

# Taking opportunities while remaining as a principal post-retirement

Christine Cawsey

One of the decisions principals considering their future need to make is one that is best made early in the principalship. Many principals will go on to positions within the Department of Education and others will decide to remain in their schools. There is no right path and the decision depends on the way principals view their work in the school.

There is plenty of data to suggest that in NSW, the overall stability of the secondary principalship in the last 15 years has cushioned the impact of many funding, management and 'selectivity' policies targeted at creating divisions between schools. Combined with demographic shifts and the increased concentration of disadvantage in some schools and communities, there are pressures on principals that have not been there before. Despite this, there is great satisfaction in our work and, if you have consulted your financial advisers and want to continue to work as a principal beyond retirement age, there can be great intangible rewards.

There are also other opportunities if principals choose to remain in their schools beyond retirement age. In my own experience:

- I have had opportunities to take short term deployments to influence policy or work on projects for both NSWSPC and the Department. The higher order skills displayed through contributions to NSWSPC as a regional, reference group, project or executive leader are recognised, especially if your work is known by colleagues. For example, the NSWSPC has recently auspiced the Shifters program in partnership with Mitchell Institute and Victorian principals. I represent the 11 NSW schools on the partnership steering committee and former principal, Dianne Hennessy, is the project coordinator for NSW. She is paid.
- Like other colleagues, I have also used school funds to employ former principal colleagues in the school as in-house consultants. Some other retired colleagues have worked in schools as business managers, deputy principals with special project roles and specialist teachers. Still others have had success as executive principals in both NSW and internationally.
- I have worked closely with university colleagues and academics on behalf of the school's growth and development and I recommend working closely with the universities who send practicum students to the school...they are always looking for 'experts' to supervise the practicum teachers.
- I have continued to be involved in professional associations and as a result, I currently hold a National role as a non-executive (unpaid) board member of ACEL (Australian Council for Educational Leaders). Other colleagues (still working and retired) have roles with NSWTF and ACE and still others work with subject based professional associations. My advice is that if they ask you to write an article or make a conference presentation, you should do it. In my case, I made the time to contribute to a book series and from there many national opportunities emerged. My further advice is to apply to present your work or the work of your school even if you are not asked, and to build your networks... opportunities emerge from networks.
- A career spent in western Sydney also created opportunities for me to influence broader community policy in western Sydney. It is important to look beyond the school to the community organisations that influence opportunities for young people. As a direct result of my voice on 'Gonski' and my willingness to speak out on matters of equity in western Sydney (especially in the Blacktown municipality) I was invited to join the boards of both The Smith Family and The GWS Giants AFL team. Both positions are unpaid and take extra time but both have significantly increased my skill set and the networks I can now leverage for students and other colleagues.

### Contributor details

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Christine is Principal of Rooty Hill High School. She was President of the NSWSPC from 2010 to 2012. Since stepping down from the Presidency she has held a number of voluntary, not for profit roles. She has also continued to lead projects and contribute to academic and educational debates. Christine was awarded her AM in 2012.