



HPTschools High School Case Study: Emerald SHS Whole of School Transformation

Running a High Performance School is definitely a team sport – just ask the High Performance Leadership Team of Emerald State High School (SHS) who have been working on a whole school transformation journey over the last two years. As they discovered, when everybody plays their part, amazing things can happen for a school's performance and outcomes for students, parents, teachers and the community regardless of the status of current results.

What is it that creates a 'High Performance School'? Is it that the school is located in an exclusive, leafy, inner city suburb (home for the country's highest SES families) or is it that their proximity to the beach blesses them by the fact that annually they can have their pick of the top new-graduates keen to embark on their teaching career while still getting some sun? Maybe it's having the newest classrooms equipped with leading edge technology? In reality, it's none of these things – it's the team that counts.

Emerald SHS is an outer regional High School in Queensland, Australia that caters for around 750 students ranging from year 7 to 12. The school's ICSEA value is 964 (below the national average), and like many regional schools, Emerald SHS has its

share of significant challenges. In the words of the Principal Ray Clarke, *"I want to ensure all of our students are receiving the same education as if they were attending a large inner-city school. Recruiting of quality teachers for rural and remote settings is still an issue as well as embedding quality training regimes for beginning teachers in our outer schools. It is a mindset predominated by urban thinking that must be constantly challenged by school leaders at all levels. Our system is making great headway, however there is still much to be done. I believe that the key to overcoming many of these challenges is to empower those who hold the crucial roles in the middle, our HoDs (Heads of Department)."*

High Performance Teams in Education

The High Performance Teams in Education program was designed to enable leadership, teaching and non-teaching teams to become High Performance Teams – increasing their levels of team Achievement and Engagement while enhancing school performance and quality teaching and learning. Over the past 5 years the program has been used by over 1600 School Leaders, from more than 250 schools, involving over 6500 school staff.

The High Performance Teams Program

The HPT Program supports school teams in developing and implementing school based action plans that address the 4KPIs of High Performance. As presented in Figure 1 below, the program emphasises balance between two distinct factors that define High Performance Teams, Achievement and Engagement.

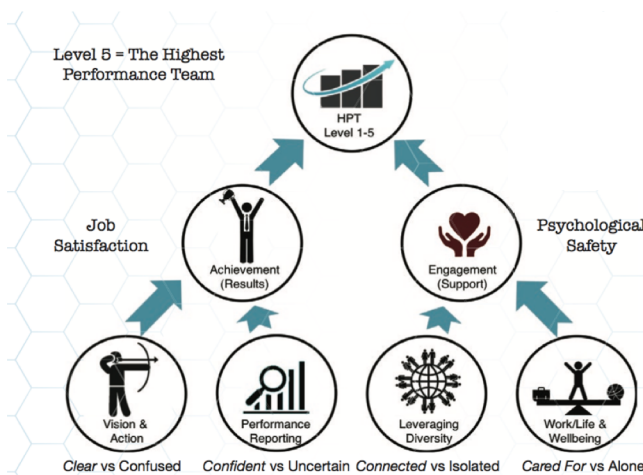


Figure 1: The HPT Model

Achievement is the ability to consistently meet and exceed performance targets with the two KPIs: (1)

clear vision, strategy, and actions; and (2) a culture of performance reporting. Common success indicators for schools with a clear vision, strategy, and actions include: Detailed Vision & Value Statements regularly discussed and owned by school staff; a 1-5 year Strategy Map; 30/60/90 Day Action Plans; and Quarterly Vision & Strategy Team Check-Ins. Common success indicators for schools reporting a culture of performance include: Clear Accountability for 30/60/90 day Action Plans; Effective Team Meeting Cycles to update & report; and regular Pulse Metrics on team indicators.

Engagement is the ability to generate positive team dynamics to create long-term working relationships and enable innovation based on cumulative knowledge. Within the factor of Engagement, we find the remaining KPIs of (3) leveraging diversity and (4) supporting wellbeing and work/life needs. Common success indicators for schools where staff leverage diversity include: Team Profiling & Behavioral skills training in dynamics of leadership, communication and conflict. Common success indicators for schools where supporting wellbeing and work/life needs is a priority include: Life Line Presentations; Work/Life Strategy Plans; Peer Mentoring & Work/Life Updates; and Communication Starters in Every Meeting.

Importantly, a focus on either Achievement or Engagement alone will not create sustainable High Performance Teams. Solely focusing on Achievement may create short-term high performance, but excessive competition and isolation will cause low morale and unwanted turnover. Solely focusing on Engagement will create cohesion, but risks organisational failure due to the lack of attention to results.

Reaching the Next Level of Performance: Levelling Up

In order to reach the next level of performance it is vital that teams clearly understand their current level of performance so they can choose the most appropriate strategy to assist them in advancing. Within the High Performance Teams Program every team member is invited to take an assessment that captures their view of the team's current level of performance and highlights the most likely intervention that will assist in team growth.

HPT Level	Value* (Focus)	Confidence (Driver)	Challenge (Approach)
Level 5 Elite HPT	10x (Leverage)	100% (Legacy)	Super-Stretch (& Coach)
Level 4 Adv HPT	5x (Strategic)	90% (Growth)	Stretching (& Coach)
Level 3 HPT	2x (Collaborative)	75% (Understanding)	Improving (& Mentor)
Level 2 Functional	1x (Constructive)	50% (Acceptance)	Systems (Manage)
Level 1 Dysfunctional	-2x (Destructive)	0% (Distrust)	Structures (Manage)

Figure 2: The Level Up Framework

As you can see in Figure 2, teams can be classified according to both the VALUE of the outputs they produce (a combination of direct and indirect productivity benefits) through achieving their targets and goals over the short- and long-term, and the CONFIDENCE they create as a team to share information with each other and provide frank and

fearless feedback to achieve their goals. They can also be classified by the main team CHALLENGE they face in order to Level Up as well as the relevant leadership approach that is needed to help the team advance to the next Level.

The Benefits of the HPT Approach

The HPT Program has been designed to enable teams to develop sustainable high performance over the long-term and is unique for three reasons: Firstly, the program has a dual focus on both supporting the achievement of business outcomes and maximising staff resilience and engagement, as opposed to only focusing on either organisational outcomes or team wellbeing. Secondly, the HPT Program takes a longitudinal approach to the transformation journey, supporting individuals and teams through three phases: establishing baseline, driving for results, and coaching for sustainability. Finally, the HPT Program includes a simple and effective series of metrics including weekly wellbeing pulse surveys and 360 Assessment tools, ensuring that results are measured and accountable beyond the effects of workshops and coaching sessions.

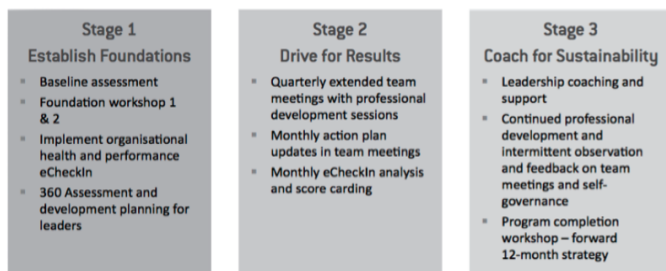


Figure 3. Stages of the HPT Program

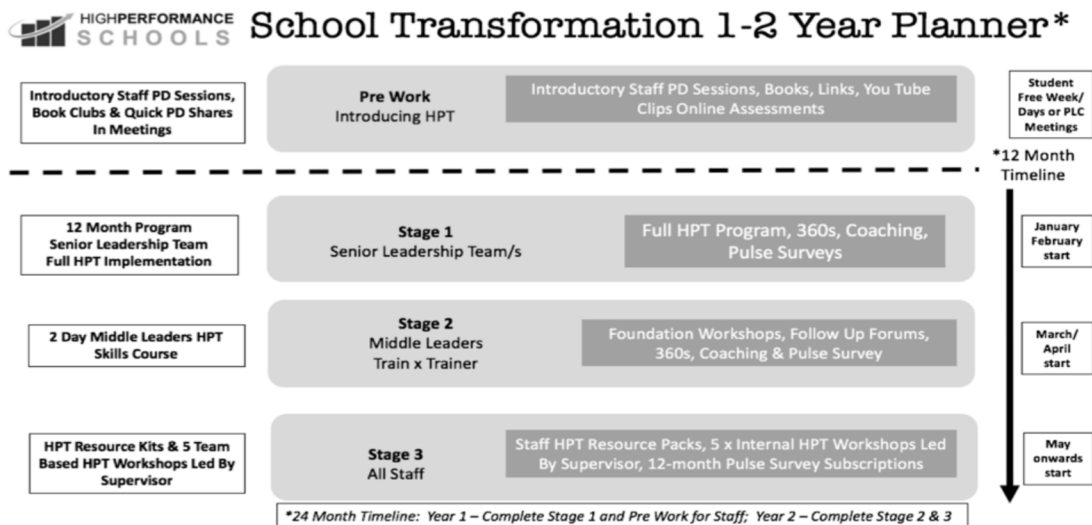
Case Study: Emerald SHS – A Team Transformation Journey

Based on positive results at schools across central Queensland, the Principal of Emerald SHS Ray Clarke, made the decision to invest in his leadership team’s development as part of the school’s broader continuous improvement agenda. Over the past 24 months Emerald SHS has taken a staged approach to implementing the program on site. In the first 12 months the leadership team participated in the program as a targeted intervention to enhance their leadership capability. At the end of the first year the leadership team, now graduates of the program,

rolled the program down through every faculty across the school.

“For the past few years, the main non-negotiable I maintained at Emerald SHS was that we were implementing the High Performance Teams (HPT) strategies in EVERY team – and that eventually everyone would participate, no exceptions. We started with the senior leadership team of 13 classified officers and by the end of the first year, we had everyone, even the doubters, saying “I believe in this.”

(Ray Clarke – Principal, Emerald SHS)



Progress Through the 24 Months of HPT

Year 1: In the first year, the Emerald SHS Leadership Team collected baseline data and worked on setting goals for the school over the following 12 months. The strategy involved building buy in, consistency and leadership capability through the Executive Leadership Team, to Senior Leadership Team (SLT), then to faculties. The first part of this involved creating a longer term vision of what the school should be which was supported through the development of a key leadership structure document that was tied to the school's 4 Year Plan.

Key program content was reviewed regularly at leadership team meetings so that no one was left behind. Finally, every leader was supported through coaching and 360-degree feedback. The important work of the leadership team wasn't only talk – they ensured transparency and clarity around their team processes by creating a team data wall, which became the centerpiece of SLT meetings and easily allowed the whole team to slowly introduce downstream staff to what they were doing.

"We developed specific action plans, team norms and behaviours. We made every aspect of being a High Performance Team explicit and clear on our leadership team data wall. The focus was on clear, concise and supportive communication!"

(Ray Clarke – Principal, Emerald SHS)

Year 2: By the beginning of the second year of the program every HoD had significant buy in to the process based on the uplift they had experienced as an SLT. It was now time for all HoDs to lead their faculties developing faculty specific data walls and HPT meeting agendas. Every HoD had clear roles and expectations and every faculty had clearly defined targets. By this stage every staff member was completing a weekly wellbeing pulse, which was reviewed in both the faculty and SLT meeting. This created a sense of collective ownership and engagement in finding solutions for improving staff wellbeing. Targeted achievement days were set aside each term, where the HoD, line manager and Principal would review the faculty's progress.

"The most significant uplift occurred after the roll out of HPT was embedded at the faculty and teacher level. It was here that we achieved massive traction in improved performance and wellbeing across the school".

(Ray Clarke – Principal, Emerald SHS)



Emerald SHS Action Plan: The 4 KPIs of High Performance

A critical success factor for Emerald SHS across both years of the program was the development of (a) an SLT Specific Action Plan in Year 1, and (b) Development of Faculty specific action plans in Year 2, each of which addressed the 4 KPIs in the High Performance Teams Framework. This was combined into comprehensive action plan strategy documents noting key accountabilities, timeframes, reporting cycles and contingencies.

A summary of the key action plan strategies for Emerald SHS SLT and Faculties for each of the 4 KPIs is outlined below:

KPI 1 – A Common Vision, Strategy & Clear Actions

To address vision and action, Emerald SHS focused on creating a clear vision around a school wide approach to teaching and learning, and a commitment to a sustainable and healthy workforce culture. This was achieved through establishing:

- Clear staff expectations and protocols for professional communication; and
- An aligned strategic planning cycle to focus on student outcomes.

KPI 2 – Accountability & Performance Reporting Systems

To address the KPI of performance reporting, Emerald SHS SLT implemented a rigorous approach to team meetings introducing a highly structured agenda containing explicit outcome intentions and timings, and roles of chair and moderator. This new approach to team meetings encouraged greater participation from all attendees as well as increased the quality of outcomes from all meetings.

KPI 3 – Leveraging Diversity

To address KPI 3, Emerald SHS conducted staff training on thinking styles and interpersonal communication preferences. Subsequently, they have gained greater insight into their own biases and default communication styles and how they can be leveraged to increase team engagement and performance. This has helped the school community

to develop a strong collegial feedback system where issues such as Essential Skills for Classroom Management rather than personalities are the core focus.

KPI4 – Supporting Team Members’ Work/Life & Wellbeing

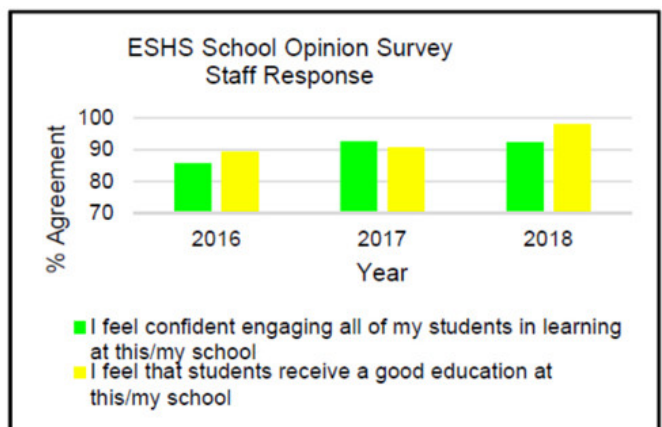
In order to promote work/life awareness within their team, Emerald SHS introduced the use of simple icebreakers (such as conversation cards) at meetings. By encouraging round-the-room responses to a randomly selected conversational topic, they noticed an increase in trust and team cohesion. Additionally, they adopted a school wide Weekly Wellbeing Pulse Survey to measure key psychosocial hazards including co-worker support, job satisfaction, work/life wellbeing balance, and feedback (both giving and receiving).

Results

Over the past two years of implementing the HPT Program at Emerald SHS there has been a number of impressive results in the areas of Team Achievement and Team Engagement compared to previous years.

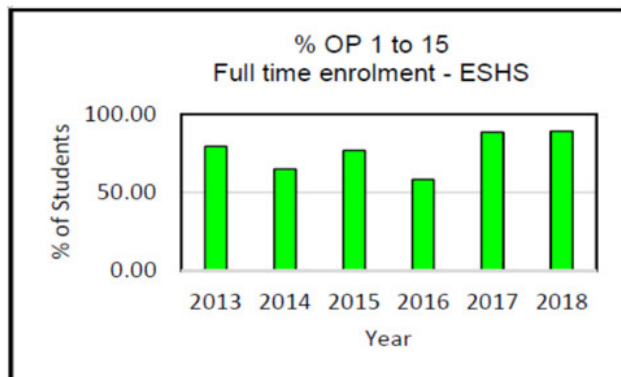
Engagement: Emerald SHS School Opinion Survey – Staff School Report

Every year since taking part in the High Performance Teams Program, staff sentiment has improved in the areas of (1) their feelings of confidence in engaging students in learning, and (2) feeling that students receive a good education at the school.



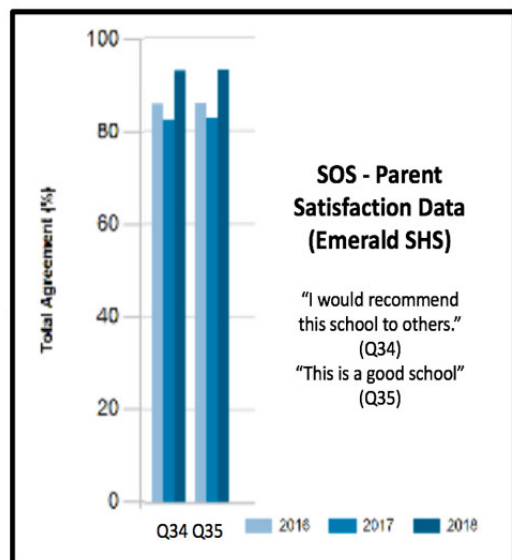
Achievement: Emerald SHS Student Results

These positive trends in staff engagement have had a clear impact on student achievement, with the number of students attaining an OP score of 1 to 15 jumping sharply during the program years.



Parent & Community Engagement

Improvements in educational outcomes have been noted and appreciated by parents and caregivers of Emerald SHS students with a significant positive increase in the School Opinion Survey results by Parents/Caregivers – particularly across Year 2 of the Program.



Post Program Growth at Emerald SHS: The Power of 'Buy-In' from the Middle

One of the most powerful reasons for the success of the High Performance Teams Program at Emerald SHS was the 'buy-in' from the middle – the extreme commitment from the Faculty HoDs, who from their experience of working with the program after Year 1 became deeply committed to ensuring that the teams that they led would reap the benefits from embedding the program. It's the deep shared commitment to increasing consistency and clarity across the school that the HoDs gained through undertaking the program themselves that allowed Emerald SHS to overcome the teething problems and growing pains typical when trying anything new at a school. This is evident towards the end of the school wide program roll out in Year 2 with leaders reporting the wider school staff community becoming more proactive, and hungry for growth and change – setting up a powerful staff led drive for improvement in the years to come.

Conclusion & Next Steps

The hallmark of High Performance Schools is their continued drive for greatness – Improving performance and outcomes for students, parents, teachers and the community regardless of the status of current results. Emerald SHS shows how any school leadership team, in any region, regardless of the challenges they face can use the High Performance Teams Framework to develop and implement improvement strategies in each of the 4 KPIs of success to transform their school culture and create sustainable and lasting change.

The results of the High Performance Teams in Education program clearly show that if we want to see long-term improvement in student outcomes in Australian Schools, we need to engage middle leaders, and establish a strategy to ensure that schools have a proactive approach to Leadership Development and Organisational Culture to maximise sustainable improvement in both Achievement and Engagement.