

NSW Secondary Principals' Council



Professional Learning Position Paper Ratified: August 2019

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The New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council (NSWSPC) believes in professional learning that is designed to improve the professional practice of principals. Professional learning should be created to support principals in the development of effective and high-impact leadership practices which can result in a school's collective effectiveness. Professional learning enables principals to understand and value their role in leadership development, becoming key enablers in developing future leaders.

The Council's main role is to enhance the effectiveness of NSW public secondary school principals through advocacy, support, professional learning and collegial networks. This role will lead to improved learning outcomes for students in public education (MOU 1.1).

Core Principles:

High quality, relevant and timely professional learning is at the heart of effective leadership and successful schools. Professional learning underpinned by evidence-informed research, determined by principals for principals is the cornerstone for successful principalship.

Professional learning needs to:

- be differentiated, dynamic, organic and responsive to need;
- offer honest and authentic opportunities for self-reflection;
- ensure principals are lead learners in their schools (Darling-Hammond et al 2017); and
- allow for continual improvement of professional knowledge and capability (NSW SPC Pledge 2012).

Purpose

The Professional Learning Reference Group (PLRG) recognises that professional learning is composed of formal and informal learning experiences. These experiences enable school leaders to improve their individual professional practice, collective efficacy skills and a school's combined effectiveness. High quality professional learning experiences allow for the development of individual and collective capacity across the principalship and wider school leadership to address current and future challenges.

This paper is written with the intention of recognising the key role the NSWSPC has in building and maintaining a high-performing public secondary education system with professional learning experiences as a foundation of daily principal practice.

Rationale

A successful public education system is underpinned by the quality of its leaders. Leaders who make the greatest impact see learning as central to their professional lives. The



NSWSPC supports the development of leadership capability, capacity and density in every public school with secondary enrolments.

The NSWSPC values the development and provision of a strong pre-principal credential focused on educational leadership which may include the involvement of tertiary credentials. Increasing demands for compliance and accountability requirements have a significant impact on the workload of principals and their ability to focus on educational leadership (NSWSPC Wellbeing Survey 2018). The PLRG aims to ensure that professional learning designed for and engaged in by principals is evidence informed, needs-based, strategic, reflective, differentiated, sustainable, innovative and inspires school leaders to develop and support teaching that maximises impact on student learning.

The PLRG recognises that professional learning also needs to be designed to support principals to effectively and efficiently lead school management practices to ensure that they are focused on maximising impact on student learning. Furthermore, the PLRG aims to support the wellbeing of principals and other school leaders through the provision of professional learning that supports personal wellbeing practices.

Historical Context

The design and provision of tailored professional learning has been a strong component of NSWSPC operations for more than 25 years. Successful professional learning events have included, workshops, programs and learning partnerships, determined by principals for principals. Over time, Professional Learning Days have been held once per term, centred on current, responsive and emerging needs to build principal capacity.

Guiding Principles

The NSWSPC will collaborate, co-partner, design, deliver and evaluate quality professional learning that meets the needs and provides opportunities for its members through:

- quality leadership development programs and events for all levels of school leadership in NSW government schools;
- structured development programs that provide opportunities for principals to enhance their leadership capability;
- appropriate resourcing that is independent of the Department of Education professional learning programs;
- supporting and sharing innovative practice;
- liaising with NSWSPC Reference Groups;
- establishing a strategic and rigorous criteria by which content and programs are sourced to meet members' professional learning needs.

Coordinating Principles into action

The PLRG, in collaboration with the NSWSPC Executive, will employ a Director of Professional Learning who will coordinate professional learning for principals. At various stages the PLRG will employ Project Officers under the supervision of the Director of Professional Learning to assist in the development and / or delivery of professional learning materials.

Partnerships, Contractual arrangements and Associations

On behalf of the NSWSPC, the PLRG identifies and forms new and strategic relationships for the benefit of its members. Each proposed relationship will be examined against the



following criteria and a judgement made based on benefit and risk to the organisation and members. At all times the professional integrity and values of the NSWSPC, the needs of its members and the quality of the professional learning, will be considered.

The criteria will include:

- whether the relationship (partnership, contractual and/or association) is fit for purpose and will result in opportunities for school leadership development;
- professional learning that is relevant;
- organisations that have a similar ethical platform as the NSWSPC with commitment to public education;
- managing conflicts of interests.

The professional learning that results from these partnerships will:

- be evidence informed;
- be responsive to identified needs of members;
- be evaluated against effective professional learning principles;
- use high quality, inspiring, engaging professionals.

The process for approval is transparent and robust. This will include:

- endorsement by the PLRG;
- NSWSPC Senior Executive being offered the opportunity for comment on PLRG decisions;
- ratification by the NSWSPC Executive;
- referral to other Reference Groups if appropriate for consultation;
- employed officer(s) applying due diligence in the development of relationships with external professional learning organisations.

The documentation of any legal and financial arrangements that result from commercial relationships will be developed jointly by the Director of Professional Learning, PLRG Leader and the Executive Member of the relevant professional learning portfolio. These documents will be submitted to the NSWSPC Senior Executive and the NSWSPC Finance Sub-committee for endorsement. The final authority to sign will remain with the President of the NSWSPC.

Funding

Events and programs will always be planned on a cost recovery basis as a minimum. These costs will include:

- administration, venue hire and catering;
- support time provided by the Director of Professional Learning;
- keynote speakers;
- workshop presenters such as principals, retired principals, project officers, school leaders and/or Department of Education Senior Officers;
- conference fee for workshop presenter(s). Principal presenters who are financial members of the NSWSPC do not incur a conference cost;
- a cyclical nature of funding to create and develop resources for future professional learning events.

Outside of this model where there is an investment by the NSWSPC without an immediate return, consultation must take place with the Finance Sub-committee and the PLRG.

Recommended Practices

Principals value professional learning designed, developed and delivered by colleague principals who share strategies, innovations and professional practices to improve student



learning outcomes. The PLRG fosters, encourages and supports principals to share these strategies, innovations and practices to support and guide other principals in their leadership of schools. The identification of successful practices is best achieved through the NSWSPC Executive, NSWSPC Reference Groups and local NSWSPC Networks.

The PLRG recommends the following practices:

- The PLRG identifies 'best practice' to share with colleagues through professional learning events and programs such as the NSWSPC Professional Learning Days held terms 1, 3 and 4;
- Professional learning encompasses but is not limited to mentoring, coaching, leader exchanges, action research, design thinking, observational practices and personal reflection.
- The method of delivery could include formal conferences, lectures from experts, online and offline delivery, collaborative practice and peer review. Professional learning programs can be a combination of just-in-time learning, medium and long term development of practice and may be responsive to Department of Education changes;
- Principals, as lead learners, need to maintain their connection with professional learning as a core responsibility. Principals need to know, understand and develop their capacity to succeed as school leaders, whilst being responsive to future educational, political and social landscapes.
- Principals should be innovative in driving systems and educational change
- Principals are in a unique position to influence educational equity and excellence and may achieve this by contributing to innovative education at local, national and international levels;
- Professional learning should be responsive to NSWSPC members' needs and be planned, designed, implemented and evaluated, with an aim to reflect the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers at Lead Level and informed by the Australian Professional Standards for Principals;
- Professional learning programs are to be delivered by credible educational experts;
- The NSWSPC through the PLRG will continue to maintain a strong affiliation with the Department of Education Leadership Institute;
- The NSWSPC through the PLRG will partner with affiliate organisations at local, national and international level. This may include partnerships with the Department of Education, other professional associations, universities and business associations. The PLRG will review, refine and respond to materials developed by NSWSPC approved partners. The PLRG will make recommendations to the NSWSPC Executive regarding future directions;
- The Director of Professional Learning will ensure quality control by reporting back to the PLRG regarding costs/utility/viability prior to approval.

Into the Future

NSWSPC acknowledges that the educational landscape shifts and changes with emerging research and practices. In response, the PLRG is committed to looking forward and shaping responsive experiences and partnerships into the future. The PLRG will engage in strategic and rigorous processes, to source content and programs that meet its members' needs.

