

Keynote Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, Delivered at the Release of 2018 NSC Examination Results, held at Vodacom Dome, Noordwyk, Midrand, 03 January 2019

Good Evening Fellow South Africans!

Strategic direction in the basic education sector

Today, we are gathered here to announce the 2018 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results. We are announcing the 2018 NSC examination results on the year in which South Africa will be celebrating its 25th anniversary of political freedom and democracy.

The NSC examination results, are one of the most important barometers to evaluate progress made by Government in improving **access, redress, equity, inclusivity, efficiency** and the **quality** of teaching and learning outcomes. This, the Government has done by strategically implementing national, continental and international commitments as articulated in the UNESCO *Sustainable Development Goals, 2030*; the African Union *Continental Education Strategy for Africa, 2025*; the *National Development Plan, 2030*; the *Medium-Term Strategic Framework* and the *National Strategy for Learner Attainment* – all of which are articulated through our *Action Plan to 2019: Towards the Realisation of Schooling by 2030*.

At the dawn of democracy in 1994, the topmost priority of Government, was to establish a single, unified and democratic system of education system, based on human rights. Transformative legislation and policy frameworks were developed to ensure that the radical reforms envisaged by Government are realised. The result of Government's reforms and developments over the past 25 years, can be seen in the educational outcomes which have improved in virtually all measures. We are, without doubt improving **access, redress, equity, inclusivity, efficiency** and **quality** of our basic education system. I wish to encourage South Africans, to visit the DBE website, where the comprehensive version of this Speech can be found.

Building a solid and foundation for teaching and learning

Fellow South Africans, we should always remember at all times that if we have to further improve the outputs of the schooling system, we will have to continue to improve the *fundamental quality of learning and teaching*, well before Grade 12. Therefore, the success of any examination, is a reflection of the hard work put in by teachers, learners, parents, and communities of trust, not only during the year of the examination, but throughout the twelve years of schooling. Research shows that the *early years of learning to read, write, and compute*, translate into positive results and outcomes later in the schooling years.

Government will soon be sharing more information on the work underway for the phased-in implementation of an integrated Early Childhood Development programme under basic education; and the phasing-in of a comprehensive Information and Communication Technology programme. Following

years of piloting, the Sector is ready to phase-in a national ICT programme, which will see “no fee” schools, schools in rural areas and farms, as well as special schools benefitting.

A great deal is happening to improve the *early Grade literacy and numeracy skills* of our children. The *Read to Lead* Campaign has been mobilising learners, teachers and communities around the importance of *reading*. The *Primary School Reading Improvement Programme* has been expanding in the numbers of schools that it is supporting, with quality learning materials designed to enrich classroom learning experiences in the early Grades. The *Early Grade Reading Study* has led to the development of a Reading Improvement Plan with clear steps to improve the support given to teachers, based on evidence of what works. The National Education Collaboration Trust has set up a *National Reading Coalition* to bring together, and guide all our efforts to improving reading in the nation.

At the basic education level, the modernisation of the classroom has become a phenomenon of the global society. In response to the demand of the 21st century skills, the DBE, in partnership with UNICEF, the LEGO Foundation, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), is currently implementing an initiative that focuses on the role of *PLAY-based learning in improving the quality of early Grade learning*, under the auspices of *Power of PLAY: A Learning Tool for a Powerful Future Programme*.

An International Africa PLAY Conference will be hosted in Pretoria on 25-27 February this year. Among the key objectives of the Conference, are the facilitation of an understanding and commitment of policy-makers and influencers on the important role of *PLAY-based learning* in preparing young children *for the opportunities of the 21st century, and the achievement of sustainable development* of a national and global level.

Fellow South Africans, as we report on the Grade 12 examination results, it is important to reflect on the recent cycles of regional and international assessment studies, namely, the *TIMSS*, the *SEACMEQ*, and the *PIRLS*, which report on the performance in lower Grades, specifically Grades 4, 5, 6 and 9.

Results of the regional and international assessment benchmark studies

At the heart of development in the schooling sector, must obviously be ***what learners learn***. During the announcement of the 2017 NSC examination results, I outlined the improvements in the performance of South African learners – though at varying degrees, as reported by the three regional and international assessment studies. The reality is that our basic education system has entered its Age of Hope. What is critical, is to remind ourselves that every child must be viewed as a national asset.

The 2018 National Senior Certificate Examinations Results

Turning to the Grade 12 examination results, the pass rate is but one of many indicators tracking trends at this level. Government’s MTSF, which is based on the NDP, emphasises the aim of getting all young people to obtain a National Senior Certificate or an equivalent qualification; either from a school or TVET institution. The MTSF also emphasises the attainment of a National Senior Certificate, which allows for Bachelors-level studies at a university; and obtaining a mark of at least 50% in Mathematics and Physical

Science. In the case of Mathematics, the 50% threshold, is the lowest threshold applied for entry into different Mathematically-oriented university programmes, such as Accounting and Economics.

Fellow South Africans, we were very happy that Umalusi, the sole authority and arbiter of standardisation, has declared the 2018 NSC examinations as “*fair, valid and credible*”.

Profile: Class of 2018

The Class of 2018, which is the *fifth cohort* to be exposed to the CAPS curriculum, has recorded the *fourth highest enrolment* of full-time candidates, and the *highest for the part-time* candidates in the history of the Basic Education system in South Africa.

The total number of candidates, who registered for the November 2018 NSC examinations was approximately **800 800**, comprising about **625 000** full-time candidates and **176 000** part-time candidates. Of these candidates, approximately **512 700** full-time candidates, and **117 660** part-time candidates actually wrote **all seven subjects** of the 2018 NSC examinations. It is noteworthy that *KwaZulu Natal, Gauteng, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape registered the highest numbers of full-time and part-time candidates.*

The scope and size of the 2018 NSC examinations, is massive. For instance, **147 question papers** were set; **8 million question papers** were printed; **7.6 million scripts** were produced and delivered countrywide; about **7 000 secure examination centres** were established; **65 000 invigilators**, and **41 000 markers** were appointed in **141 secure marking centres**.

The Class of 2018 is the first to be introduced to *twelve (12) new subject offerings, comprising –*

- *the South African Sign Language (Home Language); as well as*
- *Civil Technologies, Mechanical Technologies, and Electrical Technologies – each with three subjects; as well as Technical Mathematics and Technical Science.*

Performance of the progressed learners

The criteria for learner progression introduced in 2015, were further streamlined in 2017. The South African public will recall the learner progression policy, encouraged provinces to progress or condone over-aged learners who have repeated Grade 11 more than once, and give them extra support to either write all seven subjects of the 2018 NSC examinations; or allow them to modularise their examinations. In the latter case, progressed learners could write part of the 2018 NSC examinations in November 2018, and the rest in June 2019.

The support provided to progressed learners by provinces is important, particularly for learners who come from poorer communities. Provinces go out of their way to provide progressed learners with extra support; and this, provinces do without any additional budget. Consequently, in 2018 we saw the **largest number** of progressed learners, since the policy was promulgated in 2015.

This is a step in the right direction in the context of the *National Development Plan*, which enjoins us to mediate the high drop-out and repetition rates of learners in the Basic Education

system. The *NDP* demands of us to maintain a retention rate of 90%, and to allow for an increase in the number of learners entering vocational and occupational pathways. The *Second Chance Matric Programme*, the *Learner Progression Policy*, the *Incremental Introduction of the Three-Stream Model*, and the *Multiple Examinations Opportunity (MEO)* are means towards an end to address this *NDP* directive.

We wish to thank all provinces that invested a lot of effort in supporting progressed and struggling learners. Hence, Gauteng's progressed learners passed at **70.3%**; Free State's progressed learners passed at **65.2%**; Mpumalanga's progressed learners passed at **64.7%**; KwaZulu Natal's progressed learners passed at **63.4%**; North West's progressed learners passed at **56.9%**; the Eastern Cape's progressed learners passed at **56.5%**; the Northern Cape's progressed learners passed at **40.2%**; and the Western Cape's progressed learners passed at **33.6%**.

We are convinced that, had the provinces not provided the '*package of support and interventions*' they provided to the progressed learners, some of our young people could have fallen through the cracks of the system. It is for this reason that we continue to encourage provinces to support struggling learners, not only during their Matric years, but right through the system. This will definitely improve the through-put and retention of learners, especially in the Senior and FET Phases, where we experience high failure and drop-out rates.

Learners with Special Education Needs

We strongly believe that an Inclusive Education system, makes an immense contribution towards an inclusive economy, to serve an inclusive society. We have for the past few years included the learners with special educational needs in tracking learner performance in the NSC Examinations.

I am happy to announce that **3 856** learners with special educational needs wrote the 2017 NSC examinations, an increase of **39.9%** from 2017; and **3 051** learners with special educational needs passed the examinations. **1 669** achieved Bachelor passes; **861** Diploma passes; **402** Higher Certificate passes; and **199** endorsed NSC passes. Learners with special educational needs also attained **1 927** distinctions, including in critical subjects, such as Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics and Physical Science.

The benefits of the "pro-poor" policies of Government on the Grade 12 examination results

In the 2018 NSC examination results, the poverty ranking of schools in terms quintiles 1 to 5, revealed the following interesting trends. I will however, focus on the performance of quintile 1 to 3 schools, the "no fee" schools. The total number NSC passes in "no fee" schools, stands at **241 340**.

The Bachelor passes achieved by learners in "no fee" schools stand at **84 700**; which implies that in 2018, "no fee" schools produced **53%** of the Bachelor passes. The significance of this is that, in 2018, the Bachelor passes produced by "no fee" schools has significantly and progressively increased to **6%** from 2016. "No fee" schools also produced **91 400** Diploma, and **65 130** Higher Certificate passes. It is noteworthy that more than **55 000** candidates from "no fee" schools are eligible to register for Bachelor and Diploma studies at higher education institutions.

Government must be applauded for its pro-poor policies, which in the Basic Education arena, alleviate poverty through a variety of interventions. Among others, it is worth mentioning the pro-poor funding of schools; the provision of nutritious meals on a daily basis; and the provision of scholar transport to deserving learners on daily basis. These interventions, which are called the “*social wage*” by the Statistics South Africa, have definitely improved **access** and **retention** of learners in schools; thus simultaneously promoting **equity**, **efficiency**, and **quality** immeasurably. This, is indeed a good story to tell!!

Performance of the Districts

The NDP recognises *districts as a crucial interface of the Basic Education Sector in identifying best practice, sharing information, and providing support to schools*. The continued growth in the performance of districts is closely monitored and evaluated by both the provincial and national Basic Education departments. In 2018, **74** of the 75 districts (**98.7%** of our districts) attained pass rates of **60% and above**; and **34** of the 75 districts (**45.3%** of our districts) attained pass rates of **80% and above**. Regrettably, **one** district in the Eastern Cape, achieved a pass rate **lower than 60%**.

The top **ten (10)** performing districts in the country are as follows –

- First, is Fezile Dabi in the Free State, with **92.3%**;
- Second, is Tshwane South in Gauteng, with **91.7%**;
- Third, is Johannesburg East in Gauteng, with **90.3%**;
- Fourth, is Sedibeng East in Gauteng, with **90.2%**;
- Fifth, is Johannesburg West in Gauteng, with **90.1%**;
- Sixth, is Thabo Mafutsanyana in the Free State, with **90%**;
- Seventh, is Tshwane North in Gauteng, with **89.6%**;
- Eighth, is Gauteng West in Gauteng, with **89.1%**;
- Ninth, is Ekurhuleni North in Gauteng, with **88.8%**; and
- Tenth, is Johannesburg North in Gauteng, with **88.6%**.

Fellow South Africans, it is unprecedented that the ten top performing districts in the country, are from **two** provinces. It is for the first time that **four** of the top ten performing districts performed **above 85%**; and **six** of the top ten districts broke the **90%** glass ceiling. Notably, out of the top ten performing districts in the country, **eight** are from Gauteng, and **two** are from the Free State. We must congratulate the Free State and Gauteng – this is remarkable!!!

The top performing districts in their respective provinces, are as follows –

- First, is Fezile Dabi in the Free State, with **92.3%**;
- Second, is Tshwane South in Gauteng, with **91.7%**;

- Third, is Metro North in the Western Cape, with **85.1%**;
- Fourth, is Bojanala Platinum in the North West, with **84.4%**;
- Fifth, is Namaqua in the Northern Cape, with **83.7%**;
- Sixth, is Ehlanzeni in Mpumalanga, with **82.3%**;
- Seventh, is Amajuba, in KwaZulu Natal, with **81.7%**;
- Eighth, is Vhembe East in Limpopo , with **80.1%**; and
- Ninth, is Nelson Mandela in the Eastern Cape, with **76.1%**;

Performance of the Provinces

Only **one** province achieved below the **70%** threshold, namely Limpopo, which achieved **69.4%**, an improvement of **3.8%** from 2017 – the third highest improvement;

Four provinces achieved above **70%**, and these are –

- Eastern Cape achieved **70.6%**, an improvement of **5.6%** from 2017 – the largest improvement in the country;
- Northern Cape achieved **73.3%**, a decline of **2.3%** from 2017;
- KwaZulu-Natal achieved **76.2%**, an improvement of **3.3%** from 2017; and
- Mpumalanga achieved **79%**, an improvement of **4.2%** from 2017 – the second highest improvement.

Four provinces achieved above **80%** –

- North West achieved **81.1%**, an improvement of **1.7%** from 2017;
- Western Cape achieved **81.5%**, a decline of **1.3%** from 2017;
- Free State, achieved **87.5%**, an improvement of **1.4%** from 2017.

Finally, the top performing province for 2018, is Gauteng, with an achievement of **87.9%**, an improvement of **2.8%** from 2017.

With the exception of Limpopo, all the other provinces achieved above the 70% pass rate. All the provinces, including Limpopo, have shown improvements in their performances, except for the Northern Cape and the Western Cape. We wish to implore the communities of the Northern Cape to desist from using schools as bargaining chips in their service delivery protests.

We must applaud the Eastern Cape for joining the 70% performance club, which includes the Northern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Mpumalanga. The Eastern Cape had the largest performance improvement, while Mpumalanga and Limpopo had the second and third largest performance improvements, respectively. Clearly, the learner support programmes and interventions these three provinces have implemented, are beginning to bear good fruit.

I must particularly single out the Eastern Cape. Despite the challenges they are faced with, especially the contestations related to the rationalisation of small and unviable schools, under the leadership of MEC Mandla Makupula (may his dear soul rest in peace). The Eastern Cape has now taken off, and should continue on this trajectory. It is about to reach its cruising height. I wish to encourage the executive and administrative leadership of the Eastern Cape, to keep the fires burning, in memory of MEC Makupula's unobliterable and unforgettable legacy.

We also wish to commend the North West, Western Cape, Free State and Gauteng for maintaining their 80% performance status. It must be noted the Gauteng has raised the bar in almost all applicable performance indicators, except for their performance with the progressed learners excluded, the number and percentage of passes with distinctions, and the performance of learners with special educational needs. Congratulation to MEC Panyaza Lesufi and your team!!!

Overall national performance

This brings us to the 2018 NSC examination overall results. For the **past eight years**, we have noted that the NSC pass rate has consistently been above the previous **70%** glass ceiling. The Class of 2018 must be commended for maintaining this trend. They are the **fourth largest cohort** in the history of basic education to register for any NSC examination in the country.

The 2018 NSC overall pass rate, **with the progressed learners included**, stands at **78.2%**, a **3.1%** improvement from the 75.1% achieved in 2017. This, represents **400 761** candidates, who had passed the 2018 NSC examination. However, **with the progressed learners excluded**, the 2018 NSC overall pass rate stands at **79.4%**, a **2.9%** improvement from the 76.5% achieved in 2017. Well done to the Class of 2018!!!

Further analysis of the 2018 NSC examination results, show that –

- the number of candidates qualifying for admission to Bachelor studies is **172 000**, which represents **33.6%** of the total number of candidates, who wrote the 2018 NSC examinations;
- the number candidates, who passed with a Diploma is **141 700**, which represents **27.6%** of the total number of candidates, who wrote the 2018 NSC examinations;
- the number of candidates who passed with Higher Certificate is **86 800**, which represents **16.9%** of the total number of candidates, who wrote the 2018 NSC examinations; and
- The number of candidates who passed with a National Senior Certificate (NSC) is **99**; and the number of candidates who passed with an endorsed NSC is **129**.

It is important to note that a total of about **312 700** candidates (equivalent to **78.3%**), who achieved Bachelor and Diploma passes, are eligible for studies at higher education institutions. The **86 790** candidates, equivalent to **21.7%**, who obtained certificate passes, may register at TVET and other skills training institutions.

In 2018, about **157 000** distinctions were achieved, a decline of **2.6%** from 2017. The main contributors towards the distinctions achieved are KwaZulu Natal, Gauteng, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, and

Limpopo. It is remarkable to note that the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Limpopo – the three rural provinces, produced a combined total of **75 600** distinctions, which is equivalent to **46.9%** of the total distinctions. In the 12 key subjects (including Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics, and Physical Science among others), the total number of distinctions stands at **58 800**.

We are indeed a system on the rise – a remarkable story to tell

Fellow South Africans, the evidence I have just presented today, points unequivocally to progress in the Basic Education Sector in the area that matters most, namely **learning outcomes**. It is however, important to understand as best as possible what drove this progress, which will inform the way forward. We must be able synthesise the evidence we have just presented to clearly demonstrate that the Basic Education Sector is addressing in an unwavering manner the social justice principles we are enjoined to observe – the principles of **access, redress, equity, inclusivity, efficiency** and **quality**.

Our path towards **quality schooling**, is definitely that bearing the hallmarks of a “**silent revolution**”. A beacon of hope has been brought, particularly to the candidates who were from “no fee” schools; the progressed learners; the social grant beneficiaries; the offenders from Correctional Services facilities; learners with special educational needs – all of whom wrote for the 2018 NSC examinations, and did exceptionally well. Clearly, the transformative policies and programmes of Government are bearing good fruit.

Fellow South Africans, making sure that every young South African receives **quality schooling** is an imperative. Yet, we realise that this cannot be brought about overnight. We need a clear vision of where we want to be in 2030, or even before then, if possible. And we must make sure that every year we move a bit closer to our vision, of recognising that a large improvement is actually an accumulation of many smaller change.

Most importantly, we urge communities to desist from using their own children as shields, when communities engage in service delivery protests, as was the case in 2018. It was shameful that, in some communities, children were forced out of school for period up to six months. Speaking of success, Madiba said, “*education is the great engine of [personal development](#). It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor; that the son of a mine worker, can become the head of the mine; that a child of farm workers can become the President of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.*”

Conclusion

We will be the first to concede that, despite the notable stability of and improvements in the system, we are yet to cross our own Rubicon. We must agree that much has been achieved, but much more needs to be done in the areas of **efficiency** and **quality**.

One of the reasons we are excited about the general upward trend in our Grade 12 results, is that we know this is a manifestation of improvements occurring at all levels of the entire schooling system. TIMSS and SAECMEQ data point to ongoing improvements over the last ten to fifteen years in what our learners know and can do at the primary and lower secondary levels. Even the PIRLS results,

when viewed over the longer 2006 to 2016 period, point to substantial improvements in the ability of young South Africans to read.

In celebrating the Class of 2018, I must also thank the principals, teachers, and parents for the work they continue to do. I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the Oversight Committees (the Portfolio and Select Committees responsible for Basic Education), the Deputy Minister (my partner in crime), the MECs and the respective Heads of Departments for their stewardship, leadership and continued support.

I must thank the Director-General and his team of officials for their continued work and support. Some of the officials forfeited their holidays and worked right through the Christmas vacation in order to ensure that the announcement of the 2018 NSC examination results proceeds without glitches.

Lastly, but certainly not the least, I wish to thank our partners – teacher unions, governing body associations, our business partners working directly with us or through the NECT, our statutory bodies, researchers whose research work we cannot do without, our sister departments, South Africans, who have assisted in ensuring the stability and improvement of the Basic Education Sector. We also wish to thank the Vodacom for hosting us this year. Let me end by saying, the Governing Party was definitely correct to declare education a societal matter. Therefore, all hands must be on deck.

I thank you.

Written By: Administrator Account

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