STRENGTHENING THE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP OF NEW ZEALAND PRINCIPALS

Evaluation of the impact of Springboard Trust's Strategic Leadership for Principals programme

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Executive summary

SpringboardTrust is a non-profit organisation whose aim is to improve student outcomes through improving the effectiveness of principals. Its work addresses a conspicuous absence in the support needed for principals in the New Zealand self-managing schools system.

NZCER was asked to evaluate the short-term impact of SpringboardTrust's flagship programme, the **Strategic Leadership for Principals Programme (SLPP)**. Since 2007 SLPP has provided customised leadership development for 120 principals whose schools serve in total close to 41,719 students. It is a year-long programme.

Principals are assigned to cohorts of six, meeting together with their workshop facilitator, a senior business leader, in six workshops through the year, following a core curriculum. Principals work on the development of a strategic plan for their school over the course of the year, with individual coaching between workshops from a capacity partner from the private or public sectors. Capacity partners receive training for their role. SLPP programme managers use feedback from principals, capacity partners and facilitators to support principals' learning, monitor the programme and keep developing it.

As well as the tangible outcome of a good-quality strategic plan for their own school, SLPP aims to develop the leadership understanding and 'soft' skills to ensure that these strategic plans can underpin improvements in school capacity and learning.

This evaluation focused on the alumni of 2012–14. It draws on interviews with 40 alumni principals, principal ratings of their strategic skills and plans pre- and post-SLPP and Education Review Office (ERO) reviews pre- and post-SLPP.

We find that SLPP is a well-constructed and highly effective programme. Its high-trust, collaborative approach encourages the openness and sense of efficacy needed to make real change. The quality of SLPP is due to its curriculum, the calibre of voluntary and SpringboardTrust programme staff and their commitment to working as a 'learning organisation', in a real cross-sector partnership, to improve education and outcomes for children.

SLPP experience had positive impacts for the leadership of all but a few of the principals participating, and in the aspects of leadership that the programme aims to improve. In turn, these were leading to the impacts for schools that are the ultimate goal of the programme: particularly, improved leadership capacity among teachers and improved learning opportunities, and gains in student knowledge and skills. This makes sense: the aspects of leadership that SLPP aims to improve are important ones that are also stressed in the educational research on effective educational leadership.

We found:

✓ Principal and capacity partner (coach) ratings of principals' strategic planning skills and plans pre- and post-SLPP increased markedly.

✓ Twelve of the 26 schools that could improve their ERO level did so: nine schools improved from a 3-year to a 4–5-year level and three schools improved from the 1–2-year level to a 3-year level.

The proportion of SLPP alumni leading schools in the highest ERO review level—4–5 years—is 47 percent, much higher than the national proportion of around 15 percent.

✓ Overall, we judged that SLPP had had a high impact on the work of 24 principals, medium impact for 13 and low impact for three.

✓ SLPP was associated in principals' accounts with:
   o better strategic planning and use of strategic plans to prioritise and focus school resources of time and money, with more coherence
   o more effective work with stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education
   o strengthening teacher capacity and leadership
   o strengthening principals' decision-making, communication, and reflective and analytic skills
   o strengthening principals' 'soft' skills such as emotional intelligence, and skills in motivating others

✓ some gains for school board capability and confidence in their governance role, particularly in decile 1–3 schools

✓ some gains in parent and whānau engagement with their children's learning.

✓ SLPP learning was also linked to changes in teachers' practice and work together in many of the schools, and to improvements in students' learning opportunities and performance in 70 percent of the schools.

Introduction

New Zealand has one of the most devolved school systems in the world. It moved to self-managing schools in 1989, giving the responsibility for the direction of a school to individual school boards working with the school principal, without the 'middle layer' of other school systems to support and challenge individual school leadership. While the onus for educational outcomes has been situated at the individual school level, there has been little gain to show for it in terms of overall New Zealand student performance or tackling of the country's disparity in educational outcomes (Wylie, 2012). Although international research shows the pivotal importance of good leadership for school performance and improvement in student outcomes (Bryk, Sebring, & Allensworth, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Preston, Goldring, Guthrie, & Ramsey, 2012; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009), the New Zealand emphasis on the individual school as the administrative unit to drive improvement has not been matched by systemic support for ongoing leadership development (Robinson, McNaughton, & Timperley, 2011; Wylie, 2011; Wylie, Cosslett & Burgon, 2015).

Charters (strategic plans) and annual plans required of each school are intended to focus school leadership on ongoing review and action to achieve valued goals. NZCER national surveys show that, over time, most principals came to see these as useful for their own planning. However, they also saw strategic plans and annual reports through a compliance lens, as something that no-one really paid much attention to.

Some principals saw unrealised potential in strategic plans. When the not-for-profit SpringboardTrust asked principals in South Auckland what business leaders could do to support schools in low-income areas to achieve better outcomes for students, working with principals to deepen their understanding and use of strategic planning came to the fore. This core unmet need underpinned the creation of the Strategic Leadership for Principals Programme (SLPP).

SLPP began in 2007 with one cohort of six South Auckland primary principals. It worked with one cohort a year in 2008 and 2009, and with two cohorts a year from 2010 to 2013. In 2014 it extended from two cohorts a year to four cohorts—three in Auckland and one in Northland. In 2015 it further extended to the Waikato, and in 2016 to Gisborne, with plans to extend to the Wellington and Bay of Plenty regions in 2017. By the end of 2015, it had worked with 20 cohorts, and 120 principals, whose schools serve around 41,719 students from Kaikohe to Hamilton.

Almost all these principals' schools are primary and intermediate schools. Most have been schools in low-income areas, where student needs are greatest.

A 2009 evaluation showed high satisfaction levels among the SLPP alumni. A 2013 evaluation which included interviews with 25 principals (from the first cohort in 2007 onwards) found that most thought their leadership had improved as a result of their SLPP participation. That 2013 evaluation, and the SLPP end-of-programme feedback, show that the majority of SLPP participants are very positive about their learning and highly appreciative of the programme, which SpringboardTrust provides free of charge. The end-of-programme survey of 2014 SLPP participants found that all the 23 principals responding would recommend it to another principal.

This evaluation was commissioned by the SpringboardTrust to find out more about the short- and medium-term impact of SLPP on school leadership and schools. This report focuses on the alumni of the 2012, 2013 and 2014 cohorts, to provide analysis of the current programme. We will use this analysis to work with the SpringboardTrust on an evaluation framework for their full suite of programmes that have been developed to further support school leaders' effectiveness in improving learning and student outcomes. This includes the Schools@Heart programme which supports SLPP alumni and their schools to accelerate progress on strategic goals relating to engaging their community.

We have interviewed 40 of the 48 principals who took part in SLPP during these years.[1] Our interviews were intended to find out both about the incidence of SLPP-related change and what that change entailed. Almost all our interviews were conducted with principals at their schools, giving us the opportunity to see the visibility of strategic plan visions and goals in school foyers. Most interviews took between 1 and 2 hours.

With principals' permission we have also analysed material they have shared with SLPP and that SLPP has gathered about their programme participation. We have examined ERO reports before and after principals' SLPP participation to see if these official evaluations of school quality reflect changes that principals report in their leadership and strategic focus. Where available, we have also examined schools' strategic plans before and after SLPP participation.[2]

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[1] Our aim was to interview 42: all 12 of each of the two 2012 and 2013 cohorts, and another 12 of the 18 2014 Auckland participants, and all six of the Northland pilot in 2014. Two of the 2012–13 alumni were not contactable.

The 12 2014 Auckland participants in the evaluation were randomly selected from the primary principals who completed the programme. The six 2014 SLPP participants not selected for the evaluation were as affirmative as those we did interview in their answer to the question in the SLPP end-of-programme survey: "Would you recommend this programme to another principal?" This suggests that our picture of the impacts of SLPP has not been skewed by an under-representation of those with negative SLPP experiences.

[2] We had thought it could be useful to offer principals the opportunity for their school to undertake the Educational Leaders Practices survey, which provides teacher perspectives on school leadership practices impacting on student outcomes, and provides national norms. We stopped offering this after our initial interviews because we could see that the principals had indeed the more strategic and decisive lens encouraged by their SLPP learning and wanted to keep their staff focus on particular school strategic goals. That meant that they were not going to add a new activity into their existing programme unless it could directly contribute to those goals. It also signalled that they were confident they were getting good feedback on how well their school leadership was going from the way they worked with their staff, and looked for evidence about the effectiveness of their leadership.

Our main aim in this report is to bring together these different sources of information about principals and schools to form an overall picture of changes that can fairly be ascribed to SLPP. We also look at how the changes that are evident relate to the intent and nature of SLPP. We analyse where we can whether differences in the kinds of changes reported by principals are due to differences in how long it is since they did SLPP, the quality of their SLPP experience, ongoing participation in the Alumni Learning Platform (ALP) workshops or in their own needs and interests, or in the school context. The basis for our analysis is the draft theory of change attached as Appendix 1, which we used to construct our interview questions, given in Appendix 2. The draft theory of change was based on reading SpringboardTrust materials and reports, and discussions with SpringboardTrust staff and some board members. Principals were emailed these questions a week ahead of our interview.

In the next section, we briefly describe the SLPP, followed by principals' views of their experience. Then we provide an overview of the impact of SLPP before turning to the interview material to put some flesh on the bones: to show what changes in strategic planning and its use, and in school leadership, the principals ascribe to their SLPP learning. There is rich material in the interviews that give vivid pictures of how principals learn from SLPP, and put that learning into effect. The report concludes with a reflection on the value of SLPP.

What is the Strategic Leadership for Principals Programme?

SLPP involves principals in a 10-month programme running over a school year. Its purpose is to develop effective strategic leadership thinking and skills, with the tangible outcome at the year's end of the strategic plan for their school for the next 3 years, and the first year's action plan to realise its goals.

Principals are assigned to cohorts of six, who meet together with their workshop facilitator for six workshops, following a curriculum originally developed for SpringboardTrust by its Chair, Ian Narev, who continues to facilitate SLPP annually. This curriculum has been added to over time by additional facilitators and experienced capacity partners. In 2015 there were five facilitators, each coming to the role with extensive relevant and successful experience as leaders in the business world. They use the common curriculum, adding their own strengths and illustrations. Homework is assigned with each workshop. Figure 1 shows the progression through this curriculum.

Figure 1   **The SLPP workshop flow**

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Principals are not left on their own in between workshops. Each principal is assigned a capacity partner, with successful business or large public sector organisation leadership experience, whose role is primarily to mentor and coach the principal through the year. Capacity partners receive training and support for their role; they have a position description, and reference material in the form of a training guide and workshop guide. They are welcome to attend the workshops their principal attends, and to attend the ALP events which follow up and refresh or deepen SLPP learning. This year's events included three well-received sessions on time management, communication and authentic leadership. Eighty-five percent of SLPP alumni from 2011–14 have attended at least one ALP session in the last 2 years, some taking other members of their school leadership team.

Workshop facilitators and capacity partners give their time voluntarily. Experienced capacity partners go on to provide expertise in the two additional programmes SpringboardTrust offers their SLPP alumni—Schools@Heart and ALP. Since 2007, 84 people have undertaken the capacity partner role. In 2014 an estimate of the pro bono element of this work was $885,446.

The SpringboardTrust programme staff are essential to the coherence of the programme. To begin with, they select principals to be approached to take part in SLPP, match them with workshop facilitator, cohort and capacity partner, using information from principals about themselves, their school and the business knowledge they would like to glean. During the SLPP, they 'debrief' with principals and capacity partners about progress and any issues, and address anything that arises; they use principal feedback about each workshop combined with information from the 'debriefs' and their own workshop observations to identify particular needs that facilitators can address in their next workshop; they systematically ensure that principals are well supported to learn and use their learning in the development of a good-quality strategic plan that will anchor improvements in school capability and outcomes.

The diagram below, taken from the Capacity Partner Training Guide 2015, shows the careful meshing of these different roles with the programme structure and the ongoing feedback loops that are used to ensure the quality of the programme and principals' engagement with it.

Figure 2 **The SLPP processes to ensure quality and engagement**
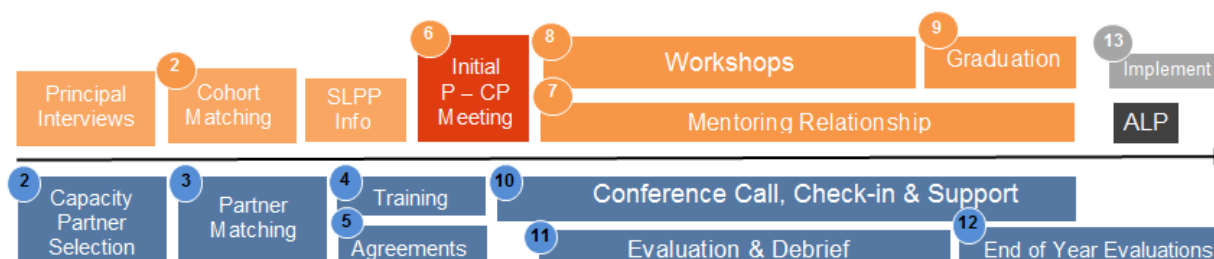
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Information from these feedback loops, and the 2009 and 2013 evaluations, has been used iteratively also to refine and strengthen the programme. While interest in SLPP has been growing, SpringboardTrust has been careful not to overextend the availability of SLPP beyond its capacity, so that it can continue to provide the meshing shown above, and the quality of expertise among volunteers and programme staff needed for the programme to be effective.

The SpringboardTrust learning portal makes available workshop slides, templates and other learning material to principals (and capacity partners) so that they can go back through it over the programme, or pull it out again to refresh their thinking in years after they complete the course.

Because of its philanthropic funding and the expertise volunteered, principals access SLPP at no monetary cost to their school or themselves, other than transport costs. The expertise they can work with through SLPP would not otherwise be affordable by New Zealand schools or principals. SLPP alumni value this expertise, finding it applicable to their leadership. The fact that

it is volunteered because the business leaders involved believe in the importance of education and are interested in enhancing equity and strategic leadership within education is affirming. So too is the facilitators' and capacity partners' recognition of the breadth of the principal's role and its complexity.

Appreciating SLPP

Principals we spoke to were generally very positive about their overall SLPP experience. Some experienced principals said it was the best professional development they had had. The fact that all the SLPP alumni of the last 3 years who were approached made time to be interviewed about the use they had made of their SLPP learning also indicated the value they placed on it. SLPP was valued because it gave them insight and understanding in often inspiring ways that they could relate to their own circumstances, and use to make change. It was also valued because it allowed them to freely describe challenges they were facing and critique their own practice in a high-trust, collaborative and safe environment.

Principals particularly appreciated workshop facilitators and capacity partners who were good coaches, adept at finding the right questions in a non-judgemental environment of scaffolding to build principal skills.

They mentioned the value to them of

- being supported and challenged in ways that allowed principals to reflect constructively on their leadership and goals for their school, and their own assumptions

    > Our facilitator was fantastic, he brought a wealth of knowledge into the discussions and didn't settle for the surface. If you said something then he would tease that out and really take it to another level which was really helpful. Because we are not always challenged in that sort of way and I think that is a really good thing for us. Sometimes you didn't agree but that's ok to have that sort of discussion I think, because you are doing it in a safe place. [2013 alumnus]

    > [capacity partner] would sit there and ask those really really deep and tricky questions which I would then have to think about. That doesn't happen often for a principal, apart from the Ministry and ERO people, and their questions were nowhere near as probing as hers and it wasn't in the context of a warm relationship. She became a really important catalyst for me to test ideas and for her to be able to reflect back what I said, so I actually know if it doesn't make sense to her—she's an intelligent woman with a business background—then it won't make sense to anybody else either. And so I found the whole experience probably the best PD I have ever had as a principal. [2012 alumnus]

- getting more clarity in their strategic planning, and

    > My capacity partner didn't say a lot but what he said was very thought provoking, in just asking those questions to make sure I knew why I was doing what I was doing. My biggest challenge with the Springboard model was how are you going to show that you've added value or you're progressing towards that goal? We've got student achievement data, but when we talk about some of the things we are trying to grow, it's very hard to put a quantitative measure to it. So he helped me understand how we could do that, how we could actually see added value. [2014 alumnus]

- learning effective ways to lead staff and develop their capability

I remember me saying that people were being rude to each other in a meeting and him then saying 'Well you've got to come back to your visions and values, you've got to have some protocols for how you work together in a team.' I'd tried to do that but I didn't have the knowledge or the skill to really work that one through or the understanding probably of how important it was. I would often say in a team meeting that 'it is important that we all resolve this amicably and as professionals' or 'we can't put each other down so let's just re-wind and go back there'. But what [facilitator] talked about was actually making that the focus of your conversation, not a side thing that you deal with as it comes up. Actually sitting down at the beginning of the year and asking 'How do we want to work together? What are our visions and values?' [2012 alumnus]

being able to contact [capacity partner] and say 'I've got a couple of people who are resisting with what we want to put in and I thought we had their buy-in on the vision, so what would be your take?' So we had some really good discussions around personnel. The whole programme's been very powerful for me. [2014 alumnus]

- being kept on track

I really appreciated his clarity of thinking, and he had quite sound advice without being dominating. I really appreciated his input and he kept me on track. He kept me focused and he always used to email and remind me about homework and offer support, and I need that because I tend to be a bit of an ideals person and go off on tangents and have 19 tasks that are half done. [2014 alumnus]

It's really supportive, it's a really good wrap around service. The facilitator who takes the sessions, absolutely stunning. And then you get your homework and the capacity partner comes in and helps you with the homework, and they are very challenging. So it was just the most amazing professional learning that a principal can have. I think there was only one time that I got really cross at the fact that I had to do homework, but that was more around my own personal time management, it wasn't around anything else. And I could see the growth that was happening and I could see how I was becoming more focused and I could see the impact with my staff, things that were happening that were really, really positive and were what I had been trying to aim for all along and I was seeing glimpses of it already. [2013 alumnus]

- sharing particular skills and tools; for example, around human resource management, or gathering stakeholder views.

My capacity partner was generous with his time. He did an evening session with us when we were looking at our new vision for the school, and went through a process with us. Then he came out and did another session with the senior leaders around surveying. That was the start of going onto google survey, and the wonderful thing about that was being able to get a quick response. That has had a really great impact. [2013 alumnus]

There was also high praise for the Springboard programme manager.

> Support is outstanding—constant checking in, contact ensuring things meet your expectations, and of benefit to us. Even back to the initial goals set with her at start of the programme. [2013 alumnus]

> She would help you because she sees us as part of her family now, and she would help you with any problem that you have. She'd go above and beyond. [2013 alumnus]

Most principals were positive also about working in their cohort of six principals.

> I felt quite privileged to get in, to have that exposure to that kind of thinking and that kind of collegiality, as well of being exposed to other principals. I learn a lot just chatting to other people and listening to what's going on. [2012 alumnus]

> Sharing your own angst about a particular issue and hearing other people's angst and realising, 'Actually I can help that person and they've got ideas to help me.' So I think that that was really valuable.

> I had a great group of principals, we had some really good discussions, hard discussions and arguments and you felt safe to do that in that little protected Springboard environment. [2014 alumnus]

Some noted the facilitator skills that enabled high engagement in the cohort group.

> [Facilitator] was very good at everyone getting the opportunity to speak…you know lots of groups I'm in it's dominated by one or two people…like all groups. But the size of the group and the way it was facilitated and the almost going around the room scenario, often meant that everyone actually had a chance. And you always had to be, you know, in the game and really present. [2013 alumnus]

Ongoing connections with fellow cohort members tended to be opportunistic rather than structured, though one recent cohort continued to meet as a group, and others used the ALP events to re-connect.

> When we do get together it's good. It's good to have that professional relationship with people, it's not just superficial, it's around how things are going and whether we're achieving what we wanted to achieve when we worked together. [2014 alumnus]

Principals also said they felt free to contact those they had worked with who were dealing with or had dealt with similar issues. Some felt they had gained by seeing how principal groups could share their learning and support one another with leadership issues.

The few disappointments expressed about the SLPP experience were related to the composition of principal cohort groups, or the availability, interest or skills of their capacity partner. Three of the 2014 alumni rated their capacity partner below 4 on the 7-point scale used. Several principals regretted that they had not taken advantage of the 'debriefs' of the Springboard programme team to ask for help with their capacity partner relationship. SpringboardTrust's programme report for December 2014 shows that its feedback loops were identifying issues for a few individuals and

outlined steps it would take to strengthen capacity partner selection, training and early identification of potential issues.

The overall picture of SLPP impact

SLPP is a customised programme. Principals and schools participating do not start with a uniform set of needs or challenges. Sometimes we found that SLPP as it were "switched the light on" for principals; for others, SLPP was more like using a higher wattage bulb. For some, the light illuminated a number of key rooms; for others, the light illuminated only one room, but perhaps profoundly.

This section describes the evidence we have of changes that are related to SLPP experience. We start with the increases in self-reported principal and capacity partners' ratings of the principals they worked with, before and after SLPP. Then we look at changes that principals described in their interviews and linked to their SLPP experience. Finally, we examine evidence from ERO reviews.

Ratings of strategic skills and plans

SpringboardTrust asks principals to rate their strategic planning skills and their strategic plan at the start and end of their SLPP. There is now some triangulation of this self-report, with capacity partners from 2014 onwards also rating these skills and the plan at the start and end of their work with principals. Both principal and capacity partner ratings are drawn from people's existing experience and knowledge rather than using a common rubric. Table 1 below shows that these ratings were much higher at the end of SLPP for both principals and capacity partners.

Table 1   **Changes in strategic skills and plans, pre- and post-SLPP**

Ratings of strategic skills and plans improved markedly.
From start to end of SLPP:
• average principal ratings of their **strategic skills** increased from 4.9 to 7.6 on a scale of 10
• average principal ratings of their school's **strategic plan** increased from 4.8 to 8.2 on a scale of 10
• average capacity partners' ratings for 2014 principals also increased
○ from 5.1 to 7.9 for **strategic skills**
○ from 5 to 8 for their school's **strategic plan**.

Principals' self-report and illustrations

Principals' answers to our questions about the difference SLPP had made in a number of key areas identified in the draft theory of change as desired areas for impact were evaluated in terms of whether the impact seemed high, medium, low or negative (no negatives were recorded). We then summed up these 'scores' for each principal to arrive at an overall score for the impact of

their SLPP work. Table 2 shows that impact was high for over half the principals. The main aspects where leadership had an impact were those intended by SpringboardTrust.

Table 2   **SLPP impacts on school leadership, capacity and student learning**

Overall, we judged that SLPP had had a high impact on the work of 24 principals, medium impact for 13 and low impact for three.
The aspects of leadership where SLPP had the highest impact were in
• better strategic planning and use of strategic plans to prioritise and focus school resources of time and money, with more coherence
• more effective work with stakeholders
• strengthening teacher capacity and leadership
• strengthening principals' decision-making, communication and reflective and analytic skills.
SLPP learning was linked to changes in teachers' practice and work together, and to improvements in students' learning opportunities and performance in most schools.

Education Review Office reviews

ERO reviews offer an external measure to evaluate changes in overall school quality, and we have compared school reviews pre- and post-SLPP. This means of evaluating change has some limitations. ERO reviews cannot provide a uniform baseline for the analysis of change over time, since they do not occur annually, and their emphasis can alter between reviews—though leadership is a constant. School quality is gauged at three levels, indicated by the length of time between ERO reviews. Some principals' schools were already at the highest level when they embarked on SLPP, deemed not to need review for 4–5 years: so they would be unable to improve further on this measure of school quality. The regular 3-year review category which covers the majority of schools spans quite a wide range of quality. A school could considerably improve aspects of its practice and achievement and remain within the 3-year review category.

With these caveats, changes in ERO review status certainly point to some marked gains from SLPP, as Table 3 shows.

Table 3 **ERO reviews pre- and post-SLPP**

Of the 32 schools for which we could compare ERO reviews 'before' and 'after' SLPP:
• 9 schools improved from a 3-year to a 4–5-year level
• 3 schools improved from the 1–2-year level to a 3-year level
• 6 stayed at a 4–5-year level
• 12 stayed at a 3-year level
• 2 shifted down from 3-year to 1–2-year level.
Overall, around 15 percent of New Zealand schools are in the 4–5-year review category[3]. The proportion of SLPP alumni leading schools in this category is 47 percent.

Exploring factors behind SLPP impacts

The next set of tables bring together this picture for each of the 3 years (2012, 2013 and 2014) in the context of principals' length of experience, school size, previous professional development related to strategic leadership and their views of SLPP. It shows that each year's set of principals and schools is somewhat different in terms of school size, years of principal experience and previous related professional development.

Principals have often spoken of the isolation of their position, with schools used to working on their own, and principals also unique in their position and depth of responsibility within the school. What has been less discussed is that principals' experience as school leaders may be narrow, even when they have been principals for a long time. It is particularly striking to see that 27 of the 40 principals we interviewed have only been principal at a single school. Only five of the principals had experience of leading more than two schools before they did SLPP. That makes the learning from SLPP particularly important, to open the horizon beyond what might have been taken for granted.

Length of principal experience was not associated with any differences in patterns of impact. Some of the highest impacts were for those with the longest experience.

There were slightly fewer of the small schools (rolls with less than 200) among the principals reporting a high impact. The principal's role in these schools is more widespread than others, with less opportunity to share leadership with others. Staff, board and community relations and sense of ownership can be more intense.

Twelve of the 40 SLPP alumni had postgraduate qualifications in educational leadership. This is a higher figure than for principals nationally. Those with these qualifications reported gains from their SLPP work as much as other principals: so what was covered in SLPP, and the way it was conveyed and realised, was different from their educational leadership postgraduate work.

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[3] ERO Annual Report 2014, p. 18, covering confirmed review reports for 3 years, 1/7/2012 to 30/6/2015, for 2,342 schools.

What these tables show is that, as one would expect, more impacts were identified by the 2012 alumni: those who had longer for their strategic plan to take hold. There was also more movement onto other schools among the 2012 and 2013 cohorts, allowing the SLPP learning to have had effect in more than the principal's original school.

Many of the principals whose schools moved up a level on their ERO reviews gave evidence that SLPP had had a high impact for their leadership practice.

The tables also show that principals were generally positive about the SLPP programme. This means that any differences in the impact of SLPP are unlikely to be due to differences in the programme actually experienced. This coherence in principal experience points to the quality and fit-for-purpose design of the SLPP programme and the effectiveness of the SLPP meshing of the different aspects of SLPP so that principals have the 'wrap around' support and challenge referred to by one of the principals quoted in the previous section, and find it hard to disengage.

There were some who did not give as positive ratings to their experience of working with their capacity partner as other principals. Some of those who did not give positive views or ratings of their capacity partner were those who showed low impact from their SLPP experience, underlining the importance of good selection, training and support for this role. But some of those whose capacity partner experience was not as good as others did do as well from their SLPP work as others, sometimes drawing on the support of the Springboard programme managers.

Because the numbers are small, it is hard to see clear patterns among the three principals whose leadership practice showed little impact from their SLPP experience. Two of these rated their strategic skills and plan very highly both before and after they began SLPP; they may have felt they had little to learn.

Table 4   **Overall picture of SLPP gains in context—2012—Auckland**

SLPP year and area	Principal experience	SLPP experience	Strategic skills shift from start to end of SLPP (average/10) *Self-report, SpringboardTrust*	Strategic plan quality shift from start to end of SLPP (average/10) *Self-report, SpringboardTrust*	Impact levels	Areas of highest impact (evidence of high impact from half or more of each year's alumni)	ERO reviews	Transfer of gains
2012 (n = 11) Auckland	7 had been principals of only one school 4 had < 5 years' experience 3 had 5–10 years' experience 4 had 15+ years' experience 2 with post-graduate qualifications relevant to strategic leadership *School size*: 3 100–200 5 201–400 3 400+	11 positive about programme 10 positive about capacity partner	4.8 → 7.4 ↑ 2.6 points	4.9 → 7.6 ↑ 2.7 points	6 High 3 Medium 2 Low	*Strategic plan* *- development* *- format* *- use* *Focus on core business* *Distributed leadership and teaching capacity* *Stakeholder management* *Principal approach* *Board focus* *Student learning*	4 gained a level 1 stayed 4–5-year level 6 stayed 3-year level	4 move onto another school during/after SLPP and link move and approach to new school to SLPP learning

In our judgement, comparing the two ERO reviews of this school, its ERO level would not have dropped if the school had been reviewed on its own.

+ SLPP had low impact for this principal, and the capacity partner was not rated positively.

Table 5   **Overall picture of SLPP gains in context—2013—Auckland**

SLPP year and area	Principal experience	SLPP experience	Strategic skills shift from start to end of SLPP (average/10) *Self-report, SpringboardTrust*	Strategic plan quality shift from start to end of SLPP (average/10) *Self-report, SpringboardTrust*	Impact levels	Areas of highest impact (evidence of high impact from half or more of each year's alumni)	ERO reviews	Transfer of gains
2013 (n = 11) Auckland	7 had been principals of only one school 2 had < 5 years' experience 5 had 5–10 years' experience 3 had 11–15 years' experience 1 had >15 years' experience 3 with post-graduate qualifications in Educational Leadership *School size*: 1 100–200 8 201–400 2 400+	11 positive about programme 10 positive about capacity partner	5 → 7.8 ↑ 2.8 points	4.9 → 8.6 ↑ 3.7 points	7 High 4 Medium	*Strategic plan* *- development* *- use* *- better alignment with resource use* *Focus on core business* *Distributed leadership and teaching capacity* *Stakeholder management* *Principal approach* *Student learning*	3 gained a level 1 lost a level* 1 stayed 3-year level 6 had last review before SLPP—3 were at the 4–5-year level; 3 at 3-year level	2 move onto another school during/after SLPP and link approach to new school to SLPP learning

* Reviewed as part of a school containing 3 schools each with their own principal, and a single board of trustees. Issues with whole-of-school governance and leadership support for governance led to the 1–2 year ERO return level. In our judgement, comparing the two ERO reviews of this school-within-the school before and after SLPP, its ERO level would not have dropped if it had been reviewed on its own.

Table 6   **Overall picture of SLPP gains in context—2014—Auckland**

SLPP year and area	Principal experience	SLPP experience	Strategic skills shift from start to end of SLPP (average/10) *Self-report, SpringboardTrust*	Strategic plan quality shift from start to end of SLPP (average/10) *Self-report, SpringboardTrust*	Impact levels	Areas of highest impact (evidence of high impact from half or more of each year's alumni)	ERO reviews	Transfer of gains
2014 (n = 12) Auckland	10 had been principals of only one school 3 had < 5 years' experience 5 had 5–10 years' experience 3 had 11–15 years' experience 1 had >15 years' experience 7 with post-graduate qualifications in Educational Leadership or Management *School size*: 1 < 100 2 100–200 5 201–400 4 400+	12 positive about programme 9 positive about capacity partner	5.9 → 7.8 ↑ 1.9 points Capacity partner scores of their principal's skills: 4.9 → 7.2 ↑ 2.3 points	5.9 → 8.3 ↑ 2.4 points Capacity partner scores of their principal's strategic plan: 5 → 7.5 ↑ 2.5 points	8 High 4 Medium	*Strategic plan use* *Focus on core business* *Distributed leadership and teaching capacity* *Stakeholder management* *Student learning*	2 gained a level 2 went to 4–5-year level during SLPP 3 stayed at 4–5-year level 5 had last review before SLPP—2 were at the 4–5-year level; 3 at 3-year level	

Table 7   **Overall picture of SLPP gains in context—2014—Northland**

SLPP year and area	Principal experience	SLPP experience	Strategic skills shift from start to end of SLPP (average/10) *Self-report, SpringboardTrust*	Strategic plan quality shift from start to end of SLPP (average/10) *Self-report, SpringboardTrust*	Impact levels	Areas of highest impact (evidence of high impact from half or more of each year's alumni)	ERO reviews	Transfer of gains
2014 (6) Northland pilot	2 had been principals of only one school 3 had 5–10 years' experience 3 had 11–15 years' experience None with post-graduate qualifications *School size*: 3 < 100 2 100–200 1 201–400	6 positive about programme 3 positive about capacity partners	4.8 → 8.7 ↑ 3.9 points Capacity partner scores of their principal's skills: 4.4 → 7.6 ↑ 3.2 points	4.4 → 8.3 ↑ 3.9 points Capacity partner scores of their principal's skills: 3.8 → 8 ↑ 4.2 points	3 High 2 Medium 1 Low	*Use of strategic plan* *Board focus* *Parent focus* *Student learning*	1 offered a 4–5-year level but wanted to stay at 3-year to get external feedback 1 lost a level **+** 4 had last review before SLPP—1 was at the 4–5-year level; 3 at 3-year level	

+ SLPP had low impact for this principal, and the capacity partner was not rated positively.

Learning about strategic planning

Turning from the big picture of SLPP impact, we turn now to focus on the changes in principals' approach to creating and using their school's strategic plan.

Most noticeable is the shift from seeing the plan as a required document listing activities that often lodged in the principal's filing cabinet once created and shared with the Ministry of Education, to an active catalyst for school development.

> I used the old charter that we'd learnt at [MoE-funded PLD] and I knew where I wanted to head but I don't think that was reflected in my strategic plan. I think it was more a compliance rather than a working document, so, I think, out of the whole Springboard Trust programme that I was on, the most powerful learning I did was around my strategic plan and I still plan in a very different way. [2012 alumnus]

> I'd never looked at it in that kind of way before, and, so, it gave me a different kind of perspective, like my strategic plans now are far more focused on achieving the aims that we actually want and they're not kind of fussy anymore, they're not the same kind of same old same old. [2013 alumnus]

> So many principals did the tickbox thing. We did it over Nov–Dec-school hols, we did think about the direction of the school, but ended up with something too big. The difference is that the strategic plan is now for the school. It's not a compliance plan, ensuring we met MoE requirements. We have 4 key areas now instead of 30—we never covered those 30 anyway. Now it has a real purpose, it drives all the decisions that happen in school. [2013 alumnus]

Principals engaged in more meaningful consultation rather than creating the document on their own; and they were more analytical in their approach to goal setting and steps needed to achieve these goals.

> Springboard showed me that this isn't my plan, it's got to have everyone recognise themselves in it. So I did more consultation. I did backward mapping…real close planning. [2012 alumnus]

> I didn't really know how to do a strategic plan well before I went there. I hadn't done too bad a job but I didn't always know exactly why I was doing what I was doing, because I'd never been trained to do that kind of thing. So [SLPP] really changed things. The first thing I really loved was the scoping idea where you go to everybody that's involved and you listen to their opinions, about using quite simple and straightforward questions, but you get to hear the values of everybody and then you can come and think about that together with your management staff. That was the first thing that really changed. The second thing was that I knew we needed to be data driven, but I think I was much too outcome focused than process focused—you know, you have to get the process going to get the outcomes. So I think that's where that's changed. [2013 alumnus]

> It wasn't until I did Springboard training that I actually got my head around it [strategic planning]. What I found I was doing previously was stealing other people's formats and because I wasn't owning any of them, every three years I would change my format. So we

did the training and it gave me huge opportunities to actually engage with the right stakeholders at the right time. [2012 alumnus]

Many principals contrasted the focused, slimmer strategic plans they created during their SLPP work with the denseness of their school's previous strategic plans, which often consisted of lists of activities planned for the year, sorted according to the regulatory headings. SLPP shows principals how to achieve meaningful coherence between goals and actions, and to reduce the number of goals to just the few most fundamental.

My strategic plans were great in the past, they were fabulous works of art and they were probably up to 50 pages... They had plans upon plans upon plans. But my concern was that they were over complicated. No one knew what they were and they had plans that didn't relate to other plans; there was a lack of alignment. What's happened as a result of Springboard is that we were able to make it a synthesis, a one page annual plan which ties everything together. That's the strategic plan. [2012 alumnus]

I think the most powerful advice is around clarity of purpose. And it's easy to just bounce from one thing to another and not always be clear about what we stand for. Actually decluttering. So now we have just a few pillars on one A3 page that we can hit home and actually the staff are able to articulate the key things from. We have a few strong pillars and just don't let up on them. Every meeting, we try and refer to them. Every Friday morning we have a half hour meeting which is a pretty positive meeting. [2013 alumnus]

Alumni from 2012 and 2013 who had been using their strategic plan for 2 years or more spoke of gains in time from a more clear-cut approach to strategic planning.

As a beginning principal there was nothing in the school, I didn't have a copy of the previous strategic plan or anything so when I started there was not a lot to base anything on so our strategic plan was like a novel really. [After SLPP] each annual plan was really easy to do and before even though we had a strategic plan it wasn't like that, it was like redoing the strategic plan every year. [2012 alumnus]

Several principals who changed schools after their SLPP experience found it valuable when they came into schools that needed considerable work.

Changing schools after I'd done it [SLPP] gave me more confidence in what I was doing, and more determination to do the right thing as far as the strategic thinking and strategic planning. I'm grateful that I had the opportunity to do it, because it set me up for success for this job in many ways. The first thing I needed to do was have a plan. The other interesting thing in the school was that they had this big plan, but nobody apart from the principal, not even the deputy principal, knew anything about it. So my first thing was to get the staff and the board on board in regards to strategic planning because they had never been involved in it before. So at least I had a few tools from Springboard that I could use. [2013 alumnus]

Gains from the changed nature of strategic plans

Because the strategic plans created through SLPP participation are more focused and coherent, with clear 'lines of sight' between activities and goals, and because they are known to board, staff

and often students, with more input as they were formed from those who need to realise them, they usually become much more useful.

> My previous one I would do, and I would comply, and it wasn't a lie but it would sit in my drawer and at the end of the year I would pull it out. But then you'd come to the end and 'oh I didn't do that' because I'd forgotten I'd put that down thinking it was a good idea, and I was disappointed I didn't do that. That's where you end up not being focused. The senior leaders know the plan more now, the teachers know the plan more, the board members definitely know it. [2012 alumnus]

> [Strategic plan] is a lot more shared now. Before it was just me and the senior leadership team beavering away, and we'd talk to people about what was happening. But now it's across the school too—people are talking about the values that we reviewed last year as part of the SLPP work, they are living values, and we share data a lot more than what we used to, so it's enabled us to work further forward on the goals. [2014 alumnus]

> The action plan that I had for the year that I had previous to SpringboardTrust was this massive document that I only really went back to mid-year and end of year. I never really used it as something to refer to all the time because it was just so huge and it did everything. Some of the actual actions I took through into my new action plan, but it [previous plan] was just way too much and too cumbersome and I never really worked with it, I was just fulfilling a Ministry need. [2013 alumnus]

> Because we had to take a deeper look, the plan became more useful and more of a working document rather than just something that just sat in a file in the shelf. And then you get to the end of the year and you think oh gosh you know we planned for that, but we've forgotten all about it. So it has become something that is referred to frequently, in board meetings, staff discussions, reporting against it. [2014 alumnus]

> If I think of my old charter now, everything was happening in terms 1 and 2 and then the things that you had forgotten about or you dropped the ball on you suddenly picked up in term 3 and it was sort of almost everything happened at the beginning…so it's been a lot more strategic in how what is realistic in terms of what we can do, knowing that there are other things that just come into play. [2014 alumnus]

> I hadn't made the link for the strategic plan to drive curriculum and curriculum change. It was sort of there but it wasn't to the strong extent that it is now. And also a lot more clarity around how I move the organisation forward. When I look at our new plan and I look at how it's driven curriculum, the uptake of teachers or the ownership of teachers of the plan and the students' outcomes through that, I think how [SLPP] has been hugely supportive of that whole process. [2014 alumnus]

> Quite a few of the staff have talked about how different things are this year, how innovative and how everyone feels like they're altogether on the same page. For example, from my targets for the charter, I gave our set of data to each of the teams, and said here's your data, you set your own targets. [2014 alumnus]

Principals often spoke of the clarity and authority their SLPP-created strategic plans gave them for decision making on the resources of time and money. These plans helped them to reject initiatives that did not relate clearly to the school goals.

So there was spending time on stuff that comes towards you, that seems like a good idea, but the thing with the SpringboardTrust is that you have to sit down and put the time into what is the most important, and you've got to think really clearly about that. If we can do these things, this is what's going to make the difference. And therefore you've got to give it the time. I think we're spending our time on the right stuff now. Money—the board is definitely putting money behind what we see as important. Pulling away from MoE as far as [taking on] contracts. Being quite strong in saying 'we've got these needs', and finding a consultant even if you've got to pay for it. [2013 alumnus]

It helped me fine-tune some of the things—not so much in terms of strategic decision making in a way but more how we took decisions that were important for the school and how you unpacked those and thought about them in terms of resourcing; in terms of who else could be involved, in terms of the responsibilities different people have for the decisions that you were making, the things that you were saying were going to be important for your school. You've got these priorities and you've only got this amount of money and so if that's really important, where are you going to get the money from and where does it go? So there were some things I had to think about that actually I've re-channelled. Now leaders have more time out of the classroom. [2014 alumnus]

Staffing is real strategic. Resourcing is all strategic. Activities within the school are all related back to the strategic plan, so there's the odd one or two times through the year that you take opportunities of a drama group coming through or a music performance. But other than that it's all planned to the plan. High awareness about everything having impact on those goals is just a daily thing, making decisions about professional development and who in the staff should take those opportunities so they link to students is all really effective. Our budget is now less structured into curriculum areas and more about resourcing the drivers. [2014 alumnus]

Over time we are doing less better as we clarify—trying to pull everything into one place— PLD, student achievement—no new initiatives this year—teachers have their mentoring and coaching programme. Teachers are key to the level of change we can make so having money to release for them to do their development—that's key. Springboard certainly helped. I came into a school where the expectation was you get what you want—no rationalisation. So the key messages about spending became where the spend needed to go—it needed to impact student achievement, so any requests for funding had to be linked to the strategic plan. 'What's the impact on student achievement?'—that became more common conversation, and those kinds of conversations took us from 200K deficit in 2011 to 40K surplus in 2013. SLPP thinking—the direct link between strategy and resourcing was a key contributor. [2012 alumnus]

Many principals spoke particularly about different kinds of decisions they were reaching about professional learning and development, with greater attention to consolidating and embedding new learning instead of continually taking on new options or offers.

As a new principal I had all these ideas of what we should be doing, what we could try, and it was all a bit too disjointed. In both First Time Principals and Springboard there was a current flowing through—you are the leader, the keeper for the school strategy. So today I had four emails from groups wanting to come and do different things at our school. All of them could equally nurture excellence in some areas. But the strategic plan as it is now it

gives you that mandate to say, no, it doesn't really fit in with where we're going. [2014 alumnus]

Whenever we have the [MoE funded] professional learning facilitators come out, we always put the charter in the middle of the table and say it's got to align with that. [2012 alumnus]

SLPP-created strategic plans also gave clear objectives for ongoing review, strengthening both its incidence and effectiveness.

I've really brought the teachers and the board and the accountabilities of each into the plan and that is something that I will certainly continue. Because I think that's really important that people see themselves within it. I refer to it a lot because it's part of my principal's report—what's in the plan. How often does the leadership team refer to it? Well that's part of what we do in an ongoing way over the year, we just constantly bring it back to 'this is what it [the annual plan] says about your leadership and how's it going?' [2013 alumnus]

The specification of goals and backward mapping from goals to see how actions in one year should lead to what was needed in the next—to have a cumulative plan rather than a repeated set of intentions or actions—was also powerful.

We were getting success, but not as much as what we've been getting last year and this year, and that comes from being more purposeful, and being more focused. You don't get distracted by other things because it is not in the plan and I think that is the biggest thing. The planning made me focus on the things that mattered the most. I had this vision but I never really had thought it out clearly enough, I knew where I wanted to go but I didn't know what I needed to do to get there. I was stumbling along and there was no clear kind of pathway or vision really for it. Through the [SLPP] year I got the opportunity to tease it out and get more clarity and understanding of what it was that I really wanted and make it simpler. It was pretty close to being quite life changing for me because I think I am better now at being more strategic and looking to the future rather than looking to the present. I can now sit back here and can see not back but sit forward and can see yes we are on the right track. And I can think right that's in two years' time, and now I know what it's going to look like five years away. [2013 alumnus]

More productive work with stakeholders

For many of the principals, the SLPP approach to identifying, classifying and working with different stakeholders to achieve important goals was particularly productive. It helped principals to think where best to place their effort and how to cultivate both more, and more supportive, partnerships within and beyond the school. It allowed their effort to be more effective, giving them a greater sense of leadership efficacy.

> I've never seen the stakeholder stuff in any other [leadership development] programme but it is critical. [2012 alumnus]

Principals became more aware of the importance of communication with stakeholders to engage them in the work needed to achieve strategic goals.

> I was aware of the stakeholders involved but I think I spent a lot more deliberate time talking with people and working with the content of the strategic plan particularly with people that are stakeholders that will have to be part of it and do something about it and probably particularly the ones that have to work within it to make sure that we reach the measurements, the targets that we want. I think they are more a part of it now. [2013 alumnus]

> I probably wouldn't have done it without the Springboard: we released all of our teachers and had our support staff in, we all worked on the strategic plan together so we were all learners together, it wasn't me telling them. It really strengthened our school in the sense everyone could talk to you about the strategic plan and everyone understands strategic planning: how it works, how it links in with our annual school improvement plan, they understand the part we all play. They have a big understanding that it's not the little nuts and bolts but it's the bigger issues, the wider issues. ERO could pick that up, they said in every room teachers could talk about the strategic plan, how it aligned with the annual school improvement plan and they could track it right back to student achievement and the teaching and learning programmes. [2012 alumnus]

Casting the Ministry of Education as a stakeholder rather than a bureaucracy to be kept at arm's length was important learning for some.

> I had intuitively just dealt with people but hadn't ever thought of them as stakeholders. So framed as a stakeholder meant that you had a construct that you could deal with, that you're asking how can I influence them? [The facilitator] said something along the lines of 'well you need to have a positive relationship with head office' and those words really, really rang for me. I kept thinking 'that is my head office: the Ministry'. How did I miss the fact that they are the stakeholders and they want things from me and I want things from them and I need to positively influence the relationship? It would be really good if I ate a bit of humble pie. [Capacity partner] worked me through that process so I rang this senior advisor up who had so annoyed me and said 'I would really like to understand more of what you were saying, is there any way that you could come out and talk to me or I could come in and meet with you?' And that began a really positive relationship, turned it completely around. [2012 alumnus]

Others rethought dealings with their local community.

> The whole scoping of all the stakeholders, it just broadened the horizon from the traditional, the parents, the students, the whānau, staff etc. to actually consider outside, and that's been really really beneficial, because this year I've actually accessed support for the students that perhaps I might not have. [2014 alumnus]

> The biggest change is participating with stakeholders. Often been in a habit of sharing information *out* but we've got a better practice of involving the stakeholders *in*. Parents are an easy one to target, especially businesses, local talent or retirees. We never thought to talk to bus drivers and now we have a relationship with the bus company. It's allowed the bus company to understand what we stand for, and then reiterate that on the bus. And even in sports, in the weekends, we're communicating with sports clubs around what values we have at school so that they can be supported in the clubs. Then our graduate profile isn't just in the gates of our school but in the weekends and the community and the township. We've got quite a nice driver around citizenship and children giving back and being proud. [2014 alumnus]

> SLPP helped me enormously. At the time I was struggling with relationships in the community—there were some very difficult people— the realisation through that programme of what is important and constantly coming back to that—which relationships do you need to spend your time on and which don't you need to worry about because in fact you can't impact on them? My capacity partner talked about 80–20—getting 80% on board is pretty good and I was worried about getting 99.9%. Identifying who were really important stakeholders—local people—education—then fold in business and Council—was all through SLPP. [2012 alumnus]

> One of the things I really learnt through my Springboard year was understanding who the stakeholders were. Part of our strategic plan was engaging the community and getting them on board for the rebuild… So understanding actually that the marae needed to be looked at as a stakeholder in all of that and not somebody sitting outside causing a problem was a great mind shift for me. [2012 alumnus]

> Managing stakeholders isn't an issue for me, but Springboard helped with those problematic ones. [2013 alumnus]

One school was able to turn around a disruptive development adjacent to the school into benefits for student learning.

> Managing stakeholders—Springboard has been very useful in identifying a much wider range of stakeholders. When [major development project] came and said what they would do to us, instead of seeing the workforce as disrupters, we saw them as stakeholders and asked what they could bring to the school. 'This is our plan—what are you going to contribute?' Casting them as neighbours and stakeholders. We're developing it as we go along. Focus on careers for Years 5 and 6—the project has 8 managers. Got the bio and photo for the 8 managers—Years 5 and 6 applied for the 8 roles—the 8 students that were successful in securing the manager roles get to go over to meetings, have agendas—sitting in the board room and to do some shadowing of the roles and the decision making. Those students will still be here when the project is completed. The widening out of stakeholders— my capacity partner was really helpful with that—said to ask them for things. They are

stakeholders—they are supposed to help…when you have a good strategic plan you can give it to businesses and they can see how to help [sourcing water tank for the school's garden to table project from one business and eco lunchboxes from another]. [2014 alumnus]

Principals who moved on to different schools after their SLPP year found it very helpful to start with mapping out the different stakeholders in their new school community and to be actively seeking knowledge about how best to work with them, rather than assuming that what held and worked at their last school would hold for the new community.

Strengthening school governance

School strategic plans are legally the responsibility of each school's governing body, the board of trustees. Much of the development of the actual plan is the responsibility of principals, as in business it is the responsibility of the CEO. As the governing body, each school board also has the responsibility to support the strategic plan's goals with its resourcing decisions and review of progress. The 2013 NZCER national primary school survey showed that, while 72 percent of principals thought their board added real value to the school, only 52 percent of decile 1–2 school principals thought so. As one SLPP alumnus observed:

> A lot of low decile schools get into trouble with their boards with being inexperienced or cut out by the principal. The more eyes and the more talking about decisions the better. [2012 alumnus]

Generally, boards were supportive of their principals' taking the lead with strategic planning, and open to changes that came about through their SLPP work. Some principals worked closely with their boards through this process, either through workshops or reporting and discussing their development of the strategic plan at board meetings.

Forty percent of the principals reported gains in the capability and confidence of their board. This was particularly marked in low decile schools. More focused strategic plans gave a clearer framework for reporting to boards to generate their engagement and questions.

> I think what has already changed [as a result of SLPP] has been the board. Our board very much looked to me to do everything and rarely tell me to do things. I have coached them to ask questions—because they are not questioners but they must ask questions. They have a bound copy of the strategic plan that they need to bring to each board meeting as I'll be reporting against that plan. Board did use it to answer ERO questions at the last ERO review. The board didn't give me or the school guidance. I had to really work with the board. It was an ALP session—[business presenter] said you have to work to get the board to ask questions, don't feel frightened. Try and make them bring the plan to their meeting and ask questions. [2014 alumnus]

> I bring that sheet [1 page strategic plan] to every board meeting, and I report against it with a snapshot report. The strategic plan has really supported the board, it has driven the board. When I first arrived we had a board that was absolutely fabulous, very tight, very nice, very kind and the number one value in our school that our parents have time and time reiterated is that of respect. Respect meant they did not ask questions. Now we are at a stage where 4 out of 5 board members are asking me questions and they're wanting clear evidence, and so my reports are aligned to that. [2012 alumnus]

> We spent a Saturday with the board on the new plan, which was really good. I changed the way that I reported in board meetings ... that's been a bit of a shock for them too. I put in questions... What does the board see as the future of the school? How do they see us with marketing? How do they see how we present ourselves into the community with the changing environment and so forth? We shape boards but they should be shaping us... We

had the relationships but they would be quiet. So now they are more confident to just share and we'd say talk some more...they actually gave ideas that we could go 'yes we love these ideas, we'll work on those'. I did learn doing the Springboard that probably the person to worry about the most is yourself particularly in low decile schools, because if you're not always reflecting on what you do and why you do it, you could make choices without the board, ...they would just go that's okay. [2012 alumnus]

When I present my report, they all have to ask me one question each at least because I go around and I say 'So what's your question today looking at my report?' Because I wasn't getting anything, you know it was a lot of just nodding the head and a lot of that was respect and not of me as the person but more of the title. [2014 alumnus]

Strategic planning also changed my reporting to the board, that was one of the biggest changes for me. At every board meeting I reflect on an aspect of our plan, whereas before I wrote a narrative of how the school was going, which wasn't purposeful. Planning and reporting—reduced from 12 pages to 2 pages. I report on one key focus area each time, the board can see how it is tracking, they never could before. So the board is now part of discussion—that has changed a lot. [2013 alumnus]

They're really active compared to before Springboard. Usually I'd come to the board meeting and have a discussion about what's gone on in the school, and how we're tracking for our targets, but now it's less talking about what's the historic history, historic monthly events and talking about the next planning forward for the month. So that's been a big change, their participation in the school has increased. [2014 alumnus]

Some principals found that strengthening their board through a different approach to planning and reporting could not always overcome issues of high board chair or trustee turnover in areas with high housing changes, or uneven meeting attendance, so that ground had to be revisited.

Others found that even with the clearer focus—"less is more" as one board described it to their principal—it remained difficult for their board to find time for their role or training for it. They found themselves training their board, rather than being positively challenged by it. One principal contrasted the relevant experience of business board directors with members of their school's board of trustees:

I hear about [facilitator's] board and how they are all top business people themselves and so they understand his business, they can forward the business through their input. But I don't think I could say that of my board. Most of my board meetings are about training my board…about what a school does. And by the time I feel they've got some idea of that, they've gone. [2013 alumnus]

Some found themselves with board chairs who were high-handed or not clear about the role of governance in relation to management.

One principal sharpened their board by strategic co-option. Another took a strategic approach to the opportunity provided through the triennial board elections to ensure the school board could play a more effective role.

The Springboard emphasis on stakeholders, on building strong relationships, so I very deliberately targeted people to come on board, people in the community who influenced other people. Had 12 very strong candidates for board election—I've never been in that position before. Lots of movers and shakers in there. [2013 alumnus]

One board included themselves as a strategic plan goal in the plan their principal was developing through the SLPP work.

There was a whole section in the plan about growing the board, and they helped me plan that and then we helped implement that. We actually gave them an appraisal; we sorted out an appraisal system for them as well. It wasn't formalised and it certainly wasn't recorded, but they were much more able to examine their performance because they had goals in the strategic plan. [2013 alumnus]

One principal also shared their Springboard learning about leading others, running more goal-focused meetings that brought more participation and sharing, with their board chair.

I talked to the board chair a lot about my thinking and I shared resources with her. She would try some of the ideas and then come back and talk to me about them and say "this worked" or "I really liked that book". [2012 alumnus]

Another used her SLPP work to refocus the board of her new school.

I attended some board meetings before I started here. And it was around the shade and toilets and the lawnmower. So because of my work with Springboard and that whole focus on strategic work, I flipped that upside down. We did some work around what is the core business of the board. The core business is student achievement, and that's what we need to know, you need to know about. And we need to work strategically to improve that. They welcomed it with open arms. They were gutted that the level of achievement was as bad as it was, and is as bad as it is. So I've challenged…I've asked them to challenge me and to do something about it. [2014 alumnus]

Increasing parent and community engagement

Parents are prime stakeholders in schools. When we asked about any difference parents would notice as a result of principals' SLPP work, principals noted that this work had led them to examine their communication with parents: Did it fit with their strategic plan goals? Would it support better engagement of parents with their child's learning, and with the school in support of that learning? Digital technology has also opened up new ways to share learning. Some had specific goals to improve parent engagement with their child's learning.

Principals described the sharpening and simplifying of reports and communication, ensuring it was aligned with school goals, sending consistent messages. Some worked on questions parents could ask their children or their teachers, so that they would have a good picture of their progress in relation to student goals.

> I think parents would see us reaching out more. I'd talk about certain things in the newsletter about attendance, because that's one of our goals, but they would definitely feel we've been clear with them about their children's learning and how to help at home. [2013 alumnus]

> As far as community and the parents are concerned, we share the goals at the beginning of the year; we have a meeting with our parents. It is like meet the school, meet the parents and understand what the school can do for your child and what you can do for us. I share the vision with the parents and I talk to them about the programmes that will be run in the school. And throughout the year we have Success Evenings where we show some of the successes related to the goals so the parents can actually see them. So they are generally viewing nights and they can come in and the children walk and talk their learning, we choose a selection of children across the school and invite their parents specifically and others. So we celebrate their learning and it's connected to the goals, so that's how I inform the community. We're getting more and more parents coming, and I am getting more and more parents saying 'Can my child do it next?' [2013 alumnus]

Principals also reviewed school meetings with parents in terms of their effectiveness.

> We had traditional home–school 'partnerships' but they were not really engaging. People had equated attendance with engagement—they are different thing. Things were either shared in a way that people did not understand or they were 'dumbed down' so much that people could not understand—so there were actually two extremes. So in our first community workshop we made sure that the language was really accessible—we were really deliberate about that. It was an invitation for people to come and contribute in a very real way to the ICT and student development strands in the school. We had our biggest turn-out in years. [2012 alumnus]

Several schools were running workshops for parents which brought them into the school to understand their child's maths or reading learning, and one was about to embark on a Springboard Schools@Heart project to involve all families of Years 3 and 4 students focusing on maths, training parents to work with other parents in small groups.

One principal noted how much he had gained from listening to the other principals in his SLPP cohort in relation to increasing parent attendance at parent–teacher discussions on student progress, and in home–school partnership meetings.

Principals as strategic leaders

Some of the most powerful learning for principals in their SLPP experience was about the priority they needed to give to strategic leadership, to the 'helicopter' view of the school, its culture, coherence and its progress. They spoke of learning to set time aside for this work. Changing time use to properly prioritise the helicopter view was most challenging for principals of very small schools.

> Prior to the programme I thought I was doing self review, but it was all over the place really, no time line and no strategy behind it, hence why I say it's made life a lot easier for me. It's clear cut when everybody knows what you're aiming to achieve. I spend more time on challenging the staff. Spend more time either delivering professional development myself, or coordinating professional development to upskill the teachers, to get a shift in certain mind sets with some staff. That's where I spend most of my time. I think the best part about it is that I'm enjoying it. Where I didn't before, I think in the past I probably spent two-thirds of my time around policies and the things that make the school compliant. [2014 alumnus]

> One of the biggest impacts of Springboard has been on my mindset. It's triggered me into a growth mindset. Springboard made me think as a leader—to do that deep strategic thinking. Everyone is constantly busy—to make that time to sit in the helicopter and look down at the business—are we doing what we say we're doing. With an open door all the time I wasn't getting any work done. We were way out of kilter—I certainly was—18 hours a day, 6–7 days a week. Not really sustainable. Gave up all my personal time. I need those things to keep me sane, I'm more effective when I do all those things. My mindset was that I needed more time, therefore give up x and y, but the impact was totally the opposite. Now I put in strategic thinking time, I'll set a whole day aside. Next Monday I'll look at all the reports for student achievement. I don't feel guilty about that. I would have before, whereas now, that's being an effective leader, and if a day isn't enough time, I will block out more time. [2013 alumnus]

> It made me look at my leadership style. It has definitely assisted my confidence. I was a first time principal, this is my first school and the first year particularly I don't think I ever slept because it was such a full on learning curve. I think I have got a lot more confidence. Some of it could also come with experience in the position as well. But I think it does come from that professional development around my leadership. I think I spend a lot more time thinking strategically and including people. The inclusion of people has been a big one. I find I'm a lot calmer. [2013 alumnus]

Others used their strategic planning lens to gain clarity about the best use of their time, to decide where to give their attention or effort.

> I think more about what I spend my time on. If this is important, related to our focus, I'll put time into it. That learning from [facilitator] about the messages you send by what you value and where you spend your time: 'Never under-estimate how important that is.' 'Keep your structure simple and time efficient.' I also realised the importance of staying energised and positive because I know how important that is. I remember him saying 'The levels of

conviction and energy in the leader are critical.' And I have a better recognition of the importance of pace, knowing when to drive and when to take a slightly slower pace: 'The importance between embedding and continuing the momentum of change.' [2013 alumnus]

Springboard was the catalyst. It was a time where I could for a significant chunk of time at regular intervals look at what we were doing and make sure that everything that we were doing was actually meeting the purpose that we had set out to do it for. I saw that I have got to be heavily involved in what the teachers are doing and in designing the professional development and giving the big ideas. Our leadership team will probably spend at least an hour a day talking our way through the things that are happening in the school, taking the temperature, you know, adjusting, supporting each other, making the plans, and in a continuous talk about what we are doing and continuously checking in with each other, and the quality of those discussions has changed. [2012 alumnus]

Others were struck by particular emphases, stories or questions within workshops or discussions with their capacity partner. They took on learning about themselves, challenges to their existing behaviour.

[Facilitator] talked about being on message. And that staying on message was the one that I took most deeply and strongly because that's probably an area I found hardest, because I like to do lots of things. That actually staying on message was one of the things that really does, not create, but build and sustain, innovation. So I'm good at innovation, but building and sustaining innovation is about staying on message. [2013 alumnus]

When I reflect back I think there were situations that were really challenging with incompetent staff and I tended to be very strong minded, I don't know how other people might describe it. I would say I was quite strong and at times confrontational. I had worked in a way that had worked for me to shift the school from chaos to functioning classrooms, teachers taking greater responsibility for their children, and children learning. But that was intimidating too. I thought that was the way that it should be done, that was the right way. When I started having those conversations with my capacity partner, I started realising that there are other aspects to leadership. It's the human element of what motivates and engages adults, what makes people want to be alongside you, it's all about the positive culture of a place. The journey with Springboard for me has been about understanding myself, why I react and respond the way that I do, and trying to understand other people's responses and not deny them, not negate them. And trying to build a more supportive culture. I think the thing I am most proud of when I reflect now would be around that. [2012 alumnus].

I think I choose my language more carefully as a result of listening to [facilitator]. As a principal you have tremendous impact through your body language, what we say, how we say it. One time I could tell [the facilitator] may have been a little bit frustrated with what was being asked and I like the way he turned it around and said 'Well what would you like me to do about it?' And I've actually used that same statement today with a teacher. I think my listening has improved, my choice of language. [2012 alumnus]

Principals also spoke of how valuable was the challenge they could get by sharing thinking and progress with their capacity partner, Springboard programme manager and other principals and how much they realised they needed to lead within their own schools by similar coaching and challenging, within an open and purposeful, supportive culture.

Things like facilitating meetings; that was something I talked with my coach from Springboard about. I've got two associate principals who get on really well and we have a lot of fun, but it was quite difficult to get them focused. One in particular had a short attention span, so she was texting and popping out for various reasons...the amount of work we were getting out of it wasn't anywhere near where I wanted it to be. [Capacity partner] and I had a meeting and talked it over, and I came in the next day and said to her 'I'm not happy with these meetings; they should be the most important meetings of the school—the three of us sitting and looking at where we're going, if we're on track.' So we changed rooms, we have an agenda that's sent out beforehand, we have agreements now that we will work for half an hour, then break. All of a sudden those meetings changed. [2013 alumnus]

Making more of teachers

SLPP emphasises the importance of school leaders growing leadership themselves. Without distributed leadership, teachers using their knowledge and agency within the school's strategic plan as a shared framework for action and review, it is difficult for real and ongoing school development to occur. It is also difficult for principals to find the time to take the overall strategic leadership. SLPP brought all these strands together.

> It was a really important lesson to learn I think, to step back and let others lead. It's that whole thing around leadership and delegating and developing. And I guess that's the strength of prioritising. Because people see and know what you are doing, they get it. They get that they have to do this work now, that it's their turn, their time. I have a senior leadership team that has people who are not team leaders, like our IT person came in because I wanted her to see what being a senior leader was like, because I think she could lead across a group of schools. [2013 alumnus]

Many principals spoke of using their SLPP learning to increase distributed leadership, and opportunities for teachers to work together to focus on their shared goals.

> There is a lot more buy-in from staff now, and a lot more collaboration, and they lead a lot more because they wrote their part of the strategic plan. I handed over a lot of that to them, after the consultation, a lot of the writing of the different facets of it to different people. So their ownership of the actions, and their leadership of them, has been good. [2014 alumnus]

> My focus moved from growing individuals to growing a team. I see the pride that people have in the work that they do now. So we have got somebody who could work across our cluster. Last year she felt strong enough because she's moved so far that she could go and be facilitator across the cluster for six weeks. It was an amazing experience for her. [2012 alumnus]

> I had always seen the benefit of a distributed leadership model. If you look at changing school culture and the elite make the decisions, it does not work. I'd always seen that at a theoretical level. Here I'm moving the culture from one where they had to sign an attendance sheet at staff meetings—a low trust model—to giving groups decision-making powers; if it's 3 or 4 people saying something and they have thinking and evidence to back it, then I need to trust that. When our Springboard facilitator came into an organisation as CEO in the first couple of months he spent time working with the leaders about the vision and then pushing that down. I see clearly what my role is—it's to build leaders—and it is not easy to build leaders—it means challenging people—so I work on it fortnightly with those key leaders who have decision-making powers. [2012 alumnus]

> Originally the school would do one weekly meeting and it would alternate, so one week it would be team meetings, and the following week it would be a whole school meeting. We've changed that to having two meetings a week—so each Monday every week is a team meeting, and every Tuesday each week is a whole staff meeting. So it has meant an additional afternoon together. The meetings were separated so that the teams could do their admin internal discussions that are relevant to their teams and then the staff members are

focused on sharing professional development, going back to the strategic plan, the graduate profile, planning forward for the next term, data discussions, target groups, that we can support each other and so that's been a big change and initially more time together isn't always accepted happily, but as it's become routine, it's become more and more effective to have weekly discussions about how we're progressing. [2014 alumnus]

Some mentioned changes in how they rewarded leadership.

Instead of replacing my DP I've channelled resources in different ways, allocated units for different people to lead things within the strategic plan. At the board meeting the other night we did our mid-year review of our targets and those team leaders had done the review, did the report and came and presented it to the board. So really they were very nervous, it was the first time they had done it, but really great in terms of their role, and developing to possibly be senior leaders or principals within schools in the future, as well. [2014 alumnus]

I was always a good delegator, but I think Springboard has given me focus in keeping that delegation connected to the strategic plan—so not just tasks, but actual projects that are going to relate back to the strategic plan. We've got the ability to give responsibilities and remunerate staff with units, all of those are connected to the charter now rather than day to day life contribution to school. [2014 alumnus]

Principals were bringing together their SLPP learning about leadership development, the value of teamwork and the use of evidence with *The New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) focus on teaching as inquiry. Each of these elements is coherent with the others.

We want passionate staff, so they need to get into the stuff that they really want to get into. So this year we've made inquiry teams, strategically making sure there's someone in each team who is a deep thinker, who drives that and is motivated to stretch themselves and challenge their own thinking. [2013 alumnus]

We're doing our appraisal approach differently this year, an inquiry approach. Some of it's linked in more with NZC and then some has come from SpringboardTrust. I spend a lot of time just challenging staff in terms of how more effective they can be. I struggle with the word 'best practice' because best for me, it kind of means you've come to an end, when you've got the best. So we talk about what 'effective' looks like for our children. [2014 alumnus]

There are specific things within our job descriptions for these new leadership roles that I co-constructed those with them, and then obviously part of their performance appraisal and their inquiries is around that leadership role as well. They've got two inquiries going—a leadership one and then the one for the classroom, all related to our targets. I contracted someone to come in and do some leadership development with them, and we've also run our own PLCs [professional learning communities] as a leadership team as well to support professional learning and development for everybody. I think things are far more inclusive now. [2014 alumnus]

SLPP also emphasises the importance of coherence between strategic plans and performance management and appraisal. It was common when principals spoke of what was different for their

staff as a result of their SLPP learning that they would comment on tighter links between the strategic plan goals and measures, and teachers' performance review.

> When I did Springboard I needed to improve the appraisal and the performance management and the professional development that people were doing, and to get a whole school approach to doing that. So I did work with my capacity partner because her area of expertise was HR, did a lot of thinking around mentoring and coaching. We had a collection of teachers from not overly strong to outstanding and the whole thing was how do you get, how do you move, how do you move the bottom towards the top and keep the top moving? The new approach we developed—I think it's probably the most powerful mover of practice as a performance management system that we have ever had. And certainly, the teachers like it. The senior leaders are much more actively engaged in all of that really critical work around teaching and learning. And the same with the teachers. The teachers don't have stuff done to them, they are engaged in the work of the team and everybody has their strengths, their skills, their opportunities to be a contributor and to be a learner The amount of collaboration from the senior management team and the teachers, that is much better than it ever was before, and we have just got better and better and better at it. [2012 alumnus]

> [SLPP learning around the strategic plan] led to me using action plans more with the lead team. We would go off site for a day so we could work as a team. We'd work through developing next year's plan, so the leaders became more influential. Having the senior leadership more understanding of the goals and the actions they became responsible for them, for the school targets, they were reporting back instead of me micro-managing them. I was really happy by the end of it. We changed things like the appraisal side of things so the team leaders come for the appraisals of their staff and the senior management then appraised the leadership team—certainly the skills of the leaders lifted. We totally reviewed the appraisal system over that time...so it tied in all the school targets with the class targets, so they could see the flow, why they needed to be in there, why national standards needed to be in there. Staff who didn't get shifts in student performance left. Their kids came in and they left at the same level that they came in at. And that was one good thing about being quite clear about where we were going, so other staff jumped on and asked to be on board. [2012 alumnus]

Some principals noted the shifts in their practice that were needed to develop others as leaders.

> Building them up so that they're able to do the role and then letting them do it. Now the letting them do it part took me a while! I think I'm less controlling now. I am not sure that I was micromanaging but I think I could have been very, very close to it! [2012 alumnus]

> I see that parent coming in and I know I'm the best person to deal with that parent because they're very prickly, but actually moving that over to my APs. And it's really hard because the outcome isn't going to be as good, and that will be ongoing, but my role is to sit with them or coach them before they meet with that parent. I'm doing more coaching. My whole view of change management has changed completely. Having been coached the way I was [with the SLPP capacity partner], it's then implementing that coaching within the school to build our capacity. It's one thing going on a seminar or to a conference, or even a staff meeting, and it's another thing to have someone sitting down beside you and having a focused conversation with an outcome. [2013 alumnus]

Schools in low-income areas often have difficulty attracting or retaining teachers; principals of such schools were particularly attentive to developing teacher capability and leadership.

> This is all part of Springboard. Because one of our strategic challenges was: How can we improve teachers? Well actually we need to go and look at—from a strategic point of view—ways of keeping them here. And the way to keep them here was the board paying for every person's tertiary study. If they fail we don't ask them to pay it back. Who goes out of their way to fail a university paper? And as a result of that we've got a significant number of people doing Master's and a flow on event is we've got our teacher aides doing tertiary stuff and improving the quality of our teaching force. The whole notion of leadership is about growing yourself. So my commitment is to grow my people. [2012 alumnus]

Growing the school's own leaders also resonated well with principals of small schools, who could not offer additional management units to attract experienced teachers seeking more responsibility. These schools, however, were more likely to lose the teachers they grew into leadership as they looked for more pay or career steps.

Some principals shared their SLPP learning with their senior leadership team or board as they did the programme; others used it to reframe meetings; and some were using the ALP seminars as whole-team development, 'to lift their horizons' and to give the team a common framework to discuss core leadership issues.

> Delegation has been helped by SLPP—having the strategic plan has helped me to delegate to my AP and DP. Every time I met with Springboard or I met with my mentor, I shared the learning with them. They now have written on copies of the strategic plan, tracking our progress. Yesterday we were talking about how our vision has not gone down far enough to all the teams and all the children. Putting names against the actions is needed. [2014 alumnus]

Strengthening student learning

The ultimate purpose of the SLPP is to improve student outcomes. Improving student engagement in learning, better learning opportunities and higher levels of achievement or capability feature prominently in the SLPP alumni strategic plans. In response to our interview questions *What would be different for me as a result of your work in SLPP if I was a student?* and *What change(s) did the strategic plan result in, and how did this come about?* 70 percent of the principals we spoke with identified a link between their SLPP work and gains for student learning. Gains for students were associated with having clearer 'lines of sight' between the goals of the strategic plan and

- the use of resources (staff time, spending on professional learning and development, more collaborative work among teachers, investment in digital technology or new learning opportunities)
- inquiry into effectiveness and more consistent use of information about students' engagement and progress
- more accountability around goals
- determined principal action when progress was not evident or not sufficient.

Improvements in overall levels of performance or engagement were more likely to be mentioned by 2012 and 2013 alumni than those who had done SLPP just a year before. Some mentioned gains in national standards levels of mathematics and literacy; some mentioned gains in student attendance and engagement; some mentioned gains in the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Here are some illustrations.

> I believe it's led to a significant increase in student achievement because I think the strategic plan focused us on student achievement. Student achievement was our big overall goal. Everything we did had to underpin that. So when we do things like Pasifika fono, we think how do we align that with student achievement? and I think we do that. [2012 alumnus]

> We've had big improvements in attendance because that's been a strategic plan focus. We are consistently now at an average of 90 percent which is really good considering the challenges that some of our families have with getting their kids to school. Student achievement is improving because that is where we are focusing. We are focusing on teacher practice, teaching as inquiry and the professional learning communities to support that, and within that we are focused on the pedagogy and the learning for students. We were doing that before, but we were also doing so many other things. I am much more focused on teaching and learning in my role now. [2012 alumnus]

> We are seeing significant shifts in data—I will show you where we sit now at mid-year (2015)—we're looking at around 60 percent, late 60 percent, 70 percent at or above for each of the national standards areas, and last year we were around the mid-50 percent at mid-year. I report to the board 5-weekly. The board gets a very detailed report round these target kids. If I need more resourcing, I have the evidence. It's been a huge shift. We have de-cluttered teachers' lives—they stand or fall on the data. For some teachers that is going to be

hard. We are clear what we are here for, to raise student achievement, so we cut out anything else not related to student achievement. [2012 alumnus]

When we looked at student achievement—less than 20 percent achieving national standards—so what are the barriers—we focused on strengths in teaching and learning first—linked to staff—we were pretty brutal with it as the leadership team—who's performing, who isn't, who needs to go, what are the needs in the school, what does it look like—not happy with the standard of teaching practice. I jumped on the phone to the Ministry senior advisor—I want a programme, analysing teacher practice, what's available? We did Learning and assessment, focus on writing. Now we have 55 percent achieving national standards. Our kids are now engaged in learning and can talk about it using learning pathways—we do observations, students are asked what they're learning today, they're used to talking about their learning—we're excited too. We'll keep increasing the achievement—up to 75–85 percent next couple of years, that's our goal. [2013 alumnus]

We were getting success, but not as much as what we've been getting last year and this year, so I guess that comes from being more purposeful, more focused. One of the goals was also to increase student engagement because we know that that will increase achievement and so it goes hand in hand. So part of that was around the introduction of e-learning and capturing our boys into learning, and that has just grown astronomically. It's allowed the children to become more independent in their learning. So they are not having to wait, they can just get on with it because they are doing things using a device. [2013 alumnus]

We had a community day here recently. I wouldn't have done that a couple of years back. There's a beautiful article written by one of the agencies that were here in the local newspaper, saying what a wonderful day it had been, and how amazing the behaviour of the children—the children did interviews with the agencies and asked them intelligent questions. [2013 alumnus]

Our assemblies now are run by the children. Obviously there's a template and it's the senior children leading this. Our student council voice is, I think, more effective for the students. I also think our students understand now too their expectations, so our tone has always been good, our achievement rates have always been reasonably good, but now the students can see yeah we can attain this, we can do this, so their expectations are a lot higher. That's come from being more focused from our strategic plan to look at our data and raise the bar. We haven't been scared to set high targets. [2014 alumnus]

ERO said they can see connected, generous, thoughtful students at our school. They were impressed by the strong student voice, they said students could really articulate their learning and their goals. And I thought 'That's showing me the outcomes.' And parents talking about how engaged and motivated their kids are. Multiple levels of feedback are really useful to know that the strategic plan is having some impact. [2014 alumnus]

Some trialled new approaches in some classes.

Student learning changed because we had the 3 goals and we referred to them all the time, put resources and time and professional development into those goals. Effective digital learning was one goal. So we had a lead person, and we would change the programme in those rooms and the type of learning and they all excelled achievement wise. I chose good teachers to lead, but the students weren't handpicked, they weren't the top kids. The

teachers modified how they taught. They put a lot of ownership back onto the students—a lot of student voice, a lot of student running decision-making, they shaped it. Academically they moved, and they moved a lot more than other ways [of teaching]. [2012 alumnus]

Several principals whose schools had increased their proportion of students performing at or above national standards were now looking deeper at their patterns of progress, looking strategically to identify long-term drivers of ongoing achievement and support those better. One school was focusing on improving oral language in the early years of school, and shifting resources away from the long-standing Reading Recovery programme to do so, weighing up the likely gains for a larger number of students. Another principal was focusing on student self-regulation.

Others mentioned improvements for 'target' students identified through closer scrutiny of student engagement and progress, and more open sharing of the results of trying out different approaches.

Some of the 2014 alumni described changes in teaching practice and an emphasis on student voice and awareness of their learning goals related to strategic plan work on vision and goals. Involving students in the development of the strategic plan helped make the goals part of their everyday sense of what school was about.

> I've always talked to the kids and involve them in decision making, but it's probably stepped up. We talked to all the kids about the new logo, and I would send out different scenarios, and the teachers would talk with the kids. By asking the teams to set their own targets, they're far more empowered and their enquiries are just amazing in terms of what they're doing and therefore that's influencing what's happening with kids far more than before. It's really exciting just to see how that's made a difference, how those teachers are driving those inquiries, and how kids are having to be involved and talking about it, and teachers checking in more whether kids understand or not, and what they know or what they don't know. [2014 alumnus]

Other 2014 alumni described shifts in focus that were paying off in terms of changes in practice and student involvement in their learning progress.

> We can all use our vision because it's short. I can use it with teachers: 'How are you enabling that child to have success today?' or 'What will you do today that will enable him to have success tomorrow?' We want to improve them academically and to continue on with that progress. For me that's been one of the biggest things of my personal learning. Some of that was to do with Springboard in that it's about noticing and celebrating the progress our children make. [2014 alumnus]

> Students have probably had the biggest change [from SLPP] because everything is around having their input, the modern learning change in the classrooms, the practices with teachers. Achievement is accelerating. The other difference we did is we took away the discussions around OTJs [overall teacher judgements] and national standards and within the classrooms it's about how I've progressed. So I am at this level, want to be at this level, that's my goal, having the children map out what that looks like, and then what they talk about with the teachers and in their programmes, it's all about how they've moved rather than the end point. [2014 alumnus]

The Value of SLPP

Our evaluation of the short-term impacts of SLPP was based on the draft theory of change (Appendix 1). We found that SLPP experience did have positive impacts for the leadership of all but a few of the principals participating, and in the aspects of leadership that the programme aims to improve. In turn, these were leading to the impacts for schools that are the ultimate goal of the programme: particularly improved leadership capacity among teachers and improved learning opportunities, and gains in student knowledge and skills. This makes sense: the aspects of leadership that SLPP aims to improve are important ones that are also stressed in the educational research on effective educational leadership.

We found:

✓ Principal and capacity partner (coach) ratings of principals' strategic planning skills and plans pre- and post-SLPP increased markedly.

✓ Twelve of the 26 schools that could improve their ERO level did so: nine schools improved from a 3-year to a 4–5-year level and three schools improved from the 1–2-year level to a 3-year level.

   The proportion of SLPP alumni leading schools in the highest ERO review level—4–5 years—is 47 percent, much higher than the national proportion of around 15 percent.

✓ Overall, we judged that SLPP had had a high impact on the work of 24 principals, medium impact for 13 and low impact for three.

✓ SLPP was associated in principals' accounts with:

   o better strategic planning and use of strategic plans to prioritise and focus school resources of time and money, with more coherence
   o more effective work with stakeholders
   o strengthening teacher capacity and leadership
   o strengthening principals' decision-making, communication, and reflective and analytic skills
   o strengthening principals' 'soft' skills such as emotional intelligence, and skills in motivating others.

✓ some gains for school board capability and confidence in their governance role, particularly in decile 1–3 schools

✓ some gains in parent and whānau engagement with their children's learning.

✓ SLPP learning was also linked to changes in teachers' practice and work together in many of the schools, and to improvements in students' learning opportunities and performance in 70 percent of the schools.

Our evaluation also found high consistency in principals' views of their SLPP experience. This indicates that the SLPP model is coherent and strong. Each of its elements is essential to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of the programme. The programme meets needs specific to individual principals and their schools, while broadening their horizons. It is both sophisticated and accessible, and it ensures principals' engagement. It fosters their openness and ability to examine their own effectiveness because it provides a high-trust and safe environment, which builds efficacy while being intellectually and personally challenging.

There were few principals among the 40 we interviewed who showed little evidence that SLPP had had some impact on their leadership and schools. It is therefore hard to draw conclusions about what SLPP could do to improve from looking at just these few. Casting the net a little wider, and looking at principals where there was evidence of medium rather than high impact, and some of the continuing challenges for those who had had high impacts from their SLPP work, raises some aspects that are worth further discussion in order to increase the level of impact that SLPP can have on school leadership, and through that, student learning and outcomes.

Some of these aspects are already ones that SpringboardTrust is addressing.

These include:

- identification, training and support for capacity partners, including peer-to-peer sharing and learning
- identification of principals who would benefit (some of this is related to personal mind-sets; some to their school context)
- follow-up for 1–3 years after SLPP (the SLPP Alumni cohort reunions and Masterclass included in this year's ALP is a start; it would also be useful to see if capacity partners can 'check in' every 6 months or so to focus on progress towards goals)
- sharing of the kinds of changes made after SLPP (some of the illustrations in this report could be useful here)
- linking principals operating at not dissimilar levels of effectiveness who are working towards similar goals, facing similar challenges.

There are two aspects of SLPP that are not articulated in the draft theory of change but which our evaluation work made us very conscious of. These add another dimension to the considerable value of SLPP that is evident in the gains we found, and the worth of the long-term investment made in SpringboardTrust by its business and philanthropic partners.

First, both the content and the nature of SLPP are important because lifting the quality and viability of school leadership is vital. This has been a key missing piece in our self-managing school system.

Second, SLPP has formed and models an all too rare cross-sector approach to one of New Zealand society's prime drivers, allowing education and business leaders to work together respectfully on the common ground of a commitment to improve education and outcomes for children.

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Appendix 1:   Theory of Change used for this evaluation

Draft Theory of Change for Strategic Leadership for Principals Programme (SLPP)
Short-term impacts (1–3 years after programme)

- Quality of SLPP work with principals – so that principals graduate with sound strategic 3-year plan with clear priority goals, 1-year action plan, and understanding, skills, and agency to implement these
- Programme manager interaction at regular intervals supports principal learning and agency, and making the most of capacity partner and workshop experiences
- Capacity partner interaction at regular intervals supports principal learning and agency, and models effective mentoring and coaching
- Facilitation at workshops models effective listening, engagement, agency development
- Workshop curriculum provides sound understanding of strategic leadership
- Cohort principals support each other and share readily
- SLPP capacity partner and/or programme manager provide useful help to principals when requested

Principal engagement in SLPP
- Full attendance
- Shares information needed for SLPP to support and challenge
- Asks for help if needed
- Does the homework in the

Impacts for Principals
More effective and efficient leaders, particularly in:
- strategic development thinking & planning
- implementation of strategic priorities
- stakeholder management
- allocation of resources (people and time)
- leadership development for staff
- capacity-building staff performance goals
- using networks and external expertise including cohort principals to support school change
- contribution to cross-school work to improve student learning
- More time for high value activities that drive educational outcomes

Connection with other SLPP alumni

School context
- Leeway over resource allocation within school
- Other related PLD for school and professional leadership (previous & current)
- No major or unexpected events/changes in local or national context that divert principal attention and energy

Impacts for schools
- greater leadership capacity among staff related to school priorities
- improved learning opportunities
- increased school resources
- enhanced community engagement
- improved student outcomes

Alumni Learning Platform
SBT-organised events:
- Deepen understanding and skills of strategic leadership
- Share useful information with other alumni that will improve school leadership and student learning opportunities and outcomes, and community engagement

↑
Alumni organised contact – mainly individual

Springboard Values

High trust
Challenging with empathy
Respect
Collaboration
Low risk
Political neutrality – independence

Personalised – principal at centre – bake own cake – bespoke to community
Learn best from active leaders

Synergies of public, private, philanthropic

Appendix 2:   SLPP alumni—2015 interview

1. What are the aspects of your role as principal that you have found most strengthened or changed through your SLPP participation?

2. What are you doing differently now as a result?

3. Are there any changes in how you:

    a. spend your time?
    b. delegate?
    c. think and plan strategically (decisions you make)?
    d. plan and facilitate (strategic) meetings?
    e. identify and implement strategic priorities?
    f. manage stakeholders?
    g. plan and allocate your resourcing (people/time/money)?
    h. develop staff as leaders?
    i. lead your school (incl. of processes)?
    j. use performance goals and review?
    k. use networks and external expertise?
    l. work with other school leaders?
    m. work with other schools?

4. What would be different for me as a result of your work in SLPP if I was a

    a. senior leader?
    b. teacher at your school?
    c. board member?
    d. parent of a student?
    e. student?
    f. member of your school community?

5. Did the strategic plan and action plan you developed through SLPP work out well?

    a. If so, what made them work out well?
    b. Did they work out better than your previous strategic plan and annual plan?
    c. If not, what made them difficult to enact?

6. What did having the strategic plan and action plan enable you to do in the school?

7. What change(s) did they result in, and how did this come about?

   (seeking information about e.g., change in staff buy-in to and leadership of strategic priorities, embedding of strategic priorities in staff performance goals, development of more collective professional community, financial planning to afford teaching and learning initiatives or resources to improve student learning, school community interest in learning at the school and more home support for learning, changes in teaching and learning that show improved student learning)

8. How have your strategic plan and action plan evolved since the ones you had at the end of SLPP, and why?

   a. How much have they changed over time?

   b. How often do you revise them?

   c. How often do you refer to them?

   d. How often does your leadership team refer to them?

9. How useful have the topics on the Alumni Learning Platform (ALP) been for you?

   a. Why were they useful/not useful?

   b. What would you change about the ALP topics and formats?

   c. Is there anything else you would like from the ALP?

10. What ongoing contact do you have with other alumni, your capacity partner and the SpringboardTrust staff?

11. Looking back at your participation in SLPP, is there anything you would do differently or have the SpringboardTrust do differently to improve your learning from SLPP?

12. Are there any other aspects of your SLPP learning and use of that learning that I haven't asked about that you would like to describe?