

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 595.**

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**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 06/2023**

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

- (1) What percentage of (a) learners continued to write Matric examinations despite the challenges and (b) learners had to rewrite examinations during the COVID-19 pandemic years;
- (2) what percentage of learners, during the COVID-19 pandemic, chose to attend technical vocational education and training colleges, instead of repeating Matric?

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##### Response

(1) What percentage of (a) learners continued to write Matric examinations despite the challenges and (b) learners had to rewrite examinations during the COVID-19 pandemic years.

If question (a) is about the percentage of young South Africans who were *ever* learners continuing to write Grade 12 examinations in the schooling system, then the answer can be obtained from figures provided in the report *National Senior Certificate 2022: Examination report* of the Department of Basic Education. That report, using the General Household Survey, concludes that the percentage of youths who *obtained* a National Senior Certificate has risen to 62% in 2021, with increases continuing despite the pandemic. From this, it can be deduced that approximately 77% of youths get as far as *writing* the examinations (62% multiplied by 100% over the pass rate of 80.1%). As virtually all youths were at some stage a learner in a school, youths can be said to equal young people who were ever in school.

It should be noted that the repeated assertions by some stakeholders that the DBE is attempting to conceal a 'real' pass rate is not borne out by the evidence. The DBE has for many years published both the pass rate, and the percentage of youths who achieve the NSC – the aforementioned 62% in the case of 2022. A pass rate is internationally understood as those passing an examination over those writing the examination, and in this regard the DBE follows common practice. Moreover, the estimates of the 'real' pass rate (or, more correctly, the percentage of youths who obtain the Matric) as purported have always been under-estimates, because of a flawed methodology. In early 2023, the media reported on a figure of 54.6% put forward by the Democratic Alliance (DA). The method behind this is flawed because it ignores very high repetition rate in Grade 10; and hence, inflates the denominator. The fact-checking organisation Africa Check has examined this question some years ago and concluded that the DA's method is flawed.

With regard to (b), recent analysis of grade repetition by the DBE (as yet unpublished) puts the percentage of Grade 12 learners who are repeating at 16%, 13% and 13% for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020 respectively. A separate analysis of the exceptionally large increase in the number of NSC candidates between 2020 and 2021 reveals that both the absolute number of repeat candidates and the percentage who are repeaters in 2021 was lower than the levels seen before the pandemic, specifically in 2018.

(2) What percentage of learners, during the COVID-19 pandemic, chose to attend technical vocational education and training colleges, instead of repeating Matric?

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Details of the flows between schools and colleges are not known as student-level data that would allow for the required analysis are currently not merged across the systems of DBE and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). Had the required merged data existed, some analysis to address the question would be possible, though it should be noted that even with this data it would not be possible to know whether someone moving into a college ever intended repeating the NSC examinations. The DBE has been exploring solutions to the data gap. Currently, school-to-college flows are only known in broad terms, based on aggregates and household survey data – see for instance the DBE's *Action Plan to 2024*.