

Management & Leadership

POLICY

LEADERSHIP

MANAGEMENT

GOVERNANCE

for South African Schools

In this Issue

New President and new Minister - what it means for Education

Education and the State of the Nation Address 2
We report and comment on the President's State of the Nation Address.

Minister Motshekga's reply to the State of the Address 4
How the new minister responded, with comment and analysis.

Teacher Unions' responses to the State of the Nation Address 6
The formal responses of SADTU and NAPTOSA to the State of the Nation Address.

The Demise of Paperwork 7
A light-hearted piece by Lorna Bannatyne on how administrative demands undermine good teaching.

The State President's views on Education .. 8
What the President had to say about Education in an exclusive interview with Tim Modise of the SABC.

SAPA News 9
SAPA: Western Cape recently held their Provincial Conference at the CTICC.

Final NEEDU report: Part 2 10
The second part of our report on the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit.

Strategies for turning round failing schools .. 12
Underperforming schools are not only a South African phenomenon. We report on strategies that have been found to make a difference.

In this edition we have focused mostly on what members of President Zuma's newly-installed government have been saying about Basic Education. In his State of the Nation address, the President identified Education as his government's number one priority and made it clear that he expected the delivery of a better quality product to this country's children. He had more to say on this theme when interviewed a few days later on SABC radio. In her first major speech as the new Minister of Education, Minister Angie Motshegha expanded further on this and added some detail of her own on what the new government expects from the education system, particularly from its principals and teachers. From what has been said, it certainly seems that the new government means business and that this is going to translate into political pressure on the system. Whether this will produce meaningful change for the better, only time can tell. It would seem, however, that these pronouncements have already had some effect with officials from the DoE and PEDs scurrying around looking to put in place action plans and programmes aimed at achieving improved pupil performance.

The greatest challenge to meaningful change and improvement is the huge inertia that exists in an organisation the size of an education department. Education departments across the world have proved to be notoriously resistant to change, particularly if it relates to change in the way that things are done in classrooms and schools. Our own education department is no exception and with the unions flexing their collective muscles and funding constraints resulting from the economic downturn, the kind of change that is being spoken of - and that is needed - is going to be difficult to achieve. It is vital, however, that something be done because without the knowledge and skills that education alone can bring, we are unlikely to see the kind of growth required if South Africa is to move forward developmentally and economically.

Research shows that at school level students do succeed if effort is invested in ensuring that a few basic management systems are in place and if teachers focus their energy on the simple tried and tested techniques of good classroom practice. Some of what is required is provided in the article, "Strategies for turning around underperforming schools" which includes some ideas from Arne Duncan, the new US Secretary for Education under President Barack Obama, as well as research findings from a recently-released study by the HSRC. Turning around underperforming schools is what is desperately needed in South Africa at present, as is turning around underperformance in the National and Provincial Education Departments, in Education Districts and in classrooms. It is not just about the principals: everyone has to pull up their socks - although the research does show that the two things that make the most difference are the quality of the principal and the quality of teaching. We plan to run a series of articles in future editions which will focus on these issues and on the specific strategies and practices that are shown to make a difference in pupil performance at school and classroom level. ■

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Education in the State of the Nation Address

President Zuma, in his State of the Nation address to Parliament, identified education as one of the key priorities of his government. We summarise and comment on the most important education-related issues that he raised.

President Zuma, in his State of the Nation address to Parliament on Wednesday 3 June, identified education as one of the key priorities of his government. This was not unexpected, but what would his government deem to be areas for special focus?

Education will be a key priority for the next five years. We want our teachers, learners and parents to work with government to turn our schools into thriving centres of excellence.

Education was always going to be one of the key priorities of President Zuma's new government because of the critical need for a better skilled workforce and a more educated citizenry – essential requirements if the government is to meet its socio-economic commitments. The answers to how his government plans to achieve this needed to be sought, therefore, in what he had to say about particular components of the education system and about the specific areas of weakness identified for intervention and redress.

This is what he had to say in this regard:

“Compatriots,

Education will be a key priority for the next five years. We want our teachers, learners and parents to work with government to turn our schools into thriving centres of excellence.

The Early Childhood Development programme will be stepped up, with the aim of ensuring universal access to Grade R and doubling the number of 0-4 year old children by 2014 (sic).

We reiterate our non-negotiables. Teachers should be in school, in class, on time, teaching, with no neglect of duty and no abuse of pupils! The children should be in class, on time, learning, be respectful of their teachers and each other, and do their homework.

Early Childhood Development programme will be stepped up, with the aim of ensuring universal access to Grade R

To improve school management, formal training will be a pre-condition for promoting teachers to become principals or heads of department.

I will meet school principals to share our vision on the revival of our education system.

Fellow South Africans,

We will increase our efforts to encourage all pupils to complete their secondary education.

The target is to increase enrolment rates in secondary schools to 95 per cent by 2014. We are also looking at innovative measures to bring back into the system pupils who dropped out of school, and to provide support.

We reiterate our non-negotiables. Teachers should be in school, in class, on time, teaching, with no neglect of duty and no abuse of pupils!

Honourable Members, we are very concerned about reports of teachers who sexually harass and abuse children, particularly girls.

We will ensure that the Guidelines on Sexual Harassment and Violence in Public Schools are widely disseminated and that learners and teachers are familiar with and observe them.

We will take very serious, and very decisive, action against any teachers who abuse their authority and power by entering into sexual relationships with children.”

Certainly all of these are laudable goals, although most are not new. One cannot expect the president in his State of the Nation address to provide detail of the strategies that will be used to achieve the goals or about how these are to be funded. This is the responsibility of the Minister for Basic Education and we look forward to her providing some of the practicalities of how her department plans to achieve these goals when she presents her Education budget.

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The decision to make improving enrolment rates in secondary education as a goal is interesting because it suggests that there are obstacles other than failure or a negative experience of schooling that prevent primary school pupils from enrolling in secondary schools. That many pupils - perhaps even the majority - have a negative experience of schooling is an assumption one must make, based on the President's comments - "sexual harassment and abuse of learners" and the need for teachers to be "at school, in class, on time, teaching". Making the decision about enrolment rates even more curious is the recent decision by the Education Department to change the promotion and pass requirements for Grades 1 - 9. This decision has been greeted with an outcry by schools and education pundits, who suggest that the net result will be an increase in failure and drop-out rates and a return to the time when 15-year-olds sat next to 9-year-olds in primary school classrooms. Our drop-out rate, particularly in high schools, is far too high and this, together with our poor Senior Certificate pass rate, is one of the major constraints on this country's economic development. In all probability, the reason for these systemic failures is the failure of the education system to confront problems that are finally being addressed by the other goals of President Zuma's speech:

- teachers at school, in class, on time, teaching, with no neglect of duty and no abuse of pupils
- pupils in class, on time, learning, respecting their teachers and their peers; and doing their homework
- improved school management (this, we feel, is a pre-requisite for the first two)

It is hardly surprising that there are high failure- and drop-out -rates at schools where the three items listed above are absent. A determined drive to deal with these three problems would be a good place to begin the battle for better schooling. This, however, is unlikely to happen if more accountability is not built into the system at school and district level. It is on the issue of accountability that the ultimate achievement of the educational goals of President Zuma and his government are likely to stand or fall. Unions do not like systems which hold members accountable for performance. A good example of this is the ongoing battle between the teachers' unions and the DoE about the OSD and the reason why its implementation has been stalled. We are left wondering therefore whether the political will exists to challenge the status quo at the most basic level, because if this is not done, South Africa will continue to languish at the bottom of the education league tables.

More likely both to succeed and to have an impact on the system in terms of improved pass rates is the proposal to "step up" the roll-out of the Early Childhood Development programme with the goal of doubling the number of children involved by 2014. There is ample evidence from research that demonstrates the value, in terms of improved numeracy and literacy levels, of good quality pre-primary education. The challenge once again, however, will be the question of quality and one hopes that part of this roll-out is a plan to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of qualified and competent ECD specialists to provide children enrolled in these centres with the kind of support that they need to develop their emerging basic literacy and numeracy skills. If this is done, then these children at least will take their first steps on the educational ladder with the skills and tools they need to get to the top. With sufficient political will, maybe, just maybe, enough of the rungs on the way to the top will be fixed to enable them to get there. ■

Seen at the SAPA: Western Cape Conference

More about the conference on page 9.



Camps Bay High staff members Peter Davey, Ettie Cronje, principal Dave de Korte, Wendy Herbert, Yonela Bele and Dawn Pieters enjoying their lunch break at the SAPA: Western Cape Provincial Conference.



Rhodes High staff members Wesley Lewis, Fatima Flores, Burton Noble and Johann de Villiers also enjoyed the conference lunch

Minister Motshekga's reply to the State of the Nation Address

Minister Motshekga's official response in the National Assembly to the President's State of the Nation Address was posted, seemingly in an unedited form, on the DoE website. We feel that this does neither her nor her department any favours. She is, after all, the public and political face of the national Department of Education and as such she needs to establish by example what she expects in terms of structure, clarity of thought and the correct and appropriate use of language in her media statements.

As a new minister charged by the President with the task of improving efficiency and the quality of educational output, one would have expected her to have used her first public statement to set the tone and establish a benchmark of quality. Sadly, this is not the case and while we accept that the Minister is working through her second language, one would expect that major public statements and press releases from her office would be checked by a language specialist. After all, she is Minister of an education department and if this country's claim to 11 official languages plus sign-language is to be meaningful, then surely the DoE - of all government departments - should have language specialists equipped to check and ensure that the documents issued by the Minister or the Department are linguistically correct and error free.

In terms of content, Minister Motshekga addressed issues relating to both Basic Education and Higher Education in her response to the President. What we have listed below are some of the most important Basic Education-related issues that were addressed.

1 The President was thanked for his commitment to a better education system and for making Education the Government's number one priority. The Minister committed to doing all that she and the Department could, to ensure that the goals that he had set out in his address would be achieved within the stipulated time-frames.

2 Universal access to Early Childhood Development programmes for all children is an ultimate goal with the inclusion of Grade R in all schools by 2014 as part of the strategy to achieve this.

3 The completion of Grade 9 will no longer be considered to constitute a 'basic education' and the department would look to extend this to Grade 12 in line with the President's wishes. To achieve this aim, the Department will work to provide additional support for those who struggle to pass Grade 12. The Department's goal will be to retain 95% of learners who enrolled in Grade 1 within the system to the end of Grade 12. (It was not clear whether this carried with it the implication that 95% would pass Grade 12 or whether it meant that this percentage would simply complete the year - i.e. complete 12 years of schooling.)

4 There will be a further streamlining of the curriculum and the removal of "frills" which distract teachers from their core business of teaching; and a return to basics, with the focus on ensuring that all learners are able to read, write and count.

5 There will be a review of the application of the National Curriculum Statements across the system to ensure that impediments and barriers to its effective implementation are removed. Included in this will be an investigation into the administrative burdens that teachers 'regularly' complain about.

6 A task team, established under Minister Pandor's tenure, will tackle identified concerns related to the curriculum. These include: its financial demands, the "unbearable" amount of paperwork it involves, and the different ways in which it has been interpreted. The plan is for this team to start work "immediately" in order to ensure that by the start of 2010, all curriculum-related challenges have been "cleared". "I want to promise the President and the nation in general that this will be done".

7 Processes have already been set in motion by the DoE to organise a meeting of the President and representatives of principals' associations. Every effort will be made to ensure that all principals' organisations receive invitations to attend this meeting.

8 The testing of all Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners using standardised national assessment instruments will be expanded to include Grade 9 learners in

A task team will tackle identified concerns related to the curriculum. These include: its financial demands, the "unbearable" amount of paperwork it involves.





the future. The aim is to ensure that by 2011 at least 50% of all learners meet the required outcomes for their grade. The Foundation for Learning campaign will be used to drive this agenda.

9 The Department, with the cooperation of the Minister of Health (Minister Motsoaledi), has already begun working on a programme for the eye, ear and tooth testing of Grade 1 learners in 2010.

10 A national education workshop for all provinces is planned for 24 and 25 June to align national and provincial programmes.

11 A system – the Learner Unit Record Tracking and Information System (LURITS) - to register and track the progress of every child in the education system is under development. Once in place, the system will enable the Department to monitor the transfer of learners between schools and provinces, to identify learners whose progress is slow, and to intervene when a child drops out of school.

12 The extension of the school nutrition programmes to the poorest secondary schools has already commenced.

13 Non-negotiables in terms of the Department's Quality Teaching and Learning Campaign include: for

teachers and learners, being in class on time teaching and learning; for departmental officials, an obligation to visit and support schools on a regular basis; for parents, the need, not only to support their own children, but to act as the eyes and ears of the Department in a bid to ensure that all role-players meet their commitments. Teachers are also required not only to be in school for at least 7 hours each day but also to offer an additional hour each day to school-related activities such as preparation, marking and extra-mural activities. The work of teachers "must be closely monitored by communities".

14 A start will be made this year on the establishment of the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU).

15 Direct grants have been allocated to unions to undertake development programmes for their members. This is the precursor to the introduction of a fully-fledged Continuing Professional Teacher Development programme (CPTD) which is currently being piloted in selected provinces and which will be managed by SACE.

16 Problems related to the appropriate deployment of teachers in terms of their professional

qualifications and the needs of schools are to be addressed to ensure that teachers are appointed to posts for which they are qualified and that they teach the subjects for which they are qualified.

17 The DoE has a comprehensive database of school infrastructure which provides details of the conditions of every public school. The Department plans to appropriate some of the capacity of the construction sector once the World Cup stadiums have been completed to eradicate school infrastructure backlogs. This will be a 10-year programme, with an initial goal of ensuring that every school has basic services (water and sanitation) by 2011 and that by 2014 all unsafe and unsuitable structures have been eradicated.

18 Transport as well as boarding schools will need to be provided in some districts, while some small schools which are not viable may need to be closed. As a possible solution to these problems, the department is in discussion with the Minister of Agriculture about his plans to establish Agri-Villages.

These villages will enable farm workers to live near farms but on public property in their own homes, with public schools and other facilities provided.

19 Parents were encouraged to stand for the coming SGB elections. The Minister stressed the important role that SGBs play in the control of schools and of the significant powers that governors have over a number of important school-related matters. Her statement in this regard included the following comments:

"our schools are deliberately called public schools and not state schools – a signal that they belong to the people and not to the government"

"No other system concedes as may (sic) powers to the public as we do, and it is essential for all patriotic South Africans to participate in these governing bodies".

20 On the road to success, this is what the Minister had to say: "Speaker – the President has tasked us with ensuring that schools become Centres of Excellence. Our research shows that there are four elements to a successful school: Good and committed teachers, spending proper amounts of time on task, supported by decent textbooks, and with regular testing of learners. If we can make these four simple things happen, then we can claim that Basic Education is on the road to success." ■

"our schools are deliberately called public schools and not state schools – a signal that they belong to the people and not to the government"

Teacher Unions' responses to the President's State of the Nation Address

SADTU

SADTU welcomes the fact that the speech was very positive and speaks to the challenges we face as a nation in the midst of an international economic downturn and recession.

However, we are disappointed that the President avoided the issue of the public service and the outstanding question of OSD (Occupation Specific Dispensation) - what comrade Vavi refers to as the 'ticking time-bomb.'. Perhaps this was wise. The unions will be meeting with the relevant ministers next week - when we should receive further clarity.

For SADTU as a union - the centrality of employment in government strategy - defending and creating jobs - is crucial.

We do however have the following concerns:

- Does the current budget allow us to meet the targets that have been set? We need to look at the detailed programmes and plans that the President said would be made available in the coming days.
- Our other concern, in relation to the education commitments is in regard to provincial budgets. Often funds are budgeted - for example for ECD - and not all provinces spend the money on the intended purpose. This needs to be monitored.

On Education

We welcome the comments by the President and the emphasis on education as a priority. In particular:

- The roll out of ECD (Early Childhood Development) is crucial. International research shows that good ECD is crucial to later success in school. So the universal roll out of Grade R by 2014 is good news (although the original target was for 2010)
- We fully support the President's comments with regards to sexual abuse of learners by teachers. As SADTU we have said the following:
 - We have called on our members to blow the whistle on abuse wherever it occurs
 - We have called on the DoE to use its powers under labour legislation to discipline and dismiss
 - We have said that the police must enforce



NAPTOSA

Mr Ezra Ramasehla, president of the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) said in Pretoria today that President Zuma's State of the Nation address was welcomed because of its positive messages. Examples of this are the emphasis on properly controlled spending on infrastructure including schools which are urgently needed in some areas of the country, said Mr Ramasehla.

NAPTOSA strongly supports the plans to ensure that all the relevant interested and affected parties will work together to ensure that schools become centers of excellence, said Mr Ramasehla. The statement, by President Zuma, that efforts to ensure universal access to Early Childhood Development (ECD) opportunities would be stopped up by doubling access for the very young (ages 0 – 4) by 2014 was particularly supported. Also welcomed was the continuance of the initiative to ensure that individuals would receive proper training before being placed in management positions in schools as recent research has shown that strong leadership and good management have a profound impact on the quality of teaching and on learner performance, said Mr Ramasehla. Clearly, NAPTOSA strongly supports the drive to enhance professionalism in education and to eliminate the kind of behaviour that negatively impacts on the learners.

Also very positive were the references to a plan to bring dropouts from schools back into the system and, importantly, to provide support that would increase their chances of success, said Mr Ramasehla. Given the large numbers of learners who are not presently able to complete their schooling, this initiative has the potential to make a significant difference to the lives of these individuals and to the economy. A training and schools development plan that is responsive to the economy is an essential part of this plan.

NAPTOSA also supports the drive to improve access to Higher Education for the poor. It is not, however, clear how this could be sustained. The President's speech was however silent on the important issue of teacher supply and demand and teacher training and development. This is a crucial issue that was not mentioned and this is cause for concern.

However, it was not clear what was meant by the statement that FET Colleges would be the primary sites





SADTU (Cont)

the law with regard to statutory rape; and

- We have fully supported the actions of SACE (South African Council for Educators) in removing abusers from the teachers roll and banning them from teaching in South Africa.
- Encouraging learners to complete their secondary education - we fully support this move. Currently approximately 40% of the cohort do not reach matric. The only chance these youngsters have of finding employment is if they are educated.
- We would support the need to train principals to make them effective school managers. But we would say you need to train and build capacity at all levels of the education system - including all teachers, and officials - particularly the district officials.
- FET (Further Education and Training) - the emphasis on this as the site of skills training is vital. Recent survey shows that there are some 3 million youngsters between the ages of 18 and 24 who are not employed and not involved in any form of training - we have to reach out to them.
- School sports should be boosted and be part of the mainstream curriculum, not just an extra-mural activity. SADTU fully supports this stance. It is ironic that as we move towards 2010 the majority of our schools have no sports facilities or physical education programmes.
- Higher education - we look forward to seeing the details on how access is to be extended to the children of poor families.

Statement issued by the SADTU Secretariat, June 3 2009. ■



NAPTOSA (Cont.)

for skills development – nor was it clear what the implications of this statement would be, said Mr Ramasehla.

In short, said Mr Ramasehla, those things mentioned by President Zuma in his State of the Nation address, are all extremely positive. However, whilst one would not expect details of any of these initiatives to be provided in an address of this nature, there was no indication given as to how any of these were to be achieved. It would have been extremely useful to have been given a clearer picture of how the issues that affect education were going to be tackled, said Mr Ramasehla.

Statement issued by Mr Ezra Ramasehla, President of NAPTOSA, 4 June 2009 ■

Opinion piece

The Demise of Paperwork

by Lorna Bannatyne (Principal, Robert Carruthers School)

What a good idea writing was. So good I wish I'd invented it myself. Not long thereafter came paper and suddenly communication, recording, reporting, analysing, tallying (the list is endless) became the norm. Man was liberated. He no longer needed to confine everything to memory, thus could use his ever-expanding brain for more important endeavours.

And, so for centuries, things worked well.

Then along came 21st century South Africa. Suddenly things changed. Paperwork took on a life of its own. The mentality that buying a driver's licence somehow gave people the ability to drive spread like wild fire; mostly through our bureaucracies. It was the 'paper' that now counted and not the skill. Within no time at all we had a policy being generated for every occasion and consequently the amount of paperwork thus created criminally decimated millions of trees. The people in charge believed with all their hearts and souls that policy, forms, schedules, timetables, portfolios, etc. solved every problem.

But alas, the children continued being unsuccessful 'learners'.

Within the Education Department policies and endless, repetitive, and in many cases useful-for-nothing-other-than-window-dressing paperwork, became the order of the day; much of it written about children and their reaction to learning by people who last saw a child when they were one. So effective was the implementation of policy and documentation that we even started seeing policies about policies and documentation about documentation.

But how good it looked in all the files.

The long and the short of it is that no matter how hard one tries one cannot do away with interpretation, so many policies now in place in the country have been incorrectly analysed and implemented. The solution? Endless workshops, retraining sessions, meetings and seminars; all achieving little other than taking people out of the classroom and guess what?

Generating more paperwork.

Teachers are told repeatedly that they need evidence. Evidence of what, how, why and when they will teach. Evidence that they assess, evidence of how they assess, evidence that they come to school, evidence that they

Continued on page 16

President Zuma expands on his State of the Nation Address

The President used the opportunity on Sunday 7 June, when he was interviewed on a special SABC broadcast, to clarify and expand on his State of the Nation Address.

In a special SABC broadcast on Sunday 7 June, President Zuma was interviewed by show-host Tim Modise about his State of the Nation address. The interview gave the President an opportunity of clarify and expand on what he had to say in his address. Importantly, for those involved in education in this country, the President's statement that "If we are to address all the ills that face our country, education is the key"¹ and further that "this is an issue that we identified as an issue that I think you cannot run away from".

"Any nation that looks forward to development must skill and educate its population"

In expanding on the reason for identifying education as the key concern, the President noted, "If you have not educated your population it means your population is not empowered to participate in the economic activities or in any other activity" and "Any nation that looks forward to development must skill and educate its population". It was for this reason, he explained, that the decision was made to split the education ministries so that each – higher education and basic education – could focus on a specific component of education. The President sees Basic Education as being the most critical, as, in his words, "that's when the formative years are. That's where you shape a human being."

The President made some interesting comments about the kind of basic education system that he envisages. He emphasised the fact that pupils in rural areas should be provided with the same kinds of facilities as those provided in urban areas, and their teachers should be appropriately qualified and have the "right attitude". Failure in matric should not mean that a child should be rejected or lost to the system. These children, he insisted, should also be provided with opportunities to develop the talents that they had "even if I couldn't write an essay but I can really build a house" so that they can participate in the economic activities of the country as citizens.

Tim Modise, the interviewer, engaged the President on the changes he planned to introduce to ensure that past failures were not repeated, and what he

considered to be non-negotiables in terms of the achievement of his stated goals.

In his response the President emphasised the importance of engaging all role-players in education in discussions about what needed to be done so that there is a national understanding of what this means in practice. What was pleasing was his emphasis on the need to meet school principals, whom the President did not consider had been sufficiently involved in the past about discussions relating to school improvement strategies. He emphasised that principals need to do their work and "manage appropriately" but also stressed that they needed to be held accountable for the performance of their schools: "If you are a principal and your school is failing, you can't stay there, impossible".

"If you are a principal and your school is failing, you can't stay there, impossible"

He was conciliatory, however, in the need for principals to be properly trained so that they understood what the job entailed and had the necessary skills to deliver the kind of performance that is required of them.

School Governing Bodies, and the need to help those who served rural schools better understand the duties and responsibilities, was also touched on by the President, as was the need to bridge the digital divide between urban schools, and rural schools where pupils may never have seen a computer. ■

Reference

¹All of the quotations provided in this article are based on a transcript of the SABC interview provided by Politicsweb (<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/>) part of the Moneyweb Network (<http://www.moneyweb.co.za/>)

News

SAPA: Western Cape Provincial Conference

Was it SAPA or was it SEXPO?

The Western Cape branch of the South African Principal's Association (SAPA) has, over the past two years, been innovative in its approach to hosting its annual provincial conference. Hosting conferences of this kind has become an increasingly costly affair and with the increase in costs come the risk of large financial losses if the association is not able to attract sufficient conference delegates to at least cover these costs. As an example the cost of hosting this year's conference at the Cape Town International Convention Centre was of the order of R450 000 which meant that the association had to attract a minimum of 400 paying delegates to cover its costs. In an effort to manage this problem the SAPA Western Cape organising committee decided to broaden the scope of the conference to include speakers and topics that would be of interest to ordinary teachers and subject heads as well as principals and others holding leadership positions in the school. This more inclusive approach was once again successful this year with more than 400 delegates enjoying the benefits of the conference programme. Added to the allure of the conference was the fact that the Cape Town Sexpo was held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre at the same time as the conference. SM&L was assured, however, by a representative of the organising committee that this was not part of the plan to make the conference more attractive to delegates.

The conference theme "Believe in the Power of Teaching" was particularly apt given the present problems in recruiting young people into the profession and the generally bad press that teaching and schooling in general are faced with at present. The conference ran from 15 – 16 May and the programme included a number of excellent local and international speakers. These included Dr Jesús Amaya, Professor Titular of Departamento de

Educación y Humanidades at the University de Monterrey, Garcia in Mexico who is an expert on reaching and teaching boys.



One of the posters that greeted delegates when they arrived at the CTICC, the venue for the conference.



Speaker, Dr Jesús Amaya and his wife, with SAPA Executive committee members Alta van Heerden and Gavin Keller.

His thought-provoking presentations with title "Different Brains demand different teaching styles" and "Of Elephants and Boys" focussed on the importance of matching teaching styles to the learning styles of pupils. Other speakers were Janine Shamos, a wellness coach, trainer and counsellor who is a former high school teacher who spoke on "Teens, Teachers & Suicide"; Maryann Harman a teacher with over 30 years experience from Pre-school to University level who writes songs that are musically and educationally sound and who runs a weekly programme for parents and their children teaching them how to use music to better prepare children for school and life in general; and Sharon McAuliffe, from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CAPUT), who is committed whole brain creative Mathematics teaching.

What was interesting about the conference, besides the good and interesting presentations, were the presence of principals attending together with a significant group of teachers from their schools. There are clearly a number of important advantages to schools from this arrangement of this kind. The first and perhaps the most important of these is the sense of camaraderie that shared experiences of this kind bring with them. This arrangement also encourages staff discussion and debate about the ideas presented by the speakers. The simple fact that a significant proportion of a staff attended and participated in conference discussions means that they will be far more likely to support the introduction of new ideas and approaches that may be gleaned from the presenters, into the school's own systems. This conference model is one that the organising committees of other SAPA Provincial Conferences could well consider following. ■

Final NEEDU Report: Key findings

This second part of our article on the Findal Report of the Ministerial Committee on a National Education Evaluation and Development Unit lists and comments on some of the committee's key findings and recommendations.

Part 2: Key findings and core recommendations

In the first part of this article published in the most recent edition of *SM&L*, we summarised some of the findings of the committee in their review of education-related National Policies and from international research literature on school evaluation and teacher appraisal. The committee summarised what they had learned in 14 key findings. Interestingly but not surprisingly, these findings differed in a number of respects from the emergent findings that they presented in a preliminary report towards the end of last year and which we reported on in Vol. 3 No. 2 of *SM&L*.

The key findings

1 There is broad recognition of the crises in education and the limitations of existing evaluation instruments to remedy the situation.

In supporting this contention, the report makes the following statement:

“...whatever is proposed by this Committee in terms of an accounting system on the status of schooling, such a proposal must be read in the context of a systemic collapse of schooling, at least for the bottom half of the education system. This

does not mean that schools do not operate on a daily basis with some degree of functionality; it simply means that whatever is happening (or not happening) inside schools, it has not altered the unmistakable fact that the academic achievement of learners as a whole does not match the levels of investment in the school system.”

2 There is widespread consensus on the need for stronger accountability measures alongside developmental support to be introduced into the school system.

The committee makes it clear that they believe that any new system of accountability must cover all levels of the system, from teachers to national departmental authorities, with principals, governors, district and departmental officials all included. Their observations at this point are also apt:

“The committee heard harrowing stories of incompetent and incapacitated officials. The committee heard repeated stories of the lack of coordination and support at the level of provinces. The committee also heard of the confusion generated by the plethora of policies that placed heavier and heavier demands on teachers that drew professionals away from the classroom into never-ending paperwork.”

3 There is a reluctance in some quarters to change existing monitoring and evaluation initiatives not only because of the potential disruption but also because recent measures (such as IQMS) have not yet had enough time for expression in educational practice.

The committee comments on the “pervasive sense of reform fatigue among South African teachers” and

suggest in their comments that the IQMS system should be retained, perhaps with some modification, because of this. Further arguments for its retention included that it enjoyed some legitimacy because of the support it had received through ELRC agreements and that in some provinces at least it was

beginning to be implemented in a reasonably systematic way. They noted, however, that there were shortcomings particularly with regard for the need to include learning achievement as a measure of teacher performance.

4 There is a considerable variation in the capacity of provinces to interpret and implement existing evaluation and development measures.

The committee identified the difference in the levels of skills and capacity between the provinces in terms of their ability to evaluate schools and to translate the information garnered from this evaluation into useful and effective school improvement strategies. They note that schools not used to internal evaluation find the ordering of priorities difficult and that inexperienced external evaluators are prone to list too many recommendations for weaker schools

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which lack the capacity to deal with them. They also make the important point that “those charged with the delivery of vitally needed training and support be consummate professionals with the capacity to advise and direct teachers and schools, and win their respect on the basis of such capacity and credibility”.

5 Both authority and expertise at all levels (teacher, HOD, principal, school, district, province, national) remain important requirements for effective implementation of monitoring and evaluation.

The committee stresses the point that those charged with the monitoring task should be:

- highly trained, competent and experienced professionals
- granted the authority to observe classrooms, evaluate teachers and principals and advise on support strategies. They suggest that securing this may require a political compact between teacher unions and government.

6 Deeper and more fundamental problems undermine sophisticated efforts to monitor and evaluate school and teacher performance (listed are: curriculum organisation, time on task, school dysfunctionality).

Here once again the supporting text provides interesting insights into what the committee learned from their interaction with those in the education system. They note that “the culture of teaching and learning has, for all intents and purposes, disappeared from especially rural and township schools” and that “Over and over again school leadership emerged as the critical force in transforming schools from dysfunction into productivity”.

7 The system of evaluating teachers and schools is still considerably immature, with the incapacity for self-scrutiny among many (though certainly not all) professionals.

The committee’s findings are that internal evaluation is unlikely to produce valid and reliable results. They identified a number of reasons for this, including:

- “solidarity”, which is the term that they use to describe the fact that teachers tend to become defensive and protective of colleagues when faced with what they consider to be external threats; and
- “collegiality” which accounts for the reluctance of teachers to criticise or judge a colleague or peer. In this regard they feel there is an urgent need for a “nation-wide strategy for a re-professionalisation of education provision”.

8 The issues of excessive complexity in existing

evaluation instruments is still not resolved inside the crowded ecology of evaluation, appraisal, and development policies, plans and processes.

The committee found that the array of monitoring and evaluation instruments in use (DAS, IQMS, WSE, PM, SIPs, SDPs, etc.) is not only complex and confusing but that they are used and interpreted in different ways in different provinces. There are also significant capacity differences between the provinces in terms of their ability to manage the processes involved.

9 Existing systems for evaluation and appraisal face a growing credibility crisis because of the functional breakdown between school/teacher evaluation and developmental follow-through actions to address identified problems effectively.

Interestingly, despite the problems listed above, the report indicates that the committee found a generally positive attitude amongst teachers and principals towards monitoring and evaluation using the IQMS and WSE. However, teachers and principals were less enamoured with the failure of districts and PEDs to provide the support promised and needed to address problems identified as part of the process.

10 The co-mingling of developmentally-focused evaluation and remuneration-focused appraisal compromises the validity of school or teacher performance.

Not surprisingly, the committee found that when evaluation was linked to remuneration and/or promotion prospects, it became skewed and the information provided was less reliable and valid. The committee therefore makes the strong recommendation for the separation of data used to make decisions about levels of teacher remuneration and data used to make decisions about developmental support. The committee recognised, however, that this is not achievable in practice and recommended therefore that the data used for remuneration purposes be managed at a national level, while data used for developmental purposes be managed at provincial level.

11 The evaluation instruments used do not monitor the impact of policy on teaching and learning; they monitor policy compliance.

Complaints from schools and teachers indicated that the monitoring instruments were not only cumbersome and time-consuming but that they were directed at ensuring compliance with policy rather than with the quality of teaching and learning and developmental issues related to these.

12 The failure to separate curriculum support and

Continued on page 12

advisory roles from curriculum monitoring roles constrains the credibility of both.

Like a number of the previous points, this issue once again highlighted the extent to which the monitoring of teachers and schools for compliance with policy creates obstacles for their support. The committee recognised that this would be an ongoing problem for any system because of the necessity of both roles.

13 There is an unspoken complicity between school and district that compromises the monitoring of IQMS educator performance.

The committee found that many district officials were reluctant to moderate or change teachers' initial scores for a number of reasons. These included:

- sympathy for the teachers because of the link between scores and remuneration
- the tensions that this created between teachers, schools and district offices
- sympathy for the context in which the school and district operated e.g. lack of resources, poverty
- officials feeling overwhelmed by policy demands and paper-work.

14 Leadership is critical at provincial and school level to make the best out of the complexity of evaluation and development efforts and instruments.

Based on their work with principals who manage to turn around struggling schools, the committee identified strong and credible leadership as being a key ingredient of successful intervention strategies. Part of this relates to the leader's ability to "manage fear and anxiety" and to "move teachers and stakeholders towards change".

Core Recommendations

The core recommendations of the committee extend to 10 pages and include a significant proportion of technical detail. Of particular interest is the opening sentence which reads: "The Ministerial Committee accepts that the decision to establish a National Education Evaluation and Development Unit has already been made, and that the task was, per the Brief, to advise on the character and content of the unit". Whether this continues to be true remains to be seen and will depend, one must assume, on the extent to which the new President, Cabinet and Minister of Education are supportive of the need for such a unit. We (SM&L) certainly hope that they will be.

Some of the core recommendations are listed below.

- That the unit functions as an independent, statutory body operating at arm's length from

government but with direct reporting authority to the Ministry of Education.

- That unit officials are given the "legal and political" authority to enter classrooms for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation.
- That the scope of the unit is the school system as a whole, including independent schools.
- That the unit is not responsible for the development and management of schools but for "accounting for the state of schools" and that it makes recommendations to the relevant education authorities about these.
- That the unit absorbs the WSE function of the national and provincial departments of education but that the IQMS continues to function as per the ELRC agreement and under the authority of the DoE.
- That the focus of the unit is limited to "accounting for the state of teaching and learning in South Africa and not on the evaluation of teachers for purposes of remuneration".
- Listed under the heading "Functions", the recommended core responsibilities of the unit include:
 - to recommend minimum performance standards for schools and to account for the attainment or otherwise of those standards
 - to identify, on a system-wide basis, the critical factors that inhibit or advance school improvement
 - to make recommendations for redressing problem areas that undermine school improvement
 - to propose appropriate sanctions to ensure that schools offer effective education to all learners
 - to provide schools with evidence-based advice on how to pursue school improvement in their particular contexts
- The unit should make learning outcomes (defined as the quantity and quality of learning achieved by every learner in the school) as the single most important measure of school effectiveness.
- Methods of monitoring and evaluating schools should include:
 - the observation of classroom practice
 - the assessment of teacher knowledge
 - the assessment of learner knowledge
 - the evaluation of school leadership practice

Continued on page 15

Leadership

Strategies for Turning around failing schools

With increasing political pressure being placed on the National and Provincial Education Departments to improve school results and with them in turn transferring this pressure to principals, we thought it might be helpful to look at the kinds of leadership strategies that have been shown to result in improved pupil performance.

South Africa's new President and his government have made it abundantly clear that they expect better performance from our public schools, with performance being measured in terms of retention levels, meaning fewer drop-outs and better pupil results, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Coupled with these demands have been threats to dismiss the principals of those schools identified as failing or dysfunctional where they are unable to bring about measurable improvement in terms of pupil performance. Whether this will happen in practice or be accepted by the unions, only time will tell.

If these threats are for real and not just political speech-making then those charged with the task of 'fixing' or turning around these failing schools have a real challenge on their hands. What strategies are there for principals who may find themselves as heads of schools of this kind and what about the teaching staff at these schools who may already be despondent and demoralised and where circumstances are difficult through no fault of their own? Further up the hierarchical chain of command there will also be curriculum advisors, circuit managers and district directors who will all need to take responsibility of some kind for the schools under their care and for whose results they must also ultimately be held accountable. This is certainly what should happen as it would be grossly unfair to make only the principal of the school the scapegoat for every failing school.

So what can be done?

Firstly it is important to understand that South Africa is not alone in facing this kind of a challenge. Arne Duncan, the new United States Secretary of Education in President Barack Obama's government, makes the following statement in an article published in *Education Week*¹

"My top priority as U.S. Secretary of Education is to make sure our K-12 students are prepared to succeed in college and the workforce. If we can do this, we'll be able to meet President Obama's ambitious but reachable goal that by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world."

The Secretary of Education goes on to list four "assurances" that the U.S. Department of Education will be focusing on to ensure that K-12 (Grade 12) students

are adequately prepared for success after they leave high school. The four assurances that he lists are:

- More rigorous K-12 standards that prepare students for success in college and the workforce.
- The creation of data systems that can track students from year to year to determine whether they are making the progress that they need to pass and to succeed at college or in the workforce.
- Ensuring that states plan to find effective teachers and make sure that those teachers are working in classrooms where they will have the greatest impact on students who need help most.
- Ensuring that states have plans to turn around their lowest-performing schools.

All this sounds very familiar to what we are hearing in this country at present.

The U.S. Secretary of Education goes on to note that there is a lack of policies and of political will to tackle the problem of the country's approximately 5 000 schools which are seriously underperforming and describes the 2 000 high schools included in this group as "dropout factories". To fix these problem schools the Federal Government plans to spend up to \$5 billion over the next two years.

Prior to his appointment as U.S. Secretary for Education, Arne Duncan was Head of Education for the Chicago Public School system, one of the largest in the USA. It was during this time that he gained some experience of dealing with the problem of underperforming schools and he suggests in the article that the Chicago model is one that other states should pursue. The most successful of these were what he calls "complete turnarounds". This was a fairly simple model in concept although almost certainly more difficult in practice. "We moved the adults out of the building, kept the children there, and brought in new adults. It was the best and fastest way to create a new school culture, one in which student achievement was the primary goal. All of the school's decisions – the length of the school day and school year, the choice of curriculum, the discipline code – revolved around that goal".

Continued on page 14

He admits that the process was not easy as it involved not simply a process of replacing staff but of finding the best people to replace them - people with the capacity for fixing schools that had been failing for decades. Once these new staff members had been found the new “school leaders” ran intensive training, for up to five weeks of the school holidays to prepare their new staff teams for the new school year. Improvement strategies included extending learning time for students and providing additional planning time for principals and teachers. These efforts brought immediate and sustained results in terms of attendance rates and pupil performance on standardised tests.

Secretary Duncan admits that this model may be difficult to replicate across the country and conceded that rural areas pose a particular problem. His suggestions for these schools include:

- greater use of online learning
- the training and recruitment of leaders to run low-performing rural schools
- extending the school day and the school year
- allocating teachers more time during the summer holidays and the school day to make it possible for them to work collaboratively in an effort to devise teaching strategies that will improve results
- rewarding teaching excellence and providing incentives to encourage the best teachers to work with the most challenging students

The Secretary also cautioned that the process of systemic school improvement was not something that can happen overnight. In Chicago they started small, turning around two schools in the first year. The number grew gradually in the following years and this growth was supported by the growth of NGOs which provided various forms of support for these improvement strategies.

It is interesting to compare these comments by the US’s Secretary for Education with recently published research findings in a monograph published by the HSRC which looked at the relationship between school leadership and pupil performance. The monograph, with the title *Managing to Learn: Instructional Leadership in South African Secondary Schools* reported on research undertaken at two hundred secondary schools in two provinces (Eastern and Western Cape) during the course of 2007 and is the first of its kind in South Africa to explore issues related to instructional leadership.³ The study looked to find answers to two important research questions:

- How are the curriculum and instruction managed across different kinds of secondary schools and in different social contexts?

- To what extent do specific management practices in terms of the management of the curriculum and instruction affect pupil achievement outcomes? In this regard the researchers endeavoured to find out if specific management practices were associated with improved student achievement gains over time. As has become the practice in South African education literature, the term “student gains over time” has been abbreviated to the acronym “SAGOT”.

Based on information gleaned from a preliminary review of the international and South African research literature related to the focus of this research, in this study the authors chose to concentrate on the principal’s management of the school as an organisation rather than his or her leadership traits. They also premised their study on the notion that effective management is more about creating the appropriate environment for teaching and learning rather than about having a direct impact on the curriculum and on instruction.

The general profile of the principals of the two hundred schools studied was that they were well qualified, male and with at least five years of teaching experience. They described their main activities – those that occupied the majority of their time - as school administration and the disciplining of pupils. In most instances the management of the curriculum and of instruction was dispersed across the school.

Although most of the study’s findings confirmed what the authors had learned from their literature search of earlier studies there were also some interesting new findings. The main findings of the study are as follows:

- 1 Variables which were significantly associated with student achievement gains over time (SAGOT)
 - 1.1 The extent to which the curriculum is completed
 - 1.2 The structuring of the school day for maximal student learning
 - 1.3 Effective management of LTSMs in the school
 - 1.4 Positive relations between staff members at the school
 - 1.5 Collaboration between teachers at the school
 - 1.6 Parental valuing of and support for education at the school
 - 1.7 The willingness of the SGB to assist in the school
 - 1.8 Whether the school has a plan for improving school results.
- 2 Variables which remain significant when the others are controlled

The authors, however, went further than this and used statistical methods to analyse the relationship





between each of these and SAGOT while controlling all other seven variables. From this analysis it emerged that there are three critical factors which have a significant link to SAGOT. These are:

- Curriculum coverage
- Parental valuing of and support for education at the school
- The willingness of the SGB to assist in the school.

The schools used in this study were all secondary schools and pupil performance was measured in terms of Senior Certificate results. This study confirms the findings of most other research findings on the important part that principals play in determining learner achievement outcomes at schools. The principal's role, however, is more about creating an enabling environment for the teaching and learning process. To do this, principals need to make sure that certain things happen in their schools. These include the following:

- 1 Ensuring that the curriculum is fully covered during the course of the year – in all classes and grades
- 2 Ensuring that pupils and teachers have the LTSMs that they need and that they are used
- 3 Structuring the school day to maximise learning. This could include ensuring that all lessons start and end on time and are not interrupted by intercom announcements or pupil ill-discipline; that teachers are in class teaching and that teachers do not waste lesson time on administrative matters or use lesson time for marking. Provision must be made in the school day for adequate breaks so that teachers and pupils can refresh themselves.
- 4 Setting aside time in the school timetable or after school if this is not possible, when teachers can meet in subject, grade and phase groups to plan their teaching and assessment.
- 5 Working with staff and the SGB to develop a school improvement plan with a focus on improving results. The plan should provide detailed specific strategies that will be used to improve results including the monitoring of teaching time, the provision of LTSM (textbooks) for every pupil and the use of these books, the regular assessment of pupils with feedback to them and their parents on how they are performing, and an analysis of the results of all pupils at least once every quarter.
- 6 A programme to increase parent involvement in the school which should include information – such as the findings of this research – about the

important contribution their interest can play in their child's academic success.

7 Encouraging the SGB to become more closely involved in the matters of the school that fall under their area of responsibility, including pupil discipline, school finance and funding and the need for parental support if pupils are to succeed.

8 More than anything else, however, the research points to the fact that it is principals who can make the biggest difference in terms of the success or failure of their schools. If principals do their jobs properly and take responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning and the achievement of their pupils, their schools will prosper; if they do not, their schools are most likely to fail. ■

References

¹ Arne Duncan, Start Over. Turnarounds should be the first option for low-performing schools. *Education Week* June 12 2009

² Ursula Hoadley and Catherine Ward, *Managing to Learn: Instructional Leadership in South African Secondary Schools*. HSRC Press, Cape Town (2009)

Final NEEDU Report: Part 2

[Continued from page 12](#)

- the capacity of school governing bodies
- the efficiency of district, provincial and national support

As part of its recommendations, the committee notes that the sheer size of the schooling system makes it impossible for it to monitor all schools even in a 3 to 5-year cycle and with optimal funding. It proposes that the unit phases in its work over a number of years and that phase 1 be directed at monitoring and evaluating 25% of weakest schools in all provinces.

One aspect of the recommendations which will be music to the ears of all teachers and principals is that the unit places a "high premium on reducing the administrative demands on teachers and school management".

In terms of cost, the committee estimated that the annual operating cost of a fully staffed unit would be of the order of R420m. ■

Tell us what you think.

Will the unit improve the quality of teaching and learning and are you in favour of the establishment of such a unit?

