

**ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE KWAZULULU-NATAL MEC
FOR EDUCATION, MS MBALI FRAZER, DURING THE
MATHEMATICS SUMMIT HELD AT THE ELANGENI HOTEL,
IN DURBAN, ON 12-14 APRIL 2023**

Programme Director, Acting DDG: Curriculum Management and
Delivery, Mr M.J. Mazibuko

Head of Department, Mr G.N. Ngcobo

DDGs

Senior Management and all the officials working for the
Department of Education

Academics and other guest speakers

Representatives of organised labour

Educators

Representatives of Association of School Governing Bodies

Ladies and gentlemen

Sanibonani,

I would like to start by expressing my sincere gratitude to all of
you for attending this critical Mathematics Summit.

The outcomes of this gathering will undoubtedly bolster the
Department's efforts to provide high-quality teaching and

learning opportunities across our illustrious Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

This Summit comes at a crucial time when our nation is focusing on improving the quality of education, especially in Mathematics.

As you may be aware, the National Department of Basic Education has designated 2023 as the Year of Mathematics with the objective of surpassing the 60% benchmark in terms of Mathematics performance in all provinces.

Regrettably, KwaZulu-Natal has recorded a range of 50.6% to 54.6% at Grade 12 over the past five years, which is cause for concern. Furthermore, we are currently witnessing a decline in learner enrolment figures in schools throughout the province.

However, as the legendary Greek mathematicians, Pythagoras, once remarked: ***“Concern should drive us into action and not into a depression.”***

Our theme for this summit is: **Mathematics as a foundational skill for ALL**, and it is a call to action for us as the Department and stakeholders in education to ensure that every learner in this province has access to quality Mathematics education.

We have full confidence in the esteemed delegates attending this Summit to assist us in crafting a comprehensive, actionable, and realistic five-year plan that outlines our objectives for enhancing learner participation, improving academic performance, and supporting girl learners.

We are counting on your valuable input to develop a plan that will effectively address these critical issues

As the Department of Education, we remain committed to ensuring that every learner in this province has equal access to high-quality education, and we recognise that Mathematics is a fundamental skill that must be prioritised.

I am certain that all of you will agree with me when I say that Mathematics is an indispensable skill that unlocks doors to a plethora of fields of study, including science, technology, engineering, and finance.

Programme Director, Mathematics might be mostly in a form of numbers, but this subject can be likened to a poetic language that transcends borders and cultures. It is also a fundamental tool for problem-solving and critical thinking.

Our ANC-led government places great emphasis on Mathematics, as we recognise that it is not only a vital component of our learners' academic success, but it is also indispensable for the future careers of our youth and the economic growth of our country.

If we are to improve our Mathematics performance in KwaZulu-Natal and the country, we must recognise that Mathematics is not just for the academically gifted but is a vital skill for all learners, regardless of their background or ability.

To achieve this, we must come up with strategies to increase participation levels in the subject. We need to make Mathematics more accessible and engaging for all learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This should include offering after-school programs, tutoring, and mentorship programs to help our learners overcome any challenges they may face in mathematics.

Ladies and gentlemen, to achieve this Summit's objective to make Mathematics more accessible to learners, we must first change the perception that Mathematics is a difficult subject.

We must find a way to encourage learners to see Mathematics as a subject that is relevant to their lives and their future careers.

So, my appeal to you, esteemed delegates, is to help the Department answer a very critical question, which is – how do we instil a love for Mathematics in learners from a young age?

Like any other subject, Mathematics requires a sound foundation from the earliest grades. We cannot expect learners to excel in Mathematics at the high school level if they have not received adequate instruction and support in the foundational years.

We must learn from our past mistakes and ensure that we provide the necessary support and resources to our learners from the very beginning.

Programme Director, our educators play a critical role in this area because it is not enough for learners to memorise formulas and procedures, but they must also understand the underlying concepts and principles.

Without this understanding, Mathematics can become a very dry and tedious subject that fails to inspire our learners.

Ladies and gentlemen, studies have shown that there is a gender gap in Mathematics, with boys performing better than girls.

We must work together with all our education stakeholders to find a way to close this gap by creating an enabling environment that encourages and supports girl learners.

This is even more critical for a province and country like ours where the face of poverty is female.

The former US President, Barack Obama, said there was evidence showing that communities that give their daughters the same opportunities as their sons, they are more peaceful, they are more prosperous, they develop faster, they are more likely to succeed.

We must, therefore, empower our girls to become the leaders of tomorrow, and Mathematics is a crucial tool to help them achieve their dreams. History will judge us harshly if we fail on this task.

Ladies and gentlemen, I challenge all of us to work together to develop a comprehensive strategy that addresses the challenges we face in Mathematics education.

We must also focus on improving teacher training, creating supportive learning environments, providing resources and materials, and investing in technology that can enhance the learning experience for our learners.

As I close, Programme Director, I would like to reiterate my heartfelt gratitude to all of our delegates for making the time to attend this Summit. Your presence here is greatly appreciated.

As a Department, we understand the urgency of the task at hand and realise that we cannot afford to make grandiose promises that we cannot fulfill when it comes to improving the province's performance in Mathematics.

In the words of an Irish poet, William Butler Yeats: “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

We must light the fire of learning in our learners and provide them with the tools to succeed.

I thank you!