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Supporting best practices to improve teaching and learning outcomes in challenging, under-resourced and disadvantaged contexts.

The School Support Model

Supporting the Department of Basic Education to improve school functionality, curriculum leadership and management, teaching practices and learner results in disadvantaged, under-resourced and under-performing schools

Summary of trends 2008 - 2010

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The School Support Model makes a difference where it matters most

Pearson Southern Africa's Maskew Miller Longman Foundation is an independent Educational Trust established in 2007 to support best practices to improve teaching and learning outcomes in challenging, under-resourced and disadvantaged contexts in South Africa. Since launching its School Support Project in 8 Primary Schools and 6 High Schools in 2008, the Foundation has developed a successful model that has enabled disadvantaged, under-resourced and underperforming schools to improve their performance within 18 months, and to become consistently improving schools within 30 months.

This report briefly describes the Project and the Model it has developed, and reviews trends in school improvements achieved in the first two years of implementation.

The School Support Model

The **School Support Model** deliberately sets out to enable schools to successfully implement the Department of Basic Education's curriculum policy requirements through a 3-year school-based capacity building programme that incorporates:

- Extensive and intensive school-based support with a strong emphasis on practical training, mentoring and coaching in 'how to' meaningfully implement policy guidelines.
- Ongoing monitoring, feedback and reflection on agreed upon tasks.
- Textbooks and Teacher's Guides for every teacher and learner in every Grade and every Learning Area, to support curriculum implementation.
- Classroom kits of dictionaries, atlases and readers.
- A computer and printer to support curriculum and assessment administration.

Dramatic improvements within 18 months

Within 18 months of implementation, the **School Support Model** had enabled 13 of the 14 schools, 12 of which are in 3 of the most disadvantaged and under-resourced Districts in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, to achieve humble, yet significant improvements in:

- The functioning of School Management Teams
- Curriculum leadership and management
- Overall school functionality
- General school administration
- Teacher performance
- Learner performance
- Grade 3 and 6 learner results

In line with the Department of Basic Education's emphasis on Grade 3 and 6 Literacy and Numeracy results, the Model monitored these results closely in the 8 Primary Schools. By the end of the first year of implementing the model in 2009, results had improved over 2008 baseline study results as follows:

- Grade average improvements of between 4% and 14%
- Grade pass rate improvements of between 25% and 30%
- Significant decreases in the number of learners scoring zero per assessment activity
- Significant increases in the number of learners engaging more meaningfully with a broader range of the assessment activities

- Notably, the 3 worst performing schools in 2008 achieved the most significant improvements in 2009.

Sustained improvements after 30 months

With sustained support in 2010, the schools achieved the following improvements over the 2008 baseline study results by the end of 2010:

Grade averages:

- Grade 3 Numeracy improved in 4 schools by between 33% and 50%
- Grade 6 Numeracy improved in 6 schools by between 10% and 27%
- Grade 3 Literacy improved in 4 schools by between 13% and 39%
- Grade 6 Literacy improved in 5 schools by between 5% and 15%

These results are consistent with trends in the results achieved by these schools in the Systemic Assessments of 2008 and 2009, and the Annual National Assessments introduced in 2010.

Pass rates:

The 6 most disadvantaged schools all achieved significant increases in the number of learners scoring over 35% in Grades 3 and 6

Learners scoring zero per activity:

The 6 more disadvantaged schools all achieved significant:

- Decreases in the number of learners scoring zero per activity across 95% of the assessment activities.
- Increases in the number of learners engaging more meaningfully with all assessment activities.

Previously worst performing schools continued to achieve the most significant improvements

The 3 worst performing schools in the 2008 baseline study achieved the most significant improvements of the 8 schools for the second year in succession.

Conclusions

The impact of the School Support Model between July 2008 and November 2010 provides compelling evidence that:

With suitable kinds of support, focused in appropriate ways, disadvantaged, under-resourced and under-performing schools can become achieving schools within 18 months, and consistently improving schools within 30 months.

The potential of this Model to enable District Officials to better support under-performing schools should be of major interest to the Department of Basic Education.

Introduction

The Maskew Miller Longman Foundation's School Support Project was conceptualized in 2008 in response to the ongoing education crisis in South Africa. Its primary goal was to develop an effective, sustainable School Support Model to:

- Enable disadvantaged, under-resourced and under-performing schools to meaningfully implement the Department of Basic Education's curriculum requirements.
- Enable District Officials to support other similar schools to do the same.

This report focuses on how the School Support Model has enabled eight Primary Schools to achieve significant improvements in school functionality, classroom practices and learner results within the first year of implementation, and to sustain or improve on these achievements by the end of the second year of the three-year project.

In partnership with Education Officials, eight Primary Schools were identified in four provinces as follows:

- Eastern Cape - Libode District (the mud school District)
- Mpumalanga - Bushbuckridge District (the worst performing District in the country)
- Kwazulu/Natal - Umzinyathi District
- Western Cape - Cape Town's South and North Metropole Districts

After each school had been offered the opportunity to participate in the Foundation's proposed 3-year School Support Project and confirmed their voluntary participation, Partnership Performance Contracts were negotiated with each school. The contracts stipulated roles, responsibilities and obligations for each of the partners over the 3-year period, including an annual performance review process to assess progress, identify challenges, agree on solutions; and if necessary, to decide to discontinue the partnership.

An in-depth Baseline Study was then conducted from July – December 2008, to determine each school's levels of functionality in terms of the Department of Basic Education's Whole School Evaluation (WSE), Improving Quality Management System (IQMS) and National Curriculum Statement (NCS) expectations for:

- School leadership
- Curriculum leadership and management
- Teaching and learning practices across the curriculum
- Grade 3 and 6 learner performance in Literacy and Numeracy

A Needs Analysis followed in January 2009 to determine what kinds of support the schools believed they needed in order to more successfully fulfill the Department's curriculum implementation requirements.

The conceptualization of the School Support Model incorporated the triangulation of:

- The Department's WSE, IQMS and NCS requirements of schools
- Findings about the schools' actual functionality from the Baseline Study
- Schools' prioritized needs from the Needs Analysis

Implementation of the Model commenced in 2009 and concludes at the end of 2011. This report focuses on trends in Grade 3 and 6 Literacy and Numeracy improvements achieved in the schools between the project's 2008 Baseline Study and its November 2010 assessments.

The 2008 Baseline Study findings

This section summarizes the factors impacting most significantly on the performance of schools in the three more remote rural Districts in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu/Natal.

At District and Circuit Office levels, there were clear signs of isolation and neglect. Relationships with Provincial Offices were governed by written directives backed by little or no support. Overwhelmed and frustrated officials, stretched too thinly across too many schools, worked from under-staffed, poorly resourced environments. Their focus was almost exclusively on rushed and de-contextualized administrative compliance inspections of IQMS and NCS requirements in schools. It was very unusual for Officials to venture into classrooms to monitor implementation practices, and almost all Officials were unaware of significant and glaring dislocations between 'compliant' Educator portfolios and 'non-compliant' classroom practices. In general, Official's expectations of schools were very low and relationships between Officials and schools were often characterized by mistrust, anxiety, fear, resentment and passive resistance.

At the level of the schools, a host of socio-economic factors related to poverty impacted significantly on school performance and expectations of schools. There was widespread confusion about roles and responsibilities, and leadership and management were generally weak. There was limited working knowledge of policy requirements, widespread anxiety about administrative compliance requirements, and very little evidence of the implementation of the NCS in classrooms. Practical support with the implementation of the IQMS and NCS from Officials was unheard of.



Many teachers spend up to 3 hours a day travelling to and from their remote schools on rough roads in overcrowded bakkies

Educator energy was directed mainly towards:

- Addressing socio-economic issues impacting on the learners, the staff and the surrounding community
- Administrative compliance activities
- Repetitive transmission teaching and rote learning.

School leaders and educators were generally de-motivated, had low expectations of each other, and lower expectations of their learners.



Many rural schools feed their hungry learners under difficult circumstances

Most classrooms were characterized by:

- A severe dislocation between NCS compliant Educator Portfolios and actual classroom practices
- Educators working in isolation from each other
- Inadequate supplies of textbooks and teaching materials
- Under-utilization of the textbooks they had
- Very limited use of English in English medium lessons
- A limited repertoire of teaching styles, with the emphasis on repetitive transmission teaching
- A narrow range of learning opportunities, with the emphasis on rote learning
- Educators teaching at a slow pace
- Extremely limited curriculum coverage
- Consistently under-stimulated learners
- Most learners achieving at less than 35% of NCS expectations for Literacy and Numeracy

A few examples of under-resourced classrooms in the project schools



Building trust

Building trust between the project partners was critical in trying to understand and identify the schools' real needs. Understandably, first reactions were to present what schools thought was expected of them. However, six months of regular, all-day, non-judgmental, supportive school and classroom visits helped to develop the trust to be open about actual support needs. Each of these visits focused on:

- Observing day-to-day life and practices in schools
- Clarifying what was required of them by the Department of Education
- Understanding the challenges they faced in fulfilling the requirements
- Collaborating on how best to support them to fulfill them.



Building trusting relationships



Addressing challenges together



Discussing challenges and needs

The schools' needs

The Needs Analysis identified the following sets of needs.

First, the schools all wanted:

- To be recognized as capable of taking charge of their own future
- Trusted to do so through supported opportunities
- Treated as equal partners working towards goals based on their actual needs

Next, all of the more disadvantaged schools needed support to:

- Clarify roles and responsibilities and implement them effectively
- Develop leadership structures and capabilities

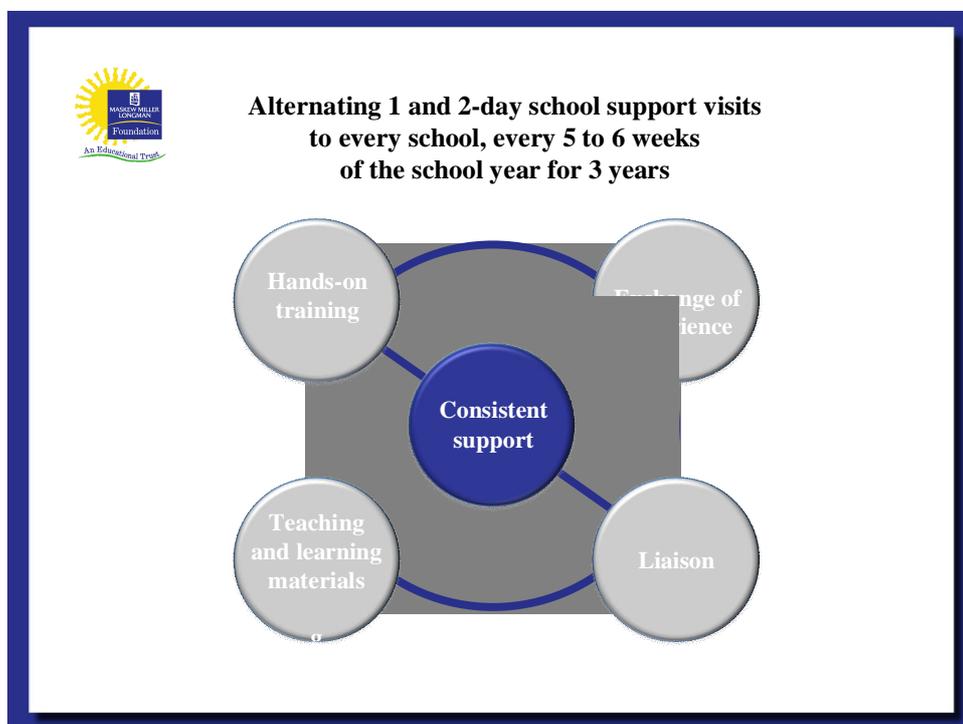
- Improve administrative procedures
- Understand and comply with policy requirements meaningfully
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning

Finally, all of the schools needed:

- Textbooks and teacher support materials to support teaching and learning
- Training and support in how to use the textbooks effectively
- Clarifications about what support they are entitled to from District Officials, and how to ensure that they receive it

The School Support Model

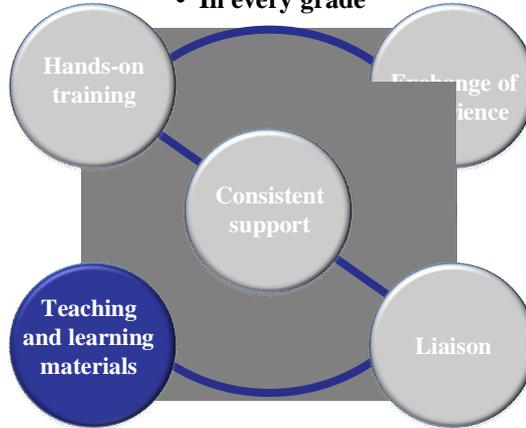
Drawing on the findings from the Baseline Study and the Needs Analysis, the project partners developed a Model to support the schools towards fulfilling Departmental compliance requirements of them. The key components of the Model are illustrated below.





Provision of approved NCS textbooks, workbooks and Teacher Guides for:

- Every teacher & learner
- For every Learning Area
- In every grade



School and classroom-based practical training, demonstrations, mentoring, coaching and support in:

- IQMS expectations, clarification of post level roles and responsibilities
- Establishing effective School Management Teams
- Curriculum planning and management within and across phases
- Establishing effective administrative and general worker support roles





Hands-on training

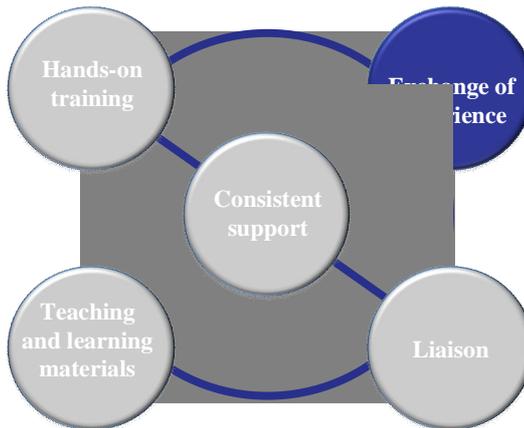
Teaching and learning materials

School and classroom-based practical, training, demonstrations, mentoring, coaching and support in:

- NCS teaching, learning and assessment requirements.
- NCS requirements for Educator Portfolios
- Curriculum planning and preparation at classroom level
- Systematic use of textbooks to ensure learner exposure to a broader range of:
 - Content and concepts
 - Teaching methods and styles
 - Learning activities
 - Assessment activities and tasksThrough more of the required MOI



Facilitating the exchange of leadership and management experience between schools through seminars





The first year of implementation

Contextual factors impacting on the schools

In 2008 and 2009 the Department of Basic Education launched a number of new campaigns and policy revisions to respond to the widely acknowledged curriculum implementation crisis. Examples include:

- The Foundations for Learning Campaign, in response to consistently poor results in Literacy and Numeracy
- The Quality Teaching and Learning Campaign, in response to the poor quality of teaching in schools
- The revision of the Progression and Promotions Requirements, in response to policy guidelines that allowed too many learners to be promoted to successive grades before they were adequately competent.

In many remote Primary Schools, these initiatives went largely unnoticed, or were perceived as 'just more changes that will be changed again next year'. For example, many schools reacted to the Foundations for Learning Programme by adapting their Educator Portfolios to include its requirements, while maintaining the status quo inside their classrooms. Fortunately for the project, there was very little evidence of NCS implementation in the project school classrooms anyway, so this initiative provided a useful leverage point to focus on how to begin to implement the curriculum meaningfully.

In the Eastern Cape, there were also concerns about budgets and management within the Department. In Mpumalanga, Bushbuckridge officials were barred from entering schools from September as a result of tensions between teacher unions and the District over appointment processes of new District officials.

Prioritized focus areas

Within the framework of the Model, the prioritized focus areas for 2009 were:

- Clarifying post level roles, responsibilities, relationships, systems and procedures for effective curriculum management within the framework of the Department's Norms and Standards guidelines
- Establishing effective administrative and general worker support roles
- Clarifying WSE, IQMS, NCS and Foundations for Learning Programme expectations, roles and responsibilities
- Establishing effective School Management Teams
- Curriculum planning and management within and across Phases
- Provision of teaching and learning materials
- Training in the use of teaching and learning materials

The approach, based on the principles of participatory action research, incorporated:

- A strong emphasis on school and classroom-based practical training, demonstrations, mentoring and coaching
- Mutually agreed-upon tasks and goals between school visits
- Regular, predictable, monitoring, feedback and reflection on performance against agreed tasks and goals.

Impact

By the end of the first year of implementation, humble but significant improvements had been achieved in all of the identified focus areas, resulting in improved overall functionality in all of the schools. Highly significant though, was the earlier than expected positive impact that these general improvements had on teaching practices and learner results.

Ongoing classroom observations confirmed that educators were using teacher's guides and allowing learners to use textbooks much more consistently than before; and that classes were also working through textbooks more systematically than before. These significant changes resulted in:

- Educators giving more attention to lesson planning and preparation
- More teaching in English in English medium lessons
- Experimentation with a broader range of teaching methods
- More structured concept explanations
- Exposing learners to a much broader range of learning and assessment opportunities
- Greater stimulation of weaker learners

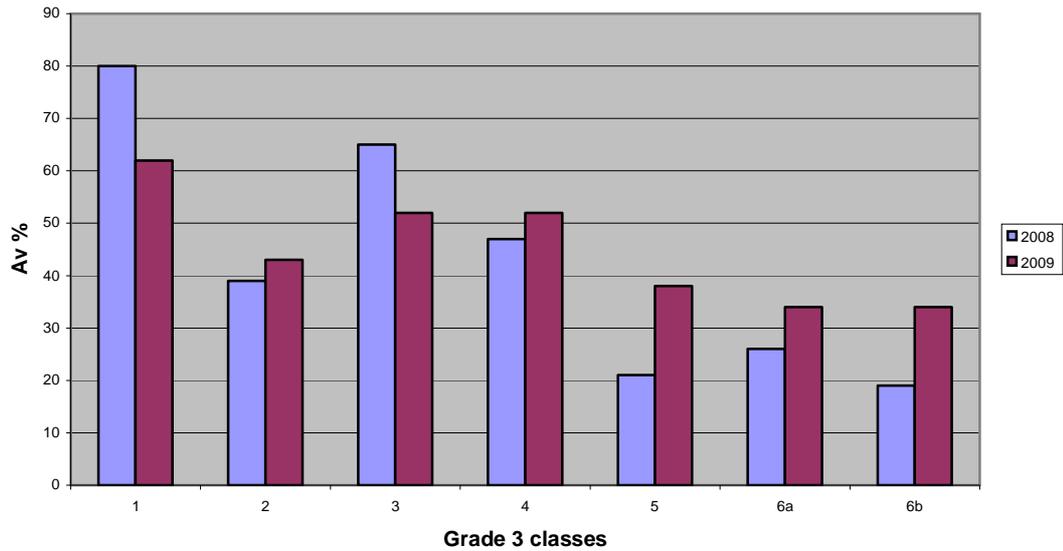
The 2009 cohort of Grade 3 and 6 learners achieved the following improvements over the 2008 Baseline Study cohort for Literacy and Numeracy:

- Grade average improvements of between 4% and 14%
- Grade pass rate improvements of between 20% and 30%
- Significant decreases in the number of learners scoring 0 per assessment activity
- Significant increases in the number of learners engaging meaningfully with a broader range of the assessment activities

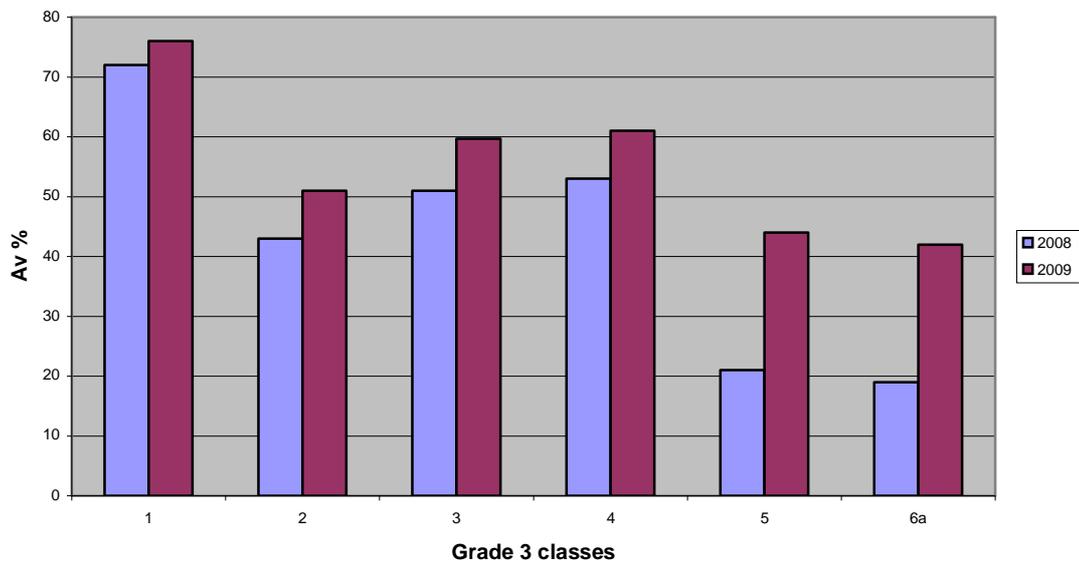
The two graphs below illustrate the achievements of the Grade 3s in the six disadvantaged schools. Note also that:

- Five of the seven Grades achieved improved Literacy results and all achieved improved Numeracy results
- The worst performing schools in 2008 achieved the most significant overall improvements in both Literacy and Numeracy in 2009.

Grade 3 Literacy: Grade average improvements



Grade 3 Numeracy: Grade average improvements



The second year of implementation

Contextual factors impacting on the schools

2010 was the year South Africa hosted the Soccer World Cup and schools had an extended mid-year holiday. This was followed by an extended teacher strike over salary demands, which disrupted most of the third school term. The strike also further strained already tense relationships between District Officials and school staff, leading to schools that hadn't already barred Officials from classrooms such as in Mpumalanga, doing so; and the general destabilization of schooling for the rest of that year. During the same period, many rural and township communities were also severely disrupted by community strikes in response to poor service delivery from their local municipalities.

2010 was also the year in which Department of Basic Education announced a number of significant changes to the NCS, as another set of steps towards addressing the curriculum implementation crisis. These included:

- Reducing the administrative burden on educators
- Renaming Learning Areas as subjects
- Discontinuing the Grade 9 Common Tasks of Assessment and introducing Annual National Assessments for Grades 3, 6 and 9
- Introducing English as a First Additional Language from Grade 1
- Reducing the number of subject in Grades 4 – 6 from 8 to 6
- Emphasizing the important role of textbooks in achieving curriculum goals
- Transforming the complex NCS curriculum guideline documents into the simpler, more accessible Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) to be implemented for 2011 onwards.

As in 2009, in many remote Primary Schools, these additional changes were perceived as further evidence of 'just more changes that will be changed again next year'. Similarly, most schools responded by incorporating what was necessary into their administrative paperwork, and continuing with classroom practices as though nothing had changed. Fortunately for the project schools, a supportive trust relationship had been built between the project partners and the significant improvements achieved by the schools in 2009 had inspired the staff significantly. As a consequence, they were eager to engage with the new changes with the project's support.

Prioritized focus areas

Following the same school and classroom-based practical, hands on training and coaching approach, the priority focus areas identified for 2010 were:

- Consolidate the support begun in 2009 and incorporate the new policy changes
- Strengthen School Management Teams
- Encourage and support teachers to work systematically through the textbooks in all subjects

Impact

With sustained support for the key focus areas, most schools' Literacy and Numeracy results continued to improve over the 2008 Baseline Study results, as illustrated in the following graphs comparing 2008 and 2010:

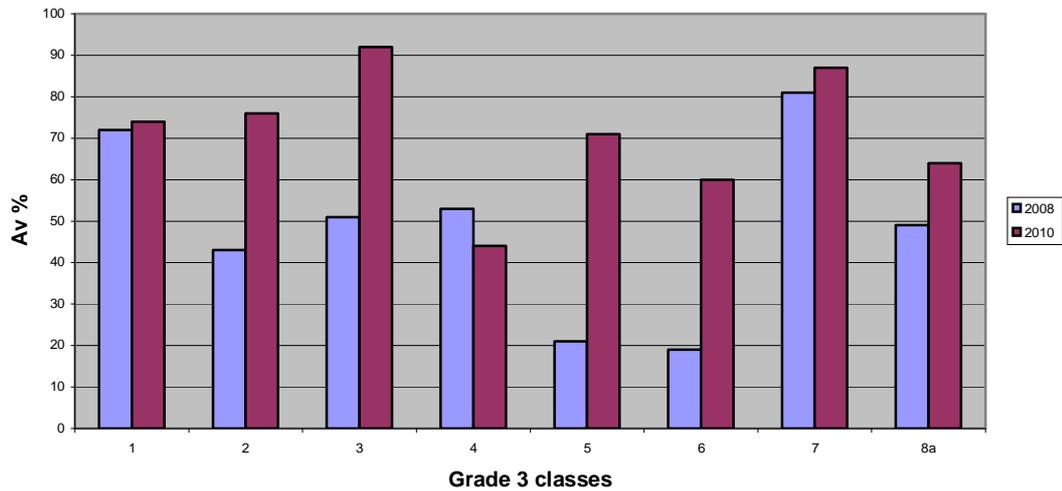
- Grade averages
- Pass rates
- Number of learners scoring zero.

Grade averages

Numeracy Grade 3:

- Grade averages improved in 7 of 8 classes
- Averages improved in 4 of these by between 33% and 50%

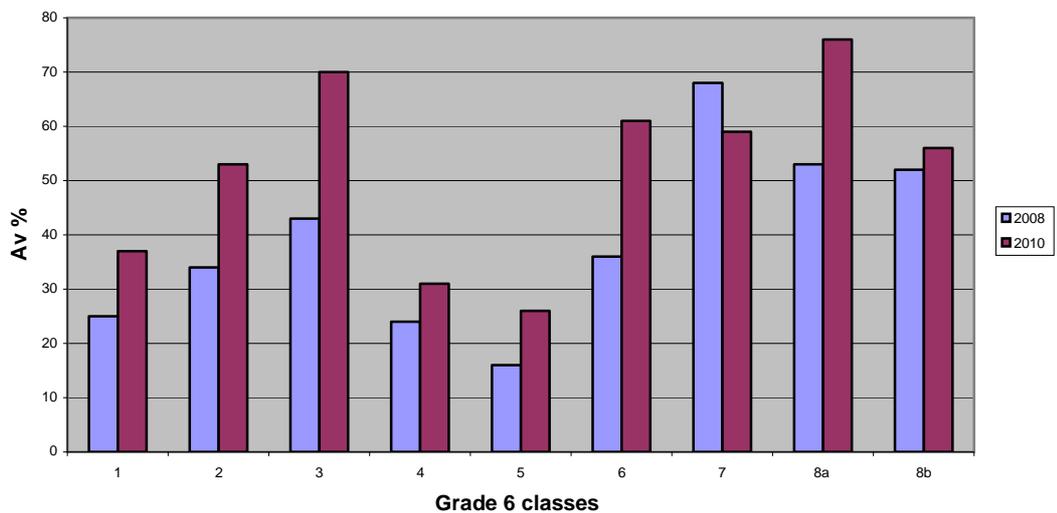
Grade 3 Numeracy: Grade average %



Numeracy Grade 6:

- Grade averages improved in 8 of 9 classes
- Averages improved in 6 of these by between 10% and 27%

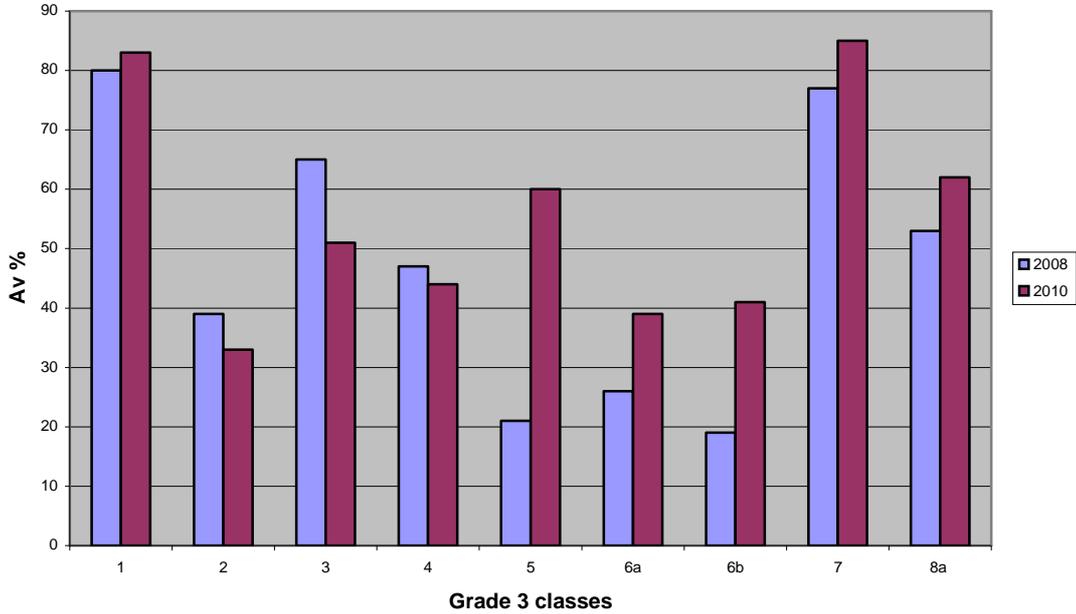
Grade 6 Numeracy: Grade average %



Literacy Grade 3:

- Grade averages improved in 6 of 9 classes
- Averages improved in 4 of these by between 13% and 39%

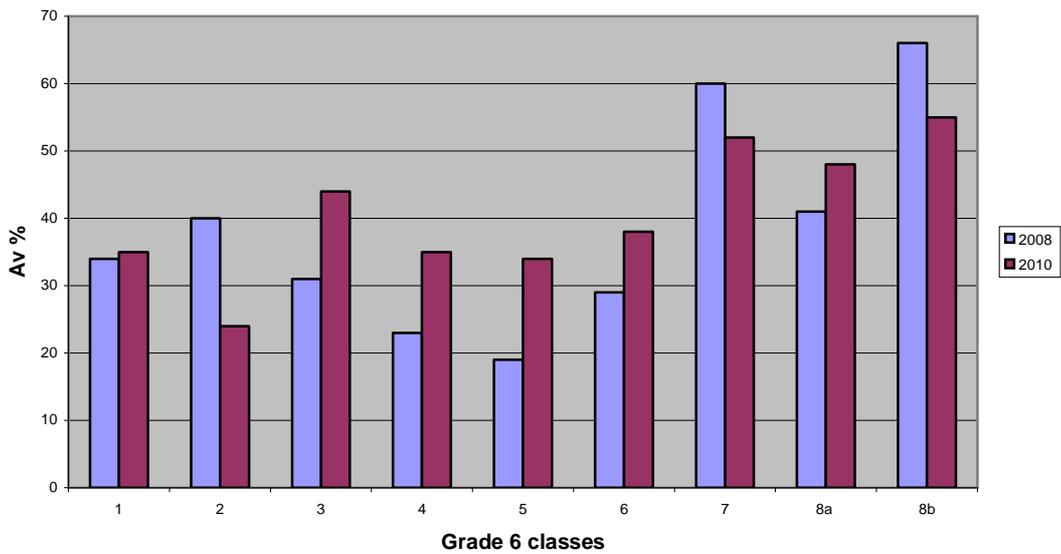
Grade 3 Literacy: Grade average %



Literacy Grade 6:

- Grade averages improved in 6 of 9 classes
- Averages improved in 5 of these by between 5% and 15%

Grade 6 Literacy: Grade average %



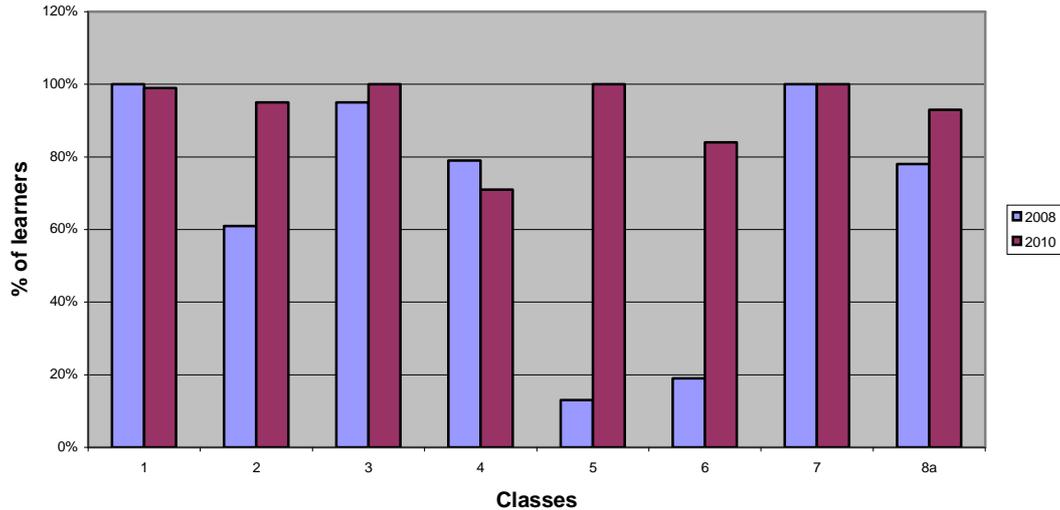
Pass rates

The 6 most disadvantaged schools (1 – 6 on the graphs below) all achieved significant increases in pass rates.

Numeracy Grade 3:

- 5 of 8 classes achieved improved pass rates
- Note the significance of the improvements in schools 2, 5 and 6

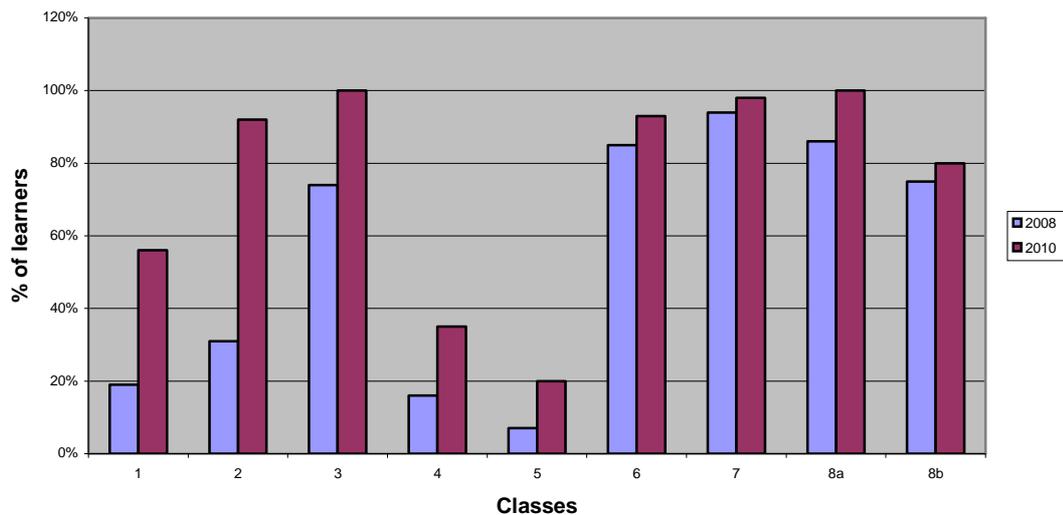
Grade 3 Numeracy: Learners scoring 35% and above



Numeracy Grade 6:

- All 9 classes achieved improved pass rates
- Note the significance of the improvements in schools 1 - 6

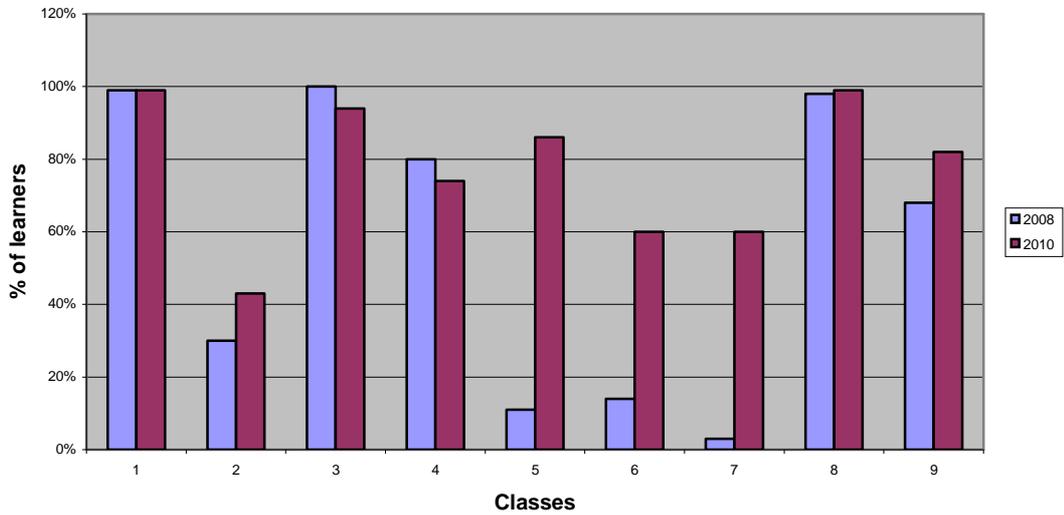
Grade 6 Numeracy: Learners scoring above 35%



Literacy Grade 3:

- 6 of 9 classes achieved improved pass rates
- Note the significant improvements in the classes in the more disadvantaged schools: 2 and 5 – 7

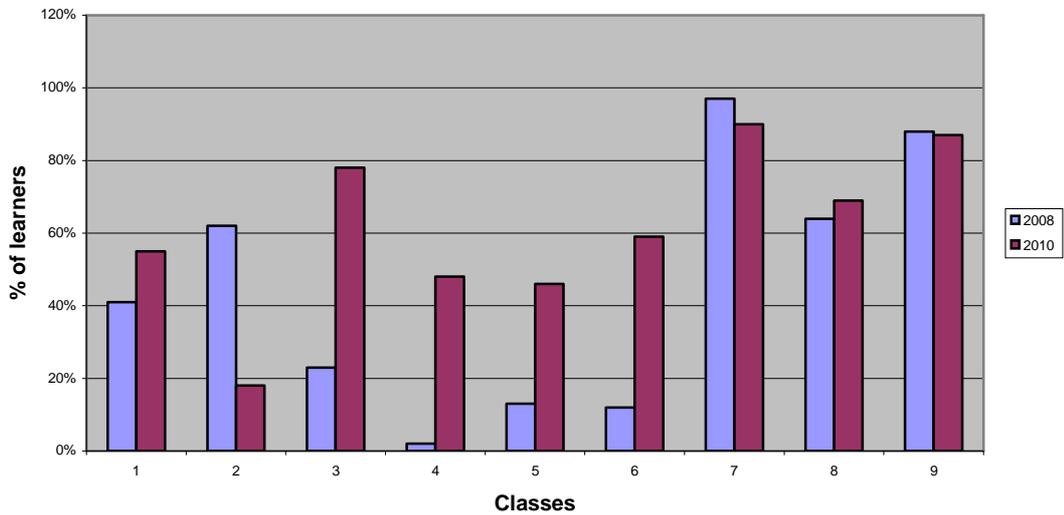
Grade 3 Literacy: scores of 35% and above



Literacy Grade 6:

- 6 of 9 classes achieved improved pass rates
- Note the significant improvements in schools 1 and 3 - 6

Grade 6 Literacy: Learners scoring above 35%



Learners scoring zero per activity:

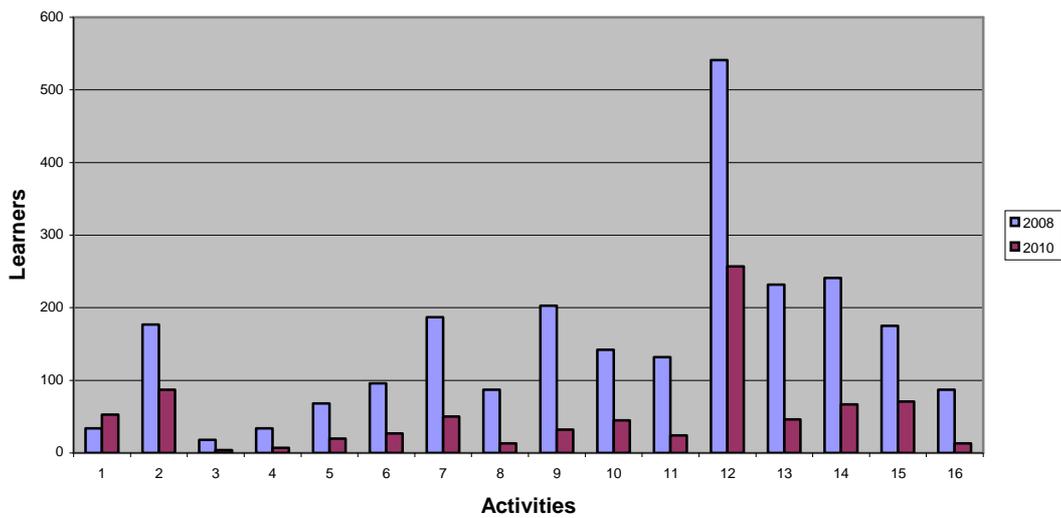
The 6 more disadvantaged schools all achieved significant:

- Decreases in the number of learners scoring zero per activity across 95% of the assessment activities.
- Increases in the number of learners engaging more meaningfully with all assessment activities.

Numeracy Grade 3:

- Significantly fewer learners scored zero for 15 of 16 activities

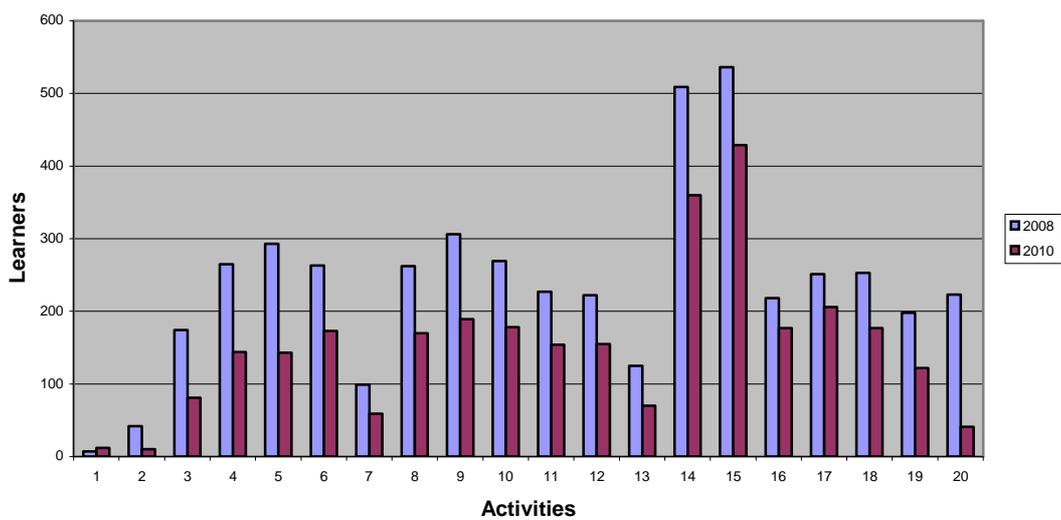
Grade 3 Numeracy: Learners scoring zero per activity



Numeracy Grade 6:

- Significantly fewer learners scored zero for 19 of 20 activities

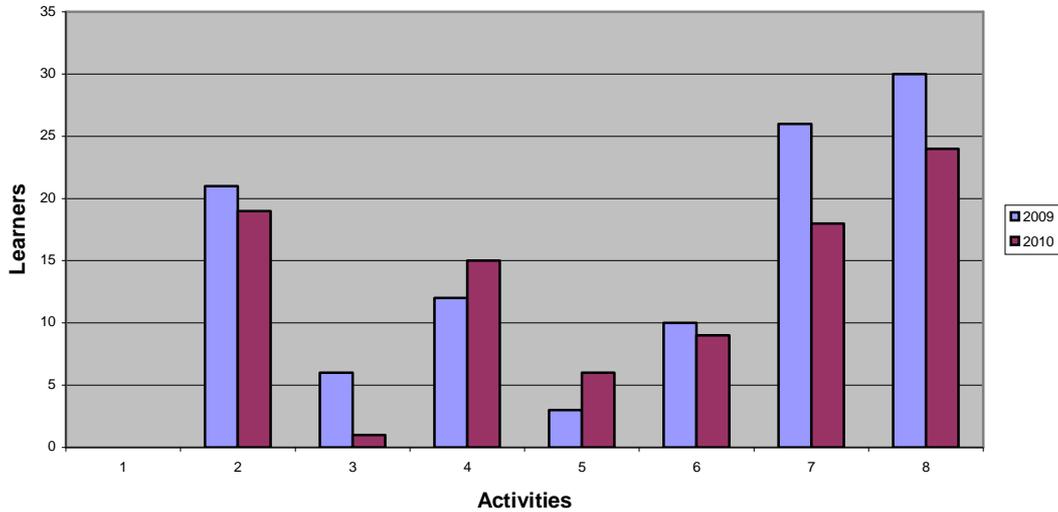
Grade 6 Numeracy: Learners scoring zero per activity



Afrikaans Literacy Grade 3:

- No learners scored zero for activity 1 in 2008 or 2010
- Fewer learners scored zero for 5 of the remaining 7 activities

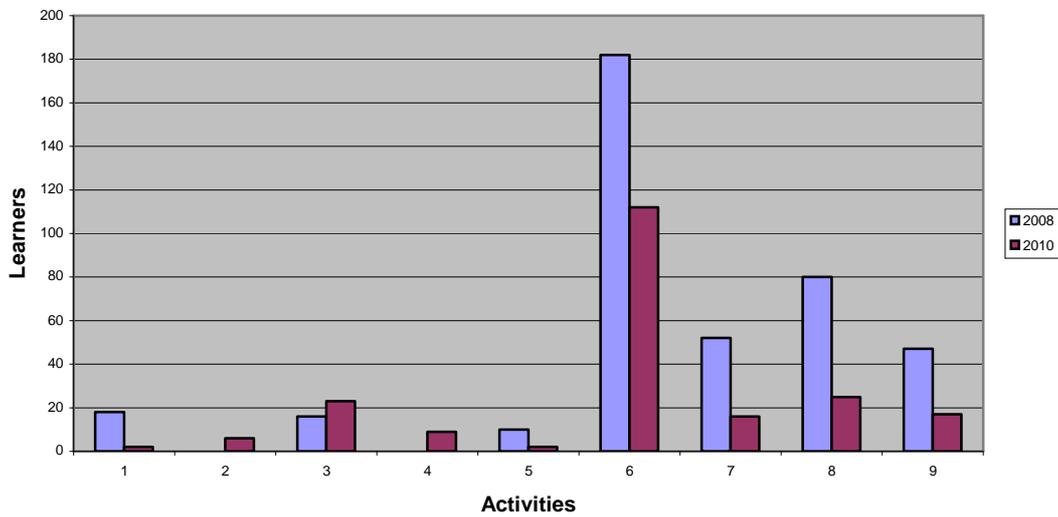
Grade 3 Afrikaans Literacy: Learners scoring zero per activity



Sepedi, Xhosa and Zulu literacy Grade 3:

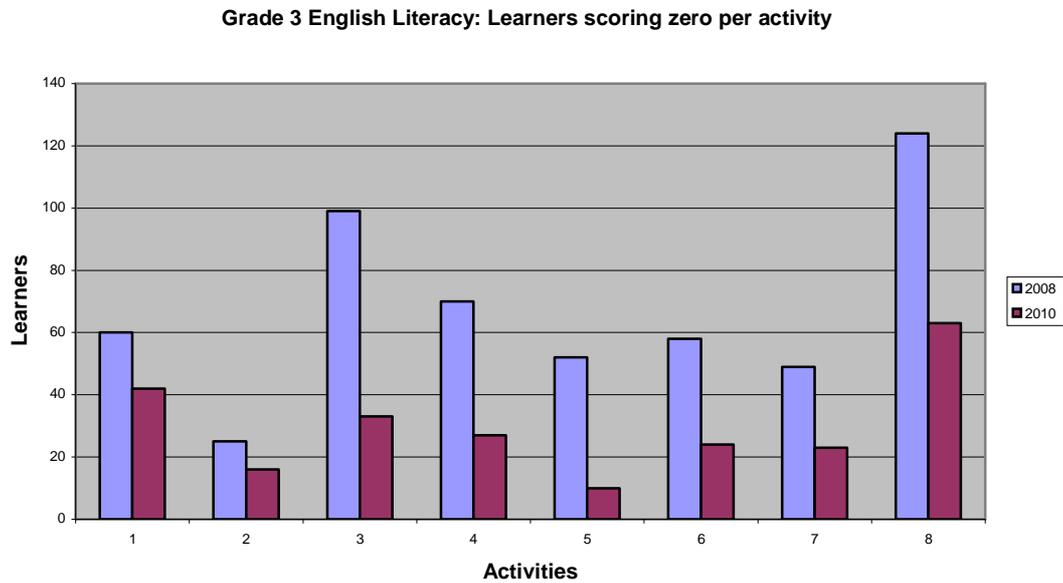
- Fewer learners scored zero than in Afrikaans or English literacy
- Fewer learners scored zero for 6 of the 9 activities

Gr 3 Sepedi, Xhosa and Zulu Literacy: Learners scoring zero per activity



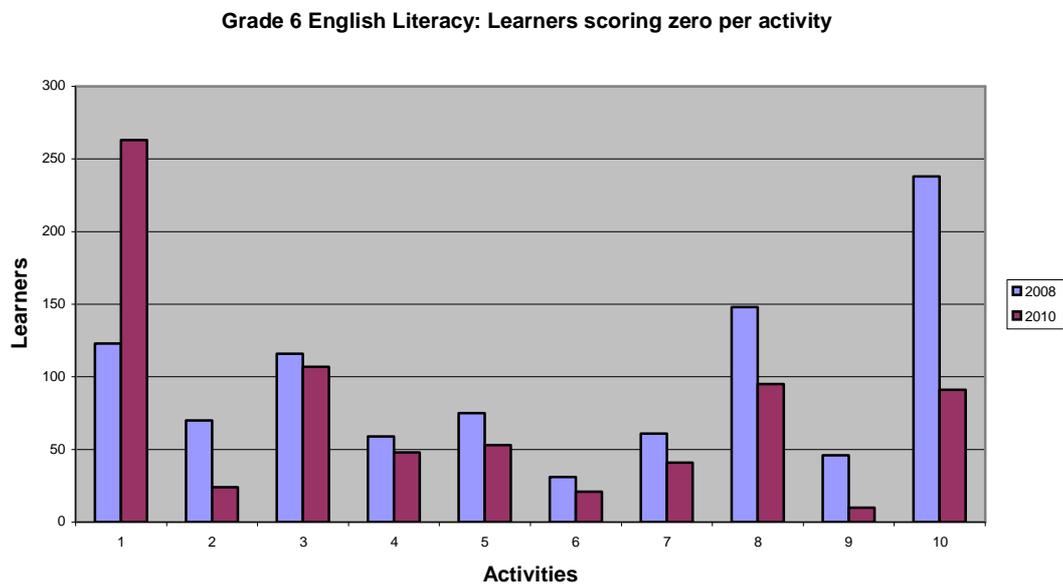
English literacy Grade 3:

- Significantly fewer learners scored zero for all 8 activities



Literacy Grade 6:

- Fewer learners scored zero for 9 of the 10 activities



Previously worst performing schools continued to achieve the most significant improvements

The worst performing schools in the 2008 baseline study achieved the most significant improvements of all 8 schools for the second year in succession.

Conclusions

The very encouraging impact of the School Support Model in such a short period of time, in spite of the many socio-economic challenges faced by the schools every day; the disruptions of the Soccer World Cup and teacher strike in 2010, and the numerous curriculum changes in 2009 and 2010, provides compelling evidence that:

With suitable kinds of support, focused in appropriate ways, disadvantaged, under-resourced and under-performing schools can become achieving schools within 18 months, and consistently improving schools within 30 months.

The potential of this Model to enable District Officials to better support under-performing schools to become achieving schools within two years should be of major interest to the Department of Basic Education.