

27 March 2018

New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF) Submission on the

PROPOSED LEADERSHIP STRATEGY

To: the Education Council

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The New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF) is the largest professional organisation for lead educators representing the interests of 2,200 Principals of Primary, Intermediate, Area and Secondary Schools. Principals are from public, integrated and independent schools and are spread throughout New Zealand. NZPF aims to be the most influential advocate for school principals to enable high quality, well supported leadership for school learners in New Zealand.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Leadership Strategy.

General Comments

NZPF welcomes the opportunity to submit comments on the draft Leadership Strategy.

We open our commentary by stating that NZPF does not support the overall scope of the leadership document, nor the tone, language and style in which the strategy is crafted. Overall, we believe it presents as a strategy that is disconnected from the current political climate for education. The themes which form the structure of the strategy present as creating a higher workload at a time when principal well-being is at a low point and recent research demonstrates that principals are already over-worked. Rural school representatives do not believe the strategy can be translated easily to their context.

We acknowledge that the draft strategy is an attempt to embrace leadership across all levels - not just those in positional leadership roles - although fails to recognise RTLb and RTLit as leaders. In doing so it marginalises the needs of experienced school principals. Further, some of the ways in which positional leadership is described in the document are misleading, for example p. 9

"The more overt administrative or disciplinary aspects of some "management" positions, and the perception of these roles as narrow in scope or overly administrative, may have further deterred some teachers from aspiring to lead"

NZPF does not agree that middle leaders are deterred from aspiring to positional leadership for these reasons. Most school leadership models in place in New Zealand schools today are collaborative in nature.

The strategy presents as a document best suited to an environment in which all schools are absorbed into the Communities of Learning (CoL) structure as outlined in the 2014 *Investing in Education Success* (IES) policy. NZPF does not support the current leadership structure for CoL and finds it inflexible and unhelpful in developing sustainable, well supported middle leadership and principal leadership for the future.

The strategy also places heavy influence on the use of digital platforms and tools for networking and leadership support, including mentoring. We do not support the view that leadership advice and support is best delivered digitally and do not believe such approaches will be acceptable in the current political climate. In our view digital technology can be helpful as an organisational and administrative tool but much less useful for providing support and advice.

The Strategy Vision and Themes

This submission comments on the draft vision for leadership and is then divided into four sections consistent with the four themes of the strategy.

Vision

The draft vision states:

Through transformative leadership, a bi-culturally capable, confident and connected teaching profession is achieving educational equity and excellence for children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Whilst notions of collaboration, equity of learning outcomes, respect for all members of the profession, inclusiveness, public accountability, transparency, empowerment and cultural competence, all implied in the vision statement, are worthy individual notions, many of these concepts and ideas take on more specific meaning when placed in a context of CoL. These concepts are standard language within the CoL environment. It is the CoL structure that we feel is a major driver of the strategy and one of our major objections to it.

Theme One: Stewardship of Leadership Practice and Learning

This theme is premised on the belief that there is no clear, shared understanding of leadership in the sector. It also implies there is confusion about accountabilities for leadership development resulting in incoherent leadership pathways for teachers and no way of knowing how to usefully invest in leadership professional learning.

NZPF does not agree that school principals do not have a shared understanding of leadership in New Zealand schools or what skills and attributes are required to be an effective leader. We have strong views on what professional learning is required to build capacity for future leadership.

There are middle leaders' development programmes flourishing in New Zealand schools, based on home grown studies of school middle leaders in New Zealand and supported by a range of related research studies. We have long had an Aspiring Principals' (AP) programme and until recently, a First Time Principals' (FTP) programme. The FTPs are now supported by the Leadership Advisory Service of 25 experienced school principals appointed to this Service.

That is not to say that the system is perfect. It is far from it. We suggest that if the Advisory Service was doubled it would still not satisfy the needs. There is no funding available at present to support the expansion of middle leaders' development; support for new principals is inadequate; and provision for experienced principals ad hoc. In addition, as long as we do not address issues of well-being and professional morale we will continue to lose high quality, high performing principals to early retirement.

What this strategy fails to acknowledge is that the Minister of Education has expressed an interest in establishing a Leadership Centre and Education Advisory Service in the future. Inevitably such structures would assume stewardship of leadership development in the schooling sector, the nature of which is unclear at this time.

Theme Two: Capabilities of Leadership

This theme explores the broad functions of school leadership and the capabilities needed to be an effective leader in today's schools.

It examines the responsibilities of leadership including setting the strategic direction, defining goals, inspiring others, and earning respect. In addition, it explores skills and expertise in which principals have no training including budgeting, procurement, contract management and facilities management and increased financial and human resource responsibilities.

This section describes leaders as team-builders, collaboration enablers and risk-takers. It also notes the importance of inclusion and accommodating diversity and suggests that there is a requirement for digital skills and data literacy at a level not previously required.

In the new environment, with the spotlight falling on assessment, over-assessment and the eradication of national standards, it is likely there will be less focus on increased demands for data literacy. We will however, see new work being undertaken in creating alternative notions of success in learning and alternative measurement tools.

Further, the Minister has announced a review of 'Tomorrow's Schools' which could radically alter the long list of responsibilities listed under this theme. It is premature to think that we can have a view of leadership capability success, until the 'Tomorrow's Schools' review is completed.

Theme Three: Personalised Learning Pathways for Leaders

NZPF supports the view that there should be equitable access to professional learning and development for aspiring and experienced school leaders, including those in rural and isolated contexts. We also acknowledge that in New Zealand we have an ageing population of principals and a need for succession planning. As already mentioned in this submission, there are factors of low -morale and lack of status for the profession to be addressed before we can resolve this issue.

Changes in recent years have reduced professional learning opportunities for leadership development and sustainability and NZPF is concerned that the intention of this theme is to provide all such opportunities through CoL and through digital tools. We would oppose such intentions.

We also believe that it would be unwise to steer such activities towards the CoL at this time given that the Minister intends to review CoL and reconsider the leadership structure. Repeated surveys conducted by NZPF show that principals believe there is far too much expected of CoL already and to suggest further functions and responsibilities for CoL would be irresponsible.

We would support the further development of middle leaders, as a priority, through the expansion of professional learning and development already occurring in some schools. NZPF would support all initiatives that raise the status of the teaching profession so that it can once again attract high quality teachers, who will aspire to becoming high quality leaders of the future.

We note that beyond principalship, there is no advanced pathway to further professional leadership. This includes leadership of CoL. CoL leadership is a short-term opportunity at present, and reportedly creates an unbearable work-load pressure for those principals leading CoL and at the same time, leading their own schools. NZPF does not support the current structure and purpose of CoL and withholds further opinion until the CoL landscape has been revisited.

NZPF believes that we need to broaden the concept of leadership pathways for the profession. The notion of revolving roles at different levels of the system could be explored as part of the wider context of leadership pathways.

Theme Four: Community Ecosystems and Networks

NZPF supports connecting principals and facilitating relational networks of principals. We believe in providing opportunities such as forums, conferences and other learning events for principals to share innovative leadership ideas and learn leadership skills to apply in their schools. We believe collaboration is a useful practice which encourages ideas sharing and collective problem solving.

We would welcome additional professional learning and development funding to facilitate these and other professional learning activities.

NZPF supports schools establishing culturally responsive conditions for learning to enable Māori students to succeed as Māori. To this end, NZPF, in partnership with Te Akatea, developed the Māori Achievement Collaborations (MACs) to encourage principals to collaboratively embark on a cultural journey of discovering not just their own culture and what it values and counts as cultural knowledge and social relationships, but also discovering that different world views exist, including a Māori world view.

The critical outcomes of this initiative include transforming principals so that in turn they can transform their own schools into bicultural entities where every Māori young person feels a sense of belonging, is socially connected and is culturally safe. In this way, it is argued, Māori children will be ready to learn.

NZPF believes that there is an over-emphasis in this section that on-line networks and CoL are the solutions to networking and building community ecosystems. We believe there is more to be gained through face to face interaction and connections, using on-line tools as a support mechanism, but not the driving force. These can occur regionally through the various regional Principals' Associations or nationally. It would be helpful to provide funding to the regions in order that a broader range of Professional Learning opportunities can be made available. It would also be helpful to provide equity funding to rural, small and isolated

schools so that they too can participate in these options. We need to grow capacity for all leaders, including experienced principals.

Summary

NZPF supports the vision of a bi-culturally capable, confident and connected teaching profession that achieves equity and excellence for young people in Aotearoa, but strongly disagrees that this vision is best achieved through the current CoL structures.

Overall, we believe that the draft Leadership Strategy has been prepared in a context that is no longer valid, is not future focused and therefore should not be acted upon in its present form. As outlined, we note that the Minister has announced a number of critical reviews and changes that are likely to heavily impinge upon the direction of this draft strategy. These include the review of *Tomorrow's Schools* and of CoL, and the establishment of the Leadership Centre and Education Advisory Service. That said, there are principles embedded in the strategy which we support, as highlighted throughout this submission.

In this new era NZPF would expect that principals would take a lead role in the development of a suitable strategy for school leadership, including directing such work.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the draft Leadership Strategy. NZPF believes that this strategy, in its present form, should not be advanced further.

Yours sincerely

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