



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION, MRS ANGIE MOTSHEKGA, ON THE STATE OF READINESS FOR 2021 SCHOOL YEAR, PRETORIA

17 DECEMBER 2020

Good morning and thank you for attending.

The year 2020 will be recorded in history as the most difficult year for the world, and indeed for our country. When we started in January, nobody could have anticipated the sudden turn of our fate. In March, we were forced to close schools indefinitely to save lives, as part of the response to the coronavirus, which was causing chaos around the world.

As soon as we closed schools, the first question we got was, when schools are going to reopen. Nobody knew the answer because there was no plan.

When we eventually had a plan after detailed and rigorous consultations with stakeholders, we resolved to reopen schools in June. The Grade 12 learners went back first, and remained in school until the end of their examination this week on Tuesday. They had lost 47 days; but through various interventions following the revision of the 2020 school calendar, they were able to recover the lost days; and in the end, finished their curriculum.

We thank all the organisations that rallied behind the Class of 2020 with the WOZA MATRICS programme. We hope that they will continue their involvement and also support the Class of 2021 because they, too, had limited time for teaching and learning.

We thank the parents for trusting us with their children's safety, by sending them back to school, even against opposition from some quarters.

Let us pause and thank our teachers, who worked tirelessly; some of them for 7 days, sacrificing their precious time to ensure that teaching and learning continues, even under trying circumstances. Thank you, and thank you again!

Let me also acknowledge that along the way, we lost 1 493 teachers, some of them as a result of COVID-19, we lost workers in schools and officials in circuits, district offices, provincial departments; and who can forget that we also lost the MEC of Education in the Northern Cape, Mack Jack – may their souls rest in eternal peace. We will not forget them. We send our prayerful thoughts to all the families of the dearly departed.

On Tuesday the 15th of December, we officially ended the 2020 academic year. We hope all the learners in and up to grade 11, got their reports; and that the results are a representation of their hard work and effort.

I wish to stress that schools are not allowed by law, to withhold reports for whatever reason. We continue to receive complaints from parents, whose children have not been given reports.

This year teaching and learning took place with a trimmed curriculum; and schools adopted either platooning or rotational approaches of alternate days or alternate weeks. We also made some adjustments to the assessment regime, as we sought to navigate our way around the pressure and complications resulting from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The coronavirus also forced us to suspend our enrichment programmes, such Spelling Bee, SASCE, Moot Court, and all the sporting activities.

The challenges also brought into sharp focus the need for us to strengthen our psycho-social support services as a sector. We managed to reopen schools through the support of other departments and social partners who operate in this space. The psychological impact of the virus will be felt in years to come; we therefore, need to work hard in this regard.

School readiness for 2021

The sector is ready for the 2021 academic year. Schools will reopen on 25 January for teachers and learners are expected back on 27 January. All provinces have finalised admission processes. District offices will be available to assist parents where the need arises.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the DBE has been monitoring the state of provinces on a weekly basis to ensure that provinces have systems in place to cope under the pandemic; and to provide support, where support is needed, to ensure smooth reopening and running of schools.

We will maintain the delicate balance of health and safety in schools and also ensure that we plug on gaps for curriculum recovery which we have been able to successfully during the 2020 academic year. Senior managers in the sector under the leadership of the Director General will be working during the festive season to put final touches to the already existing plan for 2021.

We have been working with other countries such as Zimbabwe, Namibia, Kenya, and Rwanda as well as others from other continents to draw on lessons learned during COVID -19 and preparing for 2021. These engagements have been extremely useful even from world and continental fora.

The main focus of monitoring the 2021 school reopening, will be to ensure school readiness for the 2021 school calendar year; and that blockages are addressed on time.

The 2021 School Readiness Monitoring, through provincial one-on-one meetings, has focused on the provincial state of readiness on the following areas:

- Health and Safety;
- School admissions;
- Learner Drop-out;
- Provision of Teachers;
- Provision of LTSMs;
- Curriculum Management and Assessment;
- Roll-out of Information, Communication and Technologies (ICTs);
- National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP);
- Provision of infrastructure, with emphasis on water, sanitation;
- Provision of learner transport; as well as
- School Safety; and Psychosocial Support.

In the New Year, the basic education sector will receive 300 000 young employees in schools. This is part of President Cyril Ramaphosa's Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme to create 200 000 employment opportunities for Education Assistants, and 100 000 for General School Assistants. This will be accomplished through the ***Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI)***.

The BEEI seeks to address COVID-19 academic disruption, as well as addressing some of the lingering systemic challenges. Education Assistants will support teachers in the classroom, and provide extra support to learners. General School Assistants will help schools to

comply with COVID-19 protocols, while ensuring that teaching and learning take place in a safe, secure and hygienic environment.

The 300 000 employment opportunities, were targeted at young people to strengthen capacity in schools at least until the end of March 2021.

More than 65 per cent of the recruits have been captured and the month of December and January will be used for training and induction. They will work in areas that include ICTs, Reading, Mathematics, Robotics and coding. Different organisations including the SETAs have come on board to support the initiative.

We mentioned in May that schooling was not going to be the same with regards to curriculum implementation. We were clear that the impact of COVID-19 would have far reaching implications; and that recovering from the effects of the pandemic, would take place over a 3-year period.

So, as part of the 3-year curriculum recovery plan, from 2021, we will be implementing the recovery annual teaching plans (ATP) in all Grades, R -12. The basis of the recovery ATPs, is the trimmed curriculum; but now includes the learning losses to be recovered in each grade, based on the learning losses in the previous grade.

Unintended learning losses occurred due to extended closure of schools, the phased-in approach to ensure adherence to social distancing protocols, the rotational attendance implemented in 2020, and the intermittent closure of schools due to increased localised infections. The recovery process will occur over a three-year period, straddling 2021 to 2023, to gradually recover the learning losses, while building on foundational content required for the next grade. The multi-year recovery plan also ensures that the impact of further learning losses are minimised.

The recovery ATPs, focus mainly on the core and fundamental content knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required in each grade and subject, to ensure deep learning and content mastery as opposed to superficial learning. The recovery ATPs have been uploaded on the DBE website, and can be accessed with immediate effect. Some of our teachers have already been asking for these documents. It shows that others want to finalise their teaching plans for 2021 already. That is really commendable.

The 2022 School Calendar

The Department has published the proposed school calendar for 2022. We are proposing a staggered calendar, in which coastal and inland provinces open schools on different dates. The proposed calendar is available on the DBE website as well as our social media platforms. We humbly request that members of the public and stakeholders make their inputs, before we finalise it. You have until the middle of January 2021 to send in your inputs.

Read to Lead Campaign

The school holidays are going to be very long. We therefore, urge families to embrace reading as an activity of choice. Reading becomes the only safe option, seeing that we are urged to avoid mass gatherings, wear masks, sanitise, and keep social distancing. We urge families to use the December break for reading for pleasure and to continue to promote reading.

Today, we officially launch the READING SEASON. Let us keep our children engaged, and help them endure; if not enjoy, the extra-long holidays. Let us buy books for gifts, read and discuss books as families, or start virtual reading clubs where possible.

His Excellency, President Ramaphosa, had declared during the previous year's State of the National Addresses that children must be able to read with meaning. He launched the National Reading Coalition, which is coordinated under the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). I am happy to announce that on Monday, 14 December, we launched, we launch the Book Reading Club. These reading clubs will be coordinated regularly; and we encourage members of our communities participate in these book reading sessions. Fairly soon, the NECT will release the schedule for these book reading session.

TIMSS outcomes

Last week we unveiled the results of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) survey.

TIMSS is an assessment of the mathematics and science knowledge of fourth and eighth-grade learners around the world.

The TIMSS 2019, the achievements mean that from 2003 to 2019, South Africa improved by 104 points for mathematics and 102 points for science, i.e. one standard deviation. The Mathematics and science ability levels increased from 11% of learners demonstrating that they had acquired basic mathematical and science knowledge in 2003, to 41% of mathematics learners and 36% of science learners demonstrating this ability in 2019.

In 2003, only one in ten learners demonstrated that they had acquired basic mathematical and science knowledge. This increased to four in ten learners in 2019. According to the TIMSS 2019, there's an increased proportion of grade 9 learners demonstrating improved abilities in mathematics and science.

The TIMSS Survey, is a critical study that gives us an accurate picture of the challenges and prospects in the area of Mathematics and Science. We participate in TIMSS Study, TALIS Survey, SACMEQ and PIRLS as

part of our long-term dream to build an excellent education system that stands up to the highest international benchmarks and standards.

Through our TIMSS Study participation, we have positioned ourselves as a learning system that is eager to measure our capabilities among the best in the world.

Most importantly, the TIMSS Study and others help us to develop evidence-based remedial policies and strategies.

The South African basic education judged amongst its peers and against the developed world, is firmly a system on the rise

We will be using 2021 to engage provinces and the sector in general on the TIMMS results.

Update on Matric Examinations

The matric examinations came to an end on 15 December 2020. The combined exam, which involved full-time and part-time candidates, started on 05 November, with more than 1 million candidates writing together at the same time. The exam took place in 8 200 exam centres in all provinces with 80,000 invigilators. Two hundred and sixteen (216) question papers were being written with more than 10 million scripts printed. The sector appointed 45 000 markers in 180 marking centres.

The size of the 2020 NSC examination was unprecedented; and as a result, the capacity of the system was increased to accommodate the record high numbers.

The exam proceeded well, until the leaking of some of the question papers. As a sector, we sought to have the candidates to rewrite the leaked papers. We strongly believed, as we still do, that this was the only way to address the lingering questions regarding the integrity, credibility and fairness of the 2020 NSC examinations.

The North Gauteng High Court ruling did not help either, because it did not deal with ***the credibility, integrity and fairness of the 2020 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination, taking into account the compromise of the 2020 exams, resulting from the leaks of Mathematics Paper 2 and Physical Science Paper 2.*** The public must be reminded that any compromise of the NSC examinations, cannot only be justified through the number of the defaulting candidates, but mainly through the extent of the compromise. We must state upfront that the compromise was not localised, as was the case in 2016, but it was widespread, as all provinces were implicated.

We must say, that some of the findings of the High Court, are discordant with applicable basic education legislative provisions; and some findings were made against the Department on issues that were not even raised in the court papers. The legal team is exploring avenues that are to be used to address some of the errors we have picked up in the judgment.

The Department will continue with its work, that includes the marking and standardisation processes; the latter being steered by our quality assured, UMALUSI. Marking will commence in earnest on 04 January 2021. On the 12 February 2021, the DBE will present an irregularities report to UMALUSI; and thereafter wait for the quality assurance agency to make an announcement on the integrity, credibility and fairness of the 2020 NSC examinations. **We are on schedule for the release on 22 February 2021; and candidates should get their statement of results the next day, on 23 February 2021.**

Conclusion

We appreciate the sacrifice and the hard work displayed by officials in all levels of the system – from the DBE, PEDs, Districts, Circuits and indeed schools.

Do not forget to wear your mask, sanitize, wash hands, and keep social distancing, avoid large gatherings, and stay safe.
I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Thank you

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