



EMPTY SEATS?

A Toolbox for Strategic Resilience Planning in Schools

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***Disclaimer:** The content of this paper represents my own thinking and does not reflect the position of any group or agency that I work with currently or in the past. This is an initial version of these ideas which may be expanded upon in future based on feedback and demand. For all inquiries please contact derek@futuremakers.nz*

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Introduction

What if 2023 is more disrupted than 2022? What if there are more of these empty seats and desks? Would we be prepared?

In December 2021 I wrote a [blog post](#) in which I outlined my concerns about the difficulties I foresaw in the coming year (2022), and introduced a paper titled [Resilience Planning for Schools](#) which outlined a series of things I believed schools could and should be considering in order to cope with the disruption that I believed would be experienced in 2022. At that time I was becoming agitated by what I perceived as a lack of real engagement with what so many ‘signals’ were saying, and a lack of forward planning based on the sort future they foretold.

Fast forward to February 2022 and suddenly these things began to impact schools and classroom teachers. My [resources on resilience planning and hybrid learning](#) were downloaded hundreds of times, the Ministry of Education (MoE) began providing 25 hours of PLD for schools to prepare themselves for hybrid learning, various webinars and forums were established to share ideas and the MoE also added a section with advice on hybrid learning on their [learning from home](#) website.

Then, just as quickly as the interest in hybrid learning ramped up, by the second half of the year it waned, to the point that, by the end of the year it is hardly mentioned. In fact, in speaking to many of my friends who are parents and grandparents of tamariki in schools, the end of year messaging appears to have focused on the expectation that things will be able to ‘return to normal’ next year.

But what if that is not the case? What if we’re [failing to look up](#) (again) and some of these signals actually manifest in more disruption in 2023? How prepared are we as educators, as schools and as a system to avoid this taking us by surprise? What strategies and approaches have we developed during 2022 that will ensure our resilience under such circumstances?

My reflection here is; “have we fully taken advantage of the opportunity we had in 2022 to develop the levels of resilience in our schools and system to be able to withstand another year of disruption in 2023?” I fear not.

Of course, over the past few years there have been many initiatives taken by schools around the motu, some of which have been documented on the MoE’s [Learning From Home website](#), as well as the schools such as those in the [Manaiakalani network](#) which have been using digital technologies to enable seamless home-school learning for some years now. More recently I have had the privilege of working alongside a fabulous group of teachers who have explored a range of innovative ways to connect learners with their learning regardless of location which have just been published on the [Tai Tokerau Hybrid learning Project](#) website.

Despite all of this, I remain concerned about the lack of any real movement forward as a system to engage with the level of transformed thinking required to ensure the degree of resilience required. Sadly, with an election year coming up, it’s likely that many of these concerns, as legitimate as they are, will become weaponised as individuals and political parties appeal for support for their particular ideologies.

Rather than succumb to this, let’s build on the great work already done and the success stories we have access to – in NZ and internationally. There is so much that individual schools can do to build a resilient approach and I encourage school leaders to embrace this challenge as they head away to a well-deserved break. Otherwise it will be my grandkids who again are left to ‘catch up’ as if it’s their fault there’s been such a lack of continuity in their learning.

In this paper I've identified some of the key signals I've been reading about and pondering their possible impact on schools in the 2023 school year. This isn't to create a sense of panic or pessimism among the sector, simply the act of a responsible education leader, scanning the horizon for signals of what the year may bring.

I use the term signals deliberately. These are not predictions. Instead, they provide an opportunity to consider the scenarios that may play out if one or more of them were to eventuate. We can be certain of none of these things, and the optimist in me hopes for the best. However, it's a bit like making plans for the Summer camping trip. I always consult the weather forecast – both short term and long term, and consider the options that are presented from the forecasting modelling that is carried out. On that basis I go prepared for the conditions that I may encounter.

The paper uses a basic risk assessment framework to assist teachers and schools to consider the challenges they may face in 2023, and a way of thinking about how these might be addressed. It may be that only some, none – or all, of these signals manifest themselves in 2023. But our responsibility as educational leaders is to ensure our learners can continue with their learning with the least amount of disruption or disadvantage – not just for our students, but for our teachers as well.

The rest of the paper consists of a toolbox of ideas and activities that may be useful in working collaboratively with staff and community to assess how these things may apply in your context, and to begin planning for how you might address these.

Note regarding this revision

Following the original publication of this document in early January, 2023, communities in many parts of New Zealand were faced with some severe weather events that devastated much of the local infrastructure (roads, water, sewage etc.) and caused significant damage to peoples' homes and livelihoods.

As a consequence, many schools were forced to close for a period of time just as students were returning for the 2023 school year, with some facing extended periods of closure and disruption as affected buildings are returned to a habitable state or, in the worst cases, new buildings are provided where the old ones are no longer habitable.

While the impact of severe weather events and natural disasters were not included in the original scenarios of this paper, they were signalled repeatedly as a key area of risk in previous papers on hybrid learning as they remain an ever present risk in our island nation.

Immediately following these weather events I was approached by a number of teachers and principals to ask why these things weren't included in the original paper, and after discussion with some of these people I decided it would be worthwhile including a section on extreme weather events and natural disasters in this paper so that the same forward thinking and planning could be applied using the tools and processes outlined in what follows.

What Are the Signals...?

The future is not pre-determined, but rather woven together by numerous threads that are themselves being woven in the present.

Amy Webb – “The Signals Are Talking”

There are many areas of challenge to the ongoing work of educators and schools at present, but for this paper I have chosen to focus specifically on the signals I see as potentially the most disruptive in terms of the ability of schools to continue to function as they did pre-COVID-19.

Many of these things may not be on the horizon of educators, who are instead focused on more immediate issues such as the changes in curriculum and assessment for example. However, each of these things is another ‘thread’ that is being woven to create the context for schools in 2023.

The five ‘signals’ I have identified are explained below...

1. New Waves of COVID

We are still in a relatively early phase of this new disease. The virus will likely mutate to be more transmissible and to evade our immune systems¹. This may result in ongoing patterns of school attendance for staff and students as in 2022, with irregular and unpredictable absences disrupting continuity of programmes designed around in-person participation.

2. Long COVID

The mysterious group of Long Covid symptoms is reported by researchers to afflict one in four adults and one in seven children.² This may result in extended periods of absence for staff and students as a result of chronic fatigue resulting in the inability to function effectively or for a full day in in-person settings. Extra pressures may be felt in families where parents/whānau are impacted through shortened hours or loss of employment due to long COVID for example.

3. Teacher supply in secondary schools

Many schools already find it difficult to reach and maintain full staffing levels. There is currently a national shortage of teachers, with the low scenario for secondary teachers in New Zealand showing a shortfall of 40 teachers in 2023, 510 in 2024 and 620 in 2025³

This may result in classes being taught by non-specialist teachers, schools under stress to provide all courses, students disadvantaged as a result. In some cases leading to further absenteeism due to disengagement. **(NB We are also likely also to see more industrial action in 2023 which, in turn, will impact student learning time.)**

¹ <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/c/covid-19-new-variants/>

² <https://www.navigatusconsulting.com/covid-pandemic-in-the-rear-view-mirror/>

³ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/480840/chance-of-secondary-school-teacher-shortage-in-2023-oversupply-for-primary-schools>

4. Continuing lack of access to specialist learning areas

Learning areas such as science and technology, Te Reo Māori and Māori-medium education are already difficult to provide in hard-to-staff areas and in many smaller schools. Almost a third of secondary schools that responded to a recent PPTA survey could not find specialist teachers for particular subjects, and almost 50 appointments were made by schools despite there being no suitable applicants.⁴

This may result in more students disengaging because they cannot access the learning opportunities they want – potentially leading to further absenteeism and/or failure to complete studies.

In addition, in some schools where there are specialist teachers, they end up teaching classes outside of their area of expertise to make up a full workload, resulting in lack of job satisfaction and in some cases, leaving the profession.

5. Cost of living crisis

The global cost-of-living crisis is by far the most important issue for New Zealanders right now - with 56 percent ranking the issue the most important issue facing the country - well above climate change (12 percent), crime (11 percent), the Covid-19 pandemic (8 percent)⁵. Factors contributing to this include the impact of rising mortgage rates, high rental costs, rising food costs, housing affordability etc.

There are a number of implications for schools here, including how we maintain continuity for student learning when some are required to find employment during school hours as a means of supporting family/whānau who may have lost jobs or where income isn't sufficient to meet family needs. Others may be required to stay at home to babysit pre-school siblings while both parents work.

Ensuring we have detailed and up to date records of student learning will become important where students are transferring between schools as a result of pressure on families to find more affordable accommodation. In addition, some teachers may choose to seek positions in regions where housing/accommodation is cheaper etc. with flow-on impact for continuity of teaching.

6. Extreme weather events and natural disasters⁶

Every year schools in some part of the country are impacted by unexpected weather events. School closures due to snow are a constant risk in some areas almost every year, while more extreme events such as the recent flooding in Auckland and Northland, and the impact of the cyclone in Hawkes Bay appear to be increasing in frequency as a result of global warming. In addition, we can't lose sight of the impact on schools and communities of less frequent events such as the Christchurch earthquakes in 2011 and the Kaikoura earthquake in 2016

The trauma caused by such events can have a significant impact on schools and their communities, often in very defined regions or areas of the country. In the case of earthquakes, slips and extreme flooding, the ongoing impact can last for a long time after the actual event itself, with time required to clean up, rebuild and repair infrastructure etc.

⁴ <https://www.ppta.org.nz/news-and-media/its-time-to-fix-the-secondary-teacher-shortage/>

⁵ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/478097/parents-struggling-to-make-ends-meet-as-cost-of-living-crisis-bites>

⁶ This section was added in February 2023 after the extreme weather events that devastated many regions in the North Island in January and February.

How to Use the Toolkit

The pages that follow are designed for you to use with groups of staff or community to help you assess the degree to which these things may apply in your context, and, where they do exist, the extent to which there will be disruption to your usual ways of working.

The toolkit consists of:

- Discussion starters for each of the signals identified on the previous pages
- A risk assessment matrix to help create a shared understanding of the concerns in your context
- A 'be prepared' activity to help focus on the specific things you might be able to do in your context to minimise the impact of these things, should they occur.

Discussion starters

The following five pages are designed to be printed off and used to guide discussion in small groups (say, 4-6 people). These are suitable for staff and/or community conversations.

A record of the conversation and response to questions on the starter pages should be kept by each group as this information will be important when processing the phases that follow.

SIGNAL ONE: New Waves of COVID

What's this about?

We are still in a relatively early phase of this new disease. The virus will likely mutate to be more transmissible and to evade our immune systems⁷. There are concerns about new waves of COVID through 2023, affecting NZ in particular as Winter comes, the opening of country borders (e.g. China) likely to lead to increased levels of infection among the community. New variants of the disease are also emerging, making it more difficult to manage through vaccination regimes.

How might it impact us?

- Irregular attendance of students and staff through the year
- Unpredictable absences disrupting continuity of programmes designed primarily for in-person participation
- Staff and students with particular health (and learning) needs may be more affected
- Difficulty in sustaining 'school culture' for staff and students
- Difficulty in pursuing whole school development, including new curriculum implementation etc.



Discuss

- Do you believe new waves of COVID will be a problem in your context?
- Which of these possible areas of impact are most likely to affect teachers, students and their whānau in your context?
- Are there any other possible ways this could impact those in your school or community?



Decide

Tick the box beside the statement that best reflects your response to each question below:

1. How likely do you think new waves of COVID will eventuate and become an issue in your community?
 - Highly likely, almost certain to be an issue in our community this year
 - Very likely, but many will be protected with vaccines or isolating
 - Not very likely, can't see it becoming an issue in our community
2. If these new waves of COVID occur, how significant might the impact be for your students, teachers and community?
 - Will significantly impact all aspects of how we provide programmes for our learners
 - Will have some impact, likely to affect some staff and students more than others
 - Unlikely to have much impact – we have systems in place to cater for staff and students who can't attend in person for periods of time.



Plan

List some of the things you could do (a) as individual educators and/or (b) as a school to address these issues if they do occur in your context in the coming year.

⁷ <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/c/covid-19-new-variants/>

SIGNAL TWO: Long COVID

What's this about?

The mysterious group of Long Covid symptoms is reported by researchers to afflict one in four adults and one in seven children.⁸ Symptoms include shortness of breath, cognitive dysfunction, which people call brain fog, as well as fatigue. Such conditions make it difficult for students and teachers to function effectively in regular classroom settings for a whole school day.

How might it impact us?

- May result in extended periods of absence for staff and students as a result of chronic fatigue resulting in the inability to function effectively or for a full day in in-person settings.
- In extreme cases this may mean some staff/students are unable to return to school at all.
- Extra pressures may be felt in families where parents/whānau are impacted through shortened hours or loss of employment due to long COVID for example.



Discuss

- Do you believe Long COVID is likely to become a problem in your context?
- Which of these possible areas of impact are most likely to affect teachers, students and their whānau in your context?
- Are there any other possible ways this could impact those in your school or community?



Decide

Tick the box beside the statement that best reflects your response to each question below:

1. How likely do you think Long COVID will eventuate and become an issue in your community?
 - Highly likely, Long COVID will almost certainly affect large numbers in our community this year
 - Somewhat likely, but many will be protected with vaccines or isolating
 - Not very likely, can't see it becoming an issue in our community
2. If Long COVID occurs, how significant might the impact be for your students, teachers and community?
 - Will significantly impact all aspects of how we provide programmes for our learners
 - Will have some impact, likely to affect some staff and students more than others
 - Unlikely to have much impact – we have systems in place to cater for staff and students who can't attend in person for periods of time, including those absent for extended periods.



Plan

List some of the things you could do (a) as individual educators and/or (b) as a school to address these issues if they do occur in your context in the coming year.

⁸ <https://www.navigatusconsulting.com/covid-pandemic-in-the-rear-view-mirror/>

SIGNAL THREE: Teacher Supply in Secondary Schools

What's this about?

Many schools already find it difficult to reach and maintain full staffing levels. There is currently a national shortage of teachers, with the low scenario for secondary teachers in New Zealand showing a shortfall of 40 teachers in 2023, 510 in 2024 and 620 in 2025⁹ Note – for primary schools the situation is different as school rolls in many parts of the country are declining due to drops in school-aged population.

How might it impact us?

- Classes being taught by non-specialist teachers
- Courses having to be dropped in some schools due to lack of teachers, students disadvantaged as a result.
- Further absenteeism due to disengagement.
- More industrial action in 2023 which, in turn, will impact student learning time.



Discuss

- Secondary schools - are you currently experiencing issues of teacher supply? Give examples?
- Primary schools – are you facing any challenges with staffing in this coming year? What are they?
- How is this impacting your learners? What examples of this are you seeing already?
- Are there any other possible ways this could impact those in your school or community?



Decide

Tick the box beside the statement that best reflects your response to each question below:

1. How likely do you think Teacher Supply issues will eventuate and become an issue in your community?
 - Highly likely, we're almost certainly going to struggle to attract and retain staff this year
 - Somewhat likely, we're reasonably OK, but some staff changes are anticipated
 - Not very likely, we're fully staffed and have no problems attracting new teachers
2. If these teacher supply issues occur, how significant might the impact be for your students, teachers and community?
 - Will significantly impact all aspects of how we provide programmes for our learners
 - Will have some impact, likely to affect some areas of the school more than others
 - Unlikely to have much impact – we are generally able to attract new teachers and we also have a good supply of relief teachers to call on.



Plan

List some of the things you could do (a) as individual educators and/or (b) as a school to address the issues arising from lack of teachers in your context in the coming year should that become an issue.

⁹ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/480840/chance-of-secondary-school-teacher-shortage-in-2023-oversupply-for-primary-schools>

SIGNAL FOUR: Continuing Lack of Access to Specialist Learning Areas

What's this about?

Learning areas such as science and technology, Te Reo Māori and Māori-medium education are difficult to provide in hard-to-staff areas or in many smaller schools. Almost a third of secondary schools that responded to a recent PPTA survey could not find specialist teachers for particular subjects, and almost 50 appointments were made by schools despite there being no suitable applicants.¹⁰

How might it impact us?

- Students disengaging because they cannot access the learning opportunities they want – potentially leading to further absenteeism and/or failure to complete studies.
- Some teachers teaching classes outside of their area of expertise to make up a full workload, resulting in lack of job satisfaction and some leaving the profession.



Discuss

- Do you currently have problems attracting and retaining specialist teachers in your context? In what areas? How do you compensate for this?
- Which of these possible areas of impact are most likely to affect learners in your context? In what ways?
- Are there any other possible ways this could impact those in your school or community?



Decide

Tick the box beside the statement that best reflects your response to each question below:

1. How likely do you think lack of access to specialist learning areas will eventuate and become an issue for learners in your community?
 - Highly likely, we're already struggling to cover a number of subject areas
 - Somewhat likely, but we do have staff who can cover other areas if required
 - Not very likely, we are able to provide teachers in all of the specialist areas required
2. If this lack of access occurs, how significant might the impact be for your students, teachers and community?
 - Will significantly impact all aspects of how we provide programmes for our learners
 - Will have some impact, really only an issue in a small number of areas
 - Unlikely to have much impact – we have systems in place that allow us to access specialist support from within the community or virtually



Plan

List some of the things you could do (a) as individual educators and/or (b) as a school to address these issues if they do occur in your context in the coming year.

¹⁰ <https://www.ppta.org.nz/news-and-media/its-time-to-fix-the-secondary-teacher-shortage/>

SIGNAL FIVE: Cost of Living Crisis

What's this about?

The global cost-of-living crisis is by far the most important issue for New Zealanders right now - with 56 percent ranking the issue the most important issue facing the country - well above climate change (12 percent), crime (11 percent), the Covid-19 pandemic (8 percent)¹¹. Factors contributing to this include the impact of rising mortgage rates, high rental costs, rising food costs, housing affordability etc.

How might it impact us?

- Increased stress on families, increase in mental health issues etc.
- Increased mobility of families as they seek cheaper accommodation, employment opportunities etc.
- Students having to take casual employment to help support families, or to provide support for siblings while parents or older siblings are working.
- Some teachers seeking positions in schools where housing/accommodation is cheaper etc. with flow-on implications for continuity of teaching.

Discuss

- In what ways is the cost of living crisis presenting as an issue in your context? What is the evidence you have of this?
- Which of these possible areas of impact are most likely to affect teachers, students and their whānau in your context?
- Are there any other possible ways this could impact those in your school or community?

Decide

Tick the box beside the statement that best reflects your response to each question below:

1. How likely do you think cost of living crisis will become an issue in your community?
 - Highly likely, most of our staff and community are or will be affected
 - Somewhat likely, only some of our staff and community will be affected
 - Not very likely, can't see it becoming an issue in our community
2. If the cost of living crisis occurs, how significant might the impact be on your context?
 - Will significantly impact all aspects of how we provide programmes for our learners
 - Will have some impact, likely to affect some staff and students more than others
 - Unlikely to have much impact – we have systems in place to cater for staff and students who can't attend in person for periods of time, including those absent for extended periods.

Plan

List some of the things you could do (a) as individual educators and/or (b) as a school to address these issues if they do occur in your context in the coming year.

¹¹ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/478097/parents-struggling-to-make-ends-meet-as-cost-of-living-crisis-bites>

SIGNAL SIX: Extreme Weather Events and Natural Disasters

What's this about?

Every year schools in some part of the country are impacted by unexpected weather events. In more extreme cases such as the recent flooding in Auckland and Northland, and the impact of the cyclone in Hawkes Bay schools can be impacted for longer periods., And we can't lose sight of the impact on schools and communities of less frequent events such as the Christchurch earthquakes in 2011 and the Kaikoura earthquake in 2016. The signal for us to be taking notice of here is the increasing frequency and severity of such events, and the difficulty of predicting them in any way.

How might it impact us?

- Complete school closures for periods of time
- In some cases, schools may be closed for extended periods of time due to the extent of damage, and in extreme cases may close altogether.
- Widespread evidence of trauma related behaviours and conditions
- School rolls decline as a result of some learners (and families) who are forced to find different places to live and may end up leaving the community and school.
- Potential impact on some teaching staff that may force them to resign and shift away
- Likelihood of much longer term impact due to the scale of damage and cost of repairs

Discuss

- What are the major areas of risk for your school and your community as a result of extreme weather events or natural disasters?
- How significant would the impact be should any of these events occur in your context, and how prepared is your school community to respond to these events if they should happen.
- What are the possible short term and long term impacts of anything like this happening in your context?

Decide

Tick the box beside the statement that best reflects your response to each question below:

3. How likely do you think cost of living crisis will become an issue in your community?
 - Highly likely, most of our staff and community are or will be affected
 - Somewhat likely, only some of our staff and community will be affected
 - Not very likely, can't see it becoming an issue in our community
4. If the cost of living crisis occurs, how significant might the impact be on your context?
 - Will significantly impact all aspects of how we provide programmes for our learners
 - Will have some impact, likely to affect some staff and students more than others
 - Unlikely to have much impact – we have systems in place to cater for staff and students who can't attend in person for periods of time, including those absent for extended periods.

Plan

List some of the things you could do (a) as individual educators and/or (b) as a school to address these issues if they do occur in your context in the coming year.

Risk Assessment

Once your groups have completed their discussions and time has been provided for feeding back the conclusions that each group has arrived at, you will be in a position to collate this information into a form that identifies the concerns your community has identified as being significant for them, and then to use this as a basis for planning

The templates on the following pages are provided for you to use in this process. Note that there are two forms of the template provided:

- **Semi-completed** – ideal for use in situations where there isn't sufficient time to explore things in depth, or where there isn't a skilled facilitator available to help guide the session. You could simply choose to highlight the particular risk/concern in column one and expand on this as required.
- **Blank** – ideal for use by groups familiar with the risk assessment process and/or where there is an experienced facilitator available to guide the entire process. Column one is completely blank to be populated from key points, unique to your context, that were identified in the group discussions.

When you are satisfied that you have represented the expression of risks and concerns in column one, you are prepared to move to the next phase which involves two steps outlined below...

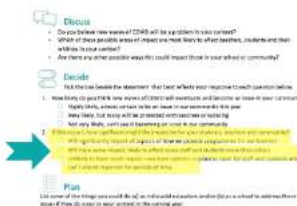
1. Assessing the likelihood of this risk



Use the group responses to the first set of questions under the heading 'Decide' on each of the discussion starters to agree on where your community believes the likelihood of this risk occurring. Colour the box as follows:

- Very likely, almost certain this will occur
- Somewhat likely, especially in some areas
- Not very likely, don't see this as a concern

2. Assessing the scale of impact



Use the group responses to the first set of questions under the heading 'Decide' on each of the discussion starters to agree on the level of impact your community agrees this might have if it were to occur. Colour the box as follows:

- Significant impact, likely to cause major disruption
- Some impact, affecting some more than others
- Little or no impact, measures in place to accommodate this

Potential Risks (for example)	Likelihood	Impact
<p>New Waves of COVID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Irregular attendance of students and staff through the year - Unpredictable absences disrupting continuity of programmes designed primarily for in-person participation - Staff and students with specific health (and learning) needs may be more affected - Difficulty in sustaining 'school culture' for staff and students - Difficulty in pursuing whole school development, including new curriculum implementation etc. 		
<p>Long COVID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May result in extended periods of absence for staff and students as a result of chronic fatigue resulting in the inability to function effectively or for a full day in in-person settings. - In extreme cases may mean some staff/students are unable to return to school at all - Extra pressures may be felt in families where parents/whānau are impacted through shortened hours or loss of employment due to long COVID for example. 		
<p>Teacher supply in secondary schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classes being taught by non-specialist teachers - Courses having to be dropped in some schools due to teacher unavailability, students disadvantaged as a result. - Further absenteeism due to disengagement. - More industrial action in 2023 which, in turn, will impact student learning time. 		
<p>Continuing lack of access to specialist learning areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students disengaging because they cannot access the learning opportunities they want – potentially leading to further absenteeism and/or failure to complete studies. - Some teachers teaching classes outside of their area of expertise to make up a full workload, resulting in lack of job satisfaction and some leaving the profession. 		
<p>Cost of living crisis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased stress on families, increase in mental health issues etc. - Increased mobility of families as they seek cheaper accommodation, employment opportunities etc. - Students having to take casual employment to help support families, or to provide support for siblings while parents or older siblings are working. - Some teachers seeking positions in schools where housing/accommodation is cheaper etc. with flow-on implications for continuity of teaching. 		
<p>Extreme weather events and natural disasters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete school closures for periods of time - In some cases, schools may be closed for extended periods of time due to the extent of damage, and in extreme cases may close altogether. - Consequently students unable to attend school and need to continue with learning online - Potential impact for some learners (and families) who are forced to find different places to live and may end up leaving the community and school. - Potential impact on some teaching staff that may force them to resign and shift away - Increased stress on families and communities, increase in mental health issues. 		

Potential Risks in our context	Likelihood	Impact
New Waves of COVID:		
Long COVID :		
Teacher supply in secondary schools:		
Continuing lack of access to specialist learning areas		
Cost of living crisis :		
Extreme weather events and natural disasters		

What this might look like

The way these templates are completed will look different in each context – which is why such planning is important. I have provided just a couple of examples below that illustrate how things might look in two different contexts – the first is a primary school serving a community in a lower socio-economic area, while the second is a secondary school serving a mix of farming families and those involved in related service industries. (NOTE – these are provided as illustrations only and are not intended to be analysed too deeply 😊)

Scenario One – Primary School

Potential Risks (for example)	Useful	Impact
New Waves of COVID: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High risk of infection of students and staff through the use of digital devices (e.g. tablets, laptops) in the classroom. High risk of infection of students and staff through the use of digital devices (e.g. tablets, laptops) in the classroom. High risk of infection of students and staff through the use of digital devices (e.g. tablets, laptops) in the classroom. High risk of infection of students and staff through the use of digital devices (e.g. tablets, laptops) in the classroom. 	Red	Green
Long COVID: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May result in extended periods of absence for staff and students as a result of chronic fatigue, loss of memory, loss of concentration, loss of ability to function effectively in the classroom, etc. Students may have more severe symptoms and be unable to return to school at all. Extra pressure may be felt in families where parents/families are impacted through a range of ways as a result of COVID-19. 	Yellow	Green
Teacher supply in secondary schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom taught by non-specialist teachers. Classroom taught by non-specialist teachers. Classroom taught by non-specialist teachers. Classroom taught by non-specialist teachers. 	Green	Green
Continuing lack of access to specialist learning areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students struggling because they cannot access the learning opportunities they want – generally leading to further absences and/or failure to complete studies. Some teachers teaching classes outside of their area of expertise to make up a full weekend, leading to lack of job satisfaction and some leaving the profession. 	Green	Green
Cost of living crisis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased pressure on families to support their children's education. Increased pressure on families to support their children's education. Increased pressure on families to support their children's education. Increased pressure on families to support their children's education. 	Red	Yellow

This primary school has benefitted from future-focused leadership over some years, with support provided from both community and philanthropic trusts to provide digital devices for all students. All teachers use the school's online platform to maintain an online presence for their classes, providing resources and learning activities online that can be accessed from home as students are allowed to take their devices home.

All teachers work collaboratively in teams to do all planning and teaching, sharing their expertise across areas of the school as appropriate. The school maintains a parent portal, keeping parents up to date with programme activity, and providing opportunity for feedback at any time.

As a consequence, the school and its community feel confident that they have measures in place to minimise the potential impact associated with the risks being considered here.

Scenario Two – Secondary School

Potential Risks (for example)	Useful	Impact
New Waves of COVID: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High risk of infection of students and staff through the use of digital devices (e.g. tablets, laptops) in the classroom. High risk of infection of students and staff through the use of digital devices (e.g. tablets, laptops) in the classroom. High risk of infection of students and staff through the use of digital devices (e.g. tablets, laptops) in the classroom. High risk of infection of students and staff through the use of digital devices (e.g. tablets, laptops) in the classroom. 	Red	Red
Long COVID: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May result in extended periods of absence for staff and students as a result of chronic fatigue, loss of memory, loss of concentration, loss of ability to function effectively in the classroom, etc. Students may have more severe symptoms and be unable to return to school at all. Extra pressure may be felt in families where parents/families are impacted through a range of ways as a result of COVID-19. 	Yellow	Red
Teacher supply in secondary schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom taught by non-specialist teachers. Classroom taught by non-specialist teachers. Classroom taught by non-specialist teachers. Classroom taught by non-specialist teachers. 	Green	Red
Continuing lack of access to specialist learning areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students struggling because they cannot access the learning opportunities they want – generally leading to further absences and/or failure to complete studies. Some teachers teaching classes outside of their area of expertise to make up a full weekend, leading to lack of job satisfaction and some leaving the profession. 	Yellow	Green
Cost of living crisis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased pressure on families to support their children's education. Increased pressure on families to support their children's education. Increased pressure on families to support their children's education. Increased pressure on families to support their children's education. 	Red	Red

This secondary school has been undergoing a steady development over recent years, aimed at improving student achievement. While they have achieved notable success in this regard, the efforts have been largely focused on improvement strategies rather than transformation of any kind, and the traditional pattern of time-tabled classes with specialist teachers prevails.

While individual students are permitted to use digital devices at school, and the school has some devices to loan, there is no school-wide adoption of a BYOD strategy or policy, and it is left to individual teachers as to whether they set up any kind of online support for their students.

The school population is relatively stable, with little movement of students within a school year, and staff turnover is also relatively low.

Those families involved in the service industries are more likely to feel the impact of any downturn in the farming sector.

Students at this school are generally able to access learning in the subject areas they want as the school is a member of the Virtual Learning Network, enabling students to access subjects not providing the the school. Some students are also encouraged to enrol with Te Kura where the VLN isn't able to provide for their needs.

Be Prepared

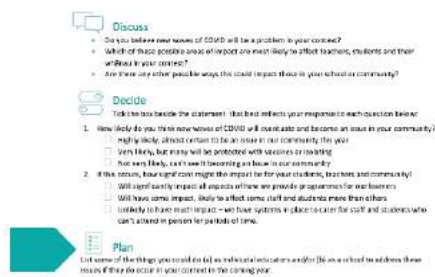
The final phase involves giving consideration to, and planning for, the things that can be done to mitigate the impact of these things, should they occur. As noted earlier in this paper, the goal here is to simply be prepared for the likelihood of these things affecting your staff, students and community.

A common thread through each of the five risk areas is the potential impact on students (and teachers) who are, for a variety of reasons, unable to attend school in person for varying lengths of time. As the COVID experience demonstrated, this creates challenges for the way schools operate where the conventional expectation is for teaching and learning to occur in fixed periods of time in common physical settings, generally operating with one teacher catering for an age-based cohort of students.

If the primary focus of your school is on providing continuity of quality educational opportunities for all students, a key mitigation strategy must involve the design and development of strategies, systems and processes that enable learning to continue regardless of location or time.

If preparation of this kind is done well it can lead to a ‘re-imagining’ of school where the mitigation strategies aren’t simply an ‘add-on’ to conventional practice, but instead, are actually ‘woven into’ everyday practice. This is the essence of the concept of ‘hybrid learning’, enabling for a seamless transition between in-school and remote learning as the need arises.

Step One – Brainstorming

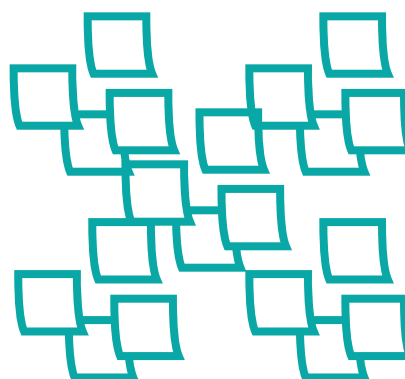


Begin by going back to the discussion starter activity and re-visit the ideas that were generated during the final question on these sheets under the heading ‘plan’.

Use these ideas as a starting point for generating as many ideas as possible that might be useful as ways of addressing the particular problems or areas of concern that were identified by your groups.

It is important through this process that you are open to receiving all ideas, and accept these without judgement or discussion. The goal is to simply generate as many ideas as possible.

Think about how you might do this to ensure maximum participation in the process – often people are stimulated by seeing what others have contributed, so the use of sticky notes that can be displayed on a large chart or whiteboard helps here. Or if you are working with digital devices, consider using group brainstorming tools such as [Miro](#), [Lucid](#) or [Jamboard](#) for example.



Step Two – Grouping



The next step in the process is to look at all of the contributions that have been made and group them according to the similarities and differences you see.

In some cases you might choose to refine or reframe what has been expressed in several contributions as a single action statement.

Step Three – Locus of Control

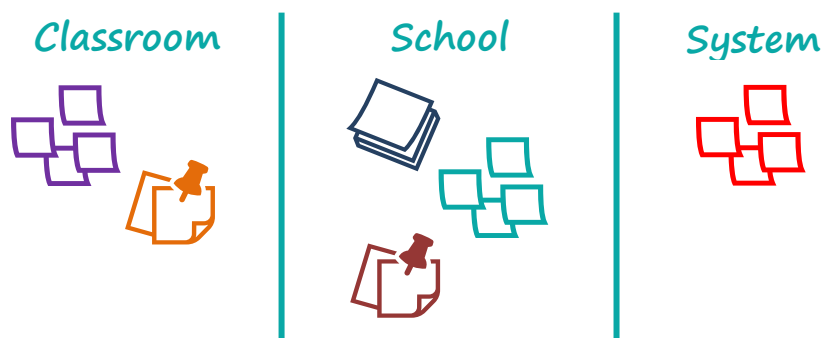
Finally, it will be important to consider these actions from the perspective of who is actually able to make this difference.

There will be some actions that individual teachers will be able to pursue in their own teaching and learning contexts. For example, creating a class blog for communicating with students and parents at home; changing assessment tasks so they can be completed in a variety of ways at home or at school etc.

Other actions will require a whole school approach. For example, changes to the school website, use of a school-wide learning management system, changes in the way teachers work in collaborative teams etc.

And then there may be actions identified that require changes at the system level. For example, funding structures that allow for students to be enrolled with more than one provider, changes to the way attendance is used as an indicator of engagement, equitable provision of digital devices, provision of online tools and environments that meet agreed standards around digital identity and data security etc.

Organise these things thus:



Step Four - Complete the Matrix

Now populate the final column in the matrix on the following pages with the specific actions you've identified through this process. (NOTE – again, two versions provided – one pre-populated to illustrate and the second blank for you to complete as appropriate.)

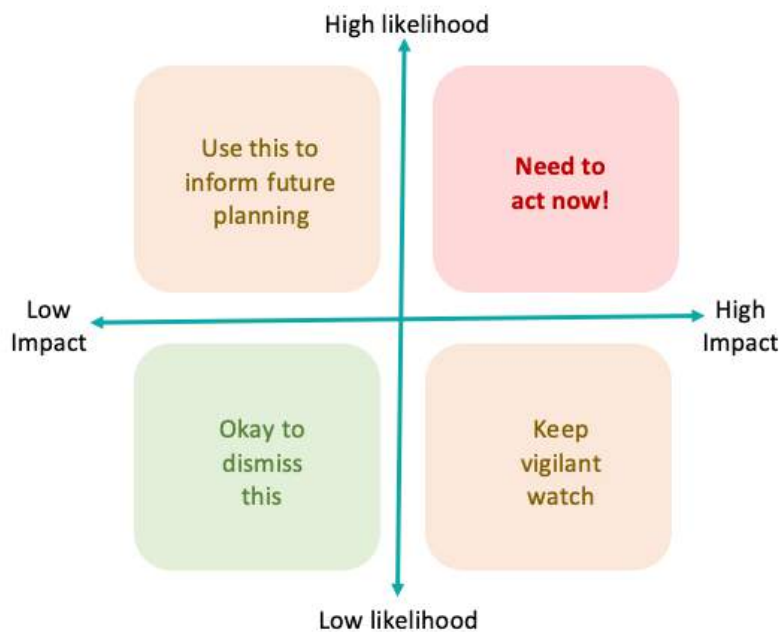
Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
<p>New Waves of COVID - we are still in a relatively early phase of this new disease. The virus will likely mutate to be more transmissible and to evade our immune systems. This may result in ongoing patterns of school attendance for staff and students as in 2022, with irregular and unpredictable absences disrupting continuity of programmes designed around in-person participation.</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff working in teams to plan, teach and assess collaboratively – avoid the one teacher, one class, one subject, one hour scenario. • Build stronger partnerships with parents/whānau – establish regular and empowering two-way comms. • Invest in robust technology systems that will ensure equitable access for all staff and students whether in-school or at-home. • Use common digital platform(s) for all planning, resources and assessment. Ensure ubiquitous, role-based access, allowing both teachers and students to work at home and at school without disruption.
<p>Long COVID - The mysterious group of Long Covid symptoms is reported by researchers to afflict one in four adults and one in seven children. This may result in extended periods of absence for staff and students as a result of chronic fatigue resulting in the inability to function effectively or for a full day in in-person settings. Extra pressures may be felt in families where parents/whānau are impacted through shortened hours or loss of employment due to long COVID for example.</p>			<p><i>As above, plus...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement appropriate wellbeing programmes within school for staff and students. • Ensure processes are in place for recognising symptoms of long COVID and systems in place to accommodate the needs of staff/students who are unable to sustain themselves for a regular school day • Establish wellbeing checks and support for parents/whānau. Provide information that helps them cope with cases of long COVID in their context. • Aim for complete ubiquity that allows students (and teachers) to transfer seamlessly between home/school contexts for learning.
<p>Teacher supply in secondary schools – Many schools already find it difficult to reach and maintain full staffing levels. There is currently a national shortage of teachers, with the low scenario for secondary teachers in New Zealand showing a shortfall of 40 teachers in 2023, 510 in 2024 and 620 in 2025</p> <p>This may result in classes being taught by non-specialist teachers, schools under stress to provide all courses, students disadvantaged as a result. In some cases leading to further absenteeism due to disengagement. (NB Also likely also to see more industrial action in 2023 which, in turn, will impact student learning time.)</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on culture ahead of structures, systems and processes. Create a sense of value around your people. • Establish good networks of support, mentoring/coaching, professional pathways etc. • Celebrate successes and share widely – internally and externally. • Be active in various forums and continually feed-into the conversations. • Promote a culture of ‘we’, not ‘me’ among staff. Grow leaders. Recognise success and replicate that. • Don’t sweat the small stuff – focus on vision, graduate profile for learners, big goals etc. • Create teams, collaborate, don’t isolate teachers,
<p>Continuing lack of access to specialist learning areas such as science and technology, te reo Māori and Māori-medium education in hard-to-staff areas or in smaller schools. This may result in more students disengaging because they cannot access the learning opportunities they want – potentially leading to further absenteeism and/or failure to complete studies.</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish robust processes for genuinely engaging with learners to find where their interests and aspirations are, and then actively explore options for enabling them to pursue these. • Build relationships within and between schools to address shortages in specialist areas – i.e. Specialist staff teaching classes across two or more schools. • Create virtual sharing of specialist staff between and among schools – utilising the specialist expertise where it exists and creating new/different career pathways for teachers in the process. • Consider both what you/your school can access in this way, as well as what you can contribute.
<p>Cost of living crisis – including impact of rising mortgage rates, high rental costs, rising food costs, housing affordability etc. This may lead to increased stress on families, increase in mental health issues etc. Leading to increased mobility of families as they seek cheaper accommodation, employment opportunities etc. Implications for how we maintain continuity for student learning during these transitions. Teachers likely to be affected similarly, with some forced to seek positions in schools where housing/accommodation is cheaper etc. with flow-on impact for continuity of teaching.</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a school, explore the broader community networks that exist to support individuals and families facing economic difficulty, and actively work to connect families in need with these agencies. • Ensure regular check-ins with individual staff members to provide support and guidance, and to pro-actively plan for contingencies in staffing that may emerge. • Create and maintain excellent record of learning for each student that can transfer easily to other schools to ensure seamless continuity of learning can be provided for them. • If appropriate, create a ‘brokerage’ on your website for connecting families to available rental accommodation in your area – either independently or in collaboration with local rental agencies.
<p>Extreme weather events and natural disasters – such events can result in the complete closure of schools, and in more extreme cases, are accompanied by significant damage to property affecting homes and livelihoods. Schools may be faced with long periods of closure, particularly in cases where the school buildings are affected by damage. Families may be forced to move because of damage to homes, affecting the school roll. With extreme events, the effects can be long term in terms of repairs to homes, businesses and infrastructure, meaning that some students may be unable to attend school on a regular basis for some time.</p>			<p><i>As for COVID, long COVID and Cost of Living scenarios above, plus, for immediate response:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the school emergency supplies and disaster kits are maintained and up to date • Ensure all staff and students are familiar with emergency procedures, and that parents are well informed of these • Establish and maintain current contact details for all parents/caregivers to be used in case of emergency <p><i>In the longer term...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access support from specialists in trauma induced behaviours, including counselling support • Maintain regular contact with parents/whānau to assess wellbeing and home circumstances

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
New Waves of COVID			•
Long COVID			•
Teacher supply in secondary schools			•
Continuing lack of access to specialist learning areas.			•
Cost of living crisis			•
Extreme weather events and natural disasters			•

Priorities for Action

Finally, you need to prioritise the things that you are going to focus on and create an action plan to get you there. It's highly likely that, through the process outlined on the previous pages, you will have identified a wide range of things that could be done – all of which are, perhaps, worthwhile and strategically important, and many of which will have strong advocacy from within parts of your community. The problem is that, if you attempt to do it all at once failure is the most likely outcome (along with exhaustion, loss of buy-in and general pessimism).

One way of doing this is to use a simple decision-making matrix as shown below.



Go back to the completed Risk Assessment measures you identified in the centre two columns of your Risk Assessment Matrix on the previous two pages (coloured red, orange or green) and use the simple matrix above to identify which quadrant each area of risk is positioned in for your context. For example, a risk are that is red for both likelihood and impact will appear in the top right. Two greens will go in the bottom left, while some discussion needs to be had about where to place those that are a mix of orange and red.

When you have identified the thing(s) that are, for you, the most important as judged by this process, you could use a simple action planning template such as that shown on the following page to develop a plan for how you are going to address this.

Sample Action Planning Template

Use the template below (or a modified version of it) to collaboratively develop an action plan that identifies everything that needs to be done to implement your mitigation strategy(ies).

“Act Now” Priority	Actions	Responsibility	Resources	Timeframe	KPI’s (Outcomes)
<i>Name the specific mitigation strategies that you have identified as a priority to focus on in your context, and the strategic goal you are seeking to achieve by this. (e.g. by implementing a school-wide online platform for sharing learning programmes we will enable more learners to learn from home during times of absence,)</i>	<i>List the specific actions you will take to achieve this goal. Action One...</i>	<i>Who will be responsible for following this action through?</i>	<i>List the specific resources required:</i>	<i>Be specific about when things will be done and ensure a reporting focus to keep things moving</i>	<i>Simple statement here that describes the desirable end state – if you are successful in achieving this goal, what will it look like? What will the impact be?¹²</i>
	<i>Action Two...</i>	<i>e.g. use a simple RASCI¹³ framework here</i>	<i>e.g. - release time - money - external assistance</i>		
	<i>Action Three..</i>				
	<i>Etc.</i>				

¹² <https://www.kpi.org/kpi-basics/>

¹³ <https://www.goodcore.co.uk/blog/a-guide-to-the-raci-rasci-model/>

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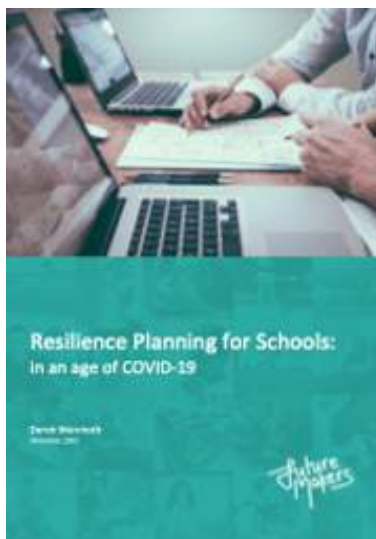
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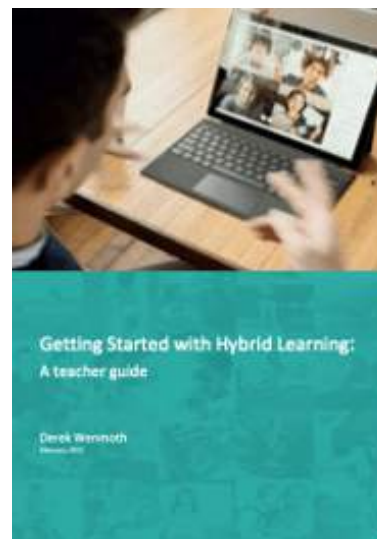
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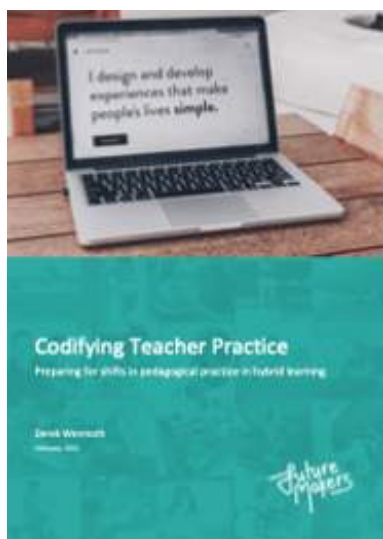
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