



Rethinking and redesigning the role of the principal.

The SASPA / SASSLA
case for change

Abstract

The work of school principals is intellectually demanding and emotionally taxing. The school principal functions as a community leader, as an organisational and cultural leader, and as a leader in the professional field of school-based education. But professional expressions such as these have been constrained by the technologies of the corporate infrastructure which governs much of the principal's practice in our public education system.

This project has identified seven 'policy-based' problems which, once resolved, will engender greater levels of trust between the three tiers of leadership and management within public education (school, region and state) and, most importantly, empower the principal role with a much-needed agency to better address the needs of their local communities.

— Peter Mader Ph.D.

Executive summary

Foreword

The principal plays a key role in the provision of quality schooling. In particular, the direction and impact of the teaching profession is influenced greatly by the design of the principal's role, i.e., the scope of their responsibilities and decision making, and the extent to which principals have agency over how they use their time to service different priorities.

For much of the 21st century social, economic, political and technological forces have shaped the expectations of schools and of those who lead them. Whilst facing these increased demands and pressures, public school principals have

experienced a diminished level of autonomy resulting from higher managerial expectations and expanded accountabilities.

Public education in South Australia, and the nation more broadly, now faces a set of seemingly intractable problems which include principals' excessive work demands and the dwindling interest from leading educators wanting to become principals. It is timely, therefore, for this collaboration between the South Australian Secondary Principals' Association (SASPA) and the South Australian State Secondary School Leaders Association (SASSLA) on the *Rethinking and Redesigning the Role of the Principal* research project.



Research and project details

The principal role is positioned at the intersection of people working in schools and people in the corporate governance and service functions of the Department for Education (DfE). Principals occupy a unique position: one which provides a distinctive view of how policies and systems of work shape practices, culture, and performance at a school level. This is why the *Rethinking and Redesigning the Role of the Principal* research project accepts the view that successful educational change and school improvement are best supported by bringing principals into the foreground of education strategy, delivery, and evaluation.

The origin for this research project is the July 2023 discussion paper, *Reconceptualising the Role of the Principal*, which was issued jointly by SASPA and SASSLA. That paper argued for a strategic response to two problems which were adversely impacting the work of principals.

1. The relationship between the principal's role, capabilities and expected outcomes and how these aligned with the change agenda in South Australia's public education strategy, i.e., the differences between principals' work broadly and the specific needs of the system.
2. The need for the work demands of principals to be reviewed so that the time and space for the leadership of schools

could be reclaimed to focus on educational change and school improvement, i.e., the principal's struggle between organisational management and educational leadership (and the resources needed for each).

The SASPA-SASSLA discussion paper highlighted the need to gather knowledge from the profession to assist in the formation of a macro view about the changes needed to the principal role. To this end, four fields of enquiry were identified:

- The responsibility, decision making and accountability of principals
- The team around the principal
- Illuminating good practice in the principal role
- Towards a new generation of school leaders.

The *Rethinking and Redesigning the Role of the Principal* research project is attached specifically to these four fields of enquiry, and to the insights provided by SASPA and SASSLA members through a series of Twilight Seminars across the 2024 school year. These forums, which were accessed face-to-face and/or online, generated the project's data – i.e., 'expert' inputs, suggested readings, transcripts of member responses, and notes from table team/online meeting room discussions.

Research design and methodology

The research design of the *Rethinking and Redesigning the Role of the Principal* project actively sought to draw upon common understandings and shared experiences from school leaders attending these forums as a means of considering; (i) the differences between principals' work broadly and the needs of the system, and (ii) the principal's struggle between organisational management and educational leadership (and the resources needed for each). To maximise the sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences, the data from each of the four sessions was interrogated using a thematic analysis¹ approach. As a method, thematic analysis is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is spoken about and of making sense of those commonalities.



¹ The thematic analysis approach used by this project is consistent with Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). *Thematic analysis*: American Psychological Association.

Key understandings

In her advice about autonomy to the *Commonwealth's Independent Public Schools* project, Suggett (2015) argued; (i) more support, rather than less, is needed for the full potential of school autonomy to be realised (p. 1), and (ii) governments, in the move to decentralise schooling in the 1980s and 1990s, never rescoped the role and responsibilities of the bureaucracy relational to the autonomous school (p. 19). These 'missed steps' in the establishment and support of local school management have been used by the *Rethinking and Redesigning the Role of the Principal* project as a way to reconsider the principal – education department relationship.

Does the corporate infrastructure² exist to serve the locally managed school and its leadership, or does the school and its leadership exist to serve the corporate infrastructure?

Framed by this question, the thematic analysis of project data about the principal's role identified seven 'policy-related' problems. The emphasis, here, is on how policy represents a problem and how this representation produces all sorts of effects for policy actors (principals).

Whilst this project's interest has been about rethinking and redesigning the role of the principal, it is recognised that any redesign of the role will need to be matched by a rethink of the relationship between the corporate infrastructure and the locally managed school. The project's larger goal, therefore, is for an improved balance to be found between the needs of the education system (i.e., the corporate infrastructure which governs much of the principal's professional practice as the employer and as the statutory authority) and the needs of the profession (i.e., the principal as a community leader, as an organisational and cultural leader, and as a leader in the professional field of school-based education).

Essentially the project's key findings represent differences between school leaders and the school system that can and must be renegotiated. To this end, the SASPA-SASSLA project has identified a set of changes which, when aggregated, not only represent a reconceptualisation of the principal's role but also a rescoping of the role and responsibilities of the corporate infrastructure relational to this reconceptualisation.



Seven key priorities



Principal
accountability
and school
(and principal)
autonomy



Reduced
managerial
tasks



Support from
the corporate
infrastructure



School
improvement



Distributed
school
leadership



Equity



Pathways to the
principalship

² 'Corporate infrastructure' is used as a catch-all in this report to avoid any pejorative connotation from the word 'bureaucracy'.

³ The deliberate use of the term 'policy-related problems' is consistent with Carol Bacchi's (2009) *What's the Problem Represented to Be?* framework. Bacchi challenged the notion of public policy as problem-solving by focussing on the 'problems' policies produce through how they are represented.



1. Principal accountability and school (and principal) autonomy

Problem representation:

Since *Partnerships 21* (i.e., Local School Management) autonomy has been enmeshed with accountability.

Policy effect:

Principals want and accept the need to be accountable to their community. But, over time, the accountabilities placed on principals have been deepened and extended to fit the outcomes specified by the corporate infrastructure, resulting in a reduced level of professional judgement and autonomy of action for principals.

Recommended changes:

Accountability

- A new approach to *school accountability* is taken: one where there is an increased emphasis on each school community's needs and interests as they relate to quality schooling – i.e., student achievement, student development, student wellbeing – and these are held in balance with the interests of the corporate infrastructure.
- A new approach to *principal accountability* is taken: one which includes the principal's role in leading school improvement but also focuses on other key and valued undertakings such as change leadership, cultural leadership and building capacity in others.

Reclaimed autonomy and professional judgement

- Principals have a defined role and increased discretion in school leadership, inclusive of school improvement.
- Such increased autonomy and trust in professional judgement becomes codified in new job and person specifications and is recognised in the organisational culture that emerges from any newly developed relationship between school principals (and schools) and the regions (i.e., the middle tier leadership within the corporate infrastructure).

Progress stages:

First step:

Whilst it is acknowledged that work has commenced on improvements to DfE's approach to school improvement (i.e., 'improvement as learning') and principal accountability, principals want to see integrated into this approach: (i) an increased emphasis on each school community's needs and interests as they relate to quality schooling, and (ii) a refocused accountability scheme where there is an emphasis on one's local context and on the process of leading change, developing and sustaining school culture, and building the capacity of staff.

Next step:

Revisions must be made to the principal job and person specification which codify increased principal autonomy and a restored trust in the principal's use of professional judgement.



2. Reduced managerial tasks

Problem representation:

There is an imbalance between the volume of managerial tasks principals undertake on behalf of the system and the educational leadership work they perform.

Policy effect:

The managerial work principals perform on behalf of the system too often prevails over their educational leadership obligations.

Recommended changes:

Principals must have agency over how they use their time to service school priorities. To create the time needed by principals to fulfil their educational leadership obligations, the corporate infrastructure must reduce the administrative and managerial tasks expected of the principal (and senior leaders in schools).

Progress stages:

First step:

Principals must be asked to identify the administrative tasks currently undertaken in schools that could and should be performed centrally or regionally (or could and should be dispensed with altogether).

Next step:

The DfE must incorporate these administrative tasks into its functions (with the understanding that some of its other functions may have to be scaled back or discontinued altogether). The DfE must monitor, review and report annually on the effects of reduced managerial tasks.





3. Support from the corporate infrastructure

Problem representation:

Over the years, the improvement work performed by the principal has been simplified by the corporate infrastructure to Running Records, NAPLAN growth and SACE achievement and completion.

Policy effect:

The full complexity of school reform and the principal's role has been under-recognised, and this has adversely impacted the nature of the support provided to principals by the corporate infrastructure.

Recommended changes:

It is acknowledged that DfE has commenced work on improvements to the nature of support being provided to principals. The empowered principal – i.e., the principal with increased agency and autonomy – will still need support from the corporate infrastructure. However, this support must respect any reclaimed autonomy and recognise the principal's role as a leader in the professional field of school-based education and of their local community. Consequently, the external 'team around the principal' should be focused on differentiating their support of principals according to context, experience, and need. At the regional level, principals want Education Directors to be advocates for their work, disposed to leveraging additional support from the State Office when it is needed.

Progress stages:

First step:

As the DfE develops its new model for supporting schools and principals, school leaders will want to see that they are empowered by a high level of trust and by an approach to support that is differentiated according to context, experience, and need. Principals will want to see their Education Director as an advocate for their work, disposed to leveraging additional support from the State Office as, and when, it is needed.

Next step:

The DfE accepts this first step as one of its accountabilities, regularly seeking feedback from the field ahead of organising an independent review into the effectiveness of this model after 12-18 months.





4. School improvement

Problem representation:

Over the years, the middle tier of the corporate infrastructure (i.e., Education Directors) has been amplified and its role in school improvement processes expanded.

Policy effect:

The approach to school improvement had become homogenised and, in such a development, the responsibility for school improvement was blurred between the internal leadership of the school and the external management of schools undertaken by the Local Education Team.

Recommended changes:

It is acknowledged that DfE has taken some steps to address these policy effects. Subsequent steps should make it explicit that the task of school improvement is the responsibility of the internal leadership of the school. This task is then supported corporately by an external 'team around the principal' which includes a re-purposed Education Director and various personnel from the region or the State Office.

Progress stages:

First step:

That in its steps towards a new approach to school improvement (i.e., 'improvement as learning') the DfE ensures that the task of school improvement is the responsibility of the internal leadership of the school, with differentiated support from the Education Director (and others).

Next step:

The DfE accepts this first step as one of its accountabilities, regularly seeking feedback from the field ahead of organising an independent review into the effectiveness of this model after 12-18 months.





5. Distributed school leadership

Problem representation:

The DfE's formula for the administration time allocated to senior leader roles within schools is inadequate for meeting the current and emergent demands placed on schools.

Policy effect:

The inadequacy of funded administration time for the school-based leadership structure means that the work of senior leaders is geared more to management functions (i.e., corporate related work) than leadership responsibilities (i.e., context sensitive school-based work).

Recommended changes:

The DfE should increase the administration time (and decrease the instruction time) allocated by formula to senior leaders and middle managers. Principals must be empowered to use their discretionary funding to make local decisions about the number of senior leaders and middle managers needed to service the needs and aspirations of the local community and to meet the requirements of the corporate infrastructure.

Progress stages:

First step:

The DfE should increase the administration time allocated by formula to senior leaders and middle managers.

Next step:

Principals must be empowered to use their discretionary funds to make responsible local decisions about the number of senior leaders and middle managers it needs.





6. Equity

Problem representation:

Principals consistently uphold the view that public schools are incredibly diverse, and every school's context is unique, but a standardisation approach has meant that schools have been treated as if they are the same.

Policy effect:

The diversity, complexity and unique contexts of our public schools have been under-recognised and, consequently, under-served. This is most acutely felt by principals of schools which are difficult to staff, and which serve the needs and interests of our most disadvantaged student populations.

Recommended changes:

As per the SASPA 2024 annual conference, school leaders want an approach to public education that uses policy change to mitigate against the inequities in our system of schooling. By using a more differentiated approach it is recognised that some schools will receive increased and prioritised service and support from the corporate infrastructure through amending those policy instruments which magnify the inequities within our system (e.g., enrolment, facilities and staffing).

Progress stages:

First step:

The DfE must commit to creating a fairer system by commissioning an independent review that investigates the gaps between how the needs of rural, regional and isolated students (and staff) are serviced compared to the metro area, and between how the needs of students (and staff) in low-SES schools are met compared to the needs of students (and staff) in high-SES schools.

Next step:

The DfE must use a more differentiated approach so that rural, regional and isolated schools and low-SES schools receive increased and prioritised service and support from the corporate infrastructure on policy-related matters such as enrolment, facilities and staffing.





7. Pathways to the principalship

Problem representation:

Encouragement of the next generation of school leaders is hindered by the aspirants' recognition of how performative the work of principals has become, and the excessive work demands that have been attached to the principal's responsibilities. The DfE's role in creating and sustaining these conditions has been unhelpful.

Policy effect:

There is dwindling interest from leading educators wanting to become principals.

Recommended changes:

Aspiring to be an empowered principal

On the understanding that Changes 1-6 (outlined above) are all orchestrated, principals will be empowered by: (i) the autonomy they have reclaimed; (ii) the agency they have over local decisions (including over how they use their time to service different priorities); (iii) the increased leadership density and support they have within their school, and (iv) a newfound level of trust from the corporate infrastructure.

This reconceptualised version of the principal's role will be much more attractive to aspirants.

The pathways to the principalship

There are a variety of paths individuals take to the principalship. Regardless of that path, the principal at the local level and designated leaders within the corporate infrastructure, must provide aspirants with a program of support, where a balance is realised between:

- local and general
- present and future
- ideal and reality
- knowledge and skills
- theory and practice
- formal and informal.

Principal recruitment, induction, mentoring, professional learning

An end-to-end review should be undertaken to identify issues in the recruitment and retention of principals. Such a review would consider identification, recruitment, induction, mentoring and professional learning (prior to recruitment, during the early career phase, the mid-career phase and the late-career phase).

First step:

Current principals will be empowered once the DfE makes the changes 1-6 outlined above. Beyond this, the DfE must conduct an end-to-end review of the existing procedures for principal identification, recruitment, induction, mentoring and professional learning. Such a review must also consider the relationship between principal recruitment and principal retention, particularly as it relates to professional learning (i.e., prior to recruitment, during the early career phase, the mid-career phase and the late-career phase).

Next step:

The knowledge from the aforementioned DfE end-to-end review must be used to revise its recruitment and support mechanisms.



Progress stages:

Table 1: Problem representations, policy effects and recommended changes

The change process: **nothing about us, without us**

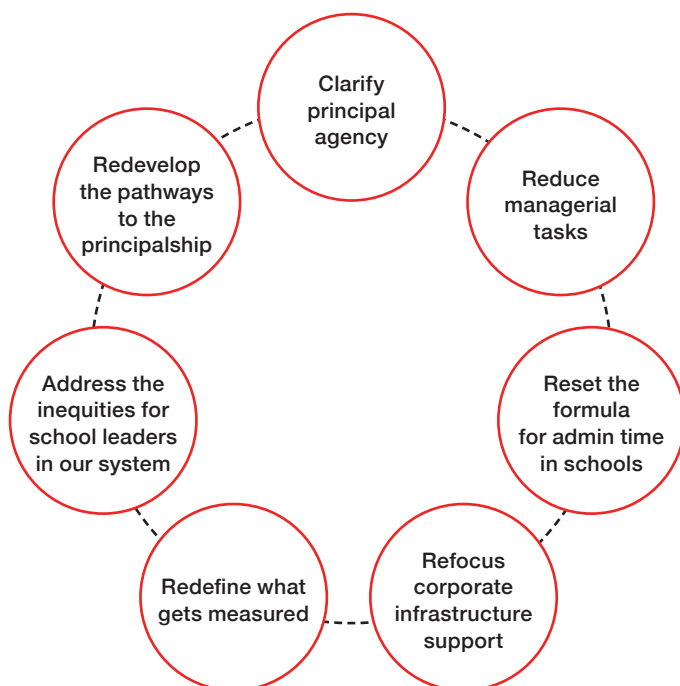
The principal - positioned at the intersection between people working in schools and people working in the corporate governance and service functions of the DfE - occupies a unique position within the educational change process. Principals enact school-related policies owned and produced by the corporate infrastructure, and they observe first-hand the effects of such policies, i.e., principals have 'inside knowledge' about what works, what does not work and what might work better. This 'inside knowledge' is something that policy makers should draw upon as a matter of routine prior to the revision of school-related policy. It follows, that for policies relating to the work of school principals, there should be *nothing about us, without us*.

This SASPA-SASSLA project holds the view that the process by which systemic change is settled becomes as important as the policy outcomes produced by settlement. To this end, the change process recommended by this project is that of *codesign*. Here, with the assistance of an independent facilitator⁴, changes to policy and practice are considered and settled through a partnership approach adopted by the policy owners (i.e., the education system's senior executive) and those advocating for policy change on behalf of principals (i.e., the various principal representative bodies).

The scope of the codesign process should include:

- clarifying what we mean by principal agency or principal empowerment by defining the key decisions to be made at the local level
- asking principals to identify the administrative tasks currently undertaken in schools that could and should be performed centrally or regionally
- settling on an increase in the administration time allocated by formula to senior leaders and middle managers in schools, as a key support to principals
- addressing the bespoke support needs of the empowered principal in the way corporate infrastructure support to schools is refocussed regionally and centrally
- redefining what should be measured, how it should be measured, and how contextual differences are recognised within the scope of accountability and school improvement
- addressing the inequities felt by some school principals in the public education system so that those hard to staff schools and those schools which serve the needs and interests of our most disadvantaged student populations are advantaged through a more differentiated approach from the corporate infrastructure
- redeveloping the pathway to the principalship (and the supports provided locally and systemically).

Diagram 1: Policy-related touchstones in the codesign process



⁴ Independent facilitators well matched to this work include Denise Picton (OzTrain), Danielle Elston (Good Government Advisory) and Jon Clarke (Jon Clarke Advisory).

Project summary

Historical context

Regrettably, the 'policy-based' problems this project examined have been constraining the work of school leaders for too long. In 1998, as a former SASPA president, (now Professor) Pat Thomson, was commissioned to write the paper, *The Changing Role of the Principal*, as a means of informing the Enterprise Agreement negotiations between the Australian Education Union (SA), SASPA and the Department of Education, Training and Employment. Thomson's paper identified eight issues or factors related to increased leadership and management demands, each of which retains currency today.

1. Leading and managing a school in a context of paradoxes and tensions.
2. Increase in managerial work (i.e., devolved responsibilities, risk prevention, accountability measures).
3. Work in a re-adjusted hierarchy (i.e., "performativity").
4. Work in the context of scarcity.
5. A complexity of reform tasks.
6. A hierarchical approach to reform.
7. Lack of recognition of difference.
8. Work in a high-pressure context.

In 1999, the Partnerships 21 program of local school management was implemented in South Australia which saw its public schools take on responsibilities devolved from the administrative centre. Under local school management, the eight issues identified by Thomson's 1998 research, were intensified and remain unresolved for school leaders, alongside the universal recognition within the profession that the demands of the job need to change⁵.

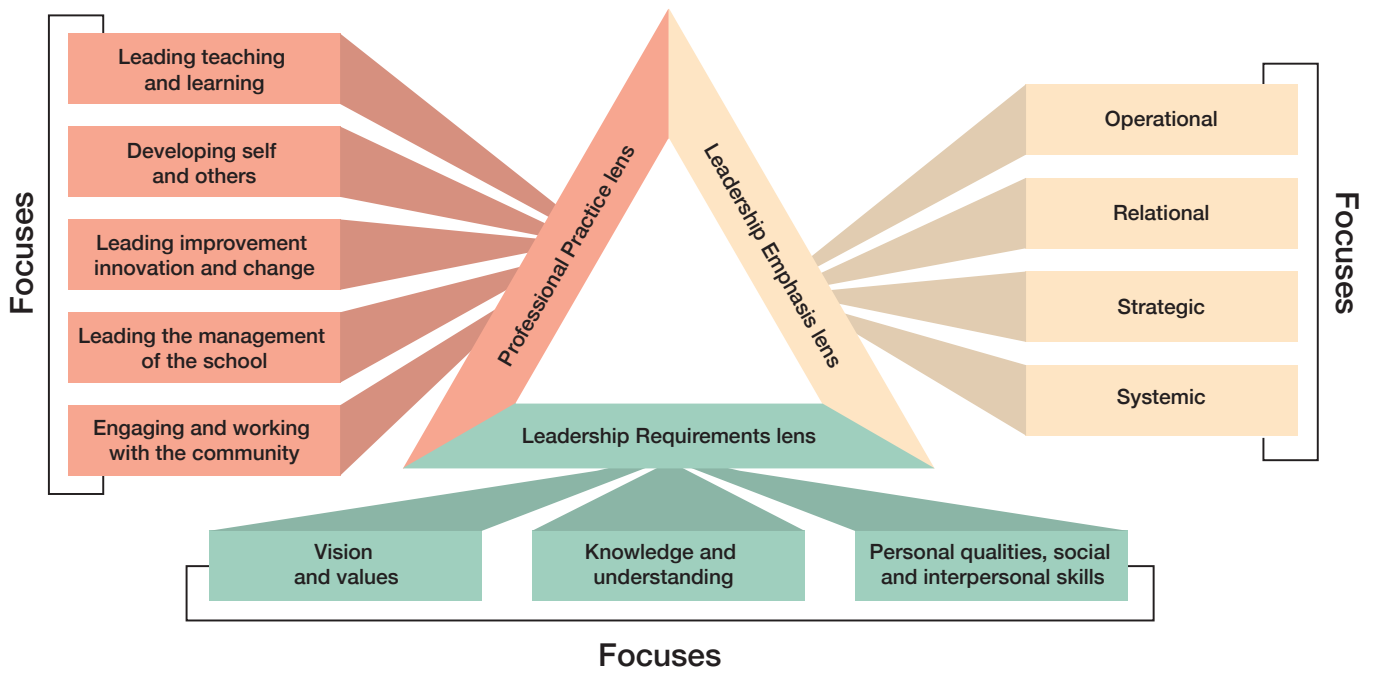
Instrumentalising principals' work

In 2011, the AITSL standards for principals were introduced by the Commonwealth government as a depiction of principal's work. In South Australia, the AITSL standards were accepted and have been used for the recruitment and selection of DfE principals and for the Education Director's management of principal performance.

The AITSL framework of principal standards was the product of the government's need to define the work of school principals so that this work could be evaluated and governed. The framework, therefore, serves the instrumental interests of government and government policy, rather than matters of cultural importance to the profession. Such concerns include the navigation of the relationship the 'autonomous' principal has with the bureaucracy, and the exercise of their professional judgement within a complex set of interests that go beyond those of government – i.e., the needs of the local community, the norms and values of the profession, and the broad purposes of schooling.

⁵ This is a notion supported by the annual reports of the Australian Principal Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey conducted by researchers at the Australian Catholic University (ACU) and Deakin University. See <https://healthandwellbeing.org/>

Diagram 2: The AITSL framework of principal standards



The need for change

The AITSL standards represent the national view of principal work. This SASPA-SASSLA project, *Rethinking and Redesigning the Role of the Principal*, argues the need for change at the State level. That argument has developed through research shared across a series of Twilight Seminars held during the 2024 school year.

A summary of data generated by these seminars and how they relate to the project’s key findings are outlined in the next section of this report.

Table 2: SASPA-SASSLA twilight seminars (2024)

| Focus of enquiry | | Expert input |
|---|---------|------------------|
| 1. Illuminating good practice in the principal role | March | Dr Chris Dolan |
| 2. Principal responsibility, decision making & accountability | May | Peter Mader |
| 3. The team around the principal | June | Phil O’Loughlin |
| 4. Towards a new generation of school leaders | October | Prof Pat Thomson |

Twilight seminars: an overview



SESSION 1 Illuminating good practice in the principal role

This session, led by Dr Chris Dolan, drew upon the Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion's (UniSA) research into the complex and changing nature of principal's work, *Illuminating Principal Practice (IPP)*. Commissioned by SASPA, SAPP and SAASLA, this research sought answers to two questions:

1. What do the practices of principals reveal about the current conditions for leadership in South Australian public schools?
2. How do principal practices inform a reconceptualisation of the principal role?

Current conditions for leadership

With regards to the first question, the IPP research produced 14 key findings which were grouped into 4 themes, i.e., work intensification, a changing student cohort, workload management, and system membership (including the sub themes of stress, wellbeing and risk, and the tension between accountability and autonomy). Essentially, the IPP research makes the case to:

1. Remove unnecessary administrative and managerial tasks from the principal role
2. Provide more flexible options for principals in human resource management
3. Reduce external accountabilities imposed on principals and their schools
4. Explore distributed leadership options that reduce workload demands on principals
5. Give principals more autonomy on making decisions that impact their schools
6. Give principals more agency in planning and leading change in their schools
7. Emphasise trust as a key quality in relations between principals and the system.

Reconceptualising the principal role

In relation to the second research question and the reconceptualisation of the principal role, the key findings and considerations of the IPP research team have been organised into four groupings.

| Key finding | Considerations |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| The importance of context | Recognising the many and varied contexts in which school leaders operate. Holding open the complexity of practice in efforts to capture the lived experiences of leaders. Directing discussion and analysis to better understanding contextual conditions and the ways they facilitate and/or obstruct effective leadership. |
| A preference for cultural leadership | Greater recognition of school leaders' roles in creating a positive, participative and successful school culture. |
| Leading teaching and learning | Leading teaching and learning – questions of role responsibilities, practices and priorities Distributed leadership – purposes and effective models Social justice leadership – what does it mean in practice? |
| Job satisfaction | Work intensification, issues of accountability, autonomy and system membership, a changing student cohort, and workload management adversely affect leaders' satisfaction. |

Table 3: IPP findings and considerations

Six key areas of interest have emerged from these understandings.

1. The rationalisation of administrative responsibilities and the reduction of the administrative workload.
2. The design and implementation of new leadership models and structures.
3. The need for the issues of principal workload, stress and wellbeing to be addressed.
4. The modification to current (i.e., 2023) approaches to school and principal accountability.
5. The monitoring of any work done to increase levels of principal job satisfaction.
6. The strengthening and amplification of principal voice.

Member responses

Forum members were asked to consider which features of the research were most important for SASPA and SASSLA to pursue through the *Rethinking and Redesigning the Role of the Principal*. Participants affirmed the research and, by sharing their own experiences, demonstrated strong agreement with the following:

- The importance of **context** and how each school community is unique.
- The work of the principal is **complex** and is measured by those who don't understand its complexity.
- There are **fewer educators** who are **aspiring to leadership roles** because those roles have become more about administration and management than educational leadership.
- Before **distributed leadership** models can address workload issues and the nature of change leadership work, we (the public education system) need a better approach to **building the capacity of emerging leaders**.

When asked what was missing from the IPP research, members identified three areas of interest. First, the need for the administrative centre to understand that some school leaders are confronted by the 'new freedom' having spent the past 5 years being directed by their Local Education Team on all phases of the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Second, the need for streamlining human resource procedures to address the burden of administration relating to staff selection. Third, the need to explore a 'new principalship' unburdened by the unrealistic expectation that school leaders have to be an expert in all policy matters.

Thematic analysis: 'policy-related' problems

The thematic analysis of project data from this session indicated the following 'policy-related' problems.



There is an imbalance between the volume of managerial tasks principals undertake on behalf of the system and the educational leadership work they perform.

Encouragement of the next generation of school leaders is hindered by aspirants' recognition of how performative principal's work has become and of the excessive work demands that have been attached to the principal's responsibilities.

Since the introduction of Local School Management, autonomy has been enmeshed with accountability.

Principals consistently uphold the view that public schools are incredibly diverse, and every school's context is unique. But the standardisation of school improvement has meant that schools have been treated as if they are the same.

The middle tier of the corporate infrastructure (i.e., Education Directors) has amplified and expanded its role in the processes of school improvement.



SESSION 2: Responsibility, decision making and accountability of principals

This session was led by Flinders University PhD candidate, Peter Mader, who drew upon research from his thesis, *Principal associations: the struggle for principal agency in neoliberalising policy regimes*. This thesis focusses on how principals were constituted, and constituted themselves, by the expanded approaches to accountability instituted by South Australia’s public education bureaucracy across three major reforms: *Partnerships 21 (1999-2002)*, *Partnership Performance Review Panels (2015-2022)* and *From Good to Great: Towards a World-Class System (2018-2022)*. In 1970, South Australia’s education department devolved local authority to school principals. But, by 2018, the Department for Education had instituted an apparatus for principal compliance through its *From Good to Great* reform. Diagram 3 (below) depicts the trajectory of how these accountabilities eroded principal autonomy. It also acknowledges the loss of principal permanency from 1989.

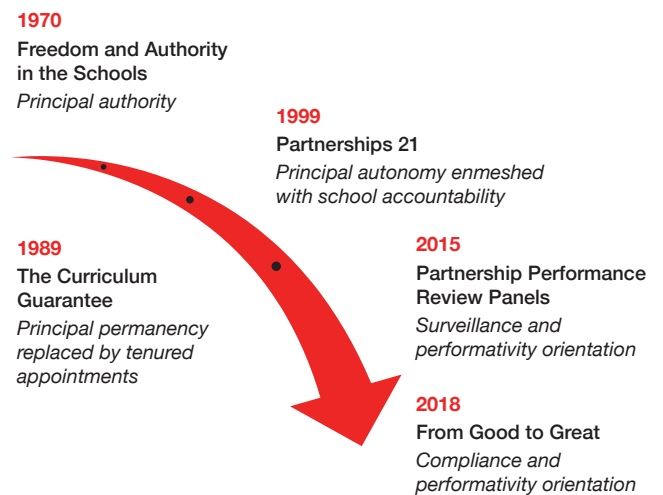


Diagram 3: Autonomy and accountability trajectory: principal authority to bureaucratic compliance

Mader’s research concluded that the corporate infrastructure’s expanded interest in accountability revealed a diminished regard for principal autonomy. Here, the new managerial practices and neoliberal inflected policy of the Department for Education (DfE) made it injudicious for individual principals to resist this loss of autonomy.

Table 4 (below) is a representation of the policy effects on school principals of the changes in the accountability and autonomy relationship across the *Partnerships 21 (P21)*, *Partnership Performance Review Panels (PPRP)* and *From Good to Great (FGTG)* reforms.

Table 4: Summary of policy problem representations and effects

| | Problem representation | Policy effect |
|------|--|---|
| P21 | How to retain bureaucratic control of schools in a devolved model of schooling. | Principal autonomy and school accountability are enmeshed. |
| PPRP | How to accelerate school improvement in a system now governed through the Local Education Partnership. | Clusters of schools and pre-schools are compelled to perform collective surveillance of each other’s performance data and to account for the effects of their leadership to the DfE’s senior executive. |
| FGTG | How to accelerate school improvement so that the system could move from 482 (good) to 530 (great) on the McKinsey and Company’s universal scale. | An accountability apparatus is assembled to control each school’s improvement targets, plans for improvement, strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy, and monitoring and reviewing school (principal) performance. |

Through *Partnerships 21*, the devolution of public education in South Australia was realised. To retain its control over schools, the administrative centre assembled a suite of accountabilities which included an Annual Report, external checks that schools had performed their Self-Review, and the external monitoring of Basic Skills Test data and SACE completion. The effect of this was that principal autonomy became enmeshed with school accountability. By 2014, schools were managed by the Local Education Partnership, a geographical cluster of schools and pre-schools, and supervised by the Education Director. To accelerate school improvement through this form of devolution, the *Partnership Performance Review Panel* was established. Its effect was to compel schools and pre-schools to surveil each other's performance data and to give an account to the DfE's senior executive of their practical and strategic responses. Here, principals retained responsibility for student achievement at their own school but were encouraged to take an interest in improving the performance data at neighbouring schools. That this work became the focus of data conversations with DfE's senior executive saw principals constituted as corporate subjects, i.e., undertaking a performative function for the sake of senior executives within the corporate infrastructure.

In 2018, the *From Good to Great (FGTG)* reform strategy was launched with the intention of accelerating school improvement in South Australia so that the DfE could move from good to great on the McKinsey and Company's Universal Scale. The accountability apparatus that was assembled under this model

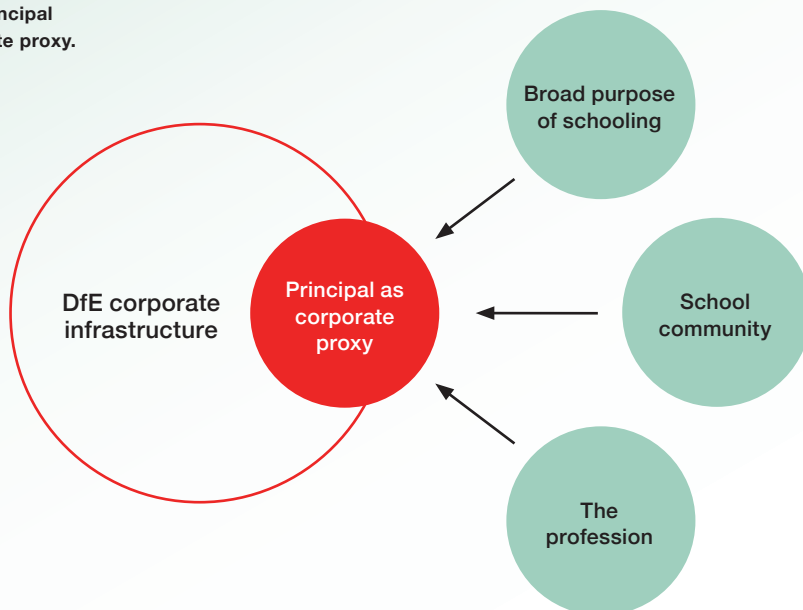
saw the Education Director (and their Local Education Team) control the principal's school improvement targets, plans for improvement, strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy, and the monitoring and review performance. Here, this middle-tier of the corporate infrastructure's leadership performed a surveillance role that further diminished the principal's autonomy. The effect of this was to constitute the principal as an instrument of the corporate infrastructure, i.e., the principal as corporate proxy.

In the SASPA-SASSLA exercise of reconceptualising the role of the principal, this notion of the FGTG principal having become a corporate proxy is an important consideration. Diagram 4 (below) depicts the public education principal as having to balance the four main professional interests and responsibilities which shape their work:

- retaining a focus on the broad purposes of schooling⁶
- responding to the needs of their school and its community
- acting in accordance with a professional field
- fulfilling the requirements of the DfE corporate infrastructure.

It is an attempt to graphically explain what happens when the principal becomes so governed by the administrative centre that they act as its proxy, regardless of how it affects adherence to these other professional interests and responsibilities. In a broader sense, it is a depiction of what happens when neoliberal inflected policy and managerial practices reconstitute what it means to be a school principal.

Diagram 4: The FGTG principal constituted as a corporate proxy.



⁶ In the 2018 ASPA monograph, *Beyond Certainty*, Professor Alan Reid AM proposed that there are four key purposes of school education. The first is a democratic purpose (i.e., schools are the main means society has to systematically develop young people as citizens able to play an active and constructive role in democratic life). The second is an economic purpose (i.e., schools make an important contribution to the Australian economy by preparing people for work in the many occupations that comprise the contemporary and future labour markets). The third is an individual purpose (i.e., schools provide opportunities for all children and young people to 'acquire knowledge that takes them beyond their experience' and which enables them to lead rich, fulfilling and productive lives). The fourth is a social and cultural purpose (i.e., schools are an important means by which children and young people develop the understandings, skills and dispositions necessary to play an active role with their fellow citizens in a diverse and multicultural civil society). See https://saspa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/aspaspa0001_Monograph_digital.pdf

The dilemma of dualism

Within this need to observe the four main interests and responsibilities which shape their work – i.e., the purposes of education, the school and its community, belonging to a professional field, and being an DfE employee - principals experience a *dilemma of dualism*. That is, principals belong to a profession (with a set of established norms and values) but they also belong to an agency which employs them. The corporate infrastructure for public education also has a set of established norms and values, but ones that are not always completely congruent with those of the profession, and with the added control over principals and teachers that employment bestows. Whilst the relationships between these two poles are not necessarily incompatible they are constraining. For the FGTG principal, for example, being constituted as a corporate proxy was a constraint formed within this dilemma of dualism.

Member responses

Beyond affirming the research presented, forum participants were asked to respond to three questions, and this is reflected in the summary which follows.

- a) *What responsibilities of the principal are not captured by the AITSL construct? Are there responsibilities principals have currently that should be off-loaded (and, if so, to whom)?*

The problem with the AITSL standards is that they ‘construct’ and ‘decide’ the practices that principals undertake. The effect here is that they are performative, and this attributes more power to the policy-makers so that government/education policy is enacted.

The AITSL standards miss the complexity of each school and community context. This is because the standards follow the policy logic that principal’s work can be standardised. This was not the experience of school leaders in the room, each of whom spoke of the uniqueness of their community and of the differences in their ways of leading they had invoked as a response. One group’s response indicated that Valerie Hannon (2023) in her publication, *Towards an Education Workforce Dedicated to Human Flourishing*, makes a much better case for the complexity of principal’s work than AITSL. Likewise, a Deloitte (2017) report, *Principal workload and time use study*, undertaken on behalf of the NSW Government, provides a more expansive view of principal’s work than that of AITSL.

Principals are responsible for many areas of educational leadership. This includes: the education and wellbeing of students; educational programs; student progress and achievement; management and development of staff and staff wellbeing; financial management of the school; leading improvement, innovation and change; management of school property; and engaging with the wider school community. (Deloitte, 2017, p. 4)

In consideration of those principal responsibilities that should be off-loaded, forum participants suggested that Managing Significant Underperformance should be an undertaking of the corporate infrastructure and that solving the various frustrations with HR administration would also be welcomed.



- b) *What decisions should the principal make that they are not currently empowered to make? Are there decision making powers principals currently have that should be off-loaded (and, if so, to whom)?*

The view of the group was that principals retain wide ranging responsibilities but no longer have the autonomy (or the power it brings) to make the best decisions. Here, the issue centred on how interventions made by the bureaucracy into decisions that were once made locally (school improvement, curriculum, teaching and learning, staffing composition) meant that principals increasingly felt untrusted and uncomfortable. It was strongly reflected in the discussions that principals should be making decisions about what matters most in regard to student achievement, development and welfare, and about the nature and methods of the workforce tasked with these responsibilities.

Discussion also centred on the time-sucking nature of administration undertaken on behalf of the corporate infrastructure such as critical incidents, facilities management, workplace health and safety etc. Some leaders involved in major works explained their frustration of having to work within the constraints of this process.

Again, the issue of managing the significant underperformance of staff entered the group's discussion, with the prevailing view

that its management (beyond the process of identification) should and could be undertaken by the corporate infrastructure.

- c) *If you could design your own accountability regime what would you include? Why?*

The view of the group was that principal accountability had become very dependent on one's Education Director. Here, it was acknowledged that it wasn't the school's story that was in focus, rather, it was the system's expectations, and the school's contribution to these, that was framing the ED – principal relationship.

In conceiving a better approach to school accountability, a common idea amongst the group was the notion of a site-based plan where the various features of that plan could be measured and/or evaluated over time, and where improvement would be understood as progress made relative to contextual factors and the ambitions of the school and its community. One group referred to this as producing 'portfolios of evidence'. It was agreed that accountability had to be contextual, not a one size fits all, and this had been missing in the DfE's recent accountability regimes. It was also agreed that principals are cultural leaders, and that it is important that we find a way to measure this core component of our work. Fundamental to all of this was the DfE supporting rather than punishing schools for any perceived lack of growth or improvement.

Thematic analysis: 'policy-related' problems

The thematic analysis of project data from this session indicated the following 'policy-related' problems.

Since the introduction of Local School Management, autonomy has been enmeshed with accountability.

There is an imbalance between the volume of managerial tasks principals undertake on behalf of the system and the educational leadership work they perform.

The middle tier of the corporate infrastructure (i.e., Education Directors) has amplified and expanded its role in the processes of school improvement.

Over the years, the improvement work performed by the principal has been simplified by the corporate infrastructure to Running Records, NAPLAN growth, and SACE completion.

Principals consistently uphold the view that public schools are incredibly diverse, and every school's context is unique. But the standardisation of school improvement has meant that schools have been treated as if they are the same.





SESSION 3: The team around the principal

This session was led by SASSLA chief executive, Phil O'Loughlin, who drew upon the research from recent papers the association had either produced or sponsored including *Review of Band A Classification and Remuneration (2022)*, *Sustaining Leadership: Serving Schools and Students (2023)*, *Workload in Enterprise Bargaining Negotiations (2023)*, *Principal Permanency (2023)*, *Reconceptualising the Role of the Principal (2023)* and *Band A Labour Market (2024)*.

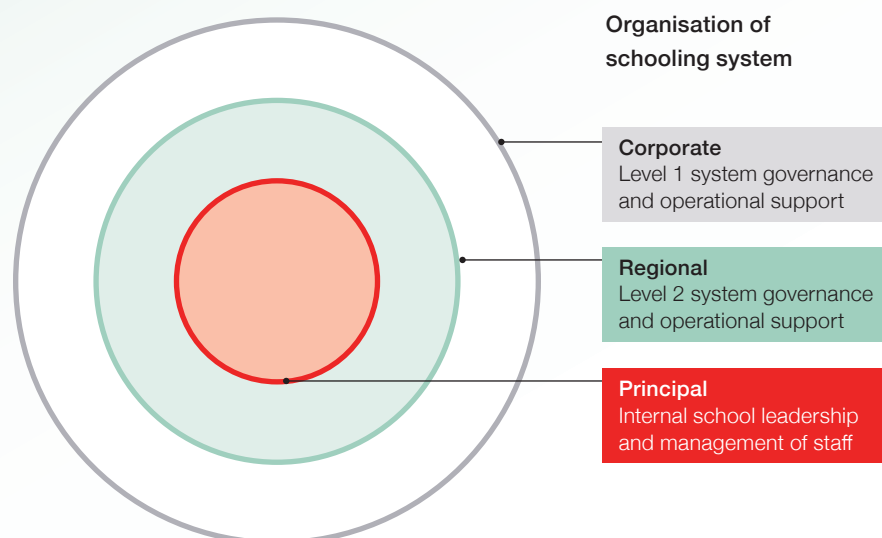
These various discussion (or position) papers have drawn attention to the increased complexity in the social, economic, and technological conditions which impact contemporary schooling and of how the capabilities of school leaders have had to change in order to meet the educational leadership challenges presented by such transformations. Given this context, the need for a redesign of the principal role is paramount, but it should not be done in isolation. It must be matched to the need to renovate the 'team around the principal' (at the school level and at the corporate infrastructure level).

O'Loughlin's presentation focused on three key concepts.

1. Schools draw upon different capabilities and resources to actively respond to the needs of students and the communities they serve.
2. Under current organisational models, these capabilities and resources are spread across a three-tiered system which consists of the school, the regional office and the corporate centre.
3. The 'team around the principal' notion implies a future state: one where the three-tiered system is designed to support the operational realities of contemporary schooling.

Diagram 5 (below) was used to illustrate this notion of the 'team around the principal', i.e., where the functions of the State Office and the Regional Office are refocused to system governance and operational support of the school principal, alongside a renovation of how the school's senior and middle leadership is organised.

Diagram 5: Team around the principal



Member responses

Beyond affirming the research presented in this session, forum participants were asked to respond to three questions.

- a) *What capabilities are needed by school to successfully navigate the existing emergent work context? Are there critical capability gaps now evident?*

Forum participants brainstormed a comprehensive list of capabilities (and related attributes) which suggested three distinct groupings, as indicated by Table 5 (below).

| Examples | |
|--|--|
| Educational leadership | autonomous, seeing the big picture, having a local narrative, balancing the needs of people with the drive for improvement, building and sustaining teams, capacity to delegate, gate-keeping, generational understanding, managing staff and their performance, moral purpose, problem solver, resilient, strategic and systems thinker, time manager, trusting, vulnerable |
| Corporate relationship | accountable, interdependent, politically savvy, strategic influence |
| Human attributes and professional values | adaptable, agility, emotional intelligent, ethical, having empathy and showing care and compassion, highly developed relational skills (including communication and collaboration) |

These capabilities and attributes reflect how school leaders have had to change in order to meet the educational leadership challenges presented by the increased complexity in the social, economic, and technological conditions impacting contemporary schooling. With regards to ‘capability gaps’, the main focus from participants was on the notion of teams. Here, two strands of thinking emerged. First, there was the idea that the principalship should no longer be considered one person but, rather, a cohesive team of leaders. Second, it was emphasised how important it was to build senior leadership teams with complimentary skills sets and of how pivotal the role of mentoring was in leadership (and middle management) development. Although falling outside of the notion of a ‘capability gap’, an interesting observation made by more than one discussion group was how important it is to have trust at the school level (within the leadership team) and between the school and the system (particularly between the Local Education Team and the school leadership team).

Table 5: Attributes and capabilities



b) *The changes made to Band B and SSO structures have followed a pattern of making incremental adaption to keep schools functional and stable. Are further adaptations needed or are deeper changes now required?*

The strongest prevailing theme to emerge in this discussion was the importance of school context and the need for the DfE to move away from a one size fits all policy logic with regards to Band B (admin/teaching time ratios) and SSO roles and functions. This was most acutely felt by leaders with country schooling experience. Of the schools represented at the forum, none stuck to the DfE agreed admin/teaching time ratios for Band B leaders which means schools are self-funding the additional time to address an intensified administration workload and expanded leadership responsibilities. It was agreed that, whilst DfE's funding of administration time for Band B leaders was barely adequate to cover management tasks, it was well-short of the time provision needed for most senior leadership functions.

In discussions about SSOs there was strong support for increased flexibility both in the nature of the support role and its duration. The term 'fit-for-purpose' was used by some groups to explain how the SSO classification system had failed schools needing to adapt to changing needs. As the purpose for support work changed, many SSOs were not equipped to adjust. This led to some questioning about whether it was the school's or the corporate infrastructure's responsibility to train and retrain SSOs. It seemed to many participants that SSOs were undervalued within the DfE workforce and were not well supported systemically to progress with a career plan. One group highlighted how difficult it is for Finance Officers to step up to a Business Manager role without having had HR management capacity building provided. Another group highlighted how some SSOs – e.g., Youth Workers, ICT Network Managers etc. – provided much higher work value than their classifications permitted, and how rigid the system of reclassification seemed when they had tried to address such unfairness.

Although falling outside of the line of questioning, one of the common observations made by groups was just how absurd it was that principals and Band B leaders were appointed to the school on a tenure whilst most SSOs at the school were appointed to a permanent role in an ongoing position.

On balance, forum participants felt that 'deeper changes' were now required to Band B and SSO structures, since schools had done as much as they could to self-fund the short-fall in the administration time of Band B leaders and to accommodate the mis-match between SSO classified roles and the actual support needs the school had identified. As one leader indicated, "The bureaucracy has hundreds of project officers, yet I cannot appoint a project officer to my staff because there is no SSO classification for such a role."

c) *What is needed to align regional governance and service based roles with the needs and interests of schools?*

This was a robust discussion with most opinions settling on the need for the system to be 'flipped' so that students and schools were firmly at the centre of public education, with the support of Tier-2 (regional) and Tier 1 (corporate) services adjusted to their needs. Here, the question became "what is the 'network' of the education ecosystem that provides the best support for principals and school leaders"? In referencing the past, participants indicated that Portfolios were better than Partnerships. The logic here was that the larger collective provided for more networking of secondary school leaders. Others noted that the Secondary Alliances (which have been impervious to DfE changes to the regional landscape) were a powerful network for challenging and supporting secondary school leaders and, interestingly, had never needed the supervision of an Education Director to function.

What was universal across the forum participants was the notion that any Tier-2 support (Education Director or otherwise) needed to act as the school's intermediary with Corporate – i.e., an advocate for students, schools and school leaders – rather than being a servant of Corporate or, as one participant observed, "simply doing the bidding of Corporate". Here, the prevailing view was that there had been no distinction between Tier-2 (regional) and Tier 1 (corporate) during the From Good



to Great (FGTG) era. Consequently, whatever emerges in the future needs to draw clear delineations in the relationships between schools, the region and the corporate office, and be committed to serve the interests of students and educators (including school leaders). For most participants, those relationships will need to be more encouraging of collaboration and collegiality and geared to trust and support (i.e., something that was not apparent with Local Education Teams in the FGTG era). Again, forum participants emphasised the importance of school contexts (which are diverse) and for DfE to exploit opportunities to move away from a one size fits all mentality.

It was agreed that the future 'team around the principal' needs to learn from the lessons of the past and ensure that all levels of the corporate infrastructure work to serve the diverse needs and interests of schools. This means that Education Directors, for example, will need a new role description and be able to demonstrate the capacity to work with and for schools and school leaders. Implicit in this understanding is that Education Directors will need to empower school leaders rather than hold power over them (as was the case in the FGTG era).

Some conditions directly affecting the psychological wellbeing of principals were also raised in this discussion. One of these, the reappointment of principals or the decision to extend the principal's tenure, was considered by all participants to be 'urgent and pressing business'. Here, the group's thinking was that the system's default position should be that the principal continues in the role unless she or he wins another position or there have been serious issues raised well before the end of tenure and, despite many and various attempts to address those issues, the concerns remain. This line of thinking reflects the resentment within the ranks that SSOs and teachers are in ongoing positions, but principals and Band B leaders are tenured, and their continuation in the role and at the school, remains a decision for others to make.

Thematic analysis: 'policy-related' problems

The thematic analysis of project data from this session indicated the following 'policy-related' problems.

The middle tier of the corporate infrastructure (i.e., Education Directors) has amplified and expanded its role in the processes of school improvement.

There is an imbalance between the volume of managerial tasks principals undertake on behalf of the system and the educational leadership work they perform.

The funding model for how the internal leadership of a school is considered and organised, and the percentage of administration time allocated to senior leaders and middle managers, supports management functions ahead of leadership functions.

Principals consistently uphold the view that public schools are incredibly diverse, and every school's context is unique. But the standardisation of school improvement has meant that schools have been treated as if they are the same.





SESSION 4: Towards a new generation of school leaders

This session was led by Professor Pat Thomson from the School of Education at the University of Nottingham and the University of South Australia, who drew upon her 25+ years of research in the field of educational leadership. The focus of this session was described as a conversational approach⁷ to thinking about: (i) how we support new leaders and (ii) how we **should** support new leaders.

Becoming a school leader

The first discussion focus was on how forum participants became school leaders. Much of this conversation affirmed the notions from the literature that Pat presented to the group.

- School leaders are not 'born'.
- Formal and informal learning, experience and opportunities are all important.
- Becoming a school leader is often strongly connected with a sense of moral purpose or to the vocation.
- Essentially there are three ways for educators to become principals:
 - a long-held ambition, carefully planned
 - a growing desire to become a leader because of an event, an example or an opportunity
 - serendipity, an accidental principal.

Two of the most common features in the experience of forum participants were the importance of having others believe in one's suitability and readiness, and of receiving informal and/or formal mentoring. The significance of having a 'network' was also discussed, with most discussion groups noting the significance of the work undertaken by principal associations.

Supporting leadership progression

Some international approaches were introduced to demonstrate just how diverse and varied approaches can be to developing school leaders.

Scotland National Professional Qualifications (NPQs)

This is a formal qualification offered in partnership with universities (where the program contributes approximately two-thirds of the units needed for a post-graduate degree – M.Ed. or equivalent). Interestingly, this is a mandatory requirement for Headteachers (Principals) in Scotland⁸. South of the border, in England, a lot of educators complete the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQA). This had previously been a mandatory expectation but now is 'preferred' rather than expected.

Professor Thomson reminded forum participants that when there are these formal qualifications needed to progress to a headship, considerable thinking is undertaken about the relationship between theory and practice. What is the knowledge component? What is the skill component? How are these best acquired? Where is the best place to develop these?

The Proposed New Leadership Programme (from Wales)

Wales will be taking a really different view from almost anyone else. The core of their program will be working with a leadership coach. The program is designed to have developing leaders supported by a coach with whom they can speak to about the kind of experiences they are having as well as what they are learning along the way. Also, there are residential components, where formal courses are undertaken. It will be a two-year program, consisting of core elements and electives.

⁷ Unlike Twilight Sessions 1, 2 and 3, this session was designed to focus less on 'expert input' so as to focus more on having forum participants reveal South Australia's experience of growing leaders.

⁸ It was also noted that many of the states within the USA had mandatory qualification requirements for school principals. For example, some expected principals to have a doctorate.

What Do Excellent Leader Preparation Programs Look Like?

Alongside the formal programs from the United Kingdom, Professor Thomson introduced research from the USA by B. Fusarelli and L. Fusarelli as an indication of contemporary and innovative thinking about 'what works'. The diagram below, 'at a glance' is a quick summary.

At a glance

- ★ **Principal leadership is a crucial element in high-performing schools**
- ★ **Preparation for principals is undergoing increasing focus from universities, foundations and school districts**
- ★ **Authors Bonnie C. Fusarelli and Lance D. Fusarelli outline the characteristics of exemplary school leader preparation programs**
- ★ **Those characteristics include a principal residency program, similar to a medical residency, executive coaching, mentors through the first year of work as a principal, and professional development that includes veteran principals as well as candidates.**
- ★ **School district partnerships with universities and foundations and support from state and federal grants are essential in creating programs that will train school leaders to face today's challenges**

That many of the key features of 'what works' – principal residency program, executive coaching, and partnerships with universities – are not evident in South Australia was noted by participants.

Forum Discussion

Discussion related to support and the importance it played in one becoming a school leader. The discussion was also expanded to include what was not provided in support but would have made a difference.

Much of the discussion affirmed Professor Thomson's view that school leader development is often undertaken through a combination of formal and informal 'training', where training can denote programmes and/or postgraduate study and opportunities to 'act up'. Beyond agreement with this view, participants reiterated the importance of mentorship, champions, coaches and 'critical friends'. On the subject of formal programmes, participants emphasised how the mandatory approach taken by DfE during 2015 – 2019 with the UniSA Graduate Diploma course had missed the mark: (i) by insisting that the study be done from the commencement of the

principalship, and (ii) by focussing predominantly on the principal's role as a business leader ahead of an educational leader. Others spoke of DfE programmes from different eras and also of executive leadership programs provided by government.

On the matter of what more support participants would have liked, the prevailing view was a combination of either coaching or mentoring (understanding the difference between the two) + time for reflection + leadership tools (available and regularly updated) + a network. Essentially the message from this discussion was the need for principal aspirants and early career principals to have more bespoke support.

Necessities and possibilities for changing school leaders' practice

The focus of this discussion was to make the principal role more attractive to aspirants, and it took two tangents. First, how do we make the good components of the principal job more visible? Second, how do we lessen the emphasis on the less attractive aspects of the role? Brainstorming by discussion groups was far reaching but four common themes were established:

- increased autonomy and flexibility
- contextual understanding (by the DfE corporate infrastructure) of schools
- the DfE corporate infrastructure listening to, and working with, school leaders
- the DfE corporate infrastructure rethinking the nature and volume of administrative and managerial tasks performed by schools.

Interestingly, these themes were consistent with views expressed at other Twilight Seminars despite the differences amongst those who attended. Beyond the common expressions, some noteworthy individual comments included: (a) principals having the time and encouragement to develop a narrative for their school to inspire its students and staff (including principal aspirants); b) principals finding ways to talk realistically about the job and their needs; (c) reimagining length of principal tenures (or, better still, providing permanency) so that leaders did not have to keep 'performing' for a job all the time; and (d) the DfE's corporate infrastructure relieving principals of the managerial work associated with issues of Work Cover and the underperformance of staff.

Designing a programme for principal aspirants

With the remaining time, participants were encouraged to design a programme for principal aspirants with a focus on the essential componentry. Whilst brainstorming by discussion groups was again far reaching, there was more commonality apparent. First, the sense of what is important (and what is not). Here the notion of importance focused on educational leadership (e.g., understanding how students and adults learn, and having the capacity to develop and improve student achievement and teacher practice) and building and sustaining an effective school culture. Second, the idea that some components are best learnt in the job (e.g., leading people) whilst others are best explored more formally within a programme (e.g., systems thinking, risk management, work/life balance and knowing how to access corporate infrastructure support). Participants reintroduced the importance of networks and of either coaching or mentoring, and how these should be part of a programme's componentry.

Some issues

In reflecting on the previous discussion, Professor Thomson remarked that what we had been exploring was a curriculum for school leadership. Here, the theory-practice question presents as vexing. This is why there are so many different

solutions across the world as to how the theory and practice should be balanced. By concluding that there is no 'perfect' solution, Professor Thomson acknowledged a range of issues associated with the developmental support of school leaders. These included:

- informal experiences are not evenly distributed
- talent spotting is invariably inequitable
- leaders discussion of current challenges may be off-putting
- current procedures may eliminate some people unfairly, e.g., potential versus track record, discrimination etc.

Next steps

In 2025, SASPA and the University of SA, with the support of the Principals Australia Research Fund (PARF), will focus on research related to preparing the next generation of school leaders. Part of that research will include a literature scan which will help us to understand what is happening elsewhere. But most of the work will focus on connecting our next generation of leaders through a range of focus groups and other forums. The research will be led by Professor Pat Thomson and Dr Chris Dolan (University of SA), and Rosie Heinicke (Strategic Convenor, Leader Development) will be the SASPA lead.

Thematic analysis: 'policy-related' problems

The thematic analysis of project data from this session indicated the following 'policy-related' problems.

Encouragement of the next generation of school leaders is hindered by aspirants' recognition of how performative principal's work has become and of the excessive work demands that have been attached to the principal's responsibilities.

There is an imbalance between the volume of managerial tasks principals undertake on behalf of the system and the educational leadership work they perform.

The funding model for how the internal leadership of a school is considered and organised, and the percentage of administration time allocated to senior leaders and middle managers, supports management functions ahead of leadership functions.

Principals consistently uphold the view that public schools are incredibly diverse, and every school's context is unique. But the standardisation of much of what is to be done by schools (including leadership development and progression) has meant that schools have been treated as if they are the same.



Closing remarks

The *Rethinking and Redesigning the Role of the Principal* project actively sought to draw upon common understandings and shared experiences from school leaders attending these forums as a means of considering; (i) the differences between principals' work broadly and the needs of the system, and (ii) the principal's struggle between organisational management and educational leadership (and the resources needed for each).

The common understandings that emerged from the four Twilight Seminars formed a set of seven 'policy-based' problems. To address the effects of these 'policy-based' problems on school leaders, the *Rethinking and Redesigning the Role of the Principal* project has suggested a series of policy changes to be negotiated with the DfE. This, then, is the SASPA-SASSLA case for change.

But policy change does not occur just because it is advocated. Understanding this, and knowing the importance of what is at stake, the *Rethinking and Redesigning the Role of the Principal* project argues that these policy changes be negotiated through a codesign process. Here, changes to policy and practice are considered and settled through a partnership approach adopted by the policy owners (i.e., the corporate infrastructure's senior executive) and those advocating for policy change (i.e., the various principal representative bodies).

Principals, having identified the policy-related problems inherent in the role, are keen to play their part in settling policy related solutions. They ask, through their collective and organised bodies – i.e., SASPA and SASSLA – that the DfE works with them on this enterprise of developing a plan for systemic change: one which includes the monitoring and evaluation of the effects these changes have on the work of principals.

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