

# Make your school a magnet for the community

With good principals in great demand, you can become a stakeholder

## **WORKPLACE STAFF**

**S**TATISTICS SA's report titled *The Social Profile of Youth, 2009-2014* shows that black Africans between the ages of 25 and 34 are less skilled than their parents, and every other race group.

This, according to Rosie Chirongoma, head of stakeholder engagement at Partners for Possibility (PfP), points to the dismal state of the country's education system.

The survey shows employment is linked directly to education levels, with little changed since 2009.

"In the five-year period, the study shows people who do not have matric are the most likely to remain unemployed," Chirongoma says.

She says of the roughly 25 000 schools in the country, 20 percent are world-class but 80 percent are "failing" schools. "Less than 30 per-



**Rosie Chirongoma**

cent of the 1 million children who start Grade 1 every year will be able to sustain themselves financially. The system is failing our children.

"There are two differentiating factors for those successful schools: they have principals who are equipped for their task and they have an active community of citizens supporting him or her, including parents who are actively

engaged in partnership with the teachers, as well as a supportive school governing body," says Chirongoma.

On the other hand, failing schools often have teachers who have been promoted to the role of principal without the knowledge and skills required, and with very little support from other citizens and parents.

A growing body of literature recognises school leadership as the critical factor in turning around an education system in crisis, she says.

"The principal needs to be equipped for this task. There is increasing recognition that the highly specialised role of a school principal requires specific knowledge, skills and expertise. In South Africa, the majority of school principals are not being sufficiently equipped for their role."

Business leaders can support school principals to lead change in their schools and communities, says Chirongoma.

"There are thousands of business leaders in South Africa who

have been well-equipped to assume leadership positions and manage organisational change. They can support school principals and help them acquire the knowledge, skills and expertise they need."

She says the principal needs an actively engaged team around him or her to make change happen. "School staff, especially teachers, often feel overburdened, tired and de-energised. Many have become disengaged."

In addition, staff need parents and other members of the community to become involved – they can't lead change alone.

Studies show that one of the key differences between schools that succeed and those that fail is the extent to which parents and other community members are involved in the school.

"Schools can become magnets for gifts and contributions from the community. Many South African citizens are keen to make a contribution, but don't know how to do so," says Chirongoma.

This is why Partners for Possibility was established.

"Since 2010 Symphonia has been supporting and developing school principals by partnering business leaders (with skills and knowledge of leading change) with principals in co-action and co-learning partnerships for possibility.

"The PfP partnership not only gives the principal an opportunity to acquire leadership and management skills, but also helps business leaders develop the skills to deal with complexity and influence without direct authority," says Chirongoma.

"The programme gives the school and principal access to the business leader's network and contacts."

PfP's vision is to improve the quality of education for all children by 2025, and in doing so change each school's story into one of hope and opportunity.

To date, PfP has 411 partnerships (411 principals paired with 411 school communities) across South Africa.

● *For more information on the programme, please visit: [www.pfp4sa.org](http://www.pfp4sa.org).*