



**SPEECH BY**  
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**AFRICA**

**DISTRICT DIRECTORS MEETING**

**FRIDAY, 11 OCTOBER 2024**

Programme Director,  
Deputy Minister, Dr Reginah Mhaule  
Director General, Mr Mweliso and his leadership team  
District Directors,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning,

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to this meeting. I am particularly excited because this is my first District Directors' Meeting, and I view it as a vital platform to connect with the pulse of our education system. You are the front line of our efforts, and your insights are invaluable in helping us understand the successes and challenges of education delivery at the district level.

As we gather today, it is clear that we stand on the cusp of both exciting opportunities and significant challenges. First, I would like to reflect on the headwinds of change that bode well for the education sector.

One of the most encouraging developments has been the stability brought about by the Government of National Unity (GNU). When many feared that a lack of an outright winner in the last election would lead to political chaos, South Africa defied expectations. We came together—ten political parties joined forces to form a united government. This stability is critical not only for governance but also for the future of our education system. In a world increasingly defined by uncertainty, this moment of unity offers us a solid foundation to build upon.

Another transformative factor is the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI has the potential to revolutionize the way we teach and how learners engage with educational content. The Department of Basic Education has already begun integrating AI-driven technologies, including coding and robotics, into the curriculum. It is crucial that our curriculum reflects the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, as we integrate technology into education, we

must not neglect critical thinking, creativity and problem solving as core to our education agenda.

Our education must be relevant to the learners' futures and prepare them for the globalized digital world. These steps are crucial for preparing our learners for a future where digital literacy will be as fundamental as reading and writing.

Furthermore, I cannot stress enough the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in improving literacy and numeracy levels. Now that ECD has been moved under the Department of Basic Education, we are better positioned to formalize and professionalize the sector. Our goal is to provide every child with the foundation they need to excel throughout their educational journey.

However, we also face considerable headwinds that present challenges to the sector. One of the most distressing issues is the rise of protection rackets. These criminal groups are extorting money from schools, threatening the safety of our educators and learners. We must work closely with law enforcement to address this issue, as safety is fundamental to any effective learning environment.

Another challenge we must tackle is the cost of making Grade R compulsory. While this initiative will significantly benefit early learning, the financial implications are substantial. It will require us to invest in infrastructure, teacher training, and learning materials to meet the growing demand.

Additionally, the impact of climate change on our schools cannot be ignored. Severe weather events like the floods and tornadoes in KwaZulu-Natal have caused significant damage to schools. This is a challenge that will only grow in the coming years, and we must ensure that our infrastructure is resilient enough to withstand these disruptions.

Despite these challenges, there is much to celebrate when we look at the achievements of the past year. Let me highlight just a few:

- We achieved an 82% pass rate in the 2023 National Senior Certificate—the highest since the dawn of democracy. This is a testament to the hard work of our learners, teachers, and administrators.
- We also successfully conducted the School Governing Bodies (SGB) elections, ensuring that communities continue to play a critical role in the governance of their schools.
- There have been significant strides in the implementation of Mother Tongue Bilingual Based Education, which is crucial for improving educational outcomes, particularly in early grades.
- Lastly, our focus on improving Reading and Mathematics remains at the forefront of our strategy to ensure that we build a solid foundation for all learners.

As we move forward, I look to all of you, the District Directors, to continue playing a pivotal role in realizing these goals. Together, we can ensure that our education system not only survives but thrives, even in the face of the challenges ahead.

Thank you for your dedication, and I look forward to our continued work together in shaping the future of education in South Africa.