

"Models of management and staff organisation used in a variety of U 4/5 New Zealand schools, and successful strategies to develop career pathways for staff"



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- \* Senior staff at St Patrick's who stepped up in my absence to keep the school running smoothly
- \* School Principals in the Nelson/Marlborough region who hosted me during my research.

### **Key Areas of Interest:**

- What are common management structures in U4-5 schools?
- What innovative structures are some schools using?
- What are typical patterns of remuneration (unit allocation) for senior leadership roles, and what accompanying workload does this carry?
- What deliberate acts/ strategies are schools employing to provide career pathways for teachers and aspiring leaders?

### **Rationale and Background**

I am currently Principal of St Patrick's school Taupo, a U4 school with a roll of 200-240 annually. My career pathway has been from teaching in a U3 school to principalship of a U1 school (roll: 29); principalship of a U3 school (roll:100); to my current position.

This sabbatical provides me with the opportunity to reflect on steps taken so far in my career and to consolidate for the years ahead. It allows me to take time to deeply and thoughtfully consider what the best next steps for St Patrick's school will be. We are a young school (established 1997, with an opening day roll of 66) and I am its second principal. Management positions in the school have developed over time in response to growth and need. With the school roll stabilizing in recent years, It is an appropriate time to stop and evaluate what has evolved, to consider other possible structures and practices, and to resource accordingly for the next stage of the school's life.

As a younger principal I was strongly encouraged by two of my mentors to firstly apply for this sabbatical (despite my self-talk that I hadn't earned it yet) and secondly to use the time away

from the job to refuel, reenergize and refocus for the next stage of my career as a school Principal.

### **Study Process**

I intend commencing my Masters in Educational Leadership in 2012 and so am preparing for a season of academic engagement ahead. With that in mind for the next few years I chose to approach this sabbatical study in a less rigid manner; to simply meet with a variety of Principals and Deputy Principals and to hear their stories; and then to glean the gold from the conversations for collation in this report. I wanted to see the common leadership and organizational patterns and also to study the outliers – to see which schools are doing things in a markedly different way from the norm, and why.

I chose to visit schools in Nelson/ Marlborough, focusing on U4/5 schools as that is most applicable to my current school size. I chose this region as it is where I grew up and I have a working knowledge of the different communities, yet having not worked there would not bring any undue background knowledge to my visits. A secondary factor was the ability to combine school visits with the opportunity to spend time with family and friends.

I had initially planned to also visit schools in the Napier/ Hastings region but for personal reasons was unable to complete this.

I visited 18 schools in total, spending anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours in each school. In each instance I met with the principal, had a tour of the school, some discussion and conversation around the questions below, and finally sharing documentation relevant to my study.

The schools were picked primarily on the basis of size but included a mixture of urban and rural, full primary, contributing, intermediate, state integrated and private schools.

The following questions were used to direct the conversation.

### ***Management Teams***

Please describe the management structure in your school (show if on paper).

- Remuneration/ spread of units incl. fixed term vs. permanent units
- Structure of team
- Meetings/ responsibilities/ principal's role in leading senior managers
- Responsibilities of DP's/AP's (any job description examples appreciated)
- Ratio mgmt. vs/ scale a teachers in school

- Turnover of people in positions
- Strengths of your current team
- Stumbling blocks/ future opportunities for your current team
- What you might set up differently if you could start over with a new structure

### ***Career Pathways***

- Tell me about your career progression to Principalship
- Does the allocation of management units affect/ influence career progressions for teachers?
- Has the introduction of additional management units in the last 5 years influenced career progressions and pathways as was intended?
- Do your structures allow progression for teachers' growth within the school, or do they need to move out to move up?
- Do you have any formal statements re: career progression for staff in your school?
- How do you manage/ provide opportunity for up and comers

Predictably the conversations that emerged from these questions were wide ranging and the dialogue that followed, rather than the direct Q and A was the most important part of the process. There were a wide variety of responses and some requested to be off the record. In honouring that, and respecting the confidentiality and honesty of the conversations I held, I have summarized below my overall findings in a non-identifiable way. I am more than happy to be contacted by individual Principals if they would like to hear more about my findings or more specific information.

### **Management teams**

All schools visited had either a Deputy and Assistant Principal, or two Deputy Principals. Responsibilities attached to these roles varied. In many cases the DP was responsible for overseeing/ leading a current school focus area or goal, and the AP would be responsible for leading curriculum development with the backing of the management team. There was an even mix of "2 DP" schools and "1DP/ 1AP" schools with pros and cons in both setups.

Most leadership teams had a set meeting time on a weekly or fortnightly basis with the Principal setting the agenda. Some met only 2-3 times a term with a strong focus on strategic leadership at their meetings. Both approaches worked well depending on the context and needs of the school and the capabilities of the individuals involved. Meeting schedules were mostly kept fluid and responsive to needs.

Remuneration varied depending on the size of the school. One DP received 6MU but the majority received 3-4 as a combination of permanent and fixed term units. AP's generally received either the same amount of units or one less than the DP.

I was interested to observe a number of schools now awarding team leadership roles for fixed terms only. This was to share leadership opportunities around and to ensure people were kept challenged. It meant having a future focused eye and creating opportunities for teachers to grow into. This approach invariably involved challenging and frank discussions with staff, and being clear about the rationale for fixed term management appointments. In this admittedly small scale study, held in an area of the country where staffing is acknowledged as quite settled, Principals were needing to be creative and/ or challenging to keep new ideas and opportunities coming for their staff. The first step in this for some Principals seems to be making team leader or curriculum leader roles fixed term.

Release times varied between schools with very little consistency or commonality. This was because every school had different needs and organizational demands. However some interesting findings/ initiatives are summarized below:

- Some schools providing "as needed" release for leaders rather than specific time each week.
- Guidelines for release in some schools was very prescriptive and task focused; in others a high degree of trust was shown.
- Parents requesting their children not being placed in leaders classrooms due to time out of the classroom and perceived impact on their child's education.
- Schools which pool release days for all leaders (e.g. all leaders on release on Thursdays)
- Leaders released from classroom teaching specifically to be "roaming" in other classrooms, and/ or working with teachers in their classrooms, as opposed to "admin time".

The closing two questions under the management team subheading above were deliberately geared at asking what Principals would like to do differently but couldn't. Those who had been at their schools for a longer period of time (5 years +) found that they had had sufficient staff changeover/ change in school focus to be able to really implement their own vision and to put in place a system that they felt was best for the current needs of the school, and which had the buy-in of staff. Those with shorter tenure often wanted to change what they had inherited but found that difficult to do without staff buy-in, even when there were compelling and immediate needs for change.

There was some concern that the influx of units in the last five years had meant decreasing motivation for DP's and/ or senior teachers to look for a promotion. They could be very well

remunerated in their current role, receiving more than they might as a smaller rural school Principal (a more traditional pathway to Principalship). Incentives for such people to lead their own school then became about personal drive and ambition rather than for any financial benefit.

All Principals found the additional units good for giving younger leaders opportunities - so in this sense, the “career pathways” promoted by NZEI is happening. One Principal was adamant that “units are for leadership, not jobs” – and gave the example that a teacher being responsible for the PE shed was just what a teacher might do as part of their contribution to the whole school community, but it wouldn’t be financially rewarded. Leading Health and PE programmes, staff and related professional learning may well ensure a unit. In most cases it was felt that emerging leaders would get management units for a fixed period of time, which could be used as a springboard into other leadership roles.

Some schools were quite deliberate about removing the word “management” from their workplace; they strongly identified as being a “leadership” team instead.

### **Career Pathways**

Accepting that Nelson/ Marlborough is seen as a very settled area for staffing, I was interested to hear how Principals managed to promote career pathways. Most Principals had taken the rural route to principalship and were advocating the same to their staff who wanted to progress. This was seen as a less attractive option than it may have been in previous times due mostly to family commitments and changing social priorities. Internal advancements were available irregularly and were difficult to anticipate or plan for.

### **Summary**

Schools which appear very similar externally are structuring their management/ leadership teams in different ways depending on their contexts, people and priorities. Increased management unit allocations in recent years has allowed increased remuneration and flexibility for roles than may have been previously available. This has been a positive but also creates challenges for principals. Career pathways are available but rely on the individual being prepared to move around and opportunities that schools can provide internally.

### **Postscript**

During 2011 a number of changes occurred in my own school – some anticipated, some not – contributing to changes in our school management structure. Two of my staff members moved into school Principal roles of their own and one team leader resigned. These changes meant

that my study leave focus became extremely timely! On my return in term four, in consultation with staff and the Board of Trustees, significant changes to our schools management structure were undertaken that see a new structure and system in place for the 2012 school year. My experiences and findings during my terms sabbatical therefore had a significant impact on the changes made in our school and the new structures and systems adopted.

In closing I would like to thank TeachNZ and the Ministry of Education for their continuing support of the Principal Sabbatical scheme – it is a great initiative and one which recognizes the significant workload Principals carry. It was a great opportunity to leave my school for a term in capable hands and look deeply into an area of interest without the need to manage the day-to-day workload that principalship brings. The leave has impacted positively on my practice and I encourage other principals to also consider taking advantage of this opportunity.

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