

## Circles of Engagement



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### Background

A Kāhui Ako of more than 15 schools spread across a large rural area was always going to be a leadership challenge. The differences amongst the schools are profound with different deciles, cultures and sizes being the most prominent.

Due to its size, it was natural and clear that there were two circles:

- The “inner circle” consisting of those schools who were actively engaged in the work of the Kāhui Ako, supported the Lead Principal believing they could make a difference in the community through closer collaboration
- The “outer circle” involving those schools who were sceptical about any clear benefits flowing through to their students, teachers or community, were participating on paper only, enabling them to take advantage of the release budget and additional management units afforded to Within- and Across-School Teachers.

### The project

The change management intervention was designed to integrate the two circles and ensure that all participating schools had an active stake in the Kāhui Ako and its strategic plan. The Lead Principal was up for re-election and he wanted to be sure that he had the positive support of his colleagues.

During the period of change management support, the principals’ group invested a lot of time meeting together, working through the provocations presented in strategic planning workshops and co-constructing a strategic plan that resonated with their community. It took a while to come up with the 3 strategic goals that are the anchor points of their plan. High decile schools achieving academically at the upper end of the range, did not see any advantages to their students in collaborating with other local schools on curriculum or teacher development.

Therefore, the Kāhui Ako's goals focused on developing coherent learner pathways as students transition from school to school, student and staff well-being, and partnerships with parents and whānau. They spent time crafting an evocative story about the backdrop to their plan which involved an historical account of the place and its evolving social profile, a cultural narrative, their tradition of co-operation and engagement amongst local schools, and their collective expectation to share and collaborate with commitment.

They also discussed their approach to decision-making and agreed unanimously that the Lead Principal should have operational leadership accountabilities within the parameters of the new strategic plan. They further agreed that some of the WST roles would be re-purposed to work alongside the ASTs to support the implementation of the plan, rather than lead in-school inquiries.

## Outcomes

The investment in co-creating the foundational elements for collaboration has paid off. With the exception of one school that geographically and in terms of students' pathways is better suited for another community, all remaining schools are now firmly committed to the Kāhui Ako.

The Lead Principal was unanimously re-elected by all the principals and his collaborative leadership skills have developed dramatically with his growing confidence arising from the support of all his colleagues, clarity of purpose, and defined strategic direction. Across school and within school roles are in the process to be filled with high potential leaders who have clarity about their roles and the opportunity to develop their leadership skills.

