

## Strategic and annual planning problems? Help is at hand!

Term four is the busiest for schools. Instead of winding down, we wind up as we cope with end-of-year reporting and planning for the next year, as well as managing 'business-as-usual'. Recent work by the University of Auckland Centre for Educational Leadership (UACEL) with principals and senior management highlighted the support that schools need in order to develop their strategic and annual plans. Plans are really just theories – they are theories about what we think will make THE difference we are seeking.

If the theory is to be proven correct in practice, the plan needs to be simple enough and different enough to be a real test of the theory. It is difficult to be succinct and clear – and comply with legislation – and really plan something that is going to make a difference to those whose performance most needs a lift. But that is why we plan.

So – here are some tips:

- Keep it very simple; just have one or two major goals that are focused on the difference you want in the learners – not the teachers.
- Talk to teachers, students and families about what the adults have to do differently to get that shift.
- Talk to students about their contribution.

These ideas about what everyone needs to do differently (strategies) become your theory for improvement. Like the adults, students need to be specific about their planned actions and commit to them. Students need to be part of the plan.

Don't forget to analyse very basic things in your school to see if they are truly aligned to your goals for improving student outcomes. Don't just think about the professional learning you need to do. Think about the meetings you have – do you use that time well to really work on improving outcomes for students? Do you have the meetings you really need to have? Are you really examining what is going on for the students? Your staff and school will tell you the answers to these questions if you are brave enough to ask them.

UACEL has worked on a template that supports schools to clearly identify what is required in order to clarify their strategic thinking and comply with NZ legislation. In collaboration with the Planning and Reporting staff from the Ministry of Education we have tried to ensure that we have an aligned view of some aspects of 'best practice' in schools' strategic and annual

planning. A good plan is a simple and clear plan.

We know that a template cannot speak to the many nuances of contexts nor can it answer questions that may arise. It is merely a scaffold and obviously people will have a variety of philosophies about what good planning for improved outcomes entails. We do not suggest that this template is the one and only way of planning – merely that this is one way that has a close focus on serving the needs of all students.

So, if you are having trouble making your plan concise and closely aligned to student achievement goals, try using the template that is provided on our UACEL website at: [Download Strategic and Annual Planning Blank Template](#)

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The key to making a plan into a good outcome is to be clear about how you will monitor progress every single term. You need some indicators of student progress to review to see if your theory is a good theory. If you are not getting shifts after one term, don't assume you will get them later. If it is not working after two terms – stop and think again. You need a new theory! Don't keep pursuing what isn't working for your priority learners.