

**Can Boards of Trustees
Merge Schools Effectively ?**

2004

**Kellogg / Primary Industry Council Rural
Leadership Programme**

Chris McIntosh

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Executive Summary

Boards *can* merge schools effectively.

When we acknowledge that education is paramount to students and subsequently the countries future, we must also allow Boards of Trustees to govern towards greater student achievement.

With mergers, this occurs when complete, relevant information is available to:

1. investigate if and how to merge
2. work through a robust predetermined process that is transparent and flexible enough to allow collaborative consultation between Board of Trustees (BoT), Ministry of Education (MoE), New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA), and unions such as Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA), New Zealand Education Institute (NZEI) and Service and Food Workers Union (SFWU). It is crucial that both potential barriers and disruption are minimised.

This report presumes commitment from Boards, and identifies the need for better quality information and clear transparent processes to follow.

It is recommended that a national data base with relevant merger information be established, and for it to have a coordinator position attached. This coordinator would update and grow that database, and promote its use back to grassroots level, where ultimately the decisions should be made.

It is also recommended that NZSTA, MoE, NZEI, PPTA, SFWU discuss the role that a mediator may play in multi-party negotiations, should negotiation still be required.

Introduction

In 1989, the New Zealand Government undertook a reform of education administration, commonly referred to as “Tomorrow’s Schools”. This reform effort created a change in direction on how schools would be governed, and placed decision-making at the closest point to impact, i.e. at the coalface.

This paradigm shift allowed for more meaningful parent and community involvement into their school, thus providing a local influence in schools, and endeavouring to better meet the needs of the students within their community.

But as the years have passed, this altruistic ideal has been tempered with greater demands being placed on Boards of Trustees, both on workload levels particularly around compliance with regulation, and skills required by trustees to achieve the expectations placed on boards, both by the government and the community.

Further to the governance role that trustees undertake; they are also required to complete additional tasks such as employment issues, financial issues and school rationalisations, mergers, CAPNAs, network reviews. These types of additional tasks have become more prevalent over the last few years.

Often, when these additional tasks are thrust upon a Board, they have no prior experience or knowledge on how to deal with them: just the desire and commitment to do the right thing by their students as well as meet the expectations of the Ministry and ERO.

One of these additional tasks is the focus of this study. An Education Development Initiative (EDI) is defined as a process that “enables local communities to look at how education is being delivered in schools in their district”.

The three basic principles are to:

- Strengthen the curriculum for students in each school;
- reflect the preferences of a local community;
- achieve agreed changes within existing resources.

The first study on EDI policy was in 1992, as part of a Massey University study titled “Is EDI for you?”. This study found that the EDI process needs to have information available to those involved, a clear timeframe, and that all groups need to be well informed throughout the community-led process.

This project attempts to take these findings further, as it is recognised that one way in which Boards of Trustees can be more effective is to learn from the experiences of other Boards involved in an EDI to see what they did well and where they could improve.

The research process is described in the following sections and the survey sample results can be found in Appendix 2.

Aim

The following report attempts to investigate Boards of Trustees' perceptions and ability to facilitate effective school mergers.

Specific focus will be placed on:

- determining whether Boards are effective in facilitating school mergers and to identify barriers (if any) in achieving acceptable and sustainable educational outcomes in terms of student achievement; and
- identifying various strategies to reduce the barriers for Boards to be more effective in the future.

From these findings specific recommendations will be made to facilitate improvement in educational outcomes for students, while making the necessary changes to schools to reflect the changing demographics within New Zealand.

Methodology

Criteria for selection

Schools in the lower South Island were chosen that focused on schools that had undertaken a merger as part of an Education Development Initiative (EDI). Both community driven and those initiated by the Ministry of Education were included in the sample. These range from small rural school mergers to large urban school network reviews. Board chairs, trustees and principals were chosen from the Otago/Southland region that had been involved in an EDI merger during 1994 to 2001, and preliminary contact was made with each of the target schools before questionnaires were sent out.

Participants

The following schools were contacted: Pembroke, Waitaki Valley, Silverstream, Taeri College, Fiver Rivers, Central Southland Rural Primary. 25 questionnaires in total (a copy of which can be seen in Appendix 1) were sent out to board members, trustees and principals of these schools. There were 15 questionnaires returned. Board chairs, trustees and principals all participated in the questionnaire.

Sample

The intention was to cover a range of school types within the sample group. NZSTA suggested a range of schools that would fit the research criteria, and supplied the contact details for people at these schools. The sample group was determined from this list of schools, to reflect a representative sample of school types involved in EDI mergers.

Design

The survey questionnaire listed a range of questions that required qualitative and quantitative answers. Several questions used a rating scale to measure the weighting of the decision by each participant. Other questions were “closed” questions, requiring either a “yes” or “no” answer. Several questions were designed to examine changing attitudes over time, particularly around the EDI process and information available. It was thought that these types of questions would give an insight into the perception of the process by the survey participants. It was intended that the responses would then be collated into core data, and analysed.

Results

Section A

This section was intended to identify whether experience, position, roll size or decile rating had any significant effect on Boards in a merger process.

There was an even spread of participation from trustees, chairpersons, and principals, which allowed for comparison of any different viewpoints between positions held on the Board.

From the survey, it was found that both principals and chairs had over 4 years experience in all but one case. Trustees were less experienced, and predominantly in the 0-3 years range of experience. The amount of time chairpersons have spent in the role reinforces the assumption that the majority of Board members are committed to their role, and will serve more than one term (3 years) on a Board.

The school decile in relation to participants of the survey was concentrated in decile 5 - 10, i.e. higher decile schools. The decile rating question results revealed that this could be a significant factor in this survey. It was expected that an even spread from Decile 1 (low socio-economic values) through Decile 10 (high socio-economic values), would have been seen.

All but two respondents had no prior experience in school mergers. 40% of respondents indicated there was someone that they could turn to for advice on mergers. These were predominantly chairs and principals, who would be more likely to have better established networks within the school sector to tap into the appropriate experience and advice. In the section for general comments, some respondents reported that advice was “conflicting and not timely”.

Section B

This section attempted to identify whether Boards had enough relevant information to determine how to or if to merge with another school.

Chairs and Trustees were widespread in their views as to whether they had enough information at the time of the merger to decide whether to merge or not. Principals were more confident that they had the appropriate information available. There was no significant change on whether these people thought that in retrospect, they should have had more information available.

Chairs felt strongly that they did not have enough information to lead or drive the process, whereas in contrast, principals agreed that they had enough information. There was some change in the second question on this, where chairs were more evenly spread in their responses.

Responses as to whether in retrospect, participants felt that the information given by the various stakeholders School Trustees Association, Ministry of Education, unions was fair, honest, balanced and complete, revealed that generally, information on mergers

obtained failed to be honest, balanced or complete. There was no change in respondents' views between "pre" and "post" merger.

Section C

Section C looked at various resources and whether they were limiting factors in effective school mergers.

All respondents believed that they were committed to the EDI process for greater educational outcomes for students, indicating that the Board commitment was high.

For the merger process, the timeline response was generally either "too short" or "just right". Only one respondent answered that the timeframe for the EDI process was too short. In response to the question as to why timelines were not met, there were a number of responses that recorded this as "not applicable". Several reasons were also supplied, including the reliance on contractors to ensure that work was completed within a specific timeframe, and delays in decision making by the Ministry of Education.

Costs related to the merger process were split into 2 categories:

- Reimbursement of trustees of costs associated with mergers. The result here was polarised: about 40% said that they definitely were, and about 40% said that they were not.
- Paying for outside assistance. Respondents indicated that funds were generally available early in the process for Boards to employ consultants such as Change Managers. Two respondents did not believe that they had funds early enough and that this could have had a detrimental effect on their merger outcome.

Section D

This section aimed to identify any impediments on the process and/or composition of the continuing Board. A continuing Board is defined as the board of the school that remains once the merger has taken place.

The majority of respondents felt that the composition of the continuing board fairly represented the different school communities involved in the process. Respondents also felt that their views were reflected fairly as they had an equal voice on the continuing board.

It was found that there was a strong preference for the composition of the continuing board to be made up from the pool of board members of the affected schools.

Respondents believed that they had suitable expertise either within the board or capability to identify and outsource the appropriate skills to facilitate a desirable outcome.

There was a spread of responses to the question of whether all realistic options for the management hierarchy, staffing and property were explored. This range of responses does not reflect the same type of answers given to a similar question in section B

(question 7). All respondents agreed that the result achieved a satisfactory and sustainable outcome.

Section E

This section aimed to identify any other barriers to achieving effective mergers. Generally, respondents agreed that there were sufficient funds to carry out the process.

There was a range of views on whether professional development for the board was sufficient to undertake these mergers, with no clear trend of the view of trustees, chairs and principals.

When asked about access to information on experts/ consultants, there was a mixed response, which is in contrast to an earlier question in section D, where respondents felt confident they could locate or source the appropriate expertise. It seems from these results that the information on these experts was not readily available, although it could be found through various sources when needed.

Over two thirds of respondents thought that if they went through the merger process again, they could so it in a less disruptive fashion for all categories – boards, staff, students, community.

Section F

Section F gave an opportunity to list and/or comment on any positive points to the merger process that may be worth recording in this project.

The comments included:

- Facilities for students were upgraded to state-of-the-art;
- Boards came away with a much more positive working relationship with the Ministry of Education;
- Boards now know who to deal with to get action;
- Bigger schools generally provide more options for children;
- There are opportunities for students to make new friends;
- The merger has resulted in greater consultation with the community;
- The bus service is now available to all children;
- The merger has resulted in a good learning environment and good results.

Discussion

In determining whether Boards are effective in facilitating school mergers and to identify barriers (if any) in achieving acceptable and sustainable educational outcomes in terms of student achievement, it is useful to understand the operating context of boards in relation to mergers.

Principles of Trusteeship

In nearly all cases, parents and caregivers allow themselves to be elected onto Boards of Trustees because they have *a desire to see their children get the best education possible*.

One of the consistent themes identified through this research has been the commitment demonstrated by board members to greater educational outcomes for students, regardless of how they would be perceived in their community in making these tough, and at times, unpopular decisions. This is made even more difficult when the community is ill informed, or looks at the problem from a narrow perspective.

School trustees are elected by their communities to serve the best educational interests of the children, and when making decisions to enter these types of arrangements, they take a longer-term view of education and school sustainability, and weigh this up against factors such as generational links to the school, and the role of the school within the community.

Operating Environment

Boards operate in a highly compliance driven environment. An example of this is the expectation to adhere to the National Administrative Guidelines (NAGs) for school administration, set out by the Ministry of Education. The NAGs are mandatory for all state and state integrated schools, and cover: curriculum; self-review; personnel; finance and property; health and safety; legislative requirements. These have become more elaborate, and more effort is required to sign them off, despite their apparent intent to improve in effectiveness and accountability.

From this research, it appeared that higher decile rated school communities have a greater propensity to be exposed to a school roll decline and therefore a higher chance for the community to look at mergers to rationalise education delivery. However, there is no New Zealand based research available that could confirm this assertion. Reasoning for this assertion is that higher decile rated communities (therefore higher socio-economic communities) are better able, through trustees being more proactive in strategic planning, to see the necessity to merge and also tend to place higher emphasis on their children getting an education that supports tertiary studies, and therefore want to ensure that the best education network is available (and is sustainable) to support that goal.

It is government policy to put education money into enhancing student learning and not maintaining surplus buildings, and in rural areas, farms are getting larger and more mechanised, therefore less staff are needed. This leads to a lower density in the rural

population, so boards are looking at sustainable school numbers and what they would want from a school merger, other than the obvious outcome of having more students at the school.

Merger Process

Nationally, mergers/EDIs and network reviews have become more frequent, because of today's educational environment of declining rolls and changes to government policy and regulations. However, in any particular community, they are a rare event. As a result, Boards of Trustees are at a disadvantage. It is felt that the Ministry of Education and unions lack awareness of this fact, and do little to support boards through this difficult and divisive process.

All respondents showed a commitment to seeing the merger completed, even if they thought that the process was fundamentally flawed. However, it was interesting to note that some people seemed reluctant to acknowledge decisions were made that may have been different and "better" had more information been available. Perhaps this is a reflection on the ability of trustees to "get on with the job" as they are often operating in an information vacuum.

Few respondents had prior knowledge or experience of a merger process. From other research studies conducted (such as the EDI study), the Ministry of Education also had not developed robust guidance for its staff on the EDI process, and how to respond to queries. Decision making was often held up at the Ministry level as there were questions as to who was responsible, and compounding this problem was staff on leave at critical times during the process, and staff turnover. This added to trustees frustration, and created some difficult questions to answer. There is also an issue as to whether unions and representative organisations should have been able to offer more assistance and advice to board members and staff. It is expected that if questioned further, board members would have expected information from these organisations to be more honest, balanced or complete.

Principals seemed to be quite clear on who should drive the process. This is probably reflective of their role in the education sector, and that they are often expected to drive or lead project and initiatives. Board members were not clear on who should lead or drive the process, and the information supplied on this did not seem to give them sufficient clarity. It would be interesting to ask this question to the people involved in the current round of network reviews, as the principals job is disestablished as part of the network review process, and therefore the current principal may not be successful in being appointed to the principal position in the continuing school.

It is interesting that all respondents were satisfied with the result achieved from the merger for their students, given the lack of information available about the process. It can be assumed that Boards used other avenues to source information to help them through the merger process, such as trustees from other Boards, or people with skills but not associated with schools. If this is so, the resourcefulness of Boards is to be congratulated.

Funding

Board members responded that funds available to work through EDI processes are generally sufficient. It is likely that as time progresses, the merger process will become more formulated and transparent. It appears that with the current round of network reviews this has already started to occur.

In September 2002 the Ministry of Education produced a document that set out the EDI funding policy, which comprised of an EDI cash grant, property entitlement and Joint-School Initiative Funding (JSIF). This document effectively covers almost all of the funding issues associated with an EDI process. The EDI cash grant is currently based on a calculation involving student enrolment numbers. Financial tables let boards readily identify the allocated monies. Other entitlements, both pre and post merger are also outlined.

Boards are in a better position now to facilitate effective mergers, as they are no longer negotiating with seasoned adversaries. The process has become far more transparent because of written policies, and Ministry of Education publication that outline the process. In short, the outcomes can be more clearly forecast.

As part of this, the Ministry of Education appears to have had a change of mindset towards more public and has created a more workable policy that:

- better empowers Boards to make progressive governance decisions, and
- gives Boards more confidence to think strategically as there are fewer unknowns.

For larger merger processes such as network reviews, supplementary reference documents including “Building Sustainable Schooling Networks” (Ministry of Education, 2004) are invaluable for effective decision making. Significant issues like seeking funding applications are covered in these documents which protect cash flow and the liquidity of the development project.

The Ministry of Education themselves acknowledge the process has been less than ideal to follow, and have stated that:

“The process must be transparent” and “the calculation of funding to be returned to the school will be based on formulae and not on individual negotiation” (School Closures and Mergers: Information for Schools September 2002 p.1).

It is satisfying to know that now Boards are more likely to follow Ministry guidance, with standard formulae and written procedures, and less likely to commit funding faux-pas.

By and large, trustees were not compensated for the costs they incurred during the merger process. A possible reason is that trustee reimbursement may not have been discussed in the early stages of the merger process. If it wasn't considered early, before particular costs were identified, trustees might be reluctant to bring it up later. If any trustee incurred significant costs in mileage, phone calls etc., to claim these expenses might be also have been seen as penny pinching – especially if these costs had not been included in a forecast budget, or if they would be perceived as a “cost” charged to the school.

Why then, was there the difference between adequate funding of Boards' expenses and contracting of consultants and Change Managers?

One explanation could be that MoE and Boards value the input outsourced expertise can bring to the process, while trustees contributions are undervalued. The reason for this may be that trustees are "committed to better educational outcomes for the students", and are likely to overlook their costs, as the end justifies their loss of means. Trustees are also used to working in a voluntary capacity, and put in many hours beyond what they are paid a meeting fee for. It is likely that they would recognise the amount of time needing to be set to get tasks associated with the merger completed, and would allocate their own time and resources to do this.

Also, there is a certain detached view for the consultant, which upon reflection is fair: the children involved are not their children. This also follows that a cost imposed on the school is not a cost to their child (or their children's education).

Undesired outcomes of the merger

Anecdotal evidence suggests that students tend to be disrupted the most in a merger process. But when comparing students with Board, staff and community, the respondents felt the process was more disruptive on staff and Board. This is probably more reflective of the sample group than the reality of the situation.

In any EDI process, a student, particularly a young student, has to face a large number of changes such as a different way of getting to school, from perhaps walking with Mum to going on a long bus ride with unfamiliar faces; a different teacher; a much larger school and a large age range of students at the school (when a primary and secondary school are combined). These are generally changes in the students' environment and the disruption should reduce as they get accustomed to the new ways. Disruption is initially huge but is only for a short time and is environmental.

As far as staff and Boards are concerned, however, disruption is also huge and ongoing, and not only environmental but more importantly, interpersonal relationships. This kind of disruption could potentially be reduced by including two key elements in the process: a more transparent process prior consultation with all affected parties; and keeping parties informed as progressive steps are achieved.

Timeframe

Timing of the EDI process also seemed to have an impact on board members. Many considered the timeframe either "too short" or "about right". It is expected that those respondents who thought the time allocated was inadequate would blame all parties (BoT, MoE, and unions) for time delays.

The continuing board

Section D was included in this report because some discussion amongst educationalists had centred on whether the current legal composition requirements of a continuing Board best suits today's environment. Currently, the nominated continuing Board is

required under the Education Act 1989 to co-opt only **one** trustee from each of the other merging school Boards. The continuing Board has discretion to co-opt more members as it sees fit.

Although this allows the possibility of a biased continuing Board, the survey results indicate this possibility did not eventuate. It is acknowledged that the sample size for the research was small, however it is likely that if this had been experienced in any of the mergers that were surveyed, that this would have appeared in the responses. This could be attributed to the reasoning that Board members only want to “do right” by all the students involved in their merger, regardless of which school they are from.

A narrow majority thought the continuing Board should come from existing Boards rather than the entire affected school communities, presumably because they know most of what is involved and have demonstrated an interest by being on the Board in the first place. There was also a sense that Board elections would put further demands on existing and potential trustees and on a community already undergoing upheaval, and that there is not enough time within the EDI process to also run an election process.

When considering whether a continuing Board should be chaired independently by a suitably qualified person, no obvious preference surfaced. This seemed to be reflective of the quality and capability of members on the Board. There was also a concern for some respondents that funding of an independent chairperson could be an issue. In the general comments for this section, there were several reasons for and against an independent chair, as shown in the table below.

Independent Chair

Strongly agree	Strongly Disagree
Impartiality	Cost of an independent chair
No emotional involvement	Board Chairman already in role to do it
Needs to be strong	Needs to be passionate

Merger results

Generally, respondents felt that the continuing Board had at their disposal enough expertise to facilitate a satisfactory and sustainable outcome for students. However, when questioned as to whether all realistic options for management structure, staffing and property were explored, 50% disagreed.

This leads to the point that one should not confuse a satisfactory and sustainable outcome with a brilliant and sustainable outcome. It is likely that there was room for improvement in being able to investigate all realistic options as part of the EDI process.

The difference between the 50% who agreed and the 50% who disagreed might be defined by whether or not the school merger involved the new school being reclassified e.g. a primary school merging with a secondary school to become an area school, as opposed to two primaries on one site, retaining its classification as a primary school with no corresponding change in management structure. Further research would be necessary to confirm this theory.

Where no change in class occurs, it would be easier to consider all options as there was probably only one option available. Where a change in classification was required, the Board would require being open to considering more dynamic solutions that better reflect the needs of the new school community.

It must also be acknowledged that many respondents believed it was too early yet to say whether the merger would be satisfactory and sustainable.

Barriers to effective mergers

In identifying various strategies to reduce the barriers for Boards to be more effective in the future, three themes emerged in the responses, and could be viewed as the “top three” barriers. These were: people with hidden agendas; lack of relevant models; and misinformation. It is interesting to note that organisations (e.g. Ministry of Education or other boards) were not identified as particular barriers to the process.

Other barriers to effective mergers may have been:

- The Ministry of Education holding the purse strings too tightly.
- A lack of strategic or directional planning towards an outcome.
- Lack of timeliness of the appointment of a Change Manager.
- Lack of early identification of Board members’ strengths and weaknesses.
- Lack of guidelines, protocols or relevant models to follow.
- Lack of awareness of specific funds available for specific tasks of a merger process.
- The experience and suitability of the Change Manager.

Merger information to Boards was seen to be misleading, biased or incomplete by the majority of the respondents. If information was frequently misleading, biased or incomplete, how then did Boards achieve acceptable outcomes? Did Boards get helpful information from S T A, the Ministry of Education or unions? Did Boards make rational decisions despite the information given?

The timeline was more often than not, seen to be too tight (therefore the process was rushed). The merger process could have been less disruptive, particularly for trustees and staff.

Therefore, availability of quality information and a reasonable timeline are two key strategies that would assist on creating effective mergers.

Strengths of the Merger Process

Trustees’ were committed to improving educational outcomes. Boards felt that they had access to sufficient expertise to make effective decisions and the composition of the continuing Board was perceived to be fair and every trustee had an equal voice. There was no change in the viewpoint between “pre” and “post” merger as to whether they would do things differently, indicating that trustees made decisions and stuck with them in order to get a result.

Funds were available early enough in the process to employ a Change Manager.

Issues for further investigation

- Were all realistic options considered by the Board? If not, how does one know the best outcome was achieved?
- While a sustainable, satisfactory outcome was achieved, that is not the same as a brilliant, satisfactory outcome. The limitation might have been in the question, as satisfactory was the highest option that respondents could choose. In hindsight, it would have been better for the “5” choice to be “brilliant”.
- Was there a need for an independent chairperson for the continuing Board? This would depend on (i) The quality of the people on the Board. (ii) The quality of the people available as independents. (iii) How complex and demanding the merger process would be.
- Was the Board professional development adequate, appropriate and current?
- Some trustees weren't reimbursed for the costs associated with the merger. This question could have been elaborated to include the effort contributed generally i.e. time with meetings etc, which often comes at the expense of ones family life.

Conclusion

Boards of trustees are effective in facilitating mergers as part of an EDI process. They can do this effectively when there is relevant, timely, and useful information on the process, that describes the role of the board, the actions they need to take, and the consultation and communication needed to get the community on side. It needs to be a locally tailored solution that also is an acceptable outcome for the Ministry of Education.

The process needs to be focused on meeting the educational needs of students. This focus is often lost in the process, as people concentrate on property needs, staffing entitlements and curriculum development. EDI processes have a real impact on students learning, and create a tangible shift in student outcomes if handled well. It is up to boards, principals and other staff, and the Ministry of Education to ensure that this occurs.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- NZSTA considers investigating (by further research and a larger survey pool) whether information received by merging boards was less than satisfactory and to identify the reasons.
- merger stakeholders i.e. NZSTA, MoE, PPTA, NZEI, SFWU to consider, at a joint forum, the role of an independent mediator to help multi-party negotiations in pre and post merger meetings.
- a database to be established that aids improved and less disruptive decision making with regard to mergers. The database should include previous merger case studies and the contact details of those involved in the process, and latest and relevant guidelines from the Ministry of Education, NZSTA and the various unions, concerning mergers. Guidelines and working models should be included for a wide range of tasks, from building project procedure through to designing a new school management and curriculum structure. The database should be reviewed annually and jointly by the stakeholders.
- a paid position within NZSTA to be established to coordinate the dissemination of this information to the stakeholders at a grassroot level that promotes a collaborative approach and promotes open dialogue between stakeholders.

Glossary

C A P N A – Curriculum and Pastoral Needs Analysis – the system where excess staff is identified.

Continuing Board – When 2 or more schools merge, one school is designated “the continuing school” and that school’s Board is termed “the Board of the continuing school”. This Board must have a co-opted trustee from the merging school/s. The Board has a mandate to govern the transition process through to the elections of a new Board.

Decile Rating – a system whereby schools are ranked by socio-economic values. 1 is the lowest ranking and 10 is the highest.

E D I – Education Development Initiative. This is provided to the remaining school Boards for the educational benefit of the students within the state compulsory education system. The E D I and Joint-school initiative funding are generated from the savings made from any closed or merged schools.

Joint-school initiative funding – Where more than 2 schools are involved in a network review and 2 or more remain at the end of the process, then additional funding is provided specifically for joint education initiatives to enhance the education provision across all schools.

Mergers – If 2 schools are joined, to continue under a Board of the continuing school, this is a merger.

Network Reviews – this refers to the provision of buildings and resources across an area.

N Z S T A – New Zealand School Trustees Association

P P T A – Post Primary Teachers Association

N Z E I – New Zealand Educational Institute

S F W U – Service and Food Workers Union

S T A – School Trustees Association

APPENDIX 1

Survey Questionnaire

To respondents,

My name is Chris McIntosh and I have just relinquished the chair of the Tuatapere Community College Board of Trustees, in Southland. I am completing the Primary Industry Council/Kellogg Rural Leadership course through Lincoln University, and as part of this qualification, I am seeking your valued input into a research project on Boards of Trustees' perceptions and abilities on effective School Mergers.

I was the chair of a Board that completed an E D I process over a period of 4 years. During that period, our board had difficulty in completing the EDI process due to the lack of information, the knowledge available to assist with the process, and access to, and identification of other skills necessary to get to a satisfactory outcome.

This project attempts to establish from the sample group identified, if our experience was similar to that of other boards involved in EDIs, or if it was an exception.

A way forward of Boards of Trustees, can sometimes be to look back. Your contribution may make it easier for trustees in the future as they move towards community driven "voluntary" EDI options.

A copy of the project report will be available when the project is completed. All survey questionnaires will remain confidential, as results available in the report will be presented as collated answers, so that no comments can be attributed to a particular individual.

There is a mystery prize available. In order to be eligible for the prize draw, please fill out your details on the separate slip provided, and return with the survey in the prepaid envelope provided, by **August 20, 2004**.

Yours sincerely,

Chris McIntosh.

SECTION A

This section is intended to identify whether experience, position, roll size or decile rating had any significant effect on Boards in a merger process. If applicable to you, please answer this section as if you were pre-merger.

1: What was your position on the Board?

Trustee **Chairperson** **Principal** **Other** (Circle one)

2: How many years experience did you have on a Board of Trustees ?

0-3 **4-6** **7 or more years** (Circle one)

3: Were you part of the merger process from the beginning ?

Yes **No** (Circle one)

4: What was your school decile rating ?

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**
6 **7** **8** **9** **10**
(Circle one)

5: Did you have any previous experience in school mergers ?

Yes **No** (Circle one)

6: Did you have anyone you could turn to for advice on mergers ?

Yes **No** (Circle one)

SECTION A

Comments:

21: Do you believe all realistic options for the management hierarchy, staffing and property were explored ?

Strongly disagree Strongly agree
0 1 2 3 4 5 (Circle one)

22: Do you believe the result achieved, realised a satisfactory and sustainable outcome for the students of your school ?

Strongly disagree Strongly agree
0 1 2 3 4 5 (Circle one)

SECTION D

Comments:

- 27: Were any of the following factors seen by you as a barrier to the process:
- Not being aware of Boards strengths and weaknesses, initially
 - Use of independent mediators in industrial processes
 - People with hidden agendas
 - Different stake holders having different levels of commitment to the process
 - Misinformation
 - Reluctance to disseminate information
 - Personality conflicts
 - Lack of relevant models for new school or process. (e.g. not told of another school, or school was inappropriate)
 - Other – please specify. (Tick relevant factors)

SECTION E

Comments:

SECTION F

Section F gives an opportunity to list and /or comment on any positive points to your merger process that may be worth recording in this project.

Comments:

If the researcher required, would you be prepared to participate in a follow-up interview at a mutually agreeable time and place?

Yes

No

(Circle one)

If so, please supply contact name and phone number:

Name:

Phone Number:

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

PRIZE DRAW

Please supply your name and contact details for the prize draw:

Name:

Address:

Phone number:

Fax number:

Email address:

Appendix 2

Survey Results - data

Section A

Question 1

T	C	P	O	Total
4	7	3	1	15

Question 2

	0 to 3	4 to 6	7 or more	Total
T	3	1	0	4
C	1	3	3	7
P	0	1	2	3
O	0	1	0	1

Question 3

	Yes	No	Total
T	4	0	4
C	7	0	7
P	3	0	3
O	1	0	1

Question 4

Decile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
T							1			2	3
C		1			2		1	1	1		6
P					1	1		1			3
O						1					1

Question 5

	Yes	No	Total
T		4	4
C	1	6	7
P	1	2	3
O		1	1

Question 6

	Yes	No	Total
T	1	3	4
C	3	4	7
P	2	1	3
O		1	1

Additional comments – section A

Advice can be conflicting and not timely

We were a first between intermediate and high school - seen as a blueprint

Change Manager was very experienced

From a distance, mostly through email

Section B
Question 7i

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T		1		1	1	1	4
C	2	1	1	1	2		7
P				1	1		2
O		1					1

Question 7ii

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T		1			2	1	4
C	2	1	1	2	1		7
P				1	1		2
O		1					1

Question 8i

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T		1		2	1		4
C	2	3			2		7
P						1	1
O		1					1

Question 8ii

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T		1		2	1		4
C	2	2	1	1	1		7
P						1	1
O		1					1

Question 9i

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T		1	1	2			4
C		2	1	3	1		7
P		1		1	1		3
O		1					1

Question 9ii

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T		1	1	2			4
C		1	2	3	1		7
P		1		1	1		3
O		1					1

Additional comments – section B

different viewpoints/perspectives in approach and information

misled by MoE, STA, local MP and Minister of Education

aggressive and dominant boards got better funding and buildings, passive boards were worse off

we were first, so told the Ministry their formulae were irrelevant

fait accompli by MOE

each school was looking out for themselves

MoE misled us about bus run, resulting in division of community

Section C
Question 10

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T						4	4
C					1	5	6
P					1	2	3
O						1	1

Question 11i

	a	b	c	Total
T	1		3	4
C	3	1	2	6
P	2		1	3
O			1	1

Question 11ii

	a	b	c	Total
T	1		3	4
C	3	1	1	5
P	2		1	3
O			1	1

Question 12

	a	b	c	d	e	f	Total
T				1	1	1	3
C	1	1	1		4	1	8
P					3		3
O						1	1

Other comments - delay in decision put us behind all other timelines
arranging contractors to do the work and finish on time
not enough time

Question 13

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T	2					2	4
C	1	2		1		3	7
P	3				1		4
O	1						1

Question 14

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T		1			1	2	4
C		1		2		4	7
P				1	1	1	3
O				1			1

Additional comments in section C
If we had a choice we wouldn't have done it.

Section D
Question 15

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T				1	2	1	4
C		1			2	3	6
P					1	2	3
O					1		1

Question 16

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T					3	1	4
C	1				2	3	6
P					2	1	3
O					1		1

Question 17

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T	1	2				1	4
C	3			1	1	1	6
P	3						3
O					1		1

Question 18

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T		1		2		1	4
C	3			1	1	1	6
P			1	1		1	3
O		1					1

Comments

needs to be strong
impartial new perspective is good, no emotional involvement is good
MoE picked stronger board
Chairperson already in role to do it
Community would perceive impartiality - good

Question 19

	a	b	c	d	Total
T	3	1			4
C	2	1	2		5
P	1		1	1	3
O					0

Comments

Larger school would decide – unfair
too biased
seen as neutral
MoE in consultation with BoT of all affected schools

Question 20

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T				1	3		4
C		1	1		2	2	6
P				1	1	1	3
O					1		1

Comments

Had to work bloody hard!

Question 21

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T		1		1	1	1	4
C	1	1	1		3	1	7
P		2				1	3
O		1					1

Question 22

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T				1	1	2	4
C	2*			1	1	3	5
P				2			2
O					1	1	2

Comments

2 chairpersons stated "yet to be determined"

Additional comments in section D
 needed mediator earlier
 needed no interference from MoE
 needed more information
 didn't need inept facilitators

Section E
Question 23

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T			1		2	1	4
C	1		1	1	1	3	7
P				1		2	3
O					1		1

Question 24

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T			2	1	1		4
C	1	2	2	1		1	7
P				2	1		3
O		1					1

Question 25

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T			1	1	2		4
C		3	1	1	1		6
P				2	1		3
O				1			1

Question 26
Students

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T	1			2	1		4
C		1		2	1	3	7
P	1		1			1	3
O		1					1
Total	2	2	1	4	2	4	

Staff

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T		1		1	2		4
C			1	1	1	4	7
P	1		1			1	3
O				1			1
Total	1	1	2	3	3	5	

Board

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T		2		1	1		4
C				2	1	4	7
P	1		1			1	3
O		1					1
Total	1	3	1	3	2	5	

Community

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
T		1		1	2		4
C		1	1	1	1	3	7
P	1		1			1	3
O				1			1
Total	1	2	2	3	3	4	

Question 27

	T	C	P	O	Total
A		1			1
B	1	1	1	1	4
C	2	6	2		10
D	1	2	1	1	5
E	1	5	2	1	9
F	1	2	1		4
G	1	3	1	1	6
H	3	4	1	1	9
I	0	0	0	0	0

Chairpersons: Considerable competition among schools has resulted in ill feeling and loss of trust.

A “jump on or get left behind” hard nosed approach had win/win for teachers.

Consultation process was waste of time.

Biggest limitation is our own knowledge of what else is possible.

People’s fear of change.

Bus funding didn’t meet need.

Principals: Unstable staffing/leadership made it more challenging for me to define my principal’s role.

Section F

Respondents Comments:

Trustees: Good learning environment and good results.
Gained good facilities.

Chairpersons: Too early to say.
Bus service now available to all children.
Has joined 3 communities into one.
Children seem happy and have new friends.
Upgrading of school buildings.
Huge success: roll growth went from 527 to 960.
Brand new state-of-art facilities.
100% improvement with relationship with MoE.
Learnt who to deal with to get action.
Aggressive Board approach got more funds from MoE.
Political leverage (election year looming).
Bigger school leads to more options for children.
Need/have to have good leader in the school.

Principals: In a few years time it would have positives.
Planning with BoT on how process would happen.

Good consultation with communities re: vision.
Continuing Board appointed two members from each of the other
schools to the new Board.

Other: Early appointment of principal helped.