

Address by Hon. Premier DD Mabuza at the Meeting with School Principals

13 October 2009

Programme
MEC for Education MEC Regina Director,
Head of Department of Education Ms Mahlasedi Mhlabane,
Circuit Managers and School Principals,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Access to quality education is the critical measure of progress, growth and prosperity for any nation that seeks to change the quality of life of its people for the better.

As most of you would be aware, education is one of the five priorities to which the current government will pay particular attention over the next five years. Other priorities include:

- The creation of decent work and sustainable livelihoods
- Health
- Rural development, food security and land reform, and
- The fight against crime and corruption

For us to achieve the priorities we have set ourselves, investment in education and training is imperative towards providing the skills necessary for the economic and social development needs. The path to sustainable growth and prosperity is dependent on our ability to improve the quality of education outcomes, and increase our skills base to drive growth and development.

It remains crucial that we enhance the capacity of our Further Education and Training Colleges to respond to the needs of the provincial economy and development challenges.

Equally, there is no doubt that quality education remains a central lever for social transformation and human development. Education contributes to poverty reduction and elimination of inter-generational cycles of poverty. For the poor, access to quality education is the only path to success and endless possibilities for a better quality of life.

Therefore, if we fail to deliver quality education to the poor, we are condemning them to a life of perpetual poverty and deprivation. If our education outcomes do not improve, we are strangling prospects for growth and development.

Ladies and gentlemen, today's meeting provides an opportune moment of reflection and honest engagement on the key challenges besetting the transformation of our education system in the Province.

After fifteen years of democracy, there is still serious underperformance in our school education despite substantive investments in education to improve governance and education outcomes at all levels.

Whereas South Africa's per capita spending on education is higher than that of its peers, our school children score the worst in all international benchmark tests on literacy and mathematics, below countries such as Korea, Malaysia, Botswana and Ghana. Compared with other African Countries, South Africa's performance has been poor, scoring below countries such as Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda.

As school managers, we need to ask serious questions about "what has gone wrong with our education system?" What needs to be done to revive and turn our education system around? As school managers at the coalface of education delivery, perhaps you have better explanations or relevant answers.

One would argue that schools are the heartbeat of any functional education system. If schools are dysfunctional, and the quality of education outcomes is poor, there is no hope to chart a path for sustainable growth and progress as a nation.

Over the last few years, the Province has been dealing with the challenge of perennially underperforming schools. Learner performance at Grade 12 has always been an important indicator of deep-rooted weaknesses in the quality of learner outcomes across all grades.

For example, 151 schools in the province have never performed above 60% for the past five years. Our output in mathematics and physical science has been inadequate to address the challenges of scarce and critical skills in the Province.

The quality of foundational phases and primary feeder schools has been dismal, making it difficult to produce top performers at high school, and grade 12 level in particular. It is absolutely essential to enhance the quality of learning and teaching from Grade R to Grade 12.

As agents of change within the school environment, school principals have a huge responsibility to ensure that our education system delivers quality outcomes at all levels. We need to improve learner attainment and instil a culture of quality teaching and learning at all grades.

Effective school management is a necessary condition for improved learner performance. Principals must lead and manage to ensure that schools are functioning properly. Poorly performing schools are a consequence of leadership and management failures. Principals have a responsibility to implement effective performance and accountability measures to entrench a culture of excellence and accountability for results.

Principals should ensure that the school environment is conducive to quality teaching and learning.

In his State of the Nation Address this year, President Jacob Zuma highlighted some the non-negotiable imperatives for the transformation of the education system. He said:

"Teachers should be in school, in class, on time, teaching, with no neglect of duty and no abuse of pupils! The children should be in class, on time, learning, be respectful of their teachers and each other, and do their homework."

We all support the President's clarion call for action.

Part of what we need to do is to ensure that teachers and learners have access to easy-to-use instructional materials in time. Research shows that the provision of easy-to-use 'instructional materials' to educators and learners is the most effective input towards the improvement of education outcome levels.

Principals must always be available to supervise their teams and provide regular feedback on performance.

As government, we will continue to provide resources for teacher development to enhance the quality of curriculum delivery in the classroom, including timely delivery of learner support material to schools.

We will ensure the provision of requisite infrastructure for learning and teaching, as well as improve the overall safety and security in schools.

We will also provide training and development support to educators to improve their content knowledge and ensure that learner performance improves.

Most importantly, we want to ensure that there is a specific focus on enhancing the quality of teaching in literacy, mathematics and physical science to increase the output of learners who can pursue tertiary studies in engineering and technical fields.

Discipline and commitment by principals and educators remain crucial in laying a foundation for achieving better results in future. We dare not fail the nation.

Principals should strengthen partnerships with key stakeholders in education. The active involvement and participation of parent and learner representative structures as well as teacher unions is critical towards forging a common vision for the improvement of education outcomes in the Province.

Programme Director, as we continue with the revival of our education system, we should be equally cognisant of our obligation to improve the quality teaching and learning in farm schools. Learners in farm schools come from poor and vulnerable households. In many instances, the infrastructure for conducive learning and teaching is not adequate, if not non-existent.

As I alluded in my State of Province Address, we are committed towards providing comprehensive support to poor and vulnerable learners in the form of 'no fee' schools, transportation and nutrition. It is important that we develop the best model to deliver quality education to remote farm and rural schools to ensure that we are able to provide holistic support to learners from poor households.

In this regard, the Department of Education is exploring various options to enhance access to quality education and comprehensive anti-poverty support initiatives to poor and vulnerable learners in farm schools.

Programme Director, as our Grade 12 prepares to sit for their final examinations this month, let me take this opportunity to wish the class of 2009 all the best. Let me also recognise all those dedicated principals and educators for their contribution and service to the Province.

This year, we worked hard to enhance the management of Grade 12 examination systems and processes so that we ensure the integrity of our examination results. We are confident that systems and accountability measures

that we have put in place will result in effective and efficient management of the grade 12 exams.

Today's interaction with you as managers of our schools is the first step in our quest to revive our education system, restore hope and build a better and prosperous nation. As bearers of hope and enlightenment, let us not be fazed by the task ahead of us. Together we can do more.

Thank you

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