Democratic Alliance Speech by

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Its high time Gauteng Education gets a budget that talks to the future of underprivileged learners

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Thank you, Madam Speaker,

Honourable members,

We need a budget for the future, a budget that will shape the future of all learners in Gauteng especially those from disadvantaged communities. The lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us to find ways to do things differently. Unfortunately, this budget is not responding to learner-educator ratio problems. It is deeply concerning that we still have learners who attend school twice a week. This is common amongst quintile 1-4 schools which are poorly resourced.

Alanridge Secondary School in Rabie Ridge is facing the same problem. Finetown Secondary School had to shut down for a week to draw attention to the fact that parents want their children to attend school full time in a conducive learning environment. Thank you for heeding the call last week and delivering furniture at Finetown Secondary School.

Siyabusa Secondary School in Slovoville has severely overcrowded classrooms and they are still using a rotational learning system. I visited the school yesterday; the rotational learning system must urgently come to an end.

We were told, that there are about 38 schools that are continuing with the rotational learning system. Will these learners be exempted from competing with other learners? The answer is ‘no’, so why are we trapping them in poverty? This budget doesn’t talk about their future.

It was very easy to blow R450 million within three months on the decontamination of schools and the service providers were paid on time. Why is there no urgency to end the rotational learning system and ensure that all learners return to school on a full-time basis?

This will result in many of our learners across the province dropping out of school. MEC Lesufi, why are you trapping these learners into poverty? We all know that the rotational learning system is deeply affecting learners from poor families who are sending their children to no-fee schools. This current setup is perpetuating poverty and inequality in our province.

These young people who are deprived of everyday schooling have ambitions and are looking upon us to save them. They are dreaming of a better future where they don’t need to rely on EPWP opportunities. However, they will end up in these programmes which will pull them away from becoming part of the pool of experts and pull them away from the entrepreneurial space.

We all know that this government is so happy that the list of social grant beneficiaries is growing. Surely, this can’t be right, especially for an active population. All young people must be given access to job opportunities. They must be given opportunities to advance their careers. They must be given support to start their own small businesses.

They must be empowered with skills to grow our economy. Certainly, this government has no idea on what to do to revive the economy. If this province fails to take the lead, the country will go down too.

Let’s look at the different programmes:

Programme 1: Administration

There is an R5 billion allocation, this is a 10.2% increase compared to the last year’s budget and it includes the rental of offices. Why don’t we allow district officials to spend time in schools which is the primary focus? There is no need to increase this budget by 10.2%. The targets have been reduced but the budget has increased as indicated on page 241 of the budget book as compared with last year’s service delivery measures.

Programme 2: Public Ordinary School Education

There is an R42.3 billion budget for this programme, this is a 9.1% increase. The DA supports this increase especially the compensation of employees, which saw an increase of 8.2%, considering the passion and commitment shown by our teachers. They are trying their best under difficult circumstances, and they have been navigating through tough economic times; fuel prices have been increasing, repo rates have been increasing, unreliable electricity has gone up and municipal bills are always increasing. The DA does support subsidies to no fee-free schools. We support school nutrition programmes, but we don’t support awarding R1.5 billion to only 26 service providers. Considering the high unemployment rate and the lack of economic growth, this R1.5 billion must benefit more than 500 service providers who will create more job opportunities and create business for more service providers.

The same goes for scholar transport with an R988.8 million allocation. The DA believes that the department must create opportunities for more people to enter the space. We have noticed the current challenge by service providers alleging that the process was unfair. Unfortunately, this has caused problems for our learners as they missed some days of schooling because of the scholar transport strike. The Sedibeng schools were badly affected by this scholar transport strike.

The DA is urging the department to increase the target for learners achieving more than 60% in Maths and Science. More so, that there is a target to embark on a robust teacher development programme. Equally, the target of bachelor passes must be more than 50%. This will indicate a stable system and become a sustainable base.

The department must start investing in facilities and equipment for different sporting codes. We cannot afford to postpone the current need to diversify sporting codes in Gauteng. I wish this province could avoid spending R24 million to demolish a stadium and use the budget to build or improve more sporting facilities in schools. This will advance social cohesion and nurture natural talents amongst young people. Instead of spending money on a flag, we must get our priorities right.

Programme 3: Independent schools

This programme's budget is R1.0 billion and there is an increase of 4.7%. The DA supports this allocation, as independent schools play an important role, especially where government is failing to build more schools. They minimise admission pressure and offer some relief to migration problems. However, the existence of illegal independent schools in Gauteng is a huge concern. The department has not acted decisively to protect learners and parents from unregistered schools. The DA is also concerned with administrators who get paid R495 000 every month to monitor schools on how to spend their budgets. We propose that each school which fails to account must be referred to the Matthew Goniwe Leadership programme. There must be mentorship programmes offered to schools which have no capacity.

Programme 4: Public Special School

The budget allocation is R4.9 billion which is an increase of 8.2%. There is a need to get more public schools to accommodate learners with special needs. All these schools must be well resourced. Filadelphia has been on the news for the wrong reasons. We urge the department to make necessary interventions to ensure that the school has the proper leadership to fly the school flag high. Unfortunately, Nokuthula LSEN School is still not fully occupied. I’m not sure if the Acting MEC Mamabolo has honoured his commitment to resolve this problem. Imagine spending more than R300 million and the school can still not be fully occupied even though the Premier had cut the ribbon in 2018. Yet there is no consequence management.  Only R40.5 is allocated for infrastructure in Public Special Schools but there are no plans to build any new school this year.

Programme 5: Early Childhood Development

This programme has a history of under expenditure. The budget allocated is R1.9 billion, which is an increase of 8.3%. All children in grade R and pre–Grade R must never be denied access due to a lack of funding. ECDs must not only be caring centres but learning institutions which prepare children to start formal schooling. This will demand rethinking about professionalizing practitioners and their working environment. There were many incidents of abuse and uncaring behaviour reported in certain centres. This must be attended to urgently. It is good that there is an alignment of all foundation phase institutions preparing for entry into grade 1. This must help learners to improve literacy and numeracy levels.

Programme 6: Infrastructure Development

The budget allocated to this programme is R1.7 billion and it is not adequate considering that there is a high demand to fix ageing, dilapidated and broken school infrastructure.

This includes replacing asbestos schools and mobile schools. We have noticed an increase in protests demanding more resources to ensure that learning and teaching take place in a conducive environment. The department should cut the administration budget and allocate more to infrastructure. The MEC will no doubt leave office before eradicating all structures built of inappropriate materials. The department must leave its abusive relationship with DID as there are so many outstanding issues with projects under DID, for example, Mayibuye Primary school and Braamfischer Primary School to name a few. These issues range from lack of approved plans, no occupational certificate, non-payment of subcontractors, the appointment of unqualified service providers and only allocating projects to friends and comrades.

Programme 7: Examination and Education-Related Services

The budget allocation has increased from R1.7 billion to R2.7 billion. This is an increase of more than 60%. Examination budget allocation is necessary as it is about the 4th industrial revolution. We must seek to foster a more balanced working relationship between increasingly smart technologies and humans. Covid-19 caught us on the back foot hence we must align the budget to the future. Can we deploy technologies to enhance learning and teaching? Can we prevent bullying? Can we prevent violence? In short, we need an effective school safety strategy. Equally, all schools must comply with occupational and health standards.

Conclusion

Madam Speaker, we have a responsibility to provide access to basic quality education. We must strive to ensure that all schools have quality leadership and management.

There must be no learner who sits at home due to a lack of space. We must do our best to guarantee parental choice and online admission must not take away such a choice.

We must champion schools of specialisation. Let’s not celebrate mediocrity.

Let’s think about the future; South Africa must be a better place to live and work. Gauteng province must brim with opportunities through education which plays a vital role in improving quality of life.

The DA is appealing to all education stakeholders to put our learners on top of the agenda. Learning and teaching must be our priority. Let's plan for the future of our children. This budget must be about building strong communities and empowering young people with much-needed skills.

Thank you.

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