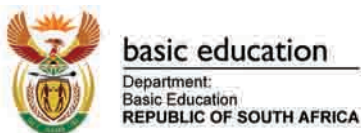


# Promoting Active Citizenship in Education: A Reflection on the District Steering Committee Model

Prepared for the Ministry of Basic Education and the  
National Education Collaboration Trust – August 2016





## About Us

### **National Education Collaboration Trust**

The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) was formed in 2013 as a direct response to the call by the National Development Plan (NDP) for greater collaboration amongst social partners to improve the education outcomes. It is the result of a collaboration between government, unions, business and civil society, it operates independently of all of its stakeholders to be an honest broker and a creative force for the change we need to see if 90% of learners are to pass maths, science and languages with at least 50% by 2030.

Driven by the NDP objectives, the NECT aims to achieve marked and sustainable improvements through the active collaboration of the best capacities in society.

The NECT has selected eight districts, representing 20% of all schools in South Africa, in which to roll out its programmes. Ten percent of these schools, Fresh Start Schools, receive intensive support and continue to serve as a trial for the national roll out of NECT interventions.

[www.nect.org.za](http://www.nect.org.za)

*Compiled by Martin Prew on behalf of the NECT, DBE and GTAC*

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## Foreword by the Minister

Schools are integral parts of communities. In many ways, teachers and learners and how they interact in schools are a reflection of the communities they come from. While schools are critical drivers of the socio-economic emancipation of their communities, their very success depends on the support they receive from those communities. Furthermore, the South African education system is founded on collaborative governance. Every school is required by law to establish a School Governing Body (SGB) comprising the principal of the school, representatives of teachers, parents, non-teaching staff and, in the case of secondary schools, learners. The SGBs are encouraged to co-opt community representatives with the intention of bolstering community members' skills and the social capital required to maintain education provision of the highest standards. This unique characteristic of our country is emphatically promoted by the National Development Plan which calls for active citizenry and the establishment of 'virtuous cycles' representing the various and key stakeholders in every sector of our economy.

The founding of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) and establishment of the District Steering Committees (DSC) was in pursuance of this ideal. Through these structures, business, labour and civil society have been brought together to work with government to improve service delivery in education. This collaboration has been able to attract additional financial resources, skills and expertise, enhance trust among stakeholder groups, and foster a common vision for education improvement.

We are delighted with the observations of the NECT case study which highlights ways in which we can strengthen community participation in schools, circuits, and district offices. The lessons are pertinent to the improvement of the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign, SGBs and SGB associations. The case study clearly shows that where collaboration structures have focused on and jointly resourced improvement projects, high levels of stakeholder interest have been achieved along with better, more tangible results.



*Ms Angie Motshekga – Minister of Basic Education*

# Introduction

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) launched the District Improvement Programme (DIP) in 2013 to improve the performance of South Africa's schools in line with the Education and Training Chapter of the National Development Plan. The NECT was established by government, business, labour and civil society to promote collaboration for improved education outcomes in South Africa. The NECT works closely with the Department of Basic Education to test innovations that can be replicated across the national system. The District Improvement Programme is being tested in eight districts across KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, North West and Mpumalanga Provinces.

The eight target districts are; Libode and Mt Frere in Eastern Cape, Pinetown and Uthungulu in KwaZulu-Natal, Waterberg and Vhembe in Limpopo, Bojanala in North West and Bohlabela in Mpumalanga. They jointly comprise of 4 362 schools, 66 000 teachers and nearly 2 million learners, and make up 10% of all districts, 18% of schools and 18% of teachers respectively.

A key element in the DIP intervention is the District Steering Committee (DSC). Each of the 8 districts has a DSC. The DSCs are multi-stakeholder structures similar to the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign structures. The DSC model has additional feature such as oversight on a funded and active improvement programme with dedicated technical and coordination support. They are made up of about twenty members, who represent a range of communities and interests. Each of the DSCs has representatives from local business, teachers' unions, school governing body associations, local government and the district education office, religious orders, and youth structures, as well as traditional leaders.

In line with the concepts of active citizenry and strong local leadership holding public service accountable promoted by the NDP, each DSC monitors the implementation of DIP and bring local communities and relevant structures into education and education decisions. At the same they are

there to help the district education office solve community-based challenges that it may be facing.

The DBE and NECT, working with the national Treasury, commissioned a study into the emerging model of community engagement and active citizenship in education which the more successful DSCs seem to be promoting in line with their mandate. This paper explores that model and explains why it is so important to the future development of schooling and education in South Africa.



### NECT DSC Profiles

Districts	Chair	Provincial Rep (s).	District Rep (s).	Civil Society	Traditional Leaders	Church Leadership	Teachers Unions	Business Rep (s).	SGB Rep (s).	University Rep (s).	Other	Total
Pinetown District	1	1	2	1	1	1	4	1	1	2	3	18
uThungulu District	1	0	4	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	16
Bohlabela District	1	1	5	1	1	1	2	2	1	0	1	16
Bojanala District	1	3	5	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	20
Waterberg District	1	0	6	1	1	1	4	0	1	1	3	19
Vhembe District	1	0	3	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	3	16
Mount Frere District	1	0	4	1	1	2	6	1	2	1	3	22
Libode District	1	0	4	2	1	1	7	1	1	1	2	21
<b>Total</b>	8	5	33	9	8	9	31	8	9	9	19	148

# Bringing the Community Back into the School

The overall aim of the DSC is to bring local people back into their schools so that they view education as something that they can get involved in, debate and influence. The emergence of the DSC is in response to the NDP and a belief that since the birth of democracy local communities, particularly in townships and rural areas, have removed themselves from engaging with education issues. This is surprising given the historical relationship between these communities and their schools. Many rural schools, in particular, were built through the hard-work and savings of the communities they serve. Then in 1976 the Soweto Uprising began in schools and spread to the whole community, in the 1980s schools were the centres of highly visible funerals of those killed by the apartheid authorities and schools were often closed as a key part of any protest, and in 1994 they were used as voting centres.

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*The only way community members could get involved in their local school was if the SGB co-opted them. The result was that even community members who were interested in education felt excluded from playing an active role in their local school.*

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So what went wrong? Why did communities which had traditionally seen schools as the centre of their community and central to their political engagement stop engaging with them?

- (i) With the election in 1994 many communities seem to have assumed that their fight was over: the ANC was in power and would now solve all problems, including those related to education and the local school. As a result active (and often very tired) community members focused on other aspects of their life and community, sometimes being elected to local government office or starting new businesses to survive and make sense of life in the post-apartheid reality.
- (ii) The South African Schools Act, which was being implemented from January 1997, codified community engagement with schools. Parents of children in the school could be elected onto the school's governing body (SGB) and would have full voting rights on the SGB. However, community members could not be elected onto the SGB. The only way community members could get involved in their local school was if the SGB co-opted them. As co-opted members they would have no vote in any decisions the SGB made. The Ministerial Commission on School Governance, which was set up in the mid-2000s, found that the co-option facility was rarely used by SGBs, and community activists showed



little interest in playing a non-decision-making role on SGBs. The result was that even community members who were interested in education felt excluded from playing an active role in their local school.

- (iii) The post 1994 legislation made provision for communities to be involved in having oversight of education in their province and influencing how it developed through the provincial education and training councils (ETC). However, few of these were ever launched. Those that were launched focused their activity on an annual stakeholder meeting. To community activists a one day meeting about education in general may have seemed distant from being active in one's local school. Generally, in these annual ETC meetings only organised voices were heard, from the unions, associations and government. The single voice of the activist was largely lost.
- (iv) Various campaigns were designed by the departments of education and their partners to get community members back into their school. These included the Tirisano

initiative in the early 2000s, and more recently the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign. There were also many NGO led projects, which included elements of community engagement, such as the Quality Learning Project in the 2000s. Few if any of these 'projects' and 'campaigns' appealed to local community members and did not recognise and build a role for local leadership, with real decision-making powers and access, and so most fizzled out with little community ownership, engagement or interest.

As a result, over the last twenty years communities and community activists have lost the excitement of being involved in their schools. Before 1994 engagement in one's local school was part of protest, a way of improving education so that the community could proudly proclaim graduates among its success stories, in opposition to the regime's attempts to keep black communities in poverty and ignorance. The structured, differentiated engagement in the local school offered by the democratic government must have seemed like a poor substitute for the activism and engagement before 1994. Education was the loser. Why was this?

## Why citizens lost the excitement of being involved in their schools?

- (i) Rural and township schools often became educational backwaters; failing their learners and the community. The old engagement had often kept the teachers accountable and as part of the struggle they knew they had a duty to perform; to educate the next generation to resist apartheid. Teachers often became inward looking and disinterested in the performance of their learners, typically blaming their learners for being lazy and lacking in motivation.
- (ii) School governance, led by the SGBs, focused on procurement and the many rules and regulations that came from the departments of education. As such they have been playing a self-interested, non-political and often conservative role. In some communities the SGB members have actively tried to protect their

school against unwelcome elements such as poor children, children who head up households and children of immigrants.

Given this background the DSCs are a welcome change from this increasingly universal reality.

“Active citizenship requires inspirational leadership at all levels of society. Leadership does not refer to one person, or even a tight collective of people. It applies in every aspect of life.”  
– National Development Plan

“

*There is now an urgent need to craft a social contract that will enable South Africa to achieve higher growth and employment, increase investment and savings. The idea of a social compact is a relatively simple one: all stakeholders buy into a clearly articulated vision; have a shared analysis of constraints and are committed to finding solutions; and parties understand the objective of the compact. The compact should offer attractive (indeed compelling) benefits to each party and all parties should believe that the necessary sacrifices are relatively equitably shared amongst all participants.*

”

*– National Development Plan*

# The District Steering Committee

Through the DSCs the Minister of Basic Education and NECT are trying test a model for building real community involvement and ownership of education with local recognised leaders taking a key role so as to reverse the situation described above. The DSCs are explicitly required to help rebuild local community engagement in education issues in their districts. Over the last two years, partly by design and partly by organic development a model of what a successful DSC looks like has emerged. The diagram below captures the main elements of that model.

“Parents, leaders of the community and public figures should demonstrate leadership qualities’ by ‘leading by example’, ‘exhibiting honesty, integrity and trustworthiness’, managing change by driving a new agenda while communicating with their constituencies effectively and ‘keeping them interested and informed’, and making ‘unpopular decisions’.”  
– National Development Plan

**Representation:** Comprehensive representation of stakeholders( provincial office, district office, unions and community)

**Mission:** to improve learning outcomes

**Key:** dedicated district/ schools improvement programme

**Role:** Monitor the Improvement programme, Remove implementation blockages, mobilise communities, raise resources

**Principles:** non-partisan, respectful etc.

If DSCs can sustain themselves and carry on playing a critical role in education then not only will schools in the participating districts improve but the DSCs may augur a new way of organising society in support of public services while also holding them accountable.

## The Research

The research into the way the DSCs were set up and are working was conducted in early 2016. A sample of 4 out of the 8 pilot DSCs which are included in the District Improvement Programme nationally were included in the study. This sample was selected based on a range of indicators and included DSCs which are serving urban and rural communities and a mix of those considered effective and struggling.

The research team used both quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect the data which was then used to develop a consolidated case study of the work of the DSCs.

The international literature that was reviewed as part of the evaluation signalled that there is awareness in relevant literature on the need to create strong community and political support for school and district transformation. This is rarely if ever translated into the successful promotion of active citizenry and strong local leadership holding public service accountable at a local level, as promoted by the NDP. There is therefore little or no precedent for an inclusive apolitical but politically powerful governance structure attached to a district and school improvement project. As such, this experiment is of interest to all school and district improvement practitioners and if shown to be successful, would be a model that deserves being replicated elsewhere.

## The objectives

The objectives of this research were to:

- Understand how the DSCs, as a key element of the DIP, are functioning in relation to the DIP and identify their support needs
- Identify the variables that lead to some of the DSCs being particularly successful in comparison to others and assess whether they are a model which could be replicated in other district.

## The question

In pursuit of these objectives the key research question was:

- How do the DSCs work to meet the educational and transformational objectives for which they were formed?

Subsidiary questions that were used as the basis for collecting data were:

- Do the DSCs add value to the DIP, ensuring that it delivers as planned within budget and, if so, are they a suitable model for playing this role?
- Have the DSCs managed to mobilise the stakeholders so that they are working towards a common goal, and if so how have the DSCs managed to achieve this?
- Is the project through the DSCs managing to create a sustainable alliance for improving schooling (and particularly rural schooling) in South Africa?

## The Key Findings

How well each DSC has fulfilled its role varies. The research found that:

- DSCs are able to unblock barriers that were preventing the effective support of school improvement by education districts and at various levels in the schooling system which have impeded improvements in performance. Some of these barriers relate to national and provincial policy and the way policy is implemented, while some relate to the actions of local government and teacher unions or youth formations, and some barriers are specific to a particular local community and the schools themselves.
- DSCs are able to play an oversight role in relation to the delivery of the DIPs in each of the 8 districts, and are increasingly gaining in confidence so they can also make the delivery agents and/or NECT accountable for the delivery of the project in their district.
- The DSCs have held events encouraging communities

to get involved in their schools. These have been well attended. In addition members of many DSCs have spent time in schools motivating the teachers and offering support. Education district offices have noted improved relations between the office and schools as a result of these activities.

- Key to the success of the DSC is the interest, local standing and capacity of the DSC chairperson, and to a lesser extent, the members of the DSC. Where the DSC chair is committed, has local standing and capacity, with members who are prepared to give their time to being active citizens, the DSC is a powerful addition to the district improvement intervention.

However, while increasingly presenting as a model for mobilising active citizenship in education, and showing the benefits of that at school and district levels, the audited DSCs had failed to establish independent projects by early 2016, and were still in the early stages of creating their own funding streams.

## DSC Chairpersons



*Mr John Dombo – Waterberg DSC*



*Judge Joseph Raulinga – Vhembe DSC*



*Mr Mbusi Dlamini – Pinetown DSC*



*Mr Mogotsi Gustaph Mompei – Bojanala DSC*



*King Thandisizwe Diko – Mt Frere DSC*



*Mr Samuel Zungu – Uthingulu DSC*



*Nkosi Vikele Ndabeni – Libode DSC*



*Dr Richard Ngomane – Bohlabela DSC*

# Unblocking the System and Resolving Problems

The most effective community engagement exercises have been where the DSC chairs have intervened to resolve a problem facing a particular school or community, or the district more generally. Members of each DSC gave at least one example of such an intervention. These included:

- (i) Intervention in a school which has been long troubled by the local royal household which treats the school as its own and ignores legislation, which has created confusion.

The DSC chair intervened with the royal family, explaining the damage they were doing to the school and the children. The royal household withdrew and the school is improving.

- (ii) Calling in the national Minister to hold an imbizo to encourage improvement in the Matric results. This allowed the local community to inform the Minister of their problems and allowed the DIP and DSC to be profiled. Matric results improved and the DSC chair got the Minister to include the district in a pilot to rationalise schools.
- (iii) Various DSCs have assisted in getting critical teachers appointed where there was a lack of teachers by intervening at district and provincial levels to clear red tape and delays. Posts were then properly advertised and appointments made.
- (iv) A DSC met with traditional leaders and got them to agree to impose a moratorium on the issuing of any new liquor selling licenses. The argument being that the proliferation of liquor outlets was impacting on youth and their schooling. The traditional leaders also gave a commitment to reduce loud music, and monitor the reduction of these levels, in their communities during school exam periods.





## Vuwani crisis and the role of Vhembe District DSC

When the boundary dispute in Vuwani (Limpopo Province) escalated in May 2016 to burning schools the DSC went into action and convened a series of meetings of its stakeholders in the affected areas – youth, pastors’ forum, teachers’ unions, school principals, SGB chairs and the district’s education management team – to bring order to schooling. It also mounted an advocacy campaign to calm the situation. Through its task team the DSC, with NECT, coordinated a crowd-resourcing initiative to support Grade 12 camps and help restock the schools as soon as they reopened. It managed to mobilise local business (including untapped sectors such as taxi owners) to contribute and to commit to supporting schools beyond the crisis. Once schools reopened it led the way in re-establishing order by targeting donations to schools which needed them and reintegrating those learners who had boycotted school and joined protests, with those who had attended the camps. The DSC has been able to coordinate stakeholder structures through the crisis because it is seen as neutral, while having an ear to the ground.

- (v) In a school which had been terrorised by a drunken teacher the DSC got him removed and then managed the community reaction to ensure that it understood why he had been removed by the district office. This intervention ensured that there was no negative community response.
- (vi) When a young female learner was raped the DSC mobilised the community to march on the court and make sure that the alleged rapist was not granted bail.
- (vii) The DSC helped resolve an impasse over the opening of a newly built education district office after members of the DSC camped at the relevant provincial office till they got a commitment that the matter would be resolved.
- (viii) Two DSCs have been working together with the Ministry of Education and the ETDP-SETA to train unemployed youth in basic maintenance skills, so they could set up small businesses and offer maintenance support to their local school. This is one of a number of internship schemes operating around the intervention.

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*Where the DSC chair is committed, has local standing and capacity, with members who are prepared to give their time to being active citizens, the DSC is a powerful addition to the district improvement intervention*

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# A Special Kind of Leader

Critical to the success of the model is the leader or chair of the DSC. The characteristics of a successful DSC leader have become clear during the life of the DSCs. The ability to attract leaders of such calibre and local standing is a key difference between this project and other projects aimed at mobilising community engagement with their schools and education, such as the QLTC.

The leaders of the most effective of the DSCs are committed, hard-working, generous with their time and their wisdom, and deliberately political in their actions but not their party affiliations. They are all successful and are greatly respected in their communities and in their DSC, and were appointed to the post of chair of the DSC based on peer and community recommendations and due to their local positional power

and influence. They were not elected – and indicated that if membership of the DSC was based on standing for election, they would have refused. They are in fact modern day versions of the great anti-apartheid community leaders of yesteryear. As with those leaders each is very different and so it is important to look at what each brings to their role as DSC chairperson. Three of the more successful are briefly profiled below.

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*The leaders of the most effective of the DSCs are committed, hard-working, generous with their time and their wisdom, and deliberately political in their actions but not their party affiliations*

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## The Paramount Chief

The paramount chief previously worked in the World Bank Group as an Independent Consultant to the National Department of Human Settlements. Prior to that he held the positions of Housing Perspective Leader and Manager: FSC and Industry Liaison at ABSA Bank, Acting Chief Director for the Department of Human Settlements and Senior Researcher (Housing) in the South African Human Rights Commission. He has held various leadership positions in the community and has written and published articles and reports. He has a Masters in Development Communication. His positional power makes him a perfect leader and he has augmented this through leadership, accessibility and willingness to get his hands dirty in the cause of improving education in his kingdom.

## The Judge

The judge serves as a Judge of the High Court of South Africa. He previously served as a Chief Magistrate in the Polokwane and Bloemfontein Magistrate's courts. He is involved in community leadership initiatives and serves as the Advisor and Coordinator of the Madombidzha Education Trust. The judge was one of the youngsters who were trained and guided by Dr Beyers Naude and Dr T.S. Farisani at Bester Mission in the mid-1970s. The judge has numerous degrees including a D. Juris in Private Law and a LLB in Private Law and a LLM in Legal Philosophy and Constitutional Law. Although very busy the judge is greatly respected and praised for giving his valuable time to education and the community.

## The Pastor

This Senior Pastor of Living Waters Church is also a businessman. He has served as General Manager of the homeland and provincial development corporations. He serves on a number of boards, including the Bushbuck Ridge Water Board, and is an Audit Committee Member of the Mpumalanga Department of Social Development. He previously served as a Board Member of the International Labour Organisation (South Africa). He has a doctorate from the University of Pretoria and a number of other degrees and qualifications focused on theology and leadership. His background in the church, in business and in provincial roles means that he has a strong local profile.

None of these prominent citizens would normally have a leadership role in relation to their schools under the South African Schools Act – and even if they had their role would have been restricted to one school at which they had children. Their role in the respective DSCs provides them with an influential role in education and in a role which allows them to make a real difference to education delivery and provision across a whole district.

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*DSCs are able to unblock barriers that were preventing the effective support of school improvement by education districts and at various levels in the schooling system which have impeded improvements in performance*

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# Why is this Model of Active Citizenship in Education Important?

The simple truth is that the DIP is probably the first national intervention since 1994 to include a successful and replicable district-level model of real community mobilisation around schooling with the ability to get things done and solve problems impacting on the delivery of quality schooling to children. Significantly, existing power structures are not sidelined in the membership of the DSC, so it includes local religious, political, youth, local government and union leaders. In the better led DSCs what was impressive was the extent to which organisational agendas were shelved and all members of the DSC worked for the common good of education in their community. This alone makes the DSC an important innovation and why DSCs have the potential to add real value to schools in rural areas, in particular.

An important consideration in evaluating the DSC is whether this model will survive the end of the funded phase of the intervention. If it does not, it will join many other initiatives which promised but failed to create sustainable systems and processes. That the participants and the chairpersons believe that the DSCs will survive is significant but not conclusive. The proof will only be seen in five or ten years' time. However, there are some positive indications as the successful DSCs develop their own character and independence and are defining their role in relation to the dynamics prevailing in the district and communities they serve.

To be sustainable in the long-term the DSCs will need to:

- (i) Raise its own funds or have access to a limited source of funding for its meetings and out-of-pocket costs of conducting community engagement meetings;
- (ii) Continue to be able to talk to power and get issues resolved;
- (iii) Continue to provide education district offices access to local communities (to which they normally lack access) and so extend the reach and influence of the district offices to their advantage;
- (iv) Have such status that representatives of organisations on the DSC continue firstly to serve the DSC and education, rather than serving sectional and partisan interests;
- (v) Be replicated in other districts in each province with comparable leaders and levels of success.

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*Significantly, existing power structures are not sidelined in the membership of the DSC, so it includes local religious, political, youth, local government and union leaders*

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In preparation for the end of the project the NECT needs to help lay the ground for the survival of the DSCs. In order to do this it needs to ensure that the DSCs have a secure funding source or have been trained in fund raising with a realistic chance of raising their own funding, have a clear and limited focus which will probably not include setting up community projects, and have a stable and committed leader. In districts where no suitable candidate is prepared to volunteer for this role or where a chair is failing to lead as well as anticipated the NECT may want to intervene to identify and train up a potential leader. However, the NECT must be aware that the successful chairs of the present DSCs were already successful in other leadership spheres before taking on the DSC responsibility and had a strong sense of civic responsibility. This may be impossible to create through training.

As for preparing the DSCs for the roles that they could take on once the project ends, the NECT may need to do little for the existing DSCs. They have extended their roles organically and in fact their project monitoring responsibilities have been joined by other roles that they have adopted and been asked to play by the district office. As long as senior district officers see their DSC as a powerful and useful ally in making their work easier then the DSC is likely to survive. This is

quite likely to occur as the education district directors in the districts with successful DSCs indicated that they realised how much greater community access the DSCs allowed them, with the resultant improving of relationships and resolution of problems, than they had without the DSC. They believe that the education district benefits by its association with their DSC.

In addition, key to the sustainability of the DSCs is the value that the national and provincial education departments put on the DSCs. An important factor in the success of the effective DSCs is the ability of their chairpersons to use their direct line to those in power and get them to act to resolve challenges in the interests of education in that community. This direct line to the national and provincial ministers needs to be maintained. National and provincial leadership in education needs to see the advantages of a body of this nature resolving important educational problems at local level so that they do not bother decision makers at provincial or national levels. If they do, funds can be allocated through the education district budgets to allow the DSCs to operate. However, it will be important to ring-fence these funds to ensure that the DSCs can act independently and do not become arms of the district office.

## Conclusion

The DSC is a significant development for the DBE, NECT and the nation. It exemplifies that sectional interests of the stakeholders in South African education can be shelved and through the apolitical DSC all work for the good of the child.

Possibly the most important role that the DSCs play as a model is that they allow, for the first time in 20 years, acknowledged community leaders a defined role in education which is commensurate with their position in society. The authors of the National Development Plan had this in mind when they talked of active citizenry and strong local leadership holding specific public services accountable at a local level. The crucial test for the Department and NECT is to ensure that the conditions are created and take root at district level which will allow the DSCs to both survive and spread. If they can do that an important new element in improving school performance and positioning schools as central to their communities will have been created at minimal cost.





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