

# Business bigwigs go back to school

A novel scheme is seeing executives partnering with principals to beef up tuition

**Bongani Nkosi**

**I**f you want to help fix education, then do it. Don't just talk about the problems. Get stuck in and help." So believes the South African Revenue Service's acting chief financial officer, Bob Head.

Head is part of a movement of business leaders doing their bit to fix the ailing state schooling system. Driven by the nongovernmental organisation Partners for Possibility, the businesspeople join forces with public school principals to transfer skills.

Although the campaign has been running nationally for four years, on Friday the organisation is announcing the partnering of 66 Gauteng schools with as many executives. This will push the number of partnered schools across the country to 267. One such person is social entrepreneur and businesswoman Wendy Luhabe, who has thrown her weight behind the campaign and will partner with a principal next year.

Partners for Possibility founder Louise van Rhyn said: "We are welcoming all interested businesspeople to join us and the Gauteng department of education on this exciting new journey."

Head (56), who has held executive positions in various companies in South Africa and the United Kingdom, has been working with Jane Tsharane, principal of Makgatho Primary School, for nearly two years. The school is in Saulsville, the sprawling township west of Pretoria.

"Basically you're not a coach or mentor to the principal, but a buddy. The principal is in control of the leadership role. I can't tell her what to do. I'm just there to help [her to] do her job, give her confidence," Head told the *Mail & Guardian*.

Head goes to the school every fortnight and interacts with teachers, pupils and parents.

Tsharane, who has been in the teaching profession for 20 years, seven of them as a principal, said the partnership has "improved my confidence, as well as my managerial skills and my productivity. The relationship between management and staff members has improved as a result of the workshops on skills and development conducted by Bob."

More importantly, the project has convinced parents to become more involved in the school's affairs and their children's education. Tsharane said parents' turnout at meetings had improved from 43% to 68%.

"Our parents have been [inspired] to get more involved at the school and they are inspired by Bob's total commitment."

**"I've realised that we sometimes make the assumption that parents are not interested in education, without making an effort to get them interested"**

but indeed it was true. That's when I began to change my approach to the problem of water and electricity that the school experienced."

Seetal said the "issues, problems and concerns" she has tackled with Mpungose so far include teacher absenteeism, governance, leadership, discipline and community involvement.

Joe Makhafhula, principal of the Gauteng-based Diepsloot Primary School, said the adult-based education and training (Abet) classes held at the school were the best initiative to emerge from his work with entrepreneur Peter Laburn.

"With my partner we wrote a let-

ter to the education department and asked to start Abet classes, and today we have over 350 adults attending in the afternoons," he said.

"I've realised that we sometimes make the assumption that parents are not interested in education, without making an effort to get them interested."

By reducing adult illiteracy in Diepsloot, Makhafhula said "parental involvement has improved greatly, and the school governing board is very supportive of school activities without interfering with the daily management of the school".



**Just do it: He is a top Sars official but Bob Head works with an NGO to deal with problems at schools**