

## 2019 Sabbatical Report: Finding Achievement Gains in Kahui Ako

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### Acknowledgements:

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### Executive Summary

Many Kahui Ako are now into their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years of existence. Having shared goals, sharing good practice, improved communication and enhanced cooperation are all common responses to positive outcomes from this initiative. Evidence of measurable achievement gains is much less common with only one Kahui Ako leader that I spoke to being able to show that this had happened. To do this they had moved away from MOE advice to work on 3 to 5 shared goals and has instead concentrated all their energy and resources on what they believed was their one most important goal – writing and in particular that of underachieving boys. Most leaders spoken to were unanimously of the opinion that there were no measurable achievement gains made and that this was largely due the long and involved formation period, to the inflexible nature of the Kahui Ako structure, the constraints on how the resourcing could be used and the rigid parameters that needed to be met for achievement challenges to be endorsed.

### Purpose

The purpose of Kahui Ako is made clear in a number of official statements:

The ERO publication From Jan, 2017 – “Communities of Learning: Kahui Ako in Action” tells us that:

‘Investing in Educational Success (IES) is a Government Initiative aimed at lifting student achievement..’

The NZSTA Website tells us:

‘Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako are a part of Government’s Investing in Educational Success (IES) initiative to help raise the learning and achievement of all children and young people, particularly students at most risk of underachieving.’

My purpose was to investigate whether lifting and raising achievement was indeed happening as a result of Kahui Ako efforts.

Having personally been involved for almost 3 years in my local Kahui Ako, I was frustrated over a number of things, but particularly by the absence of identified and measurable achievement gains made by any of the students. In our community of schools. I wanted to know if this was a widespread experience in other Kahui Ako

## Rationale and Background Information

Whereas the driving document for Kahui Ako is the Achievement Challenge, many of these, including ours, did not specifically set targets for improved achievement, either across the Kahui Ako or for identified priority learners in specific learning areas.

Where there were targets, there was usually no information about how resources would be allocated to achieve improvement. Given that Kahui Ako resources are limited to the teaching positions and inquiry time, and that there is very little else, this does not seem surprising. Also, because resources are split by formula between schools, the Kahui Ako leadership has no authority or power over how they are used in member schools.

I wanted to know if there were Kahui Ako who were overcoming these hurdles and managing to make and measure achievement gains amongst their students. For the first three weeks of my sabbatical I visited Rotorua and then travelled the South Island, drawing on both existing connections and recommendations from MOE advisors on effectively functioning Kahui Ako.

## Activities Undertaken

I visited Kahui Ako Leaders, School Leaders and Across School Teachers in Auckland, Rotorua, Hawkes Bay, Nelson, Takaka, Westport, Queenstown and Christchurch.

I worked from a set of 9 pre-prepared questions which were mostly answered in an interview format although some respondents sent me written answers if they were unavailable.

## Kahui Ako Questions:

1. Can you list 3 things that you think are positive opportunities for schools involved in Kahui Ako
  - Building relationships with feeder schools
  - Sharing of expertise
  - Professional development opportunities
  - Sharing of achievement data
  - Having an expert partner to work with
  - Getting consistency in pedagogy and learning language
  - Transitions smoother
  - Governance expanding to include iwi, agencies eg RTLB cluster
  - Vertical focus is good – working with families that are common to all our schools
  - Having influence on the quality of intermediate students graduating to high school
  - Common language through collaboration
  - Improved relationships between school leaders and more collaboration
  - Build relationships and connections between teachers
  - Deprivatise practice
  - Sharing to build good practice

- Relationship building and resource sharing
- Improved transitions
- New School so only just getting involved. Still to appoint across and in schools
- DP Has extra Leadership role

2. Can you list 3 challenges that Kahui Ako pose for the schools involved

- I think the challenge is related to time. It takes time to identify how we can make changes. It takes time to source and participate in PD. It takes time away from your classes and school duties to attend meetings, PD etc.
- Competitive model still affecting Kahui Ako
- Silo's
- Inconsistent language of learning across schools
- Timetabling across schools to get Across school teachers together-not practical
- Who owns the in-school teacher resource? KA or school?
- Confusion due to lack of clarity and guidance from ministry
- Lots of hours used in 'forming' – building relationships
- Achievement challenge expectations (narrow focus)
- Structural limitations on how the time can be used (the specified roles)
- Narrow criteria for achievement challenges
- Shared Leadership Position – one leaves causes a problem

3. Can you describe any measurable achievement gains made by learners in the Kahui Ako you have been/are involved with? (with special reference to priority learners)

- We can only expect achievement gains once teachers have had the opportunity to integrate new learning in their classroom programmes. This is not a quick fix just for priority learners. For us it is about consistent practice across all sectors.
- Worked with Helen Timperly and local iwi on Theory of Improvement for writing, did PLD with staff and then prioritized boys which had some effect
- No data produced to show achievement improvement or gains
- Not aware of any achievement gains being reported
- No progress made on achievement in first 2 years
- No
- None
- No our tracking of readers is not showing yet

4. Can you describe what actions that you have been involved with that have led to achievement gains for learners (with special reference to priority learners)

- All of our work with the Literacy Learning Progression Learning Progressions Framework and implementation of the PACT will lead to more accurate achievement data and then to achievement gains.
- To get consistency we used Learning progressions and the PACT Tool

- None yet
- No
- Professional sharing of practice in and across schools
- ECE to primary transition improved after collecting student voice and consequently early years literacy results improved. More play based practice in early years
- None
- Authentic context for learning working with boys eg Technology, Gardens, Quest project

5. Can you describe any actions taken that led to greater engagement and/or achievement gains for boys who were identified as a group of priority learners

- Using the LLP's to identify next steps in writing has led to greater engagement in Writing.
- Not so much – had more of a focus on priority learners
- None yet
- Not one of our priorities
- Used digital technologies as a lever
- Focused on strategies to engage boys
- None
- We were already a high functioning cluster. Kahui Ako has just made it formal

6. Has your Kahui Ako been involved in prioritizing resources to member schools with the greatest need (eg most priority learners). If so describe what took place.

- If by resources you mean PD, then yes. The schools with the least amount of understanding or implementation have received intensive and 1:1 PD.
- Across School and In School Teachers were used as Learning Leaders and helped deliver PLD and pushed it across all our schools
- No
- Not in our achievement plan
- High School has an across school teacher made up of in school places because of identified greater need
- ECE has hours to help
- No – only the allocation of an in school teacher to a school that was too small to get one

7. As a school leader, can you describe strategies that you have applied in your school to address any achievement disparities between boys and girls.

- We are a single sex school and our priority is to raise Maori Student Achievement. We have addressed the achievement disparities for Maori over the last 10 years and our success has been documented in many places. (Prime Ministers Excellence Awards, etc)
- Playbased learning, digital tech, short learning lessons

At NCEA level?

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8. What changes, additions or increased flexibility would you like to see brought to the Kahui Ako model.

- Personally, I feel the Across School Leaders roles are not required. A collaboration within school leaders is where the work is happening.
- Flexibility to combine In School resource into Across school positions
- Some principals are 'capturing' the in-school resource. Not allowing flexibility in use
- More flexibility and more staffing
- Share across and in school roles to where they are needed
- PLD Model needs reviewing (how allocated)
- Innovation Fund – too complicated and too hard
- Inquiry time too limited to free up other teachers
- Give us the money and let us decide what to do with it

9. What is your best idea for raising boys achievement in Co-ed state schools.

Respondent 1

- Culturally appropriate and responsive contexts for learning.
- Kapa Haka and Bi-lingual programmes
- School wide commitment to Tikanga
- Tuakana-Teina model works with young boys
- Sports is important in a new school / community in bringing people together

Findings

Achieving Challenges are the guiding documents for the work of Kahui Ako and the use of their human resources. (see Appendix below) Many achievement challenges (which can be easily accessed online) contain detailed tables of numbers of students who are underachieving, the percentage improvement goals that have been set, and how many individual students will be lifted as a result. These tables seem to all follow a similar format which reflects the criteria set for achievement challenges to be approved.

From the feedback given to me it does not appear that many Kahui Ako have:

- a. measured their achievement against the goals set
- b. shown that they have been successful in making achievement gains
- c. reported that information to their community or to the ministry

Implications

If there is limited accountability of Kahui Ako to their Achievement Plan and if few meet the requirement to show progress against goals set, then there should be concerns that the resourcing given to Kahui Ako is having any positive effect on raising or lifting student achievement.

Conclusions

It would appear that the IES initiative has been implemented with the lofty goals of making a positive difference to student achievement, but that the reality of the early years shows

that this is not yet occurring in any significant way. Many respondents see positives in the areas of sharing, collaboration and improved practice, but few are seeing the achievement results that are supposed to be the driving reasons for the IES initiative.

My personal experience has been of a 'forming phase' that highlighted the challenges of getting collaboration in place. This phase involved a lot of meetings and little in the way of work that impacted on our schools and achievement. This has been followed by a 'Storming Phase' which saw Achievement Plan work streams underway with meaningful work happening but still without evidence of student achievement being lifted. These two phases have taken up the first 3 to 4 years in our Kahui Ako. I would hope that the next phase of 'Norming' will see more refined achievement goals with smart allocations of resources to priority learners and areas of achievement deficit, something that may see the original intentions of IES finally realized.

## References

<http://www.education.govt.nz/>

<http://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/how-the-ministry-works/early-learning-bulletin/what-are-communities-of-learning-kahui-ako-february-2017/>

<https://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/communities-of-learning-kahui-ako-working-towards-collaborative-practice/>

## Appendix

### Achievement challenges

Achievement challenges are shared goals that are identified and developed by a Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako based on the needs of its learners.

Kāhui Ako should set between 3-5 achievement challenges. These should be related to, or derived from, the National Curricula and can include preconditions necessary for achievement such as wellbeing/hauora and student engagement. Achievement challenges should be focused on the things that the Kāhui Ako consider will make the most significant difference to all the children and young people and help them to achieve the outcomes in the [New Zealand Curriculum](#) and [Te Marautanga o Aotearoa](#).

### Endorsement of achievement challenges

Once the achievement challenges have been identified and a high level plan for addressing them has been developed, the boards of trustees of each of the schools need to agree to them and sign a memo of understanding. Staff members, parents, family and whānau should all be involved in the achievement challenge process.

Achievement challenges need to show:

1. The evidence for why each challenge has been chosen: ie. The inquiry process that led to identifying the learning need, and how this relates to the outcomes sought in the NZ Curriculum/Te Marautanga.
2. The story about what will happen to make progress against each challenge.
3. How it will be known that progress is being made against each challenge.