Creating and Supporting a
Performance & Development Culture

Sample Application – Element 5 – Rangeview PS

Element 5 - Belief by teachers that the school has a performance and development culture

A range of research and ongoing practice over many years has facilitated the strengthening of our professional community. The development of three School Charters during the period with accompanying processes for Self Assessments and Triennial Reviews has provided a framework within which the school has evolved. Together with the application of the Hill - Crevola Model over many years the implementation of the Victorian Early Years Program has created a focus and clear purpose for professional interaction and growth. This was particularly important in assisting the culture in earlier years. Similarly the adoption of philosophies associated with the Middle Years of Schooling and the subsequent Middle Years Research and Development project (MYRAD) since 1998 also provided a framework for School Improvement during the period.

Importantly, throughout this period there has existed considerable clarity, order and organisation in relation to professional accountability; school organisational and curriculum processes; and provision; and leadership of the parent community through the School Council. The documentation of agreed organisational, decision making and curriculum arrangements has resulted in the compilation of a Rangeview School Operations Compendium. Likewise, all members of the School Council experience an induction program and are provided with a Rangeview School Council Operations Compendium. In a very concrete and clear manner this provides the administrative and management ‘roadmap’ for total school functioning. The enhancement and operationalising of such detail represents our leadership, culture and opportunity.

Throughout the period the Principal (of eleven years’ experience) has undertaken considerable professional development. The involvement of the Principal in such programs as the School Leadership Development Program; the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Teaching and Learning Project; the Leadership Team Development Program; the Hay McBer Leadership Development Program for School Principals and more recently the Leadership through Excellence Program, An Advanced Program for Experienced Principals and the SAGE Mentoring Program with the Australian Principals Centre have provided the Principal with the feedback, knowledge and skills to facilitate their leadership and the enhancement of their school. The Model of Transformational Leadership, Sergiovanni (1984) increasingly cited in relation to publications relating to the Blueprint for Education 2003 is well known to this Principal and represents one of a number of paradigms of use in developing one’s own approach to Leadership. Together with project work based upon the research of Peter Hart, Insight IRC the Principal has become increasingly aware of his Leadership style; the factors contributing to positive school climate and organisational health and ultimately student outcomes. Increasingly a review of the School Level Report 2004 provides for the further development of the Principal and school, but also the entire Rangeview Leadership Team. In recent times, personnel have been strategically identified and developed to explore and share these understandings for the benefit of all school stakeholders. We look forward to this continuing in depth and complexity to provide increasing distributive leadership and empowerment.

The valuing and support of teachers and all staff is of core essence, ongoing and assiduously pursued. Opportunities are sought to support and value all staff by the Principal, Assistant Principal and, most importantly, interdependently within the entire staff group. In reality, bonds are increased as these people often become the greatest advocates and supporters of their team and each other. The Principal’s strong coaching style of leadership together with a clear focus upon Human Leadership (per Sergiovanni 1984) results in an enduring focus upon the support and valuing of all staff. Moreover there is a deliberate effort to recognise opportunities taken by staff to trial new ideas and practices. There is a general acceptance that until we have tried something different we cannot grow and develop. During the last three years the move away from the Performance Development cycle of mere compliance to an increasing focus upon self assessment and identified professional development has assisted to inculcate such values. Similarly the fact that all staff – teaching and non teaching are all expected to participate in this process also assists in creating the expectation that all can and are expected to reflect and grow.
This is particularly reflected in the trials relating to the development of digital portfolios; the application of thinking skills and associated pedagogies; and the use of alternative literacy and numeracy strategies for those with identified needs in this area. The highly considered approach we are currently exploring at various levels, in relation to meeting the needs of students with extended abilities, is a powerful example. The involvement of one of our Leading Teachers- Accountability & ICT in the Teacher Professional Leave program (Blueprint- Flagship 3) for Term Two, to explore the pedagogical implications of digital portfolios on Student Learning, will also assist in the development of our staff and also other schools as knowledge and research gained is entered on to the Knowledge Bank (Blueprint – Flagship 1). Currently this teacher is using his professional leave to research digital portfolios with personnel from the University of Melbourne and the Victorian Innovations Commission and working with our Year 5 & 6 students over the course of the Term. He is also tracking the continuing use of digital portfolios established with our students now attending Year 7 at Wesley College and Vermont Secondary College. Last year these initiatives resulted in two of our students presenting at the International E Portfolio Conference held at the University of Melbourne. Earlier this year these students and three staff shared their learnings and growing insights with teachers at a Cluster Innovations and Excellence Curriculum Day. Despite this phenomenal growth there is a general recognition that we on the precipice of a new pedagogical era.

The strength of our Level teams over many years; their shared professional engagement and development; their quality leadership; their familiarity and ease with student achievement data and the connectedness they build between identification and diagnosis, professional development, teaching pedagogy and ongoing reflection and evaluation ensure sustainability. Importantly our Expert Teachers are those that continue to provide the modelling and example that enables all aspects of the Effective Schools Model (Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore 1995) to evolve. The Staff Opinion Survey, the Parent Opinion Survey and the Student Attitudinal Survey will continue to provide evidence for ongoing feedback and improvement.

The survey results reflect convincingly that there is a strong belief about the presence of a Performance and Development Culture within the school. The means of 4.2 to 4.8 on the survey items clearly supports this contention. Importantly, the high scores on items relating to the way in which the School Leadership Team supports the culture is also significant. The notion of being valued and supported was well supported by the evidence. Specifically 92.3% either agreed or strongly agreed that they were recognised for a job well done. Similarly 100% either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt supported by the Leadership team in trying out new ideas. In addition, 100% either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt supported in their teaching. Furthermore 100% either agreed or strongly agreed that the leadership team values the knowledge and skills of teachers.

In relation to the taking of calculated risks and trying new things the survey results were also supportive. 100% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the School Leadership Team supported them to try new ideas. Similarly 100% of the cohort either agreed or strongly agreed that they had many opportunities to learn new things at the school.

The survey results also substantiate the presence of a culture where professional accountability has been established. 100% of the cohort either agreed or strongly agreed that teachers maintain high standards in their teaching. Furthermore 96.2% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the Leadership team expects teachers to be accountable. Somewhat related, 92.3% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that teachers who teach well in this school are given leadership opportunities. Not surprisingly then is the quality of advice offered to teachers in the school: 96.2% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they received good advice from other teachers in the school. Furthermore, 96.2% of the cohort either agreed or strongly agreed that teachers regularly evaluate how well programs meet students’ needs.

The perception of the contribution the Rangeview Leadership Team provides to the Performance and Development Culture and therein the development of a Learning Community is demonstrated by the survey results. 98.5% of the cohort either agreed or strongly agreed that the Leadership team is responsive to staff suggestions for changes. Somewhat related, 98.5% either agreed or strongly agreed that the Leadership team promotes collaboration and reflection. In addition 92.3 % either agreed or strongly agreed that the leadership team provides opportunities for teachers to give feedback.

The evidence that Rangeview has a sustainable and ever developing learning community is substantial. In addition to that already stated, the school has increasingly become a centre for professional growth and development. In 2003 our School took the initiative to provide Professional Development programs in the areas of Mathematics and Science. These programs involved staff from three and five schools respectively through the Australian Government Quality Teaching Program. This involved professional development for up to one hundred and fifty teachers over three terms with close relationship with the Mathematics Association of Victoria, Regional
Consultants, Educational Consultants of a private nature and the Gould League Victoria. In addition, the Rangeview Principal and staff led four schools in a successful submission to the City of Whitehorse and the Gould League in relation to each of the schools receiving funds to continue their journey to become accredited as a Sustainable School. This is continuing and accreditation is envisaged in Term Four 2005, not only for Rangeview but also for Orchard Grove, Nunawading, and Parkmore Primary Schools. Furthermore, in 2005 we have negotiated a Professional Development package with Ward Sagar, a literacy provider to conduct a series of Professional Development experiences in relation to Literacy and Spelling. Again many of our staff will be involved. Furthermore our Level Four staff have taken the initiative to participate in a mutual shadowing program with teachers at Vermont Secondary College. Also the involvement of our staff in the Designer PD initiative in Southern Metropolitan Region is enabling many of our staff to gain insights and an interchange that extends their horizons. Not insignificantly, these professional experiences over three years relate directly to our School Charter priority of Mathematics and the Improvement areas of Writing and Science. Currently as a school undertaking a Negotiated Review in Term Two and Three we look forward to celebrating what this has meant for the development of our staff and the enhancement of student outcomes. (see Appendices 5)

Other factors contributed greatly to the development of our school as a learning community. The involvement of the Rangeview Principal as Chairperson of the Inaugural Whitehorse Network of Schools in 2003-2004 was significant in influencing the focus on curriculum development and professional development across the twenty nine schools involved and attracting a range of sources of funding for new initiatives. It also provided symbolic leadership towards the goal of encouraging the sharing of professional insights and experience. The organisational structure and associated provision has continued from that time. A number of related curriculum networks: Performing Arts, Visual Arts and Health & Physical Education are led and developed through the efforts of our staff. In 2004 our Assistant Principal and the President of the Nunawading District Sports Association collaboratively developed a procedural manual to assist in the provision of Sport at the District & Zone Level. This has assisted considerably with succession planning but also in the recording and sharing of skills and knowledge across many schools. There are a myriad of similar examples that build connectedness and interdependence between our staff and those in other schools.

The evidence to meet the accreditation phase at Level Four is considerable. In many cases our school is working towards aspects at Level Five. The challenge in the next few years will be not only to consolidate and entrench those practices found to be highly supportive of a Performance & Development Culture but to sustain the drive, energy and enthusiasm to reach new levels and increasingly act with shared purpose as new learnings and insights emerge from immersion in high level professional interaction and engagement. We look forward to creating experience, not merely moving through it.