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13 September 2014

## MEMORANDUM

### We demand Decent and Dignified Sanitation in Our Schools

For the attention of:  
MEC for Education in Gauteng, Mr. Panyaza Lesufi

#### PROPER SANITATION FOR ALL

1. We are the students of Tembisa, Kwa Thema, Daveyton and Tsakane. We are members of Equal Education, a national movement of students, parents, teachers and community members, campaigning for quality and equality in the South African education system.
2. We are here today to demand proper sanitation for all schools in Gauteng. We have too few toilets, and many of them are blocked or broken. The toilets in our schools smell very bad, and there is never enough toilet paper or soap. Many of the taps are not working, and sometimes there is no water.
3. Our education, our health, our safety and our dignity all suffer because of poor sanitation. We have to wait in long lines to use the toilet, and miss out on classes because of it. We get sick because the toilets are dirty, and there is no soap to wash our hands afterwards. Many of the girls among us stay at home when we have our period because we don't want to use the dirty toilets at school.
4. All of this makes us feel like we don't matter. It makes us feel that our dignity is not respected, and that our potential is not recognised.
5. We know that students in Model C and private schools, whose parents can afford to send them there, have proper sanitation. We know that they have enough toilets, and that their toilets are clean. We know that they always have running water, soap and toilet paper. We know that they have libraries, laboratories, computer centres, sports fields and school halls, which we do not have. This is wrong and unfair. We are all equal.

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6. Students in the rural areas of Limpopo, Kwa Zulu Natal and the Eastern Cape are in an even worse situation than we are in. They have to use pit latrine toilets, in schools where there is often no water or electricity.
7. We remember Michael Komape, the six year old boy from Chebeng village in Limpopo, who died in January of this year, when he fell into a pit latrine at his school and died.
8. We don't only want nice toilets for us. We want all children in Gauteng, and the rest of South Africa, to have proper toilets and a quality education. This is what we are fighting for as Equal Education, and our parents are with us in this struggle.

### **A YEAR OF CAMPAIGNING**

1. We started our sanitation campaign over a year ago. In August and September 2013, we did a two-week sanitation audit of 11 high schools in Tembisa. We found that at over half of these schools, more than 100 boys or girls often had to share a single working toilet. This is even worse than at the overcrowded Johannesburg Medium A Prison, where 65 men share a single toilet, according to the Wits Justice Project.
2. At that time the MEC for Education in Gauteng was MEC Barbara Creecy. We shared our information with MEC Creecy and her officials, and asked them to urgently fix the situation. We also asked the MEC for a long-term plan to fix sanitation in the whole of Gauteng. However, for a long time we got no response.
3. Then on World Toilet Day, 19 November 2013, we went public, and exposed the situation in Tembisa in the media. This finally got things moving and in December, we met with the MEC.
4. At this meeting MEC Creecy said that she had a plan to address the sanitation crisis in Tembisa. However, she refused to share this plan with us. Instead, she came to Tembisa in January 2014 to announce that she would be delivering two prefabricated toilet blocks each to five schools in the area, and that she would also be sending contractors to do repairs.
5. The contractors did come to do repairs in some of the schools. However, by the time that MEC Creecy left office in May 2014, the 10 new pre-fabricated toilet blocks delivered in January, which contain 50 toilets, were all still closed.
6. In May when Mr. Panyaza Lesufi became the Education MEC for Gauteng we wrote to congratulate him and to request a meeting. We wanted to find out what the MEC's plans were for Gauteng, and inform him about the sanitation crisis in Tembisa.
7. This meeting took place on 8 July 2014. In response to the issue of the prefabricated toilet blocks, which were still closed, MEC Lesufi said that he would follow up on this and let us know what was happening by 14 July. MEC Lesufi also told us that he would unblock all toilets in Gauteng schools by 31 August.

8. On 15 July MEC Lesufi came to Rabasotho Hall in Tembisa and presented his plan for education in Gauteng. More than 300 of us attended this meeting, where the MEC again said that he would unblock all toilets in Gauteng by 31 August.
9. However, the prefabricated toilets remained closed. We wrote letters, phoned, emailed and messaged the Office of the MEC, but our cries were ignored.
10. At the same time, we realised that it wasn't only Tembisa which had a sanitation problem. In August, our members in Kwa-Thema and Daveyton did a two week audit of high schools in the area. They found that on any given day, up to 80 toilets are blocked or closed in these areas.

### **OUR DECISION TO MARCH**

11. On 1 September 2014 we wrote to MEC Lesufi to say that because he was ignoring us, we were going to be marching to his office. We mobilised students, parents and community members, and explained ourselves to our teachers and principals. Many of them support the work that we are doing, even though they have in the past been told by the Department not to work with us.
12. Our decision to march has already brought improvements. This past week in Tembisa contractors have been at our schools every day. They have been cleaning and unblocking the toilets, opening the pre-fabricated toilets, fixing the pipes, painting the walls, providing new taps and windows. In Kwa Thema and Daveyton, there have also been contractors sent to a few of the schools.
13. MEC Lesufi held a special press conference in Tembisa this past Thursday where he said that he had allocated R150 million to improve sanitation at 580 schools in Gauteng, and that over the past few months repairs had already been completed at 400 of these schools.
14. We give credit to the MEC for taking action to improve sanitation in our schools, and for engaging positively and constructively with Equal Education. At the same time, we want the MEC to know that there are still many of our toilets that are closed or blocked, and that have broken taps and basins.

## **WE DEMAND**

We are not the first generation of students to go to school in the shadow of a sanitation crisis. However, we are determined to be the last. We therefore demand that by 27 September 2014:

1. The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) must unblock and open all toilets in Tembisa, including the prefabricated toilets, immediately to address the acute sanitation crisis there
2. The GDE must release a costed plan for permanently addressing the sanitation crisis in Gauteng schools. The plan should:
  - Define a standard regarding the supply of toilets, water supply and sanitation materials (e.g. sanitary bins, soap and toilet paper); maintenance; and the ongoing monitoring of the sanitation system to which both schools and the GDE can be held accountable
  - Provide a timeline for ensuring all schools reach this standard, prioritising those schools that are of greatest need and reflecting the urgency of the situation
  - Include accountability measures to ensure an open and transparent process, such as community consultation committees and publicly available regular progress reports
3. The GDE must release a full update on its progress in unblocking all toilets in Gauteng, which was initially meant to happen by 31 August 2014. The GDE must also release the names of the 580 schools whose toilets are meant to be fixed, including information on what improvements each individual school has already received or is scheduled to receive, and by which date.
4. The GDE must document its progress towards fulfilling MEC Lesufi's promise of employing eight parents in every ward to clean school toilets. We noted your promise at Rabasotho Hall in Tembisa on July 15 to employ eight parents in every ward to clean toilets. This must happen not only because it will help schools but also because it will help address unemployment in our communities.
5. The GDE must release all data relating to its efforts to address the sanitation crisis in Tembisa schools over the past 24 months. We demand to know how sanitation services have been provided to schools and who has been responsible for providing them. This is important so that we can hold private sector accountable for delivery.

**Signed:**



Date: 13 September 2014

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Date:

Gauteng MEC for Education Panayza Lesufi