

Poor education adds to unemployment woes, prioritise it Mr President

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***Note to Editors:** The following speech will be delivered today during Parliament's debate on the State of the Nation address and is under embargo until delivery.*

Somlomo

Malungu'Abekekileyo

Fellow South Africans, ndiyanbulisa ngalenjika'langa

Molweni

Mr President, there was a glaring omission to your SONA on Thursday evening.

An omission which underpins our epidemic of unemployment.

An omission which is key to the future success of our nation.

An omission which signals that this government does not see it for the crisis that it is.

And that omission is the state of our education system.

Mr President, a country that does not adequately invest in its youth through quality education confines generations to a lifetime of poverty and unemployment.

Impact of Covid-19 Regulations on Schools

Terrible damage has been inflicted on our children's education through the disruptions to their schooling that has occurred over the last two years.

Children in rural and township schools have lost between 50% - 75% of their learning and teaching time.

Rotational schooling mostly affected the poorest and most vulnerable schools.

Despite the Ministerial Advisory Committee in July 2021 recommending that rotational schooling be abandoned.

Yet it was only after facing urgent court action from the DA that your government finally ended rotational schooling.

What is more concerning is that a grade 3 learner in June this year will only know what a grade 2 learner knew in 2019.

This is terrifying, because before the State of Disaster, only one in five of our Grade 4 children could read for meaning in any language.

And yet there is little urgency from your government.

Learners reading, writing, language and numeracy skills have dropped.

Even to date the Eastern Cape Department of Education has not delivered textbooks to schools yet they expect these learners to catch up.

Ominously, the 2021 Medium Term Expenditure Framework contains no budget allocation for any systematic catch-up plan.

The DA urges government to **make curriculum catch-up of the education system a priority.**

1. At a minimum, this should include an additional budget for the prioritisation of reading, writing, language and numeracy in the foundation phase.
2. Reduce Teacher admin using Education Assistance so that teachers can focus on a full day of teaching and learning.
3. Consult with stakeholders on the potential of extending the school day where needed, beneficial and practical by providing incentives to Teachers considering learner transport and school nutrition.
4. Provide funded extra lessons for the curriculum gaps through absorbing graduates and calling back retired teachers.

Dropouts and Matric Results

A catch up plan is crucial, because education is the only way to produce the skills you refer to, Mr. President. However, we must ensure that we don't leave learners behind – especially dropouts.

Mr President, we have 3.3 million of our youth not in employment, skills training or education.

The State of Disaster has nearly tripled the number who have dropped out, to three quarters of a million children.

So, while the Free State has a pass rate of almost 86%, it has the second highest learner dropout rate of 43% leaving many learners behind giving us an illusion of a high matric pass rate when in reality, many left the school system.

Dropouts mean these learners join the six in every 10 young people that are unemployed.

This is why we need a **learner tracking, tracing and retention mechanism**, working alongside the department of social development to find and place those who have dropped out of the school system or who perhaps have gone to TVETs.

I am ready to share a detailed recommendation on this.

Quality Teaching, Monitoring and Development

Mr President, dropouts are closely related to poor quality teaching.

One of the key things in producing quality education and results is quality teaching that plays a significant role in the success of our learners.

Many teachers in fact cannot pass the same tests in the very subjects that they teach.

I went to Fairvale Technical High School where learners are forced to change their technical stream in matric because there were no teachers for the past 2 years yet these are skills and artisans we so desperately need to participate in the economy.

We need to fill the 24 556 vacant posts in Education.

Furthermore, need to raise required teacher competencies and further monitor quality teaching.

In the DA-led Western Cape, we have established an independent school evaluation authority to measure and support quality teaching and development.

This is needed in all provinces to monitor teaching quality, ensure adherence to standards and identify development areas for teachers.

Infrastructure

In addition to teacher quality, poor school infrastructure remains a reality.

In 2018, in my Constituency of Bizana, a 5-year-old boy fell in a pit latrine. He drowned. Recently, a teacher sent a learner down a pit toilet to fetch his phone.

On Thursday, you Mr President, promised to build 2 500 additional schools.

How realistic is this when there remain more than 2 000 pit toilets in schools, which you promised to eradicate by March 2020 through the SAFE Programme?

Furthermore, schools' infrastructure has not escaped corruption and mismanagement by implementing agents.

Vezimfundo School in Mpumalanga was built for a whopping R36 million on a wetland.

Collingwood Primary School in KwaZulu-Natal has been a construction site for 5 years.

Last week, a matric learner in Geluksdal Secondary School in Ekurhuleni died after being electrocuted.

Over 7 200 still do not have adequate fencing while schools are targeted for vandalism, break-ins and criminal syndicates.

How do we know the vague “Special Purpose Vehicle” you mention to deliver school infrastructure won’t simply be another opportunity for cadre deployment, corruption, and lack of delivery?

BELA Bill

Based on the existing flaws I have mentioned in the system, the BELA Bill seeks to further consolidate the ANC's powers within the school's system. The proposals in the Bill will remove the powers from School Governing Bodies in deciding on their admission and language policies.

By robbing governing bodies of these powers, the Department of Basic Education plans to centralise control over public schools not in the hands of the communities and parents who know what is best for their children, but in the hands of ANC cadres like Gauteng Education MEC Panyaza Lesufi.

This move is a direct attack on SGBs and mother-tongue education. The DA will do everything in our power to ensure the power stays with the people.

Conclusion

Mr President, a country that does not develop its youth has no future.

When replying on Wednesday, please as matter of urgency provide for a budget and plan to catch-up the gap on reading, writing, language and numeracy.

Hold your ally premier Mabuyane and MEC Gade accountable for not delivering textbooks.

Engage Ministers Motshekga, Zulu, Nzimande and all Education MECs on a dropout strategy to track, trace and retain learners.

Institute a budgeted process for the re-establishment of teacher training colleges to upskill and train teachers, esp. critical subjects or trades.

Institute directives for the establishment of independent schools evaluations authority across all schooling districts to monitor quality teaching.

Hold those implicated in corruption and mismanagement accountable, and investigate the non-delivery by implementing agents and ensure you eradicate all pit toilets by this year.

Mongameli, In order to fight poverty, inequality and not lead young people down the rabbit hole of unemployment, quality education must be at the center of your government's implementation.

Remember that many young people being poor, have only their dreams; **they have spread their dreams under your feet**; tread carefully because you tread on their dreams by ignoring this Education crisis.

I thank you.