

A young girl with yellow face paint around her eyes is smiling in a classroom. She is wearing a grey hoodie with a yellow geometric logo. In the background, there are purple storage bins and a red and blue striped object.

G:

**PROGRAMMATIC
ASSESSMENT OF
MOLO MHLABA**

A low-fee
independent
school

Document Reference

**Programmatic Assessment
Molo Mhlaba low-fee independent school**

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Authors

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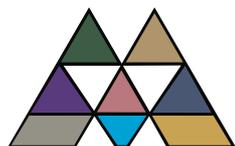
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molo mhlaba

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Context	6
Methodology	7
Understanding Molo Mhlaba	8
Curriculum	11
Montessori Teacher Training	13
Teachers' Content Knowledge	14
Hours Spent Teaching	15
Educational Outcomes	16
Ensuring that Young Girls stay in School	16
Learner Absenteeism	17
Learner Performance	18
Findings	24
Preparing Children for the Future	27
Soft Skills	28
Hard Skills	29
Conclusion on Educational Outcomes	30
Funding Mechanisms	31
Funding Model	31
Funding Trends and Sustainability	32
Conclusion on Funding Mechanisms	37
Impact on Community	38
Parents	38
Community Partnerships	41
Conclusion on Partnerships with Community Organisations	49
Relationship with Local Government	50
Conclusion on Relationship with Local Government	52
Glossary	54
Bibliography	55



Introduction

Although South Africa has made significant progress in improving access to universal primary and secondary education, provision of quality education that leads to positive long-term educational outcomes, is still severely lacking.¹

A report published by Amnesty International in 2020 indicates that South Africa's education system largely consists of inadequate infrastructure, under-resourced teaching staff, and overcrowded classrooms, which all disproportionately negatively affect the poorest in the country.² South Africa's inequality, which is a remnant of Apartheid, filters into the country's school system as well - children in the top 200 schools (a large proportion of which are independent schools) achieve more distinctions in subjects such as mathematics than the following 6,600 schools combined.³ The effects of this inequality are far-reaching as poor educational outcomes lead to poor economic outcomes, impacting people's ability to enter the labour market effectively, escape poverty, and contribute towards economic growth in the country.⁴ As a result, significant work needs to be done with regards to providing quality education in the country, which in turn, will determine the trajectory of South Africa's development outcomes.

“Molo Mhlaba”
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Molo Mhlaba, a low-fee independent Pan-African primary school situated in Khayelitsha was established in 2018 with support from the Thope Foundation in order to mitigate some of the challenges that exist in the current South African education system.

Established as a non-profit organization, Molo Mhlaba's mission is to support young girls through STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) education, early literacy development, physical health education as well as outreach programmes for children in the Khayelitsha community.⁵

In keeping with its STEAM focus, the name “Molo Mhlaba” directly translates to ‘Hello World’ from isiXhosa to English.

- ¹ South African Human Rights Commission (2012) Charter of Children's Basic Education Rights: The right of children to basic education, Available [here](#).
- ² Amnesty International (2020) South Africa: Broken and unequal education perpetuating poverty and inequality, Available [here](#).
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Giovetti, M. & McConville, K. (2020) How does education affect poverty? It can help end it, Concern, Available [here](#).
- ⁵ Molo Mhlaba Proposal Document



A remnant of Apartheid's forced removals, Khayelitsha is the second largest informal settlement in South Africa and houses approximately 391,749 people and 118,809 households.⁶ Poverty is pervasive in Khayelitsha - approximately half of Khayelitsha's population lives below the poverty line, a stark contrast to the greater Cape Town area.⁷ Crime rates remain high in Khayelitsha - in a survey conducted by the Commission of Inquiry, 41.3% of all respondents had personally been a victim of crime in the last year.⁸ The same survey also found that only 6 out of 10 crimes are reported to the police, indicating that the incidences of crime in the community are likely to be higher.⁹ This violence seeps into the experiences of many youth, particularly at school, which often leads to a number of long-term psychological impacts.¹⁰ This backdrop is particularly alarming considering that socioeconomic status (SES) is a strong determinant of educational outcomes, which in turn affect other long-term socio-economic outcomes.¹¹ This has also been confirmed specifically in the Western Cape — where a study found that approximately two-thirds of differences in academic achievement in the Western Cape could be attributed to SES.¹²

Molo Mhlaba seeks to combat some of the effects of Khayelitsha's socioeconomic context through establishing a safe place where girls can access good and safe, quality education in their home communities that will assist them in achieving success in the short-term and long-term. Part of locating the Molo Mhlaba schools in the home communities of learners is to also reduce the migration from townships to other communities.

Molo Mhlaba specifically aims to achieve their goals in the following ways:¹³

- By providing high-quality education for learners coming from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- By recruiting, supporting and retaining high-quality African teachers from the communities where the schools are located and where the learners emanate;
- By providing conditions and pedagogy that best support quality learning of Maths, Science, Life Skills and Language; and
- By building strong primary school foundations for future learning.

This independent report, conducted by Genesis Analytics (hereafter "Genesis"), provides a programmatic assessment of Molo Mhlaba, since its establishment through assessment of its theory of change. It is important to note that the school has only been operating for the last 4 years, in which it has faced disruptions in funding and teaching as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this should be kept in mind while reading the report. As such, Molo Mhlaba's theory of change has a long-term strategic focus.

⁶ City of Cape Town (2013) 2011 Census Suburb Khayelitsha, Available [here](#).

⁷ Super, G. (n.d.) Violence and Democracy in Khayelitsha Governing Crime through the 'Community', Stability Journal, Available [here](#).

⁸ Clark, J. (2015) Setting the scene: Schooling in Khayelitsha, Partnerships In Action, Available [here](#).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Du Plessis B, Kaminer D, Hardy A & Benjamin A (2015) The contribution of different forms of violence exposure to internalizing and externalising symptoms among young South African adolescents. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 45: 80-89

¹¹ Coleman JS, Campbell EQ, Hobson CJ, McPartland J, Mood AM et al. (1996) Equality of educational opportunity. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹² Van der Berg S & Burger R (2002) Education and socioeconomic differentials: A study of school performance in the Western Cape. *South African Journal of Economics* 71(3): 496-522.

¹³ Molo Mhlaba Proposal Document

Context

In order to understand Molo Mhlaba's mandate, it is necessary to understand South Africa's education landscape as a whole, specifically with regards to the inequalities that persist as well as the key differences between public and private school education (also known as independent school education) within the country.

The *South African Schools Act of 1996*, recognises two categories of schools: government and independent. The right for independent schools to exist in South Africa is enshrined in the Constitution, a peculiarity in a developing country.¹⁴ There is no granular definition for an independent school – essentially, any school that is not state-controlled is an independent school, which means that independent schools are often quite diverse in their mandates and offerings.¹⁵

Despite the fact that the South African government spends a significant portion of its national budget on education, average educational outcomes in government schools still remain poor. Education accounts for approximately 19.5% of government expenditure in 2020¹⁶ which is higher than the upper middle-income country average of between 5.1% and 14.9%.¹⁷ Although there are a number of government schools that achieve high educational outcomes, approximately 75-80% of South African schools are unable to provide an education that assists in providing students with the required skills.¹⁸ Considering that in 2019, the Department of Basic Education indicated that there were 23,076 ordinary public schools and 1,922 independent schools,¹⁹ the vast majority of these 'underperforming' schools are government schools.

As a result, there is a significant market for alternatives to public school education, which has seen an increase in independent schools over the past decade.²⁰ In the past, independent schools were often inaccessible to most South Africans largely due to the nature of the school fees (independent school fees are generally significantly higher than public school fees), however, South Africa has seen a significant increase in enrolment in independent schools due to the growth of low-and-middle-fee independent schools.²¹

The increase in low-fee private schools specifically has been so significant that the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) estimates that low fee private schools charging below R12,000 a year, provide education to approximately a quarter of a million students, the majority of which form part of previously disadvantaged demographic groups.²² These schools mainly exist to increase access to quality education to children who would otherwise be excluded. In addition, they provide parents who are disillusioned with the conditions and outcomes of many public schools but cannot afford the elite private schools in South Africa with another avenue to provide their children

¹⁴ ISASA (n.d.) Overview of Independent Schools, Available [here](#).

¹⁵ CDE (2015), Low Fee Private Schools: South Africa and International Experiences, Available [here](#).

¹⁶ World Bank (n.d.) Government expenditure on education, total (% of government expenditure)-South Africa, Available [here](#).

¹⁷ CDE (2015), Low Fee Private Schools: South Africa and International Experiences, Available [here](#).

¹⁸ AfricaCheck (2015) Are 80% of South African schools 'dysfunctional'?, Available [here](#).

¹⁹ Department of Basic Education (2019) School Realities, Available [here](#).

²⁰ Section 27 (2017) Education Rights In Independent Schools, Available [here](#).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

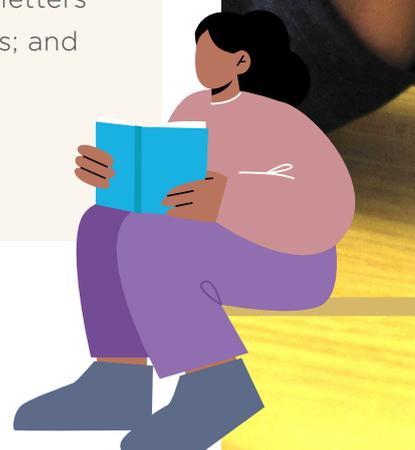
with quality education.²³ Molo Mhlaba is a recent offering in the low-fee private school landscape and has two definitive differences: its focus on establishing a Pan-African curriculum and its orientation towards young girls. This makes Molo Mhlaba a unique offering in the independent school landscape.

Methodology

This programmatic assessment employed a mixed methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data to establish insights for the report.

The following methods were used to gather data for the project report:

- **Document review:** A thorough review was done on all the Molo Mhlaba documents in order to understand what informs the school's current goals and future strategies. This includes their proposal, their strategic documents, as well as their curriculum documents;
- **Qualitative data analysis:** Key informant interviews were conducted with stakeholders from Molo Mhlaba, as well as the community organisations who Molo Mhlaba partners with. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with the teachers from the school, as well as with the parents from the school;
- **Quantitative data analysis:** Data analysis was performed on academic progress reports, school attendance rates, and sponsorship data;
- **Independent educational assessment:** The Genesis team used an academic tool to conduct an independent educational assessment that established the progress of learners with regards to reading letters and words in comparison to national benchmarks; and
- **Desktop research:** Findings were consistently triangulated through desktop research throughout the assessment.



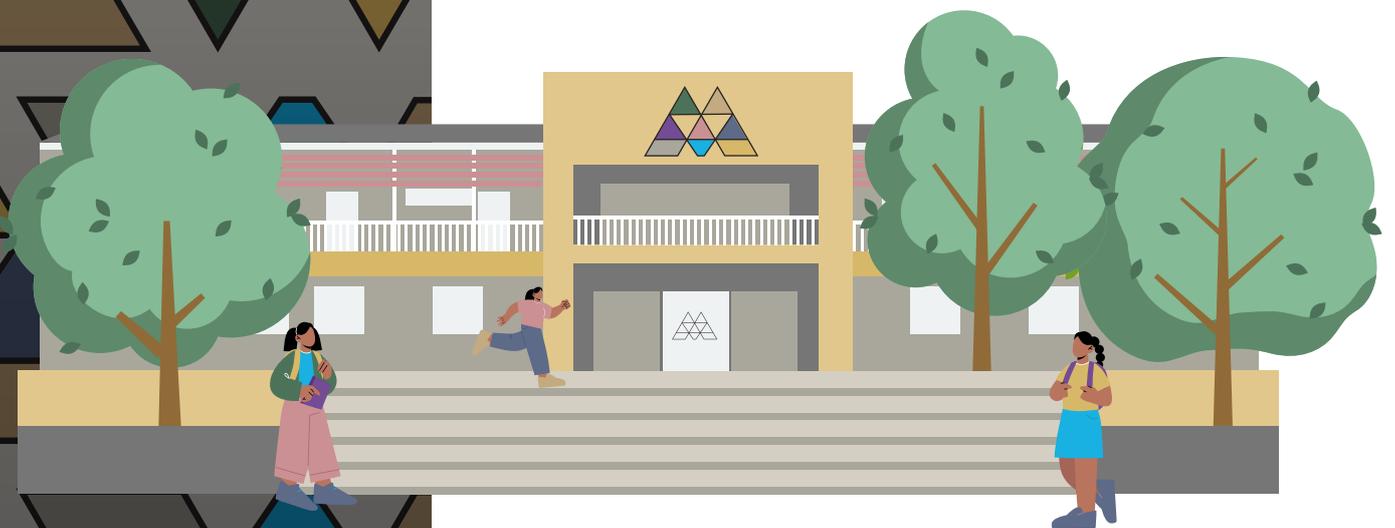
²³ Ramulongo, N. (2020) Low-fee independent schools ignored, Mail and Guardian, Available [here](#).

Children are kept safe and engaged through experiential extracurricular programmes.

Understanding Molo Mhlaba

In order to understand the extent of Molo Mhlaba's impact, it is important to understand Molo Mhlaba's methodology and pedagogy.

This section details the specifics of these approaches, particularly with regards to their contribution to achieving their short-term and long-term impact.



Molo Mhlaba's model consists of the following components:²⁴

- **Extended school day:** The school day is from 7:30am to 4pm so that working parents can drop off their children and collect them, children are kept safe and engaged through experiential extracurricular programmes operated as part of the school day.
- **Nutritious meals:** Learners are served two hot meals (breakfast and lunch) and two snacks to ensure healthy minds and bodies.
- **Highly qualified teachers with a teacher to learner ratio of 1:25:** Molo Mhlaba aims to have a teacher to learner ratio of 1:25 meaning that they have smaller classrooms that make for better learning environments and a manageable workload for teachers and their assistants. This is in stark contrast to the Western Cape, which has an average teacher to learner ratio of 1:37, one of the worst in the country.²⁵
- **Located in the same communities as the girls:** By housing schools in the same communities as the girls, Molo Mhlaba aims to reduce the travel time required between getting to and from schools, save parents money on additional transport costs and positively impact the mental health and identity of learners by showcasing what is POSSIBLE in their communities. Molo Mhlaba aims to establish models of teaching excellence and what a high impact STEAM school for girls looks like in underserved communities.
- **Leadership training for children and teachers:** Molo Mhlaba invests in active leadership training programmes for both teachers and learners at the Molo Mhlaba Schools.
- **Molo Mhlaba outreach:** These are after school programmes targeting learners in public schools with after school enrichment programmes focused on STEAM education. By offering these classes to an additional 5 000 learners, Molo Mhlaba aims to increase the likelihood of more women and girls accessing STEAM education, remaining in STEAM careers and encouraging future generations of women and girls to do the same.

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Molo Mhlaba's strategy is also informed by its theory of change (TOC). Molo Mhlaba's TOC centres around achieving the short-term and long-term outcomes of two main impact statements below:

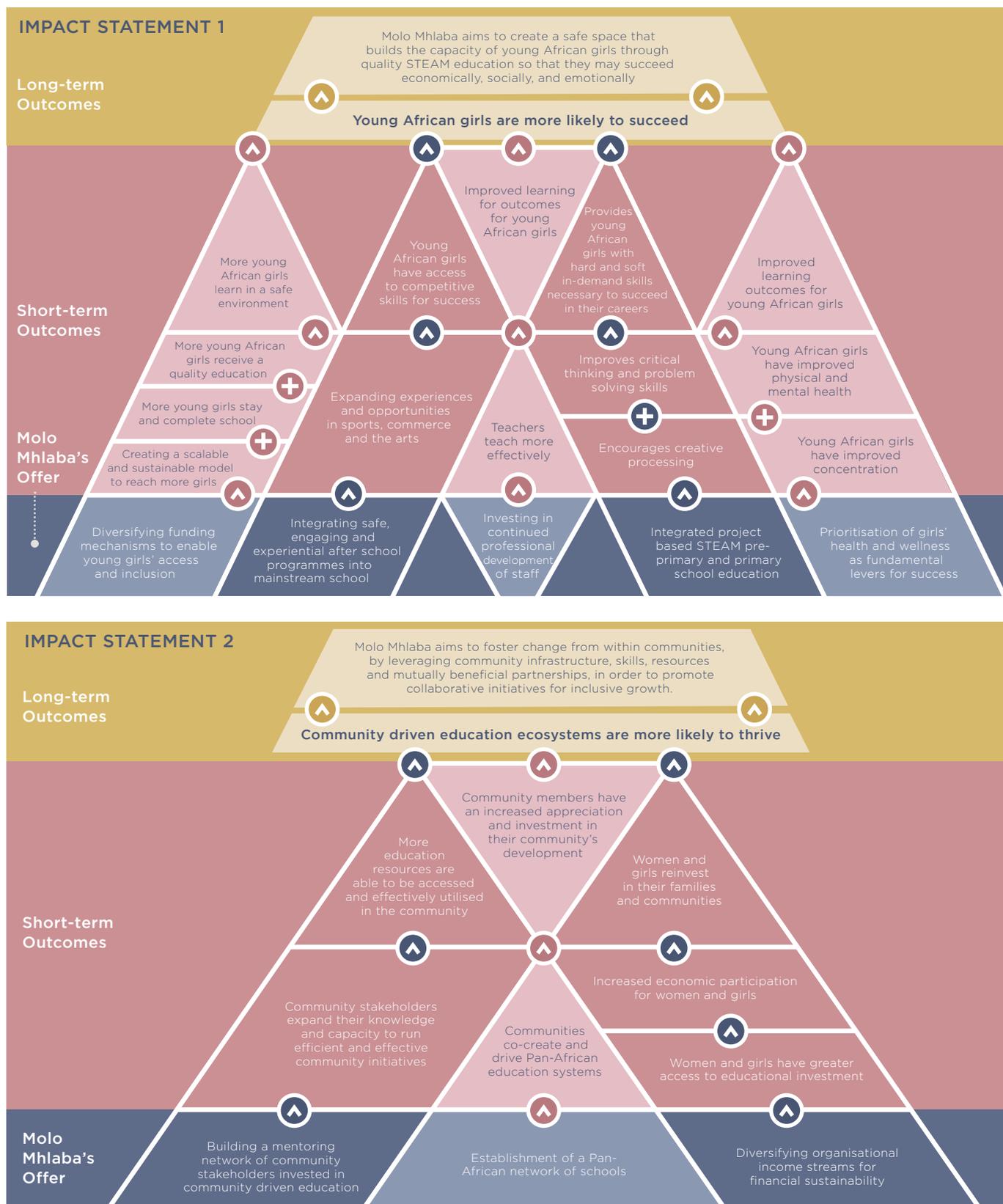
- **Impact Statement 1:** Molo Mhlaba aims to create a safe space that builds the capacity of young African girls through quality STEAM education so that they may succeed economically, socially, and emotionally; and
- **Impact Statement 2:** Molo Mhlaba aims to foster change from within communities, by leveraging community infrastructure, skills, resources, and mutually beneficial partnerships, in order to promote collaborative initiatives for inclusive growth.

²⁴ Molo Mhlaba's Website, Available [here](#).

²⁵ Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2020) Teacher Absenteeism & Learner/Teacher ratio at schools in the province, Available [here](#).

In keeping with the values enshrined in Impact Statement 2, the theory of change and relevant indicators were established in a theory of change workshop with Molo Mhlaba and Molo Mhlaba's community partners. The detailed theory of change, specifically including Molo Mhlaba's contributions, short-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes, can be viewed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Indicates Molo Mhlaba's TOC and Impact Statements



As a result, the theory of change and accompanying impact framework with relevant indicators informs the methodology and the analysis of the report.

Curriculum

Molo Mhlaba's curriculum is based on Montessori teaching while being aligned to the CAPS policy. Molo Mhlaba aims to offer all the subjects in Figure 2, though since the school is still quite new, not all subjects have been implemented yet. Coding and engineering are also taught via LEGO Robotics, LEGO Mindstorms, Kano Computing, Scratch and Google Apps.

Molo Mhalba also aims to curate literature in the classrooms so that the girls are exposed to heroes of the world, and world history through a feminist and Pan African lens. The resources within the classroom are either written by black women or are about black women leaders and pioneers, with the hopes of allowing the girls to be able to 'see themselves' in the stories and books. The aim is that these subjects are taught by means of investigation by learners. Using project-based learning, learners are expected to complete physical projects and reach learning outcomes through a self-directed process of play and exploration.

Molo Mhlaba's pedagogy is aligned to the Montessori method but tailored to the context in Khayelitsha where the learners and the school are situated.

The main intention behind this is largely because key stakeholders in the school believe that the Montessori method will provide high-quality education to learners. In addition, the Montessori method teaches learners to cope and be independent, while providing an environment that will stimulate learners' ability to move from abstract to concrete instruments and tools that enable a control of error in execution.

The Montessori method, which is informed by eight key principles (see Figure 3) is also valued for enabling the school to work with all abilities and learning styles.

The Montessori method's ultimate outcome as envisioned by Maria Montessori, is to establish a process of learning that eventually results in improved independence, proactivity and self-determination in children that is long lasting.²⁶

Figure 2: Indicates all subjects Molo Mhlaba aims to offer

Subjects that Molo Mhlaba intends to offer:

- Literacy and Numeracy (Maths)
- Languages (English, Xhosa, Swahili, Arabic, French, Sotho)
- Social Sciences (History, Life Sciences and Geography)
- Economic Management Systems (EMS)
- Girlpreneur (teaching girls' entrepreneurship)
- Engineering
- Computer Science
- Arts, Music and Drama
- Career Guidance
- Debate and Public Speaking
- Leadership and Lifeskills
- Mindfulness and Yoga
- Physical Education (Soccer, Rugby, Yoga, Martial Arts/ Self-Defense, Indigenous Games, Swimming)

Figure 3: Montessori Principles

Eight Principles of Montessori Education²⁷

- 1** Movement and cognition are closely linked and movement can enhance thinking and learning;
- 2** Learning and well-being are improved when learners have a sense of control over their activities, time, and space;
- 3** Learning is improved when learners are interested in what they are learning;
- 4** External rewards for an activity, such as grades and other recognition for achievement, negatively impact motivation to engage in that activity when the reward is withdrawn;
- 5** Collaboration can be conducive to learning;
- 6** Learning that is located in a meaningful context is deeper and richer compared to learning in abstract contexts;
- 7** Particular forms of adult engagement are linked to more optimal child outcomes;
- 8** And having an orderly environment is beneficial to learners.

Various studies have shown the successes of Montessori education over traditional forms of education, with some also showing how parental effects and socioeconomic status (SES) affect educational outcomes.^{28, 29} One study from 2005 found Montessori education to be effective in that Montessori learners performed better or the same as non-Montessori learners on every measure against which they were measured.³⁰ Another study from 2017 similarly found that Montessori children performed better in academic achievement and social cognition, while also showing grit by persevering through difficult tasks.¹⁴

In addition, Montessori has also been shown to combat inequities in education in that by the end of the same study, educational outcomes from children in the lower income half of the sample who received a Montessori education, were on par with the educational outcomes achieved by higher income children of the study.³¹ However, despite this, success with regards to the Montessori method is based on a genuine understanding of the child's place in the world, what they require to cultivate a love of learning and effective implementation. There are cons to the Montessori method as well. Namely: it can be an expensive alternative to traditional forms of education, some children may struggle without a definitive structure and routine, and lastly, independence though an important skill in one's personal life, may not always prepare children for future milestones such as employment.³²

27 "The Science behind the genius", (Lillard, 2005), Available [here](#).

28 "Evaluating Montessori Education", (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006), Available [here](#).

29 "Montessori Preschool Elevates and Equalizes Child Outcomes: A Longitudinal Study", (Lillard, Heise, Richey, Tong, Hart, and Bray, 2017) Available [here](#).

30 "Shunned and Admired: Montessori, Self-Determination, and a Case for Radical School Reform", (Lillard, 2019), Available [here](#).

31 Ibid.

32 Meinke, H. (2019) Exploring the Pros and Cons of Montessori Education, Rasmussen University, Available [here](#).

It is important to note that Molo Mhlaba uses Montessori as a form of pedagogy but that it has been adapted to suit its needs and requirements e.g. Molo Mhlaba still engages in formal assessments, which is outside the mandate of Montessori. This is also largely because the school's aim is to ensure that the students can perform well in South African high schools and higher education which conducts formal assessments.

Montessori Teacher Training

Molo Mhlaba seeks to uphold the standards of Montessori education by funding teachers to receive Montessori teacher training through affiliated training centres.

In order to offer a Montessori education, all Molo Mhlaba's teachers must go through a Montessori teaching course. This is taught via the [Montessori Early Learning Foundation](#) or the [Montessori Centre South Africa](#), which is adapted to the South African context. The training that is undergone by teachers is intended to help instil a single accepted standard of teaching that is internationally recognised and that teachers are expected to practice within the classroom.

Molo Mhlaba also tries to optimise adherence to the Montessori method by hiring recent Bachelor of Education (BEd) graduates, which is a South African teaching qualification.

The main belief is that new teachers are more easily converted to Montessori pedagogy since they are less likely to have become used to other methods of teaching. This is in stark contrast to teachers whose experience has been gained in either government or even private schools, who may struggle to take up the Montessori method because of years spent acquiring and reinforcing proficiency in a different pedagogy.

While the recruitment strategy may minimise the effort of unlearning old ways, teachers at Molo Mhlaba expressed that they experienced difficulty in initially taking up the Montessori method as it was different from the method of teaching in which they were trained.

One teacher indicated that she would have benefited from additional support in adopting the method. In addition, the school's Pan-African mandate places an emphasis on using isiXhosa extensively, which some teachers have indicated has been difficult to adapt to Montessori.



However, despite the initial 'growing pains', teachers also indicated that they did feel that the Montessori method had improved their teaching, making it more practical overall.

Furthermore, a pitfall that was voiced by staff at Molo Mhlaba was that it takes more effort to onboard recent graduates with minimal prior experience into the school as they need to be taught about employer-employee relations, the education sector and other peripheral education needed to take up their roles. However, teachers generally expressed willingness and motivation to apply the Montessori method, which indicates that teachers are making the effort and working towards being adherent to the method.

Hiring new graduates is not uncharacteristic of low-fee private schools in general. Many low-fee private schools tend to hire teachers with fewer qualifications and minimal experience than those hired by government schools and instead, provide additional pre- and in-service teacher training to compensate for their lack of experience.³³ In addition, these younger teachers also require lower remuneration, making their inclusion in the staff body more cost-effective. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Molo Mhlaba would also provide additional training in a similar manner, largely through external consultants who would do instructional teaching in the class and tandem teaching to demonstrate teaching methodologies to teachers. However, with the arrival of COVID-19, the loss of funding and the restructuring of priorities for funding, the intensive training was scaled down. In response, there is now a focus on ensuring that teachers receive Montessori training and accreditation.

Current plans to bolster the quality of teaching and learning at Molo Mhlaba include providing teachers with in-service training through mentoring and coaching in the classroom.

To drive this strategy, Molo Mhlaba is in the process of recruiting a head of education whose role will be instructional leadership of teaching and learning at the school. Since the school is still in its early years of establishment, the Executive director will be responsible for business development, fundraising and community activities at the school in addition to leading while the principal focuses on the teaching body and managing the school operations.

Teachers' Content Knowledge

Teacher content knowledge is widely regarded as being crucial to learning outcomes as they are able to stimulate their children to perform better. A weakness related to Molo Mhlaba's teachers' content knowledge is that Molo Mhlaba relies on content knowledge gained through the teacher training received by teachers during the course of their university and in-service training. This is the same training received by teachers in public schools. As a result, teachers are assumed to have the requisite knowledge for their subjects and there are no measures in place to test whether teachers have the requisite content knowledge. However, if teacher training through university and in-service training produces teachers with low content knowledge in the public schooling sector, then there is no reason to believe that teachers hired by Molo Mhlaba with the same training will be better off. Thus, the school cannot control for this if it does not screen for good content knowledge in its hiring process. As a result, this lack of screening for prior content knowledge is a gap in the hiring process.

³³ Roland, M., Upadhyay, A., & Burnett, N. (2016). Understanding Household and School Proprietor Needs in Low-Fee Private Schools in Ghana: A Needs and Impact Assessment of the IDP Rising Schools Program. IDP Foundation, Inc. Results for Development.

Hours Spent Teaching

The Western Cape Government requires a total of 23 hours of scheduled learning time for learners in Grades R-1 and 25 hours for learners in Grades 2-3.³⁴ Molo Mhlaba provides five hours of scheduled teaching time per day to learners in Grades R to 3, amounting to 25 hours per week, which is on par with government requirements for Grades 2 to 3 and above the government requirement for Grades R to 1. This indicates that Molo Mhlaba is comparable to other schools when it comes to hours of teaching in relation to the school curriculum. Teacher absenteeism at Molo Mhlaba is at approximately 5%. The Western Cape teacher absenteeism rate was at approximately 4% to 5% in 2020,³⁵ indicating that the teacher attendance rate at Molo Mhlaba is on par with Western Cape schools' averages. However, it must be emphasised that Molo Mhlaba already has a strict policy on teacher absenteeism to ensure uninterrupted learning.

In addition, Molo Mhlaba has achieved its mandate with regard to class size per teacher. The table below compares Molo Mhlaba's average teacher to student ratio in comparison to other independent and government schools throughout the country:³⁶

Table 1: Indicates the teacher to student ratio per school

School	Ratio
Molo Mhlaba Aggregated Ratio (Grade RR to Grade 4)	1:20
Spark Schools	1:32 ³⁷
Curro School	1:25
ADvTECH Crawford	Approx 1:25
Average Government School	1:35

Table 1 indicates that Molo Mhlaba's teacher to student ratio is much lower than other independent schools, as well as the average government school. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has emphasised how small class sizes remain beneficial to students as it allows teachers to give each student more individual attention. This in turn results in better outcomes, while also giving teachers an opportunity to more effectively meet the needs of students i.e. step in early if a student is struggling.³⁸ In this vein, Molo Mhlaba has laid a solid foundation with regard to achieving productive teacher to student ratios.



³⁴ Western Cape Education Department Circular 0048/2017 "Guidelines for governing bodies on the determination of school times", 2017, Available [here](#).

³⁵ Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2020) Teacher Absenteeism & Learner/Teacher ratio at schools in the province, Available [here](#).

³⁶ BusinessTech (2018) Class sizes in public vs private schools in South Africa, Available [here](#).

³⁷ Spark schools have emphasised that not all 32 students are taught at once.

³⁸ OECD (2014) Education at a Glance 2014 OECD Indicators: OECD Indicators

Educational Outcomes

Molo Mhlaba's first impact statement is to provide quality education to ensure that young children are able to succeed in the 'real world.'

This means that Molo Mhlaba's educational outcomes, specifically with regards to attrition rates and academic performance, must be on par with or better than national benchmarks. This is explored in the section below.

Ensuring that Young Girls stay in School

Molo Mhlaba has succeeded in ensuring that learners generally remain at Molo Mhlaba. Only three learners left the school from Grade 1 going into 2021, and only one learner left the school from Grade 2 going into 2021. The reason provided by Molo Mhlaba staff for this attrition was that it was a result of parental relocation out of the area. This means that these learners transferred to other, potentially closer schools, indicating that the children had not dropped out of school. It is also important to note that it is not uncommon for parents to switch schools for their children early on as a result of personal preference. This is consistent with overall 'attrition' rates in the foundation phase of schooling in South Africa as learner retention rates typically become a challenge only after Grade 9 (after the end of compulsory schooling).³⁹ Pooled datasets from 2016 - 2018 indicate that learner retention rate across the foundation phase is 99,17%.⁴⁰ Learner drop-out rates after obtaining Grade 1 in South Africa is at 0,1%, 0,23% for learners completing Grade 2, and 0,31% for learners dropping out after Grade 3.⁴¹

Molo Mhlaba is registered with the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) and issues termly, grade-specific reports to allow easy reference should a learner transfer to another school. Based on their assessments, learners are flagged for support on a termly basis if they score a '3' or below (3 equating to 40% and below).

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³⁹ Report on Dropout and Learner Retention Strategy to Portfolio Committee on Education, Department of Basic Education, 2011, Available [here](#).

⁴⁰ Statistics South Africa, General Household Survey (GHS), DBE own calculations, 2019 Question NW1251 to the Minister of Basic Education on Parliamentary Monitoring Group, Available [here](#).

⁴¹ Ibid

Learners are not flagged for support based on failing tasks or projects, but rather on overall averages at the end of the term. This system of flagging learners for support is consistent with the WCED system of flagging learners for support. Only one learner was held back from Grade 3, and remained in Grade 2 going into 2021. No learners were held back from Grade 2 (Grade 1s in 2020).⁴² There were two learners who were flagged for support in Term 1, but not flagged in Term 2 due to having just passed. These learners then failed Term 3 resulting in having failed the overall year.⁴³ This indicates that additional ways of flagging learners for support, and additional support for learners might be required.

Learner Absenteeism

Learner absenteeism rates in South Africa can range from 5% to 15% depending on the size and sampling, and definitions utilised by studies conducted. A 2006 Labour Force survey of 30 000 households found that 8% of learners attending school had been absent from school for more than five days over the past 12 months, while a Centre for Social Science Research (CSSR) found learner absenteeism to be closer to 15%.⁴⁴ It is also important to note that chronic absenteeism is regarded as 10 or more days of schooling missed consecutively.⁴⁵ Considering the above, learners at Molo Mhlaba had rates of absenteeism consistent with the rest of South Africa, with rates of absenteeism increasing in 2021 compared to 2020. In 2020, the average number of days absent was 7 days (4%) compared to 12 days (6,25%) in 2021 with the majority of learners (86%) being absent for 10 or fewer days in 2020. There are also a number of outliers that represent extremes. For example, one learner was absent for 26 days (16%), one for 19 days (12%), and one for 15 days (9%) in 2020. Molo Mhlaba indicated that this was due to COVID-19 positive test results from the learners' parents and resultantly, they had to be isolated.

In 2021, the majority of learners (54%) were absent for more than 10 days (5%).⁴⁶ 4 learners missed 21 days of school (11%), two learners missed 20 days of school (10%), and two learners missed 19 days of school (9.9%). The Grade 1 class in 2021 were absent for an average of 16 days (8%), compared to the Grade 1 class of 2020 who missed an average of 9 days of school (5,6%).⁴⁷ Considering that 2020 was when the COVID-19 pandemic began, it becomes apparent that absenteeism in 2021 was due to factors outside of the pandemic.

Learner absenteeism rates are a key predictor of ensuring learners stay in school, particularly as learners progress to higher grades, as well as a key factor in terms of learner performance.

According to the Molo Mhlaba absenteeism policy, parents are contacted if a learner has missed two consecutive days of school - without the parent having contacted the school. In some instances, contextual circumstances influence absenteeism, with the Executive Director indicating that often learners might miss a week of school if the family has to travel for a funeral, and the learner is expected to travel with, or there is no one else to care for the child while the family travels.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ This was the case for two learners in Grade 2 in 2020

⁴⁴ Community Agency for Social Enquiry & Joint Education Trust (2007), "Learner Absenteeism in the South African Schooling System", Report for the Department of Education

⁴⁵ Coetzee and Venter (2016), "South African law and policy regulating learner absenteeism at public schools: Supporting an ecosystemic management approach", *South African journal of education*, 36, 4

⁴⁶ This is out of 192 teaching days in 2021

⁴⁷ This is out of 158 teaching days in 2020

While these circumstances are unavoidable, continued learner absenteeism over a long period of time is detrimental to the success of learners. Considering that absentee rates at Molo Mhlaba are either within the average rates of absenteeism in South Africa, or when analysed on an individual basis are considered high, there is a need for Molo Mhlaba to establish more mechanisms to decrease absentee rates or provide greater support to learners and parents to ensure that girls are not missing days of school.

Learner Performance

Overall, learner performance is higher in the lower grades, with learners performing much better in 2021 than 2020.

From Grade 1 to Grade 2 more learners improved than decreased their marks across subjects. However, from Grade 2 to Grade 3; more learners' marks went down in Home Language and Mathematics. Learners' results in Term 1 (2020 to 2021) decreased by as much as 32%, with an average of 16% decrease (for those whose marks declined) in Mathematics.

As per the CAPS Curriculum, learners in the Foundation Phase have four subjects on their report card; isiXhosa home language, English first additional language, Mathematics and Life Skills. Learners are assessed on "Listening and speaking", "Phonics", "handwriting", "writing" and "reading and comprehension" in languages. Learners are assessed on "Numbers, Operations and Relationships", "Patterns, Functions and Algebra", "Space and Shape", "Measurement", and "Data Handling" in mathematics. However, it is unclear what is entailed in each assessment component; and how this might be taught or assessed in a more holistic way. The following sections specifically detail learner performance as per learner reports in 2020 and 2021.

At present, the moderation of the curriculum, and assignment tests are primarily internal with the teachers co-moderating each other. Molo Mhlaba also exchanges formal assessments with a nearby independent school in Khayelitsha for co-moderation. At the end of the year, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) circuit manager reviews all learner data, and reviews assessment samples of the learners to determine whether learners are being assessed at the right level. In terms of the quality and standards of the curriculum, Molo Mhlaba is currently going through the process of accreditation with the UMALUSI Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training. All assessments are internally set and are used to determine learner progression, need for learner support and to provide learners with termly reports.

The internal nature of this assessment is important to note since peer review of assessments has limited benefit in ensuring that the assessments provide a sufficiently rigorous test of learners' educational outcomes. Co-moderation with other schools in Khayelitsha is helpful, but this is dependent on whether the quality of education and assessment at the neighbouring schools are adequate for co-moderation to be instructive. In addition, the WCED representative who determines whether learners are being assessed at the right level is not intentionally conducting a rigorous benchmarking exercise, but rather may be completing a primarily compliance-driven exercise.

However, there is still value in understanding Molo Mhlaba's perspective on how children are performing at the school, specifically with regards to how this performance has changed from year to year. Genesis also conducted an independent educational assessment, which has national benchmarks from low-fee independent schools throughout South Africa.

Both assessments must be kept in mind when understanding Molo Mhlaba's educational outcomes and are articulated in the sections below:

Grade 1 Performance in 2020

Grade 1s in 2020 fell mostly into the range of 60-69% across subjects, except for Life Skills where the majority of students fell into the distinction bracket of 80-89% (9 out of 23). 11 students (approximately 48%) received a mark of 70% or higher for Mathematics, while the remainder of children (52%, 12 out of 23) received a mark of between 50% and 69%. This indicates that there were still some learners who were underperforming in Mathematics. It is also important to note that throughout the year, there were some learners who underperformed severely. Most notably, two learners obtained below 50% for home language in Term 1, and one learner obtained below 50% for Mathematics in Term 3. However, despite this, all the Grade 1s in 2020 passed the year and were promoted to Grade 2 in 2021.

Grade 1 Performance in 2021

Grade 1s in 2021, consistently (across both terms and subjects), fell into the distinction bracket (80 - 100%), with no learners obtaining below 50% for any subject, in any term. Specifically, 16 out of 19 (84%) received distinctions for English Home Language; 13 out of 19 (68%) received distinctions for First Additional Language; 18 out of 19 (95%) received distinctions for Mathematics; and 16 out of 19 (84%) received distinctions for Life skills. This indicates a core difference in academic performance of Grade 1s between 2020 and 2021.

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Grade 2 Performance 2020

2020 seemed to affect the performance of Grade 2s in a more individualised way, with some learners continuing to consistently obtain distinctions, but others then scoring lower than the general trend. Although one learner obtained below 50% in Term 1 for Mathematics, and one learner obtained below 50% for Mathematics in Term 4, more students (46%, 12 out of 26) obtained results in the distinction bracket than in any other bracket, indicating good academic performance overall. Molo Mhlaba believes that this continued good performance during the lockdown might be due to the online schooling and virtual support that was provided during COVID-19, and that there is a correlation between the learners who were performing poorly and those whose parents could not engage virtually, however, the Genesis team cannot confirm that this hypothesis is true. The reasons for some parental





virtual non-engagements are numerous, and include personal issues such as some parents being uncertain as to how to use some technology. This may indicate that despite the support provided by Molo Mhlaba (such as provision of data), external inequality affected who had access to learn at this time, which may have affected academic performance.

More learners (35%, 9 out of 26) obtained between 60-69% for their final Home Language (HL) result than other result brackets, however second highest to this, approximately 27% (7 out of 26) obtained a distinction. This indicates that results were not cohesive across the grade. In addition, four learners obtained below 50% in Home Language in Term 1, one learner obtaining below 50% in HL in Term 3, and one learner obtaining below 50% in Term 4, indicating that there were still some students struggling throughout the year.

Concerningly, for First Additional Language (FAL), 27% of students (7 out of 26) fell into the bracket of 50-59%, and 7 learners obtained below 50% in FAL in Term 1, 3 learners in Term 3, and one learner in Term 4. This indicates that there were a number of students struggling with FAL throughout the year. The majority of learners (13 out of 26 or 50%) obtained a final mark of 70-79% for Life Skills, while 3 learners in Term 1, and 3 learners in Term 3, obtained below 50% for Life Skills. All learners, but one, in Grade 2 were promoted to Grade 3 in 2021.

Grade 2 Performance 2021

There was a notable improvement in Grade 2 performance in 2021. The majority of the Grade 2 learners in 2021 then fell into the range of distinction (80-100%) across terms, and across subjects. Only one learner obtained a result below 50% (for first additional language, in Term 1).

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Grade 3 Performance 2021

46% (11 out of 24) of Grade 3 learners in 2021 obtained distinctions for Life Skills across terms, however one learner obtained below 50% in Life Skills, in Term 3.

33% (8 out of 24) of learners obtained a final result of 60-69% for Mathematics, however, 6 learners (out of 24 total learners, 25%) obtained a distinction overall in Mathematics. Two learners obtained below 50% in Term 2.

38% of learners (9 out of 24) obtained a result of 70-79% for FAL, however, 3 learners (13%) obtained a distinction overall in FAL. 3 learners (13%) obtained below 50% in Term 2, one learner in Term 3 and one learner in Term 4.

As a group, the Grade 3s performed worst in Home Language, where 42% of learners (10 out of 24) obtained a result of 50-59% for their final mark. This was followed by 7 (29%) learners obtaining between 60-69%, and 7 (29%) learners obtaining between 70-79%. No learners scored a distinction for their final Home Language result in Grade 3 in 2021. 5 learners obtained below 50% in Term 2 and two learners in Term 3. Similarly, to other grades, this indicates that children are performing the poorest when it comes to Home Language.

Molo Mhlaba Comparison to National Benchmarks

In 2014, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) conducted the Annual National Assessments results, in order to gauge how students across the country were performing in all grades in Mathematics and Home Language.⁴⁸

These results compared to Molo Mhlaba’s internal results specifically pertaining to Mathematics and Home Language can be seen in the table below:

Table 2: Indicates Molo Mhlaba’s academic performance in relation to national benchmarks

Subject	Mathematics	Home Language
Grade 1		
National Average	68.4%	63.2%
Molo Mhlaba - Grade 1 2020	70-79%	60-69%
Molo Mhlaba - Grade 1 2021	80-100%	80-100%
Grade 2		
National Average	61.8%	61.1%
Molo Mhlaba - Grade 2 2020	70-79%	60-69%
Molo Mhlaba - Grade 2 2021	80-100%	70-79%
Grade 3		
National Average	55.4%	56.2%
Molo Mhlaba - Grade 3 2021	70-79%	60-69%

This indicates that the Molo Mhlaba internal performance is either on par with national averages or exceeding national averages particularly with regards to Mathematics, a focus of the school. It is important to note however, that these are still internal results so the validity of this outcome will only be truly clarified once children from Molo Mhlaba engage in the same assessments as those in other schools.



⁴⁸ South African Government (2014), Minister Angie Motshekga: Release of Annual National Assessments results 2014, Available [here](#).

Independent Educational Assessment

The entire class of Grade 2 learners were assessed independently by means of a standardised assessment tool commonly used across independent evaluations of early literacy skills both in South Africa and internationally - the early-grade reading assessment (EGRA).⁴⁹ The version of the EGRA used for the evaluation has been developed and adapted to isiXhosa by a range of local and international experts (including researchers involved in developing early reading benchmarks in Nguni languages for South Africa's Department of Basic Education, discussed on the next page).⁵⁰

The assessment includes a suite of pre-literacy and early literacy tasks.

The data was gathered by independent researchers from Genesis, with the support of isiXhosa speaking, non-teacher staff at the schools. These staff were trained and supported in conducting the assessments according to the same protocols that are observed in previous academic research using the isiXhosa EGRA, ensuring that the data were gathered in a comparable manner to previous research studies using the same assessment instrument.

The data gathered allows one to compare the data collected using the isiXhosa early grade reading assessment (EGRA) tool, discussed above. The assessment was conducted for Grade 2 Molo Mhlaba learners in the middle of Term 2 (more specifically, April 2022). Genesis reports scores on two aspects of the assessment, letter-sounding and oral reading fluency (ORF), which can be compared against decoding thresholds and benchmarks that are being developed for the national Department of Basic Education. These national thresholds and benchmarks are being developed based on longitudinal EGRA data from EGRA assessment in Nguni Languages (isiXhosa, isiZulu and siSwati) for 16,400 learners across 660 “no fee” schools (i.e. in low income areas) in four provinces across South Africa (the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Mpumalanga).⁵¹

Learning to read depends on a complex set of interconnected skills, which rely on acquiring a somewhat sequential set of skills. Learners need to acquire certain foundational decoding skills (i.e. phonemic awareness, being able to accurately identify certain letter sounds and words, etc.), before moving on to higher order syllable and word reading. From there learners move on to read entire passages with the necessary speed and accuracy (i.e. fluency) such that they can understand and recall what they have read (see Figure below). This is the so-called decoding threshold hypothesis, underlying the national reading thresholds and benchmarks that are in the process of being developed for Nguni languages like isiXhosa.⁵²



⁴⁹ See Gove, A., and Wetterberg, A. (eds.) (2011). *The Early Grade Reading Assessment: Applications and interventions to improve basic literacy*. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI Press.

⁵⁰ The isiXhosa EGRA assessment used was adapted by Nangamso Mtsatse and Nwabisa Makaluza and Professor Cally Ardington as part of the evaluation of the Funda Wandu Wandu interventions taking place in multiple provinces across South Africa. The foundational isiXhosa EGRA on which it draws and extends has been developed by a range of local international experts, as discussed in Ardington and Meiring (2020) *Impact Evaluation of Funda Wandu Coaching Intervention Midline Findings*. Cape Town: SALDRU, University of Cape Town. p. 20. Available [here](#).

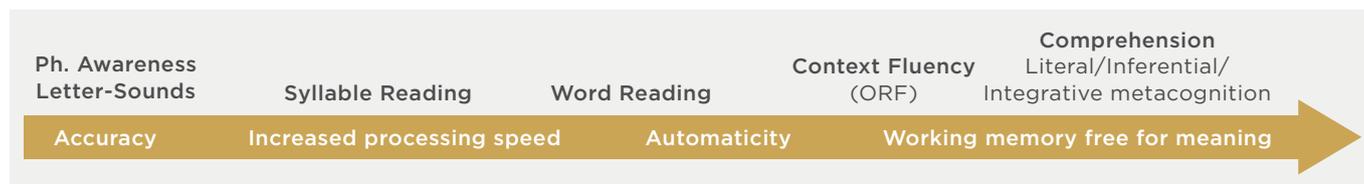
⁵¹ “Benchmarking oral reading fluency in the early grades in Nguni languages”, (Ardington et al., 2021), Available [here](#).

⁵² “Benchmarking oral reading fluency in the early grades in Nguni languages”, (Ardington et al., 2021), Available [here](#).

More specifically, according to the national reading threshold and benchmarks research:

- Letter-sound knowledge refers to alphabetic knowledge of the written code.
- Oral reading fluency (ORF) refers to the ability to read words in context with speed, accuracy and prosody (It must be acknowledged that this process doesn't reflect whether 'reading for meaning' is achieved i.e. whether the children understand what they are reading).⁵³

Figure 4: The theory underlying decoding thresholds and benchmarks



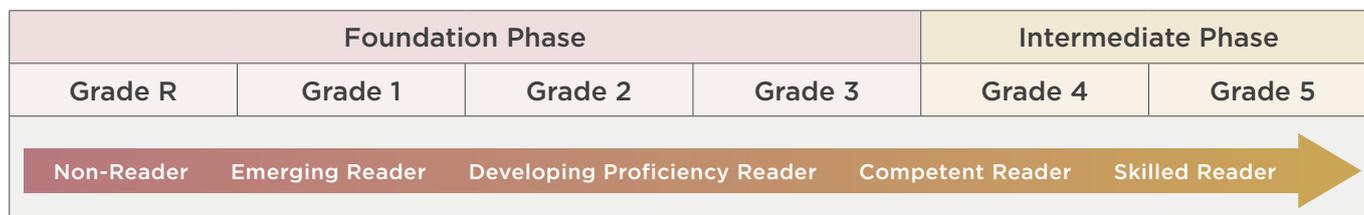
Source: Ardington et al. (2021). *Benchmarking early grade reading skills in Nguni languages.*

These thresholds and benchmarks function as a measure of proficiency in specific pre- and early literacy decoding skills, and are thus used to monitor learners' progress toward reading for meaning.⁵⁴ Given that reading proficiency and reading for meaning is a foundational skill to learners' ability to learn more generally, the assessments provide an indication of early learning ability and progress against a core foundational skill for further learning across domains to occur.

Below we circumscribe what is meant by decoding thresholds and benchmarks:

- **A threshold** refers to the lower bound level of speed and accuracy required in pre- and early literacy decoding skills (in this case, measured as the correct letter sounds identified or words read, per minute), that are required for higher order reading skills to develop (such as reading comprehension).⁵⁵
- **A benchmark** is a numerical measure of the proficiency of specific reading skills at a given level of development (Grade 1, Grade 2, etc.), that have been shown to be a predictor of later reading skill acquisition. Benchmarks are used to monitor whether children are on track to acquire the various sequential sub-skills required to read with the requisite accuracy and speed. These sub skills are a prerequisite to learners eventually being able to read with comprehension (be a competent reader) in a given language by the end of Grade 3.⁵⁶

Figure 5: Benchmark reading skills acquisition envisioned in the South African curriculum



Source: Ardington et al. (2021). *Benchmarking early grade reading skills in Nguni languages.*

⁵³ Where prosody refer to how natural reading sounds (in terms of conforming to speech rhythms, intonation patterns, punctuation conventions, etc.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "Summary report: Benchmarking early grade reading skills in Nguni languages". (Ardington et al., 2020), Available [here](#).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Findings

From the following findings one can make inferences about the reading progress of Grade 2 learners at Molo Mhlaba and potential learning progress, but not about progress specific to school subjects (such as Maths and Science).

The thresholds and benchmarks are valid in the South African context; they are not set too high to be unattainable for early grade learners in poor South African schools, but are simultaneously set to establish expectations to motivate teachers, schools and learners to achieve reading excellence.⁵⁷

Importantly, the findings below are based on a sample size of 16 Grade 2 learners at Molo Mhlaba. The total class size and intended sample size was 20, however, 4 learners were absent on the day of the assessment. To make inferences about the Molo Mhlaba Grade 2 class as a whole (i.e. all 20 learners), one must assume that the four learners absent on the day of the assessment are not significantly different from the 16 learners present, or are not outliers. Regardless of whether or not this is a realistic assumption, it must be made for the findings below to be interpretable.

The thresholds and benchmarks reflect the number of correct words per minute (cwpm) from a written passage for ORF, and the number of correct letters spoken per minute for letter-sounding. Table 3 below indicates the class average for the first ORF assessment and the first letter-sounding assessments conducted with Grade 2 Molo Mhlaba learners, alongside the thresholds and benchmarks for these measures.

Benchmarks are set to establish expectations to motivate teachers, schools and learner.



⁵⁷ Ibid.

Table 3: Comparison of class averages for ORF and letter-sounding assessments for Grade 2 Molo Mhlaba learners to thresholds and benchmarks

	Class average for Grade 2 learners at Molo Mhlaba (n=16)	Thresholds and/or benchmarks from Ardington et al. (2021)
Letter-Sounding Assessment 1	27 correct letters per minute	Benchmark: By the end of Grade 1 all learners should be able to sound 40 correct letters per minute.
ORF Assessment 1	21.25 cwpm	Threshold: By the end of Grade 2 all learners should be able to read at least 20 words correctly per minute when reading a passage.

Table 3 indicates that Grade 2 learners at Molo Mhlaba, on average, are able to read 27 correct letters per minute. This is below the benchmark of 40 correct letters per minute by the end of Grade 1 set. No threshold has been set for this measure. Important context to consider here is that the Montessori approach places focus on the structure of words, rather than on phonics when learning to read. Under the Montessori method children are taught to put letters to familiar sounds into a word before they are taught to string together the sounds of a word on a page.⁵⁸ This may provide insight into why the class average score for this letter-sounding assessment is lower than the benchmark.

In terms of ORF, Grade 2 learners at Molo Mhlaba, on average, are able to read 21.25 cwpm. This is above the threshold that should be achieved by the end of Grade 2, such that learners are able to develop higher order reading skills. It is below the benchmark that has been set for the end of Grade 3. These findings indicate that while the learners' letter-sounding scores are below the required benchmark, the learners are above the threshold for ORF and are thus likely to meet the benchmark of 35 cwpm by the end of Grade 3. Figure 6 shows the count of Grade 2 learners falling into different reading classification zones that are defined in relation to the benchmark and threshold. The Figure indicates that there are few outliers on either side (who either cannot read one word or who meet and/or exceed the benchmark), but that most learners are either scoring below the lower threshold or between the threshold and the benchmark for ORF. When understanding the performance of learners in the assessment, it is important to consider the position of the overall distribution rather than individual learner scores, given that learner assessment data will always contain outliers on either side of the distribution.

Additionally, it was anecdotally mentioned that while the learner who was unable to read one word could not read words in isiXhosa (the language in which the assessments were administered), the learner communicated that they were able to read in English.

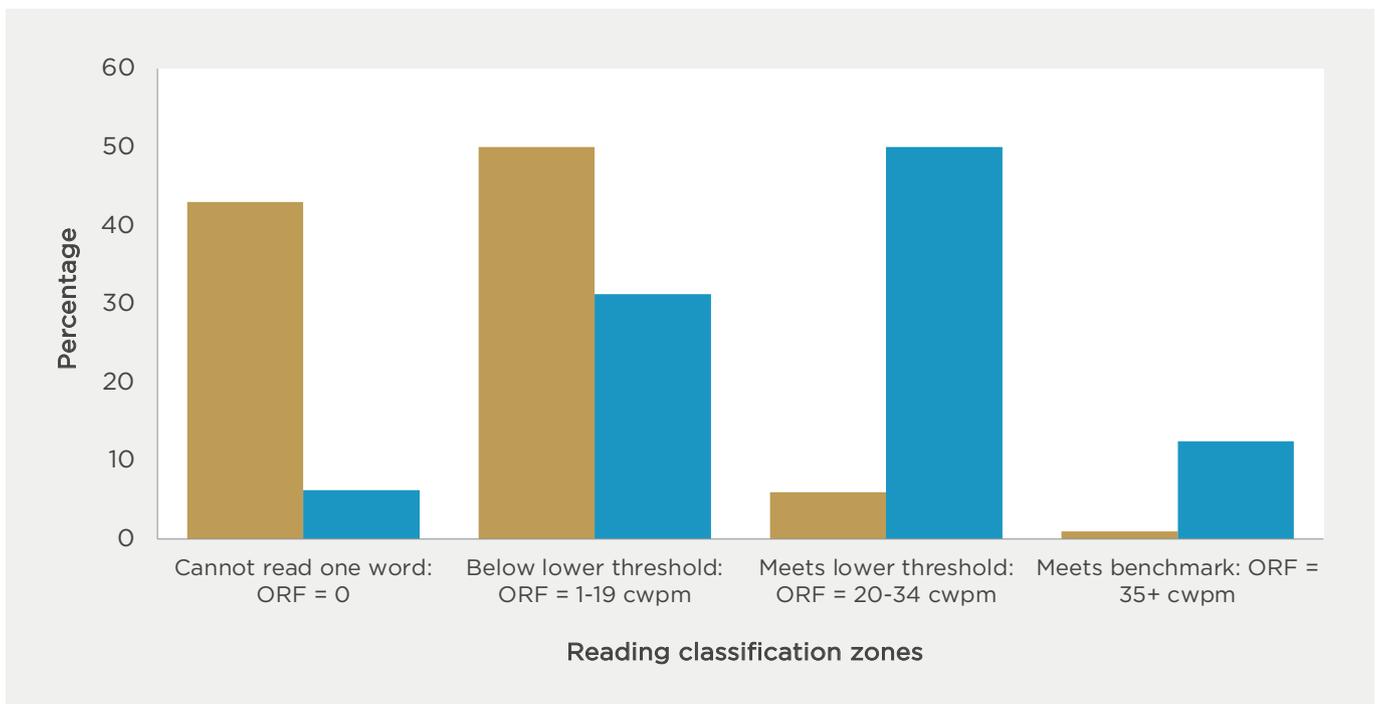
⁵⁸ The Guidepost Team. (2022). Teaching Reading and Writing with Montessori. Available [here](#).

Figure 6: Distribution of ORF Assessment 1 scores



Having compared the measures of Grade 2 Molo Mhlaba learners to benchmarks and thresholds set, the following discussion and tables present a comparison of Molo Mhlaba with the EGRA study data that was used to inform the above benchmarks and thresholds. Importantly, the sample sizes of each are vastly different, with the Molo Mhlaba sample being too small to make meaningful inference and comparison; thus, the comparisons that follow are rough indicators of Molo Mhlaba’s reading progress.

Figure 7: Distribution of ORF Assessment 1 scores for Molo Mhlaba and EGRA study samples



Source: Ardington et al. (2021). *Benchmarking early grade reading skills in Nguni languages.*

Note: The EGRA study sample was assessed in Term 1 while the Molo Mhlaba class was assessed in Term 2 of the school year. It is important to remain cognisant of this difference, along with the difference in sample sizes, when interpreting the above comparison.

Figure 7 alongside visually depicts a distribution for the EGRA study sample that is skewed to the right, while the Molo Mhlaba sample is somewhat skewed to the left. This tells us that more learners are meeting the lower threshold and benchmark in the Molo Mhlaba sample in comparison to the EGRA sample, in which most learners either cannot read one word or are below the lower threshold. This indicates that in relation to this large sample, Molo Mhlaba Grade 2 learners are performing relatively better in terms of ORF.

In terms of the letter-sounding benchmark, in the Molo Mhlaba sample four Grade 2 learners (25%) met the benchmark of being able to sound at least 40 correct letters per minute. This compares similarly to the EGRA study sample in which between 10 and 45 percent were able to meet this benchmark.⁵⁹ Together, these findings and comparisons suggest that Molo Mhlaba's Grade 2 learners are largely on track regarding their proficiency in reading skills, while the letter-sounding of Grade 2 learners remains below the benchmark that has been set for Grade 1 learners, perhaps due to the Montessori approach taken towards letter sounding and reading as discussed above. Tentative comparisons to the ERGA study sample indicate that Molo Mhlaba is performing better in ORF compared to this larger sample of Grade 2 learners.

Preparing Children for the Future

One of the outcomes Molo Mhlaba works towards achieving is instilling in its learners a sense of direction about their future, especially in terms of what careers they will pursue.

The school works hard to expose learners to as many different career fields as possible, especially careers where there is application and/or practice of the hard sciences, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics (STEAM).

For example, learners were exposed to a career as an astronaut through Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin space mission where they were provided the opportunity to write and send postcards into space. Learners were also exposed to careers in various sciences through a partnership with the University of the Western Cape. The extracurricular activities that are done during the extended school day also carry the objective of exposing girls to careers as sportswomen, musicians and dancers.

⁵⁹ Ardington et al. (2021). Benchmarking early grade reading skills in Nguni languages. Available [here](#).





Careers that fall within STEAM, in particular, tend to have benefits such as high earnings, sustained job security and transferability of skills which leads to job flexibility. In addition, STEAM fields contribute to the competitiveness of countries' economies.⁶⁰

However, women, and especially women of colour have historically been underrepresented in these careers, which Molo Mhlaba aims to change. Moreover, Molo Mhlaba's focus on STEAM is also relevant in light of South Africa's poor mathematics outcomes as evidenced by the most recent (from 2019) Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) data.⁶¹ This data showed that South African Grade 4 learners fell in the bottom three out of 64 countries that were assessed on a number of tests. Furthermore, the scores attained by South African learners indicated a lack of basic knowledge in Mathematics and Science.⁶² Molo Mhlaba aims to ensure that this does not become the status quo amongst its learners. This indicates that Molo Mhlaba is making efforts to foster a sense of direction, an orientation towards the future, and to give learners the skills necessary to pursue careers in STEAM fields. Additionally, the school's efforts are geared towards prioritising the holistic development of its learners by helping them to develop mentally, physically, and emotionally, which will also stand them in good stead for their future.

Soft Skills

Students at Molo Mhlaba learn soft skills primarily as a function of the Montessori teaching method, which fosters skills such as independence, discipline, self-motivation, organisation, collaboration, self-confidence, creativity and many more.

A parent in one of the focus group discussions highlighted the stark contrast between his two daughters in regard to communication and self-awareness when he said that his daughter who is at Molo Mhlaba had grown to become aware of her feelings and she expressed them often. She also exhibited a sense of confidence that she did not possess prior to enrolling at Molo Mhlaba. Most parents also indicated that their children are both more proactive and independent

⁶⁰ "STEM Careers and Technological Change", (Deming & Noray, 2018), Available [here](#).

⁶¹ "The shocking state of maths and science education in South Africa", BusinessTech, Available [here](#).

⁶² "The shocking state of maths and science education in South Africa", BusinessTech, Available [here](#).

having been students of Molo Mhlaba. This indicates that Molo Mhlaba's Montessori curriculum is translating into outcomes related to soft skills, such as independence and self-awareness.

Hard Skills

Some of the hard skills that learners are being taught either through extracurricular or classroom activities include:

- **Bilingualism:** Many of the learners enter the school speaking mainly isiXhosa, their home language, with little to no ability to speak English, but learners become fluent in English during their time at the school. In a paper that explored the relationship between English language proficiency and earnings in South Africa, **it was found that there were large returns to reading and writing in English with high proficiency, especially among those with tertiary education.**⁶³ This follows from the fact that English (and Afrikaans) have been the dominant languages of the economy and government as a result of South Africa's colonial history. Parents from the FGDs also indicated that what they liked about Molo Mhlaba was its focus on bilingualism, as they believed it set their child up positively for the future.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Students are given seed funding and come up with business ideas which they get to develop into a business that they run. Through the entrepreneurship experience, students are already experiencing dealing with the failure of a business and all the lessons that come with this. Students also practise pitching and selling their ideas to their peer and adult investors. Establishing interest with regards to entrepreneurship is important as entrepreneurs are in short supply in South Africa and in many other parts of the world. **From primary school, Molo Mhlaba learners already gain the experience of entrepreneurship being a viable career option,** thus increasing the options for potential careers that learners can pursue, which is one of Molo Mhlaba's objectives.
- **Basic financial literacy:** Students are taught about money and savings in class and have learned how to save money by receiving help from the school to open their own bank accounts where they can deposit money themselves. This gives students the opportunity to apply what they have been taught in class, which forms a component of experiential learning. **Experiential learning as a way of developing learners' financial knowledge is supported by research that was conducted in the Netherlands, where learners who were taught financial modules and given the opportunity to apply what they learned showed greater financial knowledge and skill.**⁶⁴
- **Technology skills:** Students at every level are exposed to robotics and forms of computer programming that equip them with the skills to manipulate digital technology. **These skills do not only expose learners to careers in robotics and software engineering, but they also serve as a gateway for learners to begin developing their skills further, if they are interested in a career in one of these fields.**

⁶³ "English language proficiency and earnings in a developing country: the case of South Africa", (Casale & Posel, 2010), Available [here](#).

⁶⁴ "The effect of financial education on pupils' financial knowledge and skills: Evidence from a Solomon four-group design", (Dare, van Dijk, van Dijk, van Dillen, Gallucci, & Simonse, 2020), Available [here](#).

Conclusion on Educational Outcomes

Learner performance in Mathematics on average at Molo Mhlaba is on par to or above the national average. However, greater mechanisms to support learners who are struggling are required beyond a termly average 'flag for support'. While learners in general remain at Molo Mhlaba, individual learner absenteeism needs to be more effectively addressed. The EGRA assessment also indicates that the children at Molo Mhlaba are largely on track with regards to reading proficiency, though Molo Mhlaba must be cognisant of the fact that they are not as proficient with regards to recognising letters specifically.

Overall, the hard skills that Molo Mhlaba attempts to teach are relevant and the school has prioritised them appropriately (this is particularly so in light of the critical skills that South Africa needs now and will need in the future). The effectiveness of this intention will be highly dependent on the extent to which this curriculum is taught as well as whether these translate into long-term learning outcomes. This report confirms that it is too early in the school's history to establish whether these learning outcomes related to the provision of hard skills have been reached.

Overview		
	Mathematic Performance	
	Mechanisms to Support	
	Absenteeism	
	Reading Proficiency	
	Recognising Letters	
	Hard Skills	

.....

 Proficient
  Improvement required
  Not yet established

Funding Mechanisms

In order to be attractive to stakeholders, low-fee independent schools must be both financially viable and sustainable.⁶⁵

Molo Mhlaba's funding model focuses on partnerships with external stakeholders and the community in which the school operates. The following section analyses the model and the sustainability thereof.

Funding Model

Molo Mhlaba has a three-thirds ($\frac{3}{3}$) funding strategy that it hopes will get the school to financial sustainability, as follows:

- One third ($\frac{1}{3}$) of the cost per learner should come from parent fee contribution;
- One third ($\frac{1}{3}$) from grant donations or sponsorship for one child (i.e., from individual or institutional donors); and
- One third ($\frac{1}{3}$) from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) independent subsidy, benchmarked at their cost per learner and determined by the quintile of the school and how much they charge in fees.

Thus, the true cost per learner at Molo Mhlaba is the monthly fees that the school charges a parent multiplied by three which aligns with its mission of being a low-fee independent school.

The current fees related to send a child to Molo Mhlaba is as follows: 1) R8,400 per annum for school fees alone; 2) R2,900 per annum for extra-mural activities like dances and yoga; and 3) R990 per annum for stationary. Uniform is at an additional cost to parents and children on scholarships receive free uniform.

When Molo Mhlaba began its operations in 2018, the school benchmarked its fees against the South African Child Support Grant— in addition to guidance that it received from the Khayelitsha Early Childhood Development Forum.

Molo Mhlaba hopes to operate a total of ten campuses by 2030.



⁶⁵ Brewer, S (2011) A sustainable financial model for low fee private schools in South Africa

After three years of operations (i.e., in 2021) Molo Mhlaba had established the true cost per learner at the school and increased its fees accordingly, hence moving away from the guidance and benchmark of its more middle-class school partners. That said, the costs borne by parents are intended to remain relatively affordable because of the subsidised nature of the school's financial model (i.e., the three-thirds model).

By 2030, Molo Mhlaba hopes to operate a total of ten campuses located in Harare in Khayelitsha (in operation), Montclair (under development), and other township communities across South Africa. The Harare Campus that has been operating since 2018 will be the training and model campus of all future Molo Mhlaba Schools.

As part of the financial sustainability of the school, Molo Mhlaba hopes to follow the following operating model once all ten campuses are in operation:

- Centralised administration and operational support for all campuses which will be managed by a central office;
- A centralised logistics and procurement process for all the schools thus harnessing the benefits of economies of scale in maintaining low operational costs; and
- Each campus will be a centre for teaching and learning and community engagement with the hassle of administration removed from the daily operations of the school.

Funding Trends and Sustainability

In order to determine whether the funding mechanisms for Molo Mhlaba are trending towards sustainability, the Genesis team considered the trends in the three sources of funding identified in the funding model of the school highlighted above: sponsorships, government subsidy and parent's contribution. The information analysed was taken from 2018 to 2022. An assumption was made that the three-thirds funding model would ensure long-term financial sustainability of the school.

The central question of this analysis was therefore whether the model is viable and realistic.

This section seeks to answer whether a third of the school's funding comes from government subsidy, a third from parents' contribution and a third from donors/sponsorships.

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Sponsorships

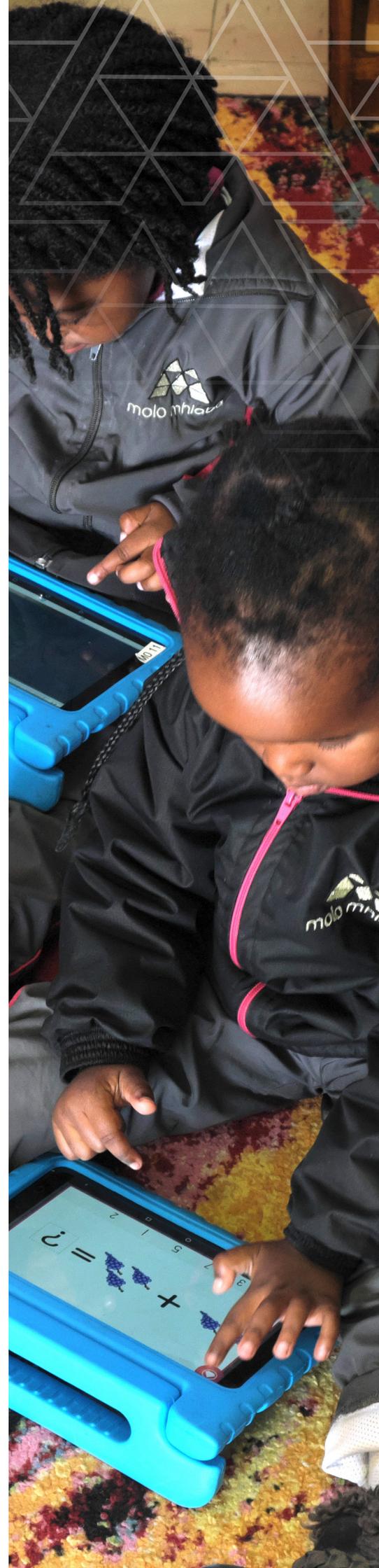
Figure 8 shows the number of students who were sponsored from 2018 to 2022 (expressed as percentages), segregated into different sponsorship types: full sponsorship, partial sponsorship, fees-only sponsorship and discounted-fees sponsorship.



Figure 8: Number of sponsored learners at



Note: In 2020, the school implemented a COVID-19 fee write-off for all parents. Effectively, all students were fully sponsored during that year.

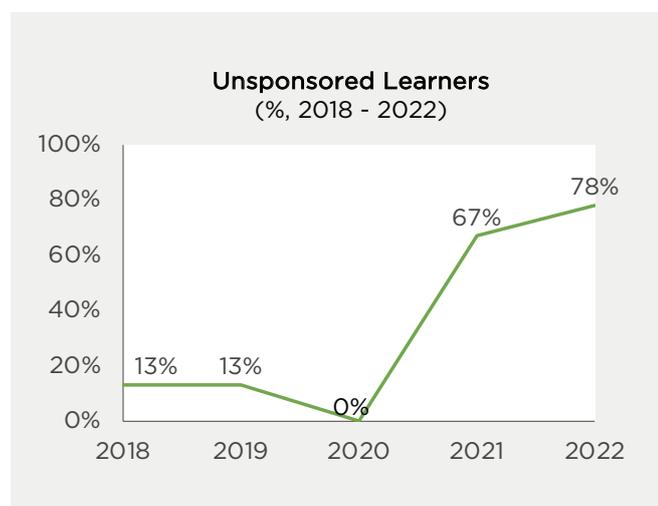


Some key takeaways from this data are as follows:

- 1** The number of fully sponsored learners fell from 87% in 2018 to 57% in 2022. This is a positive development. For sustainability, the school should ideally have no fully sponsored students. All students should have some form of partial sponsorship (partial sponsorship, fees-only or discounted-fees sponsorships as explained below) that covers only a third of the cost of keeping the students in school.
- 2** The number of partially sponsored students rose from 0% in 2018 to 30% in 2022. This is a positive development as well. As mentioned above, for the three-thirds model to sustainability to be realised, students should receive partial sponsorships that cover at least a third of the costs.
- 3** The number of learners who benefit from fee-only sponsorship (i.e., the sponsor only covers the fees) rose from 0% to 13%. This is a positive development as well, for the reasons highlighted above.
- 4** The number of students who received discounted-fees sponsorships remained unchanged at 0%.

Figure 9 presents the number of unsponsored learners at the school (expressed as percentages) between 2018 and 2022.

Figure 9: Number of sponsored learners at Molo Mhlaba



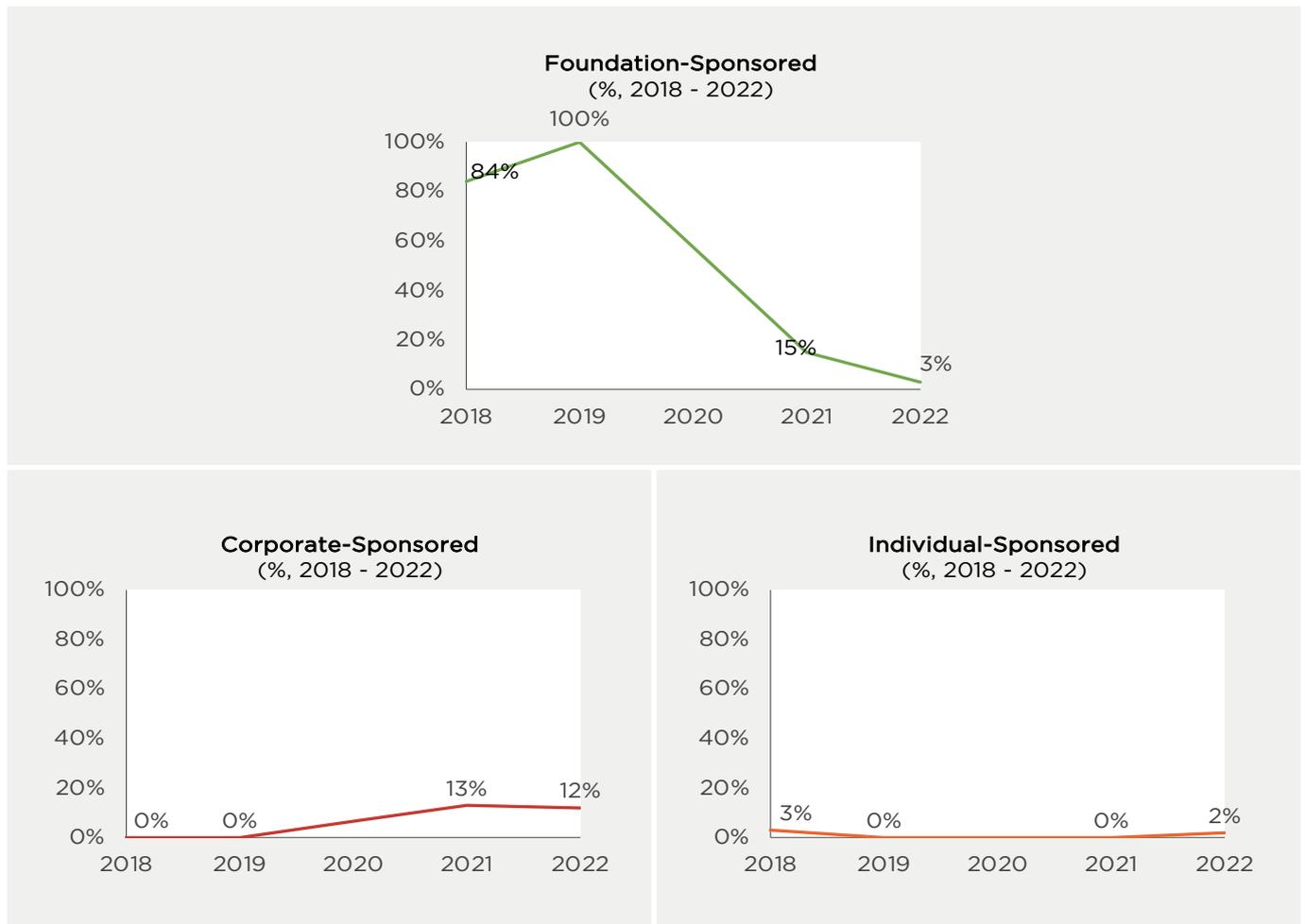
Note: In 2020, the school implemented a COVID-19 fee write-off for all parents. Effectively, all students were fully sponsored during that year.

As shown, the number of unsponsored learners rose from 13% to 78%. Although this may seem to be a positive development, it could also be interpreted to mean that parents are bearing the costs more and more (and that they are willing to bear these costs). However, we know that this is not the case.

Parents are not paying fees as expected, as will be highlighted below. Therefore, the rising number of unsponsored students is a worrying trend, as this may undermine Molo Mhlaba's financial stability, which will affect whether the school will struggle to operate or survive. As mentioned earlier, in an ideal setting, all students should have some form of partial sponsorship that covers at least a third of their costs.

Figure 10 shows the number of sponsored students at the school by sponsor source.

Figure 10: Number of sponsored learners at Molo Mhlaba by sponsor source



Note: In 2020, the school implemented a COVID-19 fee write-off for all parents. Effectively, all students were fully sponsored during that year. Because of this, Molo Mhlaba operated at a loss in 2020 due to the write-off. Some of the school's donors took on the operational costs which would have been covered by fees allowing the school to finish the year with all costs covered.

Figure 10 indicates that:

- 1** Students who benefit from foundation sponsorship fell from 84% to 3%.
- 2** Students who benefit from corporate sponsorship rose from 0% to 12%.
- 3** Students who benefit from individual sponsorship more or less stagnated (3% in 2018 and 2% in 2022).

This shows that **there needs to be some diversification with regards to sponsor type**, even though there has been some progress since 2018 (for instance, Molo Mhlaba has grown its funding base from two anchor donors to seven donors in 2021).

This would ensure that there is no over-reliance on one individual sponsor or one type of sponsor for long-term sustainability.

As an illustration, the figure above shows that foundation sponsors fell from 84% to 3% in less than four years which is worrying. It appears that the reason for this is because Molo Mhlaba had one major donor from the United States who exclusively covered the foundation scholarships in 2018 and 2019 but they closed down in 2020 hence the steep decline.

Government Subsidy

By the time of writing this report (April 2022), the school had not started receiving the WCED subsidy referenced above. Hence, from 2018 to 2022, the school has been making up the two-thirds of its three-thirds funding model via grant funding or sponsorship for individual students.⁶⁶ However, this is set to change as in December 2021 the school received communication that they had been provisionally approved to receive the subsidy in the 2022/ 2023 financial year. The condition to receive this subsidy was that the school had to apply and be accredited by the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training (UMALUSI). This is an accreditation that they had to receive regardless as an independent school. As of April 2022, Molo Mhlaba was in the process of pursuing the accreditation and was hopeful to receive it by the end of 2022. The subsidy, however, is guaranteed for the year 2022/ 2023, provided they get the UMALUSI accreditation.

Effectively, it appears that the school will not struggle to cover one-third of their costs due to government subsidy in accordance with its funding model going forward.

Parents' Contribution

In theory, the parents' contribution section of the funding model of Molo Mhlaba should not present any challenges. Communities are disillusioned with the current failing public education system and are looking for low cost, affordable, high quality education models to send their children to that are near to where they live. Molo Mhlaba targets this growing market of parents with a little bit of disposable income to put towards their children's education. However, things have turned out differently.

Debtors data provided by the school, as validated by interviews conducted with the school management, indicates that some parents have not kept up to date with paying school fees.

As an illustration, as of April 2022 the school was owed R474,757 in unpaid school fees by parents (49% of this debt was older than three months), as compared to December 2021 when it was owed R301,535 (73% of this being older than three months) and December 2020 when the debt stood at R118,910 (56% of this being older than three months). This trend is not encouraging, even with factors such as the impact of COVID-19 being taken into account. The reasons why parents are struggling to pay fees are unclear, although it was noted that Molo Mhlaba operates on a trust system where the information that the parent provides on the sponsorship application form is taken for granted. No background or credit checks are done to ascertain the financial needs of students applying. It is possible that this system might be creating incentives for parents to be unwilling to pay.

However, it is important to note that until 2022, essentially no learners had been financially excluded from the school (except 12 learners who were financially excluded not as a result of parents being unable to pay but deliberately refusing to pay fees on the basis that other parents who had lost their jobs were no longer paying). This indicates that the fee model does suit many parents operating in the Khayelitsha context, and that issues regarding non-payment do not have far-reaching implications.

⁶⁶ Specifically, as of April 2022, the deficit in the cost per student was covered by funding from Rotary International. The school had a three-year funding contract with them that expires in 2023.

Conclusion on Funding Mechanisms

Generally, the funding for the school as it currently stands looks like it is trending towards sustainability.

The three arms of the three-thirds funding model present optimism going forward, save for the parents' contribution:

- 1** The government subsidy, although it has not been available from 2018 to 2022, should be available going forward. One third of the school's costs would be covered by this subsidy.
- 2** Funding from sponsorships is also looking healthy, although there needs to be a diversification of sponsors so that there is no over-reliance on any one individual sponsor or sponsor type. This would ensure long-term sustainability.
- 3** The parents' contribution arm, however, is struggling. Strategies need to be put in place to ensure that parents begin paying their share of the cost. After all, Molo Mhlaba is a low-fee independent school and thus parents cover some costs, although the costs are significantly subsidised.



However, it is important to note that this does not necessarily mean that this sustainability is in line with Molo Mhlaba's scaling ambitions, which is a requirement for low-fee independent schools to be financially viable (see the systemic change section).

When low-fee private schools belong to a chain of schools there are great economies of scale in terms of fixed costs and standardising quality of output. Additionally, older schools are able to subsidise newer ones within the chain which allows for enterprise sustainability.⁶⁷ As a result, Molo Mhlaba must consider altering its financial model in its ambitions to scale.



⁶⁷ Tinsley, E., & Agapitova, N. (2017). Providing Low-Cost Private Schooling for the Poor. Innovation Policy Platform, 1-10. Retrieved [here](#).

Impact on Community

A significant portion of Molo Mhlaba's long-term strategy is to positively influence the community in which it operates. This is distinct from other independent schools, whose main mandate is to provide quality education.

As a result, the way in which Molo Mhlaba influences the community, specifically parents, community organisations and the WCED is explored in the following section.

Parents

Successes

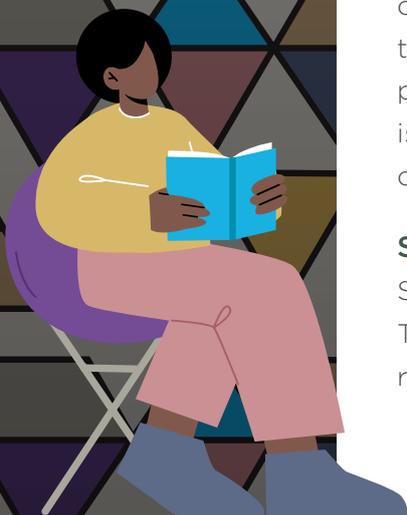
School Application Process

Parents who were part of the FGDs all said that the application process for the school was easy. However, one of the parents also raised a concern about failed communication by the school in announcing the opening of applications. This parent voiced that she missed the notification relating to applications being opened, which resulted in her missing the application window when she tried to register her second daughter to the school. Some of the reasons given by the parents for why applying to the school was easy included: the school was responsive to communication from parents; the process is simple and has no barriers that make it difficult to apply; information about the school was forthcoming—one parent even visited the school and received a tour and a run-through about the academic programme. Proximity to the school also made it possible for one of the parents to go to the school and get help with aspects of the application that she did not understand. This indicates that Molo Mhlaba is mindful of its context and the barriers that parents may face when applying to schools and that the school is prepared to support parents in their efforts to enrol their children at the school.

Safety and Security

Safety is an important component of Molo Mhlaba's mission. This is particularly relevant considering that there are high rates of sexual assault of and gender-based violence towards

Molo Mhlaba learners' often have a strong desire to be at school and are often sad to go home.



girls in South African schools.⁶⁸ The biggest challenge faced by young girls in Khayelitsha, according to not only parents, but also Molo Mhlaba staff, and the school's partners is a lack of safety. Girls are vulnerable to a number of forms of gender-based violence and harassment. However, parents say Molo Mhlaba protects their children from some of the perils of life as a young girl in Khayelitsha.

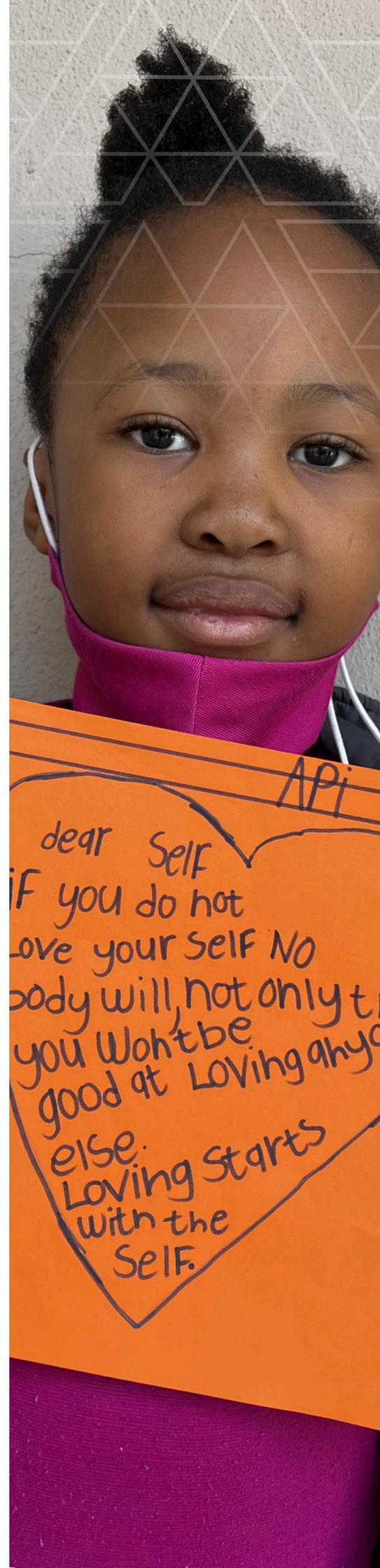
All parents responding to the question regarding challenges faced by girls and how Molo Mhlaba is addressing those challenges highlighted that Molo Mhlaba keeps learners safe.

Molo Mhlaba does this in a variety of ways - for example, Molo Mhlaba has a strict policy that no external persons are permitted on the school grounds except for parents, who must have an appointment before they can enter the school premises. Another mechanism through which Molo Mhlaba protects its students is in the way it handles the transit of students to school and back home. All transport that brings girls to Molo Mhlaba must be registered with the school, and girls are signed into school when they arrive and signed out when they leave. Molo Mhlaba's extended school day, which runs from 7:30am to 4:00pm, also protects its students by ensuring that the school day ends at a time when parents are back from work and can see to the safety and security of their children after they have left school. One of the parents said she is at ease when her daughter is at Molo Mhlaba because she knows that her daughter is safe. This indicates that Molo Mhlaba has succeeded in putting in place a number of controls that create a safe school environment. Additionally, the school's extended day also mitigates adverse events that may occur at home where learners would otherwise be left unattended. However, even with its efforts, the school is limited in its ability to change the overall safety of the Khayelitsha area, indicating that there are certain components of safety that are out of the school's control.

Overall Environment

Parents expressed that they felt classrooms were well equipped, with each child having a desk and workstation and teachers always being present. They were appreciative of the school providing uniforms to their children. However, some parents raised concerns about the small classroom sizes in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and also raised concerns about the impact of the classroom sizes on the school's waiting list. However, one parent expressed satisfaction with the

⁶⁸ Wilson, F. (2012) Gender Based Violence in South African Schools, UNESCO, Available [here](#).





Parents also made positive comments about the school's feeding scheme.

classroom sizes, saying it reflected the Montessori approach to teaching. Parents were also generally concerned about the lack of a playground where learners could participate in sports or play in jungle gyms. Feedback received from the Molo Mhlaba staff was that the school did not have outside playgrounds on account of a lack of financial resources to acquire a space that had these facilities. However, the school has purchased land that it intends to develop into a full-fledged school that will have facilities such as playgrounds, indicating that it does take these concerns seriously.

Parents also made positive comments about the school's feeding scheme, which they said was promoting healthy eating in their children even when they are at home. In general, parents were also of the view that their children were happy at school and enjoyed the activities offered by the school, such as yoga and dance. As a result of learners' experience at Molo Mhlaba, learners' often have a strong desire to be at school and are often sad to go home. This indicates that both parents and learners have a high level of satisfaction with Molo Mhlaba and what it offers them, with the exception of a suitable playground for outdoor activities.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Molo Mhlaba offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as ballet, hula hooping, jump rope, music, soccer, and yoga. Parents named a number of benefits that they perceived as being a result of the activities, such as a greater sense of calm, proactivity, physical fitness, washing the dishes, learning the value of practice, improved posture, improved social skills, and a broadened perspective of career paths (i.e. pursuing a career as a dancer or sportswoman is a viable option). This outlook on the extracurricular activities indicates some success in terms of Molo Mhlaba's intentions to be holistic in its approach while orienting learners to think about their future career paths.

Communication

Parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the support provided by the school to their children and the level of engagement maintained by the school with parents on all matters relating to their children. However, one parent expressed strong concerns about the school's teacher turnover rate and lack of communication about changes in staff members. He said he did not know some of the new staff nor what their qualifications are, which was concerning to him. He also commented that parents were not notified of the previous principal's departure. When asked what he would change about

Molo Mhlaba, he said he would improve the lines of communication and increase the opportunities for communication to flow from parents to the school, especially in teacher and parent meetings. It must be noted however, that this view was expressed by only one parent, and that Molo Mhlaba has extensive communication channels both informal and formal – these include emails and WhatsApp groups. However, this finding does indicate that the school needs to set expectations with parents in regard to where parents can be involved, to what extent they can be involved and what remains the school’s mandate only.

Community Partnerships

Molo Mhlaba has formed several partnerships with local community organisations also operating in Khayelitsha and surrounding areas. Most of the partnerships have formed organically between Molo Mhlaba and the partner organisations, through partner organisations’ exposure to the school through their networks of other organisations, or through the personal and professional networks of the school’s leadership. The evaluation team engaged with nine of these partners⁶⁹ in KIIs. While the roles and responsibilities of each partnership differ, through our engagements with partner organisations it became clear that in nearly every partnership, a reciprocal relationship has been established between Molo Mhlaba and each partner organisation.

Table 4 below summarises this reciprocal relationship via documentation of the roles and responsibilities of Molo Mhlaba and each partner organisation that have been expressed by partner organisations in KIIs. Instances where the partnership is not reciprocal and only one organisation (either Molo Mhlaba or the partner organisation) provides support are highlighted.

Table 4: Roles and responsibilities of partnerships between Molo Mhlaba and partner organisations

PARTNER ORGANISATION <i>Roles and Responsibilities</i>	MOLO MHLABA <i>Roles and Responsibilities</i>
UWC	
The provision of tutors, speakers and volunteers for astronomy related activities.	Supported the university to achieve its community outreach goal.
Office of Astronomy for Development	
Funding of community outreach programmes (incl. Astro Club and Astro Academy). Funding of Astro programmes. Support at school events (e.g. Molo Mhlaba Astro Festival). General sharing of resources.	No direct support provided to partner organisations mentioned.



⁶⁹ UWC, Office of Astronomy for Development, ActivateHer, Iphupha Lam Social Welfare, iKapa Dance Theatre, Breteau Foundation, CHOSA, Baphumelele Waldorf Association and ZnZ Maths Academy of Excellence.

ActivateHer	
Provision of after school sports and movement programmes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoveHer • PlayHer • LeadHer Reciprocal professional and personal guidance to Molo Mhlaba leadership.	School leadership is on the ActivateHer board, provision of insights from a school perspective. Molo Mhlaba provides access to girls and a space in which to pilot programmes; it is more difficult to have access to this with public schools. Reciprocal professional and personal guidance to ActivateHer leadership.
Iphupha Lam Social Welfare	
Provision social support and assistance to learners: after-school programmes providing assistance to learners with their school work; counselling sessions and mentorship.	Ad hoc support with activities such as building applications for donors, facilitating networking with other community organisations, and help with programme administration. Molo Mhlaba also provided financial support for the astronomy clubs and nutrition programmes in 2021.
iKapa Dance Theatre	
Integration of arts education into the school day and building the Arts Department within the school. Fundraising partner. Project management support for new Molo Mhlaba campus.	The school has provided strategic support by providing iKapa Dance Theatre the opportunity to integrate its activities into the school day, as opposed to being an after-school activity only. Molo Mhlaba makes a financial contribution to the organisation. Through being a well-resourced school, Molo Mhlaba supports the partner in focusing solely on its specific offering.
Breteau Foundation	
Provision of tablet technology, teacher training and software to Molo Mhlaba. Pivoted to providing funding and general resources such as food packages during the pandemic.	The school environment supports the foundation with 'piloting' new initiatives, receiving feedback and incorporating it before rolling out to additional schools. This is enabled by the close communication and relationship with Molo Mhlaba and its leadership. The school leadership also provides guidance on practical decisions that the foundation takes regarding its general operations.
CHOSA	
Provision of unrestricted monthly funding and a budget coordinator.	Training sessions that bring together all partner organisations, facilitating networking with other organisations.

Baphumelele Waldorf Association	
<p>Referral of girls in their educare centre or care home to Molo Mhlaba.</p> <p>Employment of Molo Mhlaba volunteers (general and administrative workers) through the public works programme.</p> <p>General sharing of human and economic resources (for example, food donations during the pandemic).</p>	<p>Provision of volunteer workers to fill the overflow of public works placements that had been allocated to Baphumelele Waldorf Association.</p> <p>Facilitation of networking with other organisations.</p> <p>General sharing of human and economic resources (for example, passing on of donations in excess).</p>
ZnZ Maths Academy of Excellence	
<p>No direct support provided to Molo Mhlaba mentioned.</p>	<p>Helped to set up an online payment system for ZnZ, financial management systems and provision of policies and standard operating procedures for operating afterschool programmes.</p>

The descriptions of roles and responsibilities of Molo Mhlaba's partnerships indicate that the approach to partnership has been one characterised by a *mutual* sharing of ideas, resources and networks between local community organisations.

Successes

Molo Mhlaba has positively influenced the strategic vision of many of its partner organisations.

There are several channels through which this is happening. Firstly, the expansive vision and creative thinking that is encouraged by the school leadership has permeated partnerships and have changed the mindsets of partner organisations' hope for what is achievable in the community and in its future; for example, one partner organisation described their organisation as a "brainstorming partner" to Molo Mhlaba. Secondly, the school leadership's thorough knowledge of the context in which Molo Mhlaba and all partner organisations work has changed the course of small, often practical decisions taken by partner organisations in their own operations. Thirdly, organisations' have indicated that their understanding of female-focused interventions has been broadened; some partner organisations have shifted towards an increased focus on female-driven outreach programmes after working with Molo Mhlaba, and organisations' approaches towards projects focused on girls' education and how they are evaluated have been influenced.

Molo Mhlaba is creating a network of community organisations that are working together to achieve ground-up, substantive community development.

Many partner organisations expressed that Molo Mhlaba has played a role in facilitating networking between partner organisations, and has provided the space for networking events. Similarly, partner organisations have expressed that collaboration with Molo Mhlaba has allowed for the sharing of resources across organisations to ensure that they are placed where they are needed most. These processes are enabled by the shared vision of community development that Molo Mhlaba and many of its partner organisations have in common. Additionally, this network is mutually beneficial to partner organisations and Molo Mhlaba. For example, networks with partner

organisations have contributed to the school's growth e.g. this has led to the involvement of a partner organisation in project managing the development of the school's second campus, and the establishment of a team of architects, town planners and engineers to manage this.

Molo Mhlaba contributes to partners' ability to push the boundaries of their offerings.

This is primarily enabled by the stable environment that the school offers, relative to other schools in the area. There are two ways that partner organisations have expressed that this allows them to improve their offerings. Firstly, it allows them to hone in on their specific offering, focus on executing this to the best of their abilities and hence nuancing their offering. Secondly, the stable environment that the school enables partner organisations to pilot new processes or activities with ease, and ensure that they work well before introducing them in schools where it is more difficult to introduce new processes. Feedback from Molo Mhlaba on these new activities and processes is integrated into the process of rolling out new activities at the other schools that partner organisations work in.

Communication with many partner organisations is informal, regular and personable, and this has contributed to the strength of Molo Mhlaba's partnerships.

Many partner organisations commented that the primary way in which they communicate and engage with the school is directly and personally with the school leadership via regular text or phone calls. The informality of these communication structures coheres with the ground-up and horizontal approach to community development and engagement that Molo Mhlaba and many of its partner organisations share, and is present with partner organisations that have worked with the school for some time. There are formal elements of communication between the school and its partners too. These include annual memoranda of understanding, grant-making contracts, regular visits to the school, monthly meetings and reports on use of funds.

In summary, based on these successes mentioned, Molo Mhlaba is emerging as an important organisation acting as an advocate for other local emerging organisations, a connector and link between local organisations that otherwise might not work together, and an influencer of local emerging organisations' strategies.



Challenges

There are two relevant sets of challenges that have been discussed by community partners. The first set is those challenges faced by the school as observed by community partners. The second set speaks to challenges that community partner organisations have experienced working with the school.



Community partner observations: Challenges that Molo Mhlaba faces

Resource constraints

- 1 Financial constraints:** Partner organisations have identified that the goal of running a school that is both financially accessible and provides a high-quality education will put strain on finances. Additionally, partner organisations highlighted that there is still more that Molo Mhlaba could achieve with increased funding as many ideas come about as a result of partnerships but are unable to be practically implemented due to funding constraints.
- 2 Human resource constraints:** Constraints highlighted by partner organisations include: paying teachers a wage that is competitive with public schools to improve retention (which is linked to financial constraints); that temporary volunteers are not a stable source of human capital and turnover affects the running of programmes (although it is acknowledged that the school has done well to find the large number of volunteers and staff that they have); and that teachers are stretched to capacity (the introduction of intern teachers to assist full-time teachers has helped with this challenge).
- 3 Spatial constraints:** the lack of an outdoor space at the school means that the hall is in high demand. This impacts community partners as they have to ensure that they are flexible in their programme offering and timing of this to accommodate other activities also taking place at the school.

COVID-19

The primary challenge presented by the COVID-19 pandemic was the interruption of the many programmes and offerings at the school for almost a year. Partner organisations also highlighted the issue of digital inclusion and raised the fact that some learners were unable to engage in 'online learning' due to lack of access to the internet at home. Molo Mhlaba did however invest in ensuring that their learners had the necessary opportunities to engage in online learning by providing cell phones and data to learners, through the sponsorship of data costs by the Breteau Foundation to some learners. This aimed to ensure that online learning could continue, and that parcels of education support materials, personal protective equipment and food continued to be delivered to learners monthly throughout the period of closure.

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Community Partner Experiences: Challenges experienced working with Molo Mhlaba

As a precursor to this subsection, it should be mentioned that the engagements with partner organisations were overwhelmingly positive with regard to their experiences of working with Molo Mhlaba. Organisations were directly asked about challenges they experienced with working with the school, as it is always useful to elicit areas for improvement. The challenges that follow reflect the few challenges that partner organisations could think of when asked this question. In fact, many partner organisations often initially responded that they have experienced little to no challenges when working with the school.

Challenges below are structured according to the nature of the challenges raised:

Communication

- 1 One partner mentioned that they have a preference for a more structured partnership model that specifies communication engagements and allows organisations to better leverage the partnership. There are, however benefits to informal, unstructured ways of engaging too that the school currently employs. Introducing flexibility of engagement style could be helpful in this regard, and could be informed by dialogues with partner organisations on their preferences regarding partnership models and engagement styles.
- 2 While the informal, personable and centralised communication arrangements between the school leadership and partner organisations have contributed to the strength of these organisational relationships, it has in some instances left minimal room for engagement between teachers and partner organisations. This challenge reflects some partner organisations' desire for teachers to show more initiative and proactive engagement regarding the extra-mural activities and offerings provided by partner organisations.

Capacity and Human Capital

The use of volunteers to run programmes at the school is not a stable source of human capital. In some instances, this has affected the running of programmes offered by partner organisations. It is recognised however that the use of volunteers is a direct response to financial constraints, and is a resourceful approach to managing this constraint. Partner organisations have highlighted that the efficiency of after-school programmes could be improved if one staff member was hired permanently to run all after-school programmes.

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Capacity Building

The above successes and challenges speak to elements of the organisational relationship between Molo Mhlaba and its partner organisations that work well, and elements that can be improved upon. Highlighting both elements is important for Molo Mhlaba to further build its capacity through these organisational partnerships by continuing to invest effort into elements that are working and shifting increased focus towards areas for improvement.

Many of the successes described above, and thus elements of Molo Mhlaba's community partnerships that 'work', speak to the *horizontal community engagement*⁷⁰ that Molo Mhlaba has established with many of its partner organisations. Firstly, this process of engagement has allowed the school to identify like-minded organisations that are similarly invested in the project of community development in Khayelitsha; as such, they have tended to function as "brainstorming partners" and the partnerships are evidently creating the space for visionary thinking and creative, resourceful collaboration between the network of organisations that Molo Mhlaba has been instrumental in connecting. The nature of these partnerships thus clearly embodies Molo Mhlaba's

⁷⁰ "Horizontal community engagement is where people are engaged in their local community as active community members. This type of community engagement is often associated with community building and community development." (Stuart, 2012). Available [here](#).

second impact statement of aiming to foster change from within communities, by leveraging community infrastructure, skills, resources, and mutually beneficial partnerships, in order to promote collaborative initiatives for inclusive growth. The informal and personal nature of communication between the school leadership and partner organisations contributes to the regularity with which communication takes place and the strength of Molo Mhlaba's partnerships. It is, however, worth highlighting that a frustration for a few partners was that, while their partnership with Molo Mhlaba enabled ideating and creative, visionary thinking, **the working environment is severely resource constrained, and thus many of the ideas discussed are either slowly implemented or unable to be implemented at all.**

Indeed, some elements mentioned by partner organisations in KIIs concerning where the partnerships can be improved concern resource constraints that Molo Mhlaba faces that in turn impact partnerships with other organisations (as detailed in the 'Challenges' section above). Addressing these resource constraints is a substantial task, and it is evident that the school continuously works to address them. Furthermore, these resource constraints faced by the school may also be borne of the support that the school voluntarily provides to its partners. Molo Mhlaba is guided by its second impact statement, which highlights the school's role in leveraging community infrastructure, skills, resources, and mutually beneficial partnerships to promote collaborative initiatives for inclusive growth. As such, Molo Mhlaba extends its time, human capital and material resources to its network of community partners to provide the necessary support (some of this support was detailed by partner organisations in KIIs and is reflected in Table 4) to many of its resource constrained partner organisations.

One way in which the school can build on its working environment is to leverage existing networks and garner new sources of financial support through strengthening a *vertical* approach towards community engagement when appropriate.⁷¹

This would complement the effective approach to horizontal community engagement that Molo Mhlaba has developed.

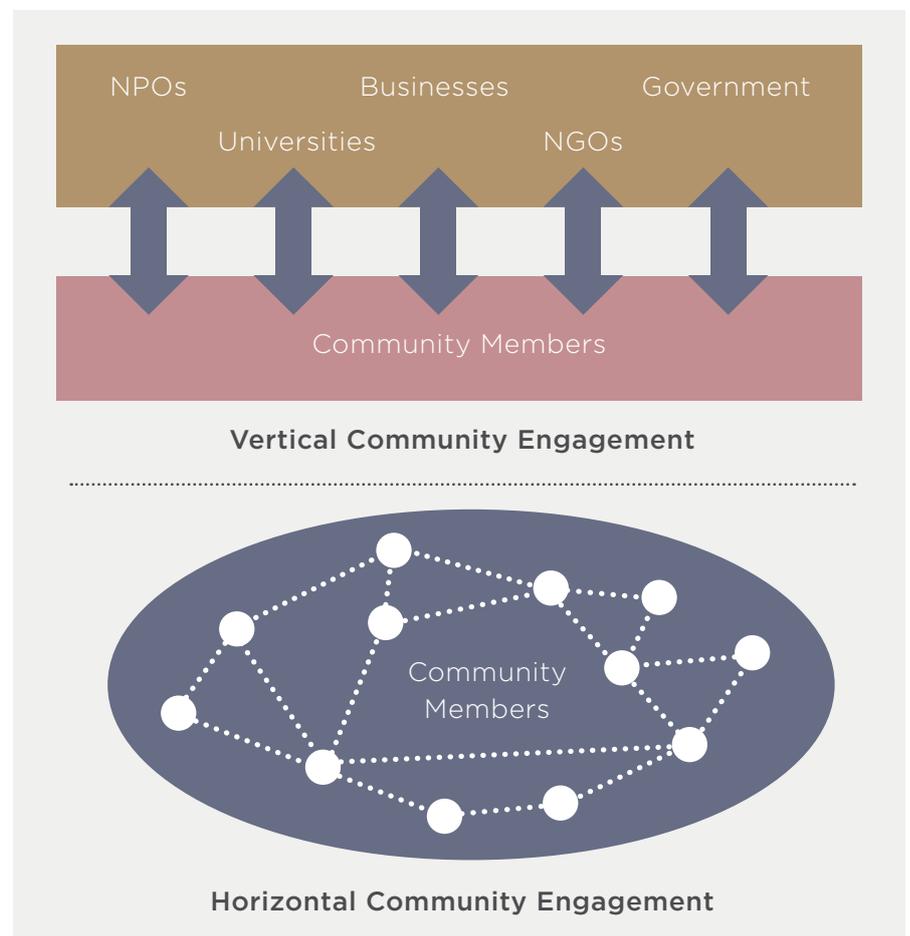
⁷¹ "Vertical community engagement is where government, business, or other organisations want to engage the community in consultation, decision-making or in some other aspect of their work. Vertical community engagement is particularly associated with consultation and planning, and is generally initiated from the top down, even if a bottom up process is adopted." (Stuart, 2012). Available [here](#).





This vertical approach could include setting up formalised channels and structures that could be leveraged in engagements and planning around funding, and strengthening existing vertical approaches that Molo Mhlaba and its partner organisations are already leveraging. A vertical approach to engagement could also be helpful in defining the boundaries of support that Molo Mhlaba is able to provide to its partner organisations. For example, this could be done by defining these boundaries in writing in a Memorandum of Understanding between the school and the partner organisation (if this is not already a current practice). This would prevent the school from overshooting the limits of support it is realistically able to provide. Figure 11 below visually depicts both kinds of community engagement.

Figure 11: Visual depiction of vertical and horizontal community engagement



Source: Adapted from Stuart (2012). Available [here](#).

The extent to which Molo Mhlaba is able to build its capacity as a school and scale is strongly influenced by the school's financial sustainability going forward. The increased pressure to raise financial resources to be able to unlock opportunities for growth which require capacity is a stumbling block for Molo Mhlaba and its partners. It is clear that many of the partnerships that the school has established are strong. This is likely because

of the shared visions of the organisation working together, the high standard that Molo Mhlaba applies when considering partner organisations to work with, and the personable and informal model of communication and collaboration between the school and partner organisations. These strong partnerships will undoubtedly positively influence the sustainability of the school going forward. However, as has been previously mentioned, all organisations in this environment, even if working together resourcefully and effectively, can only achieve so much when considering the financial constraints faced by Molo Mhlaba, and likely its partner organisations too. The sustainability of the partnerships is in turn influenced by these financial constraints; one partner organisation has highlighted that beyond 2022, there may be limited funds available to continue running an after-school programme.

Partner organisations also highlighted that an important element to focus on that would improve the sustainability of the school is the delegation of communication, engagement and general leadership responsibilities throughout the school structures. Partner organizations also suggested that movement away from the present centralised engagement approach that works primarily through the school leadership would be beneficial. This is important for ensuring that Molo Mhlaba's institutional knowledge is spread across different levels and structures within the school.

Conclusion on Partnerships with Community Organisations

Overall, Molo Mhlaba has been successful in establishing several strong community partnerships with like-minded organisations and facilitating the mutual sharing of ideas, resources and networks between these partners. Thus, these partnerships effectively embody the school's second impact statement of aiming to foster change from within communities, by leveraging community infrastructure, skills, resources, and mutually beneficial partnerships, in order to promote collaborative initiatives for inclusive growth. Many of the successes of these partnerships illustrate how the school has realised this second impact statement. This includes: the influence of the school on the strategic vision of its partner organisations, the creation of a network of community organisations and their collaboration to achieve meaningful community development, the ability of partner organisations to push the boundaries of their offerings as a result of working with Molo Mhlaba, and the contribution of the informal, regular and personable communication styles to the strength of the school's partnerships.

Many of the challenges that have either been observed or experienced by Molo Mhlaba's partner organisations stem from resource constraints. These include financial, human capital and spatial constraints. Partners also highlighted the impact that COVID-19 has had on the school. Additional challenges mentioned include the preference for a more structured partnership model between Molo Mhlaba and its partner organisations and the need for increased engagement between teachers and partner organisations.



The infographic is divided into two main sections. The left section features a red icon of two hands shaking, followed by the text 'Established several strong community partnerships' and a green circular icon with a white checkmark. The right section is titled 'Molo Mhlaba's partner organisations challenges: Resource constraints' and contains four circular icons: a red circle with a banknote and coins for 'Financial', a red circle with a person icon for 'Human Capital', a red circle with a cube for 'Spatial', and a brown circle with a virus icon for 'COVID-19'.

Established several strong community partnerships

Molo Mhlaba's partner organisations challenges: **Resource constraints**

- Financial
- Human Capital
- Spatial
- COVID-19



The WCED has experienced the school's leadership as visionary and extremely hard-working.

Relationship with Local Government

Molo Mhlaba and the school's leadership have worked closely with the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) since registering with them as a school, particularly with parts of the department that manage independent schools in the Western Cape.

The evaluation team engaged with a representative from the WCED through a KII to gather inputs on the working relationship between the school and the WCED.

Successes

The representative from the WCED has experienced Molo Mhlaba as being **responsive, compliant and easy for the department to work with** when the department has provided the necessary guidance to help the school comply with the rules and regulations of operating a school.

Similarly, to the partner organisations that Molo Mhlaba works with, the representative from the WCED has also experienced the school's leadership as **visionary and extremely hard-working**, and have observed how this influenced the school's **positive working environment**. There is a sense that everyone who works at Molo Mhlaba loves the work that they do and the environment in which they do it.

Again, in alignment with the inputs received from partner organisations, the representative from the WCED highlighted that there is **a consistent, regular and open channel of communication** between the department and the school's leadership. This has been an enabling factor in ensuring that the school is compliant with the department's rules and regulations, given that any problems that have arisen in the past have been easily and promptly discussed between both parties and resolved. Additionally, the representative from the WCED highlighted that they make a number of informal 'social' visits to the school. In these visits much important information is exchanged and communication



and conversations that take place are elevated to a 'higher level', so to speak (for example, discussions around building and growing the school in the future take place).

The representative from the WCED highlighted that the **Montessori curriculum and learner education approach prioritises consistent training and skills development of teachers**. This stands out relative to CAPS in which teachers often only receive once off training that is not sufficient.

Finally, engagements with the representative from the WCED serves as a good example that demonstrates how Molo Mhlaba is **leveraging both vertical and horizontal approaches towards engagement**. As highlighted above, interactions are often informal and there is an open and personable communication channel between Molo Mhlaba and individual WCED staff members. However, the school is still simultaneously engaging with the WCED's more formal structures through consultation and decision-making engagements. For example, the school has applied to receive the subsidy offered to independent schools by the WCED, attends quarterly head of school meetings and annual promotion and progression meetings with the WCED, and engages with the WCED on approvals on outings and staffing changes.

Challenges

The greatest challenge expressed by the WCED on the operations of the school is the fact **that the school does not yet have their own space to operate from**, but are rather renting a public space that is perceived as being in a disruptive and unsafe area. The WCED is one of several stakeholders engaged with that expressed this, whilst also expressing the wish that the school could find a space to operate from that is fit for the purpose of running a school. Such a space would be able to accommodate visitors, provide space for children to play, ensure privacy and provide storage.

An additional although unavoidable challenge is the **lack of alignment and hence support that Molo Mhlaba is able to receive from the WCED on matters concerning its curriculum**, given that the school does not follow the CAPS curriculum. The WCED highlighted that Molo Mhlaba still attends training concerning matters outside of the curriculum, such as school management training. It is also apparent that this lack of curriculum alignment has not compromised the support received and close communication that occurs between the WCED and Molo Mhlaba.





Finally, the representative from the WCED highlighted that the school has struggled with **parents who have not paid fees in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic**, given that their children were not attending the school in-person. This then contributes to the financial constraints already faced by the school.

Systemic Change

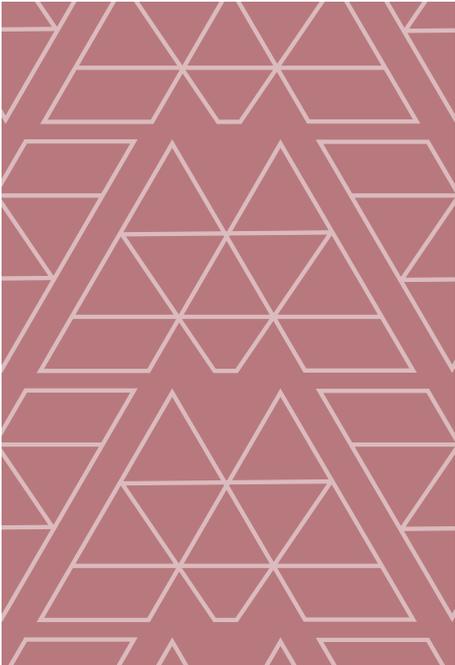
The extent to which the school is able to achieve systemic change is severely constrained by the school's current financial model. Echoing other stakeholders, a representative from the WCED has expressed that despite the immense growth of the school that they have observed, they are concerned about the sustainability of the current financial model. They fear that the current financial model cannot accommodate the continued growth and scaling that the school envisions, and that would catalyse systemic change. The emphasise has been placed on approaching the growth of the school in a slow and steady manner to avoid scaling too quickly and in an unsustainable manner.

In line with this, the representative of the WCED firmly believes that Molo Mhlaba's approach to learner education and the education model has the potential to be scaled. However, it was highlighted that it may be a challenge to recruit and invest in teachers that are willing to learn the Montessori curriculum that is implemented in the school, given that awareness of this curriculum is less widespread relative to CAPS. Thus, the Montessori-focused workshops, training and supervision sessions that teachers are already receiving are essential.

Conclusion on Relationship with Local Government

Engagements with a representative from the WCED reflect Molo Mhlaba's ability to leverage both vertical and horizontal approaches towards engagement. Additional successes with local government that have contributed to the school's effective functioning include Molo Mhlaba's responsive and compliant approach towards working with the WCED, experiences of the school's leadership as visionary and extremely hard working, and the influence of this on the schools positive working environment. The consistent, regular and open channel of communication between the school and the WCED has further reinforced this success. In addition, WCED's appreciation of the use of the Montessori curriculum and learner education approach that prioritises consistent training and skills development of teachers has been beneficial.

Challenges observed by the local government all concern the working environment of Molo Mhlaba rather than the nature of engagements between the WCED and the school. These include the fact that the school does not yet have their own space to operate from, the lack of alignment and hence support that Molo Mhlaba is able to receive from the WCED on matters concerning its curriculum and parents who have not paid fees in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has implications for the school's financial sustainability. Indeed, the local government has highlighted that, to really achieve systemic change in the long-term, it is crucial that the school does not expand too quickly and in an unsustainable manner.



	Molo Mhlaba's responsive and compliant approach towards working with the WCED	
	Leadership is visionary and extremely hard working	
	Molo Mhlaba's positive working environment	

Challenges observed by the local government

Lacks own space	Lack of alignment	Lack of support	Unpaid fees

Local government has highlighted that it is crucial that the school does not expand too quickly and in an unsustainable manner.





Glossary

BEd	Bachelor of Education
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements
CDE	Centre for Development and Enterprise
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
CSSR	Centre for Social Science Research
CWPM	Correct words per minute
DBE	Department of Basic Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EMS	Economic Management Systems
FAL	First Additional Language
FGD	Focus group discussions
HL	Home Language
KII	Key informant interview
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ORF	Oral reading fluency
SES	Socio-economic status
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TOC	Theory of Change
UMALUSI	Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education & Training
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

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