

Corporate social investment is key for education in SA



By [Paul Fick](#)

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Education in South Africa today is fraught with challenges. Teachers and learners struggle due to limited resources and tools, resulting in a general falling of standards. Decreasing the national pass requirements to 35 percent will not solve this problem and it has a knock-on effect as matriculants face the challenge of obtaining university entrances.

Even when they do make the grade, the gap between school and university standards becomes apparent, making it more difficult to pass. Action is required from corporate South Africa to assist the government in its efforts to improve the level of education in South Africa. Corporates need to start thinking and investing in their future workforce to ensure that South Africa remains globally competitive.

Re-instilling a sense of pride

This means raising the bar and re-instilling a sense of pride in learning, and an attitude of excellence. Corporate South Africa also needs to start equipping the young with the tools for a better education. These tools are not only to assist in combating unemployment, but also to ensure that more competent graduates are employed to strengthen our economy. Technology solutions are key enablers of these sought-after outcomes. However, the government alone cannot meet the educational needs of our future leaders. Corporate South Africa has to become more involved.

Incorporating investment into education technology into an organisation's CSI initiatives is not only vital for improving education, it also benefits organisations directly as they can be assured of more qualified, better prepared future employees. However, simply donating money is no longer enough. Education technology initiatives need to be carefully planned by specialists, applied correctly within schools, and accompanied by continuous teacher-training initiatives to empower educators to embrace new methods of teaching and inspire learners to further their education.

Specifically designed solution lacking

Although there are ongoing efforts to incorporate technology into schools, what is lacking is a solution that is specifically designed for educational facilities. The Critical Links Education Appliance is the world's first purpose-built education server, a "school in a box" that enables up to 3000 students to be connected on a single server and delivers an enriching educational experience with one-on-one e-learning to develop skills in the 21st century.

As a holistic solution, the Education Appliance addresses planning and implementation challenges, as all of the tools that are needed are built in to the central server and students and teachers need only a basic end-point device to access them. The rugged Classmate PCs that are part of this solution have been designed to withstand the tough school environment: they are spill resistant and highly robust. Intricate security has also been incorporated into the laptop-style devices to ensure that should they be stolen, they can be rendered useless, making them unable to be sold, which will prevent the massive losses caused by theft. The Education Appliance, together with stimulating customised educational content developed by local partner LearnThings, offers a complete interactive learning solution that engages and empowers learners.

A centralised administration facility

The Education Appliance is also a cost-effective solution that enables any classroom to become a computer lab quickly and easily, with a centralised administration facility that enables all sites to be remotely managed for ease of maintenance. For a minimal investment, any corporate can deliver a full "classroom in a box" complete with server, 30 Classmate PCs and WiFi connectivity. The server can also be linked into any existing computers that the school may have, so the GSOP-

funded devices, if still available, will not be a wasted investment. All the required infrastructure functionality is integrated into a single appliance, combining modern learning techniques with smart technology to help both students and teachers overcome their fears of computers. The Education Appliance lets teachers create dynamic, up-to-date lessons and allows learners to have convenient 24-hour access to learning resources.

Getting the necessary technology into schools is of the utmost importance and it is up to corporates of all sizes to get involved to ensure future success for students and business. By sponsoring a classroom, with hardware such as the Education Appliance as well as teacher training to bring them up to speed with 21st-century techniques and devices, means that businesses can help schools to access technology and teachers to become more passionate, inspiring learners to partake in their education and their future.

The government has a road map for the implementation of ICT in schools, but this must be augmented by corporate efforts. The process needs to be sped along if education in South Africa is to be improved and, in order to do this, corporates and business need to step up to the plate and spend their CSI money wisely, investing not only in learners, but also in their future employees and in the economy as a whole.

ABOUT PAUL FICK

Paul Fick is the chief technology officer for The Jasco Group. He became a part of the Jasco Group in 2010 with the merger of Spescom and Jasco. Email Paul at paul.fick@jasco.co.za and follow him on Twitter at [@pfick100](https://twitter.com/pfick100).
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