation process, although they all helped each other as well. The Student Achievement Manager led the implementation committee (made up of teaching staff) and the Deputy Principal led the parent-student-teacher meeting process. This model of a form of distributed leadership worked well for this school.

- Consultation: As with any new programme in a school, staff consultation and agreement is essential. This needs to work with what happens in each school. Staff consultation at MHS was extensive and was carried out over time by a management team who reported regularly to whole-staff and departmental meetings.

- Staff preparation: Staff training is another key part of the intervention. MHS provided training and/or advice for its staff regarding the key elements of the ACTS programme, including phoning parents/caregivers, leading the extended parent-student-teacher meetings, engaging students in academic counselling, and using targets to speak with students about their academic performance, goals and strategies. Other professional development included staff sharing their expertise with others, for example, the Careers Advisors upskilling the Deans regarding the use of careers databases.

7.3.4 Resourcing

One of the most important lessons learned from the MHS experience is that resources must be used strategically to produce the biggest positive effect. An important challenge for a school planning to introduce an ACTS programme is how to target resources (for

staff release) and how to ensure the person selected to manage and analyse student data has the appropriate skills and support for the task.

- Funding and staffing: The implementation of the ACTS programme by MHS had an estimated cost of approximately $170,000 (2007) in its first year.[12] This reflected the size of the school (approximately 2,300 students). The resources were used to release all 10 Deans from teaching one class for a year, on top of their usual time allowance, and to release the Student Achievement Manager from 50% of her teaching load. In addition, some resources were also used for advertisements and hospitality for the first series of parent-student-teacher meetings, for photocopying, and to employ a person to help with data entry.

- Skills: The skills required by the Student Achievement Manager (or equivalent) are specialised and need to be acquired through professional development, requiring some funding from the school. This could entail this staff member enrolling in university courses and/or being released from school to work with a large research project dealing with tracking student data, such as Starpath.

7.3.5 Sustainability

Even after one year of trialling the programme at MHS, significant ongoing support is needed to make the intervention sustainable. There are three possible areas of risk to the sustainability and effectiveness of this intervention – resources, consistency of approach, and succession planning.

- Resources: ACTS is a costly programme with respect to the amount and duration of staff release time needed to make the programme work effectively and smoothly. Schools need to address this if they are to introduce the programme. Schools may consider making adjustments to the programme, such as placing greater reliance on Form teachers to provide academic counselling, but this raises the second issue, consistency of approach.

- Consistency of approach to academic counselling: One of the main strengths of the programme is that it is a school-wide, cohesive and systematic approach to student academic improvement. Having academic counselling delivered by a small team of 10 experienced Deans helped provide consistency and quality in the counselling focus and approach, even though this was costly. By increasing the number of people involved in the delivery of academic counselling (e.g. by distributing the work among Form teachers, without teaching time release) schools might risk the consistency and quality of this essential element of the

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[12] Using the Banking Staffing Formula

programme. One way of mitigating the risk would be to put more time and resources into staff training and monitoring, but that in turn would require additional resources.

- Succession planning for Student Achievement Manager: Preparation needs to include a plan for succession, particularly with respect to the role of the Student Achievement Manager. This role is pivotal to the programme as a whole and requires specialist skills. Schools need to identify more than one person who could take on this role and develop the necessary skills.

Although the initial evidence of the value and effectiveness of the ACTS programme is impressive, schools planning to implement this type of programme need to ensure that they set aside the necessary resources to make the programme sustainable over several years. It is not enough to demonstrate that the programme can be effective in the short term. To make a real difference to student achievement, the programme needs to be sustained over a longer term. In this context, it is worth noting that the current proliferation of 'clip-on' initiatives in schools aimed at enhancing student achievement, most of which are not systematically evaluated, is also very costly, and might be much less effective in lifting student performance than a 'whole-of-school' academic counselling and target setting programme. For sustainability, a programme such as this needs to be planned carefully and resourced adequately. It also needs to be embedded into the everyday work of the whole school so that it becomes a normal part of how the school approaches its mission and goals.

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APPENDIX A: Glossary

achieved see not achieved/achieved/merit/excellence

achievement standard a nationally registered, coherent set of learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria. Achievement standards are at Levels 1, 2 and 3 on the National Qualifications Framework and cover learning areas related to the school curriculum, including subjects previously covered by School Certificate, Sixth Form Certificate and Bursary (secondary school qualifications that were replaced by NCEA). Generally speaking, there are between five and eight achievement standards worth a total of 24 credits in each subject at each level. Achievement standards can be not achieved, achieved, achieved with merit, or achieved with excellence. Some are assessed internally and others are externally assessed.

approved subject NZQA maintains a list of approved subjects for University Entrance, and specifies which standards are included in these subjects. Many subjects offered at schools are not on the University Entrance approved list. (See University Entrance).

asTTle Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning. An assessment tool which tests the reading, writing and mathematics skills of students in Years 4 to 12. (www.minedu.govt.nz; www.tki.org.nz/r/asttle)

Board of Trustees (BOT) Group elected by parents and caregivers to govern the school. The Board of Trustees is the legal entity of the school, and all contracts and employment agreements are with the Board. (www.minedu.govt.nz)

BOT Board of Trustees.

careers advisor a member of staff at a school who advises students on study options and career pathways.

credit a numerical value assigned to unit and achievement standards that represents the estimated time needed for a typical learner to demonstrate that all specified outcomes have been met. It should take around ten hours per credit (including class time, independent study, and time spent in assessment) to meet the requirements of a standard. Students must gain a certain number of credits to get NCEA Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 (see National Certificate of Educational Achievement).

credit tracker a form provided to students at MHS where they keep a record of the internal NCEA credits they have gained each term.

curriculum manager a staff member at MHS who is responsible for the school timetable and the student management system, manages the level co-ordinators, and is the principal's nominee.

dean a member of staff at a secondary school with responsibilities in student personnel services, which may include discipline, administration, pastoral care, and course placement. Schools usually have multiple deans, each of whom are responsible for a particular group of students, such as a certain Year level.

decile all state schools are given a decile rating from 1 to 10. A school's decile indicates the extent to which the school draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students. The lower the school's decile, the more funding it receives from the Ministry of Education. Usually, schools with a decile of between 1 and 3 schools are considered to be 'low-decile' schools, decile 4 to 7 schools are considered to be 'mid-decile'

schools, and decile 8 to 10 schools are considered to be 'high-decile' schools. (www.minedu.govt.nz)

Education Review Office (ERO) government agency responsible for reviewing and reporting regularly on the performance of New Zealand schools and early childhood education centres. (www.minedu.govt.nz)

endorsement students have their NCEA certificates endorsed with excellence if they get 50 credits at excellence, at or above the level of the certificate (these credits can be gained over more than one year). For example, students can gain "NCEA Level 2 with excellence". Likewise, students that gain 50 credits at merit (or merit and excellence) will have their NCEA endorsed with merit.

ERO Education Review Office.

excellence see not achieved/achieved/merit/excellence

external assessment all those assessments where the assessment judgement is made by persons outside of the learning institution/school. In NCEA, external assessment is done once a year, through national exams sat in November and December. A few externally assessed standards, such as in graphics, require students to submit a portfolio or collection of work. (www.educationcounts.govt.nz)

external standard an achievement standard that is externally assessed (see external assessment).

faculty leader see head of faculty

Focus Learning Department staff at MHS that assess and support students at the school that have special needs and those in the gifted and talented group.

form teacher a teacher who has a coordinating and pastoral oversight of a class of students. In some schools such teachers may be referred to as whānau teachers or tutor teachers.

guidance counsellor a member of staff at a school who provides pastoral care to students and supports them in dealing with personal problems and difficulties.

head of department (HOD) a middle management position in a secondary school with oversight of the teaching of a subject area in the school.

head of faculty a middle management position that exists in some secondary schools that has overall responsibility for a broad learning area, such as sciences or languages, and acts as a manager of a group of HODs. (www.coda.ac.nz/unitec_educ_di/4)

high school see secondary school.

HOD head of department

internal assessment all those assessments where the assessment judgement is made within a learning institution. In NCEA internal assessment is carried out throughout the year by schools. All unit standards and some achievement standards are internally assessed. Schools decide how they will assess internal standards and marking is carried out by teachers.

level there are 10 levels of the National Qualifications Framework - 1 is the least complex and 10 the most. Qualifications, as well as their components, such as unit and achievement standards, all sit at a specified level. Levels 1-3 are of approximately the same standard as senior secondary education and basic trades training. Levels 4-6 approximate to advanced trades, technical and business qualifications. Levels 7 and above approximate to advanced qualifications of graduate and postgraduate standard. NCEA qualifications and achievement standards only exist at Levels 1 to 3 as they are designed for secondary school students (see National Certificate of Educational Achievement). For a different meaning of the term level, see Year level.

level coordinator an administrative position in some secondary schools with responsibilities for a particular Year level, in particular with regards to the timetabling of courses and changes in subject choices.

low-decile see decile

merit see not achieved/achieved/merit/excellence

mid-decile see decile

MidYIS Middle Years Information System. Provides, among other things, baseline assessments of learning ability at Year 9. (www.cem.canterbury.ac.nz/midyis)

MoE Ministry of Education.

National Certificate a qualification on the National Qualifications Framework made up of unit standards in a particular area, such as Computing or Tourism. National Certificates are usually registered between Levels 1 and 4, and require a minimum of 40 credits at or above the level at which the qualification is registered. Credits gained for a National Certificate can also be counted towards NCEA qualifications. Many schools offer National Certificates, and they can also be studied in tertiary courses or in workplace training.

National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) standards-based national qualifications for senior secondary students in New Zealand, registered between Levels 1 and 3 on the National Qualifications Framework. Credits gained from both unit standards and achievement standards count towards NCEA qualifications, which students are awarded at Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 if they meet the following requirements:

Level 1: 80 credits at any level including 8 in literacy (reading & writing) and 8 in numeracy (maths)

Level 2: 60 credits at Level 2 or above + 20 credits from any level

Level 3: 60 credits at Level 3 or above + 20 credits from Level 2 or above

Typically students work towards Level 1 in Year 11, Level 2 in Year 12 and Level 3 in Year 13. Credits can be gained over more than one year, and used for more than one qualification (e.g. credits gained for NCEA Level 1 can be carried over and used towards Level 2 as the 20 credits which can come from any level).

National Diploma a qualification on the National Qualifications Framework made up of unit standards and registered between Levels 5 and 7. The top 72 credits define the level at which the qualification can be registered and at least 120 of all credits contributing towards the qualification must be at Level 4 or above. National diplomas usually take one or two years of full-time study to complete. They are taught through industry training and apprenticeships, as well as by tertiary education providers such as polytechnics and private training establishments.

National Education Guidelines (NEGs) These are defined by Section 60A of the Education Act 1989 and contain a statement of goals for education in New Zealand, as well as curriculum and administration requirements. They are incorporated into all school charters. (www.minedu.govt.nz)

National Qualifications Framework (NQF) collectively, all national qualifications, unit standards, and achievement standards, together with the relationships among these. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is designed to provide nationally recognised standards and qualifications as well as recognition and credit for a wide range of knowledge and skills.

NCEA National Certificate of Educational Achievement.

NEGs National Education Guidelines.

New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) NZQA's primary function is to coordinate the administration and quality assurance of national qualifications in New Zealand. Among other things, NZQA administers the National Qualifications Framework (including NCEA), runs national senior secondary school examinations, registers and monitors private providers of education and training to ensure they meet quality standards, and evaluates overseas qualifications for people who want their qualification recognised in New Zealand.

not achieved/achieved/merit/excellence the four results possible for achievement standards. Not achieved means that the student has not demonstrated the learning outcomes specified in the standard, and is not awarded any credits for the standard. Achieved means that the student has met the specified basic standard and will be awarded the number of credits which the standard is worth. If a student meets further specified criteria they can be awarded a merit or excellence grade (excellence being the highest possible grade on a achievement standard). Merit and excellence grades for a standard attract the same number of

credits as an achieved grade, but count towards NCEA endorsements and can help students compete for entrance to limited-entry tertiary programmes. There are only two possible results for unit standards – not achieved, if the specified outcomes have not been demonstrated, and achieved, if they have.

NQF National Qualifications Framework

NZQA New Zealand Qualifications Authority

MHS The acronym used in this report for Massey High School.

Principal's Nominee a staff member nominated by the principal of a school, who carries out duties and responsibilities on behalf of the school and liaises with NZQA for the purpose of the administration of all NZQA rules and procedures.

Record of Learning an individual learner's transcript of unit standards and achievement standards credited and national qualifications completed, provided by NZQA from a national database. Has now been renamed 'Record of Achievement'.

school charter all schools are required to have a charter. The charter establishes the school's mission, aims, objectives, directions and targets to give effect to the government's National Education Guidelines and the Board of Trustees' priorities. The Charter must include all annual or long-term plans the Board is required to have or has prepared for its own purposes (or a summary of each plan or a reference to it). It should be regularly updated, setting targets for the key activities and achievement of objectives for that year. (www.minedu.govt.nz)

secondary school In New Zealand, a school that caters for students from Year 9 to Year 13 (i.e. from around the age of 12 or 13 to 17 or 18). Also known as high school.

senior management/senior management team the group of staff in a school who have senior leadership and management roles, such as the principal, deputy principal(s) and assistant principal(s).

stakeholder a person, group, or organisation which has interests in a particular endeavour, policy or programme.

standards defined learning outcomes, together with performance or assessment criteria, examples of their interpretation and application, and associated quality assurance processes. Includes unit standards and achievement standards.

student achievement manager a staff member at MHS who analyses student data, develops achievement targets for the school and individual students, manages the academic counselling programme, and is an understudy to the curriculum manager.

TEC Tertiary Education Commission.

tertiary education post-secondary education; includes learning undertaken in the workplace as well as with providers such as polytechnics, universities, wānanga and private training establishments.

Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) The agency responsible for leading the government's relationship with the tertiary education sector, and for policy development and implementation. (www.tec.govt.nz)

UE University Entrance.

unit standard a nationally registered, coherent set of learning outcomes and associated performance criteria. Unit standards were originally developed to assess workplace learning but were subsequently developed for conventional school subjects. Unlike achievement standards, unit standards can only be achieved or not-achieved, and are all internally assessed. All unit standards are registered on the National Qualifications Framework, assigned a level and a credit value, and may contribute to the award of a National Certificate or Diploma, as well as NCEAs and University Entrance.

University Entrance (UE) the common educational standard established, after consultation with the universities and the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee, and maintained by NZQA as a prerequisite for entrance to university for people under 20. Currently gaining University Entrance requires:

- a minimum of 42 credits at Level 3 or higher on the National Qualifications Framework, including a minimum of 14 credits at Level 3 or higher in each of two subjects from the approved subject list, with a further 14 credits at Level 3 or higher taken from no more than two additional domains on the National Qualifications Framework or approved subjects.

- a minimum of 14 credits at Level 1 or higher in mathematics or pāngarau on the National Qualifications Framework

- a minimum of 8 credits at Level 2 or higher in English or Te Reo Māori; 4 credits must be in reading and 4 credits must be in writing.

Generally New Zealand universities have a number of limited-entry programmes – particularly in professional areas such as medicine, engineering and architecture – which have entry criteria additional to University Entrance. From 2009, all undergraduate qualifications at the University of Auckland will be limited-entry.

Year level school students move from Year 0 or 1 through to Year 13. Secondary schools teach Years 9 to 13, and students usually work towards NCEA Level 1 in Year 11, NCEA Level 2 in Year 12 and NCEA Level 3 in Year 13.

APPENDIX B 1: Student Questionnaire

STARPATH PROJECT

"Evaluation of an academic target setting intervention at a New Zealand secondary school"

QUESTIONNAIRE – STUDENTS

(A) First, please tell us a little about yourself:

(1) Are you? Female ☐   Male ☐

(2) How old are you? Years ☐   Months ☐

(3) Where were you born?

New Zealand ☐ Overseas ☐ If overseas, how long have you lived in New Zealand? ☐ years

(4) Do you identify <u>primarily</u> as?

NZ Maori ☐	NZ European or Pakeha ☐	Samoan ☐	Tongan ☐
Cook Island Maori ☐	Chinese ☐	Indian ☐	Niuean ☐
Other (please specify) ☐			

(B) Now, tell us what you remember about *academic target setting and counselling* last year:

(5) What information did you get about it before the new programme started?

(tick one option only)

No information	☐
Some verbal <u>or</u> written information	☐
A lot of verbal <u>or</u> written information	☐
A lot of both verbal <u>and</u> written information	☐

(6) Who provided the information you received about the new programme?

(tick all relevant options)

No one	☐
Dean	☐
Form teacher	☐
Academic Achievement Manager	☐
Subject teacher(s)	☐
Other (please specify)	☐

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(7) What did you expect to happen as the result of the academic target setting?

(tick all relevant options)

I would get more choice in my studies	
I would have to study harder	
I would get more choice in my assessments	
I would be told what I had to study	
I would be able to decide what I wanted to study	
I would be able to put less effort into my studies	
I would have to discuss my studies with my parents or caregivers	
It would make no difference to me	

(8) How did the academic target setting programme affect you once it was started? (tick all relevant options)

It made me worried	
It made me confused	
It made me think more about my subject choices	
It made me try harder to reach the academic targets	
It made me unsure if I was going to reach the academic targets	
It gave me the motivation to work harder on my studies	
It made no difference to me	

(C) Now, looking back, tell us how useful has *academic target setting and counselling* been to you:

(9) Did the academic target setting and academic counselling you received last year help to improve your academic performance? (tick one option only)

Not at all	
Not sure	
Yes, a little	
Yes, a lot	

(**10) Did the academic target setting and academic counselling you received last year help to improve your motivation to aim for higher academic achievement?** (tick one option only)

Not at all

Not sure

Yes, a little

Yes, a lot

(11) Do you think that the programme of academic target setting and counselling should continue? (tick one option and give a reason)

No, because ....

Not sure, because ....

Yes, because ....

(12) Are there any changes you would like to see in how academic target setting and counselling is done at the school? (please tell us what the changes, if any, should be)

....

....

(13) Overall, how much of a difference has academic target setting and counselling made to your studies so far? (tick one option only)

A lot of positive difference

Some positive difference

No difference

Some negative difference

A lot of negative difference

(14) Any other comments about academic target setting and counselling and your experience with it so far?

....

....

....

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(Please continue on back)

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Please place the completed questionnaire in the box provided (and marked "Starpath Survey").

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee

on 10 December 2007, for a period of three years, reference no. 2007/038

APPENDIX B 2: Parent Questionnaire

STARPATH PROJECT

"Evaluation of an academic target setting intervention at a New Zealand secondary school"

QUESTIONNAIRE – PARENTS / CAREGIVERS

(A) First, please tell us a little about yourself:

(1) Are you?   Female ☐   Male ☐

(2) Where were you born?

New Zealand ☐   Overseas ☐   If overseas, how long have you lived in New Zealand? ☐ years

(3) Do you identify <u>primarily</u> as?

NZ Maori ☐   NZ European or Pakeha ☐   Samoan ☐   Tongan ☐

Cook Island Maori ☐   Chinese ☐   Indian ☐   Niuean ☐

Other (please specify) ☐ _____

(4) <u>During 2007</u>, how much contact did you have with your child's teachers and/or school? (please tick all relevant options)

No contact of any kind	☐
Received school newsletters	☐
Attended one parent-teacher meeting	☐
Attended two or more parent-teacher meetings	☐
Talked with my child's teacher(s) by phone one time	☐
Talked with my child's teacher(s) by phone two or more times	☐
Had phone or personal contact with the Principal or a Deputy Principal	☐
Had email contact with the school (teachers or other staff)	☐
Other contact (please state)	☐

(B) Now, tell us what you remember about *academic counselling* your child took part in last year:

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(5) What information did you get about it before the new programme started? (please tick one option)

No information

Some verbal <u>or</u> written information from the school

A lot of verbal <u>or</u> written information from the school

A lot of both verbal <u>and</u> written information from the school

(6) Who provided the information you received about the new programme? (please tick all relevant options)

My child

The school (eg, in a newsletter)

My child's Form teacher

Another teacher (eg. My child's maths teacher)

The school's Academic Achievement Manager

Other (please specify)

Did not receive any information

(7) What did you expect to happen as the result of academic counselling programme?
(please tick all relevant options)

My child would get more choice in his/her subject choices

My child would have to study harder

My child would get more choice in his/her assessments

My child would be told what he/she had to study

My child would be able to decide what he/she wanted to study

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My child would be able to put less effort into his/her studies

My child would have to discuss his/her studies with me

It would make no difference to my child or myself

I was not aware the programme had been introduced

(8) How did the academic counselling programme affect your child once it was started?

(please tick all relevant options)

It made my child worried

It made my child confused

It made my child think more about his/her subject choices

It made my child try harder to reach set academic targets

It made my child unsure if he/she was going to reach set academic targets

It gave my child the motivation to work harder on his/her studies

It made no difference to my child

I was not aware the programme had been introduced

(C) Now, looking back, tell us how useful *academic counselling* has been to your child:

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(9) Did the academic counselling your child received last year help to <u>improve his/her academic performance</u>? (please tick one option)

Not at all	
Not sure	
Yes, a little	
Yes, a lot	
I was not aware the programme had been introduced	

(10) Did the academic counselling your child received last year help to <u>improve his/her motivation to aim for higher academic achievement</u>? (please tick one option)

Not at all	
Not sure	
Yes, a little	
Yes, a lot	
I was not aware the programme had been introduced	

(11) Do you think that the programme of academic counselling should <u>continue</u>? (please tick one option and state a reason)

	No, because	
	Not sure, because	
	Yes, because	

(12) Are there any changes you would like to see in how academic counselling is done at the school? (please tell us what the changes, if any, should be)

....

....

....

....

(13) Overall, how much of a difference has academic counselling made to your child's studies so far? (please tick one option)

A lot of positive difference	
Some positive difference	
No difference	
Some negative difference	
A lot of negative difference	

(14) Any other comments about academic target setting and counselling and your or your child's experience with it so far?

....

....

....

....

....

....

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Please place the completed questionnaire in the box provided (and marked "Starpath Survey").

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 10 December 2007, for a period of three years, reference no. 2007/038

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APPENDIX B 3: Individual Interview Schedule

STARPATH PROJECT

"Evaluation of an academic target setting intervention at a New Zealand secondary school"

<u>Individual Semi-structured Interview Schedule</u>

(Principal, Academic Achievement Manager, Careers Advisors, Curriculum Manager)

<u>Questions about the Context</u>
What was the existing practice with regard to academic counselling, and why was a change needed?
- What were the existing practices related to academic counselling for Year 11 students?
- What issues/concerns were there about existing practices *(if any)*?
- What/who identified a need for a new programme?
- How was the new programme designed and by whom?
- To what extent, and in what way, were others *(students, teachers, parents)* involved in the design of the new programme *(if at all)*?

<u>Questions about the programme/intervention</u>
Can you tell me about the new programme – what are its features, what is needed to resource it, and what are the expectations?
- What was the nature of the new programme *(What did it consist of)*?
- What were the aims of the new programme *(In relation to students/staff/parents)*?
- What measurable changes were expected as the result of the new programme?
- What was the time line for the intervention?
- What resources *(financial, material, staff time)* were identified as necessary for the implementation of the new programme

<u>Questions about implementation</u>
How well was the intervention implemented from your role/position?
- What was implemented?
- Who was involved in the process *(giving end, receiving end, in others ways?)*
- When? *(Over what period of time?)*
- How was the implementation managed *(information giving, planning, discussions, consultations, feedback)?*
- What documentation was produced in the process?
- What resources were used in the process?

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Email: starpath@auckland.ac.nz Website: www.starpath.auckland.ac.nz

Questions about your experiences

What were your experiences of the implementation of the intervention?
- What information did you have/receive before the intervention?
- Did you have any expectations of the intervention?
- How were you involved and/or affected by the intervention?
- How much time/effort did it require from you?
- What effect/impact did the intervention have on you *(work, study, personal feelings)?*

Questions about the evaluation

On reflection, how effective has the intervention been and is it sustainable?
- Did the intervention deliver what it promised?
- Did the intervention deliver what you expected?
- What immediate and subsequent benefits can you identify?
- What changes can you see as a result of the intervention?
- Are the identified changes/benefits worth the effort/resources involved?
- Is the new program sustainable *(should it be sustained)*?
- What were the unexpected consequences *(if any)*?
- What were the negative consequences *(if any)*?
- What have you learnt as the result of this experience?

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APPENDIX B 4: Focus Group Interview Schedule

STARPATH PROJECT

"Evaluation of an academic target setting and counselling intervention at a New Zealand secondary school"

<u>Focus Groups – Semi-structured Discussion Questions</u>

<u>Questions about the context</u>

What was the existing practice with regard to academic counselling and why was change needed?

- What were the practices related to academic counselling for Year 11 students before the intervention was implemented?
- What issues/concerns were there about those existing practices *(if any)*?
- What/who identified a need for a new programme?
- How was the new programme designed and by whom?
- To what extent, and in what way, were others *(students, teachers, parents)* involved in the design of the new programme *(if at all)*?

<u>Questions about the Programme</u>

Can you tell me about the new programmme – what are its features, what is needed to resource it, and what are the expectations?

- What was the nature of the new programme *(What did it consist of in practice)*?
- What were the aims of the new programme *(For students? For staff?)*
- What measurable changes were expected as the result of the new programme?
- What was the time line for the intervention?
- What resources *(financial, material, staff time)* were identified as necessary for the implementation of the new programme

<u>Questions about the implementation</u>

How well was the intervention implemented from your role/position?

- Were you involved in designing the intervention
- What information did you have/receive before the intervention?
- Did you have any expectations of the intervention?
- Were you aware how much time/effort it would require from you?

FOR MATHS AND ENGLISH TEACHERS ONLY

- The teacher received targets for individual students in the External Standards at Level 1
- The teacher read through the targets
- The teacher discussed targets with students
- Did the targets change the teacher's expectations of the individual students?
- Did the teachers change their teaching practice in class as a result of the discussion with students?
- Did the discussion change the relationship the teacher had with the students? How, and in what way?

Questions about your experiences
What were your experiences of the implementation of the intervention?

- To what extent have you participated in advising students from the Year 11 cohort?
- Have you noticed any academic patterns/trends in the Year 11 student cohort? *(in terms of gender, socioeconomic background, cultural/ethnic affiliation or other factors)?*
- Has your experience with the academic counselling been positive/negative?
- How has the Year 11 cohort responded to the academic counselling intervention?
- How have the parents/caregivers of the Year 11 cohort reacted to the academic counselling intervention?
- Has the academic counselling intervention changed your relationship with the Year 11 cohort (positively/negatively)?
- How were you involved and/or affected by the intervention?
- What effect/impact did the intervention have on you *(work, study, personal feelings)?*

Questions about the effectiveness
On reflection, how effective has the intervention been and is it sustainable?

- Did the intervention deliver what it promised?
- Did the intervention deliver what you expected?
- What immediate and subsequent benefits can you identify?
- What changes can you see as a result of the intervention?
- Are the identified changes/benefits worth the effort/resources involved?
- Is the new program sustainable (should it be sustained)?
- What were the unexpected consequences (if any)?
- What were the negative consequences (if any)?
- What have you learnt as the result of this experience?

PLEASE NOTE
The Student Achievement Manager is interested that these questions are answered. Please ask them **ONLY** if you think the focus group has not answered them through other questions.

- What were your thoughts on the "whole school targets" when these were announced in July 2007 (*by the Student Achievement Manager, doing a powerpoint presentation – in case they need reminding*)?

- What do you see as the main contributor to the school's academic success in 2007 (given the NCEA results they've just received for last year)?

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