



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Remarks by the Minister for Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, MP, at the Joe Gqabi district improvement indaba held at Barkly East High school, Eastern Cape

21 July 2022

Programme Director

District Director Dr. M.B. Mceleli

Principals

SMT members and Educators

Ladies and Gentlemen

Fellow South Africans

It gives me pleasure to speak to the basic education mandarins here in the Joe Gqabi district.

I am certain that Comrade Joe Gqabi is smiling beyond the clouds when we meet not to apportion blame, mourn or throw insults at each other but to focus on the basic education of our people.

Gqabi would be proud of the current cohort of principals and district managers who, against all odds, continue to offer basic education to our children in a resource-constrained environment.

The aphorism rest in POWER means that our forebears, like the ANC stalwart Gqabi, can only rest well once the demands of the people for a Better Life are met by us.

Our people made one demand clear: The doors of learning must be opened. Our seminal document, the Freedom Charter, doesn't say these doors must happen only for the children of Gqeberha, Sandton or Pretoria.

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

I know we keep harping on this point that education districts are the glue that holds the basic education sector together.

Our districts are more like a pivot upon which to bid for higher academic achievement, improved learning outcomes, overall education coordination and resource allocation.

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.

Programme director, we couldn't have chosen a better month to have this Joe Gqabi district education improvement indaba.

Interestingly, we met a few days after the world celebrated former President Nelson Mandela's birthday. As we know, Mandela comes from this province, home of legends.

He dedicated all his life to the betterment of the lives of children.

Despite our eternal gratitude to him through platitudes and statuettes, we can only repay him in full by improving our children's lives.

We must do so by ensuring that we don't have a repeat of the Enyobeni tavern tragedy, where school going children perished before their prime.

Madiba believed in the unique power of basic education to change people's fortunes, from prisoner to president, from miner to minister of minerals resources, and from domestic worker to nurse etc.

It is no cliché to say by paraphrasing Madiba that basic education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world - by strengthening the levers of democracy and promoting civic duty.

Put differently, basic education maketh a nation. It contributes to the nation's well-being, economic prospects and the rule of law on which our Constitution is founded.

Our responsibility as basic education bureaucrats in 2022 is to write **civil** in bold to the nomenclature civil servants.

We must never forget that we are here to serve, not to be served.

Our role isn't just to improve learning outcomes, which are essential but to build a nation and contribute to job creation, peace-building and economic development.

We gather here for two reasons: to congratulate you as district officials and principals for reclaiming past glory and to seek innovative ways to reach the milestone of 75 per cent in the district matric results.

I must reaffirm that your dedication to the national cause of educating the nation won't go unnoticed.

As leaders in your own right, you know the daunting task that awaits you every day as you navigate managing basic education in a scarce resource environment.

For that, we owe you a debt of gratitude for not abandoning this Joe Gqabi district ship.

In the recent National Senior Certificate examination results, this rural village beset by learner overcrowding and teacher shortages achieved a 69, 2 percentage pass, a significant improvement from a meagre 61, 5 percentage point in 2020.

Obviously, we would all hanker for the pre-Covid achievement of 76, 4 percentage points.

In his wisdom, I am told that the district director is gunning for a 75 per cent pass rate across the district.

However, we must do things differently for this district to reach new heights.

We have to deal with overcrowding. The latest report shows that this district requires at least 500 desks and 20 additional classrooms.

In this regard, earlier this year, I initiated a Special Intervention Programme (SIPOS) to alleviate the classroom and furniture shortage leading to overcrowding in schools.

The Special Intervention programme aims to ensure the complete return to daily attendance and implement the sector's recovery plan after two years of school learning losses due to Covid-19.

I urge district management to liaise with Basic Education in Pretoria to add this district to the schools needing urgent attention.

We have to find a way to deal with legacy issues such as schools damaged through fires, storms and vandalism.

I again appeal to the principals and the district management to compile a list with pictures of all damaged schools; perhaps we can draw from the present disaster funds or approach the national Treasury.

It is a basic human right for our teachers and learners to enjoy the same level of infrastructure here as they do in urban settings.

As we say, South Africa is a single country bonded by a world-renowned Constitution that promises equality of rights and opportunities.

Programme director, I am pleased that our game-changer programme, the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) Initiative, is gaining momentum.

It is a pity that we are still building augmented modern toilets, more like pit latrines that went to the private school.

We do so because of challenges beyond our control. The biggest problem in this political district is the lack of bulk water supply despite overflowing rivers and the uMzimvubu dam.

We must also devise teacher retention strategies as the best educators prefer an urban environment with modern flushing ablution facilities.

Some teachers are lured by the bright lights of the cities that are a pretty sight to see.

Of course, we can't blame them. I also like the middle-class comforts offered by urban living.

I urge all trained teachers to look to this district as a beacon of hope, remembering first that teaching is a calling before becoming a profession.

The role of a teacher is to help learners learn by imparting knowledge to them and setting up a situation in which students can and will learn effectively.

In other words, teachers are torchbearers of the society.

There's nothing in the role of the teacher where it says that the local infrastructure of the village where the school is located must be *lit* as am2000 would say.

Having said that, Programme Director, it could alleviate the pressure if we get local children to train as teachers through the Funza Lushaka Bursary.

We do so on one condition that they come back to fill vacancies left by the city people in this district of legends.

Over and above, in the short term, we must improve the working conditions of the existing cohort of teachers.

For instance, there's no reason why we can build district offices in the next financial year.

It is beyond me why district functionaries can't have the same tools of the trade, such as reliable Wi-Fi, modern photocopying machines and dependable transport.

In his wise words Joseph Kizerbo former Minister of Education in Burkina Faso, said: "The school in many underdevelopment countries is a reflection and a fruit of the surrounding underdevelopment, from which arises its deficiency, its quantitative and qualitative poverty."

Kizerbo argued that little by little, there lies the grave risk; the school in these underdeveloped countries risks becoming, in turn, a factor of underdevelopment.

This is true if one considers the challenges facing this district. Yet we must refuse to let our schools here become the hodge-podge of underdevelopment, reflecting an uncaring employer and political head.

Although I am miles away, I am here to support you as your political head, a mother and a citizen.

It pains me to know that our learners don't have many options here for both post-matric schooling. We need a champion in this district for post-schooling opportunities for our learners.

It is really unjust that the nearest university is 400 to 600 kilometres away.

I am advised that the current district director would like to volunteer his services and ensure that this district gets a satellite TVET college to offer agricultural science at the very least.

We suggest agricultural science because this area is ripe for an agrarian revolution.

There's an abundance of vacant land and an urgent need to improve the employment prospects of young people here. Not to mention increasing food production for the school nutrition scheme and food security in general.

On our side, we need to capacitate the agricultural schools in this district. Our Rural Education directorate at the national level must visit agricultural schools here to see what intervention can be made.

Let's work without ceasing to ensure we have a whole government approach to the problems facing this educational district.

The time to work in silos is long gone. I will speak to the district champion regarding the District Development Model (DMM) to ensure that government work is integrated.

Under the DMM, all three spheres of government coordinate and integrate development plans and budgets and mobilise the capacity and resources beyond government in pursuit of inclusive growth and job creation.

We must ready this district for transition to ICTs-led basic education delivery as announced by the President, His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa.

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

Our learners here in this district must be able to read for meaning by their tenth birthday.

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

All learners should be able to count from 1 to 10 by four years old.

I insist that if our basic education doesn't free up the potential of the post-1994 children, then we are just keeping them busy while their parents are out hustling.

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 such as this area.

In conclusion, 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.