

**Speech delivered by the MEC for Education, Mrs Reginah Mhaule
on the occasion of the Psychosocial Support Workshop on 25
February 2014**

Members of the Executive Council

Members of Senior Management

Representatives from the Department of Justice

Representatives from Labour

Representatives from UNICEF

Representatives from SAPS

Representatives from SANCA

Representatives from Childline

Representatives from NICRO

Representatives from Districts

Principals present

Officials present

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Sanibonani,

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to express my gratitude towards this gathering today. The transformation agenda of government aims to encourage public and private sector partnerships and inter-sectoral collaboration to always enhance service delivery.

The nature of this assembly therefore gives one hope that we are individuals that are hard at work, with a common goal, which is to overcome the diverse challenges that our province is faced with, and we are therefore a force eager to inscribe a new story about our province.

Overview of psychosocial support

*Allow me to remind everyone that **Goal 25 of Action Plan 2014 Towards Schooling 2025**: focuses on the use of schools as vehicles for promoting access to a range of public services among learners in the areas such as health, poverty alleviation, psychosocial support, sport and culture.*

The house should note that psychosocial support therefore addresses emotional, social, mental and spiritual needs which are all essential elements for positive human development.

It is therefore for this reason that there are numerous benefits if psychosocial support programs and interventions are mainstreamed through a holistic approach of intervening with barriers to learning and development.

Strides to strengthening Education Support Services

Ladies and gentlemen you will agree with me that South Africa has made remarkable strides on matters relating to children's rights and responsibilities but challenges still remain enormous due to provincial inequalities and urban and rural set-ups.

Many children are exposed to social ills such as poverty, HIV and AIDS, neglect and they experience death which leads to them to suffer

overwhelming grief. These are just some of the day to day atrocities witnessed by our children.

The Education Sector is committed to strengthening Education Support Services (ESS) as part of a framework for establishing an inclusive education and training system. At the centre of the Education Support Services is the District Based Support Team.

One of the main functions of the District Based Support Team is to provide a full range of support services including capacity building of educators on specialised competencies that will assist them to handle psychosocial support programs and interventions at school level.

The Department has created 30 Social Support posts as part of the expanding access for learners to relevant support services. The overall well-being of learners is believed to have a positive effect on learner outcomes.

The desired mainstreaming trends of psychosocial support should be those that embrace the voices of children; listening to children and allowing them to express their feelings.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let us all join hands to express love for our children, care for them and protect them.

Contributing factors

A conducive family environment also contributes positive towards learner outcomes. However, South Africa has a very long history of children who are not living with their biological parents or with siblings in the same dwelling due to a wide range of factors. Research shows that the majority of the children in the country live with their mothers.

Statistics South Africa (2011) stated that ***the number of children living with parents has decreased from 38% in 2002 to 33% in 2010. In Mpumalanga, children who live with neither of parents are 24, 6% versus the national average of 23, 9% and double orphans have increased with 3% nationwide.***

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, a joined venture of different stakeholders is very key, since no single organization can address all the needs of children because of complexities and challenges involved.

There should be no independent service provision for psychosocial support, mainstreaming approach is important for cost-effectiveness and access to relevant and quality services without distant referrals that may lead to numerous delays.

Investing in well-being and development of our learners; is indeed an investment in future leaders who will contribute positively to the society. Children have a right to be cared for, to be loved and protected. So, let us build resilience for our learners as means to maximize their performance and in return the system can achieve better results in terms of enrolment, retention and progression.

Allow me to conclude by referring to the wise words of the late former states man, Nelson Mandela; ***'There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children'***.

Thank You.