

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 594

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594. Ms H Ismail (DA) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

. (1) What percentage, during the pandemic of COVID-19, of (a) teachers chose not to return to school and (b) matriculants chose not to return to school due to academic gaps;

(2) what percentage of (a) matriculants chose homeschooling to complete Matric and (b) students repeated Matric in the new academic year during the specified pandemic?

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Response

(1) What percentage, during the pandemic of COVID-19, of (a) teachers chose not to return to school and (b) matriculants chose not to return to school due to academic gaps.

The exact responses to the above questions and the ones that follow are not available in any existing report by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), and are not obtainable 'at the press of a button' through existing Business Intelligence systems. The responses provided below draw from some new examination of existing data, to the extent that was possible within the applicable timeframe.

With regard to (a) above, the question deals with a type of teacher attrition. How the DBE defines and calculates educator attrition rates is explained in, for instance, a 2009 report titled 'Inflow of new teachers into the public system', available on the DBE website. The following table deals with the attrition of just 'teachers', as this is the scope of the question (non-teacher educators such as school principals are thus excluded).

Table 1: Attrition for teachers 2018 to 2022

	Number of teachers in November	Percentage of teachers in one November not present in November next year	Any age	Age 50 or below
2018	312,148	5.6		4.2
2019*	317,544	5.0		3.3
2020*	324,567	5.7		3.9
2021	325,863	6.4		4.8

Every year there are teachers who choose to leave the public educator workforce. If the question is whether there was an increase in the percentage of teachers doing this as a result of the pandemic, Table 1 suggests this was not the case. It would clearly be difficult to attribute voluntary departure from the workforce to pandemic-related factors, as opposed to other factors. However, it is noteworthy that attrition during the

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period particularly affected by the pandemic (years marked with an asterisk) attrition was *lower* than immediately before or after the pandemic. This would be in line with the understanding that a general rise in unemployment associated with the pandemic made teachers less willing to risk leaving their jobs to seek work elsewhere.

Table 1 under-states the decline in ordinary voluntary attrition during the pandemic if one considers that some 3,500 educators lost their lives as a result of the pandemic. The DBE is in the process of finalising its detailed report on excess deaths among educators during the pandemic.

With regard to (b) above, there is attrition between Grade 12 enrolment as registered in the first half of the school year and actual participation in the Grade 12 examinations at the end of the year. Comparison of Grade 12 enrolment figures published by DBE (see the *Education Statistics in South Africa* series) and figures on the number of examination writers published in the annual examinations report can provide a picture of this attrition. In the three years 2017 to 2019, the percentage of the enrolled participating in the examinations as *full-time* candidates was around 80%. This figure rises to over 90% if *part-time* candidates are also included, and it would increase further if non-state examinations were taken into account (these examinations are taken by around 2% of Grade 12 learners). If figures from 2020 and 2021 are examined, it is found that 92% and 94% of enrolled learners respectively participated as *full-time* candidates in the examinations. The evidence thus points to engagement with the examinations *increasing* during the pandemic. This is not surprising if factors such as school nutrition (which benefits some Grade 12 learners) and the contraction of the labour market during the pandemic are taken into account.

(2) What percentage of (a) matriculants chose homeschooling to complete Matric and (b) students repeated Matric in the new academic year during the specified pandemic?

With regard to (a) above, 2021 General Household Survey microdata were examined. The survey does not break participation in home schooling down by grade, but for youths aged 17 to 21, 0.1% of those participating in any form of education are engaged in home schooling. In line with for instance Government Notice 1239 of 2018 ('Policy on home education'), provincial education departments must keep registers of home-schooled learners. However, currently national statistics from these registers are not compiled.

With regard to (b) above, a recently completed analysis by the DBE of learner-level enrolment data from the provincial departments points to 13% of Grade 12 learners in 2020 repeating that grade as enrolled learners in 2021. The values for Grade 12 learners in 2018 and 2019 are 16% and 13% respectively.