

Rights and Responsibilities of Parents - A Guide to Public School Policy

The South African Schools Act of 1996 requires all children between the ages of 7 and 15 to attend school. All parents and guardians must make sure that all learners of this age are registered to go to school. As a parent, your relationship with the school starts on the day that you decide to register your child with a particular school. This relationship is defined by a set of rights and responsibility towards the school.

At what age can my child be registered for school?

You can only register for grade 1 when s/he is seven years old or will be turning seven in the first year of schooling.

When and where do I register my child?

You may only register your child in a school near your home or workplace between August and November in the year before the child start school.

Can I register my child at any school even if it is not near my home or workplace?

Yes, you can register your child at any public school. However, most schools give first preference to children whose parents live or work near the school.

What do I need to know before I register my child?

The principal of the school must give you the admissions policy of the school and explain it to you. You should also ask which language/s are used for teaching at the school and decide if that is suitable for your child.

A public school may not administer any test for admission to a school. A test may only be used for deciding which courses or programmes your child should do at the school.

Which documents are required when making an application?

- Birth Certificate; and
- Immunisation card; and
- Transfer card or last school report card for learners who have been to school previously.

(Note that baptismal certificates will not be regarded as proof of birth date.)

What additional documents are required if I am not a South African citizen?

- Study permit; and
- Temporary or permanent residence permit form the Department of Home Affairs; or
- Evidence that you have applied for permission to stay in South Africa

How do I know if my child has been accepted at the school?

The provincial Department of Education, through the school principal, must inform you about the outcome of your application.

What can I do if my child is refused admission to a school?

You can request a written explanation from the provincial department, through the school principal. If you are not satisfied with the reasons given for the decision, you may lodge a written appeal to the MEC for Education in the province.

Do I have to pay school fees?

The school may ask you to pay school fees. However, if you cannot afford the required amount or can pay a lesser amount, you may write a letter to the school governing body (SGB), requesting exemption from paying school fees. The school governing body will inform you of its decision. A copy of the regulations dealing with school fees is obtainable at the school. The school must also assist you if you need help with your application for exemption.

How do I appeal against the decision of the SGB?

You can lodge an appeal with the Head of Department in the province. S/he will explain the reasons if you were not granted exemption.

It is determined that you can afford to pay the fees, and fail to do so, legal steps can be taken against you to ensure that you pay any outstanding fees.

(Note that no child may be refused admission to school due to parent's inability to pay school fees. The school may also not withhold your child's results or exclude him/her any educational activity if you cannot afford to pay school fees.)

What is a school governing body?

A school governing body is a structure that governs the school. It stands in a position of trust towards the school. It is made up of the principal, elected representatives of educators, non-educator staff, parents and learners in the case of secondary schools.

How do I get elected to represent other parents on the governing body?

You can represent other parents on a governing body if you are nominated and voted for by parents.

How do I get to know about the election process?

The principal of the school is required by law to provide all parents with information about the election of parents onto the governing body.

What happens if I'm not elected onto the school governing body?

Even if you are not elected onto the school governing body, you still have the RIGHT to be involved in the affairs of the school through attending meetings of parents.

You also have the RIGHT to be consulted by the educators or the principal about the schooling activities of our child. The principal and the educators at the school must timeously notify you about the behaviour, attendance and learning progress of you child.

Who makes the decision about school matters?

The Head of Department, through the principal, taking decisions about funding, discipline of learners and governance of the school.

Where can I lodge an objection against a decision or action?

You can lodge an objection against a decision or action of:

- an educator to the principal;
- a principal to the Head of Education in the province;
- a representative council of learners to the school governing body; and,
- a school governing body and or member to the MEC or Head of Department

What does the Language-in-Education Policy say?

The Department's Language-in-Education Policy encourages learners to learn more than one language. It also encourages them to use the language that they best understand as the language of learning and teaching and to maintain this language throughout as they learn other languages as subjects or add other languages as languages of instruction.

Will my child not be disadvantaged by being taught in a language other than English?

Learning in the first formal schooling years in the home language ensures a solid foundation for future learning, as well as the acquisition of new/other languages.

Who decides on the language of learning and teaching?

The school governing body must decide on the language of learning and teaching used in a school. The language used will depend on the preference of the majority of learners in the school and the ability of the school to teach in the preferred language. In addition, the school governing body needs to indicate how it will promote multilingualism in the school.

Does my child have options regarding the language of learning and teaching in a school?

Yes. Each learner must, upon registration at a school, indicate the preferred language of learning and teaching. Any of our eleven languages may be indicated as the language of learning and teaching in a public school.

What if the school does not offer my choice?

Should there be 40 requests per Grades 1-6 or 35 per Grades 7-12 for instruction in a language not already offered in a school, the provincial department will need to find means of meeting your need.

What are my responsibilities as a parent with regard to payment of school fees?

Schools may charge school fees in order to supplement the funds provided by the Department of Education. As a parent you are responsible for paying your child's school fees. If you cannot afford part of or the entire amount, you must apply for exemption as soon as possible from the school governing body. The school governing body will assess your situation and let you know of its decision. Note that, if you have not been exempted from paying and it is determined that you can afford to pay school fees and you fail to do so, legal steps may be taken against you to ensure that you pay any outstanding amount.

How can I contribute towards the development of the school?

The South African Schools Act gives the school governing body the responsibility to strive for the development of the school. There are many ways in which the school governing body can do this. One of the ways is to encourage parents, learners, educators and other staff to render voluntary services to the school.

As a parent, you have a responsibility to contribute towards the development of the school by rendering services to the school. This may include making yourself available to participate in the activities of the school such as the maintenance of school property, auditing of financial statements, managing sports events etc

What role can I play in supporting the learning process of my child?

Your child is in the custody of the school staff when s/he is at the school. The school staff can successfully carryout their teaching responsibilities if they receive the support of the parents.

As a parent you have the responsibility to:

- assist with the discipline of your child;
- monitor your child's educational progress;
- ensure that s/he completes her/his homework;
- ensure that s/he attends school;
- liaise with the school staff.

How can I keep abreast of the developments at the school?

Parents of learners must take responsibility for attending school meetings that are organised for them. The school governing body is legally bound to report to the parents of learners at the school form time to time and should keep parents informed about issues that affect them.

(Note that you have the right to request any additional information of your interest form the SGB and the principal of the school.)

Please contact any of the following provincial Departments of Education at these numbers:

Eastern Cape
(040) 608-4200/212

Free State
(051) 404-8428/9

Northern Cape
(053) 839-6500

Western Cape
(021) 467-2000

KwaZulu Natal
(035) 874-8411/3592
(035) 327-0331

Gauteng
(011)355-0000

Mpumalanga
(013) 249-8500

Northern Province
(015) 297-0895

North West
(018)387-3428/9

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