

Speech to be Delivered by the MEC for Education, Mrs Reginah Mhaule at the Occasion of the 2014 Bohlabela District Academic Awards to be Held on 29 January 2015

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District Director; Ms. Lorraine Goba

Pastor Solly Mhaule

Bishop Lisbeth Mashele

Sam Mhlaba from the Sam Mhlaba Foundation

Representatives from Sunbake Bakery

Representatives of Trip Technologies SA

Representatives from Old Mutual

Representatives from Mpfumelelo Business Enterprise

Representatives from Khanyakwezi Trading

Members of the District Management Team

Circuit Managers

Principals and Educators

Parents

Departmental Officials

Learners

Ladies and Gentlemen,

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Inhlikanhi,

Let me take this opportunity to welcome all educators, non-teaching staff members and learners to the 2015 school year. I hope that you have come back from your holidays reenergized and ready to tackle the year ahead.

It is a time for me to pour out my heart to the good and outstanding work done in Bohlabela District over the years. As we are here to celebrate and reward excellence in education it is indeed our way of inspiring and acknowledging good performance.

It has been in my mind for long that one of these days I should come to your midst and celebrate with you the improvement of the grade 12 results. I had made all the arrangements to be amongst you today but the situation has changed as other commitments have prevented me to come and celebrate with you. Please be informed that I am with you in your celebrations.

I must say that I am greatly excited by the progress made by Bohlabela District over the years. We come from a situation where the District was recorded as amongst the lowest achieving districts in the nation. It is thus gratifying that we

have turned the corner and have managed to go even beyond that national average. It is proper that we give ourselves a pat on the back in this regard albeit there is still a lot to improve on.

Give Credit Where it is due

Lao Tzu, the Chinese philosopher was correct in saying that, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.” This is how we have travelled and we have travelled a long way. This journey has not been easy for us and was fraught with a lot of challenges.

It is thus prudent to acknowledge the smart and hard work that has borne these wonderful results. Let me thus appreciate the leadership of Premier Mabuza, who learning from the previous dismal performance came up with the notion of the adoption of Circuits by Members of the Executive. I must say that this took off in a great way and has given some impetus to the focus on learner performance and attainment.

We also should appreciate the role played by the house of traditional leadership led by Kgosi Mokoena in taking an interest, mobilising and leading communities around matters of education delivery and learner performance.

We also appreciate the role played and the support of the executive mayor in advancing educational matters in the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality. I must say that as a Department, we really appreciate this pulling together of all sorts as we know that the African way of doing things advocates for communal living which is always about cooperation. No hindrance, manmade or natural can stand in the way of a determined community eager to succeed and the results in Bohlabela vouch for that.

Let me also take this opportunity and appreciate the role played by Mr. Mfana Lushaba, who at some point had to manage both Ehlanzeni and Bohlabela Districts as a Director. We are quite aware that managing two districts at once could be taxing and strenuous for any individual at any given time, hence we say well done to Mr. Lushaba and the management team for steering the boat at the time. We should not forget that this was a collective effort with the district officials doing all the spade work and they should be commended for that as well.

Our greatest asset is our teachers, without them there could be no moving forward as they are our loyal foot soldiers. We appreciate the sterling work done by our teachers at the classroom level, teaching, motivating and showing our learners

the right way to go. We are also grateful for being parent at school as they coach and mentor our children. This we must acknowledge that is not an easy job and credit must be given to our teachers and their labour unions in maintaining peace and a working relationship with the department.

We are excited by the role played by parents, learners and the general Bohlabela community with regards to the progress made from 2009 to 2014. This is testimony that the mantra: Education is every one's business is taken to a higher level of practice and that we are on course with socio-economic developmental matters.

Let me also acknowledge the contributions of Pastor Solly Mhaule, Bishop Lisbeth Mashele, Sam Mhlaba from the Sam Mhlaba Foundation, Sunbake Bakery, Old Mutual, Mpfumelelo Business Entrprises, Trip Technologies SA and Khamyakhwezi Trading for their support on educational development in the district.

Your Support is dearly supported and we hope that this partnership will be cemented to benefit generations for many years to come.

The 2015 Road Ahead

Sir Francis Bacon is known for his profound knowledge and wisdom the world over. I marvel at his work and one of the greatest statements which is very profound in meaning says; "The secret of getting ahead is getting started." These are the exact words that I want each and every one of us to heed and act upon. We can go even further if we just work on improving what we have already achieved. Let's be vigilant and guard our achievements jealously.

At the occasion of the announcement of results I stated that that this time around there will be a need to intensify school based intervention program, meaning that schools will be supported in accordance to the specific circumstances in an effort to ensure that all schools improve their results and no school drops its results.

I will be comforted is you could indicate the kind of support that you will prefer so that we could improve our results in a qualitative manner.

The Department will still offer other support programme that are of direct support to learners.

We will also be receptive to your suggestions which may add impetus to our quest to improve the results. I will be happy to hear from schools that obtained 100% on what is it that they have done differently to have these results. It is an issue of sharing good practices.

The Department has already started engaging principals of schools to look at issues relating to the Annual National assessment results and to discuss efforts to improve at that level.

Election of School Governing Bodies

I request that we make every effort to work collaboratively with parents and the communities that our schools are serving.

We must win the hearts and soul of all our parents and involve them in the education of their children in a way that has not been seen before. We need to rid out this emerging phenomenon were some who claim to be parents will unilaterally close the gates of schools in order to address certain community matters.

I believe that it is only when gates of schools are opened that communities may acquire growth and development.

Conclusion

Once more we welcome all school role-players and wish them well for 2015. To the class of 2015, remember the words of the founding father of our democracy and Freedom, the late Dr. Nelson Mandela Said: “It always seems impossible until it’s done”

This is your time and this is your year. the greatest challenge for you is to do better than the Class of 2014.

We have come here so that you may draw inspiration from today's events so that you may also excel and do yourselves, your parents and your city proud as you pass your grade 12 with flying colours. If the best in the Province could do it, so can you.

Congratulations to all of you who have done well.

The Mpumalanga department of Education is proud of you.

Inkomu.