

NSW Secondary Principals' Council



The Consultant Principal Position Paper A new era in Principal Support

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The Role of the Principal

The NSW Secondary Principals' Council re-affirms the statement of beliefs and values set out in "The Leadership of Secondary Education in NSW Public Schools" and positions outlined in the "NSWSPC Role, Authority, Leadership and Accountability of the Principal paper" and re-commits to the view of the principal's role expressed in that document; specifically that the principal as school leader will:

1. Lead and be responsible for maximising the educational achievements of all students to create and sustain cultures of success, learning and achievement underpinned by consistent pedagogical platforms, the development of the whole child and a positive values framework.
2. Lead and be responsible for the design and implementation of the school's curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning programs within agreed curriculum frameworks to address the needs of particular student, staff and community contexts.
3. Sustain strong educational leadership and effective professional learning and development to strengthen and support the profession within and beyond the school.
4. Lead and be responsible for recognising and building student and school capacity to develop strong community relationships and work with colleagues to position public secondary and central schools as the preferred choice for the 21st century.
5. Lead and be responsible for the planning, organisation, management, administration, evaluation and accountability of the school to accommodate diverse school-community contexts.

Background

The following proposal represents a radical shift in the intellectual underpinning of how we currently support and supervise Principals. It strengthens the notion of Principals and bureaucrats working in partnership for the betterment of educational outcomes, rather than in a more conservative, traditional line management relationship.

It is widely accepted that the Principal of a Public School in NSW is a unique position. It is pivotal in the success or failure of any initiative, policy or procedure. The Principalship is the one and only place in the NSW DEC at which all of the education system's functions come together. With this in mind it is little wonder that the development,



support and supervision mechanisms for Principals have been, and continue to be a central concern for senior bureaucrats and politicians past and present. At various stages in the past this has been reflected in different ways including:

- genuine concern for Principals by individual senior officers,
- structural responses recognising the OH&S responsibility of DEC for Principal induction and welfare, positive attempts at support at a local and regional level,
- high quality professional learning,
- issuing of directions and demands for accountability, compliance, paperwork, some of which have been unrealistic and
- conduct of various investigations.

In essence, everyone wants access to and influence over, the Principal. Historically the supervision of Principals has been driven by line management/performance management systems, with attempts at provision of support in managing difficult situations, drawn from business models where the line manager had a title (including School Inspector, Cluster Director, District Superintendent and School Education Director).

At various stages these line managers were in turn supervised by Regional Directors who in turn were line managed by the Deputy Director General (DDG), Schools, or the equivalent.

Regardless of the structure of the day, all of these relationships were fundamentally driven by a pyramid style model of management. Essentially this model provided bureaucrats and politicians some form of reassurance that the Principal would be held accountable by someone in a more senior position, and that if needed some sort of support for the Principal was in place. Despite this structural reassurance it is not clear from the past how Principals, or their immediate supervisors, have in fact been held accountable for the majority of outcomes within their areas of responsibility². In other words, whilst it is often stated that Principals and their supervisors are held accountable for such things as student learning outcomes, there is little evidence that this has occurred or does occur with any rigour or educational measurement.

Further, there has been a tension between the role of the supervisor as line manager and the role of the supervisor in providing support and professional learning for the Principal and the school. In recent years, primarily since the introduction of the 2004 Principal Assessment and Review Schedule (PARS), there has increasingly been an attempt to portray the model as one of supporting the professional growth of Principals. It is the view of the NSWSPC that in spite of that rhetoric the relationships between Principal and SED remains primarily focused upon line management. Indeed the very title of the PARS process focuses attention upon the area of “Assessment” and “Review”, not school improvement or Principal professional growth.

It is the evidence based view of the NSW SPC that the existing situation represents an outdated and ineffective model of support which is not well suited to the complexities of a modern educational system, nor to the current political emphasis at both state and national levels of the development of more locally empowered schools.

It is also clear from an abundance of research and surveys that the most likely source of support sought by a Principal is a colleague Principal and the most common source of

professional learning is from colleagues, Principal associations and other professional associations.

This particular characteristic has led to innovations in other systems in Australia, as well as overseas. Most recently, the National College of School Leadership in the United Kingdom has introduced a system of Professional Partners for Principals multiple systems in the United States have formal Principal Mentor structures, and even in Australia several other states have formal Principal support positions drawing upon the expertise of colleague Principals

Two fundamental questions

There is extensive rhetoric that the Principal is the key educational leader in the school system, and that the role of the bureaucracy is to support the Principal to lead the school community. Arguably though, the bureaucracy has had much more of a focus on line management and control of Principals, with an excessive focus upon issues management and risk management especially at the local level.

Underpinning this position paper are two paradoxical questions. They are seemingly simple questions, and yet also highly complex.

1. *If the Principal truly is the key leader, and there is less focus upon line management, what would support for a Principal look like?*
2. *If the Principal truly is the key leader, and there is less focus upon line management, what would student learning outcomes look like?*

A process for exploration

In exploring some of the possible answers to that question this study involved the following steps:

1. An initial briefing paper was prepared and a hard copy provided to the then Shadow Minister for Education, Adrian Piccoli. The paper was discussed at a meeting with him in Griffith in January 2011. At this stage the document was simply an attempt to determine possible means by which Principals could be better supported in their work.
2. The initial briefing paper was refined and submitted to the NSW SPC State Assembly. A presentation was developed which highlighted the possible areas for exploration and likely sources of contention. The State Assembly endorsed the further exploration of the concept at its meeting in March 2011.
3. The Consultant Principal Concept was nominated for the 2011 Academy Fellowship Award and was ultimately successful in winning that award. The funds associated with the Fellowship were utilised in undertaking consultation with Principals and completing the subsequent versions of the paper which will ultimately be presented to the SPC State Assembly.
4. A series of briefings was held with SPC groups across the state during Terms 2 and 3 in 2011. The concept raised great interest and substantial debate. The material from these meetings was collated and led to a number of key questions that needed to be addressed in order to move the concept to a more substantial recommendation for reform.

5. Discussions took place with a very senior Departmental Officer in Western Australia and some Principals in that state in relation to the advantages and disadvantages of their Network Principal model.
6. Discussions took place with some Principals in Victoria in relation to the advantages and disadvantages of their Cluster Principal model.
7. In Term 4 2011 a Zoomerang survey of SPC members was undertaken. The questions that emerged as a result of the state-wide consultation meetings provided the basis for the Zoomerang survey. 255 members returned the survey, representing about 65% of all SPC members. The responses to these questions formed the key parameters for the penultimate draft of the paper. The Zoomerang survey and responses are at Appendix number 1.
8. A small group of critical friends from within and beyond the DEC reviewed the paper and offered further suggestions which were incorporated into the final paper.
9. The final paper was submitted to the NSW SPC State Assembly for endorsement at its Term 2 2102 meeting.
10. A report of the research project and outcome will be delivered at the SPC Annual Conference in 2012 as per the Fellowship guidelines.

Contestable considerations

1. It is the view of the NSW SPC that the concerns it has raised on many occasions in recent years relating to the welfare of Secondary Principals as a result of increased work pressures have led to little or no tangible response from the employer. This serious "Workplace Health and Safety" concern has seen numerous motions passed at NSWSPC State Assemblies, calling on the employer to take positive action in dealing with the WH&S issue. These motions have frequently been drawn to the attention of successive Directors General and Ministers for Education by the senior Executive of the NSWSPC.

The NSWSPC conducts annual longitudinal surveys of its members and it is clear from those surveys, and from information held by the employed officers and executive of the NSWSPC, that an increasing number of Principals are suffering health and well being problems as a result of their work. Despite the clarity with which these concerns have been expressed to senior bureaucrats and successive Education Ministers the problem remains unaddressed.

This concern about Principal welfare has been a factor in the innovations explored in other systems in Australia and overseas countries as a means by which it can be demonstrated that those respective systems are being pro-active in addressing the need to provide more effective support for Principals.

It is the position of the NSWSPC that the introduction of the Consultant Principal model will not only lead to more effective professional growth and support for Principals, but in doing so, will also begin to alleviate some of these WH&S concerns.



2. The current model of Principal supervision based on a Regional / School Education Director (SED) model is one which is heavily based on poorly defined line management and system compliance rather than professional support and professional growth. It is the view of the NSWSPC that central to the ineffectual nature of the current model is a tension between those two areas of compliance and development.

Principals understand and accept the need for system accountabilities and monitoring. This is similarly the case in every school at which the Principal and other Executive are responsible for the provision of support and development, but also for compliance in relation to policies and procedures. However, in the case of the supervision of Principals by SEDs, the NSWSPC believes there is a need for more clarity guiding the distinction between what is systemic monitoring and what is professional support for school improvement. There needs to be a much stronger focus on professional support, and that support should be provided by those with expertise in leading Secondary and Central schools and SSPs for secondary students.

This is by no means to be interpreted as a criticism of the dedication or interpersonal skills of individual School Education Directors. Many of these have excellent professional relations with their Principals, but it is the view of the NSWSPC that Principals of Secondary and Central schools and the senior officers of DEC need to move beyond such superficial judgements to assess the value of the current model in terms of professional growth of Principals.

3. It is the view of the NSWSPC that at present the various Directorates at the State Office of the DEC frequently provide excellent support to school leaders. This support takes multiple forms including the development and delivery of professional learning programs, provision of advice and workshops at NSWSPC events, the development of partnered events with outside providers, research and policy development, and advice provided to individual Principals on a needs basis.

It can sometimes be argued that devolved bureaucratic models are desirable, but this needs to be balanced with the need to ensure consistency of delivery of key programs and state-wide compliance with various regulatory bodies. The existence of 10 Regional entities creates the possibility, and many would argue frustrating reality, that this actually involves 10 different devolved bureaucratic models.

Thus, one of the great challenges for the DEC in a Regionally based model is the need to “risk manage” many functions that involve system compliance with outside providers. Just a few of these currently include organisations such as the NSW Board of Studies, the NSW Institute of Teachers, and both state and federal Vocational Education Training organisations. Arguably in the future this may also involve the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

4. The workforce demographic for the NSW DEC is changing quite dramatically with the impending retirement over the next 5 years of a significant percentage of highly capable and experienced Principals. This raises two issues, one is a challenge and the other a possible option for improvement.

The challenge is how best to replenish that loss of corporate knowledge, capability and resilience. There will be need for a different structure to contend with this phenomenon which has never previously occurred to such an extent. There has always been succession planning and a spread of people retiring and others in readiness for the new role, however not in the proportions likely to be seen in the years ahead. Undoubtedly new Principals will bring a vast new set of skills, but the need to be able to support such a significant number of relatively inexperienced school leaders at one time is problematic.

This challenge is well articulated in the following comment from a Principal who has just completed his first year in the position. This paper does not claim that one person's view can be claimed to represent the whole membership, however, the quote is certainly illustrative of the value of Principals support for colleague Principals.

“I am not trying to be critical of my SED but there have been many occasions when he was unavailable or I just felt it was inappropriate to ask what some might see as a dumb question. I never felt this with my network. In fact I always felt at ease and so many of them went out of their way to make this process not feel threatening. hey have probably been my greatest support during the first 12 months and I suspect they will continue to be so in the next 12 months.”

The option for improvement is to utilise some of the expertise of retired Principals in some way to support those new to the position

Concept outline: The Consultant Principal

The concept of a Consultant Principal represents a new strategy in an attempt to move away from an outdated line management model to one which draws more directly upon the expertise and trust that already exists within Principal networks and professional communities.

It is the position of the NSWSPC that 30 FTE Secondary and Central Consultant Principal positions be established across NSW.

These Principals may be drawn from current school based Principals, or those who have retired from full time work as a Principal within the last two years.

It is proposed that the position of Consultant Principal be established to work with groups of Principals for Secondary, Central and Secondary SSPs, or individual Principals, for the express purpose of providing support, professional learning and / or professional coaching and mentoring for key responsibilities and tasks.

These areas are not limited to, but may include;

- The development of personal professional learning plans

- Assistance with the provision of access to high quality professional learning resources, activities and networks
- Assistance with conducting collegial reviews of school programs
- Support for early career Principals
- Support in developing conflict resolution skills
- Support specific to leading and managing Central Schools
- Improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students
- Improving educational outcomes for students in low SES environments
- Improving educational outcomes in rural and remote school
- Improving educational outcomes for Gifted and Talented students.
- Dealing with staff performance and conduct issues
- Development of, and ongoing management of, school planning
- Workplace, health and safety management
- Development of professional learning communities and associated local networks
- Assistance with Staffing entitlements
- Assistance with financial and resource management

The advantages of this proposal are that it has the potential to reduce levels of bureaucracy and it provides a more direct, high quality support for Principals, from those who are deemed to be existing high quality practitioners in key tasks and processes.

The Consultant Principal positions should not be aligned to Regions, but should have a direct “line of sight” relationship between the Professional Learning and Leadership Development Directorate (or its equivalent) and Principals in the field. Given the array of technology available to all, it is not essential that these positions necessarily be assigned to geographical areas. Breaking free of the artificial construct of a Regional model opens up other possibilities for the deployment of these positions. For example, one of more Consultant Principals may be regarded as having specific expertise that could be available to any Principal in the state regardless of location

There are several significant differences between this proposed model and previous models including the abandoned Regionally based Principal Support Officer model. These significant differences include:

- The positions are not Regionally based, nor regionally line managed
- The positions have limited tenure
- The positions include people with expertise in specific skill areas
- There are significantly more positions
- The role is not based directly around Principal welfare.

In the event that this position paper also be adopted by the NSW Primary Principals Association, and additional cost offsets are required, it is the view of the NSWSPC that the number of SED positions should be reduced and that their role statement should be more explicitly aligned to ensuring system compliance with policy and procedure. In essence this provides greater clarity around the role of the SED and continues to



provide the system with the assurances it needs to risk manage the various elements of school administration for which it is responsible.

Specific recommendations

The original concept paper associated with this research had proposed the eventual replacement of all SEDs with Consultant Principals. Clearly this notion is not supported by the membership and has subsequently been refined. There were many comments of similar nature, at the meetings and in the survey, expressing the concern that to establish a line management relationship would simply be replacing the problems embedded in the current practice with a similar model.

1. That the Consultant Principal position be established with a limited tenure of up to two years, with right of return to current school and an allowance paid above the normal Secondary Principal classification relating to that individual.

Although there was strong support for this period there were a significant number of respondents opting for a one year tenure. Clearly, the concern expressed at various stages of the consultation process, was about the potential negative impact on the individual's substantive school as the period of tenure increases.

2. That continuing consideration be given to other options for the operation of Consultant Principals beyond that which is made in recommendation 3.
3. That Consultant Principals should be appointed following a merit selection process convened by the NSW DEC with a panel comprising a delegate of the DDG Schools, a member of the NSWSPC Executive and a member of State Assembly. There was clear support for a properly convened merit selection process with a strong SPC presence.
4. As a means by which the new Consultant Principal model may be resourced, that the position of School Development Officer be abolished.
5. That the role of School Education Directors be more specifically aligned to systemic monitoring and that the number across the state be reduced to 60 in total in the event that cost savings are required to incorporate Primary Principals into this model.
6. That further discussions take place involving the NSWSPC, The NSWDEC and the NSWTF in relation to the employment conditions and allowance for the Consultant Principal position.

The future

The concept of the Consultant Principal has many possibilities and represents a significant shift in thinking from an "Industrial Revolution" style line management model, to something that represents a more substantial professional learning community. It requires a fundamental shift in the level of trust the system places in

Principals, their capacity to determine what is best for their local circumstances and their authority to act locally.

As Anthony Robbins once said, “If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always got.” (This quote has in fact been attributed to many different people)

