



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**SUMMARY REPORT ON THE CONSULTATIVE MEETING: REFLECTIONS ON
THE GENERAL EDUCATION SYSTEM WITH A FOCUS ON EDUCATION FOR ALL -
IMPROVING ACCESS, EQUITY AND INCLUSIVITY IN EDUCATION**

**DBE Conference Centre
Sol Plaatje House. Pretoria
17 October 2013**

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1. BACKGROUND

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) through the Strategic Planning, Research and Coordination, Chief Directorate hosted a meeting on the 17th of October 2013, Consultative Meeting : Reflections on the General Education System with a Focus on Education For All- Improving Access, Equity and Inclusivity In Education.

The focus of the consultative meeting was a discussion of the progress, achievements and concerns of the sector. The consultative meeting provided an environment for consultation with key stakeholders including practitioners, senior managers, researcher, academic, non-governmental organisations and partners in order to holistically reflect on how the general education system has improved and identify gaps and challenges in order to realise the Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025 and the National Development Plan.

The meeting also provided a means of disseminating good news about sector progress based on national and international trends. Key sector reports were shared with participants.

2. PARTICIPANTS

The Consultative Meeting was well attended, approximately 80 participants from across the sector, the participated. The Acting Director-General, Mr SG Padayachee, presented the opening address and the meeting was chaired by the Chief Director for Strategic Planning, Research and Coordination, Ms C Nuga Deliwe.

In addition to Senior Managers from the DBE and provincial representative, participants that attended the meeting included representative from the University of Johannesburg; Durban University of Technology; University of Witwatersrand, University of Zululand, Governing Body Foundation, Federation of Governing Bodies of SA Schools and the Molteno Institute For Language And Literacy amongst others.

Presentations were made by the following individuals representing a range of institutions:

- Dr O Chulu, United Nations Development Programme Regional MDG Policy Advisor for Eastern and Southern Africa
- Dr S Taylor, Advisor in the Office of the Director-General, DBE
- Ms Stella Banyana Mosimege, Director, Strategic Management Services, North West Provincial Education Department
- Ms Nadi Albino, Chief of Education, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) South Africa
- Ms Shirley Wakefield, CEO, Panda Keeper’ at Pondering Panda
- Martin Gustafsson, Researcher with the Department of Economics at Stellenbosch University and Advisor for the Department of Basic Education
- Dr Faith Kumalo, Chief Director, Care and Support in Schools, DBE
- Dr Thabo Mabogoane, Deputy Director: General, Outcomes Facilitation, Basic Education and Skills (DPME)

3. PROGRAMME

The Consultative Meeting programme is at Annexure A.

The Acting Director-General of the Department of Basic Education, Mr PB Padayachee attended the meeting and provided the opening address. In his opening address he acknowledged the approximately 90 participants who attended the meeting from across the sector, and reflected that “Over the past 20 years substantial progress has been made in issues of access, equity and inclusivity in the sector. This has resulted from a combination of policy development, capacity enhancement, development of norms and standards, definitions of roles and responsibilities as well as interventions. Although substantial progress has been made, a lot of work remains, and the themes in the discussion for today will assist the Department in identifying gaps and the way forward.

4. SUMMARY OF KEY DISCUSSIONS

- The presentation focused on **progress as well as Post 2015** agenda setting for international agreements including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Emphasis was made on

highlighting that these **goals were intended to accelerate development in critical human development and poverty alleviation areas**. The consultative process that has been followed for the development of these goals was elaborated on although criticism on the limitations of the consultation process was also acknowledged. It was indicated that the goals for the Post 2015 agenda would remain the same, namely; food, health, shelter and education amongst others but with greater attention paid to the detail and a focus on the quality of delivery rather than the quantity. Concern noted for effective implementation included the **need for better coordination to ensure inclusivity in development** particularly for the very poor that do not have access to resource, adequate governance structures and partnerships.

- The second presentation, discussed **education access and efficiency measures through various sector indicators and measures**. Dr Taylor highlighted the shortcomings of using the standard Gross Enrolment to measure access to education as it excludes Grade R learners in non-school ECD centres. Various alternative calculation methods and their implication including using different data sources such as the General Household Survey were discussed. It was proposed that the consideration of such alternatives in international reporting should be considered to improve the accuracy of reporting.

The presentation also discussed **internal system inefficiencies including grade repetition, learner retention and drop-out**. The analysis of spending patterns indicate that from the contribution of government, racial spending inequalities have been eliminated and education spending is now virtually as pro-poor as feasible. The efficiency of the system as well as learner performance have however not been as reflective of these changes. Areas that need to be addressed to improve learner performance and the returns to education include system inefficiencies; grade repetition which should be mediated with systematic remedial support to ensure effectiveness of repetition; decreased drop-out rates in Grade 10 and 11 through ensuring that low learning outcomes are addressed early; as well as overall improved curriculum coverage.

- The presentation provided by Ms Stella Mosimege focused on **Provincial Perspectives on System Performance and Progress based on the North West Provincial Education Department's perspective** highlighted the initial focus of the province as similar to that of the DBE. Initial efforts concentrated on access, and the use of Grade 12 results as a proxy for measuring the quality of

education. It is only in the recent years that the basic education system is placing emphasis on performance at the lower levels, (introduction of ANA).

In terms of the issue of equity, the North West province is one smallest & poorest provinces in the country with 75% of learners in quintile 1 schools. Most of the **challenges experienced are socio-economical**, some schools allocated in deep rural areas with challenges of infrastructure and basic services as well as limited access to secondary schools. Other noted areas of concern are the lack of gender parity with fewer girls enrolled as well as poor care and support services to support social retention. Categorisation of schools is also problematic with inaccurate quintile categorisation and some schools that are not necessarily offering the standard definition of primary schools such as Grade R to 7 but may include Grade 8 and 9 which creates challenges in resource allocation.

Overall access has improved but performance is still relatively low, both completion and retention rates have also improved but more efforts need to be made on access to secondary schooling. The **Annual National Assessments have been a useful tool in reflecting on the poor learning outcomes** at the foundation phase and efforts required to address this.

- The DBE partnered with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in commissioning a **Learner Happiness Index** with the Research Company Pondering Panda. Pondering Panda is a consumer insights company specialising in smart, innovative, real-time research, using mobile phones to engage with the youth. Connecting with thousands of young people daily, Pondering Panda has completed over 4.8 million interviews within their first 2 years of operating.

The intention of the Learner Happiness Index, was to **measure, on a quarterly basis, how happy learners in South Africa are**, across pre-selected metrics aligned with the Department of Basic Education’s goals. Each quarter a series of new topics was selected to be surveyed.

The Index looked at the general happiness levels of learners in South Africa by gauging perceptions through proxies that measure happiness, these were intended to bring awareness on the overall wellbeing of learners through easy to answer broad questions. The survey targeted respondents in the 13-24 age groups, from both public and private schools, with the majority of responses received from the 15-17 years age group. A total of 5435 learners were surveyed. All the

data collected was weighted to match the South African learner proportions according to the Census.

- The presentation made by Shirley Wakefield focused on **key findings of the Learner Happiness Survey were as follows:**
 - On the whole, learners' level of optimism about the school year ahead was relatively good. The survey was done between 9th-11th May 2013, 19-26 August and 20-28 March 2014.
 - As young people grow older, stress increases and happiness decreases which is the trend across the entire population generally across the world
 - Perceived teacher performance was good. Learners had a **relatively high regard** for their teachers. There was no difference in the **opinion of teachers among private and public school learners.**
 - On balance, the picture painted by learners in SA is **more positive** than reports in the media (bearing in mind that the number of learners that completed the survey were selected through access to the Mxit platform and not according to national demographics.
 - Learners felt **mostly positive about their schools (75% of the sample)** and a relatively high proportion felt a **sense of pride about their school (40% of the sample).**
 - Learners are more likely to be **hungry for education**, and even indicated an interest in longer school hours, if provided with the opportunity to learn a 3rd African language, or improve their Maths & Science performance.
 - Above all, learners felt it was **essential for a school to focus on teaching and learning**, but safety and security was also seen as important.

- Martin Gustafsson presented on **progress against key sector indicators** providing a summary of areas of success, challenges and what the performance trends are. The presentation was made to provide reliable data in response to the concerns raised on the quality of education, providing the correct figures for areas where performance is lacking and providing evidence for areas where there has been improvement.

The areas of success discussed included the following:

- In the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2011, South Africa's performance, although still low, has improved. We had **virtually the largest improvement one could expect**, in a context of greater and younger Grade 9 coverage. The greatest improvements in scores was observed at the lowest end, from the lowest performing schools and provinces, and in schools formerly designated for Africans.
- Learner **attainment through the National Senior Certificate has grown faster** than the youth population growth.
- By 2013, around **114 million national workbooks have been provided** to public schools, and these were rated as **high quality** materials by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).
- There has been an **improvement in the public perceptions** of the delivery of education, especially relating to books as measured in the General Household Survey (GHS) amongst other sources
- The Purchasing Power of teachers improved by 30% in five years, from 2007 to 2012. Given the current economic climate, this is remarkable.

The areas of challenges discussed included the following:

- Despite the improvement noted in South Africa's performance in the TIMSS 2011, there is still no strong sense that we've turned the corner in terms of quality. Secondly, the top South African performers only approached the average performance of the top performing countries.
 - There are still substantial challenges in measuring the quality of improvements in the system
 - Other than for the Bachelors level indicator in the National Senior Certificate (NSC), improvements in Grade 12 are still weak. There is a challenge in understanding how to balance breadth (enrolments) and depth (teaching and learning).
- **Dr Faith Kumalo** delivered a presentation titled 'Responding to the care and support needs in schools'. The DBE's approach or understanding to the need for care and support of learners is based on a recognition that societal problems such as poverty, illness, alcohol and drug use manifest in schools and impact negatively on the attainment of good educational outcomes. As such, the DBE

must respond to these societal challenges as learner and educator well-being are critical for achieving quality outcomes in education.

The recognition of this linkage and the urgency for response are seen in National plans including the basic education sector plan as well as international agreements such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA).

The DBE's response is based on an ecological systems approach with three pillars as articulated through the **Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) Framework**. The goal of the CSTL is to realise education rights of all children through schools becoming inclusive centres of learning, care & support. The role of the DBE is defined as **“creating an enabling environment for other stakeholders to act in and through schools; and to lead in addressing education and school level barriers to learning”**.

The pillars of the strategy are as follows:

- **Intrinsic** (e.g. physical, mental, health)
- **Systemic** (policy, curriculum, violence/bullying, etc)
- **Societal** (poverty, HIV and AIDS, lack of parental care, etc)

Some of the priority areas are **Nutritional Support, Psychosocial Support and Health Promotion**.

Some of the main challenges indicated in the presentation are as follows:

- Delivery of Care and Support in the education environment is complex
- Care and Support within education is not an end in itself
- Value & impact must be measured by contribution to educational outcomes
- Multiple manifestations of vulnerability (risk and protective factors) need multi-stakeholder partnerships

Dr Mabogoane from the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) presented on **Sector Progress**. The presentation discussed several aspects of the system including Grade 3 and Grade 6 **Literacy based on the Annual National Assessments (ANAs)**. It was highlighted that the performance of learners indicated inefficiency and poor accountability at the school level. The discussion also focused on the critical lessons learnt from the provisioning of textbooks in schools in

terms of provincial and national responsibilities. It was noted that although there are substantial improvements, provisioning was not optimum and did not necessarily equate to curriculum coverage. The issue of accountability was further expanded to include the role of **curriculum oversight** that is not adequately fulfilled by school and district management.