



## **SURVEY OF PRINCIPALS' VIEWS ON COLs 2017**

NZPF has undertaken a survey of school principals (2,300) to gather their observations on the Communities of Learning (CoL). 709 principals returned completed surveys, which is a sufficiently high proportion to have confidence in extrapolating from the results.

Percentages have been rounded up or down to form whole numbers so do not necessarily add up to 100%.

The survey ran online from 28 April to 15 May 2017.

1. The survey statement 'Sharing expert teachers within a CoL will improve innovation in teaching practice' had the following responses:

9% strongly agree

39% agree

34% did not know

13% disagree

4% strongly disagree

2. The survey statement 'Special Education could be delivered well through schools in a CoL pooling their resources and employing and sharing special expertise' had the following responses:

6% strongly agree

29% agree

30% don't know

23% disagree

13% strongly disagree

3. The survey statement 'Pooling money for relievers would give all schools in the CoL good access to quality relievers' had the following responses:

1% strongly agree  
8% agree  
29% don't know  
38% disagree  
24% strongly disagree

4. The survey statement 'Transitions between levels of schooling will become smoother for schools in a CoL' had the following responses:

10% strongly agree  
44% agree  
27% don't know  
14% disagree  
5% strongly disagree

5. The survey statement 'Over time schools in a CoL will be willing to share their facilities to meet student needs' had the following responses:

5% strongly agree  
33% agree  
42% don't know  
14% disagree  
6% strongly disagree

6. The survey statement 'Over time schools in a CoL will not compete with each other' had the following responses:

3% strongly agree  
16% agree  
33% don't now  
33% disagree

15% strongly disagree

7. The survey statement 'Over time, schools in a CoL will be willing to share staff and operational funding to meet student needs' had the following responses:

1% strongly agree

9% agree

30% don't know

36% disagree

24% strongly disagree

8. The survey statement 'Network reviews could be successfully undertaken by CoL' had the following responses:

2% strongly agree

21% agree

40% don't know

22% disagree

14% strongly disagree

9. The survey statement 'Too much is being expected of a CoL' had the following responses:

43% strongly agree

36% agree

14% don't know

6% disagree

1% strongly disagree

10. The survey question 'Is your school currently in a CoL? Had the following responses:

10% said yes, since 2015

20% said yes since early-mid 2016

18% said yes, since late 2016

22% said they are in a 'forming' CoL

30% said No

The survey also asked for responses to three open-ended questions. These questions asked what participants like about CoL so far; what concerns participants have about CoL; any other comments on CoL.

The survey revealed high levels of support for collaboration and sharing. In addition, it revealed a number of hurdles in the way of principals feeling positive about CoL. These hurdles include concerns about principal and teacher roles, the lack of flexibility and autonomy of the CoL to make their own decisions about structures, functions and leadership models; pressures from the Ministry to join and concerns that the model as it is will not be able to support good collaboration. There are also ongoing issues of trust and insecurities about the real intent of CoL.

### **Positive features of CoL**

We asked all principals, "What do you like about CoL, so far?"

572 principals responded to this question, with their comments falling into seven main categories. Some responses covered more than one category and therefore the percentages do not add up to 100.

51% liked the collaborative nature of CoLs, the collegiality between principals and having communication across sectors. Developing trust and building relationships was also highlighted, particularly where previously there had been little cross over of sectors. Many schools are continuing links with schools that have been present for a number of years.

*"Opportunity to move from collegiality to cooperation...and ideally collaboration. Opportunity to share ideas across schools, and in return receive ideas."*

28% of respondents indicated that there was nothing that they liked about CoLs or that it was too early for them to say.

*"Neutral. I haven't been in it long enough to fully appreciate some of the positives."*

15% liked the sharing aspect of CoLs. This included sharing physical resources such as facilities, as well sharing data across schools, staff expertise, good practice, ideas and initiatives.

*“Conversations and idea sharing with the leadership from other schools. The notion that it takes a village to raise a child - we all need to work together, pool our strengths for the betterment of all the students no matter which school they attend is a good one.”*

9% liked the additional funding for resources, staffing and PLD. This was more significant for small and rural schools.

*“Amazing PLD opportunities that my little school wouldn't have had access to, wonderful spirit of sharing resources and facilities, in depth conversations with other principals about pedagogy.”*

4% liked that they were part of a group with a shared vision. The CoL is working towards a common purpose that allows them to identify shared needs and goals. This can then allow them to plan strategically.

*“Working closely together as Principals to get the best we can out of joining together as a CoL, developing a shared understanding across our schools, the potential for learning pathways for our students, developing a shared vision for our schools, opportunities to share expertise and knowledge in a structured way.”*

3% liked the potential for innovation that will positively impact on student outcomes. Some principals stated that they liked the concept and the possible potential of CoL but did not elaborate on the specifics.

*“I like the possibilities of being in a CoL and the ability to look at innovation for our students. I like that schools are talking to each other about tamariki and looking at the bigger picture for our hapu, iwi, rohe, province. I like that we are looking at student achievement and how the current education model has shaped the achievement data and how we can address these with innovation and solution minded thinking.”*

1% liked the leadership opportunities that CoL present. ...

*“The collaboration between principals; the opportunity for across and within school teachers to grow as curriculum leaders and to collaborate with others at the same level.”*

## **Concerns about CoL**

We asked principals ‘What concerns do you have about CoL?’

623 principals responded to this question, with their comments falling into five main categories. Some responses covered more than one category and therefore the percentages do not add up to 100.

Percentages given are out of these 623 responses, and are rounded up or down to produce whole numbers.

37% have a general distrust of the real intent of CoL and when considered alongside all the changes in the Update of the Education Act, such as introducing the notion of 'super' principals and 'super' Boards, like the UK model, they are particularly suspicious. They say the rules keep changing and now there are multiple functions for CoL which are nothing to do with learning but are about saving money. They report coercion and bullying by the Ministry to join CoL and interference by the Ministry in setting up CoL. They see CoL as politically not educationally motivated.

*"The bullying that is occurring because if we don't join a CoL we have been told we won't have access to PLD or maybe even special education support. We are being forced into something that we don't necessarily think will work for our community or our learners."*

*"If there is a principal over several schools or a board over several schools I am concerned about schools being able to meet the specific needs of their communities."*

*"What is the real aim of the CoL which we may not be aware of? Too much of an expectation that CoL will solve all of the problems created by poor decision making and cost cutting and underfunding over the last few years. Will this lead to the end of our community running our schools with individual Boards of Trustees for each school?"*

26% reported there is limited flexibility for the CoL roles and the model is too 'top-down' - a faulty leadership model. It is also hard to establish iwi CoL or similar character CoL. There are inequities and large schools dominate. There is no clear pathway for many students to intermediate or secondary schools and the achievement goals are not flexible. They are based on national standards with unrealistic expectations. This model destroys local community control, diversity and uniqueness.

*"The current model, whilst touted as being a collaborative model, actually isn't. Schools are still silos with the across school leaders flitting from school to school, checking in. The achievement goals for the CoL are too narrow because the goals we originally identified as being valid for all our students were rejected by the Ministry and we were forced to agree on goals that weren't relevant just to be accepted as a CoL. There is still a feeling that the model of CoL is hierarchical despite it being touted as a model leading from the middle."*

*"It is a flawed model and the achievement targets are too narrow, i.e. national standards and NCEA. Where is the depth and breadth of our curriculum? We are in danger of losing it. We are also concerned that this is leading to combined boards and loss of individual*

*autonomy. We are here to serve our local communities and reflect their needs and know our own learners. I don't see this model promoting this."*

21% reported that there is no research evidence to show that CoL will improve learning outcomes for children and schools and parents do not want their expert teachers out of their schools. Backfill staffing and release time to support lead and expert teachers to work in CoL are not available in many cases, especially small and rural schools.

*"There is no research evidence supporting the CoL ability to improve educational outcomes for kids. There is a strong political imperative though to 'herd' schools into groups to better facilitate more centralised control."*

*"...the possibility of taking my excellent staff out of my school and staffing them with 'less excellent' staff – we can't even get good relievers as it is."*

*"Difficulty for small schools to release teachers to do the across school role, even though the backfill is funded. It is hard to replace a teacher for two days a week when the school staffing is seven or so. Consequently most roles are going to secondary school teachers as those schools are able to release without disruption for the rest of the school."*

20% reported a shortage of time to perform the leadership roles or to be involved. They said there were too many meetings and too much disruption to their own schools. CoL produced increased workload and pressure and there were unrealistic expectations of CoL. They said there was too much talking, too many meetings and no action. Because the concept had not been developed with the profession, CoL and the Ministry were making it up as they went along.

*"The amount of time that is being taken away from our leaders of schools and our within school leaders of learning. This is taking away time from me as the principal to focus on our school's core business, continuing to focus on what was making our school a successful place for our learners."*

*"A plane being put together while flying."*

14% report that investment in CoL is a waste of money and would be better spent on other issues like special education, or even just distributed to schools. They said that many schools already collaborate successfully. They feel that there is too much money for the leadership roles and not enough money for the work of the CoL.

*"The money being spent on salaries should be given to schools to use for the benefit of students. Each school knows where help is needed and should have the autonomy to be able to help their own students."*

*"We have a lead principal getting \$25,000, an across schools' teacher \$16,000 and now the Ministry are funding 'Expert Partners'. There are also senior advisors in districts who have*

*been appointed to work with CoL. If the money for the Picton Sounds CoL was distributed across the schools, Picton School would get at least \$52,000 each year for four years.”*

*“The money would be better spent on actual educational things that have been shown to lift achievement e.g. reading recovery.”*

*“I have major concerns around the funding of CoL. Historically, teachers/principals have shared skills, knowledge and good practice willingly for the greater good. Paying individuals to do this does not sit well with me and I believe that the money could be far better spent.”*

### **Any other comments about CoL**

We asked principals if they had any other comments to make about CoL

406 principals responded to this question, with their comments falling into eight main categories. Some responses covered more than one category and therefore the percentages do not add up to 100.

Percentages given are out of these 406 responses, and are rounded up or down to produce whole numbers.

22% expressed that they have long term concerns about CoL. They have concerns about what CoL might look like in the future and are sceptical about what is intended for CoL. They believe that the Ministry are expecting too much of CoL.

*“My comment relates to the main motivations behind their creation (along with COOLS), that they are political. The recent Ministers of Education [Hon Hekia Parata & Hon Nikki Kaye], have had steadily increasing power and control over education: the Ministry, ERO and Education Council are all directly controlled by the one portfolio, and all at a time when the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) has done very little to empower school communities and their kids. The reverse is true for the politicians driving the reforms through.”*

*“The focus of CoL was to be improving student achievement. By adding a vast number of largely administrative tasks and management functions we are at risk of losing sight of the original intent. It’s looking more and more like an economic model not an educational one.”*

20% expressed concerns about CoL control and rules. They said that they were worried about the Ministry taking control of CoL and setting the rules for them. They felt the model for CoL was rigid and not flexible enough to be functional. They were also concerned about the way the goal posts kept changing for CoL and said that there were geographical challenges which led to inequities. Some were even excluded from CoL.

*“There needs to be more flexibility in regard to the CoL make-up. For instance, why can’t two or three principals share the lead role so no-one is out of their small school for a great amount of time? The model is very rigid and does not cater for the diversity we have.”*

*“The parameters are changing all the time as the Ministry do not know what works and what does not. Again no piloting of the idea and simply following what has happened overseas with little evidence of any improvement.”*

15% said they disagreed with the funding model and thought that more funding was required to go directly to schools and to target funds where they are needed such as for special education. They disagree with the CoL funding model where most of the money is going to the leadership positions not to the CoL.

*“The specialist roles within a CoL (Across School and Within School Expert Teacher positions) have the potential to undermine senior positions (DP and AP) already in schools. This would happen in my school if one of my teachers received an Across School position. We receive only 5 units for the whole school. A young teacher could easily receive more pay than a very experienced senior leader (who also has a class) and with far more responsibility. The funding model for schools is all wrong already and is just amplified by extra payments for specialist positions.”*

*“It is a real shame that all the money went into people. If we could have been trusted to use the money CoL-wide to develop PLD, what a difference there may have been. Maybe the new Minister will actually consult with the education community to make the changes that are needed.”*

15% said they were positive or neutral about CoL and reported that their own CoL was working well. They believed CoL was a good initiative with potential to be better. They also said it was early days and would wait and see.

*“I actually think there is a lot that could be really effective and innovative about a CoL. I am hoping over time that these will be sorted out, there will be less suspicion and we can make it work for the betterment of our students and our teaching colleagues.”*

*“I like the concept of collaborating at this level. It’s the practicalities of putting these things in place.”*

8% said that there were CoL staffing issues and they were not supportive of having expert teachers out of their classrooms. They expressed concerns about the increase in workload and administration brought about by CoL

*“Taking teachers and leaders out of their own schools will cause difficulties for those schools and their students. There will be an increase in workload for everyone involved and will the benefits be worth the extra meetings and commitments?”*

*“Most of us are struggling to find relievers and good teachers get permanent jobs so we can’t ever expect a large pool of high performing relief teachers.”*

8% said that there was undue pressure for principals to join CoL or to stay in a CoL. Some also said that their CoL was experiencing challenges and not working as intended.

*“They were brought in with the stress on them being voluntary but there has been some degree of pressure put on me and my Board to join one. I imagine this pressure might be intensified. So far we have resisted the pressure and will not be forced into something that we don’t believe suits our children, their school or their community. I am, though, anxious that this ‘voluntary’ involvement might become ‘involuntary’ and legislation might force our involvement. Pressure might also come from ERO in their school inspections. Will they listen to our good and strong reasons for not joining a CoL or will they simply assess us as a school that is not achieving as high as we could because we haven’t joined the local CoL?”*

*“The pressure from the Ministry to remain in a CoL is horrible. The removal of access to PLD is an effective(ish) bullying tactic.*

7% said that the success of any CoL was dependent on the quality of the leadership. They suggested that one option should be to use recently retired principals to lead CoL rather than current principals. They also said that the model of leadership for CoL was concerning

*“The success of a CoL will depend on the quality of leadership and capacity of principals, leaders and teachers to move to a collaborative approach across schools.”*

*“I hear repeatedly that Lead principals are feeling overwhelmed with the work involved. Provision should be made for retiring principals to become CoL leaders. This is surely another ‘career pathway’ as it will free up principal positions for those wishing to aspire to principal leadership roles. A retired, experienced and competent principal would welcome a project such as this and be most effective as it would enable them to focus on one role and they could give the time and energy to the position.”*

4% said there was no need for CoL. They reported that they had a perfectly successful working community without CoL.

*“The Kahukura schools have been in a community of practice for more than four years. We are a highly successful collaboration of very diverse schools and we fundamentally disagree with the hierarchical structure of CoL and their narrow view on what success for children should look like. We have evidence that what we are doing across our seven schools has been innovative and highly beneficial for our staff, students, Boards of Trustees and principals. The CoL model is flawed and there are far better ways to achieve much more ambitious outcomes.”*

*“We would like the Ministry to consider other models for CoL. We are an established group who have built relationships over a number of years. It is not a contrived community of learning, therefore a lot of issues such as trust and open conversations between schools already exist and we have been able to get on and get our PLD up and running relatively smoothly.”*

The findings of this survey are very similar to a survey of CoL conducted in 2016. Except that there are possibly more schools involved in CoL now, the attitudes to CoL are much the same.

NZPF would recommend that the major findings of this research including that principals continue to distrust the model and its intent and that they find it inflexible and unworkable in many cases, should be considered by the in-coming Minister. Whilst principals have always supported the notion of collaboration and cooperation, they make it quite clear that under a self-managing model of schooling there are limitations for this to occur. In the main, principals feel that the CoL money could be much better spent on individual schools and learning support services rather than on individual leadership roles.