

Basic Education: Minister's Budget Speech

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Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga MP 2009 Education Budget Speech

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Members
Honoured Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

The theme of my speech today is “Together achieving quality education and access for all”. In presenting this budget, I therefore draw on the manifesto of the ruling party, as informed by the resolutions adopted at Polokwane, as well as on the Medium Term Strategic Framework of government, and the President’s State of the Nation address. The underlying theme of all these is the fact that the ANC has declared education to be a top priority of this government, and has also declared that we can do more by working together.

In the 15 years of democratic rule, there have been significant achievements in education, especially in regard to access. A recent report by Child Gauge has noted that we have achieved universal primary education, in line with the Millennium Development Goals, and have also achieved Gender Parity in education. More children are staying at school until matric, and it is estimated that about 85% of children now receiving 12 years of education – either in schools or colleges.

We are also taking steps towards improving the quality of education, as shown by the independently conducted annual national assessments. In 2008, the results in numeracy and literacy were some 30% higher than in 2007 – an improvement that the OECD described as “significant and unprecedented”. Our matric results have stabilised over the past few years despite a general consensus that the curriculum is a more demanding one, and that the examinations have got much tougher.

Despite the many achievements we pride ourselves over, we acknowledge that many challenges remain.

Speaker

If we are to make true the instructions of our President that teachers are in class and on time and learners in class studying, a number of things have to be put right.

The approach is informed by the belief that “together we can do more” – and that we need to make education a “societal” matter.

Much progress has been made in moving the system away from the precepts of Apartheid education. More children attend school and more attend without the burden of school fees. More children participate in school nutrition programmes and in an expanded curriculum. More teachers and principals are exposed to in service development than ever before. And more provision has been made to improve the infrastructure of schooling especially in rural areas of the country.

That massive challenges remain is widely acknowledged; that qualitative changes in education have been effected cannot be denied

The findings of the Prof. Jonathan Jansen's committee on NEEDU confirms what we all know, what the view is outside there and reasons for a general lack of public confidence in our education system

"Throughout the country in each of the provinces, from government officials, unionists, and teachers alike the Committee heard the strongest expressions of concern, often in very passionate terms, that there was an indisputable crisis in education, and that it needed to be resolved; indeed, it would be a serious mistake to underestimate the depth and intensity of concern among all education stakeholders."

The report goes on to say that

"This does not mean, also that there are not pockets or excellence within the school system, among districts, and even within provincial structures. The Committee found striking evidence of exceptionality. Such observations, on the one hand, give cause for hope but on the other hand give cause for concern – since the school system cannot be transformed as a system on the basis of exceptional performance among the few. It is fundamental to the vision of government that all schools – especially in disadvantaged communities – is a priceless resource when trying to lift the standard and improve the practice of the rest of the education system."

A number of challenges continue to bedevil our schooling system and these include and are not limited to:

Accountability

The school accountability system is weak, uneven and limited in scope. The accountability system is weak because of a pervasive culture of resistance to strong measures of accountability within schools and not only teachers should be singled out for attention of failing schools, the accountability net stretches wider than individual teachers. The system needs to improve coordination of support at all levels. Accountability must of necessity account for performance at all levels from the teacher, to the principal, to the governors, to the district, provincial and national department authorities. While the teacher is undoubtedly the most important influence on learning in the classroom, the extent to which the act of teaching is nested within other supporting contexts cannot be overstated.

More important, it is important that there must be consequences for every action.

Teachers on time, daily teaching, learners learning is non negotiable.

The teacher on time and teaching also needs to be assisted by ensuring that the system begins to confront some of the more fundamental problems in the system viz. Curriculum organization and school dysfunctionality related challenges

We are all aware of incidents whereby our schools lose valuable teaching time because of absentee teachers, incompetent principals, and under-prepared district officials. The culture of teaching and learning has, for all intents and purposes, disappeared in most rural and township schools.

These teachers we want in class on time teaching are also reported to be feeling overwhelmed by never-ending external demands on their work and making them resentful and being distracted from their work.

Teacher's dedication, commitment, work ethics are key, time on task and careful use of time is also very key to quality instruction and quantity of instruction.

The same report, I am quoting from, Speaker, has this to say

"There also appears to be continuing problems around curriculum. There is still suspicion about outcomes based education. There remain, in some provinces, very articulate expressions by school managers and teachers about the failure of curriculum implementation to address the basic competences of literacy and numeracy in schools"

The teacher in class on time teaching will be confronted by the following challenges which she or has to attend to in order to support the learners.

High levels of poverty, youth criminality, hunger, malnutrition, drugs, violence, teenage pregnancy, etc. Again as a community we have to develop measures to address this. Our President has also called all of us to be involved in education and make education every bodies business

Strong leadership and management.

As indicated earlier, in most instances schools stand and fall at the feet of its leadership

Resources

For historical reasons that are well-understood, the better resourced schools and provinces are better able to support the education system and produce better educational outcomes.

This is a major challenge. Despite the fact that we say this government has invested acceptable levels of resources in education, their proper utilization or adequacy continues to be a challenge and we need to find a way of ensuring that for all the resources invested by government, there is value for money.

There is no doubt that with the economic downturn facing us, prudent use of resources is going to be extremely necessary. The DG and heads of department will have to develop belt tightening measures to ensure that whatever little money we have, it is used for the education outcomes we have set for ourselves.

Schools in poorer areas remain under resourced. Science is being taught without labs, children share books and desks, the continues to be overcrowding in the majority of our schools, etc.

CURRICULUM

Our core product in education is curriculum delivery. This is our product and our success depends on it. What is its content, how is it packaged and how is it issued, marketed, received and used.

The minister's report on schools that work put the problem as follows:

"In almost every school, the primary school curriculum was regarded as problematic. Many interviewees mentioned that learners from primary schools arrived at high school not being able to read and write properly; that they lacked systematic knowledge; and that they found the transition to senior grades difficult.

The challenges are not simple but fortunately with almost 15 year experience some of the challenges are known and also well documented. In addition to the constantly mentioned

challenges of alleged excessive paperwork burden; expensive demands; the risks of different interpretations, inadequate preparations of teachers there are also challenges around classroom practices resulting from the education system we chose as a country. We will be doing both investigations and holding public hearings on this matter in the next four months to make sure that we identify areas of further work and interventions and address them once and for all within the coming months and years. We will also look into matters of curriculum resourcing, on going research and support.

Through the establishment of National Education Evaluation and Development Unit we will not only evaluate schools and teachers but evaluate the entire system so that again on an ongoing basis identify challenges and working together with the different stakeholders affected, address them

There is no doubt that there is a link between educational outputs with socio political and economic conditions. The South Africa historical and current socio economic dynamics play a major role within our education system.

Our schools' performances to a very large extent are still shaped by their social and historical contexts of colonialism and apartheid. Because of this our schooling system continues to be unequal, we have a set of few public schools in South Africa serving fewer learners which are well-endowed with impressive resources and facilities and produce superior academic results. On the other hand we have desperately poor schools with very little to show in terms of academic performance.

The greatest consolation is that even within these challenging conditions a number of schools have excelled beyond expectations. Leaders and educators in these schools appreciate the fact that our children's educational achievements cannot wait, all children, despite their class, race, gender and location deserves good quality education. The country for its economic growth and development, need to have all its children given an equal opportunity to develop their full potential, the very children themselves all of them, deserve nothing less and it is this colleagues that I think all of us as political head managers need to develop our programme and plans for the next 5 years should be guided by.

In conclusion colleagues

We have to manage our environment socio economic challenges (facing our learners), historical and political (mainly educators skills, work ethics, culture) systemic malfunctions – districts, provinces and head offices.

Focussing on the task at hand. Lets all do what we have to do. All at the right time in a right manner.

Part of the reason for this confidence is the re-organisation of Ministries into a Ministry of Higher Education and Training and a Ministry of Basic Education. This new configuration will allow for a dedicated focus on the respective sectors, which is certainly welcome. Basic Education includes all schools from Grade R to Grade 12, as well as adult literacy programmes, while Higher Education and Training will deal with universities and the whole field of training, including post-school education and training, as well as the co-ordination of the National Human Resource Development Strategy. The FET Colleges will migrate to this Ministry, but it will be done in a responsible way, with no destabilisation of this vital sector.

As a former MEC for Education, I believe that the new ways of working will require a new understanding of the respective roles of the national and provincial departments of education. We must understand ourselves as being parts of a single education system, with

one set of objectives, one set of national outputs. We are fortunate in having a rich capacity in the sector, with 11 political heads to guide the system, and a substantial and capable set of officials to administer the system. With such an approach, there is no reason for us not to succeed in meeting our goals. At a national level, the Department of Education will place a stronger emphasis on planning and monitoring, but this will also need to be replicated at provincial and local levels.

As regards the budget allocations for the financial year 2009/2010, I can record with appreciation that the overall budget has increased by R2.49 billion (or 12.9%) - from R18.857 billion last year to R21.287 billion. Additional funds have been received this year for the following priorities:

Higher Education subsidies – R 480 million

School nutrition – R577 million – allowed us to expand to quintile 1 secondary schools

The recapitalisation of technical schools – R5 million, to plan for implementation over the next two years

The National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (the NEED-U) – R6 million, and

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) – R63 million

Mass Literacy Campaign. R443 million,

Systemic Evaluation programme (R5 million), and in the further development of EMIS (R5.7 million),

Some existing programmes on the budget deserve special mention. One of these is the NSNP, which feeds some 7.4 million children on a daily basis during school terms, at a cost of R2.394 billion. As a conditional grant on the budget of the Department,

We also have a conditional grant of R177 million, which is used by provinces to provide relevant life skills programmes in all schools. The decline in new infections among the youth is significant, and may be in part attributable to this programme. However the rising tide of teenage pregnancies is a great concern which must also be addressed, and this life-skills programme is being reviewed to see if it can give more attention to this aspect.

Teachers who have to be in class teaching continuing to be a major part of our focus, and the most expensive and most valuable resources in our system. We have received an investment of some R700 million this year in supporting more than 9 000 student teachers. Speaker, I am pleased to record that together with the teacher unions, and other stakeholders, we have launched the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (the QLTC), of which a major part relates to the “non-negotiables” for different components of the system. For teachers, this involves being in class, on time and teaching, while learners have committed to focus on learning, to respect their teachers, and to do their homework. Departmental officials have promised to visit schools regularly, and to provide them with support, while parents have volunteered to ensure that all of us play our part. Put simply, if we all did our job as we should, we would see the quality of education improve by leaps and bounds.

These non-negotiables require two pillars of support. The first of these is the NEED-U, which will evaluate all parts of the system to unearth constraints and problems in ensuring quality education. The other pillar is that of effective school leadership – a key component of the system. All the evidence, locally and internationally, shows that a good school has a good principal. There are many such examples, including that of Mr. Timothy Mathopa who is here with us. I am pleased to recognise in the house who has been accompanied by his wife. Mr. Mathopa is a true hero, representing many other principals running schools serving some of our poorest communities. Mr Mathopa, I was told was a very difficult teacher, constantly fighting his former principal for poor leadership, lack of commitment and dedication to his work, the district which got tired of intervening in their fights, as part of punishing him sent him to a worst performing school, with a zero% pass so that he can show what he accused his principal for. Within a year he took over the new school, the

results were 57% pass, he made all his learners move from functional maths to general maths, then he improved the results further to a 92% pass rate. In 2006 the results became 100 % pass. He is amongst the very few teachers serving poor communities and enrolling his own children at the same school where he is the principal. Ntate Mathopa and all the other many principals and educators you represent, *Re A Le Leboha ho menahane!* Thank you very much and you are indeed our heroes and heroines!

You will have heard the President commit to a meeting with school principals, the message is a critical one in the transformation and development of education, and the Department will do all it can to support this meeting and ensure its success. The meeting with our President, J.G. Zuma with principals will now take on the 07th August 2009 in KZN.

One key area of focus will be the rural schools in our country, many of which are inadequately provided for in terms of infrastructure (classrooms and basic services like water and electricity), as well as facilities, with a complete lack of libraries, laboratories, or even sports and playground facilities. This is unacceptable, and we will be partnering with the Ministry of Rural Development, as well as with other relevant Ministries such as public works, water affairs, and transport, to alleviate the plight of these rural communities. We have recently revised to school funding norms to ensure that small rural schools are guaranteed a minimum level of funding, irrespective of the number of learners, and we will be building on the successes of the Free State and North West provinces in regard to consolidating small rural schools through the provision of hostel accommodation.

Infrastructure will remain a challenge, and we will be looking at innovative funding approaches to ensure that we deliver decent schools in the shortest possible time. We have seen with the 2010 stadium building process that where there is political will, we can make a difference, and we will be taking the same kind of approach to school infrastructure. I hope we will be able to absorb much of the capacity, and retain many of the jobs that have been created in the building of stadiums, and direct these to building schools across the country.

Speaker – these are but a sample of our priorities for 2009, and the rest are elaborated on in the Strategic Plan, which has been distributed to all members. I urge members to note the work we will be doing in regard to the recapitalisation of our Technical High Schools, following a successful similar process in regard to the FET Colleges. I must also conclude by ensuring the house that I will be keeping an eye of the provision of education for learners with special needs. I am concerned that we have still got too many children out of school – especially from poor families - because of some or other disability, or other special need, and we are compelled to respond to this. Recall that my theme for today emphasises access for all, and until the last child has been brought into school we should not rest.

Speaker, let me end by paying tribute to all the Members of the Executive Council responsible for Education, who have assisted in defining this agenda, and to Deputy Minister Surty, for his strong and capable support *at all times*. My thanks go also to the Director General and his senior officials, who have the responsibility of ensuring that this agenda is efficiently implemented. A special tribute goes to the Chief Financial Officer, Mr Philip Benade, who retires today after many years of service to government, and who has delivered clean audits over an extended period.

Thank you.