

Leading for equity: Systems thinking in school leadership

New Zealand's education system continues to face persistent inequities particularly for Māori and Pacific learners, and those from low socio-economic communities. Despite pockets of innovation, many interventions remain isolated and fail to address the deeper, systemic conditions that shape learner outcomes. Te Uru Amokura | Springboard Trust has worked with over 1,000 principals and senior leaders across Aotearoa, supporting strategic leadership development that leads to measurable improvements in school performance and equity. Our work is grounded in a deep commitment to educational equity and a belief that systemic improvement in education starts with leadership.

This interactive workshop introduces a systems thinking approach to leadership, drawing on the Advanced Leadership Forum (ALF), a Springboard Trust initiative bringing together education and private sector leaders to foster collaboration and fresh thinking. Participants will engage with a practical systems thinking tool used in ALF to help leaders understand the complex dynamics within education systems and identify high-leverage points for transformation.

Systems thinking enables leaders to move beyond surface-level fixes and address root causes of inequity. By seeing the broader structures, relationships, and feedback loops that shape outcomes, leaders can design more sustainable, impactful solutions. This approach empowers principals to shift from reactive leadership to proactive, system-level innovation.

The workshop includes hands-on activities and showcases real-world examples of leadership initiatives that have emerged from ALF. Participants will leave with a practical tool, fresh perspectives, and inspiration to apply systems thinking in their own leadership contexts.

This session is designed for principals, senior leaders, and changemakers seeking to lead differently moving from isolated interventions to systemic, sustainable change that delivers equitable outcomes for all learners.