



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Keynote Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, delivered at the Release of 2021 National Senior Certificate (NSC) Examination Results

20 January 2021

Good evening Programme Director, Ladies and gentlemen!

Today, we are gathered here to announce the 2021 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results. We are announcing the 2021 NSC examination results in the context of what the National Development Plan enjoins us to do. The NDP directs that *“by 2030, South Africans should have access to education and training of the highest quality, leading to significantly improved learners’ outcomes. The performance of South African learners in international standardised tests, should be comparable to the performance of learners from countries at a similar level of development and with similar levels of access”*.

It is without doubt that the 2021 academic year, will be remembered as the year that, not only presented major health challenges, but as the second year in which the entire world was held to ransom by the novel COVID-19 pandemic. As at this stage, the Class of 2021, was the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as they had to endure two consecutive years of harsh exposure to the unrelenting COVID-19 pandemic. Government, with its Basic Education Departments and its strategic partners, worked tirelessly to strike a balance between saving lives and saving the 2021 academic year.

When we announced the 2020 NSC exam results, we had conceded that the loss of learning and teaching time during the 2020 academic year, could never be fully recovered. In 2021, the Class of 2021 had to go through the harsh realities brought about by COVID-19 in 2020, while they were in Grade 11, and faced the same harsh realities, while they were going through their 2021 academic year.

International benchmark assessment studied and our National Assessment Framework (NAF)

Over the past three years, we have continuously reminded the nation about the seven Basic Education Sector cardinal priorities of the Sixth Administration. Among these priorities is dealing decisively with the **quality and efficiency** through the implementation of *standardised assessments at various exit points of the system at Grades 3, 6 and 9*; and offering the *General Education Certificate (GEC)* before the Grade 12 exit qualification, to direct learners through different pathways; and introduce multiple qualifications and certification.

As many countries of the world, continue to review their education strategies in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a commitment towards understanding the early years of schooling better; and tracking learning losses through the different Phases of the system. To better respond to the NDP injunction, vis-à-vis “*the performance of South African learners in international assessment tests*”, we have introduced, and are in the process of introducing a battery of strategies, within the context of a **National Assessment Framework (NAF)**.

Several activities have already been introduced in 2021, to generate data on the status of learning at key transition points. These, include the administration of an *Early Learning National Assessment (ELNA) in Grade 1* to check of the state of readiness of learners to enter Grade 1; *the Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS) in Grade 4*; and *the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) in Grade 6*. I implore all South Africans to visit our website, to read more about our innovative assessment strategies.

In February to March this year, we will introduce the **Systemic Evaluation** study in Grades 3, 6, and 9 – the critical exit points of our system, prior to Grade 12; in order to better understand the learning trajectory from primary to secondary schools. These initiatives, will add to the current Grade 12 NSC examination results; and give a more comprehensive picture of the impact of COVID-19 on South African schooling. Within this framework, the Department has taken initial steps towards the introduction of a **General Education Certificate (GEC)** in

2023 – a commitment that was made in 1995 by our democratic Government in the very first *White Paper on Education and Training, Government Notice No.196 of 1995*.

The GEC **is** seen as an important and progressive qualification that will improve career pathing, employability and reduce dropout rates of South African youth. It allows for learners after 10 years of schooling (Grade R-9), to be recognised for their levels of curriculum attainment, general capabilities and talents. Information and scores from the 21st century skills into School-Based Assessment (SBA); standardised curriculum tests and through an inclination (or talent) assessment, will be used to generate a report card, reflecting a holistic dashboard of learner's skills and capabilities.

The Department has consulted broadly with Basic Education Sector stakeholders, partners, and experts on the most appropriate model for the GEC; and public comments have been considered in amending the draft policy. This year, about 300 schools will participate in the GEC pilot, with further up-scaling planned for 2023. By 2024, all schools will be participating GEC policy.

The 2021 National Senior Certificate Examination Results

Programme Director, during last year's Budget Vote Debate on Basic Education, we had reminded the nation that we are increasingly prioritising interventions, improvement programmes, and policies that target improved **quality of learning and teaching**; and implementing **accountability systems** to ensure that quality outcomes are achieved right through the basic education system. Given South Africa's divided past, and the continued negative impact of socio-economic realities on learning outcomes, the interventions and improvement programmes we continuously introduce, are an attempt to counteract the unintended negative impact and learning deficits on learner attainment.

Our interventions continue to cater for both learners who are at **risk of underperformance**, and learners who are **moderate to high achievers**. This differentiated approach, aims to address both content deficiencies that may prevent learners from achieving good educational outcomes; as

well as providing support to moderate and high achievers to improve their performance – thereby improving the ***quality of learning outcomes***.

This we had to do, despite the devastation brought on all nations of the world by the COVID-19 pandemic. We had repeatedly informed the nation that our interventions were multipronged. At the helm, we focused on saving lives against the novel COVID-19, while focusing on improving the quality and efficiency learning and teaching outcomes. We continued with the differentiated timetabling; the trimmed curriculum delivery for the school communities below Grade 12; the regular provisioning of school feeding and psychosocial services; as well as the extra tuition and support provided to the Matric Class of 2021, were all intended to mitigate against the risks that were brought about by the prolonged absence of learners from schooling.

It is therefore, correct to contextualise the hostile environment within which the Class of 2021 sat for their 2021 National Senior Certificate examinations, an environment that none of the previous cohorts of learners were ever exposed to in the past. The 2021 academic year, similarly to the 2020 academic year, will remain an extraordinary year for all sectors in the world, and our Basic Education Sector in particular. In our war against the COVID-19 pandemic, we unfortunately continued to lose lives. We pray to God to continue to provide solace to the affected families.

Programme Director, Ladies and gentlemen, we as a Sector, can proudly say that we continued to ensure a safe and healthy school environment, and adhering to the health and safety measures to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19 infections in our schools. Wide consultations and collaboration within the Sector, were a critical factor in ensuring our success. All activities related to the 2021 NSC exams, were craftily managed – from the actual writing of the exams; marking of the scripts; the capturing of the results, and the standardisation of the results by Umalusi; and now, the announcement of the 2021 NSC exam results.

Umalusi declares on the credibility and integrity of the 2021 NSC examinations

We are happy to inform you that on Friday, 14 January 2022, Umalusi, our Quality Council in General and Further Education and Training, has declared that *“there were no systemic irregularities reported that might have compromised the credibility and the integrity of the November 2021 NSC examinations, administered by the DBE”*. The Executive Committee of Umalusi further approved the *“release of the DBE November 2021 NSC examination results, based on the available evidence that the examinations were administered in accordance with the examination policies and regulations”*.

Profile: Class of 2021

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Class of 2021 is the ***fourteenth cohort*** of learners to sit for the National Senior Certificate (NSC), and the ***eighth cohort*** to be exposed to the CAPS curriculum. Most poignantly, ***82.3% of the full-time candidates***, and ***40.2% of the part-time candidates*** were ***16-20 years of age*** during the 2021 NSC exams. This implies that these candidates could possibly have been part of the Early Childhood Development programme in 2009. The foundations for lifelong learning these young people were exposed to in 2009, included *language, motor skills, perceptual skills, problem-solving, basic numeracy, self-regulation, executive functioning, and the love for learning*.

The Class of 2021 was the ***fourth cohort*** to be introduced to ***twelve*** (12) *new subject offerings, comprising the South African Sign Language (Home Language)*, written by ***one hundred and twenty seven*** (127) ***candidates***; and *Civil Technologies, Mechanical Technologies, and Electrical Technologies – each with three (3) subjects; as well as Technical Mathematics and Technical Science, written by fifty thousand, three hundred and thirty* (50 330).

This Class was impacted by Policy changes, such as the Policy on Progression – they were the ***eighth cohort*** to be exposed to this Policy change; the discontinuation of the Policy on Multiple Examination Opportunity (MEO); the offering of ***two*** (2) ***question papers in Accounting and Business Studies***; the offering of a ***third paper for all Second Additional Languages***; the addition of new subjects, such as

Dramatic Arts, Music, Marine Sciences, and a Practical Assessment Task (PAT) for Technical Mathematics; as well as changes in the structure and duration of some question papers.

The total number of candidates, who registered for the 2021 NSC exams was **eight hundred and ninety seven thousand, one hundred and sixty three** (897 163) candidates – an increase of **23.6%** from 2020, comprising **seven hundred and thirty three thousand, hundred and ninety eight** (733 198) full-time candidates – an increase of **20.2%** from 2020; as well as **one hundred and sixty three thousand, nine hundred and sixty five** (163 965) part-time candidates – an increase of **41.5%** from 2020.

Pass requirements for our NSC examinations

Programme Director, in the last weeks leading to the release of the 2021 NSC examination results, we were exposed to a raving and a baseless debate on the pass requirements for the National Senior Certificate. The Department and respected scholars, have sought to clarify this matter, and we will continue to do so until it is understood by the public. At the outset, I must discourage the spreading of misleading information regarding the NSC pass requirements.

In a nutshell, all that needs to be said is that **30% is not a pass mark** in this country. If any candidate gets an **aggregate of 30% in all subjects written, that candidate will surely fail**. There are myths, fallacies and misinformation that get paddled year-after-year, almost by the same people on this matter. The NSC pass requirements are as follows –

- **Admission to Bachelor Studies** – a candidate **must** obtain **at least 40%** for the candidate's **Home Language** (this is compulsory); **must** obtain **at least 50%** for the candidate's **four** (4) other subjects, excluding Life Orientations; **must** obtain **at least 30%** for the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) of the Higher Education Institution; **must** obtain **at least 30%** for **one** (1) other subjects; and **must** pass **at least six** (6) of the **seven** (7) subjects.
- **Admission to Diploma Studies** – **must** obtain **at least 40%** for the candidate's **Home Language** (this is compulsory); **must** obtain **at**

least 40% for **three** (3) of other subjects, excluding Life Orientation; **must** obtain **at least 30%** for the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) of the Higher Education Institution; **must** obtain **at least 30%** for **one** (1) other subjects; and **must** pass **at least six** (6) of the **seven** (7) subjects.

- **Pass with Higher Certificate** – a candidate **must** obtain **at least 40%** for the candidate's **Home Language** (this is compulsory); **must** obtain **at least 30%** for the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) of the Higher Education Institution; **must** obtain **at least 40%** for **two** (2) other subjects; **must** obtain **at least 30%** for **three** (3) other subjects; and **must** pass **at least six** (6) of the **seven** (7) subjects.

Performance of the progressed learners

Programme Director, in the 2021 NSC examinations, we saw **sixty one thousand, seven hundred and eighty nine** (61 789) progressed learners enrolling for the 2021 NSC examinations. **Fifty six thousand, eight hundred and twenty six** (56 826) of the progressed candidates actually wrote the requisite **seven subjects** during the 2021 NSC examinations.

Twenty one thousand, four hundred and ninety nine (21 499) progressed learners passed the 2021 NSC examinations. This represents **37.8%** of progressed learners, who wrote **all seven subjects** during the 2021 NSC examinations; and **4.0%** of the 2021 passes. **Three thousand, four hundred and forty** (3 440) of the progressed learners, obtained Bachelor passes – an increase of **13.6%** from 2020; **eight thousand, three hundred and ninety four** (8 394), obtained Diploma passes; **nine thousand, six hundred and forty** (9 640), obtained Higher Certificate passes; and **ten** (10), obtained NSC passes. A total of **one thousand, four hundred and eighty four** (1 484) distinctions were attained by progressed learners, including distinctions in critical subjects, such as Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics and Physical Science.

The significance of these achievements Programme Director, is that the progressed learners, who passed the 2021 NSC examinations – *the*

would-be-high-school repeaters and dropouts, had they not been progressed, now have a golden opportunity to access either Higher Education Institutions, TVET Colleges, and other skills development institutions. What a good story!!

Learners with Special Education Needs

We strongly believe that an ***inclusive education system*** makes an immense contribution towards an ***inclusive economy***, to serve an ***inclusive society***. Providing learners with special education needs ***access*** to quality basic education programmes, is an imperative, based on the Constitutional social justice principles of ***equity, inclusivity*** and ***redress***, among others. We have for the past few years included the learners with special education needs in tracking learner performance in the NSC examinations.

Two thousand, four hundred and eighty nine (2 489) learners with special education needs, enrolled for the 2021 NSC examinations – an increase of ***10.7%*** from 2020. ***Two thousand, three hundred and ninety seven*** (2 397) of them actually wrote the 2021 NSC examinations – an increase of ***19.1%*** from 2020. ***One thousand, nine hundred and thirty seven*** (1 937) of these learners, that is ***80.8%***, passed the exams. ***Eight hundred and seventy nine*** (879), and ***six hundred and thirty six*** 636 of these learners, achieved Bachelor and Diploma passes, respectively. ***Three hundred and fourteen*** (314), and ***hundred and eight*** (108) learners with special education needs obtained Higher Certificate and NSC passes, respectively. Learners with special education needs achieved a total of ***five hundred and eight*** (508) distinctions – which is equivalent to ***2.8%*** of the total number of distinctions, also in critical subjects, such as Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics and Physical Science.

The benefits of the pro-poor policies of Government

The 2021 NSC passes for quintiles 1 to 3 (“no fee”) schools combined, stand at ***three hundred and fifty four thousand, four hundred and seventy six*** (354 476) – an increase of ***28.5%*** from 2020. The Bachelor passes achieved by learners in “no fee” schools, stand at ***one hundred***

and forty nine thousand, six hundred and forty eight (149 648) – an increase of **29.5%** from 2020.

The poignancy of this increase, lies in what research tells us, that in 2005, 60% of the Bachelor passes, came from the best performing 20% of the schooling system. However, with the *introduction of a pro-poor policies in the education system*, in 2015, “no fee” schools, produced **51%** of the Bachelor passes, which increased to **58%** in 2020, and **62%** in 2021. Therefore, the significance of this, is that the gap between the Bachelor passes produced by “no fee” schools versus those produced by fee paying schools, has significantly and progressively increased from **2%** in 2015, to **16%** in 2020, and **24%** in 2021. This is remarkable; hence, His Excellency, President Ramaphosa calls it a “*silent revolution*”!!

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, we are the first to conceded that, whilst from 2015 to date, greater **equity** and **redress** have been systematically addressed, inequalities still remain in the system. Government must however, be applauded for its pro-poor policies, which in the Basic Education arena, alleviate poverty through a variety of interventions. Among others, it is worth mentioning the pro-poor funding of schools; the provision of nutritious meals on a daily basis; and the provision of scholar transport to deserving learners on daily basis. These interventions have definitely improved **access** and **retention** of learners in schools; thus simultaneously promoting **equity** and **quality** immeasurably. This, is indeed a very encouraging development for our country.

Access and retention of learners from Grade 1 in 2010 to Grade 12 in 2021

It must be stated that the **seven hundred and thirty three thousand, one hundred and ninety eight** (733 198) learners, who were retained right up to Grade 12 in 2021, were among the **one point one million** (1 116 899) learners, who were in Grade 1 in 2010. Thus, **67.2%** of the young ones, who accessed Grade 1 in 2010, survived through the Basic Education system. It is also noteworthy that there were **five hundred and seventy nine thousand, three hundred and eighty four** (579 384) Grade 12 learners in 2010, a number which progressively increased to

seven hundred and thirty three thousand, one hundred and ninety eight (733 198) Grade 12 learners in 2021. This is a clear indication that, we are **improving the retention or “survival” rates**, and the **reducing the dropout and failure rates** in the Basic Education system. Also, only **4.0%** of the full-time Grade 12 learners, who did not write the 2021 NSC exams. A remarkable **96.0%** of the 2021 full-time Grade 12 cohort, wrote the 2021 NSC examinations. Steady but surely, the Basic Education system is addressing the concerns related to dropout, amplified in the NDP.

The performance of social grant recipients and candidates in correctional facilities

We must indicate that we had young people, who are recipients of social grants; and young people who are in correctional facilities, who wrote the 2021 NSC exams. In summary, **six hundred and twenty six thousand, five hundred and thirty nine** (626 539) social grant recipients, wrote the 2021 NSC examinations. **Four hundred and ten thousand, five hundred and nine** (410 509) social grant recipients passed the 2021 NSC exams. **One hundred and seventy seven thousand, four hundred and forty eight** (177 448) of these candidates, obtained Bachelor passes; **one hundred and forty four thousand, one hundred and fifty four** (144 154), obtained Diploma passes; **eighty eight thousand, seven hundred and forty four** (88 744), obtained passes with Higher Certificate; and **ninety two** (92), obtained NSC passes.

Equally impressive, were **one hundred and twenty** (120) young people, who are in correctional facilities, registered as full-time candidates for the 2021 NSC examinations. **One hundred and eleven** (111) of these candidates, wrote the 2021 NSC exams. **Fifty nine** (59) of the full-time candidates, obtained Bachelor passes; **twenty nine** (29) obtained Diploma passes; and **eleven** (11) obtained Higher Certificate passes. Therefore, **89.2%** of the full-time candidates in correctional facilities, who wrote the 2021 NSC examination, passed. These are the young people who unfortunately found themselves on the wrong side of the law, who in their future lives, could be judges – the same profession that sentenced them to jail; the may be doctors, and other critical professionals needed

by our country. Honourable Ministers Lindiwe Zulu and Ronald Lamola will surely speak about the impact of **social grants** and **restorative justice** on the beneficiaries of these programmes, who were part of the Class of 2021. What a great story to tell!!

Aggregation according to gender

There were **seventy seven thousand, two hundred and fifty** (77 250) more girls than boys, who enrolled for the 2021 NSC examinations – improvement of **7.4%** from 2020; and there were **seventy four thousand, two hundred and forty seven** (74 247) more girls than boys, who actually wrote the 2021 NSC examinations – an improvement of **11.4%** from 2020. Overall, there were **two hundred and ninety seven thousand, one hundred and fifty two** (297 152) girls, who passed the 2021 NSC exams – an improvement of **21.4%** from 2020; and **two hundred and forty thousand, five hundred and thirty five** (240 535) boys, who passed the 2021 NSC exams – an improvement of **22.5%** from 2020. When translated into percentages, this represents **76.4%** girls, and **76.4%** boys, who passed the 2021 NSC examinations – **parity** of the highest order.

There were **one hundred and forty six thousand, one hundred and fifty six** (146 156) female candidates, who obtained Bachelor passes – an improvement of **21.4%** from 2020; while **one hundred and nine thousand, eight hundred and seventy five** (109 875) male candidates, obtained Bachelor passes – an improvement of **20.7%** from 2020. Some **ninety three thousand, eight hundred and sixty eight** (93 868) female candidates, obtained Diploma passes – an improvement of **16.7%** from 2020; while **eighty three thousand, seven hundred and four** (83 704) male candidates, obtained Diploma passes – an improvement of **19.1%** from 2020.

More girls than boys achieved Bachelor and Diploma passes; thus more girls than boys are eligible to study at Higher Education Institutions. Also more girls than boys passed with distinctions. These distinctions include critical subjects, such as Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics, and Physical Science. Clearly, we are systematically addressing social justice principles, especially **equity** and **redress** imperatives.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, the account we have given in the four categories, namely, **progressed learners, learners with special education needs, Government’s “pro-poor” policies** – including candidates who were in “no fee schools, candidates who were grant recipients as well as candidates in correctional facilities, **and the aggregation by gender**, clearly shows that we are systematically and successfully addressing the cardinal social justice principles of **access, equity, redress, equity, inclusivity, efficiency and quality** within Basic Education system. The fact that we have reached **parity** between girls and boys, when the passes are expressed as a percentage, is a great achievement indeed!!

Overall national performance

This brings us to the overall results of the 2021 NSC examinations. Programme Director, it is important to remind the nation that for the past ten years, the NSC pass rates have consistently been going up from **60%** in 2009, to above **70%** in recent years. The Class of 2021 must be commended for maintaining this trend, despite the astronomical challenges they faced.

The 2021 NSC overall pass rate, **with the progressed learners included**, stands at **76.4%** – an improvement of **0.2%** from the pass rate achieved by the Class of 2020. This, represents a record of **five hundred and thirty seven thousand, six hundred and eighty seven** (537 687) candidates, who passed the 2021 NSC examinations – an improvement of **21.9%** passes from 2020. **Without the progressed learners**, the overall pass rate stands at **79.8%** – just **0.2%** below the 80% pass rate.

Further analysis of the 2021 NSC examination results, show that –

- the number of candidates qualifying for admission to Bachelor studies at universities, is **two hundred and fifty six thousand, and thirty one** (256 031) – an improvement of **21.4%** from 2020. This represents **36.4%** of the total number of candidates, who wrote the 2021 NSC exams. By the way, **the 2021 Bachelor passes in number, is the highest attained in the entire history of the NSC**

examinations; but the second highest to that attained in 2019, when expressed as a percentage;

- we must state that KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal contributed the most Bachelor passes in the combined Bachelor passes of **one hundred and seventeen thousand, seven hundred and four** (117 704), which is equivalent to **46.0%** of the overall Bachelor passes nationally;
- the number of candidates, who passed with a Diploma is **one hundred and seventy seven thousand, five hundred and seventy two** (177 572) – an improvement of **17.8%** from 2020; which represents **25.2%** of the total number of candidates, who wrote the 2021 NSC examinations;
- the number of candidates, who passed with Higher Certificates is **one hundred and three thousand, eight hundred and fifty nine** (103 859); which represents **14.9%** of the total number of candidates, who wrote the 2021 NSC combined exams; and
- the number of candidates, who passed with a National Senior Certificate (NSC) is **hundred and three** (103), which represents **zero point zero one percent** (0.01%) of total number of candidates, who wrote the 2021 NSC exams.

It is important to note that a total of **four hundred and thirty three thousand, six hundred and three** (433 603) candidates – equivalent to **61.6%**, who achieved Bachelor and Diploma passes, are now eligible for studies at Higher Education Institutions. The **one hundred and three thousand, eight hundred and fifty nine** (103 859) candidates – equivalent to **14.7%**, who obtained Higher Certificate passes, may register at TVET and other skills training institutions.

We must state that between 2008 and 2021, the Basic Education system has produced a total of more than **two point two** (2.2) **million** Bachelor passes. In order for our country to meet the skills demands projected by the NDP, it may be necessary to track the whereabouts of these young people, and check on their current skills and employability profiles.

In 2021, a total of **two hundred and eleven thousand, seven hundred and twenty five** (211 725) distinctions were achieved – an increase of **19.3%** from 2020. The main contributors towards passes with distinctions, were –

- KwaZulu-Natal with **sixty one thousand, eight hundred and eighty seven** (61 887);
- Gauteng with **forty seven thousand, three hundred and ninety-nine** (47 399);
- Western Cape with **twenty nine thousand, five hundred and forty two** (29 542);
- Eastern Cape with **twenty four thousand, one hundred and seventy four** (24 174); and
- Limpopo with **seventeen thousand, seven hundred and fifty one** (17 751).

It is remarkable to note that the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo – the three most rural provinces in the country, produced a combined total of **one hundred and twenty one thousand, three hundred and twelve** (121 312) Bachelor passes, which is equivalent to **47.4%**; and an improvement of **26.6%** from 2020; as well as **one hundred and three thousand, eight hundred and twelve** (103 812) passes with distinction, which is equivalent to **49.0%**; and an improvement of **43.3%** from 2020. It is also noteworthy that the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo were also able to produce a combined total **eighty eight thousand, and seventy two** (88 072) **passes with Diploma**, which is equivalent to **49.6%**; and an improvement of **23.1%** from 2020.

Therefore, this kind of consistent and improved performance by our three most rural provinces, clearly illustrates our resolve to provide what Professors Joseph Farrell and Ernesto Schiefelbein term in their longitudinal study of young people in Chile, call the “**equality and equity of access, as well as the equality and equity of outcomes**” for all Chilean learners, irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds. After-all even, our noble Constitution, the UNESCO SDG 4, the *Continental Education Strategy for Africa on the African Agenda 2063*, the

NDP – Vision 2030, and our *Action Plan 2021* enjoin us to address the six cardinal social justice principles of **access, redress, equity, efficiency, inclusivity** and **quality** of learning outcomes in our system.

Provincial level performance

Programme Director, the 2021 NSC examination results show that **only one province** achieved **lower than the 70% pass rate**; **five** (5) provinces performed above the **70% pass rate**; and **three** (3) provinces performed above the **80% pass rate**.

The achievements by province, are as follows –

- The Free State is the leading province at **85.7%**, an improvement of **0.6%** from 2020;
- Gauteng achieved at **82.8%**, a **1.0%** decline from 2020;
- Western Cape achieved **81.2%**, an improvement of **1.3%** from 2020;
- North West achieved at **78.2%**, an improvement of **2.0%** from 2020 – the third highest improvement;
- KwaZulu-Natal achieved at **76.8%**, a decline of **0.8%** from 2020;
- Mpumalanga achieved at **73.6%**, a **0.1%** decline from 2020;
- Eastern Cape achieved at **73.0%**, an improvement of **4.9%** from 2020 – the second highest improvement;
- Northern Cape achieved at **71.4%**, a **5.4%** improvement from 2020 – the highest improvement; and
- Limpopo achieved at **66.7%**, a **1.5%** decline from 2020.

District level performance

The NDP recognises *districts as a crucial interface of the Basic Education Sector in identifying best practice, sharing information, and providing support to schools*. The continued growth in the performance of districts, is closely monitored and evaluated by both the provincial and national Basic Education departments. From the monitoring oversight, analyses of the performance of all schools, be they fee-paying, “no fee” or

Government-subsidised independent schools whose learners write the NSC examinations, special schools, and schools of skills, will be done and made available to districts. This will assist and enable districts to reprioritise their intervention programmes.

In 2021 NSC exams –

- **two (2)** districts – (both in Limpopo) attained pass rates lower than **60%**;
- **ten (10)** districts (**4** in Limpopo, **3** in the Eastern Cape and **3** in the Northern Cape) performed **between 60% and 69.9%**;
- **thirty seven (37)** districts (**9** in the Eastern Cape, **4** in Gauteng, **10** in KwaZulu-Natal, **4** in Limpopo, **4** in Mpumalanga, **3** in the North West, **1** in the Northern Cape, and **2** in the Western Cape) performed **between 70% and 79%**; and
- **Twenty-six (26)** districts (all **5** districts in the Free State, **11** districts in Gauteng, **2** in KwaZulu-Natal, **1** in the North West, **1** in Northern Cape and **6** in the Western Cape), performed at **80% and above**.

The **top ten (10)** district level performances in the country in the descending order, are –

- **First**, is Tshwane South from Gauteng with **89.3%**;
- **Second**, is Motheo in the Free State with **87.9%**;
- **Third**, is Fezile Dabi in the Free State, with **87.5%**;
- **Fourth**, is Johannesburg West in Gauteng, with **86.5%**;
- Tied in the **fifth** place, are Ekurhuleni South in Gauteng and Metro North in the Western Cape, with **86.2%**;
- **Seventh**, is Lejweleputswa in the Free State with **85.6%**;
- **Eighth**, is Xhariep in the Free State, with **85.5%**;
- **Ninth**, is Johannesburg North in Gauteng with **84.9%**;
- **Tenth**, is Eden and Central Karoo in the Western Cape, with **84.4%**;

It is important to observe that among the 75 education districts in our country, the **top ten** (10) districts are in **three** (3) provinces – **four** (4) each from the Free State and Gauteng; and **two** (2) from the Western Cape. More impressively, **all of the top ten** districts, performed **above 84%**.

The **top district level performances** in the respective provinces, are as follows –

- In the Eastern Cape, the leading district is Buffalo City at **79.0%**; and is ranked **32nd** nationally. Siyabulela tat'uMabece;
- In the Free State, the leading district is Motheo at **87.9%**; and is ranked **2nd** nationally. Ms Moloi kea leboga;
- In Gauteng, Tshwane South is the leading district at **89.3%**; and is also ranked **1st** nationally. Many thanks to Mrs Galego;
- Ugu, is the leading district in KwaZulu-Natal, with **80.4%**; and is ranked **23rd** nationally. Siyabonga malume Sibiya;
- Capricorn South is the leading district in Limpopo at **73.8%**; and is ranked **51st** nationally. Ms Nkuzana, re ya leboha sesi;
- Ehlanzeni is the leading district in Mpumalanga, with **75.6%**; and is ranked **43rd** nationally. MaBrukwe, siyabonga;
- Bojanala Platinum, is the leading district in the North West, with **81.6%**; and is ranked **18th** nationally. Thank you Mrs Paledi;
- Namaqua, is the leading district in the Northern Cape, with **81.2%**; and is ranked **20th** nationally. Baie dankie Meneer Cloete;
- In the Western Cape, the Metro North is the leading district, with **86.2%**; and is ranked **5th** nationally. Ms Horn, congratulations.

I am looking forward to our next district meeting, where we share best practices, information, and experiences. District Directors are the closest to our schools and our children. Thank you very much!!

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the system has begun to reach the desired stability; which is healthy for a large system, as large and

important as ours. The unquestionable resilience our school community has shown against such a devastating pandemic; cannot go by unnoticed. The fact that we managed to enrol the highest number of full-time candidates for the 2021 NSC exams, is a clear sign that our communities have faith in the Basic Education system, and the NSC exams we are coordinating. What South Africa may not know, is the reality that the majority of our independent schools, prefer to write our NSC examinations, rather than those offered by independent examinations bodies. This is a great story to tell!!!

The high quality passes we have achieved this year, especially the number of Bachelor and Diploma passes, the overall pass mark, and the passes with distinctions, even in critical subjects, are the hallmarks of the performance of the Class of 2021. The Classes of 2020 and 2021 produced the best results of quality in the history of the NSC exams. We are of the strong view that, had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic, these two Classes could have been the best performers, since the inception of the NSC exams. We are indeed proud of the Classes of 2020 and 2021, which persevered against such monumental challenges that our system was never exposed to in the past. These two Classes, have characterised the resilience of the system, which withstood an unprecedented test of administering an examination of the largest number of candidates; faced by the worst pandemic in human history.

We will continue expend our energies on our Sector priorities. We must continue with the *consolidation of programmes for ECD; we must ramp up the performance in all the four phases of our schooling system; we must continue to improve the reading proficiency of our learners; we must work harder, but smarter with all our partners to consolidate the gains we have made in the Skills Revolution through the Three-Stream Curriculum Model and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, amongst others; and we must continue to strengthen the assessment regime in all four Phases of the system.*

In celebrating the great achievements of the Class of 2021, we must thank the principals, teachers, support staff, and parents for the work they continue to do. Schools are at the coalface of Basic Education delivery.

What you do at the school level, is what matters the most. The future of our learners, and the prosperity of our nation, is in your hands. We applaud you for the great work you continue to do on a daily basis.

I must thank His Excellency, President Cyril Ramaphosa and Cabinet, the Portfolio and Select Committees responsible for Basic Education, my partner, the Honourable Deputy Minister – Dr Reginah Mhaule, the Honourable MECs responsible for Basic Education and their respective Heads of Departments for their stewardship, their leadership and their continued advice and support. I must thank the Director-General and his team of selfless officials for the hard work they continue to provide.

I also wish to thank our strategic partners – teacher unions; governing body associations; our business partners; the NECT; our statutory bodies – Umalusi and SACE; researchers, whose work we cannot do without; our sister departments; South Africans, who together with us, have made the stability and the improvement of our Sector their responsibility. We also wish to thank MTN for sponsoring this event; as well as the SABC for hosting us once again. Let me end by saying, the Governing Party was correct in declaring education a societal matter. All hands must be on deck, as the Class of 2022 may face three consecutive years of hardship, brought on us by the pandemic of COVID-19 and its variants. We therefore, encourage our 12-17 year-old learners to vaccinate; but do so, with parental consent. We also encourage our educators and support staff to get the booster shots. This is the best way we can protect our school communities from COVID-19 and its variants.

Once again, let me conclude by thanking the Class of 2021. Your future is in the palm of your hands; make the correct choices. Those candidates who did not do well in the NSC exams, do not despair. There are lots of life chances available. Those who wish to improve their results, should enrol for the Second Chance Matric Programme. Registration into the Programme, is already open, and will close on 15 February 2022. You will receive support from the DBE and our partners; you won't be left to your own vices. I wish you all the best in your youthful lives!!

I thank you