

Improve education to lower youth joblessness

THE RECENT statistics from Statistics SA's report The Social Profile of Youth, 2009-2014, which show that black Africans between the ages of 25 and 34 are less skilled than their parents, and every other race group, highlight the dismal state of the country's education system.

This is according to Rosie Chirongoma of Partners for Possibility (PfP), who points to the findings of the survey that employment is linked directly to education levels and little has changed since 2009.

"In the five-year period, the study shows that people who do not have a matric were the most likely to remain unemployed," she says.

"It is time for the business sector to step up and take note of this problem which directly impacts the economy as learners are not adequately educated or prepared for the workplace and therefore struggle to become meaningful contributors to the economy."

Of the roughly 25 000 schools in the country, 20 percent are world-class while the remaining 80 percent are "failing" schools.

This means that less than 30 percent of the 1 million children who start Grade 1 every year will be able to sustain themselves financially in the future.

"The differentiating factors for those successful schools are two things: they have principals who are equipped for their task and they have an active community of citizens supporting the principal, including parents who are actively engaged in partnership with the teachers as well as a supportive school governing body," says Chirongoma.

On the other hand, she says failing schools often have a teacher who was promoted to the role of principal – without the knowledge and skills to lead an organisation, and very little support from other citizens and parents.

A growing body of literature recognises school leadership as the critical factor in turning around an education system in crisis. A principal is the change leader at a school.

"The principal needs to be equipped for this task," Chirongoma stresses.

"However, in South Africa, the majority of school principals are not being sufficiently equipped for their roles. School staff in South Africa, especially teachers, often feel overburdened, tired and de-energised. Many have become disengaged."

She believes business leaders can support school principals to



Partners for Possibility gives school principals the opportunity to acquire leadership and management skills. Picture: Thomas Holder

lead change in their schools and communities.

Business leaders can support school principals and help them acquire the knowledge, skills and expertise they need – and this is why Partners for Possibility was established.

Since 2010, Symphonia for South Africa (SSA), a registered non-profit organisation and public benefit organisation, has been supporting and developing school principals by partnering business leaders who have skills and knowledge of leading change

with school principals.

PfP, the SSA's flagship programme, not only gives a principal the opportunity to acquire leadership and management skills, but also helps business leaders develop the skills to deal with complexity and influence without direct authority.

"The programme gives the school and principal access to the business leader's network and contacts, which helps them to remove many of the obstacles that they face," says Chirongoma.

"In addition, school staff need parents and other members of the community to become involved – they can't lead change alone. Studies show that one of the key differences between schools that succeed and those that fail is the extent to which parents and other community members are involved in the school."

PfP is driven to improve the quality of education for all children by 2025, and in doing so change each school's story into one of hope and opportunity.

To date, PfP has 411 principals paired with 411 school communities across South Africa.

Many South African citizens are keen to make a contribution, but don't know how to do so.

To find out how you can assist PfP, please visit www.pfp4sa.org.