



**basic education**  
Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**Keynote by the Basic Education Minister, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, at the Workshop on the Implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education held at Motheo TVET College, Free State.**

**Date: 21 May 2024**

Programme Director

MEC,

HoD,

Stakeholders,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct honour and privilege to address the Language and Literacy Workshop on Implementing Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education here in the Free State.

On 21 February 2024, during the International Mother Language Day, I, in my capacity as the Minister of Basic Education, announced a call to action towards the full realisation of learners' rights to be educated through their respective home languages, which are official languages

of the Republic of South Africa in terms of Section 6 of the Constitution.

I launched a renewed effort to ensure parity of esteem for all official languages of the Republic, advocating for their use not only as subjects but as languages of learning, teaching, and assessment for Mathematics, Science, and Technology beyond Grade 3 by 2025.

For practical purposes and systemic planning, January 2025 will mark the year we begin to fulfil this constitutional obligation incrementally.

This means this cohort of learners will write their first Mathematics, Science, and Technology National Qualifications Framework Level 1 General Education Certificate in 2030.

They will also write their National Senior Certificate in 2033. These exams will be in their home languages, which are official languages of the Republic of South Africa. This is a critical change in the course of history for the children of our country born since the dawn of our democracy.

Never again shall the children of this country have to learn the language of instruction first, then register the content in Mathematics, Science, and Technology, and only then strive to understand the content itself in languages that are not their mother tongue.

According to the Language in Education Policy of 1997, cognitive dissonance in the learning experiences of our learners will no longer be allowed to continue.

African languages with official status in the Constitution deserve their place in the sun, like all official languages of the Republic of South Africa. Non-official languages also deserve protection, respect, and development.

We should not wait any longer. The time to rededicate ourselves to the dream of freedom in education must go to the next level.

As a country, we aim for social cohesion at the highest level, and multilingualism is our ultimate vehicle towards attaining one nation.

We have chosen to start with Mother Tongue-based Bilingualism in keeping with our Language in Education Policy of incremental multilingualism.

Therefore, mother tongue-based bilingual teaching, learning, and assessment is a mechanism to ensure an effective response to human resources and provision of learning and teaching support material.

Schools are currently providing data on e-forms to ensure a scientific response to the real language profile of each school in 2025.

Artificial Intelligence will be the vehicle we use to ensure the success of the Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education roll-out.

South African Sign Language, as the 12th official language of our country, must benefit learners using it when explained to them in their official home languages first.

Assessment in the mother tongue-based bilingual approach will be a new feature for our Grade 4 learners in mathematics, science, and technology starting in 2025.

We expect our learning outcomes to gain more profound quality as we make teaching, learning, and assessment meaningful, ensuring that our learners learn meaningfully and read for meaning.

Learners will begin to enjoy the long-overdue right to learn and read meaningfully, like all leading nations of the world that do so in their home languages.

The first announcement by UNESCO to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and promote multilingualism was made on 17 November 1999. It was formally recognised by the United Nations General Assembly by adopting a UN resolution in 2002.

From that day, Mother Language Day has been part of a broader initiative titled: “The Potential Role of Technology to Advance Multilingual Education.”

Programme director, South Africa has a historic case study in the Eastern Cape, where Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education was piloted over the last ten years, and the quality attainment of education outcomes is emerging from that province.

It takes an honest mindset to accept responsibility, as a people and a nation, to confront the need to give effect to true freedom to all citizens of our beautiful country.

Real freedom is true freedom, and true freedom is human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.

Never shall the home languages of our beautiful country be second to any. Our iconic Constitution bestows the honour, status, and esteem to use them for trade, business, education, scientific inquiry, government communication, learning, teaching, and assessment.

Never and never again shall we stand aside and look, as Bob Marley says, while we watch our languages and everything about us be relegated to second place. We rise. We stand up! We defend, protect, and advance the human rights and freedoms, the human dignity of all people and their languages. Let freedom reign.

The decision to launch the Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education campaign on International Mother Language Day this year, with the Pan South African Language Board and the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, was purposeful.

Together, we will ensure that the roll-out of Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education in 2025 is supported by the expertise and technical innovation already in our grasp.

Higher Education is our twin partner, ensuring the continuity of Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education in higher education. Remember, in terms of the National Education Policy Act 1997, we are a single and uniform education system.

For the uninitiated, let me remind this workshop is about our official languages.

The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, and Sign Language.

The Constitution enjoins us to ensure, at all material times, the recognition of the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people and that the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.

The Use of Official Languages Act 12 of 2012 enjoins us, as a government, to facilitate equitable access to services and information of the national government and to promote good language management by the national government for efficient public service administration and to meet the needs of the public.

Ladies and gentlemen, it would be remiss of me not to reflect on the 30 years of basic education and the BELA Bill.

This summary is based on the insights from the 30-Year Review of Democracy Report, launched two weeks ago by His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa.

According to the Review Report, over the past 30 years, our nation has embarked on a transformative journey to improve educational access

and infrastructure, ensuring our children receive the quality basic education they deserve.

Our endeavours aren't politically motivated but are enjoined by Section 29 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to basic education. In line with the Freedom Charter's call to open the doors of learning, we have surpassed targets and set new records.

Since the advent of democracy, the basic education sector in South Africa has undergone transformative growth and improvement, including an overhauled curriculum and the repeal of all apartheid laws.

From an under-resourced and racially segregated system, the sector has evolved to achieve near-universal access for the compulsory schooling age group of 7 to 15 years by 2021, with attendance rates between 97% and 99%.

The public sector, led by this ANC-led government, educates approximately 12 million learners at about 23,000 public schools.

We employ and successfully pay over 400,000 teachers every month.

This monumental achievement was bolstered by policies to reduce poverty, invest in our people, and achieve a Better Life for All. These policies have significantly reduced the costs associated with school attendance, thereby enhancing access for many.

The first significant investment in our people that could be termed a “pro-poor policy” and has markedly improved the trajectory of basic education over the past 30 years is the implementation of no-fee schools in our country. This critical measure has significantly influenced both school attendance and educational equity.

According to the 2024 Basic Education Sector Review, this policy has led to substantial increases in school enrolment nationwide, with the percentage of learners paying fees dramatically reduced from 50% in 2009 to just 24% by 2022.

The expansion of no-fee schools now encompasses 80% or roughly 18,400 public schools, demonstrating a solid commitment to educational accessibility.

This considerable decline in fee-paying students highlights the policy’s effectiveness in enhancing access to basic education, particularly for learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Ladies and gentlemen, the highly acclaimed National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) is central to these efforts, which now provides nutritious meals to over 9.6 million learners (out of 12 million) across 21,274 ordinary public schools.

The NSNP goes beyond merely offering a meal; it is crucial in improving attendance rates, addressing child stunting, and combating malnutrition.



By ensuring that children receive at least one balanced meal daily, the programme supports their physical and cognitive development, enhancing their ability to learn and thrive in school.

The success of the NSNP isn't solely a governmental triumph; it epitomises the collaborative potential of the public and private sectors. The story of the National School Nutrition Programme is multifaceted, weaving in elements of community, collaboration, and empowerment.

Through this initiative, thousands have found economic opportunities, with 61,314 volunteers from local communities cooking meals and receiving a stipend for their invaluable service. We are ardently working to introduce breakfasts across all National School Nutrition Programme schools.

Beyond merely enhancing school attendance, which achieved near-universal status in 2021, we have continued to progress despite persistent challenges, including safety in schools, crime, and various social ills.

In terms of infrastructure, we've renovated and built new schools, enhanced water and electricity infrastructure, and ensured that our learners study in environments conducive to teaching and learning.

Since the Democratic Breakthrough of 1994, the ANC-led government has refurbished 11,077 out of 23,000 public schools that needed such improvements and added 115,512 classrooms to alleviate overcrowding.

The addition of new classrooms equates to approximately 8,885 new schools. It can potentially benefit up to four million six hundred twenty thousand four hundred eighty (4,620,480) learners, assuming an average class size of 40 students.

We have extended water infrastructure to 2,459 schools over time that previously weren't covered and electrified 8,313 schools, emphasising that these were where the services didn't exist.

Today, you will be hard-pressed to find a school without electricity in South Africa.

Most of the 23,000 public schools have access to water, except in struggling municipalities. During the COVID-19 crisis, more schools in water-scarce municipalities received emergency water tankers.

Our commitment to providing secure and conducive learning environments is evidenced by the fencing provided to 5,605 schools described as high-risk. All new schools come standard with running water, decent sanitation, electricity, and fencing. Therefore, we do not have a school fencing backlog.

We have achieved significant progress under the Accelerated School Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI), specifically designed to replace schools constructed from inappropriate materials such as mud and planks.

By August 2023, we replaced 329 out of 510 schools with state-of-the-art facilities.

This upgrade ensures dignity and improved learning environments for an estimated 164,500 learners, assuming an average of 500 learners per school. This initiative underscores our resolve to transform the educational landscape, fostering environments that nurture the intellectual growth of our learners.

All new and refurbished schools conform to the Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure, launched in 2013, ensuring a comprehensive and conducive learning environment.

These Norms and Standards include science and technology education laboratories, nutrition centres to support student health and well-being, and combo courts for various sports and physical activities. Administrative blocks are established to facilitate efficient school management, while access to essential utilities such as water and electricity is guaranteed.

Additionally, these schools have decent sanitation facilities, promoting hygiene and health.

Other features, such as libraries and computer labs, are also included to enhance the educational experience and support holistic student development.

Programme Director, it is fitting that last week, amidst the 30-year celebration of our democracy, the National Assembly passed the much-vaunted Basic Education Laws Amendment Bill, known as the BELA Bill.

The BELA Bill ushers in a new era for our education system aptly termed Basic Education 2.0.

The Bill addresses critical challenges that have, for years, hindered the progress of our education ecosystem. One of the primary issues it tackles is determining a school's language policy.

There's a common misconception that the Bill aims to erode the autonomy of School Governing Bodies (SGBs).

In reality, it aspires to harmonise the powers of the SGB with the directives of the relevant provincial head of department (HoD). While the SGB is initially tasked with setting a school's language policy, the Bill emphasises that this authority is not unequivocal. It ascertains that such policies are adaptable, inclusive, and congruent with the constitutional right to basic education.

Furthermore, the BELA Bill also addresses the crucial issue of managing pregnancy among pupils. The unfortunate reality is that pregnant pupils often face ostracism and educational hindrances.

The Bill aims to guarantee that their constitutional right to education remains intact.

The Minister's regulatory power isn't about dictating personal decisions or delving into health matters such as abortion.

It's centred on ensuring schools adopt a compassionate and pragmatic stance towards supporting pregnant pupils.

Additionally, the BELA Bill unequivocally places the responsibility of determining the admission policy in the hands of the SGB. It states: "The admission policy of a public school is determined by the governing body of such school."

Therefore, it is mischievous to contend that this power is being removed from the SGB. Within the confines of the law, the Head of Department (HoD) will only intervene where an admission policy discriminates against a pupil, which our Constitution frowns upon.

Ladies and gentlemen, the BELA Bill neither allows nor encourages the use, transportation, or consumption of alcohol in our schools.

As I prepare to conclude, I must emphasise that the right to vote is one of the most significant achievements of our democracy.

On 29 May, we will go to the polls once again.

Every eligible South African must exercise their right to vote. Voting is not just a right but a civic duty. It is a powerful tool that allows us to shape the future of our nation.

By voting, we honour the sacrifices of those who fought for our freedom and ensure that their legacy endures.

In conclusion, our founding father of the new South Africa, President Nelson Mandela, said: “if you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”

Let's Do More Together!

I thank you.