

# The New Zealand Principal's Experience of the School Board as Employer

Survey Report to the New Zealand Principals' Federation and the New Zealand  
Secondary Principals' Council

October 2009

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## **Acknowledgements**

The author wishes to thank:

The New Zealand Secondary Principals' Council and the New Zealand Principals' Federation for funding, and for technical support with survey distribution.

Consultant Adviser Howard Youngs, Senior Lecture in Education, and Programme Director for Masters of Educational Management of Unitec, Auckland for his advice and assistance with survey design and statistical analysis, and his review of the final report.

Eileen Piggot-Irvine, Associate Professor of Education and Director NZARRC, Unitec, for reading the report and offering comments and suggestions.

Cathy Wylie, Chief Researcher at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research for her comments on the survey questions.

The group of practicing principals who contributed at the design stage of the survey, tested the survey and offered comments.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Purpose of the survey .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Background .....</b>	<b>5</b>
The legal obligations of boards .....	5
Assistance and guidance for boards .....	7
Resolution of disputes .....	8
Inter-relationship of board performance of its governance function with the performance of its employer responsibilities .....	8
<b>The Survey .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Key questions .....	8
Limitations .....	9
Distribution and piloting .....	9
Ethical issues .....	9
The survey data .....	10
Analysis of data .....	10
Terminology .....	11
<b>SURVEY FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Board's performance of its employment duties .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Who performs which employment roles? .....	13
Formal delegations .....	18
Familiarity with the relevant principals' collective agreement .....	19
Discussion .....	20
Recommendations .....	22
<b>Performance management process .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Performance management policy .....	23
The annual performance agreement .....	23
Contents of the performance agreement .....	25
Discussion .....	26
Recommendations .....	26
<b>Appraisal .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Have you had a written appraisal in the last year? (Q30) .....	27
How closely is the appraisal process set out in the agreement followed by the board?(Q34) .....	27
To what extent did the appraisal process contribute to your professional development? (Q35) .....	28
The appraiser: internal or external? .....	29
The cost of appraisal .....	31
The external appraiser .....	33
Length of time appraised by the current appraiser .....	34
How is the appraisal reported back to the board? .....	35
Respondents' general comments and concerns relating to appraisal .....	36
Discussion .....	39
Recommendations .....	40
<b>Professional development .....</b>	<b>41</b>
Background .....	41
Preparation for principalship .....	42
Ongoing professional development .....	43
Recommendation .....	44
<b>Professional support .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Planning for general professional support .....	45
Evaluation of support accessed .....	45
Reasons for not accessing support .....	46
Accessing legal support .....	47
<b>The board's performance of its governance role .....</b>	<b>48</b>
Board relationships .....	48
Board competence .....	52
Who performs the key governance tasks .....	55
Discussion .....	61

**Problems with the board-principal relationship..... 62**

- Dealing with problems in the early stages ..... 62
- Problems with previous boards ..... 65
- Serious conflict and employment issues ..... 66
- Discussion ..... 68

**Respondents' comments about the board-principal employment relationship ..... 70**

- 'It's all about relationships' ..... 70
- Concerns about various aspects of the employer board system ..... 72
- Respondents' suggestions for change ..... 73

## INTRODUCTION

### PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

Since 1989 New Zealand has had a decentralized system of school governance and management which provides that every school is governed by a voluntary board made up of the principal, five parent elected trustees, a trustee elected by the school staff, and the principal. Secondary schools also include a student trustee elected by the pupils.

A feature of the New Zealand system is the extensive responsibilities and powers which each board has been given under the Education Act 1989, the State Sector Act 1988, and the Crown Entities Act 2004.<sup>1</sup> Included in these responsibilities are the role of being the legal employer, with accompanying responsibilities for appointment, performance management and professional development of principal and staff. The devolution of responsibility for these tasks to individual school boards inevitably carries with it the potential for a wide variety of standards and expectations from school to school. It also has the potential for inconsistency of standards over time, as within each school the composition of boards can vary quite substantially every three years.

In 2007 several 'governance stocktake' exercises to review the current school administration system were undertaken by the New Zealand Council for Education Research (NZCER), the Education Review Office (ERO), and the New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) with the Ministry of Education (Ministry)<sup>2</sup>. The reports found that the majority of boards were doing a reasonable job of governance, but all three reports identified principal employment, performance management and support as continuing areas of weaknesses in the current governance framework.

In light of those findings, and in order to build on and further develop the work begun in those reports and in other employment related research<sup>3</sup> this survey sought principals' observations of the way in which the board-principal employment relationship works within the governance framework which operates in New Zealand schools.

## BACKGROUND

### The legal obligations of boards

Boards are charged with extensive legal obligations which are set out in a number of Acts which do not need to be listed in full here.<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this employment related survey it is useful to group those obligations into two types: governance obligations and employer obligations.

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<sup>1</sup> These are the key Acts setting out boards' legal obligations but there a number of other important Acts which also impact on boards as a result of their employer responsibilities.

<sup>2</sup> Education Review Office (2007) *School Governance: An Overview*; Wylie, C. (2007) *School Governance in New Zealand-how is it working?* New Zealand Council for Educational Research; New Zealand School Trustees Association (2008) *School Governance: Board of Trustees Stocktake, Report of Findings..*

See also Springford, L. (2006). Tomorrow's primary schools: Time to evaluate governance alternatives? *Policy Quarterly*, 2(3), 32-39.

<sup>3</sup> Hodgen, E and Wylie, C. (2005) *Stress and Wellbeing among New Zealand Principals* New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

<sup>4</sup> These are summarised in *Working in Partnership: Information for New School Trustees 2007-2010* Ministry of Education 2007.

## **Governance obligations**

These are the duties that the legislation requires boards to perform in fulfilment of their roles and responsibilities to the government and to the community for the performance of a school. These responsibilities are numerous and detailed but are currently summarised by the Ministry as follows:

*Boards of trustees are Crown entities and are responsible for the governance of schools. Your role, as a trustee, is to make sure that your school is run in the best interests of your students and your community.*

*A school's board needs to be able to assure the government that:*

- *the students in the school are receiving a high quality standard of education*
- *national priorities for school education are being addressed in the school*
- *the resources are being used prudently to ensure the highest possible quality programmes are provided for students.*

*The board's role is to:*

- *ensure the school has a clear sense of purpose by establishing its strategic objectives, documenting these objectives in a school charter, and monitoring progress in achieving these objectives*
- *set priorities and goals for improvement of learning and achievement in the school*
- *seek assurance from the management (principal and senior staff) that the programmes being implemented in the school can achieve the goals*
- *monitor the school's performance against student achievement outcomes*
- *seek assurance from the school's management that the school's resources are being used optimally to deliver the agreed outcomes, ensuring, for example, that resources are available to ensure the knowledge and skills of the teachers are up to date*
- *be accountable for the exercise of decision-making rights.*<sup>5</sup>

The Ministry of Education has a high level view of the board's role, with a focus on monitoring performance and being accountable to government and the community for student achievement in the school. Since the introduction of the Educational Standards Act 2001 there has been a strong emphasis on board strategic planning, goal setting, monitoring and reporting against targets.

While the Ministry's description of the board's role is a 'big picture' one, the NZSTA website sets out a more task oriented description of the governance role:

*The Board of Trustees key areas of contribution are to:*

- *Set and, as needed, modify the vision, mission and values.*
- *Protect the special character/values of the school*
- *Ensure a sensible and feasible Strategic Plan.*
- *Approve and monitor the Annual Plan*
- *Develop and review the general policy direction.*
- *Monitor and evaluate student learning outcomes*
- *Appoint, assess the performance of and support the Principal.*
- *Act as good employers.*
- *Provide financial stewardship.*
- *Oversee, conserve and enhance the resource base.*
- *Approve major policies and programme initiatives.*
- *Manage risk. ...*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid p 4.

### **Employer obligations**

In New Zealand the Ministry of Education pays salaries and negotiates collective agreements. Apart from that it has no further legal role in the employment of school staff.<sup>7</sup>

The Board of Trustees is the employer for all other purposes. It is the legal employer of all staff with the power to appoint and dismiss all employees, including the principal. In practice, it delegates many of the day-to-day aspects of this function to the principal (Education Act 1989 s 66). However, the board cannot delegate its responsibilities as employer of the principal to the principal.

The board's employer powers and obligations are set out in the Education Act 1989 (**EA**), the State Sector Act 1988 (**SSA**), National Administrative Guidelines (NAGs), Ministry of Education guidelines (eg on Performance Management Systems), and Principals' Collective Agreements. The key functions *in relation to the principal* include:

- Power to select and appoint the principal (EA s65) (but must impartially select suitably qualified persons (SSA s77A));
- Obligation to develop and implement a principal's performance management policy (EA s60A,s76, SSA s77A, NAG 3);
- Obligation to have in place a written principal's performance agreement (Collective Agreements for Principals).
- Obligation to appraise the performance of the Principal (Collective Agreement for Principals);
- Obligation to provide professional development (SSA s77A(2)(e));
- Obligation to provide an opportunity to improve performance (Primary School Principals Collective Agreement, general employment law);
- Obligation to treat the principal fairly and to follow fair processes (SSA s77A, collective agreements, general employment law); and
- Power to dismiss the principal (SSA s 77E).

### **Assistance and guidance for boards**

In the performance of the above obligations the board is guided by regulations and guidelines usually agreed by the Ministry and stakeholders such as NZSTA and principal professional organisations and unions. It is also supported by NZSTA helpline services and regional industrial relations officers, and the School Support Services division of the Ministry. Collective agreements for principals include national professional standards for principals.

However, in contrast to governance structures in other education systems which have also devolved employment responsibilities to individual school boards, the board's employment powers are not fettered by any legal obligation to consult with or take advice from central or local education authority professionals (although in practice many do). Thus boards dominated by parents who may have no

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<sup>6</sup> What is Governance?" [www.nzsta.org.nz](http://www.nzsta.org.nz)

<sup>7</sup> Unless the Ministry forms the view that a school board is not able to perform its employment roles, in which case it can use statutory powers to intervene and appoint a Limited Statutory Manager to perform the board's employer responsibilities or a Commissioner to replace the board completely.

professional educational or management experience, have the power to appoint, control and dismiss principals.

### **Resolution of disputes**

In the event of serious disagreement between the principal and the board, there are a number of support agencies, professional organisations and unions which may mediate or advise, but the principal's only legal resort is to use the employment courts or to indirectly seek a statutory intervention. Officially only the board as a whole may ask for a statutory intervention but the Ministry of Education may impose an intervention where evidence suggests that this may be necessary in the interests of the students and the school. Common statutory interventions may range from a requirement to seek specialist advice, right up to the appointment of commissioner to replace the board. Statutory interventions have generally been seen as having negative connotations and the more drastic interventions are not usually sought by principals.

### **Inter-relationship of board performance of its governance function with the performance of its employer responsibilities**

It is arguable that the board's responsibility for the principal's employment conditions is not limited to the performance of the employment tasks listed above. The board's performance or non-performance of its governance responsibilities (setting school direction, strategic planning, review, monitoring, evaluation, financial management and risk management) may have a significant effect on the principal's workload and the burden of responsibility that he or she may be forced to bear for the overall success of the school.

## **THE SURVEY**

### **Key questions**

The survey sought answers to the following key questions:

- a. Which aspects of the employer role are currently being performed effectively by boards and which are being done less well or not at all?
- b. Why the board may, or may not, be performing their employer functions and duties effectively?
- c. Whether there are any common factors in schools where performance management and other employment tasks are poorly done or not done at all (gender, age, experience, school size, decile, school type etc.)?
- d. How does the board perform its governance role and how, and to what extent, does this impact on the principal's employment conditions?
- e. What percentage of principals have concerns about their relationship with the board, what are the most common stressors to the employment relationship, what triggers a deterioration in the relationship, and how principals believe this could be avoided?
- f. How appropriate and timely are current support and mentoring mechanisms?



The survey was performed in June and July 2009, in the last year of a three year board term (2007-2010). It was therefore expected that new boards would have been trained and would have had time to 'get to grips' with their employer and governance responsibilities.

The survey did not specifically examine the board's performance of its principal appointment role as the respondents were current principals who do not usually have direct experience of appointing a principal. In addition, some research by Keren Brooking on principal appointments in the primary school setting in New Zealand is already available.<sup>8</sup> Brooking reports an over-representation of males amongst principal appointments and suggests that there is a tendency for some boards to be overly influenced by the personal characteristics of the applicant (age, sex etc) in preference to the applicant's professional qualifications and experience.

### **Limitations**

The survey provides data on principals' perceptions of various aspects of their employment relationship. It does not purport to provide a full multi-dimensional analysis of the employment relationship. Consideration was given to whether board chairs' viewpoints on the same questions should also be surveyed and cross-linked. However, as linking each principal and board would have required indentifying individuals and schools, it was considered that concerns about confidentiality would be heightened and that principals would be less frank.

A similar survey of board chairs could well provide some different perspectives and is an area for potential further research. In the meantime, it may be helpful to read this research alongside other New Zealand research into board knowledge, capability and training needs.<sup>9</sup> Some references have been made to that body of research in the report which follows.

### **Distribution and piloting**

An electronic survey was sent by email to all state and integrated schools. The survey contained a mix of questions providing both qualitative and quantitative data. The survey was initially piloted with a small group of principals and adjusted as a result of their comments. Questions were redesigned to improve flow and clarity, and to allow a wider range of answers. Some questions were removed to reduce the time required to complete the survey. More opportunities were given for comments in order to explore underlying causes in more depth. Most technical problems were resolved but unfortunately there was still a group of around 5% of total respondents who experienced technical problems with the survey. This appears to be not uncommon with the survey software used. The final survey is attached as Appendix 1.

### **Ethical issues**

Because a number of the questions were potentially sensitive and it was hoped that principals would be frank with their responses, care was taken to protect the confidentiality of participants. Neither school names nor principal names were requested as part of the survey and the electronic survey was designed to exclude the respondents' Internet Service Provider (ISP) numbers. Respondents were advised that where comments made might inadvertently identify a respondent or school the researcher would take the utmost care to protect confidentiality in any reporting.

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<sup>8</sup> Brooking, K. (2005) *New Zealand Boards of Trustees Selection of Primary School Principals*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Deakin University, Melbourne; Brooking, K. (2008) *Principal Appointments Data Report* New Zealand Council for Educational Research; Brooking, K.(2008) *Future challenge of principal succession in New Zealand primary schools: Implications of quality and gender*, *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 36 (1). pp 41-55.

<sup>9</sup> Youngs, H, Cardno, C, Smith, A, France, C. (2007) *Governance Leadership in New Zealand Schools: The perceptions of board chairs in relation to their role and development needs*. *Leading and Managing*, Vol 13, No 1, pp 49-65; Wylie, C. (2007) *School Governance in New Zealand – How is it working?* (New Zealand Council for Educational Research).

The survey was reviewed and approved for distribution by the New Zealand Secondary Principals' Council and the New Zealand Principals' Federation.

### **The survey data**

Survey links were sent by email to all principals of primary and secondary state and integrated schools in New Zealand. There were 787 responses that were sufficiently complete for use in the data analysis, making a response rate of 32%.

Representation of different groups within the survey cohort (gender, age, school size, school type, decile, state or integrated, and principal age) was generally consistent with their representation in the national group as recorded in the 2009 (where available) or 2008 statistics held by the Ministry of Education, with the exceptions noted below. The figures and graphs showing alignment between the survey group and the national cohort of all state and state integrated principals are set out in Appendix 2.

Some areas of slight under representation or over representation were:

- a. Slightly more women responded than men. 47.4% of respondents were female (compared to 45% nationally) and 52.6% of respondents were male (compared to 55% nationally).
- b. Secondary principals were slightly over represented (14.5% as compared to 13% nationally). Composite schools (area schools and middle schools) were underrepresented (2% compared to 4% nationally,) as were special schools (1.6 compared to 1.9% nationally). Kura kaupapa maori were also under represented (1.3% compared to 2.75% nationally).
- c. Deciles 1 to 3 were under represented by about 12%. U grades 1 and 7 were also underrepresented by about 35%.<sup>10</sup>

The majority of respondents had more than 5 years experience as a principal (69%);45% had more than 10 years experience and 24% had 5-10 years experience.<sup>11</sup> 6 % of respondents had less than a year's experience, 17% had 1 to 3 years' experience, and 9% had 4 to 5 years experience.

### **Analysis of data**

'Survey Monkey' software was used to breakdown responses to individual questions into key groups relating to school type, size decile, location and years of principals experience. The data for each group was then compared with the overall respondent group and where there were patterns and differences of interest these were noted in the report. In some cases the percentage differences between groups were not large but are reported in order to show patterns and trends.

The filter and cross tabulation functions were used for closer examination of the responses of particular groups and sub-groups.

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<sup>10</sup> U1 to U16 are categories relating to the size of a school, where U1 is a school of less than 50 students and U16 is a school of more than 2400 students. A full list of the U-grade categories is provided in Appendix 3. D1 to D10 (decile 1 to 10) are socio-economic categories. D1 contains the poorest group of students and D10 contains the richest group.

<sup>11</sup> I was unable to find recent national data on years of principal experience. I note that a teacher work place survey in 2004 found that 67% of principals had 4 or more years experience, and an NZCER survey of principals in 2005<sup>11</sup> noted that 65% of respondents had 5 or more years of experience. (Hodgen, E and Wylie, C. (2005) *Stress and Wellbeing among New Zealand Principals* New Zealand Council for Educational Research.)

Where a rating scale was used in a small number of questions, independent-samples t-tests or 1-way ANOVAs were carried out at the 0.05 level of significance. If a statistically significant difference was evident, the magnitude of the difference was determined by calculating the effect size. An overview of the statistically significant findings are summarised in Appendix 5. SPSS 16 was used to carry out the above analysis.

Qualitative data has been used verbatim or summarised to illustrate the quantitative findings. There were well over 800 comments amounting to 60 typed pages. Some comments were one line, others were several paragraphs long. Comments were grouped by topics and as far as possible broken down into different sub-group “points of view”.

Some groups (special schools, kura kaupapa Maori, and area schools) which provided interesting data were underrepresented and too small to be statistically valid. They have not been reported separately. On occasion, where data from one of these groups provides an interesting perspective it has been referred to in the report, but with the caveat that it is not statistically reliable.

State-integrated school respondents showed almost no differences to state school respondents in most questions in the survey. Where there were differences they have been noted.

### **Terminology**

In the discussion of data, ‘primary schools’ includes both primary and intermediate schools, ‘secondary schools’ include Yr 7-13 schools and Yr 9-13 schools, and ‘composite schools’ refers to areas schools, middle schools and kura kaupapa Maori schools.

‘Small schools’ describes schools of up to 150 students (this group makes up approximately 40% of all New Zealand schools and boards); ‘large schools’ refers to schools of over 500 students (17% of all New Zealand schools).

‘Low decile’ is used to describe decile 1-3 schools and ‘high decile’ describes decile 8 -10 schools.

For ease of reading, percentages have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

### BOARD'S PERFORMANCE OF ITS EMPLOYMENT DUTIES

#### Overview

This section of the survey sought to understand to what extent boards delegate various employment tasks to the principal or retain final decision-making power for themselves and what knowledge principals thought boards had of their employment responsibilities. The findings are summarised as follows:

- In most respondent schools (87%) the principal and board jointly appoint senior staff.
- By contrast 48% of all respondents (but only 6% of secondary respondents) said that the board was involved in teacher appointments. In smaller schools of less than 150 students, and in rural schools the board was the figures were noticeably higher (69% and 65% respectively), whereas in schools of more than 500 pupils the figure was 15%.
- Disciplinary investigations of staff are undertaken by the principal in around 58% of respondent schools. In 2% of schools the board alone investigates and in 37% the principal and the board are involved in the investigation.
- The decision to take disciplinary action short of dismissal was made by principals alone in 54% of respondent schools. In 40% of sample schools it was a joint decision and in only 2% of the sample was it a board alone decision.
- Only 9% of respondent principals said that they made the decision to suspend or dismiss staff alone, 72% said it was a joint decision and 12% said it was a board only decision. Secondary schools were more likely to leave the final decision to the board.
- In 96% of respondent schools the responsibility for managing the staff appraisal system was delegated to the principal.
- The principal alone made the decision on competence in 46% of the schools surveyed, with the principal and board making a joint decision in 44% of respondent schools and the board alone deciding in 7% of schools.
- 12% of respondents said that the principal had the final say on content of the principal performance agreement and 19% of respondents (correctly) said that the board had the final say. A majority of respondents (67%) said that the board and the principal jointly had the final say.
- Legally, the responsibility for ensuring that the principal's performance management process occurs is the board's. In practice 22 percent of respondents (24% primary, 12% secondary principals, 27% small schools) said that they had to take responsibility for making sure the performance management process occurs.
- Fewer than half of all respondents (46%) were sure that necessary delegations were recorded in the board minutes (38% primary, 88% secondary).
- 44% of respondents did not know if the board chair had seen the collective agreement and had not discussed it with them.

**Who performs which employment roles?**

The first graph shows the responses to the question "The board is the legal employer of all staff in the school. It is customary for the board to delegate many aspects of this role to the principal....In your school which aspects of the employment roles are performed by you and which by the board?" It has been pointed out that board and board and principal are legally the same thing. However, the aim of the wording was to allow for the situation when the board may act without the principal (egg in performance management of the principal).

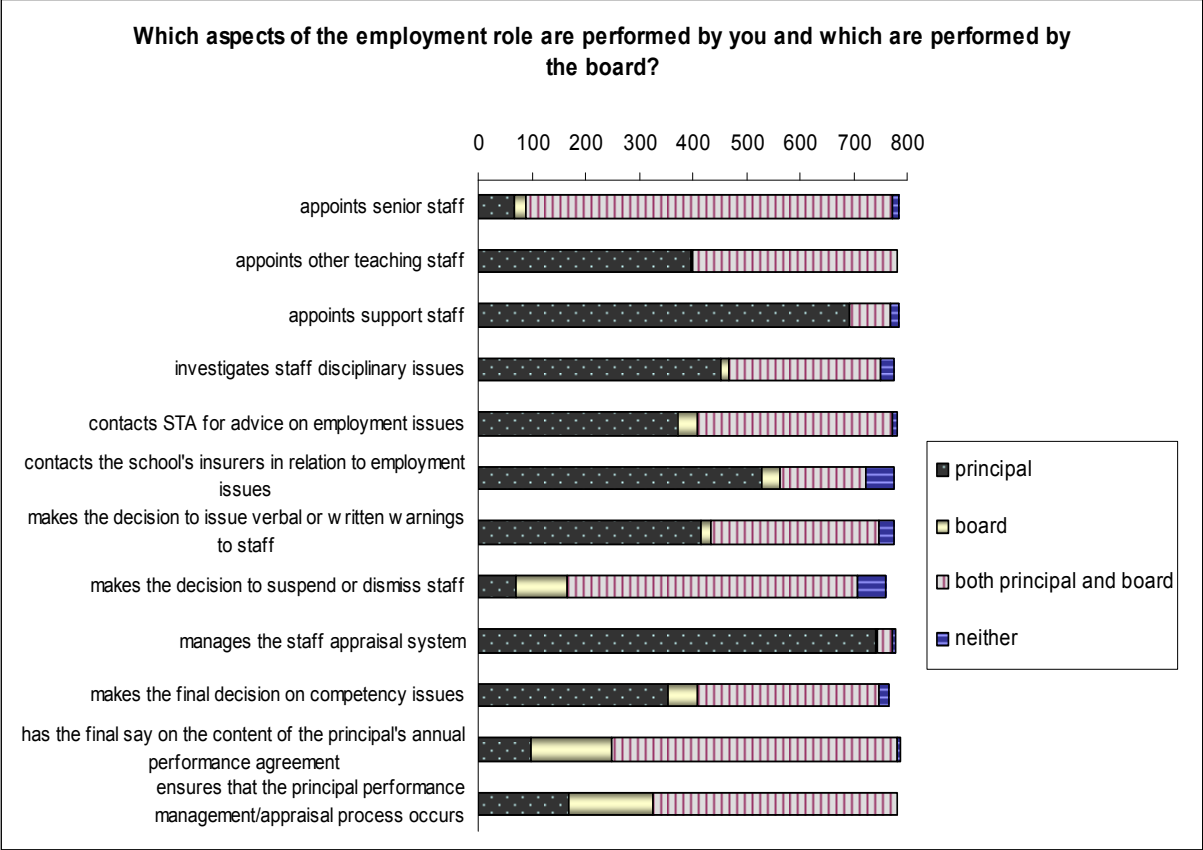


Figure 1

**Appointing senior staff**

Legally boards may appoint staff themselves or delegate the task to the principal.

In most respondent schools (87%) the principal and board jointly appointed senior staff (see Figure 1). The appointments were made by the principal alone in 8.5 % of schools and only 2.8% of boards made this decision without the principal. The joint involvement appears slightly higher in secondary schools (89%) and lower in rural schools (83%), schools of less than 150 students (83%), and low decile schools (84%). Otherwise there were no other commonalities between principals who took this responsibility for themselves.

**Appointing other teaching staff**

The second graph shows a comparison of the responses of different sub-groups of principals to the question " who appoints teaching staff?" The question was intended to focus on who is involved in choosing the appointee rather than later "ratification" by the board.

Overall, 51% of respondents said that the principal alone appointed teaching staff in their school and 48% of respondents said that the board was involved in teacher appointments (see Figure 2). In primary schools the board is involved in 56% of respondent schools. There was a noticeable difference at the secondary school level, where boards were involved in appointing teaching staff in only 6% of respondent schools. In smaller schools of less than 150 students, and in rural schools the board was more likely to be involved in teacher appointments (69% and 65% respectively), whereas in schools of more than 500 pupils the figure was 15%. In low decile schools the board was only involved in appointments amongst 38% of respondents while in high decile schools the figure was 54%.

In relation to board involvement with the staff appointment process, one respondent commented:

I still do not believe the appointment process for principals is always fair and above board. I have been told by more than one board chairperson that if a male applicant is available he is 'likely' to be appointed. This has certainly been something I have observed with my own board when appointing staff. Despite them wanting to appoint the best person for the job, there are certain applicants who the board are more interested in because of gender.

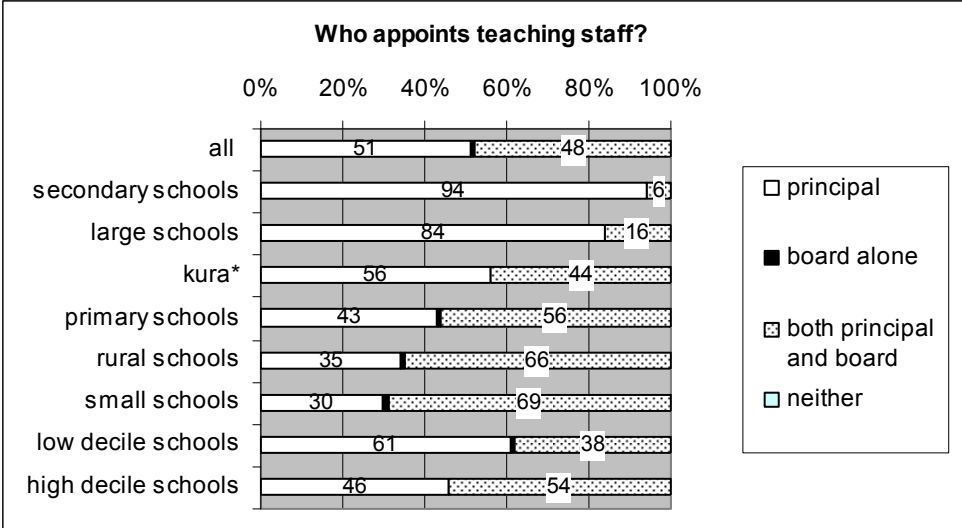


Figure 2

**Appointing support staff**

In 88% of schools surveyed the principal appointed support staff ( 87% in primary schools and 95% in secondary schools) and in only 10% of respondent schools were the board involved (see Figure 1). Board involvement was higher in rural and small schools (17% and 18% respectively).

In 5% of both secondary schools and large schools neither principal nor board were directly involved in the appointment of support staff and this may reflect a practice of delegating such appointments to the executive officer or other senior manager.

**Investigating staff disciplinary issues**

Investigation of staff disciplinary matters requires careful process. In general the principal may be the investigator so long as he or she is not the person alleging the misconduct.

In around 58% of respondent schools the principal investigated staff disciplinary issues (see Figure 3). In 2% of schools the board alone investigated and in 37% the principal and the board were involved in

the investigation. In 3% of schools surveyed neither conducted the investigation. It is possible that an external investigator or other senior staff member performed this task.

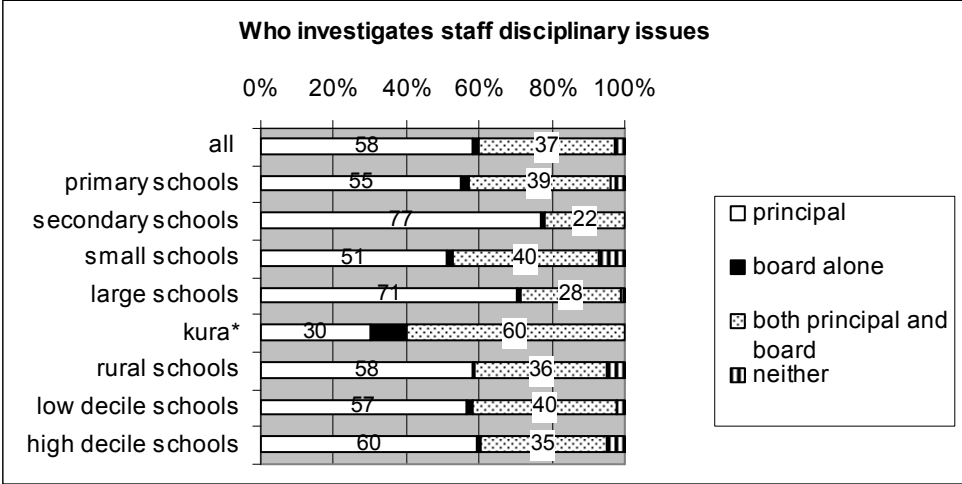


Figure 3

The principal was more likely to have responsibility for investigation in secondary schools (77%) and in larger schools generally (71%) and less likely in primary schools (55%) and small schools (51%).

**Contacting NZSTA (STA) for advice on employment issues**

STA provides both a helpline and regional industrial relations advisers for boards. Roughly 48% of all respondents said that it was the principal who contacted STA when advice was needed (see Figure 1). In 46% of cases it was a shared responsibility and in 5% of schools it was the board alone which contacted STA. In 1.5% of respondent schools it appears that neither contacts STA.

In secondary schools and large schools the principal took responsibility in 65% of cases but in small schools and rural schools the figures fell to 38% and 40%. There appeared to be little or no link between decile and allocation of this responsibility.

There appears to be some link between principal experience and who contacts STA, with 52% of new principals with less than one year’s experience likely to contact STA while only 44% of principals with more than ten years’ experience took the sole responsibility for this.

**Contacting the school’s insurers**

Contacting the school’s insurers is more likely to be left to the principal, with 68% of respondents saying that they did this, 21% doing it jointly with their board, and 5% reporting it as a board task (see Figure 1). The 7% who said that ‘neither’ did this probably reflected the number of principals for whom employment disputes have not so far been an issue.

In secondary schools and large schools 90% and 89% respectively said that the principal contacted the insurers. In small schools and rural schools the figure fell to 55%, with 27% joint responsibility, 7% board alone and 10% apparently not having had to consider the issue. Decile did not appear to be a factor affecting whether this would be a principal, board or joint responsibility.

### ***Making the decision to issue verbal and written warnings to staff***

The decision to take disciplinary action short of dismissal was made by principals alone in 54% of respondent schools. In 40% of sample schools it was a joint decision and in only 2% of the sample was it a board alone decision.

The principal was slightly less likely to take sole responsibility for this decision in primary schools (51%) and small and rural schools (44%), and more likely in secondary schools (64%) and large schools (61%).

Principal experience may also be a factor in the allocation or assumption of this responsibility, with 32% of principals with less than one year's experience stating that this decision was made by them, rising to 47% of principals with 1-3 years experience and 60% of principals with 4-5 year's experience. There was then a drop to 50% amongst principals of 5-10 years experience rising again to 58% of principals with more than 10 years' experience.

### ***Making the decision to suspend or dismiss staff***

A board can delegate the power to suspend or dismiss to the principal. However, the serious nature of this decision appears to be reflected in the allocation of final responsibility between board and principal. Only 9% of respondent principals said that they made this decision alone, 72% said it was a joint decision and 12% said it was a board only decision. Secondary schools were more likely to leave the final decision to the board alone. Amongst secondary school respondents 21% said it was board only decision and 68% a joint decision while the corresponding figures for primary schools were 11% and 72%. In small and rural school principals appear to be least likely to make this decision on their own (9% board only and 74% joint), and low decile principals slightly less likely than high decile principals.

Principals with more than 10 years experience were slightly more likely than other principals to handle this matter themselves (12% compared to 9%).

### ***Managing the appraisal system***

In 96% of schools the responsibility for managing the staff appraisal system was delegated to the principal, with joint responsibility occurring in 4% of respondent schools. In small and rural schools the board was slightly more likely to be involved (7%) and lower decile schools were more likely than high decile schools to have some board involvement (5% compared to 3%).

On the whole there appeared to be a very clear understanding that it was the principal's task to manage the appraisal of staff, and boards generally showed little interest in further involvement. Schools where boards were involved tended to be small and/or rural although the difference was minimal.

### ***Making the final decision on competency issues***

Advice on the 'Educational Leaders' website<sup>12</sup> states that 'In determining the professional competence of a teacher, the board will be strongly guided by its chief adviser, the principal. This is particularly so when the other trustees have little or no knowledge of the competencies required of teachers or how to assess them. The principal will be required to exercise his or her professional judgement and then advise the board in their capacity as employer.'

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.educationallleaders.govt.nz/Problem-solving/Education-and-the-law/Personnel-management/Appraisal-of-a-new-teacher>



The above advice does not suggest that the principal may make this decision on his or her own, but as with most other employment powers this can also be delegated to the principal. It appears that this is what occurred in 46% of the schools surveyed, with the principal and board making a joint decision in the remaining 44% of respondent schools, and the board alone deciding in 7% of schools.

These figures were almost identical in both primary and secondary schools, except that in secondary schools boards alone were more likely to make the final decision (10%), than primary schools (6%).

Principals in small and rural schools were less likely to make the decision alone (38%), but principals in low decile schools were more likely than average to do so (47%).

One respondent commented on board involvement in employment matters:

...The further management issues, such as staff leave, discipline and competency are removed from boards the smoother the ride is. Smoother doesn't mean nothing happens, teachers have been disciplined, competency questioned and three teachers have been removed or resigned from the school through such processes, which were smoother without board interference.

**Deciding on the principal's performance management agreement**

	Principal	Board	Both Principal and Board	Neither
Who has the final say on the content of the principal's annual performance agreement?	12.4% (98)	19.0% (150)	67.5% (532)	1.0% (8)

Figure 4

The principals' collective agreements are clear that in the event of any irresolvable disagreement the board has the final say on the content of the principal's performance management agreement, although a principal has the right to attach any concerns they may have to the written agreement.

Interestingly 12 percent of principals said that they had the final say (see Figure 4) (13% in primary schools and 4% in secondary schools). 15% of new principals said they had the final say compared to 12% of principals with more than 5 years experience.

Overall, 19% of respondents said that the board has the final say. However, 25% of principals with less than 3 years experience correctly stated that the board has the final say compared to 18% of principals with more than 5 years experience. Secondary principals were more likely than primary principals to state that the board had the final say (26% and 18% respectively).

A majority of respondents (67%) said that the board and the principal jointly had the final say and this figure varied very little across all variables (with the exception of principal experience, where 70% of principals with more than 10 years experience said the final decision was a joint one compared to 60% of new principals). While this can be interpreted as an indication of a misunderstanding of the legal position on the part of principals, an alternative and more positive view of the data may be that in the majority of schools agreement is reached between the parties and since there has not been significant disagreement the issue of who has the final say has not arisen.

**Ensuring that the principal performance management process occurs**

	<b>Principal</b>	<b>Board</b>	<b>Both Principal and Board</b>	<b>Neither</b>
Who ensures that the principal performance management/appraisal process occurs?	21.6% (169)	19.9% (156)	58.4% (457)	0.1% (1)

**Figure 5**

The responsibility for ensuring that this occurs is the board’s: the principal cannot be delegated to take responsibility for his or her own performance management. In practice 22 percent of respondents (24% of primary schools principals and 12% of secondary principals) said that they had to take responsibility for making sure the performance management process occurs. Small schools were slightly more likely to be in this group (27%).

There were 28 comments (out of 241 comments on appraisal) discussing the lack of board interest or involvement in the appraisal process. A sample of those comments are included below:

Board has no input to process and shows no interest in my goals or professional development. If I did not run the process it would not happen.

Process driven by me as principal for my own ‘protection’. If left to BOT members to initiate it would not have happened.

Board are happy with the way things are running at the school and so don’t see rigorous appraisal as a big priority, despite Principal explaining about how it can lead to improved performance/learning.

I have to remind my BOT every year that I need an appraisal. They ignore the need for it and the process...

There is so much on my plate that I don’t remind BOT of things like my performance agreement or appraisal - sometimes feel guilty about this ... but whose role is it to do this??

By contrast 58% said that this was a joint responsibility and only 20% overall (29% in secondary schools) said that the board had the main responsibility for ensuring that the principal was appraised. Principal experience appeared to influence whether a principal considered that they had to drive the process but it was difficult to identify a pattern (see Figure 6):

**Percentage of principals who believe they have to drive the principal’s performance management process**

Less than 1 year’s experience	1-3 years	4-5 years	5-10 years	More than ten years
15%	16.7%	28.1%	17.8%	25.1%

**Figure 6**

The area of principal appraisal is discussed in more detail in the next section on performance management.

**Formal delegations**

It is a legal requirement that employment powers delegated to the principal must be approved by resolution of the board and recorded in writing (EA s66). Respondents were asked if their board had

recorded in the board minutes those powers which it had delegated to the principal (Q20). Their answers are shown in Figure 7:

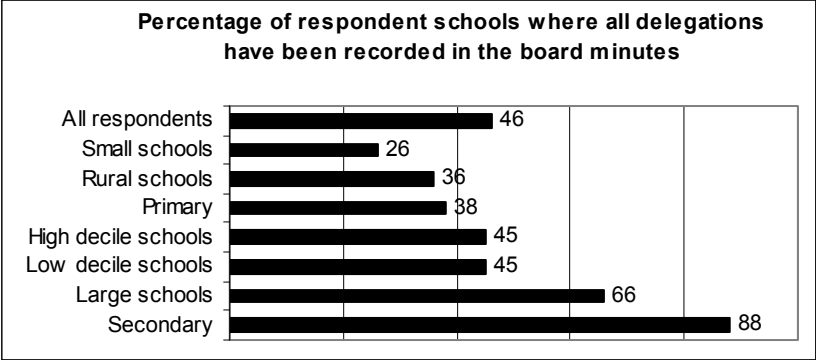


Figure 7

Fewer than half of all respondents (46%) were sure that delegations were recorded in the board minutes (only 38% of primary principals were sure, contrasted with 88% of secondary schools).

However, a further 25% percent of all respondents were aware that ‘some’ delegations had been recorded. Almost 20% believed that no delegations had been recorded, and a further 8% admitted that they didn’t know whether delegations had been recorded or not.

The data indicates some very clear differences in board knowledge of, and compliance, with legal requirements depending on whether the school is a primary or secondary school and depending on the size of the school. Decile and principal experience did not appear to make a discernable difference.

**Familiarity with the relevant principals’ collective agreement**

The collective agreements for principals set out the conditions of employment and include the duties and obligations of the employer (the board) and the employee (the principal). They also include a number of financial supervisory responsibilities for the board. Respondents were asked how familiar their board chair was with the relevant Principals’ Collective Agreement (Q21). The choices were: (1) has a copy/ is very familiar with it; (2) has a copy/ generally understands it; (3) has a copy/ hasn’t referred to it; (4) don’t know if he or she has seen it/ haven’t referred to it. Their answers are shown in Figure 8)

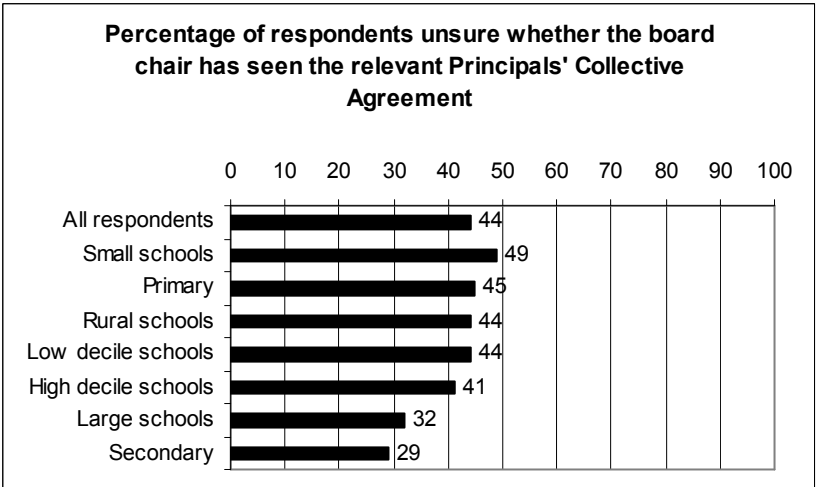


Figure 8

Almost half of all respondents (44%) did not know if their board chair had seen the collective agreement and had not referred to it. The remainder knew that their board chair had a copy of the agreement: 13% had not referred to it, 36% considered that the board chair understood it, and 8% were confident that the board chair was very familiar with it.

Large schools and secondary schools were more likely to be sure that the board chair had a copy of the collective agreement (68% and 71% respectively) and small schools were less likely to be sure (51%).

The question does not establish conclusively that board chairs are, in fact, unfamiliar with the collective agreement but merely expresses the percentage of principals who are not confident that the board chair has seen the collective agreement, either because it has never been discussed or because the principal him or herself has not given the chair a copy at the start of his or her tenure.

Nevertheless the data does tend to suggest that in a sizeable minority of schools the board chair may not be aware of the contents of the agreement.

## Discussion

*Board involvement in employment tasks:* Overall the larger the school the more likely that employment tasks of all kinds will be delegated to the principal, and the less likelihood that the board will be involved, either jointly with the principal, or on its own. There is a clear picture of greater board involvement with most aspects of the staff employment role as the school gets smaller.<sup>13</sup>

*Appointments:* It is possible that size of school and size of community may influence the extent to which boards feel the need to be involved in appointing classroom teachers. The smaller the school the closer the relationships and the more parents may feel the need to ensure that a new teacher is appropriate and compatible. Conversely, in secondary schools interactions between teachers and parents may be less frequent, and in larger schools generally board involvement in every teacher appointment would be onerous. There appears to be some relationship between decile level and board involvement in teacher appointments, with lower decile school boards less likely to be involved.

Since it appears that in half of schools there is no perceived need for parental involvement in teacher appointments, the extent of parental involvement in the other half of schools raises two questions for further research:

1. What are the reasons for parental involvement with teacher appointments and what knowledge and skills do parents bring to the evaluation of applicants; and
2. To what extent does parental involvement mean that teachers are more (or less) likely to be appointed on the basis of gender, age, personal compatibility and ethnicity, rather than on their proven professional skills. There is research to suggest that boards appointing principals tend to place greater emphasis on personal attributes and less on professional skills.<sup>14</sup> Even

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<sup>13</sup> There may be a trend away from board involvement in some employment decisions. A 1997 survey of school trustees found that the board believed it had delegated employer responsibilities to the principal in the following areas and proportions: appointment of senior staff 28% (cf 8% in our survey), appointment of teaching staff 42% (cf 51%), appointment of non-teaching staff 43% (cf 81%), staff discipline 46% (cf 50%), performance appraisal of staff 53% (cf 95%). (Wylie, C *The Role of New Zealand School Boards in 1997: Report to the New Zealand School Trustees Association*. New Zealand Council for Educational Research.) It is matter of a conjecture how well trustees' and principals' understanding of their respective decision making powers aligned at that time.

<sup>14</sup> Brooking, K. (2008) *Principal Appointments Data Report* New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

though boards may be reminded of their obligations to be equal opportunity employers and to employ on professional merit, research evidence suggests that boards are prepared to flout the law.<sup>15</sup>

*Other employment tasks:* Given the potential complexity of employment issues it is unclear how parents on boards of smaller schools would be better equipped than those in larger schools to contribute effectively, dispassionately and usefully to the employment role. In addition, there would appear to be a greater risk of personal and community relationships in smaller schools affecting, and potentially complicating, employment decisions. In particular, a decision on competency is arguably a matter of professional judgement, so it is difficult to see why the assistance of board members is required at all in this decision.

On the other hand, it is acknowledged that principals in small schools may find the ability to discuss employment issues with the board chair or a subcommittee particularly useful, especially in difficult situations. It may also make certain decisions easier for the principal if the board can be seen as the final arbiter.

*Responsibility for managing the principal:* The one area where smaller schools appear to step back slightly from employer involvement is in ensuring the performance management of the principal (73% of boards involved compared to 78% of all schools). By contrast in large schools and secondary schools principals and boards are more likely to be jointly involved in ensuring principal performance management (83% and 87% of boards involved). The requirement for the board to ensure that the principal is appraised has been in place for over 10 years and it is of some concern that 22% of all respondents and 27% of respondents from small schools still have to struggle to get an appraisal done.

Respondents suggested a number of reasons why their boards were reluctant to take on the performance management responsibility including lack of skills, lack of interest, lack of understanding of the process and the reasons for it, general satisfaction with the way things were going in the school, board thought it had enough information from the board meetings, too busy to spend the time to do it themselves, deference (board feeling that it was inappropriate for them to appraise the principal), unwillingness to spend the money on an external appraiser, and limited choice of good independent appraisers in rural areas.

Boards need to assume their responsibility to ensure that the principal has a signed and dated performance agreement negotiated annually and to assist in its implementation. While this is a process which will be developed in discussion with the principal, the principal should not have to bear the burden of organising the entire process and then constantly reminding the board to perform their part of it. Principals who are having to do this are carrying an unfair burden (although said they found it easier to manage the process with minimal board involvement). Boards who fail to step up to this responsibility are not acting as 'good employers' and are failing to meet their obligations under the Principals' Collective Agreements.

*Delegations:* Delegations do not appear to be as well understood in primary schools as in secondary schools. It is likely that in some cases there is no record of who has authority to make an employment decision (the principal? a committee?). There may be implications here for those giving employment

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<sup>15</sup> Brooking, K. (2008) *Future challenge of principal succession in New Zealand primary schools: Implications of quality and gender*, International Studies in Educational Administration, 36 (1), p. 41-55, at p 48: 'While school boards demonstrated that they were not unaware of official EEO requirements, in the absence of monitoring or legal consequences they were prepared to openly flout the law and discriminate against target groups.'

relations advice to schools, including a need for advisers to smaller schools, rural school and primary schools generally to ensure that before actions are commenced the necessary delegations have been passed and recorded in writing.

Delegations, once recorded do not have to be passed every year and it is a little surprising that only 38% of primary school respondents are sure that they have recorded delegations. One option to avoid disputes over delegated powers either within the school or in the employment courts may be to record some standard delegations in the Education Act that would apply in all schools but which can be varied by the board if they choose to do so. This would provide clarity and safety for both principals and boards and would perhaps prompt boards to actively consider the issue of delegations and what aspects of the employment role they wish or need to be involved in.

*Knowledge of the collective agreement:* A sizeable minority of respondents (44%) were not sure that their board chair had read the relevant collective agreement. While it is possible to interpret this positively, as an indicator of an absence of disputes or disagreements between the board and board chair, the collective agreements set out some important responsibilities for the board which cannot be delegated to the principal.

It is acknowledged that, in a dispute situation, lack of knowledge of the agreement may not be a problem because boards are likely to contact NZSTA and receive guidance. However, there are obligations in the agreement which are ongoing and not related to disputes. For example, boards have particular financial responsibilities in relation to the approval and refunding of expenses to principals, and the failure of a board to do this may inadvertently backfire on the principal. Situations have arisen where refunds have not been properly approved and principals have been blamed for the fact that they, as chief adviser to the board, have not pointed out these obligations to the board.

It is a somewhat unusual situation when a professional employee has to take the responsibility of providing the employer with a copy of the collective employment agreement and ensuring that the employer performs its duties and monitors him or her properly, but this would appear to be a prudent precaution for all principals.

## **Recommendations**

- Boards, particularly those in primary schools and smaller schools, should evaluate the extent to which they are involved in day-to-day employment tasks. They should be able to articulate why they are involved, whether it is necessary, and whether their involvement adds value to the performance of the particular task, or complicates it.
- Boards need to assume their responsibility to ensure that the principal has a signed and dated performance agreement negotiated annually.
- A core of statutory delegations for employment tasks in schools should be enacted to get around the situations where many principals and boards do not record, or are not aware of the need for written delegations for employment tasks.
- Although it should be unnecessary, for their own protection, all principals should ensure that their board chair has a copy of the collective agreement and should discuss key aspects of it with him or her.

## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

### Overview

Although 93% of respondents have a current annual performance agreement, fewer (80%) said the agreement was signed. One quarter of respondents in secondary schools did not have a signed agreement. Overall 89% of respondents said that their school had an agreed principal performance management policy

Despite advice to boards to enter into a performance agreement promptly the data showed that new principals and particularly first time principals may take several terms or over a year to establish a performance agreement with their board. Only 62% of those respondents with less than a year's experience had a signed agreement.

89% of respondents who had a performance agreement said that it set out clear performance goals (81% of secondary respondents). Around 77% of those who had an agreement said that the agreement set out the appraisal process to be followed.

10% of respondents had difficulty reaching agreement on performance goals, the appraisal process or the appraiser, with performance goals more likely to be problematic. 12% of those who experienced difficulty reaching agreement had used independent mediation to help resolve the disagreement. Only 3.5 % of respondents who had a performance agreement said that they were unhappy with the final outcome of negotiations, with fewer than 2% recording their objections.

### Performance management policy

Overall 89% of respondents said that their school had an agreed principal performance management policy but the number was lower in secondary schools (84%).

### The annual performance agreement

Respondents were asked whether they currently had an annual performance agreement (Q22) and whether the agreement was signed by both the principal and the board chair (Q23)(see Figure 9). Signing and dating is required to record the agreement of both parties, and to record also the time frame during which the agreement applies. Agreements that are not signed are also more likely to be undated and therefore without an agreed time frame that the parties keep to.

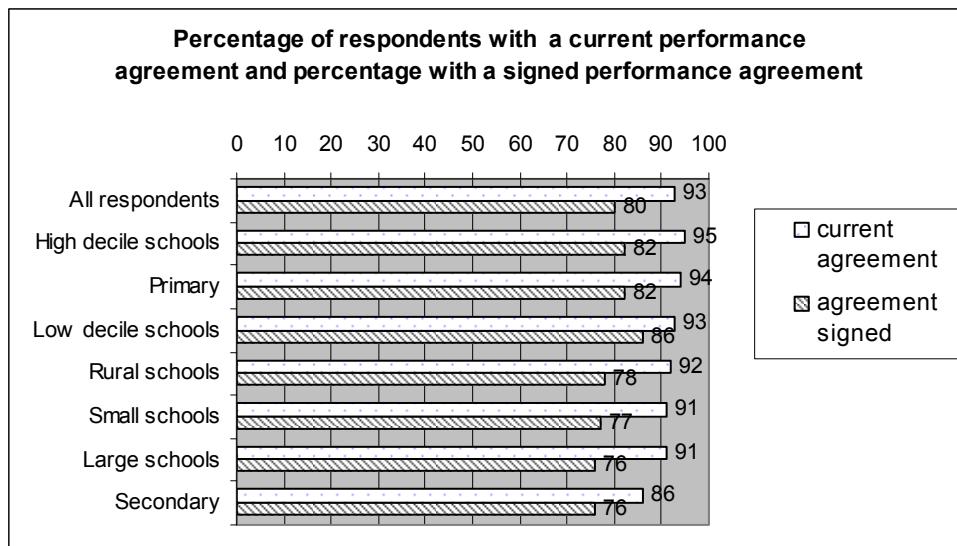


Figure 9

The great majority of all respondents (93%) said that they had a current agreement but fewer (80%) said that the agreement was signed. Although awareness and compliance with employment law is usually higher in secondary schools, in this instance it is actually lower than average, with 86% having a current agreement and fewer (76%) having a signed agreement.

There was a variation in the percentage of signed agreements according to the principal's experience as shown in Figure 10.

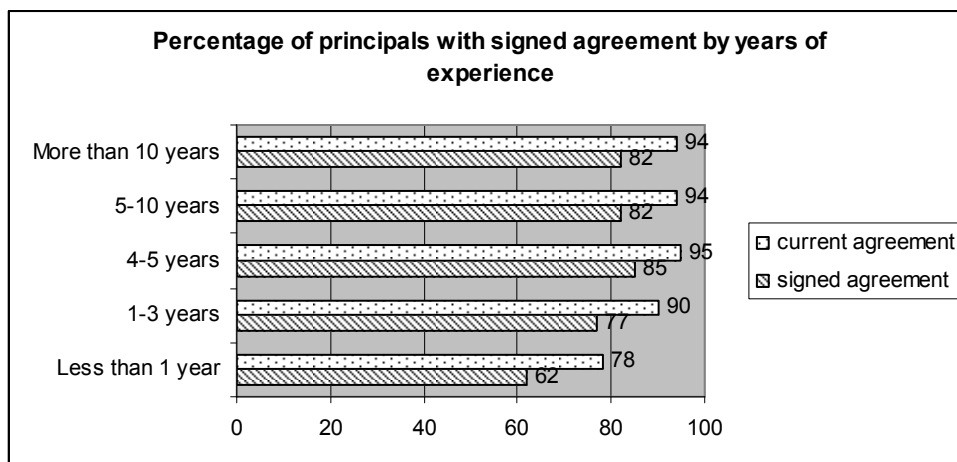


Figure 10

Only 62% of principals with less than 1 year's experience have a signed agreement and 10% were unclear as to whether they had a performance agreement at all. This rises to 77% with a signed agreement for principals with 1-3 years experience before approaching the national average after 4 years of experience.

Qualitative data, and the slightly smaller number of principals in the 1-3 year group with signed agreements (see Figure 10), may indicate that a number of new principals have some difficulty getting their board to provided them with a performance agreement. Some comments were:



Whilst I have answered yes that I have a current performance management agreement etc, I have had to battle to ensure this process was put in place and it has taken two years to get my board to engage in the process.

In the first 12 months here I had no performance agreement despite asking for one various times. The principal appraisal policy was one line. ERO was coming so I pushed and shoved to have a summative appraisal report done so we could tick that box. I was very unhappy with the overall process in the first year.

32 respondents wrote comments on delayed appraisals, hitches in the process, lack of follow through, or no appraisal done at all. The following response is similar to others in this group:

I was appraised well in 2007, 2008 no appraisal agreement was completed and it is now July and only now is a formal appraisal sorted (external)

Although NZSTA is clear that the process of developing a performance agreement should begin shortly after a principal is appointed,<sup>16</sup> in practice, if a new principal is appointed by an inexperienced board it may take longer to get the process up and running (see Figure 10). One person suggested that there were advantages in extending the role of the board advisor used during the appointment process:

It was a good decision by the Board to use the consultant they used for my appointment process to now be my appraiser for the first year in my Principal role.

## **Contents of the performance agreement**

### ***Does your agreement state clear performance goals for the year? (Q24)***

Most respondents who had a performance agreement said that it set out clear performance goals (89%). Primary school respondents (91%) were more likely to have set goals than secondary respondents (81%). Large schools were slightly less likely than small schools to have clear goals but there was no difference based on decile. Principals with more than 4 years experience were more likely to say that the agreement had clear performance goals (91%) than those less than 4 years experience (85%).

### ***Does the agreement set out the appraisal process to be followed? (Q25)***

Only 77% of those who had an agreement said that it set out the appraisal process to be followed. 16% said 'no / not really', and 6% said there was no agreement. Again primary schools (80%) were more likely than secondary schools (76%) to have the process set out. There was minimal variation related to school size but low decile schools (80%) were slightly more likely to have the appraisal process set out than high decile schools (77%).

### ***Negotiating the contents of the agreement***

Respondents were asked whether they had any difficulties negotiating the elements of the performance agreement (Q31).

#### **PERFORMANCE GOALS**

92% of respondents said that they reached agreement on what the performance goals would be. 5% said that they did not reach agreement and 3% said that they reached agreement, but not initially. Secondary schools, large schools and high decile schools were more likely to reach agreement (95% each) than small schools (87%) and rural schools (87%).

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<sup>16</sup> *Guidelines for Boards of Trustees: Principal Appointment*, NZSTA, May 2005, p 22.

## THE APPRAISAL PROCESS

95% of respondents reached agreement on the appraisal process, with 4% unable to reach agreement and 2% not initially reaching agreement. Respondents from rural and small schools were slightly less likely to reach agreement on the process (93%) and secondary schools were also less likely (91%). There were no other major variables.

## WHO THE APPRAISER WOULD BE

95% of respondents agreed on the appraiser, with 4% not agreeing and 2% unable to agree initially.. School size did not appear to be relevant.

### ***Where there was difficulty reaching agreement, was an external adviser or mediator consulted? (Q32)***

Although 78 respondents (10%) had difficulty reaching agreement on one or more of the above matters, only 9 respondents said that an external adviser was consulted.

### ***How happy were you with the amount of input that you had into the performance agreement?(Q33)***

Although 10% of respondents had some degree of difficulty reaching agreement over one or more aspects of the performance management agreement, only 25 respondents (3.5%) who had performance agreements said that they were ultimately unhappy with the amount of input they had into their performance agreement. 13 (1.8 %) said they were unhappy but did not do anything about it and 12 (1.7%) said that they made sure that their objections were recorded. Those who were unhappy with the amount of input were more likely to be in high decile, or small or rural schools.

## **Discussion**

Signing and dating of performance agreements is important because it gives the performance management process a time frame and ensures that there is actually agreement between the parties. An unsigned agreement has very limited legal effect.

## **Recommendations**

- Where an adviser is appointed to assist the board with the principal appointment process, it may be appropriate for the adviser to ask whether the school needs assistance with developing an initial performance management agreement.
- There appears to be a relatively high level of agreement on the contents of the performance management agreement but in those situations where there is not agreement greater use could be made of an independent mediator. Inability to reach agreement may be an indicator of more problems down the track and it may well be better to address these issues sooner rather than later.

## APPRAISAL

### Overview

Around 80% of respondents had signed performance agreements, 90% had received a written appraisal report in the last year, and (80%) found the appraisal process 'useful' or 'very useful' (37% very useful and 43% quite useful). Key findings were:

- Around 69% of appraisals in the previous year were done externally. High decile schools, large schools and secondary schools were much more likely to use internal appraisals.
- Overall respondents tended to rate appraisal under \$1000 as less useful, those in the primary sector attributed most usefulness to appraisal in the \$1000-\$2000 category and those in the secondary sector to the \$2000-\$3000 category.
- Nearly three quarters of respondents using an external appraiser used an independent consultant and the appraisal was perceived as being more useful when the appraiser was known to the principal. 8% used another principal who was known to them personally. This group expressed the lowest satisfaction with the usefulness of the appraisal.
- The average number of years a respondent had been appraised by their current appraiser was 2.16 and the highest was 19 years of being appraised by the same board chair. Respondents tended to place increasing value on the appraisal as the principal and appraiser get to know each other over time, peaking at around three years.
- In (29%) of schools the chairperson reported back to the board that the appraisal had been done, and the report was not viewed by the rest of the board. In about half of schools (49%) a summary of the report or the full report was provided to the whole board in-committee.
- 15% said the report was put before the board in open or public session. This latter is a breach of employment obligations, but 88% of respondents from this group said that they were happy with this method of reporting.

### Have you had a written appraisal in the last year? (Q30)

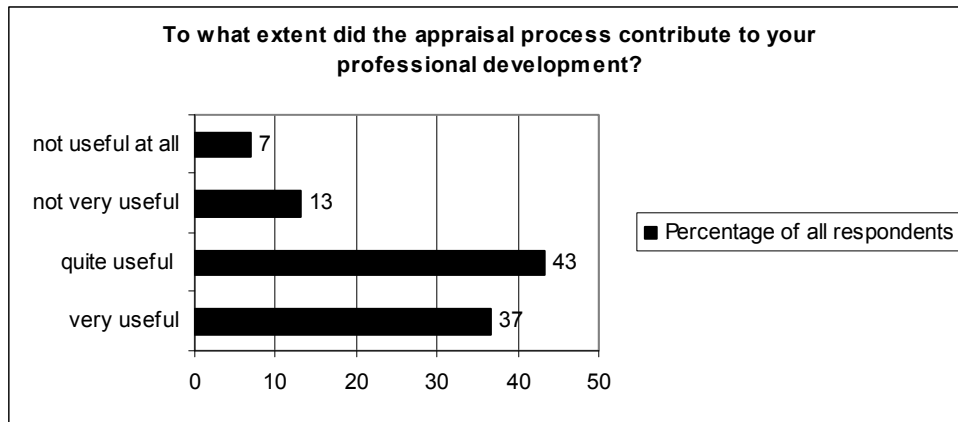
Overall 90% of respondents had received a written appraisal in the last year, even though only 80% of respondents had a signed annual performance agreement (see discussion under Annual Performance Agreement above p 23). There was little variation in this figure across deciles and school type except that respondents in secondary schools were slightly less likely (88%), and those from small schools were also less likely, to have had a written appraisal (86%).

### How closely is the appraisal process set out in the agreement followed by the board?(Q34)

Overall, 91% of respondents said that the appraisal process was either closely followed or mostly followed, with only 3% saying that the process was not followed at all. School size and type made little difference.

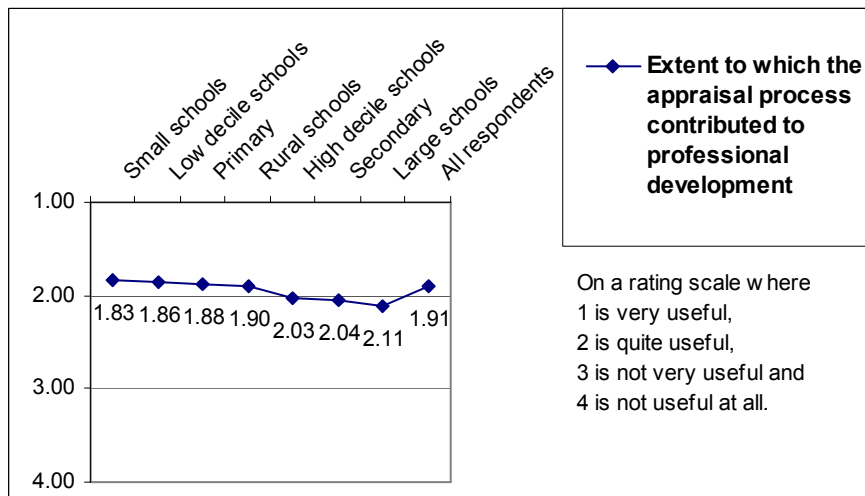
**To what extent did the appraisal process contribute to your professional development? (Q35)**

Respondents were asked to choose between 4 possible responses on a scale from 1-4 where 1 was 'very useful' and 4 'not useful at all', as shown in Figure 11.



**Figure 11**

A large majority (80%) found the appraisal process was useful or very useful for their professional development (37% very useful and 43% quite useful). Where the responses were averaged to produce an overall rating for each group, small schools, low decile schools and primary schools were slightly more likely to find the appraisal useful than large schools, high decile schools and secondary schools (see Figure 12).<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 12**

We looked more closely at the approval rating in larger schools. In schools with rolls of 500-1025 students (100 respondents) the rating was 2.16; where the roll was 1026-1600 (28 respondents) the rating was 1.8; and in schools of 1601-2400 students (11 respondents) the rating fell to 2.4, and nearly 32% of the latter group said that the appraisal process was not very useful or not useful at all (compared to only 20% in the group of all respondents). This may indicate a need for more high quality, high level professional and/or management development to meet the needs of principals in

<sup>17</sup> In the Wylie (2007) (see fn 2 above) around half of *trustees* said that the appraisal had a lot of use for their principal's professional development (p34).

these larger and more complex institutions. There were no respondents from schools of more than 2400 students.

Using the same scale the data showed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the value obtained from the appraisal process tended to decline with years of experience as a principal (see Figure 13).

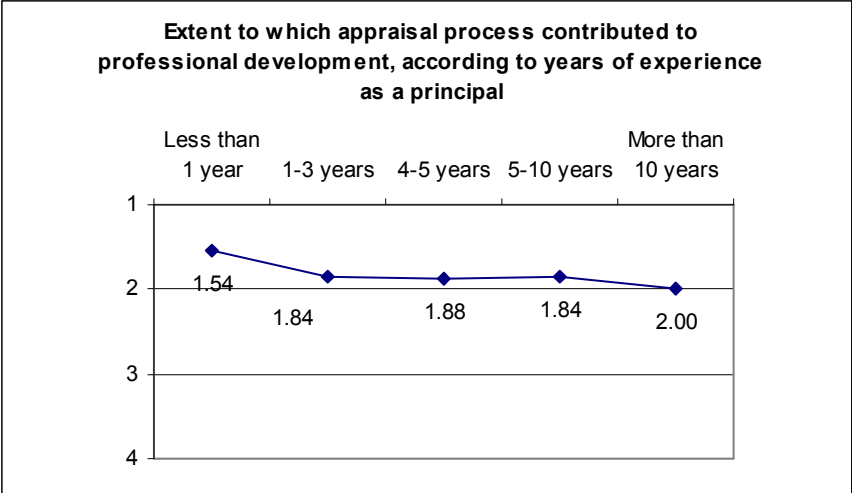


Figure 13

The 58 respondents who rated the appraisal ‘not useful at all’ were twice as likely to be male (64% male compared to 36% female), and have more than ten years experience as a principal (62% compared to 45% of all respondents). They were less likely to have a signed performance agreement (63% compared to 80% overall), and much less likely to have clear performance goals (67% compared to 89% overall). Only 42% of the agreements for this group set out the appraisal process to be followed, compared to 78% of all respondents. Curiously, 60% of those who rated the appraisal process ‘no use at all’ were happy with the amount of input they had had in to the performance agreement.

There appeared to be a connection between a carefully developed written performance agreement and the perceived usefulness of the appraisal process, in other words, those respondents who had appraisals without a written performance agreement tend to be less likely to find the appraisal process useful.

**The appraiser: internal or external?**

Respondents were asked whether their most recent appraisal was internal (done by the board chair or by a board committee) or external.(Q36) Their responses are set out in Figure 14.

Overall 69% of appraisals were done externally<sup>18</sup> and only 31% were done internally, with 25% of internal appraisals being done by the board chair and 6% by a board committee. Quite a number of respondents commented that they operate a rotating system with an external appraiser every 2-3 years. If this was general practice the figures might have been expected to show only 33.3% – 50% of schools using an external appraiser last year but as the graph in Figure 14 notes, this was not the case.

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<sup>18</sup> This may represent an increase Wylie (2007) (see fn 2 above) noted at p 34 that trustees said that 56% of boards had used an independent person for the principal’s last performance appraisal.

The likelihood of a board using an external appraiser varied according to school size and type. An external appraiser was much more common in small schools, low decile schools, rural schools and primary schools, and much lower in high decile schools, large schools and secondary schools.

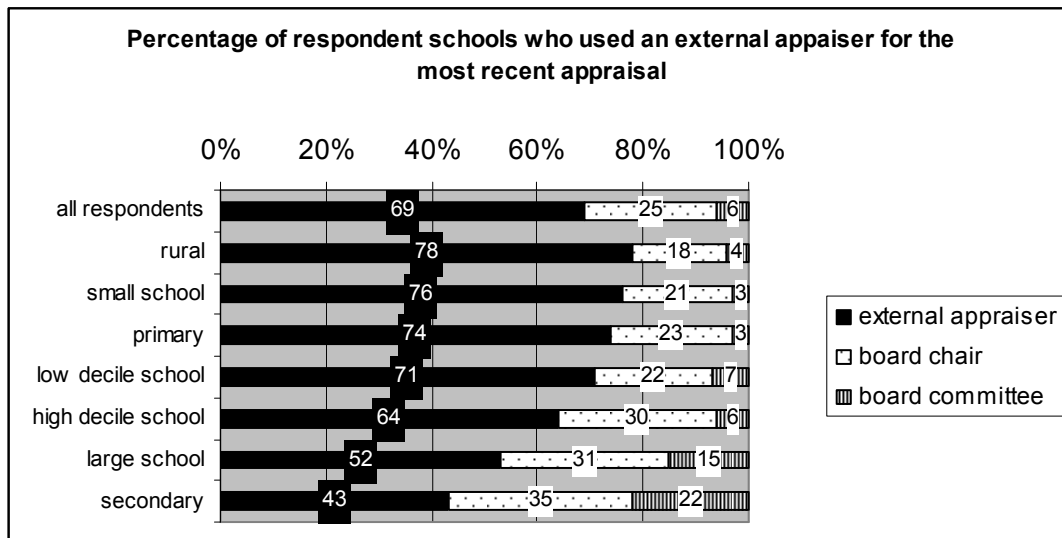


Figure 14

Secondary schools were most likely to have the board chair or a committee do the appraisal (57%) and rural schools boards were least confident to undertake this task (22%).

It may be that the reluctance of rural and small school boards to become involved with the performance management process (discussed above at p 18) means that the principal has more freedom to obtain an external appraiser. Conversely, larger and secondary school boards may be more confident that they can perform the process themselves.

There may be a link between the lower satisfaction expressed by secondary school principals with the value of their appraisal process (see above Figure 12), and the fact that a greater proportion of those appraisals were being done internally, as compared with the primary sector. The usefulness of the professional development which secondary school principals received from their appraisal process, using the 1- 4 rating system, where 1 is high is set out in Figure 15.

Method of appraisal	external appraiser	board committee	board chair
Rating of usefulness by secondary respondents.	1.79	2.18	2.26.
Rating of usefulness by primary respondents.	1.82	2.09	2.00

Figure 15

The difference was more noticeable when we looked at how many secondary respondents described their appraisal as 'very useful' (see Figure 16). The table shows a comparison between secondary and primary school principals' views of the usefulness of appraisals depending on whether the appraisal was done by an external appraiser, a board committee or the board chair alone.

Method of appraisal	external appraiser	board committee	board chair
Percentage of secondary respondents describing method of appraisal as 'very useful'	50%	18%	12%.
Percentage of primary respondents describing appraisal as 'very useful'	41%	38%	28%

**Figure 16**

There appears to be a difference between the ability of the external appraiser and the ability of the board chair to contribute to the secondary principal's professional development. There were a small number of comments on this question.

At times board chairs do not know how to do a performance agreement, appraisal etc and will not get training for an education setting because they think they know from business what is required. Having been professionally appraised a number of times by an external consultant, it was a rude shock to have such a poor job done last year.

Although some board chairs are very well-equipped to conduct competent appraisals, there is obviously an element of luck in this. Those board chairs or board members whose contribution was most valued appeared to have relevant professional appraisal experience or a high level of knowledge of the school, as indicated by the following comments.

I have a board member who is very capable of appraising. She has personally up-skilled and been far more thorough and useful than my previous external ones.

The first year my board chair was my appraiser and this was extremely difficult, and a process which I never want to repeat again. I have made sure that an independent facilitator is used in the future so that the system is both fair and suited to the education world not the business world model...

I am not happy that someone who thinks they know my job, but does not in my view, does my appraisal. I have raised concerns but never had these responded to. Time frames have not been met by the BOT chair and would not be if I did not press the matter.

Those who were operating a system with different kinds of appraisal rotating every few years generally commented that they were happy with the system although there was sometimes a problem with continuity and the variety of approaches as these respondents commented:

We have a two year cycle Year 1 Internal (BOT Chair) - Year 2 External Appraiser Ex-Principal or Consultant. Works well, but with using different externals sometimes using different methodologies, formats, and processes.

An excellent, open process, conducted by a respected professional. At this level, we have agreed that a 2-yearly formal appraisal by an external appraiser would be satisfactory.

I do first year fairly light with chairman 2nd year much more challenging goals appraised with Chair 3rd year external provider, usually costs \$3-5000

Four respondents commented that rotating internal and external appraisals was a way of saving costs.

### **The cost of appraisal**

The Ministry provides funding within the board's overall operational funding, for boards to use to assist in performing the principal's performance management/appraisal. The funding is not tagged and the Ministry were unable to provide an estimate of how much was allowed for the principal's appraisal within the overall operations grant.

Respondents who were appraised externally were asked how much the appraisal cost (Q37). Their response are set out in Figure 17.

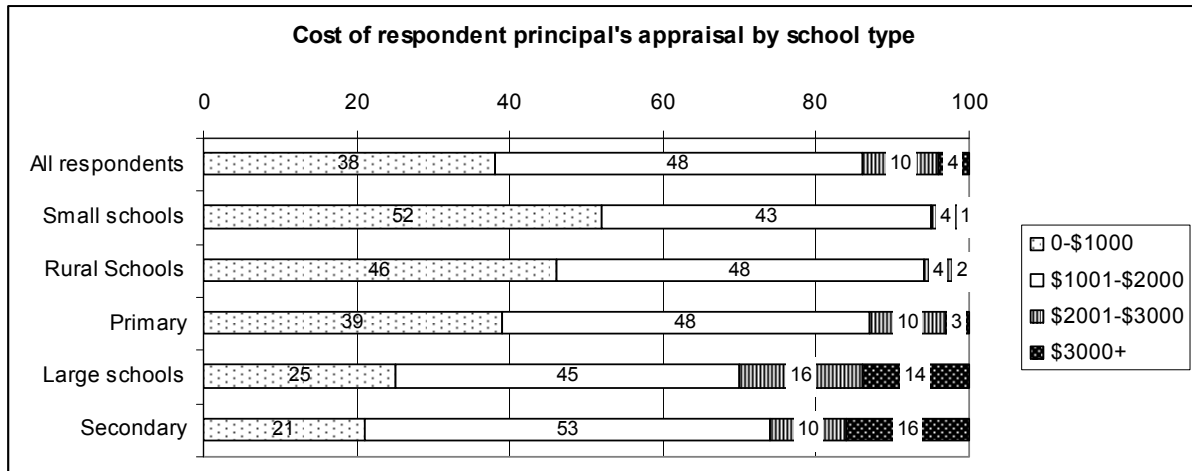


Figure 17

As might be expected, there was some alignment between the cost of the appraisal and school size. Decile did not make a noticeable difference to the amount spent on the appraisal.

There was also some alignment between cost and the perceived usefulness of the appraisal in the principal's professional development (see Figure 18).

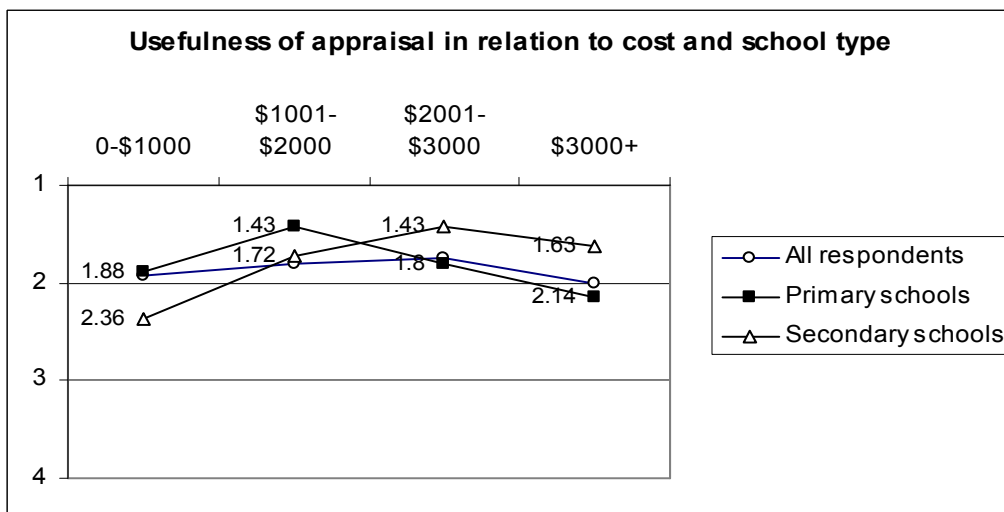


Figure 18

On the rating scale where 1 is 'very useful' and 4 is 'not useful at all' the respondents as a whole got slightly more perceived value from the \$2000-\$3000 appraisal (1.75) than the \$1000-\$2000 appraisal (1.81). However, those in the primary sector attributed most usefulness to the appraisal in the \$1000-\$2000 category, whereas those in the secondary sector attributed most usefulness to the appraisal in the \$2000-\$3000 category. It is likely that the larger the school the more complex the appraisal and therefore the optimum cost:usefulness ratio appears to be \$1000-2000 for primary schools and \$2000-\$3000 for secondary schools or large schools.

Overall, respondents tended to rate appraisals under \$1000 lower in usefulness, and there appears to be a point at which appraisals over \$3000 may not be perceived as proportionately more useful than



an appraisal for less than \$3000. There was some small indication at the 0.05 level of significance that appraisals over \$3000 were more likely to be linked with stress between the principal and the board (see Appendix 5, Table 1)

### The external appraiser

Respondents who used an external appraiser were asked who was chosen to do the appraisal.(Q38) Respondents were asked to choose from: 'another principal that I know personally'; 'another principal that I do not know well'; 'an independent consultant that I know personally'; 'an independent consultant that I do not know well' and 'other'. Their responses are shown in Figure 19.

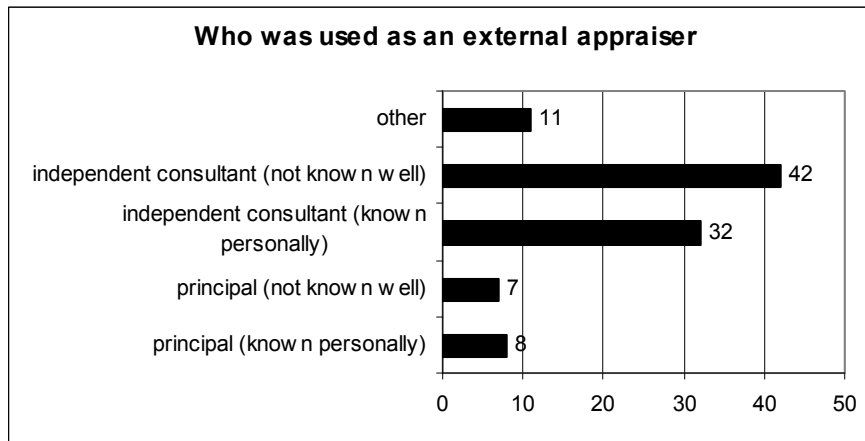


Figure 19

Nearly three quarters of those using an external appraiser used an independent consultant, and only 8% used another principal who was known to them personally to do their appraisal. It appears that official advice from NZSTA and ERO discouraging the use of neighbouring principals to do principal appraisal has been taken seriously by boards. Some of those who had considered using neighbouring principals commented:

It is very difficult to find affordable consultants to conduct appraisals. ... Having principals from the same locality as appraisers is not seen as having the same credibility by board and community, as those from further afield.

I had an independent one but he was injured and I have now been provided with a known ex local principal and I feel they are too close to the job and I am not happy. But I have no choice.

...My Board are not comfortable with a fellow principal appraising me!

...I would not use another principal to assist as I hear of so many gossip trails that follow, unfortunately.

### Other external appraisers

In addition to other principals and independent consultants, principals used a range of other institutions and advisers to perform their appraisals. Strictly speaking many were listed who would fall into the category of being independent consultants. The largest group was retired principals. Another group listed a leadership and management adviser or other person from School Support Services. Several principals were using the mentor provided through the First Time Principal programme as their appraiser, and some were being appraised as part of the Ariki project. Others mentioned appraisers from the local University Education Department. A few had used the Principals' Development Planning Centre (PDPC) process as their appraisal. One respondent had used the Limited Statutory Manger who had recently finished at the school, and in another case the appraisal was done by the

Manager of Catholic Schools. There were two other systems being tried: another principal and current board moderated by another board; and a three-way process with two other local principals.

There was some alignment between the kind of external appraiser used and the usefulness of the appraisal in the principal's professional development, as shown in Figure 20.

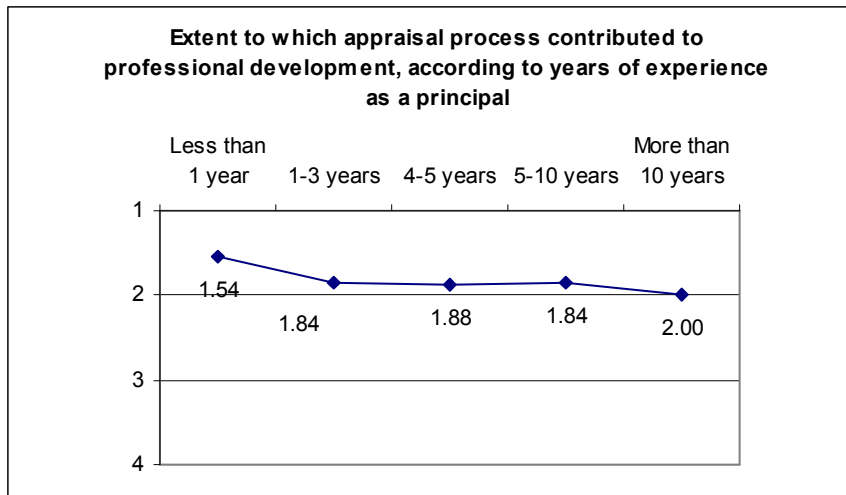


Figure 20

Those respondents who were appraised by a principal who was known to them expressed the lowest satisfaction with the usefulness of the appraisal (2.23). A practising principal was valued more if he or she was not known to the principal being appraised.

On the other hand, where an independent appraiser was used, the appraisal was perceived as being more useful when the appraiser was known to the principal. The question did not discriminate between whether the respondent knew the consultant personally before the first appraisal or whether the consultant and the principal had come to know each other as a result of continuing appraisals. The higher value placed on an independent consultant who is known to the principal may be due to respondents being appraised by the same independent appraiser over time and gaining greater value as the appraiser builds up knowledge of the principal and the school.

A small number of respondents commented that it was important to them that the appraiser had experience as a successful principal themselves, but equally, several commented that this was not essential or necessarily sufficient of itself.

#### Length of time appraised by the current appraiser

Respondents were asked how many years they had been appraised by their current appraiser (Q39). (Some noted that the years they had been appraised by the current appraiser were not necessarily consecutive.)

The average number of years was 2.16 and the highest was 19 years of being appraised by the same board chair. 38% of respondents had used the current appraiser for one year only, 22% for 2 years, only 12% for three years, and only 4% for 4 and 5 years (see Figure 21).

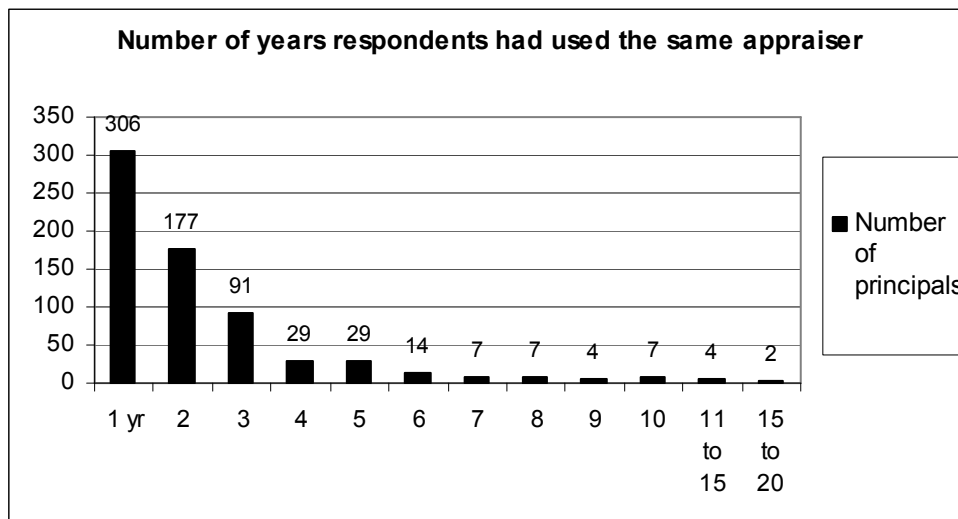


Figure 21

There were some interesting links between the number of years that principals had used the same appraiser and the usefulness they attributed to the appraisal (see Figure 22 ).

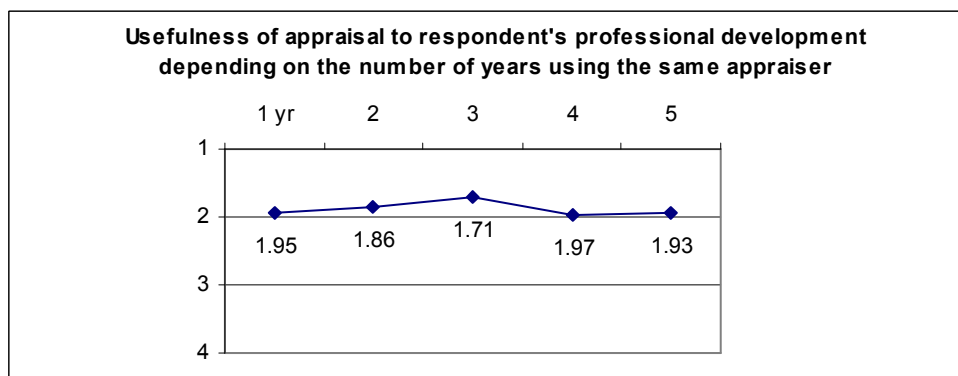


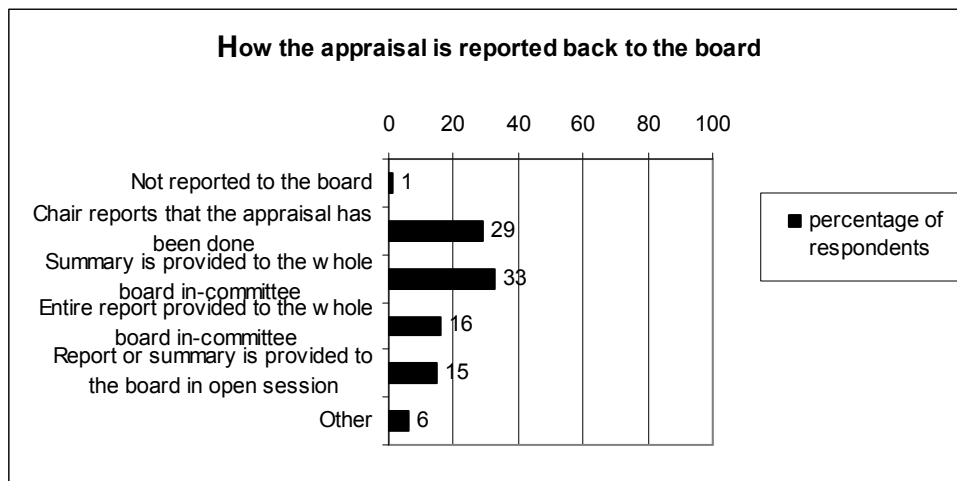
Figure 22

Respondents tended to place increasing value on the appraisal as the principal and appraiser get to know each other over time, peaking at around three years. After that it appears that the value tends to decline. Numbers from year 5 onwards are very small and the ratings are therefore statistically unreliable.

### How is the appraisal reported back to the board?

Respondents were asked how the result of the appraisal process was reported back to the board in their school. Guidelines on the NZSTA website recommend that the final written report of the principal's appraisal should be given to the full board in committee, either in full or in summary form.<sup>19</sup> It appears that around half of schools follow this advice (see Figure 23).

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.nzsta.org.nz> Framework for Managing Principal Appraisal



**Figure 23**

In more than a quarter of schools (29%) the chairperson reported back to the board that the appraisal had been done and the report was not viewed by the rest of the board. The number was slightly higher in rural schools (32%) and in low decile schools (33%).

In about a third of schools (33%) a summary of the report was provided to the whole board in-committee. This rose to 39% in high decile schools and was a low as 25% in small schools.

In 16 percent of respondent schools the entire appraisal report was put before the whole board in-committee. This method was more likely in secondary schools and large schools (20% and 18%).

In 15% of respondent schools the report of the principal's appraisal, whether in full or in summary was tabled at the board in open session. This happens in as many as 21% of rural schools.

Only 7 respondents, fewer than 1%, said that the appraisal was not reported to the board at all.

Tabling and/or discussing the appraisal report in open or public session is a breach of employment obligations to respect the mana and the privacy of the principal. However, 88% of respondents from this group said that they were very happy or happy with this method of reporting and clearly either felt proud of the report or un-defensive about it. 88% of respondents who said that the entire report was put before the board were happy, or very happy with this procedure with only 12% objecting. There may be a connection between the happiness with the method and the results of the appraisal.

### **Respondents' general comments and concerns relating to appraisal**

Respondents were given the opportunity to list any comments or concerns that they had about the appraisal process. 241 of the 787 respondents (30%) chose to comment. 33 percent of those who commented were positive, expressing satisfaction with the process and the quality of the appraisal that they had receive. A further 33% gave details on their processes or said that they had no concerns. Finally 34% of those who commented raised various concerns about different aspects of the process or the quality of the appraisal.

#### **Comments expressing satisfaction with appraisal processes and quality:**

Appraisal was robust and very valuable in that it helped to inform future goals and direction.

Excellent, thorough, professional

No concerns at all. My board (and those preceding this one) have always been keen to use an external consultant. I U6D8 have played a major role in selecting the consultant. My boards have always felt this has been very well done. In no way has there ever been any opportunity for that process to be called into question. It has been very professional, challenging and supportive for myself and assuring for the board.

We have a clear process and policy. We use an external appraiser who is agreed to between the Board and me, and we change that person every three years to avoid too much familiarity leading to complacency.

Very robust, thorough system from an experienced consultant - with help in clarifying next steps in an agreement.

The last 2 years have been fine as a real focus has been on the principal as the Leader of Learning and growing leadership capacity in the school - in the past BOT have demanded certain things to be included in appraisal process that are business orientated and have had little relationship to the specific nature of the principal's job.

I am appraised by an external independent consultant that has a proven career and experience in education. ...her mana could not be questioned by either the board or principal. As a result the principal respects the comments of the appraiser and the board are confident that the appraisal is an accurate reflection of the principals performance.

Two kura kaupapa Maori respondents commented positively on the high value they received from their appraisal even though the appraiser did not speak Maori.

### **Concerns**

Some of the concerns raised which have not already been discussed above were:

#### **BOARD LACK OF INTEREST IN THE APPRAISAL PROCESS**

Although no specific question was asked on this issue five respondents expressed their disappointment at the lack of feedback that they received from the board (not just the appraiser) on a good report and the apparent apathy and lack of interest of board members in the appraisal process and its outcomes. Boards may discuss the report in-committee and without the principal present and the principal may not hear the board's overall conclusions on the report. It appears that principals, like all other employees, welcome having their hard work acknowledged, and being told where they are performing well, as these comments indicate:

Disappointing that only the board chair has taken an active interest in the outcome of the appraisal and the professional development of the principal

I have not received any feedback from the BOT in the last 3 years after my appraiser has reported 'in committee' on my report. Although they have been very positive appraisals, I have never received any acknowledgement, thanks, comment or support back from the BOT.

My appraisal process is very much a tick box exercise completed by the Chairperson. It seldom includes comments and never includes praise on what has been achieved or the degree of satisfaction my employer has in my performance

I like how my appraiser gets my BOT Chairperson to give me direct feedback because I don't get much feedback from the board, so it's useful to know how I'm going

#### **SECRECY**

Three respondents also expressed concerns about their inability to have any control over how the report was presented to the board in-committee. If the report had any contentious matters principals

wanted to be able to address those directly with the board rather than let them draw their own conclusions without further discussion or input.

I still have concerns about how the principal appraisal is presented to other board members, as one year a summary was given with isolated sentences given out of context and without any explanation. This year I talked my chair into giving the board the full copy so that this could be avoided.

It appears that in some schools the report is tabled without the principal present, possibly on the basis that the board are discussing a matter relating to the principal's performance and that therefore the principal should absent themselves. While this is correct in general, there is no problem with the principal being present while the report is read through and being available to answer questions or put their point of view. The principal can then leave and allow the board to have further discussion and form their final conclusions.

#### LACK OF RIGOUR

Twenty of those who commented said they had no concerns about the process but wanted it to be more rigorous and professionally challenging:

No concerns about the last few years really except that I feel the appraisal could be more precise and robust.

No concerns but its a bit of a joke. The board approves the process and contents but has little input into the development.

I would have liked the appraiser to look more closely at my systems and advise me where improvements needed to be made.

#### LACK OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Four principals expressed confusion or concern over various aspects of the process which they believed should be confidential but which the board did not. In particular, some felt that the board did not have the right to know the detailed content of discussions with the appraiser.

[A concern was]...The Chair at the end of every meeting I had with the consultant wanting to know, and being supplied with, all the nitty gritty discussions I had with the consultant. I felt there was no confidentiality involved.

I do not feel comfortable that the whole board discusses my full appraisal report, especially with the staff rep present... I am not worried about anything in my appraisal report. I think it is a good process and fair and reasonable, just the confidentiality of it disturbs me. I would expect a general summary presented to the board would be better with the BOT Chair only involved in the appraisal report back interview with the Principal.

These issues were more likely to be raised by principals experiencing some kind of friction with the board, but it does raise again the issue of potential conflict for the appraiser who is also purports to be acting as a mentor. Latest advice<sup>20</sup> is that the appraiser role and the mentor role should be separate to avoid this conflict, but many schools cannot afford to provide their principal with both.

My board wanted me to have a mentor but then we subsequently found out that we needed an appraiser; we couldn't afford both. Cost is an issue as all external appraisers are very expensive.

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<sup>20</sup> NZSTA [www.nzsta.org.nz](http://www.nzsta.org.nz), *Framework for Managing Principal Appraisal*

## COMPLIANCE FOCUS

Around 28 of the 241 respondents commented that the appraisal had a negative or compliance focus.

This year I have an external appraiser and the focus is on learning - my learning and the ways I manage and support teacher and student learning. For the last 2 years I had a Board driven performance management agreement. This followed some difficult times with the Board where I needed NZEI support to talk with the Board. The Board decided that they would take over my appraisal and not have an external appraiser which I had had before that because they did not agree with the appraisal report. The Board appraisal committee did my appraisal. They set the goals. If they agreed to my input they would reword the goal but it was very much compliance driven and had no learning component for me as a professional. Fortunately I had a clear idea of the learning I needed to undertake and ways to get support. It has been an unpleasant 2 years but this year has been much better.

## Discussion

The quantitative data tends to show a relatively high level of compliance with performance management paperwork requirements and an encouraging level of perceived value gained from appraisal processes in many schools. Comments indicated a widespread expectation that the appraisal should be useful and robust, rather than simply a compliance process.

However, it is still a concern that a fifth to a quarter of principals have to drive the performance management process themselves.

Several respondents commented that although the agreement had not been negotiated or signed an appraisal had still been done. While it is probably better that principals are being appraised despite the lack of a written appraisal agreement (rather than not at all), it is less likely that such appraisals will be related to schools goals and linked with appropriate professional development, as Ministry and NZSTA advice requires them to be. It is also less likely that the resulting appraisal will be perceived as useful (see discussion at p 29).

The slightly lower satisfaction expressed by secondary schools and large schools may be related to having had internal appraisals. In large schools in particular there may be a need to ensure that the appraiser has the skills and experience to appraise these more complex institutions.

Smaller schools, rural schools and primary appear to have acknowledged their limited capacity to provide robust appraisals, and external appraisers were widely used (75% or over) in these schools for the most recent appraisal.

The qualitative data suggested that there are still issues for some principals, particularly those in rural areas, around cost and availability of good external appraisers.

There was a wide variety of styles of reporting back on the appraisal. It may be argued that it is difficult for a board which receives no report of the appraisal to be properly informed and appropriately involved in setting goals for the next performance management agreement. Boards which report on the appraisal in open session may be breaching their employment agreement if the principal objects. Even if the principal is happy with the content of the report, this would appear to be inappropriate and sets a bad precedent for succeeding principals who may be less confident or experienced. There are other ways of reporting to the community on the success of the school or the principal. Certainly, those who are unhappy with this method of reporting are entirely within their rights to require that the report be tabled in-committee.

It is possible that a focus on the necessity of regular appraisal for performance management and compliance reasons (monitoring or ensuring the principal is 'up to scratch') has led to a negative focus

and distracted some boards from the positive benefits to the school and students of a high quality appraisal which contributes to the ongoing professional development of the principal. It may lead to better student outcomes if a greater emphasis were to be placed on the board's statutory obligation to ensure the professional development of their principal (SSA s 77A(2)(e)), than on the board's monitoring and accountability function.

### **Recommendations**

- Boards of secondary and large school should give consideration to whether the chosen appraiser has the skills to contribute to improving the principal's performance in the large school environment.
- Around half of schools may need to reconsider the way in which they report back to the board on the principal's appraisal.



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Overview

Boards of trustees did not appear to be particularly interested in, or take an active role in ensuring, their principal's professional development. Only 52% of respondents said that their performance management agreement recorded what professional development they would receive. 56% of primary respondents' said that it was recorded compared to only 38% of secondary respondents.

Almost all principals had received some form of principal professional development in the last year, with local principals' meetings and principals' conferences predominating. However principals listed a very wide range of programmes and study in which they had participated in the last year.

It appears that, where funding permits, many principals drive their own professional development and are pro-active about seeking out further opportunities to improve their professional skills and knowledge.

Because the professional development has to be funded from the operations grant, some principals clearly felt reluctant to use school funds for this purpose.

It is unknown to what extent principals pay for their own professional development and post-graduate qualifications. They may also be reliant on gaining Ministry of Education Study Awards and fee-paying scholarships.

### Background

Under the SSA (s77A) boards of trustees were delegated responsibility for ensuring that principals received professional development. Boards of trustees appeared to remain unaware of this responsibility, or if they were aware of it, to have little idea what they should do in order to carry out that responsibility. In addition there was no consistency in the quality or amount of professional development provision or even any guarantee that the principal would get any professional development at all. The devolution of responsibility to untrained boards for ensuring the professional development of both principals and staff, led to random, uncoordinated professional development programmes.

The quality of [provision] was found by the Ministry to be highly variable. In 2001 the Government decided to intervene to create greater consistency in the provision of principal development. There were three strategies developed by the Ministry to attempt to address the problems around principal recruitment and retention, that came out of the 2001 budget initiative—the First Time Principals Programme (FTP); the Principals' Development Planning Centre (PDPC); and Leadspace. These were developed as a result of concerns from the Principals' Associations, but according to Collins (2003), there was a strong central element in their design and little account of regional or local variation.<sup>21</sup>

More recently leadership development has become more centralised with the development of the Kiwi Leadership for Principals Programme<sup>22</sup> and policy for nationwide leadership development not only for

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<sup>21</sup> Brooking, K. (2007) *Summary of the New Zealand literature on recruitment and retention of school leaders: Issues, challenges, trends, and strategies for succession planning* New Zealand Council for Educational Research. p 23.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Education (2008). *Kiwi Leadership for Principals*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

principals but also for senior and middle managers. In addition to programmes for a Aspiring Principals there are now also programmes for experienced principals who may never have received any principal training at all.

In New Zealand a teacher may apply and be appointed to a principalship without any leadership training or qualifications at all, so this action by central government was clearly essential. However, there is still no legal or professional requirement for a principal, whether aspiring or experienced, to participate in any kind of leadership or management training. Since principals are appointed by lay boards who may, or may not, seek or follow advice during the appointment process, some form of minimum standards and professional quality assurance would appear to be an ongoing issue.

## **Preparation for principalship**

### ***Qualifications***

Overall 76% of respondents had a Diploma of Teaching and 53% had a Bachelors Degree, 16% had a Masters degree or higher, 23% had a Diploma of Educational Management or similar level qualification, and 9% had Masters of Educational Management.

Amongst primary school respondents 51% had a Bachelors Degree, and 13% had a Masters degree or higher. By comparison, in secondary schools, 64% had a Bachelors Degree, and 32% had a Masters degree or higher.

### ***Educational management qualifications***

There was a difference in the number of educational management qualifications (those with either diplomas or masters) between small schools (17%), rural schools (23%) and large schools (47%), and between low decile schools (25%) and high decile schools (39%).

Educational management qualifications were also more numerous amongst respondents with more than 5 years experience (36%) and more than 10 years experience (35%) compared to those with less than 1 year's experience (20%), 1 to 3 years experience (25%) and 4 to 5 years experience (24%). It should be noted that around half of the respondents who had less than 5 years experience said they were in rural schools. This may be an indicator that many principals may start their careers in rural schools and work their way up, possibly gaining their leadership qualifications through part-time study while 'on the job'. Alternatively, the programmes for training aspiring principals and first time principals which have been introduced in recent years may have come to be seen as an alternative to diplomas and masters in educational management.

### ***Principal training***

Only 40% of respondents said that they had received or were currently receiving formal training of some kind for principalship. In primary schools this figure was 37% compared to 54% in secondary schools. In small and rural schools the figure was 50% compared to only 33% in larger schools. In low decile schools the figure was 40% but in high decile schools it dropped to 36% of respondents who had received training.

93% of respondents with less than one years experience had received or were receiving some training, compared to 83% in the 1 to 3 year group; 66% in the 4 to 5 year group, 45% in the more than 5 years group and only 9% in the group with more than 10 years experience. These figures appear to relate to the Ministry's introduction of more centralised professional training for principals in recent years.

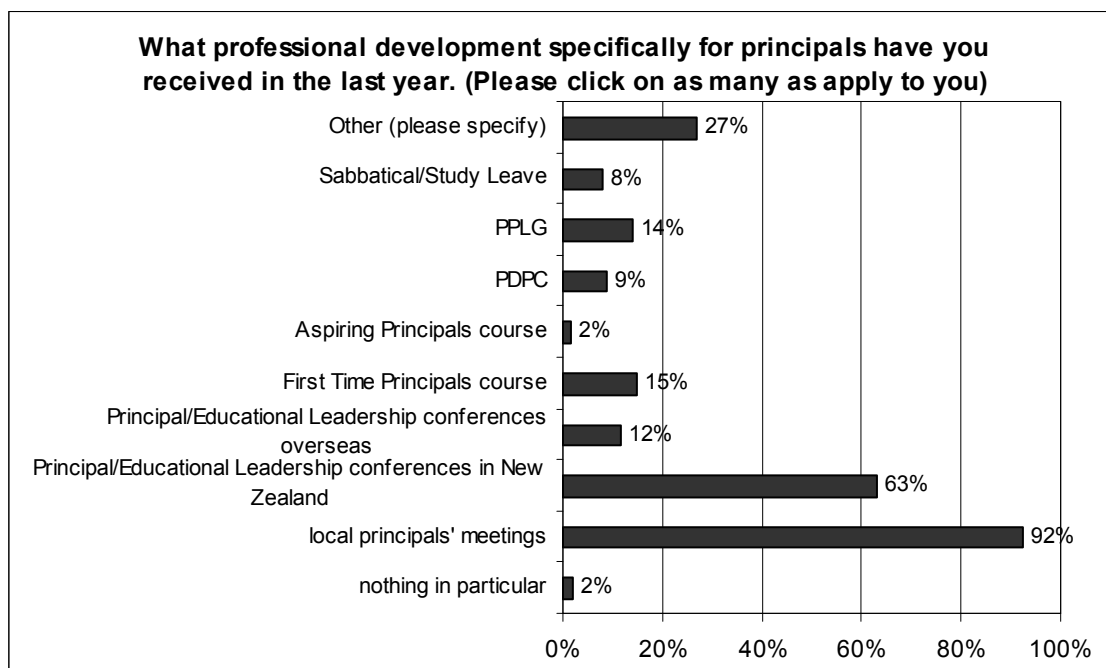
## Ongoing professional development

### **Recorded in the performance management agreement? (Q26)**

Only 52% of respondents said that their performance management agreement recorded what professional development they would receive. 56% of primary respondents' said that it was recorded compared to only 38% of secondary respondents. It was more likely to be recorded in low decile schools (58%) than in high decile schools (54%).

### **Professional development received in the last year (Q43)**

Respondents were asked what professional development they had received specifically for principals in the last year. Almost all principals had received some form of principal professional development in the last year, with local principals' meetings and principals' conferences predominating. The most common forms of professional development are set out in Figure 24.



**Figure 24**

92% of respondents had attended local principals' meetings (95% of secondary respondents). 63% had attended principal or educational leadership conferences (only 56% in smaller schools, 59% in rural and low decile schools, compared to 70% in larger schools and high decile schools). Only 2% of respondents said they had received no particular professional development.

12% had attended principals conferences overseas (9% of primary respondents compared to 24% of secondary respondents). The figures for attendance at overseas conferences did not vary across deciles, but were higher in larger schools(23%) and lower in smaller schools (3%).

More secondary respondents took sabbatical or study leave (12%) than primary respondents (7%).

A greater percentage of secondary respondents did the First Time Principal's course (20%) than primary respondents (15%).

There was a large range of other forms of professional development that principals listed, from Harvard Master's courses, post-graduate and doctoral academic study, principal's clusters, quality

learning circles, focus groups and professional learning groups, Ariki project, mentor and adviser visits, reading and courses selected to meet personal perceived needs, mentoring and supporting other principals.

### **Concerns raised**

Concerns raised in relation to professional development tended to centre around difficulties in agreeing with the board what proportion of professional development funding should be spent on the principal. This appeared to arise as much from a misguided reluctance of principals to spend scarce money on themselves (as they saw it) as from the reluctance of boards to provide the principals with money for things they saw as extravagances. Some principals said that they found having to negotiate their professional development expenses with boards whose members were themselves poor was difficult and embarrassing, as illustrated in the following comments:

I am just concerned about the cost. I'd rather the money was spent on the children.

My concern is that ... although I request PD it goes to the whole board for their approval or not and there are some interesting discussions. I have the authority to arrange PD for all other staff BUT as it involves me spending money on myself I feel it's prudent to make sure my chairperson is aware of it. It generally comes down to me who knows how little is in the budget anyway giving in. Conferences are expensive for a school of our size as is the Relief teachers that are needed to cover my teaching component. I know how important PD is BUT when you weigh my needs against the children in the school and their needs it's an awful situation to be in. I find this process very embarrassing. ... I worry that I may be short changing myself or my school.

More a concern over how many principals can feel very isolated when trying to negotiate any PD or general support they may need to effectively perform their jobs as busy principals - e.g. home telephone / internet support, cell phone, conference attendance, future study and supervision (which is done very poorly in this country as opposed to my 10 year experience in x) has to be negotiated separately with each Board - many principals experience stress (guilt trips?) with this approach...

The boards, as employer of the principal, must budget for the principal's professional development but it appeared that schools varied greatly in their understanding of the importance and necessity for ongoing professional development. Two respondents said their board saw it as a low priority or a luxury for a principal to attend national principals conferences, for example:

Feel a lack of professional respect from Board. They are trying to run the school as a business and often huge focus on money or lack of. They cut the money for relief teachers for sick leave and for professional development of teachers. They expect (and have said) that I have to teach to save money...

### **Recommendation**

- Boards should take greater responsibility for ensuring and supporting the professional development of their principal.

## PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

### Overview

*Planning for support:* Overall 40% of respondents said that professional support to be accessed was recorded in their performance agreement, but there was a difference between primary schools (43%) and secondary schools and large schools (30% and 25% respectively). About one quarter of respondents were in the position of not having discussed support mechanisms with their employer, either formally or informally. It was difficult to identify any particular pattern, apart from the fact that slightly more men (57%) than women (43%) were in this group.

*Usefulness of support:* For most respondents the first port of call was colleagues in other schools, followed by NZSTA and the Ministry, NZPF, NZEI or PPTA and Principals Advisers. For most the advice received was considered helpful or very helpful. Primary principals and principals of small schools tended to rate the advice and support as slightly more helpful than principals of secondary and large schools. The older more experienced the principal the less likely the support was rated as very helpful.

Of those who had not accessed any support, 71% (84 respondents) said it was because they didn't feel any need for support. 14% who didn't get support said it was because they lacked time (sometimes due to heavy teaching commitment), 6% had concerns about confidentiality and 5% had concerns about being perceived as inadequate or not up to the job.

### Planning for general professional support

Respondents were asked if their performance agreement recorded what professional support mechanisms they would access or be provided with (Q27). 40% said this was recorded but there was a big difference between primary schools (43%) and secondary schools and large schools (30% and 25% respectively). It is likely that principals in larger schools will be more experienced and may feel less need of support or be perceived as needing less support.

Of those respondents whose performance agreement did *not* record support mechanisms however, nearly half had discussed support mechanisms with the board chair.

Ultimately about one quarter of respondents were in the position of not having discussed support mechanisms with their employer, either formally or informally. It was difficult to identify any particular pattern, apart from the fact that slightly more men (57%) than women (43%) were in this group.

### Evaluation of support accessed

Respondents were asked what personal professional support or advice they had accessed in the last year (Q44). Personal professional support was defined as 'support sought to solve a relationship, staffing, management or legal issue arising from their role as principal'. It did not refer to professional development on curriculum issues. Respondents were also asked to rate how helpful they found the advice and support. An overview of the statistical differences related to this question can be found in Appendix 5 Table 2.

744 respondents answered this question. The percentage of respondents who had accessed each of the listed forms of support were: other principals 97%; NZSTA 79%; Ministry of Education 78%; Principals Federation 43%; NZEI 69% or PPTA (72%); and Principals Adviser (Team Solutions) 40%.

For most respondents the first port of call was colleagues in other schools, followed by NZSTA and the Ministry.

Respondents rated the helpfulness of the advice and support received on a 1- 4 scale where 1 is high as set out in Figure 25.

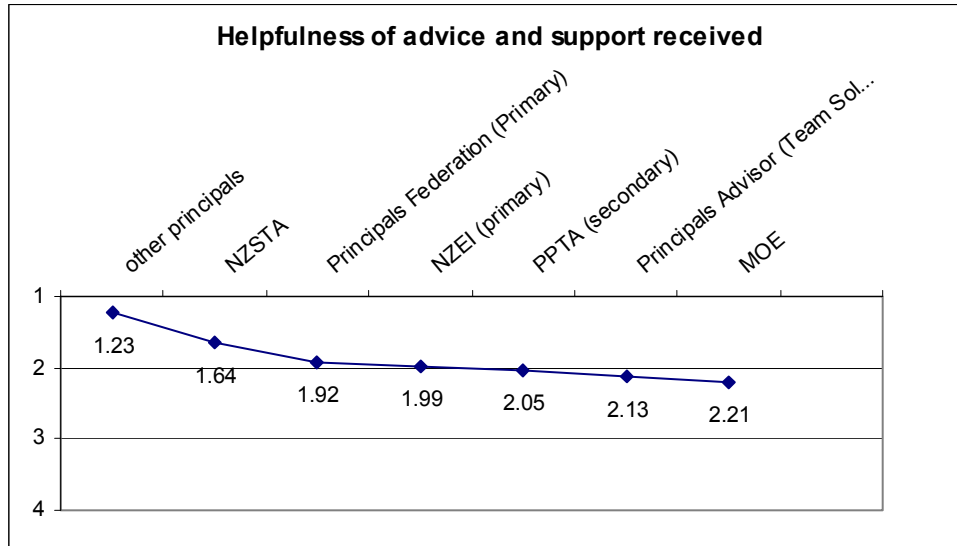


Figure 25

Other organisations that people sought advice from and found helpful were New Zealand Secondary Principals' Council, SPANZ, leadership coaches, mentors and advisers from various universities and colleges of education and other organisations, First Time Principal mentors and FTP mentor groups which have kept going, School Support Services, Principal Professional Learning Communities or Groups (PPLC, PPLG), principals networks and clusters, Association of Integrated Schools, Maori Leadership Forum, the school's lawyer, appraisers, limited statutory managers and commissioners that the principal was working with, the board chair, and local business experts.

For most respondents the advice received was helpful or very helpful (an overall rating below 2.5 for an organisation would be 'not very helpful', or worse). Primary principals and principals of small schools tended to rate the advice and support as slightly more helpful than principals of secondary and large schools. The older more experienced the principal the less likely the support was rated as very helpful.

These findings vary only slightly from findings in Wylie's 2005 Survey Report for the New Zealand Principals' Federation previously referred to<sup>23</sup>, in which respondents rated the quality of the support they received from key organisations in the following order: NZPF, NZSTA, Advisory Service, NZEI, Ministry.

### Reasons for not accessing support

Those who had not accessed any support were asked their reasons for not doing so (Q45). 71% (84 respondents) said it was because they didn't feel any need of support, and secondary principals were more likely to choose this answer than primary principals (87% compared to 67%). 14% of 118 respondents who didn't get support said it was because they lacked time (sometimes due to heavy

<sup>23</sup> See fn 3 above.

teaching commitment), 6% had concerns about confidentiality and 5% had concerns about being perceived as inadequate or not up to the job.

Other reasons given for not accessing support were: difficulty finding the expertise; lack of confidence in the knowledge of the local adviser; lack of confidence in the quality of the advice ('hidden agendas'); lack of money; don't know who to contact about certain things, or the adviser didn't understand the school and Maori community's needs.

## **Accessing legal support**

### ***Professional indemnity insurance for principals(Q49)***

The nature and extent of coverage provided by professional indemnity insurance for principals may vary, but it generally provides for legal advice where the principal finds him or herself in a dispute with their employer.

41% of respondents said they had professional indemnity insurance (54% of secondary respondents, 39% of primarily respondents, and 28% of respondents from small schools). 50% said they had no cover (primary 54%, secondary 25%) and 9% were not sure (7% primary 21% secondary).

### ***Legal risk***

Respondents were asked how many personal grievance claims (PGs) had been taken by staff at the school in the last three years (Q46). 12% didn't know and could not easily find out. 76 schools reported PGs (approximately 10% of all respondent schools). 1 school had 5; 1 school had 4; 3 schools had 3 each; 14 schools had 2 claims; and 57 schools had 1 claim each in the last three years.

Costs ranged from \$1500 to \$37,000 for individual PGS.

There were more PGs reported in schools of fewer than 500 students (52) than in schools of more than 500 students (24). (Schools with fewer than 500 students contain just over half of all New Zealand school students). Deciles 1-5 had more PGs (44), than deciles 6-10 (32).

## THE BOARD'S PERFORMANCE OF ITS GOVERNANCE ROLE

### Overview

In addition to the board's performance as an employer, the board's performance as a governing body may impact on the principal's employment conditions in two key ways:

- a. The relationship that it develops with the principal; and
- b. The competence and willingness with which the board performs its own tasks.

### *'Supportive'*

The data showed that most principals enjoyed a supportive and positive relationship with their boards and that only a small percentage (8-9%) were experiencing significant stress in the relationship, describing it as quite stressful or very stressful. Small and rural schools were a little more likely than other schools to find the relationship stressful (11%).

### *Competent?*

The data showed that the competence and willingness of boards to be actively involved in governance was an issue. This was particularly so in primary, small, low decile and rural schools which make up half of all New Zealand schools. Nearly half of this group of respondents described their boards as passive; 40% felt that the board did not give them clear direction; fewer than 20% said their board was professionally challenging; fewer than half thought the board chair brought useful professional skills to the job; 25% of these respondents wanted to see more of their board chair, who was unavailable when needed; 65% said (towards the end of a three year board term) that their board chair was not experienced and was not knowledgeable about educational issues or educational management issues.

### *Pro-active?*

Unwillingness or lack of confidence to take on governance responsibility was also a significant issue in all schools but more so in the small, rural low decile category. More than 65% of all primary respondents and notably, more than half of all secondary school respondents, thought that it was the principal (not the principal together with the board) who drove the formulation of the school's vision and goals, developed the strategic plan, monitored progress towards school goals and decided what the principal would report to the board on. Around 65% thought it was the principal who managed risk. 32% of primary and 21% of secondary respondents said the principal ensured the financial soundness of the school. In the case of the small, rural, low decile school categories, around 70% of respondents said the principal performed most governance tasks.

## Board relationships

### *Relationship with current board*

#### SUPPORTIVE

Most respondents described their board as supportive with only 7% failing to tick one of the 'supportive' categories.



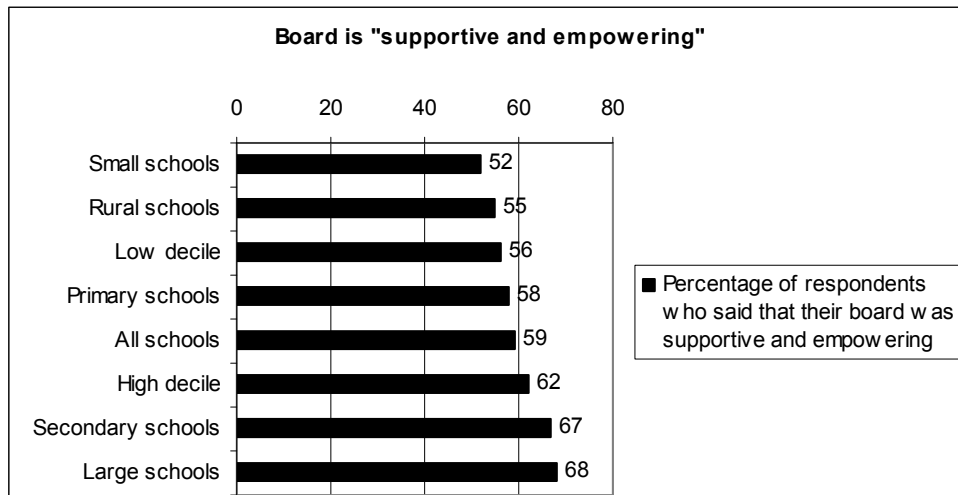


Figure 26

There was a difference between the percentage of small and rural schools (52% and 55%) that saw their board as supportive and empowering and the percentage of large or secondary schools (67% and 68%) who viewed their board that way (see Figure 26).

#### SUPPORTIVE BUT DEMANDING

17% of respondents found their boards supportive but demanding (16% of primary schools but 22% of secondary and 24% of large schools; 10% of low decile schools but 27% of high decile schools).

#### SUPPORTIVE BUT PASSIVE

Overall 35% of respondents described their boards as supportive but 'passive'. There were marked differences depending on decile, size and type of school (see Figure 27). 50% of respondents from low decile schools described their board as 'passive' compared to only 27% of high decile schools. 45% of small schools compared to 21% of large schools thought their board was passive. Primary schools (38%) were more likely to say their boards were passive than secondary schools (20%).

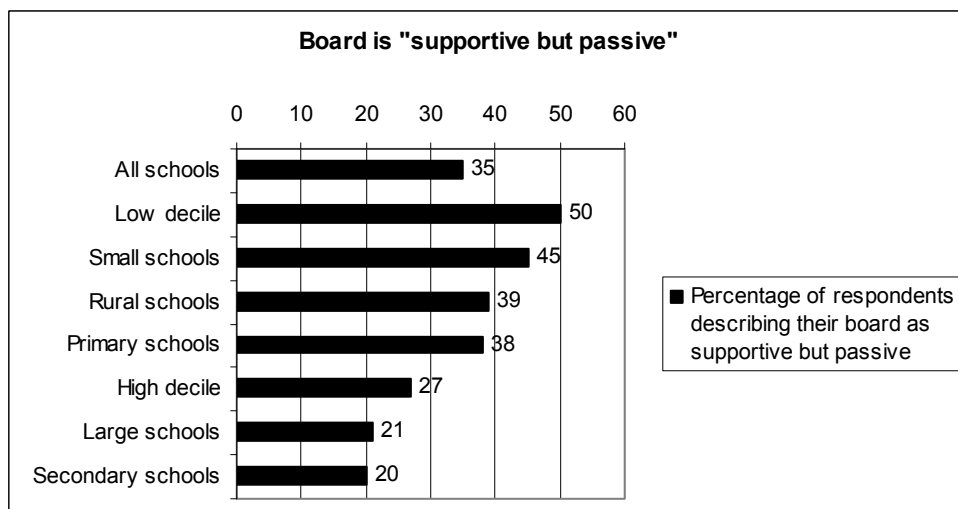


Figure 27

Comments related to board passivity include the following:

Board is very passive and most members only attend meetings. Currently operating with 1 board vacancy. Apathy might be a good word for the majority of members and burnt out for the board chair.

Board ... is reluctant to pick up and run with their governance issues. As a sole charge principal I don't have time to build up their roles, get them training etc. I wish that they had some get up and go. They go along with what I want them to do but really don't seem to grasp their role. Very passive. Part of this may be their own lacks within education - some are illiterate.

The Board are not prepared to take their part in the governance of the school. The situation is not unpleasant, it just means that I do all the work. The Board does not want to know about it's role, despite very good training.

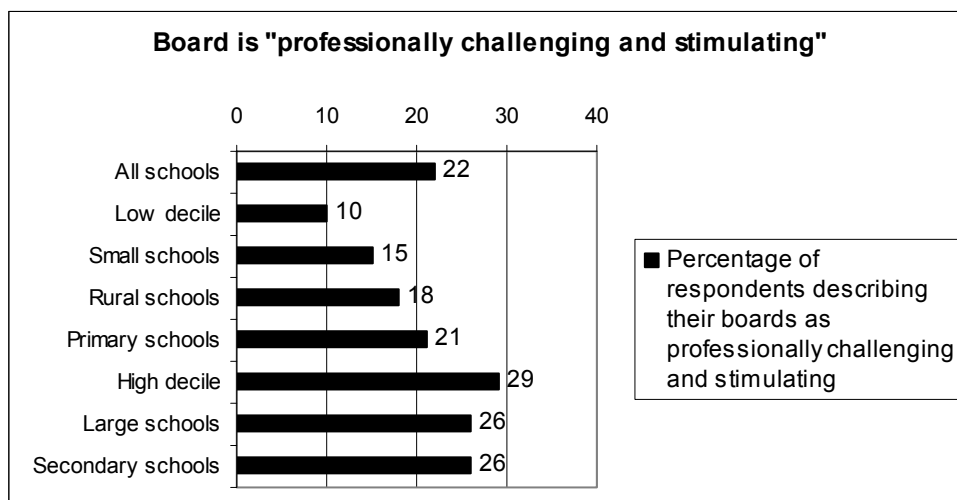
The problem in rural areas is getting a high degree of professionalism from the Board. They are really doing a volunteer job, and most of them believe that this involves simply turning up to meetings (some people often not having read the reports and agenda!). They have busy lives outside of school. They are well intentioned, but it takes a long time for them to get up to speed and fully understand their roles. By this time they often feel that they have done their stint. As Principal, I admit that I often regard Board meetings as something to be endured or got through with a minimum of hassle, so that I can get on with my real work.

This Board have had a lot of support and many people on the Board have been on for many years but they don't believe they need training and they really do not have the understanding to run a school. Two of the BOT can't even read which makes some reporting a challenge.

Our Board are supportive - but don't actually do anything (other than offer great support). All of the governance/management duties are mine - and they seem happy to have it this way! This can be problematic at times.

PROFESSIONALLY CHALLENGING

On average 22% of all respondents thought their board was professionally challenging and stimulating. However, few low decile schools (10%) thought this, compared to 29% of high decile school respondents (see Figure 28). This is interesting when we consider that the role of the board, and in particular, the board chair has been described as 'to act as a critical friend' to the principal, both supporting and challenging him or her and providing different viewpoints and perspectives.



### Figure 28

The data tends to suggest that while some boards are clearly able to provide that kind of challenging thinking and dialogue for their principal the percentage is not high overall. For many principals, and low decile and small school principals in particular, their professional challenge will have to come from outside the school. This figure also explains to some extent our earlier finding that appraisals by the chair or board committee are generally perceived as less useful than appraisals by an independent appraiser. One principal commented:

Supportive and occasionally challenging but in reality hasn't time to be well informed about issues facing schools in any detail.

Only a small number of respondents (6%) described their board as 'controlling or micromanaging' and even fewer (1%) described their board as negative, antagonistic or confrontational.

Only 0.5% (4 respondents) said that their board currently appeared to be focussed on removing the principal.

#### **Communication (Q56, Q57)**

Just over half of respondents (52%) said that they had regular phone and email contact with their board chair, initiated by either party. This figure was slightly lower in low decile schools (47%) and higher in high decile schools and rural schools (56% and 57%).

All I can say is that I have a very good relationship with my Board Chair and also the members of the Board. We are always in communication with one another at all times.

Around 10% said that the regular contact was mostly initiated by the principal and only 2 respondents said the contact was mostly initiated by the board chair. In low decile schools the principal was slightly more likely to say that they did the initiating (15%).

13% overall had contact once a week at a set time, and this more formal arrangement was more likely in secondary schools (24%) than in primary schools(11%). Small schools were least likely to stick with the once a week format (6%).

Around 13% described their contact with the board chair as 'occasional' (18% of small schools).

In 1-2% of schools the board chair was 'seldom or never' seen outside a board meeting.

Most principals were happy with the frequency of communication and less than 2% said they would like it to be less. However over 20% said they would like to see more of their board chair (26% in small schools, 21% in primary schools and 13% in secondary schools).

Those who said they would like to see more of their board chair were those in the 'once a month' or 'occasionally' or 'seldom or never' groups and those who said they had to initiate most of the contact. A number of these respondents thought that both the board chair and board members were too busy in their own lives to give much time to the school.

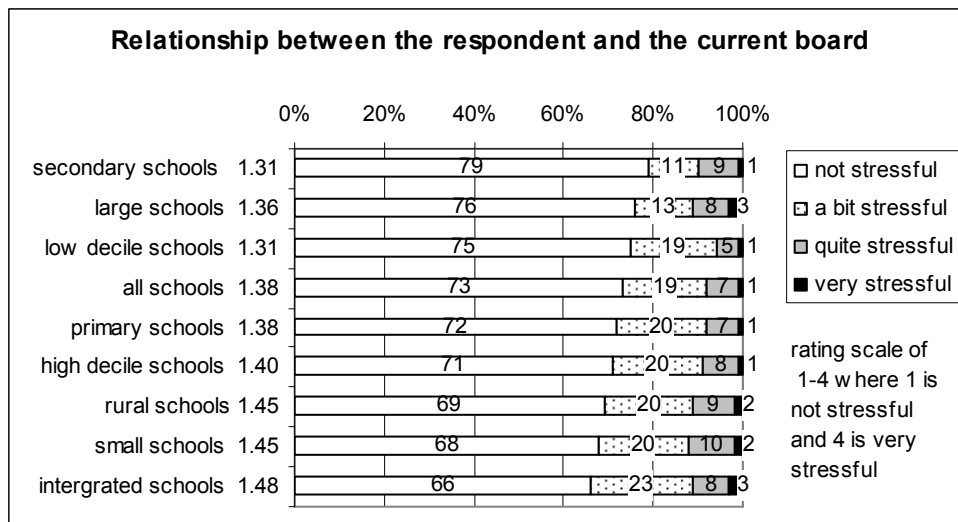
Says he will act on things but seldom does. Seldom meets with me between BOT meetings, yet we are meant to meet twice. Probably meet three times this year.

Well meaning but provides little leadership. Rarely finds opportunities to meet with me to talk.

**Rating the relationship (Q58)**

73% of all respondents said that their current relationship with the board was not stressful. 27% were experiencing some stress (19% felt a degree of stress in the relationship, 7% said it was quite stressful and 2% said it was very stressful).

Stressful relationships with the board were more likely to be reported by respondents from integrated schools (34%) and from small schools and rural schools (32% of respondents) and was also slightly more likely in high decile schools (29%) (see Figure 29).



**Figure 29**

These findings are very similar to findings on principal stress in previous surveys, notably Wylie 2005 survey report previously referred to, which found that just over a third of respondents said it was a 'good professional relationship', 59% said it was 'happy, relaxed but I do most of the work', and 6% reported a negative relationship with the board.<sup>24</sup>

**Board competence**

**Competence of the board chair (Q51)**

Boards were asked to choose a number of phrases to describe the competence of their current board chair.

**UNDERSTANDS DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

77% of respondents thought that their board chair understood the difference between governance and management (although some commented that they didn't always observe it). This was slightly higher in large or secondary schools(79%) and lower in small schools and rural schools (67%and 70%). There was no noticeable difference related to decile. When the results of this question are compared with other findings on the performance of governance tasks, it would appear that an understanding of the difference between governance and management does not necessarily mean that the boards are performing their governance role. It may mean that they simply are not interfering in day-to-day management.

<sup>24</sup> See above fn 3.

Principals with more than 5 years experience were more likely to say that the board chair understood the difference between governance and management (79%) compared to principals with 1-3 years experience (67%) and 4-5 years (71%). It may be that as principals gain in experience they are able to give clearer and more confident messages to new boards about where the boundaries are.

#### EXPERIENCED

48% overall described their board chair as experienced but this figure was much lower in small schools and rural schools (34%), and primary schools (42%) and much higher in large and secondary schools (60% and 73%). Again there was little difference based on decile.

#### KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Only 35% thought their board chair was knowledgeable about educational management issues (38% secondary, 33% primary).

#### KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT CURRENT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

Around a third (34%) thought their board chair was knowledgeable about current educational issues (37% secondary, 32% primary).

#### BRINGS USEFUL PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE TO THE BOARD

50% of respondents thought that their board chair brought useful professional expertise to the board (64% large schools, 60% high decile schools, 57% secondary, 48% primary, 40% small, rural and low decile schools).

10% of respondents thought that their board chair was not very knowledgeable or well informed, but was getting training and learning fast; 5% thought that the board chair was not very knowledgeable or well-informed but did not see a need to get further training; and 12% said that the board chair was not well-informed and relied on the principal for guidance. Small schools and low decile schools were more likely to say that the board chair relied on them for guidance (16% and 18%).

12 out of 88 who commented on the board chair spoke positively on the skills of their board chair and the support they gained from their relationship with their current board chair:

Visionary

Is sensible, realistic and capable. Is on executive of STA in this area

Manages and leads a very skilled group of trustees well.

Loads of common sense, and runs effective meetings.

Provides excellent support and critically reviews all documentation, seeking further information as required.

However, even though it is nearing the end of the 3 year board term, a majority of principals in small and rural schools (66%) considered that they were working with inexperienced board chairs and only half of all primary respondents described their board chair as experienced. A majority of all respondents did not consider the chair to be knowledgeable about educational management issues or current educational issues and even at secondary level little just over half of respondents (57%) thought the board chair brought useful professional expertise to the board. Comments included:

Without exception, the members of my Board are on it as community service. None have any interest in education particularly, all would prefer to be off if there were others willing. In this situation, I have to take much more of a lead and unsupported role. No choice and can't really blame them. Two of my 4 members don't even have kids!

I believe that the system is ridiculous and should be changed - I cannot see how one overworked teacher/Principal can be expected to manage a business on their own with a group of people from the community who know nothing about current education. As much as I like them, their ideas about schools are entrenched and political ... and education is not about making money. People who know what current 21st century learning looks like should run schools....

The Board /Principal game is a cyclic one which I find quite frustrating. As each new Board evolves there is a tremendous amount of time and energy devoted to upskilling and sorting out management/governance boundaries. It takes about three years and just as you are getting it right a new Board starts and it is back to square one...

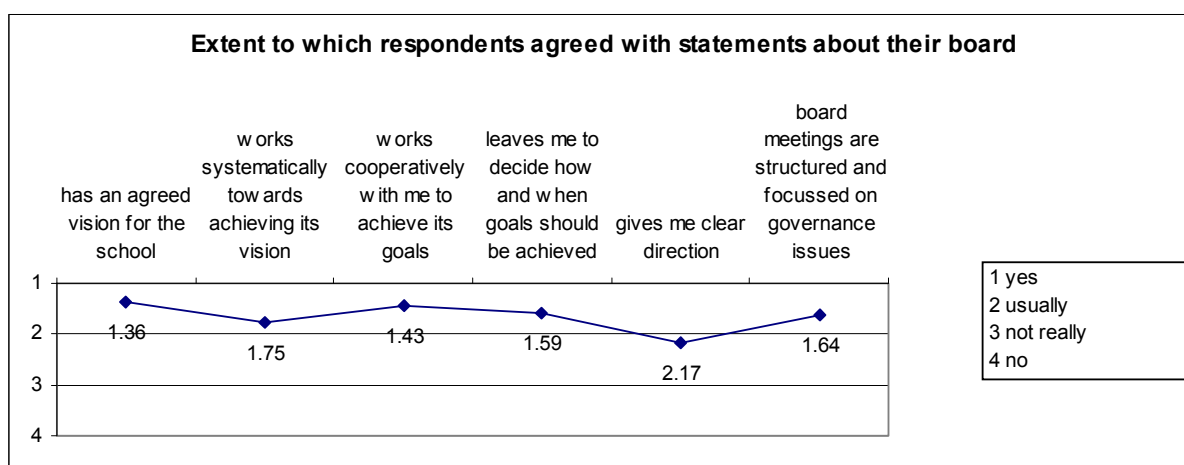
I feel that the Board are enthusiastic about the school and the work that I do. They are able to offer sensible advice based on knowing the community and it's needs. They are supportive on a personal level but have little to offer in terms of practical skills and knowledge that can support me professionally.

### How the board operates

Respondents were asked whether they agreed with a number of statements about board operations. Their responses are set out in Figure 30. Most respondents (92%) agreed or mostly agreed that their board had an agreed vision for the school. One might expect this to be the case as it is a requirement of the charter, a copy of which is sent to the Ministry every year for approval. Despite this 7% of respondents still did not think their school had an agreed vision. An overview of statistically significant differences in relation to principal perceptions of how their board operates can be found in Appendix 5, Table 3.

83% agreed or mostly agreed that the board worked systematically towards achieving its vision. Small and low decile schools were slightly less likely to agree (79 and 80%).

92% said that the board worked cooperatively with the principal to achieve its goals and 90% said the board left the principal to decide how and when the goals should be achieved. 89% agreed or mostly agreed that board meetings were structured and focussed on governance issues. Only about 10% of all respondents (14% of small and rural schools) complained that meetings were unstructured or not really focussed on governance issues. Board training appears to have been particularly effective around this area of board performance.



**Figure 30**

The one area that respondents were less sure about was the issue of whether their board provides the principal with clear direction. Around 35% said 'not really' or 'no'. This figure was higher in small schools (40%) and low decile schools (43%). Only 25% of secondary and large schools thought the board failed to provide them with clear direction.

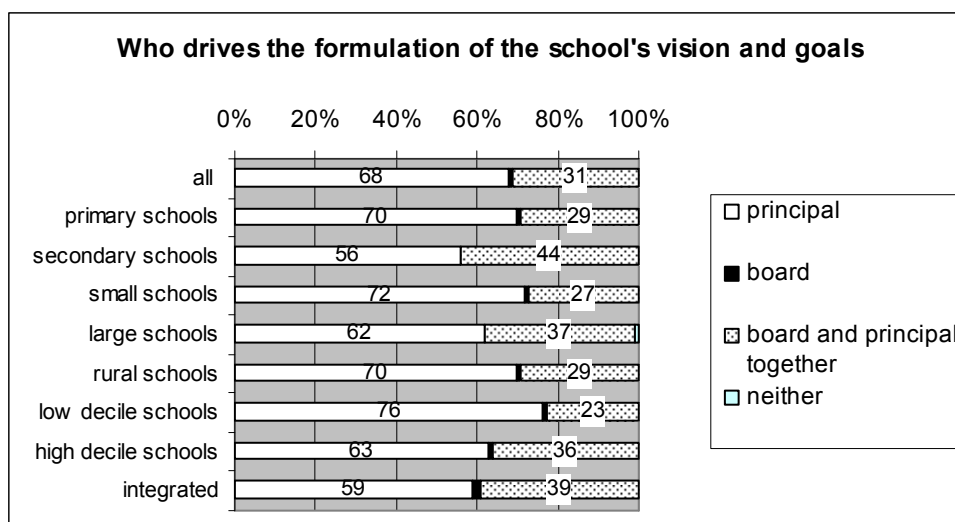
**Who performs the key governance tasks**

Respondents were asked who usually performs the tasks which are listed in the NZSTA and Ministry websites as the tasks which the board are legally responsible for. The question sought to discover which tasks respondents thought were performed by the board and principal together and which were performed by the principal.

**THE SCHOOL VISION AND GOALS**

The board is the entity which has legal responsibility for setting the school's vision and goals and one would therefore expect to see that the responsibility for this task was shared between the board and the principal. The Educational Standards Act 2001 clarified these requirements and there has been a considerable amount of board training on this specific issue. It was somewhat surprising to see that a majority of principals considered that they were the ones who usually drove the formulation of the school's vision and goals (see Figure 31).

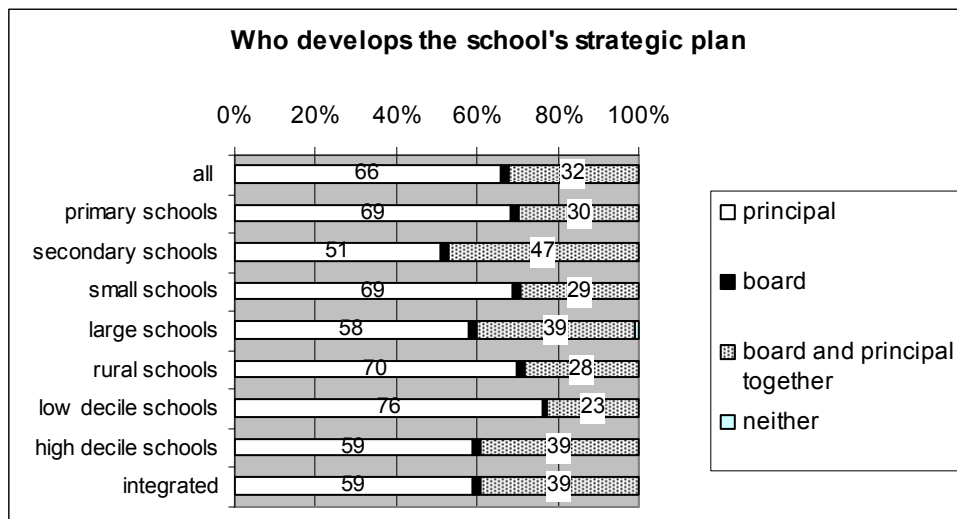
This task was more likely to be driven (and in some cases performed) by the principal in low decile schools, small schools and rural schools. However, even in secondary schools, more than half of principals thought they were the ones who ensured this process happens. Integrated schools were more likely than state schools to have board involvement with this task and this is likely to be due to proprietor involvement in the process.



**Figure 31**

**DEVELOPS THE SCHOOL'S STRATEGIC PLAN**

While it is clearly intended by the legislation that the board should develop both the vision and goals and a strategic plan, in secondary schools and large schools there appeared to be slight falling off of involvement from the board after the goals had been agreed. In at least 50% of all schools the principal considered that they developed the strategic plan themselves and this was as high as 76% for low decile schools.



**Figure 32**

The principal was more likely to be doing this task in small, rural, low decile schools and primary schools (see Figure 32).

#### DEVELOPS THE ANNUAL PLAN

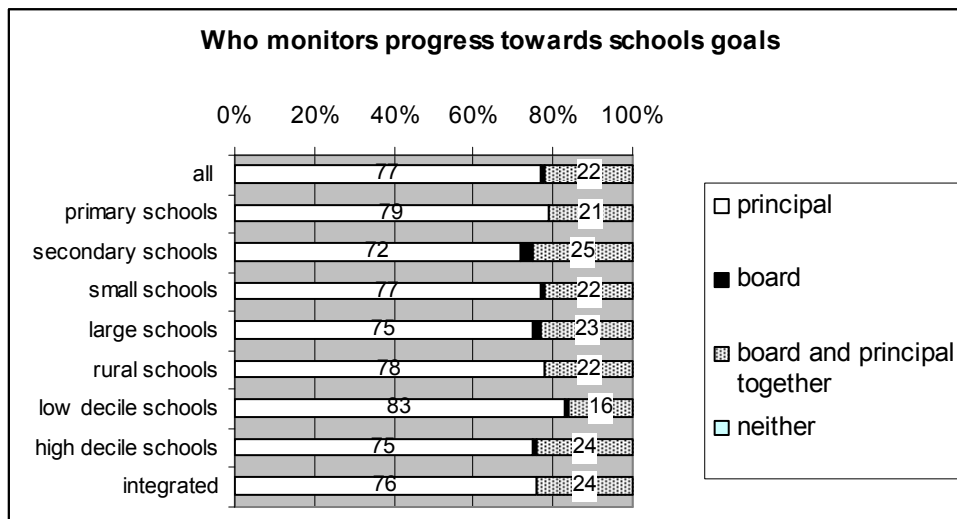
While boards were likely to be working with the principal on strategic planning in about a third of respondent schools, when it came to the annual plan this figure dropped back to 11-12%. It was slightly higher in small schools and lower in low decile schools (8%) and large schools (9%). The annual plan appears to be generally regarded as part of day-to-day management rather than a governance task. Good governance theory would tend to suggest that this is appropriate, with the board leaving the details of how long terms goals are to be achieved to its chief executive.

#### MONITORS PROGRESS TOWARDS SCHOOL GOALS

Having set the school goals the board is then required to monitor progress towards those goals. The perception of respondents appears to be that this is primarily a principal responsibility. It would be natural for the principal to do this in the first instance – the question really seeks to find the extent of board ownership of this task

Overall 77% of respondents said that the principal usually monitored progress towards goals. A much smaller group of respondents (22%) said that the board and the principal do this together. Secondary schools were more likely to say this task was jointly performed (26%) and respondents from low decile schools were least likely to say their boards usually did this (16%). See Figure 33)





**Figure 33**

The data is not an indication of whether or not boards are monitoring progress towards school goals, or the extent to which they are doing this, but it probably does indicate that only a small percentage of school boards are perceived by their principals as being a driving force in this process. There were very few cases where respondents saw the board as being primarily responsible for this (1%).

#### MONITORS AND EVALUATES LEARNING OUTCOMES

Monitoring learning outcomes could be said to be a subset of monitoring progress towards school goals. Some would argue that it is a management task and not a governance task. 91% said that the principal usually does this, rather than the principal and the board together. There was very little variation between different school types.

#### DECIDES WHAT THE PRINCIPAL WILL REPORT TO THE BOARD ON

The intention of the legislation and current governance guidance from NZSTA, is that the board, having set goals, will monitor them by receiving appropriate reports from the principal. For this chain of responsibility to be effective as a monitoring tool, it is necessary for the board to have some say about what they receive reports on.

This governance model is most likely to be adhered to in secondary schools where 50% of respondents said that the board and the principal together decide on what will be reported to the board. In 7% of cases the board alone makes this decision (see Figure 34).

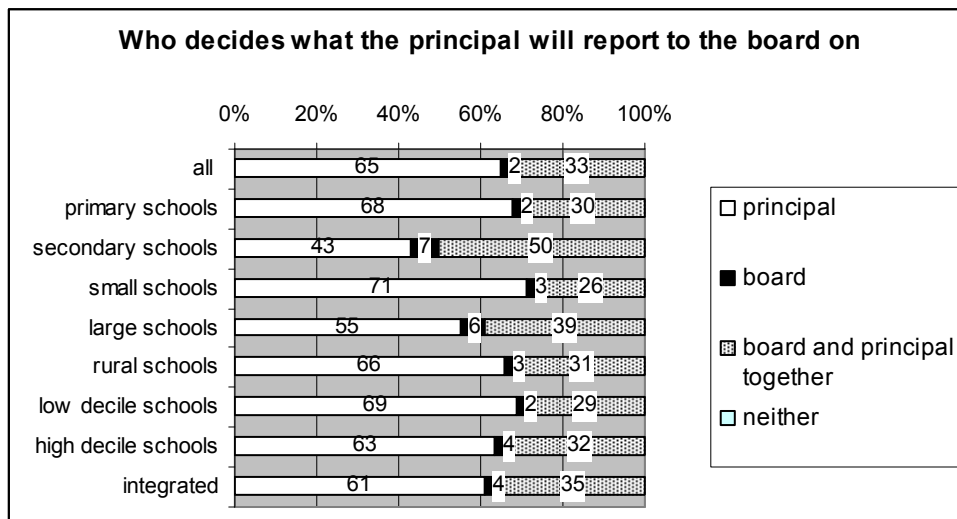


Figure 34

By contrast in small, rural, and low decile schools and in primary schools generally only about a third of boards are making sure they have input on what is reported to them (see Figure 34). In the majority of these schools the principal decides what he or she will report on.

#### DECIDING ON FINANCIAL PRIORITIES

A majority of respondents saw the board as playing a greater role in deciding financial priorities. This is an area which boards are traditionally a more comfortable with and where they are more inclined to be pro-active.

Overall 65% of respondents said that the board and the principal together decided on financial priorities, 4% said the board alone did it, and 31% said it was a task performed by the principal alone. These figures only slightly across school types with the notable exception of low decile schools where 39% of principals said that they did this (see Figure 35).

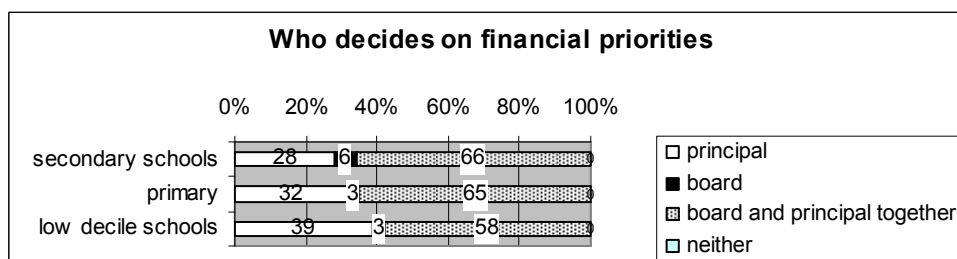


Figure 35

#### ENSURING THE FINANCIAL SOUNDNESS OF THE SCHOOL

Around 64% of all respondents said that ensuring the financial soundness of the school was the responsibility of the board and the principal, 5% said it was the board's task alone and 31% said that the principal alone did this (see Figure 36).

I feel that the board is definitely there for me when things are going well, however like this year our budget is really difficult and that's when I feel isolated. I report transparently BUT I am required to magically fix it somehow. This causes me immense stress. If I felt more that it was shared and not up to me to come up with the solution on my own/or not I would sleep a lot better.

Secondary school respondents were least likely to say that they alone ensured financial soundness (21%) and principals in low decile schools were much more likely to say that they undertook this responsibility (44%). It was not clear whether principals who said that they ensured the financial soundness of the school meant that they operated without board sign-offs which would place them at major legal risk personally, or simply that they took the decisions but made sure that the board signed off on those decisions.

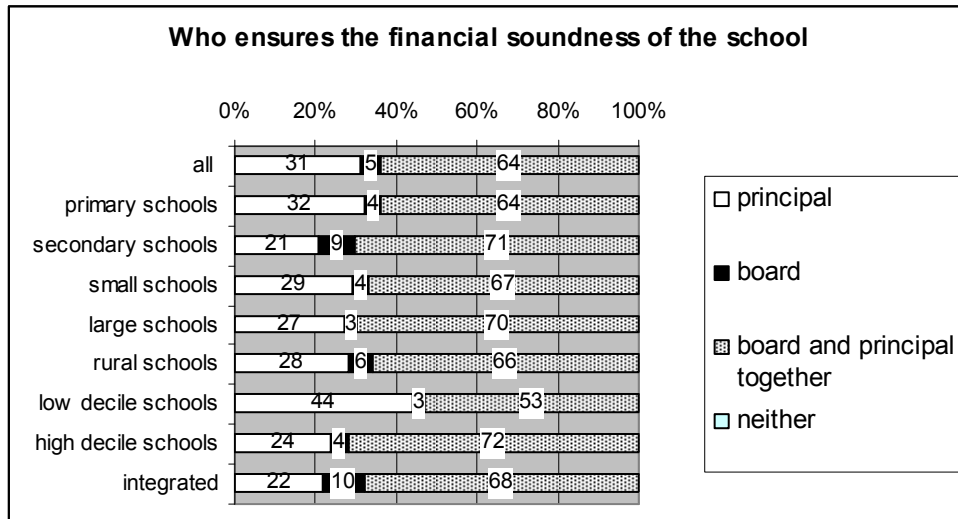


Figure 36

WHO ENSURES COMPLIANCE WITH LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND MANAGES RISK

Overall 65% of respondents thought that the principal managed legal risk, 2% thought the board alone did and only 33% thought it was a joint task. This figure was the same for both primary and secondary schools (see Figure 37).

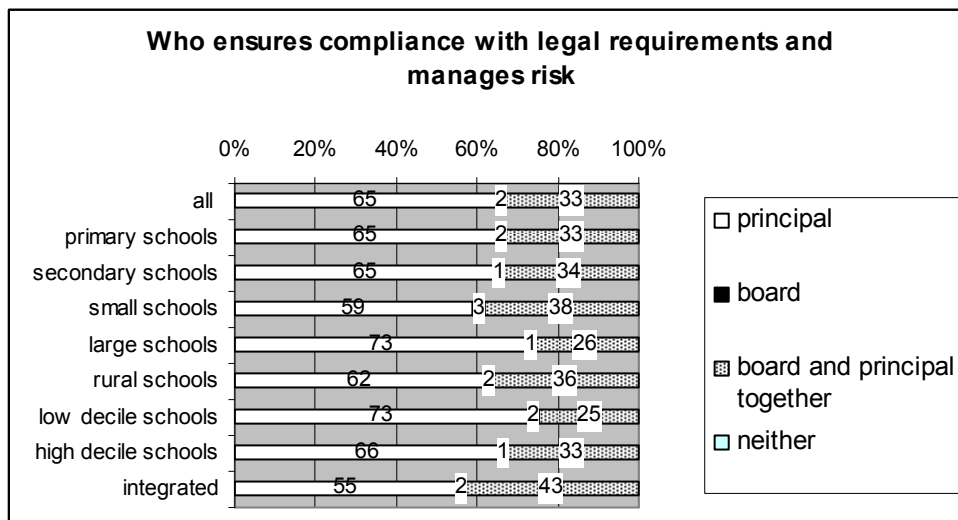


Figure 37

Respondents from large schools and low decile schools were more likely to see it as the sole responsibility of the principal (73%), and those from integrated schools and small schools were less likely to say that it was solely their responsibility. 40% of respondents with less than one year's

experience as a principal thought it was solely the principal’s responsibility, where as 69% of those with more than 10 years experience saw it as their task.

**FUND RAISING**

Although fundraising is not a governance or management task per se, sourcing more funds is an ongoing concern for most schools. A large minority of respondents (39%) said that fundraising was driven by someone other than the board (normally this group would be the PTA).

34% of all respondents said that the principal drove fundraising, 10% said the board alone did and 20% said the board and principal jointly drove fundraising. However 44% of principals from low decile schools and 44% of principals from secondary schools said that they, rather than the PTA or the board, were the ones who drove fundraising.

**PROPERTY ISSUES**

Dealing with property issues is an area where the board has traditionally been perceived as most active, and confident of being able to contribute. Overall 47% of boards were involved with the principal in property issues and 5% of boards took responsibility for this themselves. Rural schools and small schools were more likely to support the principal on property issues (55%) and low decile school boards were less likely (38%) to provide this kind of support. Large schools were also more likely to leave this to the principal, no doubt because such schools have greater staffing resources and support staff (see Figure 38).

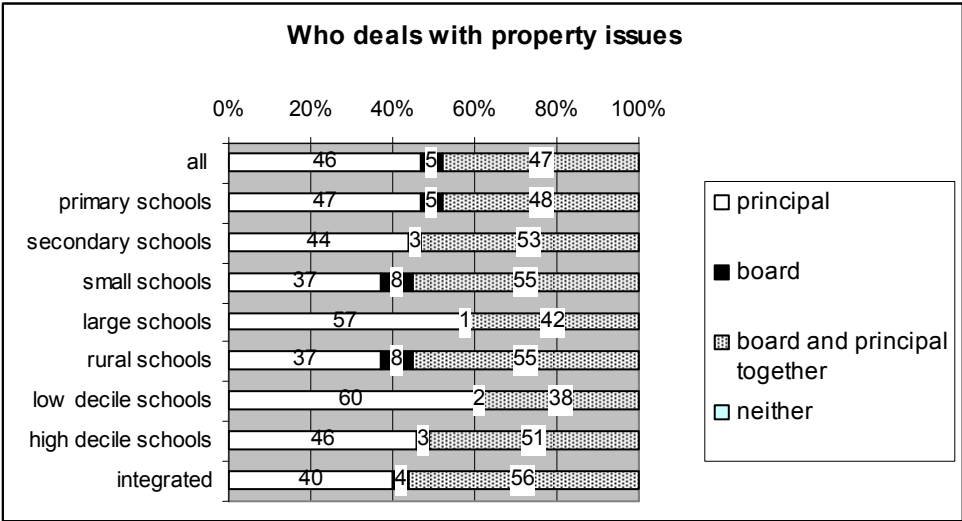


Figure 38

**WHO DRIVES MAJOR BUILDING PROJECTS**

Boards were also more likely to be working with the principal on major building projects. The figures and patterns were similar to responses for property issues above with the exception that in around 4% of cases someone other than the principal or board drove the project – presumably a project manager. A majority of these cases appear to be in integrated schools where the proprietor may also play a key role. This percentage is likely to increase with the recent requirement for property managers to be used on more projects.

There were many comments on the board’s overall performance of its governance tasks, a sample of which follow:

My board are great in that they trust me to get on with day to day things but at times I could really use more practical support. I know they all have busy lives and mean well but I often feel very alone.

The BOT has developed a professional trust in my ability to lead the school. It is a huge responsibility for me to carry. I would appreciate more involvement from trustees and them 'working' with me more to achieve school goals. It would be ideal if we shared the load but they are busy people with jobs and families. They all come to the meetings and are very interested in the school but the workload is very uneven at present. I do most of it.

It is my experience that Principal's do most of what is laughingly referred to as the work of the Board of Trustees. I vowed and declared that I wouldn't. But I am. There is no alternative.

...Sometimes I feel the situation is a farce, I know in my school, I am fulfilling so many roles (and like to do so because I know my job well and do it competently) but we have to go through the motions of 'pretending' the Board do it. ...

## **Discussion**

The data showed that principals generally enjoy supportive relationships with their board. However for 1 in 5 respondent schools, and a quarter of all respondents from small schools, a central figure in the governance framework is hard to find when they are needed for decision making and support. The qualitative data suggested that the absence of the employer when they are called on to make decisions appears to be an extra burden for those principals.

To say that a board is supportive says little about its effectiveness. In contrast to the statutory expectations, the data from this survey of principal's perceptions suggests that in at least 50% of all our schools, boards are willing and supportive but simply do not have the time or the confidence to ensure that key governance tasks (particularly in relation to strategic management and monitoring) are performed. Several respondents commented that both the board chair and board members were too busy in their own lives to give much time to the school.

This has significant implications for principal workload and there was a considerable amount of qualitative data which focused on this point, often at length (see p 72).

Board reluctance to take the initiative in these areas also calls into question how effective monitoring and performance management is likely to be these schools.

Note: The findings in this section of the report are similar to findings by Wylie (2007) in her report<sup>25</sup> about governance capacity, but with some differences. Whereas Wylie found that decile was a key indicator of capacity these findings tended to suggest small school size (0-150) was also very relevant. There is a potential connection between the size of the pool of available trustees (and the educational level of the available trustees) and the ability of a school to provide effective governance consistently over time.

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<sup>25</sup> See fn 2.

## PROBLEMS WITH THE BOARD-PRINCIPAL RELATIONSHIP

### Overview

*Dealing with problems in the early stages:* For primary respondents who thought that relationships with their current board were problematic (120) the most frequently mentioned contributing factor was failure of the board to follow through when they have promised to attend to things (56 respondents, 46% of sub-group). By contrast the 18 secondary respondents who were experiencing differences with their current board were more likely to be troubled by board over-involvement in day-to-day management of the school (9 respondents) than by board inertia (3 respondents). For large schools the most commonly cited contributing factor was 'unrealistic performance expectations of the board'.

*Useful interventions:* Most intervention strategies involved using different independent people to assist or referee and also appeared to involve additional time and input from the principal. After colleagues and friends, NZSTA was rated the most helpful source of advice on problems with boards.

*Problems with previous boards:* Across all school types the most frequently mentioned contributing factor from past conflict experiences was 'over-involvement of the board in day-to-day management of the school'.

*Serious conflict and employment issues:* Some common themes of comments from this section were that where there the principal had resigned under pressure or was dismissed support of all kinds tended to decline and some principals experienced isolation and extremely high levels of stress. Others talked of the high costs of legal advice to solve some very complex situations when support from key organisations evaporated. There appears to be a need for a group to play a greater support role for principals who find themselves in this position.

### Dealing with problems in the early stages

Respondents who thought that relationships with their current board were problematic or more stressful than they would like were asked what factors they thought were contributing to the problem (Q59). Around 120 respondents (15% of all survey respondents) said that they were currently having some kind of problems with the board and several listed more than one factor that was troubling them.

#### Causes

For the 120 respondents to this question, the most frequently mentioned contributing factor was failure of the board to follow through when they have promised to attend to things (56 respondents 46%). Commentary in relation to this referred to the fact that their board would agree to do things (for example strategic planning, or policy writing) but the principal would have to either take the responsibility for making sure the board did it, or do the task themselves.

The 86 primary school respondents who were experiencing problems were most likely to complain of the board failing to follow through (49 respondents - 57%). Small schools (49) were more likely to say this was a problem (29 - 59%). Large schools were much less likely to say this was a problem (30%)

The next most likely problems in order of frequency were over-involvement of the board in day-to-day management of the school (34 respondents), frequent questioning or criticism of management

decisions by board members (30), disruptive demanding or antagonistic board members (30), division or dysfunction amongst board members (28), unrealistic performance expectations from the board (27) and lack of clarity about what the board required (21). 13 had a personality conflict with the board chair; 8 had problems with the staff representative; 4 thought the expectations of the board were realistic but did not feel able to meet them; and 7 said that their own mistakes or misjudgement were a contributing factor.

Comments were:

As a female principal in a kura it is very difficult to try and keep whanau issues separate from the running of a kura. It is also very difficult to recruit younger people to the board if there are older members who demand respect due to the position they hold within the community and who will use tikanga when they are challenged. As a female this can add to difficulties when having to deal with older male members. I feel the principal should be answerable to the Ministry directly, this would surely help to overcome some of the difficulties when working with the BOT.

From a personal point of view I would really like to work with a small group of professional people eliminating whanau politics...

I have several very opinionated parent reps on the BOT who come from business backgrounds and expect the school to be run like a company. They do not understand the difference between governance and management and have made my professional life very difficult as a result of this lack of understanding. STA training has not helped them. Because it is a small community I have had to retreat to survive!

...The most difficult issue regarding the BOT/Principal relationship is the lack of affirmation or direction-its often like managing in a vacuum!

By contrast the 18 secondary respondents who were experiencing differences with their current board were more likely to be troubled by board over-involvement in day-to-day management of the school (9 respondents) than by board inertia (3 respondents). Sample comments were:

Attempting to micro manage finance - involved in management A Chairperson who fails to exert leadership and PR roles. A Chairman who failed to declare a conflict of interest during co-option of two BOT members. They currently meet out side BOT and subcommittee meetings to discuss and attempt to decide on school management and governance matters.

BOT has little experience and prefers not to take my advice on issues that sometimes they know nothing about. ... BOT meetings are often the worst part of my month. Apart from them the BOT just lets me drive things day to day which is good. I often wonder what use BOT meetings are for the school.

For large schools the most commonly cited contributing factor was 'unrealistic performance expectations of the board'.

Interestingly, high decile schools in the group experiencing problems with the board were slightly more likely than low decile schools to complain of lack of board follow – through ((53%) compared to (44%)

The different emphasis on factors contributing to problems depending on whether it is a primary or a secondary school, a small or a large school is consistent with issues raised in other parts of this report about board lack of initiative and involvement in smaller, rural or low decile schools.

### ***Respondents recommendations***

Respondents who were experiencing ongoing difficulties with their boards suggested a number of interventions or strategies that might help improve the situation or prevent it deteriorating further

(Q60). There were 91 comments which are summarised below. Numbers in brackets indicate the number of similar comments.

#### SOLUTIONS SUGGESTED OR ALREADY BEING USED FOR CURRENT PROBLEMS

- *A Commissioner being appointed and the BOT disbanded/ no solution (7)*
- *Having the deputy principal present*
- *I am already accessing outside help trying to be proactive, engaging with my board chair and keeping the board fully updated.*
- *Intervention used and successful, working with [independent consultant], advice and support by LSM and NZSTA*
- *Meeting with Chairperson I believe it is manageable at this stage but, I will have discussions with: - Mentor -STA and PPTA industrial officers*
- *Not sure. I am trying to 'teach' skills - like reflecting on the annual plan as part of Board meetings, or giving specific jobs to members and then helping them to achieve. However it makes it hard work. They did go to training initially but now feel they have been there, done that and so not keen to revisit even when I offer to go with them. Its not a bad situation, just adds to my workload rather than eases it!*
- *We have had an LSM and the staff and himself are in agreement that this Board does not have the ability to govern efficiently and the only way would be to have an alternative to a BOT.*
- *Resignation/removal of the Board member. (7)*
- *The board chair and I will run a meeting on governance and management this month actually as I have had enough of this situation and spend too much time speaking with board members.*
- *The BOT chair and I will be meeting with a NZSTA person to deal with the BOT member issues - I am hoping that this will solve it.*

Many of these strategies appear to involve a lot of additional time and input from the principal.

#### GENERAL IMPROVEMENTS WANTED FOR THE CURRENT SYSTEM:

##### *Training*

- *A mandatory requirement for Board members to attend fundamental training on election as a first time member. Board training should be compulsory and ongoing. (19)*
- *An effective board trainer to train the whole board at our school where all members can have access to training that is targeted. While some board members have gone on training, they have taken different messages from it. (6)*
- *...most training we have received (NZSTA/Consultants etc) seem to be about how you 'check' if your principal is doing the right thing!! Low trust models!! What would be helpful is training on what things it would be appropriate to do together... and how we could collaborate. (3)*

In contrast to the last comment several principals commented on the high quality of the current NZSTA training and trainers.

##### *Independent referee or mentor*

- *Access to a board mentor to give feedback to board about how to handle some situations better. (3)*
- *External expert to be on board.(2)*
- *Involvement from an experienced and supportive person from the MOE who perhaps they would listen to. I think the previous model of MOE expertise in certain areas is great as they are dealing with the same kinds of issues over a number of schools. BOT members are inexperienced and can change overnight and this is what happened in our school.(2)*
- *A local principal adviser who works with BOT chairs as well as Principals.*

##### *Other*

- *Some clarity about what a Principal should expect the BOT to do (3)*
- *Greater guidance given from Principals Federation to BOT members of their role and the impact they have on principals in general. An organisation created to openly support Principals in their role. NZPF, NZEI do not openly play an active role in profiling our roles and rights they tend to be reactive to problems only.*
- *Power to remove 'rogue' board members and / or power to let the community know how board members are behaving(6)*



## CHANGE TO THE BOARD SYSTEM

- *Dissolve boards of trustees and implement a 'Commissioner Type System' to oversee a cluster of schools. This person to have had success as a practitioner in education, possibly respected principal whose role is to support schools in governance and management issues (2)*
- *The system of Boards of Trustees should be reviewed with the aim of creating clusters of schools governed by professional Boards.*
- *Down grade BOT/ Remove boards altogether ? Do without a Board having a steering committee instead?*
- *I think the board of trustees model is flawed. ... Hours and hours of management staff time is spent with board members, mostly to no worthwhile end. If we could just get on with leading and learning without boards of trustees it would be considerably more efficient and effective. ...*

### Helpfulness of available support

Respondents who were experiencing problems with their current boards were also asked what advice or support they had *already* received from various organisations and parties in order to solve their problem with the board, and how helpful that advice was. Responses are set out in Figure 39. Helpfulness was rated on 1-4 scale where 1 is very helpful, 2 is quite helpful, 3 is not very helpful and 4 is not helpful at all. An overall rating below 2.5 would be an indication that the advice and support was not very helpful.

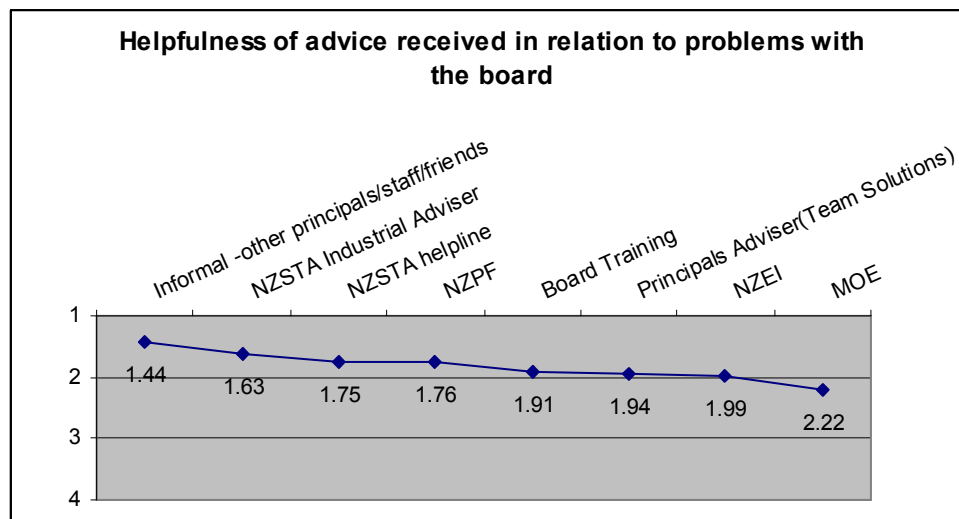


Figure 39

After colleagues and friends, NZSTA was rated the most helpful source of advice on problems with boards. (But see below under serious conflict and employment problems for situations where this may not apply p66.)

There were a number of other organisations and persons who were asked for support by respondents but the smaller numbers made the rating scale unreliable. They were: PPTA, the NZ Secondary Principals' Council, SPANZ, lawyers and independent advisers and consultants.

### Problems with previous boards

Respondents were also asked whether they had experienced problems with *previous* boards, and if so, what they thought had contributed to the problem (Q62). 158 responded to this question and there were 44 comments.

Across all school types the most frequently mentioned contributing factor from this group was ‘over-involvement of the board in day-to-day management of the school’. Followed closely by ‘disruptive demanding or antagonistic board members’ and then ‘division or dysfunction amongst board members’. For 20%, lack of clarity about what the board expected of them was an issue. 16 respondents (9% of the group) said that their own mistakes or misjudgements had contributed to problems they had experienced previously with a board.

In most cases (44% of the group) the problem was solved by the individual(s) who were causing the problem leaving the board (Q63). 18% of the group had managed to repair the relationship; 12% had resigned and found another job because the situation was so unpleasant and 3% had been actively pressured to resign. None said that they had been dismissed by the board.

Those who had managed to repair the relationship or resolve the issue were asked what other parties or organisations they received advice or assistance from and how helpful it was. The most frequently used forms of assistance in this situation were: Informal (other principals / staff / friends) (used by 63 respondents) NZSTA Industrial Advisers (56 respondents), NZEI (55), Board Training (50), NZSTA Helpline (48) NZPF (26) MOE (23), Principals’ Adviser (21), adviser or consultant paid for by the school (16). Other groups used were PPTA, NZSPC, SPANZ and lawyers. Almost all of these forms of support were described as quite helpful or very helpful (see Figure 40).

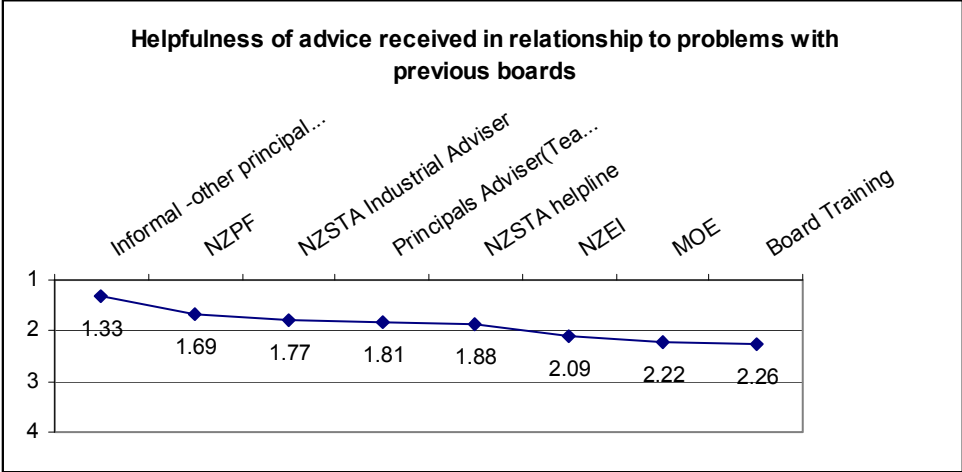


Figure 40

The pattern is similar to the ratings of current advice and support (see Figure 39) except that board training appears to be rated a more useful intervention now than it may have been in the past.

**Serious conflict and employment issues**

Respondents were asked how helpful the above forms of support were in the situation where the principal resigned under pressure or was dismissed (Q65). 16 principals rated the various organisations but because the numbers were small it is not possible to reliably produce a comparative rating scale. What was a common pattern, however, was that in serious conflict situations support from some organisations was rated slightly less highly and in particular, NZSTA ratings dropped (from 1.77 in figure 39 to 2.40). Friends and family became the top source of support. Support from fellow principals was possibly less open.

This group of principals who had experienced conflict with the board were asked what other support they would like to have received (Q 66). Not all who answered this question wanted to comment. Some who did explained that even answering the questionnaire brought back such bad memories of

stress, isolation and lack of support from key organisations that it was very difficult for them to write about it.

Some common themes from comments related to this section were:

1. Where there are serious conflicts with the board principals may not necessarily expect support from NZSTA.
2. Support from unions may also disappear, especially if there is any kind of conflict with staff.
3. Ministry support is also less likely.
4. Some principals who were members of their union but not of a principals' organisation, found themselves in a conflict situation with no legal or emotional support at all.
5. Some who were members of the principals' organisations did not have indemnity insurance and had the additional financial stress of having to take legal action at their own expense.
6. Those who were members of principals' organisations felt that the organisations should take a stronger role in supporting principals in difficulty.
7. Principals in this situation and their families experienced extremely high levels of stress, one said she had contemplated suicide.<sup>26</sup> Others talked of the high costs of legal advice to solve some very complex situations when support from key organisations evaporated.

Some of these principals' comments are set out below:

I felt I was pretty much left on my own. After resigning other stories came to light from previous principals and employees. It was clear the school had serious problems.

...I found NZEI difficult. I had approached them about problems but when the teacher concerned went to them they had to drop us and go with the teacher. This seems very inadequate.

Very little support available for principals. If any group is approached for help the feeling that you are being branded and judged so it is best to shut up and get on with it and do the best you can. I have had comments come back to me of issues I have taken to groups such as STA. This does not instill confidence. STA are focused too much on the role of the BOT and how to deal with Principals. NZPF is not strong enough in the public support of their principals. There is a severe lack of support for Principals. We are at the mercy of our BOT chair and if they have hidden agendas it is time-consuming and emotionally draining continually dealing with them.

Went to NZEI because I'm a member. Would like to see NZPF take on a greater role with support.

MOE intervenes too late in board issues. NZSTA supports boards even if their processes are appalling. NZEI is too focused on 'exit packages' and doesn't attempt to resolve the core issues. Principals' Federation needs to take over the industrial support role for principals from NZEI. Principals are very isolated in schools and need to talk about these issues in the open.

My experiences these past six months have made me realise what a difficult position we can end up in. If the board uses the services of NZSTA we may not have anyone to support us. I don't feel at all comfortable about using the

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<sup>26</sup> Another principal has made a similar comment to the researcher outside the context of this survey.

PPTA field officer because she is someone I work with in regard to staff issues - ie staff go to her and she supports them in situations where I might then use NZSTA. [xxx] legal advice was excellent but he operates from [xxx] - and there's the issue of cost. Fellow principals are in a very difficult position in giving open support - and the relationship we have as professionals can be compromised if they attempt to help. Besides they each have far too much to do to be able to devote time to assist another principal who has problems with his/her board. If there are other avenues we can seek assistance from I'd like to know but no one has mentioned them to me.

## Discussion

While there may be valid reasons for the board to be in conflict with the principal, a number of features of the board system make the resolution of the problem more problematic and stressful than it would be in other jobs. James Crichton, a Member of the Employment Relations Authority who has acted as a commissioner and limited statutory manager has set out some of these features in a 2008 conference paper.

1. Boards may have no employment experience and may operate without advice.
2. STA Industrial Advisers are overworked and not always available when they are needed. Some schools are driven to obtaining employment advice from private providers. Those in smaller schools will have less money to draw on and will be tempted to 'wing it'.
3. Although a board is supposed to set the direction of the school, a principal cannot be removed from a school simply to enable the board to change the philosophical direction of the school or achieve a new set of goals. The contract and the law require that they can only be removed for 'cause' ie for issues of professional competence or misconduct.<sup>27</sup>

A school which loses confidence in its principal, whether justifiably or unjustifiably, is therefore driven to find one or the other of the above reasons to get the principal to leave. Alternatively it remains in a condition of paralysis until a Ministry intervention is invoked.

Board members, staff, parents, and sometime students and the media may become embroiled in the issue making it very difficult for the matter to be resolved dispassionately and sensitively.

The resulting stress for the principal at the centre of this issue may be exacerbated by publicity and an increasing sense of isolation within his or her community and from professional colleagues, whose support may fade or become less open.

The degree of stress suffered by the principals in serious employment conflict situations may indicate that support such as counselling may be needed well after the principal has left the school.

The group of principals who spoke in this survey are all principals who have found other jobs as principals and have, in some cases after enormous effort, rebuilt their careers. There is another group of principals whom this survey could not access and that is the group of people who have left principalship as a result of principal-board conflict. The comments from the group in this survey suggest that the personal and professional destruction suffered in the situations that we have not been able to investigate could potentially be considerably worse.

In such situations, regardless of the principal's perceived mistakes or defects, there appears to be a need for an organisation which takes responsibility for ensuring that the principal is supported to avoid

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<sup>27</sup> James Crichton, *Managing Conflict Resolution in New Zealand Schools*, Conference Paper, Australia and New Zealand Educational Law Association, Christchurch 2008.

self harm or mental breakdown. Support from principals' organisations appears to be voluntary and ad hoc, and sometimes fellow principals do not wish to be associated with the 'struggling' principal. There may be a need for a group to play a greater support role for principals who find themselves in this position.

## RESPONDENTS' COMMENTS ABOUT THE BOARD-PRINCIPAL EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP

### Overview

232 out of 787 respondents (30%) took the time to write about their views on the employment relationship. Most comments were thoughtful and some were very detailed. Around 45% were positive or neutral about their experiences with the board, the remaining 55% were critical of various aspects of the system which they were working in. Many comments provided constructive suggestions for improvements or modifications to the employment (and governance) framework in which they work. Comments were analysed and divided in to two main categories.

### 'It's all about relationships'

This group of 102 (out of 232) respondents had had generally positive experiences with their boards and mostly enjoyed good relationships. They attributed their good relationships to:

- Transparency and openness
- Development of mutual trust and respect with the chair though frank and free communication and regular contact with the chair
- Making sure the board gets training (regular and ongoing)
- Consulting with the board, keeping them informed, valuing their input
- Admitting mistakes, not being defensive
- Being prepared to debate issues and not being offended if board members ask questions, but being firm and not acquiescing on important issues
- Good documentation to support processes, and ensuring new boards revisit their predecessors' documentation
- Having a sense of purpose that can be shared and articulated by everyone
- The principal taking the lead in initiating and a professional relationship with a new board and continuing to manage that relationship

Some (24 comments) in this group also acknowledged that there was an element of luck in the type of people that they got on the board.

The other side of this coin is having board members who are very level-headed and appreciate what is being provided for them and do not seek to use any information in a negative way. I have experienced difficult Board members who have not behaved as one would hope but I have been, in a sense, protected by a strong chairperson and \ or my own bloody-mindedness. It doesn't hurt to be a bit long-in-the-tooth!... . I believe that there is no 'right' way to manage principal - board relationships as it is often down to the idiosyncrasies of personality.

Others (11 comments) saw that it was their responsibility to ensure that the right people get on the board and/ or to make sure that the relationships worked:

Our BOT has dealt with some pretty difficult things and I have always been impressed with their common sense and wisdom in delicate issues. We have worked hard to make sure this type of person puts their name forward at elections and attends meetings prior to the elections so succession is maintained. We have usually made sure the BOT chair has had at least a year in office so there is a smooth transition at election time as well. We ensure the BOT have adequate training and agree on meeting protocols at this training.

A principal colleague said that 'principals are only as safe as their last BOT meeting'. While there is validity in this, the key issue is to build positive working relationships with board chairpersons. Changes at this level can bring significant challenges. It is also my responsibility to 'make the relationship with the board chair work.' However even as a Tomorrow's School principal veteran one has to work very hard at this role, dealing directly with issues and working together. Love the job.

The Board-principal relationship is not one that can be taken for granted. Even after years of a positive relationship, it can fall apart quite quickly if not worked at. Principals need to be pro-active about this. I have only come to realize it after quite a few years.

#### Around 5 comments fell into the 'they are very supportive and leave me to get on with it' category

It seems to me that if a board isn't hugely skilled and prepared to do a lot of the onerous stuff (like property, etc) and/or if they also don't get the governance management divide, then it's better to run things yourself and have them just in a pleasant, supportive role even if you have to do it all. Much better than them wanting to run things and being a nuisance. My board are supportive, a voice of and an ear into, the community but we have a high trust model and they let me and the staff get on with things and report to them. They feel that we are the experts about much of what happens and are prepared to let us make most decisions. They are very interested, very appreciative and very supportive. Long may it last!

#### Other boards were valued for being pro-active, both as employers and in governance (10 comments):

The Board at our school is very positive and supportive. They have total trust in me, and vice versa. They focus on being good employers. As our Board are all CEO's or professional people, time can be an issue. They create the time they are able to deal with school issues, but their work issues come first, as I fully appreciate. They are happy to come into school and work with a group of teachers to review plans and policies, and I make sure this load is spread around, and not too time consuming....

I like having my board there to support me in my work for our school. They are very supportive and empowering and largely let me get on with my work. They do like to be kept informed and seem to have a high degree of trust in the staff and myself. It is great relationship. While some principals say they could do without their boards I believe that a good board supporting a good principal is a bonus. If they are not then something (someone???) may need to change! (maybe not the board!)

... every time I have received/reported to a new Board Chairperson the way I have had to communicate with them has had to change - to meet their needs and lifestyle. No one Chairperson has ever favoured /needed the same mix of approaches. It's my job as principal/manager/CE to get it right. Whilst we have dealt with difficult issues, (including PGs, competency, conflict etc) in various settings - I have not yet been in the position of losing confidence in, or the confidence of, my Board of Trustees. And have often been involved in other schools helping sort things out etc. .... But a free-thinking, confident and interested board that is continually developed, encouraged to ask questions and provide ideas is the best employer and governance authority that you can have.

I value my Board's input. They are totally supportive and have a clear understanding of governance and management roles. They provide a critical sounding board for new initiatives, but in a visionary way. They positively

promote our school and work with the parent group to ensure the best possible opportunities are available for our children.

Only 20% of this group of 104 who were happy about their board experiences were in the U1-3 category, which constituted nearly 32% of the total respondents in the survey (and 38% of the national group).

### **Concerns about various aspects of the employer board system**

Common themes in this group of comments related either to the anomalies of having unskilled people managing principal and school performance, the lottery-like nature of getting a new employer every three years (or more often), or the effect of the overall governance system on principals' workload:

- Relationship with employer can change very quickly when chair or board members change / board's operation and expectations are too variable and personality driven;
- Difficulty of being performance managed by people who know little about the principal's job;
- Board has little understanding of their employer role;
- Conflict of interest if the employer is also parent, lack of professional distance. Rogue BOT can destroy principal's careers and lay people shouldn't have that kind of power.
- Board is supportive but not very effective. They increase my workload:
  - For the system to work principals have to teach the board everything and manage them in their roles – extra workload for principals.
  - Training new boards is time consuming and burdensome and an endlessly repeated cycle;
  - Board changes substantially every three years / high turnover of board members makes continuity and succession planning difficult;
  - Trustees are busy and don't have lot of time to commit to the school and the role.
  - Trustees do it as community service or because it is their turn and are not particularly knowledgeable or interested in education
  - Many board members have difficulty getting to grips with the expectations on them. In low decile schools finding parents with the appropriate skills and willingness is difficult.
  - The board is only as effective as the abilities and willingness of the board members allow. Board training is not enough to make up for the skill deficit.
  - In small schools and kura it can be difficult to keep family issues separate from the running of the school. The lack of variety of backgrounds in rural areas (i.e. nearly all farmers- no one with any educational/business experience) reduces the effectiveness of the boards / no pool of professionals to draw on;
  - Parent board members don't have to have any qualifications, are not accountable, and cannot be removed for destructive behaviours.



### Sample comments were:

It is very strange to have a new employer elected every three years. The stressful part is not knowing who you will end up with, especially if there is no election and whoever wants to get on the board gets on.

... I am always in fear of what the next board election will bring. If I got a chairman I couldn't work closely with in a low-stress way, it would influence my decisions on how long to stay. In spite of a couple of us trying to do some 'succession planning' and co-opt new skills onto the board, others are resistant to this and believe everything should be left to the election. I see this as a massive gamble and it scares the hell out of me.

I feel Tomorrow's Schools does not work well in a small rural community. There are too many conflicts of interest and people are not likely to be professional about this. They have little knowledge and little incentive to become upskilled. The principal is one of the few professionals who knows about education but BOT members can get the votes they need on all sorts of issues based on conflicts of interest and the Principal is outflanked to the detriment of the school...

### Respondents' suggestions for change

#### Suggestions tendered were:

- A proper nationwide review is required – the way the system is described and the way it works in practice in many schools is completely different;
- In small schools principals should be employed by the Ministry –boards could still be involved in the selection of the principal;
- The position of board chair should be a professional appointment;
- There should be a professional board/district board/ district governor that sits over a number of schools and knows their business (5);
- There need to be clearer delineations of roles in the Act/ NZEI and NZPF should take a stronger part in clarifying roles (5);
- Principals need to have their own separate union.

.... I would like to see the Board Chairs replaced by district governors with the experience and expertise in appointments and governance procedures as well as an understanding of organizational development. Times have changed since 1989. While the concept is good to have community involvement, the concept of self governing schools has not kept pace with development and research into effective school leadership...

I think the whole Board of Trustees model is flawed. Parent reps who have control of a complex sophisticated organisation and who are expected to drive performance in a school is problematic It is a huge responsibility for volunteers who can easily get off track. ... If people realised the legal implications that they are liable for I wonder if they would stand. I shield our BOT from a lot and basically do everything myself. Schools in rural areas are at the mercy of some real nutters.

... I am not convinced parents know how to govern a school with the professional rigour that is required to meet the learning needs of ALL students...very complex!

Personally, I feel that the BOT structure in the administration of NZ Schools is systemically wrong. The whole process of how a Board is created is the fault. Expecting the democratic process to create a cohesive,

knowledgeable and effective Board is at the heart of this fault. ... I believe that one way to solve one of the problems is to make the position of Board Chair a 'professional appointment' (not an elected one). Although I have generally been very lucky with the quality of my Board Chairs, I have had nine of them! Other principal colleagues have not been so lucky. I also believe having a Staff Rep is also unnecessary. This is often the source of conflict for Principals.

...In some cases all of the competent parents have already done a 3 year term on the BOT, and the only parents remaining in the community willing to do it are the difficult and most challenging parents who get onto the BOT unopposed. Surely this is evident to our current Government who have a rural leaning, because it is the country / smaller schools who are being crippled in this way. Anyone can be appointed to a powerful position within their community when they join a BOT, and either intentionally or unintentionally go about destroying a school and / or the reputation of a professional(s) within it. There is still certainly a place for significant parental involvement in our schools, and this can be accommodated in a number of ways through a new approach, but the time has come to allow the professional school leader to lead without any unnecessary distractions coming from difficult members of a parent group who simply have way too much power.

...I would prefer a professional Board that sat over a number of schools and knew the business. I also think BOT meetings should be in work hours and not at night. How many other CEOs have to hold their most important strategic planning/thinking meetings at night when everyone is tired?

.... In my first school ( decile 2) I had 8 board chairs in 10 years. Board meetings were like taking another class. It was an exercise in community empowerment. When I moved to a decile 8 school I expected to have a more proactive board. It was only marginally so. Their policy was ' the board appoints the principal and the principal manages the school. We shall support as required.' I am now back in a decile 2 school ... The board are all committed to making a positive difference and we are working effectively together. The reality is however that the legal expectations on boards is ridiculous. In general they do not have the educational knowledge and management/government expertise for the role. They are very reliant on the competency of the principal to cover all bases.