

# Association News



## Australasian Principals' Update

---

### New South Wales

**IN 2003** our focus will be on leadership and the leadership required in schools to shape the pedagogy we believe in. The linking of leadership and pedagogy follows directly from the *Futures* project and the focus on pedagogy in 2002.

Principal welfare has also been a key issue, with the continuation of the role of a Professional Support Officer. Additional support will be provided by a number of retired principals, who will provide phone support and occasionally face-to-face support. The Professional Support Officer has the role of researching current and emerging issues, preparing papers, providing other services and representing the NSWSPC in various forums. The support officer will also work closely with the deployed principal in head office, whose task is to support all principals in their day-to-day role in an often difficult environment.

At a recent meeting with the Premier and Minister, NSWSPC President Chris Bonner was left with the following impressions:

- that the tide was turning in enrolments and in the number of young people wanting to become teachers;
- that the Vinson process was supported but to what extent remains of interest; and,
- that there appears to be an either/or nexus over salaries/class sizes.

Both the Premier and Chris Bonnor expressed their

dissatisfaction with Commonwealth funding levels. Other issues of interest include:

- VETAB audits, which have revealed a problem with compliance in the provision of commercial kitchens and ergonomic furnishings in schools;
- the impact of the drought on rural staffing ranges, from minimal in the short-term to disastrous;
- a working party has been formed to develop options on the introduction of a compulsory dress code for students; and,
- the Leadership Capability Research Project report is due for release in early 2003. It is hoped that the research findings will provide direction for DET School Leadership Development.

The State elections have concluded with the Carr Government being re-elected for a further term. The resulting Cabinet reshuffle has seen John Watkins (now Police) replaced by Deputy Premier Andrew Refshauge as Education Minister. It will be interesting to see in what direction the new Minister points the portfolio.

#### *ABOUT THE AUTHOR*

*Dr G.W. Wagener is Principal of Oak Flats High School, in NSW.*

---



## Using Strategic Planning to Bring About Change

**While this advice on managing change is set in a NSW context and reflects the education politics and culture of that State, it is worthy of careful consideration by school leaders everywhere.**

**IT IS QUITE** possible that some schools find that the need to undertake strategic planning does not come naturally but they are aware it is nevertheless expected. There may be some schools that adopt a passive role and simply sign-off on a systemic strategic plan, as yet another task completed. Schools can make up their own mind where they lie on the strategic planning continuum; from active pursuit (school level future planning) to passive acceptance (systemic adoption). However, even at the most fundamental level, there is a responsibility to have clearly established goals, as well as objectives and strategies for achieving those goals. All goals, objectives and strategies must be appropriate for the circumstances. They need to be clearly understood by those with the task of implementing them. Increasingly, schools are becoming active strategic planners. They have a sensible plan that can be monitored carefully, which provides direction and a reference point to determine whether goals are being achieved. Planning is a good thing and experience suggests that planning before action adds significantly to the likelihood of final success. Strategic planning involves taking the future into account to achieve a desired outcome; determining in advance what actions and resources are needed to reach a goal; understanding the interdependence of decisions needed to achieve a desired future state; and a formalised procedure.

decisions; it points towards sound management practices and it is inherently about current co-ordination for future success. Planning is also considered strategic if it goes to the heart of why an organisation exists; involves a commitment of resources; makes steps towards moving the organisation in a preferred direction; involves evaluation; and will have a lasting impact. The basic, but far reaching questions that need to be asked are: 'What is our preferred future?' and 'How are we going to get there?'. So, strategic planning is a process that addresses the need for an organisation to identify and take deliberate steps to deal with issues that have real consequences for it.

### Leadership in the Change Process

The leadership team is charged with the responsibility of determining how to achieve the desired results and to manage the implementation process. In addition to specifying the clear direction and the priorities, the leadership team has the task of analysing the risks; the 'what ifs?' This involves anticipating the risks and discussing the possible alternatives, so the decision-making process is clear, valid, open and well communicated. One of the increasing challenges to school leadership teams is to be able to move from crisis managers to educational outcomes managers. The strain on leadership is to retain a focus on what is right, what is best, and not to ease the leadership burden by giving in to what is easiest, since the easiest path often lacks real purpose and direction. Leadership should not just focus on the rhetoric, the activity and 'talking the talk'. It should also focus on the achievement, the actual changes, the real results, 'walking the walk' and the measurable and observable changes for the better. So leadership needs to do strategic planning in company with strategic thinking. There is a need to think about your plan, and plan as you think. Asking certain questions can help the focus. Define:

- what has to be done;
- what needs must be met;
- what results do we all want to achieve;
- what group(s) are we going to target;
- what could be the cost (people, resources, morale, etc.); and,
- what are the priorities, especially if there are competing alternatives?

Addressing these questions is no easy task and cannot be left to one or two in the leadership team. All of those who have a responsibility for leadership (either as the result of position or status; whether desired, earned or forced) must be part of the decision-making process and must take ownership. The way the leadership team

goes about deliberations is important. New answers and questions should be allowed to emerge and even actively sorted out. Strategic planning and strategic thinking are not *status quo* oriented. If those on the leadership team are doing their job, they should be looking ahead towards the horizon. They should be aware and united in the direction they are heading and should be continually willing to challenge where they are, where they want to be, the outcomes they expect, and the challenges they must face in order to achieve the best for all concerned.

## A Change Process

Bringing about change in any organisation is not an easy task. Change managers know that. Our experience enables us to point to certain practices that we have been able to identify that are needed in the planning for change. Here are some helpful guidelines.

1. Encourage the free and easy exchange of ideas.
2. Trust, respect and recognise contributions as being healthy.
3. Learn how to disagree without factionalising what you are trying to do – anticipating the outcome beforehand means you are not sure of your ground – put in some more spadework.
4. Be an ethical, open, and intelligent team.
5. Define, clarify, and articulate the values on which you stand, so that everyone knows where you are coming from, and where you are trying to go.
6. Define the processes and systems you intend to implement to get the job done.
7. Be willing to review and change.
8. Define the performance you seek and include the anticipated impact on the people in the school and the community it serves.
9. Realise and spread the word that change is not inherently threatening, although recognise that it is difficult and often contentious. Keep your eyes firmly fixed on the end result.

## Change in Practice

One comprehensive public high school in New South Wales recently underwent a significant change process that involved the integration of strategic planning and strategic thinking. The process may be of interest to others contemplating significant change, so this outline is presented as an example of change in practice.

### A. The Mission Statement

All schools have developed a 'Mission Statement' or 'Statement of Purpose'; an articulation of the fundamental core beliefs that drive the school – an enunciation of the principles upon which decisions will be made.

In this school this statement is emblazoned across the entry to the Administration Block. This in itself does not make the school entrance particularly different from those of many other schools, except in this case the statement at the entrance has become a tool in the change management process, rather than a departmental expectation. '*(X)High School is committed to developing both student and staff potential in a caring, supportive environment.*'

Noble sentiments, but how? The answer lies in the actualising of this belief, rather than the chanting of just another motherhood statement.

### B. Actualising a Belief Statement

The 'Mission Statement' of this school became the catalyst for the development of a strategic plan. This set out a future direction and painted a picture of where the school wanted to be in three years time. Using various survey tools every sector of the school community - students, teaching and ancillary staff, parents, caregivers and the wider community - were canvassed about their vision for the future of the school. As has been the case in many outcomes-driven schools, a common thread soon emerged that may be familiar to your own situation. The wider school community wanted:

- students who were effective learners;
- students who were articulate and capable of problem-solving;
- students who were flexible and adaptable and able to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world;
- students who would become effective citizens and make worthwhile contributions to their community; and,
- a school that was outcomes-driven, student-centred and focused on best practice.

These sentiments are hard to argue against - indeed, all parents and educators want these things to occur, but how?

### C. The Management Plan

Once a strategic focus has been developed, it must be actualised. This is the role of the Management Plan, a one year 'bite' out of the long-term plan. This is a far more specific document that targets individual goals, assigns responsibilities and sets time frames and outcomes against which success can be measured. Like the Strategic Plan, this document relies on giving all members of the school community a legitimate voice in the targeted objectives. Moreover, it establishes the executive of the school as the Professional Learning Team; a team charged with ensuring this wider vision is achieved; a team that



*continued ...*

examines the most recent, validated research and experience and uses it in the context of the plan. Members of the Professional Learning Team will also be held individually accountable via a rigorous faculty monitoring process. They will be asked why targets haven't been reached by certain times. If assigned goals have been bypassed, they will be asked to explain. In short, membership of the Professional Learning Team develops a wider understanding and responsibility for school improvement in the executive. It necessitates the executive consulting with their staff and actively aligning faculty activity with school planning.

### ***D. Alignment***

Perhaps the most crucial element in this entire process is the Faculty Plan. This is the coal face response to the wider Management Plan which, in turn, has been drawn down from the vision of the Strategic Statement, born out of the core belief or Mission Statement of the school. This Faculty Plan is a mandatory requirement to ensure alignment of stated school direction and anticipated outcomes. Budgets, professional development, support groups, physical resources and administrative procedures should reflect these plans. Unaligned plans should be modified and redirected to ensure alignment - otherwise they should be rejected. Formal bi-annual faculty monitoring is the most significant accountability tool for gauging how faculties are traveling and how they could be better supported. Obviously, this monitoring makes individualized supervision of staff by headteachers commonplace as a means of ensuring that all are working in a common direction. It is also a comprehensive way of establishing teacher efficiency as required annually by the Department. Using this process as a change agent, significant advances have been made in what has traditionally been a very conservative school. Perhaps the most exciting change is the movement to a five by one-hour period structure for 2003, with a built-in, welfare-specific, daily period. Critical analysis of pedagogic practice, current research, validated experience and a strategic vision that necessitated a change of infrastructure saw this change achieved as a logical extension for actualising both our short and long-term plans, with a minimum of angst. Such planning will continue to drive improvement and an outcomes focus for this school.

### ***ABOUT THE AUTHORS***

*Dr Grahame W. Wagener is Principal and Mr John Hambly is Deputy Principal of Oak Flats High School, in NSW. Dr Wagener can be contacted by email at: [grahame.wagener@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:grahame.wagener@det.nsw.edu.au).*

# The Heart and Soul of Learning

**CHRIS PRESLAND outlines a planning strategy that is firmly based on learning as the school's core business.**

**SCHOOLS** are under constant pressure to meet the changing expectations of what schools and their leaders can accomplish. Community concerns, political agendas, societal changes and even the 'latest research' all seem to create a sense that schools should be always be doing something different. Is it any wonder that school leaders can be tempted by the latest 'silver bullet' of pedagogical or leadership products and processes? In the midst of these pressures, it is timely to reconnect with the importance of clearly focused and coherent school organisation.

## Transient School Population

Airds High School, in the Campbelltown district of south-western Sydney, serves one of the State's most socio-economically disadvantaged communities. It has an enrolment of approximately 620 students at any one time. The student population is culturally diverse, with a total of 56 different cultural groups represented (including 12% Aboriginal and 15% Pacific Islander students). Almost the entire school population is drawn from the Airds Public Housing estate. The school population is often transient and the mobility rate in recent years has been consistently around 30% per annum. Historically, the school has a very high rate of staff and executive turnover.

In the midst of such a challenging environment exists one of the most dedicated and focused staff teams imaginable. The school has developed a school-wide Management Planning process and a school-wide Faculty Programming process. These constantly seek to align daily practice with a clearly articulated Values Platform and Learning Platform.

The underlying assumption is that the explicit articulation of the school's beliefs about values and learning, strongly aligned with plans, resources and work teams, will lead to a development of teacher capacity. This will then lead to an improvement in student learning outcomes, which will occur as a result of the provision of a more coherent, consistently delivered and resourced, whole-school curriculum.

Learning does not occur in a vacuum. Any form of capacity building, whether in terms of teaching capability or leadership density, requires sustained dialogue focusing upon common understandings within a context.

## The Values Platform

This is a series of five statements that define the core of what the school believes. It strongly reflects a more comprehensive Strategic Plan, which is based on what the school believes students should know, be like and be able to do when they leave the school. There is nothing particularly unique about the statements, other than that they are the result of extensive dialogue amongst staff, students and parents, and most importantly, that they are directly linked to the school's Management Plan.

Each statement forms one 'chapter' of the Management Plan and clearly shows how the school will 'breathe life' into the statement. During the planning process, the school identifies activities that are either congruent or incongruent with each value. Those items that are congruent are the subject of discussion around how best to reinforce and promote them. Those items that are incongruent are the subject of discussion about how to rectify them. The resulting Management Plan, with its central focus upon the Values Platform, then forms the basis of the school's financial resourcing and work team structures. In essence, if an activity cannot be directly related to the Values Platform, then it does not appear on the Management Plan and receives no school funding.

## The Learning Platform

This is a series of seven statements, which define the school's most sacred beliefs about quality learning. Again, there is nothing particularly special about the statements themselves but they are the product of extensive discussion between teaching staff, ancillary staff, parents and students. Each of the Learning Platform statements has been cross-referenced against each Faculty's teaching programs, with a concerted effort being made to identify exactly how the program fosters the development of that particular belief. In a similar fashion to the whole school Management Planning process, the aim is to identify aspects of the Faculty Program that either reinforce or contradict the Learning Platform. Those that reinforce are strengthened, those that contradict are amended.

At the Faculty level much professional development, at both the team and individual level, then concentrates upon how each teacher in their classroom, or their unit delivery, will 'evidence' the reinforcement of the beliefs articulated in the Learning Platform.

## The Importance of Classroom-Focused Professional Dialogue

There is a huge emphasis at the school upon the provision of quality training and development aimed at improving classroom-teaching skills. There has been extensive training in the 4MAT system as a means of creating consistency across the school in terms of the way in which teaching and learning activities are programmed and structured. There is a commitment to a constructivist approach to learning, and a lot of time spent on maintaining currency in relation to brain research. High on the school's agenda is a belief that one of the most fundamental responsibilities of a teacher is to be able to understand the science of 'how' learning occurs, as distinct from merely being able to identify the conditions for effective learning. Some of the most significant results of this have been a reduction in the 'kaleidoscope' effect of what students are exposed to from classroom to classroom, a steady increase in cross Faculty dialogue and increasing discussion around student learning instead of simply student behaviour. Another positive outcome of what the school has done is that members of the senior executive staff are frequently requested to speak at conferences all over Australia, in order to share the processes the school has developed. In most cases other members of the school's teaching staff have the opportunity to accompany the presenters as an additional T&D activity.

**Many school leaders have the theoretical understanding about how quality organisations should be structured, but many feel they lack the actual processes to lead staff through such actions.**

In developing these workshops the Airs staff has created not only an opportunity to share the 'how', but also to engage with an ever-increasing professional network of educators around the country.

### In a Nutshell

Since these processes began, some extraordinary data has emerged. The student attendance rate has improved by approximately 5% and is now better than the District average in both Years 7-10 and Years 11-12. In the case

of the latter, it is also 1% better than State average. The retention rate from Years 10-12 has improved by approximately 9% and is now comparable with District average. Value-added data at both School Certificate level and Higher School Certificate level shows a marked improvement across almost all areas, with the most significant being a 5% improvement in Literacy value-added at the School Certificate. There have only been five staff transfers in two years, and there has been no change at executive level. Given the context of the school outlined earlier in this article, a context that has not changed in terms of the community, such data becomes even more significant.

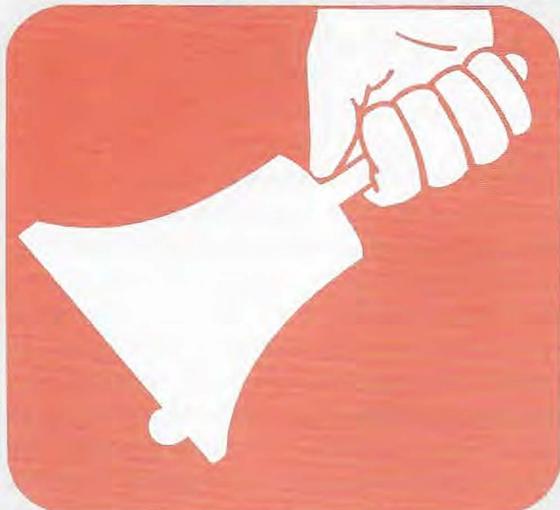
In the midst of a challenging environment, which is often run at a frenetic pace, and in the midst of a system constantly facing more demands and expectations, Airs High School has created a structure that constantly seeks to align beliefs with practice. The processes associated with both the Values Platform and Learning Platform mirror each other. In so doing, they serve to reduce the potential fragmentation of school life. Above all else, the two platforms create the parameters of the school's operation and provide something that helps teachers to make sense of the day-to-day pressures that confront them. They also provide a clear benchmark for determining the school's progress.

**Perhaps the simple point being made in this article is that, rather than constantly seeking to take on more and more demands, and meet more and more expectations, we really need to become more clearly focused upon what we, the professional educators, believe is important for our students.**

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Mr Chris Presland is Principal of Airs High School, in Campbelltown, NSW. He has a strong history of developing a shared understanding of learning across subject areas, leading to improved teaching and learning, and greater levels of professional dialogue between teachers. He has presented keynote speeches and workshops relating to successful organisational change and the foundations for effective leadership, for audiences in the USA, from New Zealand, South Australia, Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and many locations across NSW. Whether in writing or as a lively facilitator, his areas of expertise focus upon the processes, rather than just the theory of how to get 'stuck' organisations moving. He can be contacted by email at: [Chris.Presland@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:Chris.Presland@det.nsw.edu.au).*

# Association News



## Australasian Principals' Update

---

### New South Wales

AT OUR recent AGM the President made mention of many of our achievements over the past year. He mentioned that the biggest achievement would have to be our contribution to the *Vinson Report*, the Public Education Alliance and the resulting ALP policy platform and election commitments. It appears that the Department is in the process of implementing many of the changes we have been after for a number of years. Nevertheless, the engagement and empowerment the New South Wales Secondary Principals Council (NSWSPC) believes is critical to success is not readily encouraged and modelled in the way education is managed across NSW. We are still heavily accountable, still have little discretion, are still under resourced, and still tested and retested by the system, the media, and parents. We still have things done to us over which we have little control. For instance:

- our teaching staff is delivered to our schools in a 'like it or lump it' model;
- Training and Development is delivered to us in packages or as sermons from the mount;
- property services are eventually delivered but only via the most tortuous path; and,
- public and media crises are delivered to us while the powers that be duck for cover.

It often appears that we are grudgingly given discretion over some inputs, which seem to make little difference, and not have control over the inputs that can reflect well on the government and the bureaucracy. We continue to work with no conceptual framework, little research base, without an understanding of the big picture, and in an environment about to be restructured, yet again. The President commented that what we have never done in NSW is to have serious conversations about what balance of central and local control is best for our students and schools. All we have done over the decades is play with clichés and a variety of expedients. We have never seriously examined the frameworks in which we operate. Our Futures Project has helped shift the education agenda in NSW, especially in technology, pedagogy and leadership. However, the problem remains that the biggest barriers to translating our achievements into actuality for students and schools is the structure in which we work. We need to shake those structures and we need to break the nexus between the sources of funding and the sources of control. This might be the year that we make inroads into doing just that.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Dr G.W. Wagener is Principal of Oak Flats High School, in NSW. He can be contacted by email at: [grahame.wagener@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:grahame.wagener@det.nsw.edu.au).*

# Australasian Principals' Update

## NEW SOUTH WALES

**IN JUNE 2003** a broad model for restructuring the Department was released for consultation. During the consultative period more than five thousand responses were received. From the original proposal a revised model was released for further consultation in late September. Features of this model include the following.

- Portfolio areas related to Teaching and Learning; TAFE and Community; Strategic Planning and Regulation; Corporate Services; Corporate Communications; and the Office of the Director-General.
- A proposed ten regions, i.e., the Hunter/Central Coast; Illawarra; New England; North Coast; Northern Sydney; Riverina; South Western Sydney; Sydney; and Western; and Western Sydney.
- Forty-four Education Support Centres, each headed by a School Education Director.
- Regional specialist support, including curriculum consultants, Aboriginal and equity consultants, staff to support students, performing arts and sport coordinators, staff support officers and CEOs Teaching and Learning, and a CEO Manager and Student Data. Direct support for schools within each of the ten regions will be provided through Education Support Centres, each led by a School Education Director. There will be 44 Education Support Centres, with four new centres located in Bourke, Muswellbrook, Windsor and Wyong. Resources to the ESCs will be applied flexibly and focus on the area of greatest need.
- Each of the new regions is to be geographically aligned to a TAFE college. It is anticipated that each regional office will be located in a TAFE building.
- A primary and secondary school principal will be deployed to each region to work with the Regional Director and consultancy teams to provide support and advice to principals.

The revised model states that support for staff affected by this restructure is a key priority. Support services include face-to-face workshops to support people in times of uncertainty; career planning and management; and support in preparing a resume. There is also the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which is a free and confidential counselling service for work-related and personal problems.

The procedures for non-school-based teaching service staff, chief education officers and all other staff affected by the restructure are being discussed with the relevant unions. The procedures under discussion include processes for the direct appointment of staff (where the duties of a position are the same or similar and the position grade is the same as the employee's previous substantive position); redeployment of potentially displaced, displaced and excess staff; retraining of staff in areas of demand; internal advertising of positions and a voluntary redundancy program.

Obviously, there will be more to report in future issues. Stay tuned!

### *ABOUT THE AUTHOR*

*Dr Grahame Wagener is Principal of Oak Flats High School, in NSW. He can be contacted by email at: [grahame.wagener@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:grahame.wagener@det.nsw.edu.au).*