



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Keynote Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, delivered at the Release of 2021 National Senior Certificate (NSC) Examination Results

22 January 2021

Good afternoon Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Today, we are gathered here to announce the 2020 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results. We are announcing these results in the context of what the NDP 2030, enjoins us to do, that “*by 2030, South Africans should have access to education and training of the highest quality, leading to significantly improved learner outcomes. The performance of South African learners in international standardised tests, should be comparable to the performance of learners from countries at a similar level of development and with similar levels of access*”.

It is without doubt that the 2020 academic year, will be remembered as the year that, not only presented major health challenges, but a year when the entire world was engulfed by the by the novel COVID-19 pandemic. Government, with its education departments and its strategic partners, worked very hard to strike a balance between saving lives and the 2020 academic year.

Basic Education Sector priorities for the Sixth Administration

We must remind the nation that the Council of Education Ministers had approved the Sector priorities to lay a ***solid foundation for quality education*** as well as contribute in providing permanent solutions to the architecture of the education and training system of our country once and for all. These priorities include *inter alia* –

- improving the ***foundational skills of numeracy and literary***, which should be underpinned by a ***Reading Revolution***;

- ramping up **Early Childhood Development (ECD)**, which includes the urgent implementation of **two-year of ECD before Grade 1**, and the **migration of 0-4 year-olds from the Department of Social Development to Department of Basic Education.**; and develop an **integrated Framework for ECD**;
- the immediate implementation of a **curriculum with skills and competencies for a changing world in all public schools**, particularly the Three-Stream Curriculum Model, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Entrepreneurship, Schools of Specialisation, Decolonisation of the Curriculum, amongst others;
- dealing decisively with the **quality and efficiency** through the implementation of standardised assessments at various exit points of the system at Grades 3, 6 and 9; and offer the General Education Certificate (GEC), through which learners are directed through different pathways; and introduced to multiple qualifications and certification;
- completing an **Integrated Infrastructure Development Plan** and the **Agency**, informed by infrastructure delivery and regular maintenance as well as resourcing;
- working with Sports and Recreation, Arts and Culture, Health, and South African Police Service to teach and promote **social cohesion, health, and school safety**; and
- in line with our commitment towards an **inclusive education**, and ensuring that no child is left behind, the Sector needs to continue with its work to improve and strengthen education provisions of **learners with special education needs** (LSEN).

International benchmark assessment studies

Programme Director, during the announcement of the 2019 NSC exam results, we informed the nation about the seven Basic Education Sector cardinal priorities for the Sixth Administration. We can report that we are continuing to participate in international benchmark assessment studies, such as the **Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS)** for Grade 4; the **Trends in**

International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) for Grade 5, and the **Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ)** for Grade 6, to benchmark the performance of our system with other systems of the world. All of these international benchmark assessment studies have been providing evidence that our Basic Education system is definitely on the rise.

We are proud to announce that in 2020, South Africa's participation in benchmark studies, again pointed towards an upward trajectory in the past eleven years. The latest release of the **TIMSS 2019**, explained that in the context of many forms of inequalities, the education system continues to improve on its achievements, and continues to bridge gaps on disciplinary knowledge and educational outcomes. The 2019 TIMSS results indicate a steady increase in the percentage of Grade 5 learners, acquiring basic Mathematics and Science skills at lower levels of the system. From 2003 to 2019, the Mathematics and Science achievements, **increased by 104 points** and **102 points**, respectively.

The 2020 National Senior Certificate Examination Results

Last year, during the Budget Vote Debate on Basic Education, we had reminded the nation that we are increasingly prioritising interventions, improvement programmes, and policies that target improved **quality of learning and teaching**; and implementing **accountability systems** to ensure that quality outcomes are achieved right through the basic education system. Our interventions cater for both learners who are at **risk of underperforming**, and those who are **moderate to high achievers**. This differentiated approach, aims to address both content deficiencies that may prevent learners from achieving good educational outcomes; and support moderate to high achievers to improve their performance – thereby improving the **quality of learning outcomes**.

This we had to do, despite the devastation brought on all nations of the world by the novel COVID-19 pandemic. We had repeatedly informed the nation that our interventions were not only confined to saving the 2020 academic year, but most importantly to save lives. The staggered reopening of schools from around June 2020, the

differentiated timetabling, the trimmed curriculum delivery for the school communities below Grade 12, the regular provisioning of school feeding and psychosocial services, as well as the extra tuition and support provided to the Class of 2020, were all intended to mitigate against the risks outlined by the World Health Organisation (WHO); risks that were brought about by prolonged absence of learners at school.

The World Health Organisation states that *“during the COVID-19 pandemic, prolonged school closures may result in a reversal of educational gains, limiting children’s educational and vocational opportunities, as well as their social and emotional interactions and development. The longer [learners] stay out of school, the higher the risk of dropping out. Additionally, [learners], who are out of school – and particularly girls – are at increased risk of vulnerabilities, [not limited to] teenage pregnancies. Furthermore, prolonged school closures, interrupt and disrupt the provision of, and access to essential school-based services, such as school feeding and nutrition programmes, immunisation, [as well as] mental health and psychosocial support”*.

Dr Martin Gustafsson, agrees with the WHO in his article posted in the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Blog on 21 October 2020, when he says *“disruption in schooling, has denied learners their usual classroom experience with teachers and other children. Disruptions were serious for younger children, who are most in need of contact teaching”*.

Intervention and support programmes for the Class of 2020

The Class of 2020 was offered targeted support aimed at ensuring that all learners receive maximum opportunities to succeed. The 2020 learner support programmes, encompassed a broad collection of educational strategies, including supplementary materials – including textbooks, study guides, revision notes and worksheets; vacation classes (during autumn, winter and spring vacations), as well as morning and after-school classes; teacher development on content, pedagogical methodologies, and assessment support; mobilising volunteer tutors, as well as alternative and differentiated ways of grouping and teaching learners; ICT interventions, including

the provision of devices, data, online content, virtual classrooms, broadcasts and radio lessons.

Schools also provided specific learner support programmes to address specific performance results or trends. NGOs, corporates, institutions of higher learning, community groups, and volunteer-based learning programmes – including the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) with its “*Woza Matrics*” campaign, often worked in partnership with schools and provided highly valuable support to our learners – for that, we remain eternally grateful. We also wish to commend all learners, teachers, Senior Management Teams, support staff, parents and our officials for the resilience they have shown in braving the novel COVID-19 pandemic, with a single goal of ensuring that the Class of 2020 receives optimum, but indispensable support.

Umalusi declares on the credibility and integrity of the 2020 NSC combined examinations

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me quote from the ***standardisation decisions and approval statements of Umalusi***, on the 2020 NSC combined examinations, administered by the DBE. Umalusi pronounced that “*having noted with concern the serious irregularities regarding the leakage of Mathematics Paper 2 and Physical Sciences Paper 2, [Umalusi] is satisfied that there were no systemic irregularities reported, which might have compromised the overall credibility and integrity of the November 2020 NSC examinations, administered by the DBE. [Umalusi] approves the release of the DBE results of the November 2020 NSC examinations*”. I advise South Africans to read the full statement from Umalusi; it is available in their website.

Profile: Class of 2020

The Class of 2020 is the ***third cohort*** to be introduced to ***12 new subject offerings***, comprising the South African Sign Language (Home Language), written by ***one hundred*** (100) ***candidates***; and Civil Technologies, Mechanical Technologies, and Electrical Technologies – each with three subjects; as well as Technical Mathematics and Technical Science, written by ***forty thousand, eight hundred and fifty-six*** (40 856) ***candidates***. The Class of

2020 was also impacted by policy changes, such as, the Policy on Progression – they were the 7th cohort to be exposed to this Policy change; the discontinuation of the Policy on Multiple Examination Opportunity (MEO); the offering of **two** (2) question papers in Accounting and Business Studies; and the abolition of the designated list of subjects in 2018.

The total number of candidates, who registered for the 2020 NSC exams was **seven hundred and twenty-five thousand and thirty-four** (725 034), comprising **six hundred and seven thousand, two hundred and twenty-six** (607 226) full-time candidates, and **one hundred and seventeen thousand, eight hundred and eight** (117 808) part-time candidates.

In addition to the full-time and part-time candidates who enrolled for the 2020 NSC exams, we combined the November 2020 NSC examinations with the June 2020 Senior Certificate, and June 2020 NSC exams. This increased the number of candidates who wrote the combined 2020 November exams to a record of **more than a million** (1 0 54 321) candidates.

We set **one hundred and forty-seven** (147) question papers; printed **eight (8) million** question papers; produced **seven point six (7.6) million** scripts, which we delivered countrywide to **six thousand, eight hundred and seventy-two** (6 872) in secure examination centres; in which **sixty-five thousand** (65 000) invigilators were on duty. **Forty-five thousand, two hundred and seventy-two** (45 272) markers were appointed, in **one hundred and seventy-nine** (179) secure marking centres.

Programme Director, **at the outset, we wish to advise everyone that a more comprehensive Statement, can be found from the DBE websites.**

Performance of the progressed learners

In the 2020 NSC examinations, we saw **seventy thousand, five hundred and sixty-five** (70 565) progressed learners enrolling for the exams. **Sixty-five thousand, four hundred ninety-nine** (65 499) of these candidates, actually wrote the requisite **seven subjects** during the 2020 NSC examinations. **Twenty-four**

thousand, two hundred and forty-four (24 244) progressed learners passed the 2020 NSC examinations.

Three thousand and twenty-six (3 026) of the progressed learners, achieved Bachelor passes; ***ten thousand, one hundred and seven*** (10 107) obtained Diploma passes; ***eleven thousand and eighty-eight*** (11 088) obtained Higher Certificate passes; ***eleven*** (11) obtained NSC passes; and a total of ***one thousand, six hundred and fifty-five*** (1 655) distinctions, including distinctions in critical subjects, such as Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics and Physical Science.

The significance of these achievements, is that the ***twenty-four thousand, two hundred and forty-four*** (24 244) progressed learners, who passed – *were the would-be-high-school repeaters and dropouts*, who have a golden opportunity to access either higher education institutions, TVET Colleges, and other skills development institutions. What a positive story!!

Learners with Special Education Needs

We strongly believe that an ***Inclusive Education system*** makes an immense contribution towards an ***inclusive economy***, to serve an ***inclusive society***. We have for the past few years included the learners with special education needs in tracking learner performance in the NSC exams. Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, we are happy to announce that out of the ***two thousand, one hundred and sixty-one*** (2 161) learners with special education needs, who enrolled for the 2020 NSC examinations, ***two thousand and fifty-eight*** (2 058), wrote the 2020 NSC exams.

One thousand, seven hundred and fifty-seven (1 757) learners with special education needs passed the 2020 exams. ***Nine hundred and forty-three*** (943) and ***five hundred and eighty-two*** (582) of these learners, achieved Bachelor and Diploma passes, respectively. ***Two hundred and four*** (204) and ***twenty-eight*** (28) of them obtained Higher Certificate and NSC passes, respectively. Learners with special education needs achieved a total of ***six hundred and fifty-three*** (653) distinctions, including distinctions in the critical subjects.

The benefits of the pro-poor policies of Government on the 2020 NSC exam results

The 2020 NSC exam passes for “no fee” schools combined, stand at **two hundred and seventy-five thousand, six hundred and fifteen** (275 615). Bachelor passes achieved by learners in “no fee” schools, stand at **one hundred and fifteen thousand, four hundred and forty-four** (115 444). The poignancy of this increase lies in what research tells us, that in 2005, 60% of the Bachelor passes, came from the best performing 20% of the schooling system.

However, with the **introduction of a pro-poor policies in the education system in 2015**, “no fee” schools produced **51%** of the Bachelor passes, which increased to **58%** in 2020 (compared to 55% in 2019). Therefore, the significance of this, is that the gap between the Bachelor passes produced by “no fee” schools versus those produced by fee paying schools has significantly and progressively increased from **2%** in 2015, to **13%** in 2020 – a **3%** improvement from 2019. This is remarkable indeed!!

Programme Director, whilst imperatives related to **equity** and **redress** are systematically addressed, there are stubborn inequalities that still remain in the system. Government must however, be applauded for its pro-poor policies, which in the Basic Education arena, alleviate poverty through the pro-poor funding of schools; school feeding; and scholar transport to deserving learners. Among the Class of 2020, we must indicate that we had young people who are recipients of social grants; and some wrote their exams in correctional facilities. Ministers Zulu and Lamola will announce the impact of **social grants** and **restorative justice** on the beneficiaries, who were part of the Class of 2020.

Aggregation according to gender

There were **seventy-two thousand and thirty** (72 030) more girls than boys, who enrolled for the 2020 NSC examinations; and there were **sixty-six thousand, six hundred and twenty-six** (66 626) more girls than boys, who actually wrote the 2020 NSC examinations. Overall, there was **75.8%** girls, and **76.7%%** boys passed the 2020 NSC exams. More girls than boys achieved Bachelor and Diploma passes, as well as passes with distinctions. These distinctions

include passes with distinction in critical subjects such as Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics, and Physical Science.

Overall national performance

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, for the *past ten years*, we have noted that the NSC pass rates have consistently been improving from **60%** in 2009 to above **70%** in recent years. The Class of 2020 must be commended for maintaining this trend. The 2020 NSC overall pass rate, **with the progressed learners included**, stands at **76.2%** – a decline of **5.1%** from the record pass of 81.3% achieved by the Class of 2019. This represents a record of **four hundred and forty thousand, and seven hundred and two** (440 702) passes – an increase of **7.5%** in the number of passes from 2019. **Without the progressed learners**, the overall pass rate stands at **81.2%** – a **1.1%** decline from 2019.

Further analyses of the 2020 NSC exam results, **with the progressed learners included**, show that –

- the number of candidates qualifying for admission to Bachelor studies is **two hundred and ten thousand, eight hundred and twenty** (210 820) – an improvement of **13.3%** from 2019. This represents **36.4%** of the total number of candidates, who wrote the 2020 NSC exams;
- the number of candidates, who passed with a Diploma, is **one hundred and fifty thousand, six hundred** (150 600) – an increase of **4.1%** from 2019; which represents **26.0%** of the total number of candidates, who wrote the 2020 NSC exams;
- the number of candidates, who passed with Higher Certificates is **seventy-nine thousand, one hundred and seventeen** (79 117) – an improvement of **0.2%** from 2019; which represents **13.7%** of the total number of candidates, who wrote the 2020 NSC examinations;
- the number of candidates, who passed with a National Senior Certificate (NSC) is **sixty-one** (61), which represents **one in a hundred** (**0.01%**) of the number of candidates, who wrote the 2020 NSC examinations; and

- **one hundred and seventy-seven thousand, four hundred and thirty-five** (177 435) distinctions – an increase of **13.1%** from 2019, were achieved. The main contributors towards passes with distinctions, were KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, and Limpopo.

Provincial level performance

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me provide the performance of the Class of 2020 at the provincial and district levels. The 2020 NSC exam results show that, **with the progressed learners, three Provinces achieved lower than the 70% pass rate.** The achievements by province, **including the progressed learners,** are as follows –

- The Free State is the leading province at **85.1%**, a decline of **3.2%** from 2019;
- Gauteng achieved at **83.8%**, a **3.5%** decline from 2019;
- Western Cape achieved **79,9%**, a decline of **2.4%** improvement from 2019;
- KwaZulu-Natal achieved at **77.6%**, a decline of **3.7%** from 2019;
- North West achieved at **76.2%**, a decline of **10.6%** from 20219;
- Mpumalanga achieved at **73.7%**, a **6.6%** decline from 2019;
- Limpopo achieved at **68.2%**, a **5.0%** decline from 2019;
- Eastern Cape achieved at **68.1%**, a decline of **8.3%** from 2019;
- and
- Northern Cape achieved at **66.0%**, a **10.5%** decline from 2019.

However, **without progressed learners, all provinces performed above 70%**; and **five provinces performed above 80%**. Once again, the Free State tops the list at **91.6%**.

It is interesting to note from the analyses of **the performance of the Class of 200 by fee-paying status**, that the Free State is ranked first in all its fee-paying, “no fee”, and Government subsidised schools that write the NSC exams; while Mpumalanga’s fee-paying schools are ranked second; but their “no fee” and Government subsidised schools are ranked fifth and sixth, respectively; and Limpopo’s fee-paying schools are ranked third; while their “no fee” and Government subsidised schools are ranked seventh and fourth, respectively. It is for this reason that we are consolidating our work

on an ***inclusive basket of criteria***, which will use other critical variables, over and above overall pass numbers and percentages.

District level performance

The NDP recognises *districts as a crucial interface of the Basic Education Sector in identifying best practice, sharing information, and providing support to schools*. The continued growth in the performance of districts, is closely monitored and evaluated by both the provincial and national Basic Education departments. From the monitoring oversight, analyses of the performance of all schools, be they fee-paying, “no fee” or Government-subsidised independent schools whose learners write the NSC examinations, will be done and made available to districts. This will assist and enable districts to reprioritise their intervention programmes.

In the 2020 NSC exams, the ***top ten (10)*** districts in the country are:

- ***First***, is Tshwane South from Gauteng with **89.6%**;
- ***Second***, is Johannesburg West in Gauteng, with **88.1%**;
- ***Third***, is Gauteng North in Gauteng with **87.0%**;
- ***Fourth***, is Johannesburg North in Gauteng with **86.9%**;
- ***Fifth***, is Sedibeng East in Gauteng, with **86.8%**;
- ***Sixth***, is Fezile Dabi in the Free State, with **86.5%**;
- ***Seventh***, is Thabo Mofutsanyana in the Free State, with **85.8%**;
- Tied at ***eighth***, are Metro North in the Western Cape and Ekurhuleni South in Gauteng, with **85.4%**;
- ***Tenth***, is Motheo in the Free State, with **85.2%**;

It is important to observe that among the 75 education districts in our country, the ***top ten*** districts are in ***three*** (3) provinces. More impressively, ***all of the top ten*** districts, performed ***above 85%***. Notably, out of the ***top ten*** districts in the country, ***six*** (6) are from Gauteng, and ***three*** are from the Free State; and ***one*** from the Western Cape.

The ***top district level performances*** in the respective provinces, are as follows –

- In the Eastern Cape, the leading district is Nelson Mandela at **75.5%**. Siyabulela Mr Gongozola;

- In the Free State, the leading district is Fezile Dabi at **86.5%**. Dr Chuta, Hilda is leaving the Sector at the end of March; you can reclaim your number 1 spot;
- In Gauteng, Tshwane South is the leading district at **89.6%**; and is also ranked **first** nationally;
- Ugu, is the leading district in KwaZulu-Natal, with **81.7%**. Malume Sibiya, obiya ngeenkomo, uma abanye bebiya ngamahlahla;
- Waterberg 2, is the leading district in Limpopo at **77.5%**. MaMadela promised me I visited her district, re ya leboha sesi;
- Bohlabele and Nkangala are the leading districts in Mpumalanga, with **74.6%**. MaGoba and Mr Maja, siyabonga;
- Bojanala Platinum, is the leading district in the North West, with **81.2%**. Mrs Paledi, congratulations
- Namaqua, is the leading district in the Northern Cape, with **78.6%**. Meneer Cloete, baie dankie; and
- In the Western Cape, the Metro North is the leading district, with **85.3%**. Mr Millar, congratulations.

I am looking forward to our next district meeting sessions, where we share experiences and best practices. I also wish to actually thank all District Directors for their hard work. You are the people at the last mile towards the centrepiece of our Sector – our schools, and our children in particular. Thank you very much!!

Conclusion

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen in conclusion, there is no doubt that the system has begun to reach the desired stability; which is healthy for a large system, as large and important as ours. It is a pity that we missed the 80% glass ceiling we achieved last year; though we appreciate the unquestionable resilience our school community has shown against such a devastating pandemic; and managed to achieve a plausible **76.2%** national pass.

The high quality passes we have achieved this year, especially the ***number of Bachelor and Diploma passes, the overall pass mark, and the passes with distinctions, even in critical subjects, are the hallmarks of the performance of the Class of 2020.*** We are of the strong view that, had it not been for the novel COVID-19 pandemic, the Class of 2020 could have been the best performers, since the inception of the National Senior Certificate. We are indeed proud of the Class of 2020, which persevered against such monumental challenges that our system was never exposed to in the past. This Class, has characterised the resilience of the system, which withstood an unprecedented test of administering an examination of the largest number of candidates; faced by the worst pandemic in human history.

In celebrating the great achievements of the Class of 2020, we must also thank the principals, teachers, support staff, and parents for the work they continue to do. Schools are at the coalface of Basic Education delivery. What you do at the school level, is what matters the most. The future of our learners, and the prosperity of our nation, is in our hands. We applaud you for the great work you continue to do on a daily basis.

I must thank the Portfolio and Select Committees responsible for Basic Education, the Deputy Minister, Dr Reginah Mhaule, the MECs and the respective Heads of Departments for their stewardship, their leadership and their continued advice and support. I must thank the Director-General and his team of officials for the hard work they continue to provide.

Lastly, but certainly not the least, I wish to thank our strategic partners – teacher unions; governing body associations; our business partners working directly with us or through the NECT; the NECT itself; our statutory bodies – Umalusi and SACE; researchers, whose work we cannot do without; our sister departments; South Africans, who together with us have made the stability and the improvement of our sector their responsibility. We also wish to thank the GCIS for hosting us this year. Let me end by saying, the Governing Party was correct in declaring education a societal matter.

I thank you