

Seeing leadership and education come together

Strong schools need strong leaders – that’s where PFP comes in

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PARTNERS for Possibility (PFP) is a public-private partnership in the field of education, born out of a desire to turn around the nation’s many failing schools by improving the standard of leadership in them.

If ever the Peter principle applied in practice it is in the case of school leadership where teachers who excel in the classroom are promoted through the ranks, and some of them eventually become principals.

There is little or no training provided to prepare them for their new role and often they find themselves out of their depth when it comes to managing finances, human resources and community relations – areas far removed from their area of expertise, which is teaching.

The oversight mechanism in



CORPORATE SUPPORT: Nedbank chairman Vassi Naidoo.

schools is the school governing body (SGB), drawn from the parent community and, supposedly, there to guide and advise the principal.

And it’s just there that the divide between our “have and have-not” schools becomes apparent.

Whereas new principals of schools in the former model C environment are as poorly suited to the role, they will typically have an SGB with financial, legal and

technical expertise in its ranks to help them along.

That’s not so in the majority of schools, those located in the townships and rural areas. The SGB members are parents, living in impoverished areas and many of them have little expertise to offer.

PFP, the brainchild of Symphonia’s Dr Louise van Rhyn, in response, runs a programme that sees a business leader paired with a school principal for a year. It’s a mutual learning experience – the principal gets advice on how to run the school according to business best practices, and the business leader learns about leadership and life under difficult circumstances.

There are now 437 schools on the programme, and it’s spreading to all the provinces.

At this time of the year PFP stages celebration evenings around the country at which the year’s successes are recognised and where partnership pairs from that region get to tell their stories.

The Gauteng celebration was held at the Nedbank HQ in Rivonia last week, which was fitting as

the bank has been a long-standing friend of the programme – its up-and-coming executives are urged to get involved as part of their personal and professional development.

Last week’s celebration marked the 50 percent growth in the past year, and also the global recognition of the World Innovation Summit on Education Awards (WISE), who selected PFP as one of 15 global finalists for its annual awards in September, as well as HR.com, who selected it as one of its Top 10 International Leadership Training programmes.

The meeting was opened by Abe Thebyane, group executive for HR at Nedbank, the chairman of Symphonia for South Africa, and addressed by Vassi Naidoo, chairman of the Nedbank group.

Naidoo spoke of organisations needing “a social licence to operate”. Businesses were not there only to make money, he said. They need to contribute to the society they operate in and PFP is a good example of how to do that.

“Seeing leadership and edu-

cation come together around a common purpose, as they do in the Partners for Possibility programme, demonstrates the potential for using education as a national vehicle for creating abundance in our society, opportunities for employment and growth for our continent,” he said.

Justice Malala was another speaker at the event and he used the opportunity to show the importance of education in empowering people.

He did that by telling the story of ANC founder Pixley ka Isaka Seme, who persevered in getting an education under seemingly impossible circumstances and eventually returned to the country to initiate a game-changing process.

“We are very thankful for the growing interest in our work and the number of business leaders who contribute to the future of South Africa,” said Van Rhyn. “We encourage all interested parties to make contact and help us improve the future of all our children.”

● For more information visit www.symphonia.net.