



**basic education**

Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **Remarks by the Minister for Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, MP, at the Districts Conference held at Coastlands Hotel, Durban**

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Programme Director

Deputy Minister

Members of the Executive Councils for Education

Heads of Provincial Education Departments

Senior Officials from the Provinces and Basic Education Department

Ladies and Gentlemen

Fellow South Africans

I am truly honoured to add my two cents worth on the evolution of the post-Covid-19 basic education reform agenda.

Perhaps it is apt to repeat my message about the role and place of education districts in our current basic education model.

Education district offices have a pivotal role in ensuring that all learners have access to basic education of progressively high quality in a safe and conducive learning environment.

The district directors are the crucial link between various parts of the basic education ecosystem by design.

Before diving into the basic education reform agenda, I must applaud district directors, principals, and teachers for holding the fort under highly challenging conditions in the past two years.

As a country, we are indebted to you all, including our stakeholders and corporate sector.

Despite the Covid-19 induced challenges, the sector held many credible National Senior Certificate (NSC) Examinations against the advice of doomsayers who were calling for the total closure of public schools.

We collectively navigated the uncharted territory and emerged victoriously, bruised, yes, but stronger together.

Your dedication to the national cause of educating the nation won't go unnoticed; some of you later tonight will walk away with silverware as a token of appreciation for your hard work.

Programme director, history tells us that basic education reforms and curriculum transformation have been a priority of the ANC-led government since the dawn of freedom in 1994.

The basic education reforms must respond unambiguously to the clarion call of the Freedom Charter, which turns 67 years this year: that doors of learning and culture must be opened.

Since we delivered on the function shift of the Early Childhood Development responsibility from Social Development to Basic Education, we can add that the doors of learning must open for all from birth until they complete the compulsory part of their secondary education.

Let's not be bogged down by the diagnosis of the failings of the basic education system.

As South Africans, we are the masters of diagnostics.

We are miles ahead of our peers in producing policy tomes that gather dust in file 13.

To paraphrase German philosopher Karl Marx, educationists in SA have only interpreted the basic education world in various ways, but "The point is to change it."

As today's basic education mandarins, we are at the coalface of driving basic education reforms agenda, not our critics.

Thus, this current round of basic education reform agenda must move from a premise that the topography of basic education today is markedly different from what obtained on the ground in 67 and 28 years, respectively.

In the back of our minds, we must be mindful that basic education is critical to the success of the democratic project.

Most importantly, basic education must advance the notion of a nation-state and advance and protect our sovereignty.

By its very nature, public schooling seeks to right the wrongs of the past.

If it doesn't free up the potential of the post-1994 kids, then we are just keeping them busy while their parents are at work.

We must use the power of basic education to bridge the gap between urban and rural, information-rich and information poor, black and white, men and women, and finally between rich and poor.

In other words, this cohort of education managers must deliver on the promise of our forebears to use basic education as a tool for redress and advance the notion of social justice.

We must look at critical transformative tools such as access to schooling amongst poor households and quality education provided to rural and impoverished neighbourhoods.

We must improve our governance model and look at curriculum design, teacher deployment, and teacher training.

While I am not advocating for wholesale curriculum changes, there's a scope for reforms to answer the questions that Covid-19 posed on basic education systems worldwide.

There is a need for collaborative research relating to the post-2024 curriculum statement modernisation and its implementation.

Based on the international practices and literature, there is a need to accurately determine the most appropriate curriculum approach given the changing topography of the sector post-Covid-19.

We must envisage the development of a South African Competency-Based Curriculum Framework that addresses the unique South African context.

As public schooling advocates, programme director, we are not the training mill for the industry; hence, we must think about how to use basic education curriculum reforms for social cohesion.

Rewriting our history books and curriculum is a good start.

The key talking point today is the impact of Covid-19 on schooling, pedagogy, and the role of Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) in curriculum delivery and school management.

Covid-19 indeed altered the basic education landscape irrevocably.

We must prepare the sector for transition to ICTs led basic education delivery as announced by the President, His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa, in his 2019 State of the Nation Address.

Every school child in South Africa must be supplied with digital workbooks and textbooks on a tablet device by 2024.

Our learners must be able to read for meaning by their tenth birthday.

All children must thrive by five, meeting all developmental milestones.

Programme director, the elephant in the room, remains poor learning outcomes, social ills that negatively impact schooling delivery, and high dropout rates.

There will be no point in rebooting the system if we do not confront the low uptake and throughput in STEM subjects, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

Let us be honest and ask the question; what is the role of mother tongue education in the changing landscape of basic education amid poor learning outcomes by second English language learners?

There is an urgent need to constructively address the language in education policy, which currently limits the language of learning and teaching to English and Afrikaans.

Our policy lodestar, the National Development Plan, tags mother tongue teaching as integral to basic education to achieve improved learner outcomes in Mathematics, Science and Technology.

In the Eastern Cape, the ‘Home of the Legends’, it all began in 2010 when the Language in Education Policy Unit was established.

They were mandated to develop African languages as languages of learning and teaching 'LOLTs' and teaching Mathematics, Science and Technology.

The target languages that were set for an upgrade were isiXhosa and Sesotho.

Epistemological access to the curriculum remains the driving principle behind this Mother Tongue based Bilingual Education programme.

It obviously aims to widen access to conceptual understanding of a subject matter such as Mathematics, Science and Technology.

Thus far, it is the only department in the country to have piloted and implemented incrementally the Mother Tongue based Bilingual Education (MTbBE) strategy for Mathematics and Natural Science and Technology since 2012.

We must strike while the iron is hot and commission a full scale extended research on the language issue and what will be the most appropriate policy relating to the language of learning and teaching.

We are no longer asking whether it is possible to teach in the tongue mother language beyond primary school years.



We are no longer in the business of pontification, but we need practical implementation strategies taking into account the needs of each province.

The move to Bilingual Mother Tongue Based Instruction has implications for teacher resources, learning support materials and classroom organisations.

Hence, research in this area is critical given that if learners are allowed to learn in their mother tongue post Grade 3, this will improve the learning outcomes, as the results in the Eastern Cape show.

My view is that the lessons learnt from the Eastern Cape Mother Language Education Programme are sufficient reasons to agitate for the national rollout today, not in the distant future.

Having said that, I don't think we need a ministerial task team to develop a new curriculum statement.

We do not need another version of the Action Plan to 2019 Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030.

Instead, our reform agenda must be informed by what former President Nelson Mandela called the power of education to extend beyond the development of skills we need for economic success.

In his address to the Presidential and Premier Education Awards on 22 November 1997, Mandela said: “That basic education can contribute to nation-building and reconciliation.”

He stated that our previous system emphasised the physical and other differences of South Africans with devastating effects.

Furthermore, he argued that we are steadily but surely introducing education that enables our children to exploit their similarities and common goals while appreciating the strength of their diversity.

Only public schooling can offer such education as we are not the training mill for commerce and industry.

We, the basic education mandarins, must lead society in the current matter of rising tensions between locals and foreign nationals.

We must close the space taken up by demigods and political gangsters seeking public office by means both foul and unfair.

Thus, I propose that we formulate a post-Covid-19 social compact that defines the objectives of basic education schooling in our homeland.

We must seek to produce a basic education delivery model.

The model must take into account the new learner we have today.

Teaching aids must speak to the new teacher we have today.

We need a new Resource Allocation Model for school funding that ploughs resources where there's a need for redress to achieve the social justice agenda.

The character and attributes of a basic education delivery model we seek to build must produce learners' fit-for-purpose and attuned to the needs and complexities of the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution and beyond.

In the post-Covid-19 policy reform agenda, training and capacity must take centre stage for all in the sector.

Our teachers and education managers must understand the changing nature of the basic education landscape and the need to adapt or die.

Programme director, the bugbear of the sector remains the dire state of school infrastructure in townships and rural areas.

We need reliable data on the current state of school infrastructure.

We must eradicate infrastructure backlogs relating to inappropriate structures, sanitation and water supply.

We must eradicate pit latrine toilets.

We need to repair schools damaged by storms and vandals promptly.

Yet, the current implementation mechanism is not delivering the results we require.

We need to consider an alternative approach to the delivery of school infrastructure.

The current procurement process is prolonged and cumbersome.

In conclusion, I hope this conference has already achieved what Mao described as the proverbial hundred flowers blooming and a hundred schools of thought contending.

In my book, robust engagement in the basic education sector must be its zeitgeist.

I am looking forward to reading the final report.

Let's continue to lead the basic education sector in launching a final assault on Covid-19 by taking up vaccine boosters.

Let's choose life.

#I choose the Covid-19 vaccination.

I thank you.

Ngiyabonga!