COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING | KĀHUI AKO

Working towards collaborative practice

Education Review Office
Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga

Contents

Introduction

This resource is designed to support CoL | Kāhui Ako as they work towards effective collaborative practice. It is framed around key questions in each of the seven effective practice areas and is able to be used both as evidence-based progressions and as a useful internal evaluation tool. As CoL | Kāhui Ako mature and seek to develop their ways of working, the evidence base will be further developed and enhanced, based on our increased understanding of the New Zealand experience.

Making the decision to form a Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako (CoL) requires shifts in both thinking and practice. For many leaders, teachers, children and young people and parents and families, their school/service 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 New Zealand education system for over a quarter of a century.

As schools and services form together in a learning pathway 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 | Kāhui Ako and most importantly these questions help to place the focus firmly on the benefit of collaboration for improved learner outcomes.

Creating a culture of collective responsibility is at the heart of how an effective CoL | Kāhui Ako operates. Leaders and teachers in newly created roles in each CoL | Kāhui Ako play a critical part 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 learner 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 education communities rather than regional or district networks. As CoL | Kāhui Ako develop and share what they are finding works well and not so well there is a unique opportunity to build new knowledge about collaboration in the New Zealand context.

Supporting conditions	Working towards effective collaborative practice
Leadership for equity and excellence	
How effectively is community leadership enabling and evaluating: > collaborative planning and action? > processes and resourcing designed to support professional learning > improvements to professional practice designed to achieve equity and excellence? How effectively is leadership building collective capability and capacity for improvement?	> Leaders provide clarity about community roles and how they are designed to provide support at the different levels. > Leaders ensure that goals and achievement challenges are embedded in members' strategic planning documents as well as in community plans. > To support capability building, leaders identify the knowledge and skills that managers and teachers need. > Leaders seek the views and ideas of students, parents and whānau and incorporate these into evaluation processes and forward planning. > Leaders build the collective capacity of community members to do and use evaluation for sustained improvement.

Post endorsement of achievement challenges

- > Leaders take collective responsibility for equity of outcomes in the community.
- > Leaders provide frequent opportunities for ongoing collaborative inquiry and sharing of teaching practices.
- > Leaders with key community roles have access to ongoing, effective leadership development.
- > Leaders respond to development needs of the community as they are identified.
- > Members identify organisations and people in the community who can support the community's improvement agenda.

- > Community leadership focuses on achieving equity and excellence in student outcomes in every participating institution.
- > Members have a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of those with leadership roles in the community.
- > Leadership collaboratively develops and pursues the community's vision, goals and targets.
- > Leadership seeks the perspectives and aspirations of students, parents and whānau, and incorporates them in the community's vision, goals and targets.
- > Leadership knows the groups within the community well and takes responsibility for their development, creating opportunities for collaboration and strengthening the conditions that enable improvement.
- > Leadership is flexible and responsive, shared across a range of leaders whose authority is derived from their expertise.
- > Leaders have expertise in focused instructional leadership, demonstrating exemplary teaching and learning practice, understanding and sharing appropriate theory and research, and guiding reflection and inquiry.
- > Leadership coordinates and supports effective collaboration, building relational trust at every level of the community.
- > Leadership ensures that organisational structures, processes and practices support collaboration and professional learning that is focused on improving student outcomes.
- > With the support of external expertise as required, leadership identifies and develops the internal expertise necessary for ensuring that improvement goals are met.
- > Leadership builds collective capacity to do and use evaluation and inquiry for sustained improvement.
- > Leadership monitors and evaluates the impact of actions on practice and student outcomes and makes changes as necessary.

Supporting conditions	Working towards effective collaborative practice
Communication and relational trust	
How openly and effectively are participants communicating across different levels and across the community? To what extent are trust-based relationships enabling open communication, challenging professional conversations, and risk taking?	> Members are beginning to engage in open-to-learning conversations with the aim of learning from each other and improving practice and outcomes. > Communication channels are being developed to ensure that community members get coherent messages about focus and operations. > Achievement information is communicated at transition points to ensure that there is a growing body of knowledge about how well students are progressing. > The purpose and focus of the community is clearly communicated to trustees, parents, whānau, students and the wider school community. > Members are developing relationships with parents, whānau and the wider community that support students' learning and achievement.
Purpose and focus	
How well has the community developed and established a clear collective purpose, student outcome focus and measurable goals for improvement?	> Members are assuming a shared responsibility for addressing the agreed achievement challenges. > There is clarity at school and community level about which students and groups of students are to be targeted. > Members are developing clarity about how the agreed challenges will be pursued across transitions so that students experience coherent pathways.

Post endorsement of achievement challenges

> Members have challenging, open-to-learning conversations about what's working and what needs improvement.

> Members exchange evidence and ideas and use new knowledge to improve practice and outcomes across the community.

> Community systems and processes are flexible and responsive.

> Parents, whānau, and other educational and community organisations are integrally involved in educationally focused relationships across the community.

> Communication channels are well developed, known and used by community members.

> Trust-based relationships foster connectedness and collective purpose among the members of the Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako.

> Well-developed communication channels facilitate the exchange of ideas and synthesis and use of new knowledge.

> Transparent sharing of data enables community members to learn from others, improve their practice, and raise student outcomes.

> Community members confidently acknowledge what they don't know, engage in challenging, open-to-learning conversations, and feel supported to take risks.

> 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.

> There is a shared focus at all levels of the community on addressing the achievement challenges and lifting student outcomes.

> Achievement challenges are reconsidered and refocused as necessary to reflect evidence of changed outcomes.

> School performance data enables ongoing monitoring of the progress of students and groups of students against targets, along the pathway and at transition points.

> The community has a small number of high-leverage, ambitious and measurable learning goals for students, teachers and leaders that are clearly articulated and understood.

> The community has a shared focus on enabling positive educational pathways for students.

Supporting conditions	Working towards effective collaborative practice
Collective theory of change and plan of action	
What range and depth of evidence has the community used to develop its approach to improvement? How well integrated are the community's identified priorities, options for improvement, action planning, and implementation approach?	> The community's action plan is underpinned by an integrated theory of improvement. > The community's plan outlines what needs to improve and how this will be achieved. > Planning considers how the actions and roles of each member will contribute to addressing the achievement challenges. > The community's plan reflects evidence about what actions will have the greatest positive impact on achievement. > Members are developing their understanding of what success will look like.

Post endorsement of achievement challenges

> Members use monitoring evidence to evaluate the impact of changed actions and, where necessary, redefine the problem and determine next actions.
> Planning includes coordinated actions and accountabilities designed to address achievement challenges.
> Members use available evidence to build descriptors of community success.

> The community's action plan reflects an integrated theory of improvement: problem definition, rationale for and alignment of solutions, targets and success indicators, monitoring and evaluation.
> The community has identified and selected improvement actions based on evidence about their likely effectiveness.
> The community has identified, put in place and communicated structures and practices that will enable shared ways of working.
> Sufficient resources are allocated to support the goals and actions.
> All members of the community are engaged in and show ownership of the plan to address the identified achievement challenges.

Supporting conditions	Working towards effective collaborative practice
Collaborative inquiry and working that challenges thinking and practice	
To what extent are community members: > working together to address shared teaching and learning challenges? > developing the knowledge and expertise they need to improve practice and outcomes? > improving student outcomes and accelerating achievement in focus areas?	> By developing the necessary data literacy skills, members are getting sound, moderated evidence of achievement that they then use to improve consistency of decision making. > Teachers increasingly draw on research evidence to improve outcomes. > Members focus their collaborative efforts on changes to instructional practice that will improve learning outcomes and accelerate achievement. > Teachers have frequent opportunities to engage with each other on inquiries about teaching and learning.

1   Earl, L., & Timperley, H. (2009). Understanding how evidence and learning conversations work. In L. Earl & H. Timperley (Eds), Professional learning conversations: *Challenges in using evidence for improvement.* Cambridge: Springer.

Post endorsement of achievement challenges

> Community members are data literate and use their knowledge and skills as the basis for evidence-informed discussions.

> Members engage in cycles of collaborative inquiry with the aim of improving instructional practice.

> Teachers have opportunities to design, try out and test evidence-based changes to practice.

> Leaders engage appropriate expertise as required to build members' capabilities to engage in ongoing improvement and innovation.

> Community members have a clear, shared vision and purpose and a compelling agenda for change.

> Leaders and teachers are data literate: asking focused questions, using relevant data, clarifying purposes, recognising sound evidence, developing understanding of statistical concepts, engaging in thoughtful interpretation and evidence-informed conversations.[1]

> Appropriate tools and methods are used to gather, store and retrieve a range of valid data.

> The community engages in cycles of collaborative inquiry for the purpose of improving instructional practice.

> Researchers and practitioners work together to identify problems of practice and performance measures and to design, test and refine improvement actions.

> Participants engage in focused interaction and dense, frequent knowledge sharing that contributes to the consolidating and refining of practice.

> The community connects outwards to access new ideas and the expertise needed to support improvement and innovation.

> Timely access to appropriate expertise builds capability for ongoing improvement and innovation.

> Community collaboration enriches opportunities for students to become confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners.

Supporting conditions	Working towards effective collaborative practice
Monitoring and evaluation for improvement	
How well is the community tracking the progress of its improvement actions? How well is the community evaluating the impact of its improvement actions? To what extent is the community using evaluative information to adjust or change actions and strategies?	> Members have suitable tools and methods for gathering, storing and retrieving a range of valid data. > Members are developing systems and processes that will provide timely information about progress towards the agreed targets. > Emerging evidence from monitoring influences actions taken to improve teaching practices. > Processes are being developed for sharing data and information at community level. > Members are developing agreed processes to evaluate the impact of improvement actions. > Members are developing a strong sense of urgency for improving outcomes and accelerating achievement.
Sufficiency of resourcing and supportive infrastructure	
How effectively is community infrastructure and organisation supporting collaborative activity and improvement? To what extent is resource allocation supporting joint efforts to improve professional practice and raise learning outcomes?	> Resources are equitably allocated to support the community's vision, purpose and challenges. > Structures and systems enable cohesive organisation of community activities. > Sufficient time is made available for joint planning, collaborative inquiry and professional learning. > Data management systems support the sharing and use of data. > Improvement activities in line with the community's agreed priorities.

2   Ainscow, M. (2015). *Towards self-improving school systems.* New York: Routledge.

Post endorsement of achievement challenges

> - Systems, processes and tools are in place to monitor progress towards the agreed targets.
> - Members agree on processes for evaluating the impact of changed actions and implement these as part of an inquiry cycle.
> - Regular monitoring and evaluation provide timely, trustworthy information about what is and is not working, and indicate how actions and strategies should be adjusted.
> - Members share accountability for community outcomes.

> - Members of the community own the change process and seek evidence of impact.
> - The community uses a range of evidence from evaluation, inquiry and knowledge building activities for the purposes of selecting, developing and reviewing strategies for improvement.
> - Low-performing schools in the community improve their performance.
> - Collaboration and involvement in decision making enhance the self-efficacy and collective resolve of leaders and teachers to drive improvement across the community.
> - The community is characterised by strong group norms and behaviours and a strong sense of responsibility for outcomes (internal accountability).

> - In meetings, maximum time is allocated to considering evidence and inquiring into the impact of teaching practice on student outcomes.
> - Data management systems support ongoing, transparent sharing and use of data.
> - community infrastructure supports purposeful joint working activities.
> - Transitions are managed to ensure the least possible disruption to students' pathways.
> - Appropriate internal or external expertise is engaged to support further learning.

> - Allocation of resources is clearly aligned to the community's vision, goals and targets.
> - Adequate provision is made for joint planning, collaborative inquiry and professional learning within member institutions and across the community.
> - User-friendly data management systems provide timely, relevant, transparent data that enables tracking of student achievement and progress in and across community institutions.
> - Infrastructure and organisation enable effective coordination and engagement of community members in purposeful, joint work.
> - Community meetings maximise the time spent inquiring into teaching practice and its impact on outcomes, using evidence of student learning.
> - Community members who are in change-agent and facilitation roles have access to effective leadership and capability development opportunities.
> - Leadership creates pathways across social boundaries to facilitate the movement and use of knowledge and ideas within the community.[2]