



## **basic education**

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Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

# **STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION, MRS ANGIE MOTSHEKGA MP, ON THE LEARNING LOSSES IN THE BASIC EDUCATION SECTOR SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC**

**29 AUGUST 2021**

Good morning, and thank you for joining us.

Let me start by condemning all the acts of gender-based violence that were perpetrated against women and children. The most recent incidents of violence meted against innocent women and children, are very disturbing and marrow-chilling.

The murder and mutilation of a fourth year law student at the University of Fort Hare – Nosiselo Mtebeni; the assassination of the CFO of the Gauteng Department of Health – Babita Deokaran; the gang-rape of a 11 year-old girl in Majeje, Limpopo; the Grade 1 learner allegedly raped at a Soshanguve school in Gauteng, by a general assistant working at the school, are heinous crime and barbaric acts committed by humans on other humans, especially during and around Women's Month.

We implore all law-abiding citizens to deplore such monstrous crimes; but allow the arm of the law to take its course. It is indeed about time, that we, as a nation, take a stand; and say enough is enough! We must never allow gender-based violence to thrive in our communities. Let us all speak against gender-based violence everywhere it shows its ugly head; let us act against it, using all legal platforms available to us.

As we come to the end of August, we must continue to advocate for harmony, understanding and cooperation as a society – men and women of our democratic country.

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

This week, we released the results of the 2021 May / June examination. The examination was successfully administered, despite the enormous challenges relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both candidates with COVID-19 symptoms and those who tested positive, were allowed to write the examination in special isolation venues. The prevalence of examination irregularities of a serious nature, such as imposters, crib notes, and possession of cell phones during the writing, have declined compared to previous years.

The results of the May / June examination cannot be reported the same as the end-of-the-year National Senior Certificate examinations, given that candidates for the May / June exams, register to write one or more subjects. We must however, note that a significant number of May / June candidates, attained passes in gateway subjects, such as Mathematics and Physical Sciences. The total number of candidates who attained a pass in Mathematics and

Physical Sciences is ***eleven thousand, five hundred and fifty-seven*** (11 57), and ***eight thousand, two hundred and fifty-eight*** (8 258), respectively.

The results of the candidates, who wrote this examination, are available at District offices, or at the centres, where the examination was written. Senior Certificate candidates, who sat for this examination, can obtain their results from the DBE website ([www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za)).

### **On ECD Function Shift**

Let me take this opportunity to report also that on Thursday (26 August 2021), we launched the Early Childhood Development (ECD) National Census. This is an important step in the ECD function shift process, which is taking place between the Departments of Social Development and Basic Education.

The first-of-its-kind ECD national census, will highlight opportunities to broaden the access to quality learning for every South African child. The ECD national census 2021 data and indicators, will also establish a baseline for assessing the quality of learning through play in South Africa.

A key barrier to effective planning in the ECD sector, has been the lack of accurate data on ECD programmes and data systems. There is limited accurate information on the ECD ecosystem as a whole at present. Information gathered from the census, will be used to integrate ECD into the DBEs' Education Management Information

System (EMIS), and thus expand the provision of education support programmes, as well as play-based learning.

Funded by the LEGO Foundation, the data and indicators will also establish a baseline for assessing the quality of learning through play in South Africa. The census started mid-August and will continue until December 2021.

All registered and non-registered ECD Centres are strongly encouraged to participate in the national census, as this will broaden access to quality learning for every South African child. We therefore, appeal to ALL ECD sites, owners, and practitioners to open their doors to the field workers for the successful execution of the ECD national census. In many instances, we need the ECD centres to proactively volunteer their details to participate in the ECD Census 2021.

### **On teenage pregnancy**

Ladies and gentlemen there is one matter that we cannot ignore as a Department because it impacts negatively on the work we do in the sector. We are concerned about the alarming rate of teenage pregnancies in the country. Let us be clear that it is not just a problem of Gauteng, it is a national crisis. Most of these teenagers are of school going age. It is a serious indictment on all of us as a society and we really need to reflect deeply on this crisis and take urgent action to arrest the moral decay.

Early an unwanted pregnancy perpetuates poverty and it disrupts the growth and development of our young people. It also contributes to the worrying drop-out rate that we are fighting so hard to reduce. It has become even more urgent that as a nation we act together

collaboratively on this matter as it threatens the future of the country as a whole. For its part the Department of Basic Education and its stakeholders will intensify the implementation of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education which aims to empower young people with age appropriate information.

We will need once again to mobilise our communities and stakeholders to unite against this scourge. The time has come to bury our differences with the religious sector, the traditional leadership, parents, guardians and all others who opposed the implementation of CSE.

### **On Return of primary school learners**

South Africans will recall that schools resumed for the Third Term on 26 July 2021. On 02 August 2021, we also saw the return of the majority of primary school learners to full attendance; while those schools that have space limitations, including the non-availability of appropriate spaces to mount mobile classrooms, were allowed to stagger learner attendance. In all of these arrangement, the health and safety of learners and teachers was paramount.

We must also indicate that social distancing requirements, remain a challenge in some schools, but we continue to work with the Department of Health and our stakeholders to explore solutions in this regard. No one can deny the resurgence of COVID cases in isolated parts of the country, which affect our schools. For instance, the Phoenix area in the Umlazi District in KwaZulu-Natal, and the Motheo District in the Free State, are cause for concern. The Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, continue to record high community infections, resulting in the temporary closures of schools. Other than this, the system has remained stable and functional,

despite persisting learning losses attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We must report that we are extremely concerned about the learning losses observed within the Sector. Of particular concern, are the learning losses reported across the system, since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The unpredicted closures of our schools, and the unplanned disruptions to teaching and learning, have resulted in the reversal of gains made in the last 20 years.

Research indicates that lost school days, lead to foregone learning losses. International experience confirms learning losses experienced during pandemics, lead to long-term adverse effects, including learners obtaining lower overall educational value, and ultimately lower lifetime earnings.

Thankfully, we have now begun to measure COVID-19 related learning losses in our local contexts, by comparing how much children learnt in 2020, with how much they learned in an average school year before that. These measures indicate that between 50% and 75% of a typical year's worth of learning, was lost during 2020.

The delay in the start of the academic year in 2021, and the extended absence of learners from school, would have a long-lasting negative impact on society in general, and not only on the entire education sector. Although we only have information for specific Grades, and learning areas – such as reading; learners across Grades and subjects, would likely have been similarly affected.

The Sector lost a week in the extended 2021 winter school holiday, resulting in a reduction of the number of school days, initially scheduled in the amended School Calendar. It is therefore, likely that these learning losses would have been more significant in poorer communities, where children have less access to adequate remote learning opportunities and home support.

There is new evidence from the National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM), which is a broadly representative study or survey on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on South Africa, that more school-aged children are not attending school than usual. It is not yet clear whether this is temporary non-attendance, or may become permanent (dropout) from schooling. In the long run, the learning losses in primary school, may lead to an increase in dropout, when these children reach the Further Education and Training (FET) Band at Grades 10, 11 and 12.

What we know at this point, is that learners with weak learning foundations, begin to drop-out in more significant numbers, as they progress through the Grades. This creates an urgent need to recover learning that has been lost.

The first step towards addressing the crisis of lost learning, is to prevent further disruptions to school time, and prevent other learning losses. Experts keep on reminding us that children are less susceptible to COVID-19 infections. Our efforts to introduce comprehensive safety protocols in schools, and the vaccination of teachers and support staff, have created the possibility to keep schools open, and a sustained return to regular attendance.

The second step is to introduce measures to catch-up on the time as well as the teaching and learning that was lost through the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular. We urge parents and all of our stakeholders in the sector, to support our efforts to ensure that education continues without any further delays and / or disruptions.

### **On vaccination**

The Department of Basic Education, in collaboration with the Departments of Health, and Social Development continue to provide health services to learners in schools through the Integrated School Health Programme (ISHP). For children to receive these services, Government requires permission from parents and guardians in writing. There is a form (SHS 1a), which has been distributed to schools, which must be completed by parents and guardians to give consent for the services to be rendered to learners. Of course, we are aware of the legal limitations of such consent; but it is critical for parents and guardians of our learners to allow the Sector to provide these health services.

The health services include checking the child's health; deworming; routine immunisation against measles, polio, and Human Papillomavirus (HPV), which causes cervical cancer later in life; as well as checking for common health problems; provide health education; and indeed, mental health and psycho-social support. On the days when these services are rendered, parents are free to come to school with their children to obtain more information.

We wish to stress that there are currently no COVID-19 vaccines that are approved in the country for people under the age of 18. Contrary

to the rumours on social media, there is no intention whatsoever to vaccinate children for anything else, other than what is already declared in the form. Those spreading the rumours, we implore you to stop spreading such rumours, because you are causing anxiety and panic among our school communities. The (SHS 1a) form is standard, and there is nothing sinister about it.

Let me take this opportunity to encourage all the 18 year-olds and above in our schools, to get vaccinated.

### **On the 2021 School Calendar**

The Council of Education Ministers (CEM) met on Friday (27 August 2021) to consider inputs from stakeholders, following rounds of consultations, regarding the already amended School Calendar for the 2021 academic year. We wish to remind South Africans that the determination of School Calendars, is a statutory process, which involves extensive consultations with the Sector's critical stakeholders.

Three options emerged from the consultations; and these were presented to the CEM for consideration. In the end CEM agreed that the amended 2021 School Calendar **MUST** be retained as it was from its very last amendment – that the October vacation, will not be interfered with. CEM further recommended that the lost number of school days, should be recovered at District and school-level, but with reasonableness.

### **Conclusion**

May I ask Professor Martin Gustafsson to make a presentation focusing on learning losses. When he finishes, Ms Cheryl Weston, Director from the Curriculum Branch, will present on curriculum coverage.

I thank you