

Sabbatical Report Term III 2019
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About the author

I am currently the principal of Tawa Intermediate School and have been for the past six years. Prior to that I was principal of Newlands Intermediate School for six years. I am the chairperson of the Tawa Kāhui Ako stewardship group and have been in that role since its inception two and half years ago.

Background to Tawa Kāhui Ako

The Tawa basin has eight schools. This is made up of six primary schools, five of whom are Years 1 – 6. They are Linden, Greenacres, Hampton Hill, Redwood and St Francis Xavier (Catholic). Tawa Primary School has Years 1 – 8. The two remaining schools are Tawa Intermediate School and Tawa College. We have a total combined student population of around 3500.

Tawa is a compact community nestled in the Tawa valley. Historically, the area has been well served by high performing schools. In recent times this has seen a number of students commute from outside of Tawa to have their education in Tawa. We have been fortunate in having strong community support for the schools in Tawa. There is a strong academic expectation of our schools, particularly for the college where NCEA results compare favourably to the national norms.

The Tawa Community of Schools is unique within the Wellington region as there are no zones from schools outside the Tawa area that overlap. There is a strong history of collaboration and participation in both curricula and co-curricular areas. An example of achievement collaboration has been the work with MoE involving Mary Wootton to use a common diagnostic tool of measuring student progress through Years 1 -13. A co-curricular example is the long running community music festival that has been running for 38 years and showcases vocal, instrumental and dancing talents in all the schools and this festival incorporates whānau and local Tawa music groups. Another recent example has been the ALLiS project which has been a collaborative initiative to encourage the learning of Japanese between the Intermediate and the College. Considerable work has been initiated related to health and well-being in the Tawa Schools where restorative practice has been adopted as a common approach.

There is a strong history of collaboration between the schools. Notably the Principals cluster meets regularly and every year make an effort to travel away together to visit other schools and develop themselves professionally. At the primary level there is an AP's & DP's cluster, literacy cluster and a maths cluster who also meet regularly. The purpose of these is to collaborate and provide professional learning opportunities for all staff at their schools. The Tawa Intermediate and Tawa College have termly senior leaders' meetings to share information and plan together.

In many ways the Tawa schools have been operating as a Kāhui Ako before the John Key government introduced the Investing in Education Success (IES) policy in 2015/16. It was later rebranded to Community of Learning and then Kāhui Ako.

My role with the Tawa Kāhui Ako is through my involvement as principal of Tawa Intermediate School. I have been principal there since July 2013. Originally our Kahui Ako was formed through our principals group because of the opportunities that we felt the original community of learning concept presented. There was a nervousness amongst us around the framework with the focus being a literacy and numeracy one captured by student achievement data and national standards.

After some initial meetings we progressed our expression of interest into approved achievement challenges. From there we formed a group of principals (Sue Goodin - Redwood School, Murray Lucas - Tawa College and myself) and six Board of Trustees members from the Tawa schools. This was our governance group from which I was elected chair of the group. Initially, we saw ourselves as a governance group but have since re-named ourselves as the stewardship group of the Kāhui Ako.

A Stewardship Group is an inclusive environment where all parties involved in and with the Kāhui Ako can be represented and could include early childhood education, tertiary, key employers, iwi and the wider community.

Acknowledgements

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What is a Community of Learning – Kāhui Ako?

According to the Ministry of Education a Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako is a group of education and training providers that form around children and young people's learning pathways, and work together to help them achieve their full potential.

What am I looking at

As the chairperson of the Tawa Kāhui Ako stewardship group I want to examine governance models of Kāhui Ako across New Zealand. I want to gain a better understanding of governance practices that can support our Kāhui Ako, it's governance group, our lead principal and Across School teachers to maximise the opportunities presented by our Kāhui Ako.

Methodology

I undertook a series of interviews of colleagues who are involved in or have been involved with the formation and running of various Kāhui Ako across the Wellington region. I asked a number of questions related to the governance/stewardship groups role in their Kāhui Ako. These were:

- How was your governance/stewardship group formed - describe the thinking behind it and how was it formed?
- Would you characterise the governance/stewardship group as a success - why/why not?
- What would have helped the governance/stewardship group e.g.levels of MoE support/understanding?
- Next steps for the governance/stewardship group?

Purpose of Governance/Stewardship groups for Kāhui Ako

From the Ministry of Education

All Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako should have a Stewardship Group that oversees how the community is progressing towards tackling its achievement challenges, helps keep the community on track, and receives reports on progress from the Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako leader. Boards in a Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako should seek opportunities to collaborate and share good practice across their community. Individual boards continue to be the accountable entity for their school's performance. 1

From the New Zealand School Trustees Association

Stewardship Groups are the kaitiaki/guardians of the Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako. They have oversight of the vision, progress against the achievement challenges and the growth and development of the Kāhui Ako, on behalf of the Kāhui Ako and its wider community. The Stewardship Group helps to build and foster collaboration beyond the individual members of the Community of Learning reaching further into the local, regional and possibly global community to support achieving the vision. Their focus should remain at a high level and not become caught up in detail and day to day operation of the members. 2

So, that is the purpose of the governance/stewardship group - how has it worked?

Introduction

It has been a really interesting process having the time to talk with various Kāhui Ako principals and how they have seen the success or otherwise and in one case relevance of governance/stewardship groups. I have been impressed with the level of commitment to Kāhui Ako and the opportunity that they present to us.

Interview data

- How was your governance/stewardship group formed - describe the thinking behind it and how was it formed?

Kāhui Ako 1.

Began by calling all Boards of Trustees together and principals presented what the Community of Learning concept was about. The initial structure was discussed and acceptance that Board members would be part of a stewardship group to appoint a lead principal. The various Boards were keen to have input into this. Board Chairs took the information back to their own Boards and asked for interest. There was a desire from all to have the stewardship group represent the community. From there a group was formed with principals and they followed Ministry of Education (MoE) and New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) documentation and support templates. A Lead Principal appointment was eventually made and confirmed by the Secretary of Education.

Kāhui Ako 2.

Recognised that they needed to have a governance structure. The school principals were driving Kāhui Ako 2. so they became the stewardship group. It was a relatively small group of schools so that helped. They saw their role as a communication bridge between their existing Boards of Trustees and the Kāhui Ako. The principal interviewed said they are just a management group that supports the Lead principal.

Kāhui Ako 3.

Kāhui Ako 3. Established an interim stewardship group responsible for the appointment of their lead principal. The interim group was a large group with representation including Board of Trustee members and principals. The initial leader of the group was a highly experienced BoT Chairperson who was a lawyer and who specialised in governance. This was a huge advantage for the group. After the appointment of the lead principal, in this case a dual leadership model was established, the interim stewardship group dissolved itself. Kāhui Ako 3. is now looking at establishing a new group and have developed terms of reference to guide them moving forward.

Kāhui Ako 4.

This Kāhui Ako started off as a long standing principal's cluster that was well established. Two schools chose not to participate in the Kāhui Ako, one of which wasn't eligible as it was an Independent school. The principals established an appointments group with the intention that it would move into a stewardship role. After the appointment of a lead principal the stewardship group was not established because some principals did not want one. The Kāhui Ako lead principal just reports back to the principals group which has become a quasi stewardship group with none of the formalities. There has been no push back from the MoE regarding the lack of a stewardship group. This group appointed the across school roles.

Kāhui Ako 5.

After some initial hiccups Kāhui Ako 5. was formed and approved by the MoE. Three principals from the group met with interested Board of Trustee members and formed a stewardship group. One of the principals was appointed as chair. Their first task was to appoint a lead principal. This was completed and approved. The lead principal was responsible for reporting regularly back to the stewardship group and also local Boards of Trustees. Across School roles were filled and this involved a delegated appointments panel from within the stewardship group which included the three principals, the lead principal and two Boards of Trustees members who were on the stewardship group. MoE support was extensive.

- Would you characterise the governance/stewardship group as a success - why/why not?

Kāhui Ako 1.

Have not seen the presence of a Stewardship group as a success. They have met several times a year and have only been involved when the lead principal appointment was made. They were not involved in the appointment of Across School Lead teachers as this was run by the principals. An interesting point with this Kāhui Ako was the recent Board elections have meant changes in personnel will have to be made to the Stewardship group.

Kāhui Ako 2.

They believed that despite being a relatively new Kāhui Ako things were going well because of the time spent prior to the formation developing working relationships between principals and that they were a small number of schools. The stewardship group was also working well because they had been deliberate in their lead principal appointment and have a shared model across primary and secondary sectors. This added to the equitable philosophy. Further to that the across School appointments were also reflective of the primary and secondary partnership with every school having an Across School Lead Teacher.

Kāhui Ako 3.

This group is happy with how the appointment process for the leadership role worked. Interestingly enough their interview panel consisted of 22 people. The interim stewardship group was not responsible for the across school leadership roles. As stated earlier they were fortunate in having a chairperson who was highly experienced in the governance field. Their chairperson was able to break down the complexity of some of the language so everyone could get a good grasp of it's intent.

Kāhui Ako 4.

There is no group.

Kāhui Ako 5.

The group meets several times a year and has successfully navigated it's way through the appointments processes. The main driver continues to be the local principals group and their work with the lead principal in providing strategic direction and value.

- What would have helped the governance/stewardship group e.g.levels of MoE support/understanding?

Kāhui Ako 1.

As it is the Stewardship group only meets 2 - 3 times per year so that information can be shared with them. There was still a lack of understanding conceptually of what the Kāhui Ako represented and that members of Kāhui Ako 1. were conscious of "patch protection" and not wanting their school to miss out. The MoE tried hard with Kāhui Ako 1. and supported it as much as they could. It was felt that the MoE advisor was very genuine and helpful. The wider issue was the changing nature of the political landscape providing a different government with a different agenda for Kāhui Ako across the country.

Kāhui Ako 2.

The scaremongering of the NZEI did not help the initial impression of the CoL/Kāhui Ako roll-out from the MoE. This led to Kāhui Ako 2. being very cautious initially.

Kāhui Ako 3.

They felt that the MoE framework and support was of a high standard and in particular the MoE advisor was outstanding.

Kāhui Ako 4.

There was an outstanding level of support from the MoE advisor. Nothing was too much trouble and everything was followed up by the MoE. They did think that more thought about the structure and implementation would have helped with attitudes toward the Kāhui Ako 4. stewardship group - in particular sector involvement.

Kāhui Ako 5.

The MoE advisor was very helpful. The appointments advisor (separate person) was particularly detailed and thorough which was helpful.

- Next steps for the governance/stewardship group?

Kāhui Ako 1.

Would like to see stewardship membership remunerated so that there would be more involvement. Uncertainty as there hasn't been a huge vote in confidence by the new minister of Education for Kāhui Ako as they are currently constituted. Communication is always going to be a challenge because of the size of the group - it has more than ten schools.

Kāhui Ako 2.

Getting sufficient and appropriate Iwi representation is a real issue as Kāhui Ako 2. has several Iwi across their geography. Kāhui Ako 2. Are unsure on how they will manage this.

Kāhui Ako 3.

Perhaps some Board of Trustees training for new trustees after the elections would help with an understanding of what Kāhui Ako are about. Iwi representation is an issue because of the different Iwi geographically represented by the Kāhui Ako. This is yet to be resolved.

Kāhui Ako 4.

Not sure because there is no stewardship group.

Kāhui Ako 5.

Will continue as is with several meetings per term. They have recently re-appointed a lead principal which has developed into a shared dual role.

Conclusions

The sample of Kāhui Ako interviewed is a very small sample of the operating Kāhui Ako across New Zealand so the findings might not be an accurate reflection of the national picture.

When looking at what the interviews have highlighted about the role of governance/stewardship groups in Kāhui Ako it is hard to see how they have meaningfully contributed to the success or otherwise of them. In fact one of the Kāhui Ako was operating without a governance/stewardship group and quite happy about that as it has been a conscious decision to simplify things for them.

There seems to have been a genuine belief amongst all those interviewed that Kāhui Ako represented an opportunity for schools to work in a collaborative space that was active and

financially supported by the MoE. All Kāhui Ako were trying to work collaboratively prior to IES/CoL/Kāhui Ako with varying levels of success.

The most significant role that they have played is the appointment of the lead principal. Two of the five stewardship groups did not have Board of Trustees representation during this process.

Of the five Kāhui Ako interviewed only one of those was involved in the appointment of across school lead teachers which was the follow up employment process after the lead principal was appointed. Four of the five Kāhui Ako had principals doing this job without participation from the wider community.

What seems obvious to me is that principals have taken control of the Kāhui Ako by forming the governance/stewardship group themselves and are working collaboratively with the lead principal. In these cases it seems to be a happy outcome and less complicated. Strategic direction has been set by principals and they have reported back to their respective Boards of Trustees on progress. There is also an element of community capability in supporting Kāhui Ako governance/stewardship as one group had the services of a highly qualified parent who was a significant asset to the group because of his professional background. Not everyone was as fortunate as they were.

The issue of Iwi involvement in Kāhui Ako governance/stewardship is vexed and is difficult to navigate. Several Kāhui Ako have multiple Iwi represented geographically in their group and this has created a cautious approach as no-one wants to get it wrong as the damage could be significant if they don't develop an Iwi partnership that is inclusive of all. For one Iwi the problem is that several Kāhui Ako are in their space and they have talked about having one representative across multiple Kāhui Ako (at least three) and how do they support that adequately.

It would also seem that the framework provided by the MoE whilst useful hasn't always been followed but that in Wellington the MoE advisor has done an outstanding job in trying to support Kāhui Ako with timely advice and support. This is a credit to her.

Summary

Theoretically the concept of having a stewardship group for Kāhui Ako is sound. It allows for community representation, Iwi involvement and aligns nicely with the Tomorrows schools ideals of inclusion and collaboration. However, this hasn't been the outcome from what I can see with Stewardship groups. Kāhui Ako have struggled to fully utilise this opportunity either because they didn't want to (and were seemingly not compelled to) or Boards of Trustees willingly ceded this responsibility to their principals and the local principals group took control. There was some involvement from the wider community but this has lacked consistency.

In my view stewardship groups have not added a great deal of value to their Kāhui Ako and are more symbolic than of practical support. So in terms of me gaining a greater insight of effective Kāhui Ako stewardship strategies this has not happened. However, my study has highlighted to me how lucky we are in having an education system that allows for initiative, creativity and excellence amongst my colleagues.

References/Readings for background information

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