



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Keynote Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, delivered during the Release of 2023 National Senior Certificate (NSC) Examination Results – Abridged Version

18 January 2024

Programme Director;

Honourable Deputy Minister;

Honourable Chairpersons and Honourable Members of the Portfolio and Select Committees, responsible for Basic Education;

Honourable MECs;

CEOs & Top Management from the Private Sector, who continue to partner with us, especially MTN – our main sponsor for this event;

Director-General of the DBE; HoDs of Provincial Education Departments, and Senior Management from the DBE and PEDs;

Director-General in the Presidency; National Commissioner from the Department of Correctional Services;

Chairpersons, Board Members, CEOs and Senior Management of Umalusi, SACE, ELRC, and the NECT;

Leadership or organised labour and national SGB associations;

Management and governance leadership of our schools;

Ladies and gentlemen and esteemed guest!

Thirty years of unequivocal progress in basic education along the six dimensions of social justice principles

Today, we are gathered here to announce the 2023 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results. We are announcing the 2023 NSC exam results mindful of the reality that, at the heart of any development within the Basic Education Sector, must obviously be ***what learners learn***.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are also announcing the 2023 NSC exam results fully cognisant of the context that the NDP enjoins us to observe; namely, “*By 2030, South Africans should have access to education and training of the highest quality, leading to significantly improved learners’ outcomes. The performance of South African learners in international standardised tests, should be comparable to the performance of learners from countries at a similar level of development, and with similar levels of access*”.

Without any shadow of doubt, we can confidently state that the past thirty (30) years, have been thirty years of unequivocal progress in the education of the people of South Africa. Over the past 30 years, Government has continuously and consistently implemented policies, programmes and interventions, which clearly demonstrated the Ruling Party’s unwavering commitment to expand and enhance Basic Education through the implementation of social justice principles of **access, equity, redress, inclusivity, quality, and efficiency**, which over the years, have yielded remarkable outcomes.

Government’s budget allocation to basic education, depicts the Ruling Party’s commitment to better the living standards and conditions of all South Africans through quality education. While our budget allocation falls within the lower range of the average for developed OECD countries, and the median range recommended by UNESCO, our nation’s per-learner spending reflects Government’s unwavering dedication to “**opening the doors of learning to all**”, as enshrined in the Ruling Party’s policy bible – the **Freedom Charter**; which was aptly articulated as **section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996**.

Access to educational institutions has expanded steadily. Not only do more young people attend and complete schooling than ever before, access to early learning opportunities, has expanded dramatically. Recent StatsSA surveys reveal that Early Childhood Development (ECD) opportunities have also surged. For instance, enrolments in early childhood education for **5-year-olds, have surged from 40% in 2002 to 90% in 2021. Over 98% of learners, who are 7 to 15 years of age**, have been attending educational institutions since 2009, signalling **a near universal attendance rates for compulsory education in South Africa**.

In terms of participation and completion rates, a mere 10% of Black South Africans born in the 1950s and 1960s, completed 12 years of education; whilst those who were born in the 1980s, saw this figure **rise to approximately 30%** completion rate. According to 2021 General Household Survey data, nearly **60%** of young Black South Africans now attain this milestone – this means **six in 10** South Africans, complete Grade 12.

The number of NSC candidates obtaining a **Bachelor passes, has nearly tripled since 2008**; with the strongest growth coming from “no fee” schools,

demonstrating the equitable nature of these improvements. In part, better NSC results were caused by improved efficiency in the system – lower Grade repetition rates, meant less over-age learners in Grades 10 and 11; and allowed more young people to reach Grade 12, and get an opportunity to write their NSC exams.

It has become increasingly evident for education departments the world over, not to rely on single large scale assessment metrics, but to make use of a collection of valid and reliable assessment instruments, to track learning outcomes across different Grades and Phases. When we released the PIRLS results earlier this year, we indicated that it was important to rely not only on international assessments, but to also reflect on equally valid results from national assessments that are more closely aligned to our curriculum.

Despite starting from a relatively low base, the quality of learning outcomes has shown consistent improvement. South Africa has been one of the fastest-improving countries in international standardised assessments, including the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)*, the *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)*, and the *Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SEACMEQ)*, and our own recently introduced assessment programme, the *Early Learning National Assessment (ELNA)*, and the *national Systemic Evaluation*.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily disrupted this upward trajectory, strategic measures were put in place to safeguard the opportunity for learners to take their National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations. Remarkably, the nation achieved more NSC passes, and Bachelor passes and passes with distinctions than ever before.

The improvements in equity and inclusivity have also been attributable to highly intentional Government's "pro-poor" education policies, such as the **free nutritious meal every school day to about 9.6 million children** (about 84% of all learners); **75% of public-school learners do not pay school fees**, they receive quality learning and teaching support materials (LTSMs), such as textbooks, stationery, and workbooks, free of charge. About **60% of learners in "no fee" schools** are provided with free transport daily. Policies to screen and identify children for special educational needs, have also helped ensure that **more than 90% of 7-15-year-old children with disabilities** now attend school.

In the past 30 years, significant strides have been made in **eradicating adult illiteracy, which affected an estimated 25-37.5% of adults** at the dawn of democracy in 1994. StatsSA's **2020-2021 General Household Survey (GHS)**, indicates an **adult literacy rate of 86.4%**, which was achieved after the successful implementation of the *Kha Ri Gude* Mass Literacy Campaign in

2009-2017, reaching **about four point one** (4.1) **million** adults all over the country.

While challenges remain, these advances are a testimony of Government's work, in investing in targeted initiatives, and a clear vision for an empowered and educated nation into the near future.

The next phase in the Basic Education landscape, is to continue *to ramp up ECD programmes; and focus on foundational skills of reading, writing, and counting; as well as diversifying the curriculum for the skills and competencies of a changing world to continue to address the factors leading to the high failure and drop-out rates in the FET Phase.*

ECD is with us now; therefore, the foundations for learning must be strengthened from ECD, right through the Foundation and Intermediate Phases. With the imminent approval of the BELA Bill by His Excellency, the President, Grade R will be compulsory; thus, giving us an opportunity to strengthen the foundations for learning.

Scope and size of the 2023 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations

Programme Director, at the outset, we wish to share with the South African public the ***scope and size of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations. Eight hundred and ninety-seven thousand, seven hundred and seventy-five*** (897 775) ***full-time and part-time candidates***, enrolled the 2023 NSC examinations.

One hundred and sixty two (162) question papers were set; ***ten point four*** (10.2) ***million*** question papers were printed; ***nine point eight*** (9.6) ***million*** scripts were produced, which were delivered countrywide to ***six thousand, eight hundred and ninety eight*** (6 898) secure examination centres, in which ***seventy two thousand, five hundred*** (72 500) invigilators were appointed; ***fifty two thousand, five hundred*** (52 500) markers were appointed in ***one hundred and eighty four*** (184) secure marking centres.

Some of the other features of the 2023 NSC exams included ***a high degree of stability in the system***. There was much improved *data collection, data analysis, and data feedback processes* within the DBE; and more importantly, the Class of 2023 showed the *greatest determination, fortitude and resolve to overcome all odds*, similarly to the Class of 2022 – a good sign of a *maturing and resilient Basic Education system on the rise, which is developing proficiency and capacity to deal with unexpected challenges*.

Umalusi declares on the credibility and integrity of the 2023 NSC exams

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, we are happy to inform the nation that on Monday, 15 January 2024, Umalusi, our Quality Council in General and Further Education and Training, declared that “*the examinations were administered largely in accordance with the Regulations Pertaining to the Conduct, Administration and Management of the NSC. The irregularities identified during the writing and marking of the examinations, were not systemic, and therefore, did not compromise the overall credibility and integrity of the November 2023 NSC examinations administered by the DBE. The Executive Committee of Council therefore, approved the release of the DBE November 2023 NSC examination results ...*”

It is indeed gratifying to note that Umalusi –

- had accepted the raw marks of **forty-nine** (49) subjects, equivalent to **74%** – compared to forty-seven (47) subjects, whose raw marks were accepted in 2022;
- had adjusted **six** (6) subjects upwards, equivalent to **9.1%** – compared to sixteen (16) subjects, whose raw marks were adjusted upwards in 2022; and
- had adjusted **eleven** (11) subjects downwards, equivalent to 16.7% – compared to three (3) subjects, whose raw marks were adjusted downwards in 2022.

In respect of identified irregularities, the DBE is required to block the results of all candidates implicated in irregularities, including the candidates who are implicated in the alleged acts of dishonesty, pending the outcome of the DBE investigations and verification by Umalusi.

We will address Umalusi’s directives for compliance, and submit to Umalusi our improvement plan on or before the set date on **15 March 2024**. We also appreciate the commendation from Umalusi on the manner in which the DBE conducted “*a successful examination on such a large scale*”.

The unique profile of the Matric Class of 2023

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, facts show that the Class of 2023 is the **tenth cohort** exposed to the CAPS-based National Senior Certificate examinations. The age profile of candidates enrolling for the NSC exams, has been improving over the years. Most poignantly, in 2023, **88.2% of the full-time candidates**, and **47.8% of the part-time candidates** were **16-20 years of age** when they enrolled for the 2023 NSC examinations.

When the Class of 2023, enrolled for Grade 1 in 2012, they were **one point two** (1.2) **million**. The DBE database shows that about **seven hundred and forty one thousand** (740 566), progressed from Grade 1 in 2012 to Grade 12 in 2023. This was the number of candidates that enrolled for the 2023 NSC exams in July 2023. However, in October 2023, **seven hundred and fifteen thousand, seven hundred and nineteen** (715 719) candidates enrolled for the 2023 NSC exams.

It is a known fact that the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was designed in such a way that the education landscape in our country, is symbiotically interlinked between basic education, TVET Colleges and Higher Education and Training institutions. Therefore, some candidates from the Class of 2023 might have moved to TVET Colleges after passing Grade 9, as the NQF allows for such a movement. We have agreed with the Department of Higher Education and Training to synchronise and align our databases better, so that we can accurately account for learners who choose to take the TVET College pathway after Grade 9, instead of completing their Grade 12.

The Class of 2023 was part of the ECD programme in 2011, and formally entered schooling in Grade 1 in 2012. The foundations for lifelong learning these young people were exposed to in Grade R, assisted them in focusing on key developmental foundational skills, such as **language, motor skills, perceptual skills, problem-solving, basic numeracy, self-regulation, executive functioning, and the love for learning**.

This cohort was exposed to COVID-19, while they were in Grades 9 and 10 in 2020 and 2021, respectively; thus, placing them at the eye of the COVID-19 storm!! Their ability to cope during those extremely difficult academic and psycho-emotional draining years, is the manifestation of their fortitude and burning desire to improve their future prospects.

Of the total number of **eight hundred and ninety-seven thousand, seven hundred and seventy-five** (897 775) total number of candidates, who registered for the 2023 NSC exams, as indicated earlier, **seven hundred and fifteen thousand, seven hundred and nineteen** (715 719) were full-time candidates; while **one hundred and eighty-two thousand, and fifty-six** (182 056) were part-time candidates.

As indicated in previous years, we did mention that our curriculum offerings are in the continuous process of refinement and alignment. Part of this work, we did by introducing more subjects in the vocational and technical fields. Some of the new subjects we introduced, included Maritime Economics, Sports and Exercise Science, Nautical Sciences, Equine Studies, and Maritime Sciences. We introduced a Practical Assessment Task (PAT) for Technical Mathematics; as well as changes in the structure and duration of

some of the question papers. Our technical report has all the information on participation and performance in these subjects.

Distinct features for learner support programmes

Clearly, the support programmes and interventions introduced by the DBE – both for learners and educators; the policy shifts introduced to mitigate the deleterious effects of COVID-19; the strengthening of the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum and assessment practices; the resilience of this cohort; the stability and the maturity of a system on a rise; the involvement of all communities of trust within the Basic Education Sector in our schools; the psycho-social support as well as care and support for teaching and learning provided to learners; parental involvement to ensure the safety of learners at school during extra tuition; the strengthening of school governance imperatives; as well as the support programmes introduced by the private sector and NGOs, including remote digital learning (RDL) offered curriculum – to mention a few, have surely borne “good fruit”!! We wish to thank the private sector, particularly the SABC for its support programmes.

Performance of the progressed learners

South Africans will recall that we introduced the Policy on Progression to unclog the system, as lots of learners were unnecessarily repeating the same Grade and/or Phase more than once. The Policy of Progression therefore, directed that no learner should repeat a Phase more than once. We strongly believed that learners, with focused and strategic support and intervention programmes, can succeed in their educational endeavours. The Policy on Progression, and the Second Chance Matric Programme, were introduced to reduce the number of young people, who were not in employment, nor in education and training – the so-called NEETs.

In the 2023 NSC exams, we saw **fifty-four thousand, nine hundred and forty-three** (54 943) progressed learners enrolled for the 2023 NSC exams. **Forty-nine thousand, eight hundred and sixty-six** (49 866) progressed learners, actually wrote the requisite **seven** (7) subjects during the 2023 NSC exams.

Twenty-two thousand, six hundred and eighty-eight (22 688) progressed learners passed the 2023 NSC exams, representing **45.5%** of the progressed learners, who wrote **all seven** (7) **subjects** during the 2023 NSC exams. **Three thousand, one hundred and forty-seven** (3 147) of the progressed learners, obtained admission to Bachelor studies; **eight thousand, eight hundred and twenty-eight** (8 828) obtained admission to Diploma studies; **ten thousand, six hundred and eighty** (10 680) obtained admission to Higher Certificate studies; as well as **eleven** (11) and **twenty-three** (23) obtained the NSC and Endorsed NSC passes, respectively.

A total of **two thousand, five hundred and seventeen** (2 517) distinctions were attained by progressed learners, including distinctions in critical subjects, such as Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics, Physical Science, Computer Applications Technology, and Agricultural Studies, amongst others.

Learners with Special Education Needs

We strongly believe that an **Inclusive Education system** makes an immense contribution towards an **inclusive economy**, to serve an **inclusive society**. Providing learners with special education needs **access** to **quality** basic education programmes, is an imperative, based on the Constitutional social justice principles of **equity, inclusivity** and **redress**, among others. We have for the past few years included the learners with special education needs in tracking learner performance in the NSC examinations.

Five thousand, four hundred and fifty-eight (5 458) learners with special education needs, enrolled for the 2023 NSC exams; and **five thousand, two hundred and eighty-eight** (5 288) of them, actually wrote to 2023 NSC exams. **Four thousand, five hundred and eighty-one** (4 581) learners with special education needs passed the exams. **Two thousand, four hundred and ninety-one** (2 491); **one thousand, three hundred and sixty** (1 360); **five hundred and ninety-one** (591) learners with special education needs achieved Bachelor, Diploma, and Higher Education passes, respectively. These learners managed to achieve a total of **two thousand, and seventy-two** (2 072) distinctions.

The benefits of the “pro-poor” policies of Government on the 2023 NSC exam results

Research tells us, that in 2005, **sixty percent** (60%) of the Bachelor passes, came from the best performing **twenty percent** (20%) of the schooling system. However, with the **introduction by Government of its “pro poor” policies**, which were supplemented with the strengthening and diversification of the curriculum, around 2015, the system managed to produce **51%** of Bachelor passes, from the schools that in the past, were poorly performing. This percentage has **further increased to more than 65%** during the 2023 NSC exams.

The 2023 NSC passes for quintiles 1-3 schools combined, stand at **three hundred and seventy-nine thousand, nine hundred and seventeen** (379 917). The Bachelor passes achieved by learners in quintile 1-3 schools, stand at **one hundred and seventy-four thousand, six hundred and seventy-six** (174 676).

Internal efficiency of the Basic Education system

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, in October 2013, one year after the Class of 2023 had entered formal schooling in Grade 1, the DBE published a report, entitled *The Internal Efficiency of the School System – “a report of selected aspects of access to education, Grade repetition, and learner performance”*. This report explains the concept of “**internal efficiency**”, which refers to ways in which **a school system uses resources more or less efficiently, to produce educational outcomes for children**. A system in which children stay in school until Grade 10 or 11, repeating multiple Grades along the way, and then drop-out of school, without achieving a qualification, reflects a highly inefficient use of State resources.

Policies to reduce excessive Grade repetition, such as the **Progressed Learner Policy**, and efforts **to improve learning quality, have succeeded in improving the internal efficiency of our system** in recent years. The average age of young people successfully completing a National Senior Certificate, has been gradually lowering over the years. Our schooling system used to be far more inefficient, with many children staying in school into their twenties, but then exiting without having completed Grade 12. These days, **children repeat less, are less likely to be in school into their twenties, but most important of all, they are much more likely to successfully complete a National Senior Certificate, or an equivalent qualification**.

We, therefore, can confidently conclude that, over the years, we are steadily improving **learner retention and the throughput ratio** in the system. It is, therefore, no wonder that the internal efficiency on the Class of 2023 has improved – a signal that the Basic Education system is incrementally addressing the concerns related to **drop-out** and **repetition rates**, amplified in the **NDP**.

Candidates who are recipients of social grants

Ladies and Gentlemen, we must indicate that we had young people, who are recipients of social grants, who wrote the 2023 NSC exams. In summary, **five hundred and forty-three thousand, seven hundred and eighty-six** (543 786) social grant recipients, wrote the 2023 NSC.

Four hundred and forty-one thousand, eight hundred and seventy-one (441 871) social grant recipients, passed the 2023 NSC exams – equivalent to **81.2% pass rate**. **Two hundred and two thousand, one hundred and fifty-six** (202 156) social grant recipients, obtained Bachelor passes – an **improvement of 2.1%** from 2022.

One hundred and fifty-two thousand, four hundred and thirty (152 430), obtained Diploma passes; **eighty-seven thousand, one hundred and thirty-**

five (87 135), obtained passes with Higher Certificate; and **eighty-nine** (89), obtained NSC passes. **One hundred and sixty thousand, three hundred and twenty-six** (160 326) passed with distinctions, including distinctions in critical subjects such as Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics, and Physical Science.

Candidates in correctional facilities, who sat for the 2023 NSC exams

One hundred and thirty-seven (137), of the **one hundred and forty-seven** (147) young people in correctional facilities, who wrote as full-time candidates, passed the 2023 NSC exams. **Ninety** (90) of these candidates, obtained Bachelor passes; **thirty-four** (34) obtained Diploma passes; and **thirteen** (13) obtained Higher Certificate passes.

Therefore, **93.2%** of the full-time candidates in correctional facilities, who wrote the 2023 NSC exams, passed. **Two hundred and seventy-eight** (278) distinctions were attained by young people in correctional facilities.

Surely, the Honourable Ministers Lindiwe Zulu and Ronald Lamola, will speak about the impact of **social grants** and **restorative justice** on the beneficiaries of these progressive programmes, some of whom, were part of the Class of 2023.

Aggregation according to gender

56.4% of the total number of candidates who wrote the 2023 NSC exams, were girls, while **43.6%** were boys. More interestingly, **82.9%** of both the girls and boys passed the exams. **42%** of the girls, and **39.6%** of the boys, who wrote the 2023 NSC exams, attained Bachelor passes; while **26.1%** of the girls, and **28.6%** of the boys, attained Diploma passes. **14.8%** of the girls and **14.6%** of the boys, attained Higher Certificate passes. **66.4%** of the distinctions were attained by female candidates.

District level performance

The NDP recognises *districts as a crucial interface of the Basic Education Sector in identifying best practice, sharing information, and providing support to schools*. The continued growth in the performance of districts, is closely monitored and evaluated by both the provincial and national Basic Education departments. Reports on the monitoring and evaluation oversight, and the analyses of the performances of schools, which are normally presented at the quarterly meetings I convene with the District Directors, continue to assist and enable districts to reprioritise their support and intervention programmes.

In the 2023 NSC examinations –

- **None** of the 75 districts attained pass rates **lower than 60%**;
- **Only one** (1) district in the country performed below **70%**;
- **Nineteen** (19) districts performed between **70% and 79%**; and
- **Fifty-five** (55) districts performed at **80% and above**.

The **top ten** (10) district level performances in the country in the descending order, are as follows –

- **First**, is Johannesburg West in the Gauteng, with **92.5%**.
- **Second**, is Motheo in the Free State, with **91.2%**.
- **Third**, is Tshwane South in Gauteng, with **90.4%**.
- **Fourth**, is Umkhanyakude in Kwazulu-Natal, with **90.0**.
- **Fifth**, is Fezile Dabi in Free State, with **89.6%**.
- **Sixth**, is Ugu in the Kwazulu-Natal, with **89.5%**.
- **Seventh**, is Thabo Mafutsanyana in the Free State, with **89.4%**.
- **Eighth**, is Ilembe in KwaZulu-Natal, with **88.6%**.
- **Nineth**, is Gauteng North in Gauteng, with **88.4%**.
- **Tenth**, is Zululand in Kwazulu-Natal, with **87.2%**.

It is important to observe that among the 75 education districts in our country, the **top ten** districts are in **three** (3) provinces – Free State, Gauteng and KZN.

The **top district level performances** in the respective provinces, are as follows –

- In the Eastern Cape, the leading district is Alfred Nzo East at **85.1%**; and is ranked **24th** nationally. Siyabulela mam' uKuzwayo.
- In the Free State, the leading district is Motheo at **91.2%**; and is ranked **2nd** nationally. Ntate Moloi, kea leboga.
- In Gauteng, Johannesburg West is the leading district at **92.5%**; and is also ranked **1st** nationally. Mr Ramokhoase, kea leboga.
- Umkhanyakude, is the leading district in KwaZulu-Natal, with **90.0%**; and is ranked **4th** nationally. Bab' uMotha, siyabonga.

- Mopani West is the leading district in Limpopo at **83.8%**; and is ranked **33rd** nationally. Mme Modika, re ya leboha.
- Ehlanzeni is the leading district in Mpumalanga, with **81.8%**; and is ranked **49th** nationally. Dr Ndlovu, siyabonga.
- Bojanala Platinum, is the leading district in the North West, with **84.2%**; and is ranked **28th** nationally. Mme Paledi, thank you;
- Namakwa, is the leading district in the Northern Cape, with **81.6%**; and is ranked **51st** nationally. Mr Farao, many thanks.
- In the Western Cape, the Metro North, is the leading district, with **85.9%**; and is ranked **20th** nationally. Ms Horn, congratulations.

Provincial level performance

Ladies and gentlemen, the achievements by province, are as follows –

- The Free State is the leading province at **89.0%**, an increase of **0.5%** from 2022. We must observe the passing of the former MEC of Education in the Free State, Dr Tate Makgoe, who passed on last year. May his soul rest in eternal peace.
- KwaZulu-Natal, the third best improved province, achieved **86.4%**, an increase of **3.4%** from 2022.
- Gauteng achieved at **85.4%**, an increase of **1.0%** from 2022.
- North West achieved at **81.6%**, an increase of **1.8%** from 2022.
- Western Cape achieved **81.5%**, an increase of **0.1%** from 2022.
- The second best improved province, is the Eastern Cape, with an achievement of **81.4%**, an improvement of **4.1%** from 2022.
- The best improved province is Limpopo, with an achievement of **79.5%**, a **7.4%** improvement from 2022.
- Mpumalanga achieved at **77.0%**, a **0.2%** increase from 2022.
- Northern Cape achieved at **75.8%**, a **1.6%** increase from 2022.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, we should state that **none** of the provinces performed below the **75% pass rate**; and **none** have a decline when their 2023 NSC exam results are compared with those of the previous year. More heartening and encouraging, is the very small percentage gap pass rates attained by provinces, For instance there is a **1% pass rate gap** between KZN

and Gauteng; while the North West, Western Cape and the Eastern Cape differ with **0.1%**. This, demonstrates the overall growth in the system from all educational angles; so that we do not misrepresent our provinces, districts and schools, as centres of dysfunctionality.

Performance based on the provincial inclusive basket

The Council of Education Ministers (CEM) had approved a provincial inclusive basket **to provide monitoring and evaluation oversight to all Provincial Education Departments' performances**. The provincial inclusive basket includes performance in the NSC exams, according to **fee paying status of the schools; performance in critical subjects – including Accounting, Mathematics, Physical Science, and Technical Mathematics; participation in Mathematics, Bachelor passes attained, passes with distinctions achieved; and throughput ratios** achieved.

For instance –

- Mpumalanga, the Western Cape, and the Eastern Cape have achieved the highest throughput ratios;
- Free State, KZN and Gauteng have achieved higher % pass rates, including higher % achievements in terms of fee paying (and North West), as well as higher performance in Technical Math, and in Bachelor passes according to fee status (and Western Cape);
- Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the North West have higher Maths participation according to fee status;
- Limpopo and Free State have higher achievement in Accounting according to fee status;
- Western Cape, Free State, Gauteng and North West have higher performance in Maths and Physical Sciences according to fee status; and
- KZN and the Western Cape have higher passes with distinctions.

Overall national performance

This brings us to the overall results of the 2023 NSC examinations. Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is important to remind the nation that for the **past ten years**, the NSC pass rate has consistently been going up from **60%** in 2009 to above **80%** pass rates in recent years. The Class of 2023 must be commended for maintaining this trend despite the astronomical challenges they faced.

The 2023 NSC overall pass rate has reached the 82.9% mark (compared with 80.1% in 2022, and 76.4% in 2021) – an **improvement of 2.8%**, and **6.5%** from the pass rates achieved by the Classes of 2022 and 2021, respectively. This represents **five hundred and seventy-two thousand, nine hundred and eighty-three** (572 983) candidates, who passed the 2023 NSC exams.

It should be noted that, while **the pass rate of the 2023 NSC exams in number is the second highest** in the history of the NSC exams; when expressed as a percentage, **the pass rate of the 2023 NSC exams, is the highest** in the history of the NSC so far. Similarly, **Bachelor passes as well as passes with distinction produced by the Class of 2023, stand out as the highest** in the history of NSC exams.

Further analysis of the 2023 NSC exam results, shows that –

- The number of candidates qualifying for admission to Bachelor studies at universities, is **two hundred and eighty-two thousand, eight hundred and ninety-four** (282 894), represents **40.9%** of the total number of candidates, who wrote the 2023 NSC exams. The **Bachelor passes in number and percentage, are the highest attained in the entire history of the NSC exams.** KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng contributed the most Bachelor passes.
- The number of candidates, who passed with a Diploma, is **one hundred and eighty-seven thousand, nine hundred and ten** (187 876), which represents **27.2%** of the total number of candidates, who wrote the 2023 NSC exams.
- The number of candidates, who passed with Higher Certificates is **one hundred and one thousand, nine hundred and sixteen** (101 973), which represents **14.8%** of the total number of candidates, who wrote the 2023 NSC exams.
- The number of candidates, who passed with a National Senior Certificate (NSC) is **ninety-six** (96), represents **one in a hundred** (0.01%) from 2022 of total number of candidates, who wrote the 2021 NSC exams.

It is important to note that a total of **four hundred and seventy thousand, seven hundred and seventy** (470 770) candidates, equivalent to **82.1% pass rate**, who achieved Bachelor and Diploma passes, are now eligible for studies at higher education institutions.

In 2023, a total of **two hundred and fifty-three thousand, eight hundred and seven** (253 807) distinctions were achieved. The main contributors towards passes with distinctions, were KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, and Limpopo.

It is remarkable to note that the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo – the **three most rural provinces in the country**, produced **50.9%** of the total Bachelor passes. In addition, these three most rural provinces, produced **59.0%** of the total passes with distinction. In addition, these three rural provinces produced **39.5%** of the total Diploma passes nationally. Therefore, this kind of consistent and improved performance by our three most rural provinces, **dispels the myth that quality education, is a character of urban provinces**, thanks to the “pro-poor” policies of Government!!

Conclusion

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen in conclusion, there is no doubt that the Basic Education system has begun to reach the desired stability; which is healthy for a large and important system as ours. The unquestionable resilience our school community has shown, against such a devastating pandemic; and other challenges, such as sporadic service delivery protests, the floods in some provinces, violence, and the general moral decadence, such as alcohol and substance abuse, cannot go by unnoticed.

Clearly, the system cannot survive without the direct involvement of all communities of trust, not only those who are part of the Sector, but everyone. The Class of 2023 has clearly demonstrated that with all requisite support and intervention programmes, we can make it. We must prioritise our interventions on teaching and learning losses. Support and intervention programmes must be implemented across the system.

We wish to recognise the confidence our communities have in our public education system. The fact that we had about 96% of the candidates who enrolled for the 2023 NSC exams, did so in public schools, shows the confidence communities have in our systems. We cannot let our communities down; we must repay them with good and quality teaching and learning outcomes.

The high quality passes we have achieved this year, especially the *record number of Bachelor and Diploma passes, as well as passes with distinction; the fact that none of our provinces are performing at pass rates lower than seventy percent (75%); the fact that none of our districts are performing below sixty percent (60%); the fact that our “no fee” schools have contributed more than sixty five percent (65%) of our Bachelor passes – therefore, there is no room for error in the delivery of Government’s “pro-poor” policies, programmes and interventions; the fact that the majority of our schools are performing at and above eighty percent (80%),* are an indisputable testimony that ours, is indeed a system on the rise.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, as a Sector, we must continue to expend our energies on our Sector priorities. We must continue with the

consolidation of programmes for ECD; we must ramp-up the performance in all the four Phases of our schooling system; we must continue to improve the reading proficiency and numeracy of our learners; we must work harder but smarter with all our partners to consolidate the gains we have made in the Skills Revolution through the Three-Stream Curriculum Model and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, amongst others; we must continue to strengthen the assessment regime in all four Phases of the system; we must continue to work hard with our partners to maintain and sustain the labour peace we have enjoyed for such a period of time.

In celebrating the great achievements of the Class of 2023, we must thank the principals, teachers, support staff, and parents for the work they continue to do. Schools are at the coalface of Basic Education delivery. We must ensure that programmes such as school safety, as well as care and support for teaching and learning (CSTL) are prominent in what we do in all our schools. We must all agree that whatever we do at the school level, is what matters the most. The future of our learners, and the prosperity of our nation, are in our hands. We applaud you for the great work you continue to do on a daily basis.

I must thank His Excellency, President Cyril Ramaphosa and Cabinet; the Portfolio and Select Committees responsible for Basic Education; the Honourable Deputy Minister – Dr Reginah Mhaule; the Honourable MECs responsible for Basic Education and their respective Heads of Departments for their stewardship, their leadership and their continued advice and support. I must thank the Director-General and his team of selfless officials for the hard work they continue to do.

Lastly, but certainly not the least, I wish to thank our strategic partners – teacher unions; school governing body associations; the disability sector; our business partners working directly with us, or through the NECT led by Dr Sizwe Nxasana as its Chairperson; our statutory bodies – Umalusi and SACE; the ELRC; and researchers – whose work we cannot do without; our sister departments; South Africans, who together with us, have made the stability and the improvement of our Sector their responsibility. We wish to thank all our sponsors, in doing so, single out MTN, our main sponsor for this event. Let me thank our partners from the private sector, who continue to support us in our Sector activities and events. I wish I could mention all of them, but time would not allow me.

Once again, let me conclude by thanking the Class of 2023 in all our ordinary public schools, and in all our independent schools. Your future is in the palm of your hands; make the correct life choices. Those candidates, who sat for the 2023 NSC exams, and earlier exams, who did not do well, do not despair. There are lots of life chances available. For instance, those who wish to improve their results, should enroll for the Second Chance Matric Programme.

Registration into the Programme is already open; and will close on **20 February 2023**.

You will definitely receive support from the DBE and our partners; you won't be left to your vices. I wish you all the best in your youthful lives!! Choose your careers wisely and pursue them. This country wants to see you succeed.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to end by saying, the Governing Party was correct in declaring education as a societal matter. All hands must be on deck!!!

I thank you!!