

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 680.**

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**680. . Ms N R Mashabela (EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:**

Given the rising societal challenges and strained public resources, what (a) evidence can she provide to show that the current investment in early childhood development programmes leads to societal benefits and (b) strategies are in place to ensure that the specified benefits are indeed realised?

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##### **Response**

a. Global evidence consistently shows that investments in ECD offer a remarkable return, not only for individuals but for societies as a whole. At the individual level, quality ECD programmes are associated with a better transition to primary school, reduced repetition and drop-out rates and higher learning achievement in school (Heckman and Masterov 2007; Engle et al. 2011; Shafiq et al., 2018). Investments in children's health and nutrition during their first 1,000 days yield better health outcomes throughout the lifetime. Across all types of ECD interventions, the benefits are more pronounced for children from poor households. Evidence from a range of settings also suggests that the cognitive and socio-emotional skills children develop in their early years are critical to success in the workplace and in life as adults, contributing to rising living standards of the entire population. At the societal level, the long-term benefits of investing in ECD established across countless studies, include reduced involvement in crime, better health-seeking behaviours and increased social cohesion and equality, all of which promote economic growth and reduce the burden on government systems (Garces, Thomas and Currie 2000; Heckman 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Heckman and Masterov 2007; Karoly et al. 1998; Schweinhart et al., 1993). These benefits also have implications beyond the individual's lifetime in their potential to stop the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Gertler et al., 2021; Heckman and Karapakula, 2019).

b. The Department of Basic Education developed, and started implementing the 2030 Strategy for Early Learning Programmes. This Strategy will enable the South Africa to achieve universal access to quality ECD programmes, which in turn will enable increase job creation, micro-enterprise development, local economic development, and most importantly, establishing the foundations for children to thrive by five and ultimately to become economically productive citizens. Furthermore, the Inter-Ministerial Committee on ECD, that was convened by the President in April 2024, agreed to track the progress on holistic child outcomes using an Outcomes-based monitoring framework. This framework will enable the various Department responsible for delivering services to children from conception to school-going age to track their progress on service delivery.