



## **MEDIA BRIEFING STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION, MRS ANGIE MOTSHEKGA, HELD IN PRETORIA**

**18 JUNE 2023**

Good morning, members of the media and, through you, the entire nation of South Africa.

Two days ago we marked the 47<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the June 16 uprising. This is a significant event in the history of our country and it is for that reason we continue to recognize June as Youth Month.

This is an important month in the national calendar because it gives us an opportunity to recognize and indeed pay tribute to the youth of our country whose lives were cut short at the hands of the apartheid regime.

Their sacrifice and commitment to fight against apartheid assisted to prepare for an inclusive education system in our country.

As we observe youth month let us also collaborate in equipping the youth with the skills necessary to secure a bright future for our country. We also have a responsibility to create employment opportunities, particularly for the youth who are neither in employment, education nor training.

For its part the Department of Basic Education is implementing the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative. Now in its fourth phase, the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) seeks to give effect to the objectives of the PYEI, which is South Africa's most comprehensive response to addressing rampant youth unemployment.

Phase IV will see a total of 255 000 young people appointed in public ordinary schools and schools for learners with special education needs across the country.

### **On Early Childhood Development function shift**

It is now just over a year since the Department of Basic Education took over responsibility for early childhood development.

We were and are delighted at the opportunity that this presents – to elevate the early years as the foundation of all education and learning, and to inject new momentum into government’s commitment to deliver access and quality for every child.

Much work has been taken forward over the last 12 months, and not all of it is visible outside government.

During the function shift process we listened carefully to the ECD sector, to learn about the challenges faced on the ground, and to make sure that your priorities are our priorities. We have sought to build a strategy for ECD that places the child at the centre, and that recognises the tireless efforts of you, the ECD practitioners and support staff, who are the backbone of the ECD sector.

A key priority has been to ensure that government takes standardised approaches to help ECD programmes to become registered and to access the ECD subsidy. We have also prioritised training on the National Curriculum Framework and developing a plan for workforce development – which are key planks in our strategy to build quality.

As I have visited ECD programmes across the country over the last year, I have never failed to be inspired by the sheer dedication of the people who are working day in, day out to ensure the strongest possible start for young children – from ECD practitioners, principals, home visitors, and programme support staff like cooks and cleaners, to trainers, mentors, NGO staff and funders.

### **On May/June Matric Examinations**

The month of June is also the one in which Second Chance Matric examinations are written mainly to give those young people who seek a second opportunity to improve their marks or rewrite. These are young people who recognize that a matric certificate is essential in their lives.

More than 279,000 candidates enrolled for the May/June examinations. The examinations started on 3 May 2023 and concluded this week on June 14. Marking starts this coming week on June 21 and the results will be released on 7 August 2023.

### **On BELA BILL**

The public hearings on the Basic Education Laws Amendment Bill have been concluded. The Portfolio Committee on Basic Education led the public hearings which began in March this year.

The BELA Bill seeks to amend certain sections of the South African Schools Act of 1986 to respond to administrative challenges facing our schools and to continue with the transformation agenda of our education system.

It is not a whole-sale Bill that covers all aspects of the sector. It focuses mainly on the administrative processes of the department and schools. It would therefore not include:

- Curriculum aspects, so there will be no mention of subjects, 3 stream model, assessment, Life Orientation which includes sexuality education.
- Human resources – no appointment of teachers and general workers
- Infrastructure – no sanitation, pit latrines, mobile classrooms, building of schools or such. These are covered in the Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure
- Inclusive Education and schools for Learners with Special Needs which are covered in White Paper 6.

It is a Bill that responds to the current needs in terms of the changing demographics of our communities, findings by the courts and our own observations as we monitor schools.

The Bill has 56 clauses ranging from the introduction of Grade R to learner attendance, Code of Conduct for learners, Home Schooling, rationalisation of schools, abolishment of corporal punishment and initiations, language policy, admission policy, and the criminalisation of disruptions at schools.

It is concerning to note that some members of the public are debating the content of the Bill along racial and political lines. We urge members of the public to engage more meaningfully and constructively on this matter.

### **On SASCE**

The South African School Choral Eisteddfod is taking place next week. It is the country's biggest choral music competition that involves more than 8000 learners from all provinces.

The ABC Motsepe SASCE is a celebration of the best that South African school choral and traditional music has to offer; it is important that we give these learners the support they require to achieve their aspirations and become more well-rounded individuals. It is these co-curricular and enrichment programmes that are intended to afford our learners the opportunity of self-discovery, engender self-esteem, respect, and build leadership skills.

SASCE is intended to promote unity in diversity, national reconciliation, social cohesion, and a national identity among young South Africans of school-going age. It is appropriately named the ABC Motsepe SASCE in recognition of the partnership between the Department of Basic Education and the Motsepe Foundation. Join us at the Rhema Bible Church in Randburg from 27 to 30 June 2023.

### **On Reading Literacy**

Over the past month there has been a raging debate about reading in schools. The ongoing public discourse on reading literacy intensified when the results of the latest report on Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) were released on 16 May.

The report confirmed that South Africa, like virtually all countries, saw lower primary reading competencies declines due to pandemic-related school disruptions.

The magnitude of our declines relating to the pandemic does not come as a surprise.

South Africa was among the countries most actively gauging impacts on learning outcomes during the pandemic.

The results we see now in PIRLS are in line with earlier findings. All of this is concerning and informs the Government's emphasis on addressing reading at the foundation phase.

But it is not true that most learners cannot read and write at all, as some have put it. In fact, since the release of the report we have embarked on a series of briefing sessions with various stakeholders to share the findings and provide insight on the mechanics of participating in these international studies.

One of the points we sought to make is that we are not competing but merely participating to bench-mark against the best in the world. It is also important to reiterate the fact that we are one of only 3 countries in Africa brave enough to participate in PIRLS. We were also the only country to put forward all our official languages in the study.

Early learning is a fundamental stage in a child's educational journey.

We must recognize that learning does not start in Grade R or Grade 1; it starts at zero. So there are steps the Department can take but also parents and caregivers have a critical role to play as they are a child's first and most important teachers during their early years.

While the Department of Basic Education plays a significant role in supporting early literacy skills and teaching children how to read, the entire ecosystem must be involved.

Schools play a crucial role in providing reading materials, especially for families who rely solely on them.

I look forward to a deeper analysis of the PIRLS data by researchers inside and outside the Government.

I now invite the Director for National Assessments, Dr Mark Chetty, to share a presentation on PIRLS.

I wish all the fathers a very happy Father's Day!

Thank you

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