

# Public-Private Partnerships in South African Education: Risky Business or Good Governance?

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## Abstract

This article discusses the globalised phenomenon of public-private partnerships, which involve the private and public sector collaborating to provide infrastructure and service delivery to public institutions. Within the education sector, the most commonly known public-private partnerships exist in the United States as charter schools and the United Kingdom as academies. Discussing this phenomenon in the South African context, this article draws on the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project as an example for understanding how the involvement of private partnerships within public schooling is being conceptualised by the Western Cape Education Department. Framed within the debate of public-private partnerships for the public good, the article provides a critical discussion on how these partnerships are enacted as a decentralisation of state involvement in the provision of public schooling by government. The article concludes by noting that the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project, which involves significant changes in policy regarding how schools are governed and managed, requires more rigorous and critical dialogue by all stakeholders as the model unfolds in schools in the Western Cape.

**Keywords:** public-private partnerships; Collaboration Schools Pilot Project; public good; education policy; school governance and management



Education as Change

<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/EAC>

Volume 24 | 2020 | #4873 | 18 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/4873>

ISSN 1947-9417 (Online)

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## Introduction

The development of what is termed public-private partnerships (PPPs) has become a globalised phenomenon over the past two decades. There is no clear definition of PPPs. However, at the broadest level, PPPs can be defined as “co-operative institutional arrangements between public and private sector actors” (Hodge and Greve 2007, 545) where the private and public sectors collaborate to provide infrastructure and service delivery to public institutions. Typically, this involves the private sector sharing the risks, costs, and resources with the public institution (Tilak 2016; Van Ham and Koppenjan 2001). The sharing of responsibility, which is usually established as a reasonably long-term co-operation, comprises the parties involved sharing the decision-making and any risk associated with the joint venture, and includes an agreed outcome where all the parties involved stand to gain from mutual collaboration and effort (Forrer et al. 2010; Hodge and Greve 2007). In this way, PPPs are ongoing agreements between government and private sector organisations that allow private organisations to participate in the decision-making and production of public goods or services that have traditionally been provided by the public sector, and in which the private sector shares the risk of that production.

Within the international education sector, PPPs have brought about significant changes in how educational systems are governed. A World Bank report defines the concept of PPPs in education “as a system that recognises the existence of alternative options for providing education services besides public finance and public delivery” (Patrinos, Osorio, and Guaqueta 2009 in Levin, Cornelisz, and Hanisch-Cerda 2013, 520). The most well-known educational PPPs exist in the United States (US) as charter schools and the United Kingdom (UK) as academies. However, besides the US and UK, educational PPPs operate in various forms in both basic education (for example in Australia, India, Ireland, Germany, Chile) and tertiary education institutions (for example in Australia, the UK, Mexico) (see Robertson et al. 2012; Rose 2010; Tilak 2016). A further common type of PPP in the basic education sector is the involvement of corporate or private philanthropy in the form of sponsors from businesses, faith organisations or voluntary groups. Through the PPP model, in most cases, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private corporations or philanthropic initiatives provide finance and services to help grow and develop public institutions to achieve educational, social, and economic policy objectives.

In South Africa, the concept of PPPs in the education sector is less well known. The 2017 National Treasury Budget Review listed 31 PPP projects concluded in South Africa. The projects that have taken place nationally fall under the headings of transport, water and sanitation, correctional services, health, tourism, information technology, and office accommodation (National Treasury 2017). No projects were listed within the education sector. However, under the heading of PPP projects under review, one education project is listed, namely the student financial aid programme, which falls under the auspices of the Department of Higher Education.

Despite no mention being made in the National Treasury Budget of school PPPs, in the Western Cape a project called the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project is currently operational in several schools in the province. Former premier of the Western Cape, Helen Zille (2016), stated that the project was established based on the academy school model that “enables public schools to be operated in partnership with non-profits and sponsors”.

This article focuses on the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project as a case study for understanding how PPPs are being conceptualised within the education sector in the Western Cape. It begins by framing the debate on PPPs in the education sector by considering the notion of education for the public good (see Jonathan 1997; 2001; Levin 1999; Sayed and Van Niekerk 2017). Second, the article provides a critical discussion of how these partnerships are enacted in practice as a decentralisation of state involvement or a “power-sharing” arrangement between the public and private sectors and local school communities. The article concludes by considering whether these partnership agreements, which impact significantly on school governance and management, are being rigorously and critically considered as an alternative to the governance of public schools, or whether the influx of additional private funding for poor schools is the driving force for the ongoing commitment by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) to the current school PPP agreements.

### Education for the “Public Good”

In this section, the article situates the debate on PPPs in the education sector by considering the notion of education as a public good (see Jonathan 1997; 2001; Levin 1999; Sayed and Van Niekerk 2017). This discussion considers broadly the role that PPPs play as partnerships that are developed between the public and private sectors and local communities to overcome certain shortcomings in the delivery of public services by the state.

The classic definition of a public good is one that is non-excludable and non-rivalrous and is valued by individuals. Non-excludable refers to a public good or service that does not exclude any individual from enjoying the benefits of it, while non-rivalrous refers to the fact that the consumption of the service or activity by one individual does not reduce the quality available for consumption by other individuals. Conventionally, a public good is “something of benefit to all which cannot be subdivided into individual shares and can thus only be effectively provided by all, for all” (Jonathan 1997, 78). Standard examples of a public good within a country’s infrastructure include a national highway system, a public airport, national defence, or a common judicial system. Public good services are typically funded by the government out of tax revenue and provided free of charge or at an agreed upon rate by the government.

In general, education provided by the state is widely considered a public good in that it is provided by the state for the majority of the population as a service that is not for profit. Supporting this premise, Jonathan (1997, 78) states that “it is evident that on

the dimension of benefit to society (prosperity, a prerequisite range of knowledge and skill, a certain level of culture and civility, a necessary level of social harmony and co-operation) education is a public good”. However, public education does not always manifest as a pure public good. Jonathan further notes that “it is equally evident that on the dimension of benefit to the individual, education appears to be a private good from which all do not—and in many respects cannot—stand to benefit equally” (1997, 78). Not all schools are equal in their infrastructure or in the level of education they provide to learners. In addition, there are times when students may be excluded from some schools. The Department of Basic Education’s (DBE) National Education Policy Act of 1996 clearly states that no learners may be excluded from public schools. However, it is well known that many school governing bodies (SGBs) find alternative ways to exclude learners. The most common method is when schools state that learners fall outside of their “feeder zone”. As SGBs may determine a school’s feeder zone, they can use this to exclude learners. Thus, not all learners have access to all public schools and education cannot be described as always being non-excludable. Similarly, it can be argued that one student attending a school prevents another child from benefiting from education at that school due to the cap on class sizes at schools. In this manner, schools are not always non-rivalrous, as a learner who takes his/her place at a school “consumes” the service, thereby excluding another learner from benefiting from the service of education at a particular school (Daviet 2016).

It is necessary to distinguish “public goods”, which are provided by the state for all citizens, from “private goods”, which are supplied and distributed by the market. The key difference is that a “private good” can be produced, distributed and consumed by individuals for the advancement of those individuals, while a public good should be available to all individuals and no single individual should benefit from the service. However, Jonathan states that in a social context “‘goods’ are too complex to be neatly divided into two categories, with those which are deemed unproblematically ‘public’ to be commonly provided and enjoyed under regulated conditions, and all the others to be deemed ‘private’ and best distributed and competed for through the market” (Jonathan 1997, 78–79).

Accordingly, despite education being touted as a public good in that it is provided by the state for all citizens, it does not fit the standard criteria for a “public good”. Although all citizens might benefit from the existence of public education, “all do not—and cannot—share its direct benefits equally, however much opportunities are equalised” (Jonathan 2001, 41). It can, therefore, be stated that the “unique features of education as a social practice makes this ‘good’ *neither ‘public’ nor ‘private’ but social*” (Jonathan 2001, 41; italics in original).

Developing the discussion further, Tilak (2016) states that as education is neither a public nor a private good, PPPs are processes, and over time, under the strain of the state focusing on transforming the educational landscape, we will see the shrinking of the state’s involvement in education and the growth of the private sector’s

involvement in education to become the dominant or even “the sole player in education displacing the public sector altogether” (Tilak 2016, 8). Similarly, Daviet (2016, 6) asserts that given the need to provide quality education for all, coupled with public budget constraints, the trend towards growing the broadening and diversification of non-state actors in education will become the norm. Thus, the role of PPPs in education has become the latest mantra of development in many developing as well as advanced countries, and “while many claims are made about the potential benefits of the PPP, going by the available empirical evidence, which is not abundant, these seem to have produced a mixed bag of outcomes” (Tilak 2016, 2).

In the South African context, in order to find ways to provide all students with quality government education, particularly in schools serving students from low socio-economic contexts, the involvement of the private sector in education has taken on several different forms. To date, schools in poor communities have mostly been supported through informal philanthropic initiatives run by NGOs. The more formal aspect of purposely finding and collaborating with a group of external funders to provide support for government schools has only been developed in the Western Cape more recently.

Unpacking the ideological thinking behind education policies in the Western Cape province, Sayed and Van Niekerk (2017) recently published an article titled “Ideology and the Good Society in South Africa: The Education Policies of the Democratic Alliance”. In this article, the authors present an analysis of the education policy of the Democratic Alliance (DA), which is the elected governing party of the Western Cape. Sayed and Van Niekerk note that “[p]olitical parties and their education policies are underpinned by ideologies that have direct consequences for sustaining or eroding education as a public good in South Africa” (2017, 53). Supporting this premise, they (2017, 53) cite a 2017 parliamentary policy speech by the former DA leader, Mmusi Maimane, that positions the politics of the DA as advocating for “non-state actors, increasingly performing a central role in finding solutions to under-performing public schools (education), but managed and regulated by the provincial state”. Furthermore, within the framing of education provision, particularly for schools situated in socio-economically poor communities, the DA, in a document titled *Learning for Success: DA Policy on Basic Education* (2013), states that to resolve South Africa’s education crisis and turn around the education system, there must be a focus on encouraging innovative solutions to poor schooling. The DA goes on to state:

In terms of this framework, any group of individuals who possess certain defined qualifications, recognised experience, and who are able to produce a viable business plan, will be able to apply to take over the management of a school and to run it as any other state school, while continuing to receive state subsidies. ... The DA would encourage the institutions that currently run some of South Africa’s private schools, as well as organisations from other countries who have proved their success in this area, to take on this challenge. (DA 2013, 15)

Sayed and Van Niekerk (2017) provide a useful background and overview of the ideological underpinnings of the DA's educational policy framework, policy ideas and strategies proposed for the governance of the Western Cape. Aspects of this article, as it relates to the political ideology concerning education in the Western Cape in the development of PPPs, will be incorporated in the discussion below.

## Public-Private Partnerships: Policy and Power-Sharing

Miraftab (2004), in her article "Public-Private Partnerships: The Trojan Horse of Neoliberal Development?", presents her concerns about power relations that may exist within PPPs. Drawing on research conducted in South Africa in 1998 on PPPs within community development programmes, Miraftab notes:

Private sector firms approach local governments and their impoverished communities with the message of power sharing, but once the process is in motion the interests of the community are often overwhelmed by those of the most powerful member of the partnership—the private sector firm. (Miraftab 2004, 89)

Her concern rests on the fact that in many developing countries PPPs are often given autonomy to operate freely, or, as she notes, as the "Trojan horses" of development within a particular sector, as "governments often have neither the will nor the ability to intervene effectively" (Miraftab 2004, 89). She goes on to suggest that in partnerships among school communities, government and private entities, it is important to consider who initiated the process and how the partnerships were established, as this plays a significant role in the unfolding power relationships in the agreement. All partners involved in the relationship will have some expectations, either of some gain (possibly from the school community) or a change in practice (from the private entity), and the partnerships are more likely to be sustained if these benefits are mutually established and explicitly detailed.

Considering PPPs and the concept of power-sharing within the South African context, and more specifically the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project in the Western Cape, there are two partnership models currently employed by the WCED. The first relates to the private sector's involvement in what the WCED terms "turnaround schools" or "transition schools", while the second relates to the private sector's involvement in the running of new WCED schools. Turnaround schools are schools that are identified by the WCED as requiring focused support to improve the quality of school management and teaching and learning in low-income communities, as measured by learner outcomes. In collaboration with the school's SGB, these schools agree to become collaboration schools and enter into partnerships with allocated school operating partners (SOPs).<sup>1</sup> These schools retain existing educators as WCED posts, and they

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<sup>1</sup> School operating partners are allocated to the school by the Pilot Support Office, which was established to manage the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project on behalf of the funders.

receive WCED cash transfer payments for new and growth posts. “New schools”, on the other hand, are schools that have been newly established by the WCED, and which are handed over to an SOP to govern under the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project’s agreement. New schools receive a full transfer payment from the WCED to employ all staff at the school as SGB posts.

Whether the school is a “transition” or “new” school, the collaboration agreement involves a shift of responsibility for managing and governing the schools away from the WCED to the private sector. According to a document titled “Overview of the Western Cape Collaboration Schools Programme, 2017”,<sup>2</sup> the key focus areas of the SOPs include 1) providing high performing central support that focuses on educator development and school improvement, 2) focusing on comprehensive school development and improvement plans to enhance the ability and accountability of educators to deliver quality education, 3) working closely with the parents and communities, and 4) school governance. Once the school, through consultation with the school management and staff as well as the broader community in which the school is situated, agrees to become a collaboration school, the SOP is given the majority of seats on the SGB,<sup>3</sup> which ostensibly gives them the final say with regard to all management, governance and financial decisions taken in the school.

The majority rule of the SOP in the SGB is, therefore, a key power-sharing aspect that impacts significantly on how the school is governed once it becomes a collaboration school. The SGB’s decision-making capacity also extends to the appointment of all school staff, as well as the renewal of existing staff contracts. Subsequent to the school becoming a collaboration school, all new staff appointments are made exclusively by the SGB, but the school continues to be funded by the WCED via cash transfers made by the WCED to the school. This significant change in the role of the SGB at collaboration schools, termed a “structural change” by the WCED, is of significance when discussed as a form of power-sharing. This is critically debated below where the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project is presented as a case study for how educational partnerships are currently being developed within the Western Cape.

## Public School Partnerships in the Western Cape: The Collaboration Schools Pilot Project

Described as a way to “improve the provision of education to children who cannot afford to pay fees and whose academic performance is affected by their economic conditions”, the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project is touted as a possible solution to supporting underperforming schools in the Western Cape (Collaboration School Pilot

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<sup>2</sup> A document that is given to potential donors and SOPs interested in becoming involved in the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project (Collaboration School Pilot Office 2017b).

<sup>3</sup> As stated in a PowerPoint presentation given on 22 February 2017 by the Collaboration Project funders to NGOs interested in becoming involved in the project.

Office 2017b). The project draws on the UK academies and US charter schools PPP model to consider an alternative model for supporting schools situated in poor communities (DA 2013; Zille 2016). Both charter schools and academies are state-funded, but managed by the private sector, and they often serve students from disadvantaged communities. Within these PPP agreements the government retains overall responsibility for the school, but hands over the day-to-day running and operation of the school to a range of partners that include private sector companies, donors and NGOs. These schools continue to be inspected, regulated, and held accountable by a governmental education department, such as the WCED, in the same way as public schools. In this model, schools, via their partnership agreements with private funders, obtain finance and resources to assist in the running of the school, as well as professional development support to assist teachers and principals in their educational endeavours.

According to the Western Cape's Minister of Education, Debbie Schäfer (2015), similar to the UK and US PPP model, the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project seeks to improve the quality of education in public schools. The programme aims to achieve this through partnership agreements that strengthen public school governance and accountability and the implementation of interventions aimed at improving education for learners from low-income communities. In summary, according to David Harrison, the representative for the Project's funders' group, "our view is that the South African education system is so dire, so destructive to the lives of millions of young people, that we must be willing to try new ways of doing things" (2017a, 2). Harrison goes on to state that the aim of the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project is to draw expertise from the private sector into public schools by focusing on

bring[ing] new life into seriously underperforming public schools through the introduction of new capacity, new flexibility in terms of human resource management and budgeting, and outcomes-based accountability. This partnership is designed to strengthen and help revitalize the public system, and every aspect is designed to build accountability and achieve sustainability. ... [W]e need to be testing a variety of strategies for radical school improvement. (Harrison 2017b, 3–4)

Funders for the Collaboration Schools Project began discussions with the WCED in late 2014. The memorandum of agreement (MoA) between the WCED and the project donors was signed on the 1st of September 2015. Following the signing of the MoA, the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project was launched in January 2016 in five schools in the Western Cape (Schäfer 2015; Zille 2016). According to the WCED, collaboration schools are run based on four tenets: they are non-profit, no-fee schools, non-selective in their admissions and learner acceptance process, and remain part of the public sector (Motsepe 2016a).

As a collaborative project between various role-players, the document "Overview of the Western Cape Collaboration Schools Programme, 2017" states that the systemic effects of this project involve



[increasing] the ability, accountability and flexibility at a school level in the management of public schools ... by introducing new management practices, high expectations for the quality of teaching, and additional capacity to schools serving the poorest communities. ... [T]here is an opportunity to take a transformative step towards closing the gap in quality education and in giving all children the opportunity to reach their full potential. (Collaboration School Pilot Office 2017b)

The stakeholders in the project include the WCED, the group of funders, the pilot support office, the SOPs and the SGB and principal of the school involved in the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project. The roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder are laid out in the table below.

**Table 1:** Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders

Stakeholder	Responsible for	Accountable to
WCED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing financing in line with public school funding norms</li> <li>• Contracting with network operating partners and participating schools</li> <li>• Holding school operating partners accountable for delivering pre-agreed outcomes</li> <li>• Supporting the implementation of the pilot</li> </ul>	Provincial government SOPs Funder group
Funders' Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing additional funding to establish and support network operators and school improvement</li> <li>• Providing input to strategy and implementation of pilot</li> <li>• Creating and managing the PSO</li> </ul>	WCED SOPs
Pilot Support Office (PSO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting the implementation of the pilot at all levels</li> <li>• Providing technical support for the development of new network operators and education delivery</li> <li>• Monitoring and reporting on the performance of the pilot</li> </ul>	Funders' group
SGB of School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering high-quality education through vision and target setting</li> <li>• Performance management of principal</li> <li>• Staff appointment</li> <li>• Financial management of the school</li> </ul>	Parents WCED
SOP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All SGB responsibilities (as per above)</li> <li>• Delivering high-quality education through the development of school leadership and teaching</li> <li>• Operational support</li> <li>• Monitoring quality of all schools in the network</li> <li>• Supporting school learning across the network</li> </ul>	WCED Funders' group via the PSO

<b>Principal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering high-quality teaching and learning at the school</li> <li>• Creating and implementing the school improvement plan</li> <li>• Recruitment and professional management of staff</li> </ul>	SGB WCED
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Source: PowerPoint on Collaboration Schools Pilot Project: School Operating Partners Information Session on 22 February 2017 (Collaboration School Pilot Office 2017b)

Issues of management and governance in the project were addressed by the PSO in a presentation to potential SOPs in February 2017. The presentation's notes state that the pilot project involves two key structural changes with regard to how the SGB of each school is reconstituted. A school that joins the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project partners with the SOP assigned to the school. The majority of the seats on the SGB are then taken up by representatives from the SOP. It is argued, by the WCED and funders for the project, that this arrangement is necessary to enhance the accountability of the SOP to both the WCED and the parents of the school (Collaboration School Pilot Office 2017b). A second, structural change concerns the employment contracts of staff at the school. Existing WCED teachers remain WCED employees. However, all new appointments are made by the SGB through cash transfers from the WCED to the school. A new employee contract at a collaboration school, therefore, lies with the SGB, and not the WCED. All benefits and cost to company remain the same as for a WCED employee. However, the employee is now directly accountable to the SGB, and is paid by the SGB as opposed to the WCED.

In an article titled "Premier Zille, Privatising Schooling Is Not the Answer" (2016b), Tshepo Motsepe, writing on behalf of the non-profit organisation, Equal Education (an organisation that works towards quality and equality in South African education), presents concerns about the privatisation of public schools, as well as school governance and management issues involved in the model that, it is argued, contradict the 1996 South African Schools Act. It highlights concerns over the monitoring and evaluation of the project, stating that no clear directives have been provided that explain how the pilot project will be monitored and evaluated, or indeed who will be responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the project. Although not explicitly, Equal Education, with their focus on equality in education, is pointing to concerns over issues of power-sharing. What they highlight is that, under the guise of providing quality education to schools in poor communities, the project is enabling the private sector to take over not only the provision of education, but also any "voice" that the school community might have in how the schools are governed and managed, as the funders of the project, via the SOPs, are given majority voting power in all collaboration schools.

This issue is echoed by the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), currently the largest trade union for teachers in South Africa, which states:

We condemn the idea of commodifying our education system by annexing public schools and delivering them into the hands of profit-driven consortiums ... the ploy by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) is nothing more than the implementation of neoliberal policy, policy that will ignore and censor the community, parents, teachers and workers say in the governance of the school. (cited in TMG Digital 2016)

SADTU states that it is not against the sourcing of donors to provide additional finance to improve public schools. However, it points out that this should not be done by restructuring the school governance structure as it is currently outlined in the South African Schools Act. Joining Equal Education in their concerns over school governance, SADTU (cited in TMG Digital 2016) presents concerns about the draft policy bill that allows the SOPs the majority seats on the SGB. This effectively means that SOPs have the power to influence key policies in the school, such as language, admissions, and disciplinary policies.

While this project has forged forward, amendments to the Western Cape Provincial School Education Act, No. 12 of 1997, Section 12C to allow for the establishment of collaboration schools and donor-funded public schools, as well as the changed governance structure in these schools, were drafted and put forward to the public and civic groups for comment in August 2016 (Western Cape Government 2016). On 25 May 2018, the Standing Committee on Education in the Western Cape Provincial Parliament circulated an invitation to public hearings and for written comments on the proposed amendments to the bill.<sup>4</sup> The public hearing was held in August 2018, with various education bodies such as Equal Education and teacher unions giving written submissions. The main foci of the objections to the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project were on the proposed changes to the SGB constitution that provide the operating partner with majority representation and voting rights, as well as the privatisation of public schools. The proposed amendment, according to Equal Education (2018), “runs directly contrary to the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 ... and compromises democratic school governance”. SADTU similarly expressed their concern over the changed composition of the SGB, adding that the project, as it was then conceived, in effect entailed the privatisation of public education. Quoting Harry Brighouse’s (2004) warning with regard to the privatisation of schools in the US, SADTU (Montzinger 2018) warned that the “full privatisation of schools would involve states abstaining from providing funding or regulating schools ... [and] would, in most circumstances, worsen social injustices in schooling”. SADTU still argues that

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<sup>4</sup> It is to be noted that the amendments included the establishment of a Western Cape Evaluation Authority for monitoring and support of curriculum delivery in public schools, the establishment of collaboration schools and donor-funded public schools, the establishment of intervention facilities to which learners may be referred in certain circumstances, and the allowance of alcohol on school premises.

there is no independent, convincing research that indicates that any form of privatisation of public schools necessarily yields better results (SADTU 2018).

Currently, most of the literature in favour of the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project in the Western Cape is from David Harrison, who represents the funders' group for the project, and from ongoing DA or WCED press releases. These press releases state that public school partnerships, and specifically the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project, are an attempt to innovate the public-school system by providing non-profit partnerships to assist failing schools in the Western Cape. However, beyond stating that there is a dire need to find ways to assist failing or dysfunctional schools, no actual rationale that outlines *how* they intend to innovate and improve the schools in the project is given. Harrison simply states that “we just don’t yet know ... [but] we need to be testing a variety of strategies for radical school improvement” (Harrison 2017b).

### Risky Business or Good Governance?

There are currently no formal documents in the public domain that present any findings or data from the schools, SOPs or funders' group that indicate whether school management, school governance and learner outcomes have improved over the two-and-a-half-year period that the Collaborations School Pilot Project has been operational. According to one of the SOPs, the PSO has appointed JET Education Services to monitor and evaluate the pilot programme. JET is an independent, non-profit organisation that works with education institutions in the government and the private sector “to improve the quality of education and the relationship between education, skills development and the world of work” (JET 2019). However, no reports or documents are available from either the funders' group or JET with regard to the monitoring and evaluation of the project. One might argue that it is still early days in terms of “turning around” underperforming schools. However, one would expect that some form of reporting is completed yearly on the status of the project.

The DG Murray Trust (n.d.), which has taken responsibility for managing the funders' group for the project, provides an overview of the project on its website under the heading, “Public School Partnerships: Testing a New Channel for Quality Education in Public Schools through Non-Profit Public-Private Partnerships”. On the website, the project is discussed in general terms and several media articles reporting on the project are made available, as well as two *Collaboration Chronicles* (Western Cape Government 2017a; 2017b) published by the WCED. The two publications, of which there are only two issues, state that data from the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project is reviewed and analysed regularly to drive school improvement and accountability. They do not state by whom. The documents further state that targets for each school are established in agreement with the WCED's circuit managers, and are used to identify areas of accomplishment or development. However, no reports that present or analyse data from the project are available from the WCED or funders of the project. Apart from potential year-end targets presented in both issues of the *Collaboration*

*Chronicles*, no additional information is available to show whether these targets were met at the end of 2016 or 2017, or what the new targets are for the future.

A media release from Debbie Schäfer (2017b) in March 2017 reports on the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project, stating that in the 2017/2018 financial year the funders committed over R75 million to the project. Of that amount, the media release states that R31.8 million flowed directly into the schools and R37.8 million was given to the non-profit partners, that is, the SOPs. The media release adds that the non-profit partners brought additional capacity to the schools in the form of governance, support, and social capital. However, no reports, data or financial indications as to how funds have been spent are provided to support this statement (Western Cape Government 2017a; 2017b). A media release by Schäfer (2017a) in November 2017 reiterates the potential of the partnership agreement and responds to press releases by Equal Education claiming that the project operates outside the law. Schäfer cites Section 12(1)(g) of the Western Cape Provincial School Education Act, No. 12 of 1997, which states that the provincial minister may establish as a public school “any other type of school that he or she deems necessary for education” (Schäfer 2017a) to show that as the provincial minister of education she is empowered to make policy decisions, and therefore the policy agreement via the MoA that was developed for the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project is not unconstitutional.

During the time in which this article was written, the draft Western Cape Provincial School Education Amendment Bill<sup>5</sup> to amend the Western Cape Provincial School Education Act, No. 12 of 1997, was discussed in a public meeting in August 2018 and finalised in Provincial Parliament on 15 November 2018. Despite the draft bill being opposed by several concerned groups such as Equal Education, the Progressive Professionals Forum (PPF), the South African Communist Party (SACP), the African National Congress (ANC), the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) and SADTU, to name but a few (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2018), the WCED touts the reform bill as “the biggest public reform package since 1994” (South African Government 2018). Following the acceptance of the amendments to the education bill, Schäfer, in a statement to BusinessTech (2018), stated that “the only way that the State can further narrow the income gap between the poorer and richer public schools is to harness private sources of funding”. Schäfer (cited in BusinessTech 2018) further insisted that the Western Cape is not handing over public schools to private players, but that they are “trying to create sustainable partnerships within the ambit of public schools”.

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<sup>5</sup> The amendments to the Education Act include the following: the establishment of a Schools Evaluation Authority, provision for the establishment of collaboration schools and donor-funded public schools, the establishment of intervention facilities for learners who have been found guilty of serious misconduct as an alternative to expulsion, the enabling of classroom observation, and providing for an exception to the prohibition of alcohol on school premises (South African Government 2018; Western Cape Government 2016).

Ladd and Fiske (2016), discussing the debate on charter schools in the US and drawing on interviews with key stakeholders in the London Department of Education where the debate on the UK academies is under review, present several key points concerning the charter school and academy school debate. These points are apposite to the discussion on emerging PPPs in the education sector, and more specifically to the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project in the Western Cape. These authors first point to “the inefficiencies and challenges of a dual system of schools ... where two sets of schools operate side by side but function under different rules with respect to matters such as school admissions and teacher policies” (Ladd and Fiske 2016).

As stated above, the WCED argues that under the Western Cape Provincial School Education Act of 1997, it can establish a different type of school model. They do not, however, elaborate further as to how this model will operate in the future. A second point made by Fiske and Ladd is their concern regarding “the risks of radical systemic change” within the context of the UK academy schools. They state that key stakeholders use phrases such as “reckless”, “a disaster waiting to happen” and “risky” to describe the wisdom of replacing a known system with an entirely new and untried one (Ladd and Fiske 2016). In the case of the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project, this issue is of equal concern as the policy has been changed to enable a “dual system of school governance”. These policy changes in school governance significantly affect how collaboration schools are managed, as well as the way in which school staff contracts shift from the WCED to the SGB. In effect, the SGB has the power to appoint, discipline, and dismiss school staff members, even though the WCED is financially responsible for paying all staff salaries.

In conclusion, in the Western Cape, the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project is presented as the way forward to improve the delivery of education to schools in poor communities in the province. As stated in the Western Cape Government Education Budget Vote 2018/2019,

given the long-term effects of poverty and inequality in our schools, compounded by the financial constraints that we as a government are facing ... the aim of the [collaboration schools] project was to bring additional management skills and innovation into the public school system, through non-profit partnerships to improve the quality of teaching and learning in no-fee public schools. (Western Cape Government 2018)

What remains unclear, however, are the long-term, practical implications for schools involved in the project, specifically with regard to the changed governance of the school structure and related power-sharing concerns between the WCED, the funders and SOPs, and the school community itself. A further point of consideration is the sustainability of the project, particularly considering that the policy changes have a significant impact on how collaboration schools are governed in relation to other WCED schools, and on educators’ employment contracts. The efficacy of these changes in the long term has yet to be addressed.

It is difficult, therefore, to conclude whether the introduction of the PPP model in education, as enacted via the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project, is yielding any of the optimistic results desired by the WCED and private funders. However, as noted by Sayed and Van Niekerk (2017), within the policy directive of the DA's tactic to solve the education crisis in the Western Cape, and in light of PPPs within the education context globally, one can expect to see an approach that diversifies education provision by enabling the private sector to play a role in public education. What this means in the South African context is that partnership agreements with non-state actors in education will most likely be developed further and become an accepted mode of delivering education to schools in areas of poverty. Whether or not PPPs present good governance practice in the context of South African schools remains to be seen. What is more expedient at this point, however, is the need for rigorous, critical dialogue, supported by monitoring and evaluation reports, that engages with the collaboration school model as it is currently unfolding in schools in the Western Cape.

## Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Prof. Aslam Fataar from Stellenbosch University and the article reviewers for the constructive comments and suggestions that informed the finalisation of the article.

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