Collegiate principals initiative underway

The collegiate principals (CP) initiative has been moving along at a pleasing pace, with the more than 450 requests from school leaders (as of late Term 2) to be involved in the program, reflecting its importance.

The initiative is one originating from the SSTUWA and won as part of the 2019 Schools General Agreement, along with the expanded role of the Professional Learning Institute (PLI) in providing a range of professional learning opportunities for school leaders and teachers.

The CP initiative reflects the union's commitment to build capacity of our schools and provide support for school leaders that enables them to do their job strategically and develop them into sophisticated leaders.

As Canadian educational researcher Michael Fullan states: "The key to system- wide success is to place educators and students at the centre."

The SSTUWA's position is to accept the research behind the four drivers for system improvement articulated by Fullan, namely:

- Capacity building for teachers and school leaders.
- Group solutions for improvement.
- Improving instruction.
- Systemic strategies as opposed to fragmented strategies.

These drivers for improvement need certain characteristics and can be judged with four simple questions – Does the driver:

1. Foster motivation of teachers and students?
2. Engage educators and students in continuous improvement?
3. Inspire teamwork?
4. Affect all teachers and students?

Prior to 2013 positions similar to collegiate principals were in the public education system. They were known as principal consultants and were based across the state, in metropolitan and regional locations.

But in 2011 regional offices started to disappear as massive amalgamations and education budget cuts began to occur – and principal consultants disappeared.

Effectively for the past 10 years this kind of support has not been in the system for current and aspirant school leaders, leaving them more isolated and with fewer avenues to address issues.

While some school leaders have been able to push through and cope admirably, some have not.

The underlining issue to all of this has been the lack of systemic response that provides support. Whether school leaders have coped or burnt out has been at the whim of whether any regional or voluntary network support has been made

available to them.

In my first decade of being a school leader, I had access to regional support people. They came into my school, not to look over my shoulder but to give feedback on the quality of my work and provide support where needed.

In my second 10 years, those positions no longer existed.

The 450 requests demonstrate that school leaders want to reach out for support that is outside of accountability mechanisms such as public school reviews.

School leaders want to do more than just cope. The CPs were never intended to help with band-aid solutions, but to help our school leaders be the best version of themselves as leaders for the school communities.

The SSTUWA is very encouraged by the high number of requests and the efforts of the PLI to assess the applications for support.

The collegiate principals themselves were merit selected at the end of last year and went through a six-week induction program throughout Term 1, 2021.

They had a significant role in co-designing what the program would look like as well, around their own strengths, which we see as a very smart and prudent move.

A triage system was being developed to match CPs with school leaders participating in the initiative, which commenced in Term 2.

It is too early to assess how the initiative is going so far. There is a review of the CP initiative that is slated to take place in Term 3. A time frame has not been given on when the review's findings will come back.

The SSTUWA will be interested to find out how successful the triage model is, particularly in how resources are allocated in terms of regions or locations, which the union initially argued that provision be made to distribute resources this way.

We will also be keen to hear from school leaders who have sought support on how valuable they found it.

To this date all the chatter surrounding the CP initiative has been positive and we are satisfied with the transparency the Department of Education (DoE) has shown in terms of sharing progress about the CP initiative.

The SSTUWA will continue the dialogue with the DoE for this initiative to ensure that it is optimal for school leaders and delivered as intended for system and staffroom benefit.

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