

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY DR Z.L. MKHIZE
PREMIER FOR THE PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL
MEETING WITH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
4 MAY 2010

Programme Director;

MEC for Education, Mr Senzo Mchunu;

Head of Department of Education, Dr Cassius Lubisi;

Members of Parliament;

Mayor of uMsunduzi Municipality;

School Principals present;

All officials from the Department of Education;

Honored guests;

Members of the media present;

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning

First and foremost, allow me to extend a warm hand of welcome to all of you. I wish to convey words of gratitude from the Provincial Government of KwaZulu-Natal. We relish the opportunity to host this important gathering.

I believe principals gathered here this morning are ready to contribute positively and fruitfully so that we can achieve the objectives of this meeting.

I am sure most of you will recall that for the first time since we attained democracy 16 years ago, the President of the Republic Jacob Zuma met with school principals.

This was as a demonstration of commitment to putting the issue of education on top of the agenda. Therefore, today's gathering should be viewed as a build up on the foundation that was laid down by our President.

Let me however, take this opportunity and personally congratulate all of you for producing courageous learners who went on to achieve top marks during the 2009 academic year. Your courage and dedication ensured the province's exceptional performance. I thought I should do

this because I never had the opportunity to meet all of you since the release of the Matric results.

The number of schools that got 100% pass was encouraging, as was the performance on science and mathematics. It was reassuring to see overall improvement in almost all the regions in the province.

This success came as a result of continuous, consistent efforts and enormous sacrifices. More importantly, this performance was an unequivocal demonstration of our collective will to accelerate progress towards achieving a rising quality of life for the people of this province. It is for these reasons that today I want to say I am very optimistic about the future of education in this province.

The long-term benefit of working as a collective on the education front is that the nation as a whole will earn maximum benefits from an educated populace.

As a developmental state we have adopted an approach that seeks to mobilize multi-stakeholder participation in order to improve the quality of our education in this province.

Quality education has reshaped life in most countries and made it possible for the millions of people to live a fulfilling life. No doubt, without quality education, there can be no socio-economic development in this province.

Of course, one of the key elements of improving quality of education has been the performance of teachers.

We have to ensure that teachers receive continuous training and that they are subjected to professional Code of Ethics. Linked to this is the performance management system which outlines specific standards that teachers are required to meet in the classrooms.

Curriculum change in South Africa has certainly been one of the most radical educational reforms over the past decade.

This has been the most difficult process but we want to applaud the school principals for guiding teachers.

Of course this could have been impossible without ongoing interaction with teachers unions, school governing bodies as well as learners themselves. I have no doubt that if this level of co-operation is maintained, this country will not only continue to produce outstanding Matric results but we will see an enormous improvement in terms of human resource development in this province.

Curriculum transformation is explicitly intended to further the objectives of the country's Human Resources Development Strategy. In any country, human resources development enhances the ability of all individuals to reach their full potential.

By enhancing their skills, knowledge and abilities of individuals, human resources development serves to improve the productivity of people – increase their skills as well as their social development.

The most strategic priority for this government since the start of this term of office up to 2014 relates, on the one hand, to the challenge of reconciling the immense opportunities that flow from our successes and, on the other hand, to the immense challenges arising from the country's development agenda.

Our developmental agenda remains the central preoccupation of public policy, and forms the basis of collective endeavor in all spheres of our society.

Some of the most intractable and urgent challenges that we are facing include the need to eradicate poverty; ameliorate income inequality and demographic inequalities. Schools and teachers are the centre of this transformation we want to achieve.

Education remains our key weapon we are using to address these challenges. However, a serious barrier to improving our education has been the lack of resources and facilities at schools especially in rural areas and in the townships.

It is for these reasons that the government has allocated R2 031 billion for the provision of infrastructure. This was announced by the MEC in his budget policy speech; this allocation will go a long way towards redressing the backlog which we inherited from the apartheid era.

Based on the 2007 National Education Infrastructure Management System data, the province is short of 10 898 ordinary classrooms, 11 525 specialist classrooms, 4000 Grade R classrooms, 3 348 computer rooms, 3 315 media centres, 14 000 school administration offices, and 30 028 toilets.

Government is moving with speed to speed up the provision of infrastructure clearly this will assist to improving the culture of learning and teaching. We want to create schools that are able to ensure the overall development of learners for the benefit of the economy.

Linked to this is the need to ensure strong leadership and the overall development of teachers in schools. Effective education requires a dedicated professional community of educators. This entails a re-conception of what it means to be an educator and a massive investment in teacher development.

The economic competitiveness of the country is measured not only by the aggregate skills of the workforce, but – perhaps more importantly, by the flexibility and capacity of the workforce to adjust speedily to the rapid changes to technology and knowledge production.

Educators must be developed as facilitators of knowledge, as managers of innovation as community leaders, and also as lifelong-learners. We certainly know that for the country to produce highly capable individuals, a high quality cadre of teachers is required.

Teacher development remains the key driver of the envisaged change and as government we will ensure that we have ongoing programmes that are specifically designed to provide them with necessary support and training.

In view of this we also need to strengthen developmental appraisals, and a programme of national teacher recognition awards. Those who excel in the profession must be recognized and awarded accordingly.

However it is clear that even greater effort is needed to build the level of science and technology human resource capacity that is required for a highly competitive nation. We need a marked increase in the output of Maths and Science school graduates.

It is widely accepted that science, engineering and technology capabilities results in a highly productive labour force and can make a major contribution to a country's economy. We all know that there is an inadequate supply of human capital in the field of science and technology.

The central feature in addressing this challenge is to build the feeder system at lower school level.

There is a need to focus on the quality of human capital being produced. A modern knowledge-economy demands human resources that are numerically and scientifically literate, technology fluent and skilled in the problem solving.

Government has initiated a number of programmes to deal with the development of teachers. For instance we have established a specialized institution for accelerated training in mathematics, science and information communication technology – the Moses Kotane Institute.

The most important objectives are to improve the quality of teaching in our schools, and to drastically upscale the quantum of students matriculating with mathematics, science and ICT.

The Institute operates on a hub and spoke basis, using connected IT systems to reach a large number of students in various locations, focusing on the teaching of Maths, Science and IT and bridging the gap between school and university.

We want to ensure that our education system create a supply of quality science and technology human resources from the school system for the South African economy. As government we will continue to build our scientific and technological capabilities. The key focus will be to:-

- To raise the participation and performance of learners in national senior certificate Maths and science;
- To increase and enhance the human resources capacity to deliver quality Maths, Science and Technology education.

In 2014 there will be even greater need for high quality graduates than there is currently.

We need to produce school leavers who are armed with critical thinking skills and who will be able to compete in an ever-changing and knowledge driven economy.

It is widely acknowledged that sustained innovation is the key to future growth and prosperity in a competitive global economy and that education is an essential requirement in building this innovation culture.

As computers increasingly dominate our lives, there is a need to further equip learners and teachers to function in a knowledge economy as masters of information technology.

WARD EDUCATION FORUMS

Whilst it is important to ensure teacher development, this will never yield positive if the community is not involved in the provision of education. It is for these reasons that the provincial government is preparing for the launch of Ward Education Forums.

We will embark on a campaign aimed at mobilization of grassroots cadets, community workers, volunteers, religious leaders, traditional leaders, community leaders and the members of the public to join education forums in the townships, villages and suburbs.

As government we want to encourage all stakeholders to take an interest in the child's education as the saying goes: "YOUR CHILD IS MY CHILD AND MY CHILD IS YOUR CHILD."

It should be the duty of all members of the forum to work towards the achievement of the following:-

- Empowerment of parents and communities to understand educational needs of learners in the nearby schools;
- Advocating for learner-educator and parent partnerships in order to bridge the gap that exists;
- Advocating for a crime free school environment;
- Promotion of culture of learning and teaching;

Community members must seek ways to ensure the provision of education that is aligned to the social and economic development needs of their wards. This education should provide local children with a general base for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and positive attitudes for personal growth.

It should be the concern of everybody that when learners finish their metric they should proceed to higher education so that they can fill the gap across all sectors of the economy.

Ward Education Forums will assist in ensuring the safety of teachers and the eradication of crime and drug trafficking in schools.

SAFER SCHOOLS PROGRAMMES

Linked to this is the need for all school principals to work with law enforcement agencies around Safer Schools Programmes.

We need to ensure that all schools have Safe School Committee comprises of internal stakeholders of the school, learners, educators, School Governing Body (SGB) members, Councillors, PCFs, South African Police Service and Metro Police.

Working with the South African Police Service as Government, we want to ensure that this programme is rolled-out across the Province as part of the United Front Against Crime Campaign – an initiative of the Department of Community Safety and Liaison.

The programme can be implemented in all schools, even pre-primary schools, but needs different approaches at different levels. At secondary and primary school level, the programme allows for participation by learners in making their school safer.

Through the Safer School Programme, SAPS member builds a relationship with the school, visits the school regularly and assists the school management and the learners regarding school safety issues.

The Community Policing Forums can also play a vital and pivotal role in school safety because this structure is an ideal platform to address violence and crime in the community as it impacts on schools.

Representation of the school on the CPF should be encouraged. As school principals you should take the lead in CPF because another benefit of CPF is that structure encourages a culture of community ownership.

TEACHERS AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRY

Another critical aspect in teaching is the attitude of teachers.

I mean the attitude of the teacher towards himself;

The attitude of the teacher towards the school;

The attitude of the teacher towards the learner;

All of this will have a huge impact in determining the quality of the results.

Teacher is like a factory as you must always understand that you are there manufacturing young minds who must grow up and become capable leaders. Therefore as school principals and as teachers you don't create factory faults which would be created by our bad attitude.

The results are not about the school but about the impact that your product which you produce in your school will make in the community and in the country's economy.

The principal must always make sure that they regulate the performance of the teachers and the performance of learners in order to produce quality and better results.

South Africa faces a major challenge in producing the required number of skills needed by the various sectors of our economy to sustain and indeed improve our current growth rates.

The skills shortage in South Africa relates not only to the high-end professionals such as engineers, scientists, IT specialists, doctors and teachers etc, but also to the millions of semi-skilled and unskilled, often illiterate workers, who either cannot find work because they lack the required skills, or who cannot advance up the employment ladder owing to lack of technical skills.

School Principals have an important role to play as we deal with this challenge.

Some key statistics

In the last five years South Africa's economy has been growing at an average rate in excess of 5% per annum. This growth rate has placed significant supply-side constraints on the economy, most noticeably in terms of energy supply and skilled labour.

In March 2007, there were 12.6 million people employed in South Africa of which

- 12% were highly skilled (managers, professionals, legislators,...);
- 9% were skilled (technicians);
- 49% semi-skilled (clerks, machinery operators, trade workers,...);
- 30% unskilled (domestic workers, elementary occupation)(Stats SA, 2007)

According to Global Insight (2007),

- 0.9 million (age 15+) had matric + postgraduate degree
- 3.9 million (age 15+) had no schooling
- 8.2 million (age 20+) are illiterate

In terms of unemployment, poverty and development indices:

- In 2007 the unemployment rate was 25.5%, with 12.7 million people employed, and 4.3 million people unemployed out of a labour force of 17.0 million¹;
- In 2006 the poverty rate was 44.4%, with 21.1 million people in poverty²; poverty gap R37 897 million;
- In 2006 the literacy rate in the age group over 20 was 70.7%; the HDI was 0.62; and Gini coefficient 0.64.

Looking at the national secondary school matric pass rate, in 2005, only 39.9% of students who passed secondary examinations passed mathematics. This rose to 40.5% in 2007. The respective figures were 29.8% and 31.4% for science.

The training and skills development challenge

There are some important conclusions we can draw from these key statistics, namely:

¹ Stats SA

² Global Insight figures

- South Africa has too few workers in the highly skilled and skilled categories (21% of total), especially in professions such as engineering and technical trades;
- Too many workers are unskilled (30%) and/or illiterate (8,2 million out of a total employed workforce of 12,7 million);
- A high proportion of the workforce is unemployed - 4,3 million or 25,5%;
- Far too few matriculants leave school having passed Maths and Science.

We have taken the position that good quality education has to be relevant to the needs of the economy, and it should be judged by the extent to which it makes an individual self sufficient and able to maintain sustainable livelihoods on leaving school, irrespective of the level attained.

Quality education depends on the linkages between education and a variety of other social and economic outcomes, such as health, social stability, productivity, economic growth – to mention a few.

As pointed out earlier on, quality education also depends on the availability of physical infrastructure, basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity, housing, roads and health services.

All of these needs to be strengthened to support the schooling system, and this is what this Government is committed to do.

For your part as school principals, we need you to provide strong leadership. The emphasis on good leadership is paramount for it is through innovative leadership which is mission driven that we reforms our education system can be truly achieved.

The leadership in our schools must encompass a new set of values. These values should ensure probity, stability and professionalism in the provision of teaching.

I thank you.