

SPEECH BY MEC FOR EDUCATION ISHMAEL KGETJEPE AT THE CAPRICORN DISTRICT EDUCATION SUMMIT, 26 APRIL 2016, BOLIVIA LODGE, POLOKWANE, LIMPOPO

Programme director

Executive Mayor

Mayors and councillors

Traditional Leaders

Our Acting Head of Department

Teacher unions

Our religious formations

School governing bodies

Business community

District management

Circuit managers

Principals of schools

Parents

Learner formations and representatives

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

A very good morning to all of you,

Programme director, as you may well know, tomorrow, the 27th April, we celebrate a very special and meaningful day in the history of our country, Freedom Day.

We host this summit on the eve of this significant day, which 22 years ago inspired all South Africans and showed that emancipation is possible, whatever the odds. It is a celebration of equality and unity when our rainbow nation broke away from the cruelties of apartheid and chose to be a democratic united country. We must give recognition and thanks to all the veterans who fought against inequality and discrimination and to all those who believed so much in their cause that they laid their lives on the line.

Programme Director, I am not delivering a Freedom Day speech but trying to draw your attention to the fact that as a Constitutional democracy, the constitutional principles of access, redress, equity remain very high on our sector's agenda. The Basic Education sector is seized with the mammoth task of improving quality and efficiency in its education system. We are now midway through in our district summits having successfully hosted Sekhukhune and Vhembe summits respectively last week. Here in Capricorn, just like the other district, our mission is to continuously work collaboratively to seek new strategies and interventions that will bring us closer to the desired quality state of our basic education in this district.

This summit aims to give space to a wide range of voices, to build, where possible, consensus, or at least better understanding on where we disagree and how to disagree and what the priority areas are which we collectively need to address. This is an opportunity to engage on the accelerated transformation of basic education. They say you can't solve a problem you are blind to. It is in this regard that we must first and foremost get our heads out of the sand and be realistic about the challenges facing education

in the Capricorn District. Where there is a crisis, be it teacher supply, infrastructure, school governance, poor management, educator incompetence, support material and so on, we cannot be the last people to admit.

We say in Basic Education that education is a societal matter and simply says that we must dramatically improve and expand our collaborative volumes. The struggle is no longer against apartheid. The new struggle is about fighting poverty, inequality and unemployment and that is why we must as a collective, figure out what our role is as sectors. Our role is clear and has been clear since the dawn of democracy that we must deliver quality education to our people. The fact is when both basic and higher education don't work; our country won't work as expected. That is what this summit must interrogate very sharply. We must be able to zoom into the current impediments that are peculiar to the Capricorn District to ensure that education occupies a special place in each and every community in this municipality.

Our goal should be to ensure that every community cherishes the importance of education in the reconstruction and development of our society. We must highlight that although various reviews such as the Twenty Year Review and other reviews undertaken, indicate that South Africa is a much better place to live in than before 1994, we still need to do more. We must also highlight that our education is better than before 1994 and summits such as this one are efforts to explore ways of improving the quality of our education. That is why when tabling our Departmental policy statement we allocated resources the way we did under all the constraints, because we want the best education for the children of Limpopo.

The National Development Plan which is the country's socio-economic development blueprint, which is being implemented by government, outlines the type of society we want in 2030. The National Planning Commission which produced the NDP, has diagnosed that the quality of school education for black people is poor. It is also pointed out that infrastructure is poor, inadequate and under maintained. Having identified all these challenges, the NDP calls for different parts of the basic education sector to work together allowing learners to take different pathways that offer high quality learning opportunities.

It is fully incumbent on us to restore public confidence by reversing these challenges in our sector. If freedom in this country came about because of the solidarity, sacrifice and selfless support from freedom loving nations, quality education will also come because of solidarity and friendship of many education loving communities.

In 2015 National Senior Certificate, performance declined in all the five districts with Sekhukhune and Waterberg districts registering performances that are below the national norm of 60%. Capricorn was number three in the province in 2014 with 71.6% and remained at the same position in 2015 but with a further decline, achieving 66.7%, a decline of 4.8%. This should be a matter of common cause among us and particularly the distinguished leaders of our communities and that there has to be serious improvement in learner performance in this part of our province.

Improving the quality of basic education and strengthening the foundation for teaching and learning is today a matter of common cause just like fighting against apartheid and protesting against an

inferior education system of Bantu Education were. Such a performance raises questions of whether we are doing enough in terms of the protection of contact time between teachers and learners. As we speak, this is one of the problems bedeviling our education system. The amount of contact that learners have with their educators as part of their learning experience is very important and contributes immensely to learner performance. This matter has been a concern for some time now and was even raised by our President, Jacob Zuma, in 2009 when addressing the nation. He said in that address: “ **Our teachers must commit to a set of non-negotiables i.e. to be in school on time, in class on time, teaching for at least seven hours, no abuse of learners and no neglect of duty**”. That is almost seven years ago when the President of the Republic made the call for the protection of contact time but we seem not to be taking it seriously.

The decline also calls for our strengthening of school monitoring, management of schools and curriculum delivery. We have since pronounced when delivering our budget vote recently on the Premier’s directive of investing more on teacher development. To that end, we allocated as a start a sizeable amount to build the capacity of our educators to cope the ever-increasing demands of teaching. It is important for us to provide the right teacher in front of the right class teaching the right subject. We must do so knowing very well that the Premier did not revise the province’s target of 80% in matric. That means more hard work on our part to ensure that we deliver on this directive.

We had as Capricorn District 8 179 progressed learners. Learners who are progressed must be assisted to make the right choices in

consultation with parents to sit for modularized option examinations. School based assessment can assist in determining which learner is prepared to write which subject and which ones can be shelved for another examination sitting. Assessments will point out which learners are coping and taking their studies seriously. We must be able to pick up warning signs after each assessment and what interventions to be administered. Failing is not an event that suddenly happens at the end of the semester or year. It happens over a period of weeks and months when learners neglect their work and we must be able to pick such things up in time. What happens at the end of the year is just a confirmation of what would have been happening over a long period of time and we should have been able to arrest before it is too late.

We count on you, key stakeholders for a critical dialogue on ways of harnessing working relationships towards the improvement learner performance. We are certain that the presentation on improving learner performance will highlight a lot more and open our eyes to take responsibility to correct the situation. Let us in the spirit of educating the other, talk about the broad challenges impeding learner performance and to open up a conversation about how some of these might be tackled, recognizing how this district has been performing over the years.

Programme director, we know that for effective teaching and learning to take place, we must work together with traditional leaders, business community and other relevant stakeholders to deal decisively with issues of protests that disrupt schooling and sometimes lead to vandalization of school property. We have features of unstable communities due to traditional disputes and

politics that from time to time disrupt schooling. The province has a Commission specifically established to deal with traditional leadership disputes and it is in the Department of Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs.

When delivering our budget vote recently, we made it very clear that the financial year 2016/17, even the following one, will not address the infrastructure backlogs faced by the Department. It might take longer than we expect to eradicate inappropriate school infrastructure. That is why from time to time we call on the business community to invest in the refurbishing and even building some of the school infrastructure more especially in communities where they ply their trade.

As a Department we made a commitment to refurbish existing structures and even fixing storm damage schools because creating an environment conducive to learning is our priority. We know that in this district, there is a huge shortage of classrooms due to the development of residential areas. The demand for new schools is huge. We need to also because of these demand find ways of managing admission of learners in Pietersburg Circuit in particular given the influx to the provincial city. If we don't manage that process very well, we will find ourselves responding to endless media queries because our people will feel aggrieved and run to the media on a matter which could have been handled amicably.

Committed as we are to eradicating all inappropriate school infrastructures, we are not going to reward those communities that vent their frustrations on school property that has cost a lot of money to build. We want our learners to be in class on time to

learn but which class will that be if the school property has been torched or vandalized.

Programme director, we also pointed out in the budget vote that we have delivered on time all the learning and support material before the schools reopened for 2016. It is important that each learner must have access to quality learning materials. This is something that we must strengthen moving forward so that teaching and learning must indeed take place on the first day of schooling. We are however concerned by those school managers who do not place orders when it is time to do so but cry foul that their schools have not received the material. Books must be allocated to learners and be retrieved at the end of the year.

Those who made norms and standards allocation their playing ground must be warned that the money will be monitored on what it is spent on. There should be no school programme that suffers implementation because the money has been channeled somewhere else other than the intended purpose and objective. Any form of impropriety will not be tolerated.

Our people must realize that teaching and learning cannot take a centre stage if we continue to resist the programme of merging small schools which are not viable at all. We also in this regard call upon communities to understand the logic behind the process of merging small and non-viable schools. Our reasons are noble and educational. The year 2015 also saw the number of underperforming schools increasing significantly and this is a matter that this summit must look at quite keenly. Capricorn district alone has 145 of such schools.

Programme director, parents are an important stakeholder in education. Learners must enjoy the support of their parents and guardians. Parents' encouragement and support for learning activities at home, combined with parental involvement in schooling is very critical and can contribute immensely in the success of a learner. If we are to ensure that no pupil is left behind, it is vital that parents know exactly how their children are doing at school and how they can support them to improve.

Equally important are progressive school governing bodies, which are not conflicted and serve their schools with commitment all the time. We must continue to work side by side and ensure that the interest of schools and its learners are always at the forefront. Our schools will also flourish and be counted as the best when they are led by visionary and strong leaders. In schools, principals are the central figures and it must be understood that their actions will always have a direct impact on the success or failures of learners. That is why we have advertised posts of principals, deputy principals, and heads of department, because no school should be without a principal for longer than it is necessary. I must caution that we must as we appoint be careful who we appoint as the central figure of the school.

It is important that as various stakeholders, we must continue to engage in this manner and provide information about the value of basic education in order to chart a substantive route to transform education in this district. Over the coming years, we want to work with you, parents and experts to develop the twenty – first century education our district needs. Let us work together as we answer some of the challenges we have identified so that we can be the

envy of the world when it comes to education attainment and success.

Programme director, it is our belief that working together we shall have schools that are characterized by learners and teachers who are highly motivated, principals who are effective managers providing administrative and curriculum leadership, schools that are accountable to parents, committed and professional teachers who have knowledge of subjects they teach.

To this end as I conclude, we expect the discussion during this summit to be as robust and frank as possible. It must not be just another talk shop and we call upon those who will be making presentations to provoke us with critical analysis which will enable commissions to engage robustly on topics. We must do so with respect, consideration and dignity.

We must strive to make education a societal issue and understands His Holiness, Dalai Lama's insightful words when he says: **"We must recognize that the suffering of one person or one nation is the suffering of humanity. That the happiness of one person or nation is the happiness of humanity"**

Together we move South Africa forward.

I thank you!