

# Press Release

## For immediate release

21 May 2018

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South African Institute of Race Relations  
*The power of ideas*

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### **Education Charter launched to endorse greater parental involvement in our failing schools**

The Institute of Race Relations (IRR) today launches an Education Charter to give South Africans the opportunity to endorse greater parental involvement in schools as a first step to rescuing the education system from the grave crisis it is in.

The Charter is addressed to the politicians who are directly involved in managing the country's schooling system; the Minister of Basic Education, the nine provincial education MECs and the Official Opposition's Shadow Minister of Basic Education.

It will urge them all to heed growing public anxiety about the state of education in South Africa, and to implement policies that give parents the greater control and influence over schools which, universally, have led to better results in the classroom.

IRR research shows how desperately South Africa needs this approach.

A measure of our schooling crisis is that, in the absence of a dramatic change in policy, a grade one learner starting school this year will have only a 50% chance of making it to grade 12, a less than even chance of finishing matric, and even lower chance of passing well enough to go to university.

A good maths pass in matric is a key marker of a young person's chances of making it into the middle classes – but our pass marks in mathematics are dismal.

Only about 12% of matric learners pass with more than 60%. Worryingly, most of these – nearly half – are in the better-resourced Quintile Five schools, meaning that those in poorer schools (most of whom are black) suffer disproportionately.

This is to say nothing of South Africa's poor performance in international rankings – a recent study found that 80% of our grade fours are illiterate.

The consequence of all this is that most South African children are finding themselves unprepared either for university or for the world of work. High drop-out rates at university and high unemployment rates reflect this. A minority of students manage to pass their degrees within three years and more than half of people aged between 15 and 24 are unemployed. This is an untenable situation which will have dire consequences for South Africa's future.

The root of this crisis lies in our schools.

South African schools are undermined by hostile unions whose actions suggest they are more interested in protecting underperforming teachers than in educating children, as well as by poor administration, and policy that is often driven by ideology rather than the practical demands of delivering effective education.

Giving parents and communities control of schools will go some way to addressing our education crisis.

Parents should be allowed to choose the ethos and curriculum of schools, as well as have a say over staff appointments. Language policy – within reason – should also be under the control of parents of learners at the school, and of members of surrounding communities.

This is the thrust of the Education Charter the IRR launches today as a means of giving parents and community members the chance to express their support for control of schools being given to them, rather than to politicians and bureaucrats.

The Charter is part of an IRR campaign for greater parental choice in schooling.

This can be achieved through giving parents and communities greater control over schools, implementing charter schools or a similar model in this country, or giving parents education vouchers and allowing them to send their children to the school of their choice.

Where parents have more choice, and more control over schools, results are better.

Ending the crisis in education, especially in our schools, is something that concerns all South Africans, whether they have children at school or not. South Africa has the potential to provide all its children with excellent schooling, but this is not a task that we can leave to the government alone – it is vital that parents and communities get involved.

See the Charter at [here](#)

**Ends.**