Achieving purposeful collaboration
What research tells us?

"Twenty-five years of school improvement research has shown that changing schools depends on internal capacity and new learning. It requires motivation (improvement orientation), new knowledge and the development of new skills, dispositions and relationships. In particular, using indicators to improve practice in schools depends on skill in using data, creating cultures of inquiry, engaging in deep and challenging conversations about practice, and changing long-established beliefs and patterns of practice". (Earl 2014 quoted in ERO Evaluation Indicators)

"Collaboration focused on the improvement of teaching and learning is one of the highest yielding strategies to boost student, school and system performance - especially where responsibility for the success of all students is shared among all teachers and schools and a community". ERO Indicators

A review of pertinent research suggests six key foci for Communities of Learning.

1. **Reducing teaching and leadership variability.**

"There is no more important empirical determinant of student outcomes than good teaching." (McKinsey Reports). As the quality of teaching and leadership practices are the key in-school determinant of student achievement, there is a need to constantly improve the impact of these practices - especially where there are disparities in teacher and leader impact either within or between a community's schools. (Hattie 2015).

1. **Accepting the challenge of lateral (internal) accountability.**

Powerful change can be achieved when teachers and schools accept the challenge of lateral accountability for raising the achievement of all the community's leaders, teachers and students. "Internal accountability occurs when individuals and groups willingly take on personal, professional and collective responsibility for continuous improvement and success for all students." (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009).

1. **Achieving collaborative inquiry that is purposeful and evidence driven.**

Promoting collaboration that is purposeful and evidence driven is a feature of education systems that show sustained improvement. However, Timperley et al caution that "inquiry is difficult for individual teachers to do in isolation from their colleagues or from leaders". As the IES Working Party observed, "successful systems create deliberate opportunities for teachers to open up their practice to observation and discussion with colleagues within and across schools in ways that stimulate improvement."

In supporting this concept, Hattie insists we must stop allowing teachers to work alone and instead shift to a professional effort that emphasises collaboration. "We need communities within and across schools that work collaboratively to diagnose what teachers need to do, plan programmes and teaching interventions and evaluate the success of these".

Fullan believes that purposeful collaboration creates a professional culture that expects and demands critical feedback on practice from colleagues - and is the most effective form of lateral accountability. (IES Working Group).   "Getting to interact frequently with other colleagues whose work is improving student outcomes is one of the most powerful strategies that we know of for

continuous improvement and innovation." (Rincon-Gallardo and Fullan 2015). Fullan also emphasises the importance of building the 'social' capacity of the group as well as 'individual' human capital to support this beneficial interaction.

1.   **Harnessing the latent potential of your community's resources**

Hattie promotes creating a "culture of evidence' that builds on what we know. To quote Timperley et al (2014), "Ignoring the current research evidence on what makes a difference to learners and to learning is the education equivalent of malpractice!" The role of external support (CoL Across Community Teachers and others) will challenge teachers' existing problematic assumptions, practices and beliefs - and help surface pedagogy and practices and resources and strategies that make the most impact.

Collaborating as a learning community helps harness the latent potential of the community's resources. As Rincon-Gallardo and Fullan (2015) note, "The enormous potential of effective collaboration lies in two domains. First is a large reservoir of resources, expertise and knowledge that remained dormant, untapped or underused in classrooms and school systems. Second are the good ideas that do exist that are not tested and further developed as they remain in isolated pockets, while ground-breaking innovation and inventions come from people who work together to solve certain problems."

1.   **Building learning partnerships with students, parents and the community.**

The essence of new learning is seen as changing the learning partnership between and among students, teachers and families. Informed leadership provides meaningful opportunities for students to provide feedback on the quality of teaching and its impact on their learning and well-being.

In collaborative networks, such as the Learning and Change Networks, parents and families are becoming partners in the learning futures of their children. This tripartite partnership – students, teachers, and families – is especially crucial among diverse cultures (Rincon-Gallardo and Fullan 2015) and increasingly is involving the community as well. (Bryk, 2010)

1.   **Leaders need to become leaders of learning.**

This requires building trust and nurturing both individual and social capacity (Fullan) and accessing expertise external to the group. (Timperley et al, 2007). Developing trust takes time - but "environments with high trust turn transparency of data into a sense of moral urgency to get better and learn from others". (Rincon-Gallardo and Fullan 2015)

The NZ Education Council's "Leadership for Communities of Learning" paper summarises key ideas underpinning the successful leadership of collaborative endeavour.

"To lead a network of schools takes all the expertise required to run an effective school and more – confidence in one's own knowledge of the required process (which implies previous successful experience), courage to take a strong lead with the process, and the ability to inspire others to act in a timely way. Leading a network of schools is incredibly skilful and hard work". (Linda Bendikson)

Within a culture of collaboration, effective Col leaders need to see themselves as leaders of learning – able to think, engage and act quite differently from their roles as the leader of their school. They must be both "lead learners" and actively foster learning focused partnerships with others. (Hargreaves and Fullan 2013). This requires enquiry-focused leadership and learning, informed by

research and evidence. "Far from seeking autonomy for their own school they are more interested in building networks and alliances." (Mason Durie)

This is a difficult and complex challenge. There is no formula to follow as context is critical. These leaders will need to tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity – and make decisions in dynamic conditions. "Leading strong collaboration involves building a commitment to moving ahead together and making it possible for everyone to participate in robust, collegial debate where disagreement, uncertainty and failure are anticipated". (Berger and Johnston 2015)

These leaders need to create opportunities for collaborative and connective knowledge building. "Leading in complex situations involves developing the collective intelligence of the system as a whole and then allowing it to function." (Jane Gilbert). This is about leading a networked system through influence rather than institutional authority. Networked leadership is relational, collective and emergent. It is both distributed and democratic." (Derek Wenmoth).

Further, a CoL leader's moral accountability is to the other leaders and the CoL community. This necessitates involving students, parents, families, whanau and the community in learning centred relationships and reciprocal communication. (ERO)   "What is needed are leaders for learning.........enthused by the vision of communities; they accept a brief that transcends schools to embrace learning for whole communities……Leaders for learning are educational brokers. They are committed to optimal learning conditions and are open to innovation, advocacy and lobbying on behalf of all learners." (Sir Mason Durie).

This summary reflects the synthesis of evidence considered by the IES Working Group Report and the NZ Education Council – the key sources of which are listed below.

- Robyn Baker for the NZ Education Council (2015) – **"Leadership for Communities of Learning"**

- John Hattie (2015) – "**What works best in education: collaborative enterprise**" and "**What doesn't work in education: the politics of distraction**".

- Santiago Rincon-Gallardo and Michael Fullan (2015) - "**The social physics of educational change: essential features of effective collaboration**." *Not yet published…….*

- Fullan, M., Rincon-Gallardo, S., & Hargreaves, A. (2015). **"Professional capital as accountability"**.

- Hanna Dumont et al (2012) - "**The Nature of Learning": using research to inspire practice**" 7 Principles for Learning.

- Tony Bryk (2010) - "**Organising schools for improvement**." and "**Learning to improve: how American schools can get better at getting better**".

- Timperley, Kaiser and Halbert (2014) - "**A framework for transforming learning in schools: innovation and the spirals of inquiry**."

- The various IES publications from **the IES website** and the Working Group. **"Investing in Educational Success" -evidence that informed the development of this policy" (pages 30-36).** the IES website

Education Review Office (2015) - **"School Evaluation Indicators" - Effective practice for improvement and learner success**". DRAFT.