EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF 100 PARTNERSHIPS FOR POSSIBILITY

7 March 2022
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is submitted by JET Education Services (JET) to the Federated Employers’ Mutual Assurance Company Education Foundation (FEMEF). It details findings from the three-year evaluation of the Partners for Possibility (PfP) intervention and contains findings about the FEMEF-funded schools that started the PfP programme in 2018/2019. In the evaluation, the “100 school sample” refer to the schools in which partnerships were funded by FEMEF’s 2018 grant to PfP while the “30 school sample” refer to a subset of 30 FEMEF-funded schools that were selected for the annual telephonic monitoring. This report follows on from a 2019 baseline report and a 2020 midline report. In 2019, a retrospective evaluation was conducted, based on data collected on PfP partnerships that were mainly implemented in 2014. The evaluation questions answered in this report and evaluation methods used to answer them are indicated below.

Questions and methods

Questions & Methods

In 100 FEMEF-Funded Schools:
1. To what extent did the principals complete all the PfP planned activities and outputs after year one?

In 30 FEMEF-Funded Schools:
2. Do principals view the PfP initiative positively?
3. Do principals’ confidence, competence, skills and behaviours (as per the detailed theory of change [ToC]) change by the end of the PfP formal programme?
4. Do the behaviours of other school stakeholders like teachers, learners and parents change?
5. What is the total cost of the initiative per school, and how does the cost compare to other initiatives? (Component 3)

In 10 FEMEF-Funded Schools and 10 matched comparison schools:
6. Are there changes in the learning outcomes of Grades 3 and 6 learners in Mathematics and English First Additional Language (EFAL) between the baseline (2019) and endline (2021), compared to a control group?
7. How has teaching and learning been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
8. Were schools able to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic adequately, and did the PfP relationship help in any way?

Review of monitoring data, telephonic interviews, analysis of videos from PfP celebration events, learner testing, contextual data
**Programme implementation**

Based on a review of monitoring data and surveys conducted with principals, we find that the FEMEF-funded PfP programme was well implemented and well received. The FEMEF-funded PfP programme was implemented with more success than with the 2014 cohort investigated in the retrospective evaluation where approximately 20% of the partnerships did not function as expected.

### Implementation

The 100 FEMEF funded partnerships were rolled out in 18 circles over the period 2018 and 2019. Implementation was good and principals were very satisfied with all aspects of the programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communities of Practice (CoPs): All were satisfied</th>
<th>Workshops: All were satisfied</th>
<th>Coaching and triads: Most were satisfied</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“In the CoPs we spoke about our individual challenges and how we could move forward from them.”</td>
<td>“I was satisfied with the workshops. We were actively involved in the training and not just sitting and listening. The facilitators were presenting, but they engaged us to think as if we were at university.”</td>
<td>“Sometimes you are afraid to talk in a group, but in smaller groups you share and listen more. You are free, unlike in a group where many people want to talk.”</td>
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**PfP Delivered what they promised**

- Most circles had an 80%-100% attendance rate for workshops.
- Attendance at community of Practice Meetings varied for different circles – most principals attended 7 or 8 of the 8 CoP meetings.
- Coaching and triads took place in all circles.

**Many things are outside of PfP control**

- One partnership (Tshwane10) was discontinued; in two further partnerships (Upington2), the principals withdrew from the programme due to pressure by the district director, but the partnerships were still completed.
- Three principals (JHB39) withdrew from the programme.
- One (acting) principal (WLD8) went back to a position of deputy principal; another one retired, but both completed the course.
- Two principals were temporarily suspended during the PfP year following disputes. In one case (Midlands 1) the acting principal stepped in as a replacement for the suspended principal.
In-school changes

Based on reports from principals and confirmed by other respondents in the same schools, the PfP programme changed the skills of all participating principals significantly. Multiple interviewees from the same schools confirm that it has led to a more cohesively functioning School Management Team (SMT) in 83% of the schools and improvements in the engagement and motivation of teachers in 94% of schools. In slightly more than half of the schools, a significant change in the community engagement was reported. These positive findings are consistent with those reported in the retrospective evaluation, which investigated a 2014 cohort of PfP schools. Interpreted from the subjective perspective of school stakeholders, they see how the PfP programme has put them in a better position to deal with the challenges encountered in schools. However, the COVID-19 disruptions challenged schools in new ways. All schools have declined in measurements of objectively verifiable indicators such as teacher and learner attendance, completion of the curriculum, and parent participation in school meetings. The impact of COVID-19 limited the evaluation team’s ability to investigate whether the positively reported changes in SMT functioning and teachers’ engagement may have translated into objectively better functioning schools.
An example of a significant principal change: “In the past I was doing everything myself and knew that everything was my responsibility. Our school is growing, and I now share responsibilities. I listen to staff’s options on problem solving and put into practice their suggestions if I see it could work.”

The percentage indicated is only for “significant changes” that could be confirmed by other interviewees in the school.

Source: Endline telephone interview with Principal and SMT/Educators. Respondents were asked questions such as “Did you see a change in how the school management team functions over the past three years?” Open-ended responses were further probed for specific examples. If respondents could provide an explicit example and trace it back to the PFP programme, this was coded as a “significant change”. The examples were confirmed by another respondent in the school.
Differences in schools’ responses to COVID-19

A review of the patterns in the data we collected in the contextual tools reveal that, for some indicators, PfP schools were better able to cope with the COVID-19 school disruptions compared to a small sample of matched control schools. They were better able to reach learners during school closures, they reported that they were able to complete more of the curriculum, and they were more protected against vandalism in schools. No difference was found for other indicators. Except for the indicator related to school vandalism, the evaluation was not able to determine if the differences co-occurred with other in-school changes delivered by the PfP programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composite indicator: Learner reach during school closures</th>
<th>PfP schools were better able to reach learners during lockdown than control schools.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Composite indicator: Contact teaching time</td>
<td>In this small sample, we have an anomalous finding: Learners in PfP schools lost more contact teaching time than in control schools due to rotational timetabling and the phased approach to the return of learners after lockdown. Some control schools returned more learners sooner.</td>
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<td>At-home learning during off days in rotational timetabling</td>
<td>PfP schools and matched control schools were approximately equally able to provide opportunities for at-home learning and facilitating at-home learning during rotational learning. Both project and control schools sent work home for learners to do on the days they were not at school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Composite indicator: Availability of at-home learning resources</td>
<td>There was no difference in PfP/control schools’ ability to provide learning resources to facilitate at-home learning. Most schools sent home Department of Basic Education (DBE) workbooks and some printed material.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Composite indicator: self-reported curriculum coverage</td>
<td>PfP schools were better able to cover the curriculum than control schools. Teachers reported that they were only able to complete up to 50% of the curriculum, but more control schools said they weren’t even able to achieve this.</td>
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</tbody>
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| Composite indicator: Difference in the number of pages written by learners during term 3 | Grade 3 Maths: On average, learners in PfP schools completed more pages of learner work than in matched control schools.  
Grade 3 EFAL: On average, learners in PfP schools completed more pages of learner work than in matched control schools.  
Grade 6 Maths: On average, learners in PfP schools completed more pages of learner work than in matched control schools.  
Grade 6 EFAL: On average, there was no difference in the average number of pages of learner work completed in PfP schools than in matched control schools. |
Compliance with DBE COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

Regarding compliance with the DBE COVID-19 SOPs, there was no clear difference between project and control schools. Both groups were found to comply adequately with COVID-19 protocols.

Maintenance of feeding scheme

There was no difference in PfP/control schools’ ability to maintain or supplement their feeding schemes.

Protection against vandalism

A lower percentage of PfP schools reported incidences of vandalism in their schools than matched control schools. This may be due to security upgrades implemented as part of some PfP partnerships.

Changes in learner performance

In the retrospective evaluation carried out in a cohort of 2014 PfP schools, we found evidence that learner results in Grade 6 EFAL differed statistically significantly between the project and control schools, and the team hypothesised that this may be due to the implementation of reading programmes in the PfP schools that may have resulted from the participation of the business leader.

In 2021, the evaluation team tested a cohort of Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners in 8 of the FEMEF-funded PfP schools, and in a matched sample of 7 control schools. In 2019, the evaluation team also tested two cohorts of learners on Grades 3 and 6 content in these schools. The comparison of baseline to endline is constrained because the learner testing was conducted in a small number of FEMEF-funded PfP schools, and it does not trace the same learners over time in the FEMEF-funded. The results for the Grade 6 learners are inconclusive in this longitudinal evaluation. However, the Grade 3 Maths and EFAL results show that while the learner performance in both Maths and EFAL declined between 2019 and 2021, Grade 3 learner results in PfP schools declined statistically significantly less than those learners in the group of matched control schools. There was no statistically significant difference between the PfP and control Grade 3 learners at baseline, but at endline there was a difference, with PfP schools performing better. The statistically calculated effect size was of moderate magnitude. A factor that may explain the difference between project and matched control schools is curriculum coverage. In the workbooks inspected by the evaluation team, there was convincing evidence that learners in PfP schools wrote more pages of work in their workbooks and exercise books. More of the teachers in PfP schools also reported covering more of the curriculum. However, since there is no baseline measure available, it is not clear whether this has changed significantly between baseline and endline and whether this change co-occurred with the PfP programme.
Continuity and sustainable benefits

Based on the longitudinal tracing of principals in a sample of 30 schools, we find that the programme established links between school principals and business leaders that lasted well beyond the period of the project implementation. Three years after the programme, almost all principals were still in touch with their business...
partner to some degree, and almost all principals maintained contact with other principals who participated in the PfP CoPs. This is consistent with the findings in the retrospective evaluation, which also found that in 2018, a large number of the 2014 cohort of principals were still in touch with their business partners.

A large portion of the partnership projects initiated by the 2018 cohort of principals and their business partners were still found to be delivering benefit to schools three years after the programme concluded. By 2021, 36 of 65 partnership projects in 30 schools were found to be sustained or were found to have continuing benefits. While this evaluation documents positive sustained benefits in the vast majority of participating schools, there are some cases where this was not the fact. This is consistent with the findings in the retrospective evaluation where a large number of the partnership projects were found to be still delivering a sustained benefit by 2018.

During the implementation of the FEMEF-funded partnerships in 2018/2019, some principals and business partners withdrew from the project, but they were replaced in most cases. There was some attrition after the completion of the programme – about 17% of principals were no longer at their schools three years after the programme had ended. A change in the PfP principal selection criteria between 2014 and 2018 may be responsible for the better continuity of principals than in the 2014 cohort.

**Cost**

In 2018/2019, the PfP programme came to a total resource cost of R115 452 per partnership (this includes non-accounted costs too). In 2018, the programme funding was made up of R55 000 from donors (including FEMEF), R45 000 from the business partner and R15 452 through other SSA leveraging of resources.

Based on an analysis of the typical programme costs in the 2018/2019 financial year, we find that the FEMEF funding leveraged significant co-funding for the benefit of schools. Of the programme funding, 91% is applied to direct fixed and direct variable costs, meaning that there are no excessive organisational overheads on the programme. The PfP programme offers good value when compared to the costs of an intervention with training, coaching and organisational development consulting components.
In a small sample of interview data, business leaders reported that schools benefitted from in-kind and financial contributions to schools that range between R3 000 and R800 000. While these results are not necessarily generalisable to all PfP schools, they indicate that there are instances when significant financial returns are generated.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial return, in some schools, exceed financial input by FEMEF</th>
<th>Sustained project benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a small sample of 15 schools, financial and in-kind contributions of median R80 000 was raised (range between R3 000 to R800 000)</td>
<td>In 30 schools, 65 partnership projects were documented. Three years after the programme, 55% of these projects still delivered benefits to schools</td>
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Value of contributions (in '000) to schools (no. of schools)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Funds Raised</th>
<th>65 Projects</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;R100</td>
<td>55% of these sustained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;R20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R50-R100</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R20-R50</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Self-reported values from business partners in a small sample of 15 PFP schools

Source: Information shared in principal survey, conducted over three years in 30 schools