basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, at the SADTU NGC held at the Emperor's Palace –Kempton Park, Gauteng

4th October 2022

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Comrades and Compatriots

Distinguished Guests

It is my great honour and privilege to be here today to address the SADTU National General Council (NGC) session.

It is a privilege that I don't take for granted.

SADTU is a revolutionary union that prides itself on fighting for the underdogs, including the masses of our people, the poor, unemployed and unskilled.

As we know from the Congress movement, the NGC is a critical policy forum to seek solutions to the core mandate of SADTU to promote excellence in basic education.

Today, we meet in person for the first time since we rescinded all Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns.

Thus, I appeal for a moment of silence to honour teachers and school staff who succumbed to Covid-19 and other ailments.

They died like soldiers with their boots on. We remember them!

Moment of silence!!!

Comrade Chairperson, we meet here ahead of World Teachers' Day happening tomorrow.

The leadership of teachers in transforming education is the theme of this year's World Teachers' Day.

In short, it says the 'Transformation of Education Begins with Teachers.'

World Teachers' Day 2022 aims to highlight the work of teachers and call on governments to invest in teachers, involve teachers, and trust and respect teachers.

Cde Chairperson, the National Development Plan (NDP) instructs us to provide all learners with quality education, focussing on Literacy, Mathematics and Science.

The NDP sets the acceptable level of academic performance to be achieved by 2030.

It says at least 80% of learners must achieve mathematics and literacy at 50%.

As we know, literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy are the heartbeats of basic education.

Since 2019, there's been a renewed focus on reading with the launch of the National Reading Coalition and the subsequent rollout of the *Integrated National Reading Sector Plan.*

Just yesterday, the Deputy Minister of Basic Education launched the provincial-specific *Eastern Cape Reading Strategy and Campaign*, following in the footsteps of KwaZulu-Natal a year ago.

I urge the NGC to contribute to the ongoing momentum on reading to achieve 'reading for meaning' and 'reading with comprehension' by the child's tenth birthday, as required by the President.

Cde Chairperson, I have been asked to reflect on the pending curriculum reform initiative as part of the post-Covid-19 basic education social compact.

Two things define a well-functioning basic education system: teacher well-being and a dynamic curriculum.

Cde Chairperson, I invite SADTU to reflect on the need for curriculum reforms to serve our nation better, especially during the post-Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite improvements in learning outcomes in the past 10-15 years, the South African education system needs an urgent rejig to keep up with the changing times.

As we know, the 4th Industrial Revolution enjoins us to do the necessary refinements to our curriculum.

I must say that the CAPS curriculum has served the nation well; hence I am not calling for an overhaul but a refinement to meet the emerging needs and skills of the future.

Suppose we do not focus on curriculum reforms. In that case, we run the risk of our learners exiting the schooling system without the relevant skills and competencies to enable them to participate meaningfully in the economy.

The Covid-19 pandemic taught us the importance of a dynamic curriculum and resilient education system.

Thus, the pending curriculum reform initiative seeks to avoid a skills mismatch.

At the core of the curriculum reform project is to focus on the skills of the future, such as robotics and coding, from Grade R-9, to name a few.

We are ahead of schedule in introducing the Three Stream Model - vocationally and occupationally oriented subjects in the senior phase in Grades 10 – 12.

These subjects are currently being piloted in Grades 8 and 9.

As you know, we have finalised curriculum changes to introduce coding and robotics.

The enormous task facing us now is to prepare our teachers adequately.

We wish to acknowledge the contribution of our labour partners in offering teacher training in coding and robotics as part of the Teacher Union Collaboration (TUC) programme.

To intensify our efforts, we are currently embarking on strengthening our curriculum offerings, including introducing a competency-based curriculum.

Consultations with education stakeholders, including Labour, learners, teachers, school managers, civil society, the PSET sector, business and industry, is currently underway to inform a South African Competency framework.

The framework will identify the most appropriate competencies to infuse into our curriculum to equip our learners with competencies and skills for the future.

The curriculum strengthening will also include reviewing our current curriculum content to modernise and update subject content and modernise the subject disciplines on offer.

Furthermore, we seek to develop new subjects to actualise the new learning pathways in the FET band.

These will infuse cross-cutting themes such as entrepreneurship, digital literacy, climate change and citizenship into our curriculum.

Our curriculum strengthening efforts aim to equip learners with the knowledge and skills for a changing world.

We want them well prepared in our schools to quickly transition from school to work.

Cde Chairperson, we are also seized with reforming and re-purposing the school assessment regime.

These include the early identification of school readiness.

Since April 2022, Early Childhood Development has become a national priority.

We have developed an Early Learning National Assessment (ELNA) to better understand emerging literacy and numeracy skills among Grade 1 learners.

This will provide the sector with early warnings on interventions needed for learners to read for meaning and be numerically competent by age 10.

The programme is currently field tested in a nationally representative sample of schools.

By the end of 2022, national benchmarks for the programme will tell us how to better support learners in the foundation phase.

Cde Chairperson, we are getting closer to the new national assessment regime after discontinuing the Annual National Assessment (ANA).

We have developed a comprehensive contextual assessment framework.

Based on the framework, I am happy to announce that an independent service provider administered the first national systemic evaluation study in 2022.

This study has collected learner assessment data in Mathematics and languages in Grades 3, 6 and 9.

The results from the assessments will provide a comprehensive account of the status of learning outcomes at these critical endpoints in the different phases.

This will assist in improving and refining curriculum and assessment implementation and better understanding teacher and learner agency in Grades 3, 6 and 9.

We will use the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) to gather teacher and principal views on improving teaching conditions and teachers' critical role in mediating learning.

This will be in addition to the data from the Systemic Evaluation Study.

Cde Chairperson, we are getting closer to the long-awaited General Education Certificate (GEC) that will provide learners with quality holistic assessments for phase exit, not school.

We aim to deal decisively with quality and efficiency by implementing a standardised assessment to reduce failure, repetition, and dropout rates.

I must emphasise that the GEC marks ten years of the compulsory phase of basic education before the grade 12 exit qualification.

Based on progressive teaching and learning methodologies, the GEC assessment model comprises curriculum tests, project-based assessments and an inclinations and talents assessment.

The aim is to generate an integrated dashboard of learners' skills, capabilities and talents that can be used to stream learners into differentiated learning pathways.

The GEC will enable learners to access the Three-Stream Model.

The challenge in developing the GEC lies in ensuring that the assessment programme does not lead to a high-stakes examination.

Cde Chairperson**,** the Covid-19 interruptions to schooling forced countries across the globe to review their school-based assessment practices and consider alternative forms of assessment to traditional examinations.

We are developing a practical training guide on implementing formative assessment in schools linked to an Assessment for Learning (AFL) approach.

Training relating to implementing the AFL approach to strengthen school-based assessment has already been concluded in the first quarter of 2022.

The National Assessment Circular has directed teachers to further support schools in managing school-based assessments in this regard.

Key short-term interventions for better supporting teachers to manage their programme of assessment has included:

- Reducing the number of formal summative assessment tasks (including examinations) and
- Increasing the role of formative assessments and allowing teachers more time to diagnose and remediate learning gaps.

We wish to promote an assessment regime focusing on fewer topics, deeper learning and strategic thinking.

It must ensure that the promotion and progression of learners from one grade to the next are based on a collective of summative scores and formative evidence.

Cde Chairperson, the theme for the 2022 World Teachers' Day calls for teachers to be trusted and supported to make quality public education a reality for all students.

We cannot succeed in this crucial endeavour if we ignore teacher well-being.

Teachers' health and well-being frequently compete with contentious remuneration issues.

As we know from literature, teacher well-being is a positive emotional state that combines the personal needs and expectations of both learners and their teachers.

Teacher well-being and job satisfaction strongly influence teacher behaviour and are positively related to school and classroom climate and pupil achievement.

Thus, I declare again that teacher well-being is our core business.

It is core to the sold plans to improve the overall standard and performance of the basic education sector and reach the developmental milestones as set in the National Development Plans (NDP) by 2030.

The issue of teacher well-being cannot be divorced from a relentless pursuit of improved learner outcomes.

We must understand that the improved standard of basic education and better learner outcomes are a by-product of a motivated and emotional stable teacher with appropriate qualifications and assured of her safety at school.

Both teacher effectiveness and learner performance are intrinsic to the stable emotional state that allows each (teacher or learner) to reach their potential unimpeded by stress and depression caused by environmental factors.

As a matter of urgency, not by 2030, we must address the occupational hazards occasioned in part by the growing learner ill-discipline and rising incidents of crime and corruption in our schools.

I am looking forward to the final report of this NGC.

This matter is urgent for me because of the ongoing battle with the invisible enemy, Covid-19.

Teachers, as we know, bear the brunt of grief resulting from Covid-19 and other incidents as learners increasingly come face-to-face with death.

Two weeks ago, in the Pongolo incident, we lost 19 learners from various schools.

Not to mention deaths of teacher colleagues and bereavement in their own families.

Our teachers have acted as lay counsellors to our learners, safety officers, and even midwives for many years.

Yet, they receive no adequate training for these roles, let alone compensation.

We can have endless philosophical debates about whether these roles performed by our teachers in local contexts daily are the core or periphery of the main task of teaching.

In my address to the teacher well-being seminar last year, I said in theorising about teacher well-being, we must move from the premise that teachers are also emotional beings.

In our recent submission before the cabinet, we argued that teachers are emotionally affected by the enormous intersecting vulnerabilities of children whom they have to teach.

We noted that teachers are overwhelmed by the social ills that bedevil society, such as alcohol and drug use, violence, bullying, gender-based violence, and sexual abuse.

In these cases, learners are often victims but sometimes perpetrators.

A great deal of human rights violations linked to racism, unfair discrimination, prejudice and related intolerances are also affecting the state of learner well-being.

Teachers often do not know what to do or where to obtain support and assistance on the above matters, which triggers stress and job dissatisfaction.

In other words, teachers are community members before becoming teachers.

At any rate, the social ills that bedevil our society also affect our teachers.

Researchers conclude that at the core of any teaching philosophy is resilience and mental health, which provide a critical foundation for effective learning and academic success.

Resilience is recognised as the ability of individuals, in this case, teachers, to manage and cope with life's challenges, bounce back from adversity, and maintain equilibrium.

It underscores my earlier point: Teacher well-being is the core, not the periphery.

It is not the side chick of curriculum implementation and stuff like that.

Cde Chairperson, I am in awe of the resilience and tenacity of our teachers, the majority of whom are SADTU members.

As we know, any stab wound to a learner by another on school premises or outside affects the teachers significantly.

I shudder to think about how teachers cope when their star pupils succumb to illness or becomes a victim of a violent crime.

To address the teacher's well-being, we collaborate with the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC), Teacher Unions and our international friends.

For instance, on 23rd July 2021, we convened a seminar on teacher well-being to explore various orthodox and unorthodox ways to address the psychosocial needs of our teachers.

At the said seminar, we agreed that the teacher well-being portfolio should be treated as a standing item on the agenda of all Provincial Education Labour Relations Councils (PELRCs).

Reports thus far show that teacher well-being is one of the performance indicators of the ELRC.

Therefore, the PELRCs must provide quarterly reports to prove that teacher well-being programmes are being implemented in all provinces.

We urge all teachers to participate in the teacher well-being programmes, including debriefing after traumatic school incidents and bereavement.

Long live SADTU!
Amandla!!!

Ke A Leboga

Dankie

Siyabonga

I thank you.