

01 October 2020

## STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION, MRS ANGIE MOTSHEKGA, MP ON THE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BASIC EDUCATION SECTOR AND THE 2020 MATRIC EXAM COUNTDOWN

Good morning and thank you so much for your time!

It has been four months since schools reopened after the forced closure in March, and it is one month since all grades have been back in school.

There has been a significant decline in the COVID-19 cases in the country; and the same trend has been experienced in our schools. The sector is proceeding well under difficult conditions; and we commend the work done by our dedicated teachers and staff to ensure that the system returns to some semblance of normalcy.

We hardly see any schools being closed and reopened; and this can be attributed to the adherence to the revised standard operating procedures.

We are encouraged and humbled by what we see in schools. Schools continue to implement the rotation system, by either implementing staggered days of attendance or platooning. This, schools do, in order to adhere to the health and safety requirements. Safety remains our top priority, because the coronavirus is still very much with us. We therefore, need to continue to take care everywhere else, and more so in our schools.

We are however, concerned that there are learners who have not returned to school yet. In the schools that we have visited, the return rate is between eighty to ninety percent (80% - 90%). While it is encouraging to see the numbers increase gradually, we appeal to parents release their children to return to school.

This means that we need to work together with parents and communities to support the children. The fact is that schools are not operating normally at the moment.

The rotation or platooning approach which schools are using, means that there are designated days when learners are at school, and other designated days they are not. This again increases the risk of them losing interest, and forget critical curriculum topics already covered at school. The difficulties in timetabling, will be with us for the remainder of the year, as we continue to balance teaching and learning, while saving lives.

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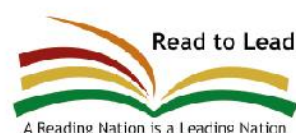
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One of the programmes that can help in keeping the children engaged, is the *Read to Lead campaign*. Households should organise reading activities in the home, and in the communities. We will soon embark on the reading campaign, to once again promote reading; but this time as an essential activity that could help save our children under the COVID-19 circumstances in which we find ourselves.

## Learner support interventions

The matric learners have been in school since the first week of June; and only had a weeks break in July. Provinces have put in a place a whole range of measures to support the learners – this includes Saturday and Sunday classes. The extra tuition opportunity has been of great benefit to the learners and the teachers. At this point, I need to actually pay a special tribute to our teachers, who have sacrificed their time to support the learners. The Director-General, Mr Mathanzima Mveli, has been visiting provinces to monitor progress; and he reports that in every school he has visited, the attendance is overwhelming.

We are really grateful for the commitment, dedication and sacrifice demonstrated by our educators in every province. In addition to the extra classes provided at our schools, the Department has launched the Woza Matrics, in collaboration with the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). This is an initiative designed to provide additional support to the Matric Class of 2020, as they prepare for the 2020 National Senior Certificate examination. We thank all the partners involved in the initiative.

## On comorbidities

In May this year, an agreement was reached at the Education Labour Relations Council that in Lockdown Level 3 and 2, teachers with comorbidities would be granted concessions to work from home.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that the country would be going to Level 1, effective from 21<sup>st</sup> September. The effect of that announcement was that the Collective Agreement with the unions had also ceased to exist, and that teachers granted concessions, are expected to report for duty.

Provinces have reported that all the teachers have gone back to work, except those teachers, who are on maternity or sick leave. We thank each and every one of our teachers for heeding the call to return to school. Health and safety measures, remain in place; and everybody is expected to comply, as we work to finish the work for the 2020 academic year.

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## Extracurricular Activities

With the country having moved to Alert Level 1, we would like to propose that non-contact sport training and physical activities in schools should resume, subject to compliance with measures to prevent and combat the spread of Covid-19. We will gazette new Directions in this regard once the processes have been completed.

## School Nutrition

One of the challenges that we have had to deal with as a result of the forced closure of schools, is the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). Initially, the number of learners coming to access the meals, was low; but we have now seen a drastic improvement. Various provinces have arranged transport for learners not in school to get their meals; or collect their food parcels. This has assisted in increasing the number of beneficiaries who should be getting their meal supply daily. The reopening of schools has helped to ensure that more learners receive their much-needed meals.

## On bullying and violence among learners

We have observed several incidents of violence among learners. It is quite disturbing to note an escalation of physical contact at a time when we are also fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. All of us must remember and practice all stipulated health, safety and social distancing measures in order to curb COVID-19 infections. We are working with stakeholders to address this challenge, which is a microcosm of the general society. We will revive our school safety management structures; including the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC), and school governing bodies to immediately deal with bullying and violence among learners.

## On ECD Function Shift

The Departments of Basic Education (DBE) and Social Development (DSD) have been planning towards the realisation of the change in leadership and responsibility for the provision of ECD programmes. To this end, the two Departments have concurrence on the scope of the functions that will be transferring. We are working on developing a detailed implementation plan to ensure that the transition is seamless and that the integrated ECD ecosystem in our country serve and protect our children so that they can thrive later in life. The details of this plan will be communicated once proper engagements with all stakeholders have taken place.

We are also aware that the COVID pandemic has hit the ECD sector particularly hard, and that many ECD programmes have been without any income for an extended time. During this time, a lot of important work has been taking place in the sector by the

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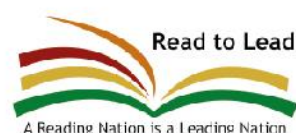
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various role players and we are grateful for the support shown to our children. It is out of this appreciation that we endeavour to partner with all stakeholders as we embark on fulfilling our new role of leading and serving the ECD sector in 2021.

As Basic Education, we have hope for the future of ECD in the country and see this as a unique and significant opportunity to improve access to quality early learning. All children in South Africa deserve to thrive and we believe that the function shift will allow us to enhance the delivery of support to the ECD sector.

## Reading

We are all aware that many days of schooling has been lost this year, especially in the early grades. This could lead to long term learning losses, and increase the inequality in learning outcomes even further. This situation makes it more urgent than before to provide sufficient support to teachers in teaching reading. All teachers know that catching-up lost learning, or learning recovery, is not an easy quick activity but requires a lot of dedicated time. This will include a concerted effort by both parents and teachers and will need to extend into the 2021 academic year. To allow for this, we have revised the Annual Teaching Plans to extend to next year.

Over the past couple of years, the DBE has initiated several efforts to improve reading knowledge, teaching and classroom practice drawing from amongst the research conducted through the DBE's Early Grade Reading Studies (EGRS) and the Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA). Some of the recent work emerging from this has been the development and release of a National Framework for the Teaching of Reading in African Languages in the Foundation Phase. This framework aims to guide and improve teacher practice in reading for African languages in the early grades.

Further, the DBE is in the process of creating reading benchmarks for African languages and EFAL for the early grades, drawing on both regional and international experience. The first language bench-marks to be released will be for the Nguni languages since they can be developed from currently existing data. We look forward to engaging on this with the sector to enable partners and education stakeholder to take these forward. Finally we thank the partners and donors both local and international that continue to support catalytic work in the sector to improve knowledge, evidence and the development of standards for reading.

## World Teacher Day and Teachers Month Activities

As I said earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us a lot of things. The sacrifice by our teachers has been seen; and we appreciate this. We always say the basic education system stands and falls on its teachers. Without teachers, we will not have effective teaching and learning. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to reconsider the way in which we have been running the sector. It is for this reason, that we have

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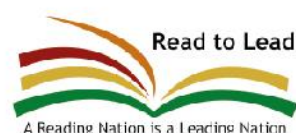
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come up with a theme for World Teachers Day that says – “**Teachers: Leading in Crisis, Reimagining the Future**”. For the month of October, as we continue with Teacher Appreciation activities, the theme is – “**Working in Solidarity with Teachers during the COVID-19 Pandemic**”.

We are fully aware that some of our teachers have lost their lives to COVID-19; and we once again, we send our condolences to all the affected families.

So today, we also launch Teachers Month; and indeed on Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> of October, we will hold a special celebration where we will also pay tribute to our fallen classroom heroes and heroines. The Teacher Appreciation and Support Programme (TASP), is a broad project which I had launched in 2015.

Many of us, who have gone through the hands of teachers, we know too well the life-long impact teachers have on individuals. Their role, is not limited only to teaching content; but they facilitate acquiring of a range of skills that individual learners will need to be successful citizens and contributors in the socio-economic sphere as adults.

## School Calendar

We have received many enquiries about the Revised School Calendar for 2021. First, let me confirm that schools will reopen on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021; and second, that the school calendar will be gazetted tomorrow (Friday, 02 October); after which, it will be publicly available. We are fully aware that the country needs the school calendar for effective planning purposes; and we have worked hard to ensure it is done properly; taking into account the disruptions that have occurred in 2020. We will need to carry over some of the curriculum work into 2021; and we have done our best to accommodate the interests of everybody. But our priority, is the learner.

## On Matric Examinations

Ladies and gentlemen, the advent of COVID-19, has necessitated the need to reschedule the 2020 National Senior Certificate examinations, to accommodate the disruptions caused by the pandemic. As we had already announced before, the June Senior Certificate (SC) examination was postponed, and will now be written together with the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination in November 2020. The examination timetable for the combined June and November examination, had to be amended; so that this examination commences in November, instead of October 2020, as was initially planned. The late start of the examination, is intended to allow as much time as possible to cover critical curriculum content, and to ensure that all examination processes are appropriately managed.

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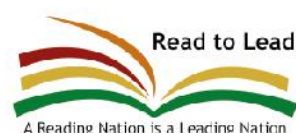
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The combined examination, makes this the largest public examination that has been administered in our country. More than 1 million (1 058, 699) candidates, will sit for the examinations; and we certainly have never had to manage a number that large before. It is going to be a huge task, but one that we will need to ensure it is managed and coordinated smoothly.

The writing of the 2020 NSC examination, will commence on 05 November 2020, and conclude on the 15 December 2020.

All examination centres, both public and independent, have been audited, in preparation for the 2020 combined examination. A protocol, to ensure compliance with COVID-19 protocols, has been developed and distributed, to guide all the Chief Invigilators, Invigilators and all other officials involved in the management of the conduct and administration of the examination. All Provincial Education Departments have secured the extra rooms at existing examination centres, that are needed for the writing of the combined 2020 November Grade 12 examinations.

So today, we launch the official Count Down to the examinations. ***It is now 34 days to the start of the NSC examination for the Matric Class of 2020!*** We therefore, appeal to parents, guardians, and communities to rally behind all the candidates who will be writing their final exams this year. It is an extra-ordinary time for them and all of us; but they need the support more.

## Conclusion

It has been a difficult a year, but there is still an opportunity to get tangible work done. We will need to work together with all stakeholders; strengthen our partnerships, intensify our efforts, and rescue the country from a possible disaster brought on us by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the country migrated to Level 1, our own Department is hundred percent (100%) fully operational; and of course, we observe strict health and safety protocols. We want to continue to ensure safety for everybody. We wish to thank all South Africans for the support we have received. As individuals, we can indeed travel faster; but together, we can travel far.

Thank you

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