

Opening gateways,
expanding horizons.
Rural leadership
shaping tomorrow.

NZEI
TERIU ROA

Rural and Teaching Principals' Conference
Tāmaki Makaurau / 27–29 May 2026

Workshop Options Thursday 28 May 2026

Workshop registration will open in April 2026.

A link to register for workshops will be sent to all conference participants.

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
9:30am - 10.15am	Lynda Knight de-Blois <i>Trauma informed practice</i>	Peter Gall <i>Assessing your leadership performance</i>	Bex Rose <i>Demystifying AI for Rural Leadership</i>	John Peachy <i>We are not leading change, we are building a culture of curiosity</i>	Jono Salisbury <i>Broken Windows, Leaky Buildings, No Funds and Big Plans: Navigating School Property as a Rural Principal</i>
11:00am - 11.45am	Lynda Knight de-Blois <i>Trauma informed practice</i>	Peter Gall <i>Assessing your leadership performance</i>	Bex Rose <i>Demystifying AI for Rural Leadership</i>	John Peachy <i>We are not leading change, we are building a culture of curiosity</i>	Jono Salisbury <i>Broken Windows, Leaky Buildings, No Funds and Big Plans: Navigating School Property as a Rural Principal</i>
2:15pm – 3.00pm	Tabatha Leonard <i>High Performance Leadership</i>	Kim Bonnington, Teaching Council <i>2026 Standards and the Professional Growth Cycle</i>	Andrew King <i>Is there still a place for play-based learning?</i>	Chad Britton Ministry of Education <i>Finance 101 – Tips and Tricks for School Finance</i>	Banapa Avatea <i>Leading with Authenticity: Culturally Responsive Practice in Action</i>
3:45pm – 4.30pm	Tabatha Leonard <i>High Performance Leadership</i>	Kim Bonnington, Teaching Council <i>2026 Standards and the Professional Growth Cycle</i>	Julie Roberts NZCER <i>Progress reporting using PAT assessments</i>	Chad Britton Ministry of Education <i>Finance 101 – Tips and Tricks for School Finance</i>	Haydon Brill <i>Tales from the Goldfish Bowl</i>



Workshop Presenter: Lynda Knight de-Blois.

Workshop Title: Trauma informed practice

Workshop Description: *Behaviour is biology: Lynda will share stories, science and strategies that have led to powerful shifts, not just for her own school but for children, schools and early childhood centres across Aotearoa. Lynda will demonstrate that when educators and leaders truly understand how to create environments, practice and culture that support all mokopuna to experience a 'felt sense of safety' significant change will happen: Some basic neuroscience and strategic decision-making can lead to change that transforms educational engagement, inclusion, learning and behaviour, mental health, stress levels, staff morale and retention. In the absence of adequate government funding and support we need to find ways to respond to the ever increasing and complex needs of learners in 2026. The good news is: it is possible*

Workshop Presenter Bio: *Lynda Knight-de Blois is Principal of Glenview School in Cannons Creek, Porirua and a Professional Development Facilitator in Trauma-informed Education and Relational Neuroscience. She has trained with Dr Bruce Perry to be a certified trainer in the Neurosequential Model in Education (NME). Lynda has mentored groups of NME trainees from around Aotearoa and presented internationally in a range of contexts. In 2024 she was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to research and present in the UK.*



Workshop Presenter: Peter Gall

Workshop Title: Assessing your leadership performance

Workshop Description: *All principals want to do a great job but how do you know and, very importantly, how does your board know that you are performing to a high standard. This interactive workshop explores 4 key questions for principals (and board PMs) to consider – What are you required to do in your role? Are you doing a great job? How do you know? What are some things you want to do even better? We will also discuss dynamics of small teams including establishing and sustaining high levels of relational trust.*

Workshop Presenter Bio: *Ko Peter Gall taku ingoa. Peter is an experienced educationalist who served for 20 years as principal of Papatoetoe High School, a large multicultural secondary school. As well as leading this very diverse and successful school he has been involved in other significant leadership roles and sector groups. Peter served on the executive of the Secondary Principals Association of New Zealand (SPANZ) for six years including a three year term as President. During that time he contributed to a number of national and regional reviews and reference groups including school property, Leaders' Forum Qualification Group, schools' resourcing, PB4L, He Kakano, initial teacher education and school leadership. In 2014 he was contracted to NZQA to chair a selected group to review the 2007 enhancements to the NCEA qualifications. Peter is now a director of Edsolnz, an educational consulting company and has been working in this field for the last 10 years. Along with co-director, Mike Leach they work in over 50 schools carrying out principal and SLT mentorship/performance appraisals, principal appointments and school reviews.*



Workshop Presenter: Bex Rose

Workshop Title: Demystifying AI for Rural Leadership

Workshop Description: For rural principals, the "AI wave" can feel like another urban trend that doesn't quite fit the reality of distance, limited staffing, and multi-hat leadership. This streamlined, one-hour workshop is designed to cut through the noise. We move past the complex theory to focus on demystification and immediate utility, showing you how to turn AI into a functional "digital DP" for your school. In this fast-paced session, we will focus on:

- **Getting the Best Out of AI:** Learn the "Golden Rules" of prompting. We'll show you how to move beyond basic queries to get context-aware, professional results that respect the unique Aotearoa educational landscape.
- **The "Rural Force Multiplier":** Discover how AI can specifically support the high-pressure environment of small-school leadership - from drafting complex community communications to summarising dense Ministry of Education updates in seconds.
- **Showcasing Two Leadership Essentials:** I will deep-dive into my two favourite AI tools for leaders.

Join us for a session grounded in reality, not hype. You'll leave not just understanding AI, but with a clear plan for how it can support your staff, your students, and your own leadership sustainability.

Workshop Presenter Bio: Bex is an experienced education leader with more than 20 years of experience, including a decade in senior leadership roles within rural schools before transitioning into professional development. She's passionate about helping educators leverage artificial intelligence effectively and strategically. As the Director and Head of Innovation and Impact at AI Surge, Bex is an expert on the challenges and opportunities of AI in education, guiding schools through its transformative potential. Beyond her AI specialisation, she is also a skilled leadership facilitator who mentors education leaders, helping them develop their capabilities and make a positive, lasting impact. Bex is deeply committed to lifelong learning and is dedicated to shaping the future of education in New Zealand, ensuring it remains innovative, equitable, and forward-thinking.



Workshop Presenter: John Peachy

Workshop Title: We are not leading change, we are building a culture of curiosity.

Workshop Description: There is a secret space that precedes change and delivers welcome innovation. How constant inquisitiveness revolutionises your leadership. Learning this art form literally changes everything about how educators engage, how knowledge becomes fluid and how WOW systematically accelerates your leadership and academic outcomes.

Workshop Presenter Bio: Former Talk Back Radio Host, Music Radio DJ, Jazz Vocalist, People Mechanic, broadcaster, writer, presenter, communicator, coach, mate, father, brother. Having made every mistake known to man in business and personal life, I can assure you the limp I walk with is fully earned and so very helpful in helping others avoid the pitfalls of complex and chaotic lives. I have the unfortunate habit of asking the wrong questions in order to obtain the right answers, and we desperately need different answers to the same old situations.

John Peachey from The Think Farm is dangerous. He is what has been described as a disruptor, a provocateur to the status quo. He will turn your world upside down... mess you up and help you put your world back together again better and stronger than before. He researches writes and delivers on leadership and communication that drives innovation, engagement and collaboration. John asks the type of questions that make leaders feel uncomfortable enough and be vulnerable enough to break free into new paradigms of innovation, adventure and influence. (Not to mention revenue!)



Workshop Prester: Jono Salisbury

Workshop Title: Broken Windows, Leaky Buildings, No Funds and Big Plans: Navigating School Property as a Rural Principal

Workshop Presenter Bio: Jono Salisbury is the Principal of Harrisville School and President of the Franklin Principals' Association. Over the past nine years, he has worked closely with his board, community, and Ministry property advisors to develop strong property systems and a strategic approach to managing school property in a rural context.

Workshop Description: In this practical workshop, Jono will share lessons from his journey, unpacking the essentials of school property management including the 5-Year Agreement, 10-Year Property Plan, funding responsibilities, and practical strategies for prioritising infrastructure, managing maintenance, and working effectively with key partners. Participants will gain practical insights to support confident property leadership in their own schools.



Workshop Presenter: Tabitha Leonard

Workshop Title: High Performance Leadership

Workshop Description: This is practical PLD for rural and teaching principals — designed for your real context: constant interruption, limited resourcing, and the pressure of being the steady one for everyone else. In the spirit of the whakataukī “**Mā te huruhuru ka rere te manu**” (adorn the bird with feathers so it can fly), this workshop equips you with simple, high-leverage “feathers” you can use immediately: a Clean Decision Filter to reduce decision fatigue, a lightweight weekly rhythm for clarity and follow-through, and micro-communication behaviours that strengthen psychological safety and belonging in everyday conversations. You'll identify your biggest momentum leaks (availability creep, emotional load, scattered priorities) and replace them with a calm operating approach — **quiet, calm, strong** — so you can open gateways for staff and ākonga while protecting your own hauora.

Workshop Presenter Bio: Tabitha Leonard is a high-performance leadership coach and facilitator who helps principals and leadership teams lead with clarity, calm authority, and sustainable momentum in high-pressure environments — particularly in complex, high-load school contexts where connection, hauora, and practical execution matter. Her work blends high-performance psychology with communication and behavioural change, with a focus on **micro-level psychological safety** — the moment-to-moment behaviours that build or break trust, culture, and performance. Tabitha is known for a “quiet, calm, strong” delivery style that is practical, human, and action-oriented. She supports leaders to reduce overwhelm and decision fatigue, strengthen courageous conversations, and lead change without creating resistance.



Workshop Presenter: Andrew King

Workshop Title: Is there still a place for play-based learning?

Workshop Description: Our education system is facing significant reform and change. This is focused on creating a 'Knowledge rich' curriculum. This was born out of a call for greater clarity of content that was not present in the previous NZC iteration. There are now clear content deliverables for teachers and children at each year level, within three phases at Primary School level.

Where does this place other important aspects of primary school education?

Fostering Dispositions for learning, Integrating Key Competencies, and ensuring well-being of our tamariki? At Ōropi School, this was where a Play Based Learning approach was an essential element of its local curriculum. We had the local ingredients (context) that naturally lended itself to this approach, which also put a strong emphasis on collecting qualitative data to demonstrate a child's achievement, through learning stories.

While adapting to a curriculum that has a stronger emphasis on 'a knowledge rich' approach, we are not forgetting about the important aspects of play across the school. It has been an opportunity to really consider the role of play in each of the three curriculum phases at our school. It is making us critically think "how is what we are providing in play ensuring curriculum links and coverage?", "how are our hands on opportunities for all classes such as Garden to Table connecting to a knowledge rich curriculum?", and "how are we ensuring we can capture qualitative data that tells parents about their child holistically as a learner?"

We are not throwing it all away. In this presentation, Andrew King will share our journey and demonstrate that play-based learning is still an important, integral feature of Ōropi School.

Workshop Presenter Bio: Andrew King has been Principal at Ōropi School, Tauranga, since 2010. As an experienced Principal he was the establishment Kahui Ako Lead for Tauranga Peninsula. He is now President of the New Zealand Rural Schools Leadership Association which is an organisation supporting 480 rural schools across the motu since 2020. He completed his Masters in Educational Leadership in 2015 with specific research in Leading a school's Global Citizenship curriculum. Andrew is passionate about the role Play Based Learning and Outdoor education can have in primary schools to ensure we are preparing our tamariki for their future as successful citizens.



Workshop Presenter: Julie Roberts

Workshop Title: Progress reporting using PAT assessments

Workshop Description: PAT assessments are formative, low-stakes assessments designed to support teaching and learning. NZCER Assist can generate a range of reports designed to support teachers, leaders and whānau get a sense of progress and achievement, surface strengths and next learning steps, and identify patterns and trends.

This workshop will explore the range of aggregate, progress over time and learner reports. Come and learn how to discover the story in your data, ways to effectively filter, and how to use this information to support teaching and learning, inquiry, and strategic decision making. Updated features in reports will be shared during the session (new progress report, whānau reports and filters in adaptive mathematics).

Bring your laptop and password to access NZCER Assist so you can have an explore of your data or a demo set of data if you're new to PAT assessments.

Workshop Presenter Bio: Julie Roberts, Kairangahau Matua / Kaitohu Mātauranga | Senior Researcher / Education Advisor. Julie has a dual research and advisory role at NZCER. Julie is an experienced mathematics and assessment facilitator who has worked in a range of capacities delivering professional learning in schools and clusters. She has strengths in mentoring and coaching leadership, effective assessment and developing data capability, and inclusive practice.



Workshop Presenter: Chad Britton

Workshop Title: Finance 101 – Tips and Tricks for School Finance

Workshop Description: A general update on all things school finance, areas of challenge, how do your audit go? and some potential solutions, an update on the new annual financial reporting framework starting from 31 December 2027, lets try to make finance fun again.

Workshop Presenter Bio: Chad is the Manager of the School Financial Advice team. Chad is a Chartered Accountant with over 20 years' experience, 16 of these years spent within the education sector the last 8 of these being with the Ministry of Education. Chad also served for several years as a Board member and Presiding member for his daughter's primary school.

Chad has a passion for organisations that operate in the education sector which lead to joining the Ministry of Education. A key aspect of the role is working with those in governance and management positions to identify areas within their school where financial challenges are presenting themselves, with a focus to undertake a collaborative approach to addressing the underlying causes of financial challenge facing a school.



Workshop Presenter: Banapa Avatea

Workshop Title: Leading with Authenticity: Culturally Responsive Practice in Action

Workshop Description: As Aotearoa's educational landscape continues to evolve, weaving cultural competency into the daily fabric of our schools is more vital than ever. In this workshop, I will share my personal and professional journey of principalship through a Pasifika lens, drawing on the dynamic context of Flat Bush School.

Grounded in our school's vision of *Kia angitu tātou katoa* (Success for ALL), this session explores what it takes to build an environment where every learner's identity, language, and heritage are championed as profound strengths rather than mere add-ons.

Moving beyond surface-level cultural engagement requires intentionality and trust. Together, we will unpack practical, lived strategies from our journey, exploring how Flat Bush School has successfully fostered authentic community partnerships. We will look at the implementation of community-driven initiatives like the *Talanoa Ako* programme, the development of our Samoan bilingual class (*O le Fogava'a e tasi*), and how we empower whānau to actively share their skills and cultural knowledge in the classroom.

While the daily realities of a rural school may look different from urban Auckland, the core leadership values of *Whakawhanaungatanga*, *Manaakitanga*, and *Mahi Ngatahi* remain deeply universal. This interactive workshop is designed to equip rural leaders with actionable tools and the cultural courage to foster reciprocal relationships with their own unique communities, ensuring every ākonga feels seen, safe, and secure in their learning journey.

Workshop Presenter Bio: No Kuki Airani rāua Ngāti Pākehā ahau. I tipu ana ahau ki Papatōetoe. Engari kei te noho ahau ki Karaka ināianeī. Ko Rupe taku Pāpā. Ko Julie tōku māmā. Ko Rochelle taku wahine whaiāipo. Tokotoru ngā tamariki. Ko Banapa Avatea tōku ingoa. Ko au te Tumuaki o te kura o Flat Bush.

My name is Banapa Avatea and I am very proud to be Principal of Flat Bush Primary school, located in the beautiful, beating heart of South Auckland, the mighty suburb of Ōtara.

I was born and bred in South Auckland and feel privileged to be working in a school where my mother once was a classroom teacher. Being the Principal of Flat Bush School in Ōtara is incredibly special because it offers the opportunity to lead a school in one of New Zealand's most vibrant and culturally rich Pasifika communities. The deep sense of connection, values of family and community, and the strength of Pasifika traditions make it a privilege to work alongside our families and students. It's inspiring to see the cultural identity of our learners celebrated every day, and being part of their educational journey is both an honour and a responsibility that I cherish.



Workshop Presenter: Haydon Brill

Workshop Title: Tales from the Goldfish Bowl

Workshop Description: Step inside the goldfish bowl and hear the stories only a rural principal can tell. In this engaging and light-hearted workshop, Hayden shares real-life moments, challenges, and reflections from his journey leading three rural schools (U2–U4) since 2002. Through humour and honesty, he explores the uniqueness, unpredictability, and character-building experiences that shape leadership in a rural context.

This session is both a celebration of rural education and a source of genuine insight; offering perspectives that may resonate, reassure, and perhaps help steady the ship. Expect relatable tales, practical wisdom, and a few laughs along the way

Workshop Presenter Bio: Haydon Brill was born in Taranaki and grew up in Tauranga, so have always been firmly in Chiefs country. After training at Waikato University, he began his teaching career in Hamilton in 1997, and rightly or wrongly, stepped into his first Principalship just over 5 years later in 2002. He has since lead three rural schools across the Bay of Plenty, Waikato and Franklin, and values the practical, community-focused nature of rural education – along with being able to wear shorts most days (except when “playing principal” off-site). Haydon is married to Nicola, a rural Deputy Principal, and together they have four children, including one teacher; he also enjoys Star Wars, a good gin, and still appreciates a cold Waikato beer.