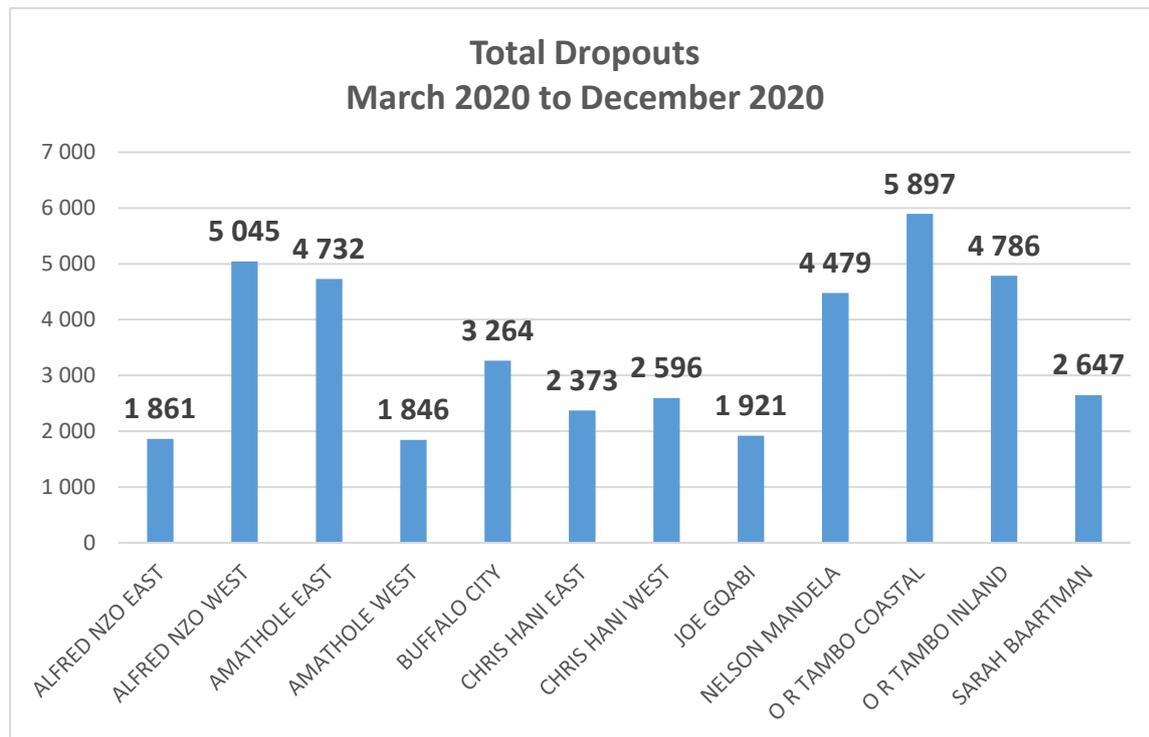


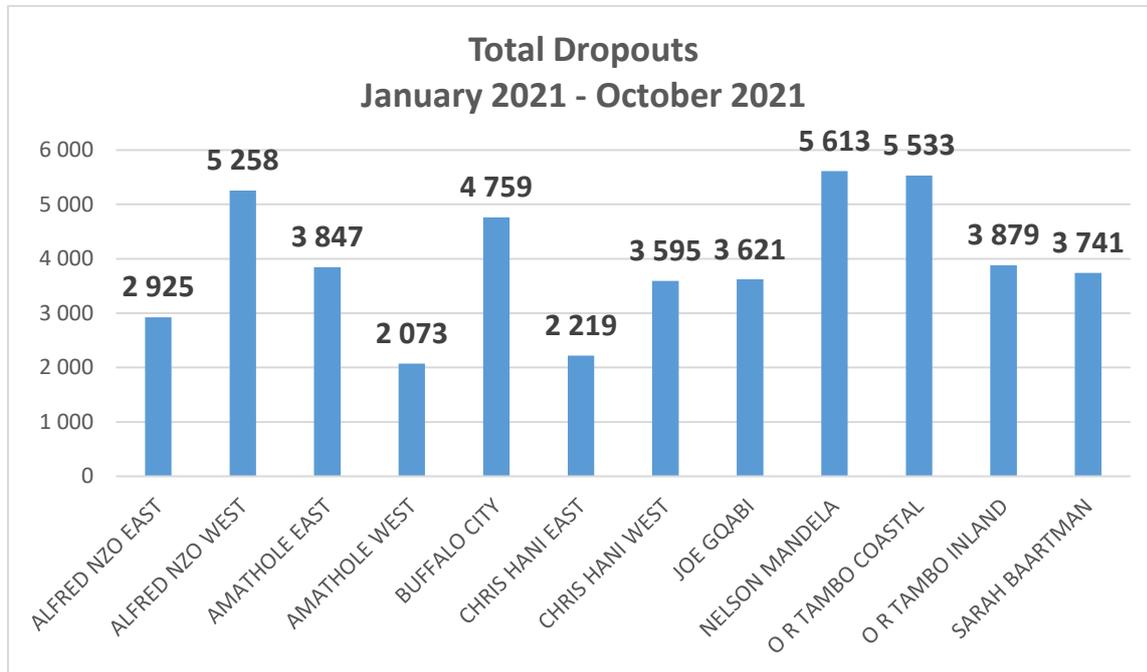


Provincial Interventions to address School Dropouts during COVID-19 pandemic

It is undeniable that COVID-19 has ravaged the education system across the world and South Africa, particularly the Eastern Cape was not spared. The pandemic heavily disrupted teaching and learning, and this has exacerbated the learner dropout across the province. The figure below depicts learner dropouts between March 2020 and December 2020 per district in the Eastern Cape Department of Education. In 2020, OR Tambo Inland was the hardest hit district by learner dropout followed by Alfred Nzo West.



The impact of Covid-19 is quite visible in learner dropout again in 2021 as indicated below with the numbers doubling from the previous years. In 2021 Nelson Mandela Bay District has the highest number of learner dropouts and this can be attributed to the surge of the pandemic as this is one of most affect areas in the province.



The department is seized by the alarming levels of learner dropouts and this compelled the department to come up with are numerous approaches to address the high level of learner dropout in the province.

Currently, the department has put in place the following programmes aimed at increasing learner retention and the overall delivery of education.

These programs are:

- the school nutrition involving feeding schemes for all learners in quintiles 1-3,
- extra classes to ensure curriculum coverage and one on one session to assist learners with different challenges,
- extra-mural activities to encourage learners to be actively involved in different activities that can help to boost their morale and zeal to be at school,
- transportation facilities to ensure that all learners who are in need of transport assistance they are getting it,



- Improved parental engagement to ensure that they are involved in the teaching and learning of their children as well as for them to check the performance of the children and where there is poor performance, they will have to work with the teacher to assist the learner,
- Educators are enrolling via Fundza Lusaka in higher education institutions to obtain qualifications to teach critical subjects (maths, science) and gain knowledge and skills on how to teach learners in Grades R-4 on reading for meaning,

It is essential to note that, feeding schemes and improved parental involvement appeared to be the more successful strategies.

Schools offering feeding schemes have some success stories of retaining their learners and improving the school conditions, as not only did learners have more energy but the feeding scheme acted as an incentive for learners to attend school.

Increased parental involvement is appearing to be quite effective as it is allowing schools to track their learners and interact with their parents more efficiently, and this helping on ensuring that learners are attending school, and that learners are doing their homework.

A lack of or negative parental engagement was in the past reported as one of the contributing factors to why learners were dropping out of school.

These intervention strategies are in fact to some extent helping to curb the high dropout rate at schools, no schools have programmes in place specifically customized to address the problem of learners dropping out.

At national level, schools reporting a lack of guidance from the GDE in terms of how to deal with this issue and the same applies at provincial and local level.

Some of the learners who have dropped out are unaware of what are their alternatives options to pursue education beyond and or beside Grade 10-12, and there appears to be negative undertones related with ABET/FET colleges which prevents learners who drop out of school from pursuing these avenues. These colleges also tend to be quite saturated preventing learners from enrolling in them.



Learner Attendance Policy and the SA Schools Act

In line with the Learner Attendance Policy and the SA Schools Act, here are some suggestions that needs to be put into consideration:

- Enrolment ratios for Grade 8-10-12 must be also included as measure of school performance,
- Learner Attendance policy should clearly define learner dropout,
- Clear guidance needs to be provided as to how schools should deal with reregistration and remove all obstacles that are hindering learners from getting back into the schooling system,
- The practice of issuing condoned passes and progressing learners through the system based on this Policy needs to be reconsidered,
- There is a need for a clear Policy Statement on pushout with explicit consequences for principals and educators,
- Learners do not know the options they have, therefore, options at FET Colleges need to be better communicated, and schools need to be assisted in communicating bursary opportunities to appropriate learners which requires strong collaboration with the DHET to ensure that all learners who obtain their NSC will be able to go tertiary institutions,
- Investigate the legal definition of “Parents” according to SA Schools Act and allow for a wider definition at schools.