

# Secondary School Principal's Sabbatical Report

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Principal  
Burnside High School  
September - December 2011

## Acknowledgements

I was originally awarded Sabbatical Leave in 2009 however, due to a change of schools, I agreed to defer my sabbatical until I had completed two years at Burnside High School. Due to the Rugby World Cup, the sabbatical was split over the period end of Term 3 through to the end of Term 4 2011.

I am grateful to the Boards of both Wanganui High School and Burnside High School for their support for my application.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank the Ministry of Education for their support for the Sabbatical Scheme, the PPTA and the New Zealand Principals Council for their work in helping make sabbaticals part of the conditions of service for secondary principals.

Finally, I wish to thank the principals and staff of the following schools for their willingness to have me visit, and learn from, their schools:

- Bryon Bentley, Macleans College
- Greg Watson, Mt Roskill Grammar School
- Tim O'Connor, Palmerston North Boys' High School
- Graeme Macann, Rosehill College
- Dale Burden, Mount Albert Grammar School
- Peter Brooks, Freyberg High School
- Salvatore Gargiulo, Manurewa High School
- Madeline Gunn, Epsom Girls' Grammar School
- Bruce Ritchie, Massey High School
- David Hodge, Rangitoto College
- Roger Menzies, Feilding High School

I was most impressed by the way principals gave of their time in support of me.

## Purpose

Burnside High School is the largest school in the South Island and one of the largest in New Zealand. Although my former school (Wanganui High School 1800) was not small, I was keen to visit schools of a size similar to Burnside High School and to determine whether there were systems and/or structures in those schools which might serve Burnside's needs. I also wanted to visit schools I was familiar with two to three years ago to see whether the changes introduced at that time were proving effective.

In addition, I attended two conferences and undertook a considerable amount of wide reading. Again, the aim was to identify best practice and determine how Burnside High School might benefit in the future.

## **General Impressions**

My readings, attendance of conferences, and school visits during my sabbatical, have helped confirm what I believe to be the essential ingredients for a successful school. My top ten are:

1. To maintain a focus on the needs of the students so as to ensure their successful futures.
2. A holistic education programme which develops the whole student - academic, sporting, cultural, social and spiritual and which recognises and responds to the needs of individuals.
3. To continue to attract, appoint and develop first rate quality staff (both teaching and non-teaching) who share a determination to put the best interests of students first.
4. To support both staff and students with the resources and facilities which will meet the demands of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner.
5. To ensure safe, efficient and effective systems are developed and maintained within the school, including:
  - Effective induction and transition programmes for all students at critical points over five years.
  - IT and SMS systems - employ first rate wireless and intranet facilities.
  - Accurate and well informed assessment and reporting systems.
  - Accurate attendance checks, reporting and follow up.
  - Clear, current communication with families and the wider community.
  - Effective guidance networks including course counseling and careers advice and guidance.
  - Effective disciplinary systems supported by all staff.
6. A broad curriculum base in Years 9 and 10 with multiple senior pathways.
7. Differentiated teaching programmes which identifies student needs and celebrates individual strengths.
8. Opportunities to promote and develop student leaders.
9. Data driven evidence of student achievement and teacher performance which helps encourage; self-review, peer review, goal setting and bench marking against national data and other similar students/schools.
10. Structures and systems that are accurate, reliable, efficient and ensure staff are both supported and accountable.

Common themes found in schools visited which support the above:

- Strong leaders with a clear vision (in various areas of the school).
- A focus on successful student achievement. Academic first, but also all round achievement.
- An efficient and effective guidance network.
- Clearly understood school-wide structures, systems and procedures.
- An emphasis on appointing first rate staff and on continual improvement through goal setting, professional development and review.
- Positive support for students and an expectation that they will perform to their potential.
- Multiple pathways to ensure success for all students.

Significant differences identified between schools visited:

**1. A variety of IT Systems and Networks, including various SMS**

While most were satisfied with their SMS, three were in the process of change. My observations and discussions confirmed the need for Burnside High School to change in 2012 (as currently proposed).

**2. Senior Administration Team Structures (15 schools contacted)**

- Most had moved to (or wanted to move to) a flatter structure.
- Only one other school currently had the position of 'Second Principal' and in that the Principal intended to modify this to rename the position 'Associate Principal', as the incumbent was retiring. Two others had Associate Principals.
- Four had a vertical form structure with four or five DPs leading a 'house' type structure.
- Five had DPs or Assistant Principals with no pastoral role.
- Seven had DPs/APs linked to horizontal form level structures.
- There were a variety of 'other' senior positions which, although not termed DPs or Aps, were in effect carrying out senior leadership roles.

**3. Guidance Structures Varied**

While all had 'Deans' or their equivalent, the time allocations and titles eg 'Lead Deans', 'Junior Deans' etc varied widely. The four schools with vertical forms linked Deans to houses (or similar).

The Macleans College House/Whanau structure is exceptional with the school campus actually designed to accommodate the whanau approach.

Numbers of Deans and the time allocation given in support of pastoral care varied, but none were as generous in this regard as Burnside High School. Nor did any school visited have as comprehensive or well-resourced Guidance Counsellor network as Burnside High School.

Particular innovations or examples of Good Practice suitable for further consideration by Burnside High School:

1. **The Best Practice Audit (Teaching and Learning) at Macleans College**

This is similar to the 'Predictions' model used by Wanganui High School and introduced to Burnside High School in 2010, but has a far more comprehensive data base for staff use. The school is currently working to further develop its software ability to provide improved data for staff use and analysis - once developed this could prove a very good investment for Burnside High School. It provides a reflective model using data to modify programmes and focus PD for staff and students throughout the year.

2. **The Accelerate Student Mentoring Programme at Macleans College**

A comprehensive support programme for the top approximately 100 students in the school.

3. **The My Portfolio/Digital Portfolio Service** provided by Kenio Pacific (hosted by Catalyst IT) and supported by the Ministry of Education

This was being considered by Epsom Girls' Grammar School at the time of my visit and is worthy of further consideration by Burnside High School in keeping with our aim to have staff form their own goals, reflect on progress and gather data in support of their annual goals.

4. **The Rangitoto College Summit Academy - Introduced 2011**

The Academy aims to identify and recognise annually a limited number of former students who have achieved excellence in a variety of fields. These people's success to be celebrated and brought to the attention of the teaching and student body. A similar system is being developed at Taradale High School.

5. **2011 Rangitoto College 'Go Digital' Initiative**

Although Burnside High School plans to weave Year 13 personal digital devices into the school's systems in 2011 were disrupted by the earthquake, the school will go ahead with this in 2012. Rangitoto have a plan to extend this to all levels and it will be interesting to compare process and issues between the two schools.

6. **Manurewa High School**

A variety of innovations are being undertaken in this dynamic school. I was interested in:

- Their decision to provide no written end of year report beyond an NCEA update for seniors.
- Their e-portfolio work for staff.
- Their decision to hire a Timetabler (external) when needed.
- Their intention to form a Ministry funded Trades Academy at the school starting 2012.

## Conferences

I had the privilege of attending two conferences:

1. The BOPPA/CNISPA conference in Taupo
2. The ACEL Learning Landscapes (Strategies for Change) conference in Adelaide

Highlights/points of interest included the following (and I would commend their work to you for further reading or given the opportunity to hear them speak):

- Dr Jane Davidson - Speaking on the Measurable Gains Framework - "Effective T and C for Maori Learners"
- Hana O'Regan (Director Maori Studies Christchurch Polytech) - Her views on the needs of Maori and Maori students in particular
- Dr Stephen Brown (and Jan Allen) - The challenges, paradoxes and tensions that school leaders face
- Prof D Andrews and Dr J Conway - School Improvement Tools - Build and Sustain Success
- Greg Morgan - Feedback for Teachers
- Dr Geoff O'Brien - Designing Effective Teacher Professional Learning for Improved Student Outcomes
- Cynthia Seto - Design Learning Landscapes with Data Driven Conversations
- Peter Senge - Author of "The Fifth Discipline"
- John Hattie - Data Driven Decision Making in Education

I am grateful to have had this rewarding and refreshing opportunity.



W J Maguire

20 January 2012