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commission**

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**NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
ADVISORY NOTE ON**

Basic Education Priorities for the MTDP, 2024-29

*Improving Planning to Improve
Literacy and Numeracy*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This advisory provides the rationale and evidence for the recommendations¹ made on Basic Education in the NPC's Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP) in which the NPC proposed that a focus on **planning to improve literacy² and numeracy** together with the actions that are **pre-requisites for creating the necessary conditions** to achieve this. This includes a deliberative focus on addressing **inequities of resourcing** that impact on performance and doing so **within a rigorous planning framework** so that the system achieves **greater efficiencies, improved quality and more equitable outcomes**. Improving literacy and numeracy from the foundation years would significantly accelerate progress

by addressing the **systemic inefficiencies** of failure and repetition and in the multiple long-term personal and systemic consequences of poor foundations on subsequent performance, and retention. A 2019 paper³ estimates the annual cost of failure and repetition in the South African system to be R20bn. Improving learner performance in early grade reading and maths would minimise both early grade and subsequent failure and repetition⁴. Evidence-informed planning is needed nationally and provincially that is aligned with resourcing across clear timeframes, which monitors and reports on both implementation and progress against agreed indicators, and which informs timeous corrective action⁵.

1. THE IMPLICATIONS OF ANTICIPATED FISCAL CONSTRAINTS ON PLANNING AND PRIORITIES

Key criteria adopted by the NPC in its decision to recommend that improving planning to improve reading and numeracy be a priority for the MTDP and therefore be the focus of this NPC advisory is the achievement of greater efficiencies whilst improving quality and reducing inequity by

improving these foundation skills. This would be generally regarded as a useful policy goal, but the emphasis on efficiency is critical given the severity of the current fiscal constraints and the need for a reduced but intensive focus in basic education on what matters most.

¹ Extensive consultation with both stakeholders and the DBE has informed this advisory. This has greatly enriched the advisory and the NPC is grateful to all stakeholders who have invested their time and energy to strengthening this process. Key points of consensus that emerged in the consultation of 2023 regarding the focus of the advisory included: a need for a focus on the early years at least comparable to the emphasis on the NSC; improving planning including specification of targets and the development of credible implementation plans; improved monitoring of implementation and of outcomes; and concerns related to a culture of malicious compliance with little value which overload schools with 'tick-box micro-management', and without substantial professional engagement on issues of quality - knowledgeable guidance' would be more useful than 'authoritarian command' with inadequate information flows. Substantive engagement with stakeholders and the DBE and PED in 2024 on earlier drafts of the advisory were invaluable in informing the final advisory.

² Literacy includes both reading and writing (with comprehension).

³ This was 8% of the total national budget allocated to Basic Education in 2018. (Van Der Berg, S, 2019. The cost of repetition in South Africa. Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers: WP13/2019)

⁴ "Failing to learn to read in the first three grades has dire consequences for the rest of a learner's schooling career since in Grade 4 learners transition from learning how to read to reading in order to learn other subjects including numeracy are at risk of performing poorly in later grades and even of dropping out of school altogether. It is important that these deficiencies in the early skills be addressed as soon as they are discovered. If this does not happen, learners will not be able to read fluently, let alone understand what they are reading". Funda Uphumelele National Reading Survey, Concept Note

⁵ The NPC wishes to acknowledge the contribution made by the FEM Education Foundation which funded the time of researchers at RESEP who contributed to the background papers and as critical readers, and the contribution of the Zenex Foundation which supported the costs of the Programme Management of developing this and other advisories for Chapter 9 of the NDP MTDP.

The Finance and Fiscal Commission (FFC) (2023, p. 154⁶) has indicated that while,

'South Africa allocates a significant portion of its consolidated spending to basic education ...over the last few years and, more specifically, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, spending on basic education has been impacted by the need to reprioritise and cut spending across government. This has been driven by increased pressure on tax revenue and moves towards fiscal consolidation driven by slow economic growth and various economic shocks. As a result, key basic education funding sources, such as the provincial equitable share and basic education-related conditional grants, have been reduced or subjected to slower real growth. It is anticipated that this relative stagnation in spending will continue over the medium term, as government tries to rein in its debt levels and the accompanying interest associated with such debt.'

The FFC anticipates that given the worsening fiscal situation, reductions to planned expenditure will be even greater and noted that 'the 2021 Medium-term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) indicated the intention to cut basic education expenditure in nominal terms, which implies sizeable cuts in real and real-per-pupil terms. (FFC, 2023, p, 157). The FFCF has demonstrated the impact of the fiscal consolidation on basic education allocations from 2012/13 and expects these impacts to continue along a similar trend over the medium-term differential provincial impacts.

The Public Economy Project (PEP) at the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies published an independent appraisal of expenditure choices that are evident in an analysis of budget data⁷. The paper argues that basic education 'will see significant declines in real resource allocation and will be reduced as a share of the budget' (p. 8) and will face 'deep cuts to real spending' (p.9), and that this decline will be evident in 'reduced investment in employee compensation and goods and services.' Reduced expenditure on employee compensation implies larger class-sizes, and reduced expenditure on goods and services will have consequences for learning material such as textbooks, and on school infrastructure.

The PEP study reports that,

'National Treasury has clearly and repeatedly warned that this will lead to an erosion of services and have negative consequences for educational outcomes, particularly for the poorest learners (National Treasury, 2021a: 59; 2021b: 42; 2022b: 58)'. (PEP, p. 13)

The introduction of Grade R as part of the period of compulsory education will put enormous pressure on the fiscus from the date of the commencement of BELA, as will the funding implications arising changes in conditions of service and potential growth in learner numbers. The 2023 Medium Term Budget Statement and the guidelines provided to Departments as they prepare their 2024/5 budgets, is unequivocal that fiscal consolidation will be implemented through spending reductions, and efficiency measures.

⁶ FFC Submission For The Division Of Revenue, 2023/24, 2023

⁷ Spending Choices In Budget 2022. Public Economy Project, University of the Witwatersrand, May 2022

What is clear is that increased efficiency must be pursued in multiple ways including: planning and implementation in the sector must be more determined to identify potential internal inefficiencies; there must be a relentless focus on quality, with clear indicators across components; within-system inequalities that reproduce social inequality must be identified and programmatic steps taken to address these inefficiencies; wasteful duplication must be ended, and coordination across components of departments must be optimised. The proliferation of ambition in multiple competing initiatives must be reviewed and competing

priorities and programmes and initiatives that can be curtailed identified so that a reduced set of key priorities can be identified on which energies and resources can be focused; 'priorities' that are not within the guiding framework of the NDP, and the advice of Treasury must be critically debated. This is necessary so that rapid progress is made in the core elements of basic education that are critical to achieving national development goals and prioritisation of key initiatives should be considered rather than an across-the-board 'trimming'. These considerations must inform the MTDP in basic education.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENTS

2.1. Absence of Indicators to Monitor Progress

While performance in literacy and numeracy shows some improvement in international assessments⁸, since the discontinuation of the Annual National Assessments (ANA) in 2015 there are no national measures before Grade 12 to monitor national progress and performance against NDP targets to guide the work of officials and schools. The results of the DBE's systemic evaluation of 2021 are anticipated in 2024⁹ and will only then provide national and provincial¹⁰ baselines against which to measure progress. Sample-based assessment using uniform and standard measures of assessment across all schools is essential for planning is necessary to guide both support and reciprocal accountability.

2.2. Misalignment between the Loci of Planning and Resourcing

Policy-informed, high-level planning frameworks for improving performance in literacy and numeracy exist at national level. But these are resourced within the realities of provincial budget constraints and operationalised at district level within the available material and human resources. Where these resources are not available, national plans cannot be implemented as intended. National goals are important, but these must be mediated through the reality that the budget required is allocated to provinces through the horizontal division of the national revenue, and Premiers-in-Executive-Councils have discretion regarding the allocation of national

⁸ All data on which these problem statements are based are drawn from DBE documents.

⁹ These were not yet available in September of 2024

¹⁰ It is unclear if the sample size of 3 000 will provide a valid baseline at provincial level.

and provincial revenue for the functions for which the province is responsible. Provincial education budgets and the management of these budgets¹¹ has serious consequences for the creation of the necessary conditions to improve literacy and numeracy.¹² Provinces have the primary responsibility, in financial terms, for ensuring that schools have the necessary resources to teach literacy and numeracy, and whatever national 'plans' are made, they can only be implemented if these can be prioritised for funding at provincial level and this determines the education activities the provinces can fund.

2.3. Resource Inequities Within and Across Provinces are a Significant Driver of Unequal Outcomes

Prioritisation of the goal of improving learner performance in literacy and numeracy requires the allocation of the requisite human and material resources essential to support the activities needed to translate this goal into reality. The absence of the key conditions¹³ necessary for effective teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy in schools correlates with both the socio-economic status of the school (for which the quintile system is used as a

proxy¹⁴) and with the educational resource base of the province. These resourcing inequities are widely viewed as factors contributing to the unequal conditions of teaching and learning, and unequal learning outcomes.¹⁵ If we are to achieve the goals of the NDP, improving these conditions must take primacy within an ambitious policy agenda.

2.4. Funding Non-Compliance

2.4.1. Non-Compliance with National Norms and Standards

Several provinces are not compliant with The National Norms and Standards for School Funding¹⁶ which provide School Governing Bodies with the resources¹⁷ to purchase, inter alia, learning and teaching support material (LTSM).¹⁸ This appears to be a clear contravention of policy on school funding and undermines its equity intentions. The South African Schools Act (SASA) requires government to fund quintile 1-3 schools (which may not charge fees) adequately and equitably. This is currently not the case.¹⁹ Failure to fund schools at the minimum levels inevitably results in shortages of those resources which the per-learner funding norms are intended to support, such as essential LTSM.

¹¹ In its Budgetary Review and Recommendations Report to the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education on 17 October 2023, the AGSA indicated that 'the Free State education department is expected to use 45% of its 2023-24 budget to fund the 2022-23 expenditure, which negatively impacts its ability to meet its future service delivery needs. It is concerning that the KZN and FS education departments have expressed significant doubt in the department's ability to operate as a going concern in the foreseeable future and urgent intervention is required to improve the financial health. (p. 22) https://static.pmg.org.za/231017AGSA_1.pdf

¹² Post provisioning planning capacity has improved in applying the formula-based model but a lack of understanding of the impact has meant that national salary negotiations result in budget adjustments below the actual provincial costs of the salary agreement.

¹³ The key conditions also include issues that require a whole of society approach such as, for example, school safety. These will be addressed in the Call to Action that will accompany the advisory and be aimed at communities and civil society.

¹⁴ A perverse outcome of the quintile system is that in the two provinces which access private contributions (fees) for between 31- 39% of public schools, the burden on the fiscus is reduced, while in the four provinces which only access private contributions in 1-12% of schools, the state shoulders the full burden of school operational costs.

¹⁵ Including e.g.: class size; availability of learning and teaching support material in school; and regular access to reading material at home

¹⁶ While provinces are meant to use the nationally set thresholds as a minimum, the FFC has shown that KwaZulu-Natal has been funding all quintiles below the national threshold since 2014, the Northern Cape has funded its Quintile 1 to 3 learners below the national threshold amount since 2015, Mpumalanga has funded all quintiles below the national threshold amount since 2016, and as of 2021, the Eastern Cape is funding all quintiles below the nationally determined threshold amounts

¹⁷ The National Norms and Standards for School Funding provides an allocation per learner to all schools. Quintiles 1, 2 and 3 schools (no-fee schools) receive a higher per learner allocation relative to learners in quintile 4 and 5 schools, which schools may charge school fees.

¹⁸ The following categories of spend are intended to be covered in the norms: (1) Learner support material (Textbooks, library books, charts, models, computer hardware and software, television sets, video recorders, Home Economics equipment, science laboratory equipment, musical instruments, learner desks and chairs); (2) Non-learner support material equipment (Furniture -excluding learner desks and chairs- paper copier machines, telephones, fax machines, intercom systems, equipment for connectivity within the school and to the internet, hardware tools, cleaning equipment, first aid kits, overalls for cleaners and grounds staff, sporting equipment, electrical accessories); (3) Consumable items of an educational nature (stationery for learners); (4) Consumable items of a non-educational nature (Stationery for office use, paper, cleaning materials, petrol, food); (5) Services relating to repairs and maintenance (Building repair work, equipment repairs and maintenance, light bulbs); (6) Other services (Television licences, internet service providers, school membership of educational associations, postage, telephone calls, electricity, water, rates and taxes, rental of equipment, audit fees, bank charges, legal services, advertising, security services, public or scholar transport, vehicle hire, insurance, copying service). The per learner allocation is also intended to assist schools with payment of utilities such as electricity and water.

¹⁹ Financial and Fiscal Commission, 2023. Expenditure Patterns and Equity in Education: National Department of Education. Briefing to the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education, 17 October 2023



2.4.2. Non-Compliance with Constitutional Funding Obligations

Section 29 (1) (a) of the Constitution made the right to basic education²⁰ immediately realisable. Provincial Executive Councils are obliged to prioritise constitutional obligations in the provincial Division of Revenue as these must take precedence over other allocation pressures. The equitable share formula provides an indication to provinces of what an inter-provincially equitable funding regime would look like. Deviations from this should be monitored and corrected where necessary and possible. FFC data shows that this varies across provinces²¹. The Provincial Equitable Share is an unconditional allocation, but constitutional commitments must take primacy with 'strong links between budget decisions and the realisation or maintenance

of access to socio-economic rights'²². Court judgements are unequivocal that 'basic education is intended to promote literacy to enable everyone to understand the society in which they live and to fit well in that modern society. Unlike some the other socio-economic rights, this right is immediately realisable, and must take preference and be protected'.²³ Court rulings have affirmed that the content of the right to Basic Education includes provision of teaching and learning material, infrastructure, furniture, transport, and provision for special needs education.²⁴ Addressing deficits in the material contexts of teaching and learning and implementing court judgements is thus not only a necessity for achieving the goals of the NDP, but is a non-negotiable and urgent constitutional obligation. The process outlined in Recommendation 2.3.2 should improve tracking of equitable share issues affecting basic

²⁰ The right to basic education is understood to be the period of compulsory education - General Education and Training from Grade 0 to 9. When the President assents to the Basic Education Laws Amendment Bill passed by Parliament in 2023 into law, Grade R will become compulsory. The NPC Advisory on ECD (2023, Effective Cross-Departmental And Inter-Governmental Coordination In Early Childhood Development) recommends that while the NDP2030 advocated for making two years of quality preschool enrolment for 4- and 5- year- olds compulsory before Grade 1, for the foreseeable future the age of compulsory school attendance should remain as the year in which the child turns 6 (which means that 5-6 year-olds would attend Grade R) as is envisaged in the Basic Laws Amendment Act (BELA). The ECD advisory notes Treasury estimates that extending compulsory schooling to Grade R would require extra funding for teachers and infrastructure of up to R17.2 billion annually. (https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/assets/Documents/NPC_ECD%20Advisory_v1.pdf p.23-24).

²¹ Only in Limpopo has the education share of provincial spending been consistently above the 48% of the PES formula allocated to education, in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape this has been between 45 - 47 % of spending in the province. In Gauteng, Northern Cape, and Western Cape the share of spending has consistently been below 39%

²² FFC, 2023/4, p. 188.

²³ Mabesele, High Court Gauteng, CASE NO: 2017/01217, and the Juma Musjid case, BCLR 761 (CC).

²⁴ See FFC (2023/4) for an analysis of these judgements.

education²⁵ and the education evidence base informing each province's division of revenue. The NPC supports the FFC recommendation²⁶ that the Minister should, in consultation with stakeholders, use a socioeconomic rights framework as a guide for spending prioritisation in the basic education sector.

"The Constitution and the rights enshrined therein are of paramount importance and should guide the government's plan of action. While spending requirements will always outweigh available resources, it is important, particularly in a fiscally constrained environment, at the very least, to protect the essential elements associated with the right to basic education. Such prioritisation cannot be afforded in isolation and should encompass reforms and corrective action to eliminate inefficiency in terms of implementation, coordination and other challenges."²⁷



The efficiency improvements and corrective actions proposed in this advisory would contribute to protecting these essential elements.

2.5. Poor Support to Educators is a Major Constraint to Improving Learning Outcomes

In addition to the severe material resource constraints under which many teachers work, the system to support teachers is operating sub-optimally. Curriculum advisers operate in crippling low ratios of adviser: school support which are significantly below the recommendations of gazetted DBE policy. This absence of support contributes to massive internal inefficiencies, particularly because many planned activities assume a capacity that does not exist, and execution is thus fatally flawed from conception²⁸. The CPTD policy adopted in 2011 has not yet been effectively implemented and teachers do not have access to the CPTD opportunities imagined in the policy because none of the component parts are operating as intended²⁹. This absence of opportunity means that the average hours spent by teachers on professional development is only 54% of collective agreements requirements. These conditions will not improve without more effective planning and better use of data across departments and intra-department silos. The improvement of performance in literacy and numeracy will be hamstrung without decisive and urgent steps with clear timeframes to resolve the challenges identified.

²⁵ Including quantifying the shortfall of funding Early Childhood Education Centres from the Conditional Grant, the extent of this funding from the equitable share, and the impacts of this on the resourcing of basic education (which is already constrained). It must be noted that, "Extending compulsory schooling to Grade R will require extra funding for teachers and infrastructure of up to R17.2 billion annually" (NPC Advisory: Effective Cross-Departmental And Inter-Governmental Coordination In Early Childhood Development, 2024, p.23) which must come from the provincial equitable share). If footnote 20 is correct, then the conditional grant for ECE should be funded entirely from a conditional grant. Legal clarification of the term 'Basic Education' in Section 29(1)(a) of the Constitution may be necessary to clarify the constitutional rights of children to education prior to Grade as a funding obligation.

Finance and Fiscal Commission Submission for the Division Of Revenue, 2023, p. 176.

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ This includes other significant current DBE initiatives such as 'curriculum strengthening', the planned renewal of the introduction of Mother Tongue Based Bilingual Education, and the envisaged introduction of the General Education Certificate which all depend on support which meets the professional development needs identified by teachers for their success

²⁸ This includes the National, Provincial, and District Teacher Development Institutes/ Centres, SACE, and the ETDPSSETA.

²⁹ DMPE Presentation to DPME Workshop on the Development of the Draft 2024-29 Medium-Term Plan. 1st December 2023.

2.6. Planning Systems are Poor

The NPC's 2023 Review of the NDP indicated that the planning system is 'disjointed, poorly implemented and misaligned to the strategic goals of the NDP', and is inadequately 'aligned across spheres of government, poorly funded, sequenced, and co-ordinated'. DPME³⁰ and Treasury³¹ have identified weaknesses in education planning³². Presentations by AGSA

to provincial education departments in Engagement Sessions in January/February 2024³³ indicated that MTSF indicators were not included in the Annual Performance Plans of some departments and have summarised lessons learnt from Education Sector work between 2014 – 2019³⁴. Planning capacity to diagnose, design solutions, resource plans, and manage change at an operational level, is weak across the system.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Institute the necessary steps so that by 2030, the proportion of children who can read for meaning and who achieve minimum proficiency levels in numeracy by the age of 10 increases.

This would contribute to the realisation of the NDP Goal and the associated targets of 'improving outcomes literacy and numeracy', focusing on primary schools³⁵ and to the MTSF 2019-2024 outcome of all '10-year-old learners enrolled in publicly funded schools read for meaning'³⁶. To achieve this, the national and provincial departments should implement reliable, rapid, and regular learning outcomes measurements in literacy, establish achievable learning outcome targets provincially and nationally, promote cost-effective evidence-based interventions and ensure planning, and

management alignment and coordination. The DBE might wish to provide guidelines which detail a minimum LTSM package for both Literacy (in the home language) and for Numeracy, with provinces reporting on their resourcing plans to achieve this, and the DBE monitoring implementation across provinces.

3.2. Address systemic weaknesses in the implementation of legal and constitutional obligations in the resourcing of education.

Urgent steps must be taken firstly, to implement the Norms and Standards for School Funding so that all schools receive the minimum per capita allocation, and secondly, to ensure that the constitutional imperative of the 'immediate realisation' of basic education informs the division of revenue of the provincial equitable share in each province on an ongoing basis³⁶.

³⁰ Van der Berg S, Gustafsson M, Malindi K. 2020. Education and Skills for the Economy. Position Paper prepared for the NPC.

³¹ Van der Berg S, Gustafsson M, Malindi K. 2020. Education and Skills for the Economy. Position Paper prepared for the NPC.

³² These include: poor differentiation between short, medium, and long-term plans; rigidity of planning systems; inappropriate indicators; gaming resulting from a compliance and audit culture; a lack of integration across the three spheres of government; silo effects within education departments being replicated in departmental planning documents; lack of clarity regarding interlinkages and contributions of budgets and activities to overall outcomes; and that 'long-range trends are not sufficiently reported on and interpreted.'

³³ Auditor General, Education Sector Presentation: Reflections. Presentation made to each Province

³⁴ These include: "While the sector has progressive policies and action plans, there is an information/expectation gap between office-based and school-based officials; schools are not effectively implementing processes that enable the generation of data for evidence-based performance improvement; monitoring done is not enabling officials at schools to provide data for schools' performance improvement; Support provided to schools is hampered by capacity challenges and not informed by evidence, risk or problem based; The different units at district, provincial and national education offices works in silos; and SA-SAMS is not fully utilised for generating and reporting data that would enable school performance improvement".

³⁵ The Sustainable Development Goals require reporting against 'the proportion of children and young people in grades 2 or 3 achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex (SDG 4.1.1a).

3.3. Strengthen education planning capacity

2.3.1 Immediately improve the functioning of the current planning system in basic education

The NPC will convene a small seminar with a focused group of participants to analyse challenges in the functioning of the current planning system in basic education³⁸, and to consider how these can be addressed in the short- and medium- to long-term.³⁹ Lessons learned might include immediate steps to improve functioning within the existing planning framework, and a distillation of lessons that would be taken forward by the NPC's Building State Capacity Task Team for the medium- to long-term.

2.3.2 Institute an education planning capacity-building programme for national and provincial officials, with clear outcomes, to be implemented in the MTDP period.

Many provinces and the DBE have limited capacity for using financial and non-financial data to inform planning. The NPC endorses the recommendations of the Financial and Fiscal Commission⁴⁰ which could inform the substantive work and outputs of the

programme. The NPC also endorses the planning tasks identified by the DBE and recommends that these be part of the substantive work of the programme⁴¹. This process should aim to improve research and analysis capability and culture; strengthen high-level analyses of provincial performance⁴²; and establish the basis for better national-provincial engagement on meeting funding targets⁴³. There should be an explicit focus on planning to address the enabling conditions for improving literacy and maths at provincial and district level over the MTDP period⁴⁴. National strategies could be interpreted through the lens of provincial and district data into implementable plans with the first iteration being available by August 2025 for implementation in the 2026/7 financial year, and with subsequent iterations informing annual resource allocation and planning at all levels. This process might review indicators for planning and monitoring in key areas to inform the annual planning process. Alignment of indicators for planning would enable provincial and national monitoring of implementation of plans in an iterative process of informing strategy based on the evidence-based realities of differing existing conditions at district level. The exercise might also consider the appropriate capacity for planning units within the DBE and PEDs.

³⁸ This would include (across all different planning timeframes): evidence informed planning including rigorous resource alignment (material and human) with the operational level; timeous monitoring of implementation that meaningfully informs the operational level and ensures that where implementation targets are not met, supported is offered (reciprocal accountability) differentiated across contexts.

³⁹ This would include, for example: DPME, the Office of the AG, Planning Chief/ Directorates in the DBE and selected Provinces, public sector experts, and National Planning Commissioners from both the Education and Building State Capacity Task Teams. The DBE's EMIS (Education Management Information System) Section, and the New Leaders Foundation (which supports the implementation and use of SA-SAMS [the South African School Administration Management System] in Districts and Schools), could be requested to explore the greater use of SA-SAMS in the planning process. The NPC could assist in convening this meeting.

⁴⁰ Analyse the cost drivers of the delivery of education services and spending pressures across provinces to assess the adequacy of basic education spending to quantify the impact of current spending pressures and of budget cuts on the delivery of basic education services; Protect the redistributive nature of the basic education funding system in the face of potential budget constraints given that funding cuts to schools are likely to have asymmetric impacts across quintiles, with a greater negative impact on lower quintile schools and exacerbate inequities in the system. Quintile 1 to 3 schools must be protected; Availability and access to credible, reliable, consistently collected, and easily comparable financial and non-financial data is critical to better understand the impact of government spending and to assess school performance. Finance and Fiscal Commission. 2023/24 submission for the Division of Revenue. 2023, p. 157-8

⁴¹ Exploring measures of assessing school-level socio-economic context in order to improve the system of funding 'quintiles'; Establishing procedures for monitoring per learner spending by province and district and providing data down to school-level averages; Undertaking an evidence-based review of the norm of the 80:20 split (personnel: non-personnel expenditure) in order to monitor compliance with school funding norms and advance equity by improving pro-poor provisions of post provisioning norms and non-personnel funding norms and to inform any steps needed to improve these policy measures; Quantifying the costs of grade repetition and impacts on equity; Exploring the funding of school improvement initiatives within the financing framework.

⁴² A more detailed analysis and disaggregation of the current Learner-Educator ratio needs to be undertaken to understand how this manifests differently across and within provinces, and in different phases and subjects. The highest ratios seem to be in the Foundation Phase where quality improvements are critical to improving success and efficiency in the system. It may be that too-wide an offering of FET subjects in many secondary schools results in class-sizes that are unsustainable, and the consequences of this for an educationally sound distribution of the key resource in education – our teachers – needs critical examination.

⁴³ This could include Including quantifying the shortfall of funding Early Childhood Education Centres from the Conditional Grant, the extent of this funding from the equitable share, and the impacts of this on the resourcing of basic education (which is already constrained). the conditional grant for ECE should be funded entirely from a conditional grant. Legal clarification of the term 'Basic Education' in Section 29(1)(a) of the Constitution may be necessary to clarify the constitutional rights of children to education prior to Grade as a funding obligation.

⁴⁴ National and provincial capacity to analyse national assessments (ELNA, systemic evaluation, PIRLS and SEACMEQ) must be improved.

The programme should also identify areas where resources could be better utilised such as in the under-utilisation of the 1% payroll levy for skills training. This sum was R2.1bn for 2020/1 and would make a massive difference to the urgent need for resourcing the improvement of educator professional development on which improvement in the system depends and which would contribute to increasing teacher wellbeing and job satisfaction, and compliance with collective agreements regarding professional development and teacher compliance with SACE registration requirements⁴⁵. Government should be exemplary in fulfilling the intentions of the skills development framework.

This exercise could also contribute to the recommendations of DPME and AGSA that the information provided in explanations for planned performance, analysis of in resource considerations, and development of Technical Indicator Descriptions could be improved. Strengthening capacity at national and provincial levels to achieve this is critical.

A plan for this process should be developed in partnership with DPME, Treasury, the AGSA, and academic institutions. Funds could be allocated for this process in the MTEF or be donor funded. Documents developed by, and with, each province in this process should be publicly available. The capacity established should be reviewed at the end of this MTDP and periodically thereafter as on ongoing process. The NPC will convene an initial planning meeting to consider the viability of the recommendation, possible modes of implementation, and could assist in seeking the necessary funding.

2.3.3 Ensure that the education planning capacity-building programme contributes to building realistic, implementable strategies for every province, disaggregated to district level, which address systemic inequalities undermining performance in literacy and numeracy.

Directing immediately available resources to the improvement of literacy and numeracy is an imperative that cannot wait until 2.3.2 has been implemented. It is recommended that planning to improve performance in literacy and maths improvement commence at the level of schools and districts for the 2025 academic year by building baselines and benchmarks for the conditions necessary for this improvement with a focus on primary schools. This planning needs to be built from school, circuit, and district levels, and bi-annual reporting of performance against targets should include action taken to address weaknesses identified with timeous monitoring to inform planning for subsequent years, and with the resourcing of all proposed activities being clearly indicated. This should be an immediate priority for all district offices, and for interactions between circuit managers and schools⁴⁶. The AGSA has indicated⁴⁷ that planning should 'commence with school self-evaluation processes as provided for in policy and already mediated by circuit and district officials. This is consistent with the AG's advocacy for Circuit Managers to apply risk-based and evidence-based targeted support and to move away from compliance-based planning in the compilation of realistic improvement plans based on the material realities of the school and circuit. Planning time frames for district support will themselves need to be determined by realistic appraisals

⁴⁵ This would include reaching a clear understanding of: (1) in which provinces, the prescribed 70% of the 1% of payroll that should be reserved by provinces for skills training is reserved and is spent; (2) what percentage of the 30% of the 1% of payroll that goes to the ETDPSSETA is utilised by provinces for skills training.

⁴⁶ Given that the circuit manager: school support ration of 1: ±30 is the lowest direct ratio of developmental support to schools in the system and where direct monitoring and support is most achievable.

⁴⁷ Informal communication between the NPC and the office of the AG.

of district human and material capacity, the selection of priorities that are achievable, and how these will guide planning time under these conditions.

This recommendation must aim to develop accurate and reliable school data driven by a well-managed education information management system. Data that is developed at school, circuit and district level will determine the scoping and differentiation of prioritised actions possible at school level and district levels given the differing material conditions within districts. School-reality-informed plans should be the building blocks of district plans and must inform provincial plans which focus on a realistic and funded plans of action to address human and material resource deficits. Strengthened processes of School Self-Evaluation and School Improvement Planning would have the potential to generate the required data at the level of the school for planning to improve the system. If this can be achieved progressively over time, then the provincial and national education departments would have improved and consolidated data for planning, with district and provincial plans being informed by school realities.

Planning requires indicators which guide resource allocation and action, and which are regularly monitored and responded to⁴⁸. All indicators selected for use in planning to improve performance in literacy and numeracy should have a research-informed evidence base in improving learner performance. A discussion of proposed indicators between districts and school leadership prior to adoption would contribute to strengthening the professional content of circuit manager-school interaction,

noting the strong criticism expressed by key stakeholder groups of compliance-driven relationships rather than deliberative⁴⁹ professionalism, and the building of agency. Districts should adopt a differentiated and developmental approach to school support based on the evidence of the differing material and professional need for support across schools. This should also strengthen reciprocal accountability between school leadership and districts, and school leadership and teachers.

This proposal is a reversal from plans that are disseminated without reference to the resources needed for implementation. At national and provincial levels, data emanating from a school- and district- based planning process would be essential to inform the processes recommended in 2.2.1 and 2.3.2. Thus, recommendation 2.3.3, while assisting with the immediate urgency of planning to improve performance in literacy and numeracy in 2025 and future years, will also over time inform and be informed by the processes of 2.3.2.

The urgency of commencing with planning alignment for the 2025 school year cannot be overemphasized⁵⁰. Evidence-based district planning of minimum priority actions to improve literacy and numeracy in should inform, and be informed by, provincial budget planning for 2025/6. Data generated through this process could be used to establish district benchmarks for improvement. The priority actions and indicators should be extended in subsequent years as the results of the work outlined in 2.3.2. The appendix provides an exemplar of what might be used at district level to plan minimum priority actions to improve literacy and numeracy in Grades R-4

⁴⁸ Districts could, in interactions with provinces, prioritise within (or extend) this basket based on a realistic appraisal of capacity and resources, and within a multi-year developmental perspective of priorities in building the conditions for improving performance in literacy and numeracy.

⁴⁹ The practice of reciprocal accountability requires that the bureaucratic ethos of legalism (a rule-based orientation in which officials uphold rules, procedures and administrative hierarchies in order to seek compliance with policy rules in an authoritarian hierarchy) shifts to a deliberative culture which stimulates a problem-based orientation and generates an organizational dynamic centred on solving problems, and encouraging officials to interpret policies in a flexible manner, adapting policy rules to local needs (Mangla, 2022). This could be discussed with the Association of Former DG's position that we need to clearly define what we mean by 'capacity' and 'capability', and how we mobilise these concepts, and that this involves not only knowledge, skills and expertise, but a capable and professional public servant must also have agency, and the willingness to activate that agency (being able and willing to make important decisions, and bear the consequences of those decisions (Association of Former Directors-General: Dialogue Series on the Capacity of the State, PARI, 2023).

⁵⁰ The NECT's Integrated District Improvement Plan (IDIP) project is well positioned to support this recommendation. Guidelines for district plans to Improve performance in literacy and numeracy could be drafted at national levels by the NECT and the DBE in consultation with provinces before district planning process for 2025 commences in term 4 of the 2024. These could be aligned, where possible, with DBE standardised output indicators to minimise reporting overload.

within the district and which should inform, and be informed by, provincial budget planning for 2025/6. The priority actions and indicators should be extended in subsequent years as the results of the work outlined in priorities 4.1-4.3 are available. This table can be extended by districts to include additional grades and material conditions, depending on provincial capacity.

3.4. Address the Systemic Weaknesses related to Support of Curriculum Specialists to Schools

It is recommended that work is undertaken in 2024/5 to quantify and resolve the extreme challenges faced by curriculum specialists (subject advisers) including their line-function and institutional location and this be a key focus of the work in the DBE and provinces. Consideration might be given to appointing a dedicated project manager with a clear mandate and time frame reporting directly to the DG because of the complexities of line function overlaps and differing national and provincial roles in this process.

3.5. Incentivise Partnership Funding to Improve Literacy and Numeracy

The DBE's wish to identify funding from the fiscus for interventions aimed specifically at enhancing quality in targeted schools in line with the spirit of the NDP is supported. A specific grant at national level with a focused priority on interventions with clear, evidence-informed plans aiming to improve performance in literacy and numeracy in the early years could be used as a basis for national partnership funding with the philanthropy sector. Motivations for this would include: complementing the fiscal resource base from private resources for targeted interventions to improve efficiency, equity, and quality in improving literacy and numeracy in a resource constrained environment; that obligatory and rigorous monitoring and evaluation would contribute to learning about systemic improvement in literacy and numeracy and improve professional practice in participating districts/ provinces; and would result in demonstrable learning gains. It is recommended that the Minister leads a process for this to be given consideration by Treasury for the MTEF period (2025/9) and, if supported, a process established to actualise this.



4. CONCLUSION

The DBE should exercise its leadership through policy development, monitoring and reporting by strengthening provincial capacity to engage provincial budget processes. This will be informed by strengthening the implementation of the norms and standards as provided for in legislation, conducting national school monitoring surveys that timeously inform planning, providing thought leadership to provinces on evidence-informed best practice in key areas of education, strategic reflection based on 'monitoring activities' undertaken in order to offer advice to provinces to inform better practice, and working with provinces to craft national policies that are realistically implementable within provincial budgets. To achieve this will require that the public will need to be disabused of a hierarchical conception

of the relationship between the national and provincial departments. The relationships are concurrent and are not hierarchical except in respect of nationally required norms and standards, as determined by the constitution.

It would be useful for the DBE to consider which of the various impact statements, outcomes, planned activities, outputs and targets in the MTDP, strategic plans, and Annual Performance Plans have a system level perspective for which the DBE cannot be wholly responsible, and the achievement of which is dependent on actions at provincial level. This consideration might generate useful discussion about appropriate mechanisms to establish, monitor and achieve national education sector goals and strategies in a constitutional and fiscal context of concurrency and cooperative governance, and how DBE monitoring and support activities can be used to strengthen provincial performance.

APPENDIX: Example of a District Level Planning Framework to Address the Enabling Conditions to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Performance

AREA	TARGET (all data to be disaggregated by school quintile)
Indicators to monitor progress and to segment teacher support priorities at school, district, and provincial levels. ⁵¹	Proportion of children in Grades 1- 4 achieving DBE literacy benchmarks ⁵² (initial baseline to be established at district level based on school reports). ⁵³
	Oral reading fluency assessments conducted by subject-advisers with Grade 3 learners on SA-SAMS generated samples (baseline to be established at district level). ⁵⁴

⁵¹ Baselines to be established as soon as possible in 2025 for each school and district as a basis for monitoring progress in improving reading and numeracy.

⁵² The DBE has adopted reading benchmarks for Grade 1 to 3 for Home Languages, and for Grades 1 to 6 for: English First Additional Language, for the Nguni language group, and the Sesotho-Setswana language group, and for Afrikaans. The benchmarking of Xitsonga and Tshivenda has been undertaken in 2023, and data analysis and report writing is underway.

⁵³ The Funda Uphumelele National Reading Survey is currently surveying learners in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 to track what percentages of children are achieving the national benchmarks and the percentage of ten-year-old reading with meaning. This will assist in standard setting, the monitoring of progress, and in the identification of support needed within and across schools.

⁵⁴ The Gauteng Department of Education is pioneering this methodology. A presentation was made by the Director of Education Research and Knowledge Management in the Gauteng Province on the GDE's 'Journey of Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)' to a DBE convened meeting on 16 November 2023. The report indicated that a final report on the ORF research with Grade 3 learners in sample schools would be presented to relevant stakeholders by March 2024. The DBE may wish to support Provinces in exploring possible application of this methodology.

Learning and Teaching Support Material in literacy and numeracy in Grades R-4.	Workbooks available to every child in all appropriate languages in literacy and maths
	Literacy material available in the classroom to every child in appropriate languages
	Take home literacy material available to every child.
	Availability of structured learning materials for teachers who would like to use these as a resource to foster professional development.
Class size in reading and maths in Grades R-4.	Class-sizes in reading and maths exceeding the District determined 'cap' (the cap being a maximum class size within Post-Provisioning Norm realities which frame teacher: pupil ratios)
Teacher deployment	Indicator: # Teachers qualified to teacher the subject/ grade (Pre-service)
Teacher Support (Grades R-4).	Teachers attending training at least twice in 2025 (subsequently 2026 etc) on pedagogical support in numeracy content and pedagogy ⁵⁵ by grade ⁵⁶ , (disaggregated by SACE accredited/ non-SACE accredited).
	Teachers indicating that the training in maths pedagogy assisted in improving their practice.
	Teachers attending training twice in 2025 (subsequently 2026 etc) on pedagogical support in literacy.
	Teachers indicating that the training in literacy pedagogy assisted in improving their practice
	Teachers participating in SACE-reported Professional Learning Communities (PLC) focused on improving literacy/ maths
	Curriculum specialists (subject advisors at SES level): school ratios for FP and IP are as per District policy, and all posts are filled.
	Curriculum specialist leadership positions (DCES) for FP and IP are filled: as per District policy
Use of BEEI Education Assistants (EA)	EA support, and are supervised by, teachers ⁵⁷ in small groups of learners in pedagogical practices such as for example, letter-sound recognition ⁵⁸ , Group Guided Reading, or in using maths manipulables. ⁵⁹
NGOs working in partnership with the District supporting literacy and maths	Number of NGOs working in literacy in primary schools in the District
	Number of primary schools in the District supported by NGOs working in literacy
	Appraisal of effectiveness of support for District literacy programmes/ goals and steps taken to maximise mutual support
	Number of NGOs working in literacy in primary schools in the District
	Number of primary schools in the District supported by NGOs working in numeracy
	Appraisal of effectiveness of support for District numeracy programmes/ goals and steps taken to maximise mutual support
Identification and Promotion of Community Programmes: Community-based programmes that support literacy and numeracy outside of school hours	Number of Community Programmes: Community-based programmes that support literacy primary schools in the District outside of school hours
	Appraisal of effectiveness and steps taken to maximise mutual support
	Number of Community Programmes: Community-based programmes that support numeracy in primary schools in the District outside of school hours
	Appraisal of effectiveness and steps taken to maximise mutual support

⁵⁵ This would include appropriate assessment

⁵⁶ This, for example, could be aligned with Standardised Output indicator SOI206

⁵⁷ This is based on the principle that BEEI EA are deployed to support the work of teachers only under the direct supervision of teachers.

⁵⁸ Research has shown the positive impact of the use of EA in this way.

⁵⁹ This is particularly important in large classes where teachers cannot easily do individual or group work

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