

Action Plan to 2024

Towards the realisation of Schooling 2030



*Taking forward South Africa's
National Development Plan 2030*

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AUGUST 2020

Introduction

This shortened version of government's five-year basic education sector, titled *Action Plan to 2024: Towards the realisation of Schooling 2030*, is intended for a wide audience, including parents, teachers, school managers, and the public at large. For more detail, the full-length document should be consulted.

Important note on the COVID-19 pandemic

The five-year plan was formulated before the COVID-19 pandemic. By May 2020, the reality of the enormous costs of the pandemic for society, the economy, and education were clear. The effects of the pandemic will remain for years. At the same time, the pandemic provided **an opportunity for South Africans to prove their resilience** and ingenuity at a time when the nation faced a common enemy.

The **pandemic does not remove any of the priorities** outlined in the plan. However, it delays the point at which certain milestones can be reached, for budgetary and other reasons. Moreover, the pandemic reshapes to some extent existing priorities.

The overall goal of the various actors in the basic education sector must remain to improve the quality of learning outcomes, and reduce educational inequalities. We should not lose sight of this. South Africa has been on an upward trajectory in terms of the skills acquired by learners for around two decades. This has profound and positive implications for South Africa's future. **The momentum of this improvement cannot be lost** as a result of the pandemic.

In fact, we can think of illiteracy among our primary school learners almost in the way we have learnt to think about the coronavirus. It is a scourge which must be eliminated, by **identifying 'hotspots' where children are not learning as they should**, and intervening to ensure that people's futures are not compromised.

COVID-19 is unlikely to disappear quickly, and beyond that there is a high likelihood that we could be struck by another pandemic. In future, **the basic education system should be better prepared** for this risk.

Good nutrition is the backbone of effective learning, especially for younger learners. The National School Nutrition Programme needs to be better prepared to ensure that food continues to be available to learners from poor households, even during school closures.

Understanding pandemics and viruses needs to feature more strongly in the Life Orientation curriculum. If teachers and learners understand these topics, they are more likely to embrace the behavioural changes that pandemics necessitate. There need to be emergency plans which everyone is familiar with, and which can be put into effect at relatively short notice. Such emergency plans must include the sudden scaling up of procedures to maintain hygiene, for instance more frequent hand-washing, cleaning of the school premises, and physical distancing. There should perhaps be periodic drills of these emergency plans, in the same way as schools need occasional fire drills.

School infrastructure needs to support hygiene. Here an **uninterrupted supply of water**, which has not been a reality for all schools, needs to be prioritised.

Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated school closures have brought to the fore the weakness of **information and communication technologies (ICTs)** in many schools, and gaps with regard to digital content for learners and teachers. South Africa is behind many similar countries in this regard. This gap must be closed. Learners, particularly those at the secondary level facing important national examinations, should become more accustomed to using online

resources. If teachers are accustomed to using these resources, it becomes easier for this to be realised among learners. Technology innovation is important whether we are faced with a health crisis or not.

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1 The historical context

☞ The NDP on education's role in dealing with the apartheid legacy:

The education system will play a greater role in building an inclusive society, providing equal opportunities and helping all South Africans to realise their full potential, in particular those previously disadvantaged by apartheid policies, namely black people, women and people with disabilities. (p. 296)

The way forward for the schooling sector must be informed by our past.

Decolonising the schooling system, and the curriculum in particular, involves understanding the harm done to nationhood and the psychology of both the oppressed and the oppressors.

In basic education, the most enduring apartheid legacy is probably the unequal system of teacher training. Addressing this will continue to require **effective in-service training**.

For historical reasons, South Africa has a **public schooling system which is inclusive, but at the same time highly unequal**. This reflects the very unequal nature of South African society in general. Inequalities must be continually monitored, in part to ensure that they do not worsen, and existing programmes aimed at reducing inequalities must be prioritised.

It is widely acknowledged that **accountability and discipline** in the schooling system has been weak for decades. The National Development Plan underlines the importance of addressing this weakness.

School governing bodies could play an even stronger role in strengthening community engagement in the task of tackling 'learning poverty'. This should be seen as a continuation of South Africa's rich history of community-based struggles.

Land dispossession and forced removals created rural areas in South Africa with very specific problems. The schooling system could do better at addressing the challenges faced by **rural communities**.

Schools have a vital role to play in combatting the **marginalisation of indigenous African languages**.

Technical and vocational education has been proven to empower youths. The fact that this type of education continues to be marginalised is illogical. The system must think differently about non-academic subjects.

2 Purpose of the Action Plan

The Action Plan, both this shorter version and the long version, are intended to guide the system, in part by explaining where the problems lie, and how the various solutions are interconnected. It supports the National Development Plan (NDP), specifically Chapter 9 of that plan. The Action Plan is moreover aligned with the 2019 to 2024 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) of the Presidency. The Action Plan guides a number of education-specific plans, in particular the five-year strategic plans of the ten departments dealing with basic education, as well as the annual performance plans of these departments.

3 National and international commitments

☞ **The NDP on the role of educational quality in the national development process:**

Improved education ... will lead to higher employment and earnings, while more rapid economic growth will broaden opportunities for all and generate the resources required to improve education. (p. 26)

The **National Development Plan** prioritises the following in basic education: the role of stakeholders; better school infrastructure; early grade reading; the role of sports, arts and culture in education; the monitoring of progress, in part through international assessment programmes; getting more youths to complete at least twelve years of education; various initiatives aimed at improving the capacity of teachers and managers; an effective system for appointing school principals; a ‘results oriented mutual accountability’ framework, where parents and schools are accountable *to each other*, and schools and districts are also accountable to each other; a more equitable availability of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in schools; and, at the highest level, an ‘education pact’ that various stakeholders, including post-school institutions and employers, agree on.

At the international level, South Africans can disseminate their own experiences, and learn from other countries, though the education structures of the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN). The AU’s *Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (CESA)* and the UN’s **Sustainable Development Goals** offer important guidance, based on experience around the world.

There is hope but also anxiety associated with rapid technological change. In South Africa, the Three Stream Model represents a bold attempt to better prepare youths for a changing world. Important guidance is offered by UNESCO, the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and others, on how to prepare youths for the twenty-first century. There is not always agreement around the best approaches. It is important that South Africans have their own debates, and that **technological change helps to advance learning, and reduce educational inequalities.**

4 Our vision of a modern and decolonised schooling system

☞ **The NDP...**

... envisions a South Africa where everyone feels free yet bounded to others; where everyone embraces their full potential, a country where opportunity is determined not by birth, but by ability, education and hard work. (p. 24)

Our vision includes the following:

Learners attend school every day and are on time because they want to come to school, the school is accessible and because they know that if they miss school when they should not, some action will be taken.

Teachers who received the training they require are continuously improving their capabilities and are confident in their profession.

The school principal ensures that teaching in the school takes place as it should, according to the national curriculum, and understands his or her role as a leader whose responsibility is to promote harmony, creativity and a sound work ethic within the school community and beyond.

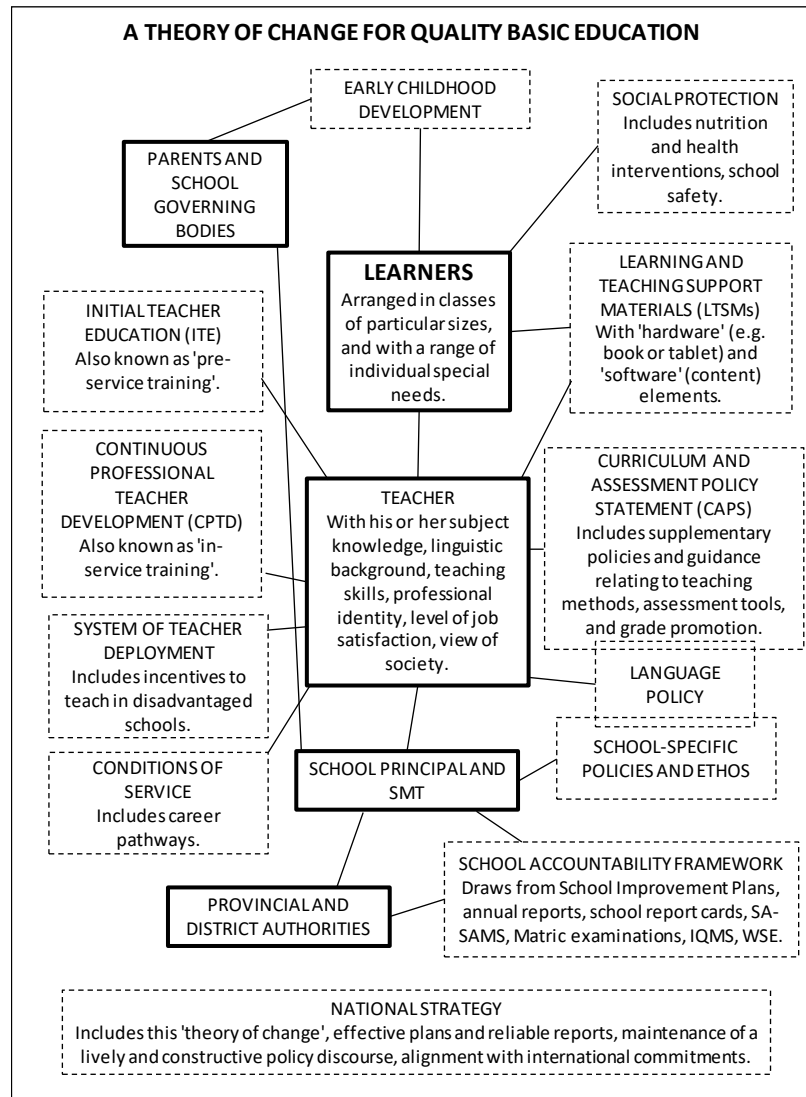
Parents, who are well informed about what happens in the school, are keen to be involved in school affairs.

Learning and teaching materials are in abundance and of a high quality.

School buildings and facilities are spacious, functional, safe and well maintained.

5 Our theory of educational change

We accept that educational improvement is complex, and depends on the parts of the following diagram being aligned toward **better learning outcomes**.



6 Developments up to 2019 that influence our strategic direction

The NDP on over-arching 'critical success factors' for national development:

Focused leadership: "Policy changes should be approached cautiously based on experience and evidence ..."

A plan for all: “Broad support across society is needed for ... successful implementation ... Vigorous debate is essential for building consensus.”

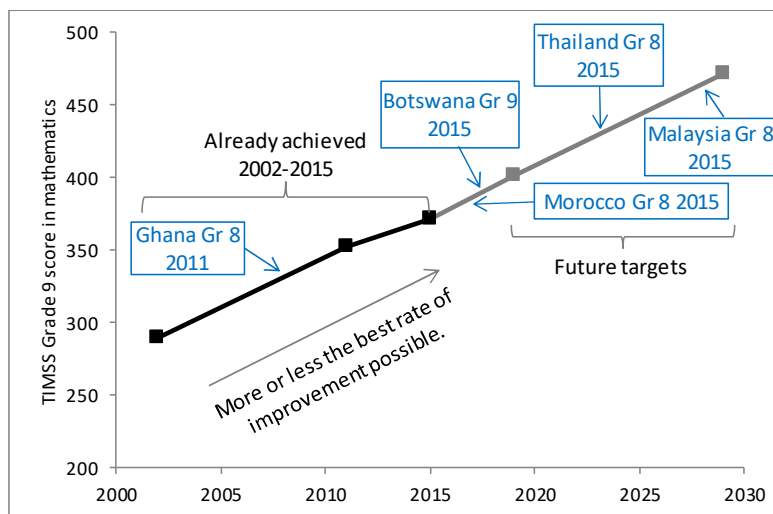
Institutional capability: “Institutions improve through continuous learning and incremental steps ... This requires good management ... high performance ... ethics and a willingness to learn from experience.”

Willingness to prioritise: “... senior public officials should focus most of their attention on a few strategic priorities.” (p. 59)

The environment in which basic education must be improved is a challenging one. The economic climate, and above-inflation increases in salaries, has meant the **spending has not been able to keep pace with rising enrolments**. The result has been a slight worsening (increase) in the learner-educator (LE) ratio since 2011.

This graph illustrates why those working hard to improve educational outcomes have in many ways succeeded. Here the trend for **Grade 9 mathematics in the international TIMSS tests** is shown. While in 2002 South Africa’s performance was considerably lower than that of Botswana, by 2015 South Africa had almost caught up to Botswana. At the current rate of improvement, which is among the steepest in the world, South Africa can reach Malaysia’s level of performance in around 2030.

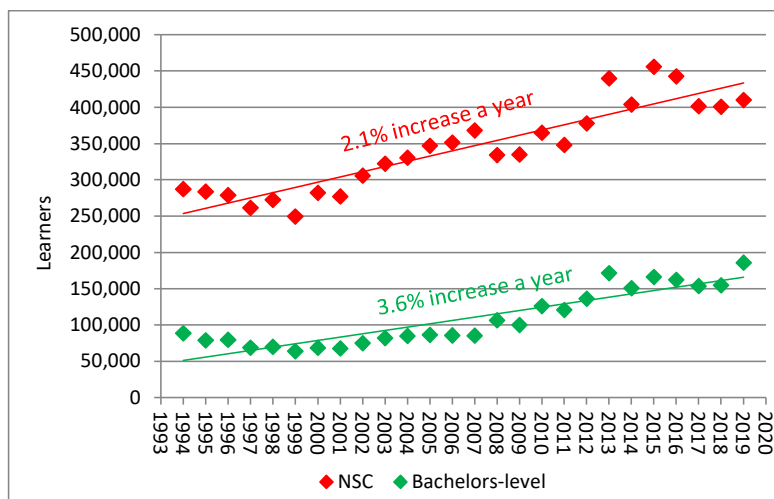
Past and envisaged educational quality trend for South Africa



Similar upward trends are seen in the SACMEQ Grade 6 language and mathematics results and in the 2006 to 2016 PIRLS Grade 4 reading results. Importantly, in early 2020, an erroneous flat PIRLS trend for the 2011 to 2016 period was removed from the international reports following an enquiry.

Qualitative improvements below Grade 12 have permitted **an increasing number of youths to obtain the National Senior Certificate (NSC)**, and the NSC with a Bachelors-level pass allowing for degree studies at a university. This can be seen in the next graph. By 2018, around 55% of youths were obtaining the NSC. While this needs to improve further, South Africa’s secondary school completion is not unusual among middle income developing countries.

NSC and Bachelors-level increases since 1994



How have the improvements in educational outcomes occurred? It is important to understand this as we move forward. Five positive changes in the sector seem to account for the improvements we have seen: (1) the **CAPS** tools designed to facilitate the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom; (2) better access among learners to **high-quality books**, such as the national workbooks; (3) more focussed **assessment practices**; (4) improved subject knowledge among **newly graduated teachers**; and (5) increasing **access to both Grade R and pre-school** below Grade R.

There are of course many things that are not right about the schooling system and which need urgent attention. These challenges are dealt with under the 27 goals.

7 Innovation priorities

We now know a lot more about how to improve **early grade reading**, which is fundamental for all learning. In particular, important lessons have been learnt through the DBE's pioneering Early Grade Reading Study, which has been internationally acclaimed. It is clear that certain types of individual guidance to teachers, and certain learning materials, can substantially increase the chances that all learners will get to read as they should by age ten. These lessons need to be applied across all schools where learners still do not acquire reading skills by the right age.

In the area of **assessments**, the DBE will continue to innovate on a number of fronts. The introduction of the sample-based Systemic Evaluation, which embraces recent best practices in psychometrics, will allow the country to track improvements across grades 3, 6 and 12 in better ways, down to the level of each province. It will also permit better reporting against the Sustainable Development Goals. Across all schools, formative assessment practices need to support the learning process in better ways. Better methods of using the Grade 12 examination results to monitor the progress of individual schools will be introduced. At the primary level, the absence of enough good information on learning outcomes remains a concern. Improvements here need to occur in stages, beginning with better use of the existing school-based assessment (SBA) data.

In the area of **e-Education**, there have been important advances in recent years. In particular, the SA-SAMS facility used by schools has grown, and partnership initiatives such as Data Driven Districts (DDD) have provided districts and schools with new management tools. Yet much remains to be done. Above all, planning and materials development capacity in the state

to take e-Education forward needs to be strengthened. In a context of changing technologies, and changing prices of these technologies, and given that some technology innovations in the classroom enhance learning more than others, moving forward requires enough local research. But lessons from other countries, and the international 2015 Qingdao Declaration should also guide the way forward.

8 The correspondence between MTSF and Action Plan elements

There has always been close **alignment between the sector plans of the DBE and the national plans of Presidency**. The first basic education sector plan, *Action Plan to 2014*, released in 2011, influenced the education chapter in the National Development Plan (NDP), launched in 2012. The 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework of Presidency (MTSF), and the new 2019 to 2024 MTSF, are five-year plans which give effect to the NDP. The MTSFs are the outcome of extensive discussions between Presidency and the DBE, and various stakeholder organisations.

While *Action Plan to 2024* makes extensive use of data and statistics, **government’s official sector-wide indicators and targets** for basic education are now those appearing in the MTSF.

9 Output goals that look at learning outcomes and coverage (Goals 1 to 13)

The Action Plan has 27 goals. These goals have remained the same since *Action Plan to 2014*. This continuity has permitted needed stability in the planning processes of the national and nine provincial departments.

Goals 1 to 13 deal with specific outcomes of the schooling system, both outcomes relating to enrolment and attainment, and outcomes relating to what learners learn.

Goal 1	Increase the number of learners in Grade 3 who, by the end of the year, have mastered the minimum language and numeracy competencies for Grade 3 .
Goal 2	Increase the number of learners in Grade 6 who, by the end of the year, have mastered the minimum language and mathematics competencies for Grade 6 .
Goal 3	Increase the number of learners in Grade 9 who, by the end of the year, have mastered the minimum language and mathematics competencies for Grade 9 .

Reaching basic levels of competencies in reading, writing and mathematics is a prerequisite for lifelong learning. Moreover, there is now much evidence that increasing basic competencies in the population is one of the best ways of bringing about a prosperous and more equal society in the longer term. How one defines minimum competencies is obviously a matter of debate. Work in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals has helped to bring about a better understanding of what this means across the world. However one defines minimum competencies, **South Africa’s level remains low among developing countries, despite rapid improvements in the last twenty or so years** discussed above. Unfortunately, improvements in educational quality do not occur overnight. South Africa’s rate of improvement has been among the fastest seen in the world. The challenge is to sustain this momentum, by protecting those interventions which have contributed to progress up to now, while realising that further improvement requires certain things to change.

The **under-performance of boys**, relative to girls, is particularly serious in South Africa. This phenomenon can be seen across all grades in the schooling system, and males drop out to a significantly greater degree than females before Grade 12. This contributes to a range of social ills. It is clear that improvement strategies must pay careful attention to this problem.

Only around **a quarter of young South African learners get to read as they should by about age ten**, according to reliable data and using international quality benchmarks. Goal 1 is

particularly important, as learners who have not reached required levels of proficiency by Grade 3 will struggle to catch up in later grades.

Up till now, South Africa has depended largely on international testing programmes to gauge progress in learning outcomes below Grade 12. Participation in such programmes should continue, but the introduction of **the new national Systemic Evaluation system** will assist in measuring progress, including the progress of provinces, using local criteria.

Goal 4	Increase the number of Grade 12 learners who become eligible for a Bachelors programme at a university.
Goal 5	Increase the number of Grade 12 learners who pass mathematics .
Goal 6	Increase the number of Grade 12 learners who pass physical science .

Government's plans to increase participation in post-school education in order to address the skills shortfalls in the country has large implications for Grade 12 outcomes. Currently, **around a third of youths get to obtain an NSC which allows them to study at a university**, and a fifth qualify for degree studies. However, achievement in critical subjects which are important for the economy remains low, despite improvements in recent years. For instance, in 2019 only around 50 000 Grade 12 learners, or around 5% of youths, obtained a mark of 50 per cent or more in mathematics. Yet this is a minimum entry requirement for many university programmes.

Better Grade 12 outcomes depend on improvements across the grades preceding Grade 12. However, incentives for schools to do well in the Grade 12 examinations could also be improved by **taking forward work on better indicators of performance**. The widely used 'pass rate' still dominates discussions around performance, yet this statistic is easily manipulated by preventing worse performing learners from reaching the examination. A wider range of indicators is needed.

Goal 7	Improve the average performance of Grade 6 learners in languages .
Goal 8	Improve the average performance of Grade 6 learners in mathematics .
Goal 9	Improve the average performance of Grade 9 learners in mathematics .

These three goals are linked to South Africa's longstanding participation in the international TIMSS and SACMEQ programmes. Both these programmes have pointed to improvements in the last fifteen to twenty years which are fast by international standards. Importantly, this progress is largely due to better performance by historically disadvantaged schools. This means **educational inequality is gradually shrinking**. Yet there is still a long way to go. By 2015, only 34% of Grade 9 learners reached a minimum acceptable level of performance defined in the TIMSS programmes (the figure was 11% in 2002). TIMSS and SACMEQ data should be used to a larger extent to determine exactly where in the curriculum the strengths and weaknesses of South Africa's learners lie, so that interventions can be better focussed.

Goal 10	Ensure that all children remain effectively enrolled in school at least up to the year in which they turn 15.
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According to household data, in recent years **99% of children of compulsory school-going age – ages 7 to 15 – were enrolled at school** and about 6% of all learners, of any age, reported having been absent during the previous week. Both statistics have been improving over the last ten years. Around 130 000 children in the compulsory schooling age bracket are not attending school, of which around 40 000 are disabled. This problem tends to be localised, and more serious in rural parts of Western Cape and Northern Cape. Much of the challenge lies in using systems such as those linked to SA-SAMS, the South African School Administration and Management System, to detect where learners are dropping out, and tracing these children.

Goal 11	Improve the access of children to quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) below Grade 1.
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Quality care and education before Grade 1 is crucial for laying the foundations for any child's schooling. There have been significant increases in pre-Grade 1 participation. For instance, between 2007 and 2017, the percentage of four-year-olds enrolled in an educational institution rose from 40% to 70%. This means that **the NDP's vision of universal coverage for the year before Grade R is not too far from being achieved**. Currently, around 95% of children get to attend Grade R. Though ECD participation tends to be highest in the poorer provinces, it is also true that children who are not in any institution tend to be from poorer households. The migration of ECD from the social development sector to the basic education sector currently under way presents an important opportunity not only to increase participation, but also to deepen quality. Enhancing quality means better interventions, in the areas of education, health and psycho-social support, but also better monitoring of where the gaps are. Nutritional deficiencies which lead to stunting need to be tackled aggressively.

Goal 12	Improve the grade promotion of learners through Grades 1 to 9.
Goal 13	Improve the access of the youth to Further Education and Training (FET) beyond Grade 9.

Grade repetition is costly, though difficult to avoid where learners are not coping with the curriculum. The quality improvements that have occurred in the schooling system could be expected to reduce grade repetition, and this is in fact what has happened. The percentage of learners in grades 1 to 12 repeating their current grade has steadily declined from 11,8% in 2013 to 9,1% in 2018. Yet declines have been faster in other countries. Grades 1 to 3 are a particular concern, as repetition worsens the problem of large classes, yet innovative teaching methods at this critical level require smaller classes. Currently, **South Africa displays amongst the highest levels of grade repetition in the early grades**. This strengthens the argument for more decisive interventions at this level to reduce repetition.

Completion of Further Education and Training (FET) in the school context means successful completion of Grade 12, and obtaining a National Senior Certificate, or 'Matric'. As indicated in section 6, attainment of the Matric has been improving steadily for twenty years. Currently, **52% of youths obtain the Matric and 55% obtain the Matric or some equivalent qualification from a TVET college**. Given growth in the enrolments of TVET colleges, the difference between these two figures may seem small. The problem is that the majority of TVET college students already hold a Grade 12 qualification, meaning that many end up obtaining two FET qualifications. This occurs while just under half of youths obtain no such qualification. The planned introduction of the Grade 9 qualification will greatly alleviate this problem, by facilitating movement from school to college at an earlier age.

10 The goals dealing with the *how* of improving schooling (Goals 14 to 27)

Goals 14 to 27 deal with *how* the improvements reflected in goals 1 to 13 are to be achieved. They thus deal with the various resources of the schooling system, and how these resources are managed.

Goal 14	Attract a new group of young, motivated and appropriately trained teachers to the teaching profession every year.
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The supply of newly graduated teachers from universities has been rising, in part due to the success of the Funza Lushaka bursary scheme. Yet the number of people joining the public educator workforce each year will have to continue to increase, from the current approximately 23 000 a year to at least 40 000 by 2030. **This steep increase is necessary to deal with the**

departure of a large bulge of educators nearing retirement. Beyond 2030, the demand for new teachers will begin declining. Almost half of the 23 000 who currently enter are older than 30, and come from a ‘reserve pool’ of people qualified to teach but engaged in other sectors of the economy. This reserve pool is also ageing, which underlines the need to have more young people qualifying as teachers. Much of the challenge will lie in obtaining sufficient funding for Funza Lushaka, and optimising the systems that place Funza Lushaka graduates in public schools.

With regard to the **quality of young teachers**, people who currently become teachers are from the top one-third of Grade 12 achievers. Improving the quality of new teachers thus rests to a large degree on improving the overall quality of Grade 12 outcomes, as well as the training provided by universities.

Goal 15	Ensure that the availability and utilisation of teachers are such that excessively large classes are avoided.
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It is clear that on average class sizes in South Africa are large by global standards. For instance, TIMSS data reveal that half of Grade 5 learners are in classes exceeding 40 learners. Moreover, the distribution of class sizes is highly unequal, despite the existence of policies aimed at equalising the distribution of teachers. Learner-educator (LE) ratios are also high by international standards, and have been rising since 2011, in the context of budget constraints and the fact that an ageing educator workforce has contributed to the rising cost of the average teacher. South Africa’s LE ratio is difficult to change as it is linked to a high ratio of teacher pay relative to GDP per capita. Yet when the current bulge of older educators exits the workforce and is replaced by younger teachers, to some extent this will lower costs and permit some easing of the LE ratio. Importantly, **much of large classes problem could be resolved by a more efficient use of teacher time**, and specifically better timetabling. This is clear if one compares provinces. For instance, Free State achieves much smaller classes than Limpopo in schools with the same school-level LE ratios.

Goal 16	Improve the professionalism , teaching skills, subject knowledge and computer literacy of teachers throughout their entire careers.
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The quality of the teaching has improved over time. Without this, the improvements in learner performance in the international programmes would not have been possible. Collaboration between the employer and teacher organisations have been key for realising sustainable interventions aimed at improving teacher professionalism. Learner assessment requirements have been made less burdensome, to permit more time for actual teaching. In 2019, an improved teacher performance management system, the QMS, was finalised. Professional learning communities (PLCs) have taken root in many schools. South Africa’s entry in 2017 into the international TALIS programme, aimed at monitoring what teachers themselves say is needed, was an important milestone. One thing that TALIS has brought to the fore, is that South Africa is behind when it comes to the use of modern technologies, such as online training, to advance teacher professionalism. Greater investments in the necessary hardware, software and content are needed.

The international SACMEQ programme, which includes the testing of teachers in subject-specific competencies, has found that **young and newly graduated teachers achieve substantially better scores than their older peers.** This applies in both mathematics and language, and seems to reflect the benefits of having shifted all teacher training to universities over the last two decades.

Goal 17	Strive for a teacher workforce that is healthy and enjoys a sense of job satisfaction .
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The purchasing power of the teacher salary notches has improved over time, by 32% between 2007 and 2019. In addition, virtually all educators receive an annual notch increment, an increment which increased from 1.0% to 1.5% as a result of the 2018 wage agreement. Yet working conditions for teachers remain difficult, given the extent of large classes, infrastructure backlogs, and insufficient opportunities for professional development. In too many schools, insecurity and violence are considerable problems. According to TALIS, 78% of teachers reported they were satisfied with their job, and yet this figure was the second-lowest of all TALIS countries. **Teacher well-being is a prerequisite for further educational progress.** There needs to be a clearer emphasis on understanding the problems experienced by teachers, and on coming up with system-wide and sustainable interventions to tackle these problems. Effective leadership and management, in the education departments and in schools, is a critical enabler of teacher satisfaction.

Goal 18	Ensure that learners cover all the topics and skills areas that they should cover within their current school year.
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Government's 2017 evaluation of the implementation of the school curriculum concluded that on the whole **stakeholders were happy with the curriculum**, and that more teachers would succeed in completing the curriculum each year if time were better managed. At the same time, in South Africa and elsewhere a healthy debate has arisen in recent years over whether national school curricula, in particular in developing countries, attempt to cover too many topics, at the expense of a deeper engagement with selected topics. This is a debate which should continue. Research into this matter, using for instance data from the international testing programmes, is currently insufficient.

Goal 19	Ensure that every learner has access to the minimum set of textbooks and workbooks required according to national policy.
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Apart from prioritising budgets for educational materials and improving systems to distribute these materials to schools, the education departments have paid close attention to monitoring that books are actually used in the classroom and at home by learners. The book supply chain is a complex one. Books can be delivered to schools, and then remain in storerooms. The data point to improvements in actual learner access to books. The DBE's School Monitoring Survey (SMS) showed that while in 2011, 61% of learners had access to the books they needed every day, by 2017 this figure had risen to 84%. There are several reasons why it is not, including cases where learners lose books, or leave them at home. The General Household Survey indicates that book shortages in schools have become less of a concern for households over time. In recent years, there has been **a strong emphasis on ensuring access to reading materials in the early grades**. The 2017 SMS found that 90% of Grade 3 learners had access to graded readers. A key reason why the national workbooks programme appears to have had a large positive impact is that books become the property of learners, and the programme has over the years helped to build up a stock of books in poorer households.

It is important that these gains be protected in the current climate of budget constraints, and that access to books reaches 100%. **Increased access to books is believed to be a key reason why educational outcomes improved in South Africa.**

Goal 20	Increase access amongst learners to a wide range of media , including computers, which enrich their education.
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As indicated in section 7 above, innovation with respect to technological change in the schooling system needs to accelerate. **One area where progress has occurred is the presence of a library or media centre in a school.** This has risen from 45% of schools in 2011, to 62% in 2017. Although technological advances have made the use by all learners of personal devices, such as tablets, more feasible, libraries and media centres remain important. They are often the most cost-effective and practical way to ensure that all learners in a school have access to digital resources.

Goal 21	Ensure that the basic annual management processes take place across all schools in the country in a way that contributes towards a functional school environment.
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☞ **The NDP on empowering capable school principals:**

Gradually give principals more administrative powers as the quality of school leadership improves, including in financial management, the procurement of textbooks and other educational material, and human resources management. These delegations ensure that principals are held accountable for their schools. Provincial departments will remain the employer of educators, and wages will continue to be centrally determined. (p. 310)

The NDP puts school principals, and school management in general, at the centre of educational improvement. It emphasises that **principals should be agents of change and innovation**, while being held increasingly accountable for learning outcomes, using reasonable targets which take into consideration the fact that socio-economic challenges vary from school to school. Compliance with the basic management processes referred to in this goal is important, and can assist in ensuring that schools are least minimally functional. However, beyond compliance, there is a need for exemplary leadership and personal character on the part of school managers.

Recent improvements in the policies on financial management and auditing in schools should help to streamline these processes, and allow for more time to be spent on what learners learn. **Principals and their school governing bodies should be primarily concerned with educational matters.**

The **expected surge in new principal appointments** in the coming years, as a bulge of principals reaches retirement, provides an opportunity to strengthen school management. Competency assessments for those applying for principal positions, something advocated by the NDP, are still at a pilot stage, and need to be taken to scale. More broadly, the whole appointment process should be aimed at ensuring the most capable person obtains the job.

Goal 22	Improve parent and community participation in the governance of schools, partly by improving access to important information via the e-Education strategy.
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The year 2018 saw, once again, the successful running of school governing body elections across the country. Community participation would in part explain why communities are

relatively happy with their schools. According to household data, satisfaction with schools is higher than satisfaction with other public institutions, such as clinics and police stations. Yet there are pockets of the country where satisfaction with the local school is low, for instance certain districts in Limpopo and Eastern Cape. The schooling system needs to listen to what communities say about their schools. At the same time, schools need to provide more information to parents, in particular on the educational progress of the school as a whole. This information is typically reflected in **school report cards, which would be among the accountability tools promoted by the NDP.**

Goal 23	Ensure that all schools are funded at least at the minimum per learner levels determined nationally and that funds are utilised transparently and effectively.
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Targets in relation to funding flowing to schools in the form of the school allocation are set in part to ensure that schools serving poorer communities are not compelled to collect school fees. In this regard, the system has been relatively successful: the percentage of learners not paying fees has remained constant at around 66% for many years, according to household data. This is a level that is above the percentage of South Africans considered poor by Stats SA. However, in the context of budget constraints, and poverty levels which have not declined for some years, it is vital that **the monitoring of both the school allocation and school fees be stepped up**, using data existing within the schooling system.

How spending powers are divided between the school and the department should also be monitored more closely, as this impacts on school management in critical ways. A balance needs to be struck between centralised control, which can bring about economies of scale and advance national priorities, and localised school control, which can result in spending decisions which are sensitive to the specific needs of the school. Policies allow for some leeway, and it is clear that currently different provinces pursue rather different approaches.

Goal 24	Ensure that the physical infrastructure and environment of every school inspire learners to want to come to school and learn, and teachers to teach.
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☞ **The NDP on building more with the money we have:**

Investigate the spiralling costs of building schools ... Develop measures to build schools at a reasonable cost without compromising quality. (p. 313)

Public concerns around the poor state of physical infrastructure in some schools are warranted. The 2017 School Monitoring Survey found that **only 72% of learners were in schools complying with minimum infrastructure standards**. These standards included the requirement that electricity and water supply be available when the school was visited. The survey found improvements with respect to some items, including the availability of classrooms and toilets. Learners with access to the required toilets went up from 82% in 2011 to 87% in 2017, according to the two waves of the survey. However, water availability dropped, in particular in KwaZulu-Natal. This compromises the health of learners and teachers. In KwaZulu-Natal, even households have experienced a decline in access to water, in part due to the effect of droughts on water reticulation systems. Clearly, solutions to water problems need to be holistic.

Progress in the area of infrastructure has been slowed by budget constraints. Between 2015 and 2020, real spending on infrastructure dropped in real terms by 23%. **The NDP's call to lower**

the cost of infrastructure development remains valid. It cannot be said that the schooling sector has devised a cost-effective model for developing and maintaining school infrastructure.

Goal 25	Use schools as vehicles for promoting access to a range of public services amongst learners in areas such as health, poverty alleviation, psychosocial support, sport and culture.
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The most essential non-educational service provided by schools is the publicly funded school meal, which in 2018 was received regularly by 81% of learners in public schools, according to household data. The success of the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) is probably a reason why, according to household surveys, hunger among children has not risen, despite a worsening economic situation for poor households. However, better coordination with other sectors, in particular the health and social development sectors, is necessary to tackle a range of health problems which ultimately affect learning. **Stunting among children remains stubbornly high, at 27%, while the percentage of children who are overweight in South Africa, at 13%, is one of the worst in the world.** The Integrated School Health Programme (ISHP) now screens a third of all Grade 1 learners, with the focus being on the most disadvantaged communities. This helps to ensure that children obtain the treatments and assistive devices they need, such as eyeglasses. The ISHP should be extended to cover more schools. Subsidised scholar transport, which currently covers around 3% of learners, also needs to be extended if all learners needing this service, according to existing norms, are to be catered for.

Goal 26	Increase the number of schools that effectively implement the inclusive education policy and have access to centres that offer specialist services.
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Progress has been made in making schools more inclusive. The number of schools with the structures and procedures needed for proper screening of special needs among learners, and for taking the necessary actions, has increased. By 2017, three-quarters of schools had this in place. Targets for the conversion of ordinary schools to full-service schools with specialists able to assist neighbouring schools have been exceeded. There are now around 800 full-service schools. There are concerns, however, which will need to be addressed, that these full-service schools are not all fully fit for purpose. At least some of them lack sufficient human capacity and equipment. There are glaring inter-provincial inequalities that must be resolved. For instance, the ratio of learners per education therapist is seven times as high in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West, as it is in Gauteng.

Goal 27	Improve the frequency and quality of the monitoring and support services provided to schools by district offices , partly through better use of e-Education.
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☞ **The NDP on districts:**

Many of the weaknesses in schools are a reflection of weaknesses at the district level. ... Deploy multidisciplinary support teams to work with districts in the short to medium term. (p. 310)

District offices should take credit for some of the improvement in learning outcomes seen in schools. District officials have been instrumental in the implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), and in monitoring book deliveries to schools. The Data Driven Districts (DDD) initiative has brought various government and non-government actors together to create a system which now spans eight provinces and greatly enhances the

organisation and dissemination of data needed by managers. Despite encouraging signs, however, at least anecdotally the quality of the services offered by districts is often weak. **School Monitoring Survey results point to the percentage of principals being satisfied with district support services remaining at around 78% for many years**, the range in 2017 being from around 90% in Western Cape and Gauteng, to 63% in Eastern Cape. Ideally, new systems such as DDD should result in noticeably better services by districts. There is a need to improve the resourcing of districts, make better use of the resources that do exist, understand the dynamics of district improvement through more research, and monitor with greater frequency what the 'clients', namely schools, say could be done better.