

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY MEC FOR EDUCATION IN
KWAZULU-NATAL, MS MBALI FRAZER, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
NATU ELECTIVE CONFERENCE HELD IN DURBAN 7 SEPTEMBER 2022**

Programme Director

President of NATU and the entire collective leadership

Deputy Director-General: Corporate Services, Advocate Bheki Masuku

Senior Officials from the Department of Education

Delegates

Members of the media

Comrades and friends

Ngiyanibingelela nonke egameni lemfundo

It is an honour and a privilege to be invited to address this momentous occasion, the National Teachers' Union Elective Conference.

1

As a Department of Education in KZN, we genuinely value the partnerships we have with all teachers' union. We always appreciate meaningful engagements and collaborations with NATU, which we consider to be one of the critical stakeholders in the delivery of quality

education in KwaZulu-Natal. I also fully concur with NATU's commitment to defend the rights of children as well as the union's dedication to work unselfishly for the right of teachers to teach. Together with all teachers' unions, our shared constitutional responsibility is to realise the Department's vision to be an innovative hub for quality teaching and learning that produces learners developed to exploit opportunities for lifelong success. The National Development Plan also enjoins us to ensure that by 2030, South Africans have access to education and training of the highest quality leading to significantly improved learning outcomes.

2

I am encouraged by the vast contribution NATU has been making towards improving the standard of living of our teachers and principals. While last year's marginal decrease of 0.8% in matric pass rate was disappointing, we cannot ignore the devastating impact the Covid-19 outbreak had on the education system. It would be very remiss of me not to applaud all of you for your resilience as you continued to show unmatched commitment to teaching and learning during the height of this global pandemic. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our educators and learners who lost the battle against the coronavirus, may their souls rest in peace.

3

The KZN Provincial Government has set an 80% target of matric pass rate for the class of 2022. All our districts were also instructed perform at 80% and above. Throughout the year, the Department partnered with numerous stakeholders in rolling out our Academic Improvement Plan which sought to improve the overall matric pass rate as well as the performance in gateway subjects such as Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, Agricultural Sciences, Mathematics as well as other technical subjects.

4

However, our focus has not only been on the matric pass rate. The Department has also been consistently rolling out programmes that seek to improve the performance of the entire education system because we want to see learners in all grades excelling in their subjects. These programmes include supporting and upskilling our educators, so they are better capacitated to deliver according to the needs of the curriculum.

5

As someone who spent a large part of my adult life as a teacher, I'm fully aware of the negative impact resulting from a shortage of educators in our schools. You, our educators are, without a doubt, the backbone of the education system. However, as you are all aware, the KZN Department of Education has been relentlessly hit by budget reductions. This has led to the need for the reprioritisation of funds

towards the most critical areas to assist the Department in ensuring that the provision of quality education to the learners of KwaZulu-Natal, is not compromised. Unfortunately, the budget reductions were implemented mainly against the compensation of employees' allocation. This created a challenge in filling of vacant posts at all levels of the Department. With the decreased budget, several educator posts are unaffordable in this financial year. The Department also has 365 critical non-educator posts that are not filled.

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Notwithstanding these challenges, our learners must not be deprived of quality education. Our core mandate as the Department is to ensure efficient curriculum delivery and that cannot happen if we don't have adequate educators in our schools. So, we must work together with stakeholders such as NATU to ensure that every classroom has an educator. When I was appointed as the MEC for Education I made a commitment that I will see to it that the Department commences with the process of filling some of the vacancies. This will also include employing some of the unemployed graduates. We may not be able to fill all the vacant posts in one go, but we must start somewhere.

7

Ladies and gentlemen, I must admit that I'm equally concerned about the deficiencies in the norms and standards to schools. This places us

below the national recommendation. The Department is fully cognisant of the critical importance of having to make every effort to catch up with other provinces in this regard as it also has a direct impact on our ability to improve the educational outcomes in the province. The expenditure incurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the unfunded cost of damages to infrastructure during the December storms and April /May floods did not allow for the provision of additional funding towards this end, in the current financial year.

8

I would also like to use this opportunity to implore all our principals to use funds allocated to their schools for the benefit of our learners. This includes paying municipalities for services such as water and electricity. We cannot continue having instances where teaching and learning is disrupted because schools have been disconnected by municipalities for non-payment. If there is a query on a municipal bill, the principal has a right to lodge a dispute with the municipality but please don't just sit back and do nothing because the debt will escalate due to interests and other penalties.

10

The safety of our educators and learners remains one of our top priorities. It is very worrying to learn about the criminal elements that are trying to infiltrate our schools. We are constantly receiving reports about our schools being broken in to during weekends or holidays.

We've also had instances where armed gunmen have entered school premises and disrupted lessons. Just yesterday, I received a report about a school where all their copper pipes were stolen during a burglary. The thieves also broke into one of the storage rooms and took all the food that was meant for meals for the pupils. Even schools where the Department has been able to supply security guards seem to be under attack.

11

Safety is a societal issue; therefore, we are pleading with our communities to protect our schools from criminals. It's now obvious that we are dealing with people who have no shame or sense of ubuntu so every resident must step up and safeguard the education of our youth by keeping a close watch on our schools.

11

The Department of Basic Education and the SAPS also have a protocol agreement which was signed more than 10 years ago to help fight crime in schools. Police regularly conduct awareness activities as well as search and seizures of dangerous weapons and drugs as part of an ongoing campaign to clamp down on the criminal activities by learners. In terms of the agreement every school is linked to a local police station. I would like to applaud and appreciate the initiative and involvement of the law enforcement officers in keeping our schools safe.

Distinguished delegates, what remains for me is to wish you a successful and fruitful deliberations during your conference. We look forward to engaging with NATU's new leadership on your union's recommendations on how can we collaborate on strengthening the capacity of the education system to deliver quality public education.

I thank you!

Amandla!