

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Public schools need urgent leadership reform warns University of Tasmania researcher

Tasmania's public education system faces a leadership crisis within five years with the potential to disadvantage students, a University of Tasmania researcher warned yesterday.

The forecast was made by the University's Faculty of Education Professor, Bill Mulford, following the Tasmanian contribution to a major international study into successful school principals.

Prof. Mulford said there should be serious concern for the future of primary and secondary schools and students with a significant turnover in retiring principals predicted in the next five years.

He said about half of the principals involved in the Tasmanian component of the study *International Successful School Principalship Project* were now aged 50 or older.

Prof. Mulford added that these principals were, in the main, highly successful with their strong work ethic, consultation philosophy and strong social conscience and the challenge was not only to generate suitable replacements but find ways to continue to use their talents.

"Internationally, this is the 'golden age' of school leadership. But, if Tasmania continues to ignore the selection, retention and continued learning of their leaders then student outcomes are not going to be as good as they could have been," Prof. Mulford said.

"Nothing aborts an ambitious school improvement effort, we now know, faster than a change in principal.

"At a time when there is a need to enhance the capabilities of those teachers who may aspire to be principals to replace the significant number of principals who will retire, research in the area of successful school principalship has high importance."

The information collected by the University will contribute to an international comparative study involving Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, England, Norway, Sweden and America. The Tasmanian survey attracted responses from 131 of Tasmania's 195 government secondary, composite and primary schools.

Prof. Mulford said that the first major phase of the research project could boost current reforms to Tasmania's school system and a copy of the findings had been provided to the Minister and Department of Education.

Other key findings in the study include:

- Tasmanian schools lacked a quality system of teacher evaluation or extensive student empowerment in schools;
- Principals in small schools faced additional challenges including coordinating teaching, administration and community responsibilities;
- Schools and principals in 'high-poverty' communities were among the successful schools and principals;
- The measure of a good school and principal should be extended from student numeracy and literacy results to include student social outcomes. Such social outcomes have been shown to be good predictors of later life chances.

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