



COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING | KĀHUI AKO IN ACTION

What we know so far

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Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako in Action

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Contents

Overview	4
Getting Started	6
Purpose and focus	13
Leading collaboration	17
Understanding what needs to change and planning to make this happen	20
Monitoring and evaluation for improvement	22
Resourcing and infrastructure	24
Conclusion	27

Overview

Investing in Educational Success (IES) is a Government initiative aimed at lifting student achievement as well as offering new career opportunities for teachers and principals. IES has been designed with this in mind, and is intended to help raise achievement by:

- > improving teaching practice across New Zealand
- > enabling teachers to work together and benefit from each other's knowledge and experience
- > helping all children benefit from the skills and knowledge of great teachers from across a group of schools/early learning services
- > helping schools work together so it is easier for children to transition through the education system.¹

We know that the most important influence on student achievement and progress is the effectiveness of teaching.² The evidence tells us that there is a difference between experienced and expert teachers and that some teaching practices have a higher probability of being successful in promoting learning than others. One way of addressing the challenge of variability is to shift the system and organisational focus to collaborative expertise and student progression.³

In collaborative cultures, responsibility for the success of all students is shared among all members of the community. Provision of the necessary support, time and resources enables teachers to work collaboratively to diagnose students' learning needs, determine what they need to focus on, plan effective programmes and teaching interventions and evaluate how successful these are in promoting achievement across the learning pathway.

Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako (CoL) are the hub of the IES initiative. They form around learning pathways for children and young people. CoL | Kāhui Ako provide opportunities to build knowledge and expertise, and stimulate improvement and innovation. CoL | Kāhui Ako provide an important opportunity to improve teaching and learning through collaboration.

This is the first of a series of iterative reports which draw together what ERO knows about CoL | Kāhui Ako, as they move from establishment to implementation. This report is based on information collected from schools (that are already members of a CoL | Kāhui Ako) during their regular ERO evaluations; information gained from the workshops ERO has conducted with CoL | Kāhui Ako and from the in-depth work we are doing alongside one CoL | Kāhui Ako.⁴ ERO will look to tell the developing story of CoL | Kāhui Ako in this series of reports.

1 <http://www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/specific-initiatives/investing-in-educational-success/>
 2 Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse students: Best evidence synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
 3 Hattie, J. (2015). *What works best in education: The politics of collaborative expertise*. London: Pearson.
 4 Information collected in Terms 2 and 3, 2016 from 82 schools representing 40% of the current 148 CoL and 20 workshops conducted nationally during 2015 and 2016

The report has been written to reflect the structure of ERO's draft document *What Do We Know About Effective Collaboration* and its companion framework *Working Towards Effective Collaboration*. These documents have been designed to support the development and evaluation of CoL I Kāhui Ako. They bring together what international research evidence tells us about effective collaboration in education networks and communities. They can be used in conjunction with *School Evaluation Indicators: Effective Practice for Improvement and Learner Success* (2016) and *Effective School Evaluation: How to do and use internal evaluation for improvement* (2016).

At the time of this report there are 148 CoL I Kāhui Ako spread throughout New Zealand. Most (70%) are at the development phase, prior to endorsement of their achievement challenges. It is at this time that they are discussing and agreeing the ways they will work together, establishing their unique identity, building the relational trust necessary for effective collaboration and interrogating data to identify their shared focus around a set of achievement challenges.

This process takes time and, if done well, provides a sound foundation from which CoL I Kāhui Ako can begin to work collaboratively to build an infrastructure, theory of improvement and operating principles to support high quality teaching practices and improved achievement.

A CoL I Kāhui Ako reaches the point of implementation when its achievement challenges have been endorsed and a Memorandum of Agreement is signed by all members of the CoL I Kāhui Ako. At the time of this report there were 43 CoL I Kāhui Ako at different stages in their implementation process. There are some innovative and exciting practices underway, but there remains a lot to be learnt from CoL I Kāhui Ako as they develop and share what works well and what could be done better.

Getting Started

One of the most critical stages in the life of an effectively functioning Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako (CoL) is getting started. Making the decision to form a community requires shifts in both thinking and practice. For many leaders, teachers, children and young people, parents, families and whānau, their school/early learning service is the teaching and learning unit they know best. While this does not change, the big challenge is to move beyond focussing on 'my school/early learning service' to 'our schools/early learning service' – to a collective responsibility for the equity and excellence of outcomes for all children and young people within the CoL | Kāhui Ako.

As schools and services form together, there are big questions to ask. Most of these begin with 'why' or 'what'. These questions are important because the answers give clarity to the purpose for establishment – 'why we are joining together' and 'what is it that we want to achieve?' They help define the unique nature of each CoL | Kāhui Ako and help place the focus firmly on the benefit of collaboration for improved student outcomes.

Effective communication and high levels of relational trust create the conditions necessary for successful organisational learning and change.⁵ It takes time to develop relationships and trust. This process can be achieved from within the resources of the CoL | Kāhui Ako or it may require external facilitation. The most important aspect of this process is time – making time for formal and informal opportunities to work together, with a purposeful and collective focus both across and at different levels of the community. Collaboration and building relational trust go hand in hand.

Relational trust is fundamental to being able to engage in challenging conversations⁶ and the openness to learning required to make the practice and outcomes of community participants transparent.⁷ Working through what it means to have relationships that are trusting is critical for the work members engage in as the community develops. This is not easy and it can be uncomfortable.

When members of a CoL | Kāhui Ako are involved in a culture of high trust, they are able to open up and acknowledge what they do not know, take risks and share knowledge and expertise to support others. Such relationships help to create an environment where it is safe to share data and information about students and provide supportive educational pathways within a community. Both are fundamental to effective CoL | Kāhui Ako.

5 Bryk, A., Sebring, P., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. (2010) *Organising schools for improvement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

6 Timperley, H. (2015). Professional conversations and improvement focused feedback. A review of the research collaboration literature and the impact on practice and student outcomes. Melbourne VIC: Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

7 Rincon-Gallado, S., & Fullan, M. (2015) The Social physics of educational change: Essential features of collaboration. Draft for comment prepared for the Ministry of Education.

Creating a culture of collective responsibility is an essential part of getting started. Leaders in each CoL I Kāhui Ako have a critical role in establishing a compelling collective vision and setting priority goals and targets that represent the perspectives and aspirations of all community participants. It is a collective commitment to the community of what matters in teaching, learning and student outcomes. All members of the community need to 'buy in' to this commitment for it to be successful.

The big picture

- > Getting started requires collegial and community 'buy in'. It entails a commitment to be part of a positively articulated and ambitious collaboration on behalf of students and their families.
- > Developing reciprocally beneficial relationships and trust takes time. The early stages are important for members to develop ways of working together that enable them to be confident, open and honest with each other.
- > Building relational trust strengthens the capacity for members to acknowledge what they don't know, to safely critique and challenge practices and to take risks and share knowledge and expertise with others in the community.
- > Strong educationally focused relationships among students, parents and whānau, teachers and leaders, and with other educational and community institutions, increase opportunities for student learning and success.
- > Well-developed communication channels, established early in the life of the CoL I Kāhui Ako, enable the exchange of ideas and the synthesis and use of new knowledge.

What have we found so far?

Starting up

There is a growing body of evidence about how collaborative networks are developing in jurisdictions other than New Zealand. As a country, there are lessons we can learn and insights we can gain from what is working and what is not. New Zealand, however, is different because we are building a country-wide system of communities rather than regional or district networks. There are no recipes or exact blueprints for how this should look but there are evidenced-based guidelines for establishing and developing a CoL I Kāhui Ako. Most importantly, communities are learning from each other and responding to their unique, local context.

The most common motivation for forming a CoL I Kāhui Ako is associated with having been part of a former active network, cluster or association of professionals. Usually, where schools have taken part in a *Learning Change Network*, a curriculum-based cluster, a professional learning group or an improvement initiative, expectations of each other and productive ways of working are better articulated and there is a sense in their discussions and documented intentions of a better understanding of the protocols needed to work together.

It takes longer for a CoL I Kāhui Ako to get underway where there is no history of networking, a lack of clarity about reasons for collaborating or the absence of initiators willing to take a lead in organising the group. Ministry lead advisers and some external facilitators have taken an important role by initiating discussion about ways of working together and by explaining and clarifying operational matters about structure, roles, process and resourcing.

The most commonly stated reasons for forming a CoL I Kāhui Ako are around raising student achievement and/or taking collective responsibility for student success. Members refer to the importance of strengthening transition arrangements for the exchange of information, developing better coherence and establishing progressive pathways. In addition, opportunities to pool expertise, improve teaching practice and access professional learning are strong motivating factors.

Notwithstanding the focus on students, some principals and trustees see access to available resourcing and career opportunities as compelling influences on their decision to get involved. Some also join because they are anxious not to miss out – particularly in regard to professional learning and development resources.

The decision to provide more flexibility in the timing for appointing a leader has eased situations where member schools have found difficulties getting started. However, the time taken to establish useful ways of working and to clearly articulate purpose and direction through building relational trust cannot be understated. These activities are foundational for effective operation and an area where effective facilitation such as the role mooted for ‘expert partners’ could be very useful.

Who is involved in getting started?

Principals are generally the prime movers in initiating the establishment of a CoL I Kāhui Ako and they are the most visible participants at community meetings. This is to be expected when bringing together a number of learning institutions that have largely worked on their own. Within a forming CoL I Kāhui Ako there are generally one or more principals who are instrumental in encouraging others to join. The downside is that without clearly stated, understood and agreed reasons for joining, some principals reported feeling pressured to take part.

It is not clear at what point teachers become aware of their school’s involvement in a CoL I Kāhui Ako and what this means for them. Given that teachers play a key role in enacting the achievement challenges in their classrooms, and service it is important they are involved as near to the point of formation as possible.

The degree to which boards of trustees are involved in forming communities varies. There are early formalities that require board approval, so it is critical that trustees are involved and well informed. We found evidence that most principals kept boards informed at a basic level about what is happening through their regular reporting channels. However, trustees' understanding and involvement during the establishment phase is particularly important given their roles as signatories to the Memorandum of Agreement, their CoL I Kāhui Ako employment responsibilities, strategic stewardship accountabilities and the role they play as parents and community members.

Trustees are less likely to take an active part in the establishment meetings that CoL I Kāhui Ako principals attend. This may be because meetings are scheduled at times where it is difficult for trustees to attend, but there is also some evidence that they are not formally invited. Where they have been informed and involved from formation, their contributions added both a school-level community and a parent-focused perspective to the discussions.

In some particular instances, the active involvement of boards alongside parents, whānau, community members and teachers has resulted in high levels of interaction and understanding about the aspirations and expectations for the CoL I Kāhui Ako. But these instances are not common in the establishment stages and there is room to look at what strategies/forums could be implemented to get a meaningful level of engagement and involvement for trustees. As early learning services increasingly become part of the CoL I Kāhui Ako, ways to involve governance and management groups should be investigated.

Similarly, there is room to explore the involvement of children and young people in CoL I Kāhui Ako. Some communities have come up with interesting ways to tap into the unique knowledge and perspectives they have about what, and how they learn. They have done this through vehicles such as specific focus groups, student-led interviews and videos and the use of opinion boxes and surveys. These communities have found that drawing together student voice and recognising the importance of student agency in their own learning gives them insight into how they might shape their teaching and learning expectations across the CoL I Kāhui Ako pathway.

A growing number of communities are actively seeking to engage with their local iwi or rūnanga as they establish the direction and overall structure of their CoL I Kāhui Ako. These early connections take the form of aligning mutual education goals with iwi strategies, deepening partnerships and understanding about iwi aspirations, and involving iwi representatives in CoL I Kāhui Ako governance structures.

Establishing collective commitment

Building a culture of collective commitment and responsibility is an essential part of getting started. One of the early roles for both leaders and facilitators is the establishment of a compelling vision around trusted and productive ways of working, valued and priority goals and a commitment to shared responsibility for the progress and achievement of all students. This collective commitment requires a shift in thinking about responsibility for the students in each individual school/early learning service to responsibility for all children and young people in the CoL I Kāhui Ako. It is a critical 'buy in' stage in the work of the community.

We have found that CoL I Kāhui Ako are spending worthwhile time working through what "collective commitment" looks like in their unique community. This foundation work should and does take time, but it underpins the quality of adult interactions as the CoL I Kāhui Ako matures. CoL I Kāhui Ako are articulating their shared commitment through the development of a code/protocol for working together; a vision that usually includes a set of shared values and, for most, a considered description of the strengths and challenges in their community.

The codes and protocol CoL I Kāhui Ako have for working together have important commonalities. Among the various components, reference is usually made to active listening, being transparent and open with each other, respecting the contributions of members, having trust and integrity in interactions and being willing to share knowledge and expertise to maximise outcomes for students and teachers. These are all important in building the levels of relational trust necessary to enable members to safely critique and challenge practices in their CoL I Kāhui Ako.

Embracing the learner pathway from early years to 18 and beyond

CoL I Kāhui Ako have embraced the concept of a learner pathway in their discussions and documentation, noting the importance of coherence in curriculum and in pedagogy. They are particularly aware of strengthening their practices at key transition points so that students benefit from more effective transfer of data, connected teaching and learning and continuity of wellbeing practices.

While the pathway focusses on the learner, the actions of adults determine its effectiveness. Where CoL I Kāhui Ako members have well established relational trust and a shared responsibility for outcomes, it is more likely that their planning actions and collaborative discussions will achieve coherence. One of the key areas that CoL I Kāhui Ako are looking at is ensuring that data is reliable and reliably used across the pathway.

A number of CoL I Kāhui Ako are beginning to look at the pathway possibilities beyond the traditional schooling boundaries. This includes connecting to post schooling opportunities and linking with early learning services. At the school/post school, tertiary and employment interface some CoL I Kāhui Ako are seeing potential benefits in using existing Vocational Pathways programmes and engaging with local industry and trades. Engagement at the early learning service/school interface makes sense but this has been very slow to evolve because it was not part of the original IES initiative.

The pathway from early learning services to schools is often difficult to define and may be part of the reason the current CoL I Kāhui Ako have relatively few members from the early learning sector. Inclusion is probably easier in smaller areas but in larger areas, particularly cities, there are many potential services that could be part of a CoL I Kāhui Ako but the logistics of inclusion appear difficult to both schools and services. In addition, parental movement across cities and large provincial towns usually results in children attending a service some distance from the school they will later attend and this is a complicating factor.

The question about meaningful involvement for early learning services resides with the integrity of the pathway. This in turn means that the higher the number of children contributing to schools in a CoL I Kāhui Ako, the more benefits accrue for children, parents and teachers. This does not mean that smaller services should be left out, but for organisational purposes it could be more useful for bigger services to represent the interests of all contributing services. Currently the potential for cohesiveness and connectedness is largely untapped.

The shape of communities of learning

Over two thirds of CoL I Kāhui Ako have between 5 and 8 member schools and there is an expectation that these numbers will increase as schools/services seek to join a CoL I Kāhui Ako. Initial guidance cites 10 as an ideal size, but as CoL I Kāhui Ako are approved there have been practical reasons for smaller or larger numbers around demography, pathways or special character configurations. The caution for CoL I Kāhui Ako with larger numbers is to ensure that all member schools/services have equitable opportunities to contribute to CoL I Kāhui Ako decision-making processes and collaborative inquiry activities.

There are some gaps nationally in uptake particularly in areas where there would be significant benefit in CoL I Kāhui Ako establishment. These are most notable in some areas in South Auckland, mid Northland, Whanganui, South Waikato/King Country, South Wairarapa and Dunedin.

In metropolitan and some larger provincial areas, the pathway from primary to secondary school is more complicated after Year 6 because students may be zoned for, or be within close proximity to intermediates that contribute to secondary schools outside the CoL I Kāhui Ako. Although this can disrupt the development of a unique pathway, CoL I Kāhui Ako affected by this appear to be focussing closely on what they can achieve and developing their challenges and processes around the core of schools within the pathway. Some are beginning to give thought to how they might link with adjacent CoL I Kāhui Ako in the future and this would have considerable benefit.

Flexibility to form faith-based Catholic and area school CoL I Kāhui Ako are bespoke arrangements with commonalities in special character and/or rural location. The faith-based CoL I Kāhui Ako generally have several secondary options as part of their defined pathways and established shared interests and practices upon which to build collaborative practice. Similarly, area schools start with a unique pathway within each school but the CoL I Kāhui Ako provides a vehicle to share and enhance practice focussed on raising achievement.

The downside for CoL I Kāhui Ako outside provincial or metropolitan areas is the distance travelled in order to meet regularly. CoL I Kāhui Ako are beginning to think about arrangements such as video conferencing and the use of digital connections and documentation as solution-focussed responses. In addition, some smaller rural CoL I Kāhui Ako report the difficulties members have finding relief staff which would enable their full involvement in leadership roles, meetings and activities.

As the take up and interest in CoL I Kāhui Ako has increased since the first approvals in late 2014, there has been some movement of schools in and out, and between communities. This is not surprising given that there are more options suited to demographics or pathway arrangements.

By and large the movement is positive and enhances the original configurations. However some principals told us of their disappointment when a key school in the pathway, such as an intermediate, opts out or chooses not to participate. This causes disruption to the potential continuity of learning and the building of coherent approaches to curriculum and teaching.

Purpose and focus

Effective Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako are clear about the purpose and focus of their collaboration. The learner is firmly at the centre and identifying what matters to improve their outcomes underpins vision, purpose and focus.

Working collaboratively to identify a small number of ambitious and measurable achievement challenges, that are clearly articulated and understood by students, teachers, leaders, parents and whānau provide the basis for the CoL | Kāhui Ako focus.

The starting point for identifying common goals and achievement challenges is effective internal evaluation. Doing this well at both individual, organisation and community levels requires asking the right questions and accessing relevant, transparent and timely information to inform the decisions made.

Internal evaluation is both a starting point and an ongoing process. In the first instance it requires leaders, teachers and community stakeholders to engage in the deliberate and systematic analysis of data to identify priorities for improvement.⁸ ERO's 2016 publication *Effective School Evaluation – How to do and use internal evaluation for improvement* outlines some of the questions that can be used to help work towards determining the most appropriate challenges based on CoL | Kāhui Ako data.

Noticing	Investigating	Collaborative Sense Making
What's going on here? For which learners? Is this what we expected? Is this good? Should we be concerned? Why? What is the problem or issue? What do we need a closer look at?	What do we already know about this? How do we know? What more do we need to find out? How might we do this? What good questions should we ask? What relevant and useful data do we need? Do we need help to interrogate our data?	What is our data telling us? Is this good enough? What do we know about the factors that might be driving variation? Do we have different interpretations of the data? If so, why? What do we need to explore further? What can we learn from research evidence about what good looks like? Do we need support to help make sense of our data?

8 <http://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/effective-school-evaluation/>

Ongoing use of data on learner and institutional performance enhances collaboration by enabling participants to identify progress and know that what they are doing is having an impact. The visibility of measurable impact builds collective efficacy and ownership and promotes further improvement efforts.

The big picture

- > Clarity of purpose and focus are essential features of high performing Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako.
- > The starting point for identifying a community vision and common goals through achievement challenges is effective internal evaluation.
- > A small number of 'high leverage, ambitious and measurable achievement challenges, clearly articulated and understood by students, teachers, leaders, parents and whānau provide the foundational focus for the community.
- > The CoL | Kāhui Ako has a shared focus on enabling positive educational pathways for students.

What have we found so far?

Determining the challenges

All endorsed achievement challenges⁹ focus on those areas for which there is national data in reading, writing, mathematics and NCEA. In some cases, national data together with supplementary local data has led to challenges being set in other curriculum areas such as science.

The most effective achievement challenges move beyond overall cohort targets (e.g. 85% of students reading at or above national standards) to identify the actual numbers of students in each school required to be accelerated to meet the targets set. Additionally, the more specific the data, the more clarity there is about targeted groups in the CoL | Kāhui Ako at risk of not achieving. We are finding the more recently endorsed challenges reflect a much higher level of specificity.

Targets set at Years 9 and 10 help to ensure that achievement challenges take account of the whole learner pathway. The majority of CoL | Kāhui Ako have targets set in the primary and senior secondary years, but not all challenges include the critical area of Years 9 and 10. This may be because there is a lack of national data at these levels but there is no reason why data sources based on curriculum levels or locally sourced assessment data could not be used to support establishing targets.

9 At the time of this report there were 37 endorsed achievement challenges

CoL I Kāhui Ako need to consider the impact that targeting achievement in the early years of secondary school will have on raising the number of students achieving at various NCEA levels. In addition, the transitions from early learning services to Year 1, Year 6 to 7 and Year 8 to 9 are all key transition points for consideration in setting coherent achievement challenges. There is also scope to explore agreed markers of progress at these key transition points.

Supporting the identification of achievement challenges

For CoL I Kāhui Ako where there is no strong history of collaboration, or where there is no clear data literacy leadership in the group, the time taken to work through the data interrogation and analysis processes and to agree achievement challenges can take considerable time – in some instances, up to 18 months.

There appear a number of reasons for this including the need to establish a sufficient level of relational trust to work transparently with each other's data, and the need for early facilitation and support to develop the necessary skills for dealing with large data sets. The latter is not surprising given that it has taken time nationally to develop the skills required to make sense of school level data and its use.

CoL I Kāhui Ako are positive about the support Ministry personnel and other facilitators have provided in helping member schools to work with data, particularly where there is insufficient data analysis capability to work independently. The proposed use of 'expert partners' working alongside CoL I Kāhui Ako will provide valuable support during the establishment phase to build capability and to support the relational conditions necessary to enable frank conversations about data.

Identifying the right challenges

We found that some of the earlier forming CoL I Kāhui Ako expressed frustration at having to resubmit achievement challenges because these did not meet 'Ministry requirements'. It is likely that the issue was more about not knowing how to use data to specify an effective achievement challenge. The redrafted challenges resulting from targeted support illustrate the need to build capability to undertake this critical part of developing the focus of the CoL I Kāhui Ako. More recently established CoL I Kāhui Ako are benefitting from the support of lead advisers and the availability of examples of endorsed challenges from other CoL I Kāhui Ako.

In a few instances there was confusion between what is perceived by CoL I Kāhui Ako as having to work with a 'narrow' data set when developing achievement challenges and the autonomy some believe they should have in determining challenges outside the scope of the national data set.

While some CoL I Kāhui Ako are keen to broaden the scope of their challenges, a strong focus on raising achievement levels in literacy and mathematics is a precursor to students achieving in the broader curriculum. This is not clearly understood by some and is an area where early intervention or facilitation leads to a more appropriate focus on high leverage, measurable challenges.

Where there is compelling evidence/data in curriculum areas other than literacy or mathematics or in such areas as the key competencies, there is no reason why CoL I Kāhui Ako cannot develop relevant challenges. If robust internal evaluation and data analysis points to a priority area of improvement and there is baseline evidence from which to determine progress and achievement, there may be a strong reason for its inclusion.

Some CoL I Kāhui Ako need support to understand the difference between evidence-based targets and the learning conditions and pedagogies that are necessary to enact these challenges. There is evidence of some CoL I Kāhui Ako setting additional targets/goals to complement what they see as 'academic'. These include areas such as individualising/personalising learning, readiness for learning, digital learning, deep learning and strengthening wellbeing conditions. While these all have merit, they sit more appropriately as part of the 'how' not the 'what' of setting targets.

Who is involved in determining the challenges?

For the most part it is principals, senior staff and in some cases teachers, who are most closely involved in the collaborative activities of data analysis and internal evaluation. This is not surprising given that educators are most closely involved with identifying what is working and what needs improvement.

We found that a few CoL I Kāhui Ako had used their initial resources to employ an external facilitator or expert. Alongside support received from the Ministry such as Student Achievement Practitioners, this was described as being a very useful process. The brief usually embraced support to develop collaborative processes in order to better enquire into data. CoL I Kāhui Ako that have employed this approach talk about having a deeper understanding of what sits behind their agreed challenges.

The extent to which boards of trustees are actively involved in the development of achievement challenges varies considerably. Trustees are more likely to be kept informed about the process by their school principal than through direct involvement. In some cases the board chair or a delegated trustee attends the discussions about achievement challenges, which usually follow initial analysis by principals or a delegated sub-group of professionals. In a few effective cases – the board, parents and community representatives take part in discussions about the tentative achievement challenges before these are submitted for endorsement.

Achievement challenges are enacted at school level, so board involvement and understanding is critical to successful implementation. Through its stewardship role, boards have strategic oversight on behalf of the CoL I Kāhui Ako about how well their own school is contributing to the overall plan to raise student achievement. Hence the need for trustees to be clear about the accountability role they have within their CoL I Kāhui Ako.

There is potential scope for early learning services considering participation in CoL I Kāhui Ako to be involved in discussion about achievement challenges. Given that the majority of challenges involve a focus on literacy and mathematics, CoL I Kāhui Ako members would benefit from including evidence of what children entering school bring with them at transition and a more robust understanding how the curriculum is structured in early learning services.

Leading collaboration

Effective leadership is a defining characteristic of communities that make a difference for students. Successful CoL I Kāhui Ako appointees need to be able to demonstrate the capabilities and expertise to frame, support and lead the work of a collective of leaders, professionals, students and community members.

CoL I Kāhui Ako leadership roles are complex and dynamic. The roles require more than a replication of the knowledge and skill-sets required to lead a school. Those appointed to CoL I Kāhui Ako leadership roles require the evaluative capabilities necessary to lead evidence-based collaborative inquiry and to identify and understand what is working and what needs to change. Alongside these abilities, leaders have to be nimble – knowing where and when changes to practice or approaches need to happen.

The roles require leadership among leaders. They are roles of influence rather than authority, where deliberate facilitation is carried out within flat power structures. Leaders need to be flexible and responsive enough to involve a range of internal and external expertise and to determine when these contributions are most relevant.

Leadership is networked at different levels in the community from the institutional to the whole. Leaders coordinate support and enact effective collaboration by seeking the perspectives, and tapping into the aspirations of professionals, students, parents and whānau. The roles require a strong focus on building and sustaining relational trust at each level of the community.

We know a lot about the evidence base for effective network leadership but we don't know much yet about how this will play out in the unique New Zealand CoL I Kāhui Ako environment. There is a lot to be done to enhance the capabilities of the people appointed to leadership roles because their effectiveness in leading collective change and driving improvement will underpin the success of CoL I Kāhui Ako.

The big picture

- > Leadership has a clear focus on achieving equity and excellence in student outcomes in every CoL I Kāhui Ako institution.
- > Leadership collaboratively develops and pursues the CoL I Kāhui Ako vision, goals and challenges.
- > CoL I Kāhui Ako members have a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of those in leadership roles.
- > Leadership supports, coordinates and leads effective collaboration, building relational trust at every level of the CoL I Kāhui Ako.
- > Leadership ensures that organisational structures, processes and practices strengthen and sustain collaborative activity and focussed professional learning to improve teaching and student outcomes.
- > Leadership builds collective capacity to do and use evaluation and inquiry for sustained improvement.

What have we found so far?

Leadership roles

CoL I Kāhui Ako leaders are in the early stages of their tenure, with the first of the current CoL I Kāhui Ako leaders appointed in October 2015. The processes for appointing the Across CoL I Kāhui Ako teachers and the Within School teachers and ensuring replacements are in place for some of these roles can take up to six months following the initial appointment of the CoL I Kāhui Ako leader. This effectively slows the implementation process. However, the time taken to ensure the roles are embedded, the role descriptions well defined and ways of working agreed by member schools is worthwhile in providing a strong platform for the CoL I Kāhui Ako to implement its achievement plan.

We found that CoL I Kāhui Ako leaders are likely to be prime initiators in their communities and may have taken a lead role in earlier networks of which they were part. In general they have the confidence of their colleagues and have developed a rapport through the establishment phase. They also have the support of their board and colleagues to apply for the role. All but three of the CoL I Kāhui Ako leader roles have had only one applicant.

The appointment and role definition of Across CoL I Kāhui Ako teacher roles are critically important to the functioning of the CoL I Kāhui Ako. Appointees to these roles provide the contextual and task specific leadership vital to modelling collaborative engagement and facilitating changes to practice across the CoL I Kāhui Ako. In the most effective instances, CoL I Kāhui Ako leaders are thinking more innovatively about how they use the available resources by appointing roles in areas such as evaluation or professional practice as well as the more commonly tagged roles related to their achievement challenges.

Role specific training and development

There is a clear need for specific training in the new leadership roles. The roles are unique and differ from institutional leadership at each level because they are roles of influence that require a new frame of reference to work collectively and responsively with professional colleagues and community members.

The leadership forums promoted through the Education Council are being well received because they provide the opportunity to learn from experts and each other. These forums are well attended by both confirmed appointees and prospective leaders, but there is also a case to focus specifically on those who have been appointed so that development can be more targeted, particularly in areas such as change leadership and leading collaborative practices.

Similarly, the Across CoL I Kāhui Ako teachers have specific development needs resulting from the roles they play. They have a different set of complexities from that of the overall leader because the role requires appointees to work across the schools in a close relationship with individual school principals and managers.

We found some instances where Across CoL I Kāhui Ako teachers were meeting resistance from individual principals about their role in critiquing data and practice. This may be a result of the CoL I Kāhui Ako not fully resolving matters of relational trust and communication at the early stages of development, or it may be about developing better ways of working. It does however point to the need for specific training to undertake the role, whether this is facilitated internally or by an expert partner.

Perceptions about the leadership role

We found some evidence of CoL I Kāhui Ako wanting to operate with different leadership arrangements. This usually took the form of a desire to share or rotate the role or to abdicate the role in favour of a facilitator. These alternatives generally arise from concerns about the time the role will take from a principal's own school and the extra workload involved, or they may stem from a genuine interest in the notion of distributed leadership.

As noted above, the role of a CoL I Kāhui Ako Leader entails a considerably different skill set that does not really lend itself to being passed around. That is not to say that different members of the CoL I Kāhui Ako cannot assume various leadership roles at different times or that roles could not be distributed among CoL I Kāhui Ako members wanting to share aspects of leadership. The fact is that every principal/manager has a critical leadership role in her/his school/service in relation to the agreed challenges and collaborative plan of action.

Confident leaders in endorsed CoL I Kāhui Ako are thinking innovatively about how they use the resources available to them and can see the reciprocal benefits of building management capability in their own school while furthering their own skill set in the new role.

CoL I Kāhui Ako leaders are finding the national criteria for the CoL I Kāhui Ako appointment process has helped them clarify CoL I Kāhui Ako priorities and directions particularly with regard to shaping role descriptions. Members of the *New Appointments National Panel* are providing CoL I Kāhui Ako with clarity about the expectations for appointments.

Understanding what needs to change and planning to make this happen

The process of clarifying the CoL I Kāhui Ako's purpose and focus provides the foundation for further investigation and collaborative sense making in order to develop priorities for action.

Having identified and agreed common achievement challenges, the community will need to investigate these more closely to understand problems or issues better and to decide what is needed to improve. Engaging with the research evidence about what works and what good looks like is important in establishing a robust evidence base to inform the decisions members will make about priorities and options that will make a difference.

Any theory of improvement has to be unique to the context of the community. In planning effectively for action the CoL I Kāhui Ako needs to:

- > be clear about the problem or issues to be solved to ensure equity and excellence of outcomes for all learners
- > understand what has to improve and how to improve it
- > consider and select options in the light of the evidence about what will make the most difference
- > know where the capability and capacity to improve lies and identify what external expertise is needed
- > identify the actions to be taken and why and what success looks like
- > allocate the resources necessary to take action.

The big picture

- > A plan of action reflects an integrated theory of improvement that defines the problem; has a rationale for and alignment of solutions; outlines targets and success indicators and includes ways to monitor and evaluate progress and outcomes.
- > A plan of action results from a collective understanding and clarity about the problem or issues to be solved.
- > Planning includes evidence-based actions that will make the most difference to professional practice and student outcomes.
- > The key structures and practices that will enable shared ways of working are clearly communicated to CoL I Kāhui Ako members.
- > Sufficient resources are allocated to support planned challenge targets and actions.
- > All members of the CoL I Kāhui Ako are engaged in and show ownership of the plan to address the actions for improved outcomes.

What have we found so far?

Planning to take action

Most CoL I Kāhui Ako that have received endorsement of their achievement challenges and appointed leaders are at the early stages of implementation. Their initial documents provide an outline of what matters in terms of vision, goals and challenges and confirms there has been thinking and discussion about defining a framework for operation and a plan of action.

Whether through facilitation or through their own auspices, the majority of endorsed CoL I Kāhui Ako have developed either a theory of improvement or an inquiry model that they have outlined in their achievement plan. As they move into full implementation, the priority will be to operationalise and embed the various elements of these in a set of priorities for action so that there is clear agreement about what needs to improve and what needs to happen to achieve these outcomes across the whole pathway.

We have found that the work that teachers in the Across CoL I Kāhui Ako role are doing to identify what is going on for students in relation to their specific challenges is providing valuable baseline information to inform and help better specify the improvement actions CoL I Kāhui Ako members will take.

As leaders and Across CoL I Kāhui Ako teachers identify areas for improved practice they are beginning to discuss the most purposeful ways to support development. There are key decisions to be made as to whether they look inward by using their own resources and expertise, whether they seek external support and facilitation or whether they use a combination of both. Increased efficacy and agency is likely to come from opportunities where CoL I Kāhui Ako members have a voice in how PLD processes can support their priorities and at what point this will have the most impact on their practices.

Embedding targets

Schools in endorsed CoL I Kāhui Ako are beginning to embed their achievement challenges as charter targets. This vital process helps to maintain a specific student focus at school level so that there is no doubt about where improvements to achievement need to happen. It makes tracking the impact of instructional practice more visible and provides the basis for robust collaborative inquiry both in-school and at a CoL I Kāhui Ako level. As early learning services become members of CoL I Kāhui Ako, they will need to consider how best to embed the contribution they will make to the CoL I Kāhui Ako.

CoL I Kāhui Ako need to be aware that the data on which they based their initial challenges will change with new data sets and as targeted students and cohorts transition through class levels and across the pathway. Some of the early endorsed CoL I Kāhui Ako have challenges based on 2014 data sets that may need updating. Revisiting achievement challenges to keep the data picture current is a strategic requirement for planning and needs to be factored in at an early stage. In addition, the timeliness and relevance of data is a critical factor as members establish the processes and timing for their monitoring cycles.

Monitoring and evaluation for improvement

Monitoring and evaluation enables the CoL I Kāhui Ako to track the progress and impact of improvement actions.

Community members need to be clear about what they are aiming to achieve and how they will recognise progress so that they are aware of what is and is not working and for whom, and can adjust or change actions/strategies if necessary. CoL I Kāhui Ako members should have access to assessment and evaluation leadership and the opportunity to develop data literacy and technical evaluation expertise to help them use appropriate tools and methods.

The CoL I Kāhui Ako needs to have the necessary systems, processes and tools in place to generate timely information about progress towards their challenge targets and the impact of actions they are taking. An important first step is to ensure that there is alignment of assessment processes and systems across the CoL I Kāhui Ako. This infrastructure supports data gathering and sense making, decision-making and knowledge building.¹⁰

As in a school setting, evaluation, inquiry and knowledge building processes should be purposeful and work together coherently, enabling the use of relevant information at every level and across the community to promote improvement. These processes enable the generation of new knowledge that can be shared and used for improvement across the community. They also increase internal accountability for improving learner outcomes and strengthen professional capital across the CoL I Kāhui Ako.¹¹

The big picture

- > Members of the CoL I Kāhui Ako own the change process and seek evidence of the impact.
- > Internal accountability has its basis in behaviours and group norms that reflect a strong and collective sense of responsibility for improved student outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation enables the CoL I Kāhui Ako to track the progress and impact of planned actions and outcomes.
- > Ongoing use of achievement data enhances collaboration by enabling participants to identify the extent of progress and know whether they are doing enough to make a difference to student outcomes.
- > The visibility of measureable impact builds collective efficacy and ownership and drives further improvement efforts.
- > Monitoring, evaluation, inquiry and knowledge building processes work together in a coherent manner so that all members know what is working, the degree to which it is working and where they need to focus future efforts.

¹⁰ Education Review Office & Ministry of Education (2016). *Effective School Evaluation: How to do and use internal evaluation for improvement*. Wellington.

¹¹ Fullan, M., Rincon-Gallardo, S., & Hargreaves, A. (2015). Professional capital as accountability. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 23 (15), 1–22.

What have we found so far?

Developing the infrastructure to monitor and evaluate for improvement

CoL I Kāhui Ako generally articulate the importance of having shared responsibility for improving student outcomes. This usually forms part of their early discussions and is evident in the documentation that supports their achievement challenges.

Most endorsed CoL I Kāhui Ako are at the very early stages of establishing plans for monitoring and evaluating the impact of their agreed achievement challenges. It is an integral part of action planning and an area that is likely to require external support and development for some CoL I Kāhui Ako.

Each school within the CoL I Kāhui Ako has its own systems and tools for monitoring and evaluation. CoL I Kāhui Ako that have started to think about coherent monitoring and evaluation are also inquiring into how they will gain alignment across schools so that there is consistency in the assessment judgements made and information gathered to determine impact has consistency and reliability.

There are early indications that some CoL I Kāhui Ako are either considering trialling the Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT) or making the decision to use the tool at primary level. The learning progression frameworks and rubrics are the same for all schools and use of the tool helps build confidence in the dependability of overall teacher judgements across schools especially where there are issues of trust related to sharing data.

In a few instances, CoL I Kāhui Ako have realised the importance of getting this right at the early stages of implementation and have allocated an Across CoL I Kāhui Ako teacher specifically for evaluation. There is considerable value in allocating specific responsibility in this area so that individual systems and processes are coordinated and evidence of progress and change is reliably collated.

The CoL I Kāhui Ako Leader has an important role in building the collective capacity to do and use evaluation for inquiry and sustained improvement. In addition monitoring and evaluating the impact of actions taken provides the basis for adjusting or changing the CoL I Kāhui Ako achievement and professional practice strategies. This is a key area where targeted professional development could be of use earlier rather than later for appointees in leadership roles.

Resourcing and infrastructure

State and state-integrated schools and kura involved in CoL I Kāhui Ako receive ongoing operational funding and staffing support. CoL I Kāhui Ako are also allocated resources to support them to develop their achievement challenges and implement a plan of action to attain these. These are allocated at different times during the various stages and include resources for:

- > the three new roles of CoL I Kāhui Ako Leader; Across CoL I Kāhui Ako teachers; and within school teachers;
- > the inquiry time component; and
- > establishment and ongoing maintenance of the CoL I Kāhui Ako.

The effective coordination and use of resources and the provision of a supportive infrastructure are critical leadership functions in a CoL I Kāhui Ako. While resources are required to support the operational activities of communities, the resources that matter most are those that create the conditions for effective collaboration. The most important resource for collaboration is time.

Developing cohesion across a group of self-managing organisations that may not have previously worked together can be complex and challenging. Opportunities to develop the relationships and trust that will support collaboration at different levels of, and across the community require expert leadership and facilitation expertise.

A clear understanding of the responsibilities involved and the development of shared ways of working ensures that the resource of those in newly established leadership roles is used effectively. The strengthening of a CoL I Kāhui Ako people and leadership resource through collaborative activity provides the foundation for ongoing improvement and sustainability.

In effective CoL I Kāhui Ako, high performing schools work effectively with low performing schools to improve performance.¹² Well functioning CoL I Kāhui Ako can choose how best to distribute the resources to meet CoL I Kāhui Ako goals and targets. Equitable approaches to the allocation of resources support these improvement efforts.

¹² Chapman, C. & Muijs, D. (2014). Does school-to-school collaboration promote school improvement? A study of the impact of school federations on student outcomes. *School Effectiveness and Improvement*, 25 (3), 351-393.

The big picture

- > The allocation of resources is aligned to the CoL I Kāhui Ako vision, goals and achievement challenge targets.
- > Adequate provision is made for joint planning, collaborative inquiry and professional learning within the CoL I Kāhui Ako.
- > Strong, user-friendly data management systems provide timely, relevant and transparent data to support the tracking and monitoring of student achievement across the schools and services that make up the CoL I Kāhui Ako.
- > CoL I Kāhui Ako infrastructure enables the effective coordination and engagement of members in joint work.
- > Meetings maximise the time spent on using evidence about student learning for collective inquiry into the effectiveness of teaching practice and its impact of outcomes.
- > CoL I Kāhui Ako members have access to effective leadership and capability opportunities.

What have we found so far?

Developing a structure for operation

Most endorsed CoL I Kāhui Ako are in the early stages of implementation. Some are finding it useful to conceptualise the operating structure of their CoL I Kāhui Ako in diagrammatic form while others integrate their agreed ways of operating throughout their documentation and Memorandum of Agreement.

Agreed stewardship/governance structures usually consist of an overall group/committee made up of representatives from each school and may include iwi and wider community representation. Membership varies between principals and board members or a mix of both. In some instances there is a separate group made up of board members from across the CoL I Kāhui Ako. This group operates in conjunction with the appointed CoL I Kāhui Ako leader, Across CoL I Kāhui Ako teachers and the Within School teachers. Effective operating structures include parents and whānau as integral stakeholders and may include other named community stakeholders. Increasingly, early learning services will become part of stewardship arrangements.

We found that some CoL I Kāhui Ako had appointed subcommittee groups in areas where they wanted to look in more depth at such areas as digital learning, monitoring and evaluation or data management. There were also sub committees responsible for areas such as appointments.

Where the CoL I Kāhui Ako infrastructure was working well there was effective coordination of meetings and time is spent on work related to the achievement targets and improvement. The longer standing CoL I Kāhui Ako have generally moved past committing the time they have together to administrative matters and are focussing on enacting their achievement plans.

Allocating Resources

As CoL I Kāhui Ako move into the implementation of their achievement challenges and plan of action there are key areas that they need to consider. These may include how effectively they use the resources available to align their activities with their agreed vision, goals and achievement challenges, and how well they create opportunities for community members to plan together, work together on collaborative inquiries and target identified professional learning.

We found that communities that have appointed their Across CoL I Kāhui Ako roles have generally thought carefully about how this resource can be best used by designating the roles to reflect their agreed challenges or by thinking about where they might need cross-CoL I Kāhui Ako expertise in areas such as data management and tracking and monitoring progress and achievement. The value of this role is maximised when the degree of relational trust within the CoL I Kāhui Ako enables reconnaissance visits, meetings and the consequent development of baseline information about CoL I Kāhui Ako practice to be shared and acted on.

The CoL I Kāhui Ako has an important strategic role in ensuring that its resources are strategic and equitable. This may mean that there are more resources committed to priority areas rather than being equally shared throughout the community. The effectiveness of these decisions may be reflected in the way the within school resource is allocated, but it might also reflect the way the 'inquiry time' resource is maximised to provide time for teachers to spend together on areas identified as priority focuses.

The most valuable resource is time. We found that as CoL I Kāhui Ako are developing their action plans they are considering the best ways to work together on the challenges they have identified through the use of evidence. Some CoL I Kāhui Ako are considering external support to help them facilitate these collaborative discussions, while others consider they have the processes in place to enable them to use their internal expertise. The most value gained from these early collaborative inquiries is around identifying how practice might change and trying out and testing these changes. To do so may require building in regular and ongoing cycles of inquiry to discuss and determine the impact of changes.

A small number of CoL I Kāhui Ako have used their resources to bring their members together in a conference day arrangement. This has enabled key members such as Across CoL I Kāhui Ako teachers and Within School teachers to begin sharing knowledge and ideas on how to lift achievement for all students. Arrangements such as these offer opportunities for participation to extend to a wider group with the CoL I Kāhui Ako including parents, whānau and other interested stakeholders who then benefit from being involved and hearing shared messages.

Conclusion

Making the decision to form a community requires shifts in thinking and practice. For many leaders, teachers, students and parents, families and whānau, their school is the teaching and learning unit they know best. While this does not change, the big challenge is to reframe the way we have been thinking about and organising our system for over a quarter of a century.

As schools and services form together there are big questions to ask and most of these begin with 'why' or 'what'. These questions are important because the answers give clarity to the purpose for establishment. They help define the unique nature of each CoL I Kāhui Ako and most importantly these questions help to place the focus firmly on the benefit of collaboration for improved student outcomes.

Creating a culture of collective responsibility is at the heart of how an effective CoL I Kāhui Ako operates. Leaders in newly created roles in each CoL I Kāhui Ako have a critical role in leading the development of a compelling, collective vision and priority goals and targets that represent the perspectives and aspirations of all community participants, particularly students, parents and whānau. It is a collective commitment to the community of what matters in teaching, learning and student outcomes and all members of the community need to 'buy in' to this commitment for it to be successful.

There is a growing body of evidence about how collaborative networks are developing in jurisdictions other than New Zealand. As a country, there are lessons we can learn and insights we can gain from what is working and what is not. New Zealand, however, is different because we are building a country-wide system of communities rather than regional or district networks. Most CoL I Kāhui Ako are early in the stage of their development and there is much to be learnt from each unique experience as CoL I Kāhui Ako develop and share what they are finding works well and not so well. This report seeks to reflect some of the early findings about CoL I Kāhui Ako and add to this knowledge base.

