

No Longer Business as Usual

Private sector efforts to improve schooling in South Africa



This CDE report was informed by numerous interviews with education experts, officials and leaders of the biggest privately funded education initiatives

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has thrown schooling systems around the world into disarray. As CDE noted in May 2020, school closures and other challenges created by the pandemic are disastrous for the majority of South African learners. (Read the report [here](#).)

Since then, the evidence for this view has only strengthened.¹ We need to get all learners learning again to avoid accumulated losses to educational outcomes, employability, lifetime earnings, human capital, and the whole economy. Martin Gustafsson and Carol Nuga Deliwe show that without a proper catch-up strategy, learning outcomes for matrics “will be lower than expected up to 2031”.² The 2020s risk becoming a lost decade.

Lifting up the entire schooling system is the only way to combat the long-term consequences of the current crisis. CDE is currently finalising a major and comprehensive report on how the country can significantly improve basic education levels in South Africa. Based on international experience and local research, that report concludes with recommendations for the President, the Department of Basic Education (DBE), civil society, and business to think differently about to how to improve the quality of learning in South African schools.

The aim of this report is to share some of our key insights and findings concerning business contributions to education reform in South Africa. We examine the role that corporations, private foundations, and privately funded education projects and partnerships have played and could play in ensuring that South Africa's basic education system performs at significantly improved levels.

The report was informed by two processes. The first involved interviewing education experts, state education officials, and leaders of the biggest privately funded education initiatives; these interviews were mostly conducted late in 2019. The second process was a virtual discussion hosted by CDE in mid-April 2020 with leaders of privately funded education initiatives and other education experts or specialists in business.

The interviews we did and the workshop we hosted happened either before or during the early stages of the Covid-19 outbreak in South Africa. The discussions did not therefore focus on the coronavirus crisis. Working to alleviate the immediate crisis is important, but it should not draw attention away from the fact that simply restarting schooling that produces very little learning is not a solution to the deep-rooted issues plaguing this sector.

The current crisis should galvanise business leaders and people across the private sector to do everything they can to bring about fundamental changes in the way the education system works. This report urges the private sector to do that, and suggests ways in which it can be achieved.

CDE and private sector interventions in education

CDE has long advocated for business to play a more strategic role in improving the quality of learning in the South African schooling system. In 2008, CDE organised a week of workshops and discussions in Washington D.C. with two groups: global and developing country education experts, and analysts and leaders in corporate efforts to improve education across the United States. (Read the two reports on our findings, [here](#) and [here](#)). We summarised the core lessons from that engagement for South Africa as follows:

Compared to government expenditure on education, the resources commanded by companies and foundations are minuscule. The country needs good ideas to help focus the allocation of private funding, so that it has the best chance of positively influencing the education system. Finding out what works in education is much cheaper than making it work. Moreover, identifying the obstacles to the effective use of public money can contribute greatly to its better future use. Because the challenges presented by the education system are persistent and chronic, any intervention needs to be strategically planned and systemically implemented.³

Since then, companies and private foundations have continued to spend large amounts on schooling initiatives in South Africa. In 2019, for example, corporate social investment funds totalling R3.4 billion were dedicated to early childhood development and basic education. Some of this spending makes a big difference in the lives of individual beneficiaries – those who receive scholarships, for example – but it remains unclear what impact, if any, this spending has on shifting the performance of the whole education system onto a sustained upward trajectory.

What is encouraging is that, as this report will detail, many efforts have been made to heed CDE's call for the private sector to think more strategically and to work more collaboratively to contribute to real system change. Large public-private partnerships such as the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS) and the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) and projects like the Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO) and the

Kagiso Trust's Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme (BNSDP) that try to raise performance across the entire education system are all steps in the right direction. More needs to be done.

Basic education in South Africa: Where are we?

The past two decades has seen some improvement in learning, but these are from an incredibly low base. International benchmark tests such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and reports by the Southern and Eastern Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), focusing on literacy and mathematics, show that South Africa has recorded "improvements since around 2002 which are rapid by international standards".⁴ Significantly, these "improvements have been largest among worse performing schools, meaning [educational] inequality has diminished".⁵

The terrible reality, however, is that, despite these improvements, inequality remains high and the performance of the education system on the whole short-changes the vast majority of learners attending public schools.

The biggest challenge is that the majority of South African learners are failing to learn the basics, i.e. literacy and numeracy. Several studies over the past decade show that perhaps as many as a third of secondary school learners are functionally illiterate.⁶ The 2016 PIRLS revealed that 78 per cent of Grade 4 learners are unable to recognise information that is explicitly stated in a basic comprehension test.⁷ And as CDE has noted for many years, our mathematics outcomes are equally worrisome. In fact, they may be worsening: the number of learners who wrote mathematics in Grade 12 dropped by 14,000 in 2019, while the pass rate for the subject – with a pass mark set at 30 per cent – decreased from 58 per cent in 2018 to 54.6 per cent in 2019.⁸ This excludes those matric learners who take mathematics literacy because it is easier than mathematics.

South Africa also performs poorly in comparison to peer countries on the global stage. Since 1995, international benchmarking tests such as PIRLS and TIMSS have consistently ranked us at the bottom in literacy and mathematics. We do worse on learning in comparative tests than Kenya and Tanzania, countries with a GDP per capita equal to one-third and one-fifth of South Africa's average income respectively.⁹ We have the GDP per capita of Colombia and Thailand, and we spend enormous amounts on basic education, yet we get the learning outcomes of Lesotho and Nepal, countries with a GDP per capita around a quarter of South Africa's.¹⁰ This shows that we get very little 'bang for our buck'. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has identified the inefficiency of our spending on education as a key stumbling block to raising the outcomes of the entire system.¹¹

Privately funded initiatives and partnerships

In this context of widespread underperformance, how has the private sector sought to improve the performance of South African schools? What is its role in generating better returns on educational investment? Education experts interviewed by CDE feel strongly that the private sector has an important role to play in addressing our learning crisis. (See the appendix for the list of experts interviewed.) A few of the country's major privately funded and/or operated education programmes are discussed below.

National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT)

Prof. John Volmink is the Chairperson of Umalusi Council, South Africa's private education accreditor and assessor of public education quality levels. He told CDE that NECT, one of the biggest recent education projects initiated by private sector collaboration and funding, is an important platform to "bring together all education stakeholders to help the DBE deliver on its objective of quality education along a common set of priority interventions".¹² This is an important first step, said Volmink, "because we need to learn to trust each other enough to work together".

NECT's funding comes from the DBE and 36 other funders, including several large banks and other corporate sponsors. In 2018, the trust spent approximately R270 million, of which 93 per cent went directly to education. CEO Godwin Khosa told CDE: "The big focus of NECT interventions is providing teachers with a plan and support materials for how you teach the syllabus. We hold workshops and provide detailed lesson plans. We work with 2,200 subject advisors – they are employed by the DBE and we work with them – this is the DBE's programme. Many schools are teaching only 30 per cent of what they are expected to teach. Our interventions introduce new forms of leadership (urging teachers to find ways to complete the syllabus) and of monitoring. A new level of accountability is introduced in this way because we are able to assess how teachers are performing in relation to the lesson plans."

When working with teachers in this way to improve the way they work, Khosa admitted that teacher unions sometimes provide an obstacle as they oppose increases in teachers' workloads. However, Khosa explained, "We believe that we have to go through a process of consultation with the unions because it is more difficult for them to reverse our progress if they buy into the programme."¹³

Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS)

Another prominent collaborative intervention, bringing together university-based experts, private funders, NGOs, and the DBE's Research Unit, is the EGRS. This project consists of carefully developed materials and various forms of coaching designed to change the way teachers teach reading in the first four grades of school. Director of Research at the DBE, Stephen Taylor, initiated the study specifically to provide answers to "key national policy questions".

In discussion with CDE, Prof. Brahm Fleisch, who has been part of the project since the beginning, explained that the EGRS is essentially designed to bring about a "fundamental shift" in the way reading is taught in the early grades. "What are the levers that can do this?" he asked. "A video tutorial is not the answer. One has to get into the daily routines of teachers. You have to affect everyday practices. It takes time before teachers start internalising new behaviours. You have to work consistently and across learning and teaching support material, professional development, and accountability levels."¹⁴

Fleisch emphasised the importance of coupling capacity-enhancing interventions with an increase in accountability. As he put it, "If increased accountability is not accompanied by an improvement in teachers' capacity, it frequently results in cheating and demoralisation. The other way around – improved capacity coupled with weak accountability – at best results in haphazard gains. You must have both for real, sustained changes to manifest."¹⁵

Evaluations that assessed groups of learners who had experienced EGRS interventions against control groups who did not receive it, have pointed to a positive impact:

- Children in schools randomly selected for the coaching intervention were on average 40 per cent of a year of learning ahead of their equivalent counterparts in control schools.
- At the end of 2016, Grade 2 learners in the treated schools could, on average, identify six more letters and five more words than learners in the untreated schools.
- Children in the coaching group outperformed other children in non-word reading, paragraph reading, comprehension, and writing.
- Only 5 per cent of the control group was reading 'very well' compared to 18 per cent of those who had the coaching intervention.¹⁶

Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO)

Some privately funded initiatives have shone the spotlight on why the education system malfunctions so badly and have pointed to possible ways to tackle these key challenges. One such intervention is PILO, led by Prof. Mary Metcalfe. Metcalfe told CDE that PILO was designed to bring about changes in a part of the bureaucratic system where dysfunction is a significant cause of ineffective teaching. A core problem is a severe lack of capacity at the district level, Metcalfe explained. "In the more poorly resourced provinces, there are far too few managers and curriculum advisers at this level, and they are not resourced or managed effectively. The shortage of subject advisers is often poorly understood. Those responsible for managing the situation merely take the total number of advisers per district into account, rather than considering whether there are adequate numbers of specialist advisers for each subject and each phase of schooling. In some provinces, it is not unusual for a subject adviser to be responsible for supporting more than 300 schools."¹⁷

In her view, it is no surprise that managers and advisers feel completely overwhelmed and adopt an unhelpful compliance-focused mentality. Their goal is merely to ensure that they tick the right boxes and get the right forms signed. This creates massive gaps in planning and governance, which leaves principals, heads of departments (HoDs), and teachers feeling completely unsupported and demotivated. To overcome this, PILO works to provide circuit managers and subject advisers with the tools to hold professional, supportive conversations about curriculum coverage. PILO also works with principals, deputies, and HoDs of both primary and secondary schools so that they are better able to support teachers and give advice on how to cover the curriculum. According to Metcalfe, "these mutually reinforcing practices lead to improved relationships with school leaders and teachers, and a stronger focus on improving teaching and learning".¹⁸

Kagiso Trust

The Kagiso Trust bases its core interventions on a similar analysis, although it tries to fill the gaps by stepping in and supporting schools, principals, and teachers through a co-funding model with the DBE at the provincial level. Their flagship programme, the BNSDP, was launched at secondary schools and then expanded to include primary schools. Themba Mola, CEO of the Kagiso Shanduka Trust (a partnership between the Kagiso Trust and the Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation), believes that subject advisers and most other district officials should be supported to do their jobs. According to Mola, there are systemic deficiencies and a lack of capacity in the education bureaucracy, and the support the system provides to rural schools is particularly weak. When the Kagiso Trust approaches schools, "very often we find a culture of despondency in them – some of the teachers have given up". The fact that "things can turn around quickly when we provide support and a renewed sense of energy" suggests to Mola that the issue is not that teachers cannot do their jobs; rather, "it is that they feel unsupported and demotivated".¹⁹

Room for improvement

With proper monitoring and evaluation, these large interventions can contribute to a new approach to education reform, one that stops tinkering and starts changing the ways in which the whole system operates. Cost-effective interventions that have been expertly and independently evaluated to demonstrate substantial impact can be rolled out across the system, or at minimum provide lessons that can be incorporated by the state, and begin to move the country towards system-level reform.

However, there is a general concern among education experts interviewed by CDE about the willingness to evaluate privately funded initiatives. Or in many cases, when such evaluations have been undertaken, there has been a reluctance to make these results public. This is especially so when the findings are negative. And yet, the experts argue, failure often provides enormous insight and learning for the future.

For example, Dr. James Keevy, CEO of JET Education Services, argued that accountability in the private sector should be driven by credible evaluation strategies. This is, however, difficult to achieve. "It takes a long time to detect causal effects and a successful evaluation approach requires a strong theory of change," said Keevy. In his opinion, "many evaluations of private sector education interventions have neither of these components, and where such evaluations are done properly they are rarely shared".²⁰

This view is echoed by Dr. Nick Taylor, Senior Research Fellow at JET and the former head of the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU), who said, "Private sector experiments have been happening for 30 years and what have we got to show for it? Very few evaluations of private sector education interventions are performed. If they are done, then these evaluations are done poorly or they find that the initiatives have not been successful."²¹

Stellenbosch University's Dr. Nic Spaull reinforced the call for private sector activities to be rigorously and independently evaluated, and for these evaluations to be made available to the public for education experts and economists to scrutinise.²²

'Voice' also remains an under-utilised and under-appreciated private sector tool for bringing about change. As Prof. Servaas van der Berg from the University of Stellenbosch argued, "business needs to become more involved" in the public discussion about schooling reform. In his view, civil society on its own is not effective enough and could be bolstered by more business involvement in shaping the public narrative. The two stakeholders could work together, with business playing an important role in funding civil society advocates who espouse sensible reforms.²³

A different type of initiative from the programmes outlined above, the National Association of Social Change Entities in Education (NASCEE), seeks to provide a platform to non-profit actors working in education to coordinate their approaches in order to strengthen the voices calling for reforms. According to Keevy, who has played a leading role in this initiative, it is important to find a way to consolidate successful private sector interventions. Beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, such an initiative could build on "a new spirit of support and collaboration; an attitude of wanting and needing to fix things".²⁴ NASCEE's model is one that could play a constructive role in the nexus between the public system and private interests in education.

The CDE workshop

CDE invited education experts and practitioners from the private sector to participate in a virtual workshop on 15 April 2020. The core themes of the workshop were outlined by CDE executive director Ann Bernstein. She asked, "How do we stop wallowing at the bottom of international rankings and move up to the level that Kenya is at, never mind the more efficient education systems like Vietnam? How do we get more value for money in both private initiatives and across the basic education sector as a whole? How can business and private funders make a more strategic contribution towards achieving these goals?"

Godwin Khosa, CEO of NECT, started the conversation. He explained that he had been thinking deeply about what the exact role of business should be in education, particularly in relation to other stakeholders such as the state, unions, and civil society. He said that it was important to accept that the state is primarily responsible for providing learning in the country, which should force business and other private funders to think harder about how they can complement and support the work of the DBE.

List of Workshop Attendees

- Ann Bernstein (Executive Director, Centre for Development and Enterprise)
- Godwin Khosa (CEO, National Education Collaboration Trust)
- Gail Campbell (CEO, Zenex Foundation)
- Louise van Rhyn (Founder, Symphonia for South Africa)
- Cathy Duff (Director, Trialogue)
- Brian Figaji (Chairman, Wesgro)
- Le Roux van der Westhuizen (Executive Trustee, Millennium Trust)
- Kay Moodley (Coach Supervisor, Partners for Possibility)
- Steuart Pennington (Chief Executive Director, South Africa – The Good News)
- Makano Morojele (Head of Education Reform, Absa)
- Gerald Thaver (Thought Leadership Manager, Absa)
- Riyaadh Ebrahim (Social Investment Analyst, Tshikululu Social Investments)
- Sibusiso Lukhele (Social Investment Specialist, Tshikululu Social Investments)
- Amy Webster (Manager, Michaelhouse Community Partnership Trust)
- Stefan Schirmer (Professor, Wits University)

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Le Roux van der Westhuizen of the Millennium Trust put it slightly differently. He said, "The state's role is to ensure universal access to education, while also making sure that the education that is available is of a decent quality. In other words, the state should see to it that every learner has the possibility of attending a good school. Other organisations, like business, can play a role in helping or urging the state to achieve these goals."

The crucial issue is how the private sector both supports and influences what the state does. In this context, accountability emerges as a crucial issue. If the state and business are to work together, they need to hold each other to account, and they both need to be accountable to a broader constituency to prevent any malevolent collusion between the two. Khosa worried that "it is difficult to hold actors accountable when it is not clear what their respective responsibilities are".

On the other hand, van der Westhuizen believes that the biggest challenge holding back accountability is the lack of data regarding learning outcomes. "It is very hard to hold anyone to account if we don't know what impact their actions have had on the performance levels of the system." In his opinion, "The only way to measure performance is to have much better data on how learners across all the grades and the entire country are performing." Right now, van der Westhuizen claimed, "No one really knows how well education departments, schools, or teachers are performing."

CDE Board member Brian Figaji echoed these sentiments on accountability, lamenting that "education seems to be the only profession where people are not evaluated" and that "until we get this right, we are going to continue to have problems".

Agreeing with Figaji, and reflecting the views of education experts we interviewed, Zenex Foundation CEO Gail Campbell pointed out that evaluations that can credibly demonstrate impact are critical not only for the public sector, but also for private sector interventions. "We need clear assessments to understand the scale of an intervention's impact and what can be done to do things differently and better," said Campbell. However, "Proving causal effects is always difficult; the causal chain between, for example, working with school principals and observing an impact in the classroom is very long, very difficult, and very expensive to measure." In Campbell's experience, "Frequently organisations want to try a new idea for a few months and then start looking for the impact, but you have to intervene at the level of the whole system for at least three years before any impact is possible."

Evaluations are also costly and complex. Properly establishing causal effects requires "a sophisticated evaluation design", said Campbell, and may cost upwards of R10 million for large projects. Business has a crucial role to play in this regard. Campbell believes that privately funded initiatives should function as the 'research and development' component of the basic education sector, because the state lacks the requisite appetite, manoeuvrability, and resources to innovate. The danger is spending money on individual projects, without thinking about impacting the broader system – a problem that has plagued business-funded initiatives for decades. Cathy Duff, Director at Trialogue, said that "most companies in the private sector are implementing their own individual programmes in the education system". While "many of these programmes do have an impact on learner outcomes, they are usually not well-measured and they do not always have good monitoring and evaluation systems in place." The problem is that "you are seeing an impact on learner outcomes from private sector programmes, but not at scale". Aside from a few notable examples, Duff has not seen "much evidence of thinking about systemic change in the private sector".

One point of contention among participants was the proper focus of business projects. Louise van Rhyn, founder of Symphonia for South Africa, which runs the Partners for Possibility (PfP) programme, argued, "The biggest challenge in our education system is that more than 80 per cent of school principals, who were teachers and then promoted, have not been sufficiently equipped to lead a complex organisation, manage a budget, or deal effectively with disciplinary issues and engage with stakeholders. These processes require fundamentally different skills from those required by teaching." This, she asserted, is where the private sector should focus. In van Rhyn's opinion, "Organisational functionality is not a maths and science programme. It is about having an effective school principal; a functional school management team; teachers who are equipped; and parents who are engaged." Rather than focusing myopically on learner outcomes, she said, private efforts should instead "determine what the critical enablers of a functional school are, and invest there".

This is what PfP aims to do, explained van Rhyn. "So far, we have supported nearly 1,300 principals by meeting them where they are located and taking a local leader, usually from business, along to support them. The idea is to strengthen principals' leadership capacity through engagement with business leaders who have been well equipped with leadership and management skills. It is vital for the business leaders to work in a spirit of collaboration and reciprocity, rather than as an act of charity." Van Rhyn claimed that "94 per cent of the programme's participants have completed it, and three out of five principals report a strong or very strong improvement in the enthusiasm of teachers as a result of their participation in the programme." By contrast, several other participants in the discussion articulated a need to work across several levels in the system and to do so simultaneously so as to achieve whole system reform and improvement. In Khosa's words, "The mere fact that we measure desirable changes at the school level does not necessarily mean that change should be driven at the school level. Change, in fact, needs to be driven at multiple levels, and it is important to ensure alignment and consistency of messages from the top to the lowest level."

Campbell added that system change "is not going to work unless it is led from the top in government, whether that is at a national, provincial, or district level – you have to have that leadership from the top to ensure that your interventions take root". Khosa explained that it was important to be cognisant of this fact, because "otherwise you will go for quick-fix solutions that will not help to move this very complex system forward". Instead, what is needed "is to develop highly coordinated, structured efforts to drive learning outcomes forward".

To this end, van der Westhuizen called for "a complete reordering of the human resource management systems and the human resource performance systems across the basic education sector – including teachers, school principals, district officials, and head office officials". The challenge to overhauling the system in this way, he said, was that "it is not in everyone's interests to know whether a school is good or not". Consequently, "the role of vested interests in the education space is an elephant in the room that has to be tackled if system change is the goal", he declared.

There was a view among some participants that business should find a collective voice and work in a unified, coherent way to work out a common private sector strategy. This question of coordination is imperative, contended Makano Morojele, head of education reform at Absa. "When we talk about business and education, we tend to second-guess what each enterprise can or cannot do and what each other's capabilities are that they could bring to the table. In order to avoid this, we need to come together in non-mandated platforms and collectively decide what the parameters of reform are, so that we walk away with a collective understanding." In her view, the conversation that emerged during CDE's workshop "is critically important for us to really begin to understand what we mean by reform".

So what did CDE learn?

Education is an extremely challenging sector in which to make a real difference at scale. Business has a large, direct stake in achieving this goal. Improving learning can spur inclusive growth by producing a more skilled and productive workforce; by improving the amount of innovation within the economy, leading to new ideas, knowledge, products, and processes; and by facilitating the transmission of knowledge needed to effectively implement technologies.²⁵

Research, data and analysis is vital. The DBE must be congratulated for getting South Africa to compete in PIRLS, TIMSS, and SACMEQ, and for embarking on education experiments in collaboration with private funders and expertise. One result is the EGRS. This initiative consists of practical interventions to improve the way reading is taught, accompanied by sophisticated evaluation techniques, which have demonstrated real impact. The challenge of taking these methods to scale is significant and is being explored.²⁶ Overcoming this challenge is a vital issue for the ultimate success of this experiment. The idea behind projects like PILO and the BNSDP is for private sector-driven projects to improve the way that district officials, principals, HoDs, and teachers work and interact with one another. In so doing, they hope to raise the levels of support and functionality within the system, thereby making it more likely that teachers will be both enabled and motivated to teach in ways that are more effective. Improving the leadership skills of principals, as PfP aims to do, is another important part of this story.

By stepping into areas where the state is weak, interventions like PILO and the Kagiso Trust are pointing to important ways in which the state could work more effectively. At the same time, they are also acting as substitutes, or helping hands, for the state. It is important to keep asking to what extent this increases or decreases pressure on the state to undertake essential reforms or implement more cost-effective allocations of public resources.

As CDE emphasised a decade ago, constructive public-private engagement is crucial for finding solutions to the crises that plague South Africa's basic education system. Privately funded actors should not however sacrifice their role in demanding better learning outcomes from the system when partnering with the government or other vested interests. Public 'voice' and pressure for change really matters. Government has to be held accountable and in public for its performance on basic education. Collective business interests need to be uncompromisingly loud and clear on the need for greater accountability and value for money across the education system. Without improvements in both these areas, no intervention has a chance of generating the kinds of ongoing, sustained improvements we need.

We are seeing important steps forward, but they have to be accompanied by a certain amount of vigilance, couched within a clear, strategic vision and a relentless concern about accountability. Some major private sector-driven initiatives seem to have demonstrated real impact (although independent evaluation is hard to find and absolutely critical) and may have contributed to the system-wide improvements that we have seen over the past decade, although it is hard to know exactly how and by how much.

In order for the full effect of interventions to be adequately assessed, the private sector must make its data publically available. Stakeholders in the education system agree that the private sector should be committed to transparency, particularly with regards to data, evaluation, and demonstrating causal impact. The ability to showcase impact and results is crucial, but learning from what has not worked is just as important, to avoid scarce resources being wasted by duplicating efforts across the system.

Concluding thoughts

Despite system-wide improvements, our education system still performs very badly as a whole and in comparison with its peers. Now, global education experts warn that the Covid-19 pandemic threatens to result in widespread and sustained learning losses. According to the Brookings Institution, low-income countries "could lose more than three full years of their investment in basic education".²⁷

In this context, the need for a well-run education system that delivers quality learning to all is more urgent than ever. Private efforts have a vital role to play.

Business leaders and civil society organisations must continue to lend their voices to, and provide resources for, campaigns and public interest groups that demand accountability from the state for actual improvements. A crucial component of this strategy must include loud, consistent, and strategic messaging on reforms. Which reforms are important and why? What are they designed to achieve? What is the ultimate vision for the entire education system? What are the benchmarks along the hard road of improving basic education in South Africa? Fixing education performance is absolutely vital for inclusion, employment, and ultimately our democracy. The platform that NASCEE provides appears to be a valuable first step in building a more coordinated approach on this and other issues.

Overall, it is encouraging that there has been a shift by many in the private sector away from pouring resources into small ad hoc projects into more collaborative action to improve the quality of learning for the whole system. This needs to be accelerated and fortified by the other recommendations made in this short report. That is the only way in which business can make crucial contributions to the fundamental reforms that the basic education sector needs now more than ever.

APPENDIX: Interviews

- Sir Michael Barber, Founder and Chairman, Delivery Associates, 9 March 2020, via video.
- Prof. Barbara Bruns, Lead Education Economist: Latin America and the Caribbean, World Bank, 29 May 2019, via video.
- Prof. Brahm Fleisch, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, 26 November 2019, CDE offices.
- Dr. Alec Gershberg, Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Urban Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 28 May 2019, via video.
- Prof. Martin Gustafsson, Associate Professor of Economics, University of Stellenbosch, 26 November 2019, CDE offices.
- Dr. Jane Hofmeyr, independent education and development consultant, 29 January 2019, CDE offices.
- Prof. Jonathan Jansen, Distinguished Professor of Education, University of Stellenbosch, 8 November 2019, Stellenbosch.
- Dr. James Keevy, CEO, JET Education Services, 24th November 2019 and 4 May 2020, via video.
- Cynthia Malinga, Programmes Manager, Sasol Inzalo Foundation, 26 November 2019, CDE offices.
- Jamie Martin, CEO, English Direct, 28 January 2019, via video.
- Prof. Mary Metcalfe, Education and Change Director, PILO, 23 November 2019, Johannesburg.
- Themba Mola, CEO, Kagiso Shanduka Trust, 28 November, KT Offices, Johannesburg.
- Prof. Lilli Pretorius, Professor of Linguistics, University of South Africa, 26 November 2019, CDE offices.
- Debbie Schäfer, Western Cape Provincial Minister of Education, 17 November 2019, Bruma.
- Dr. Volker Schöer, Associate Professor of Economics and Finance, University of the Witwatersrand, 7 November 2019, CDE offices.
- Dr. Nic Spaul, Senior Researcher in Economics, University of Stellenbosch, 30 October 2019, Stellenbosch.
- Dr. Nick Taylor, Senior Research Fellow, JET Education Services, 24 January 2019, CDE offices.
- Prof. Servaas van der Berg, Professor of Economics, University of Stellenbosch, 20 September 2019, CDE offices.
- Dr. Emiliana Vegas, Senior Fellow and Co-Director: Center for Universal Education, Brookings Institution, 11 June 2019, via video.
- Penny Vinjevold, Deputy Director-General: Education Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Eastern Cape Department of Education, 8 December, Cape Town.
- Prof. John Volmink, Chairperson, Umalusi Council, 4 February 2019, via video.

Endnotes

- ¹ See Nic Spaul, 'National lockdowns and national school closures are not the answer', Financial Mail, 21 July 2020; and Nic Spaul, 'Six reasons why schools must be open if we are to fight Covid-19', Daily Maverick, 22 July 2020.
- ² Martin Gustafsson and Carol Nuga Deliwe, How is the COVID-19 pandemic affecting educational quality in South Africa? Evidence to date and future risks, 15 July 2020, p. 18.
- ³ Centre for Development and Enterprise, Business and Schooling Reform: What Can We Learn from Experience in the United States? (2010), p. 4.
- ⁴ Martin Gustafsson and Carol Nuga Deliwe, How is the COVID-19 pandemic affecting educational quality in South Africa? Evidence to date and future risks, 15 July 2020, p. 6.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 7.
- ⁶ Nic Spaul, Priorities for Education Reform in South Africa: Input Document for Treasury's Economic Colloquium, 19 January 2019, p. 3.
- ⁷ Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), International Results in Reading 2016, 2017, p. 55.
- ⁸ Suellen Shay, 'Why South Africa's declining maths performance is a worry', The Conversation, 9 January 2020.
- ⁹ World Bank DataBank, URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD?locations=TZ-KE-ZA>; The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), 'SACMEQ III Reading & Math Achievement Scores', 2011, URL: <http://www.sacmeg.org/?q=sacmeg-projects/sacmeg-iii/readingmathscores>.
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- ¹² Interview with John Volmink, 4 February 2019, via video.
- ¹³ Interview with Godwin Khosa, 14th November, 2019, CDE offices.
- ¹⁴ Interview with Brahm Fleisch, 26 November 2019, CDE offices.
- ¹⁵ Interview with Brahm Fleisch, 26 November 2019, CDE offices.
- ¹⁶ Brahm Fleisch, The Education Triple Cocktail: System Wide Instructional Reform in South Africa, Cape Town, 2018, p. 134.
- ¹⁷ Interview with Mary Metcalfe, 23 November 2019, Johannesburg.
- ¹⁸ Interview with Mary Metcalfe, 23 November 2019, Johannesburg.
- ¹⁹ Interview with Themba Mola, 28 November 2019, Johannesburg.
- ²⁰ Interview with James Keevy, 4 May 2020, via video.
- ²¹ Similar concerns were voiced to us by Volker Schöer and Jane Hofmeyr. Interview with Volker Schöer, 7 November 2019, CDE offices; interview with Jane Hofmeyr, 29 January 2019, CDE offices.
- ²² Interview with Nic Spaul, 30 October 2019, Stellenbosch.
- ²³ Interview with Servaas van der Berg, 20 September 2019, CDE offices.
- ²⁴ Interview with James Keevy, 4 May 2020, via video.
- ²⁵ Montfort Mlachila and Tlhalefang Moeletsi, Struggling to Make the Grade: A Review of the Causes and Consequences of the Weak Outcomes of South Africa's Education System, International Monetary Fund Working Paper 19/47, June 2019, p. 39.
- ²⁶ Fleisch told CDE that "there are substantial provincial funds and we can and should reprioritise provincial education budgets", so taking successful experiments to scale should not be a financial issue. Interview with Brahm Fleisch, 26 November 2019, CDE offices. See also Jane Hofmeyr, Literature Review of Coaching in Education: From 'Knowing to Doing', Zenex Foundation commissioned paper, October 2019, p. 23.
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