



**MINISTER
BASIC EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Speech by the Minister of Basic Education, Ms. Siviwe Gwarube, at the
Release of the 2024 National Senior Certificate Results**

Mosaic Church, Johannesburg

13 January 2025

Programme Director,

Ministers and Deputy Ministers, including my Deputy Minister, Dr Mhaule

Directors-General, led by the Director-General in the Presidency,

Members of the Parliamentary Portfolio and Select Committees on Basic
Education,

Members of our Provincial Executive Councils responsible for Education,

Representatives of Umalusi,

Members of our educator unions,

Representatives of our School Governing Body associations,

Esteemed guests,

Colleagues,

District Directors,

Educators,

Parents and learners,

members of the media,

And the viewers watching at home,

Good Evening.

It is an incredible privilege to stand before you today as we mark an important day in the life of our nation — the release of the 2024 National Senior Certificate results.

This occasion is not only a moment to recognise the accomplishments of our learners but is also an opportunity for us as a country to reflect on the health of our basic education system at the start of 2025.

It is a pivotal moment in which we must reflect on the *quality* of the education outcomes we are achieving and what we need to do to expand access to quality in the schooling system for all our learners.

As we are on the eve of the 31st anniversary of South Africa's democratic transition in 1994, we must ask ourselves whether we are giving meaningful expression to the Constitutional right of every person to receive basic education.

Reflections on Our Journey

South Africa's journey since 1994 has been one of rebuilding, reimagining and recommitting to the ideals of a free, democratic and prosperous country where every person has an equal chance to build and live a life of dignity. Education has been at the heart of this journey.

Sisuka kude singuMzantsi Afrika. Sisuka kwixesha lobandlulula apho imfundo ephucukileyo yayingafunyanwa ngabantu abamnyama. Apho urhulumente woobondlululo waye dodobalisa izinga lemfundo yabantu abafana nam.

31 years later, we get to change that. We get to rewrite the story of South Africa's education system; and indeed its very future.

The right to basic education must be understood in the context of the aim of education, which is to ensure the full development of our humanity.

I believe this context is why our first democratically elected President, uTata uNelson Mandela, described education as the most powerful weapon you can use to transform the world.

Today, as we reflect on the progress and challenges of the last three decades, we do so in honour of former President Mandela and other architects of the democratic South Africa's education system, such as the recently departed Professor Sibusiso Bengu, whom we laid to rest last Friday.

Allow me to take this moment to pay tribute to Professor Bengu, who served as democratic South Africa's first Minister of Education, whose work in 1994 laid the foundation for a new education system that reflects the values enshrined in our Constitution.

Professor Bengu was resolute in his belief that education should not only be a right but a vehicle for reconciliation, redress and empowerment. We owe him a debt of gratitude for the transformative policies and laws that were introduced during his tenure and which continue to shape our sector today.

It is on his shoulders that I stand and on those of other Ministers who have led this portfolio, including Ministers Kader Asmal and Dr Naledi Pandor, who led when basic education and higher education were still under one Ministry; and Minister Angie Motshekga who led the Basic Education Department.

Their work has contributed to advancing principles of access, redress, equity, efficiency, quality and inclusivity in our basic education system.

I am committed to building on their successes every day so that we can move closer to universal access to *quality* in our schooling system.

Taking a Holistic View of the System

Today, while we celebrate the achievements of the Class of 2024, we must also reflect on the health of our basic education system. A healthy schooling system is not measured solely by matric results but by a comprehensive set of indicators that reflect its quality and equity.

In the basic education sector, we currently have 12.7 million learners, with over 740 000 in independent schools. We have over 460 000 educators who are responsible for educating the next generation of leaders. We have close to 24 850 schools, close to 889 circuit offices, 75 education districts and 9 Provincial Education Departments.

From these numbers, we can clearly see that education is a massive undertaking and a truly important function of a democratic government.

However, I must hasten to say that this is not only the work of government. Education is fundamentally a social undertaking, shaping individuals and communities for a better future, and that can never be the task of government alone.

It must be a **whole-of-society undertaking**, where government, educators and their unions, School Governing Bodies and their representative associations, parents, businesses and civil society work collaboratively to improve the quality of education outcomes.

When society invests collectively in education, it fosters greater equity and inclusivity.

By jointly committing our resources and expertise, we can address systemic challenges and ensure all learners reach their full potential. Together, we have a responsibility to create an education system that uplifts individuals, produces the skills needed to grow the economy and strengthens the nation.

As a country we have been largely successful in improving access to basic education.

We now have 98% of all children between the ages of 7 and 15 years enrolled in schools.

This gives us a near universal attendance rate for learners in Grades 1 to 9.

However, with Grade R becoming part of compulsory school attendance with effect from this school year, more work needs to be done urgently to ensure that we expand access to basic education from Grade R.

This is no small feat and will require significant planning and investment and a renewed commitment to the well-being of our children.

While good progress has been made in expanding education access, we must turn our attention to improving the *quality* of the education that our learners receive.

Learners must leave our schools with an education and a qualification that allows them to pursue higher education opportunities or enter the job market in order to live lives of dignity.

When we assess the quality that our schooling system is able to deliver, we must consider various indicators of quality beyond those offered by matric results.

The recently released international benchmarking studies (including the TIMSS and SEACMEQ studies) and our own recently released Systemic Evaluation results, show that our learners in Grades 5 to 9 significantly underperform in relation to their global counterparts in Mathematics and Science.

They also show that too many of our learners cannot read for meaning in any language by Grade 4.

Put simply, this means that too many learners progress through the basic education system without mastering foundational skills, particularly in literacy and numeracy, which are critical for performing well in gateway subjects, like Mathematics and Physical Sciences.

These deficits accumulate over time, limiting learners' abilities to succeed in higher grades and in these gateway subjects and diminishing their prospects of accessing further education and employment opportunities.

This trend manifests itself in the decrease in enrolments in subjects, such as Physical Sciences, Mathematics, Accounting and Economics, which are all subjects that are critical for a nation's ability to advance in science, innovation and economic development.

Strategic reorientation of the Education Sector

In response to these trends, the Department of Basic Education and I will embark on an urgent strategic reorientation of the system towards strengthening foundational learning.

Furthermore, provinces, districts and schools must put together plans to arrest the decline of enrolments in critical subjects.

The systemic interventions that we will undertake in this regard include expanding access to quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) for learners before they enter the basic education system and improving the quality of teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase.

I believe that this strategic reorientation towards ECD and the Foundation Phase will improve the quality of the learning outcomes we are able to achieve throughout the system – from Grades R to 3 in the Foundation Phase, Grades 4 to 6 in the Intermediate Phase, Grades 7 to 9 in the Senior Phase and ultimately Grades 10 to 12 in the Further Education and Training Phase.

And in doing so, we can expect to see more learners moving through our schooling with greater confidence to take on and succeed in subjects that set them on a path for personal and professional success.

I would now like to come to the business of the day – the National Senior Certificate results of the Class of 2024.

The Class of 2024

Ladies and Gentlemen, in 2013, we saw 1 222 851 learners start Grade 1. Of these learners, 724 156 enrolled as full-time candidates in Grade 12 in 2024.

Now, I must point out that this does not mean those who did not enrol for Grade 12 in 2024 have dropped out of our education system.

This has often led to a misconception that these learners are lost to the system, which is often not the case.

Firstly, learners have a choice after Grade 9 to switch to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and indeed a number of them do so.

Secondly, different learners at different times progress to different grades, with some moving to become part-time candidates and some changing their subjects.

Furthermore, some learners migrate from public schools to private schools that write the IEB or SACAI exams.

These learners are therefore still within the system – just not part of our Class of 2024 as full-time candidates who wrote their exams through the Department of Basic Education.

We cannot therefore classify all of those did not enrol for Grade 12 in 2024 as having dropped out.

This would be a misrepresentation.

However, what we must improve on as a sector is developing systems with the necessary sophistication to track each and every learner throughout the entire schooling system, including public and independent schools, also into the higher education and training system, to ensure that we are better placed to account accurately for each and every one of our learners.

The Class of 2024 entered Grade 8 in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was a huge disruption to teaching and learning globally.

They also entered Grade 9 – a key year for subject selection for Grades 10 to 12 – during the pandemic.

The Class of 2024 reflects the resilience of the protea, South Africa's national flower and a symbol of renewal and strength.

The protea thrives in adversity, with its woody seed cones and roots designed to survive wildfires.

After the flames of wildfires have passed, the nutrient-rich ash they leave behind nourishes the soil, triggering the release of seeds that rejuvenate protea flowers that blossom even brighter than before.

Similarly, the Matric Class of 2024 has faced immense challenges from COVID-19 that disrupted their learning, to the evolving budget pressures being felt by various provincial departments and schools, to other social ills, such as violence, gangsterism and the new trend of protection-fee rackets terrorizing our schools.

Despite these challenges, we have seen the highest rate of learners enrolled for Grade 12 in 2024 writing the NSC exams since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Siyaziqenya nge Class ka 2024. Basebenzile, ebunzimeni.

Approximately 97% of learners enrolled for Grade 12 in 2024 ultimately wrote the NSC exams in 2024.

Like the protea, the Class of 2024 seems to have drawn strength from adversity, emerging more determined and ready to flourish, proving that from the harshest conditions, greatness can bloom.

We have also seen that the level of confidence amongst Grade 12 learners to sit for and complete the exams has increased as a result of higher levels of curriculum coverage by learners and educators.

This was made possible by the collective efforts of the Department of Basic Education, Provincial Education Departments, district teams, schools, educators and parents – and the learners themselves.

Some of the key initiatives driven by the Department of Basic Education that supported the Class of 2024 included personalised learning interventions, additional teaching support and socio-emotional care.

To provide further support, provinces rolled out extra face-to-face tuition sessions, Saturday catch-up programmes and extended school hours to ensure adequate revision in key subjects.

These initiatives targeted learners who were struggling to cope with the curriculum content due to earlier disruptions, focusing on key subjects.

In addition to classroom-based interventions, learners have also benefited from extensive support in the form of revision materials, past question papers, and online resources made available through public-private partnerships with stakeholders, such as Vodacom, MTN, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) and other corporate partners.

In 2024, we saw the number of full-time candidates writing the National Senior Certificate examinations increase from 691 160 in 2023 to 705 291 in 2024.

We also saw the number of learners with special education needs who wrote the National Senior Certificate examinations increase from 5 288 in 2023 to 6 470 in 2024.

Furthermore, we saw 556 726 learners who are beneficiaries of social grants writing the National Senior Certificate exams in 2024 – 12 938 more than in 2023.

The scope and integrity of the National Senior Certificate examination process

Ladies and gentlemen, the National Senior Certificate examination process is an incredible logistical undertaking, involving almost 7 000 examination centres, over 160 question papers, 9.7 million of scripts, over 72 000 invigilators, over 52 000 markers and over 180 marking centres.

It is surely one of the greatest logistical undertakings for our country after the general and municipal elections.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere and heartfelt thanks to each and every departmental official, educator, invigilator and marker who contributed countless hours to make the 2024 National Senior Certificate examination process a success and who worked tirelessly to protect the integrity of this important process.

I would also like to pay tribute to those markers who sadly passed away during the marking process. Lala ngoxolo Mokibelo Evidence Maisela, Blessed Mthethwa, Julia Jonas, nawe Lawrence Phakiso Mofokeng.

May your families be comforted by the knowledge that you dedicated your life to the service of your country.

We will carry your memory with us.

Programme Director,

I would like to acknowledge and thank the various government departments and organs of state who have supported the 2024 National Senior Certificate examination process.

This included, for example, the efforts of many to secure our examination and marking centres against the effects of inclement weather, as well as water and electricity supply issues.

I would also like to express my sincerest thanks and gratitude to Umalusi for the important role that they play each year in quality assuring the National Senior Certificate examinations. The Quality Assurance Council verifies and, where appropriate, moderates each step in the examination cycle. As a country, we can be proud of the quality assurance arrangement in South Africa regarding the National Senior Certificate examination, which ensures that the final outcomes in this examination are valid, reliable and credible.

After quality assuring the 2024 results, I am happy to report that Umalusi has approved these results and endorsed their release.

Siyayibulela indlela isebenzisene ngayo ne-regulator yethu. The healthy checks and balances allow for results that are underscored by integrity and quality.

Siyabulela.

It must be noted that this does not mark the end of the examination cycle, as learners are entitled to apply for remarks and recounts once they receive their results.

The 2024 NSC Results

Ladies and gentlemen, the 2024 National Senior Certificate results for 2024. These results show that our schooling system is maturing, but that there is still much work to be done to improve the quality of education outcomes.

Number of passes with admission to Bachelor studies

Let us reflect on the social justice principle of Quality.

If we are to measure the quality of education outcomes in the NSC examinations, we need to look to the number of passes which allow admission to Bachelor studies achieved by the Class of 2024.

A Bachelor admission pass is a prerequisite to apply for access to a degree course at a university or university of technology. In this speech, we will refer to these as “Bachelor passes”.

I am pleased to announce that, in the Class of 2024, nearly half of the learners who wrote the NSC examinations received a Bachelor pass.

47.8% of candidates qualified for admission to Bachelor studies, which is a significant improvement from last year’s 40.9% and represents the highest number of Bachelor passes in recent history.

This is a 6.9% increase from last year.

More importantly, this is a critical benchmark of readiness for higher education and training.

In 2014, we produced 150 752 Bachelor passes. In just a decade this number has more than doubled in 2024 to 337 158 Bachelor passes.

It is also encouraging to see that some of our provinces with the highest numbers of learners are achieving high numbers of Bachelor passes.

In 2024, I am pleased to announce that KwaZulu Natal achieved the highest number of Bachelor passes with 84 470, followed by Gauteng with 66 979 and the Eastern Cape with 45 662.

I am also incredibly encouraged by the fact that approximately 67% of the Bachelor passes achieved in 2024 came from Quintile 1 to 3 schools, which are typically found in our poorer communities. This percentage represents an increase from 2023.

This means that poorer communities are producing more and more candidates who can go on to become doctors, engineers, accountants and scientists.

This is the power of education to transform lives and uplift families that Tata Mandela was talking about.

There appears to be a noticeable link between access to social grants and learner performance – something that requires further investigation. This speaks to the importance of social protections that are afforded to the poorest South Africans.

Gender performance

It is also important to note that girl learners performed better than boy learners in obtaining a Bachelor pass. This performance trend is also visible in other parts of the schooling system with boy learners staying longer in the system than girl learners.

While we are succeeding in reducing the historical challenges faced by the girl child in terms of obtaining an education, our interventions need to be strengthened and broadened to ensure that we do not leave the boy child behind.

Distinctions

Ladies and gentlemen, the Class of 2024 achieved an impressive number of 319 651 distinctions.

This represents a significant increase of over 65 000 distinctions from last year. Some of these increases were seen in key subjects, including Mathematics.

I am pleased to report that every province increased the number of distinctions achieved in 2023.

KwaZulu Natal was once more the top performing province in terms of the percentage of candidates obtaining distinctions, with 10.8% distinction potential achieved.

Coming in second with 6.3% of distinction potential achieved was the Western Cape, followed by Gauteng with 5.3%.

Notable progress was made by Mpumalanga and Limpopo in this regard where we saw this percentage increase by over 1% in 2024 when compared to the results for 2023.

Passes in Mathematics and Physical Sciences

Mathematics and Physical Sciences are gateway subjects that are essential for South Africa's socio-economic development.

In 2024, 69.1% of learners passed Mathematics, which is an increase from 63.5% in 2023. However, in Physical Sciences, whilst 75.6% of learners passed, this is a decrease from 76.2% in 2023. While the number and percentage of learners achieving distinctions in Mathematics increased in 2024 from 2023, the number and percentage of learners achieving distinctions in Physical Sciences has dropped

The improvement in performance in Mathematics is encouraging. However, the decreasing participation rates in these key subjects, and the decrease in performance in Physical Sciences, highlight the urgent need to improve foundational literacy and numeracy to ensure that our schooling system produces learners who are confident and capable enough to choose and excel in Maths and Science subjects throughout their schooling career.

Improved performance by high schools

Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to note that, in 2024, we also saw more of our high schools achieving a pass rate in the NSC examinations of between 80% and 100% than in 2023. In 2023, the number of high schools achieving this was 4 493 and in 2024 this number increased to 5 387 representing 77.7% of our high schools.

Also important to note is that the number of underperforming schools has decreased.

This is thanks to intensified interventions undertaken by the Department of Basic Education, together with Provincial Education Departments and their district teams, to support schools in distress.

National, Provincial and District Pass rates

Ladies and Gentlemen, while the matric pass rate does not tell us about the quality of education outcomes that our schooling system is achieving, it is an important indicator of progress. It simply tells us what percentage of learners who wrote the National Senior Certificate achieved the minimum pass requirements for this qualification.

To pass the National Senior Certificate, learners are not required simply to get 30% across all subjects, which is often misconceived to be the only pass requirement for the National Senior Certificate.

Instead, they are required to get at least 40% in their Home Language and two other subjects and at least 30% for three other subjects and must pass at least 6 out of their 7 subjects.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am proud to announce that in 2024 615 429 learners passed the National Senior Certificate – more than any other time in our history.

South Africa's national pass rate for the 2024 National Senior Certificate has therefore increased from 82.9% in 2023 to 87.3%.

This is the highest matric pass rate in the history of our country and should be a moment of great pride and celebration for all of us.

When we consider the number of learners that progressed from Grade 10 to Grade 12, we have achieved a throughput rate of 63%. This is in line with other middle-income countries.

As I have indicated, there are many factors that impact on this rate, including, for example, subject choice changes, shifts to part-time candidature and movements to TVET colleges from Grade 10.

Provincial Performance

At a provincial level, I am pleased to announce that every province improved on its performance from 2023 and every province achieved above 84%:

- Free State is the best performing province at 91.0%, increasing its pass rate from 89.0% in 2023.
- KwaZulu Natal is at number 2 with a pass rate of 89.5%, marking an increase of 3.2% from 2023.
- Number 3 is Gauteng, which increased its pass rate from 85.4% in 2023 to 88.4% in 2024.
- North-West comes in at number 4 with 87.5%, which represents an increase of 5.9% from 2023.
- Number 5 is the Western Cape at 86.6%, which represents an increase of 5% from 2023.

The following three provinces all received a rounded off pass rate of 85%. However, they are ranked according to highest raw percentage points achieved.

- Limpopo comes in at number 6, with a pass rate of 85.01%. This represents an increase of 5.5% from 2023.
- Mpumalanga with a pass rate of 84.99% is at number 7 – a significant increase of 8% from 2023.
- Eastern Cape achieved a pass rate of 84.98% and comes in at number 8 with a 3.6% increase from 2023.
- Northern Cape is at number 9 with 84.2%.

It is also important to add that the Northern Cape is the most improved province. It surged by 8.3% from 2023.

No-fee schools improved their pass rate from 81% in 2023 to 85.8% in 2024. This too is another sign that our schooling system is maturing.

Our education districts have also made us very proud with all districts improving on their performance from 2023. Johannesburg West is the top performing education district with a pass rate of 97%, followed by the Fezile Dabi education district in the Free State with 93.5% in second position and the Umkhanyakude education district in KwaZulu-Natal in third position with 92.8%.

Even more reason for us to smile is the fact 73 out of the 75 districts obtained pass rates higher than 80%.

Ladies and gentlemen, our District Directors deserve our praise and thanks for the incredible work they have put into ensuring that our schools were supported to improve their performance. You have played and continue to play a critical role in driving excellence in your respective districts. I must also single out the DG who visited 75 out of 75 districts in the lead up to the NSC exams. Mr Mveli, your efforts have not gone unnoticed.

This indicates that our education system as a whole is moving in a positive direction.

Quintile Performance

Learners from Quintiles 1 to 3 schools, which typically serve our poorest communities, have made significant gains, reflecting the success of initiatives, such as the National School Nutrition Programme and extra tuition support during school holidays.

However, the performance gap between quintiles remains a concern, and we will redouble our efforts to close it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Class of 2024 has excelled against the odds. These young men and women are a source of inspiration to us, proving that excellence is possible regardless of circumstance.

Special congratulations to the top achievers from schools in rural and under-resourced areas — they exemplify the transformative power of education. These young proteas continue to blossom and bloom in spite of the adversity they face.

Strengthening the Foundations for Future Success

While we have many reasons to applaud and celebrate this evening, tomorrow we must also look to the future with clarity and resolve. There is urgent and substantial work to be done to improve the quality of education outcomes that our schooling system must achieve.

As I noted during the release of the international benchmarking studies and our diagnostic reports last month, systemic improvements require long-term investment and planning.

Our strategy to reorientate the basic education sector towards foundational learning will strengthen our schooling system.

Research consistently shows that investments in early learning yield the highest returns in terms of education outcomes.

By prioritising foundational literacy and numeracy in the early years, we will lay the groundwork for stronger performance in Grades 4, 10 and 12, resulting in system-wide improvements.

Key Commitments for 2025 and Beyond

Programme Director, I would like to conclude by sharing the following: As we chart the path forward in this regard, I have committed the Department of Basic Education to the following priorities and call on all our partners in education to work with us to achieve these:

1. **Expanding Access to Quality Early Childhood Development (ECD):**

Universal access to quality ECD programmes by 2030 remains a central goal. We will continue our mass registration drive to formalise ECD programmes, aligned with the National Curriculum Framework for ECD and supported by newly developed learning and teaching support materials.

We will also prioritise the professional development of ECD practitioners and their integration into the basic education system, as well as prioritise the resourcing of ECD centres, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

2. **Improving Teacher Support and Development in the Foundation**

Phase: Teachers are the backbone of our education system. We will intensify support for teacher training with a strategic focus on improving literacy and numeracy in the Foundation Phase.

We will also ensure that the Funza Lushaka Bursary Scheme prioritises students who want to pursue a teaching career in the Foundation Phase.

3. **Improving post provisioning for the Foundation Phase:** During 2025, we will be reviewing the Post Provisioning Norms as a matter of urgency to ensure that they account for our drive to achieve universal access to quality Grade R and our strategic focus on improving reading and calculating in the Foundation Phase.

These Norms have not been updated in over 20 years and determine how educator posts are distributed to public schools.

4. **Strengthening Curriculum Delivery in the Foundation Phase:** By prioritising updates to the National Catalogue of Learning and Teaching Support Materials for the Foundation Phase in 2025, Provincial Education Departments and public schools will be able to purchase textbooks, learning materials and equipment from a comprehensive, educationally sound and linguistically inclusive list that has been specifically approved by experts to achieve national curriculum standards in the Foundation Phase.
5. **Protecting Teaching and Learning Time:** If we are to improve the quality of education outcomes, we need to protect teaching and learning time, ensuring that our teachers are at school and teaching for the entire day, for 230 days per year, to ensure adequate coverage of the curriculum.

I would like to reiterate my call to all Provincial Education Departments, all MECs, all education districts, all circuit teams, all school principals, all School Management Teams, all School Governing Bodies, all educators and all parents and learners to ensure that they urgently work together to ensure this.

Final remarks

To the Class of 2024, I say: You have proven that determination and hard work can overcome even the most formidable challenges. As you embark on the next chapter of your lives, know that you carry the hopes and aspirations of an entire nation.

To the Department of Basic Education, our Provincial Education Departments, our education districts and their circuit teams, and our public schools and their principals, educators and School Governing Bodies, I say: As we celebrate the achievements of the Class of 2024, let us remember that the success of our education system is not measured solely by statistics but by the lives transformed, the barriers broken and the futures unlocked.

To the people of South Africa, I say: Let us recommit ourselves to working together to build a schooling system that leaves no learner behind and ensures that every child in South Africa has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

I thank you for entrusting me with the future of your children. Being able to serve you is the biggest honour of my life, and for that I am eternally grateful.

Intombi yase MaWusheni, ibamba ngazo zozibini ngokundamkela njengankokheli yenu kweli sebe.

Ndiyanithembisa ukuba the oath of office I took to uphold the Constitution of this country remains my guiding principle in delivering this important service: educating our nation so that we can rescue millions out of poverty and unemployment.

I thank you! Ndiyabulela! Kea Leboga!