

# PRINCIPAL WORKLOAD AND TIME USE STUDY

## Objectives

In 2017 the NSW Department of Education commissioned Deloitte to conduct a research study into school principal workload and time use. The research set out to address the following key questions:

1. What tasks do principals spend their time on?
2. What are the enablers and barriers to principals managing their workload?
3. Is the current principal workload achievable and sustainable?
4. Has there been a change in either the quantity or nature of principals' work in recent years?
5. What are some examples of exemplary practice from which other schools could benefit?
6. Could the leadership and decision-making culture in schools change in any way to help manage principal workloads?

## Key findings

- Principals spend a significant amount of time on activities related to management and administration, which reduces the time they have to be an instructional leader.
- Greater authority for school decision-making to schools is supported by principals but that, coupled with higher community expectations, has led to an increase in workload.
- The main barriers to managing principal workload include limited training and preparation for leadership roles, insufficient administrative support and lack of access to quality support services, tools and systems.
- There is no one-size-fits-all model of great leadership. Leadership practices are contextualised to the school and system support should enhance flexibility and collaboration for school leadership teams.
- Principals could better manage their workloads if there was better coordinated, streamlined and aligned department support tools and communications.

### Time use breakdown

- 40% of principals' time is spent on leading the management of the school
- 30% is spent on leading teaching and learning
- 11% is spent on engaging and working with the community
- 9% is spent on developing self and others
- 6% is spent on leading improvement, innovation and change
- 3% on other activities.

Principals report it is difficult to fulfil their role as educational leaders because they spend a large proportion of time on activities they classify as administration.

## Workload

Principals were asked how achievable or sustainable their current workload was:

- 75% said their workload is 'difficult to achieve' or 'not at all achievable'
- 77% said their workload is 'difficult to sustain' or 'not at all sustainable'.

## Factors that help principals manage their workload

- capable and available executive and administrative support staff, in an appropriate structure where tasks are assigned to staff members based on their skills, capability, experience and capacity
- value-adding staff with capabilities that address gaps at the school level, such as the use of business managers
- creation of formal and informal collegial networks that are key sources of information and support, including involvement in principal professional bodies
- tools and frameworks such as the School Excellence Framework, the AITSL Framework and the Leadership and Management Credential for principals to self-evaluate the effectiveness of their work and identify opportunities for development.

## Barriers that affect principals' ability to manage their workload

- limited availability of administrative support and resources, including the lack of allocated administrative funding
- inability to allocate executive staff for planned and ad hoc tasks
- limited training and 'on the job' support available for the breadth and complexities of the role
- lack of functionality, integration, sufficient support and training of department systems and tools
- no clear measures of effectiveness in the principal's role
- reduced department support services for specialist roles.

## Opportunities for improvement

The research findings highlight opportunities for the department to respond to the challenges experienced by principals.

1. **Enhancing capacity:** How could the department enhance the capacity of principals to operate successfully in an environment of constant change so they are able to evaluate, prioritise and implement improvements within their context, and with the support and commitment of their teams?
2. **Creating high performing teams:** How could the department assist principals to structure and lead high performing teams so they achieve the desired outcomes of their school?
3. **Developing and supporting talent:** How could the department coach, develop and support high performing principals so they discharge their responsibilities and accountabilities to deliver against the success criteria of their role?
4. **Supporting networks:** How could the department enable and support principals' formal and informal networks so that principals receive the exposure, education, experience and environment they need to be successful?
5. **Streamlining administrative components:** How could the department enable principals to execute the administrative components of their role in the most efficient and effective way so they are able to increase their focus on educational leadership?

## Methodology

The research was conducted in Term 2, 2017. The quantitative research component consisted of direct observation of principals from a representative sample of 119 NSW government schools. Researchers observed and recorded the tasks that the principal undertook and the time spent on tasks.

The qualitative research consisted of 14 two-hour immersive contextual inquiries with principals; four focus group sessions with other school staff; and five industry subject matter expert interviews. The researchers also interviewed 16 key stakeholders.