



Western Australia school leadership strategy

Report 1: Situation analysis and preliminary
findings

June 2016

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1 Developing a leadership strategy

Learning First has been commissioned to support the WA Department of Education (the Department) to develop a comprehensive school leadership strategy. The strategy will incorporate the full leadership lifecycle of identifying, nurturing, developing and supporting aspiring, beginning, current and senior leaders.

In some respects, it is easy to see why this work is being undertaken. School leadership has been shown to greatly increase school performance and student outcomes.¹ Research highlights the role of school principals as instructional leaders who improve the quality of teaching in their school.² Many systems around the world have implemented new training programs and set standards for more instructional leadership.

But to focus on only a few levers is a simplistic outlook. WA is developing a comprehensive leadership strategy. Such an undertaking is incredibly rare. You could count on one hand the number of education systems around the world with comprehensive leadership strategies that span effective talent identification, recruitment and selection, performance management and development, and retention and succession planning. In truth, the development of this WA leadership strategy is cutting edge not just nationally but across the globe.

A strategic approach

A comprehensive leadership strategy creates clear linkages between each element of leadership development. We cannot leverage investments in improved leadership training unless we address selection issues; the best training in the world is close to useless if given to the wrong people who then go into the wrong positions. Comprehensive strategic reform will therefore not only improve the effectiveness of school leaders but increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of leadership development initiatives across the system.

Strategic leadership development is more than investment in developing individual school principals. A system must be built that integrates ongoing assessment of whole-system leadership needs with a leadership strategy – talent identification, skill development, individual support, and performance management – all aligned to transparent pathways for effective career progression. This is not easy. No school system in Australia has built a comprehensive leadership strategy, but it is an opportune time to implement a comprehensive leadership strategy in WA.

A comprehensive leadership strategy brings together all the different components of a leadership pipeline (see Figure 1 below). It begins with setting overall system objectives and using these to determine priorities for leadership. What do we want to see in WA schools over the short, medium and long term? How should WA school leaders work together and develop their skills? Once these priorities are determined, we are able to fashion the elements of the strategy to achieve the desired outcomes.

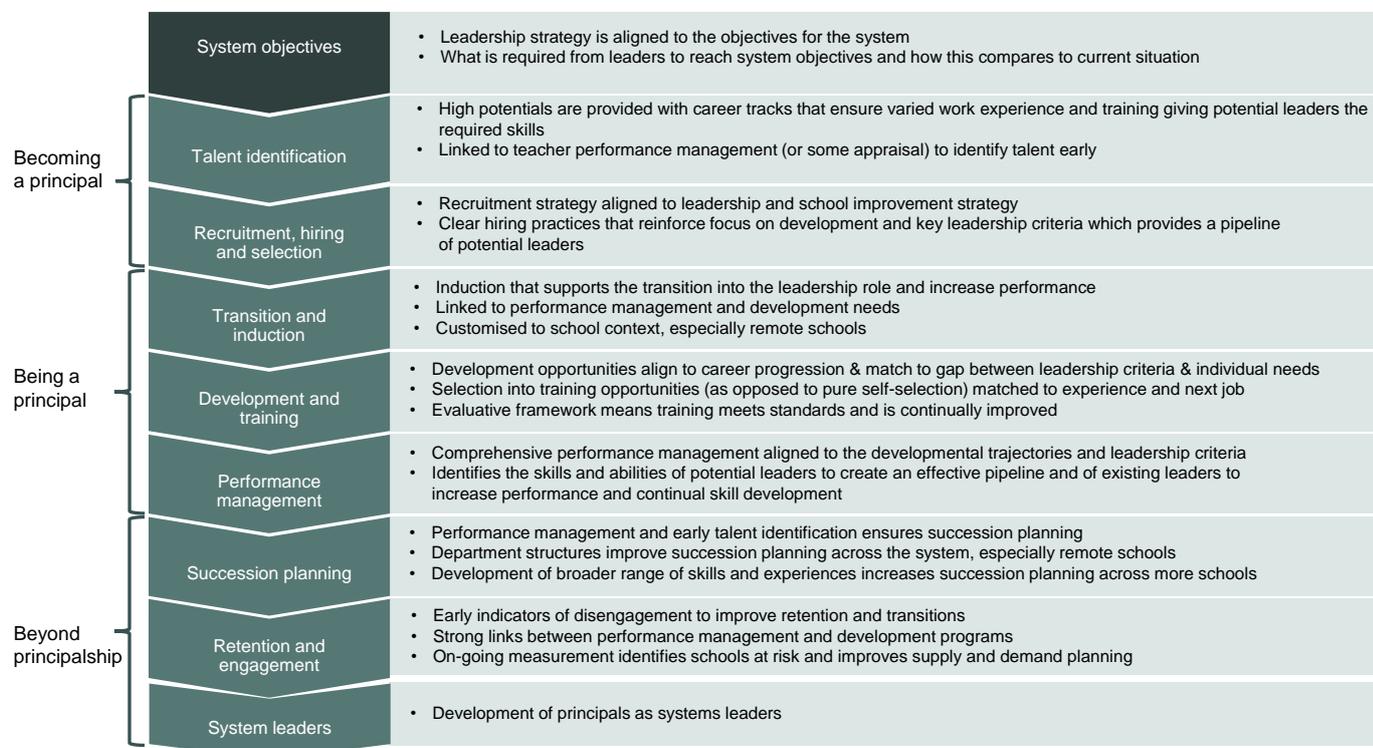
Leadership talent identification is a greatly underdeveloped area in most education systems around the world. Too many systems begin talent identification too close to the time people are selected into school principal positions. Identifying leadership potential early in people's careers and then developing

¹ Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008

² Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008, p. 638

necessary skills creates a pipeline of leaders that can overcome potential leadership shortages, but more importantly lifts the entire system.

Figure 1: The leadership strategy framework



The next stage is the recruitment, hiring and selection of these teachers into school leadership roles. This sends a message to the rest of the system about what skills, knowledge and abilities to prioritise in school leaders, and that the system recognises and values leadership talent.

Ongoing development and training for aspiring, new and experienced leaders ensures constant growth as a system. Experienced principals can become system leaders and assist new and aspiring leaders to develop their skills and transform their leadership identity.

Performance management brings many components together. It helps with identification, hiring, induction and development. It also signals the skills and knowledge that the system expects of its leaders and helps guide individual development accordingly.

Succession planning is important to ease the transition when experienced principals retire or move to system-level positions. Minimising the state of flux schools experience between leaders helps sustain school improvement. Retention and engagement strategies help keep talented and experienced leaders working in the system either as principals or system leaders or both.

The most important feature of this leadership strategy framework, however, is that no component will work alone. The strategy is a system of moving parts that work best when executed in tandem, alongside each other. This is why policies affecting each component must always remain aligned to the objectives of the system, the leadership priorities, and in turn, to each other.

1.1 Ensuring a Western Australian approach

A strategy will only be effective if it is tailored to the system in which it will be implemented. There is no point trying to copy and paste success from other systems into WA. It simply won't work. Local context and major policy reforms must be integrated into the WA leadership strategy. The strategy needs, for example, to be aligned to WA's Classroom First³ strategy and the Independent Public Schools⁴ initiative.

It is vital that WA school leaders and stakeholders have input into the development of the strategy. So far, engaging WA school leaders and stakeholders in consultation has proven successful and highlighted the eagerness for these reforms.

The process of developing the strategy involved a series of consultation phases seeking expert advice from current and aspiring school leaders and other key stakeholders.

The following conversations made up the consultation approach:

- An online Connect Community was established with all current principals and a number of aspiring principals in the state invited to join. At the time of writing, 576 principals/aspiring principals are members of the community and there have been 44 separate leadership discussions with a total of 166 individual replies and 2367 views.
- Early February – A series of consultation meetings was held in Perth between Learning First representatives, Department executives and key stakeholders including principals' associations.
- Early March – A series of focus groups and meetings was held with principals, aspiring principals and other key experts to gather information and ideas about the current state, future priorities, and potential high-impact initiatives for school leadership in WA.
- March and April – A series of ongoing consultation sessions was held to ensure all regions had input into the strategy. These sessions were conducted by the Executive Principal from the Department.
- Ongoing dialogue and focus groups were also held with school principals.

During the first consultation stage, Learning First met with over 120 principals/aspiring principals. The Executive Principal undertook additional consultations with over 75 principals/aspiring principals. This meant that over 20% of Western Australian principals were consulted as a part of this first stage of the project.

This report presents a synthesis of findings from the first phase of our engagement with the Department. It brings together:

- key findings from analysis of available system-level data relating to school leadership
- insights from focus groups with current and aspiring school principals and other key stakeholders
- assessment of gaps between the current situation in WA and a best-practice system leadership strategy
- synthesis of key findings from the situation analysis that will inform the development of the WA leadership strategy.

³ Western Australia Department of Education, 2016a

⁴ Western Australia Department of Education, 2016b

2 Summary – Overarching issues

A leadership strategy is only effective if it is customised to the system in which it is to be implemented. This is not only about addressing specific problems, but about building on the strengths of, in this case, WA school leadership and the reform context that shapes it.

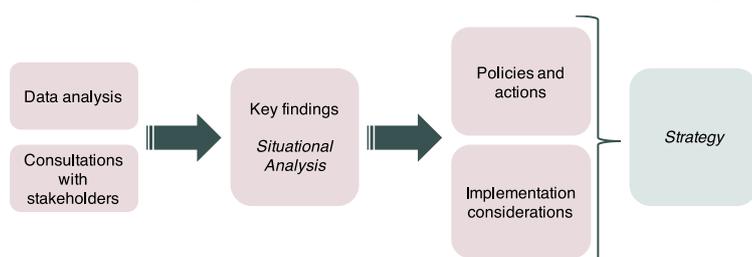
For example, it would be folly to develop a leadership strategy that does not recognise the significant reforms in school education through the system that have affected school leadership. Transforming schools to Independent Public Schools, in addition to the changing regional structure, have fundamentally shifted the roles of leaders across WA. Changes of this magnitude create significant opportunities and potential for growth. In 2007, Classroom First set the scene for “distinctive schools” exercising local initiative⁵, followed by the 2008 Empowering School Communities commitment to “a system of public schools where policy and budget will be determined for implementation locally”. The launch of Independent Public Schools was announced in August 2009, extending more autonomy and responsibility to all schools.⁶ In 2015, over half of the principals in the public school system led Independent Public Schools.

WA’s principals have responded to and delivered on these changes. They now have increased decision-making power and responsibility over resource allocations based on student needs, workforce planning, teacher development, facilities, engagement with the community, and development of the learning program for students. Melbourne University’s 2013 evaluation of the Independent Public Schools initiative highlighted the need for strong, capable principals in this context. The evaluation recommended that the motivation, energy and engagement generated in principals be capitalised on to sustain improvement, and noted the importance of providing increased support and targeted professional development for principals in years to come.⁷

The role of the principal in WA schools therefore continues to evolve. Leadership identity and capability must change as well adapt to a more autonomous system. This situation analysis identifies several key strengths of the Western Australian system and school leadership and describes important areas where there is a gap between current WA policies and a best practice system leadership strategy. This document synthesises findings from quantitative data about school leadership in WA with qualitative findings from interviews and focus groups with school leaders, aspiring leaders, and those who support school leaders across the system.

As illustrated in Figure 2, key findings of the situation analysis will feed into the policy and implementation considerations for the strategy.

Figure 2: Designing a comprehensive leadership strategy



⁵ Western Australia Department of Education, 2016a

⁶ Western Australia Department of Education, 2016b

⁷ Melbourne Graduate School of Education, 2013

Key aspects of WA leadership that feed into strategy development

Building a strategy includes identifying leadership priorities and creating a mix of policies to identify, nurture, develop and support these kinds of leaders. The strategy needs to be geared toward the future, but this is hard for many because some people still operate in old paradigms and ways of working. It is also important not to focus on one particular part of the leadership pathway and ignore the others or consider the parts in isolation from each other.

The strategic framework (see Figure 1) drove analysis of the strengths and opportunities of WA school leadership. The main findings include the following.

Western Australian leaders are eager for reform: The system is positive about possible change and optimistic about a new strategy. The strategy being developed is a considerable reform. It is not tinkering around the edges; it is not a few programs here and there but a comprehensive strategy to fundamentally lift the quality and profile of school leadership in WA. That the WA school system, school leaders and key stakeholders are so supportive of this process creates opportunities that other systems can only dream of. Moreover, it reflects fundamental strengths of the WA system and school leaders.

“The worst thing you can do is to do nothing.”

– WA school principal, school leader focus group, March 2016.

In many systems, the cultural and personal barriers to reform are severe. Resistance to change is often communicated through a mentality that the status quo is good enough so reform should be minimal and constrained. In these systems, the biggest hurdle to reform is convincing educators of the need for improvement. In contrast, school leaders in WA are embracing reform; they are not only welcoming the development of a leadership strategy but actively supporting and engaging in its development.

The importance of this mindset and support should not be underestimated. It not only bodes well for effective implementation and support for policy reform, but also enables a leadership strategy to be developed that is truly Western Australian: a strategy that is developed to address the specific issues highlighted by WA education leaders and builds on their strengths and capabilities.

The identity of the Western Australian school leader is shifting: Developing the identity of teachers and school leaders has been central to education reform and improvement for decades. For many years, this focused on developing leaders who believed they could improve the learning of all students, regardless of their socio-economic background.⁸ Efforts to make this shift have spread across the world. But two other related identity shifts are starting to occur in WA. Stemming from changes across the education system that increased the autonomy of school leaders, the identity of some WA leaders is changing to a personal belief that not only can they improve the learning of all their students but they can do it themselves; they don't have to wait for the Department or the regional office to tell them what to do. Identity change of this kind increases independent thinking and decision-making, and engenders greater responsibility felt by leaders for improving their schools.

This was apparent in all the focus groups and interviews conducted with WA school leaders. Leaders are happy with the autonomy given through (or alongside) Independent Public School reforms and many feel empowered. Some are even postponing their retirement. Leaders enjoy increased autonomy and are looking for more support on what to do with it.

⁸ Day et al., 2009

A further shift is taking place for some WA education leaders that entails greater system focus and responsibility. While the focus of school leaders will always primarily be on the learning and welfare of their schools' students, school leaders are also part of a system. Some school leaders are starting to see themselves as able to assist improvement across a system of schools outside of just their own.⁹ This is particularly important for system-wide improvement in increasingly decentralised education systems.¹⁰

Some WA school leaders conveyed an increasing focus on their system responsibilities. They highlighted the importance of continually investing in the pipeline of aspiring leaders, promoting the ongoing development and enhancement of high performing principals, assisting in the development of others, and moving into system leadership roles.

An effective leadership strategy will continually develop and reinforce a new leadership identity that redefines the role of the principal to include elements of system leadership.

There are pockets of talent identification: WA school leaders showed a great willingness to improve the way potential leaders were identified and developed throughout the system. School leaders emphasised the importance of networks and the Expert Review Group for providing opportunities for aspiring leaders to identify themselves and gain leadership experience. Some current principals also take it upon themselves to identify and develop talent within their own schools.

But they were also clear that too often leadership talent identification is currently being done in an ad-hoc and disjointed manner. People are looking for clarity on what experiences aspiring principals should have to become principals, and it is difficult for aspirants to see how one experience will lead to the next.

Figure 3: Current leadership roles including number of WA staff in each position

Primary / District



Secondary**



* Teacher leaders are teachers who have some form of leadership role (e.g. literacy and numeracy program coordinators).

**Ed support/remote/agricultural schools not included because unable to split primary and secondary in data supplied.

There are multiple pathways to becoming a principal, but one pathway is shown in Figure 3 whereby deputies become principals and where heads of department become deputies in secondary schools. Principals can skip these roles to advance, particularly at small or remote schools, but these are the

⁹ Schleicher, 2012, p. 81; Schleicher, 2016

¹⁰ Petrie, 2014, pp. 21–24

main pre-principal roles currently acknowledged by the system. Potential roles for younger aspiring leaders are not clear. The role of the Level 3 Classroom Teacher may be a stepping stone, but the role was originally designed to retain exemplary teachers in the classroom. Schools may develop other roles as needed for aspiring leaders, but these are usually not documented at the system level.

In addition to the lack of clarity on pathways and experiences, principals do not feel that the selection process is currently geared towards consistently selecting the best people to lead WA's schools. Comparisons were made to the more rigorous selection processes for becoming an Independent Public School or a Level 3 Classroom Teacher.

There is consistency on what is expected in new school leaders: For many years, there has been considerable debate on what constitutes effective school leadership.¹¹ This debate has fed into the development of standards that have helped shape thinking about school leadership. But the application of these standards has often been problematic; leaders were often selected into schools based on a long list of leadership competencies. This can cause issues for creating a strategic focus and for getting a system to focus on the core elements of school leadership.

It is very refreshing that WA school principals were so clear and consistent in their beliefs about what should be the core leadership capabilities on which to base school principal selection decisions. They emphasised the need to demonstrate ability to lead a group of teachers to improve student outcomes. This may sound obvious, but it gets to the core of what it means to lead school improvement and the crucial shifts in identity required for people to step up into school leadership roles. It provides a focus for leadership strategy development around which key aspects such as talent identification, preparation, selection, and development should be aligned. However, more work needs to be done on how school principals should be developing leaders across the system.

This is also another example of the engagement of WA leaders in the development of a new leadership strategy and how their input is shaping its development.

The next generation of school leaders are eager if the opportunities are right: While many have fears that younger teachers don't want to become school leaders, our interviews and focus groups highlighted the eagerness of some young educators in middle and senior management to take on leadership positions. This is important for the future leadership of WA schools. But these younger leaders feel hampered by a lack of opportunity in a system in which many older school leaders have been in the same positions for many years which results in a reduced number of vacancies in which aspirants can test their skills.

Some effective training and development already exists: Some training and development programs were highlighted as very effective. Mentoring and coaching programs were generally considered as positive experiences (but the accessibility of mentors may need to be improved). Initiatives like the Principal Advisory Team and other principal support teams, Coach in a Box, and Women in Leadership have been great at supporting leaders when accessed. Many leaders express an interest for more of these types of programs.

However, development and training is not well linked to appraisal of leaders' performance. Training opportunities are not sufficiently linked to development needs. Moreover, most leaders did not know how to operationalise the feedback they receive on their performance. Very few principals discussed their own development needs in the focus groups.

¹¹ Hallinger, 2011

There is a need to improve professional conversations: Performance management and development can be strengthened with an emphasis on making sure leaders have skills to hold professional conversations with each other and with other staff. Providing effective feedback and having professional conversations is an important way to improve skills for all professionals. Teachers and school leaders are no exception.¹² The evidence consistently shows that a key way to improve teaching and learning in schools is through providing feedback based on a proper assessment of classroom teaching and learning.¹³ Professional conversations also enable development issues to be addressed and play a vital role in any effective performance management and development program.¹⁴ Our interviews found that many WA school leaders are not having these conversations with their teachers with sufficient frequency or depth to significantly improve performance. These professional conversations happen even less frequently for school leaders; they lack opportunities for feedback on their own development. While coaching programs may have improved this situation more recently, many WA principals are not able or willing to have honest professional conversations. This may be related to cultural norms or a lack of training and development with specific coaching in managing underperforming staff.

These conversations are not easy. The ability to have effective conversations and enable strong communication in schools is something that requires development. If WA were to take this path, they would follow the world's top performing systems who have invested in developing school leaders' skills in this area.¹⁵

There are mixed experiences with between-school collaboration: Networks can be used to decrease professional isolation, improve talent identification, and provide leadership opportunities and succession planning. Some networks in WA are functioning well but others are struggling. The leadership strategy will consider ways to improve collaboration and the enabling structures and policies required to support it.

There is not a leadership supply crisis: While considerable improvements can be made in talent identification, it does not mean that WA has an impending leadership supply crisis. Across WA, school principals are on average four years older than they were a decade ago. However, principal cessations have remained relatively constant at around 35 to 45 per year and there are no expectations this will change in the future. This is primarily due to the increase in the retirement age. Principals may be on average four years older but they are also retiring on average four years later.

However, there is a chance that this trend could change, and the relatively high average ages of Level 3 Classroom Teachers, heads of department and deputy principals does indicate that there are limited opportunities for young talent to come through the system. Discussion of a demographic crisis in WA (and across most other states in Australia) reflects the assumption that a particular level of seniority should determine when someone is ready to be a principal. A number of studies – and practices in high performing systems – demonstrate the value of expertise over experience, especially in relation to teaching performance improving student outcomes.¹⁶ In fact, if we get talent identification and recruitment and selection working well, demographics will no longer dictate supply and demand of school leadership positions.

¹² Danielson, 2015

¹³ Hattie, 2009

¹⁴ Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull, & Hunter, 2016; Ontario Institute for Education Leadership, 2013

¹⁵ Jensen, 2010

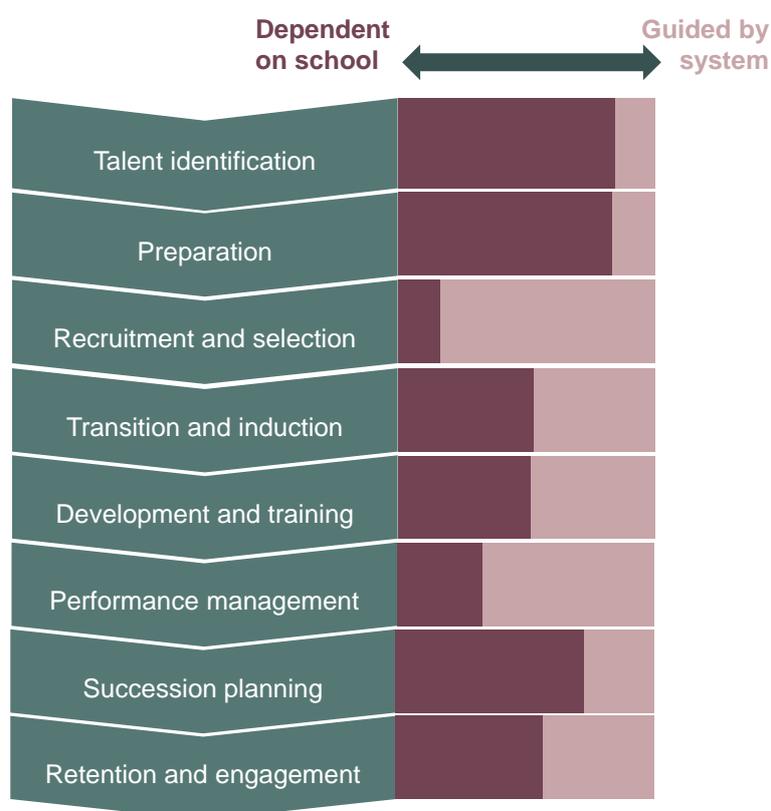
¹⁶ Hattie & Clinton, 2008

There is a lack of mobility between regions: Some principals talked about the decreasing desirability to work in remote areas. However, what many principals view as a regional versus metropolitan issue is actually a broader mobility issue (although the implications of this for regional areas are greater). Most principals are hired from within the same region where they work. However, it is likely that metropolitan areas recruit from within their own regions by choice, whereas a regional area might only be able to recruit from within the region due to lack of supply. Low mobility means that it is more likely leadership expertise is not well distributed throughout some regions, and low SES schools and leaders are less likely to identify with the system of WA as a whole. A good WA leader has experience in multiple contexts.

Current status of school versus system control

A goal of the strategy is to improve system thinking without pulling back on school autonomy. Some elements of school leadership in WA are more systemic than others. For example, talent identification is currently performed by school principals in their own schools, with few system-wide structures to support the identification of talent. The selection process, on the other hand, is a highly standardised, too compliance-focussed process with little local customisation. One question to answer is: what is the best-practice balance of devolution to schools and a systematic approach?¹⁷

Figure 4: Control of each stage of the leadership pathway



¹⁷ Jensen, 2013

3 Becoming a principal

Strengths

- Some development opportunities are very effective for talent identification, including opportunities from strong networks and the Expert Review Group.
- Many principals feel responsibility for identifying and fostering talent in their own schools.
- The selection processes for Independent Public Schools and Level 3 Classroom Teachers are considered rigorous (this is in contrast to the selection process for principals).
- There is not currently a leadership supply crisis but this could change.

Opportunities to improve specific areas

- Talent identification can be accidental and leadership preparation is ad hoc.
- Many pre-principal roles are not structured to prepare future principals to lead teachers to improve student outcomes.
- The principal recruitment and selection process does not connect to performance management and therefore relies too heavily on information from applications and short interviews.
- Leadership development in regional areas is particularly important because there are a greater number of vacancies.
- The median ages of the current pre-principal roles indicate that they are not on a stepping stone progression but instead are occupied by people who may not aspire to the principalship. This could be adversely affecting the leadership development opportunities available to aspiring principals.
- The Level 3 Classroom Teacher role was created to recognise exemplary teachers. However, it may be used as a stepping stone role in the case of some teachers who have the desire to go into leadership roles. These teachers typically act as teacher leaders in their schools but their concentration in a small subset of schools may be problematic for sharing their knowledge across the system.

What principals are saying

- Young leaders (in middle management positions) want to succeed but do not know the career pathways of how to get there. Career pathways are clearer in secondary schools than they are in primary schools. In secondary schools, there are more layers of management hierarchy (e.g. head of department) for pre-principal leadership opportunities whereas in primary there are fewer.
- The principal job is not always attractive to young teachers. Pre-principal leadership roles are also sometimes unattractive due to the lack of a pay increase in exchange for increased responsibility.
- The Women in Leadership program is an effective program for building confidence in potential female leaders.
- The recruitment process is too narrow and doesn't sufficiently guarantee the most suitable candidates will get the jobs.
- There is not enough of a focus on the non-operational elements of leadership, such as relational skills and emotional intelligence, when identifying, developing and selecting talent.

What does a strong system look like?

Early talent identification is critical for building a strong pool of leaders. Organisational psychology literature emphasises that, for it to be effective, any talent identification process must be linked with performance management, recruitment, professional development and career pathways in the organisation.¹⁸

Hence, strong education systems create clear pathways for aspiring leaders to become principals. There should be systematic early career encouragement for potential leaders and guidance provided to schools on core skills and procedures for identification. A broad pool of leadership candidates should be identified, then narrowed after performance in various leadership roles is reviewed. In Singapore, integrated talent management and performance systems track and identify teachers with leadership potential, and place them on structured career paths to the principalship ensuring that nothing is left to chance (see Box 1).¹⁹

In developing talent, schools should have clear guidance on how to structure pre-principal leadership roles to develop leaders. The goals of these roles should be seen as both managing the school as well as developing tomorrow's leaders. While some deputies do not aspire to be principals, the deputy's role should be seen as potential preparation for the principal role rather than support for the current principal. Development opportunities should be strategically deployed – not just in individual schools but across schools and in other learning environments.

The system should capture data on past performance of potential leaders and use institutional knowledge to recruit and select candidates. Strengths and weaknesses of candidates could already be identified with the information passed on to selection teams for principal vacancies. For example, Ontario school boards (similar to districts or regions) are required to annually document which aspiring leaders are qualified and ready to step into the roles of vice principals, principals and supervisory officers. Hence, the system is aware of its talent before a vacancy exists, allowing recruitment to be efficient and reliable.²⁰

WA has many opportunities to improve talent identification. It would build on existing strengths in the leadership framework that will be discussed in the following sections.

¹⁸ Walsh, 2008

¹⁹ "Leadership Track," n.d.

²⁰ Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013

Box 1: Singapore's integrated talent management system

Talent identification in Singapore is structured around formal career tracks that make clear the stepping stone roles on the way to becoming a principal. The clear career tracks also provide the backbone for an integrated system of performance management, school-based professional learning and milestone development programs. Those with leadership potential are allocated to the leadership track. Teachers do not self-select, but are identified by principals, cluster superintendents and ministry officials. Talent identification from superiors is embedded in the structures of the system.

Performance management happens systematically at all levels through the Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS). Teacher and school leader evaluations occur annually at the school level, with a panel of supervisors applying ministry guidelines. The process is intentionally development-focussed, with staff working with their supervisors to set goals and create development plans which they are then coached through and evaluated against.

Staff are evaluated on how well they develop students, themselves and other staff, and the weighting given to these areas changes depending on the person's role. As teachers and school leaders move up their career tracks, their performance review places more weighting on how they develop others' skills. More senior staff also appraise and coach those below them. This ensures early talent identification since there is shared responsibility throughout the system for the development and management of every teacher and leader.

Once on the leadership track, teachers have a clear trajectory towards leadership positions up to the highest level of the system and opportunities for formal and informal development.

Teachers on the leadership track are first appointed to a middle-management position within their school, such as a head of department. Once appointed to a middle-management position, teachers on the leadership track are sent to complete the Management and Leadership in Schools (MLS) program at the National Institute of Education. Middle managers can progress to the status of vice principal and principal after successfully undertaking a series of interviews.

Obviously, Singapore is quite unique and what works there would not necessarily work in WA. However, this case study serves to illustrate the extent to which an integrated talent management system can ensure that the best leaders are identified, trained and retained in the system.

Sources: Jensen, Hunter, Sonnemann, & Burns, 2012; "Leadership Track," n.d.; Ng Foo Seong, 2013

3.1 Pathways to leadership

"We need a clear definition of the pathways to the principalship; the progression to principal, including the training, support and opportunities available along the way."

– WA school principal, school leader focus group, March 2016.

Leaders don't start their leadership journey the day they step into the principalship. A good system of talent identification and management ensures that principals are practising their skills and developing their leadership identity in the various jobs they hold before they become a principal.²¹ In WA, however, current pre-principal identification and preparation opportunities lack clarity and can be improved.

At the moment, most talent identification relies on individual principals; some are strong at identifying and developing leadership talent but others may be unsure how to do so. Therefore, in many schools, there is a reliance on 'accidental' encouragement of leaders which means that potential leaders are only identified when there is a need to fill a position. Too often, aspiring leaders only have opportunities to develop by chance. This may only occur, for example, if someone else is leaving a position they can fill.

²¹ Bierly, 2013

Even if aspirants are lucky enough to be in a school with a leadership vacancy, it is often a temporary acting role. After the acting role ends, there is no clear next step for many aspirants.

In WA, there is the opportunity to make talent identification more systematic and proactive. Many principals are interested in having more guidance about how to identify talent and how to structure pre-principal roles in schools. Aspiring principals are looking for guidance on what experiences they should have to develop leadership skills and how to go about finding those experiences.

Below is an illustration of what a leadership pathway may look like in WA (see Figure 5). This example is only illustrative and represents the structures currently in place. We should be clear that leadership pathways should not be rigid; the ultimate aim is to create a system with multiple effective pathways to school leadership. This example illustrates what one of these pathways could look like.

In primary schools and district high schools, teachers can become deputies and then principals. Some primary schools offer additional leadership opportunities but the availability of these positions depends heavily on the schools (and often on their size). In secondary schools, there are more stepping stone leadership opportunities available. Head of department roles often act as a stepping stone to deputy principal positions.

The example pathway in WA represented by Figure 5 raises these issues:

1. Roles for younger aspiring leaders (before heads of department or deputies) are not clear because they vary based on the school. The variability of roles is not an issue in itself, but this means that there is no structure to identify these aspirants at the system-level, and their identification and development is highly reliant on their schools. This is an invisible part of the pathway for younger leaders taking smaller leadership roles in schools. Currently, these roles are not well identified by the system.
2. The median ages of the current pre-principal roles indicate that they are not on a stepping stone progression but instead are occupied by people who may not aspire to the principalship. This could be adversely affecting the leadership development opportunities available to aspiring principals.
3. The Level 3 Classroom Teacher role was created to recognise exemplary teachers. However, it may be used as a stepping stone role in the case of some teachers who have the desire to go into leadership roles. These teachers typically act as teacher leaders in their schools but their concentration in a small subset of schools may be problematic for sharing their knowledge across the system.

These issues are expanded on below.

Figure 5: Current pipeline of leadership roles, including number of WA staff in each position (2016)²²

Primary / District



Secondary**



*Teacher leaders are teachers who have some form of leadership role (e.g. literacy and numeracy program coordinators).

**Education support/remote/agricultural schools not included because unable to split primary and secondary in data supplied.

Opportunities for younger aspirants can be improved

Successful leadership development pipelines identify a broad pool of early career aspiring leaders, and the highest quality aspirants move into higher level roles with more responsibility. There are approximately 2,000 clearly designated roles for higher level aspirants in head of department and deputy roles, but the younger aspirants in teacher leader roles that may feed into these 2,000 positions are currently invisible at the system level. It is currently difficult to determine who these younger aspirants are, how many might be ready to take on higher level positions, and whether or not there are enough strong potential leaders in the pipeline.

The development of younger aspirants is often tied to them leading specific initiatives in the school or in their network. This can be highly effective for assessing and developing leadership talent, but these opportunities do not occur regularly and are highly dependent on the school or network. It is sometimes difficult for aspirants to look for the next leadership development opportunity and clearly understand what next step would be best to take.

The average deputy is only four years younger than the average principal indicating that there may be too many of these roles filled by people with little interest in becoming principals (see Figure 7). Leaving deputies or heads of department in these roles indefinitely comes at a high cost because it stops young aspiring principals from gaining experience through these roles.

Opportunities to get experience in acting roles are often ad hoc, based on being in the right place at the right time rather than being drawn from a pool of aspiring leaders available to fill acting positions.

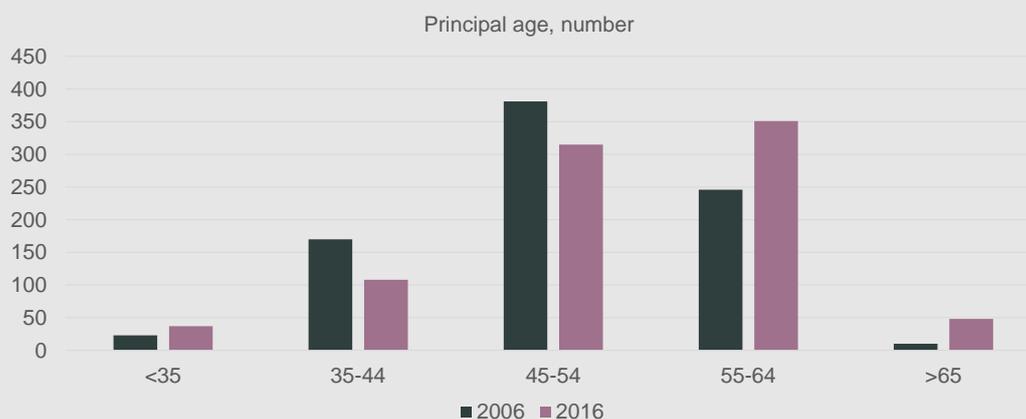
In some respects, this is the nature of schooling; positions in schools have to be filled. It is, however, a sign of a lack of systematic talent identification and management that could be adversely affecting young talent coming through and being developed.

²² This is the current role structure in terms of getting to principalship, but not everyone will follow this pathway and it is not the only pathway to principalship.

The leadership strategy will need to identify the types of other roles that may also lead to upper level leadership positions to estimate how well the system is developing a pipeline of leadership.

Box 2: Is WA facing a demographic crisis?

Figure 6: Principals are on average four years older than they were in 2006



Principals in WA are on average four years older than they were a decade ago, but fortunately this does not necessarily mean WA is facing a crisis.

To start with, principal cessations have remained relatively constant at around 35 to 45 a year and there are no expectations this trend will not continue. This is primarily due to the increase in the retirement age. Principals may be on average four years older but they are also retiring on average four years later (more on this trend in section 5.1).

There is still a chance these trends may change, and the relatively high ages of the average Level 3 Classroom Teachers, heads of departments and deputy principals does indicate that there are limited opportunities for young talent to come through the system.

Retirement crisis fears in WA (and across most other states in Australia) are indicative of an assumption that a particular level of seniority should determine when someone is ready to be a principal. A number of studies comparing experience to expertise (mainly in teachers) shows that age, experience and seniority do not necessarily relate to job performance.²³

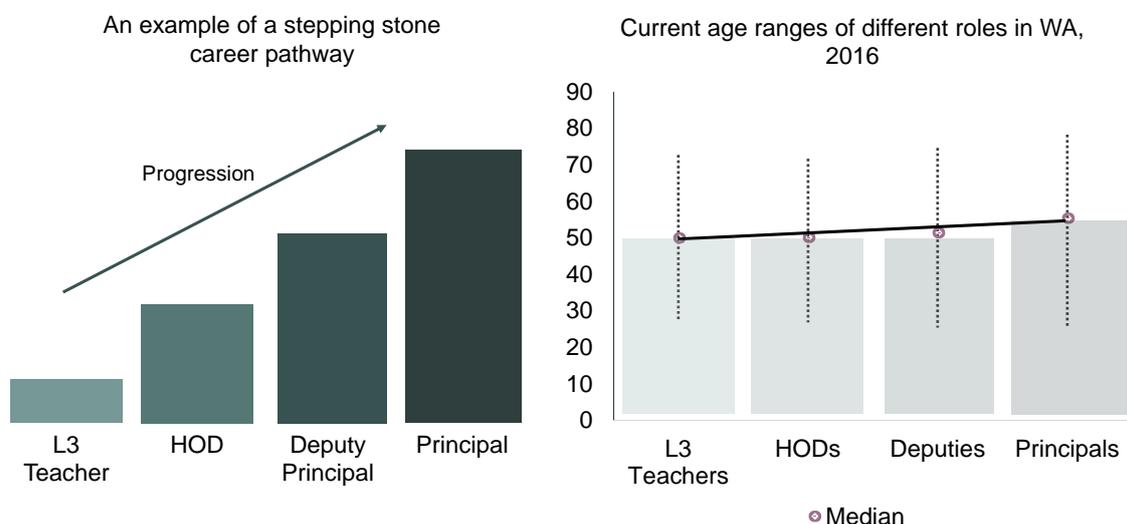
While there is no clear evidence of a looming crisis, a change in demographics can be a unique opportunity if the right talent management processes are put in place to identify, prepare and select quality school leaders at every level. In fact, if WA gets this right now and is able to identify and nurture quality young talent in the system, the returns on investment will be immense.

Pre-principal roles may not always be a stepping stone

The current age distribution of administrative roles in WA suggests that roles are not being used as stepping stones to higher leadership positions. The median ages of the stepping stone roles to principal – including heads of departments and deputy principals – are all around 50 years of age. This implies that instead of a ladder to leadership, there is considerable plateauing in potential pre-principal roles (see Figure 7).

²³ Hattie & Clinton, 2008

Figure 7: One version of a stepping stone career pathway compared to current age ranges of different roles in WA



The average length of time spent in these administrative roles also indicates that they are not necessarily being used as a stepping stone on the pathway(s) to the principalship. Mobility across positions (and schools) can greatly deepen experience and skill development. Some systems build this into their leadership strategy resulting in top leaders only spending about three years in deputy roles.²⁴ It appears that WA deputies remain in deputy roles for significantly longer, with an average of almost 10 years. However, there are limitations with this data due to the effects of acting positions (see Section 6: Data Issues).

For those in administrative roles who want to become principals, the roles may not always be designed to help aspirants develop the skills to lead teachers to improve student outcomes. The deputy role in particular should be an important training ground for future principals, but this role (and many other pre-principal roles) is often focused only on day-to-day school needs rather than serving the dual-purpose of managing these challenges and preparing future leaders. This means that aspiring leaders may not be exposed to the type of work that prepares them for principalship, highlighting the opportunities to increase the range of job responsibilities to develop core leadership skills, particularly the work of leading teachers to improve student outcomes. The roles offered and the experiences gained in the roles are very dependent on which school the aspirant is at and how well the principal manages talent development.

The Level 3 Classroom Teacher as a teacher leader role

The original purpose of the Level 3 Classroom Teacher role is to keep exemplary teachers in the classroom and to have them act as teacher leaders developing other teachers in their schools. There are currently 640 Level 3 Classroom Teachers in primary schools, 90 in district high schools and 400 in secondary schools. This means that there are enough exemplary teachers in WA to act as teacher leaders in every school, but currently Level 3 Classroom Teachers are concentrated in a small subset of schools. 50% of schools have no Level 3 Classroom Teachers while other schools have many. 25% of Level 3 Classroom Teachers are concentrated in just 23 schools. Therefore, there is opportunity in the

²⁴ Bierly, 2013

future selection of these teachers to be more strategic to make sure there is an excellent teacher in every school.

Additionally, the current age distribution of Level 3 Classroom Teachers is similar to that of higher level school leader roles with a median age around 50 (see Figure 7). Therefore, these roles are currently being filled by mostly later career teachers. There may be opportunity to expand the role to recognise younger exemplary teachers who may not have the same level of experience but have developed similar expertise.

Despite the original purpose of the Level 3 Classroom Teachers being clear, some principals are still confused about whether it is a stepping stone role to the principalship. As the role provides teachers with an opportunity to lead a group of teachers to improve student learning, it certainly has the potential to be.

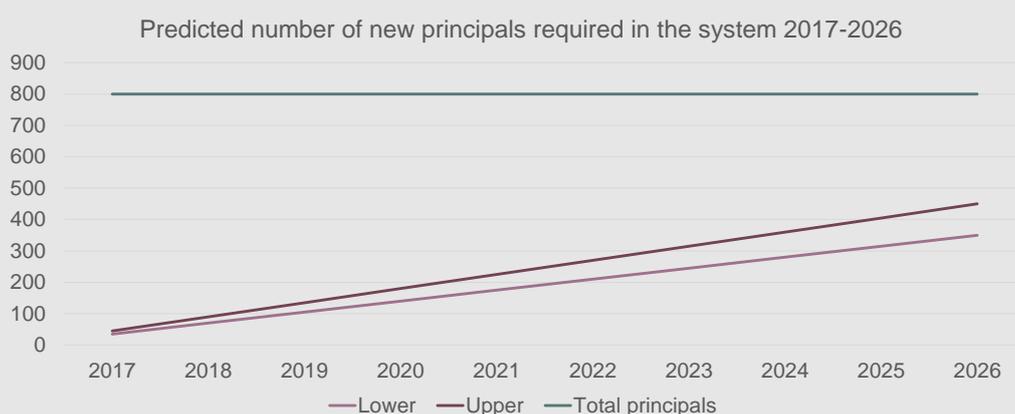
Box 3: The principal pipeline: How many new principals will WA need in 10 years?

Talent identification is closely linked to succession planning. Knowing how many new leaders are going to be needed in the years to come can help with targeted identification and development at the earlier stages of the pathway.

The cessation rate of principals in WA has remained relatively constant at around 35 to 45 principals a year and there are no expectations that it will change. Figure 8 shows the lower and upper estimates of the number of new principals that will be needed in the system over the next 10 years if this trend continues.

While this is not an overwhelming number of principals for the system to supply each year, it will require deliberate talent identification and leadership development to ensure all will be strong principals. This requires looking at who is in the current pipeline of leaders (e.g. deputy principals) and identifying the people who are best to take over in the next few years. The turnover of principal positions each year presents an opportunity to develop new talent with a new leadership strategy.

Figure 8: Predicted principal turnover over the next ten years



3.2 The principal selection process can be strengthened

Some principals do not believe that the current principal selection process consistently selects the most suitable candidates. Many expressed dissatisfaction with how short the process is and how it collects incomplete information. In comparison to other selection processes in WA, such as that to become an Independent Public School or Level 3 Classroom Teachers, it is not as rigorous (see Table 1).

Part of the issue is that applicants for principal vacancies are taken blindly. They are assessed on their written applications and short interviews even though they have been in the system for years. This is a missed opportunity to collect and use data on past performance to recruit and select candidates.

Table 1: Selection processes for principals, IPS schools and level 3 classroom teachers

Principal	IPS School	Level 3 classroom teacher
<p>The principal merit selection process consists of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An application including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A two-page cover letter assessing performance against the AITSL standards The applicant's CV Three references using RAMS A short interview with a selection panel of at least three members including the RED, and in the case of IPS, a Board representative 	<p>The IPS selection process includes four stages:</p> <p>Stage 1 – Mandatory briefing</p> <p>Stage 2 – Development program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The applicant participates in workshops and on-the-job learning activities An existing IPS principal provides ongoing guidance, support, and feedback for the applicant <p>Stage 3 – A selection panel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The principal must give a 30 minute presentation to a panel of IPS school principals The principal must explain the school's context, the challenges it will face over the next three years, and how IPS status can help the school face these challenges <p>Stage 4 – Transition process administered by Central Office.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key school staff and community members also participate in this training which is designed to equip them with the knowledge and skills to enact their expanded autonomy 	<p>The level 3 classroom teacher selection is a two stage process.</p> <p>Stage 1 – Applicants must submit a written portfolio which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A completed application form An introductory statement Written statements and portfolio of evidence as to how each of the five competencies (comprising of 23 indicators) are met Referees' verification of portfolio statements Primary reference from current line manager <p>Stage 2 – Applicants must facilitate and participate in reflective practice sessions with peers which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An oral presentation outlining and reflecting on a scenario / issue from the applicant's work experience Facilitating a discussion with peers about the presentation Participating in the reflective practice sessions of others

3.3 Leadership identification and development is particularly important for regional areas

Inequity in student outcomes across regions is an issue in education across the developed world. Secondary school students in regional and remote areas are regularly several years behind their peers in metropolitan areas.²⁵ Given the importance of school leaders and effective teachers in lifting student learning outcomes, leadership issues are of paramount importance in regional and remote areas. Unfortunately, it is easier said than done. Around the world, there has been no simple fix, no easy solution to regional disparities and the problems of getting quality leaders into difficult schools in remote areas.²⁶

For WA, this is clearly an important issue. While 60% of schools are in metropolitan areas, the remaining 317 schools are spread across some of the most geographically remote areas on the planet. Performance of students in regional and remote areas is far below that of students in metropolitan areas in WA (see Box 4). Student performance alone signals a need for a deliberate strategy to get stronger school leaders into regional schools. There are two additional factors that show the need for a focus on talent identification and development in these areas:

²⁵ OECD, 2012

²⁶ OECD, 2009

1. Regional areas have more principal vacancies and fewer applications for each position. This signals a need for greater talent identification and development in these areas.
2. There is a lack of mobility between regions making it less likely for leaders to identify with the system as a whole.

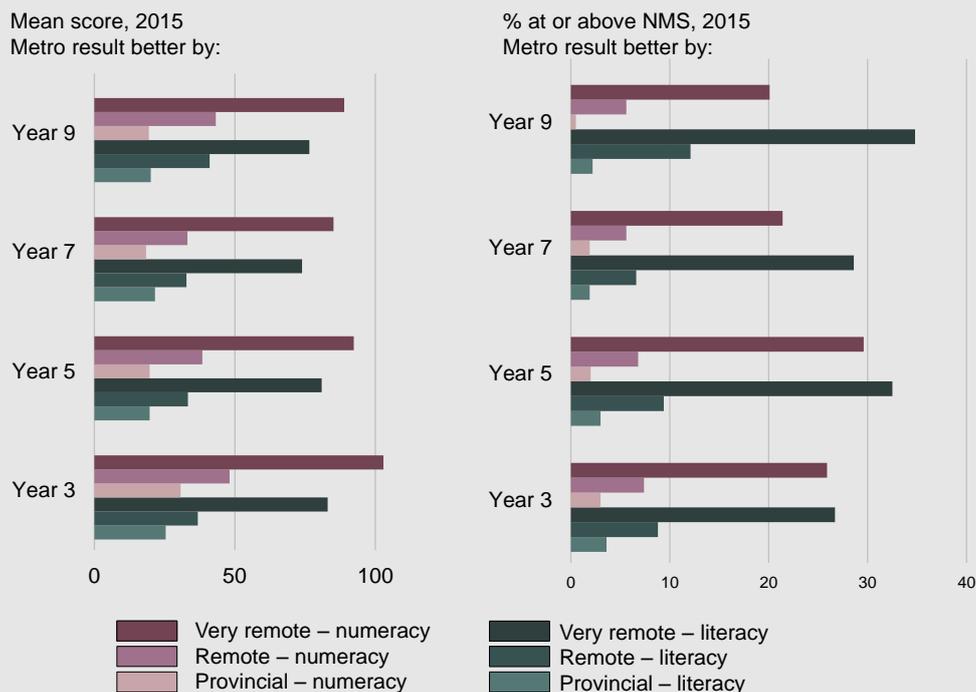
Box 4: Regional disparities in WA

WA, like many other systems, has some problems with equitable outcomes for all students. Student achievement is still heavily determined by where students live.

NAPLAN data in Figure 9 shows that student achievement is much higher in metropolitan areas than for students in regional areas. The more remote the area, the less likely are students to meet National Minimum Standards.

Regional and remote areas need strong school leaders to ensure equitable learning outcomes because research has shown that leaders are critical for improving schools.²⁷ The leadership strategy will consider ways to attract strong leaders to regional areas, develop strong leaders among those already serving in regional areas, and reduce isolation between schools to continuously share strong practice.

Figure 9: Metro students score higher and are much more likely to reach minimum standards



Regional areas have a greater proportion of principal vacancies and fewer applications for each position

Around the world, schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged students are known to be least favoured by teachers and school leaders as places to work.²⁸ Such schools are more likely to have staff shortages, and their students tend to find themselves in classes with the least expert teachers. This is

²⁷ Hanushek, Branch, & Rivkin, 2012

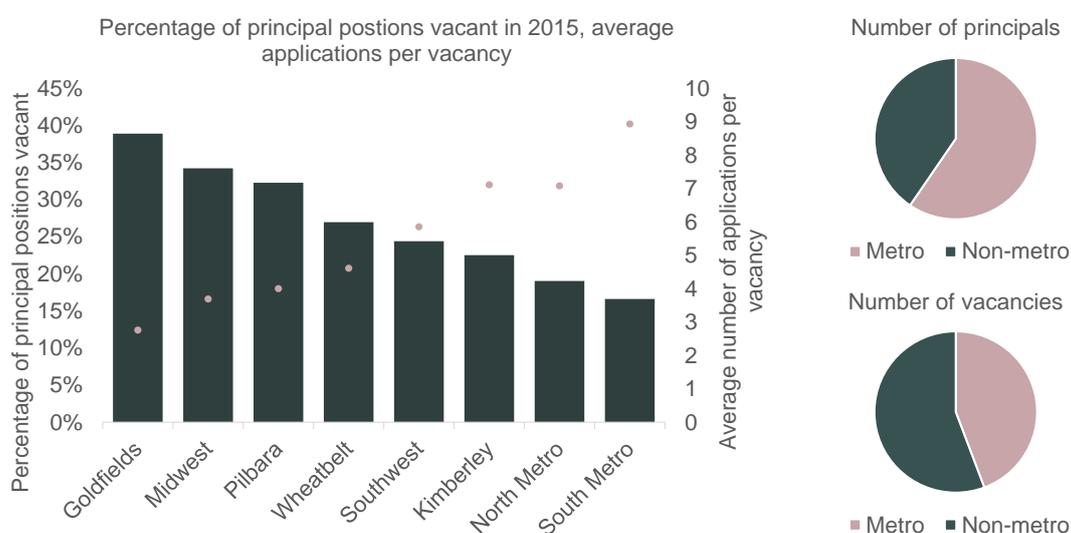
²⁸ OECD, 2012

normally more pronounced in remote and rural settings.²⁹ This problem exists in WA as there are a far greater number of principal vacancies in regional areas. Additionally, regional areas have the least number of applicants to fill these positions despite the fact that there are financial incentives to move to regional areas.

Figure 10 below shows the percentage of all principalships that were vacant in 2015 for each region. Regional areas like the Goldfields had the highest proportion of vacancies and metropolitan areas like South Metropolitan Education Region had the lowest proportion. Regional areas have fewer principals in general so a few principal vacancies in a regional area will represent a much larger proportion of total principalships than if the same number of vacancies existed in metropolitan areas. However, taken together, all non-metropolitan vacancies total more than the number of metropolitan vacancies (even through there are many more metro principalships).

The figure also shows that the average number of applications per principal vacancy is lower in regional areas. This implies that that may be two problems for regional areas: 1. Principal positions are seen as less desirable and/or 2. The leadership development pipeline is not working as effectively as in metropolitan areas. These two are most likely related. Regional areas may be experiencing more instability of leadership and therefore need to be given particular attention in identifying and developing talent.

Figure 10: There are a greater number of vacancies in the regional areas



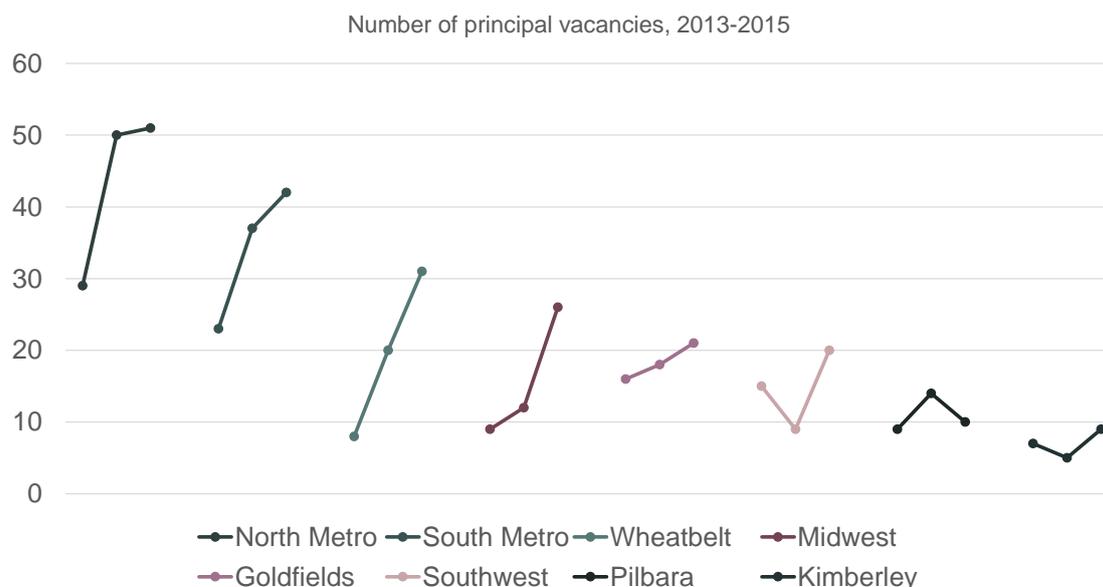
**Low numbers of principals in the Kimberley may skew the data.*

Fortunately, it does not appear that principal vacancy issues in regional areas are getting significantly worse over time. Figure 11 shows that most regions have had increases in vacancies over the last three years (as far back as the data goes). However, regional areas have not necessarily had more of a vacancy increase issue. For all regions, the reason for vacancy increases is not entirely clear because of the limited data. However, actual principal cessations in the system have remained relatively constant. This indicates that there has been greater churn due to either an increase in the number of short-term or medium-term acting positions (which is likely due to the enforcement of leave-taking) or a longer chain of flow-on effects from retirements.

²⁹ OECD, 2008

These types of vacancies may present a unique opportunity to develop talent for regional areas. Vacancies for acting roles can be a chance to develop new leaders. If the upcoming vacancies are known ahead of time, aspiring leaders from regional areas can be carefully selected to fill the positions and gain experience. This may help with developing a pipeline of leadership that can be called on once substantive positions become open.

Figure 11: Principal vacancies have been increasing over the last three years



There is little mobility across regions throughout the entire system

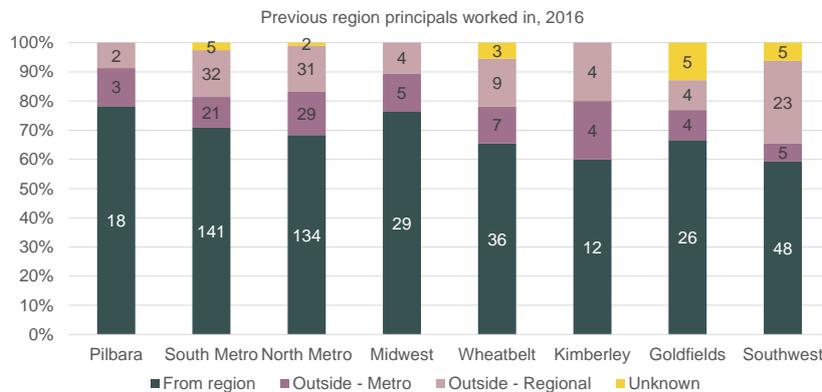
Principal mobility can be useful to a system because it encourages knowledge sharing and principal development. It can also enhance the distribution of expertise across the system. For this reason, principals in many high performing systems are required to rotate schools every five to seven years.³⁰ This is obviously easier in smaller systems and may be more difficult in a system with the geography of WA. So, while there may naturally be less mobility across regions in WA, there is still reason to have the goal of increasing movement. Some principals in WA mentioned that they would be open to the idea of contracts for principal positions (e.g. for five years) to increase mobility. This issue may be particularly important for regional areas because there is concern that the perceived lack of mobility might cause strong leaders to be reluctant to move to regional areas for fear that they won't be able to move back to their home region.

In WA, principals are not very likely to move across regions. Figure 12 shows that most principals (between 50% and 75%) take positions in the same regions in which they have previously worked. There are no major regional differences as to whether the principal previously worked in a metropolitan or regional area.³¹ When hiring from outside of their region, metropolitan regions are as likely to hire from other metropolitan or regional areas. What people are viewing as a regional versus metropolitan issue is actually a lack of mobility throughout the entire system.

³⁰ Jensen, Hunter, Sonnemann, & Burns, 2012

³¹ In the southwest region, however, most principals from other regions came from non-metropolitan areas.

Figure 12: Most principals are hired from within the same region

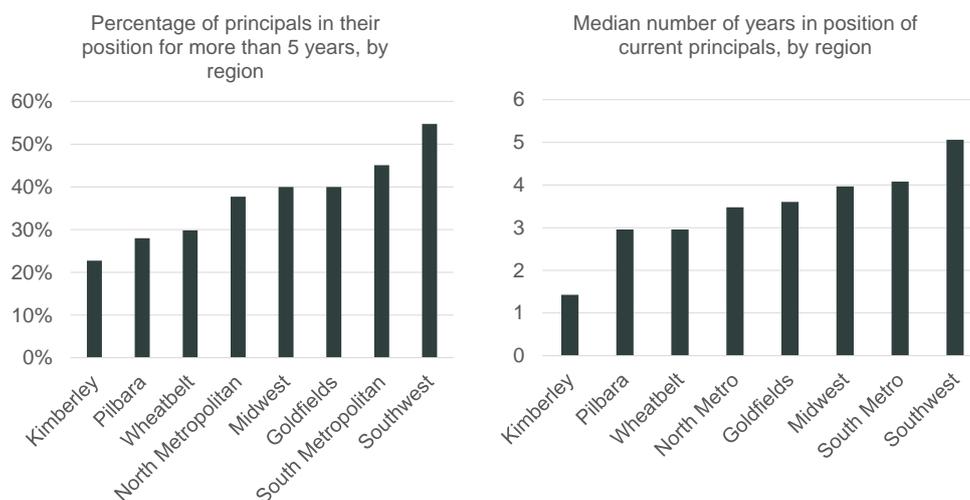


It is unclear whether principals are choosing to stay in the same regions or if they want to move but haven't been able to. However, whether real or perceived, principals have stated that there are continuing concerns about the attractiveness of certain regional positions and the potential for fewer available face-to-face development and mentoring opportunities. It is likely that low mobility in metropolitan areas is by choice, whereas in regional areas it may be because of a low supply of leaders in the area and a lack of interest from leaders to move regions.

The mobility issue is concerning because it means that only the strongest principals from remote areas may be able to find a next role in other regions. This could mean that remote schools end up with the lowest quality school leaders.

Figure 13 shows the length of time principals have been in their current position in each region. Some principals have been in the same position for upwards of a decade, and more than 40% of principals have been in their positions for more than five years – a time when principals are required to rotate in some high performing systems.³² This means that experienced principals are not moving around the system, sharing their knowledge and expertise, confining excellence (or poor performance) to a particular set of schools.

Figure 13 : There are regional differences in the amount of time a principal has been in their position



³² Jensen et al., 2012

There are no easy answers for schools in remote settings struggling to attract and retain great leaders. A comprehensive strategy can help attract and retain leaders to these more challenging settings. But it is not enough to simply attract *any* leader; the best leaders are needed for the most difficult schools. Although WA has strong financial incentives to move to regional areas, it may be that other issues aside from finances are more important when leaders make employment decisions. While evidence is thin, a number of studies consistently finds that non-financial factors are more important than financial rewards in motivating high quality leaders to work in high-need schools.³³ The most effective teachers and leaders place more importance on professional factors such as taking up positions of responsibility and opportunities to make a difference, innovate and undertake reform.³⁴ Supportive working conditions and good leadership are also key factors including additional leadership support, collaboration with colleagues and adequate resources.³⁵

³³ OECD, 2012; Rice, 2010 , McKinsey, 2007

³⁴ Rice, 2010

³⁵ OECD, 2012

4 Being a principal

Strengths

- The Principal Advisory Team and other principal support teams are well regarded and offer the support that principals need. Many principals expressed an interest in having greater access to these kinds of supports.
- Some principals are seeking out feedback from their peers and organising 360 degree feedback in their schools to improve their practice.
- Opportunities like sitting on an Expert Review Group are viewed as excellent professional development.

Opportunities to improve specific areas

- Transition and induction programs can be improved. Some new principals do not feel adequately supported and many mentioned the Graduate Teacher Induction Program as an example of effective induction.
- Development programs are inconsistent and not available for all stages of a leader's career.
- There is variation in principals' satisfaction with their performance management.

What principals are saying

- Mentoring, coaching, and job shadowing are the most useful for new leaders and aspiring leaders. Coach in a Box, the Principal Advisory Team and other principal support teams are very well received.
- Level 3 teaching principals face unique challenges that are not sufficiently acknowledged by the system.
- Some think there is not enough feedback on a principal's leadership. This is particularly the case in regional areas.
- Some professional development is too short, disjointed and operational.
- Leadership is challenging in situations where the school context is complex, and people feel overworked and undervalued

What does a strong system look like?

Strong education systems recognise the large shift new principals experience and support them through induction and ongoing coaching.³⁶ Structured professional learning for principals should be coupled with customised ongoing support that keeps school leaders reflective, motivated and continually improving. In Hong Kong, the Principals' Continuing Professional Development Framework differentiates between the professional development needed for aspiring, newly appointed and serving principals and offers different content and delivery accordingly. Development programs are evaluated and continually adapted and improved.

Performance management should be recurrent and should offer meaningful feedback on performance. In Singapore, principals work closely with their appraisers to set personal targets, identify training priorities and develop personal and school development plans.³⁷ Performance management is closely linked to ongoing professional development and system leadership opportunities.

4.1 Graduate teacher induction held up as an example of good induction

Currently there is no formal induction process in WA for principals. New principals are able to access support from the Principal Advisory Team in their first two years in the role. This team, although only consisting of four people, has been very well received by principals and has been able to provide some principals (both new and continuing) with the support that they need.

³⁶ OECD, 2010a; Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010

³⁷ Seng-Dao Keo, 2016

Principals have expressed a desire for a more formal induction process to be in place. The Graduate Teacher Induction Program was repeatedly held up as a beacon of effective induction. The program consists of four modules over two years as well as access to teaching and learning advocates who offer private coaching for up to 10 hours a year. Graduates develop a network of other graduates who they can then seek out for support in their early years of teaching. Leaders frequently suggested that having peers they could call on for help was the most important form of support in their first years as a principal.

4.2 Current leaders are not sure of the development they need

There are many opportunities for professional development in WA (see Table 2); however principals do not have a clear idea of what they need to develop once they are in the role. Some principals have taken it on themselves to elicit peer feedback from other principals while others desire feedback to be provided by the system. Principals who had completed a masters found this to be very useful development as it allowed them the time and space to think about leadership, rather than merely the operational aspects of their job. The opportunity to sit on an Expert Review Group was repeatedly mentioned as outstanding professional development. Coaching programs elicited mixed sentiments, although Coach in a Box consistently received positive reviews.

Unfortunately, the effectiveness of all forms of professional development is anecdotal as there is no link between any of the above opportunities to a change in leadership practice and ultimately improvement to student outcomes. The Institute for Professional Learning is currently looking at ways to better evaluate the programs that it provides by measuring the outcomes of participants through a series of reflective surveys. The leadership strategy will also address these issues.

Table 2: Currently available leadership programs at the Institute for Professional Learning

Program	Audience	Aim	Description / components	Number of participants	Length	Notes
Women in leadership program (Senior school leadership program)	Level 3 and 4 female deputies and principals	Confidence building and skill development of female leaders	2 Two-day seminars, spaced Work shadowing Action learning Coaching	42 in 2016 (25-40 per year since 2005) Most applicants get through with a few exceptions	1 year	The informal networks created are also an important part of the program
Explore: A career in school leadership	Aspirant leaders	To prepare future school principals for the role via engagement with the AITSL Professional Standards for Principals and self-reflection.	20 hours of classes delivered online Online facilitated discussions	31 in 2016 Participants from all regions of WA.	6 weeks	2016 is the first cohort. Has replaced a previous aspirant program.
Leading school improvement	Experienced leaders and their leadership teams	Development of leadership teams that can lead change	4 one-day seminars	274 participants	4 months	
Improving student learning through observation and feedback	Experienced leaders and their leadership teams	Development of leadership teams to lead school improvement through classroom observation and feedback	A two-day and a one-day seminar	269 participants	3 months	
Master of school leadership, WA University (funding to be discontinued)	Teachers, deputies and principals	To prepare future school leaders and support current principals	Eight subjects over 2-4 years	190 participants (~30 graduate per year)	2 years full time, 4 years part-time	Include funded and partially funded positions
Coaching	All	To broker coaching opportunities for leaders who need additional support	Growth coaching Cognitive coaching Coach in a box		Optional	Includes opportunity to learn to be a coach which is extremely popular
Experienced principal program (co-funded by the Catholic sector)	Principals with a minimum of seven years of experience in at least two schools	The enhancement of principal's leadership capabilities and health and wellbeing outcomes	A 360 degree review 5 days of seminars consisting of a theoretical program based on the AITSL standards 3 days of seminars on health and wellbeing including an executive health assessment and health coaching A 'Leadership Challenge' project with a program colleague 5 hour-long sessions with a coach over 5 months	20 per year	1 month	
*Graduate teacher program	First year teachers	Prepare early-career teachers	Four modules, spaced 10 hours of coaching	1700 graduates 700 can have coaches	2 years	

4.3 The foundations of performance management, accountability and validation processes are strong but not widespread

“The best professional development I ever had was sitting on an Expert Review Group panel with my colleagues and doing a structured review of how another school does things.”

– WA school principal, School leader focus group, March 2016.

Currently, there are a variety of performance management, accountability and validation processes aimed at assessing and improving schools. This information is used to make inferences about principal performance. In general, the use of the current performance management, accountability and validation processes for development purposes depends too heavily on the aptitude of the reviewers and the attitude of the principals.

For example, Independent Public School principals had mixed opinions on the effectiveness of the Department of Education Services reviews for the purpose of improving their own leadership. Some found them useful while other felt that the reviewers did not have the requisite time nor expertise to provide detailed, valuable feedback.

The same can be said of the Expert Review Group. While it is not intended to be an assessment of the principal's performance, the difference between a school's performance and a principal's performance may need to be more clearly differentiated in order to overcome negative attitudes.

Many principals found 360 feedback processes to be useful but noted that they often did not know what to do with the information to further their development. In particular, many did not trust that a poor performing principal would be able to get much out of a self-assessment due to lacking the reflective skills required.

Furthermore, many principals had differing expectations of the support that should be provided by the Department. In the new Independent Public Schools context, some are seeking clarity about the level of appraisal, feedback and guidance they can expect to receive on their performance. While there are measures in place to identify and support struggling schools, systematic performance management, accountability and validation processes for all principals could be strengthened to help ensure that all principals are continuously improving their practice.

While lacking a coherent framework, the current structures should be viewed as a huge opportunity as principals see the need for performance management, accountability and validation processes that are linked to their development. Often this is the largest hurdle to overcome, however in WA there is momentum for real improvements in the feedback that leaders receive.

5 Beyond principalship

Strengths

- Independent Public Schools are improving the retention of principals (principals are pushing back their retirement).
- Opportunities for secondments to central office and other system leadership experiences have been well received and help leaders develop a system perspective.

Opportunities to improve specific areas

- Some networks are working well to provide cross-school collaboration but others are lacking.
- Some schools are very proactive in their succession planning but across the system it is limited and ad-hoc. There is little formal succession planning (with limited data to assist with this). Filling vacancies regularly takes precedent over identifying talent (particularly in remote schools).
- The identity of the WA school leader is shifting and some school leaders are starting to see themselves as able to assist improvement across a system of schools outside of just their own as system leaders.

What principals are saying

- There are opportunities in the networks but currently their purpose is not clear.
- Offering staff good leadership opportunities often means losing a good staff member, particularly in remote communities. Currently, there is a tension between principals thinking about what is best for their school compared to what is best for the system.
- It is important for leaders to have different experiences in numerous regions and at multiple levels of the system as this allows them to develop a system perspective. Principals generally had positive reports of any system leadership experiences.
- People are not sure what the next stop on the career progression is after being a level six principal for eight to 10 years.

What does a strong system look like?

Systems are often concerned about shortages in school leadership. They react in various ways to try and get more people into leadership positions or to undertake training. A comprehensive leadership strategy takes a proactive approach both across the system and within schools.

It is clear that succession planning and talent identification are inexorably linked. Within schools, current leaders need to develop the next generation of leaders, for their school and for the system. This can occur in a variety of ways through performance management and development, job rotation that provides people with different experiences, and a challenging yet supportive work environment.

Succession planning can also be more formal, with a focus on the effective transition from one leader to another in a school over a given time period. An effective succession plan provides sufficient lead time, develops a shared understanding and commitment among staff through meaningful communication, and synergises the knowledge of the incoming and outgoing principals.³⁸

In a strong system principals are engaged, continually learning and recognised by the system. Regional and disadvantaged school strategies are in place to attract and retain experienced leaders at the schools that need them most. This doesn't have to be through financial rewards. Albeit limited, current evidence suggests that the most effective teachers and leaders place more importance on professional factors such as taking up positions of responsibility and opportunities to make a difference, innovate and

³⁸ Fink, 2010

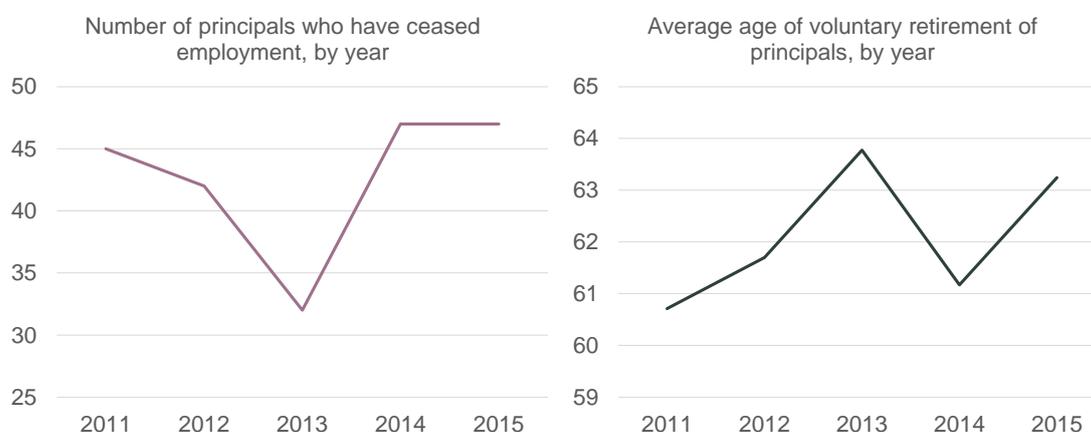
undertake reform.³⁹ Taking advantage of this, in Singapore, school principals are rotated to a different school every five to seven years to provide leaders and schools with opportunities for growth.⁴⁰ This also helps with succession planning as the department knows when leaders are moving on and incentivises leaders to move to remote schools for a set period of time.

The system needs to be supported by its school leaders and in turn should offer them opportunities to see the bigger picture. Ultimately in a strong system, school leaders feel empowered to help give back to the system and have clear opportunities in place for them to do so. In Shanghai, for example, the system pairs high and low performing schools together and holds one accountable for the performance of the other.⁴¹ This distributes quality leadership across a system.

5.1 Independent Public Schools are improving principal retention and engagement

Despite an aging workforce and fears of increased rate of retirements across WA (see Box 2), principal turnover has actually remained relatively constant over the last five years with little expectation that it will change.⁴² This seemingly contradictory situation is due to the fact that the principal retirement age has been increasing over time, from around 60 to 64 years of age (see Figure 14). Part of the justification for this is the increase in engagement felt as a result of the Independent Public Schools initiative. Independent Public School principals report feeling that they can make more of a difference under increased autonomy and are hence putting off their retirement.

Figure 14: The number of principals who leave every year has remained relatively constant due to the increase in the average retirement age



Further evidence of the satisfaction levels of principals in WA is that most principals leave the job by retiring rather than resigning (see Figure 15). The low levels of resignation coupled with the increases in the retirement age paint an overall positive picture for principal retention and engagement in WA.⁴³

³⁹ Rice, 2010

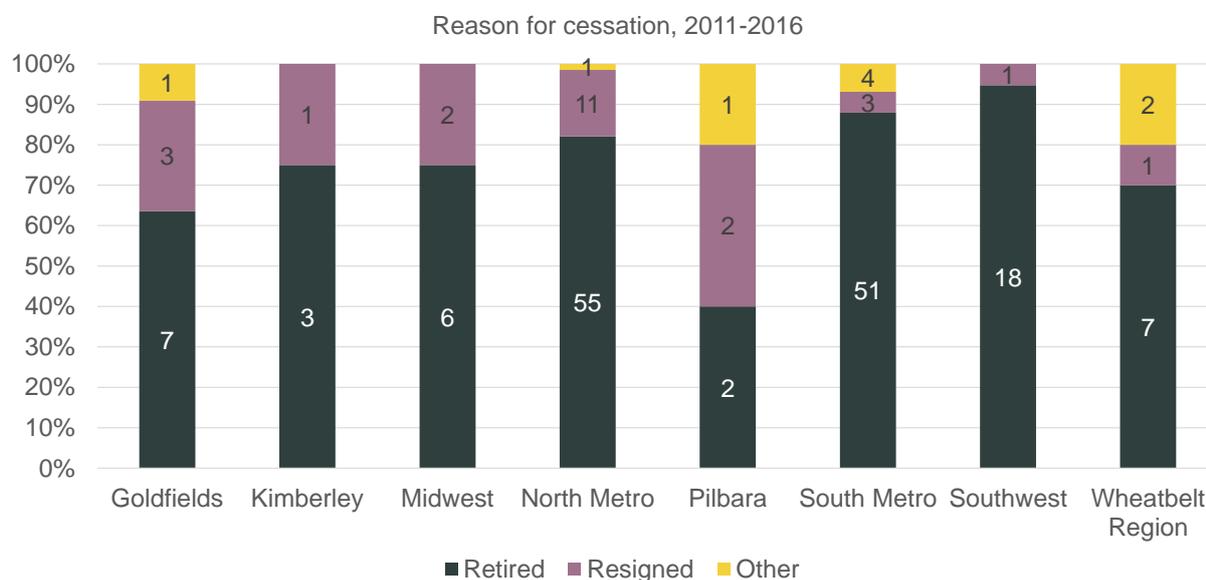
⁴⁰ Jensen et al., 2012

⁴¹ Jensen & Farmer, 2013

⁴² This is as stated by relevant sources in central office.

⁴³ However it is important to note that there are limitations of the cessation data for determining principal intention. Most of the principals who are resigning do so for 'other reasons' and it is impossible to say whether some principals are choosing to retire because they are unsatisfied with the position (see section 6).

Figure 15: Few principals are resigning



**Regional differences primarily due to the low number of principals retiring in some regions (such as the Pilbara).*

5.2 Principals want to be system leaders but it requires further development

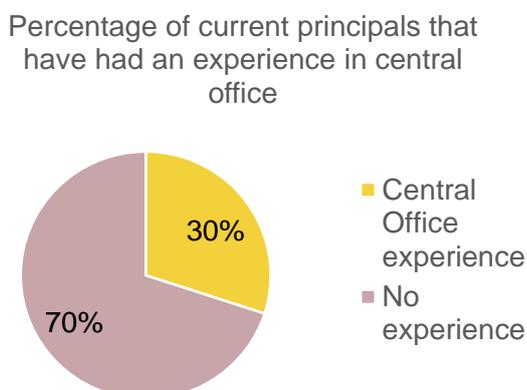
“If my professional learning is linked to the vision of the school and the system I feel that I want to continue to develop myself and be part of the bigger picture.”

– WA school principal, School leader focus group, March 2016.

The definition of system leadership is evolving in WA and principals vary in their understanding of the new structures. When asked about system leadership, many principals talked about out-of-school experiences, almost all of which were positive. These experiences included opportunities to work in central office, participate in Expert Review Group panels and visit other schools. However, some principals are confused about how they should give back to the system.

Despite the fact that being a system leader does not necessarily mean having to leave one’s school, principals often equated system leadership with time in central and/or regional office and formal role progression. While these were viewed as a positive experience, some principals talked about the decrease in system leadership opportunities. This is perception rather than reality as there are currently more system leadership and collaboration opportunities in central office for principals than ever before. Other principals were enthusiastic about the creation of new opportunities for system leadership through initiatives such as the Independent Public School Principals’ Fellowship Program or network leadership.

Figure 16: 30% of current principals have had an experience in Central Office



There is no getting around the fact that a number of the current system leadership opportunities are based in central office and require principals to come to Perth. This may be less desirable for regional principals as it involves relocating to a new city. While this problem is not new, further communication about what it means to be a system leader, outside of just working in central office, may help engage regional school leaders.

One option for regional principals to engage in system leadership is via the networks. However, feedback on the networks was variable. Some principals reported positive opportunities in the networks to visit each other's schools or systematically identify talent. However others reported a lack of shared understanding around their purpose and a lack of true collaboration between members of their network.

Some principals expressed a personal responsibility to give back to the system but felt more could be done to encourage principals to contribute to the wider system, such as better communication on ways to engage at a system level.

In order to further develop the systemic thinking that WA requires of its school leaders, greater motivation and opportunities are required. Fortunately the Independent Public School Principals' Fellowship Program provides both. The chance to receive training at an Ivy League university, receive mentoring from a central office executive director and be held up as one of WA's outstanding principals are all ways in which system leaders are acknowledged for demonstrating commitment and leadership beyond their own schools. It also gives principals the opportunity to give back to the system in a tangible way through the development of a strategic, system-level policy that contributes to reform in WA rather than merely providing operational assistance to other schools. Many principals who did feel a moral responsibility to give back were still looking for guidance as to exactly what their role should be.

Building on the enabling structures embedded in the Independent Public School Principals' Fellowship Program, WA has an opportunity to further develop its school leaders into the system thinkers it needs through its comprehensive leadership strategy.

6 Data issues

A comprehensive leadership strategy needs to be supported by comprehensive data collection and analysis. In high performing systems such as Ontario, data collection and analysis are a vital part of talent identification and succession planning to create a pipeline of future school leaders. For example, each district in Ontario annually analyses trends in: projected number of retirements over the next three years; projected numbers of positions required over next three years to accommodate system growth and/or enrolment declines; aspiring leaders who are qualified and ready to step into the role; and aspiring leaders participating in development programs/processes but who are not yet ready for the role⁴⁴.

In WA, there is a series of data gaps that need to be addressed in order to better track current and aspiring school leaders, vacancies and succession planning. One of the strengths of WA is that a lot of valuable data is collected on school and system performance as well as teacher, leader and school characteristics. However a lack of connectivity between siloed departments that independently collect their own data minimises the opportunity for deeper analysis and opportunities to connect workforce planning with development and support opportunities.

The following is a list of data limitations we have come across through our analysis:

- There is no way to systematically track talent throughout the system. This includes movements through regions, principal qualifications and the average length of the principalship.
- The recording of acting and substantive roles in the payroll system makes it difficult to determine the average principal's career progression.
- Accurately determining principal turnover is challenging due to the use of fixed-term contracts.
- The payroll data can only be tracked back to 2003 and the vacancy data to 2013, limiting the ability to identify long-term trends in principal workforce progression, development, hiring and vacancies.
- There is no systematic way of determining how many principals are new to the principalship or being promoted within the same school as a result of the way the payroll data is collected.

These are expanded upon below.

6.1 Tracking talent

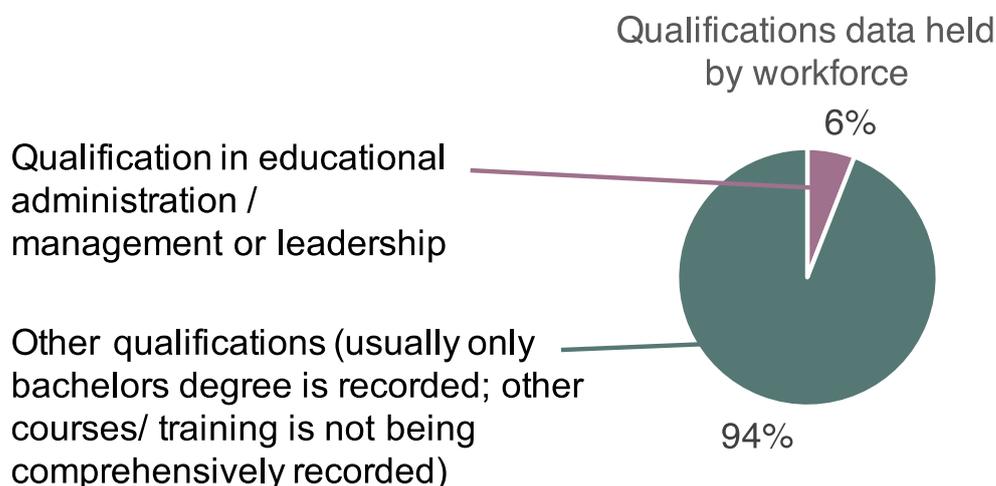
There is no systematic way of tracking talent throughout the system. While there is recording of the selection process for principals due to fair process requirements, none of it is recorded centrally and used for talent identification purposes. This means that it is difficult to systematically determine differences between applicants that are being selected and those that are not. Furthermore it is not easy to track whether repeat candidates for principal positions are eventually obtaining a principalship.

Another hindrance is the lack of integration between qualifications data held by workforce and information on programs attended at the Institute for Professional Learning. Currently, information is collected by central office about the qualifications of principals (see Figure 17). However, improvements can be made in recording information about training and other qualifications that principals complete (e.g. non-university courses). Alternate data is collected through PLIS on the training courses done through the Institute for Professional Learning. However this data does not link to the workforce data,

⁴⁴ Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013

which could help link training to staffing. For example, recently trained aspirants could be connected to acting school leader opportunities, and new appointees could be targeted for induction training.

Figure 17: Data on principal qualification is limited



Performance management data is also not recorded over the career of a teacher, aspiring leader or principal. The outcomes of teachers' appraisals, common areas for development and future leadership potential are not centrally collected and hence it is not possible to easily track trends in aspirant performance and development needs over time.

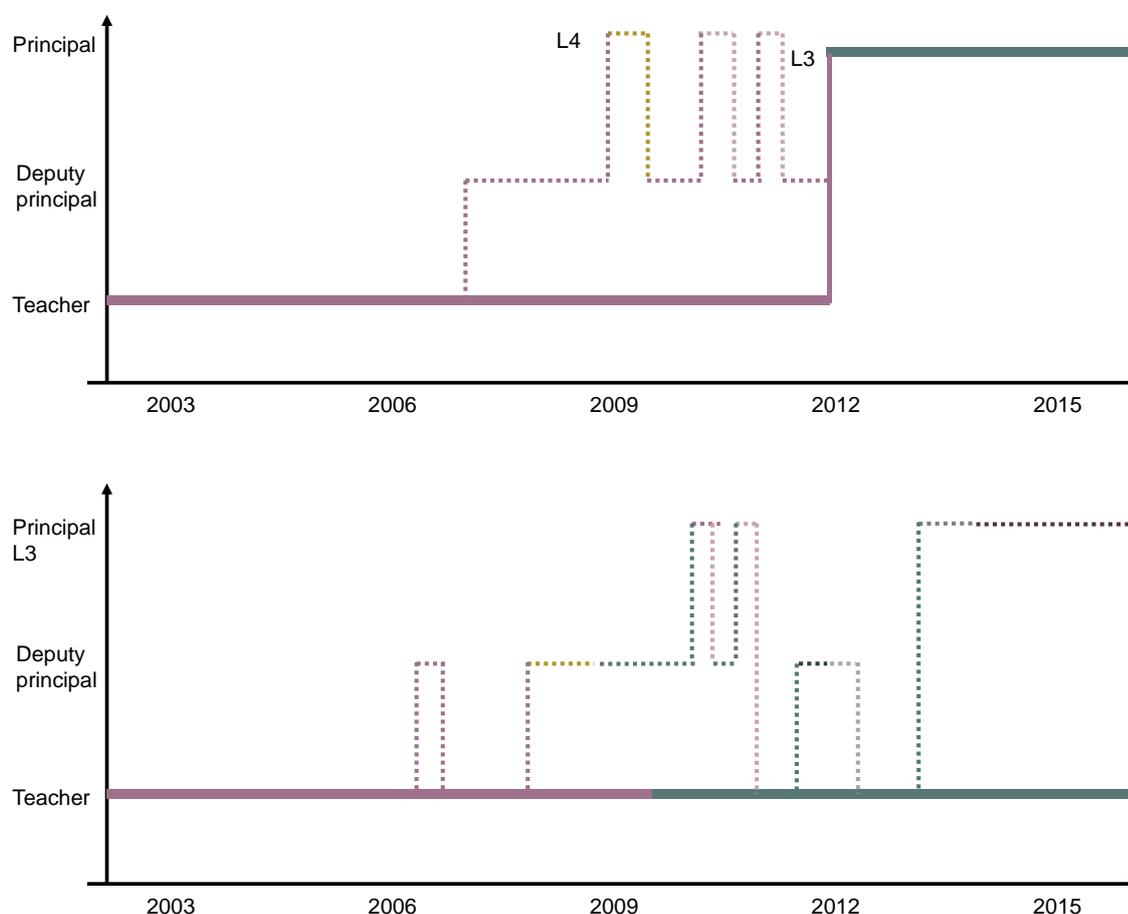
6.2 Tracking career progression

It is difficult to determine the average principal's career progression throughout the system. It can be done on an individual level (manually) but not systematically. This makes it hard to identify trends in principal progression through the system including their progression through different regions and school types. As a result it is not possible to determine the extent of the need for different types of transition and mobility programs.

This is primarily due to the frequency in which principals have previously pursued acting roles in the system. Because the data on career progression are only collected through the workforce payroll system, the first time a principal acts in a position it is recorded as their start date to the principalship. This could, however, be several years before they ever take up a substantive principal position. Additionally it appears that some principals may act in positions for substantive amounts of time (years) while a principal is on leave (or acting elsewhere) without ever being officially recorded as the person substantively holding that role. This means that determining an accurate start date for when a principal entered the role, as well as length of service and transitions between roles, is quite complex under the current system.

Figure 18 provides an illustration of the career paths of two current principals (although one is technically in an acting role) as can be determined manually from the available payroll data. Both pursue numerous acting roles for several years before only one actually changes their substantive position.

Figure 18: Example career pathways of two WA principals



Full lines indicate substantive roles, dotted lines indicate acting roles. Different colours indicate different schools. Data transfer in 2003. Unable to get data earlier than 2003.

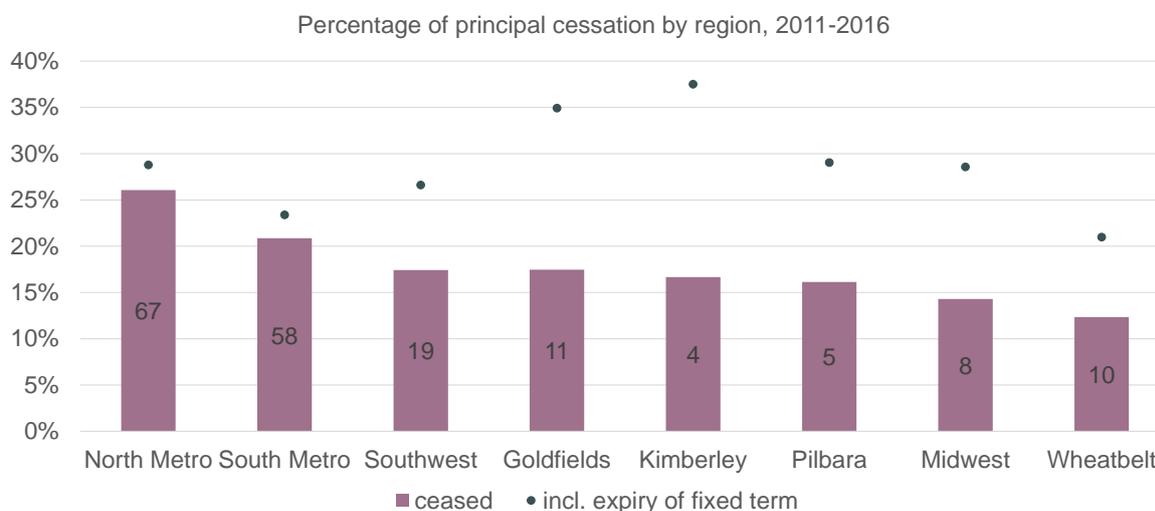
The first principal started their career as a primary school teacher. They then acted as the deputy principal at their own school while pursuing short acting principal stints at other level four schools. They became a substantive principal at a level three school in 2012.

The second principal is still substantively a primary school teacher despite having acted in various deputy roles at different schools since 2006. After acting as a deputy at one school in 2009, the principal moved to that same school still as a substantive primary school teacher. They then continued to act as the deputy at that school and others, spending almost no time as a teacher. They also acted in the principal position at several level three schools, including the one they are currently acting in.

6.3 Analysing cessation information

The use of short fixed-term contracts, more frequently used in regional areas, has made it difficult to get reliable estimates of principal cessation. This makes it difficult to easily determine cessation information that accurately reflects the number of outgoing leaders. Cessations appear higher in the metropolitan areas when fixed-term contracts are not taken into account (see Figure 19).

Figure 19: Principal cessation data is skewed by the use of fixed term contracts



The reasons given for cessation are of limited use. A significant proportion of leaders are resigning for 'other reasons' and it is not clear what these are. Collecting more detailed information on reasons for cessation will help to better understand retention and engagement issues relating to principals in WA.

6.4 Identifying long-term trends

Identifying long-term trends in principal workforce progression and development would enable WA to have a richer understanding of the effects of various policies on the principal workforce. Unfortunately, the vacancy data only goes back to 2013. This has made it impossible to substantiate claims that the number of applications per principal vacancy used to be dramatically higher than it is today. Furthermore it limits the ability to compare the effectiveness of past and present policies on improving recruitment and retention in remote areas.

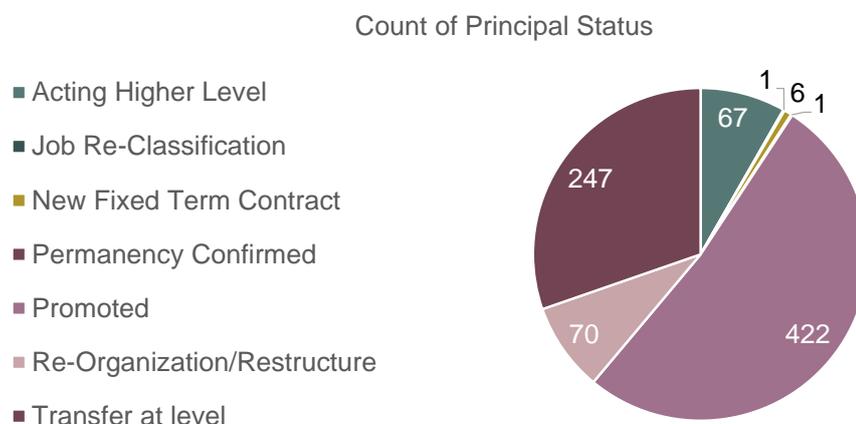
The payroll data was transferred in 2003. This means that even at an individual level it is not possible to track a person's career back further than 2003, with the exception of the recording of their start date with the Department. This makes it impossible to determine whether or not principals' career pathways have changed. In fact, because principals make up some of the longest serving members of the workforce, tracking the average pathway of a principal and determining if this has changed is particularly limited.

6.5 Tracking new principals

One gap in the data is the ability to easily identify how many principals are new to a school or new to the principalship entirely. We are able to see that most current principals have been promoted to their position, but it is not possible to see how many of these principals were promoted at the same school and how many were promoted to a new school (see Figure 20). Additionally, 'promoted' principals include not just new principals but also principals who have moved from a level 4 to a level 5, et cetera. So, it is difficult to monitor the movements of principals with the currently available data.

We can see that less than one third of principals have transferred at level. This type of move may be more likely with secondary principals (because they are all at the same level) but it is not possible to see the reason for the transfer.

Figure 20: It is not possible to get more detailed information on principal promotions



6.6 Tracking outcomes

Only a handful of training and development programs or central policies have been evaluated. As a result, it is hard to track the differences in impact between different leadership development courses or government initiatives. For example, many principals report positive outcomes as a result of their time working in central office. However the outcomes of the principals working in these roles are never recorded and hence it is difficult to make a judgement on the effectiveness of this policy.

The same is true for courses at the Institute for Professional Learning or external coaching programs. Evaluating these courses through assessment or survey data allows for a richer understanding of the practical in-school benefits of each program.

Appendix A: Key themes from the Connect Community

As part of the goal to ensure that the voices of all key stakeholders are heard as a part of the development of the comprehensive leadership strategy, an online discussion forum (a Connect Community) was established whereby all current principals and a number of aspiring principals in the state were invited to join. The community was very successful and highlighted key issues in WA leadership. At the time of writing, 576 principals / aspiring principals are members of the community and there have been 44 separate leadership discussions with a total of 166 individual replies and 2367 views.

The following is a summary of some of the key themes that emerged from the online discussions:

- Networks can be used to create leadership positions and develop a pool of aspirants. Some principals are providing the community with examples of how their networks have done this.
- Level three principals face unique challenges in often having to teach and manage a school. Many level three principals are sharing their stories.
- There are challenges inherent in the principal selection process and changes should be made to the current system. Suggestions include observing principals in their schools or requiring a folio similar to the level three Classroom Teacher selection process.
- It is important to develop not just the leader but their leadership team. Developing the leadership skills of corporate services managers is an often overlooked strategy to lessen the administrative burden on principals. Courses available through the IPL are discussed.
- Regional principals / aspiring principals highlight their limited opportunities to receive face-to-face development due to distance and additional costs of commuting to Perth.
- Principal-level classification issues may prevent attraction to the principalship. For example, the lack of a salary difference between a level three principal and a level three head of department.
- Some other recurring themes include:
 - Building and developing a pool of future quality aspirant leaders;
 - Coaching and mentoring for principals / aspiring principals, particularly beginning but also experienced leaders;
 - Providing principals / aspiring principals with opportunities to experience other schools and the importance of expanding their horizons in this way;
 - A more systematic approach to principals / aspiring principals moving up from levels 3-6.

Principals and aspiring principals are also referring to different literature and using their experiences to determine what it is to be a great leader in WA. The importance of emotional intelligence is often cited, as are the AITSL standards.

Appendix B: List of stakeholders consulted with

Learning First and members of the Department executive consulted with the following stakeholders as a part of developing this situational analysis:

- School leaders from the following groups:
 - Principals on fixed-term appointments located in central office
 - Independent Public School Principals Reference Group
 - Principals based in the North Metropolitan area
 - Principals based in the South Metropolitan area
 - Principals based in the Pilbara region (via video conference)
 - Principals based in the Goldfields region
 - Principals based in the Wheatbelt region
 - Principals based in the Southwest region
 - Principals based in the Midwest region
 - Principals based in the Kimberley region
 - Principals based in the Albany sub-region
- Aspirant leaders from the above areas
- Associations
 - WA Secondary School Executives Association (WASSEA)
 - WA Primary Principals' Association (WAPPA)
 - WA Education Support Principals' and Administrators Association (WAESPAA)
 - WA District High School Administrators' Association (WADHSAA)
 - Principals' Federation WA (PFWA)
 - State School Teachers Union of WA (SSTUWA)
 - WA Council of State School Organisations (WACSSO)
 - Level 3 Classroom Teachers Association (L3 CTA)
- Director and other staff members from the Institute for Professional Learning
- Regional Executive Directors
- Central Office Executive Directors and Assistant Directors
- Workforce Policy and Coordination
- School Innovation and Reform Unit
- Expert Review Group Unit

In total, Learning First met with over 120 principals/aspiring principals. The Executive Principal performed additional consultations with over 75 principals/aspiring principals. This means that over 20% of Western Australian principals were consulted as a part of this first stage of the project.

Appendix C: List of all data received

The following data was available and provided to Learning First by the Department:

- List of current policies and procedures that impact principals
- Principal payroll data
- Principal qualification data
- Cessation data
- Length of tenure data (with limitations)
- Principal vacancy data, 2013–2015
- Payroll data from all administrative positions (deputy principals, heads of department, Level 3 Classroom Teachers)
- Institute for Professional Learning course attendance data
- National School Opinion Survey data 2014, 2015

The following data was not available:

- Principal appraisal data – not collated in a format that could be supplied in the form of trends data
- Institute for Professional Learning course participant characteristic data – not systematically recorded by the Department

The following data was not provided due to its limitations:

- TALIS data
- Staff in Australian Schools Survey data

In both of the above cases, the data have limited validity as representative data for school leaders across WA.

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