

Lessons from the ground for better schools

Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga says schools must study the Schools that Work II report to learn new lessons from the ground that can improve education in South Africa.



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The Minister on Tuesday sat with basic education stakeholders at a roundtable discussion themed ‘Schools that Work II – Lessons from the Ground’ at the University of Pretoria.

The report comes after the Minister had requested the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) to conduct a study on schools that work.

The performance in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) was used as a yardstick to identify schools that work.

The report is the second of its nature, the first being released in 2007.

The roundtable was attended by representatives from teacher unions and School Governing Bodies (SGBs), principals, teachers, learners, members of senior management at the Department of Basic Education. The founder and CEO of Nova Pioneer Education Group, Chinezi Chijioke, was also present.

Minister Motshekga said she hopes the positives that the report identified can be replicated and used to improve education in South Africa today.

“This publication is intended to help schools to develop the habits of collaboration, discussion, inquiry and decision-making that are necessary for ongoing improvement.”

Criteria of schools that work

In the 2017 study, the selection of these top performing schools was based on three major criteria.

Firstly, the schools had to be producing learners who matched the performance indicators that were used in reporting on the NSC results.

Secondly, a pass rate of 95% or above in the past four years (2012-2015) had to have been achieved.

Thirdly, 100 or more candidates had to have been presented in the 2016 NSC examinations.

The schools involved in the study were from all five quintiles. Quintile 1 is a group of schools in each province catering for the poorest 20% of schools. Quintile 2 caters for the next poorest 20% of schools, while quintile 5 schools represent the least poor. Schools receive money from government according to quintiles. Quintile 1 schools receive the highest allocation per learner, while quintile 5 receives the lowest.

To ensure that the 2017 sample was representative of the best schools in the system, all schools were first categorized by province and quintile, and then they were ranked using the set performance markers.

When reporting on the 2016 National Senior Certificate results, the department moved from focusing on the overall pass percentage to include six further indicators that comprise the Mathematics and Physical Sciences pass percentage; Bachelor attainment percentage; distinction percentage; Mathematics participation rate and the throughput rate.

Minister Motshekga said this shift in the reporting is indicative of a shift within the department to focus more on the quality of the NSC, rather than the pass rate alone.

She said another indicator of the progress that has been made is the fact that in the past two years, quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools are now producing more Bachelor degree passes than ever before, although statistically, more Bachelor passes are produced in Quintile 4 and 5 schools.

Educational goals

Minister Motshekga cited the department's Action Plan to 2019 - Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030, which has about 27 goals.

She only highlighted three of them, which include:

- Increase the number of Grade 12 learners who become eligible for a Bachelors programme at university;
- Increase the number of Grade 12 learners who pass mathematics, and
- Increase the number of Grade 12 learners who pass physical science.

Minister Motshekga said schools must interrogate the Schools that Work report, and discuss and debate strategies that they can apply to their schools.

“Identify things that can work in your school, discuss them as staff, and discuss them with fellow stakeholders. Look at the evidence of strategies that work in the Schools that Work II report.

“See what you can take and apply to your school for a better South Africa for our children – one step at a time,” said the Minister.

All phases of education are interdependent

Minister Motshekga said a teacher in the foundation phase may feel they have very little to do with the Grade 12 learner. On the contrary, if the fundamental literacy and numeracy skills are not in place, it is almost impossible for a learner to be successful in the NSC examinations.

Likewise, Minister Motshekga said, if the initial cornerstones are not set in place in the intermediate phase where learners are introduced to the basic principles of content subjects, extending and building their knowledge and skills in Senior and FET phases is difficult.

Minister Motshekga said it is in the intermediate phase that learners need to transition from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn.

“If this vital stage is neglected, the mastery that learners need in order to succeed in their further education is significantly hampered.

“No one can embark on the NSC without the proper preparation. That preparation does not begin in Grade 10, 11 or 12. It begins in Grade 1 or Grade R.”

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