



NATIONAL
EDUCATION
COLLABORATION
TRUST

BUSINESS ISSUES *PAPER*

Background Discussion Paper For Engagement Between
Business And The State Regarding Basic Education
Relevance And Improvement

Prepared by the National Education Collaboration Trust,
November 2024

January 2025: Version 2 - Updated following the release of the 2024 NSC Results

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TABLE OF CONTENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
BUSINESS ISSUES INFOGRAPHIC	6
A. BACKGROUND	8
B. STATE OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR	10
C. REFLECTION ON EDUCATION REFORM	19
D. STRUCTURE AND PIPELINE OF THE SYSTEM	25
E. COLLABORATION BETWEEN BUSINESS AND THE STATE	27
F. EDUCATION FUNDING TRENDS	29
G. CONCLUSION	30

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The launch of the National Development Plan (NDP) in August 2012 spelled out a renewed commitment of government to promote further actor group engagement in South Africa's development. The NDP approach championed integrated, long-term, sustainable development planning driven through a developmental state model that emphasises the crucial role of private sector and civil society in the delivery of social services and development efforts. In the basic education sector, this thinking led to the establishment of the National Education Collaboration Trust in 2013. Eleven years later, the NECT has networked over 130 partners and raised and invested over R3.1 billion in educational and school resourcing programmes.

While system gaps undoubtedly remain, there are widespread indicators of progress in the system. Although progress tends to be erratic, the overall trend-line is positive. The following are several pertinent operational and outcome profiles of the current South African education system.

- Over the past decade, education enjoyed a stable implementation environment free of major disruption compared to the preceding periods. However, the political and administrative leadership environment in the Government of National Unity (GNU) requires attention to extend this beneficial stability since only 57% of the incumbents of the 21 critical political and administrative leadership positions were retained or are permanent.
- Nominal NSC statistics are either stable or improving: Matric participation has picked and normalised around 700 000; pass rates rose from 71% to 87%; university entry (bachelor) passes increased from 28.69% to 47%; and passes of above 60% in math increased by 39% between 2017 and 2024.
- The state of fundamental literacies has been improving, albeit slowly and with potential for decline: TIMMS math and science(Grade 9) scores have increased by 112 and 94 points; TIMMS math and science(Grade 5) scores have decreased by 14 and 16 points, SAQMEQ reading and mathematics increased by 13 and 99 points, SASE reading and maths (grade 3) have increased by 138 and 128 points, respectively, in 20 years; but PIRLS Grade 4 shows a decline by 35 points in the past decade. The overall average scores on all the four comparative assessments are below the 500 midpoint.
- Learner wellbeing is a new challenge in the education system as HIV infections are rising (2,3% between 2019-21) and learner pregnancy rates on the rise (16% in 2019-23).
- System efficiency is improving as both grade repetition and learner dropout rates are declining – see Figure 1 and 2.
- Education resourcing shows evidence of improvement with significant infrastructure (schools, water, electricity, toilets) delivery levels over the 30-year period. However, backlogs remain as a result of population dynamics and poor facilities management.
- In terms of the provisioning of education, the number of private schools is on the rise (by 25% between 2018-2023) although 91% of South African schools are still public schools.
- The teacher production burden is unevenly distributed across universities (UNISA and NWU produced 41.3% of the teachers whilst the remainder of the universities in South Africa produced an average of 3,4% of all teachers).

The following reforms are currently being introduced to improve education delivery: equity measures relating to language and school choice; institutionalisation and massification of Early Childhood Development (ECD); engendering of the competencies of the future in the curriculum; introduction of schools of specialisation and a vocational stream; and the introduction of mother-tongue based bilingual education.

The school nutrition programme that reaches about 10 million learners and the teacher training programmes are two of the continuing reform initiatives that are vital in sustaining gains in the system. Government's fiscal consolidation programme is envisaged to have far reaching effects on policy and policy choices of government as well as the returns on private sector investments. The situation calls for increased alignment and coordination of private and public sector investments. More will need to be done to ensure greater strategic and macro-level alignment through structures such as the HRDC, NEDLAC and intermittent government-private sector forums. The NECT has so far proven to be the best platform for systemic, multiyear private and public sector funded education improvement initiatives.

Methodological Approach and Status of the Paper

This report, prepared following comprehensive desktop research, sought to map the current state of affairs in education, addressing key strategic macro-development questions and offering recommendations to guide future initiatives and policy decisions.

While it is prepared by the NECT for Business Leadership South Africa (BLSA), it does not present the position of either the NECT nor of BLSA, but rather comprises and presents issues and baselines that will enable a constructive scaffolding of business sector discourse and conversations surrounding strategic support of education improvement.

BUSINESS ISSUES PAPER: A ROADMAP FOR BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

COLLABORATION FOR EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT

NDP

GOALS

90% of learners pass mathematics, science and language with at least 50% by 2030



ECF

Education Collaboration Framework

NECT

National Education Collaboration Trust



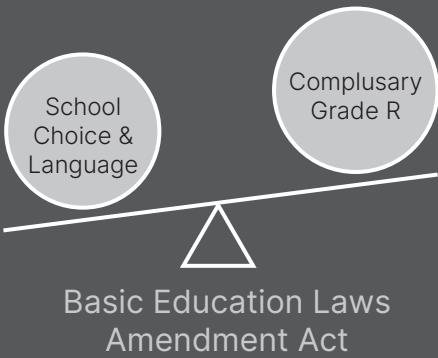
130 000 Teachers Reached

130 Partners

12 Years of Stability in Education

REFLECTION ON EDUCATION REFORM

Policy



Education Providers (2018 - 2023)

Public Schools	22 511 (-3,3%)
Independent	2 325 (+24.7%)

Teacher Production

Full-time	11 532 (67.9%)
Part-time	5 447 (32.1%)
Funza Lushaka Absorption (2019-2023)	-10% ↓

ECD

Existing Access	2 423 261
Target (2030)	3 369 966

Curriculum Reform

Curriculum Strengthening	3 stream curriculum
Schools of Specialisation	General Education Certificate

THE STATE OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Education Sector Leadership

(Top 21 positions)



57%

**Retained/
Permanent**

Political &
Administrative
Leadership

55%

Substantive

Head of
Departments

NSC Results

10 Years Change

Wrote	2.40%	↑
Pass	15.17%	↑
Bachelors	68.90%	↑
>60 math	39.20%	↑

The State of Fundamental Literacies

(approx. 20 year period)

PIRLS Gr4	- 35	↓
TIMMS Maths Gr9	+112	↑
TIMMS Science Gr9	+94	↑
SACMEQ Reading	+13	↑
SAQMEQ Math	+39	↑

Math Output

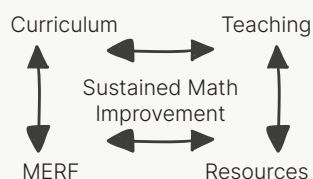


Pure Math Participation (2024)	17.51%	↓
Performance Above 60% (2023)		
Black	13%	
White	50%	
Coloured	19%	

Response to Math and Reading Challenges

NMIP

National Maths Improvement Programme



Partners: Government, Private Sector, Civil Society, Academia, Unions, Councils

Reading programmes



- Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTBBE)
- **Early Grade Reading Studies**
- Read to Lead Campaign
- **PSRIP (40k teachers reached)**
- National Literacy Strategy

Infrastructure Projects (30 years period)

Schools Renovated	11 077
School Fencing	5 605
Water	2 459
Connectivity	8 313
Sanitation Facilities	3 015 (5 yrs)
Classrooms	115 512

System Efficiency



2018-2020

Repetition	Gr 8 - 12	↓
Learner Dropout	Gr 8 - 12	↓

Learner Wellbeing

New HIV Infections (15 - 24 y/o)	2.3%	↑
Teen Pregnancy (10-19 y/o)	16%	↑
School Nutrition Budget	6.6%	↑
HIV/AIDS Budget	4.6%	↑

Opportunities for Collaboration



- Strengthened strategy for macro-development
- Increased Investment Coordination
- Government/State strategic engagements
- Refreshed NECT Mandate

A. BACKGROUND

1. The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) is organising a Leadership Dialogue, reminiscent of the 2012 Founding Dialogue, to recalibrate its mandate and explore avenues to enhance educational social capital. The NECT has been meeting with actor groups in education to gather input for this Leadership Dialogue.

This paper aims to share background for the preparatory engagement with the business sector by profiling the current state of basic education delivery and identifying collaboration opportunities for impactful improvement. The paper, premised on an understanding of the long history of private sector involvement in education improvement – including resourcing, operations support and policy engagements – takes the following two interests of the business sector as the starting point.

- Business as the user of skills from the education and training sector.
- Business commitment to promoting social justice through strategic engagement with the state and direct societal efforts aimed at promoting inclusive growth.

**Both interests are essential to achieving sustainable economic development in South Africa.*

2. The National Development Plan (NDP), as the national multi-year macro-level blueprint, champions the idea of harnessing public, private and civil society potential for achieving long-term development goals. It sets targets and proposes strategies for the achievement of goals envisaged by the plan. For the education basic education sector, the NDP envisions a state where all children reap the benefit of a high-quality education, especially with regards to languages, maths and science. It sets the following target: 90% of learners pass key subjects, with at least 50% doing so by 2030. In particular, the NDP proposes improvement in literacy, numeracy/mathematics and science outcomes; increasing the number of learners eligible to study maths and science-based degrees at university; improving performance in international comparative studies; and improving learner retention.

3. Spurred by the call to action from NDP and the evident pressing education delivery challenges, the Education Collaboration Framework (ECF) was developed and adopted. The adoption followed the Leadership Dialogue of 6 December 2012 involving the government, business sector, teacher unions and some political parties to assess that which was going well in education and what needed to be accomplished jointly in the short to medium term. The dialogue and framework resolved to promote collaboration for education improvement among key education stakeholders, including government, private sector, civil society, labour unions and international partners. The ECF made provision for the establishment of the NECT in July 2013 as the vehicle to implement key initiatives such as the mobilisation of financial and non-financial resources along with regular monitoring and evaluation to assess programme impact for assurance that programmes are effectively contributing to the improvement of education outcomes.

4. During the past 11 years of the national collaboration to improve education under the NECT umbrella, the national education system enjoyed remarkable stability, a crucial element for optimum learning and teaching; over 130 000 teachers and their managers received continuous professional development; South Africa successfully returned its learners and teachers to schools during the COVID-19 pandemic while countries such as Kenya and India took between one to two years to do so; teacher unions invested efforts into professional development that reached over 6 000 member teachers; 691 schools received sanitation facilities as a response to the President's call for the eradication of pit latrines; Early Childhood Development (ECD) was migrated to the DBE; and curriculum is undergoing a strengthening to ensure adequate coverage of new and future comprehensives.

The NECT collaboration mobilised R1.07 billion from non-state sources which leveraged R2 billion

from government, totalling 3.1 billion in investments from 2014 to 2023. Of the non-state contributors, R795 million was mobilised from the private sector.

5. The NECT experience underscores the importance of maintaining social trust, networking societal resources across the public and private sectors to create environments conducive for the sustainable development of education.

Development theory, South African history and experiences from elsewhere are instructive of the imperative for consistent implementation of clear policies and multi-year programmes.

6. Since July 2024, South Africa has been under a new governance configuration in the form of a multi-party government – the Government of National Unity (GNU). This reconfiguration presents simultaneous challenges and opportunities associated with change. Specifically, the reconfiguration has allowed for stocktaking and refreshing of the social capital built into the education space.

It is against this background that this paper presents updates against the commitments of the NDP and the points of interest of the private sector. It makes several recommendations regarding the way forward and provides a framing background for private sector discussion rather than a position of the private sector.

B. STATE OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR

B.1. Institutional leadership as the bedrock for organisational performance

7. The new government has seen the appointment of a new Minister of Basic Education and four new MECs of Education. The Deputy Minister of Basic Education and five MECs (as per the table below) have been retained. At the administration level, the Director General and five Heads of Departments (HODs) have substantive contracts whilst four are engaged through acting contracts.

Table 1: Overview of 2024 MEC and HOD positions

	MECs		HODs (Acting or Substantive)
	Returned	New	
1. Limpopo	x		Acting
2. Free State		x	Substantive
3. North-West	x		Acting
4. Mpumalanga		x	Substantive
5. Eastern Cape	x		Acting
6. KwaZulu-Natal		x	Substantive
7. Western Cape	x		Substantive
8. Gauteng	x		Substantive
9. Northern Cape		x	Acting
Total	5	4	5 (Substantive)

About half the incumbents (57%), 12 of these 21 critical political and administrative leaderships positions, have been retained or are permanent. It is vital that the provincial HOD positions are substantively filled as a matter of urgency to solidify the stability of the education system.

B.2. Reflections on education outputs and delivery

8. Gateway to Work and Higher Education: The National Senior Certificate (NSC)

Matric statistics are the most popular and regularly measured indicators of basic education performance. Regular statistical monitoring and reporting over the years has built substantive public pressure to the point where most of the teaching resources and the efforts of the education sector are concentrated at this level, likely to the detriment of early grade education.

Too much and unchecked public pressure has a tendency to force schools and their respective management jurisdictions (districts and provinces) to 'game the system'. Subject choices and promotional practices are possible ways in which the schools, districts and provinces can promote crude pass rates.

8.1. As per the table below, matric statistics show positive growth over the past 10 years.

Table 2: 10-year review of NSC participation, pass rates, maths and bachelor passes

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change from Base-line
Total learners who wrote	688660	644536	610178	534484	512735	504303	578468	704021	724146	691160	705 291	2.4%
Pass rate	75.8	70.7	72.5	75.1	78.2	81.3	76.2	76.4	80.1	82.9	87.3	15.17%
Bachelor pass	28.3	25.8	26.6	28.7	33.6	36.9	36.4	36.4	38.4	40.9	47.8	68.9%
Pass by 60% (Maths)	x	x	x	32071	28152	23796	30882	34451	33874	41273	44635	39.2%

Source: Department of Basic Education (2014-2024), National Senior Certificate Examination Reports

8.2. Since 2014, an average of 627 089 learners wrote matric, just 600 000 under the number of learners who started Grade 1 (1 235 901 learners started grade 1 in 2014). The number of learners sitting for matric has oscillated from a low of 504 303 in 2019 to a high of 724 146 in 2022. These fluctuations can be accounted for by the policy of promoting learners and those who modularised their matric at some points, initiatives aimed at increasing the efficiency of the system as well as increasing the number of young people who attain this gateway certificate. Notably, from the number of matriculates who wrote the exams, averaging 706 866 in the past three years, the general pass rate, the bachelor passes, and the mathematics passes for attainment above 60% have increased. Between 2014 and 2024, Matric participation increased by 2.4% pass rate by 15.17%, bachelor passes by 68.9% and mathematics quality passes by 39.2%

9. Mathematics Output & Quality

Globally, education systems are actively pursuing strategies and long-term plans to elevate the quality of mathematics education, driven by the recognised correlation between a nation's economic growth and learner proficiency in mathematics. The National Development Plan (NDP) targets 450,000 learners to be proficient in mathematics and eligible for bachelor's degrees in mathematics and science by 2030. Currently, this number stands at approximately 100,000, highlighting a substantial gap that requires urgent attention.

9.1. Mathematics education in South Africa faces three primary challenges.

First, there has been a significant decline in participation in pure mathematics relative to mathematical literacy. Second, persistent underperformance in mathematics is evident across all school levels. Third, the quality of mathematics passes is concerning, as many learners struggle to demonstrate mastery of higher-order skills, including complex procedures and effective problem-solving. These shape the overarching picture even though statistics from the international comparative studies over two decades suggest gradual improvements (see section 10 below). The following table (**Table 3**) provides a statistical summary of readily available data.

Table 3: Statistical summary of mathematics participation and performance by race

Measure- ment	Category		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change from base- line
Participa- tion Rate [National]	Pure Math	Raw	245 103	233 858	222 034	233 315	259 143	269 734	262 016	251 488	2.61%
		%	43.91%	44.29%	42.65%	40.60%	37.01%	37.48%	38.31%	36.23%	-17.51%
	Math Lit	Raw	313 030	294 204	298 607	341 363	441 067	450 005	421 835	442 741	41.44%
		%	56.09%	55.71%	57.35%	59.40%	62.99%	62.52%	61.69%	63.77%	13.71%
Perfor- mance at 60% and above	National		–	12%	11%	13%	13%	13%	16%	18%	50%
	White		–	–	43%	50%	51%	48%	50%	–	16,3%
	Coloured		–	–	13%	17%	17%	16%	19%	–	46,2%
	Black		–	–	7%	10%	10%	10%	13%	–	85,7%

*ND: No data provided (Source: DBE, 2023; 2024) Raw data provided by DBE.

The following are key observations from the table above.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>I. A modest nominal increase of 2.6 % in the number of learners taking pure mathematics from 2017 to 2024.</p> <p>II. A widening gap (of 8.7 percentage points) between learners taking maths and math literacy between 2020 and 2024, raising the question about the planning of stocks and flow to supply the economy.</p> <p>III. From 2018 to 2023, the percentage of learners achieving a pass rate of 60% or higher in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations increased by 33.3%, an improvement attributable to the DBE's strategic focus on enhancing educators' foundational skills.</p> | <p>IV. A much lower percentage of learners achieving higher grades in mathematics as the level of proficiency rises; in the last seven years, at most 18% (avg. of 13.7%) of all learners who took the math examination passed at 60%.</p> <p>V. Black learners performed lowest, while White learners the highest, followed by Coloured learners, raising a question of equity.</p> <p>VI. A significant increase of 85.7% in the number of Black learners achieving a pass rate of 60% and above from 2019 to 2023, a notable improvement largely attributable to their initial low base of 7%.</p> |
|---|--|

9.2. Numerous opportunities for improving mathematics outcomes are emerging.

These include the design and piloting of a new mathematics teaching approach by the DBE and the NECT (in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency); the DBE's refreshed strategy (the National Mathematics Improvement Plan [NMIP]); the interest and commitment of business and civil society actor groups; the expertise available in associations and universities; and additional material and non-material resources beyond government budgets.

Organisations such as SAICA, Engineering Council, mathematics associations, universities and funding organisations have established a multiple actor-group initiative that supports mathematics participation and systematic improvement

9.3. More sustainable improvements can be achieved if the private sector supported the multiple-lever NMIP initiative. This would strengthen the capacity of the state as well as eliminate unproductive duplication and conflicting mathematics teaching methodologies.

10. State of Fundamental Literacies: Reading, Writing and Numeracy

The table below shows 24 years' performance trends of South African learners based on various international and national comparative studies: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SEACMEQ) and the South African systematic Evaluation (SASE).

Table 4: Overall performance trends of South African learners in PIRLS, TIMSS, SACMEQ and systematic evaluation (2003 and 2007 SASE % scores converted to point scores).

Assessment Study	2000	2003	2005	2007	2011	2015	2016	2019	2021	2022	2023	Change from baseline ¹
PIRLS Gr 4	-	-	-	-	323	-	320	-	288			-35
TIMSS- Maths Gr5						376		374			362	-14
TIMSS – Science Gr5								324			308	-16
TIMSS Maths Gr 9	-	285	-	-	352	372	-	389			397	+112
TIMSS Science Gr 9	-	268	-	-	332	358	-	370	-		362	+94
SACMEQ Reading	492	-	-	495	-	-	-	-	538			+46
SACMEQ Maths	486	-	-	495	-	-	-	-	552			+66
SASE Gr3 Reading Lit		30% (300)		36% (360)						438		+138
SASE Gr 3 Maths		30% (300)		35% (350)						428		+128

(Source: TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Center, 2022²; SACMEQ, 2024³)

10.1. Overall performance statistics from international studies show that South African learners perform below the 500-centre point. Over the past 20-24 years, trends in mathematics and reading have been mixed. TIMSS Grade 9, SACMEQ, and SASE show positive trends, while PIRLS Grade 4 and TIMSS Grade 5, both in mathematics and science, have shown a decline.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>I. The performance of Grade 4 learners in PIRLS has declined by 35 points between 2011 and 2021 [change from baseline]. The decline is more pronounced between 2016 and 2021, but it is possible that the 2021 results reflect COVID-19 learning losses.</p> <p>II. The performance of Grade 5 learners in TIMSS, in both Mathematics and Science, has declined between 2015 and 2023. Again, this could be due to the negative impact of Covid-19.</p> | <p>iii. The performance of Grade 9 learners in both TIMSS Mathematics and Science has increased by 112 and 94 points respectively between 2003 and 2023.</p> <p>IV. It is encouraging to observe that the performance of South African learners in SACMEQ reading and mathematics has been on an upward trajectory by 13 and 39 points, respectively, between 2000 and 2021. It is also worth noting that South African learners scored above the centre point of 500 and, most importantly, above the international average score of 500 for the first time in the SACMEQ IV (2021).</p> |
|--|---|

10.2. South Africa has its own learner performance assessment system, systematic evaluation (SE). The system assesses learner performance in reading comprehension, mathematics and natural science amongst others. In the 2006 SE cycle, Grade 6 learners obtained the following national mean score: 35% in language, 27% in mathematics and 41% in natural science⁴. The scores were below the centre point (50%). The results of the 2022 Systemic evaluations increased to 438 points for Reading and 428 points for Mathematics – these results show the post-COVID state of affairs.

1. Change from baseline refers to the crude difference between the initial statistic and the latest.

2. TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Center (2022). IEA TIMSS and PIRLS. <https://pirls2021.org/south-africa/>

3. SACMEQ (2024). SACMEQ Reports – South Africa. <http://www.seacmeq.org/?q=sacmeq-members/south-africa/sacmeq-reports>

4. Department of Basic Education (2005). Intermediate Phase Systematic Evaluation Report. DBE, Pretoria.

10.3. Since 2018, improvement interventions have been initiated to close the reading, writing and numeracy gaps. Several of these are outlined in Box 2 below.

Box 2 Initiatives of the past decade aimed at improving reading	
i. The Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP) aimed to enhance English First Additional Language (EFAL) skills for Foundation and Intermediate Phase learners. By 2023, the programme had trained 92 Foundation Phase and 125 Intermediate Phase subject advisors who reached over 40,000 teachers, making a measurable impact on literacy at scale.	iv. The National Literacy Strategy (2024-2030) outlines ways in which the DBE seeks to equip teachers and education officials with practical, culturally responsive tools for effective reading instruction – with emphasis on monitoring, feedback and reporting; advocacy and communication; and partnerships.
ii. The Teaching Maths for Understanding (TMU) framework is a new approach, designed from a Japanese math approach, to fundamentally enhance the teaching and learning of mathematics throughout the country in a learner- and teacher-friendly manner whilst promoting number sense and play-based learning in classrooms (see details in section 8 above).	v. The Read to Lead Campaign aims to mobilise partners to improve the reading abilities of all South African children supported by communities and the adult population of the country.
iii. The Early Grade Reading Studies (EGRS) is a series of evaluations led by the DBE in collaboration with academics at various universities to accumulate evidence about what works to improve the learning and teaching of early grade reading in South African schools (2020). The findings of the EGRS have had an impact on literacy policy and programming in South Africa.	vi. The Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTBBE) is a dual language approach that seeks to leverage children's first language while gradually introducing a second language, aligning with international research that shows strong early literacy skills are best developed in a familiar language. MTBBE is set to commence in Grade 4 for mathematics and natural sciences and technology in 2025.

While these initiatives are commendable, the basic education sector must ensure the continuity of these initiative to institutionalise their effects while simultaneously ensuring impact.

11. Wellbeing of Learners as a Human Right and a Precondition for Learning Excellence.

The importance of wellness in educational success has accrued understanding and attention in education in the past two decades. The COVID-19 school closures showed that learners from different socio-economic backgrounds experienced education differently. Whilst the DBE, with assistance from the private sector and the NECT, broadcasted lessons via radio, television and the internet, the education of most learners from the poor households was adversely affected by the prevailing under-resourcing and poor nutrition. The table below profiles several challenges that learners experienced.

Table 5: Summary of learner welfare indicators

Wellness Issue	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change from baseline
New HIV Infections (15-24 y/o)	42.7%	-	45%	-	-	2.3%
Rate of teenage pregnancies (10-19 y/o)	129 223	-	-	139 361	150 000	16%
Growth in school nutrition budget allocation	-	7 665 887	8 115 269	8 508 321	9 278 942	6.6%
Growth in HIV and AIDS budget allocation	-	187 095	241 914	242 275	213 863	4.6%

(Source: SADC SRHR, 2021; StatsSA, 2022⁵; DHET, 2023⁶)

5. Statistics South Africa (2022). Profiling health challenges faced by adolescents (10-19) in South Africa. [ome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajp-cglclefindmkaj/https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/03-09-15/03-09-152022.pdf](https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/03-09-15/03-09-152022.pdf)

6. Department of Higher Education (2023). Persons who are Not in Education, Employment or in Training (NEET). https://www.dhet.gov.za/Planning%20Monitoring%20and%20Evaluation%20Coordination/Fact%20Sheet%20-%20NEETs_%20March%202023.pdf

11.1. It is concerning that learner pregnancy rates have been on the rise. Additionally, there is an indication of pronounced experiences of bullying in South Africa (34,4%), which is higher than the global reported average (23,6%).

11.2. The DBE, together with a range of private partners, has introduced various responses to these challenges.

I. The provision of daily meals to over 10 million learners in public schools through the National School Nutrition Programme.	IV. Agreement signed with teacher unions to ban teachers found guilty of sexual offences from practicing in South Africa.
II. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) was introduced into the curriculum in 2000.	V. Introduction of the Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP).
III. The National School Safety Framework (NSSF) provides an all-inclusive strategy that guides the DBE and PEDs in a coordinated effort to address violence occurring within schools.	VI. Protocols that guide learners in the reporting of corporal punishment and sexual abuse and harassment in schools.
	VII. Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy.

11.3. There are a wide range of responses currently being pursued by the DBE and private partners which create opportunities for increased private sector involvement. There are ample opportunities to partner on change management aspects relating to teacher support of learners, learner training and the screening and referral of learners who require health and psychosocial support.

12. System Efficiency: Indicators of Returns of Public Investments

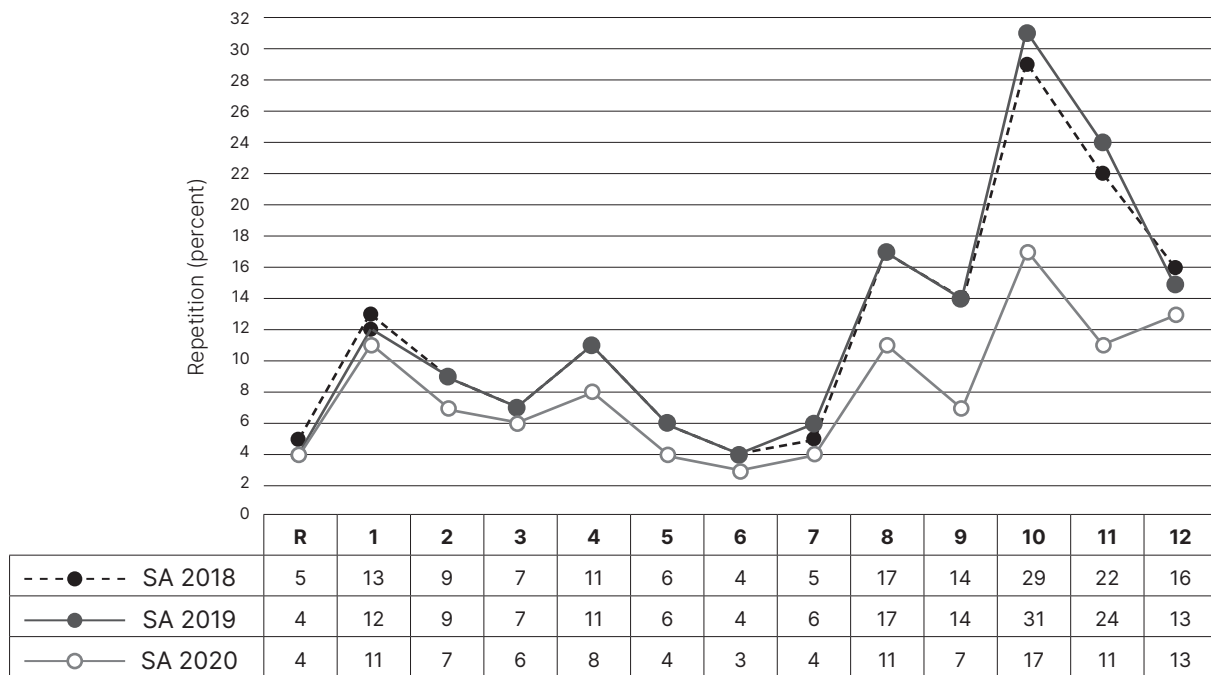
System efficiency provides a multi-year indication of the returns on education public spend. Systems that have low learner progression are inefficient as they spend on the same learners for extended periods or spend on learners who do not complete schooling. Three metrics are used to measure system efficiency in education: grade repetition, learner drop out ('throughput') and Grade 12 completion rate. This section reflects on the repetition and dropout rates, whilst completion rates are addressed in part in Section 8 above.

12.1. Grade repetition and its effects

In South Africa, repetition rates range between 4% and 31%. As per Figure 1, repetition jumps from 6% to above 10% when learners are at Grade 8; that is, during learners' first year in high school when learners progress to a different learning institution. The rate jumps to the highest level at Grade 10. It is possible that schools start to sift their learners to reduce the number of weak performers transitioning to matric.

It is interesting to note that repetition rates are lower post-COVID-19, a pattern that could reflect more accommodative promotion policies. Grade repetition negatively affects the system. Having repeaters in the public education system costs the state significant amounts of money – estimated at R20 billion (in 2018 prices) – about 8% of the total national budget allocated to basic education in 2018/2019 (Van der Berg et al., 2019)⁷. Repetition also causes overcrowding as classroom space is a perpetual issue.

7. Van Der Berg, S., Wills, G., Selkirk, R., Adams, C., & Van Wyk, C. (2019). The cost of repetition in South Africa.



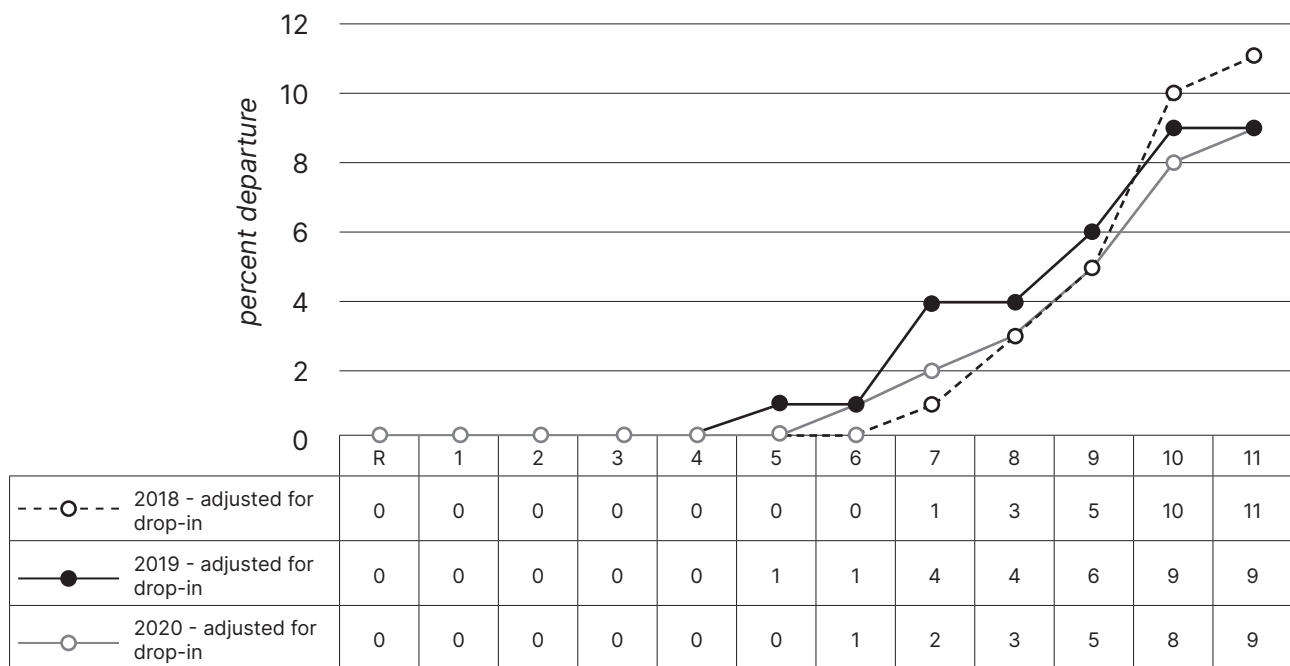
Source data: Gustafsson (2022). Table 6 estimates from LURITS 2018-2019, 2020-2021. The UNESCO method of calculating repetition rates is not used here. Rather these estimates are obtained from longitudinal data that tracks individual students across grades. Repeaters are those identified as in the same grade as the year before using learner unit record data. Repetition rates in 2018 reflect non promotion from 2018-2019, repetition rates in 2019 reflect non promotion from 2019-2020, and repetition rates in 2020 reflect non promotion from 2020-2021

Figure 1: National repetition rates by grade

12.2. Learner dropout rate or departure from schooling

Figure 2 shows that dropout is more pronounced year-on-year starting from 2018. Whilst dropout was a concern from Grade 7 in 2018, it has become prevalent even at Grade 4 in 2019. Dropout rate increases with grade level to a high of 11,5% at Grade 11. A positive trend has been forming at the FET level where the dropout rate has decreased by about 3% to 8,5%. Dropout rates contribute to the concerning numbers of young people in 'Not in Employment, Education and Training' (NEET). According to StatsSA, the NEET year-on-year statistics have increased by 1,5 percentage points to 34,2% in 2024, Quarter 3.

A variety of interventions are being implemented in the system to improve the efficiency of flow and the retention of learners. These include the improvement of early grade reading and numeracy to strengthen learner performance foundations; the provision of school nutrition via the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) to relieve hunger and increase learner attendance; the advocacy of learner mental health support and sexuality education to prevent teenage pregnancy; accelerating the implementation of the three-stream model that offers multiple pathways to accommodate learners with either vocational and technical education interests; and support to at-risk learners in Grades 8-11 who are prone to dropping out of school.



Data source: DBE (2023) using LIRITS

Figure 2: The percent of learners departing at the end of each grade

13. School Infrastructure Backlogs

Over the past 30 years, the DBE has made notable strides in enhancing the accessibility and quality of educational facilities across the country⁸. Through targeted initiatives, thousands of existing buildings have been upgraded, and new schools have been constructed, especially in historically underserved regions. These efforts have transformed the learning environment for millions of learners, ensuring access to clean water, dependable electricity and safe and secure facilities. The DBE has accomplished the following.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>I. Renovated 11,077 schools.</p> <p>II. Provided fencing for 5,605 schools.</p> <p>III. Installed water infrastructure at 2,459 schools.</p> | <p>IV. Constructed 115,512 new classrooms.</p> <p>V. Connected 8,313 schools to electricity.</p> <p>VI. Provided 3,015 schools with safe, age-appropriate sanitation facilities.</p> |
|---|--|

8. Department of Basic Education. Annual Report 2023/24.

Table 6 provides addition statistics regarding the provision of infrastructure.

Table 6: Trends in addressing school infrastructure backlog

Infrastructure	1996	2000	2007	2011	2014	2018	2022	2023	2024
Inappropriate schools	1000	900	750	510	x	189	x	36	2
Schools with no water supply	8 823	7 817	2 891	1 117	x	300	x	94	14
Schools with no toilets	3 265	2 496	1 318	701	x	300	x	30	x
Schools with pit toilets	9 600	9 200	8 500	6 500	x	3 898	x	x	667
Electricity supply	15 263	12 109	4 046	902	x	100	x	x	x
Internet connectivity	x	x	x	x	48%	x	80%	x	x

(Source: DBE, 2023⁹) X: No data available

As it is the case in other sectors, infrastructure provisioning is a moving target – changing as the system inputs and efficiency levels change – and is heavily dependent on the maintenance programmes.

The standard of infrastructure is unclear as a comprehensive conditions assessments across provinces is lacking. Provision of infrastructure planning and monitoring systems is an area in which the DBE could benefit if partnering with the private sector.

9. DBE (2023). Detailed Progress Report on School Infrastructure. Presentation by the DBE on 30 May 2023.

C. REFLECTION ON EDUCATION REFORM

14. The recently promulgated Basic Laws Amendment Act, 32 of 2024, while making news headlines, continues to be a bone contention. The Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Act makes amendments to some key clauses of the South African Schools Act of 1996 and the Employment of Educators Act, 1998. The amendments impact the laws relating to three areas identified in the table below.

Category A School Governance and Administration	Category B Learner Behaviour and Discipline	Category C Financial Management and Accountability and Labour Relations
• Making attendance of Grade R compulsory • Enhancing the authority of the HOD regarding the admission of learners in a public school after consultation with the SGB • Requiring SGBs to submit their language policies to the HOD for approval • Requiring, amongst others, parents to apply to the HOD for the registration of their home-schooled children	• Abolishing corporal punishment in schools, including non-physical punishment • Changing the learner code of conduct so it takes into account the diverse cultural beliefs, religious observances and medical circumstances of learners	• Strengthening financial management and accountability by SGBs by, inter alia, requiring quarterly financial reporting by SGBs and granting the HOD authority to investigate cases of financial mismanagement • Prohibiting an educator from conducting business with the state

- Category A has two highly contested clauses that were deferred by the President for further consultation when he signed the Bill into law: Clause 4 - admission policy and Clause 5 - language policy. These clauses are controversial because they are linked to school choice and race dynamics, redress and equity tensions that many countries have to deal with. There are instances of SGBs that have excluded learners on the basis of language choice. As a result, more power has been allocated to the administration to make final decisions. On the other hand, there are concerns from some Afrikaans-speaking communities that this arrangement could see the disappearance of Afrikaans-medium schools. These arguments stir tension between two societal values: cultural preservation and inclusivity.
- As to alternative schooling, for a long time, the home-schooling space in South Africa remained unregulated. While parents have a right to school choice for their children, according to the new Act, the HOD has a right to ensure that the education for homeschooled children meets required educational standards.
- Category B and C are more acceptable as they are merely reinforcing existing principles and aspired public ethics.

15. Private Education Providers

The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 established a post-Apartheid schooling configuration that recognised two categories of schools: public and independent.

Table 7: Total number of public and independent schools¹⁰

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change from baseline
Public schools	23289	23076	23004	22740	22589	22511	24 850	+6.7%
Independent schools	1865	1922	2195	2154	2282	2325		+24.7%
Total no. of schools	25154	24998	25199	25894	24871	24836		-1.3%
% of independent schools	8	8.3	9.5	9.5	10.1	10.3		+2.3%

Public schools are state controlled and independent schools are privately owned and governed. South Africa has seen an expansion of private education institutions. The table above depicts a 25% increase in the number of independent schools between 2018 and 2023.

While this growth highlights the swift expansion of private education in South Africa, public schools still cater to the majority of the 13 million school-going children, especially from poor households.

16. Teacher Production

There is a recent indication of potential risk relating to future undersupply of teachers into the South African system. The majority of South African teachers are older than 50 years¹¹.

The rising cohort of ageing teachers is happening parallel to the number of learners growing in line with the country's population growth rate.

Currently, South Africa employs approximately 410 000 teachers in public schools, but it is estimated that by 2030, the demand for new teachers will be around 59 034 per annum (i.e., against the current output level of around 30 000)¹².

16.1. The following table (**Table 8**) provides a snapshot pattern of teacher preparation in 2019, showing that South African institutions of higher learning produced a total of 16 979 ITE teachers from both full-time and part-time training programmes.

UNISA alone accounted for the largest share (at 23%) of the total number of teachers. If UNISA and NWU were treated as outliers, the remainder of the universities account for an average of 3,4%. UNISA and NWU produce 23 and 14 percentage points above the average output of the other universities.

10. Department of Basic Education. School realities (2018-2023).

11. DBE (2023b). Presentation on PYEI, BEEI, Funza Lushaka and New Teacher Induction Programme, 18 August 2023.

12. Van der Berg et al. (2020). School teacher supply and demand in South Africa in 2019 and beyond.

Table 8: Number of (initial teacher education) teachers from South African institutions of higher learning in 2019

Institution	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Percentage %
1. NMMU	260	0	260	1.53%
2. US	270	0	270	1.59%
3. DUT	307	0	307	1.80%
4. WITS	389	0	389	2.20%
5. UFH	401	0	401	2.30%
6. UWC	418	0	418	2.40%
7. CUT	489	0	489	2.80%
8. TUT	518	0	518	3.00%
9. CPUT	644	0	644	3.70%
10. UFS	654	0	654	3.85%
11. UP	660	0	660	3.88%
12. UNIVEN	661	0	611	3.89%
13. UJ	671	0	671	3.95%
14. WSU	783	0	783	4.61%
15. UL	874	0	874	5.14%
16. UZ	950	0	950	5.59%
17. UKZN	1014	0	1014	5.97%
18. NWU	1236	1759	2995	17.63%
19. UNISA	333	3688	4021	23.60%
Total	11532	5447	16979	100%

Source: DHET (2020). School teacher supply and demand in South Africa in 2019 and beyond.

16.2. It is concerning that the large output achieved through distance learning may not compare well with the quality of face-to-face training.

A question arises pertaining to the regulation of teacher production to ensure that the burden of preparing teachers for the nation is more equally distributed across all universities. It is also desirable to cap the number of teachers produced through distance learning so as to systemically increase the quality of the pre-service preparation of teachers.

16.3. Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme

Between 2007 and 2023, a total 52 099 teachers successfully completed their initial teacher education training through the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme¹³. As captured in the table below, the placement rate of the Funza Lushaka graduates has been declining, from 84% in 2019 to 74% in 2023, a 10% decline from the baseline.

Table 9: Placement rate of the Funza Lushaka graduates 2019 and 2023

Placement Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change from Baseline
Percentage	84%	82%	76%	68%	74%	-10%

Source: DBE (2023)

13. Motshekga (2023). Teacher Supply and Demand by 2030: Securing South Africa's Future. <https://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=NZEKV3wVsKo%3D&tabid=609&portalid=0&mid=12335>

The DBE links the placement decline to a reduction in the number of available posts in provincial education departments¹⁴. Noting the spend of over R13 billion between 2007 and 2022¹⁵ on Funza Lushaka, the absorption of the graduates needs to increase in order to optimise the returns on investment.

17. Function Shift of ECD From DSD to DBE

In February 2019, the President announced the country's commitment to implement two years of compulsory preschool education for all children prior to Grade 1. Subsequently, the responsibility for Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres was transferred from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the Department of Basic Education (DBE).

17.1. The table below show the current status and anticipated progress for Early Learning Programmes (ELPs)

Table 10: Existing and target access for ELPs by 2030

Total number of children aged 0-5.5 (6 337 993)						Difference between existing and target access
	Existing access to ELPs		Target access by 2030		Access gap	
Age (years)	Total children	% of total children	Total children	% of total children	Children	
0-2	744 729	22%	1 029 706	30%	284 977	8%
3	603 658	50%	850 201	70%	246 543	20%
4	690 372	59%	989 861	85%	299 489	26%
5 - 5.5	384 502	73%	500 199	95%	115 697	22%
Total	2 423 261		3 369 966		946 705	

Source: Department of Basic Education (2024). Presentation on ECD Strategy Support.

Box 3 provides some commentary on the state and future plans regarding ECD provision.

Box 3 Notes on ECD State of Affair and Vision			
I. Only 22% of children aged 0 to 2 have access to Early Learning Programmes (ELPs), a figure projected to rise to 30%, necessitating the accommodation of an additional 284,977 children.		I. Access for 3-year-olds is planned to increase from 50% to 70%, leaving a deficit of 246,543 children.	
II. The difference between existing access and the target access highlights persistent gaps that need to be addressed, with the largest percentage gap being 26% for 4-year-olds.		I. There is an overall deficit of 946,705 ECD spaces, underscoring the need for significant investment and expansion of early childhood education services.	
II. Currently, 59% of 4-year-olds have access, with a target of 85%, requiring services for an additional 299,489 children. For children aged 5 to 5.5 years, access stands at 73%, while the target is 95%, leaving a shortfall of 115,697 children.			

14. Ibid

15. Motshekga (2023). Teacher Supply and Demand by 2030: Securing South Africa's Future. <https://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=NZEKV3wVsKo%3D&tabid=609&portalid=0&mid=12335>

17.2. Mass registration drive

Recent progress within the ECD sector includes significant steps for driving mass registration of ECD centres. Once all ECD centres are registered, the DBE will be better positioned to expand access and enhance quality in more informed and system ways.

18. Recent Progressive Curriculum Reform

There are two notable curriculum reforms being implemented in the DBE: curriculum strengthening to accommodate competencies of the future and a three-stream model to accommodate the vocation stream. These are briefly discussed.

18.1. Curriculum strengthening

The DBE is updating the curriculum to equip learners with competencies for the future to facilitate their transition to work and higher education¹⁶. The initiative aims to develop and implement a South African Competency Framework to support curriculum changes, secure broad stakeholder buy-in and engagement through consultations with diverse education stakeholders and provide adequate resources to enhance the development of the relevant skills and attitudes. Additionally, it seeks to introduce a measured shift from formal assessment to holistic approaches that emphasise learning over testing. The South African Competency Framework was drafted in 2022. There is a need for engagement between the DBE and the private sector on the new framework, and an exploration of how the private sector can support its implementation.

18.2. Rollout of the Schools of Specialisation

Schools of Specialisation, also known as Focus Schools, are an essential part of South Africa's three-stream model, which includes academic, technical and vocational pathways¹⁷. These schools, distinct in their legislative framework, serve learners in Grades 10 to 12 who show particular talents and aptitudes in specialised fields such as agriculture, technology and the arts. Focus Schools aim to align education with economic demands, addressing skill shortages and high unemployment rates to support the National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030¹⁸.

18.3. While some Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) have made strides in establishing Focus Schools, progress is uneven across the country (refer to following table).

To address these challenges, a 'Focus School Think Tank' was formed to refine strategies and align educational outcomes with workforce needs. With targeted curricula and partnerships with the private sector, these schools are geared to enhance academic and technical preparation and the career readiness of learners¹⁹. Table 11 is a breakdown of Focus Schools per province.

16. Department of Basic Education. (2023). Improving learning outcomes through curriculum strengthening. Retrieved from <https://www.education.gov.za/ArchivedDocuments/ArchivedArticles/Improving-learning-outcomes-through-curriculum-strengthening-0923.aspx>

17. Department of Basic Education. Implementation of the Three-Stream Model in South African Schools: Focus on Focus Schools and Schools of Specialisation. Department of Basic Education, South Africa.

18. Department of Basic Education (n.d.). Preparing Students for the Workforce through Focus Schools and Specialized Education in STEM, Arts, and More. Department of Basic Education. Retrieved from <https://www.education.gov.za>

19. Department of Basic Education (2024). Focus Schools Annual Progress Report.

Table 11: List of Focus Schools per province

Province	Area of Specialisation/Category /Focus	No. of schools
Gauteng	Mathematics, science and technology, it, arts, engineering, service and sports	22
North West	Commercial, mathematics, science and technology, engineering/technical, agriculture, IT and arts	76
Western Cape	Mathematics, science and technology, engineering/technical, arts, marine, IT and services	52
Free State	Agriculture, arts and service	48
KwaZulu-Natal	Agriculture, engineering/technical, mathematics, science and technology, marine	7
Limpopo	Agriculture, engineering/technical	23
Mpumalanga	Mathematics, science and technology, engineering/technical, arts, IT and agricultural studies	155
Eastern Cape	Engineering, agricultural studies, and arts	23
Northern Cape	Agriculture, engineering/technical, mathematics, science and technology, marine	17
Total		423

18.4. The conception of Focus Schools is based on an envisaged partnership between the schools and the industry stretching from the design of programmes to their implementation support from industry experts.

Gauteng province appears well ahead in establishing partnerships between schools and industry. More must be done in this respect in the other eight provinces.

D. STRUCTURE AND PIPELINE OF THE SYSTEM

19. Development in regard to the General Education Certificate (GEC)

The GEC is a new Level 1 qualification on the General Education and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)²⁰. The GEC, designed for learners in schools, serves as a foundation certificate for those completing the General Education Training (GET) phase of their education. The GEC aims to provide comprehensive general education, recognising knowledge, skills, values and competencies acquired through 10 compulsory years of formal schooling. It aims to equip learners with essential skills to function as responsible citizens and contribute to societal and environmental issues. The introduction of GEC in Grade 9 intends to address community economic life, guiding learners to decide on National Certificate Vocational (NCV) or mainstream education²¹.

19.1. The GEC is a qualification with at least 120 credits, as shown in the table below, requiring the completion of nine subjects: three carry 20 credits each, and six carry 10 credits each. Learners prepare for the GEC across three phases: Foundation (Grades R-3), Intermediate (Grades 4-6) and Senior (Grades 7-9). The GEC caters to learners who have completed compulsory basic education, addressing a need unmet by other qualifications on the NQF. It formally recognises learning achievements up to the end of Grade 9, meeting promotion and progression requirements of the National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-12. The draft policy on GEC argues that achieving it enables learners to access three learning pathways.

- a. Academic:** to continue with an academic route through the completion of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) in school, culminating in the achievement of the National Senior Certificate at NQF Level 4;
- b. Vocational:** to choose a vocational route through completion of the National Certificate: Vocational Qualifications at NQF Levels 2, 3 and 4, which contain vocational specialisations offered in TVET colleges; and
- c. Occupational:** to access occupational specific qualifications at NQF Level 2, 3 and 4, which consist of knowledge, skills and workplace experience and learning, in schools or in other institutions.

Table 12:: Time allocation and credits for General Education Certificate

Subjects	Hours per week	Credits
Home language	5	20
First additional language	4	20
Mathematics	4, 5	20
Natural sciences and social sciences	3 each	10 each
Technology, economic and management sciences	2 each	10 each
Life orientation and creative arts	2 each	10 each
Total	27,5 hours per week	120 credits

Source: Draft Policy for the General Education Certificate (2021).

20. Draft Policy for the General Education Certificate (GEC): A Qualification at Level 1 on the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework of the National Qualifications Framework (2021).

21. Maluleke, M.R. (2024). General Education Certificate (GEC) Exit Point from Grade 9 Good for South African Education System and Economy. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Educational Research*, 6(2): 277-287.

19.2. Table 12 outlines the time allocation and credit structure for the General Education Certificate (GEC) in South Africa. The curriculum includes core subjects like home language, first additional language and mathematics, each receiving the most time and credits (20 credits each). Subjects such as natural sciences, social sciences, technology, and economic and management sciences have less weekly time (2-3 hours) and contribute fewer credits (10 each). The total weekly time is 27.5 hours, equating to 120 credits.

While the GEC's time and credit structure offers a balanced curriculum, focusing on foundational skills in languages and mathematics while ensuring diverse disciplines, it requires adequate resources and trained teachers. Furthermore, it more highly incentivises learners to study mathematics.

19.3. The GEC plan has faced criticism and challenges since its inception, with concerns about its potential impact on dropout rates and education quality²².

One argument against the GEC plan is that it might potentially encourage learners to exit school early, at Grade 9, especially in disadvantaged areas with limited access to education and few job opportunities. The challenges historically disadvantaged learners face in gaining access to higher education, including difficulties in understanding admission processes and language proficiency issues, suggest that the GEC alone will not be sufficient to eradicate these deep-rooted problems²³. In 2021, the DBE commenced an initial pilot on field trials of the GEC assessment instruments in selected schools²⁴.

This pilot intended to evaluate the standardised assessment instruments and gather data to refine the policy framework and assessment model. The GEC is expected to boost school performance, particularly in STEM subjects, and place a stronger focus on Grade 9, similar to the current emphasis on Grade 12.

22. Mpya, N. G., & Sadiki, M. C. (2024). Inclusive Basic Education in South Africa (pp. 244–261). igi global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-1147-9.ch017>

23. Ibid.

24. DBE confirms its state of readiness for piloting the General Education Certificate. <https://www.education.gov.za/GEC2021.aspx>

E. COLLABORATION BETWEEN BUSINESS AND THE STATE

Corporate Social Investment (CSI) programmes, skills funds and government and planning committees have served as the basis for collaboration between private sector and business. The following sections briefly discuss the CSI and joint committee structures, and the Human Resources Development Committee in particular.

20. Corporate Social Investment

From 2015 to 2024, businesses invested a total of R102.1 billion in Corporate Social Investment (CSI) projects. Throughout this period, education-focused initiatives consistently received a substantial share, ranging between 39% and 50% of the total CSI funding²⁵. However, a notable decrease in education funding occurred in 2021 as priorities shifted towards health-related initiatives due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

By 2024, the total CSI investment increased, reflecting post-pandemic recovery efforts. While total CSI spending has grown since 2015, the proportion allocated to basic education has increasingly been in competition with the higher education tuition and employability pressures. Corporates need pay special attention to the need to strengthen the basic education pipeline which inadvertently influences higher education efficiencies and employability.

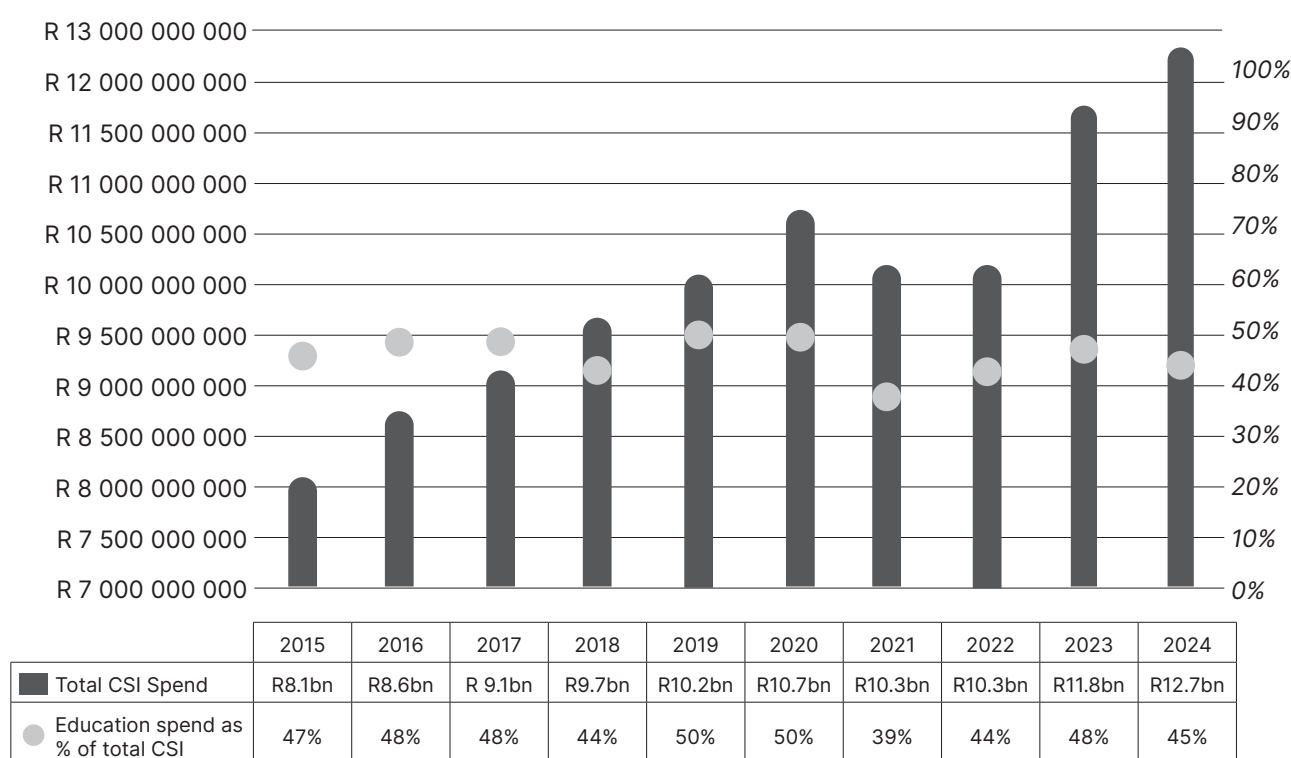


Figure 3: CSI expenditure trends 2015-2024

21. Government, Private Sector (and Labour) Cooperation

21.1. In the main, the NEDLAC and Human Resources Development Councils (HRDC) have served as the two primary structures, with dialogue and joint planning promoted between key players in the economy. The NEDLAC is the vehicle by which government, labour, business and community organisations seek to cooperate, through problem-solving and negotiation, on economic, labour and development issues and related challenges facing the country. The HRDC, on the other hand, is an advisory body charged with the responsibility of improving productivity and human resource development in the country. In addition, government and business (occasionally including labour)

25. Trialogue (2015-2024). Trialogue Handbook.

have in the past decade organised various engagement standings or impromptu forums to address development issues or to take briefs and progress reports. Among these were updates on education collaboration (based on the work of the NECT) and joint structures to address the electricity crisis or crime.

21.2. The committees and the forums, perhaps with the exception of NEDLAC, have diminished in effectiveness. The HRDC does not appear to have achieved much over the years beyond organising various summits. The forums, characteristic of the period following the adoption of the NDP, have spread fewer and farther apart in recent past.

These committees and forums hold great potential for the alignment of government and private sector thinking regarding the vision for and investment into macro-education development.

F. EDUCATION FUNDING TRENDS

22. Government commitment and efforts towards fiscal consolidation will have far reaching effects on policy and policy choices going forward. Constrained growth, inflation and the wage bill are among the key factors that will determine the continuation and depth of education reform and improvement initiatives.

In education, the increase in the wage bill is less likely since teaching is a labour-intensive service. Reduction in the number of teachers will hike teacher-learner ratios and further undermine the conditions for improvement in the quality of education. Meanwhile, teacher salaries have stagnated since being frozen in 2020 and lagging inflation in 2021 and 2022 (4,2% and 3% respectively) has thereby caused a 9% drop in their pay relative to CPI. The greatest challenge is that the Treasury guidelines suggest that the shortfalls will be funded from the existing baselines .

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| <p>I. The per capita spend in 2025 is projected to fall by R2 365, from R24 000 in 2020. The introduction of some new, important policies, and the increasing budget pressure risk reduced funding to new school buildings, nutrition and learning materials.</p> | <p>II. The ECD grant was at R530 million in 2019 and increased to R1,7 billion in 2024.</p> <p>III. The existing budget is argued as sufficient for only 238 000 learners instead of the 486 000 learners who are eligible for ECD (Sachs et al., 2023).</p> |
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23. Non- or under-funding of essential operations will undermine education improvement. It can also be argued that returns on the CSI will be compromised. The situation calls for increased alignment and coordination of private and public sector investments.

G. CONCLUSION

The paper presented a picture of a stable and improving education system, albeit slowly. It highlights threats relating to the inputs into and the operationalisation of the system – leadership stability, teacher preparation quality, policies and programmes relating to the pathways and flow through of learners, and funding which will likely contract due to the ensuing fiscal consolidation programmes.

These developments have profound repercussions for private sector investments in education improvement and the economy. It is recommended that strategies are sought and efforts made to increase macro-development level alignment between the private sector and government (and other players) in respect to the improvement of relevance, output and quality of education.

Similarly, efforts need to be intensified to improve coordination at the programming level so as to align the practical responses to the macro-development alignments referred to above. While CSI projects are essential and welcome, systemic interventions hold higher potential of return for the large education systems such as ours.

Its 12-year lifespan and achievements in education render NECT the best platform to drive macro-improvement in South African education. It is therefore imperative to refresh private sector resolve behind the NECT so as to extend sector stability, social capital and strategic utilisation of capabilities built.



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