



**basic education**

Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **Keynote Address by the Basic Education Minister, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, at the Rotary Club of Pretoria West on Challenges and Opportunities in the sector post-Covid-19**

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Programme Director

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Members and Friends of Rotary

Ladies and Gentlemen

Programme Director, members and friends of Rotary, we meet today to discuss the challenges and opportunities in basic education post-Covid-19.

We thank the members and friends of Rotary for this invitation.

Although not as bad as last year, the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted schooling.

Since we reopened after the extended mid-year recess, there's been a steady improvement in the recovery of lost curriculum time.

District Governor, our researchers, have thankfully begun to measure Covid-19 related learning losses in our local contexts by comparing how much children learnt in 2020 with how much they learned in an average school year before that.

These measures indicate that between 50% and 75% of a typical year's worth of learning was lost during 2020.

The delay in the start of the academic year in 2021 and the extended absence of learners from school would have a long-lasting negative impact on society in general, not only on the entire education sector.

The sector lost a week in the extended 2021 winter school holiday, resulting in fewer school days initially scheduled in the amended School Calendar.

It is, therefore, likely that these learning losses would have been more significant in poorer communities, where children have less

access to adequate remote /digital learning opportunities and home support.

The impact on early learning for children attending ECD centres is also likely to have been significant since attendance rates at ECD centres have also dropped considerably since the pandemic.

District Governor, there is new evidence from the National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on South Africa.

It reveals that more school-aged children are not attending school than usual.

It is unclear whether this is a temporary non-attendance or may become permanent (dropout) from schooling.

In the long run, the learning losses in primary school may lead to an increase in dropout when these children reach the Further Education and Training (FET) Band at Grades 10, 11 and 12.

Although we only have information for specific Grades and learning areas – such as reading; learners across Grades and subjects would likely have been similarly affected.

The first step towards addressing the crisis of lost learning is to prevent further disruptions to school time and prevent other learning losses, of which the faster roll-out of Covid-19 vaccines would yield the required outcome.

The second step is to introduce measures to catch up on the time and the teaching and learning lost through the Covid-19 pandemic; I will expand on this point later.

Let's avoid the worst of the 2020 year.

Instead, let's rebuild, innovate and refocus.

The Covid-19 global health emergency tests the resilience of all of us as a nation.

Just a few weeks back, the coronavirus pandemic threatened to overwhelm our health system.

Thankfully we are exiting the third wave.

As a mitigating factor, District Director, I am happy to report that all our teachers and key personnel in the education sector are fully vaccinated against Covid-19 disease.

Our country has enough vaccine doses to fully vaccinate over two-thirds of the adult population.

At present, we are vaccinating approximately 1 million adults every four days.

As our vaccination roll-out gains momentum, we hope to be ready for the fourth wave, and hopefully, there won't be any need to tinker with the school calendar again.

Sadly the mortality numbers keep growing.

Let's vaccinate to save lives.

District Director, since the beginning of the Covid-19 induced school closures, we adopted and applied the novel 4 Cs, namely Consultation, Communication, Collaboration and Curriculum.

We constantly consulted with teacher unions, amongst others, communicated broadly and consistently to society, collaborated with key stakeholders and designed joint plans to recover lost curriculum time.

In summary, here are the challenges we faced as basic education since the pandemic hit our shores.

These include in no particular order:

- Loss of teaching time due to school closures and rotational timetabling;
- Increased number of positive cases of officials, educators and learners;
- Inadequate water and sanitation in some schools;
- Non-attendance of teachers and officials with existing comorbidities;
- Frequent closing and opening of schools due to Covid-19 positive cases;
- Unavailability of adequate quantity and quality of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and allied protective resources, on some occasions;
- Increase in incidents of school vandalism during Covid-19 induced closures.
- Lack of devices to access online learning resources;
- Poor connectivity, particularly in rural schools, as well as the high cost of data;
- Inadequate knowledge and skills amongst teachers and learners to participate in online learning; and
- Increased need for psychological and mental health services.

To mitigate the crisis, District Director, we have reaffirmed that our schools are more than educational facilities but centres of health, hygiene, nutrition, and psychosocial support.

All learners in qualifying schools are provided with nutritious meals every school day through the much-vaunted National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP).

There's a National Hygiene Programme in lower grades to teach the basics of health-related hygiene protocols, especially in times of Covid-19.

We have a variety of health-related services available for all learners, including the successful National Deworming Programme.

All district offices support schools within their locale through the provision of social workers and psychologists.

District Director, and Rotary Members, in our all-out endeavour to rescue the 2021 academic year while protecting lives, required ingenuity.

Thus, we have developed a Three-Year Curriculum Recovery Plan in response to the learning losses of 2020.

The current remedial actions include:

- We have implemented curriculum adjustment to recover the loss of teaching time.
- Development and provision of Recovery Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) per subject and grade for 2021 - 2023.
- The 2021 ATPs contained trimmed content, knowledge and skills and focused on the content, concepts and skills required in each subject and grade.
- The Annual Teaching Plans include multi-year content to ensure important content from the previous grade is incorporated into the next grade.
- Recovery plans are located at the school level to ensure it meets the specific context of schools. Each teacher to develop a handover report to the next teacher outlining the content that could not be covered or adequately covered in the preceding years.
- Baseline surveys are conducted at intervals to determine learners' pre-knowledge and assist in planning and delivering lessons and additional support. Schools are required to develop school-based recovery plans based on baseline surveys.



- Reduction of the number and/or type of formal Assessment tasks to create more time for teaching and learning. For example, the June examinations have been removed as a compulsory component in Grade 4 – 12.

In Grades 4 – 11, the examination has been replaced by a test to focus on teaching and learning.

- We have launched the Adoption of Assessment for Learning (AfL) as a pedagogical approach to recover the learning losses.
- A formal programme to build teachers' capacity in applying this approach is at an advanced stage. This will ensure that our teachers focus on learning and not on assessment for the sake of the assessment or malicious policy compliance.
- While still in infancy, we have adopted the hybrid teaching models using our national broadcaster, including its radio stations, to ensure learning continues whilst applying rotational attendance models.
- Schools are also experimenting and innovating using social media platforms such as WhatsApp to continue teaching and learning, even if learners are not physically at school.

District Director, as a country, we have to emerge from this Covid-19 induced crisis stronger and united.

We have to be steadfast in our battle against illiteracy, innumeracy, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am happy to report that literacy and numeracy are apex priorities out of the eleven strategic areas we have identified for the 2019-2024 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF).

The spoke in the wheel of educational progress in South Africa is the high number of learners who cannot read for comprehension.

We are investing both human and financial capital in improving our learner's low literacy levels.

We work with most civil society organisations and the international community to unlock the 'reading for comprehension' conundrum.

His Excellency Mr President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa has given us as the basic education sector a mandate to ensure that every learner can read with comprehension across all the subjects by their tenth birthday.

Since 2017, we have implemented the Primary School Reading Improvement Plan (PSRIP).

The PSRIP programme aims to improve literacy and reading outcomes in Grades 1-6, with a critical focus on teacher development and support.

The PSRIP aims to strengthen the capacity of Foundation and Intermediate Phase teachers to teach learners how to read more effectively.

It achieves this by improving the skills of Subject Advisors to provide adequate support to teachers and upskilling School Management Teams (SMTs).

District Director, we have launched the much-vaunted Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) to ensure evidence-based tracking of improvements.

The objective of EGRA is to track the reading proficiency levels of learners at regular intervals with a sample of learners in all the 11 official languages.

We focus on languages offered as the Languages of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) and English First Additional Language (EFAL) to inform interventions in the teaching and learning of reading.

District Director, we have also launched the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS).

The developmental objective of EGRS is to inform national scale-up of evidence-based programmes that positively impact reading and literacy outcomes in the early grades.

The EGRS aims to build evidence about what works to improve the learning and teaching of early grade reading in South African schools.

It is a research project that has investigated the impact of alternative forms of support.

It focuses on the implementation of the Home Language Literacy and English First Additional Language curriculum.

Interventions have been undertaken in the North West province (2015-2017) and Mpumalanga Province in 2017-2019.

We appeal for funding and human capital to scale up the Early Grade Reading Study across the country sooner than our current resources can allow.

District Director, we have begun to provide teacher toolkits with the following: lesson plans, workbooks, Big Books, graded readers, most importantly, interactive digital content and trackers.

We are also providing teachers in selected schools with tablets loaded with digital curriculum resources to aid in teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, we need all the help we can get to scale up the digital curriculum provisioning.

District Director, I am proud to announce that South Africa has designed its first-of-its-kind online programme dubbed: *The Comprehension Across the Curriculum*.

The online programme offers an opportunity for teachers to be upskilled in reading for comprehension.

The programme will be launched later this month and will train teachers to teach reading comprehension skills across the curriculum.

District Director, in our quest to improve reading for comprehension across the curriculum, throughout society, in 2019, we launched the *National Reading Coalition (NRC)*.

The NRC is an innovative vehicle to deal head-on with the reading for meaning imbroglio that involves civil society and Government.

Its raison d'être is to support reading improvement across the country.

The NRC's main tasks are establishing reading clubs, training teachers, and material development in Reading, Numeracy and Literacy.

They also have to mobilise resources and expertise to enhance quality teaching and learning in the reading, numeracy, and literacy space.

The NRC has developed and advocated a national plan that aligns and coordinates various initiatives that support existing initiatives, including the '*Read to Lead*' Campaign.

Subsequently, we have launched a comprehensive "cradle to the grave," *Integrated National Reading Sector Plan*.

The spanking new *Integrated National Reading Sector Plan* aligns with our policy lodestar, the *National Development Plan (NDP)* that seeks to achieve critical developmental milestones by 2030.

The *NDP* envisions that by 2030, schools will provide all learners with quality education, especially in Literacy, Mathematics and Science.

The *National Reading Sector Plan* is an overarching evidence-based strategy that will alter the country's entire reading and literacy landscape.

It complements rather than replaces all existing literacy initiatives, including the *Read to Lead* Campaign, the *Primary School Reading Improvement Plan* (PSRIP), and other reading/literacy initiatives.

The main thrust of our comprehensive *National Reading Sector Plan* is to ensure reading for meaning across the curriculum, in all grades, and in all schools throughout the country.

Our plan is to ensure that we teach all our learners to read well and read for meaning.

By 2024, the plan would have been successfully implemented throughout the system, meaning: wall-to-wall coverage, circuit by circuit, district by district, and school by school.

This *National Reading Sector Plan* will be supported by teachers and subject advisors trained on reading methodologies.

All our learners would have been provided with a minimum reading pack for improving their literacy levels.

We would have mobilised civil society across the nook and cranny of our country to be part of this reading revolution.

All parents of school-going children will form the backbone of this National Reading Sector Plan.

As the Government, we have resolved to socialise all our learners into becoming life-long readers.

We must support them in their reading for academic purposes, and for knowledge and for enjoyment.

District Director, in conclusion, we are on the cusp of something bold and exciting concerning the function shift of the Early Childhood Development centres from the Department of Social Development to the Basic Education.

Since the cabinet decision was made a few years back, much work has been accomplished.

The cabinet decision allows the Basic Education Department to assume complete control: registration, curriculum design and provision, funding, and management of all ECDs.

The decision to effect a function shift to Basic Education aligns with international trends and UNESCO ECD guidelines.



Today, I am happy to report that the relaunch of a much improved, reimagined and integrated ECD sector will be unveiled in 2022.

We are at present concluding the first-of-its-kind ECD national census.

The ECD national census will highlight opportunities to broaden the access to quality learning for every South African child.

The ECD Census 2021 data and indicators will also establish a baseline for assessing the quality of learning through play in South Africa.

A key barrier to effective planning in the ECD sector has been the lack of accurate data on ECD programmes and data systems.

There is limited, accurate information on the ECD ecosystem as a whole at present.

This lack of updated empirical data concerning the levels and nature of ECD provisioning is hindering informed resource allocation, ECD practitioner support, and policy development and planning initiatives.

The information gathered during the Census will integrate ECD into the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and expand education support programmes and play-based learning.

The survey will also observe the facilities available at the sites to enable planning for greater inclusion of children with disabilities and the delivery of integrated health and safety programmes.

The ECD Census 2021 marks the first public activity of the Department of Basic Education in preparing for the relaunch of a much improved, reimagined and integrated ECD sector.

Put differently, we are conducting the ECD census 2021 because all our children count.

Data count. Data saves lives and educate the nation.

I cannot stress enough the importance of reliable data to guide decision making in basic education.

I hope I have demonstrated our challenges and opportunities in basic education as requested.

It is clear that much has been achieved, but much more is required to meet our lofty goal of high performing public schooling by 2030.

I thank you.