



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ministerial Opening Address by Basic Education Minister of South Africa, at the 2024 Basic Education Sector Lekgotla held at Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo Conference Centre

14-16 March 2024

Programme Director,

Ministers and Deputy Ministers,

MECs and HoDs,

Members of National and Provincial Legislatures,

Representatives of Political Parties,

Representatives of Teacher Unions,

Representatives of SGB Associations, Higher Education Institutions, Education Organisations, and Civil Society,

Representatives of Business,

Our Sponsors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning,

Good Morning, Sanibonani, Molweni,

It is with great honour and a sense of profound responsibility that I stand before you today, at the cusp of this significant occasion—the 2024 Basic Education Sector Lekgotla.

As we convene under the theme of revitalising and revolutionising the trajectory of basic education in our beloved country, we mark not only the continuation of our collective journey but also the pioneering strides towards educational excellence in a new era.

Ladies and gentlemen, today, I want to focus on a crucial truth: long-term improvements in Grade 12 results depend heavily on what happens at the primary level.

Interpreting data from primary education assessments like SACMEQ (Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) can be more challenging than analysing TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) results for Grade 9. This is partly due to statistical adjustments.

However, both assessments paint a similar picture. Prior to the pandemic, primary education witnessed improvements comparable to those seen in TIMSS.

For example, SACMEQ data shows a rise in Grade 6 mathematics of 0.06 standard deviations per year between 2007 and 2013, while TIMSS recorded a 0.07 standard deviation increase in Grade 9 mathematics from 2002 to 2019.

Similarly, PIRLS data (adjusted as detailed in the Action Plan to 2024) indicates a 0.07 standard deviation annual improvement in Grade 4 reading from 2006 to 2016. Evaluating progress in terms of standard deviations allows for approximate comparisons across different testing programs.

It's important to clarify a misconception sometimes portrayed in the media. While roughly 80% of South African learners did not reach the low international PIRLS benchmark in both 2016 and 2021, this doesn't imply complete illiteracy.

The PIRLS benchmark sets a high standard for the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Nonetheless, learners who fall below it possess varying degrees of reading ability.

As highlighted in the Action Plan to 2024, 93% of PIRLS 2016 participants answered at least one constructed response question correctly, demonstrating basic comprehension skills.

The limited number of developing countries participating in PIRLS and TIMSS makes it challenging to compare South Africa's performance directly against that of other developing nations as a whole.

However, a comparison to Morocco in these assessments at the primary level proves instructive. Both countries saw significant improvements before 2020, with Morocco being roughly five years ahead of South Africa in reading skills based on PIRLS data.

Disappointingly, the 2015 to 2019 TIMSS Grade 4 mathematics trend showed no improvement. This predates the pandemic and requires further investigation. A potential explanation could be budgetary constraints leading to increased learner-educator ratios and larger class sizes.

New Systemic Evaluation

May 2023 marked the release of the first results from the new Systemic Evaluation, a sample-based national assessment programme. Designed to

measure South Africa's progress against SDG benchmarks, this programme provides comparable results across Grades 3, 6, and 9.

Programme Director, the year 2024 is set to be significant, with the release of results from various international assessments scheduled. These assessments serve as crucial barometers of our progress, highlighting our successes and identifying areas requiring concerted effort and innovation.

For instance, our participation in the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) has been instrumental in shedding light on the dynamics and challenges our educators face. The forthcoming main study in 2024, building on the field trials conducted in 2023, promises to offer invaluable insights into improving teaching methodologies and learning environments across our schools.

Similarly, the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SEACMEQ) V study, encompassing nearly 7000 learners across a sample of 314 schools, is poised to provide a comprehensive analysis of educational outcomes in the region. The eagerly anticipated results, set for release this year, will undoubtedly inform our strategies for enhancing learner achievement.

Moreover, our ongoing engagement with the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) continues illuminating the pathways to excellence in these fundamental areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as we deliberate on the future of basic education in South Africa, let us anchor our discussions in the rich data and insights gleaned from these international and regional assessments.

Let us forge a unified vision that not only aims to transcend the benchmarks set by the global community but also ensures that every South African learner is endowed with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

In this era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, our mission extends beyond the traditional confines of basic education. We are tasked with preparing our learners not just for today's jobs but for tomorrow's realities—where critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability are paramount.

Thus, as we embark on this Lekgotla, I urge each one of you to engage in these discussions with an open heart and a visionary mind.

Together, we must sculpt a future for South African education rooted in equity, efficiency, quality, inclusivity and sustainability.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to introduce to you His Excellency, President of the Republic, Mr Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa.

President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa was born on the 17th of November 1952 in Johannesburg.

President Ramaphosa holds a law degree from the University of South Africa. He has received several honorary doctorates from local and international universities. He received the Olof Palme prize in Stockholm in 1987.

Political involvement

The President was detained in 1974 for organising pro-Frelimo rallies to celebrate Mozambique's independence. He was imprisoned for the second time in 1976 following the Soweto student Uprising.

He became the first general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers in 1982.

In 1991, he was elected as the African National Congress (ANC) Secretary General and subsequently became head of the ANC team that negotiated the transition to democracy.

Following the country's first democratic elections in 1994, he was elected chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly, which wrote South Africa's new democratic constitution.

He moved into the private sector in 1996, and in 2001, he founded Shanduka Group, a diversified investment holding company. He resigned from Shanduka in 2012 following his appointment as Deputy President of South Africa.

In December 2012, he was elected Deputy President of the governing party, the African National Congress (ANC).

In December 2017, he was elected President at the ANC's 54th Elective Conference.

On the 15th of February 2018, he was sworn in as the fifth democratically elected President of the Republic.

On the 8th of May 2019, the African National Congress led by President Ramaphosa won 57.50% of the vote in the 2019 South African general election.

Subsequently, he was elected unopposed to his first full term as President by the National Assembly on the 22nd of May 2019.

In December 2022, he was re-elected as President of the ANC.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the son of the soil, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa, the Honourable President of the Republic.

I thank you.