



**The secret behind Free State and
Gauteng's 8 years of excellence**



RESILIENT CLASS OF 2020 RISES TO THE TOP AGAINST ALL ODDS



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The Class of 2020 defies Covid19 odds to shine

THEBE MABANGA

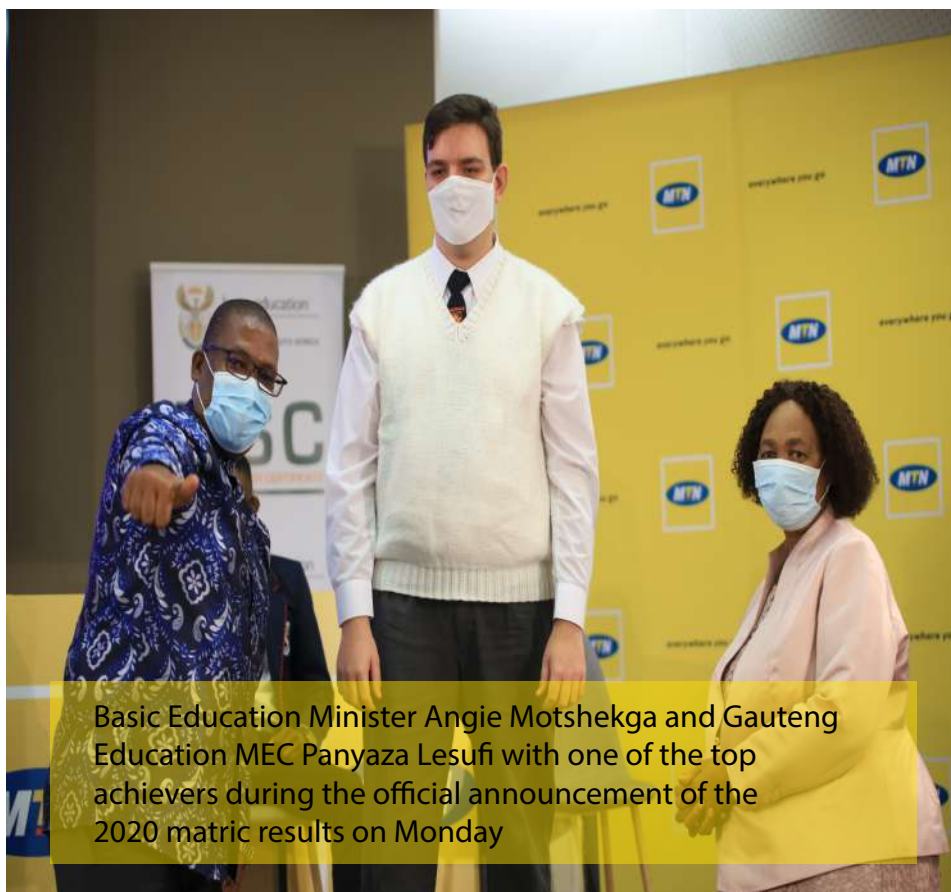
The unveiling of the National Senior Certificate results this week, which showed that the class of 2020 attained 76,2% pass rate down from last year's record 81,3%, should be viewed as a significant development milestone for South Africa. To administer an examination for 1 million candidates, including the May/June candidates and progressed learners with the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic, is nothing short of remarkable. The Independent Examination Board (IEB), which caters mostly for private schools had to cater for 12 000 candidates throughout Southern Africa with immense dedicated resources.

Announcing the results on Monday, Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga started off by restating South Africa's goal in education as stated in the National Development Plan: "by 2030, South Africans should have access to education and training of the highest quality, leading to significantly improved learner outcomes," the minister said "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". Since the introduction of the National Senior Certificate in

2008, this year's -pass rate is nowhere near the lowest as feared. The nadir was reached in 2009, the second year of the NSC, when the rate was 60,6%. From there, the pass rate rose-only to dip slightly in 2015 before going on an upward climb to last year's record before being pegged back by COVID-19.

Motshekga offered evidence of South Africa's improved performance in international benchmarks such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

"The latest release of the TIMSS 2019, explained that in the context of many forms of inequalities, the education system continues to improve on its achievements, and continues to bridge gaps on disciplinary knowledge and educational outcomes." The minister noted: "From 2003 to 2019, the Mathematics and Science achievements, increased by 104 points and 102 points, respectively." The Free State and Gauteng remained the country's leading provinces on matric pass rates at above 80%, although both had experienced declines of 3,2% and 3,5% respectively



Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga and Gauteng Education MEC Panyaza Lesufi with one of the top achievers during the official announcement of the 2020 matric results on Monday



Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga

A closer scrutiny of the performance from the Department's School Report and School Subject Report in other key subjects and indicators shows, at best, a mixed bag of results. An analysis of the 11 most popular subjects in the five year between 2016 and 2020 shows a combination of steady upward progress, stagnation and slight regression in others, even before taking coronavirus into account. Accounting for example had a pass rate of 69.5% in 2016, followed by a slight dip to 66,1% before increasing over 70% in the last three years with this year's 75,5%- a 3-percentage point fall from last year's 78,4 %. Business studies started at 73,4 % in 2016, before dipping to reach 64,9% in 2018 before climbing to 71% in 2019 and reaching a notable 77.9 % last year.

Maths and Science, two subjects that threatened to taint the 2020 exam and had to be settled through a court challenge, saw a fall in pass rates, supporting the quality assurance body uMalusi's view that there were no widespread irregularities in the exam. The Maths pass rate stood at 53.8%, down from 54.6% in 2019, while the pass rate for physical science stood at 65.8%, a decline from the 75.5% in 2019. Over the five-year period, the maths pass rate was highest in 2018 at 58% while physical science was also the highest in that same year, at 74%.

Covid19 exposed the Fault lines that in South Africa and many developing countries, schools are more than just channels to deliver education- they also play the role of childcare for younger learners, delivery of nutrition

programmes and offering learners social interaction they would otherwise be deprived of. This raises the question of how much and how quickly the country should invest in online learning resources to attach for virtual learning which would impose increased cost of childcare and feeding cost on parents.

Motshekga pointed out a range of interventions that were out in place to support the class of 2020. These include supplementary study materials, extra classes on Saturdays and holidays as well as radio broadcast, including the private sector driven National Education Collaborative Trust (NECT). The reality is that these interventions, like the Covid Relief R350 grant, will need to be kept in pace for longer if not permanently.



Motshekga expressed relief that Umalusi approved the exam, following the department's failure to enforce a rewrite of leaked Maths and Science papers. "having noted with concern the serious irregularities regarding the leakage of Mathematics Paper 2 and Physical Sciences Paper 2, [Umalusi] is satisfied that there were no systemic irregularities reported, which might have compromised the overall credibility and integrity of the November 2020 NSC examinations, administered by the DBE," the quality checking body has said. Failure by Umalusi to recognise this year's certificates containing Maths and Science would have been disastrous for the department. It

now remains to be seen how universities will treat this year's

Maths and Science pass at admission stage.

A key feature of the public education system is progressed learners, those who are promoted to Grade 12 even though they may not be fully ready. The private education does not worry about these and, although some grab the opportunity and achieve a bachelor pass, over all progressed learners drag down the national average.

This year, there were 70 565 progressed learners enrolling for the exams. 65 499 of these

candidates, wrote the requisite seven subjects during the 2020 NSC examinations, with 3016 obtaining bachelor passes. "The significance of these achievements is that the 24 244 progressed learners, who passed – were the would-be-high-school repeaters and dropouts, who have a golden opportunity to access either higher education institutions, TVET Colleges, and other skills development institutions." Motshekga said without progressed learners, this year's pass rate would have been 81%.



2020 matric top achievers and stakeholders in the education sector paying attention as Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga announced the matric results in Pretoria this week



The minister also highlighted the improved performance of “no fee’s school, which continue to receive an increased proportion of government resources. She said in 2005, 60% of the Bachelor passes, came from the best performing 20% schools in the country. In 2015, “no fee” schools produced 51% of the Bachelor passes, which increased to 58% in 2020. “Therefore, the significance of this, is that the gap between the Bachelor passes produced by “no fee” schools versus those produced by fee paying schools

has significantly and progressively increased from 2% in 2015, to 13% in 2020 – a 3% improvement from 2019” Motshekga said.

Yet challenges remain with no fee schools and a [province like Mpumalanga illustrates these. While Mpumalanga fee paying schools are among the top three performers in the country, the province’s no fee schools rank seventh, illustrating gaps in quality.

South Africa now joins countries

like India in having girls outnumber boys at various stages of the education system. There were 72 000 more girls who enrolled for the exams than boys and 66 000 wrote. This trend is likely to feed through to degrees and higher qualifications. This is viewed as a positive development indicator, as women tend to be primary care givers and better education given women choice and mobility which allows to free themselves of abusive relationships and thus reduce the scourge of gender-based violence.

Lesufi prepares to take Gauteng education to the next level

THEBE MABANGA

The Gauteng MEC for education Panyaza Lesufi is one of the most settled leaders in any portfolio in government at provincial or even nation level. Having held the post since May 2014, and apart from a brief appointment as MEC for finance in 2019, only to be returned to education, he has fully come to grips with challenges facing the sector and is now ready to take it to the next level. This is despite challenges including R 7 billion in budget cuts over the next three years. On Wednesday, Lesufi celebrated the Gauteng class of 2020, placed second after Free State with a pass rate of 83,8%, which is a 3,5% decline from 2019. In his time at the helm, Lesufi has been determined to turn the Gauteng education into a high performance that is capable of coping with demand pressure extorted by inward migration in a province that is a magnet for economic opportunity like Gauteng.

Lesufi had good preparation for the role as he spent a number of years as spokesperson for basic education minister Angie Motshekga, which gave him a vantage of the education picture nationally. Such is his bond with Motshekga that he still addresses her with motherly affection as his senior both in his party and in government and shows her deference, even as there are loud calls that he



should replace her as national minister. This is probably because he recognizes that he is able to achieve what he has in Gauteng because of access to resources provided by the engine of the South African economy. At national level, resources are stretched and distributed unevenly. Raising R 80 million to build a smart school in the Eastern Cape would prove a mission.

He has taken on vested interest from governing bodies and school management most notably Afrikaans schools over language policy and parent bodies over admissions policy and either won or reluctantly back down to pause only to take on that fight again.

He has dragged the province

kicking and screaming into the digital age when he introduced online registration from Grade 1 and Grade 8. After initial resistance and technical glitches, the system is now fully established and is regarded as the norm and preferred method of registering learners, with the department and district left to deal with the unallocated, who currently stand at 687.

His latest mission is to convince middle- and lower-income household parents in Gauteng's townships that schools in their vicinity, rather than those in town which carry a higher tuition and transport cost, can offer good value for money and quality education. It's a battle he is hoping to win through opening of smart schools at what he



Gauteng Premier David Makhura Congratulate one of the province's top achievers

once declared a new school every month but has since slowed down and will slow down even further in the years ahead.

He also hopes to show that those schools that have not been converted into smart schools are receiving other resources to improve performance. He now has to strike a balance of equipping his schools with technology to enable virtual learning in the wake of COVID-19 but also recognizes their role as centre of childcare while parents are at work or look for work, and the delivery of services like nutrition programmes and educational support of extra classes, which requires physical presence, and cannot be administered in the face of a Lockdown.

On Wednesday, Lesufi's leadership style that is inclusive, in touch with grassroots and exudes empathy was on display as he saluted the latest group of school leavers, some doing so in style. Lesufi went through a range of emotions in his address, moving from being statesman like in his poignant tribute to those in the education community who had lost their lives to COVID-19, beaming with pride when celebrating the province's top learners, schools and districts and bristling with a sense of indignation when berating Umalusi for perceived unfairness and admonishing laggards, those schools that have performed below par in the exams."

"We congratulate the learners for their resilience, dedication and hard work displayed during

this pandemic and wish them well in their future endeavours" Lesufi said noting that all top 3 achievers are given four years bursaries to an institution and degree of their choice. Lesufi subtly reminded those who wanted the academic year cancelled, including the former Democratic Alliance leader Mmusi Maimane, that the salvaging of the academic year was the result of the efforts and sacrifice of teachers, parents and learners, some of whom paid with their lives.

It was through his leadership, together with provinces such as the Western Cape with the backing of national government that stood up to teacher unions who wanted schools closed for much longer partly over Covid fears, but possibly over the luxury of being paid without



performing work.

"We can present these results today because of those teachers who risked their lives" he said. "Unfortunately, we lost 34 educators and I want to dedicate these results to the 34 educators that sacrificed their lives so that our children can get an education and pass." Lesufi said, in a manner that suggested deep compassion, his department also lost 18 officials including the head of scholar transport.

In a portion of the address aimed at communities, he particularly lamented section of Ekurhuleni that prevented learners from going back to school. These include Thokoza, Duduza in the Far East Rand and Etwatwa near Daveyton, and this reflects in the sad reality that their two districts are the worst performing in the province.

One of his enduring achievement has been to consolidate the Secondary School Improvement Programme (SSIP) designed to help poor performing schools and one about which he is so passionate that it now enjoys its special category of recognition at these celebrations.

Lesufi said last year, SSIP targeted over 65 734 grade 12 learners in over 436 priority schools from January. The SSIP offers extra classes on mornings, afternoon and Saturdays and in some years offered study camps. Last year, classes also extended to Sun-

days to make up for lost time due to the Lockdown. "More than 78,7% of SSIP learners passed compared to 78,5% of learners in 2019," said Lesufi, adding that 79 SSIP schools achieved above 90% pass rate. Four SSIP schools achieved 100%. "The SSIP programme once again proved its value," Lesufi says. He notes that the sustained improvement in results over the last four years shows the SSIP system is improving teaching and learning in the prioritised schools.

Lesufi concedes that a district like Tshwane South performs well because of a legacy of good, predominantly Afrikaans schools such as this year's top 3

Hoerskool Menlo Park, Hoerskool Garsfontein and Hoerskool Waterkloof. He displayed the maturity to put aside court battles and differences to celebrate with the schools. He now wants to challenge these schools to offer a minimum of three languages, since Gauteng offers all 11 as well as Sign Language.

He points out that the district also contains township schools, which he is passionate about, including such as Seshegong Secondary School, which achieved 96.95%, Rosina Sedi-bane Modiba Sport School (95.39%) and Vukani Mawethu Secondary School (92.86%). Lesufi also points to a district





like Johannesburg Central, which is essentially Soweto with no former white suburbs and has achieved a 79% pass rate and its top three schools attaining over 90%.

Lesufi said he was especially pleased with the performance of township schools that achieved a 100% pass rate and a Bachelor rate above 60%. These were Diepsloot Secondary No 2, with 76,9% Bachelor passes. The school is made up of container classes and had multiple break ins. In one instance, the school had stolen valuables such as toilet seats and pipes replaced, only to have all its windows broken. The other schools are Rusoord Secondary School, with 73,9% Bachelor passes; Marlboro Gardens Secondary School, with 69,2% Bachelor passes and Denver Secondary School, right in the middle of an informal settlement, which had 66,1% Bachelor passes. "I want to congratulate the principals of the 82 township public schools that achieved above 90%. This is down from the 132 schools that

achieved above 90% last year." An area that Lesufi would clearly like to cement as part of his legacy, is closing the gap between township schools and their suburban counterparts. "In 2009, township schools achieved an average pass rate of 60.1%, with non-township schools achieving 84,2%, making for a gap of 24,1 percentage points." Lesufi said, "In 2020, the gap has been increased to 11,8% compared to 2,78% in 2019 and 4,6% in 2018, due to the negative impact of COVID-19 on our education system."

The worst performing township school, Lesufi announced sadly, was the ironically named Kgothlang (Sotho name for work hard) in the West Rand which attained a 31% pass rate from its 234 candidates, with not a single distinction and 5% bachelor pass. Lesufi personally undertook to adopt the school to turn its performance around. The worst performing suburban school is Eureka in Springs with a pass rate of 54%.

Lesufi's strength as a leader is his ability to completely trust those around him to do their job and thus bring out the best in them. This was illustrated by attendance of the ceremony by the director of the country's best performing district, Tshwane South Mme Hilda Kekana. She is about to retire next month and received a special Harry Gwala award from Lesufi named after the decorated struggle icon who was also a teacher who taught the likes of Moses Mabhida. In his tribute, Lesufi expressed the complete faith he had in Kekana and expressed genuine appreciation for her valuable support in a manner that solicited reciprocity from Kekana.

Kekana told Inside Education that she has been in education for 39 years first as a teacher and rinsing through the ranks to spend the last 13 years as a district director, 11 of them at Tshwane South. Kekana said what she will miss most about her work is interaction with school leadership and seeing school improve. She says after a proper break, she would be willing to contribute her skills to the sector or her community. She expressed praise for Lesufi's patience and wisdom in his leadership.

Lesufi is renowned for being brutally frank in addressing perceived shortcomings of comrades within his party's provincial executive or stakeholders in his work in education. On Wednesday, he reiterated his criticism of the quality assurance body Umalusi,



noting how it had “missed an opportunity to become a leveler” and failed to consider the impact of COVID-19 on exam preparations. Lesufi noted that in 2019, Umalusi had adjusted marks for two subjects downwards, arguing that the pass rate was excessive which suggest that the exam was of a low level of difficulty. “In 2020, during a pandemic, they adjusted marks for eight subjects downwards, which we feel is unfair” the MEC said. Umalusi has not responded to the comments.

Earlier this year, the MEC announced that his department faces a R 7 billion budget cut over the next three years due to government’s constrained fiscal position. He said the department will have to cut back on some of its programmes but keep vital ones such as SSIP. He says they will hire teachers at a slower rate but use the ones they have better by allocating more classes or, if qualified, allocate more subjects to teach. Lesufi says his department will also build new smart schools at a slower rate and hold back on buying furniture.

Lesufi points out that the long-term revolution of the education system relies on issues such as teacher allocation for example. “Teachers are trained by the same university, but if a teacher goes to resourced school, they produce results and one who goes to an under resourced schools struggles.

Lesufi’s vision is to see schools adapt to technology, but also



Gauteng Premier David Makhura Congratulate one of the province’s top achievers

share resources better by being merged based on geographic proximity not whether one is in the township and another in affluent suburb. He now wants the ANC to adopt policy and legislation to make these possible, as previous attempts were met with resistance.

The Gauteng province produced six of the top ten performing districts nationally or, as Lesufi quickly points out when asked, “five of the top five”. As disclosed by Basic Education minister Angie Motshekga on Monday, Tshwane South tops the list with 89,6% followed by Johannesburg West with 88,1% and Gauteng North (87%). Johannesburg North stands at 86,9% while Sedibeng East is at number eight with Metro North in the Western Cape at 85,4%. Lesufi could not hide his joy as he looked for various ways to express the provinces dominant

performance. “no single province has made 92 000 learners to pass matric – and more than 45 000 to get Bachelor passes to go to a university of their choice,” Lesufi said to a spontaneous outbreak of applause. He noted that Gauteng has contributed 23,6% to national bachelor pass rate and produced enough matriculants to fill up all the first-year university slots in the province and still leave some learners to look for places in other provinces.

Lesufi further noted. If diploma passes are considered, the total number of learners that have passed that go to any higher institution of their choice stands at 73%. “So, 73% of learners that wrote matric in Gauteng last year can go to any higher education institution to enrol for a skill of their choice, thus cementing our decision to be the centre of skills revolution in our country” Lesufi said.

Diverse, bright starlets put Gauteng on the map

THEBE MABANGA

A healthy diet and balanced lifestyle, a commitment to your vision coupled with constant prayer and sheer hard work and study, that is what some of Gauteng's top learners recommend to their peers and contemporaries as a recipe for success.

The bright youngsters were rewarded with prizes including bursaries, laptops and cash at the Gauteng government's matric results announcement and prize giving ceremony held in Johannesburg on Wednesday. One of the star pupils Zamahlangu Mahlangu, had to put her appearance at these awards by a year while coming to terms with a debilitating loss. She was named as the top achiever from a township school and a top achiever from a Secondary School Intervention Programme (SSIP). The star pupil from Emadwaleni High School in Johannesburg West obtained seven distinctions and is preparing to study bio medical technology at Wits University. Mahlangu stays with her mother Thoko and brother in Meadowlands, Soweto. Her mother describes her as a self-starter and straight A student.

Mahlangu was supposed to write her matric in 2019 but lost a grandfather and an uncle in a space of two months which affected her focus to a point where she sat out her matric



Zamahlangu Mahlangu, Top Achiver from a Township School



Blessing Mlambo



Noelle Vann Der Walt



Omphile Makhnaya

exams, arguing that she would not give her best. When she returned last year, the outbreak of Covid caused her mother anxiety as she feared that she may lose a second year of study. "When COVID-19 happened last year, I was not sure if I will write my exam, but I kept preparing in the hope that we would" she says. Asked what her secret is, she notes "there is no secret, it's just hard work and study."

The award for a top learner with a disability went to Omphile Makhnaya of Prinshofskool in Tshwane West. Makhnaya obtained distinctions in English Home language, Afrikaans, Music and Business studies. The visually impaired youngster speaks with a confident disposition that betrays her disability, which is impossible to detect through normal interaction. Ahead of receiving her award she told the story of how after attending a mainstream creche, her mother, former journalist Kefiloe Makhanya, felt that her

intelligence gift would not be fully realized. Through parental and schooling support, she simply took a conscious decision not to let her disability limit her. Her study option includes film and video production and communication science at the University of Johannesburg/ Noelle Vann Der Walt of Hoerskool Menlo Park in Tshwane South came third overall best student in the province. She says the secret to her success is to lead a balanced and healthy life that was not only focused on academics. This included an almost daily exercise routine. This is why the lockdown proved frustrating for her. "The early part of the lockdown was frustrating because in the afternoon I be sitting in my room instead of exercising, which I need to keep my brain fresh and focused" Van der Walt said she started exercising as soon as restrictions lifted which often meant jogging on her own or with her sister. She is now preparing to further her studies

at Stellenbosch university, partly aided by a bursary from the Gauteng government. Blessing Mlambo of the IR Lesolang secondary School in Winterveldt is another star performer under the SSIP programme. The programme offered extra lessons of normal school hours and when Covid19 struck to make up for lost time the lessons would be offered on Sundays, something which Mlambo complied with without complaining. "When the lockdown happened, I kept myself motivated through prayer and revisiting my vision board to remind myself what I want to achieve in life" says Mlambo who encourages the class of 2021 to "Have a dream, and believe in them"

At the ceremony there were also prizes for the three top schools which went to Hoerskool Menlo Park, Hoerskool Garsfontein and Hoerskool Waterkloof.

Limpopo looks ahead after holding its own in tough covid-19 year

LUCAS LEDWABA

WHEN minister of basic education Angie Motshekga noted in her announcement of the 2020 matric results that she had expected a bloodbath owing to the abnormal schooling year – she must have had provinces like Limpopo on the top of her list.

Although the province had been on a somewhat upward trajectory with a 73.2% pass rate in 2019, 70.6% in 2018 and 67.4% the year before, it faces unique odds aptly articulated in a statement by ANC provincial secretary Soviet Lekganyane. “The Limpopo province is dominantly rural with challenges of inadequate infrastructure and lack of technological resources, and has made significant improvements, despite some schools lacking technological luxuries like access to e-Learning amenities. The majority of Limpopo Schools are in Quintile 1 and 2 and were still able to stage a fierce contest compared to their counterparts in predominantly affluent provinces,” Lekganyane said in a statement acknowledging the province's 68. % pass rate by the class of 2020. Provincial MEC for education Polly Boshielo said last year the province registered 79 813 National Senior Certificate candidates. She said 78 695 candidates wrote all the seven subjects.

With the country placed under



lockdown as a result of the covid-19 outbreak for most of last year it was expected that under resourced provinces like Limpopo would be hardest hit. “We want to emphasize that this has been a different year, a very disruptive year and you can imagine the kind of immediate adjustments and adaptations that needed to be made. It is in this regard that we announce that the highest recorded performance of 73.2% achieved by the class of 2019 has declined by 5% and accordingly the class of 2020 has achieved a provincial pass rate of 68.2%,” Boshielo said.

The performance placed Limpopo just two places from the bottom of the national standings above Eastern Cape and bottom placed Northern Cape. Boshielo said while there is concern about the decline in the provincial pass rate, it should be

noted that 22 907 of the candidates who sat for the exams achieved bachelor.

This was in comparison to the 19 022 bachelor passes achieved by the class of 2019, an increase of 29.1%. Boshielo said overall, 53 634 of the 78 695 candidates passed the 2020 matric exams. The province scored a total of 16 044 distinctions in various subjects. Provincial spokesperson on education for the DA Jacques Smalle said the party had anticipated that this year's matric learners would not perform well, especially in certain gateway subjects. He said it was also deeply concerning that 134 schools out of the 1370 schools in the province failed to reach a 40% pass rate and that 31 of these schools failed to reach even a 20% pass rate with nine schools scoring a 0% pass rate.



Limpopo MEC for education Polly Boshielo

"It is clear that there needs to be a focus on offering greater support to our learners especially in gateway subjects to improve performance. There needs to be a focus especially on the no fee paying schools to ensure they are not victims of inequality and that they are well resourced to ensure they are not disadvantaged in their preparation for the NSC," Smalle said. Lekganyane said considering the fact that the sector is permeated by a legacy of underdevelopment, glaring backlogs of infrastructure and lack of resources, the province has made some improvements with the 'odds stacked against it'. "The improvement in the percentage of Bachelor passes is also a point worth celebrating," he said.

The Waterberg became the top performing district with 77.5% followed by Vhembe East with 77.1% and Vhembe West at 72.7%.

Mbilwi Secondary School in Vhembe East retained its top spot in the Club 100 of Mathematics and Physical Sciences in Public Schools with 219 passes. A school qualifies to be in the club if 100 or more candidates pass Mathematics at 50% or more. The overall pass percentage in the subject must be 65% or more. Boshielo noted that the department has cut down the number of zero percent schools from nine in 2019 to seven in 2020. "We have been appealing to our communities to work with the department on the rationalisation of schools with low enrollments, so that they are effectively merged with other schools. This process is done to advance quality education and not for personal and sentimental purposes as it is often misunderstood. The small schools have proven to be costly to the system, unsustainable and not viable," she said. Boshielo said valuable lessons have been learnt during the

covid-19 lockdown and the department will be taking steps to adjust. "As a Department we will be investing our energies, time and resources on closing the gaps that Covid-19 exposed in terms of our traditional ways of teaching and learning," she said.

Boshielo added that they will now focus on improving support for grades R to 9 to ensure that the learners are able to attain foundational competencies such as reading, writing and enumerating. "These are basic skills required for further learning in higher grades. Extra classes will require more funding in this academic year given the Covid-19 pandemic that has stolen the teaching and learning time. We have been investing a lot of resources in enrichment programmes and if we are to do more, we will need more funds on e-learning as we move forward," she said.



Village girl Pearl glitters to the top

Learner from overcrowded village school in underprivileged area shines in matric class of 2020

LUCAS LEDWABA

WHEN Limpopo youth Pearl Khosa took her place among the country's top performing matriculants this week she was still wondering how she had managed to end up there given her tough circumstances. Pearl would always be exhausted every morning when she reached school after a 45-minute walk from her home village of Shibangwa in the Collins Chabane municipality. In the afternoon she would walk the same distance back home after a long day of lessons in an overcrowded classroom. Her home is in the far north east of Limpopo where in the summer months temperatures often soar into the high 30s during the day. Her school PP Hlungwani High School is in the quintile – 1 group in the Malamulele south circuit. Quintile -1 is the group of schools catering for the poorest 20% of learners.

Pearl earned a total of 1667 marks to become number 1 achiever in quintile 1 in Limpopo. She also scored eight distinctions. To qualify for the category, a learner must have achieved the highest total of the six best subjects excluding Life Orientation and a minimum of 60% in each of the subjects considered. She was also one of four recipients of the MEC Special Award.

Limpopo education MEC Polly Boshielo said the award was in



Pearl Khosa, Top performing matriculant

recognition of those learners from quintile 1, 2,3 and special schools "who have prevailed against all material learning conditions."

The national lockdown brought about by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic complicated matters even worse for many learners including Pearl. "I'm not used to studying by myself. We always studied in a

group. When the lockdown was announced it made things very difficult for me," she said about the lengthy period learners were forced to stay at home due to the lockdown.

Pearl said even when they returned to class life wasn't easy. "It was difficult. Our school is



Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga

overcrowded. We had to wear masks and all that," she said. Boshielo underlined the tough conditions brought about by the outbreak of the virus. "We cannot even begin to describe how Covid-19 has unsettled our candidates, teachers, parents and officials, and the challenges they had to go through for us to be here today. It has been a whirlwind journey and suffice to say that all the anxieties will today be a thing of the past..." she said

Pearl was fortunate to have the support of her parents who ensured that during the lockdown she had enough data to access study material on a laptop she won previously as part of her academic achievements.

Her proud father Bumani Khosa said they supported her by also not burdening her with too many household chores. "At the beginning of the year the school laid down some rules. They told us to reduce the amount of household chores we gave the learners, that we should support them in their school work and not stress them with chores," he said. He said although his daughter had excelled previously, they were not expecting she would do this well given the impact of the corona virus lockdown. "We were not expecting much. It came as a complete surprise and we are grateful. We are very happy," he said.

Pearl said her proud parents sacrificed a sheep in celebration

on Tuesday.

"I'm over the moon. It's all thanks to the Lord," she said. The mathphile is now bound for the University of Cape Town to study actuarial science, a course she learnt about from her teacher while doing grade 10. In announcing the well spoken youth as a top achiever on Tuesday, provincial MEC Boshielo said: "Pearl, we are proud of you!"

MTN Foundation SA: Using Technology To Overcome Covid-related Barriers In Education

THEBE MABANGA

WHEN South Africa entered the global mainstream of the Covid 19 pandemic with the confirmation of the first positive case in March last year, education was among the earliest casualties as the declaration of the National Disaster, even before the Nation Lock down led to a closure of schools. This has forced entities like the MTN SA Foundation to rethink their approach to supporting education.

“MTN believes in the use of technology to enhance teaching and learning” says Angie Maloka, a senior manager at the MTN SA Foundation.

A key feature of this support is partnership with the department of Basic Education, Department of Social Development, NGOs who provide specialised education as well as technology partners who provide equipment.

Maloka says the MTN Foundation’s strategy is revised every three years and the biggest challenges that the organisation is currently grappling with is Covid19, but also theft and vandalism at schools supported by the company.

MTN’s flagship education programme has been the construction of 350 media centres since 2014, which Maloka points out are more than computer laboratories as



Angie Maloka, Senior Manager: Community Projects at #MTNSA Foundation.

they consist of smart boards, printers, data to access the internet as well as off-line content.

Fourty-five of these are at schools for learners with special needs including those who are deaf and blind, dyslexic and have physical disabilities.

Ten are community-based centres aimed at helping community members, including victims of Gender Based Violence, unemployed women and the youth to access computer training and information related to job or business opportunities.

Last year, the Foundation opened a media centre at the University of Zululand, to help first year students adapt to the use of computers at university.

The bulk of the centres are in primary and secondary schools, which are also loaded with digital content. MTN spent the past three years digitising all language and numeracy content for primary schools and developing content for Computer Applied Technology (CAT) for high school. For high schools, this included developing textbooks for the subjects enabling some schools to offer CAT and IT as formal subjects for the first time.

Teachers remain a vital component of the multi-media centres as they still play a facilitating role even in a digital or virtual environment. For every school that receives a multi-media centre, a minimum of 20 teachers are trained to use the equipment, with a coordinator training more teachers if required.



“And then Covid happened,” Maloka says of the predicament the company faced as its multi-media centres could no longer be accessed.

MTN has since partnered with Siyavula Foundation, an NGO academy that offers digital maths and science content. MTN has zero rated the website so learners can access it for free.

The company has now gone a step further and paid R 3 million a year to have the subscription based content made available for free. The subscription has since been renewed for a further two years, a period which Maloka forecasts Covid will cast a shadow over the education system.

A huge setback on for the MTN programme has been theft, vandalism and break-ins at the schools that have sophisticated equipment. Last year, the Department of Basic Education reported that 1,577 schools suffered vandalism and theft during the lockdown, with computer particularly targeted.

“it’s heart-breaking, its painful” says Maloka, who was personally informed of a school that suffered a break in at the Vaal area on New Year’s Day. Maloka say such incidents disrupts the lives of learner who have CAT as a matric subject and have gone through Grade 10 and 11 but will now have no access to computers for their matric year.

It also disrupts the lives of teachers who used the labs for



research as well as for lesson plans preparation. Finally, the community members who used the centres to prepare CVs and search for jobs have an important resource taken away.

MTN is now developing a fully fledged portal, which will have content, be interactive and have assessment capabilities so learners can be tested online. This will be accessible virtually to far more learners and will be rolled out in the next three years.

To complement the portal, learners will require suitable equipment. To prepare for this phase, last year, MTN piloted the distribution of 800 tablets nationally together with device manufacturer Huawei.

This year, MTN will distribute a similar number and schools are expected to manage these the same way they manage text books and loan them to learners.

Maloka acknowledges that the number is not sufficient, but says they hope to partner with

other equipment providers to scale up the distribution in the years ahead.

This model will allow for greater access virtually in the event of disruptions like that caused by Covid19 and eliminates the threat of vandalism.

“Technology is a great equaliser” says Maloka of South Africa’s successful embrace of the Fourth Industrial Revolution,” It enables a child in Lusikisiki and one sitting in Sandton or Florida in the United States to access the same information when they do research on, say, photosynthesis.”

Maloka notes that South Africa’s challenge is relatively low penetration of high-speed networks with some rural areas still on 2G network, unable to access advanced functionality.

“This requires government to speed up the process of opening up the digital spectrum, and there will be willing corporates and other partners who will take up the challenge of improving access” concludes Maloka.

Ramaphosa says government need to Prioritise Technology

CHARLES MOLELE

PRESIDENT Cyril Ramaphosa has called on the Department of Basic Education to assist teachers to effectively integrate technology into subject areas, while increasing access to quality education for all South African pupils, regardless of their location, proficiency level and socio-economic circumstances.

Ramaphosa was addressing the three-day 2021 Basic Education Lekgotla on Thursday, following the announcement of the matric results this week.

In recent months, the president has been vocal about the critical issues facing the country's young people, noting more needs to be done to ensure South African youth are employable, especially in the context of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR).

He said that as the lekgotla reviewed the matric results, one of the prominent indicators of quality education was how the country was doing in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

"If we are to seize the opportunities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, our education system must be reoriented towards its development in our country," said Ramaphosa.

"Studies show that the country lags behind in the information technology skills needed for the



PRESIDENT Cyril Ramaphosa

digital revolution. It will not be possible for us to build an e-skilled economy as envisaged in the National Development Plan if we do not pay attention to subject areas at basic education level. Even as the pandemic delayed the process last year, the Department of Basic Education is making headway on the national rollout of coding and robotics."

He said that even as the pandemic delayed the process last year, the Department of Basic Education was making headway on the national rollout of coding and robotics.

"The draft coding and robotics curriculum has been submitted to Umalusi for evaluation and quality assurance, and a draft curriculum will soon be gazetted," said Ramaphosa.



He said during the course of this year, 200 schools will be piloting the draft curriculum from Grades R to 3 and 1,000 schools will be piloting the Grade 7 curriculum.

“However, focus on these new areas should not come at the expense of basic skills such as reading for comprehension. We also have to continue to invest in early childhood development as the foundation for cognitive development, and create policy certainty where it is lacking,” said Ramaphosa.

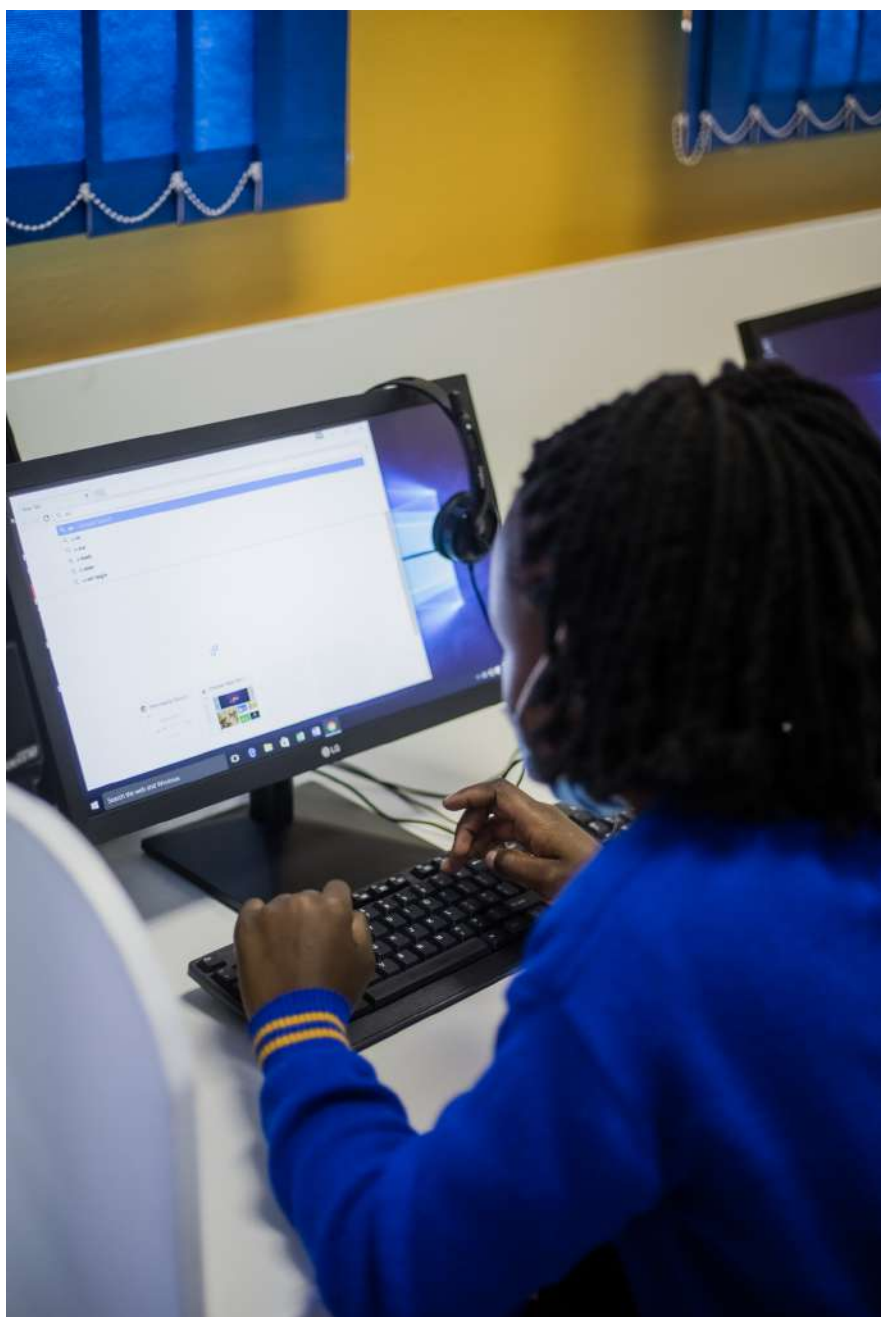
Ramaphosa also lauded the Class of 2020 for the overall pass rate of 76.2% in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations.

“This is an outstanding achievement considering the huge disruption caused to the academic year by the coronavirus pandemic,” said Ramaphosa.

“We are grateful for the efforts of Minister Angie Motshekga and her team and all the stakeholders and partners in the education fraternity.”

The president said COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the digital divide in society, particularly with regards to the adoption of technologies for learning and teaching.

Ramaphosa was referring to the switch to hybrid teaching and learning models, which exposed the glaring inequalities in education – from basic educa-



tion all the way through to higher education.

During the pandemic, the lack of access to online learning and digital skills put many young people at risk of falling behind their peers.

This deepened the divide between students on the continent who have access, and those who don't.

He said the pandemic has underscored the need to intensify efforts by government to ensure connectivity and equitable access to data.

“This calls for stronger public-private partnerships to ensure that we mobilise the necessary resources to help our learners,” said Ramaphosa.

Free State does it again

CHARLES MOLELE



Free State Education
MEC Tate Makgoe

TATE Makgoe, a chemical engineering graduate, has used his skills, commitment and abilities to bring fundamental developments to the province in his role as MEC for education in the Free State.

In the last several years, Makgoe has worked with all stakeholders to ensure that the Free State is a force to be reckoned with in the area of education.

Once again, the Free State produced the highest pass rate with 85.1%, a decline of 3.2% from last year.

Ever an optimist, Makgoe was aiming for 100% target, but the COVID-19 struck and put a stop to that.

He expressed gratitude to the support that the department has given to learners that could have dropped out of school at one point or another especially, under the COVID 19 conditions "So we are indeed Number One again! Since the advent of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) in 2008, the Free State has been number one for 5 times in the last 8 years," said an elated Makgoe.

On Tuesday, Makgoe dedicated the Free State's highest past rate for the 2020 matric results to the 66 educators, who succumbed to coronavirus-related complications.

The Free State is the only province in the country that has achieved a 90% pass rate at least on four occasions in the past five years.

"It is important to note that no other Province ever achieved 90%, yet the Free State Province has done so four times in the past five years," said Makgoe.



"I also wish to take this opportunity to introduce our top achievers who against, all the turmoil caused by COVID-19, have proved that hard work and dedication pays off. These are the Kings and Queens of the Class of 2020."

He said the performance of the Class of 2020 in the face of the devastating and invisible COVID 19 is a consequence of systemic interventions for strengthening and raising performance in all levels of the system.

"Indeed 2020 has shown that remarkable progress in education will depend highly on deliberate, purposeful action. While we celebrate the many achievements we are making together in education, the challenges of 2020 brought about by unprecedented pandemic should spur us on seriously to consolidate our advance," said Makgoe.

Makgoe attributed the success of the Free State on the building-blocks put firmly in place in the past 13 years.

"We emphasized thorough preparation for the NSC exam.

This exam is the ultimate measure of achievements of twelve years of schooling. It assesses learners' knowledge and skills gained over years of schooling. NSC results rank among important performance indicators of the entire schooling system," said Makgoe.

Makgoe said since 2012, the Free State undertook to increase the number of Grade 12 learners who pass Mathematics and Physical Science subjects.

"We've also focused on improving performance in other subjects," said the MEC.

"The province is also making good strides in improving the performance of technical subjects. We are proud of the achievement of candidates of SASHL. This subject is growing by leaps and bounds, and more learners are entering for this subject."

Makgoe said districts in the Free State have also worked very hard under alert level 5 lockdown to achieve this milestone.

He said key interventions focused on improving performances in Mathematics, Physical Science, Accounting and supporting underperforming schools and their principals. "These initiatives have reaped observable dividends, said Makgoe.

"We are pleased to announce that all of our districts achieved more than 80% in 2020. It is a clear demonstration that we are serious about the quality of results: Our Star district, ladies and gentlemen, remains Fezile Dabi at 86.5% – a decline of 3.8% from 2019. Fezile Dabi was named by the Minister for the second time as number SIX (6) out of 75 districts nationally as best performing district in the entire country. Congratulations to Dr VUSI CHUTA and his team."

Makgoe has thanked various sponsors of education in the Free State, including, among others, De Beers Group, MTN SA and the Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation.

"We take this opportunity to thank our generous sponsors for landing a helping hand in supporting the class of 2020," said Makgoe.



"It is important to note that no other Province ever achieved 90%, yet the Free State Province has done so four times in the past five years"

Matric: The Northern Cape Was The Worst-Performing Province In South Africa

NYAKALLO TEFU



Northern Cape Education
MEC Zolile Monakali

THE Northern Cape has recorded the lowest pass rate, where only 66% of students passed, the Department of Basic Education announced on Monday.

Both the provincial MEC of Education, Zolile Monakali, and Northern Cape Premier, Zamani Saul, expressed disappointment and anger at the 2020 provincial matric results.

The challenges faced by the education system in the Northern Cape are many and varied, however, Monakali has vowed to

galvanise teachers, pupils and parents and other stakeholders to pull out all the stops to improve the quality of education in the province.

"I am very disappointed," said Monakali. "We did expect a decline in our results, but we did not expect such a big drop. We definitely did not expect to be at the bottom of all provinces."

The Northern Cape, the worst performing province, came out at number 9 of all provinces in the matric results, recording a

66.6% pass rate, a drop of 10.5% from a 76.5% pass rate of 2019.

"We do, however, recognize that it was a very difficult year and our children went through a very difficult time, but we are grateful that we could get through the academic year," said Monakali. Monakali has cited the corona virus as one of the biggest challenges for most provinces following the disruption of schooling when the country was placed on hard lockdown.



while many learners in different schools across the country resorted to e-learning, provided in part by mobile network giant MTN SA, Northern Cape struggled with remote learning and teaching

Monakali said the province had two big challenges.

These included the number of educators that were not available to teach and the number of learners who did not attend classes but went to write their finals

“We are a small province with a small number of educators. We had 10 000 educators and from that, 2700 of them applied to be exempted because of comorbidities,” said Monakali.

Monakali said compared to other provinces with more educators, the Northern Cape had a bigger amount of teachers who were forced to stay at home due to comorbidities and old age.

In addition, most parents feared letting their children return to school during the lockdown.

“We had about 12 000 learners who registered but more than 2 000 of our learners did not return back after the reopening during COVID-19, but those learners pitched for the exams and therefore had a negative impact on the pass rate,” said Monakali.

Learners were forced to start with remote online learning and teaching because of the pandemic. However, the Northern Cape, a sparsely populated province of South Africa, was one of those that struggled with remote learning and teaching.

Northern Cape is one of the rural provinces in South Africa with many poor people.

Many pupils who reside in rural areas do not have access to technology and much-needed infrastructure.

“The Northern Cape is a very rural province. We are a very poor province and affluent schools in the province had access to online learning, but most of the learners from the townships and rural areas unfortunately could not have that benefit,” said Monakali.

Monakali said the lack of resources contributed greatly to the low matric pass rate in the Northern Cape.

“We did expect a decline in our results, but we did not expect such a big drop”

'Despite COVID-19 Challenges, Class of 2020 Made Us Proud' – EC MEC

CHARLES MOLELE

THE Eastern Cape is the second lowest performing province, after it achieved 68.1%, a decline of 8.3% from the 2019 matric results.

This comes barely a year after the province performed well in 2019- with a 77% matric pass rate, a drastic improvement that nearly took them into the 80 percentile range.

Despite this, the provincial MEC, Fundile Gade, told Inside Education on Tuesday the achievement of the Class of 2020 in the Eastern Cape amid COVID-19 was a game-changer, and sent a clear message that the virus is not a death sentence, nor was it a crusher of learners' dreams.

The department, says Gade, has ensured that thousands of anxious candidates did not have their dreams deferred, but were accorded an opportunity to start their journey to the future, here and now.

"Gratefully and gracefully, the 2020 academic year was brazenly saved by the Department of Basic Education to the disbelief of many doomsayers/naysayers," said Gade.

"This achievement was despite the global push to postpone examinations as was captured in different countries."

The Eastern Cape Department of



Education fielded a higher number of Grade 12 learners compared to 2019.

There were 72 926 learners in 2020 compared to 63 198 in 2019, an increase of 9 728, representing a 15.3% increase.

Out of the 82 449 full time candidates in the school system, 79 670 were registered for NSC examinations.

"I would like to begin by congratulating the Eastern Cape class of 2020. Remain assured that the Eastern Cape government is committed to ensuring that the National Senior Certificate is the first step on your road to further studies and work opportunities. We are also committed to ensuring that those who did not complete the NSC in 2020 are supported to success," said Gade.

He added: "The Eastern Cape Department of Education already has detailed plans for those wishing to write NSC examinations in October/November 2021. These plans will be communicated in the next few weeks."

Gade said due to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 50 school days were lost and in order to recover some of these lost teaching and learning days the examination timetable had to be shifted between November and December.



The May/June National Senior Certificate examinations were cancelled due to Covid-19 lockdown and merged with NSC 2020 November examinations.

He added that the Department of Education in the Eastern Cape had to conduct Grade 12 National Senior Certificate examinations in 933 full time public schools, including 50 independent schools and 147 part-time centres.

The 933 full time examination centres inclusive of public and independent schools registered 79 888 fulltime candidates, while 5 842 markers were employed to undertake marking, and 1 200 examination assistance were appointed to support the marking process.

"This had huge logistical implications with ripple effects on financial and human resources," said Gade.

"However, the administration, management and conduct of examination fully adhered to the Covid-19 pandemic regulations such as social distancing and all other safety measures to protect lives of learners and teachers."

Gade said all districts in the Eastern Cape experienced a drop in pass rates with highest drop of 14.9% in Joe Gqabi, followed by OR Tambo Coast at 12.5%.

He said the bachelor passes were least affected at 30%,

showing a drop of 2.3% from 2019 Bachelor pass.

However, more learners earned a bachelor in 2020 at 21886 compared to 20419 in 2019.

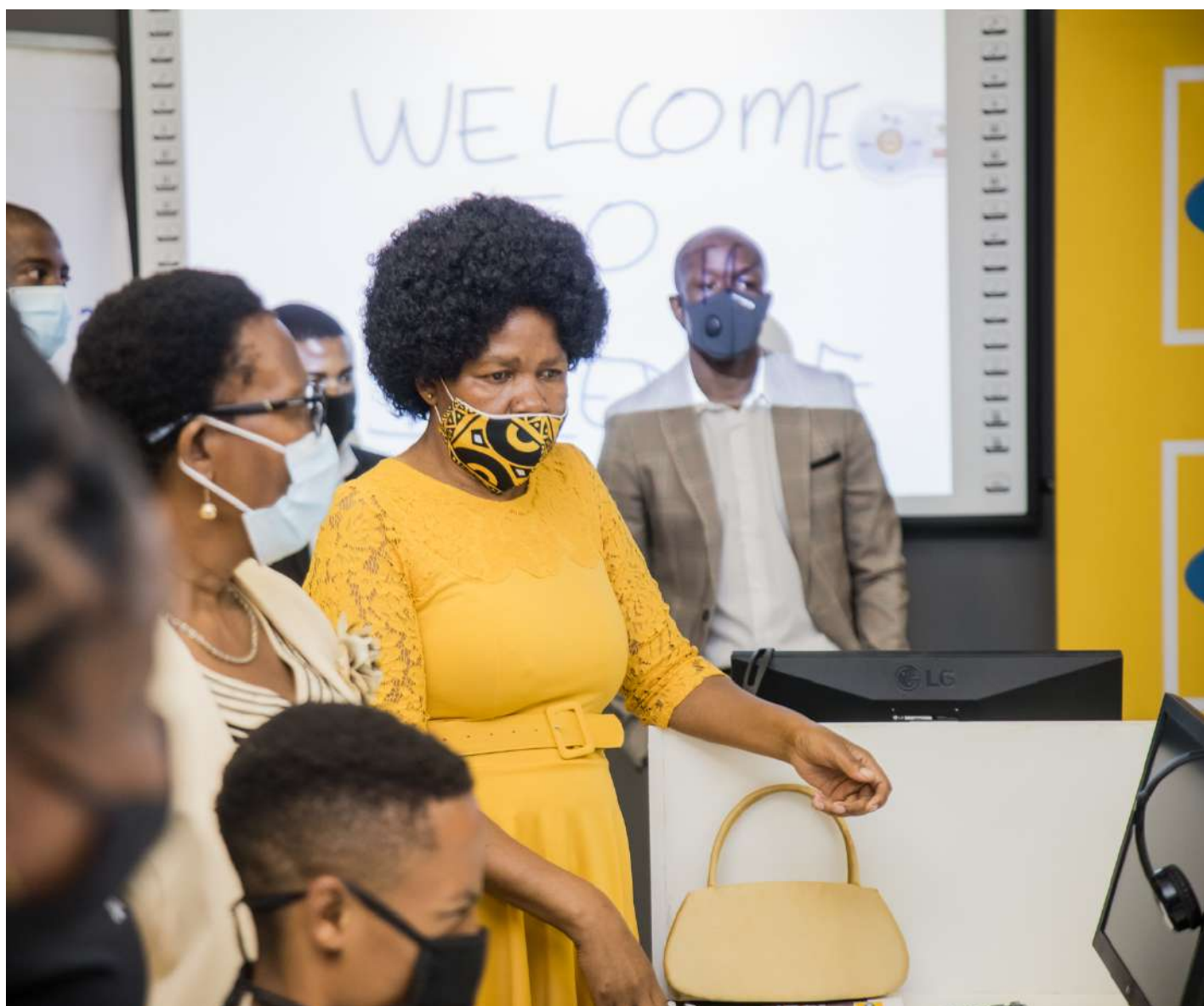
The highest bachelor passes were obtained in BCM at 37.5%, followed by Nelson Mandela Bay at 36.9% and Sarah Baartman at 32.8%.

In terms of subject performance, said Gade, big enrolment subjects have shown signs of resilience despite ravages of the pandemic.

Business Studies improved from 68% to 77.8% and History improved from 87.2 to 87.9.



Eastern Cape Education
MEC Fundile Gade



“Our learners were hardest hit in Physical Science which dropped from 70.2% to 55.6%, and the subject carries 25 870 learners,” said Gade.

“In languages, English First Additional Languages has shown a significant improvement, from 96.5% to 98.5%, and it carries the majority of learners in the system. Both Afrikaans and English Home Languages had a slight improvement at 1.5% and 2.8% respectively. IsiXhosa and Sesotho have a marginal decrease of 0.1% in

both languages.”

Gade said the Eastern Cape’s matric pass rate wouldn’t be possible without the commitment and dedication of teachers, and the role played by teacher unions.

“You provided extra lessons; you participated in Saturday Schools and afternoon sessions, you provided additional study materials; you ensured that your learners’ School-based Assessment was completed, and the results submitted on time,” said

Gade.

“You encouraged and cajoled. We, the citizens of the Eastern Cape salute you and thank you for all that you have done for our young people. My heartfelt gratitude also goes to the leadership of all Teacher Unions in the province –the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union (SADTU); the National Professional Teachers’ Association of South Africa and the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwys Unie (SAOU).”

Western Cape Slips Out Of The A League, Keeps The Highest Proportion Of Learners In School

NYAKALLO TEFU AND THEBE MABANGA

The Western Cape slipped out of the A league when its matric pass rate fell by 2,4% from 82,3% to 79,9% but the province still produced one of the country's top ten performing districts, the Cape Metro North District, and recorded some notable improvements by schools from some of its poorest areas.

Western Cape Education MEC Debbie Schaffer noted that while the [province's pass rate declined in line with the national average due to Covid19, they suffered the least. "Our pass rate declined by 2.4% compared to last year, to 79.9%. This impact is lower than the average national decrease of 5.1%, and the lowest decline of any of the provinces," said Schaffer.

The Western Cape has for the 2020 matric year landed on the number 3 spot, behind Gauteng and the Free State, which both scored above 80%.

As with the rest of the country, Schaffer noted that Covid19 cast a shadow over the examinations. "The biggest challenge was Covid-19, it disrupted everything not only in South Africa but the world. Managing people's anxiety, while managing our own was also very difficult but overall we did very well," the MEC said.

The Western Cape was one of the provinces that pushed for

learners to return to school during the lockdown in 2020, however, most parents and teacher unions were not happy with the decision saying children and staff will be at risk. "We have learned that the advice we got scientifically was good advice and following protocols has worked well for us," added Schaffer.

Schaffer said she is happy that the province increased its bachelors pass rate and overall numbers which reached a record 22 634, or 43,8% of the 51 633 candidates who wrote. "Mathematics pass rate (70,8%) has gone up and Maths literacy (82,9%), both have gone up since last year which is very pleasing especially with the year we had last year," said Schaffer. The Western Cape once again produced the top two candidates in mathematics nationally in Daniel Alwyn of Hermanus High School and Verna Naidoo of Rondebosch Boys High.

Schaffer celebrated the results at Elswood Sekonder in Elsiesriver, which saw its own pass rate increase by 24, 8% to 83,8%. The school is in the Metro North, the top performing district in the province, which is also one of the top 10 performing districts nationally, tied at seventh with Ekurhuleni South in Gauteng with 85,1%.

Schaffer noted that the Western



Western Cape Education MEC Debbie Schaffer

Cape is the most successful in keeping children in school for the last three year of schooling. She noted that two thirds, or 66,6%, of learners who were in Grade 10 in 2018 went on to write matric last year, the highest proportion in the country. Schaffer actively encouraged unsuccessful candidates to use options available to them including rechecking, remarking and supplementary examinations, or rewriting matric completely. "I would encourage all learners who did not pass their exams not to give up and to continue doing whatever they can to complete Grade 12."

KZN brushes aside damaged schools and covid-19 to score 76.2%

LUCAS LEDWABA



The KwaZulu-Natal matric class of 2020 defied the covid-19 pandemic and the discomfort of schools destroyed by flooding to score a respectable 76.2% pass rate.

Although this is a 3.7% drop from the 81.3% pass rate in 2019, it is however viewed as a fair performance that places the province in fourth place behind Free State, Gauteng and Western Cape who are the top three achievers.

KZN which had a total of 144307 matric candidates in 2020 has been hovering in the 70s bracket in the last five years, scoring 78.2% in 2018, 75.1% in 2017 and in 2016 came in at 72.5%.

Ugu district was the top performer in the province with a score of 81.7%.

In December 2019 the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education announced that 81 of its schools had been severely damaged by storms and were in need of urgent repairs ahead of the 2020 school year. The department said most of the affected were in the uMgungundlovu, Utrecht, Ladysmith and Zululand areas.

The same challenge appears to have plagued the province again during last year but on a scale lower than in 2019. However, education MEC Kwazi Mshengu said the damages will

be dealt with whilst schools are in operation except for schools where damage is such that teaching and learning cannot take place.

A satisfied premier Sihle Zikalala, in announcing the provincial matric results lauded the class of 2020 for its resilience. "The matric class of 2020 defied the odds to make it to this moment. You were able to rise beyond circumstances and excel during a pandemic. This is the class that has demonstrated resilience and tenacity and risen above all the circumstances with the help of your teachers, family and friends. You had to battle



Kwazulu Natal Education
MEC Kwazi Mshengu

with many upheavals and adjust too many new normal. There were doubts that set it whether you will make it to, yet you made it this far because you worked hard," he said.

"The Covid-19 pandemic naturally brought pandemonium, a tinge of fear and trepidation as we entered into a world that until then, was unknown to us.

The national lockdown meant that schools were also closed down in order to allow the country, the continent to think through solutions against the Corona virus," he said.

Zikalala acknowledged that life under Covid-19 changed education drastically.

"The introduction of online education and remote learning has now become the new normal but has admittedly been a disruptive force to what we were used to until then," he said. Zikalala said the province was already looking ahead and would continue to diversify the educational output of the system.

"By 2022 four new schools in KZN will implement the Teaching of Technical Occupational Subjects which we piloted in 2020," said Zikalala.

"We can also assure you that for 2020/21 a further six schools in the province will pilot the technical occupational subjects as part of the introduction of the

3rd Stream," he said. Zikalala added that in 2021, two technical high schools will be added to the 70 technical high schools that offer two or more technical subjects to bring the total to 72.

"In the same year, the province will open the Dabulamanzi Agricultural Focus School as an addition to the four existing agricultural focus schools," he said.

The Impact of COVID-19 On Learners Performance Was Incalculable – Northwest MEC of Education

NYAKALLO TEFU

THE North West Education MEC Mmaphefo Matsemela blames the poor performance of matric learners in the province on the disruptions brought about by COVID-19 pandemic.

She said due to the coronavirus, matriculants spend time at home during the pandemic in isolation and without explicit face-to-face instruction, while teachers were scrambling to adapt content for online platforms.

“Not only did the Northwest go down, but other provinces too. This shows how the year 2020 was challenging. If it wasn’t for the pandemic, I believe we would have done better,” said Matsemela.

The province’s matric pass rate sits at number 5 on the list at 76.2%, which is a drop of 10.8% compared to the 2019 matric pass rate.

“The year 2020 was a very difficult year throughout the world. We may be at the 5th position, but we will stay strong and we will rise as the department of education,” said Matsemela.

Matsemela said the department tried different interventions to ensure that learners do well in their examinations.



North West Education
MEC Mmaphefo Matsemela

Between 2017 to 2019 the Northwest province had been in the third and fourth position in the matric pass rate nationally.

However, in 2020 it dropped to fifth place.

“Implementing the full curriculum in Grade 12s was hard for some learners. We dropped by 10,68%. We need to know that these learners did not sit for June examinations,” added Matsemela.

Matsemela said this year, the department would continue to focus and assist learners with the curriculum for the year.

“We may be at the 5th position, but we will stay strong and we will rise as the department of education”

Land of the rising sun meets the Covid19 challenge to produce country's top learners

THEBE MABANGA



Mpumalanga Education
MEC Bonakele Majuba

The Mpumalanga province achieved some notable successes in the 2020 National Senior Certificate results, including producing the country's top students in Technical mathematics, but challenges relating to inequality within the school system remain.

Unveiling the results this week, Education minister Angie Mot

shekga said the province was placed sixth overall with a pass rate of 73,7%, a decline of 6,6% from 2019, in line with the national average, owing largely to the outbreak of the Corona virus pandemic.

Unveiling the results at the University of Mpumalanga on Tuesday, Bonakele Majuba, the MEC for education in the prov

ince pointed to the Covid19 pandemic as casting shadow over the exams. "It is common course that the 2020 school year was the most challenging year we have ever experienced with unprecedented developments in the annals of our education history." Said Majuba.

He pointed to the collaborative between teachers, who he



called the province's 33 000 frontline workers, parents, school management teams and

health authorities to salvage and academic year which at one point looked set to be deferred. Majuba said Covid19 also laid bare inequalities within the education sector and exposed areas that needed to be attended to urgently without fail. The pandemic imposed upon us what we now regard to be "the New Normal." He told the audience which included the premier Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane.

"I, therefore, wish to appeal to the school community of the place of the rising sun to continue to rise to the occasion in the quest to improve the delivery of education in particular for the children of the working class and for those who live below the breadline," he said.

Motshekga highlighted this inequality within the province's education system when she noted that "Mpumalanga's fee-paying schools are ranked second nationally, but their "no fee" and Government subsidised schools are ranked fifth and sixth, respectively".

The province registered a record 93 899 candidates for the combined National Senior Certificate and Senior Certificate Examinations for the year 2020, which included the rescheduled May/June exam.

A total of 53 391 learners wrote

this examination and 39 367 passed, to yield 73.7% pass rate. The Bohlabela and Nkangala Districts both recorded 74.6% mark that is above the provincial average.

The Ehlanzeni District recorded a 74.5% which is also above the Provincial performance whilst Gert Sibanda District registered a 70,9% pass rate.

Majuba said his department was encouraged that all four districts within the province managed to perform above 70%.

The best performing circuit is Mbombela with a 90.3% pass rate as compared with 89.2% in 2019. Out of 555 schools which served as examination centers, 30 of these schools achieved a 100% pass rate.

Majuba further stated that the 2020 overall best performing school in the province is Magigwana Secondary School within Thulamahashe Circuit in Bohla

bela District. 276 learners from this school wrote the 2020 Grade 12 Examination and all of them passed- recording a 100% pass rate.

Simphiwe Phangisa and Mthobisi Brian Hlatshwayo from DD Mabuza Comprehensive School in Nkomazi Circuit registered full marks and distinctions in technical mathematics.

Majuba expressed hope that the province will continue on an upward trajectory of its performance and used the occasion to pay tribute to the late minister in the Presidency Jackson Mthembu, who died of Covid19 recently, as well as members of the schooling community in Mpumalanga, who include John Siwela, principal for the most improved school in the province, Machaye Secondary School in the Bohlabela District in Bushbuckridge, which raised its pass rate by a staggering 54,8 percentage points from 26,1 to 81,3%.



Matric Results: MTN Awards SA's Top 183 Matriculants With Laptops, Computers

NYAKALLO TEFU



MTN SA Foundation General Manager: Kusile Mtunzi-Hairwadzi.

MTN SA has awarded the top 183 matriculants with laptops and computers following the announcement of matric results on Monday by the Department of Basic Education.

"As a reward for their efforts and stellar results, MTN Foundation is handing over laptop computers to the top 33 achievers nationally, as well as providing laptops to the top 15 achievers in each province," MTN said in a statement.

MTN added that the top 15 learners in the ICT (CAT and IT subjects) and special needs category, nationally, will also receive laptops.

"Each of the 183 achievers will also receive an MTN backpack filled with stationery," said the network operator.

MTN SA Foundation's general manager, Kusile Mtunzi-Hairwadzi, said the past year has tested the mettle of the matricu-

lants, with learners facing unprecedented challenges ahead of the biggest exams of their school careers.

"We congratulate them on achieving an outstanding national result despite the challenges," added Mtunzi-Hairwadzi.





Opinion: MTN SA Foundation Accelerates E-learning Support To SA Learners, But Crime Poses A Major Threat

KUSILE MTUNZI-HAIRWADZI



THE impact of rampant vandalism, theft and break-ins at schools is influencing the hopes and dreams of children across the country.

Thousands of Computer Application Technology (CAT) pupils will not be able to access the digital tools they need to succeed, unless urgent support and greater access to technology is provided on a large scale.

Last year, in an address by Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, it was reported that 1 577 schools suffered vandalism and theft during the country's national lockdown, with computer laboratories the hardest hit.

The situation has not improved and early this year more than 42 computers stolen at just one school in the south of Johannesburg.

Through the MTN Foundation, we see first-hand the ripple effects this criminal activity is having on our future generations.

It is devastating to see the impact on learners.

These children had just been given access to computers for the first time in their lives, and to have them taken away is heart-breaking. and immediately stifles their learning potential.

To date, MTN SA Foundation's flagship project within the e-Learning offering has been the provisioning of multimedia centres in schools, institutions of higher learning and communities across the country.

However, as many as 34 of the schools which were connected between 2014 and 2017 have, sadly, reported burglary, theft, or some form of vandalism during the past three years.

The 34 schools represent over 26% of the total schools connected over the past three years, being impacted.

Visiting the schools targeted truly lays bare the broad impact



these crimes are having.

Grade 12 learners, for instance, were using the multimedia centres to apply to universities and for bursaries, while free access to data and computers was opening the door to a myriad of opportunities for learners and teachers.

Hundreds of Grade 10 learners had also just started their studies in Computer Applied Technology (CAT), and there is a risk many schools and their learners may not be able to do the practical work needed to pass their exams, or may not be able to continue with their subject at all.

This will leave these learners to enter the job market unprepared for the digital world, which will only widen the digital divide and take away future opportunities from these young adults

Teachers, along with their ability to keep up with curriculums, will also be hindered as they use the labs to research and formulate lesson plans.

Not only that, but entire communities also lose out, as the multimedia centres established at many schools were being utilised by all members of the community, giving them access to the benefits of the digital economy and connected world. There is no doubt the futures and dreams of these children are being placed in jeopardy by these unacceptable actions.



The torching of schools has, of course, further hampered progress as repairs to vandalised school buildings often take a long time with limited budgets available.

With the education system as fragile as it is at the moment, working to weather the

COVID-19 storm, digital solutions for children in remote or

disadvantaged areas who may not be able to access physical classrooms, teachers, textbooks or computers, is more critical than ever.

While MTN is saddened by the devastation wrought at many of these centres and schools, we stand steadfast in our commitment to support vulnerable children and schools.



As the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) ushers in exciting opportunities, it is important that barriers for learners are removed.

Learners simply cannot be exposed to computers for the first time when they enter university gates, in doing so, these students are immediately at a significant disadvantage to their tech savvy peers, once again stacking the odds against those with less financial stability.

It is imperative that the class of 2021 receives support to close the gaps in accessing online tools and learning.

This year again, together with key partners, MTN SA Founda

tion will work to help children, along with teachers and educational institutions, overcome the hurdles that have been placed in their path and continue to drive greater access to education across South Africa as children head back to classrooms.

The 2021 MTN SA Back-to-School programme is focused on increasing learner's school performance and access to e-learning, building on the Foundation's pivotal work during the COVID-19 school lockdowns.

The programme will take aim at assisting those in need, and especially children who may not enjoy the benefits of textbooks,

teachers, or even properly functioning schools.

Several interventions and offerings of e-education and virtual schools will leverage the existing MTN technology solutions.

This is critical as the pandemic has shown how crucial it is to drive seamless connectivity and support to help improve learning outcomes, no matter how challenging the situation may seem.

For instance, during the ongoing COVID-19 storm, MTN's 96% LTE connectivity is enabling e-learning and virtual classes in previously unreachable areas.





In the Eastern Cape Province alone, 72 000 SIM cards were pre-loaded with mobile data and provided to the Eastern Cape learners, in addition to the zero-rating of educational websites, and provision of equipment for modern multi-media centres, across the country.

However, we must remain aware that 51% of the country still makes use of “feature phones” which do not allow for online learning.

The cost of bringing features phones and tablets to market is a significant hindrance to accessing the internet.

To solve this problem, we will need a concerted and collaborative effort between business, NGOs and the private sector.

Working with the Siyavula Foundation, the MTN SA Foundation has invested into the Siyavula e-learning platform that offers textbooks, practice software and exam preparation content.

This investment is ensuring that SA’s Grade 10 to 12 learners across South Africa have access to world-class Mathematics software and online textbooks for CAT and IT.

Education is a right, and a crucial opportunity to grow and develop our future leaders.

It holds the key to a better life for all children and adolescents worldwide, a life with less



MTN SA Foundation General Manager: Kusile Mtunzi-Hairwadzi.

poverty, better health and an increased ability to take their future into their own hands and become active participants in the economy.

MTN’s primary focus on education seeks to drive access to information using technology as an enabler.

Therefore, we are placing a heavy focus on creating an MTN e-school that will use virtual platforms to provide access to curriculum aligned information to the target audiences.

Teachers will never be replaced.

We need to personal interactions, the sensitivity that comes with know your learner’s strengths and weaknesses and the power of experience when try to help a learner through a tricky piece of work.

But we can all do more to better use the resources we have at our disposal.

Through ongoing collaboration and support with likeminded partners in the public sector, aligning to the strategic intent of the National Department of Education, Department of Social Development (DSD) and Department of Basic Education (DBE), in 2021 and beyond, we will continue to assist with brightening the futures of children and communities, despite the obstacles in their way.

This work will be ramped up even further this year as we continue to bring the benefits of the modern, connected life to more people.



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