



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OPENING AND WELCOME REMARKS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION, DR REGINAH MHAULE, AT THE DISTRICT CONFERENCE: RECALIBRATING THE EDUCATION REFORM LENS, COASTLANDS HOTEL, UMHLANGA

06 APRIL 2022

Minister Motshekga who will be joining this conference later today.

MECs – Boshielo, Monakali, and also expected, Mshengu.

The Director General, Mr Mveli

The NECT Trustees: Mr Manuel and Mr Dolopi,

Chief Executive Officer and staff of the NECT.

Chief Executive Officer of SACE and Umalusi

The Provincial Heads of Department

Leadership and Representatives of the our Sector Unions

Leadership and representatives from the Universities

Leadership and representatives of Civil society organisations

DDGs, Chief Directors, Directors and Chief Education Specialists from the DBE and Provinces.

District Directors, Circuit Managers and Subject Advisors

Principals and

Teachers

Sanibonani, committed educationists and officials who have seen this sector through the challenging two-year pandemic. I would like to take the opportunity to recognise all of you and thank you for joining the conference.

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you all to this prestigious Education Districts Conference which has brought together great minds of educationists and experts at all levels of our education system, as well as our partners in the Teacher Unions, Civil Society Organisations, and Academia, to talk about priority issues that we need to address as we continue with our Education Reform Agenda.

This Conference is convened under the theme **‘Recalibrating the Education Reform Lens’**, was initiated as a result of the NECT Trustee’s decision to embark on a stakeholder engagement and consultative process that will allow focussed reflection on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on our education system, recovery of curriculum, as we reboot and recover the system, while staying on course with our reform agenda post Covid-19 pandemic.

Much has been said in the past couple of months about the depth of the impact COVID19 has had on learning and teaching. Especially, the loss of instructional time, learning losses and lost learning opportunities. We are glad that all our learners are back in schools, fulltime, in all grades. As we maintained, rebooting the system was the precondition for the recovery and rebuilding of our education system. What is required now, and going forward, are focused and well-coordinated recovery programmes.

The role of District has been a serious discussion since the dawn of our democracy. The first and memorable conference in 1999 – which addressed both issues of policy and practice. Essentially it addressed the ever important question of organisational configuration, which in the past half a century revolved around the extent of the decentralisation of public service provision.

This discussion was taken further at the conference of the Governing Party in 2007. During these two important historical points, South Africa confirmed the importance of districts among the other tiers of government. In 2012, the NDP again took this commitment further and pronounced that “districts had the responsibility to provide targeted support to improve teaching in schools, ensuring district specific support coupled with increased communication and information sharing, undergirded by the requisite skills and capabilities.”

The tall but necessary culminated in the promulgation of the policy on Organisation, Roles and Responsibilities of districts in 2013 was welcomed by all and the policy is being implemented in all the provinces. Part of the implementation has been the realignment of the education districts with the municipal districts, as well as adjusting the shape and sizes of our own districts.

The adjustments on the shapes and sizes of the districts has necessitated a revision of the norms and standards for post-provisioning in 2018. Notably, the implementation of the policy has led to a steady increase in the number of subject advisors in the system. This development in education is consistent with the Presidential district development model that was adopted by cabinet in 2019. Central to this model is the integration of planning and spending across the three spheres of government. It goes without saying that the successful implementation of the district model requires ongoing reflections and evidence on how well its various aspects work.

This district conference satisfies those requirements: reflection and a commitment to discover new ways of coordinating, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of education policy. It is effectively educational districts that employ the largest number of public sector employees, oversee a significant infrastructure resources. Without strong and effective districts, there is no sustainable macro-development of the nation. It is also the districts that will carry out the important task of coordinating

the response to the Covid-19 set-backs in education. It is therefore, necessary that we as a sector better prepare the districts for this all-time unique challenge.

The district management discourse needs strengthening from all angles, including the recruitment and selection of staff- from schools to the district offices; reconfiguration of districts in order to do away with the silo operational patterns. It is the layer of the system that requires specific professionalisation initiative. It is a level that requires more dedicated research, systems and capabilities development. The universities should grow their appetite and capacity on the district management discourse.

As we move towards the 10-year anniversary of the policy on districts, we need to show tangible evidence of what we have achieved in building a sustainable implementation capacity at this level. Clear set of priority approaches and strategies that work must be consolidated from across the various district cases of good practice. Again, this district conference is another plank in the build up to the 10-year anniversary.

Delegates, we are truly grateful to all of you for having spared time to come and contribute your ideas to this Conference. We trust that you will actively participate in the deliberations towards realisation of the objectives of the conference. As we deliberate on where we go from here (post the COVID19 disruptions), we should not lose sight of the critical roles played by our partners in the labour, business and civil society sectors pre and during the pandemic.

Let us bring them along this journey of Recovery and Building Back Better.

We are building back better together.

I wish you a successful conference and trust that your contributions will help us take our country forward.

Ngiyabonga