

Management & Leadership

POLICY

LEADERSHIP

MANAGEMENT

GOVERNANCE

for South African Schools

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is published 10 times per year by Ednews. It is editorially and financially independent and it is not affiliated to any organisation. It seeks to provide the leaders of South African schools with current and relevant information on issues of policy, leadership, management and governance.

The final demise of C2005?

One hopes that Minister Motshekga's positive comments about the recommendations contained in the draft report of the task team established to review the implementation of the National Curriculum Statements indicate that she and her department are supportive of the recommendations contained in the document. Her support of those recommendations dealing with teacher and pupil portfolios is likely to be greeted with universal jubilation and a huge sigh of relief by principals and teachers, who have had to suffer the administrative burden associated with the keeping of portfolios. Any move away from the garbled complexity associated with Curriculum 2005 to a simpler model of textbooks, teaching and testing will be a massive step in the right direction for a school system that has been floundering. Simpler is always better, and if the Minister and her officials really want to make an impact, they need to treat the system to a big KISS. For those who don't know, KISS is the acronym for 'Keep It Simple, Stupid', a management approach based on the notion that simpler is better. The theory is that less complex systems are more efficient at achieving their outcomes than more complex systems are because they are easier to understand and there are fewer opportunities for things to go wrong. This is just the opposite of the implementation of Curriculum 2005 and its derivative, the National Curriculum Statement, which (although better) still involves too many complex and demanding procedures. We hope that when the Minister makes her promised statement towards the end of this month, she accepts most - if not all - of the recommendations of the task team. You can read about their recommendations on 13.

With most schools finalising their budgets as they read this, we bring you an article by Jorrie Jordaan which attempts to untangle what law and policy tell us about accountability and the designated roles and responsibilities of those individuals whose task it is to prepare the school's budget and to manage its financial affairs. Jorrie is the Deputy Principal of Hoërskool Kempton Park.

The city of New Orleans was devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. It was the USA's worst natural disaster with more than 80% of the city affected by the floodwaters. Now 4 years on, the city's education district has shown the greatest improvement of any district in the state of Louisiana in terms of the scholastic improvement of its pupils. The success in turning around their underperforming schools included some drastic measures but these seem to have had the desired impact. Are there lessons from the New Orleans experience for the education districts of this country as they struggle to produce the improvements that the government is demanding of them? Find out more about their strategies and their impact in "Turning around failing schools – lessons from New Orleans" on pp. 6.

Also in this edition we continue with the third article in our School Improvement Series.



Strategies for School Improvement (3)

Begin the conversation

How do you start to engage your staff, SGB and parents on issues relating to school improvement to ensure that you get their buy-in?

In this the third article in our series on school improvement strategies, we look at the strategies principals can use to get the SMT, the SGB, their staff and their communities talking about the benefits of improved pupil performance and the things that need to be done to achieve those improvements.

As we mentioned in the first article in this series, the success of any school improvement strategy depends on the leadership and commitment of the principal. If the principal does not believe she can make a difference and is not committed to making a difference, nothing will come of it. It is for this reason that in both the USA and in the UK, replacing the principal is one of the first steps that the authorities take in their effort to turn around underperforming schools. It is a tough but necessary decision because of the critical role that leadership plays in driving any change process. The principal needs to champion the cause and everything that she does and says must carry the stamp of her conviction that she can and will succeed in achieving the goals that have been set.

On being a champion

A report¹ prepared for the Sports Science and Technology Division of the United States Olympic Committee, a team of researchers from the University of North Carolina Applied Sport Psychology Laboratory identified 14 psychological characteristics which were common to the 10 Olympic champions they studied. The 10 athletes in the study represented 9 different Olympic sports, had on average competed in 2.4 Olympic Games each and had won between them a total of 32 Olympic medals (28 gold, 3 silver and 1 bronze). Among the characteristics listed are several which are necessary attributes for principals and others who wish to champion causes in their schools (the full list is published in a box elsewhere on this page.). These characteristics are:

- Mental toughness
- An ability to set goals
- An ability to cope
- Confidence

- High drive
- High optimism
- Intrinsic motivation
- A willingness to learn ("Coachability")
- Adaptive perfectionism (See the box on the adjacent page for an explanation)
- The ability to focus

What became clear from the interviews conducted with these Olympic champions was that they had set their own goals, that the standards that they set for themselves were high and that it was their own intrinsic motivation that drove them to work to achieve their goals. They were not goals and standards set by others, nor was their decision to pursue these goals driven by others. There are important lessons here for those in leadership positions within our schooling system who would like things to improve – set your own goals and

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Character traits of the 10 Olympic athletes studied

The Ability to focus
Mental toughness
Hope/ Goal setting ability
Sport intelligence
Ability to cope
Competitiveness
Confidence
Coachability
High drive
Intrinsic motivation
High optimism
Adaptive perfectionism
Automaticity: The ability to click into automatic performance
Emotional control: The ability to relax and reactivate.



make sure that the standards you set, your work ethic and your professionalism are exceptional because that is the way of a champion.

What is interesting about this research about the motivation of Olympic champions is that it resonates with some of the research findings about improving schools. The research that we are referring to shows that the principal and staff of those schools that show significant improvement in pupil performance hold the view that all pupils can succeed. It is on the basis of this view that they set about developing the strategy needed to make it happen. Translated into our current South African

..the principal and staff of those schools that show significant improvement in pupil performance hold the view that all pupils can succeed.

context, it suggested the need to for principals, district directors and their officials to use the following statement as their theme and basis for all school improvement efforts.

"We who work in this school/education directorate hold the view that all pupils can succeed and we are working to see that it happens."

The need for faith

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines faith variously as: "complete trust or confidence", "firm belief, especially without logical proof" and "duty or commitment to fulfil a trust, promise, etc". This is

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Perfectionists

The term 'perfectionist' is commonly used in schools to describe teachers and pupils who are particularly meticulous in the way in which they do their work and the standards that they set for themselves. Perfectionists are also frequently praised for their commitment and for the standards they set, while simultaneously being pitied for the unreasonable demands they make of themselves.

The standard definition of perfectionism² is "a disposition to regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable" and is considered to have a "uniformly deleterious effect on mental health and adjustment."

More recently, psychologists have classified perfectionists into one of two types. (There is a third type - the one to which most of us belong called non-perfectionists: people who set lower personal standards and do not get over anxious when they fail to meet these standards.) The two types of perfectionists as described by Hamachek³ are:

Adaptive perfectionists – individuals who are engaged in the "relaxed and careful" pursuit of activities that are evaluated in light of high but reasonable self-standards. The Olympic athletes used for the study described elsewhere on the page are examples of these.

Neurotic or maladaptive perfectionists - individuals who are immersed in the "tense and deliberate" pursuit of unreasonable expectations.

Adaptive perfectionists tend to derive pleasure from their efforts. They are individuals who set high personal

standards and are also highly organised, which makes it possible for them to meet these standards. Interestingly, in the case of students, they also perceive their parents to have moderate expectations of excellence and they are not overly concerned about mistakes, about parental criticism and about their ability to meet these expectations. In contrast, the Neurotic perfectionists, while also setting high personal standards, are less well organised in their approach to meeting these standards. They perceive their parents to have high expectations for excellence and are very sensitive about parental criticism. They are anxious about mistakes and have doubts about their ability to meet goals and expectations. They never believe that they will have done things sufficiently well to feel good about their achievements. Typically, the neurotic perfectionist is vulnerable to emotional disorders such as stress, depression and eating disorders.

References

Information based on material derived from KG Rice and DK Lapsley, Perfectionism, coping, and emotional adjustment, *Journal of College Student Development*, Mar/Apr 2001

¹ Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 1996 (as quoted in the original article)

² Ibid

Continued from page 3

exactly the kind of faith that you, as a principal, need to have in expressing your belief that all pupils can succeed. This because in doing so you are expressing your hope for all pupils under your care, and establishing your commitment to doing whatever it takes to ensure that this happens. The fact that it may be difficult or take a long time should not deter you or diminish your commitment to making it happen. It is with this kind of a faith that you need to start engaging your senior members of staff, SGB and community members in discussions about what you need to do to make it happen. Pose the question to them: "What do we need to do to make sure that every pupil at this school succeeds?" Do not let them fob you off with laughter or suggestions that the task is impossible. What you want to do is to get people talking about this as a possibility and get the conversation going about the kinds of things that need to be done. These kinds of conversations are also the start of the process of creating a vision of a better and more productive and successful school - a school that may enhance the reputation of all who learn and teach there.

Spreading the word

Initially, the kinds of conversations that you need to have as a principal are those of a salesperson. Your aim is to convince people that a better future is possible and that there are benefits for everyone from it. They need to be informal conversations to stimulate discussion and to set people thinking. The time will come when you will need to begin a more formal conversation about what needs to be done and how best to do it. Do not, however, move from the informal to the more formal processes of strategic planning, before you have managed to identify key members of your staff, SGB and the community who have come to believe like you that a better education is not only possible but is essential. These like-minded individuals will form the core of your school transformation team and they need to be chosen with care and also with sensitivity. It is important to remember when identifying these individuals that they are going to need to be the fellow champions of your cause. It is no good looking for people who simply agree with you because you are the boss. They need to be people who have their own views and who are willing to ask questions about things that they think are not right. More than anything else, however, they must be people who share your faith that all pupils can succeed and your commitment to ensuring that the pupils at the school

get the best possible education which the school can provide given the resources at its disposal.

Formalising the process

When talking to staff, SGB members and parents about school improvement, it is important to keep the conversation on track by feeding them information about the kinds of interventions that research has shown can make a difference. We have provided some information of this kind

in the previous article in this series and there is also plenty of material in back copies of *SM&L*. It is also worth consulting *The Handbook of School Management*² and *The Handbook for School Governors*³ which also contain information about school improvement strategies. The Wallace Foundation⁴ also provides access to a number of on-line publications dealing with educational leadership and school improvement strategies.

The time will come, however, when you will need to move from talking to developing the strategies and setting up the structures that are needed to move the process of school improvement from talk to action. The first step in this process is to introduce the concept into the formal school processes. This means placing it on the agenda of meetings of the School Governing Body and of the Senior Management Team. Before doing so you need to have a clear idea of the steps that need to be taken and the processes that need to be followed as you develop your strategy so that everyone involved understands what you are talking about and what their involvement will be. A basic outline of the process is given on the facing page and will form the basis of the next article in this series, dealing with the strategic planning process. ■

"What do we need to do to make sure that every pupil at this school succeeds?"

Reference

¹ D Gould, K Dieffenbach & A Moffett, *The Development of Psychological Talent in U.S. Olympic Champions*, (University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2001). Downloaded from <http://www.texasarchery.org/Documents/coaching/DevelopTalent.pdf>

² A Clarke, *The Handbook of School Management*, (Cape Town, Kate McCallum, 2007)

³ A Clarke, *The Handbook for School Governors*, (Cape Town, Kate McCallum, 2009)

⁴ The Wallace Foundation website address is <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/>

The strategic planning process

The strategic planning process involves the following steps

1 Preliminary processes

This is the phase when you:

- decide who will be included on the planning team
- decide on the processes you will use to inform and gather information from the staff, pupils, SGB, parents and community members
- decide on the timelines you will work to – the dates and times when things will be done, as well as the deadlines for their completion.

2 Information gathering

This is the phase when you gather the information that you will need to develop your plan. You will need information about:

- The values of staff, pupils, parents, the SGB and the community and what they think about the school and the work that it does
- The school's infrastructure
- The school's and community's resources and how these are used
- How the school functions
- The working environment of the school
- Pupil performance
- The level of support provided by the community, district and province

3 Devising the plan

During this phase you use the information you have gathered to gain a better understanding of your school as an organisation - how it functions, the challenges and obstacles that it faces and the opportunities that exist for improvement and future success. Based on the

information gathered in phase 2 and the discussion that you have you will need to:

- produce a brief written statement which describes your school, its values and the goals that you are striving to achieve.
- set and list the targets that you aim to achieve and the deadlines for achieving these targets
- develop the strategies that you will use to achieve these targets
- list the actions that need to be taken as part of these strategies, together with the timelines for these actions and the people who will be responsible for ensuring the targets set are achieved.

4 Finalising and formalising the plan

Once the team responsible for developing the plan has finalised its work, the plan needs to be presented to staff, parents, pupils, the SGB and community members for their comment and to gain their support for the proposed plan of action. The plan may need to be amended and possibly further refined based on their comments and constructive suggestions.

5 Endorsing the plan

Once finalised, the amended strategic plan needs to be taken to the SGB for formal approval. Once approved, it becomes the school's official improvement strategy and should be used to guide all future decision-making and actions. Copies of the strategic plan need to be made and distributed to all involved in the process, as well as to any other key stakeholders who may have an interest in the school.

Reference

Based on information provided in *Guidelines for School Strategic Planning 2009*, School Workforce Reform & School Improvement Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Melbourne, Australia 2005)

Meeting of the Council of Education Ministers

The meeting of the Council of Education Ministers is a meeting of the Minister of Basic Education, the MEC's for Education for each of the provinces and senior departmental staff. Regular meetings take place on a monthly basis.

The media statement from the October meeting, held on 1/2 October, suggests that most of the meeting was devoted to discussion on the findings and recommendations of the task team, established by the Minister in July this year, to investigate the nature of challenges experienced in the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement. The draft report of the task team was released last month. There is more about the report and the key findings of the review committee

Minister Motshekga is committed to making an announcement by the end of October ... "about measures that will bring immediate relief for teachers"

on page 11. According to the media statement, the recommendations of the task team and their implications will now be considered by the Department of Basic Education, pending a decision on the way forward. Minister Motshekga is committed to making an announcement by the end of October on the basis of these deliberations "about measures that will bring immediate relief for teachers". Some of these measures will apparently be implemented from the beginning of 2010, while others may only be implemented following further planning and consultation.

Two other matters that were discussed that have important implications for schools both relate to the funding of schools. The first concerns the capping of school fees and there is good news and a relief for those schools which are still able to charge school fees, as the Council did not support the capping of school fees. The second issue concerns the granting of compensation to schools that offer fee exemptions – we suspect this applies to every state school that charges school fees. In this case the news is also positive as the Council approved for public comment its proposal for the granting of compensation for schools that offer exemption. This means that the Minister will publish a document setting out the proposed model in a *Government Gazette* and will invite public comment on the proposal. The final decision on the matter will depend on the nature of the comments

that are received and the extent to which these influence the Minister's decision on the matter.

Other matters discussed and listed in the media statement include a report on the state of readiness for the 2009 NSC examinations. There are 588 000 full-time learners enrolled this year, which is much the same as the figure for 2008, when 588 643 candidates were registered. The enrolment of candidates is complete and the date for the final submission of school-based assessment is 15 November. The NSC examination results will be released on 7 January, which means that for the first time in many years principals will be able to relax between Christmas and New Year and will not have to worry about returning to the district offices and schools to collect, check and provide their candidates with copies of their results.

The final matter listed in the media statement was a comment on the audit reports of the DoE and the 9 PEDs. Four of the provinces (Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Western Cape) received unqualified audit reports implying that the auditor general was completely satisfied with the financial statements presented by these provinces. Three PEDs (Gauteng, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga) received qualified reports which indicates that there were some shortcomings or areas that the AG was unhappy about in the financial statements. Of the

remaining two provinces, one (Northern Cape) received a disclaimer which means that the AG was unable to determine from the financial statements of that province whether or not they were a true reflection of the state of the department's finances, and the other (Eastern Cape) received an adverse opinion, which means that the AG believed that the financial statement did not reflect the financial position of that department. Although this is on aggregate an improvement over previous years – in the 2006/7 financial year only one province (Gauteng) had an unqualified report and in the 2007/2008 financial year

there were three provinces with unqualified reports – it is a matter which should be of grave concern to the Minister and the MECs as political heads of these provincial education departments, given the large amounts of money involved and the lamentable state of some of our schools.

Provincial Education Department Audit Reports for 2008/2009 Financial Year

Eastern Cape	Adverse
Free State	Unqualified
Gauteng	Qualified
Kwazulu-Natal	Unqualified
Limpopo	Qualified
Mpumalanga	Qualified
North West	Unqualified
Northern Cape	Disclaimer
Western Cape	Unqualified

Curriculum

Is Curriculum 2005 finally dead?

If the Minister of Education approves the recommendations of the task team she established in July this year to review the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement it may well be the final nail in the coffin of what was left of C2005 which is just as well because it was beginning to stink a little.

The task team commissioned by Minister Motshekga in July this year to review the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) recently presented its draft report to the Minister for her consideration. The report was discussed at the October meeting of the Council of Education Ministers (CEM). According to the media release following that meeting, the minister has committed to releasing a statement on the basis of the report at the end of October, once her officials have had a chance to study the implications of the recommendations more thoroughly. The media release suggests, however, that this statement will include an announcement "about measures that will bring immediate relief for teachers".

SM&L has obtained a copy of the draft report and we have listed below a largely verbatim transcript of the recommendations which comprise Chapter 9 of the report. It is important to note, however, that these are recommendations in a draft report to the Minister. The final report, when released, may include amendments made as a result of an interrogation of the draft report and its recommendations by the Minister and senior officials of the DoE.

On the basis of the recommendation listed below, however, we believe the report represents good news to education in this country: a return from the cloud cuckooland world of Bill Spady to the basics of what has been shown to work in practice and what is possible, given the educational realities of this country.

The recommendations

Five year plan

A coherent, clear, simple Five Year Plan to Improve Teaching and Learning across the schooling system needs to be developed and adhered to; it must be clearly and widely communicated to the nation, and the improvement of learner performance must be its central theme. (Recommended implementation date (RID): October 2009)

Streamline and clarify policies

- The current set of National Curriculum Statement documents should be rationalized into a set of single, coherent documents per subject or learning area per phase from Grade R to Grade 12. Discrepancies in and repetition of information in the different National

Curriculum Statement documents (especially the National Curriculum Statement, Learning Programme Guidelines and Subject Assessment Guidelines) must be resolved. These new documents need to be made available to all schools, district offices and to parents via print and digital media. In other words, everyone should have access to the national curriculum in the form of a comprehensive document. The documents should be prepared for September 2010, for implementation at the beginning of 2011. The Foundations for Learning documents, and the Subject Assessment Guidelines at FET will provide useful starting points for production of the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy. (RID: October 2009 to September 2010, for implementation January 2011)

- The new document should be titled Curriculum and Assessment Policy. The documents should be prepared with a minimum number of design features.
- The new Curriculum and Assessment Policy documents must consist of curriculum and assessment statements which are clear, succinct, unambiguous, measurable, and based on essential learning as represented by subject disciplines. Design features of OBE, especially learning outcomes and assessment standards, should not be featured in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy documents, and should become part of the General Aims of the curriculum, similar to the Critical and Developmental Outcomes. The documents should be organized around the knowledge (content, concepts and skills) to be learnt, recommended texts, recommended pedagogical approaches and assessment requirements. The last-mentioned will specify the level at which content, concepts and skills are to be taught, and how and when they should be assessed.
- Development of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy documents should be overseen by the same persons from Grade R to Grade 12, to ensure coherence and smooth transition across phases, especially from Grade 3 to 4 and from the GET to FET phases. Experts in learning areas and subjects at the different levels should be designated to write the documents. The current Foundations for

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Learning campaign, popular and helpful for teachers, must be incorporated into the Curriculum and Assessment Policy.

- The current curriculum has come in for severe criticism for knowledge gaps, especially in terms of the specification of content to be taught. These gaps must be addressed in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy documents. In particular, the Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase curriculum needs content and assessment specification.
- The documents should be thoroughly edited for consistency, plain language and ease of understanding and use. Presentation of what teachers are expected to teach must be standardized and easy to retrieve from the Curriculum and Assessment Policy document.
- The Foundations for Learning, which has addressed many of the current problems with the National Curriculum Statement documents, must be implemented in all schools in 2010.
- Where appropriate, teachers should be given guidance and support in the documents on how to teach specific content / concepts and skills, particularly in areas of difficulty. Clarity on the appropriateness of certain methodologies, such as group-work, should be provided.
- An annual appendix for elective content must be issued to schools by September of the preceding year for which the content and assessment requirements are prescribed.
- Separate, special guideline documents for ELSEN and for multi-grade classes will be developed, aligned to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy documents.

- A strong campaign should launch these new consolidated documents in order to clarify the status of the documents in relation to other documentation available up to now. The documents should have the status of policy. (RID: October 2010 to March 2011)
- There must be clarification of the roles and responsibilities at national, provincial and district levels with respect to curriculum production, dissemination and monitoring and support of implementation to ensure that reinterpretation and layering of policy is avoided. (RID: October 2010)

Clarify the role of subject advisors

- Subject advisors' roles as school-based subject experts must be affirmed. A job description and performance plan for subject advisors that focus their work on the delivery, implementation and moderation of the curriculum, and offering subject specific support to teachers must be tabled. (RID: End 2009).

- The role of subject advisors as school level moderators must be asserted. Cluster meetings for moderation purposes should be limited to an annual meeting for teachers, focused on sharing information and considering other schools' examination papers and marking memoranda. (RID: End 2009)

Teacher workload and Administrative burden

- The three levels of planning must be rationalized and duplication in the process must be addressed. Each teacher should have a single Teacher File for this purpose. The Teacher file should consist of an annual work schedule, assessment plan, formal assessment tasks and memoranda, textbook to be used, and a record of each learner's marks per formal assessment task. Planning should indicate sequence, pace and coverage. Lesson plan development should be at the teacher's discretion and teachers should be encouraged to use good textbooks for planning purposes. At the school level, the teacher-developed year plans and assessment plans need to be pulled together to form a comprehensive year plan for the school. There must be no duplication of administrative work. A consolidated record of learners' marks that pulls together individual teachers' marks must be compiled at school level. (RID: January 2010)
- Responsibility for oversight of the curriculum needs to be centralized within the DOE. As of September 2009, circulars related to any recommended changes to the national curriculum, its implementation or assessment should be made only once a year. No changes may be made after September for the following year. All changes need to be passed through the CMC and HEDCOM, and issued through a DG circular. (RID: September 2009)

Assessment

- A consistent set of terminology and grading descriptors for Intermediate, Senior and FET phases must be used to ensure consistency and clarity in the system. The current set of Grade 7 to 12 percentages and codes should be used from grades 4 to 12. (RID: January 2010)
- In Grades 3 and 6 there should be regular, external, systemic assessment of Mathematics and Home Language and the testing must be extended to First Additional Language (English) for all learners in these grades.
- CTAs should be replaced with annual national testing for all Grade 9 learners in Mathematics, Home Language and First Additional Language (English) to ensure successful transition to the FET phase.





Progression from Grade 9 to 10 will be based on current policy, requiring a 40% pass mark in Home Language; 40% pass mark in English First Additional Language, and a 50% pass mark in Mathematics. (RID: 2011)

- Promotion and progression requirements must be clarified and finalized (for 2011), and be aligned with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy documents.
- The number of projects as an assessment requirement must be reduced to one project per year per learning area. A range of potential projects should be issued by the DOE, and should be carefully scaffolded in order to assist teachers and learners in meeting the requirements. (RID: January 2010)
- Learner portfolios as separate, formal compilations of student assessment tasks must be discontinued. All learners' work must be kept in their books or files, to be at school for moderation purposes when required. The administrative load associated with compiling assessment requirements for learner portfolios will thus be reduced. (RID: January 2010).
- Clear, simple and subject-specific assessment guidelines should be included in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy to replace complex and generic assessment requirements.
- The balance between year marks and exams should be 50% year mark and 50% examination mark for grades 4-9, and 25% year mark and 75% examination mark for grades 10 to 12.

Transition and overload in the Intermediate Phase

- The number of learning areas in the Intermediate Phase should be officially reduced to six, and should be reflected in the statements of learning and in the assessment requirements. The following are suggested:
 - Home Language 20%
 - First Additional Language (English) 20%
 - Mathematics 20%
 - Natural Science (including aspects of Technology) 13%
 - Human and Social Science 13%
 - Life Orientation (including aspects of Arts and Culture) 14%
- The teaching of English as a First Additional Language must be given priority, both in the provision of appropriate texts and in clear specification for teaching mother tongue and English as the language of teaching and learning in parallel. English must be taught from Grade 1 and this should be policy. This

will support a smoother transition from Grade 3 to 4. (RID: January 2010)

LTSM

- A national LTSM catalogue needs to be developed and the approved textbooks need to be aligned with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy. Textbooks on the national catalogue need to be of excellent quality, and offer appropriate content and methodology, as well as assessment support.
- Mechanisms and guidelines need to be developed so that the DOE is able to manage textbook pricing effectively while offering teachers a range of high quality textbooks to suit their contexts and needs.
- The useful role of textbooks and other LTSM needs to be communicated to teachers. Teachers should be encouraged to use nationally approved textbooks and teachers' guides, for both planning and classroom teaching, to ensure that the curriculum is covered in the year (supporting appropriate sequencing and pacing).
- Control of textbook acquisition and distribution for both Section 20 and Section 21 schools should be allocated to provinces.
- Each learner from Grade 4 to Grade 12 must have his/her own textbook for each learning area / subject. The DOE must issue guidelines to schools of formal procedures for textbook retrieval, based on current best practice.

Teachers and training

In-service teacher training should be targeted to where it is most needed. Training needs to be subject-specific.

- Principals, HODs, District and provincial support staff need in-depth training on curriculum content and assessment requirements to be able to support teachers effectively.
- Higher Education Institutions should be required to align their teacher training programmes with the national curriculum policies.
- All training, in all contexts, must be underpinned by the principle that teachers should be actively teaching for a minimum number of hours a day, every day. This should be determined and enforced by the DOE as soon as possible.

School reform

Turning around failing schools – Lessons from New Orleans

Four years after the devastation caused by hurricane Katrina, the city's school children have shown greater scholastic improvement than any other school district in the State.

On 29 August 2005, New Orleans, an American city in the state of Louisiana, recognised by many as the birthplace of jazz, was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The city lies at the mouth of the Mississippi River, on the Gulf of Mexico. The force of the hurricane and the floodwaters it created damaged the barriers meant to protect the city from the sea. The result was catastrophic, with more than 80% of the city under water at the height of the flooding. It was the USA's most costly natural disaster, killing more than 1 600 people, displacing about 1 million more and destroying 200 000 homes. Despite this, in the four years since the catastrophe, the city's school children have shown a greater level of scholastic improvement than any other district in the state, according to a report published in *Education Week*¹.

According to the report:

- The percentage of failing schools is down significantly
- Pupil test scores are up in every grade and subject
- The 10th Grade proficiency rate has improved from 39% to 58%
- Senior graduation rates (equivalent to passing our NSC examinations) have improved from 79% - 89%
- Grade 8 English proficiency has improved from 26% to 42% (The authors note that this needs to be seen in the context of an improvement of just 3% between 1999 and 2005).
- The improvements have been made despite the fact that there is now a higher percentage (84%) of poor pupils and that many pupils missed months of school as a result of the disaster

The authors of the article note that these improvements should not be seen as a necessary consequence of the disaster and/or as a result of work that was undertaken to restore the city's

infrastructure and school system following the disaster. They are rather a result of reform initiatives that were launched prior to the disaster and it is these approaches and the strategies adopted which are worth considering as we battle with the challenges of improving and reforming our own underperforming districts and schools.

The reform initiative in New Orleans was shaped by four key strategies according to the authors:

- School accountability legislation was enacted which placed 'failing' schools under the control of a separate governing entity called the Recovery School District.
- New schools were established as "Charter" schools and were rigorously screened to ensure quality. (For more about Charter schools turn to page 8. Ed.)
- "An unequivocal embrace of parent choice" for all schools. In practical terms this meant that parents could apply to enrol children at the school of their choice and that there were no defined feeder zones for schools which have been the norm in public education in the USA until recently.
- Schools were staffed with "mission-aligned, talented educators".

It is the authors' contention that the creation of the Recovery School District (RSD) was the most significant contributor to the success of the school improvement initiative. Recovery in this instance refers to the recovery of schools from "academic failure" and not from the effects on Hurricane Katrina.

Essentially the Recovery School District served as a separate independent school district established to take on underperforming schools and to manage whatever processes were needed to achieve acceptable levels of performance in terms of pupil achievement. The identified schools were transferred from their districts to the Recovery School District. While other school

Essentially the Recovery School District served as a separate independent school district established to take on underperforming schools and to manage whatever processes were needed to achieve acceptable levels of performance in terms of pupil achievement.

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districts were responsible for schools operating in a particular geographical area, the Recovery School District was essentially a 'virtual' district, controlling a group of schools which were identified by their incapacity. The control the RSD assumed of these schools included control of the school buildings, pupils and funding. These schools no longer fell under the control of their local district and school board and were exempt from their policies, procedures and contracts. Teachers and other staff employed by the school or district were not necessarily transferred with the school to the RSD. (In the USA teachers in public schools are typically employed by their school district or school board and their conditions of employment are negotiated by their unions with these bodies.) The RSD was freed from these constraints, which made it possible for the RSD to attract better teachers by offering improved salaries and/or better conditions of employment, as well as to use performance-based employment contracts. This freedom to act came with additional levels of accountability and as the authors note, helped to eliminate the "blame game". The onus was on schools to perform and if pupils did not perform, it was the "adults in the building" who would be held accountable for this failure. In most of the schools the principals

The onus was on schools to perform and if pupils did not perform, it was the "adults in the building" who would be held accountable for this failure.

were given the autonomy to select and promote their own staff but were also held accountable for the performance of their staff. As the authors note: this "freedom, combined with the need to perform, resulted in a 'laser-like focus' on teacher quality".

Besides the introduction of the "Recovery School District" concept, there were a number of other initiatives which contributed to the general improvement in school and pupil performance and which were to an extent complimentary to the RSD concept. These included, as has been mentioned earlier, the abolishment of attendance zones (defined feeder areas which prescribe which public school pupils must attend based on the location of their place of residence). Not only were attendance zones abolished - giving parents the right to send their children to the school of their choice - but the schools were required to provide transportation to and from school, no matter where the child lived. NGOs assisted parents in identifying the most suitable school for their child(ren) by publishing information guides about all schools. These and other NGOs also assisted by coordinating the enrolment

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SM&L Comment

The two articles on this and the facing page tell the stories of two innovative and successful approaches that have been adopted by districts and schools in the USA as a means of improving pupil outcomes within the public school system. There are lessons to be learned from what has happened in New Orleans and from the "charter" school movement. Perhaps it is time for our state school system to follow the US example and to allow provinces and even districts to experiment with our current model public schools and the way in which they are funded, staffed and monitored. There has been talk of giving the better-performing schools greater financial freedom and more say in the selection and appointment of staff. This may be a good start, provided that we take note of some of research findings of the factors which have influenced the successes and failures of charter schools. The legislation and policies which govern these processes will need to create an enabling environment if schools of this kind are to flourish. There has also been talk, in the Western Cape at least, of public - private partnerships. The private sector has a vested interest in education and is forever lamenting the fact that our public schools are not producing sufficient individuals with the kinds of skills that employers seek in their employees. Business and industry would be more likely to commit to supporting public schools if they knew that schools were delivering matriculants with better skills and a more positive attitude to the world of work.

Maintaining the status quo will take us nowhere, particularly if the more vociferous teacher unions are allowed to dominate discussions about policy issues, staff appointments, the curriculum, and the recruitment, training and professional development of teachers. Their obstreperous approach to performance monitoring and school improvement efforts in some education districts and schools has made the process unworkable there. Despite the supposed commitment of their leaders to a new era of cooperation, the situation in the majority of schools where these unions dominate remains unchanged and the children and the country suffer as a consequence of this. Can this be changed?

Innovation

Charter Schools

The Charter school movement in the USA is an innovative approach to public (state) schooling. Charter schools have greater independence than other state schools and are under contract ("charter") to the state to provide certain minimum levels of schooling in return for state funding.

In 1991, Minnesota became the first state in the US to pass a Charter school Law. A "charter" is essentially another name for a contract; and "Charter" schools are schools which are under contract to the State which, in return for providing the charter schools with a certain level of funding based on their pupil enrolment, requires them to provide a certain minimum predetermined standards of schooling. Conceptually the idea is to provide a free-market model within the public education system – the thinking being that greater autonomy will make it possible for individual schools to become more market orientated, and therefore responsive to the needs of the community that they serve. Those who supported the charter school concept believed that charter schools would be better run and would produce better results in terms of pupil outcomes than their non-charter public school equivalents. The legislation that established the former Model C schools attempted to do much the same kind of thing, although the reason for the establishment of those schools was very different. It is important to note that charter schools are not independent (private) schools. They are considered to be public schools. The USA also has a strong independent school movement.

There are currently approximately 4 600 charter schools in the USA, with charter school movements in most (but not all) of the states. When the charter school movement began, there was the expectation from those who supported the concept that they would not only become more innovative in terms of their teaching and the way they were run but that their performance in terms of pupil results in standardised tests would outstrip those of their less independent public school peers. This has not been the case and although there are many charter schools that are excellent, evidence from research is inconclusive about whether charter schools as a group have delivered on their promise.

The Centre for Educational Reform (CER), a Washington-based independent advocacy group, recently produced a report¹ on charter schools, analysing their results on a state by state basis. The analysis was done in this way because in the USA it is the states which control education and which must pass

the legislation necessary for the establishment of charter schools. One of the main findings of the CER report is that charter schools are successful and outperform their public school peers in states where the laws governing their establishment and their performance are strong. This is because in these states the law gives charter schools greater operational independence while establishing clear and unambiguous standards in terms of their "charter". In these states, charter schools are held accountable and are required to meet certain pre-determined standards for pupil performance. Those that do not meet the standards set out in their "charter" are initially cautioned and then, should they continue to underperform, simply closed down.

A total of 5 250 schools have opened since the establishment of the first charter schools. Of these, 657 have closed. The reasons given for the closure by 41% of this group were financial difficulties as a result of mismanagement, and/or declining pupil numbers. The next highest reason for closure was mismanagement (27%) followed by academic underperformance (14%). It is the 14% of school closed for their academic failure that best demonstrates how the charter system is meant to work. These schools were unable to produce the level of pupil performance – the scores in standardised tests and examinations that were demanded by their charter – and were closed down because of this. Put differently, this translates to 86% of all charter schools meeting their academic obligations in terms of their charter. This suggests that on this measure at least, charter schools have been a successful innovation. The main findings of CER report are that charter schools are:

- "outpacing" their public school peers with fewer resources and in the face of tremendous obstacles.
- making notable gains in pupil achievement
- serving a diverse pupil population in urban, suburban and rural settings

..the law gives charter schools greater operational independence while establishing clear and unambiguous standards in terms of their "charter"

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Management

Accountability and the management of public school finances

Jorrie Jordaan, Deputy Principal of Hoërskool Kempton Park, attempts to unravel the mystery of who is actually responsible and who should be held accountable for the finances of a public school.

Some school leaders have been in the dark concerning school finances since 1994, when self management in schools was implemented. According to Van Rooyen¹ the South African Education system has undergone major changes since 1994, and some of the successes include the improvement of access to schooling for poor learners and an increase in the State's contribution to the poor schools. Schools' budgets are now equal to those of small businesses, and schools must be financially managed as if they are businesses. Few principals received training in the management of school finances before 1994, and the extra burden of financial management made it increasingly difficult for them to manage their schools effectively. At present the Department of Education is in the process of providing training for principals through the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) courses, where financial aspects are addressed. Some schools have identified financial management as a problem area, and have employed people with financial expertise to help in this regard. Very little has been written on the management of school finance from a South African perspective.

While the implementation of the South African Schools Act (SASA) addressed the management of schools, only a few financial aspects are addressed in the Act. In an effort to address this problem some provincial departments have drafted guidelines regarding the management and control of the schools' finances. Newspaper headlines such as "Struggling schools owe R196 000 for electricity", "The worst headmaster in the country" and "School fees wrangle in court" emphasize the need for better financial control in schools, and that the necessary procedures must be implemented to ensure such control.

The role of the principal, the SGB and the State

What is the role of the principal, the governing body and the state, accordingly to legislation?

Principal

The SASA states clearly in Section 16(3) that the professional management of a public school must be undertaken by the principal under the authority of the Head of Department.

According to the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) published in General Notice 222 of 1999 the principal is accountable for the professional management of a public school.

School Governing Body (SGB)

The interests of the parents in public schools is vested with their elected representatives on the SGB. The SGB are elected in terms of section 28 of the SASA.

Section 36 of the SASA states that a SGB of a public school must take all reasonable measures within its means, to supplement the resources supplied by the State in order to improve the quality of education provided by the school to all learners at the school.

The State

Providing education in public schools is the responsibility of the state as defined in Section 34 of the SASA:

"(1) The State must fund public schools from public revenue on an equitable basis in order to ensure the proper exercise of the rights of learners to education and the redress of past inequalities in education provision."

Most education systems make a distinction between school policy-making, which is the responsibility of the SGB, and operational management, which is the preserve of the principal. The SASA goes beyond such general guidance to make what appears to be a clear statement of the respective roles of the SGB and what it calls 'professional management'. According to Bush and Heystek², the SGB's responsibilities are extensive and appear to exclude only matters relating to teaching and learning during the school day, the purchase of educational supplies and the operational management of personnel and finance.

What are the rights and tasks of the school principal in managing the school's finances?

As noted earlier, the SASA makes it clear that the professional management of a public school is the task of the school principal. Van der Blank³ defines school management as the day-to-day administration and

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organisation of teaching and learning at the school and the performance of departmental responsibilities that are prescribed by law. Feddas⁴ is of the opinion that the role of the school principal, as a representative of the Department of Education, is limited to the management of the professional people (teachers) responsible for curriculum matters.

According to the South African Schools Amendment Act No.31 of 2007, the school principal is responsible to the department of education for public funds that are allocated to the school by the DoE, for "LTSM", textbooks supplied by the Department and the maintenance of buildings and resources which are the property of the school. In the findings of the High Court case of Schoombee vs the Mpumalanga Department of Education⁶ it was clear that the school principal is not accountable to the Provincial Department of Education for private funds because these funds are not assets of the Department. The concept that the school SGB is responsible to the community concerning school funds is also not correctly interpreted by departmental officials, school principals or school governing bodies.

What are the rights and tasks of the school SGB in managing the school finances?

According to Clarke⁷ it is the SGB that is responsible for the management of the school's finances, and that it is generally accepted that the daily execution of these tasks is normally delegated to the principal and staff. The way that the school principal is involved in the daily function of the management of finances will depend on the size of the school. Big schools with large budgets usually employ an individual with a financial background to manage their finances. In smaller schools the finances are usually managed by the school principal or a senior staff member.

SGB's Duties

Financial accountability is probably the most important responsibility of the SGB. According to the SASA, the SGB's duties include:

- Preparing of a budget (Section 38 (1))
- Presenting the budget at the annual general meeting to the parents for approval (Section 38(2))
- Determining the school fees (Section 39)
- Enforcement of payment of school fees (Section 41)
- Keeping of financial records and statements of the school (Section (42)
- Appointing an auditor (Section 43(1))

Legal responsibilities of the principal

What are the legal responsibilities of a school principal in the management of school finances?

Some of the school principals with whom interviews were conducted were unsure of the legislative prescriptions, as were some SGB members. The school principal's authority should be stipulated by the school financial policy; for example signature authority on cheques, etc. The school principal needs also to be involved from the planning phase of the budget, the drafting of the budget and fundraising plans, to the control of the expenditure.

Legal responsibilities of the SGB

What are the legal rights of the SGB in the management of school finances?

In terms of SASA the SGB has legal responsibilities that cannot be changed. These responsibilities include, for example, the drafting of a budget. The SGB is required to estimate the school fees that will be received, to decide how these should be allocated, and must control the budget. The SGB is responsible for ensuring that school fees are paid and must deal with applications for school fee exemptions.

In terms of the financial management of a school, the following responsibilities of the SGB should be emphasized:

- The functions allocated in terms of Section 21 of SASA (if the school has Section 21 status)
- The establishment and administration of a school fund in terms of Section 37 of the schools Act;
- Their responsibility to determine and charge school fees and to enforce the payment of school fees, in accordance with Sections 39, 40 and 41 of SASA.
- Their responsibility to appoint a person registered as an accountant and auditor in terms of the Public Accountants and Auditors Act, 1991 (Act No. 80 of 1991), to audit the records and financial statements of the school in terms of section 43 of SASA;
- The need to function in accordance with the SASA, and the school's constitution, and to ensure that the welfare of the learners at the school is being promoted.
- The need to ensure the school is able to meet all its financial obligations.





The role of the principal

How do school principals see their role in handling the school's finances?

Some school principals believe that they are responsible for the handling of the school's finances and consider themselves to be the accounting officer of the school. In the court case involving of Schoombee⁸ previously referred to, the court ruled that it is the SGB that is accountable for the school's finances and not the school principal. School principals may be delegated the responsibility of the day-to-day management of the school finances and the principal is then accountable to the SGB for the proper management of this duty. The day-to-day function of the school's finances may also be handled by a registrar or financial officer employed by the school to whom this task must be delegated by the SGB.

The role of the SGB

How do SGB members see their role in handling the school finances?

The SGB representatives, elected by the parents, are accountable for the school's finances. The Treasurer of the SGB is required to act as chairperson of the financial committee, and to monitor the handling the school's finances in terms of national and provincial legislation and policy.

To summarise

Although principals and school governing bodies do not always agree on who is accountable for a school's finances, and especially who is the accounting officer of the school. It was clear from my research that school

principals are unsure, as was shown in the High Court case involving the Mpumalanga Department of Education and Schoombee, of what is required of them. School principals need to support and give advice to the SGB in managing the finances of the school. The SGB may delegate the day-to-day handling of the finances to the school principal but remains accountable for the school's finances to the school, the school community and the Provincial Department of Education. ■

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Charter schools

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The CER report is rather at odds with another report produced by Stanford University's Centre for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO)² which found that there was "wide variance in the quality of the nation's several thousand charter schools with, in aggregate, students in charter schools not faring as well as students in traditional public schools". Although the report acknowledged that there was strong demand from parents and local communities for more charter schools, it found that while 17% of charter schools showed greater improvement in pupil performance than more traditional public schools, in 37% the improvement was not as good as those of their public school counterparts and that in 46% of charter schools there was little or no difference between their performance and that of traditional public schools. One of the other

interesting findings of the research was that students from low-income families performed better than their peers of similar socio-economic status at traditional public schools, as did pupils whose mother tongue was not English ("English Language Learners"). ■

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Turning around failing schools

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process, helping oversubscribed schools and parents making applications to these schools and dealing with the choices and complexities of an open enrolment process of this kind.

Charter schools, which have been considered by some in the USA to be a threat to the public school system, have been embraced by the state of Louisiana which has set up a rigorous screening process to ensure that individual charter schools, once established, meet the standards they demand. Strong monitoring and accountability measures have also been put in place to ensure that charter schools continue to perform. They are required to meet specific performance standards by year 5 in terms of their contracts. Once established, charter schools have the use of the school buildings (many charter schools were formerly public schools which have converted to "charter" status) and are provided with per-pupil funding in the same way as are public schools. They may also choose to access the transport, food services and special education support services of the public school system on a cost-shared basis where they pay the costs of their pupils. Sixty percent of pupils now attend charter schools and charter

and non-charter public schools now have autonomy over budgets and staffing. Funding for schools is on a per-pupil basis (i.e. based on school enrolment).

Perhaps the most interesting and probably the most challenging aspect from a South African state school perspective is that in New Orleans there is no longer a collective bargaining agreement or a city-wide salary schedule. One wonders if this is not the magic bullet for school improvement. What if a select group of underperforming schools in this country were placed under the control of a Recovery School District with similar powers to that of the RSC of New Orleans? What if the RSD were to be given the freedom to fill posts with the principals and teachers of their choosing, attracted by suitably competitive salaries and the chance to show that good leadership and exceptional teaching can make the difference that research findings suggest? It is an experiment that we believe is worth trying, given the current dire state of many of our public schools. There could be lessons in it for everyone but would the unions permit it and do the politicians have the guts to try it?



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