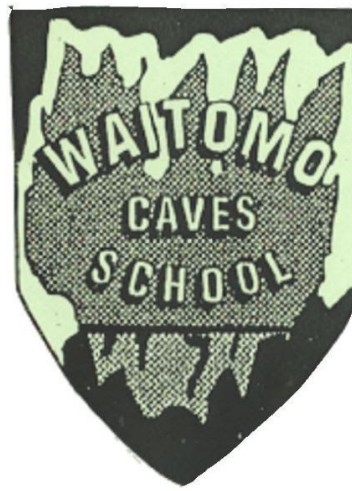


Primary Principals Sabbatical Report 2019



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Term 2, 2019

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Acknowledgements

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Thank you also to Pat Poland (Acting Principal) and Virginia Poland (Principal Release Teacher) who made it possible for me to be released from school along with Julian Dimond (Deputy Principal), teachers and administration staff for taking on additional responsibilities during my absence. I really appreciate their support.

My penultimate acknowledgement is to the Principals of the U1 and U2 rural schools I communicated with for having generously answered my questions and sharing their time with me. Finally, I would like to thank our learners, their family/whānau and our community for their acceptance and support of my absence during Term 2, 2019.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this inquiry is to focus on wellbeing. Hauora, (health and wellness) is the overarching theme of many educational conferences of late and has brought wellbeing to our attention. Not just the wellbeing of our learners and staff but our own

personal wellbeing. So many principals have dedicated resources, time and care into providing a safe and healthy workplace, they often forget about their own health, safety and wellbeing.

The increasing complexity and workload demands of school principals are impacting on their health and wellbeing. (Riley, 2018).

Waitomo Caves School teaching staff have a wellbeing goal within their performance agreement. This includes the teaching principal.

I have researched some literature from Professor Philip Riley, The Ministry of Education, New Zealand and various articles from New Zealand authors.

There is no quick fix for positive mental health and wellbeing but there are plenty of guidelines we can be encouraging, implementing and practising that would fully support improvements on how we feel about what we are doing and why we are doing it within our professions as educators. And as the term goes, we must practice what we preach!

Purpose

The professional learning activity I have undertaken involved an inquiry focus into staff wellbeing. I have communicated with other New Zealand school leaders and had discussions with fellow principals of small rural schools. Particularly those of U1 and U2 grades, who are teaching principals. A difficult job indeed.

I have inquired into schools practise of staff wellbeing supporting improved outcomes for staff, and inevitably their students. Information has been gathered on changes brought about following professional learning.

The findings will support us to develop our own wellbeing guidelines. The school community and the wider community will have access to these research findings. The wider community will include the Ministry of Education and other interested persons viewing the TeachNZ Sabbatical Reports online.

Methodology - Activities Undertaken

I intend to undertake professional conversations with leaders and teachers of U1 and U2 schools across a variety of age groups. This will involve surveys, questionnaires and meetings. All forms of data gathering will remain private and confidential where no personal or school names will be used. Once the report is complete all material will be destroyed.

- The methodology I used included exploring literature, collecting data, conversations and personal reflection.

- In 2018 I completed the NZ Health and Wellbeing Survey for Principals researched by Professor Philip Riley and will complete the follow up surveys in October 2019 and 2020.
- I began reading a range of research including texts from The Ministry of Education and The Education Review Office.
- I attended the Teachers Matter Conference Day in Rotorua facilitated by Karen Boyes and Meg Gallagher on The Joy of Teaching and Learning.
- I participated in the professional development pathway of Pause, Breathe, Smile training in Te Kuiti provided by the Mindfulness Education Group.
- I attended the 2019 NZEI Rural and Teaching Principals Conference in Nelson themed Location, Location, Vocation.
- I designated time to talk with colleagues that are teaching principals to gather data around their current practices, to consider the evidence when developing actions for improving my own wellbeing and teacher wellbeing.
- I will be attending the Waikato Principals Connection Day, along with our Deputy Principal, in Term 3 featuring Dr Tom Mulholland about 'Reclaiming the important things in life'.
- I have also taken time to reflect on research and conversations to plan forward thinking based on my findings.

Findings

The Health and Safety definition of stress is 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'.

We can all feel pressure at times and also stress. We feel as though everything becomes too much when things get on top of us, or when we feel as though we are unable to cope it leads to people opting out.

Stress affects us in different ways at different times and is often the result of a combination of factors in our personal and working lives.

Work related pressure can be tackled by working with your employer to identify issues at the source and agreeing realistic and workable ways to tackle these. This can be recorded in performance agreements as goals with indicators and outcomes to be achieved.

What is wellbeing? Wellbeing is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.'

'However, it is important to realise that wellbeing is a much broader concept than moment-to-moment happiness. While it does include happiness, it also includes other things, such as how satisfied people are with their life as a whole, their sense of purpose, and how in control they feel.' (Mental Health Foundation, 2015).

Seven rural and teaching principals were surveyed with four responses over a twelve week range. One came in way after the expected date which was due to the principals workload. Three did not respond at all and my understanding of this is most likely due to the pressures of workload demands and limited time for participation in the 5 minute survey. Two late participants I called on to survey are colleagues within my local principals association. These two responded because we have a supportive working relationship.

Of the four teaching principals I surveyed three have wellbeing goals within their performance agreement to develop as part of their personal growth. One has achieved their goal, one is not on track to achieving their goal and the other is a 'maybe' able to achieve their goal before the end of their twelve month performance agreement. The fourth person has no wellbeing goal.

When asked what support is in place for them to achieve their wellbeing goal it astounds me that there is little to no support from schools. Of the three colleagues with wellbeing goals two indicated there is no support from their school, while one is supported. The support received is an understanding of where their principal is if they are off site, which is referred to as attendance at principal group activities such as workshops, connection days, conferences and meetings. These are all work related, job related events. Such networking and the like, are very important for principals to participate in to develop and further professional growth as their job requires. It hardly constitutes wellbeing support.

It is also important that principals have some 'time out' within reason. If a principal has a work related meeting, which often involves leaving the rural surroundings, why not stop off for a coffee while in town. Principals and Board Chairs have developed a supportive 'trust' relationship where this can happen because we all know principals work hard over long hours.

I found most schools have something in place that supports wellbeing within the school.

One school hasn't implemented anything new but continues to keep on top of the things they already do that minimises stress levels.

A teaching principal within a sole charge environment has shared their personal health concerns with their Board of Trustees, of which they are kept up to date regarding progress. Unfortunately, a lot of medical intervention has been required to support this principal to regain good levels of wellness as well as having a puppy which provides positive wellbeing.

'Studies show that dogs reduce stress, anxiety and depression, ease loneliness, encourage exercise and improve your all-around health. For someone living with depression, there is so much to gain from having a dog.' (Grenley, 2018)

One particular school ensures all staff have a wellbeing goal as part of their appraisal where the principal checks in with staff each term to monitor that goal. They use a wellbeing survey for staff and the principal pops in to the classroom to gauge the tone and stress levels. There is also staff supervision funding available.

What some schools do to minimise stress levels:

- Have only one meeting a week
- Provide staff treats
- Shared kai
- Release days when required
- Time off to support family
- Teacher slips are added to the PB4L assembly reward draw, where the teacher spins for a lucky prize as the children would

What difference has this made?

When schools actively support staff wellbeing the major difference noted is the fact that staff are taking less sick leave and are happy to be at school. There are continued positive attitudes of teachers towards school while happier vibes and tones are present in the school and staff rooms.

Some initiatives show recognition of teachers which children enjoy seeing too.

In a sole charge school, having implemented some strategies to support staff wellbeing the principal now has more clarity, with fewer errors, more energy and motivation.

Staff wellbeing is reviewed on a variety of schedules ranging from each term, annually, ongoing, and constantly in an informal way.

When wellbeing is being reviewed there are a number of indicators that leaders and individuals look for to gain evidence that staff wellbeing is at the expected or agreed level. Such indicators include:

- How many sick days are taken each term
- Arrival times at school
- Departure times from school
- The quality of food in the school fridge
- How many energy drinks are brought to school
- The level of grumbling that occurs
- The level of laughter in the staff room

Also this includes how close someone is to achieving their wellbeing goal, if it has been achieved, or not. Wellbeing surveys and satisfaction surveys are the most common measures to identify staff wellbeing levels.

I learnt one of the four schools currently have staff wellbeing procedures or guidelines within their school. This was something that was developed post-conference.

Schools are taking appropriate next steps to ensure staff wellbeing is supported from day to day level and through governance. The schools surveyed are involved in reflective dialogue, they hold fewer meetings but have quality sessions, they ensure staff have access to any professional support they need, and re-evaluate what they do and why - particularly the pressure around student assessment.

Small schools continue to do what they are doing well with reminders to the Board of Trustees that funding is required to ensure staff are kept 'safe'. Release time is given over and about Classroom Release Time (CRT) along with teacher aide support.

One school is looking particularly close at principal wellbeing where the Board of Trustees are very supportive however it is challenging with a school of all very new teachers.

As far as next steps for principals own personal wellbeing goes, some are unsure what direction they are heading with this, one will continue on the same path until they are feeling 'back to normal', others are looking at developing better systems to prioritise tasks so they work to become more proactive rather than reactive.

One principal will be looking into the opportunity of study leave where they can refresh, relax and rethink.

Implications

In comparing school sizes, small schools with fewer staff face issues of not having that leadership support larger schools have. They don't have the support of a leadership team as a sounding board or staff meeting support to call on each other.

There are concerns that the wider the group of 'agencies' we are required to work with, the more airtime gets stretched. For small school and teaching principals expectations from the Ministry of Education, Iwi groups, Special Education etc can dominate time of principals. Managing these is key to us being able to do our jobs well.

What is challenging is the workload for teaching principals and the lack of support from government. This is evident in the ongoing negotiations currently being

addressed around our Primary Principals Collective Agreement following our 2015-2018 Agreement.

Summary

Good practice would see a school trying to identify the causes and what they can do to make things better for their staff, and hence improve wellbeing for all.

My next step following on from this report is the development and implementation of systems at Waitomo Caves School that further support teacher and principal wellbeing. Working Together to Improve Wellbeing @ WCS, (Appendix 2) is a working document that will review our practices, consult with staff and strengthen staff wellbeing.

By working collaboratively, we will learn it, live it and embed it. Our wellbeing approach will provide a framework for conversations to change, and positively affect our lives.

Good staff wellbeing is essential for cultivating a mentally healthy school, for retaining and motivating staff and for promoting pupil wellbeing and attainment.

As school staff juggle a multitude of different tasks and demands, it is important that everyone is given the right emotional and practical support so that they can, in turn, support their pupils. In addition to having a positive impact on colleagues and children, staff wellbeing can improve performance and job satisfaction, which can lead to reduced staff turnover. It can also help to reduce absence (both short and long term), increase productivity and promote staff engagement.

As a school leader, do you regularly set time aside to focus on your own health and wellbeing? How could you incorporate this into your daily or weekly routine?

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Appendix 1

School Name _____

School Size U1 / U2 / U3

Google Form Questions

Q1. Do you have a goal in your Performance Agreement that supports your own wellbeing?

Q2. Are you on track to achieve this goal?

Q3. What support is in place for you to achieve your wellbeing goal?

Q4. What have you implemented to support staff wellbeing?

Q5. What difference has this made?

Q6. How often do you review staff wellbeing?

Q7. When you review, what indicators do you look for to gain evidence that staff wellbeing is at the expected or agreed level?

Q8. Does your school currently have a procedure or some guidelines on supporting staff wellbeing?

Q9. If yes, were these existing ... (Pre-conference, Post-conference, Reviewed within the last 12 months)

Q10. What are your next steps to support staff wellbeing?

Q11. What are the next steps for your own staff wellbeing?

Appendix 2

Working Together to Improve Wellbeing at WCS

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1x_sKc71PlaUD3PUjyN0BMy2rhtA9qWZYjXdnbRxgpTE/edit