

Education Forum: *'Reimagining the Principalship'*

Tuesday 1 August 2023

Session Summary Notes

Forum Purpose: To critically reflect on the role and function of the principalship as it currently exists in Western Australian public schools, and to reimagine what it could be to authentically meet the needs and realities of our students, schools and system into the future.



1. Key messages to be communicated from the forum:

- 1.1. The role of principal as it currently stands is not sustainable—it has become too broad and encompassing.
- 1.2. The core focus of a principal's role is to be an educational leader of the school—this means leading quality teaching and creating the best conditions for learning throughout the school.
- 1.3. Principals are distracted and consumed by operational management and compliance, and these elements could be better managed by others in the school or system.
- 1.4. Reimagining the principalship needs to happen in conjunction with reimagining the broader functioning of the Department of Education.
- 1.5. We are committed to ensuring the sustainability of quality principalship now and into the future.
- 1.6. Such changes are in the best interests of students.
- 1.7. This represents the collective voice and commitment of all principal Associations.

2. What should the responsibility of schools be?

- 2.1. The core responsibility of schools is to be places of learning—providing the conditions to meet the educational needs of all students so that they can be successful citizens.
- 2.2. This requires strong relationships with parents and families, and coordinated support with other agencies to meet the needs of the whole child—without assuming their roles and responsibilities.

3. What is distinctive about Principalship in 2023?

- 3.1. Schools are a microcosm of society, and as our communities have become increasingly complex, this is reflected and perhaps amplified in our schools.
- 3.2. There is an increasing expectation of schools to meet the broad needs of children and young people, and in many cases, the needs of the families they belong to—whether they are educational in nature or otherwise. While schools are typically committed to meeting the needs of the whole child, the pressures placed upon them—through increased poverty and disadvantage, mental health related issues,

diagnosed and imputed disability, and social media pressures, amongst others—schools are stretched to care for students while also attending to their core learning needs.

- 3.3. There are staffing complexities across all schools impacted by teacher shortages, workload issues, and mental health and wellbeing concerns, much of which has built up since COVID.
- 3.4. There are numerous evolving external pressures on schools—including an expectation to respond immediately to the constant communication cycle from parents and the system, as well as management of system risk and compliance mechanisms.
- 3.5. While these pressures are placed on schools in a broad sense, they ultimately become focused on the principal of the school, and it is the principal who carries the load in meeting these needs.

4. What are the top issues impacting principals and preventing them from being able to do the work they would ideally do?

- 4.1. Managing compliance-based tasks rather than leading
- 4.2. Staffing issues - whether that is being understaffed or managing unskilled or underperforming staff
- 4.3. Societal expectations that schools will fix everything—particularly with regarding to complex case management
- 4.4. Supporting the mental health and well-being of staff and students

5. In the ideal world of education where do you want the role of the Principal to be focused?

- 5.1. Principals should be focused on the core educational business of schools. This means creating the conditions for learning in which all students can succeed and a culture in which all staff share a vision for quality teaching and improvement. They should be focused on people, relationships, strategic school improvement and instructional leadership.
- 5.2. Principals should have the capacity to delegate operational responsibilities and functions that are necessary for the effective running of a school within the public

education system, but take away from them being fully present to the educational priorities of students, staff and the community.

6. How might you structure and approach school leadership to meet the real purpose, needs and realities of education today? How would you “reimagine” principalship?

- 6.1. The educational leadership and operational management aspects of the roles would be separated from each other.
- 6.2. The principal would remain the educational leader, requiring the creation of a new school-based role (that would possibly be the elevation of the current Manager of Corporate Services role), to manage all delegated operations.
- 6.3. Some functions may be more efficiently managed in coordinated ways to reduce duplication—either within Networks, Regions or Centrally.
- 6.4. Some operational functions maybe outsourced to industry experts (such as human resourcing, facility management, IT, and student health).
- 6.5. Change the expectation and perception that principals are on-call at all times, unless in the case of critical incidents.

7. What is currently done well to support and guide principals that you would not want lost?


- 7.1. There are various system supports available to advise and guide principals—particularly the role of CROs and Collegiate Principals in dealing with complex situations. Associations, collegiate groups and services offered through Employee Assistance Programs provide principals with personal support to continue their work.
- 7.2. The broader system architecture that allows schools to be autonomous while also integrated improvement and support processes—such as professional learning offered through the Leadership Institute.

8. What else could the Department do to provide the necessary support for principals to lead schools in this current context?

- 8.1. Engage a strategic approach to promote understanding and appreciation of the principal role in the community. Greater respect for the complexity and importance of school leadership could support better relationships and realistic expectations from parents and families.
- 8.2. Support greater flexibility and autonomy to make local decisions in regard to workforce planning—particularly with respect to non-Education Act roles (youth workers, first aid officers, facilities coordinators, HR officers etc)—without need for correlation with student numbers or context. For example, Level 4 Assistant Manager Corporate Services should be allowed in any school that wants the role and can support the budget, rather it be determined by enrolment numbers.
- 8.3. Allow principals to delegate compliance tasks to others—whether they are school based or centrally located depending on the function.
- 8.4. Support principals to find personal and professional renewal through sabbaticals and study tours that would, in turn, offer feedback and learning to the system.
- 8.5. Find more streamlined ways of communicating information and engaging in feedback processes regarding policies and system initiatives (reducing attendance at WebEx meetings).
- 8.6. Simplify the RFA process to access support from Statewide Services more efficiently.
- 8.7. Offer more equitable regionally based training (rather than just located in Padbury or Leederville) to minimise time spent outside of schools.
- 8.8. Support Directors of Education to spend some time in every school in proactive ways, rather than limited to critical moments.
- 8.9. Work with other Agencies in the Public Sector at a strategic level (particularly Health and Communities) to reduce the pressure on schools to find supports for students that are “outside our lane”.

9. What can principals do—as individuals or collectively?

- 9.1. Give ourselves permission to take licence and be innovative in developing locally based solutions.

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- 9.2. Seize every opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the Principalship.
 - 9.3. Be more strategic and coordinated in our data collection regarding the impact of our roles on our personal lives.
 - 9.4. Stick to collective agreements.

Verbatim Responses

What should the responsibility of schools be?

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| Places of learning. Educating kids. Providing the conditions for that to happen. |
| Schools focused on education - with a greater amount of time supporting the tier 3 students. School leaders are leading these processes. Other agencies and more centralised support needed for complex cases. |
| Recognition that currently, principals are engaged in matters that are management rather than leadership - and to have more time for strategic and instructional leadership, then compliance and operational matters to be undertaken by a principal support person (FTE). Be recognised, valued, elevated, celebrated - messaging from Minister, DG, schools need a PR strategy that supports, celebrates, elevates and values the role of the principal - as a principal and a person. |
| Meet the educational needs of all students so that they can be successful citizens. |
| Curriculum, teaching & learning. Conditions for learning for success for every student. |
| Teaching and learning. Educating kids for democracy and the world beyond school. Developing the culture in the school to allow this to happen. |
| Develop students into the best version of themselves. It shouldn't be - parenting, child protection, psych support, feeding, clothing, sleeping, student health that should be covered by the health department. Unless the health department improves, the role of the principal won't improve. |
| Developing a positive school culture. Staff development - teaching and learning |

What is distinctive about Principalship in 2023?

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| Increasing societal expectations. Managing increasing mental health issues of staff, students. Increasing behaviour concerns. Increasing complex cases - 20 percent with disabilities but not all funded. Increase in compliance. Staffing complexities. Workload and wellbeing issues, burn out, fallout from covid - 3 years of build-up manifesting in increased parent complaints, entitlement etc |
| Devolvement of managerial tasks to schools. Expected to be more visible and available for parents, teachers, system at all times. More things to more people - human resource manager, psychosocial experts. The role is not revered, valued or respected (in general). Other people and roles are more valued than the principal. The principal is seen to be responsible for making any request 'happen' and not challenge requests from internal and external stakeholders. Greater workload and compliance reporting, time poor. Engaged in wider range of things - eg buildings, community, networks. More time involved in creating a safe learning environment due to the nature of student characteristics (and staff), technology and physical environment. Greater role in training staff - previously centralised and now greater scope of training required from policy to practical - with higher accountability to ensure it is done. Lead role in complex case management, inviting and leading this process with other agencies. Drivers - covid 19, risk adverse, increased legislation, policy. |
| Management of risk & level of compliance and its associated mechanisms. State of society and community |
| Staffing shortages. Staff and student mental, physical, and emotional health and wellbeing. Expectations of instantaneous communication 24/7, compliance and accountability, reduce regional and central support |
| Compliance still grows as does the complexity of individual students. More and more being prevalent in schools with and without diagnoses due to wait lists and other family concerns. All things to everyone and a holder of all knowledge - the expectation that we |

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| should know everything and do everything on demand. The impact on personal lives is growing in time, demand and stress and at the end of the day it is just a job. But if we don't do it, the students, staff and families suffer and we aren't the people to let that happen. |
| Staffing shortages. Staff and student health and well-being (mental, physical, emotional). Expectation of instant feedback and being on call 24/7. Fountain of all knowledge. Compliance and accountability demands. |

In the ideal world of education where do you want the role of the Principal to be focused?

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| Focus on people. Focus on teaching and learning. Stay in your lane - what is your lane? Be a leader in your school community and a conduit to the wider community. Ultimately focus is on outcome for kids. |
| We want to focus on teaching and learning - strategic school improvement and instructional leadership rather than management. Leading a positive learning environment. |
| Removing the barriers to allow principals to focus on the needs of individual students in the school. |
| Curriculum, teaching & learning. Conditions for learning for success for all students |
| On leading teacher development, culture, vision and planning. Whole school approaches |
| Create the environment where students are happy and learning and principals are able to drive the school improvement. Capacity to delegate roles, where they are a member of a greater ecosystem of supports to help students be the best version of themselves. Delegate to a PA, to a site manager, be the CEO who leads a team that is responsible for improvement in different areas |
| Whole school approaches. Teaching and learning. |

How might you structure and approach school leadership to meet the real purpose, needs and realities of education today? How would you “reimagine” principalship?

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| Mining model: Department as employer CEO—DG has Corporate Supporting Structures and gets the right COOs in the right schools. COO—Chief Operations Officer for their school leads learning. |
| Once it is reimaged, educating (the community and stakeholders) and celebrating what the principalship actually is (and what it's not), Elevate the profession, positive messaging of principalship role, support mechanisms to assist with operational / compliance tasks, support mechanisms for improved intra-agency support with greater clarification of roles and responsibilities, messaging around the role of parents / families. Autonomy though with support - system wide campaigns and advertising rather than relying on schools to pass on Minister messages or educate about policies and practices, Strong supportive team around the principal (in school eg HR) so that the principal can focus on instructional leadership |
| System of school based delegations. Look for opportunities/roles of non-ed act roles across contexts. Exec Assistant in every context. Level 3 principal must be non-teaching. DP must be non-teaching. Separation of leadership and management (principal/MCS.) Reimagining the principal has to be part of reimagining education. |
| 1. Broker/Delegate/Outsource facility management/operation and all its parts (eg HR; OHS; IT; building & maintenance; student health; emergency response). An operation facilities manager-like positions could be created to support this does not need an education background. 2. Focus on instructional leadership with students, staff and |

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| community. 3. 24/7 on call, change of perception by community. Holidays and weekends off limits unless if critical nature. |
| Consider the separation of teaching and learning and operational roles Principals to be focussed on instructional leadership 80% Some tasks to be taken back by central. Plans, reports taken from SIS, good templates, exemplars |
| Leadership management is separated from the role so the principal can lead the teaching and learning of the school. Anything that sits under leadership management should sit with a specialist in the DET with that experience, or delegated to a member of staff you employ specifically for that. For example: IT, OHS, SAER, CPFS, school resources, data management and compliance. If a principal is there for the benefit of improving student outcomes then these roles need to be given to someone else to manage. The principal can oversee like a CEO, or the DG becomes the CEO, the corp exec is the management and compliance team and the principal is on the ground with the main focus on teaching and learning. |

What is currently done well to support and guide principals that you would not want lost?

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| CRO support in regional office. Collegiate Principals. EAP manager assist, collegiate groups and Associations |
| Tv ads supporting the profession and moving responsibility to the parents - nz staffing autonomy with support sdd and trade-off, after school meetings with teachers (we need more) |
| Autonomous schools. Support mechanisms for principals |
| Collegiate Principal role. New professional learning through the Leadership Institute (eg LSI suite, Launch, PPP, middle leader programs, FLF) |
| Collegiate Principals, professional Associations and the nuggets of goodness in head office. Raising a support request and being unable to contact directly does need to change. |