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

The School Support Project

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

**Success stories from
disadvantaged, under-resourced and/or under-performing
schools in the Libode, Tsolo, Bushbuckridge and
Umzinyathi Districts**

Four case studies that demonstrate how District Officials could enable under-performing High Schools to become achieving schools with 2 years

**Maskew Miller Longman Foundation;
Smuts Ndamase High; Lutuka High;
Shanke High; and Bathembu High**

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Introduction

The School Support Project

Pearson Southern Africa's Maskew Miller Longman Foundation, an independent Educational Trust, was established in 2007 to support best practices to improve teaching and learning in challenging, under-resourced and disadvantaged contexts in South Africa. In 2008, the Foundation set up the **School Support Project** to explore cost-effective and efficient ways to enable consistently under-performing state schools to become consistently achieving schools.

In the light of the dismal Literacy, Numeracy and Science performances of South African learners (TIMMS, PIRLS and SACMEQ surveys; the Department of Basic Education's Systemic Assessment Reports of 2004 and 2007; the National Planning Commission, 2011; and the ANAS results announced by the National Minister of Education, 28 June 2011); the Foundation decided to identify causes that it could do something about.

A 6-month baseline study conducted in 14 disadvantaged schools identified significant dislocations between the Department of Basic Education's curriculum management and implementation policy requirements, and the actual practices in District and Circuit Offices, and in their schools (Kariem and Langhan, April 2009).

As a result, the project developed a **School Support Model** that aimed to explore how the Department's existing District Support system could more effectively enable the majority of disadvantaged and under-resourced schools to implement curriculum policy requirements more successfully, in as short a time as possible (Kariem and Langhan, October 2009).

Phase one of the Project

Phase one of the Project focused on addressing the identified dislocations. Essentially, this meant getting the basic elements of school functionality in place and functioning at least reasonably well. This was achieved through combining two main interventions:

A) Providing essential resources

- 2009 – Approved teacher's guides, textbooks and study guides for every teacher and every learner, in every subject, in every Grade
- 2010 – Classroom kits of supplementary readers, dictionaries and atlases
- 2011 – A computer, software and a printer to support curriculum planning and assessment administration

B) Providing regular, supportive, practical school-based monitoring, reflection, training, mentoring and coaching to ensure that:

1) School leaders and school management teams:

- Understood and acknowledged their curriculum leadership and management roles and responsibilities
- Knew how to improve and align their systems, procedures and practices with them
- Had guided experiences of how to implement them practically

2) Teachers:

- Understood curriculum policy requirements

- Knew how to align classroom planning, preparation, textbook use and teaching methods with curriculum requirements
- Understood how teacher's guides and textbooks embody curriculum requirements; provide teaching guidelines to compensate for inadequate training; and provide content, learning and assessment activities designed and to fulfil curriculum requirements.
- Understood why it is important to work systematically through textbooks.
- Had guided experiences of how to implement the above practically.

3) School administrators and general workers:

- Understood how to support their leaders, managers and teachers to implement the above
- Had guided experiences of how to implement this support practically.

Successes achieved by the project schools

After just two years of implementing Phase one of the School Support Model, almost all of the project schools had achieved significant improvements in one or more of the three focus areas. The combined impact of these improvements had also become visible in classrooms where, for example, many of the teachers:

- Had better organized portfolios, which integrated improved lesson planning.
- Were using teacher's guides and textbooks, which exposed learners to a much broader range of teaching, learning and assessment activities.
- Were attempting to facilitate more active learner participation by encouraging their learners to:
 - Read from and use their textbooks during lessons and to do homework
 - Give their own verbal answers, express opinions and give reasons for their answers
 - Complete much more written work than at the same time in 2008

As anticipated, the combined impact of these fairly simple adjustments to school and classroom practices contributed towards improved learner performance and results. (For details see: Kariem, Langan and Mpofo, February 2010; Kariem and Langan, March 2011; Kariem, Langan and Velensky, May 2011 and February 2012)

The purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to highlight some of the success stories from the project High Schools through a selection of four case studies that:

- Attempt to sketch the physical and socio-economic context of each school as a backdrop to its achievements.
- Showcase some of the school improvement initiatives taken by the schools, both independently and in response to project interventions. These include both anticipated and unanticipated positive developments.

- Highlight examples of improved learner results achieved in response to project interventions.

A special note ahead of the case studies: Many of the unanticipated improvements initiated by the schools were as a result of the combined impact of:

- 1) Clearer understandings about the roles, responsibilities and rights of schools and their staff
- 2) A supportive attitude from the School Support Project Managers whose primary focus was to enable staff to implement their roles and responsibilities through practical demonstrations, coaching and mentoring.
- 3) The enhanced self-esteem and increased self-confidence that 1) and 2) above developed in the staff; enabled them to implement their roles and responsibilities more effectively; and to take charge of their school's destiny.

Each achievement featured in this report, is worthy of acknowledgement, celebration and encouragement, as are the many others we could not include in this report. This is because each has been achieved under very trying circumstances, and against the expectations of Departmental Officials, local communities and the schools themselves. They have been achieved by schools located in remote rural areas where great distances, severely limited resources, widespread unemployment and poverty, and little prospect of acknowledgement or encouragement combine to create an atmosphere of isolation, neglect and low expectation.

In these kinds of contexts, aspiring to, and working towards achieving more than is expected requires extraordinary character, conviction and commitment. This selection of success stories reminds us that:

- There are many such extraordinary people in the most disadvantaged and under-resourced of our schools.
- With the right focus from their Provincial Departments, supplemented by the right kinds of support from District and Circuit Officials¹, even the most disadvantaged and under-resourced schools can make significant strides towards achieving what is expected of them.

¹ The focus and support emphases of the School Support Project are explained in Kariem and Langan, October 2009.