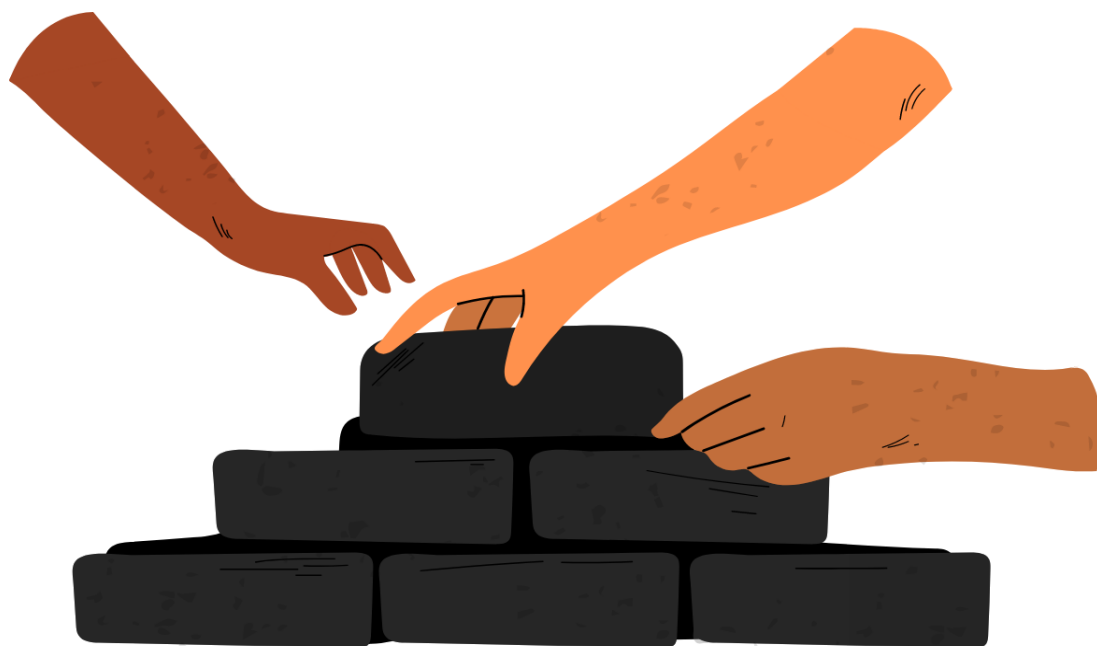


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**SOUTH AFRICA
EDUCATION RESCUE PLAN**



ONE SOUTH AFRICA MOVEMENT



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An Education Rescue Plan

“South Africa is failing too many of its young people when it comes to education. Although it has made significant progress since the end of apartheid in widening access [to education] this has not always translated into a quality education for all pupils. The system continues to be dogged by stark inequalities and chronic underperformance that have deep roots in the legacy of apartheid, but which are also not being effectively tackled by the current government.”

This is the opening paragraph of Amnesty International's 120-Page Report entitled “Broken and Unequal: The State of Education in South Africa” released in early 2020. It aptly describes how the poor state of basic education in South Africa - and the underperformance of government in addressing this – widens the inequality gap in society and undermines the future of millions of young people.

The One South Africa Movement (OSA) has a vision for an affordable, quality education from the earliest stages of schooling to high-level degrees that prepare

students for a future economy. To ensure every child has an inclusive education, opportunities for life-long learning and a career of their choice.

In educating our society, the paramount goal must be to prepare young people to become upright citizens who add value to the marketplace and can play their part in contributing to the economic and social needs of the country. We need hardworking, highly talented and goal oriented people in all sectors of our society. And to do this, our education system requires overhaul in order to become a high quality, affordable and internationally competitive system.

Given this, setting national academic performance on the basis of 30% and 40% pass marks for subjects lacks all requisite ambition. It acts as a systemic message of disbelief in potential, by telling 12 million students that only the bare minimum is expected from them. We are the only country in the world that sets such low standards and this must change if we are to make significant progress as a society.

Our nation's toughest challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality cannot be addressed without dealing with the elephant in the room - the dismal state of our education system. We are failing to educate our young people and we need to do better.

South Africa loses half of every cohort that enters the school system by the end of the 12-year schooling period. Two out of ten learners drop out of school after Grade 3, four out of ten after Grade 9, six out of ten after Grade 10 and 7.3 after Grade 11. The underperformance of government in addressing this widens the inequality gap in society and undermines the future of millions of young people.

We cannot lose 500 000 students from every cohort and wonder why there is a youth unemployment crisis. We cannot give a school leaving certificate with an average mark of 35% and wonder why the market cannot absorb young people.

It is common cause that levels of education impacts one's employment prospects. According to the past four quarterly labour force survey's (QLFS), the highest percentages of unemployment are observed in sections of the labour force with less than a matric school leaving certificate at 39.1%. This closely is followed by those with only a matric certificate at 36.6%. Effectively 75.7% of those who are unemployed are have only a matric certificate or less. In addition, 3,4 million (33,0%) out of 10,2 million young people aged 15-24 years are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

The problem at hand was created during our country's painful past, via the vehicle of Bantu Education. But the problem at hand is sustained by our country's current approach. With an annual cheque of more than R280 billion, the Basic Education Department boasts one of the largest line items in the budget. Our annual education budget is the largest in Africa.

Despite this, the quality of education afforded to the vast majority of our children is substandard. Lack of resources and infrastructure, low standards, pit toilets, crowded classrooms, unaccountable teachers – we rightly expect much more progress than we've witnessed over the past 28 years.

It is within this context that we table this education rescue plan to ensure the stark structural inequalities and fixable barriers to learning are addressed. The basics must be fixed so that current and future learners in our poorest and most underprivileged schools are given a fair shot at success in school and in life.

This document outlines a rescue plan that will ensure that our young people have access to upwards economic mobility, in which they can become the future industrialists that Africa needs and future scientists who discover the cures for diseases of the present and future.

We propose 9 interventions that if implemented immediately, would rescue South Africa's education system and provide a stable foundation for progressive

development in the coming years. It is by no means a comprehensive overhaul plan, rather a list of targeted interventions that are desperately required.

1. Drop the 30% pass mark for subjects
2. Introduce an independent education ombudsman
3. Raise salaries for educators and curtail union power
4. Replace Life Orientation with mandatory skills subject
5. Incentivize students during the academic year
6. Prioritise primary phase of education
7. Implement tighter security at all schools
8. Expand extended programmes for underperforming learners
9. Reprioritizing budget for digital learning and infrastructure
10. Conducting a nationwide teacher skills audit

1. Drop the 30% pass mark.

Matric results are grounded on “base pass marks”, formally called the National School Higher Certificate Standard. This is the lowest common denominator and the official matric pass rate announcement is based on this low standard.

The basis of that pass rate announcement is as follows: to get a certificate a learner must obtain 3x 30% in three subjects and 3x40% in three subjects. The average mark learners must obtain to be considered to have “passed matric” is effectively 35% on aggregate. This is problematic on several fronts - practically, statistically and psychologically.

To permit learners to pass subjects at 30% is damaging for three reasons. Firstly, it is in principle an inappropriate and unfair pass mark measure. Secondly, it serves to cover up the underperformance of the Department of Basic Education (DBE). And thirdly, because of its negative impact on the learners in the education system.

The DBE's own Diagnostics Report shows that the overwhelming majority students who take crucial subjects in matric pass those subjects with less than 50%. The Report's data shows that over the past six-year period (2015 – 2020), a concerning small percentage of students who passed matric achieved 50% or higher in crucial subjects. These are: Mathematics (21.3%); Physical Science (27.1%); Accounting (28.8%); Life Sciences (29.6%); Economics (20.7%) and Business Studies (28.4).

TABLE A. PERFORMANCE AT THE 50% LEVEL AND ABOVE – 2015 TO 2020 (REAL PASS RATE)

SUBJECT	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Average
Mathematics	20.3	21.2	22.2	21.7	20.2	22.3	21.3
Physical Sciences	22.0	24.8	26.8	29.8	33.1	26.3	27.1
Life Sciences	27.9	26.7	33.0	31.1	29.9	28.9	29.6
Accounting	21.9	27.4	26.3	30.5	32.5	34.4	28.8
Economics	19.0	18.1	22.3	23.2	19.8	22.0	20.7
Business Studies	30.6	29.1	23.9	22.3	26.3	37.9	28.4
AVERAGE							26.0

It is no wonder we have a shortage of engineers, scientists, and science subject teachers as the nation is failing to equip enough people to meet the market needs.

Developmental psychology is also crystal clear on this point: low expectations drive down excellence in achievement as a collective. The standards currently tell our learners that 30% and 40% are acceptable achievements.

We must set high expectations and exceed them; we must communicate to our learners that we believe in them and that consequently we have high expectations of each of them.

No loving parent would ever ask their child to simply pass, we want our children to excel, to master the academic content and to have a chance at getting well paying jobs and fulfilling careers. The state should have the same expectations of all our young people. We cannot abdicate belief in the youth because that will impact our philosophical approach to education and this will have tangible results. We must aim high because our children are the jewel and hope of our nation.

To achieve high levels of educational attainment we must aim high. That necessarily includes raising the minimum expectations. It is trite that if you aim low, you will achieve low results. We send a message to our young people that we do not believe in their brilliance, resilience and hardwork when we tell them from the outset that we expect less than 50% of knowledge from them after 12 years of schooling.

A 30% pass mark undermines the intellect of South Africa's youth and allows for the following. Firstly it allows for obfuscation of the basic education crisis by giving education administrators inflated data. Annually the education minister announces results based on this fake standard of 30% and 40%.

It is evident that once the marks are correctly benchmarked to a pass mark of 50% a clearer picture of student performance emerges. Consider the difference in reporting the maths pass rate based on the standard of 30% table 1 versus reporting the pass rate based on 50% table 2.

TABLE 1. MATHS PASS RATES BASED ON 30% PASS MARK

Year	30% or more
2016	51.1
2017	51.9
2018	58.0
2019	54.6
2020	53.8
Average	53.9%

When benchmarked to 30% the pass rate comes across as acceptable with an on average of 53.9% across five years. However this data is misleading as is revealed by the second data set. When the maths marks are benchmarked to the 50% pass mark things become much clearer in respect to the real performance of the system. The conclusion of a clear analysis is that the Ministry of Basic Education is not doing well at all when it comes to maths education.

TABLE 2. MATHS PASS RATES BASED ON THE 50% PASS MARK

Year	50% or more	70% or more	80% or more
2016	21.2	6.8	3.0
2017	22.2	6.8	2.8
2018	21.7	6.2	2.5
2019	20.2	5.0	1.9
2020	22.3	7.1	3.2
Average	21.5	6.4	2.7

While not everyone is going to acquire the ultimate level of knowledge, it is fair and rational to expect at least half of the knowledge. The expectation that a matric student who has participated in an academic programme should know at least half of the content is reasonable, considering 12 years of continuous learning. Therefore, a 50% pass mark for subjects is a fair metric.

With South Africa at the top of the youth unemployment crisis globally, the continued matric pass mark requirement of just 30% for some subjects cannot continue a day longer. This hurts our pupils, the education system and the economy. We must equip our young people to compete and win in the global economy. And they can with quality education. This begins by upping the matric pass mark.

2. Introduce an independent education ombudsman

At present, there is an accountability vacuum from the Minister at the very top to administrations in many schools. An independent education ombudsman would go a long way to filling this vacuum.

We term it the Inspector-General of Education - an office that is separate from the bureaucracy and political appointments of the department that can adjudicate school standards, teacher excellence and complaints. This office will operate in a similar way to the Office of the Public Protector. In the Netherlands, they have an office called the Dutch Inspectorate of Education and it is a critical part of their educational success. The office of the Dutch Inspectorate of Education performs the following tasks:

- It stimulates schools and educational institutions to maintain and improve the quality of education they offer.
- It assesses the quality of the education of individual educational institutes and the education system as a whole in the Netherlands and its developments.
- It communicates in an accessible way with all its target groups and stakeholders.
- It reports to the public.

Such an office, established in South Africa and accounting directly to Parliament, will help us deal with the issues of education corruption and quality control. Looking at recent events, it is clear that the public's money is not being prudently spent by the DBE. Three examples should suffice to illustrate this:

- The Gauteng education department returned almost R1 billion to the Treasury in the 2018/19 financial year.

- R 431 million was wastefully and corruptly spent by the Gauteng department on the fumigation of classrooms, which had been unused for months, in the name of Covid-19 prevention.
- R82 million was spent building the Mayibuye Primary School that was ultimately deemed unsuitable and unsafe to open its doors.

These are not trivial amounts, and they could have been directed towards priority issues to improve the quality of learning and teaching.

3. Raise salaries for educators and curtail union powers

Teacher to student ratios are a significant factor contributing to quality of learning. Over 50% of SA's primary school pupils are in classes with more than 40 pupils, with about 15% in classes exceeding 50 pupils. According to education economist Martin Gustafsson this ranks South Africa worse off than countries such as Chile, Indonesia, Morocco and Iran.

The NDP targets an additional 160 000 teachers, with a severe shortage of teachers in the STEM related subjects.

In addition to this, a central factor that affects the quality of teaching is the morale of teachers in the schooling system. A quantitative analysis of a research conducted by Matoti (2010) indicates that the majority of educators are uncertain about their own futures in education as well as the future of education per se in South Africa.

Some of their fears and concerns include the political and economic climate in the country, changes in policies, and changes in the curriculum, high rates of teacher attrition, unsafe school environments, unsatisfactory working conditions, the declining quality of education, role conflict, unprofessional conduct of educators, lack of coordinated workshops, poor management and leadership in schools, as well as a lack of accountability.

In South Africa, we have a shortage of teachers coupled with low morale. We therefore propose increasing teachers' salaries and benefits to a competitive level. This is envisioned by the NDP, which outlines that we must investigate new ways of attracting teachers, acknowledging that we have to change the pay structure for teachers.

Much of the skills and talent in the private sector are not hireable in classrooms due to low pay standards. It is worth noting that attracting a young teaching core will bring the professional standards of the private sector into the classroom – improving goal setting, understanding of concepts and an injection of fresh energy in the learning space.

Making the space more competitive will allow us to retire the underperforming teachers and to introduce new performance indicators and assessment interventions that have failed previously. It will also motivate those teachers who have been over performing under adverse conditions to keep doing excellent work. The adage goes, you get what you pay for.

In his book *No Rules Rules*, the Netflix CEO Reed Hastings emphasises the value of hiring good people and paying them well to ensure great results. Many other management thinkers have echoed this principle and while it does come with a price tag, it is worth it overall.

In exchange for raising salaries we must strongly curtail teacher unions and different structure of labour representation must be considered for the profession. It is well known that the largest teaching unions have become too powerful and too involved in national politics, as a result they have become an obstacle to necessary education reform.

4. Replace life orientation with mandatory skills subject

The Life Orientation must be scrapped and replaced with something more rigorous and inline with our present needs. Thus we proposed the introduction of

a subject which must be done by all students and examinable called Critical Thinking and General Knowledge.

This subject would have a curriculum based on (a) Conceptual analysis, (b) Systems thinking, (c) Design thinking , (d) Political and Moral philosophy, (e)Strategic thinking and (f) Logic.

The current life orientation curriculum is not fully acknowledged by the universities and they do not afford the equal status as other subjects. South Africa currently ranks 95/141 on our quality of critical thinking education.

The challenges with critical thinking are reflected in the diagnostic reports of the various content subjects. They frequently point out that students failed to explain, to evaluate and to analyse certain concepts and data sets. This is indicative that we need to revamp our teaching of critical thinking.

5. Incentivize students during the academic year.

To boost participation and performance in STEM subjects, we must financially rewarding pupils for top performances. Young people respond well to incentives and by using behavioural economics and game theory to our favour, we can keep the levels of participation and performance consistent throughout the course of the five years that are spent in high school.

These incentives can be distributed periodically upon the completion of online tests. This will also allow us to be able to track teacher competence in real time and to take remedial actions if any are necessary.

6. Strategic focus on primary phase of education

Eight out of every 10 children in South Africa cannot read for meaning by the age of 10. According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), an international, 78% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa cannot read for meaning.

The first stages of education are arguably the most crucial and best predict whether a child will complete their education and succeed at a later stage. If we fail to address the root causes of early education stumbling blocks, there's very little that can be done to rectify a child's progress later on.

As Professor Jonathan Jansen puts it, the inverted pyramid in education needs fixing. That is, too much focus – financially and otherwise – on the very latter stages of the education system. Senior phases of high school and tertiary education are prioritised ahead of the basic foundational requirements of every child before the age of 10.

Therefore, a shifted focus to the first number of years of a child's learning is required. Teachers in the primary phase must be doubled in the specific SUBJECT areas of Maths and English, this will allow for better focus on children in these very critical years. Social workers must be equipped and resourced to work closely with ECD teachers to identify any home related obstacles in learning.

This requires a mandatory standards in resources and design for Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres. The centres must be revamped and equipped with stimulating learning material to encourage creativity and interaction in every community, and built in those communities still without.

7. Implement tighter security at all schools

We need to remove the scourge of violence, bullying and gang-related activities in our schools. There have been too many cases of student stabbings and fights with teachers to ignore. The learning environment must be one that is free from any violence and disruption, it must be a place where students want to spend more time - not less.

Schools must be a place that makes teachers feel safe and not defensive. Therefore security measures at schools need to be intensified to promote an effective environment of learning and teaching

In addition to increasing security for the purpose of making the students and teachers feel safe, security must be increased to reduce levels of school vandalism and theft of school property by criminal elements in the community. Unfortunately, we live in a crime-riddled society and schools are not exempt from the attacks of criminals.

Programmes to eliminate violence should be introduced – ones to not only prevent violence but to also break behavioural patterns associated with violent behaviour. It can be argued that what is learned can be unlearned and new ways of behaving can be adopted.

It is also important that trauma and counselling support should be available to learners in violence-stricken areas and should include debriefing in crisis situations and in-depth therapy where necessary.

It is also critical to understand that discipline is the responsibility of teachers in partnership with parents who need to agree on what is appropriate so that they can support each other in cultivating the kind of values that society needs of education.

8. Extended programs for underperforming learners.

Extended programmes are useful for helping students who are not progressing at the right pace in their learning outcomes. They allow for those students to split up the curriculum from a period of 3 years (grades 10, 11 and 12) into a period of four years. Adding this additional year would allow for targeted teaching interventions to close the gaps in knowledge.

In addition to offering this program to learners prior to the grade 12 exam, this should be offered to learners who have completed the NSC exams. This would be a post matric year of learning in a structured environment with the aim of closing the gaps in learning for students who performed poorly in their first attempt at the exam. This would be free tuition offered by qualified teachers.

9. Reprioritizing budget for digital learning and infrastructure

If we are to adequately prepare learners for the future of work, bridging the digital divide is the most vital need. Our education system requires a rejig to improve the quality and extent of access to technology, skills and literacy in relation to technology.

According to the DBE's latest NEIMS report from August 2019, only 20.2% of schools in South Africa had internet connectivity for teaching and learning. Worse so for the Eastern Cape (10.8%), KwaZulu Natal (9.2%) and Limpopo (3.8%). The same report found that just 36.4% of schools had computer centres. This exacerbates inequality and removes opportunity from young people to pursue meaningful careers at home and abroad.

The Department of Basic Education needs to ringfence a sizeable portion of its R 262.5 billion annual budget to fund a mass-scale rollout programme of broadband connectivity and computer centres in all schools currently without.

10. Conducting a Nationwide Teacher Skills Audit

In 2017 it was revealed that over 5000 teachers in the public education system were either unqualified or underqualified in their area of teaching. It goes without

saying that having ill-equipped teachers impacts negatively on learner performance on all levels.

Every school in South Africa must therefore conduct a skills audit to measure proficiency in teaching and in subject matter. Those teachers found to be underperforming or unsuitable must be put through a skills and training programme before returning to teach.

Lastly, the introduction of Annual National Assessment's (ANA) must commence. This allows the DBE to assess teachers periodically to ensure that those excelling and improving can be rewarded and those not succeeding are upskilled or removed.

Conclusion

This year let us have a different conversation about the state of our education system. Let us not be distracted by the DBE as we celebrate the individual accomplishments of our brilliant learners who overcame a system that was stacked against them. Let us clearly call for a new leadership team in our education department and begin to discuss ideas that can get this vital department back on track.

With an annual cost of over R280 billion, with over 24 000 schools under its supervision and with 13 million learners in the system, we cannot afford anything but robust scrutiny of our education system. Our kids deserve better, and our nation cannot survive 27 more years of this miseducation.

*"Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today. - **Malcolm X**"*

*"Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another- **Nelson Mandela** "*

