

# SA needs collaboration and action

The need for collaboration between all stakeholders and the effective use of all the available data were themes that ran throughout the Improving Maths Performance Debate in Sandton last week

**A**cademics, unions, teachers and NGOs agreed that vast amounts of information existed in disparate systems, covering best practice, intervention outcomes and education challenges. However, only through collaboration and sharing of this data could real progress be made.

Godwin Khosa, chief executive of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), said not every intervention could be systemic, but that stakeholders had to appreciate the inter-dependence of systemic sub-systems in intervention planning and implementation. "The challenge is that we live in two worlds — the government world and the non-government world," he said. "We need to break through the glass wall and share our learnings and experience to the benefit of pupils."

Bridge's chief executive, Barbara Dale-Jones, said: "We need multi-stakeholder engagement and alignment, but this takes time. The sector needs to commit to collaboration to increase the scope and reach of interventions, minimise cost and limit the duplication of interventions. We also need to commit to rigorous evaluation of interventions."

She said one problem in education is that effective use is not always made of the data sets available in the education sector. "As a sector, we need to share working practices — what worked and what didn't. We must build our ability to work collaboratively and work in partnership, build a shared understanding of the problem, mobilise resources that match the scale of the challenges, work together to test a range of possible solutions, create feedback loops and systems for sharing and commit to learning from experience."



**Calculating:** Godwin Khosa, chief executive of the National Education Collaboration Trust, speaking at *Mail&Guardian* and FirstRand Foundation 'Improving Maths Performance Debate' at FNB Conference Centre in Sandton. Photo: Elvis Ntombela

Edward Mosuwe, deputy director general of curriculum management and delivery at the Gauteng department of education, said that much of the information needed to get to the root causes of the problems and address them probably already exists in various data bases. "We need to mine our data sets correctly. We have a great deal of data indicating what works — we need to use it," he said. "We must use all this knowledge we have at a micro scale, and go to scale with interventions."

South African Democratic Teachers' Union deputy president Mabutho Cele said the teachers' union was keen to collaborate with all stakeholders: "As a union, we feel we should be seen as partners, not enemies in education."

Parents too, have a role to play, said Professor Mellony Graven, numeracy chair at Rhodes University. "Parents

are an untapped resource. They want to help their children, particularly in the early grades," she said.

Skills transfer to teachers and between teachers, as well as to parents to help them to support their children's learning were important, agreed delegates. And action had to be taken as a matter of urgency, they said.

Khosa said building professional development in to the school timetable could ensure that sufficient time was allocated for ongoing teacher development, and said the fundamental resources had to be put in place to support improved maths teaching.

Graven called for "systemic teacher support to focus on enabling recovery, as well as the creation of spaces for recovery." She pointed out that the systemic focus tended to be more on form than function, with teacher

preparation files and the neatness of pupil books getting greater attention than outcomes. "Sometimes the systemic focus results in teachers spending more time addressing issues like neatness, than on teaching and remediation," she said. "I see no evidence that teachers aren't committed. They care deeply, and often give up their Saturdays to teach pupils.

"Education should not be delivered and received," she said, "Pupils should be given more opportunities to actually learn. We need to develop more active, engaging pupil dispositions."

Graven said opportunities to improve maths performance included enabling dialogue and partnerships for teachers within professional learning communities. Progressively tailored homework drives and after-school spaces free from curriculum demands,

where children could work at their own pace, would also help to facilitate learning, she said. Noting that many children did not have home environments conducive to learning, she said: "We think schools close too early. We would like to see these spaces kept open after formal school hours for reading and maths clubs and remediation work. This would allow pupils to grow outside of school hours."

One delegate noted at the end of the day: "For us working out there, the realities are heartbreaking. Kids are opting out because they can't engage with the content. Those who missed out on content in the earlier grades can't hope to catch up; there are huge knowledge gaps among our kids. Teachers are now battling to help children in grade eight who have grade four level knowledge. Teachers need support, not criticism."