



PARLIAMENT
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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES
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OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES, HONOURABLE N. A. MASONDO, ON THE OCCASION OF THE MINISTERIAL BRIEFING SESSION ON SCHOOL DROPOUT

DATE: 16 NOVEMBER 2021 **VENUE:** HYBRID **TIME:** 10H00

Greetings! Good morning!!

Programme Director, Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Honourable Sylvia Lucas

Minister of Basic Education, Honourable Angie Motshekga

Deputy Minister of Basic Education, Honourable Reginah Mhaule

NCOP House Chairpersons, Honourable Jomo Nyambi and Honourable Winnie Ngwenya

NCOP Chief Whip, Honourable Seiso Mohai

Honourable Permanent and Special Delegates

Honourable Members of Provincial Executive Councils

Ladies and gentlemen

Programme Director, allow me to start by thanking you for the opportunity to make the opening remarks on the occasion of this important Ministerial Briefing Session on School Dropout.

I am happy that we are all back after the election campaign activities which, hopefully, are culminating in newly-configured Municipal Councils across the length and breadth of the country. Owing to the changes in the local government sphere, we are looking forward to welcoming the new representatives of organised local government in our future sessions and other related activities.

Local government has a special place in the National Council of Provinces. Asiphelelanga uma bengekho.

Today's briefing session focuses us on the path "Towards a Comprehensive National Dropout Management and Prevention Plan". This is of critical importance given the adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the related lockdown measures, on school attendance.

There is a growing need to focus our energies on finding ways and means of securing the future of our young citizens.

In August this year, we held a Ministerial Briefing on Youth Poverty and Unemployment. The purpose was to know what government, across the different spheres, was doing to address this huge challenge. We also wanted to inform ourselves as to what we could do to assist in ensuring that a solution was found, particularly given the fact that the task of addressing youth unemployment is one of the foremost priorities of the 6th administration.

Among the issues that were raised by the Ministers that we had invited to address us, was the chilling reality that: In spite of the massive investments in education, of the 1 million young children who start school every year only 500 thousand sit for their matric exams. And that, quite expectedly, the majority of the young people who are unemployed are those without a matric certificate.

This suggests that we are already sitting with a serious challenge of the masses of our young people who are not ready to participate meaningfully in the country's economy. This raises the need to find ways of dealing with the plight of the missing children and youth while, at the same time, addressing the challenge of school dropout in a sustainable manner. As we all know, the country is already experiencing high levels of unemployment which impact a number of young people with post-matric education.

With regard to school dropout, the first point is to acknowledge that the Minister of Basic Education Mme Angie Motshekga has, for some time now, been raising the challenge of the huge numbers of children who are lost through the school system. This is a serious concern given the constitutional injunction that everyone has the right to basic education and to further education.

In particular, the South African Schools Act of 1996, as amended, states that “every parent must cause every learner for whom he or she is responsible to attend a school from the first school day of the year in which such learner reaches the age of seven years until the last school day of the year in which such learner reaches the age of fifteen years or the ninth grade, whichever occurs first”¹.

Given the impact it has and likely to have on society, the early withdrawal of learners from the school system is everybody’s problem. To address it requires the efforts of all the roleplayers and stakeholders, not to mention the parents and educators. Parents and educators are better positioned to monitor the behavior of learners and to anticipate the challenges that may contribute to them dropping out of the system before acquiring the National Senior Certificate.

The Schools Act provides that if a learner who is subject to compulsory attendance is not enrolled at or fails to attend a school, the Head of Department may –

- 1) investigate the circumstances of the learner’s absence from school;
- 2) take appropriate measures to remedy the situation; and
- 3) failing such a remedy, issue a written notice to the parent of the learner requiring compliance with the provision of the Act.

¹ Section 3 (1), South African Schools Act of 1996, as amended.

Further, it states that any parent who, without just cause and after a written notice from the Head of Department, fails to comply with the Act, is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months. The same applies to any other person who, without just cause, prevents a learner who is subject to compulsory attendance from attending a school.

At the basic level Programme Director, ideally at least, a system that entails the active participation of the parent and educator could assist to account for each learner within the system. Broadening this to include the whole of society could help to close the gaps that are created by the different social conditions under which children find themselves.

We know that some children are without parents, and as a result some find themselves having to play the role of parents to their siblings at an early age. There are many other reasons for school dropout which include family commitment, illness, lack of interest, and poverty which to a great extent is mitigated by the No-fee Schools policy.

Whatever the reasons, we need to find a workable solution to drastically reduce and ultimately eradicate the phenomenon of school dropout.

Programme Director, since their introduction in 2020 the Ministerial briefings have helped us to understand the performance of government across the different spheres in responding to the many and complex challenges that accompany policy implementation.

The sessions have provided us with the necessary information to undertake informed oversight that should result in improved outcomes for the people.

It is with this in mind that we have convened the leadership of the national and provincial spheres of government to look at ways and means of addressing the challenge of school dropout.

Programme Director, I am looking forward to the presentations and inputs that should hopefully pave the way for a solution to this challenge.

Thank you!