

Leadership in Education Beyond the School.

How do school leaders contribute to the wider education sector and how does this impact on their own school, their role as principal.

Primary Principals Sabbatical Leave Scheme.

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Acknowledgement

I express my sincere thanks to the Redwood School Board of Trustees for supporting me in the undertaking of this study and to the school leaders for their response to my questionnaire.

Over recent years there has been a great deal of research into growing leadership within schools. My main aim is to look into how principal colleagues who give of their time to represent the school leaders view in the wider educational sector and in particular how the leadership grows within their school when the Principal is absent.

Effective leadership plays an important role in developing a professional learning community at school. The commitment various colleagues give beyond their school must in turn add value to their own school. I base my thinking on the writings of Michael Fullan, Louise Stoll, David Stewart and the BES leadership synthesis with the Kiwi Leadership Framework.

At the initial stage I have contacted the two main principal organisations being the NZEI Principals Council and the NZ Principals Federation executive. Their numbers responses will form the basis of how it is that we grow the leadership potential of our Deputy and Assistant Principals when the principal is out of school.

My inquiry was based on the responses received by an online survey. The main question is how school leaders manage their role as principal, contribute to the wide educator sector, and does it contribute to growing leaders within the school.

The underlying questions would reveal whether this contribution to the wider education sector happens and that does it have an effect on growing leadership within the school. The following questions were asked.

1. What reference group/committee do you attend for your organisation?
2. What frequency are these meeting held?
3. Do you inform your Board and/or leadership team of the work you do on behalf of the organisation?
4. When out of school what provision is made to cover your absence?
5. Who carries out this responsibility?
6. Does this form part of growing your leadership within the school?

7. When you represent your organisation what is expected of you?
8. Could this work be viewed as being invisible by your Board or staff?
9. What are the benefits you gain from attending such meetings?
10. Do you feel that ranges of principal experience are represented at these meetings?

These questions add value to the expectations of the role of the principal beyond the leadership at their school. These added contributions to the wider education sector can enhance an already effective leader of a school. If you transpose the notion of leadership given within a school setting to manage and sustain change in order to improve student learning outcomes then effective leadership to the wider education sector must also count to grow educational leadership.

There have been many writings on school leadership over the years such as the writings of Leithwood, Stewart, Blasé/Blasé, Sergiovanni, Stoll and Fullan. The leadership styles such as 'hero-leader, collaborative leader, transformational, distributional leader, to the cultural change leader. All of them add to the role of being a school principal and in the manner they carry themselves daily.

In this case I tend to follow the belief and practices of the distributional principal. The leader who fosters a learning community and who finds other leaders within the school will encourage those leaders to help others in a variety of fields of learning. This does require a development of a coach or mentor that encourages individuals to step up take on responsibility and run with it. This strongly supports my notion to cultivate leaders at many levels and that it ensures leadership succession takes place.

This will in fact play a key element in the growing of leadership when the principal is absent. It requires the inter-personal skills to grow the professionalism of individuals at many levels within the framework of the school. This does not mean an abduction of the role and responsibilities nor does it mean imposing goals on followers. What it can do is to encourage staff to contribute to the values and beliefs of a school and that it has a positive influence across the workplace.

This is so important when the principal is out of the school. Many would say, “The place runs by itself” but with shared vision, values, and beliefs those that have to step up to take on the responsibility of being the principal do so with confidence.

In my own case the growing up of leadership within the school builds the confidence and professionalism of individuals to move forward. The shared beliefs and values foster this development. Regular informal and formal discussions allow for growth of this leadership. It is wonderful to see initiative being taken. This could include contact with outside facilitators, courses, and attendance at seminars. The leadership team made up of deputy principals, assistant principals, and team leaders who usually meet regularly drive the objectives set for the year and are embedded in school charters, annual plans, professional development focus, and to the systems that make a school’s organisation flow with ease.

Sometimes it is the systems functions that really need to be understood by those who step up when the principal is absent. These systems form the ‘dry’ part of the principal’s job. These tasks are usually administrative such as staffing, finances, property, enrolments, attendance, special needs, parent interviews, outside agencies (MOE, GSE, Colleges of Education, and others), and many other items. These all impact and have an impact on any day of the school year. Sometimes decisions cannot be deferred. It does depend largely on how this distributed leadership has developed over time and those that find themselves in acting Principal positions can be given the delegated responsibility to make decisions. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has enabled us to have technological devices that can make contact with the principal at any time. Text messaging, emails, and mobile telephone calls are instantly available to help if and when the need arises. This does raise the question of trust and can those who are acting for the principal make certain decisions and actions required of them on the day. I would have to say that any significant issues would be deferred until the principal returns depending on how long the principal is absent.

In most cases what work that is done by those who are left in charge of the school do so in an exemplary manner. Principals draw strength from the fact that their acting principals do this work as part of the shared

responsibility and in providing stability in the day to day organisation of the school. This is reliant on the principal growing the capability and capacity of the leadership team. The survey analysis backs up these underlying tasks driven actions.

This brings it neatly around to why do principals take part in leadership beyond their school. The reasons for this are varied but like me there are a certain group of us who don't shy away from taking on further participatory roles and functions to foster the cause of education. To this end I have chosen to survey those principals who give their time on behalf of the principal organisations such as the New Zealand Principal's Federation and the New Zealand Educational Institute Principal's Council. Other contributions by principals are those that serve on local principals' associations or are asked by NZPF or NZEI to represent them at various forums. The surprise is that many colleagues are involved with many education references groups to be part of consultation with the Ministry of Education and its associated range of other parts of the wider education lobby such as the New Zealand Teachers' Council, Education Review Office, Group Special Education, Universities Colleges of Education, training advisory groups, School Trustee Associations, Health organisations, REAP, Polytechnics, business partners, and local authorities to name a few.

This is a formidable list of interested parties who from time to time seek input from the principal's voice. These requests show that Principals make the time to discuss specified issues and demonstrate their leadership beyond the school. In many cases it can broaden the experience and to see a deeper picture of what takes place and who is involved. This in some part will add value to the principals experience, it can also have impact on the school, and contribute to the governance of the school. In many cases principal's report back to the organisations who have requested the representation on any reference group. This is usually associated with increased information for the association for feedback or to make a stance of its own policy directions.

The following results are of those who responded.

1. What reference group/committee do you attend for your organisation?

Principal's Associations  
NZPF National Executive  
NZEI Principals' Council  
REAP  
National Standards Reference Group  
Implementation of the NZ Curriculum  
Kiwi Leadership Framework  
Property Regional  
Experienced Principal Development  
NZAIMS  
Review of Special Education  
Special Education  
Health  
Helpline co-ordination  
Operations reference group  
President's advisory team  
NZEI Area Council  
Payroll Reference Group  
School Support Group  
Property – National Reference  
Management Committee RTL B  
Management Committee RTLit  
NZ Teacher's Council  
Museum Education Committee

2. What frequency are these meeting held?

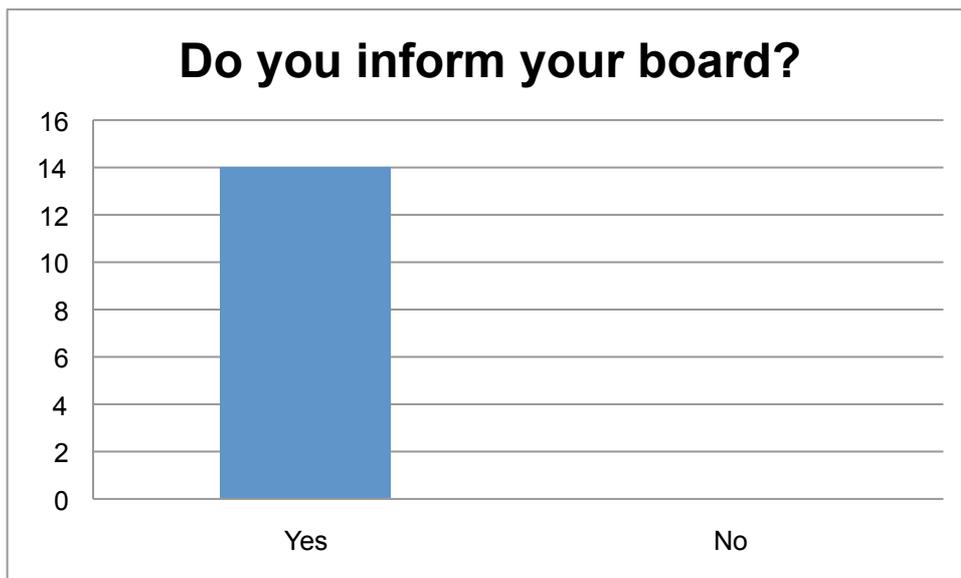
These ranges from

Once a term  
Twice a term  
Once a month

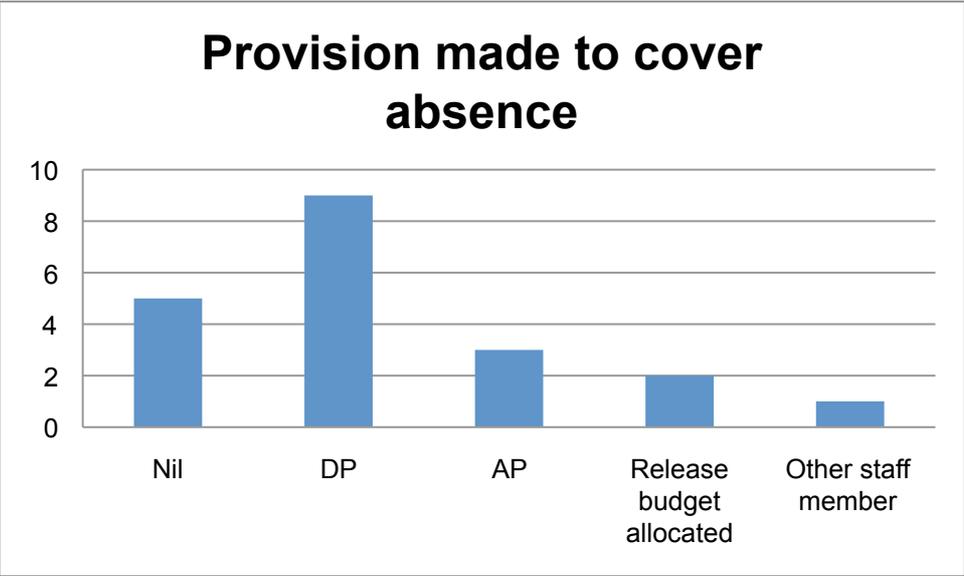
- 6 weekly
- 2 days per term
- Half day a fortnight
- 4 per month
- Half day per term
- Quarterly
- 4 per term
- Every 4 weeks

Plus many adhoc requests over and above set dates.

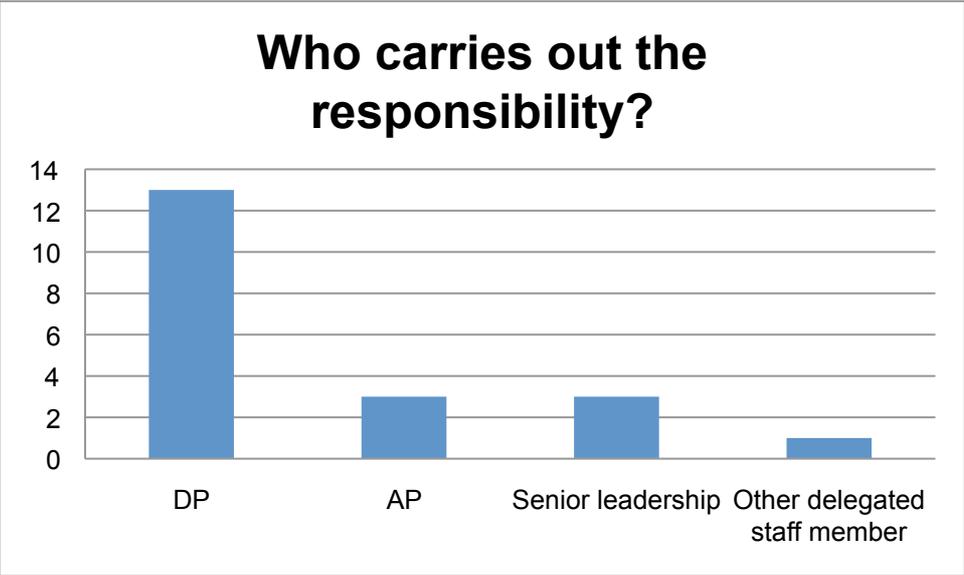
- 3. Do you inform your Board and/or leadership team of the work you do on behalf of the organisation?



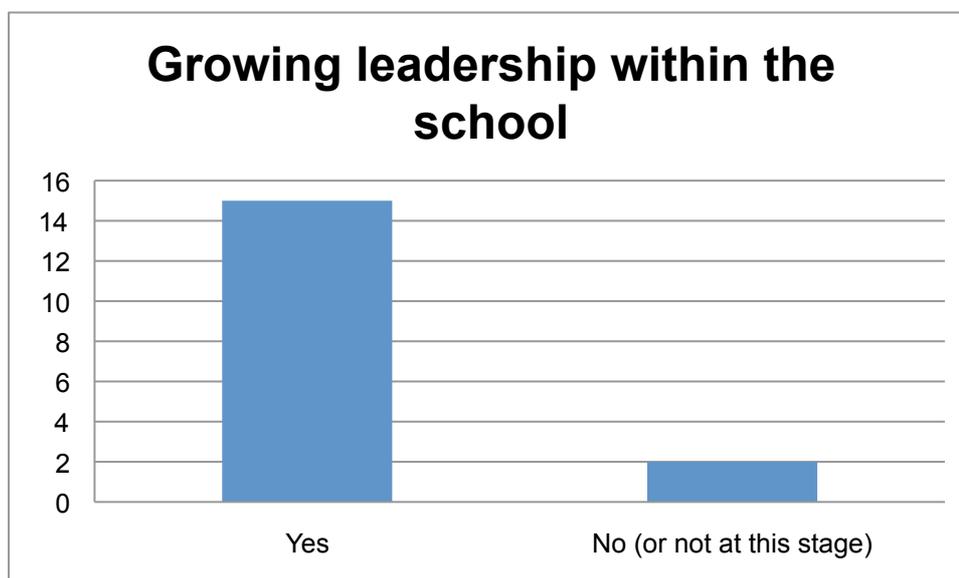
- 4. When out of school what provision is made to cover your absence?



5. Who carries out this responsibility?



6. Does this form part of growing your leadership within the school?



#### Anecdotal comments

Keeps D.P. in loop and up to date

Given the opportunity to make decisions as I would have

We have a strong belief in shared leadership and growing leadership across the staff

The information enables the leadership team and the board current information

Learning Leadership Team are all being prepared for their own Principal positions if and when they wish to apply for them

Absolutely - always at the forefront of what is going on nationally with MOE / Govt Policy and is advantageous to the school

Building leadership capacity is important regardless of my other roles

One DP is an aspiring principal

It helps build leadership competency and capability

7. When you represent your organisation what is expected of you?

Reports to and from meeting to networks

To represent all principals and the views and principles of NZPF/NZEI

Pre-reading and follow-up

Public speaking

To be well informed

Give views and perspective based on experience

Support and assist up to six First Time Principals

Workshop facilitator

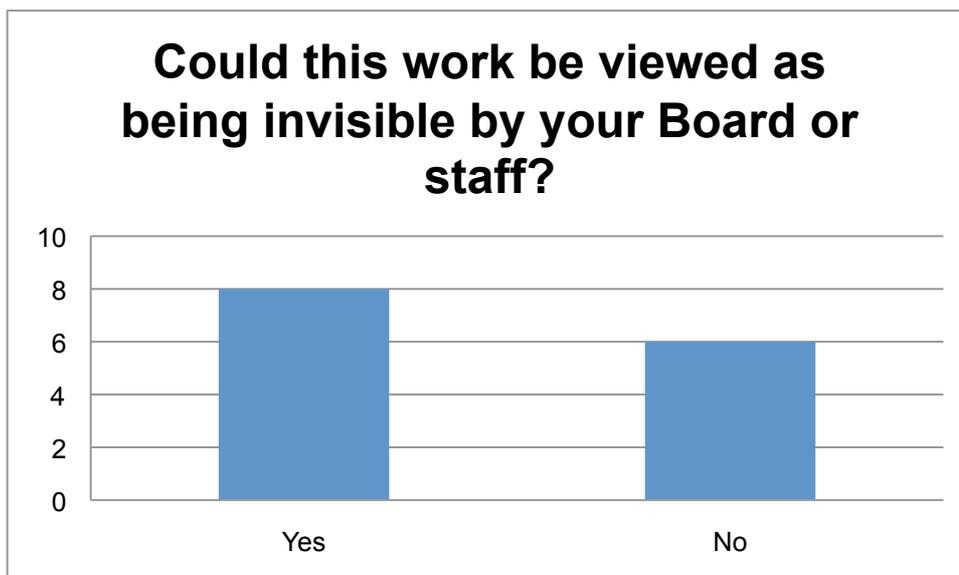
Input, ideas

Reflect the feelings / aspirations of staff, colleagues

2-way Feedback

Contribute my knowledge and skills to the group, bring the views of the group I represent to the meeting, and speak on their behalf

8. Could this work be viewed as being invisible by your Board or staff?



## Anecdotal comments

Some possibly could, some is very visible

I do include reports in my Board report, but its impact on my time is played down

## 9. What are the benefits you gain from attending such meetings?

### Anecdotal responses

Keep up to date with what is happening in the area, assist development of Principals, support local happenings, support Principals in need

Knowledge of what is happening through N.Z. Determine answers to problems, assist Principals, maintain professionalism of Principal position

Firsthand knowledge of the goings on in the education world and the interaction between the Union and MOE.

Very varied!!! some are bad for blood pressure. others are highly informative / give opportunities for me to share our views/ideas.

Up to date educational research and knowledge

### Professional Development

Very much up to date with what is occurring in education, excellent professional development

Access to colleagues and new ideas and ways of working

Professional challenge and big picture thinking

Contact with key people in the Ministry

Awareness of funding streams which the school then can apply for.

Knowing where funding comes from for initiatives

Being more aware of curriculum developments

Exposure to high quality professional development

Drawing on experience of others on exec

Wider perspective, close to policy, well informed for school decisions, collegial learning,

P's Council: Kept up to date with national focuses. Build a network of Principals who influence campaigns and trends.

Area Council: Influence others as I am seen as a "senior" Principal.

FTP Mentor: Great PD for me.

Up to date knowledge

Input into *Principal's work programme (NZEI)*

I feel that I am using my experience to achieve a high level of influence

Personal growth, professional uplifting, ideas worth implementing in own school.

Personal professional growth - strengthens my overall competence and understanding of my role and ability to think strategically for my school. Gives me a clear understanding of what is important and what this means for my school and community. Enables me to build a strong professional network.

Enhancing of my own professional knowledge and skills.

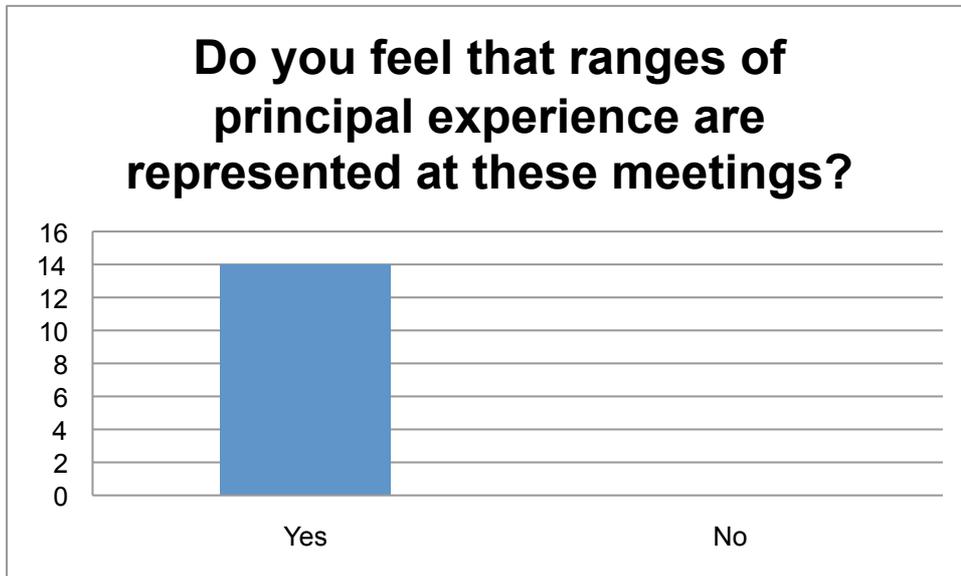
Networking within the profession.

I have the big picture view and I am learning

I can contribute to the direction followed by the museum staff. I am able to make suggestions that will benefit schools

Outstanding professional knowledge and insight

10. Do you feel that ranges of principal experience are represented at these meetings?



#### Anecdotal comments

In my experience it is only Principals of a certain size school that are able to be released to carry out this work. Due to the size of school required this tends to be more experienced principals

Most are experienced principals, and I think in the above contexts that mostly works. I appreciate that some younger people have different perspectives, and would input differently, but most experienced principals have been inexperienced at some stage!

## Conclusions

In summary this study has confirmed my views of groups of principals leading beyond their own school. The responses have provided anecdotal information to support the notion that there exists a group of principals who give their time to continue to share their leadership experience to further the cause of education. This opinion strengthens my belief that principals like to be involved in many aspects of how schools are organised through attending many different forums. As in schools it demonstrates that the principal's voice is important to be heard in a range of education activities. This range of activities as linked is by no means finite. There are many that have not been listed. Fullan talks about 'information becoming knowledge through a social process, and knowledge becoming wisdom through sustained interaction'. This I strongly believe the case for principals being involved in demonstrating leadership beyond the school. I am also strongly of the belief that these principals' use this knowledge through this interaction to grow leadership with the designated leaders and at many levels within their schools. One individual cannot do all this on their own. It is a distributed process that drives best practice for all concerned. I believe this process to be superimposed at the school level and ultimately have an impact on student learning outcomes.

Distributed leadership develops sustainability and the evidence shows this to be an important part in the organisation of the school. It is about the importance of building positive relationships. The sharing of vision, values, and beliefs are paramount to a school culture that will enable the growing of school leaders.

This shows that principals when called upon carry out a vast range of tasks. They believe in what they are doing and that it is a commitment to participate with the education policies of the time.

I thank all those that have taken part in this snapshot on leadership beyond the school.

## **Acknowledgements**

To the 17 school leaders that responded to the survey.

## **References**

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