

**Keynote Address by the MEC for Education, Mrs. Regihan Mhaule at
the occasion of the National Teaching Awards Function at
Ngwenyama Lodge on 08 October 2010**

Programme Director

Executive Mayor

Head of Department; Mrs Mahlasedi Mhlabane

Members of Senior Management

2010 Finalists

2009 Finalists

Representatives from Labour

Representatives from SACE

Representatives from Associations of School Governing Bodies

Members of the Education Labour Relations Council

Educators

Ladies and Gentlemen

Sanibonani

We are gathered this evening to celebrate the outstanding contributions and good performances of our teachers.

Government has deliberately introduced the National Teaching Awards after noting that there are few platforms where the masters of the class teaching do get acknowledgment for their excellence.

I am grateful that this year we are celebrating the excellence of our teachers three days after the World Teacher's Day which we celebrated on the 05 of October.

At the occasion of the World Teacher's Day I issued a statement making a clarion call to all communities to value and embrace our teachers and I take advantage of this platform to reiterate that call.

I acknowledge it that it is by design that we convene this event during October, a month where every effort must be put in place to leverage the good work done by all our teachers.

We must work diligently and creatively side by side with our stakeholders to reclaim the good image of our teachers and that of the teaching profession.

Parents and leaders should speak well about teaching as a profession and about teachers as custodians of knowledge, growth and development of our communities.

At the same time, teachers must conduct themselves in a manner that is befitting of the profession guided by the codes and ethics of SACE.

The teachers that we will be awarding with accolades here are a true example of the kind and calibre of educators that we should marvel as a nation.

We are proud and lack a million words to appreciate the good work that continue to do. You are indeed in good standing and we cherish being with you in our fold.

In the statement that I referred to earlier on, I also made a call to all teachers that they must take advantage of the capacity building programmes that the Department is putting in place for their self development.

In this regard, last Saturday, the Department launched the teacher laptop initiative that stands to benefit 29 231 teachers in the Province. This adds impetus on our endeavour to improve the conditions of service.

Laptop Initiative for Teachers

These laptops should be able to assist teachers to close the gap that exist between the learners of this age and their teachers.

Our learners have proved to be comfortable with these technological gadgets, doing stuff that we don't understand such as **'mixit', 'twitter', e-mailing, SMS-ing, MMS-ing.**

These learners are technically ahead of us in usage of these gadgets as most of them learn to use these gadgets on their own without being work shopped or taught.

These Laptops should assist us to find our learners, to forge ahead and lead them from the front as we did in the past. It is only when we are able to master our learners interests, that we could be able to keep their attention.

Ligbron Academy of Technology

We must value the usage of ICT for the enhancement of the teaching and learning process. I am happy to indicate that the Ligbron Academy of Technology in Ermelo has been named the first SMART Showcase School in South Africa. This was done by SMART Technologies in Canada.

The Ligbron Academy of Technology Programme was conceptualized and pioneered by Mr. Frans Kalp who was one of the finalists at the National Teaching Awards last year. Mr. Kalp, I take this time to salute you and all other teachers who embrace altruism as a way of life, and those who care about the welfare of others especially our learners.

Payment of Incentives to Teachers

The Department has already put systems in place in implement the payment of incentives to teachers in deep rural school, especially those that teach Mathematics and Science. The Department has put aside R32 million to achieve this. This is part of our staff retention strategy and is in line with the National Policy on incentives payments as published in Government Gazette No 30678, on January 2008. The Department will implement this in phases and every effort will be made to ensure seamless implementation.

Eradication of Unsafe Schools

In addition, the Department will before the end of this financial year eradicate 253 unsafe schools through out the Province. In this regard, R266,2 million has been set aside to achieve goal.

Added to this, are two hostel schools that will be built to be operational next year. This development is based on our quest to ensure that the teaching and learning environment remains conducive.

Implementation of Catch Up Programmes

I take this opportunity to extend my profound appreciation to all teachers who continue to play a pivotal role in the implementation of the Schools Catch Up Programme.

These programmes were intensive and included the three-week Winter School Programme, Saturday Classes, Radio Lessons, Spring Classes, insertion of Study Material in Local Newspapers and the Dial a Tutor Programme.

All these programmes were only successful because teachers owned and implemented them. We are very grateful and lucky because of the calibre of teachers that we have in this Province. Let me take this time and indicate that the Department will compensate educators for the work done during the Spring Classes.

I urge you that we should not relax but continue to work hard to continue to implement these programmes until the last day of our examinations.

Teacher Development

In the last Medium Term Strategic Framework, the Department has been able to improve the quality of teachers and school managers through teacher development programmes. This programme has been instrumental in reducing unqualified (REQV 10) teachers in the system reduced from 400 to 179 through the National Professional Diploma in Education programme (NPDE).

Under qualified teachers (REQV 11 and 12) were reduced from 1 555 to 832 through the Post Graduate Certificate in Education programme (PGCE).

150 principals participated in the Advanced Certificate in Education in School Management and Leadership in the University of Pretoria and 50 will be graduating this year.

Harassment of Learners in Schools

While we sing praises for the good work done by the majority of our educators, there are bad tendencies that we must condemn. Incidents of corporal punishment, rape, harassment of girl and boy learners are by law prohibited in our institutions of learning.

In the past five years, the Department had to dismiss **60** educators on issues relating to rape, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

I also have information that there might be more cases than those recorded since some poor families do not report such incidents to the Department because in their opinion the perpetrators are seen as sources of funding and support.

Support to the Class of 2010

The majority of our communities are living in trying conditions. We can only be able to lift them up from this sea of poverty by providing quality education to the best of our abilities.

Being in class on time and teaching for more than seven hours and beyond on a daily basis can yield positive results. This is what must be a daily practice in all our schools.

It is only when our communities are educated that they can make informed decisions about their lives and future.

Today, there are only 10 School Days left before the start of the Grade 12 examinations. I urge all communities to support the Class of 2010 in all grades with special emphasis to the Grade 12 Class.

We must work in such a way that when the results are announced on 06 January 2011 we all are proud for having directly and indirectly contributed to the outcome.

On 14 January 2011, the Department will reward best schools, learners and teachers following the announcement of the 2010 Grade 12 Results. This function will be hosted at a school that has performed very well. Make it your obligation that your school performs so that you will be eligible for hosting the Awards Ceremony Function.

National Teaching Awards

The National Teaching Awards is now on its 11th year since inception in 2000 and has indeed been growing in leaps and bounds.

I am satisfied with the levels of participation in the Province. However, there is room for improvement.

Last week, when monitoring the implementation of the School Catch Up Programme, I visited Ekucathuzeni Primary School in the Barberton Circuit. I was highly impressed by the way the school is managed. The school environment was very neat and the school took the initiative to start a library even though they did not have a library building.

These are the kind of schools and educators that need to be profiled continuously.

It is interesting to note that there has been significant growth in the number of candidates that participate in the different categories.

We should never be satisfied until every teacher in every school is recognized for their excellence and dedication.

Conclusion

I want to extend my appreciation to the organisers and all those who have coordinated this event. This is a job well done.

To all the candidates, I wish you all the best. You are all winners; the fact that you are candidates for these prestigious Awards makes you all winners. I don't think that at this level there is any candidate whose excellence is lesser or of no significance than the other.

You are all our ambassadors; continue to do your best at the school where you thrive best. We really appreciate your effort to improve the standard of teaching in Mpumalanga Province. As the winners are announced and we disperse to our respective schools, let us not forget that this is supposed to be a win-win situation. At the end learners should be the real winners.

Thank you.