



Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Principals Institute Australia
Submitting as a: Peak body
State: Vic.

Summary

Recommendations

- Principal Certification for experienced practising principals should be included as an essential element in a national leadership development framework
- Practical support for individual principals to finance their enrolment in certification would be a highly targeted way of supporting improved school leadership and improved student outcomes. This funding appropriately sits within a school's professional development budget.
- The time spent by principals working towards achieving Principal Certification should be counted as part of the "mandated hours" in the professional development requirement for principals maintain their registration with their employing authority

Main submission

PAI Submission to Gonski Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Monday 30th October 2017

"Great schools do not exist apart from great leaders" and as Hattie (2016) has established, great leaders do not evolve without encouragement, training and formal recognition of their developing capacity.

On average, principals can have as much effect on student learning as individual teachers. Principals' leadership directly affect the work of teachers and the conditions for learning in schools. Leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning . A principal one standard deviation higher in effectiveness than the norm in the pool of principals is associated with student test scores that are higher by 0.088-0.164 standard deviations. This equates to 0.14-0.22 years or 5.6 to 8.8 school weeks of student learning - almost a full school term (Helal & Coelli, 2016).

Over 80 per cent of Australia's principals are aged over 50 and many are set to retire within five years . With the increasing pressures on teachers and principals in Australian schools, it is essential that high performing teachers and school leaders are encouraged to aspire to be school principals. Both government and opposition education policies acknowledge that individuals with leadership potential need developmentally appropriate professional learning opportunities, including opportunities to step up and lead, whether it be leading small teams working on short term, narrowly defined tasks or larger initiatives with broader scope. The importance of the principalship for student outcomes and the deteriorating situation with respect to sufficiency of the supply of future candidates has been recognised by governments around Australia. In response to a looming crisis of supply, the federal government has tasked AITSL with creating a national leadership development framework for Australian schools.

AITSL recently released draft leadership development framework includes recommendations about development opportunities from early career teaching up to appointment to the principalship. Reference is made to leveraging off the expertise of highly experienced principals for system wide development.

The gaps in AITSL's proposed leadership development framework as described relates to the ongoing personal leadership growth and professional learning of experienced principals and how the highly effective, experienced principals to serve as mentors to aspiring and new principals will be identified reliably.

The issues to be addressed in a practical way by this submission are:

- Supporting the supply of "principal ready" candidates for the principalship.
- Supporting the ongoing personal leadership growth and professional learning of experienced principal.
- Identifying highly effective principals to take mentoring roles

Recent research has identified more clearly those leadership practices that can have a significant impact on student achievement and wellbeing. Professional standards for school leaders synthesise this research, describing the practices that link to improved student learning. In this way, standards connect leadership research and practice. What is required, at both a national level and at the level of states and territories, is policies which encourage widespread use of these effective practices. Widespread use of effective leadership practices will mean best practice becomes common practice, and learning outcomes for Australian students will be optimised.

The quality of leadership provided by Australian principals and their willingness to lead change has implications for implementation of the findings from the Gonski 2.0 review. In short, change will be impeded by an ageing principal workforce cruising towards retirement.

The best way to identify individuals with quality school leadership abilities is to recognise the principal profession as other specialised professions are recognised – through a system of professional certification. Certification is the way most professions drive continual improvement in their members’ practice; in their own interest and in the public interest.

Basing that professional certification system on assessment of evidence of the Australian Professional Standard for Principals in action in the principal’s own school is the best way to support widespread use of effective leadership practices in Australian schools.

Supporting the supply of principal candidates

A certification system which makes visible the Australian Professional Standard for Principals in action in different contexts will support principal preparation. The process achieving Principal Certification for experienced principals leads to the work of proficient practising principals captured as exemplars for aspirants to aspire to. Expertise in the principalship needs to be celebrated publicly to enhance the status of the principal profession. Recognition from expert peers is a powerful form of reward for professionals. These two outcomes of a professional certification system can be expected to assist in addressing the shortage in candidates for the principalship.

Rapid uptake of the professional certification system by the profession will give rise to a rapid pace of change.

Professional learning for experienced principals

AITSL’s draft paper discuss the importance of ongoing professional learning and leadership growth for practising principals. It goes on to highlight the characteristics of effective professional learning as

- being linked to school improvement processes and student learning needs.
- being differentiated, based on individual needs assessments
- providing ongoing opportunities for feedback and reflection, as well as time to action next steps
- offering guided learning through action research, job-embedded learning and intentional practice.

PAI’s model of Principal Certification for experienced principals embodies these characteristics. Principal Certification expects Principals to demonstrate, with evidence;

- their impact of leadership on teacher efficacy and student achievement within their school context

- a purpose driven collaborative peer network and
- an evaluative mindset with the ability to gather, interpret and analyse data to support best practice

PAI's Principal Certification for experienced principals is an essential inclusion in any national guidelines for school leadership development.

PAI's Principal Certification

Our ability to recognise and value quality professional work depends on our ability to assess it.

Principal Certification depends on reliable and valid assessment of principals' demonstration of the Australian Principal Standard in action.

Research has underpinned the Principals Australia Institute's decision that the best way to measure the complex performance of principals for certification purposes is to use portfolio assessment, taking a task-based approach. The assessment tasks, called Portfolio Initiatives, are based on authentic tasks that principals undertake as part of their normal responsibilities.

The valid and reliable assessment framework developed, field tested and implemented by Principals Australia Institute across the period 2013 to 2017 is ready to be scaled up to profession-wide implementation.

To ensure that our certification model has integrity and isn't a normative process to the below average performer, PAI has

- engaged the Australian Council for Educational Research to design the assessment framework
- engaged the Centre for Program Evaluation, MGSE to develop the evaluation framework and
- established a Certification Advisory Board. Ms Susan Pascoe AM has recently been appointed to Chair the Certification Advisory Board, which will also include school leaders and non-educators with regulatory experience to give independent oversight of the program's operations and quality assurance framework

PAI's Principal Certification model asks principals to provide a sound evidential basis on which to identify accomplished performance in their school. PAI's model positions principals to be evaluators of their own impact. Further, PAI will be able to provide data and insights from the portfolios of evidence of leadership in action by experienced principals currently leading schools in our fast-changing world to enable school leader preparation programs to continually adapt and develop in response to the real-world experiences of practising principals.

With the PAI developed and peer assessed professional certification system for principals embedded across the profession we would see:

- Principals regard the certification process as demanding, challenging and rigorous, but appropriate and worthwhile
- A system that necessarily engages most principals in implementing the Australian Professional Standard for Principals
- A system which necessarily involves principals leading initiatives with direct benefits to school improvement
- A system that builds support networks around regional groups of principals as they prepare for certification
- Most principals see preparing for professional certification as the natural next step in their career pathway
- Most principals seek professional learning experiences that help them strive to reach the standard
- A greater use of data and evidence by principals to support school improvement claims and an aligned focus on what the research establishes as being effective pedagogy
- Employing authorities and selection panels regard professional certification as a highly reliable indicator of expertise in school leadership
- Leadership at the level of the profession
- Certified principals possess a highly marketable and nationally recognised professional endorsement

Benefits to systems and employing authorities of a widely embedded professional certification system for experienced practising principals are:

- The process is independent and peer assessed
- The process itself can be aligned to the school strategy or school improvement plan, supporting & reinforcing their implementation
- with its requirement that candidates establish, prospectively and with evidence, their leadership of improvement initiatives in their school the process to achieve Principal Certification becomes a quality improvement program
- the self-reflection involved can re-engage and motivate experienced principals
- the self-reflection involved leads to more relevant, self-directed professional development

- the process requires the use of data and evidence to substantiate claims of school improvement

In North America, a task based approach to portfolio assessment for teacher certification by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has been shown to lead to improved student outcomes for NBPTS certified teachers . PAI's model of professional certification for principals using a similar theoretical approach to the assessment process. Endorsement of the concept of certification of experienced practising principals and PAI's approach to Principal Certification by the Australian government can be expected to lead directly to improved student outcomes.

Recommendations

- Principal Certification for experienced practising principals should be included as an essential element in a national leadership development framework
- Practical support for individual principals to finance their enrolment in certification would be a highly targeted way of supporting improved school leadership and improved student outcomes. This funding appropriately sits within a school's professional development budget.
- The time spent by principals working towards achieving Principal Certification should be counted as part of the "mandated hours" in the professional development requirement for principals maintain their registration with their employing authority.