

Report to The Board of Trustees

Belmont Primary School

Principal's Sabbatical Leave

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Term 2 2019

**'What does effective collaboration and leadership look like in Kahui Ako and is Kahui Ako working for your school?**

Author: Bruce Cunningham, Principal Belmont Primary School Auckland, July 2019.

**Wise men say only fools rush in... (Elvis Presley)**

**Acknowledgements:**

I would like to acknowledge all the principals and teachers nationwide who completed the survey. I would also like to acknowledge the 16 principals who took time to discuss their Kahui Ako with me nationwide.

I would like to thank my Board of Trustees for allowing me to apply for a sabbatical. I would like to thank the Ministry of Education for making sabbaticals available to principals.

Finally to my staff, thanks for letting me refresh and not making any of the changes you promised!

**Executive Summary:**

The responses of Lead Principals, Principals and teachers with consideration to surveys, interviews, researched and published material referred to in this report, confirms that Kahui Ako is **not** beneficial to many schools. It does confirm that an area badly in need of repair is communication between Lead Principals and all staff within a Kahui Ako.

My survey results show a large discrepancy as to why schools joined Kahui Ako.

Communication and effective leadership is key to successful collaboration.

There is also a large disparity of the effectiveness of leadership of the Lead Principals according to many respondents nationwide. Further to this, the insights given as to the nature of this disparity of leadership quality, could be useful in the future when system changes are reshaped as a result of the Report by the Tomorrow's School's Independent Taskforce, 2018. That report, in its findings, speaks to "system-wide challenges because our current schooling system is designed for autonomous self-governing schools, not for networked and connected schools." Kāhui Ako will have a significant part to play in this wider system change within New Zealand.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this inquiry was to gain insights as to whether the leadership capacity of both Kāhui Ako/CoL leaders and teachers with responsibilities grew and developed through participating in a Kahui Ako/CoL. I wanted to look at what constitutes effective collaboration and what is the impact on Principals' leadership due to belonging to Kahui Ako. Finally I wanted to gain an insight as to whether teachers see Kahui Ako as a positive for increasing their professional pedagogical practice and is Kahui Ako making a difference for targeted children.

**Background and Rationale:**

From the beginning of the announcement of Investing in Educational Success (IES), Kāhui Ako/CoL, at the time referred to as Community of Schools (CoS), experienced considerable opposition by the Primary School Union (NZEI Te Riu Roa) and the New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF). Much of this was about the design and funding model and subsequently this opposition attempted to undermine the great opportunity for schools to collaborate. It divided many schools and colleagues. Consequently, for those who decided to go with the design, it required a profound belief that collaboration for all students, in any given community, had to have long term positive gains.

Is Kahui Ako making a difference for leadership across schools participating in Kāhui Ako? Is Kahui Ako making a difference to our students? Is there underlying influences which are sabotaging the success of Kahui Ako or is it a flawed model, which may or may not have an impact on all schools regarding the possibility of new reforms, which some educationalists have labelled as "CoL on steroids."

Although I was a Kāhui Ako lead principal I would like to state that this report is based on both Kāhui Ako Lead Principals' voices, Principals' voice, teachers' voices and information from researchers and academics who have been thinking and expressing their thoughts on effective collaboration.

**Methodology:**

A survey was sent to 20 Lead Principals nationwide and they were also asked to forward the survey onto their staff. It is an anonymous survey. 16 principals and 38 teachers responded. The author also reviewed some of the research literature and articles published on Kāhui Ako. I also interviewed 16 principals nationwide.

The inquiry asked statistical information from Principals and teachers, what type of school do you lead or teach, does your school belong to a Kahui Ako and then inquiry questions.

The questions asked of principals were:

- 1) Why did your school join a Kahui Ako?
- 2) Do you believe your Kahui Ako leader communicates effectively with all staff in your Kahui Ako?
- 3) What has been the impact on your leadership due to belonging to a Kahui Ako?
- 4) Do you believe your Kahui Ako has been successful in delivering effective pedagogy across all your Kahui Ako schools?
- 5) In your opinion, what initiatives in your Kahui Ako could lead to an improvement in student achievement?
- 6) Do you think student achievement has increased because of the Kahui Ako initiatives in your cluster?
- 7) Do you think Maori and Pasifika achievement in your school has increased due to Kahui Ako initiatives?
- 8) Did your Kahui Ako meet their achievement challenges by the end of the 2018 school year?
- 9) What has been the major benefit of belonging to a Kahui Ako for you?
- 10) Why is your Kahui Ako successful?
- 11) What are some challenges your Kahui Ako faces?
- 12) Is effective collaboration difficult in your Kahui Ako due to competition and choice between schools?
- 13) Is effective collaboration difficult in your Kahui Ako due to disparity between the achievement levels of different schools?

The questions for teachers were:

- 1) What has been the impact on your teaching due to belonging to a Kahui Ako?
- 2) Have you been informed about all Kahui Ako student achievements by your principal?
- 3) How many times have you visited another school to observe an effective curriculum lesson organised through your Kahui Ako?
- 4) How many times have you modeled an effective lesson for your Kahui Ako cluster?

I will include all answers in full in this report and make comments in regard to research and literature, professional experiences and offer a summary based on my research.

Question 1.

### **Why did your school join a Kahui Ako?**

**To support two teachers with their leadership**

**Address a number of common challenges and concerns that a cluster of Papatoetoe schools have, particularly in terms of literacy, numeracy and the Science curriculum from Years 1-11.**

**improve opportunities for our children**

**Make connections and strengthen our transition processes, as well as provide opportunities for teachers within the school to have an opportunity re more career pathways**

**To support the transitions of students and to improve outcomes for all children on the Peninsular. I also wanted to share best practice and work with Principals and teachers to improve aspects of the system**

**Compliance at the time**

**Honestly, the other local schools were going to go ahead without us even if we didn't join so, although I wanted to wait for the outcome of the NZEI / MOE negotiations, I felt pressured into joining when I did for fear of missing out on PLD, career opportunities for the staff at my school and funding opportunities.**

**To collaborative with the purpose of raising school achievement across the ako and to share effective practice and pedagogy, particularly in maths and writing.**

**To belong to a community that will work on success for all students**

**Assist in transitioning of students**

**The school was already part of the Kahui Ako before I arrived - but I assume to enhance expertise and connections/networks which has to be better for kids.**

**Believe we are better together**

**Money.**

**We believed that there was a possibility that this idea might improve the learning for the students in our area**

I find the variety of answers intriguing, as the question, although simple, is at the heart of the current educational thinking process.

There is no doubt from reading extensively over the past 15 years as a principal that inter-school collaboration can lead to student improvement, however the context and desire for all participants to make it work needs to be aligned. I find it interesting some principals joined Kahui Ako (KA) so staff could get more money, or due to compliance or felt pressured or a possibility of improving student outcomes, while some principals joined for transitional reasons, making connections or compliance.

However one principal wrote "To collaborate with the purpose of raising student achievement and to share effective pedagogy across the Kahui Ako." Only one respondent shared this value out of 16. Is this an indictment on Kahui Ako, its leaders, the Ministry's naivety or is it a reality?

It is clear that there is not active and positive leadership from principals, there is not a common focus of raising student achievement outcomes and possibly the relationships between principals in a Kahui Ako needs to be more effective if Kahui Ako is going to be effective. Research and literature support the notion that there are difficulties in raising student achievement and it can be challenging, particularly where there is resistance from principals. For effective leadership to occur, the quality of individual principals is key in developing effective collaboration. Collaboration in education takes place when members of an inclusive learning community work together and there are no hidden agendas. Collaboration is not co-operating, it is not sharing and it is not being collegial. It is not reflecting. True collaboration is about cultivating the expertise of everyone to be effective on a collective purpose. This is an excellent theoretical definition. Do schools trust each other? Does your Kahui Ako have a clear purpose and focus? How can we improve and what is needed to do this? Can Principals be bothered?

## Question 2

### **Do you believe your Kahui Ako leader communicates effectively with all staff in your Kahui Ako?**

56% of respondents said yes for this statement, which is not high enough. 44% of principals and teachers probably do not know what is going on in their Kahui Ako, yet it is their responsibility to raise student achievement but communication across a Kahui Ako is not effective from the Lead Principas to Principals who need to disseminate information more effectively. No wonder principals, school leaders and teachers are frustrated. If well developed communication channels are created, this will allow ideas to be shared and new knowledge created. I would strongly suggest that all principals in Kahui Ako where there is ineffective communication from the Lead Principal need to have discussions and reach an agreement immediately on ways of communicating effectively as a collective group. Frequent communication will assist engagement (or not, as some respondents dislike the number of meetings Kahui Ako have which takes away from leading their individual school), however active listening and allowing everyone to have an identity and voice will assist this process to have effective collaboration. When interviewing school principals, over 80% said the lead principal had not addressed their school staff in an individual staff meeting or been given an opportunity to talk 1:1 to the lead principal at a staff meeting.

Many principals I interviewed informed me that the Across School Leaders do not meet regularly with the Lead Principal and the ASL find this frustrating, considering the Lead Principals are supposedly .4 Kahui Ako.

Including others is the most powerful, confident thing a person can do.

## Question 3

### **What has been the impact on your leadership due to belonging to a Kahui Ako?**

**A lot of time for meetings**

**More objective, reflective practice and a growing importance of transition points, ie, Primary to Intermediate to Secondary.**

**Made me think about what is important to our school**

**Workload has increased as well as making decisions around right personnel for the ASL and WSL.**

**DP's would like to be able to apply for ASL positions as they feel their workload has increased and vital that they know what is happening in CoL's.**

**Relievers too can be an issue**

**The importance of listening. Also remembering the importance of quality over quantity in terms of strategic plans. Leadership is about growing people through providing opportunities to grow and develop. I have discovered the power of coaching and trusting people to execute their role.**

**Lots of time for not much gain**

**Surprisingly positive! From being totally skeptical at the start, the school has reaped huge benefits. The benefits to me personally have been through leadership being much more distributed. The WSL have taken the initiative and run with it.**

**There are projects going on, which I would have loved to have organised but never had the time... they have got them up and running and working sustainably. Also, the ASL who works with my school has been proactive and supportive. Again, things I would have loved to do but would not have got round to, are up and running. It has been wonderful!**

**Have only recently joined**

**An additional load has been added rather than supporting me in my leadership**

**Increased networking opportunities that focus on teaching and learning as opposed to admin/organisation**

**Better understanding of Intermediate and Primary schools**

**Nil**

**Challenging questions, sharing of knowledge, experience**

**Greater understanding of our AO's -increased networking opportunities**

**Time used for meetings.**

**As the current Lead Principal I am being stretched as a leader in many ways. KA's are a coalition of the willing as as such, the ideas presented must stand on their own feet as being worthwhile or people will just not engage in them.**

I chose this question as anecdotally I had heard from principals that Kahui Ako is having positive and negative influences on their leadership. Through interviewing principals some thought being a Lead Principal was an advantage as they are invited to conferences and professional development opportunities, while principals in the same Kahui Ako were not. Lead Principals are offered more support from the Ministry in the ways of expert partners and they get very well remunerated for 'hosting meetings.' Others thought Kahui Ako was having a negative influence on their personal leadership due to the number of meetings away from school and seeing very little, if any, shifts in student outcomes, which is the purpose of Kahui Ako.

It is also interesting that principals thought that their workload has increased. This is a very unfortunate consequence that I am sure the Ministry (or Government) did not envisage. As we currently go through a protracted collective bargaining agreement, workload is a key focus, as is principal well being. Principals do not want more work. This will not be conducive to forming an effective collaborative partnership. Principals will start to reflect what is important in their school and not the Kahui Ako. When we discuss workload, we also discuss time. Principals are effective at managing their time in leading their schools, however it is apparent the Kahui Ako has impacted negatively on Principals due to extra meetings, time needed to collaborate and some believe that student outcomes have not improved due to Kahui Ako.

This leads onto one principal writing that they "are reflecting what is important to their school." I am unsure if this is a positive or a negative as if you belong to a Kahui Ako should the answer be "I am reflecting on what is important to my Kahui Ako?" I believe through interviews many Principals are reflecting on "what is important to my school and what can I do for my school," as opposed to what is important for the Kahui Ako and what can I do to assist this?

Lead Principals are also being stretched and as a past Lead Principal I fully understand this sentiment. It is not possible to run your own school for 3 days and Kahui Ako for 2 days, (as the release component suggests), regardless of the school setting the lead principal is in. Most Principals interviewed thought a secondary school principal was in a better position to lead due to having greater staffing allowances and management units to back fill. Most secondary schools have from 3-7 DPs or APs to share the load, while many Primary and Intermediate Schools have 1 or 2 DPs or APs. I did not run my school as effectively as I did prior to being a Kahui Ako Leader. I could not delegate as much as I would have liked as my APs workload was already extensive and adding 2 days to her workload was not advantageous to me, my AP, the students or the staff.

Many Principals I interviewed identified that their contributions were limited to attending meetings and participating in conversations, but did not want to sacrifice congeniality so went with the consensus to save time as there were other issues competing for their time. Almost all principals described their KA leadership meetings as ineffective as there were a lot of meetings with no benefits. This is not what the Ministry would like to hear, considering the new educational reforms that are under consultation currently. Overall, going by the verbatim of the responses and interviews, I would suggest that Kahui Ako is having a negative effect on most principals and their leadership.

While Principals are well aware of the positive impact their involvement in teaching and learning has, the competing demands of the job means finding time to implement this can be challenging. The results of the 2018 Australian Principal Occupational Health, Work and Safety Survey reports one of the largest sources of stress for Principals to be a lack of time to focus on teaching and learning.

#### Question 4

**Do you believe your Kahui Ako has been successful in delivering effective pedagogy across all your Kahui Ako schools?**

**69% of principals do not know or say no.** (43% said no, 26% did not know). Only 31% think that Kahui Ako is successful in delivering effective pedagogy across their cluster schools. For an investment that cost over \$356 million this is not good news for the Ministry, or Kahui Ako, or The Future of Schooling Reforms.

So the question now is “Why are Kahui Ako not effective in delivering effective pedagogy?” My assumption was because of conflicting pedagogies between cluster schools, or because of competition and choice between schools or because of a perceived disparity of achievement levels between schools. My survey results suggest that none of these assumptions are a contributing factor (please see questions 12-13) as to why Kahui Ako has not been effective in delivering effective pedagogy across clusters.

I could hypothesise that teachers are not that interested in Kahui Ako (see Teachers questions). One teacher wrote “The impact of the Kahui Ako has involved an increased workload to cover the duties and responsibilities of the Across School Leader in our school and more meetings with the within school leaders, with no effect. I consider belonging to the COL has not improved my professional practice beyond what could have been achieved without it. The money has been wasted on leaders who are not experts in their field, and appear to spend their time seeking knowledge from those who they are supposed to be supporting. I believe in developing highly skilled and knowledgeable practitioners in our profession through quality PD. That is, highly skilled practitioners delivering it. I believe, the only positive outcome has been from excellent maths PD from Lucy Cheeseman. I understand this was supported by COL funds. Our maths leader in our school facilitated and managed this. She is not a COL leader. Quality PD like this could have been mirrored in many areas of our curriculum where it is desperately needed, if we were not wasting funds on individuals (leaders) and a TOD with few presentations of value. There were promises that this money could be redirected into supporting the schools to improve their professional practice as they saw fit. That has not been the case which is disappointing. As SENCo in our school, seeking support to improve outcomes for our students, I find the most effective organisation who have knowledge, skills and networks across our cluster to support us, are the RTLB. They keep us together and support us to share and grow our knowledge for the benefit of the cluster as a whole. They make a difference. The COL is a waste of money.”

Principals and teachers who I talked to regarding effectiveness of Kahui Ako in relationship to government spending have unanimously agreed that if the government put the \$356 million into providing each school with a specialist teacher to work specifically with targeted children this would have been more beneficial in raising student achievement outcomes than the IES model.

My research literature shows that the only link to raising student achievement outcomes through collaborative practice comes from clusters of schools facing high challenge, within coercive models and performance federations (Ainscow et al 2006, Chapman and Muijs 2014, Lindsay et al 2007). This research describes rigid control, standardization of practice and a subversive-dominant power relationship which franchises the model school.

According to ERO (2019) only 13% of schools have a 1 year review. These are the schools that are facing high challenges and should see outcomes improve at a higher level than schools that have a 3 to 5 year review. According to this data, and this is the only data available to the Ministry, 87% of NZ schools are functioning ok, or better. My own school for example, based on National Standards data over 4 years, averaged 90% at or above for numeracy (which was one of our Kahui Ako Achievement Challenges), 88% for reading and 84% for writing (which was also an AC). Most of the contributing schools in our Kahui Ako were achieving the same results, therefore to make significant improvements in student outcomes was going to be very difficult. I would assume this is the case in 87% of NZ schools, since ERO gave this group 3-5 year reviews. The Ministry of Education in the end set our targets for us and we were told they were aspirational.

Which raises the question why was the government so adamant that Kahui Ako was the recipe for success? What research have they conducted to show that this investment would be an advantage to Maori and Pasifika students? What research showed that effective collaboration in successful schools and then communities, would lead to significant shifts in student outcomes? I asked the authors of the Report by the Tomorrow’s School’s Independent Taskforce, 2018, what research they conducted. Their answers were staggering due to the small samples and coverage. An example, the possibility of not building any more Intermediate Schools. The reviewers had not interviewed Year 9 students, they had not interviewed students who currently attend Year 7 to 10 schools and surveyed students from only 4 intermediates in the South Island.

When asked why and where Hubs had been successful their only research was based on research in Ontario, Canada by Fullan. And this did not solve poverty, equity, social housing issues or health issues as espoused by the government as to why Hubs would be successful.

While it is possible to build and sustain schooling networks with strong principal leadership, these networks do not lead to improvement achievement outcomes (Chapman & Muijs, 2014; Robinson, 2016). Many principals told me that establishing shared leadership, where everything has to be negotiated and much can be hidden, entails a different set of power relationships. Earl and Katz (2007) describe this as a distraction from the true purpose of raising achievement, and the likelihood of fruitless meetings and time wasted. My own small sample from the survey supports the work of Earl and Katz (2007).

From question 1, "Why did your school join a Kahui Ako?" it now appears many principals subscribed for the wrong reason, which will lead, or has led to the network becoming a time consuming and expensive forum with no impact on student learning (Robinson 2016).

Question 5

**In your opinion, what initiatives in your Kahui Ako could lead to an improvement in student achievement?**

**One SMS**

**Aligned PLD focusing on sharing good practice, developing the capacity of all staff.**

**More connections between staff and students between schools**

**Making connections between feeder schools re knowing children / Understanding where child is AT so all is not lost in transition.**

**Sense of belonging seeing what other schools are showcasing and having role models to look up to.**

**Secondary and Intermediate schools have invited students in and have engaged with them.**

**Focussing on one subject area and achievement challenge and building the knowledge of all teachers. Make it simple and less complicated.**

**Flexibility on who is in the COL and how PL is delivered**

**A focus on culturally responsive pedagogies**

**PLD and sharing of good practice**

**Sharing of achievement data and working on shared pedagogy that can be applied through all sectors within the Kahui Ako.**

**Wellness - Perhaps a greater focus on culture that underpins achievement rather than curriculum areas when schools are at vastly different points on the continuum. Networking - sharing of practice and innovation (based on their Spiral of Inquiry) so teachers know where to go to tap into expertise within the Kahui Ako**

**Getting rid of a few teachers**

**We have a new leader in the past few months who is very strategic and focused on systems - this is creating some great momentum.**

**ASLs inquiries across KA leading PLD applications / connecting teachers and sharing effective practice / breaking down competitive ways of thinking**

**Increased focus on transitions and well-being**

**Nothing yet.**

**Great collaboration in areas of parent engagement, subject specialisation and familiarisation with the digital technology curriculum.**

It is clear from this range of responses from experienced principals that the question is complicated as no one knows exactly what will work. There were no common threads, but there were good ideas, which I think many networks would have tried. Collaboration is interesting in networks as prior to IES there was competition between schools and schools tried to set themselves up as a school of choice. This author did. However from my survey 75% of principals did not see competition and choice as a reason Kahui Ako was not successful, and 87% of principals did not think a disparity of achievement levels between schools was a contributing factor into why Kahui Ako does not work. This is very positive.



Some of the principals wrote sharing of effective practices could be solution, which is interesting as one of the questions asked to the teachers was “**How many times have you visited another school to observe an effective curriculum lesson organised through your Kahui Ako?**” **76% said none and 19% said once. The next question was “How many times have you modeled an effective lesson for your Kahui Ako cluster?” 78% said none, 11% once and 6% twice.**

This is what I find very perplexing about Kahui Ako and the rhetoric on what makes it a worthwhile investment. The researchers, the literature, the Ministry say “collaboration” is the answer or “sharing best practice” is the answer to improve student outcomes. Yet it is clear from principals, teachers and Lead Principals that collaboration and especially sharing best practice is not happening.

The April 2019 ERO publication “Collaboration in Practice: Insight into Implementation” the authors note that IES is not the first initiative the Ministry has tried to use to bring schools together. Previously there has been Building Evaluative Capability in Schooling Improvement, Kia Eke Panuku Building on Success, Extending High Standards and Learning and Change Networks. The purpose of their research was to gather rich in depth information about the experience of schools about the performance of Kahui Ako. They researched three different Kahui Ako. Nowhere was observing expert teachers a priority. How do teachers improve their practice if they don’t observe quality teachers? How can teachers be reflective in their practice if they do not observe quality practice?

Some of their key findings were:

The 3 Kahui Ako all wanted “to build a collective sense of responsibility was paramount” (and I would suggest all Kahui Ako would have this as a goal).

There was a realisation as Kahui Ako was being formed that an improvement of teaching and learning practices lay at the heart of achievement.

The realisation that there was no silver bullet; that change can only come about by unpacking and adjusting existing beliefs held by teachers, parents and students.

Over 50% of teachers in the Northcote Kahui Ako did not see value in participating in a Kahui Ako as they perceived this would not enhance their practice.

The effectiveness of the collaborative endeavour in the Kahui Ako can be attributed to the approach of the leadership.

Question 6

**Do you think student achievement has increased because of the Kahui Ako initiatives in your cluster?**

**Only a staggering 6% of principals thought that student achievement outcomes had increased due to Kahui Ako initiatives, while 37% were not sure.** I agree it is very difficult to pinpoint why success has occurred as there can be many influencers, however 57% of principals didn’t think Kahui Ako was the reason for an increase in student outcomes, or only 6% of principals agreed that Kahui Ako was the reason for an increase in student outcomes. This author would agree with the 57%. Our student achievement levels have been consistently high for many years, and this is mostly due to the high quality of teachers at our school, the support the Board gives towards PD and our children are engaged. They attend school, they actively participate and have supportive parents. We track our own students, have a high self review process and school leaders who are experts. Many schools I believe would be in a similar position.

Why are Principals and Boards continuing to stay in Kahui Ako if 94% don't believe Kahui Ako is effective? This comes back to an earlier question where principals replied 'so they could get staff extra money (WSL or ASL),' " get access to PD" or they "had hoped it would work."

18% of principals thought Maori and Pasifika achievement levels increased due to Kahui Ako (which leaves 82% unsure or no). Most Kahui Ako have a focus on Maori and/or Pasifika students, yet this specific target has not been successful. I am sure academics who have researched what works for Maori would use a different model than Kahui Ako, otherwise we would see a bigger shift. Or is it the 13% of failing schools (based on EROs 1-5 year review data) which are failing Maori and Pasifika students. Or will Maori and Pasifika academic outcomes improve because of another initiative, MAC? Or will Maori and Pasifika academic and social outcomes improve if they were taught by high quality teachers? Or is it due to poor housing, poor health or other social issues which is letting Maori and Pasifika students down.

Question 7

**Did your Kahui Ako meet their achievement challenges by the end of the 2018 school year?**

**37% of Principals thought they had met some of the achievement challenges set by the end of 2018, while 37% of Principals claimed they had not met any of the achievement challenges, and a disappointing 25% of principals did not know.**

Why did they not know? Where is the communication from the Lead Principal? Why aren't they looking at their strategic plans? What have the principals done to find out? What are they telling their staff, their Board and their parents? For the 37% who thought they had not met their AC by the end of 2018, at least they could reflect on why not and have another meeting to inquire and set new targets.

Do these statistics cause resentment or dissatisfaction amongst principals. Why go to so many meetings, spend a lot of money on release so teachers can attend PD or spend time on an initiative that may not be working. And just around the corner is the new educational reforms.

In question 8 I asked **for the benefits in joining/staying in a Kahui Ako** and the principals were fairly consistent with their answers, considering many of the responses have shown Kahui Ako not successful.

**Two staff get paid being WSL**

**Awareness of the complexities of students pathway from ECE to Primary to Intermediate to Secondary to Tertiary.**

**Connections**

**Engagement/Networking with other BOT's/Principals/seeing past students at their schools thriving/career pathways for teachers in our school who do not want to be team leaders or DP's**

**Paying and retaining my best teachers and leaders**

**Meeting other principals**

**Working with Laurayne Tawha, in collaboration with local secondary school; wonderful projects with the secondary school (many of which I had tried to get going before but which never came to anything); last year collaboration between secondary school maths department and ourselves; working collaboratively with other primary schools on Learning Progressions Framework (small schools sharing staff meetings etc)**

**Maths PLD 2018 and writing PLD this year.**

**Meeting teachers with expertise from other schools, cluster groups eg well being, Tuakana Teina links with TGS**

**Getting to know other school leaders**

**Network opportunities - connecting with other principals to talk about teaching and learning. Within the Kahui Ako there is a strong and supportive principal network so perhaps this would have happened anyway?**

**Collaborating with other schools**

**Networking**

**Shared thinking about leadership**

**Increased networking - opportunities to work more closely with other schools**

**Relationship with the Waiuku College & money for people who don't do anything much.**

**As the Lead Principal, I am learning a new set of skills which are required to carry out the job effectively**

I like the idea that principals think the benefits include the awareness of the complexities of the pathways our students face, more engagement with principals and teachers in the cluster, networking, shared thinking about leadership and the opportunity to participate in targeted PD. These answers fit in with the espoused ideology of Kahui Ako: Collaboration, PLD, Student Improvement and Transition support.

One answer did intrigue me in particular and that was "paying and retaining my best teachers and leaders." I find this interesting as it goes against the idea of Kahui Ako possibly. If the idea is for equity, to stop competition and choice and develop all schools as equals so parents don't choose one ahead of the other wouldn't it be good if teachers and leaders shifted schools inside their Kahui Ako? This is an idea muted in the Educational Reform Consultation. What would a principal do if they had a vacancy in their primary school, and an outstanding teacher from a school within that Kahui Ako applied? Would they employ them, or say "No, stay where you are and support your school with your skills." If this happened to me, I would appoint the best applicant, regardless if they are in my Kahui Ako or not. I think most principals would.

What if high quality teachers were asked to move within their Kahui Ako every 3 or 4 years? Would this be beneficial for the students when they left school at the end of Year 12 or 13?

Question 9

**Why is your Kahui Ako successful?**

**I don't think it is**

**Regular and transparent communication, similarity of student profiles, strategic use of external expertise.**

**5/10**

**Connected/Engaged/Supportive, we took our time ...2 years to come up with our achievement challenges and we were the first KA who did not use National Standards as our AO's....it was worth it.**

**Because we didn't focus on student achievement re NStandards I can not effectively answer some of your questions Bruce.**

**Our focus was Well Being/Key Competencies/Community Engagement.**

**It is successful in my view.**

**It's not really, however the principal lead is doing their best**

**The collaboration between schools**

**People with a passion for the community**

**Geographically close, schools have existing high functioning professional relationships, similar challenges and demographics, which has enabled growth of new leadership opportunities**

**Both Lead Principals are outstanding!**

**All leaders work well together and are not in competition with each other**

**Commitment from all / shared vision and beliefs / strong leadership**

**They took time to work out their directions, a great team of leaders and principals**

**Currently it is not successful.**

**The main reason is the depth of relationships that exist between the Principals and other people in the participating schools.**

Considering the responses to the previous questions it is interesting to note that of the 16 principals that responded that only 25% thought it wasn't successful, yet a much greater percentage did not know if they had met targets, they reported that student achievement had not increased because of Kahui Ako and had spent a lot of time for meetings, but yet many of the respondents were still very positive. Are Principals positive people and have hope?

Transparent communication, connected, engaged, a focus on wellbeing, an increase in collaboration between schools, people believing in the community, new leadership opportunities, no competition between principals and an increase in relationships between principals were a common thread as to why principals thought their Kahui Ako was successful.

There is no doubt that done correctly, purposeful collaboration and collaborative learning is a journey that increases confidence and abilities of all stakeholders. This should lead to increased student achievement outcomes.

It appears through my research and literature reviews that collaboration is a complex strategy and is highly dependant on the Lead Principal and their ability to shift mindsets, have specific goals, be prepared to develop over time and there needs to be reflection. ERO (April 2019) suggest the answer lies with the Lead Principal of the Kahui Ako having the infrastructure for generating timely information about progress and goals and the impact of actions taken is considered with urgency. My research would show that this is not the case unfortunately with many Kahui Ako Lead Principals currently. ERO (April 2019) believes there needs to be an increase in accountability for learner outcomes, strengthening personal skills and competencies, an increase in managing interpersonal relationships and the ability to make discretionary judgments.

In many instances effective communication has not been happening between Lead Principals and all stakeholders, including targets set, targets met, the best way to achieve an increase in student outcomes, transition and schools still assessing differently within Kahui Ako.

When interviewing Principals many thought the Lead Principal needs to be more accountable for the hours spent with ASL. Lead Principals are not visiting schools and seeing what is happening in the classrooms of the schools they are 'leading.' 13 of 16 (79%) of Principals interviewed said their Lead Principal had not visited their teachers teaching in their schools and several teachers from Lead Principals' schools said their Principal does not even visit their classes, yet makes decisions without knowing what is occurring, without knowing the students and without consulting teachers. Know me before you teach me. Know me before you lead me.

**Teachers' Responses:** There were only 40 responses from the 20 schools that I sent surveys to. They are all anonymous.

Question 1:

**What has been the impact on your teaching due to belonging to a Kahui Ako?**

**Nil**

**More awareness to culturally responsiveness pedagogy**

**Greater reflection on my teaching practice in terms of student agency and building relationships with my students.**

**I have been taught new skills that I can use in the classroom and have been using these to help improve my teaching over the past year.**

**We have a greater focus on writing, some PD for this. A focus on maths with PD also**

**Implementing a new teaching approach inspired by Kahui Ako workshop PD**

**It has given me more perspectives and enabled me to gain a better understanding of how to be more consistent with assessment.**

**More awareness of the community**

**The COL day at TGS with workshops running.**

**No immediate impact on my teaching, positive has been learning more about the other schools in the area.**

**The Maths PD last year has had the most impact - it was great to have Lucie/Sue provide us with all the most up to date (evidence based) research and pedagogy - and to have modelling in schools and the time to really examine our practice.**

**Although most schools had been able to talk and collaborate through Maths Lead meetings in the few years before this, this was more effective due to the expertise of Lucie and Sue.**

**-participated in maths PD after school which led to some changes in my maths programme**

**-observation and discussions have assisted in my inquiry**

**The conference they held last year and the workshops we attended.**

**Gained some good ideas from the conference, great maths PD,**

**The impact of the Kahui Ako has involved an increased workload to cover the duties and responsibilities of the across school leader in our school and more meetings with the within school leaders, with no effect. I consider belonging to the COL has not improved my professional practice beyond what could have been achieved without it. The money has been wasted on leaders who are not experts in their field, and appear to spend their time seeking knowledge from those who they are supposed to be supporting. I believe in developing highly skilled and knowledgeable practitioners in our profession through quality PD. That is, highly skilled practitioners delivering it. I believe, the only positive outcome has been from excellent maths PD from Lucy Cheeseman. I understand this was supported by COL funds. Our maths leader in our school facilitated and managed this. She is not a COL leader. Quality PD like this could have been mirrored in many areas of our curriculum where it is desperately needed, if we were not wasting funds on individuals (leaders) and a TOD with few presentations of value. There were promises that this money could be redirected into supporting the schools to improve their professional practice as they saw fit. That has not been the case which is disappointing. As SENCo in our school, seeking support to improve outcomes for our students, I find the most effective organisation who have knowledge, skills and networks across our cluster to support us, are the RTLB. They keep us together and support us to share and grow our knowledge for the benefit of the cluster as a whole. They make a difference. The COL is a waste of money.**

**It has helped me to implement a problem solving Maths approach following PD with Lucie Cheeseman which has been great in helping to raise achievement in our Maths teaching. I also learnt a great deal through the conference last year - in particular understanding how positive relationships influence learning.**

**Little to none. Possible transfer of ideas and pedagogy between those more in the know than I am, but I am not aware of any shared expertise or knowledge.**

Access to effective PLD which has helped me to shift my pedagogy concerning mathematics. Opportunities to connect, collaborate and share ideas through Kahui Ako leadership meetings and cluster groups set up by the CoL

The PLD for maths has had an impact on my teaching

Awareness of the workings of other people.

Reflection re rongonui te hau

nothing at present

n/a

LITTLE

Very little. Students come to our school with entrance testing curriculum level grades in the 2 or 3 grades - obviously something has gone wrong with their education before secondary schooling begins.

Nothing is being done to bring the student through from pre-school, through primary school to be ready for Secondary education.

Culturally responsive learning has been the focus of all Kahui Ako meetings - very important but not the silver bullet to improving student capabilities and achievement. More focus need to be on teaching to developing the necessary literacy, numeracy and critical thinking student skills required at pre-school, primary and intermediate schools to enable students to embark on a successful Secondary School programme.

I have had the benefit of using expertise of a teacher from another school whereby older students were involved in guiding my younger students through an art unit. I learnt a lot and my students enjoyed the experience.

Taking on board and trialing ideas that came through in our workshops over the last couple of years. These do have a place in the pedagogy of teaching Science. Good to see how teachers of Primary and Intermediate schools build relationships, motivate and engage their students in classroom activities.

None thus far

changed the method of teaching Math, now through a problem solving approach.

Makes me look at ways to improve my practice in the classroom

There seems to be lots of meetings for staff involved with very little feedback. This means there are also less teachers in school to cover responsibilities and support teachers. I believe the money that teachers are being paid is wasted and I would rather the money was spent equally on release time. I don't feel that being part of COL has helped me professionally in any way what so ever.

Little impact

Not a lot

no impact to date

We have received the results but we have seen very little in my opinion from Kahui Ako. Our school does strive to make sure our children have a sense of belonging and its growing to achieve balance in all areas, but that is tkx to our wonderful administration and teachers not necessarily because Kahui Ako.

So the answer to your question is no, kahui Ako has not impacted my teaching.

Sharing ideas and developing relationships with teachers in other school. Becoming aware of different practices within the schools in our Kahui Ako

Forming a community with all our schools- a large emphasis has been on PLD as we work towards our achievement challenges and meeting, learning and working beside all teachers within our kahui ako has made an immense impact on how we view ourselves as both educators and learners.

Being able to meet teachers from the other schools in the Kahui Ako and get to know them properly through shared PD and have some professional conversation

A quick glance at these responses show that 38% of respondents think that KA has little or not a lot impact on their teaching. Some enjoyed specific PD, including cultural responsive PD, while some acknowledged they are looking at their practice. I still believe that having 38% of respondents who are teachers saying that their has been no impact is not positive and a wake up call for Principals and Lead Principals.

An ERO publication states "Collaboration focused on the improvement of teaching and learning is one of the highest

yielding strategies to boost student, school and system performance - especially where responsibility for the success of all students is shared among all teachers and schools and a community". ERO Indicators. This may be true however Kahui Ako has not worked for 38% of teachers in my survey, which impacts on many students.

**The second question to teachers was "have you been informed about all Kahui Ako student achievements by your principal?"**

Only 25 % said yes. Why is there a breakdown in communication?

As discussed previously, the third and fourth questions to teachers were about modelling and visiting other teachers in the KA. The data showed 77% had not visited another teacher and 80% had not modelled effective practice to others. Why not? Maybe the following observations from these researchers gives us the answer to why not. Maybe these three crucial parts are missing.

"Internal accountability occurs when individuals and groups willingly take on personal, professional and collective responsibility for continuous improvement and success for all students." (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009).

Timperley cautions that "inquiry is difficult for individual teachers to do in isolation from their colleagues or from leaders". As the IES Working Party observed, "successful systems create deliberate opportunities for teachers to open up their practice to observation and discussion with colleagues within and across schools in ways that stimulate improvement."

"Getting to interact frequently with other colleagues whose work is improving student outcomes is one of the most powerful strategies that we know of for continuous improvement and innovation." (Rincon-Gallardo and Fullan 2015).

Speeches and announcements are not enough if we want to increase student outcomes. When Kahui Ako staff hear the clarion call for transformation from a leader whose personal actions have remained unchanged, their hopes turn to cynicism in an instant.

As I have written previously, successive governments have tried many different initiatives to create change so student outcomes improve. What I find frustrating is that there is not the international research to support these ideas. There was no research that supported National Standards. There is no extensive research to support Kahui Ako as the panacea.

As leaders we understand that successive governments want to implement initiatives that increase the achievement outcomes for Maori and Pasifika students, decrease the 'tail' and ensure that all children reach their potential.

What the governments do not understand is that quality teachers make the biggest difference. The answer lies in attracting our best students into a career of teaching by paying teachers on a pay scale not seen here previously. It lies in paying our experienced and high quality teachers a lot more than they are receiving now.

But is IES, Kahui Ako the answer? Extending High Standards wasn't the answer. National Standards was not the answer.

If the question is “what knowledge is of most worth,” could the answer be it is what the students are interested in and good at. It is their strengths. Know me before you teach me. It is not a government mandate or what is being tested.”

Zhao (2009) wrote, “It is too bad that we cannot expect each and everyone of our children to swim as well as Michael Phelps, paint as well as Picasso, write as well as JK Rowling, and solve maths problems as well as Gauss-all at the same time.”

Walker (2017) thinks one of the ways to increase student achievement is through well being, students having very good health, are happy in school, are engaged and these competencies have been a focus in Finland, where there has been a substantial increase in student outcomes as well as equity amongst all schools. Finland does not focus on the curriculum like we are obsessed with in New Zealand.

We all agree that Principals make a huge difference to the quality of the school and we all agree that it is the quality of teachers in the classroom that make the biggest difference. If Governments and Ministry of Education are serious about increasing student outcomes for all students, I think we would all concur that we require a higher quality of ‘student’ being trained for our profession, that the training institutions need to train teachers better and I believe this will only happen if Governments are willing to pay teachers more. The government needs to make teaching an attractive proposition for our youngest and brightest. Then we could see a shift in attainment levels including Maori and Pasifika, but only if we get talented young Maori and Pasifika choosing teaching as a career.

From my research most respondents do not think Kahui Ako is making a difference to lifting the tail. Principals who I interviewed thought the answer lies in quality leadership and quality teachers within their own schools.

We all want to provide our children with an excellent education, but what it looks like divides us (Zhao 2009). Has Kahui Ako divided networks, when the opposite was the aim. The Future of Education Reforms are also dividing communities, principals and teachers. One of the aims of this reform is to stop competition amongst schools and make all schools equitable. This will supposedly lead to greater academic success for all students, including Maori and Pasifika according to the Ministerial appointed taskforce.

When a Kahui Ako or individual schools claim their top priority is student achievement and educational equality, but they review data once a year with every other meeting being devoted to finances, property, complaints, discipline and or administration then the real priorities become evident. In my survey principals thought that all the meetings they were attending were a negative or extra loads were being inflicted on their leadership. Not one of the 16 principals wrote that the biggest impact Kahui Ako was having was “a reflection of data” or “student achievement is now our priority.”

I agree with Reeves (2009) when he wrote “Here is a simple recipe for leading change. First pour a truckload of evidence into an ungreased container. Stir in a crock full of inspirational rhetoric. Add two heaping proportions of administrative imperatives. Finally dump in one ton of fear. Bring to boil.” Change leadership is difficult for schools and governments.

As far as Kahui Ako is concerned, to be effective, professional collaboration requires time, practice and accountability. Principals are concerned about the time Kahu Ako already consumes and through interviews Principals think that there is not enough accountability for Lead Principals. If the Lead Principals claim to lead professional learning communities but fail to provide time for regular collaboration with Principals, ASL, WSL and staff, then they are engaging in self delusion.



I think school communities are being divided over Kahui Ako as many clusters are not wanting to sacrifice congeniality for collaborative decisions which could impact negatively in their schools. Schools are not willing to sacrifice the successful high performing cultures they have built up to support mediocrity. Although my survey results did not support my hypothesis of “is effective collaboration difficult in your Kahui Ako due to competition and choice between schools,” I still think that school leaders will put their school first, ahead of schools in their Kahui Ako.

Educators are drowning under the weight of initiative fatigue, attempting to use the same amount of time (maybe more money) and emotional energy to accomplish more and more objectives. How many Principals or Lead Principals have introduced a new initiative in the last 2 years. What have they stopped doing in the last two years?

Ramsey and Poskitt (2019) wrote “Involvement in Kahui Ako, or cluster initiatives has unearthed some leadership tensions and dilemmas.” They think most Principals act as ‘tops’ in their own school and were chosen because of their skills to lead, but in a Kahui Ako context they are now ‘middles.’ These roles have different roles and constraints. Being a ‘top’ involves control of the schools resources and deciding how to shape the system to meet present and future needs. Now in a Kahui Ako context as a ‘middle’ they find themselves torn between competing interests. This cannot be conducive to successful collaboration. As a Principal and past Lead Principal of a Kahui Ako I have witnessed these tensions. When talking to other Principals nationwide their views are consistent with the observations of dysfunctional patterns of interaction.

### **Summary:**

The responses of Lead Principals, Principals and teachers with consideration to surveys, interviews, researched and published material referred to in this report, does not confirm that Kahui Ako is beneficial to many schools. It does confirm that an area badly in need of repair is communication between Lead Principals and all staff within a Kahui Ako. My survey results show a large discrepancy as to why schools joined Kahui Ako. There is also a large disparity of the effectiveness of leadership of the Lead Principals according to many respondents nationwide. Further to this, the insights given as to the nature of this disparity of leadership quality, could be useful in the future when system changes are reshaped as a result of the Report by the Tomorrow’s School’s Independent Taskforce, 2018. That report, in its findings, speaks to “system-wide challenges because our current schooling system is designed for autonomous self-governing schools, not for networked and connected schools.” Kāhui Ako will have a significant part to play in this wider system change within New Zealand. My research also shows that Kahui Ako has not grown leaders as much as the Ministry was hoping for. Some schools get no staff applying for a within school leadership role, despite the excellent funding.

Principals do not believe their leadership has improved because of Kahui Ako. In fact some felt disillusioned that Lead Principals are invited to PD opportunities but not principals, who could also benefit from learning. Many of the Principals I interviewed agreed with those surveyed and thought that time away from their school for KA meetings was taking time away from their school leadership, which they still see as their major focus.

The unfortunate mistake successive governments have made in my opinion is that there have been too many initiatives around collaboration in networks. The sad part is that most quality leaders know the answer. John Hattie, Yun and Moreno (2006), Haycock (1998), Linda Darling-Hammond (1999) or Leithwood (2004) in their studies prove that of all the variables that influence student achievement, the two that have the most profound influence are teacher quality and leadership. This is not new. The government needs to invest in making teaching an attractive career, paying more than teachers currently get by a significant amount and improve the quality of teacher training institutions.

Quality teachers will make a difference to student outcomes. Not policy.

Collaboration will help, but only if everyone is on board and communication is effective from the Lead Principal down. Collaboration is not simple and requires careful thinking, preparation and time to achieve. It is a complex strategy. It requires trust. It requires full ownership. Schools can collaborate without the fanfare of KA funding.

This author's opinion based on surveys and interviews is that Kahui Ako is not the answer to support student outcomes for our priority learners, as it was portrayed by the Government, through the Ministry. And without consultation.

The focus on developing or coercing collaborative schooling models is a response to under achievement from Maori and Pasifika students, students who have not reached their potential, to prevent students going to schools in different communities and to stop competition between schools.

Equity funding, which is replacing decile funding, will not prevent the grouping of schools who consistently have low achievement patterns achieve at a much higher rate than they currently are. Collaboration will not prevent this either. And schools who are performing at a high level are not interested in collaboration as they do face the disparity that lower socio-economic schools and communities face.

I believe that if every school got a share of the IES \$356 million plus a share of the \$217 million for the LSC initiative, each school could employ a specialist teacher, counsellor, SENCo or a teacher for targeted children and this would have been more beneficial in raising student achievement for our priority learners. This sum divided by 2500 schools is equivalent to \$230,000 for each school. No bureaucrats required. Principals appoint a quality teacher to work specifically with targeted children, children with anxieties, children who have learning difficulties and to support staff.

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