



Our case for principal development

1. Introduction

While access to schooling in South Africa has improved considerably since 1994 (enrolment of children aged 7 to 15 has been well above 95% for at least a decade¹), the country's education system is characterized by severe underperformance and is failing the majority of young people in South Africa.

- Approximately **75-80% of students are attending largely dysfunctional schools**.²
- **66% of Grade 9 students cannot do basic maths**³ (they can't reach the lowest international benchmark in mathematics).
- Around **1,5% of children who start school in Grade 1 achieve 70% or more in mathematics**.⁴
- **After full 4 years of education, 78% of SA children cannot read** with comprehension⁵.
- Early reading deficits cause most children to fall further behind over time⁶ and help explain why almost 35% of students drop out of the secondary education system and **around 50% of South Africans have not passed matric by the age of 25**⁷ (i.e. they have not received a school qualification).

The academic achievement of South African learners is undeniably influenced by a range of different factors which include the socio-economic disadvantages that effect most schoolchildren in the country.⁸ However, academic performance among equally poor children from other countries is far better than that of South African children⁹, demonstrating that factors other than poverty influence education outcomes.

¹ DBE (2016) Education Sector Review: report on progress in the school sector

<https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/Education%20Sector%20review%202015%20-%202016.pdf>

² Spaul, N. (2015). Education Quality in South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa: An Economic Approach.

<http://resep.sun.ac.za/index.php/research-outputs/theses/ph-d-thesis-n-spaul/>

³ <https://nicspaul.com/2017/01/31/matric-really-does-start-in-gr1-my-mgteacher-article-on-timss-2015/>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ PIRLS 2016 International Results in Reading, Mullis et al (2017)

<http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2016/international-results/>

⁶ Spaul et al (2016) Laying Firm Foundations Getting Reading Right

http://resep.sun.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/ZENEX_LFF-email.pdf

⁷ South African General Household Survey Focus on Schooling (2016)

<https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/General%20Household%20Survey%202016%20Focus%20on%20Schooling.pdf?ver=2018-04-11-125410-473>

⁸ Wills G (2016) An economic perspective on school leadership and teachers' unions in South Africa, Stellenbosch University

<http://resep.sun.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2016-02-21-G-Wills-PhD-School-leadership-and-teachers-unions-in-South-Africa-FINAL.pdf>

⁹ Ibid

Findings from decades of international research have consistently demonstrated that the leadership of school principals is a key determinant of student achievement¹⁰. Studies carried out in a wide range of countries and contexts, shows that school principals have a measurable and substantial influence on learning outcomes and that their practices, values and qualities are critical factors in explaining variation in student outcomes between schools¹¹.

See Annex 1 for further research evidence from South African and international studies on the link between school leadership and education outcomes.

The impact of school principals occurs through their powerful leadership role in helping to create conditions for effective teaching and learning; principals influence the motivations and capacities of teachers and the environment and climate that they work in, which in turn shapes classroom practice and learning outcomes.

There is increasing recognition that the role of school principals is not only critical, but highly specialised¹² and that school leadership is **the** critical factor in turning around an education system in crisis¹³. School principals are now recognised by the South African Government as critical levers for improving education outcomes in the country and the National Development Plan explicitly articulates that strengthening school leadership, as represented by school principals, is a national priority¹⁴. However, the majority of school principals are not yet being sufficiently equipped with the knowledge, skills and expertise required for their specialist and demanding roles, let alone with the capacity to lead the major turnaround that is required in the education system¹⁵.

The Partners for Possibility (PfP) Leadership Development and Principal Support process directly addresses this difficult situation.

2. The Partners for Possibility (PfP) programme

2.1 Symphonia's solution

Unlike most school principals, South Africa's business leaders are well-equipped by their various organisations to assume leadership positions and manage change. The PfP programme taps into this national resource to develop school principals by partnering them with leaders from the business community who help to support and equip those principals with the knowledge and skills to lead change in their schools and communities.

¹⁰ OECD (2008) Improving School Leadership Volume 1: Policy and Practice
<https://www.oecd.org/edu/school/44374889.pdf>

¹¹ Day *et al* (2016) The impact of leadership on student outcomes: Educational Administration Quarterly, 52 (2). pp. 221-258.

¹² Bush, T. *et al* (2011) Preparing new principals in South Africa: the ACE: School Leadership Program, South African Journal of Education, vol 31

¹³ Jensen (2013) The Five Critical Steps for Turnaround Schools, Grattan Institute
(www.alliance21.org.au/.../Jensen_Alliance-21-Education-Innovation.pdf)

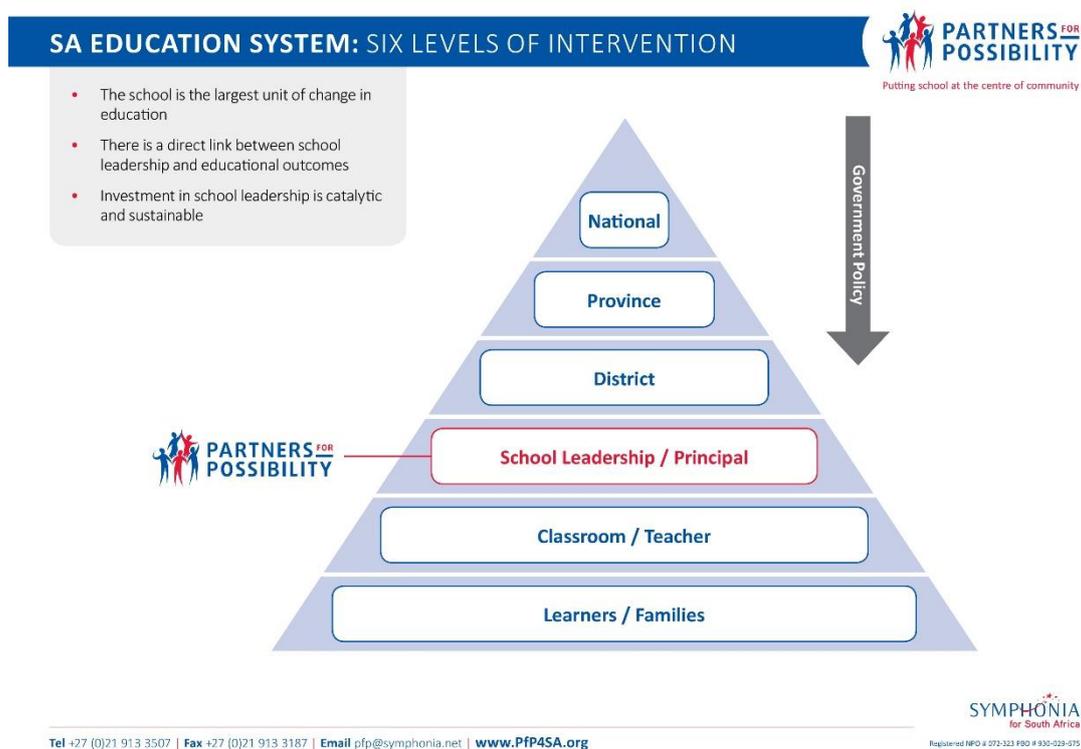
¹⁴ NPC (2012) National Development Plan 2030: Our future - make it work, Pretoria: National Planning Commission
<http://www.poa.gov.za/news/Documents/NPC%20National%20Development%20Plan%20Vision%202030%20-lo-res.pdf>

¹⁵ Bush, T. *et al* (2011) as in reference ¹² above

The PfP programme’s approach of working with principals in individual schools, has the potential to change the South African education system, by working at the level which ultimately determines the quality of education that every child receives, namely the individual school.

While the higher levels within an education system can provide policy directions for schools, their success depends on the actions of leaders at the school level¹⁶.

Moreover, a significant volume of research, rooted in complexity science, has revealed that an effective approach in attempting to bring about change in large complex systems is to identify the critical units of change and then to work with those individual units, rather than attempting to change the entire system¹⁷. Within an education system, the critical unit of change is the school. We therefore believe that intervening at the level of school, as depicted in the diagram below is the most effective way to transform the education system in South Africa.



The fact that such a small group of people can potentially have an impact on every single student and teacher in South Africa’s government schools makes the development of school principals both a key and cost-effective lever for educational improvements.

¹⁶ See OECD (2008) as in reference 10 above.

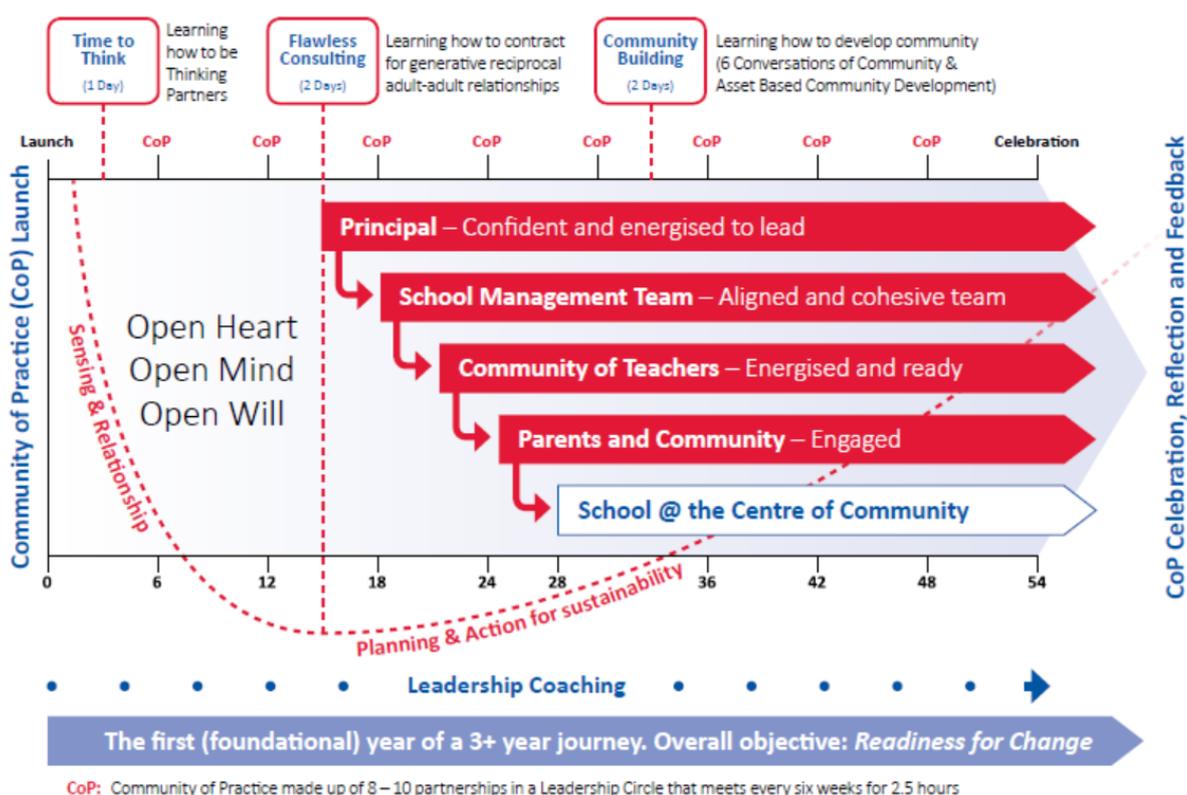
¹⁷ Goodlad, J. (1975) Schools can make a difference. *Educational Leadership* 33(2)

2.3 How the programme works

As depicted in the diagram overleaf, the PfP approach is to focus on principals and on their leadership development with four key anticipated outcomes:

1. Principals have attained the competence, confidence and energy to lead change
2. School Management Teams are aligned and working as a cohesive team
3. Teachers are re-energised and teaching with enthusiasm
4. Parents and community members are actively engaged with schools.

PfP LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT & PRINCIPAL SUPPORT PROCESS



Specifically, the PfP programme:

- Identifies and empowers school principals requiring leadership development and skills in essential functions outside that of the day-to-day teaching requirements.
- Identifies well-trained business leaders (either in corporate positions or recently retired who are enthusiastic to offer their time and expertise) and partners them with a school principal to create a **Partnership for Possibility**.
- Offers a tailored leadership development process, moderated by the University of the Western Cape (UWC) at NQF level 6, for both principal and business partner.

- Provides additional support through a community of fellow principals and partners (a Leadership Circle of eight to 10 partnerships) led by an experienced business coach.
- Provides coaching for business partners by a professional business coach.
- Recruits business partners who commit to participate in the programme for at least one year. We encourage a five-year partnership, but continuation of the partnership after a year is at the discretion of partners.

2.4 The benefits for principals

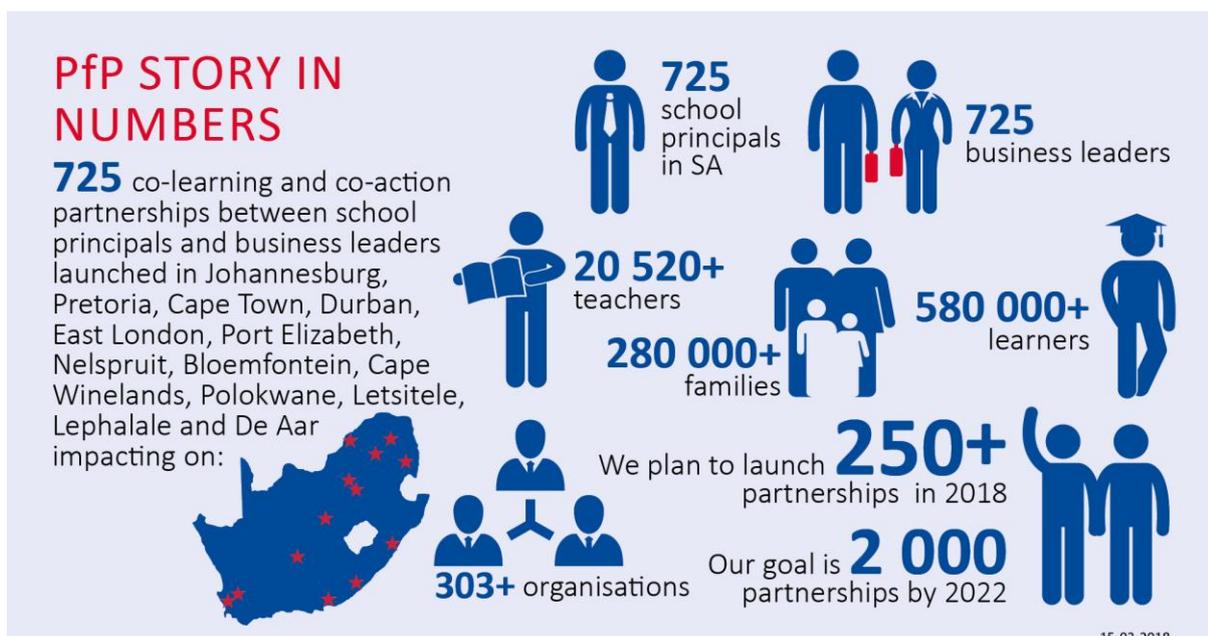
Principals gain new knowledge, leadership skills, strategies and resources that enable them to set in motion changes of attitude and practice among teachers, School Management Teams (SMT's), parents and other key members of school communities. Specifically, principals are better equipped to:

- Motivate and energise teachers
- Build an effective SMT and School Governing Body (SGB)
- Build productive partnerships with the community, learners, parents, Education Department, and other key stakeholders.
- Re-energise community support and involvement in schools
- Open doors to people in the private sector who may be able to add value
- Work with other partners to learn and share lessons in a collaborative community.

2.5 Impact to date

Since its launch in 2010, the Partners for Possibility programme has had a profound impact in more than 700 schools. We would like to see this expanded to many more schools in South Africa and would be delighted to have you as a partner to enable this mission.

So far, Symphonia for South Africa has impacted:



We now see:

- **Principals** who are:
 - Re-energised and confident to lead and manage change at their schools
 - Equipped and supported for their task
 - Leading communities to get actively involved at their schools
- Increased **energy and vibrancy** at schools
 - Happier and more engaged teachers who feel supported and appreciated
 - Engaged parents working in partnership with teachers and supporting school activities
 - Schools that become magnets for gifts and contributions from the community
 - Learners who benefit from all of the above enablers of improved education outcomes.
- **Business partners** who have become leaders by:
 - Learning how to deal with complexity and ambiguity, to lead beyond authority, influence across boundaries and lead with humanity
 - Gaining insight into the challenges in under-resourced communities which drive some of the major dysfunction in South African society.

3. Conclusion

In the face of a growing body of knowledge and our own experience of working in over 700 under-resourced schools, it is clear that now is the time to step up efforts to strengthen school leadership in South Africa.

In under-resourced South African schools principals need exceptional leadership capacity to meet the performance that is demanded from them. At the moment, most principals in the country are not being provided with the capacity development and support in response to demands for accountability. Without effective confident and energised principals, our national vision of access to education of the highest quality, leading to significantly improved learning *outcomes, will be next to impossible to achieve.*

The **Partners for Possibility** programme has been carefully designed to contribute to the realisation of our national vision for education and benefits all who are involved in it – principals, learners, teachers, business partners *and* the broader community. PfP builds bridges and makes a sustainable, replicable difference to education in South Africa with a vastly improved quality of education for the country's children, while delivering superb leadership skills development to school principals and business leaders alike.

Annex 1

A selection of findings from South African and international research on the link between school leadership and education outcomes:

1. Research indicates that **highly effective principals can raise the achievement of a typical student** in their schools by between two and seven months of learning in a single school year.

Branch et al (2012) Estimating the effect of leaders on public sector productivity: the case of school principals. US National Bureau of Economic Research
<http://www.nber.org/papers/w17803>
2. **School leadership** is key to improving the quality of teaching and learning within a school and **impacts student achievement and wellbeing** outcomes.

Breakspear *et al* (2017) Developing Agile Leaders of Learning: School leadership policy for dynamic times. World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE)
https://www.wise-qatar.org/sites/default/files/rr.7.2017_learnlabs.pdf
3. **Effective leadership** has consistently been identified in the international literature over the last quarter century as being **critical for managing change in schools** and raising the achievement of learners.

Ngcobo, T., & Tikly, L.P. (2010). Key dimensions of effective leadership for change: A focus on township and rural schools in South Africa. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 38(2), 202-228.
4. A particularly noteworthy finding, reinforced in a major study by researchers at the Universities of Minnesota and Toronto, is the **empirical link between school leadership and improved student achievement**. Most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass. Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal. Indeed, **leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that affect student learning in school**.

Wallace Foundation (2012) The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning.
<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/The-School-Principal-as-Leader-Guiding-Schools-to-Better-Teaching-and-Learning.aspx>
5. Studies have found that in both developed and developing country contexts school **principals matter considerably for student achievement**. Principals play a pivotal role in school functioning, upholding the operational management of schools, coordinating teachers, disciplining and motivating students while providing instructional leadership.

Case studies conducted in 18 South African schools that achieved good to excellent results in the matric certificate despite challenging contexts concluded **that effective leadership was a critical factor characterising schools with higher levels of student achievement**.

Wills G (2016) An economic perspective on school leadership and teachers' unions in South Africa, Stellenbosch University
<http://resep.sun.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2016-02-21-G-Wills-PhD-School-leadership-and-teachers-unions-in-South-Africa-FINAL.pdf>

6. It is now widely accepted that **effective leadership is the key to successful schools**. Leithwood (2006) maintains that **leadership is the second most important factor influencing what students learn at school after classroom practice**. School leadership, especially **the principal, has a significant role to play in the successful functioning of a school, and the student learning outcomes** the school produces.
- Mbokazi Z (2013) Successful School Leadership in Challenging Circumstances: Case Studies of Three Secondary Schools in Soweto. Doctoral Thesis: University of the Witwatersrand
<http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/17829/ZAKHELE%20MBOKAZI%20%20POST-EXAMINATION%20THESIS%20D2%2011%2006%2013.pdf?sequence=1>
7. Research findings from many countries and different school contexts have revealed the **powerful impact of leadership in achieving school improvement**. Hopkins (2001) highlights the **key role of leadership in achieving school improvement in schools facing challenging circumstances**.
- Fleisch, B. and Christie, P. (2004), Structural change, leadership and school effectiveness /improvement: Perspectives from South Africa, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 25 (1)
8. In many parts of the world, including South Africa, there is recognition that **the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes**. The development of a highly skilled workforce requires trained and committed teachers but they, in turn, need the leadership of highly effective principals.
- Bush, T. (2007), Educational leadership and management: Theory, policy and practice, *South African Journal of Education*, 27 (3): 391-406
9. School principals' resourcefulness, adjustment to change, problem solving skills, decision making, and optimism play a crucial role in the overall success of schools. **Principals' behaviour has an effect on pupils' performance** via its influence on teachers.
- Aquino, J.B. (2015). Adversity quotient, leadership style and performance of secondary school heads and commitment to organizational values of teachers in the province of Tarlac. (Doctoral Dissertation).
10. The international literature on school achievement suggests that **effective leadership promotes favourable school and learner outcomes**.
- Bush et al (2011) Preparing new principals in South Africa: the ACE: School Leadership Programme *South African Journal of Education* Vol 31:31-43 1
11. The role of principals is absolutely key in school improvement because principals offer one of the most effective means to improve teaching. A school's ability to attract and keep good teachers and to develop them in an extremely challenging and complex profession is heavily on the principal's leadership skill and yet almost all knowledge-based professions pay more attention to preparing their leaders than education does.
- Want to fix schools? Go to the principal's office*. New York Times (March 2017)
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/opinion/sunday/want-to-fix-schools-go-to-the-principals-office.html>