

Closing remarks by Honourable Mr S J Mohai (MP) Chief Whip of the NCOP during the Ministerial Briefing Session on School Dropout

Honourable Chairperson

Honourable Deputy Chairperson

Honourable Deputy Minister Dr Mhaule

Honourable MECs

Honourable Special Delegates

The Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc across the world. Like any other critical sector of society, education has been hit hard by the pandemic. The pandemic has severely disrupted learning patterns and systems across the world. It has also causes incalculable damage to household income and forced many households to put education right at the bottom of their survival.

It is estimated that over 102 countries round the world ordered nationwide lockdown, resulting in the total shutdown of schools due to the pandemic.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), over 800 million learners from around the world have been affected. In a recent study UNESCO also found that 1 in 5 learners cannot attend school, 1 in 4 cannot attend higher education classes because of no access to necessary ICT tools like computers and data.

Honourable chairperson

According to a report by the Zero Dropout Campaign, most schools in South Africa have seen absenteeism rise from the average of 2% to between 10% and 25% when school reopened in after the first lockdown in 2020.

The sad reality is that the pandemic has affected the poor and marginalised more. While we welcome the responded of the department to manage the impact of the pandemic on school, especially learning patterns, the reality is that the pandemic has exacerbated the impact of poverty, unemployment, development and lack of facilities in poor and rural areas. Rotational attendance, sporadic school closures and days off for some grades, have resulted created a space for learner dropout.

Honourable Chairperson

It is clear that despite the various legislative interventions to address the challenge of school dropout, a large number of children continue to drop out of school. While we recognise the dire impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is clear that we need to build rigorous resilience from our schooling system to manage and reduce the school dropout rate.

The reality is that if we want to continue on our national path to ensure redress of the previous historical imbalances in our society, we need to get each and every learner back to class.

We need to accelerate the Implementation of a Comprehensive National Dropout Management and Prevention Plan to thoroughly respond to the crisis of school dropout. We need to make school dropout a national priority. For us public representatives, a figure of 200 000 school dropout makes us uncomfortable and extremely concern. It calls on all of us to wage a concerted battle to take each child back to school.

The late former President Nelson Mandela once said “education is the most powerful weapon which you can change the world”.

Honourable Chairperson, each child that drops out of school has no weapon to face the world, let alone help change it.

I thank you