

Understanding your post-retirement options

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Making the decision

The decision to retire is personal and influenced by a number of factors including family and friendships, health, professional satisfaction and financial well-being. For most Principals, I suspect the retirement decision is fairly straight forward after consideration of some of the above factors. At least in the short-term retirement is a welcome relief from the responsibilities of leading such large and complex organisations as secondary schools. The professional satisfaction is enormous and the social ties are wonderful attractions of the position but in the end the decision to retire can be seen as a transition from a stimulating educational environment to some combination of alternative attractions which are still self-satisfying and perhaps also benefit the broader community. The authors below raise some interesting general issues which could assist Principals in further planning post-retirement options.

Community views on retirement are polarised (Olesen and Butterworth, 2012). Many see retirement as an escape from work and its obligations and a chance to pursue their own passions without the constraints of a fixed working regime. Others see the transition as a loss of status, social and professional connectedness and financial security. The above researchers note that studies comparing the mental health of retirees with that of working older adults has shown that retirees (particularly men) tend to have greater levels of depression and anxiety than their working peers. However longitudinal studies provide brighter news. These studies track the mental health of people moving from work to retirement and the resultant data offers little proof that this transition has significant detrimental impact on the mental health of most people. Further it is reported that it is more likely that the poor mental health observed among many retirees precedes and perhaps has driven their workplace exit. A final reinforcing statement confirms that retirement has the strongest positive psychological effect on people with solid social supports and those retirees who engage in community based activities report better mental health outcomes.

By 2040 the over 60's will make up 25 % of the national population (L. Vining, 2016) and currently many retiring baby boomers are feeling effective, motivated and ready to tackle a range of lifestyle opportunities. Vining reminds educators that they are a highly skilled demographic and often underestimate their value to the workforce. At a Principal level educators are highly equipped in organisational skills, communication know-how, understanding of time management concepts, leadership theories and practice and research skills. Problem solving is a regular challenge often associated with conflict management and the establishment of teamwork values. For the private sector in particular, the growing skills linked to financial monitoring by educational administrators is a distinct attraction, along with interpretation of reports and the ability to synthesise information (Shpak,2016).

Some post-retirement options

Laurel Schmidt (2009) argues Principals have many work opportunities to explore after they retire. The article highlights a number of options extending from overseas positions through to remaining in more localised (USA context, California in particular) employment utilising the many transferable skills and knowledge developed by Principals during their careers. Some examples include:

- (a) International Schools: We are reminded there are international schools located in many exotic situations serving English speaking students around the world. The [International Schools Services](#) website is available and every year job fairs are held to attract educators and administrators.

- (b) Independent Schools: In the USA the website for the [National Association of Independent Schools](#) is available and gives an overview of key components. It may not appeal to everyone coming from public funded resources, however roles for skilled, experienced administrators either on a full or part time basis may attract Principals to this culture.
- (c) Localised roles: Being a Californian context, Schmidt (2009) briefly reminds retired Principals of the broad range of localised employment, based on the specialised interests of the individual. For example, Human Resources with all the associated skills of communication, coaching, mentoring, interviewing, supervision and so on all are areas of possible involvement. Another is Policy Issues which incorporate research skills, problem solving, report writing and other communication skills. There are many other possible sections including financial roles and other forms of accountability.
- (d) Curriculum and instruction: This selection of opportunities covers a vast area of syllabus development, programming, assessment processes and related support resources which could be of interest either on a subject basis or alternatively through more generalised curriculum processes. In NSW of course, NESA (previously BOSTES) is the major authority responsible for curriculum, although DoE has a number of units catering for such needs. The area is closely supported and enriched by university research and teaching and recent Principal curriculum knowledge and implementation skills are always welcomed by tertiary institutions.
- (e) Publishing: Further, the article reminds Principals of the knowledge and skills accumulated and the value of sharing these ideas in both a written format as well as through workshops or leadership conferences. Journal and short article written formats will be enhanced by experiences summarised by Principals who reflect and evaluate their recent decisions. Schmidt (2009) takes this skill even further and notes the broader area of marketing education, schools promotion and reviewing learning materials.
- (f) Retooling: The final section of the paper deals with resume writing which at first seems a little unnecessary for such qualified professionals. However, some brief advice is given to encourage regular revision of achievements cognisant of the flexible lifestyle and variety of experiences throughout a calendar year.

The Australian context

The above framework gives us a structure to consider retirement options closer to home, especially in NSW and the Australian context. If we consider the 'system' level at first, the retiring Principal has normally a clear and up to date understanding of the evolving decision-making structure and more importantly is aware of individuals, networks and possible needs in key DoE areas. The other side of the process is that the Principal has interests and skills which could contribute to a number of DoE areas. The categories mentioned in the Schmidt article (2009) cover only a few possibilities but recent Principal experience and skills are suitable for many different roles. For example NESA, NSWTF and the NSWSPC would all welcome the skills and knowledge discussed above. Also the flexible nature of the work could suit both parties when casual, contract, short term or longer term arrangements are being considered. In current times, online project arrangements would be much appreciated by retired Principals and the employer on many occasions.

Within schools the retired Principal could provide many advantages through direct instruction, coaching or a mentoring role in areas such as curriculum, assessment, accreditation, management and leadership, student well-being and monitoring, learning skills and so on. The emphasis on local decision making provides opportunities to supplement school planning cycles and to act as a critical friend in determining

targets and planning goals. The professional growth of all staff is a major area of the school planning process and retired Principals with their human resources skills could provide invaluable assistance in the school's on-going programs. Just having the time to consult with individual teachers about planned lessons, observe the lesson and then provide feedback would enrich all school professional development programs.

Tertiary institutions also provide another avenue for retired Principals and the mentoring of pre-service teachers is a wonderfully rewarding activity (Paterson, 2016). In essence, the opportunity to visit a variety of public and private schools and classrooms and connect again with professional teachers helping mentor the pre-service teachers is incredibly rewarding. The stimulation of keeping up to date with curriculum, national teaching standards and expectations is at the heart of school leadership and quality teaching and learning. A retired Principal can provide invaluable mentoring and support to the school and to the pre-service teacher.

In sum there are many options for the retired secondary Principal in NSW. The process of making decisions as to which options are for you is entirely up to individual circumstances which have been outlined above. There are numerous opportunities within our educational structures and your input would be most valuable considering your new flexible lifestyle. Enjoy and contribute to our community.

References

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