

**18 January 2023**

**Equal Education pre-matric results statement:**

**Beyond merit: Matric 2022 results should be catalyst to seriously reflect on educational quality**

*“The year was quite tough as some subjects needed to be done practically but due to the situation of my school we could not afford to. As we approached exams things got harder, due to the high crime rate and lack of security in our school the electricity was cut off.” — Gcina Mtya, Grade 12 Eastern Cape Equaliser*

Tomorrow, 19 January, Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga will announce the matric results for the Class of 2022—the [largest cohort](#) to date. Equal Education (EE) commends the hard work, dedication and time invested by learners, teachers, and parents over the last three years, which have been fraught with learning challenges. The Class of 2022 was not only forced to prepare for and take their final examinations during South Africa's worst year of rolling electricity blackouts, but they also bore the brunt of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector.

### **A series of unfortunate events**

The Class of 2022 grappled with unique challenges, such as disruptions to learning caused by loadshedding and damage to school infrastructure caused by heavy rainfall, ahead of their final examinations. These challenges had serious consequences for learning and potentially compromised their wellbeing, exam readiness, and final performance.

When Eskom again implemented loadshedding in 2022, frequent blackouts disrupted teaching and learning, likely deepening existing learning losses brought on by COVID-19. Loadshedding also widened inequality in the sector as learners attending schools in rural and working-class communities were disproportionately affected. For instance, over 100 examination centres and nearly 4 000 learners were affected by loadshedding during the exam period, to the extent that learners writing their final Computer Applications Technology (CAT) and Information Technology examinations were left unable to complete them. The [official examination timetable had to be extended](#) to accommodate learners who had to rewrite these subjects. Although the opportunity to rewrite was necessary, the psychosocial impact of a rewrite cannot be overstated, especially given the stressful conditions in which these learners prepared and wrote.

For learners in [KwaZulu-Natal](#), extreme heavy rainfall in April 2022 saw a number of schools become inaccessible to thousands of learners because of damage to school infrastructure, as well as road networks and bridges, water treatment facilities, and power plant stations. While the Department of Basic Education (DBE) provided emergency mobile classrooms and accommodated learners in community halls, learner attendance remained irregular, once again negatively affecting teaching and learning time and preparation ahead of the examinations.

Grade 12 is an incredibly stressful time for learners, and their performance in the matric examinations is important to their future. The disruptions that took place last year as learners prepared for their final examinations caused deep psychological stress that will surely have impacted learners' performance. Anathi Sifaku, a Grade 12 Equaliser (learner member of EE) from the Western Cape echoes the significant psychological difficulties experienced by this group of learners, *"...every day with every single exam it felt like I was under-prepared and most of the time I kept forgetting what I had studied. Most of the time I felt like giving up because the studying and the pressure became too much to handle."*

Some reported [exam irregularities](#) involving alleged cases of cheating during the writing period—although not widespread enough to compromise the credibility or integrity of the results—could be strong indications of the mounting pressure learners were under throughout their high school years, particularly their matric year.

### **Arrested development**

Other than the harsh consequences brought about by the state's failure to provide adequate school infrastructure, the Class of 2022 had to contend with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. While [rotational timetabling](#)—where learners only attend school on some days or weeks—came to an end in February 2022, the Class of 2022 experienced more learning losses because of the pandemic than their 2021 or 2020 peers. These learners, who were in Grade 10 when the pandemic struck, had two critical years of their schooling severely interrupted.

Long periods away from the classroom and rotational school attendance for two consecutive years—both their Grade 10 and 11 years—led to this group [losing at least three quarters](#) of a school year between 2020 and 2021 alone. These learners have undoubtedly had to work extremely hard to overcome severe learning gaps and have had to catch up on large parts of the curriculum to make it to this point.

In an effort to recover the learning losses and redress the extensive disadvantage suffered by this class, the DBE and provincial education departments (PEDs) implemented a trimmed curriculum, an amended assessment programme, and provided various catch-up and support programmes for these learners in both their Grade 10 (2020) and Grade 11 (2021) years—including lessons on TV and radio, digital revision material on mobile apps, online classes, and extra study guides and textbooks. Catch-up interventions, through the Woza Matrics support programme, intensified in their final year and the months leading up to the 2022 examination. We commend the DBE for these important interventions.

Matric learners were also given further support by PEDs through autumn and winter [vacation classes](#) that provided additional revision, catch-up and curriculum coverage support for a wide group of learners, especially those at risk of failing and repeating. In spite of the extra academic support provided to help learners prepare for exams, the impact of these interventions may not have been the same for all learners. Angel Mhlongo, a Grade 12 Equaliser from Gauteng, recounts, *"In terms of my performance, [I] am a little bit worried about it, especially Mathematics Paper 2. It was challenging"*.

## **Tainted glasses and smoke screens**

EE reiterates that the traditional pass rate is a poor indicator of the education sector's overall health. The national pass rate does not accurately reflect the true state of the education system in South Africa because it masks conditions—such as learners dropping out of the school system before their matric year—that affect learners' outcomes during their schooling journey.

In addition to the overall pass rate, the number of Bachelor passes from learners attending quintile 1-3 schools (no-fee paying schools), overall provincial performance trends, particularly in rural provinces, and most importantly the throughput rate<sup>1</sup> should be scrutinised, as these indicators give a better picture of the true pass rate and the quality of our education system.

While the Class of 2022 had to face additional challenges outside the scope of education departments, longstanding flaws within the system, including poor foundational phase learning, still have an impact on their schooling. Whatever the outcome of the 2022 results, this should push the sector to seriously reflect on educational quality and serve as a call to action for the DBE to carry out a comprehensive intervention to stop further decline.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that the challenges learners contend with require more than academic interventions. Therefore, it is crucial that learners are adequately prepared and supported throughout their schooling journey in safe and dignified learning environments to ensure that they realise their full potential, successfully complete the schooling process, and are in a position to pursue further education or employment. EE continues to call for:

- the DBE and PEDs to fulfil their legal obligations in terms of the Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure and urgently #FixOurSchools;
- the DBE to invest in strengthening foundation phase learning, as a schooling system built on a broken foundation cannot survive;
- the DBE and PEDs to provide proactive retention support to all learners throughout their schooling so that they are able to fully participate in their learning experience in conducive environments, especially for vulnerable learners attending under-resourced schools; and
- government to prioritise basic education, with this priority being reflected in national and provincial Treasuries' increased funding to build and upgrade more school infrastructure.

[END]

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<sup>1</sup> Percentage of pupils who were in Grade 2 together, and who 10 years later, went on to complete matric together.

