

Leading through a crisis: Your role as a principal

Billie-Jean Potaka Ayton, Principal at Kaiti School, (a kura in Tairāwhiti)

Billie Jean begins with her pepeha, bringing her whakapapa and heritage into her solving of today's problems.

Preparation – being prepared for a crisis

- Mindset: Look after yourself, make sure you are focused with a positive mindset.
- Be prepared: If you know a storm is coming, watch the weather forecast, have a plan.
- When crisis hits, focus on your own plan and area.

Key priorities – Leadership of self, others and the school

- Focus on yourself as a leader, people will be looking to you, look after yourself in order to haere tonu, carry on and keep going.
- Operate via a distributed leadership model.
 - The plan comes from you as the leader and you require Senior leaders to distribute the plan to their teams.
 - The teacher's leadership role is to communicate this plan to their students and whānau.
 - In this recent crisis it required whānau to be leaders too - leading the education at home.
- Have a strategy, a clear plan. Pānui this, communicate this, talk about it with staff, before needing to enact it. Have thought through a few scenarios and options.
- Have a communication strategy. Consider the best way to inform parents. Think about this before you need to enact it.

Lead the team: In this recent situation the focus was around:

- Resourcing for teachers. Plan and deliver teacher PDL quickly.
- Expectations - share the expectations you have so everyone is clear i.e. in the recent situation, this is not a holiday we have a job to do - to deliver the education programme. Examples: work up on Facebook daily by 9am, check-in each day.
- Continue to live the values of your school i.e. manaakitanga, by whatever means you can.
- Understand different family situations and circumstances.
- Be innovative and take risks, try new things, even those out of your comfort zone. Billie-Jean began using Facebook and other media for kanoahi ke te kanoahi – being face-to-face, “closest to being together in person”. To illustrate risk-taking and being innovative, Billie Jean shared her own family story of converting from farming to kiwifruit, the first Maori family to become kiwifruit growers.
- Focus and rely on the resources you have in front of you. If the other resources don't materialise, i.e. packs and devices from the Ministry of Education, then you are still able to take action with what you have.
- Support the collective vision – do this as a team, remind people that they all have an important job to do. Use the messaging from the national level and apply at your school level too.

These elements are similar whether the crisis is small or large.