

All hands on deck

The National Education Collaboration Trust is upbeat about taking education to the next level to fulfil the objectives of the National Development Plan

Thabo Mohlala

Efforts to turn around the South African education system in line with the aims of the National Development Plan (NDP) are steadily gaining pace. This was the bold assurance given by the National Education Collaboration Trust's (Nect's) chairman, Godwin Khosa, and chief executive, Sizwe Nxasana, during their presentation of a 2014 interim integrated report to stakeholders at Rosebank, northern Johannesburg.

The trust was launched in July 2013 as a coalition of government, business, labour, academia and civil society. Nect's key objective is to identify intervention strategies and programmes to fix the country's underperforming education system. Nxasana said: "The trust has been set up to advocate for the improvement of the quality of education and implement practical steps that will circumvent the negative effects of a poor education system in the economy and lives of South Africans." One of the NDP's targets is that 90% of pupils must achieve more than a 50% pass in maths, science and languages by 2030.

Khosa described the first year of the trust's existence as a "roller-coaster ride" and said that despite the enormity of the challenges the Nect faced, pride kept them going. He said the first challenge was to formulate a theory that promotes change as a key component and this must be linked to clear programme theory to ensure

efficient implementation of projects. To achieve the NDP objectives, Khosa said, the trust came up with five "implementable educational programmes". They are the district intervention programme, systemic intervention, an innovation programme, investments into the improvement of maths and science and Education Dialogue. Of the five, said Khosa, only the district intervention programme had been successfully implemented while the Education Dialogue programme was at an "advanced stage" of finalisation and the rest were still at "scoping stage". These programmes are anchored on "six discernable themes for action", which are expressed in the Education Collaboration Network, a founding partnership strategy that continues to guide and direct the trust.

The progress on each of the programmes is as follows:

District intervention programme

This programme aims to support district offices to improve their roles in monitoring and supporting schools. District offices have long been characterised as the weakest links in the delivery of quality education. The idea is to optimise their operations, given their strategic proximity to schools. The programme has targeted 4 362 schools in eight districts in the five provinces of Limpopo, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Mpumalanga. To successfully drive district improvement interventions, the trust has the secured professional services of five "lead



Mark Lamberti, chief executive of Imperial Logistics, accepting his certificate of recognition for his donation to the National Education Collaboration Trust. Photo: Gerhard Louw

agencies", all of which have experience in the education field. They are, first, the Education Excellence Consortium comprising 18 nongovernmental organisations. It is assigned to schools in the Eastern Cape. Deloitte, a professional financial firm that helps schools in Vhembe and Waterberg in Limpopo, is the second lead agent. Third is the Programme for Improving Learning Outcomes, operating in Pinetown and uThungulu in KwaZulu-Natal and fourth the the PricewaterhouseCoopers Consortium, which takes care of schools in Bojanala in the North West and Bohlabela in Mpumalanga. The fifth lead agency is the Joint Education Trust, a registered non-profit organisation, which provides project management nationally.

Systemic intervention

This programme explores "support interventions" to help to bring down the proportion of money spent on personnel (known as "personnel spend") in education. The report found that presently the personnel spend stands at 86%, which it describes as "unsustainable and unacceptable".

"Even the teacher unions accede to the fact that this trend will ultimately leave teachers with no budget for their tools of trade", the report reads.

The innovation programme

Three innovation projects have been

undertaken so far. One looks into how certain subsystems of the public education sector have improved. The second project provides support to the department of basic education to develop an ICT strategy, and the third is testing a psychosocial referral system for pupils who do not receive proper screening and treatment for psychological and social needs that inhibit effective learning.

Investments into the improvement of maths and science

This programme looks at efforts to review "past social investments into how the two subjects can be improved to develop guidelines that will improve returns on investments". The idea is to highlight how school projects that are not "meaningfully aligned to the district's programme" are not sustainable.

Education Dialogue

Education Dialogue South Africa aims to provide a platform to address key issues to help to improve the professionalisation of teachers and inculcate school ethos in the country.

Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga, who attended the briefing, expressed her confidence and satisfaction with the progress achieved so far by the trust.

The report is available from Nect on 012 752 6200 or e-mail: info@nect.org.za