

Media release: Research on new Communities of Learning

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Early research on the new school groupings known as Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako (CoL) has been released.

Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako: The Emergent stage is a report from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). It draws on data from a comprehensive survey of primary and intermediate schools conducted in August and September 2016. Around two thirds of the schools surveyed were involved in a CoL.

Report author, NZCER chief researcher Cathy Wylie, said the report highlighted the pioneering nature of the move to build communities of learning.

There was a general expectation among the primary principals that it would lead to major change, with more than half (55 %) expecting more sharing of useful knowledge for teaching and learning.

There was some evidence the achievement challenges CoL had set themselves may be overly ambitious. This was not surprising given that many of the early CoL had set their goals for the end of 2017, Dr Wylie said. “Only a third of principals thought their goals were achievable in their timeframe.”

Communities of Learning were part of the Government’s Investing in Educational Success programme announced in early 2014.

The main motivation principals described for joining a CoL were a mix of benefits such as improving student learning outcomes, creating smoother transitions for students between schools, and the ability to access more resourcing. Of those principals in a CoL that was already underway, 82% reported a high level of trust between members and 78% thought all the schools in the CoL were committed to working collectively.

Principals gave a number of reasons for not wanting to join a CoL, including doubts about the model or wanting to remain in existing clusters that were working well. Only 14 % of principals expected less competition for students among schools as a result of CoL.

“CoL will need time and well-informed support to ensure that they develop purposeful collaboration that grows the capability of all the schools in the group,” Dr Wylie said.

Schools needed to be convinced the collaboration would be more than the sum of separate parts and would provide understanding and joint support, rather than extra workload.

She said the next few years would be critical for consolidating positive gains from the change. Expectations of how long this change might take, and what it would take needed to take into account the deep cultural changes required as well as the challenges in building strong relationships across schools.

The NZCER survey was conducted from August to early September 2016 and included a representative sample of English-medium state and state-integrated primary and intermediate schools.

The full report is available at:

<http://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/communities-learning-emergent-stage>

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