Speech delivered by the MEC for Education Ms Neliswa Peggy Nkonyeni on the occasion of for the 2015 Learner Admissions Campaign held at Linpark High School, Pietermaritzburg

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Programme Director, Dr E.V. Nzama, Head of Department, Dr Nkosinathi Sishi, Members of Top Management, Representatives of SGB Associations Chairpersons of School Governing Bodies Principals of schools Officials of the Department,

I greet you all.

It gives me a great pleasure to grace this function today as we launch an early registration drive for the 2015 admission year. This is an important occasion because it will ensure that learning and teaching starts on the 1st minute of the 1st hour on the 1st day of school opening.

Programme Director, with your permission, may we pay tribute to the stalwart of the fight against apartheid Mama Epainette Nomaka Mbeki who...
died on the 7th June this past weekend. MaMbheki as she was affectionately known was an activist against the cruel system of segregation that undermined and dehumanized Africans in particular and blacks in general treating them like foreigners in the land of their birth. She fought a good fight. She lived a life dedicated to the service of the nation. Lest we forget, she was also married to another struggle stalwart the late Govan Mbeki. Not only that, MaMbheki also gave birth to the son of soil Thabo Mbeki who is our former President. History records that MaMbeki was the second black woman to join the Communist Party of South Africa and contributed insightful articles to her husband newspaper, Inkundla ya Bantu. We have lost a heroine, we have lost a mother. MaMbeki, we are poorer without you.

May her soul rest in peace as you join other struggle luminaries – your husband Govan, Tata Nelson Mandela, Helen Joseph, Lillian Ngoyi and many others. In your name we will continue to push back the frontiers of poverty, fight illiteracy and make our education system an envy of the world. We dare not fail!!!

Programme Director, we meet today amidst many challenges facing our fledgling democracy; but for us to be on the right side of history; we have to do more than just do our best but we must move Beyond the Call of Duty. We must never forget that the Department of Education exists because of learners not the other way around. Therefore, we need to take issues concerning learners very seriously.

The supreme law of the land, our celebrated 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, in particular Section 28 states that “the child is of paramount importance on any matter pertaining to the child”. It is
therefore of paramount importance for us to ensure that we provide for and protect the right to basic education as enshrined in the Constitution. Putting clear processes in place for the admission of learners into our public schools becomes a critical function of the Department of Education because it addresses issues of access to basic education for the children of KwaZulu-Natal.

**Rationale for the campaign**

The campaign is based on three key objectives:

The campaign focuses on ensuring that there is compliance by schools with the legislative provisions in relation to learner admissions. Schools must comply with National and Provincial policies when they develop their own admission policies. This will ensure that our admission processes are streamlined and do not prejudice the learner in any way.

The campaign also serves as a planning tool to assist schools and the Department with early identification of resources to be acquired before the start of the new academic year. As an organisation we are striving to ensure that there is effective planning and provisioning of resources to schools prior to the commencement of the new school year. The Department has put 31st October every year as the date when all schools must have completed their learner admissions so that the Department is in a position make the necessary decisions regarding the following crucial resources, LTSM, Staffing, Furniture, classrooms and other resources.

The campaign will contribute to the provision of quality education in the sense that it treats contact time as sacrosanct and protected. This will
ensure that there is no learner who misses out on the first day of school because they are still looking for space. We want to ensure effective teaching and learning on the first day of school in January 2015 which will set a tone about the seriousness of the Department in improving learner attainment. The impact of early admission of learners and the proper utilisation of teaching and learning time will have positive repercussions throughout the schooling system and will yield positive results even in relation to Grade 12 Matric results.

**Policy framework**

As MEC for Education, the South African Schools Act (SASA), No 84 of 1996, has enjoined me in terms of Section 3 of the Act that I must ensure that there are enough school places so that every child who lives in this province can attend school as required by subsections (1) and (2). It is therefore very important that today we are gathered in this fashion, as various role players so that we can all strive to achieve a common goal, that of providing access to learning to all the children, especially those of compulsory school going age which is age 7 to 15 or until the child reaches grade 9, whichever comes first. The success of this campaign will assist in determining where in the province there is the need to provide additional classrooms and other infrastructure.

Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aims to achieve universal primary education and ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to enrol and complete a full course of primary schooling. Census 2011 indicated a big improvement in the number of 5 year old children in the country who are attending school, placing it at 81.2 % in 2011 from 45.6% in 2001. In KZN we have about 4000
primary schools which opened Grade R classes, and this is a major achievement in providing access to education for learners in the early childhood stages of their development. This campaign is intended to build on the positive spinoffs that we have achieved as a Province. This is in line with Goal 11 “to improve the access of children to quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) below Grade 1” of Action Plan 2014, and Towards Schooling 2025 of which I will elaborate on these later.

It then becomes very important that when School Governing Bodies develop admission policies, in terms of section 5 of the South African Schools Act, these must comply with the Departmental policies so that they can contribute to the vision of the Department, that of having an educated, skilled and highly developed citizenry in our province. Parents must be informed about the following issues:

**Documents required for admission of citizens of RSA namely**

i) Birth certificate  
ii) Immunisation card or  
iii) Transfer card or last school report card for learners who attended other schools before

For admission of Non-RSA citizens they are required to produce

iv) Study permit  
v) Temporary or Permanent Residence Permit from the Department of Home Affairs

**Age of admission of a learner to a public school is:**

vi) 4 years turning 5 by 30 June in the year of admission, for Grade R
vii) 5 years turning 6 by 30 June in the year of admission for Grade 1

Schools are required to process applications for admission timeously and give feedback to parents about the outcome of their application. This will enable parents to look for another school if the school which was their first preference is full. Parents do have the right to appeal to the MEC, in terms of SASA, if they are not satisfied with the outcome of their application. School principals have been delegated the function to administer learner admissions on behalf of the Head of Department. If principals perform this function diligently, there may even be no need for parents or guardians to appeal to the MEC on this matter. We also expect officials in the Circuit and district offices to assist the Head of Department in the efficient administration of Learner Admissions.

**Policies that broaden access to education**

This campaign is further enabled by the various progressive policies that are in place.

In addressing the ‘Education for All goal’s’ call for the provision of free and compulsory education, in 2007, the government adopted a policy of “No Fee” schools. The aim of this policy is progressively to give effect to the constitutional imperative of the right to a basic education. It is important to note that 4 949 of our public schools or about 80%, are now declared ‘No Fee Schools.’ The inability to pay school fees for your children cannot then be considered as a reason or even an excuse for any child to be out of school.
For the remainder of our fee paying schools, the Department published *Regulations for Exemption of Parents* who are unable to pay school fees in public schools in 2006. Fee paying schools must therefore not use school fees as a gate-keeping mechanism to attract only learners whose parents can afford to pay school fees. The School Management Teams (SMT’s) have a responsibility to inform parents about their right to apply for exemption. Deserving parents also have an obligation to apply to be exempted from payment of school fees. The Department has mechanisms in place to compensate those fee paying schools who have complied with the fee exemption policy.

As a Department, we do not want learners to enrol at the beginning of the year and then drop out of school, but we want to retain them at school. The provision of nutrition through the NSNP in quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools has also contributed to learners enrolling and remaining at school.

**Stakeholder involvement**

Representatives of SGB Associations present here are called to assist the Department by ensuring that their member schools’ support this campaign. Chairpersons of School Governing Bodies present here are members who are held in high regard in their communities and need to become champions of this Learner Admissions Campaign. Whenever you get whatever platforms you are requested to keep this campaign alive and talk about early registration of learners. This is in the spirit of the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QTLC) whereby education is no longer the preserve of Government or the Department of Education but it is a societal issue. With this advocacy campaign, as a Department, we want to
plead with all community members and community structures to help us ensure that there is no child in your community who is supposed to attend school but is not attending school, for whatever reason.

Parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children are admitted and attend school regularly, in terms of the Quality Learning and Teaching campaign - that is simple “non-negotiable”. Furthermore to that Section 3 of South African Schools Act empowers the Head of Department to investigate why a child of compulsory school going age is not attending school. If parents of such a child ignore the interventions by the Department, they may be found guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine or imprisonment. That is how serious this government takes the issue of educating our young people.

With the help of principals of schools, Circuit Managers and District Managers, It is important to indicate that 81.7 % of schools reported to have met the closing date of 31st October 2013 and completed their learner admissions timeously. This could only be achieved due to competent and effective management of our schools by school principals. I therefore encourage Departmental officials to conduct similar advocacy campaigns in every district to inform members of the public about the importance of early registration of learners. All schools must adhere to the set deadline for the coming year.

Our Communications Directorate will arrange for the use of broader media platforms in order to strengthen the campaign e.g. newspapers articles, radio slots and other relevant publications
Policy Matters

Let me turn my attention to some policy matters that we need to take note of. These include Action Plan to 2014, Schooling 2025, the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Growth and Development Strategy and Plan: 2012 to 2030, National Development Plan Vision 2030, ANC Mangaung conference and the ANC 2014 Manifesto. All these policy statements have a single thread running through them – how can the state provide quality education for the African child in particular and all children in the public schooling system in general.

Action Plan to 2014 & Schooling 2025

This event is held during the time when we are celebrating 20 years of democracy and tremendous progress in the transformation of the schooling system. During 2010 the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, declared that there would be a plan for schools in South Africa called Action Plan to 2014, and that this would form part of a larger vision called Schooling 2025. The plan is important because it tells you what the government will be doing to make Grades R to 12 schooling better, but also because it explains how we can collectively contribute towards making the goals of the plan and Schooling 2025 a reality.

This Action Plan explains the 27 national goals that lie at the heart of the plan. Thirteen of these goals are output goals dealing with better school results and better enrolment of learners in schools. The remaining 14 goals deal with things that must happen for the output goals to be realised. The goals do not capture everything we must do, but experience has shown
that for a plan to work it is important to identify a few key goals that can guide everyone. For all the goals in the plan, it is explained what government is doing and it is explained what you can do to contribute towards success in South Africa's schools.

There are two parts to the Action Plan to 2014:

- The Shorter version, labelled Part A, is intended for a wide audience including all teachers, school principals, and school governing bodies.
- The Long version of the plan, Part B, contains more details, for example further details on how goals will be achieved, details on how improvements will be monitored, and what the exact national and provincial targets are for each goal. The long version includes not just the targets we want to achieve by 2014, but also the targets we want to reach by 2025 as part of the *Schooling 2025* vision.

Both Action 2014 and *Schooling 2025* vision requires the expertise and hard working habits of seasoned civil servants such as Mr. Mosuwe and unfortunately of other SMS members who are retiring this year.

**The KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Growth and Development Strategy and Plan: 2012 to 2030**

The KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Growth and Development Strategy and Plan: 2012 to 2030 enjoins us to improve early childhood development, primary and secondary education so that the education sector produces sufficient people with the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to contribute to growth and development of our beautiful province.
How to do this?

• Review teacher education and resource capacity building programmes.
• Improve teacher deployment and utilisation.
• Collect data efficiently to track learner progress and retain learners in the education system.
• More efficient delivery of basic education services, school infrastructure, equipment and learning support materials.
• Support effective governance in schools.
• Ensure inclusive education by providing schools for children with special needs.
• Promote the use of technology and the ‘new technologies’
• Review the education funding model.
• Enhance technical vocational schools programmes.

National Development Plan

It should be noted that the PGDP does not exist in a vacuum. It is in part informed by the national developmental blueprint the National Development Plan (NDP). The NDP stipulates that free education must be introduced up to undergraduate level. It says we shall continue to test grade 3, 6, and 9 learners each year to measure improvement and identify problems. It enjoins us to ensure that educators are in class on time, teaching at least seven hours a day and that all schools must have all required teaching aids including workbooks and textbooks.
Equally, we expect learners to be attentive in class learning and respecting the learning environment including school property and educators. The NDP commits this government to eradicate mud schools in other provinces and improve ablution facilities, electricity and water.

**ANC Mangaung conference**

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, in 2009, the ANC-led government declared Education as an apex priority. And, in its Mangaung 53rd National Conference in 2012, the ANC affirmed again the status of Basic Education as an apex priority for the country.

The ANC Mangaung conference noted that there is a general agreement that education has to be protected from disruptions. Disruption of schooling through industrial action and service delivery protests impact negatively on the stability of schools and the quality of education.

The conference further resolved that a Presidential Commission be established to review the remuneration and conditions of employment of educators and make recommendations on salary adjustments and wage increases in a manner that protects education as national priority.

**ANC 2014 Manifesto**

Our recent manifesto also makes a point that education and training must be available to all - focusing on young children, students and adults. This requires, among other things, a comprehensive and integrated post-school education and training system. The ANC is committed to the progressive
realisation of free education at all levels. We have made progress in achieving universal access to quality basic education, but we need to work harder to ensure introduction of free education in higher education and training.

The key commitments laid out for the next five years are making early childhood development a priority; eradicating illiteracy; improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools; and building capacity in higher education and training.

**In the Next Five Years the ANC will:**

Make early childhood development a top priority

- We will work towards realising two years of compulsory pre-school education and strive for fuller integration of Grade R educators in the post and remuneration structure.
- About one million poor families will benefit from access to an early learning stimulation programme through community-based initiatives and home visits to prepare children before the foundation phase of formal schooling (Grades R, 1 to 3).
- We will strengthen coordination between departments responsible for early childhood development, and the non-profit and private sectors.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in our schools
- We will provide interventions, through curriculum and assessment policies, to improve performance in our schools.
Conclusion

In conclusion, Programme Director; as we have launched this campaign, we call on all stakeholders especially parents to embrace it. It is integral to making quality learning and teaching a key priority throughout of education system. I appeal to all concerned to support the call to register all qualifying pupils in the right schools, in the right grades on time.

I thank you!