

ASG Parents Report Card 2015



New Zealand parents'
perceptions of the state
of education in New Zealand

It is our desire that the findings of this research, which are unique in representing the opinion of parents, will become an important part of the discourse on education matters.



Welcome to the first edition of the ASG Parents Report Card on the state of education in New Zealand.



Education, along with economics, health and the environment, remains a key national issue.

Education is one of the most critical investments that parents, families and communities can make. A good education gives children necessary skills and, the 'know how' to advance their careers and become globally competitive. For many New Zealand parents, ensuring their children have the best education possible is of utmost importance; from the fundamental foundational skills learned in early childhood, through to the specialist knowledge and expertise gained in tertiary study.

In recent years, the focus of education policy and funding discussions has been centred on ranking, testing and scoring students and the role of schools and teachers. While this approach has provided benchmarks into performance, it has lacked the insight and input of an enormously influential and important stakeholder group in the education community — parents.

Recognising this gap, ASG felt there was an opportunity to better understand New Zealand parents' beliefs about the capacity of the current educational environment to meet the educational needs of their children. And, more importantly, give a voice to parents on the subject of their children's education.

This report explores the key findings and insights into New Zealand parents' perceptions of the state of education in primary and secondary schooling in New Zealand.

ASG worked with the Faculty of Education at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, to develop and undertake a study in March 2015. Over 2,200 Australian and New Zealand parents, grandparents and guardians participated in the research.

Both organisations are passionate about education. ASG supports children's education from preschool to post-secondary studies in Australia and New Zealand; and Monash University is a member of Australia's Group of Eight top universities, with a sterling reputation in the higher education sector.

It is our desire that the findings of this research, which are unique in representing the opinion of parents, will become an important part of the discourse on education matters.

Education is our human capital and as the late Nelson Mandela once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

John Velegrinis

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Velegrinis', written in a cursive style.

Chief Executive Officer, ASG

Research methodology

This report describes New Zealand parents' beliefs about the capacity of the current educational environment to meet the educational needs of their children.

Monash University developed this report based on a survey of more than 2,200 New Zealand and Australian parents, grandparents and guardians. Participants in the survey were volunteers, sourced from a sample of over 22,000 ASG members in Australia and New Zealand.

Ninety nine per cent of these families reported their ethnicity. The major ethnic groups included New Zealander, New Zealander European, other European and Maori.

The survey included 53 items in a questionnaire that are summarised by the following three basic themes:

1. What are the aspirations of New Zealand parents for their children's education?
2. Do New Zealand parents believe that their children have the necessary educational resources to ensure their children's educational success?
3. Do New Zealand parents believe that their children have the necessary learning capitals to ensure their children's educational success?

Monash University's conceptual and methodological approach of the development of the questionnaire was based on the actiotope model (Ziegler and Baker, 2013; Ziegler & Phillipson, 2012). The model describes the interactions between the **educational capitals** and **learning capitals** as key processes for the development of learning and achievement.

Educational capital can be further defined by five types, including:

1. Economic (financial capacity)
2. Cultural (value systems, thinking patterns)
3. Social educational (support from parents, teachers and peers, and institutions)
4. Infrastructural (physical resources such as those found in centres, schools and at home eg. learning technologies)
5. Didactic educational (access to quality teaching pedagogy and associated curriculum)

Learning capital can also be defined by five types, including:

1. Organismic (mental and physical health)
2. Actional (the skills and knowledge available to the child)
3. Telic (goal states that allow for learning)
4. Episodic (the capacity to apply skills and learning in a given learning situation)
5. Attentional (the capacity to attend to a learning task)

An eleventh factor termed 'Aspirations' was developed to measure the educational aspirations of parents for their children.

Together, these factors constitute the framework that gauges parents' perceptions of the current educational environment in New Zealand.

Parents' responses to the questionnaire were Rasch modelled to check the measurement properties of the instrument, including the uni-dimensionality of the eleven factors as well as to check its validity.

For each capital (index), parents' responses ranged from completely disagree (assigned a value of 1) to completely agree (assigned a value of 4). Responses above 2.5 were perceived to be positive by parents.

This approach ensured the academic rigour and statistical accuracy of the research.

New Zealand parents' responses to the survey and their perceptions of the state of education in New Zealand were measured using three indexes:

- A Aspirations Index (AI), which measures parents' aspirations for their children's educational outcomes
- B Educational Resources Index (ERI), which measures how parents view their children's educational environment
- C Learning Resources Index (LRI), which measures parents' perceptions of their children's learning environment

Context of study

From a family's perspective, in broad terms, children should be able to draw upon a culture that both values and supports learning, have access to adequate resources to support academic achievement, to ensure they are well prepared for learning (Phillipson, S. N, Stoeger & Ziegler, 2013; Phillipson, S, Ku & Phillipson, S. N, 2013). In New Zealand today, the government's educational policies recognise the fundamental roles played by parents and the wider community in student learning. In line with this movement, The ASG Parents Report Card provides a snapshot of perceptions in the educational environment that currently exists within New Zealand families.

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ASG Parent Report Card: an executive summary

The ASG Parents Report Card investigates the state of education in New Zealand from parents' perspectives.

The ASG Parents Report Card measured parents' perceptions of the state of education using three indexes: the Aspirations Index; the Educational Resources Index, and the Learning Resources Index.

Undertaken by ASG and the Faculty of Education at Monash University, the report reveals parental aspirations are the strongest factor in their child achieving academic success.

Other key findings include:

- Parents want to better understand the school curriculum and teaching methods, but are generally positive about the quality of teaching.
- Parents generally hold teachers in high regard, with most agreeing their children's teachers are very capable.
- While most parents would like more money to support their child's education, most agree that home, school, community and cultural support is the strongest educational resource for their children.
- Cultural expectations are also influential, with parents agreeing that they make significant decisions about their children's education based on their families' value systems, traditions, beliefs and the social support they have around them.
- Parents generally agree their children want to do well at school, however, the strength of agreement was significantly higher among parents with daughters.
- Fathers are stronger in their belief that their children have more knowledge compared to other children the same age than mothers.
- Parents generally agree that their children have most of the necessary learning resources except the ability to pay attention when learning.

Parents' aspirations breed education success

The ASG Parents Report Card reveals parents' aspirations for their children are the most important driver for their children's educational success.

The Aspirations Index score of 2.95, out of a total score of 4 points, indicates parents generally have high aspirations and a positive view towards their children's educational potential.

Ninety four per cent of parents agree that higher education is important for their child.

Interestingly, when modelling the relationship between aspirations versus education and learning, the research found that parental aspirations for their children's education is the glue that holds everything together.

These aspirations optimise and underpin all other resources and influences that support their children's educational needs and help them to fulfil their learning potential.



Communicating with children about learning: Talk soon; talk often

Whether children are just starting their primary school years, or they are in their final year of secondary school, it is important that parents maintain their value systems and regularly communicate their support of, and expectations for, their children (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007; 2012).

Regardless of the type of school a child attends, parents should demonstrate their support of their children, and remind them as they grow and learn how important education is to them.

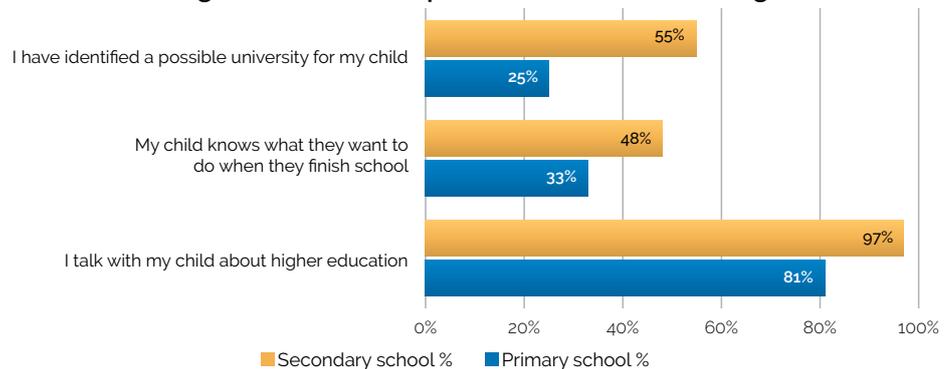
Parents who have a shared passion and aspirations for their children's post-secondary options and future ambitions will positively influence a child's belief in their ability to succeed.

Higher expectations for high school children

The ASG Parents Report Card also found that parental expectations and hopes for their children differ depending on whether they are currently in primary or secondary school.

New Zealanders of all backgrounds share strong hopes for their children's education.

Higher education aspirations vs education stage



It is not surprising that parents of secondary school children are more proactive in considering higher education options with their children.

This likely relates to the impending 'deadline' of the final year of high school and how a child's educational position at the end of this period impacts his or her acceptance into tertiary education or further study.

The ASG Parents Report Card Educational Resources Index measures how parents view their children's educational environment, including:

1. Economic factors such as families' financial capacity
2. Cultural factors including value systems and thinking patterns
3. Social educational support, from parents, teachers and peers, and institutions
4. Infrastructure, learning technologies and physical resources, such as those found in centres, schools and at home
5. Didactic educational access, including access to quality teaching, best practice teaching methods and associated curriculum

Does having more money equate to a better education for children?

The ASG Parents Report Card research found the overall value of the Educational Resources Index is 2.92 points out of a total of 4 points. Parents generally believe that there are adequate educational resources for their children's education in all aspects of financial, cultural and social sense. The lowest index reported is in families' financial capacity.

Some 83 per cent of parents would like more money to support their child's education, with just under half the parents surveyed (44 per cent) revealing they could not afford after-school tutorials and almost 20 per cent said they needed to work two jobs to support their children's learning.

Further analysis shows that families with lower household incomes are likely to struggle even more. For example, only 33 per cent of families earning less than \$48,000 per year agreed that they had enough money for all of their child's educational needs. This compares with 45 per cent of families earning between \$48,000 and \$96,000 per annum and 63 per cent of families earning over \$96,000 each year.

Cultural support and access to resources significant drivers in children's education

While money is considered an important factor, parents believe there are other significant drivers that contribute to the quality of their children's education.

All other dimensions of the educational resources were beyond 2.5 points, showing parental agreement with the availability of physical, mental and emotional resources.

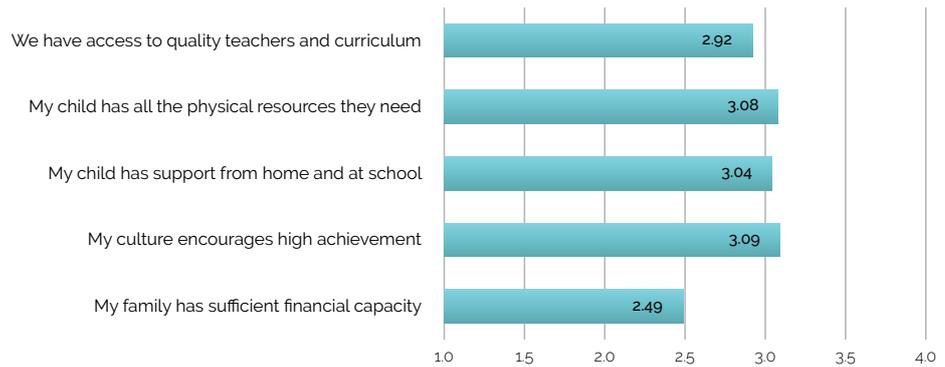
Parents agreed their cultural expectations played a major role and was the strongest educational resource available to their children. Ninety one per cent of parents agreed academic achievement is very important to their culture and children should work hard to achieve success at school. Parents also agreed they make significant decisions about their children's education based on their families' value systems, traditions, beliefs and the social support they have around them.

Access to physical resources like technological facilities and play areas was also considered to be quite important to a child's education (3.08 points). Ninety per cent of New Zealand parents agreed their child has all the resources they need for their learning at home, with parents (78 per cent) agreeing that their children have all the resources they need for their learning at school.

Parental knowledge of what is happening in their children's schooling is imperative for parents to further optimise their children's educational outcomes.

89% of parents agree their children's teachers are very capable.

Educational resources



Parents supportive of teachers; want to better understand school curriculum and teaching methods

Mums and dads are generally positive about the quality of teaching at their children's school, with 89 per cent of parents agreeing their children's teachers are very capable and 85 per cent believing the school curriculum will help their child with their future career.

Seventy nine per cent of New Zealand parents also believe the school's curriculum suits their child's learning needs. Interestingly, there are significant differences in parent responses to accessing quality teachers and curriculum between private and state schools.

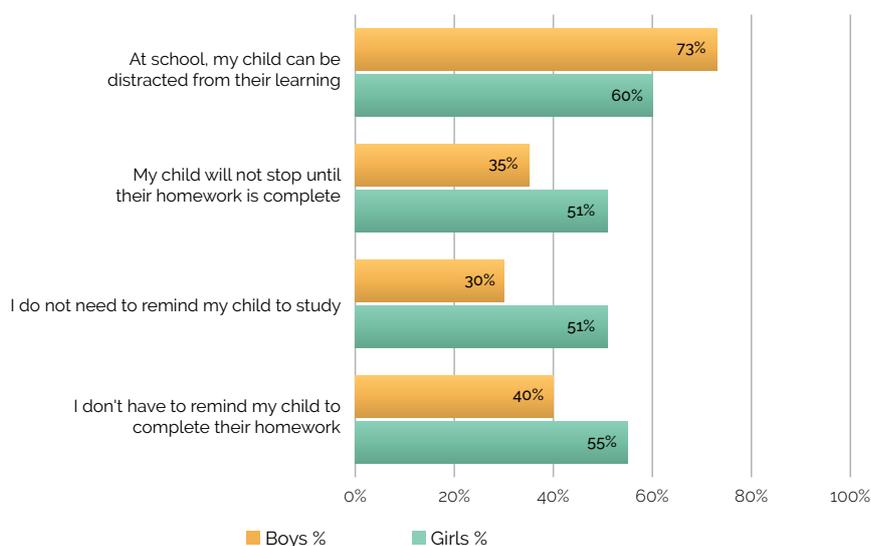
The findings of the report indicate that parental knowledge of what is happening in their children's schooling is imperative for parents to further optimise their children's educational outcomes. This knowledge would come from continued effective communication between school and home.

Are girls more 'motivated' to achieve than boys?

It is a common stereotypical belief that girls mature faster than boys and that this translates into higher performance in the classroom.

According to the ASG Parents Report Card research, parents' educational aspirations are higher for their daughters than sons with an index of 3.01 points for girls and 2.88 points for boys. The higher aspirations for girls than boys reflects research that has shown parents' tendency to differentiate parenting between their sons and daughters (e.g. Spera, 2005). However, an overwhelming proportion of parents (97 per cent) agree their children want to do well at school regardless of their gender.

Dedication to study vs child gender



All parents agreed that their children wanted to do well at school regardless of their gender.

Interestingly, 73 per cent of parents with sons agreed their child could be distracted from their learning at school, in comparison to 60 per cent of parents with daughters.

Over two thirds (70 per cent) of parents also said they have to remind their sons to study compared with 49 per cent of parents with daughters.

Half of all parents with daughters agreed that their child would not stop until their homework is complete, versus only 35 per cent of parents with boys.

Another interesting finding was that while parents generally view the learning environment for their daughters as the same as their sons, parents were more likely to consider their daughters as a high achiever (75 per cent) than their sons (65 per cent).





Ensuring the parenting agenda is gender neutral

While the findings of this report demonstrate that parents' views of their children's learning environment differ depending on their gender, research suggests that parents should be striving to have a gender neutral outlook to their child's education.

Despite what parents may think about their children's abilities and motivations to learn, they should not differentiate learning capacity or their own expectations based on gender.

International research (Melhuish et al 2008) has found that the way boys and girls are perceived from when they are young, and the way parents interact with them at home, impacts upon their future educational learning outcomes.

This finding speaks volumes on the achievement results around the world, where boys fall within the extreme pocket of underachievement or high achievement.

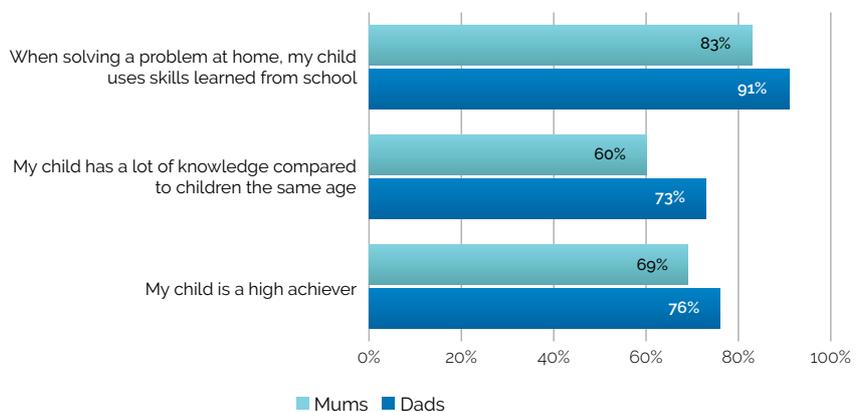
To achieve more consistent educational outcomes, parents should be wary of differentiating their children's capacity, with both sons and daughters being encouraged to strive on equal platforms.

Dads' rose-tinted glasses: mums and dads differ in their perception of children's abilities

Interestingly, the ASG Parents Report Card found fathers expressed a more idealistic view of their children's ability in comparison to mothers, who presented more realistic expectations.

Some 76% of fathers perceived their children to be high achievers.

Difference in opinions of child's ability by mums and dads



Some 76 per cent of fathers perceived their children to be high achievers, compared with 69 per cent of mothers. Fathers were also stronger in their belief that their children have more knowledge compared to other children the same age (73 per cent) versus mothers (60 per cent).

Ninety one per cent of fathers believe that their child is able to use skills learned from school when solving a problem at home, compared with 83 per cent of mothers.

C Learning Resources Index

The ASG Parents Report Card Learning Resources Index measures parents' perceptions of their children's learning environment, including:

1. Organismic factors, including their child's mental and physical health
2. Actional factors, such as the skills and knowledge acquired by their child
3. Telic goals such as their child's approach and goals to allow for effective learning
4. Episodic application includes their child's capacity to apply skills and learning in a given learning situation
5. Attentional focus; their child's capacity to attend to a learning task

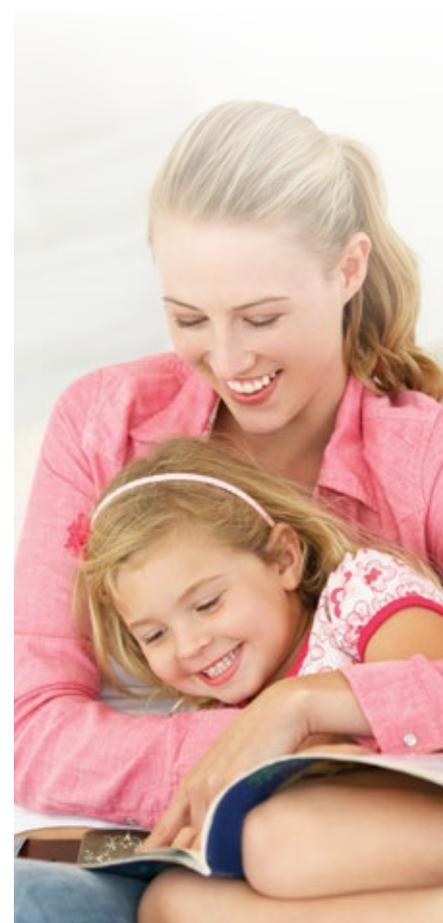
What do parents think of their children's learning capacity?

Overall, parents agree their children's learning environment supports their education. The Learning Resources Index of 2.89 points (out of a possible 4 points), indicates parents agree that their children's learning environment supports their learning.

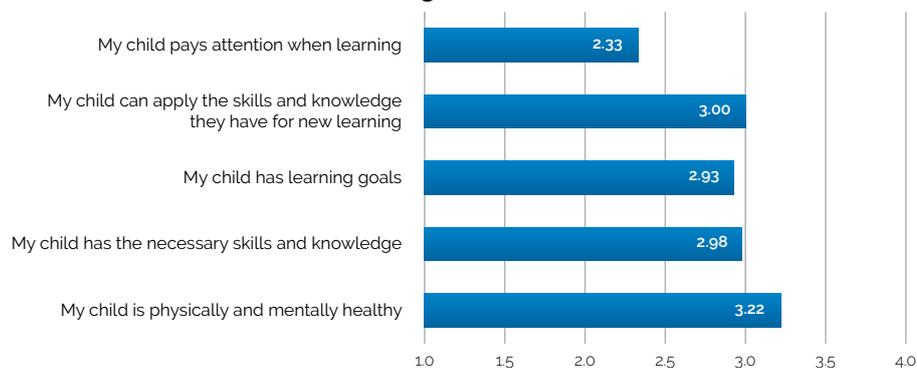
When looking at each type of learning resources, New Zealand parents overwhelmingly agree their children have the necessary skills and knowledge to do well, that they can apply these skills in different learning environments and have learning goals to guide their education. Parents also strongly believe that their child is physically and mentally healthy (3.22 points).

However, New Zealand parents' main concern in their children's learning capacity is that they don't pay enough attention to their learning, either at home or at school (2.33 points).

A strong proportion of New Zealand parents believe that their child can be distracted from their learning at school (66 per cent) and at home (74 per cent).



Learning resources



New Zealand parents agree their children have the necessary skills and knowledge to do well.



A closer look: pay attention!

Many parents experience feedback from teachers about their children not paying attention in the classroom, and also find themselves having to remind their children to finish their homework.

The ASG Parents Report Card found almost universal agreement that many children do not pay enough attention to their learning, and that the majority of New Zealand parents are dissatisfied with their children's ability to pay attention to their learning.

A closer look reveals that levels of concern however, vary.

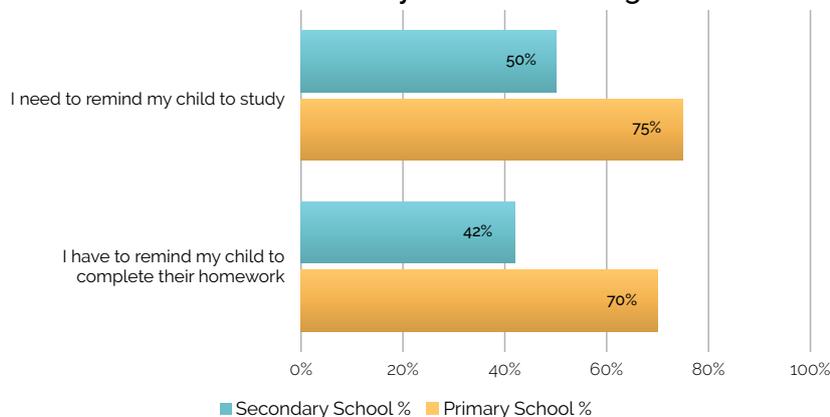
Interestingly, 65 per cent of parents of children in private or state schools agree their children can be distracted from their learning at school. However, this increased to 75 per cent for parents whose children attended state integrated schools.

Parents of children attending primary school believe that their children have the least capacity to pay attention to their learning, compared to parents of secondary school children.

For example, 75 per cent of parents with children in primary school agree that they have to remind their child to study, in contrast to 50 per cent of parents with children in secondary school.

Agreement that children do not pay enough attention to their learning is almost universal among all parents.

Dedication to study vs education stage



Do parents expect too much from their primary school children?

So are short attention spans a reality? Should teachers and parents shift expectations, and approach, to better cater to short attention spans, rather than complain and chastise children for losing interest?

There are no easy answers to these questions, but for a start both parents and teachers need to apply their own expectations of learning to their understanding of how learning happens. Individuals learn better when something is interesting; we remember best when it is interesting. Thus if we are to keep children interested in paying attention, we must make the context of learning relevant and contextually interesting.

Hence not only should we expect children to pay attention, the learning contexts need to be modified to hold that attention. Potentially, this means teachers and parents need to look at their own approaches in encouraging attention in learning.

ASG Parents Report Card conclusion

Parental aspirations for their children are fundamental for their children's education. Without such aspirations, it is not possible to optimise the educational resources or learning resources that are available to the child.

The findings of the ASG Parents Report Card point to the importance of schools, teachers and policy makers working together to model a more holistic approach to communicating with parents. Effective, ongoing discussion on the nature of learning that occurs in schools, and the approach to homework, will lead to a better educational environment for New Zealand children.

Studies have found that parents' beliefs and expectations do positively impact on the way they support their children's education and participate in schools' efforts in supporting their children (Melhuish et al., 2008; Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007; 2012; See & Godard, 2015).

It is also important that parents maintain the value systems that encourage high aspirations and expectations, and ensure they communicate those expectations to both their sons and daughters consistently regardless of their year level and type of school they attend. It has been found that when parents have high aspirations and communicate these aspirations as expectations, their children perform better academically (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007; Phillipson, 2010).

Policy makers need to ensure that educators focus on communicating with parents and forming partnerships based on shared values on the importance of education, and high expectations for academic success.

The ASG-Monash University partnership

ASG and Monash University's Faculty of Education have been working together on various education initiatives since 2012.

The ASG Parents Report Card is the culmination of many months of intensive research and analysis between the two organisations.

ASG developed the concept of the index and the Faculty of Education at Monash University, Melbourne, created the questionnaire instrument and research methodology.

The survey findings were analysed and compiled by ASG and Dr Shane Phillipson, associate professor and Dr Sivanes Phillipson, senior lecturer at Faculty of Education at Monash University (see biographies below).



Dr Sivanes Phillipson, Faculty of Education, Monash University

Dr Sivanes Phillipson is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Education, Monash University Clayton Campus. Dr Phillipson has a diverse international experience and knowledge base in the broad field of measurements and systems approach with families and in education.

Dr Sivanes Phillipson's research expertise comprises advance quantitative approaches and analysis including Rasch modelling, meta-analysis and structural equation modelling.

She has been awarded multiple research grants, including a 2014 Australian Research Council Linkage Project titled, 'Numeracy@Home' as the lead chief investigator.

Dr Sivanes Phillipson has also consulted on multiple projects internationally, including the development of measurement tools for parent engagement in schools, disability services and evaluating existing services within special care and child development services.

Her current research projects include the Numeracy@Home project, the ASG Parents Report Card and the St. Kilda Maternal Child Health project.

Dr Sivanes Phillipson is the Routledge Series Editor for the Evolving Families Book Series.

Her 2013 book, entitled *Constructing Educational Achievement: A sociocultural perspective* was published by Routledge and focuses on the sociocultural processes underlying educational achievement in multiple contexts globally. Her most recent book in 2014, *Developing Leadership in the Asia Pacific: A focus on the individual* (with Shane Phillipson) is also published by Routledge. Dr Phillipson is currently the lead editor of a book that focuses on parent engagement in early learning of mathematics at home.



Dr Shane N. Phillipson, Faculty of Education, Monash University

Dr Shane Phillipson is an associate professor at the Faculty of Education at Monash University and previously worked at The Hong Kong Institute of Education.

Dr Shane Phillipson's most recent research and publications have focused on the concept of giftedness, the development of mathematical giftedness and underachievement, and effective pedagogy for gifted students.

His major publications include *Conceptions of giftedness: Sociocultural perspectives* (Earlbaum Associates) and *Exceptionality in East Asia: Explorations in the actiotope model of giftedness* (Routledge).

Dr Shane Phillipson also co-authored *Learning and teaching in the Chinese classroom* (The Hong Kong University Press), published in November 2011 (and in February 2013 as a Chinese translation). His co-authored book *Developing Leadership in the Asia Pacific: A focus on the individual* (with Sivanes Phillipson) was published in 2014 by Routledge.

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Registered Office:

23-35 Hanover Street Oakleigh Vic 3166

+64 9 366 7670

asg.co.nz