

THROWN UNDER THE SCHOOL BUS

The future of the Class of 2020:
Gauteng as bellwether on education

*#FreeEducation
from the clutches of failing politicians*



South African Institute of Race Relations

The power of ideas

January 2020

Published by the South African Institute of Race Relations

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Thrown under the School Bus

The future of the Class of 2020: Gauteng as bellwether on education

On the 15th of January, the Class of 2020, more than a million Grade 1s, will start their school careers. What will happen to them? This is the fundamental question the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) wants to ask and begin to answer in this overview report.

The 2019 matric results in South Africa yielded one of the best pass rates in the history of post-1994 South Africa.ⁱ When the Class of 2020 ends its school career twelve years from now, their matric pass rate will be only a very small part of their story. While politicians may enjoy the short-term self-congratulating of claims of record pass rates, more insidious problems can be discovered through careful analysis of the data.

In analysis of socio-economic factors and trends, a vital component is the identification of bellwethers – indicators of things to come. In this regard, the politics and ideology of the governing African National Congress (ANC) must be seen in context and understood. It is therefore vital to understand the education policy and approach of the Gauteng government. The general importance of Gauteng as a province is undeniable, but within the context of this report, the education policy approach of the ANC government in the province should specifically be appreciated as an indicator of what the ANC as a national party wants to pursue.

The illustration of this is most clearly seen in the role played in government and the ANC by MEC for Education in Gauteng, Panyaza Lesufi.

Mr Lesufi was appointed MEC for Education in Gauteng in 2014. When Mr Lesufi was moved from the Education portfolio following the ANC's retention of the Gauteng government in May 2019, Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, decried this decision, calling it a “big, big mistake”.ⁱⁱ For a cabinet minister to strongly take a position on provincial matters of governance is significant and is a strong indication that Mr Lesufi's approach to education in Gauteng enjoys support from the national government. The subsequent return of Mr Lesufi to the education portfolio, shows the weight the issue carried within the ANC. Furthermore, it has been reported that Mr Lesufi has been involved in the drafting of national legislation, a claim denied by the ANC.ⁱⁱⁱ

The final consideration to illustrate the importance of Mr Lesufi's role in ANC education policy is the ideological context of the party's approach to state and government power in general. Tellingly, it is in Gauteng that government authority is aggressively being extended over schools, crowding out the role of school governing bodies (SGBs), and in Gauteng where school zoning is pursued with great vigour. The schools placement system of the Gauteng government is pursued despite grave failures, markedly failing to place thousands of children in schools for the academic year of 2020 by the set deadline.^{iv} Despite the shortcomings of this system and the drastic extent to which it impedes on the freedom of parents to make important decisions on the education of their children, neither the provincial nor the national ANC have given any substantive indication that the system will be abandoned in favour of returning powers to parents. Seen within the context of the ruling party's attempts to extend the functions and powers of the state, Mr Lesufi's approach to education policy chimes in clear harmony with the national government's approach of greater state involvement to the exclusion of the freedoms of ordinary South Africans.

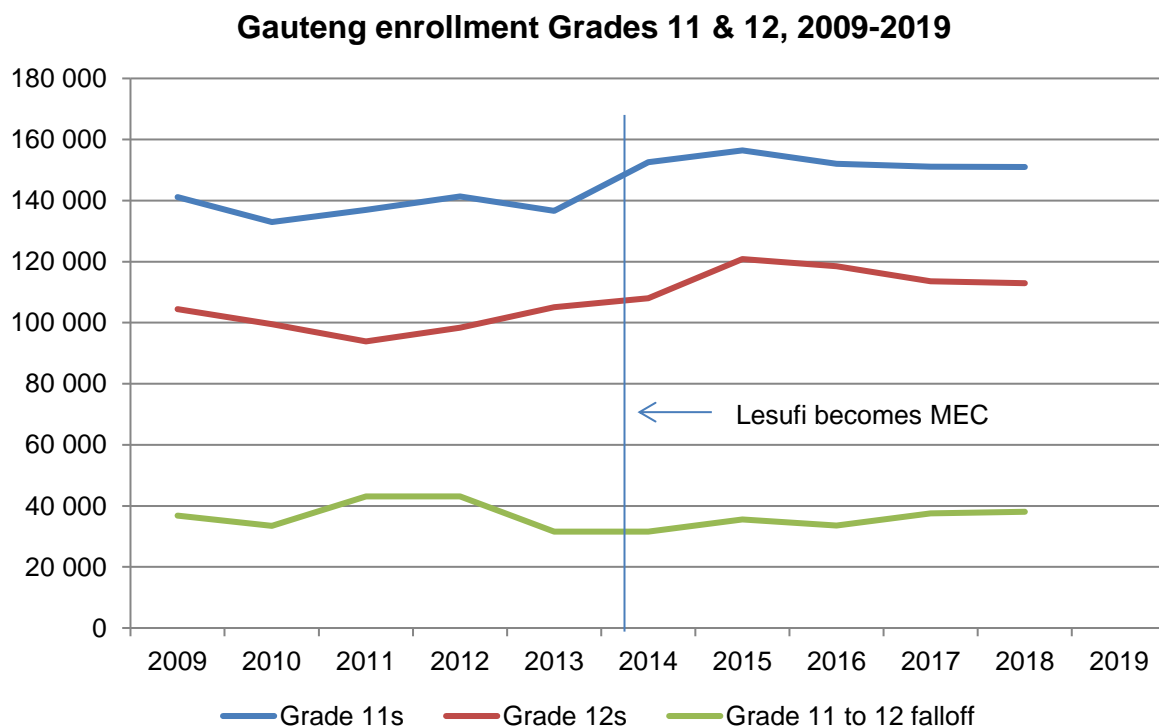
When the school careers of the Class of 2020 are considered, the reality is that Mr Lesufi's approach to education will become the model endorsed by the ANC nationwide. When considering the future of education under ANC governance, the best place to look is at the recent past and the present of education policy under the ANC in Gauteng – and the failures of Panyaza Lesufi as MEC for Education. These failures manifest in large numbers of students dropping out of basic education before reaching matric and the decline in the number of previously disadvantaged pupils who attain a bachelor pass. The underlying causes of these failures must be understood to be able to chart the future course of the Class of 2020.

The real pass rate

Oftentimes analysts will refer what is called the “real pass rate”, that is to say, the number of Grade 1 – or any other grade prior to Grade 12 – pupils who went on to pass matric in the ensuing years without dropping out of school. For South Africa's class of 2019, the national pass rate was 81.3% while the “real pass rate” taken from a cohort of 2017 Grade 10 pupils was just 38.9%.^{vi} The combined number of learners who either did

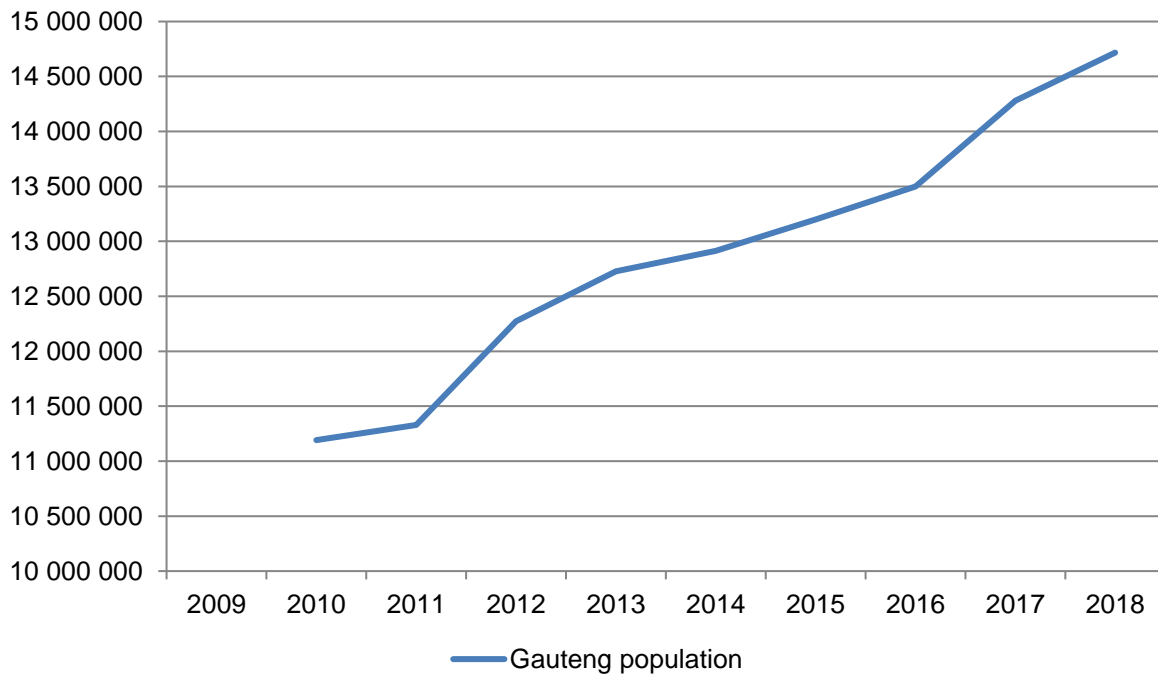
not pass matric or dropped out of school in three years is significantly large and the statistics for Gauteng as a province are not dissimilar.

When examining the number of Gauteng pupils enrolled per grade, a trend of Grade 11s dropping out before matric becomes clear. Plotted on the chart below is the number of enrolled, Grade 11s, matrics and the difference thereof.^{vii}



From this one can see that there is and has been a stark contrast in the number of Grade 11s and matrics suggesting a unique reason for Grade 11 learners to drop out before reaching matric. More concerning is the fact that difference between the number of Grade 11 and matric student has been steadily increasing since 2013. This is over and above that the number of Grade 11 and matric students in Gauteng have both been slowly decreasing since 2015. This trend is particularly notable as Gauteng's population has been simultaneously increasing.^{viii}

Gauteng population, 2009-2018



This suggests a significant distortion of the meaning of a provincial or national “pass rate” as the pass rate immediately looks better as a percentage if the students least likely to pass matric drop out before they even reach matric. Thus, the improving pass rate correlating with an increasing number of Grade 11 learners not reaching matric can be seen as evidence of learners who may be unlikely to pass matric dropping out. Correlation is certainly not causation, but analysis of such evidence shows that a simple percentage a matric National Senior Certificate (NSC) passes alone creates an inaccurate representation of educational successes and failures. This allows for other aspects of the education system to be doctored so as to look better to the public.

One thing is certain, though: a general decrease in the number of matric students in a province with a growing population needs to be explained.

Cadre deployment and corruption

In the 2016, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) released a report which detailed the effect that the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) was having on the education system in South Africa. The negative influence of SADTU was found to be such that even the Minister for Basic Education criticised SADTU for their actions of illegal strikes and boycotts.^{ix} This is over and above the finding in the Ministerial Task Team’s

report that SADTU was indeed guilty in the “Jobs for Cash” scandal – a scandal in which teaching posts were sold by the union as well as officials in the education department^x.

Gauteng was one of the six provinces whose Education department was said to be “captured” by SADTU with everything from teaching posts to district managers being subject to SADTU approval.^{xi}

The Ministerial Report further mentions the means by which SADTU maintained this kind of control and influence, some of which include^{xii}:

- using “teacher militancy” to pressure teachers to prioritise the union first and teaching second;
- practicing cadre deployment to ensure that a high number of union members occupied posts of influence and power to further the union’s interests;
- by being “an industrial and adversarial trade union”

Research by the IRR has identified the influence of SADTU over education in provinces like Gauteng as a key reason for educational failures^{xiii}.

The SADTU has, instead of protecting the rights of teachers, infringed the rights of learners in the country. Minister Angie Motshekga has criticised SADTU, saying that the union (which is an ally of the ANC through its membership of the Congress of South African Trade Unions) caused more problems than it solved in some parts of the country. She also bemoaned the union’s opposition to measures to improve education, its antagonistic approach, illegal strikes, and its use of policy matters as ‘bargaining chips’ to get its way.^{xiv}

Research conducted by a task team appointed by the DBE found that SADTU had effectively ‘captured’ the schooling system in six provinces (the Free State, the Northern Cape, and Western Cape being the exceptions). The union was selling posts and manipulating appointments, and the manipulation of appointments was not only around the appointment of teachers and principals, but also of district managers. The DBE task team did not hold SADTU solely to blame, however. Writing in the Mail & Guardian, a member of the DBE task team, Michael Gardiner, said that the department had to carry some of the blame. He said that the department’s ‘weakness and passivity’ had led to SADTU becoming as powerful as it was.^{xv}

This was partly because of the ANC's policy of cadre deployment since the 1990s, which often put someone's political position above their ability to do a particular job. Mr Gardiner writes: '25 years of government cadre deployment, which is openly determined to continue, appears to have degenerated into patronage or else a means of capturing parts of the education system.'^{xvi}

Yet, despite the poor outcomes at schools and the insidious influence of SADTU, there are moves to take power away from school governing bodies (SGBs). The Draft Basic Education Amendments Bill seeks to take away the power that SGBs have to select and appoint senior teachers, such as principals. SGBs will only be able to select and appoint junior posts. SGBs will also no longer have control over a school's admission policy, with this power lying with the Head of Department.^{xvii} According to Mr Gardiner, a number of unions (not just SADTU) argue that problems around the appointment of educators are because of SGBs. Indeed, the only union that did not identify SGBs as a problem in appointments was the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysunie. Mr Gardiner cautions against tampering with the powers of SGBs, arguing that they should be assisted to meet their potential, and that more should be done to develop them, to ensure those serving on them are familiar with 'professional aspects of posts or with the intricacies of school management'.

The selling of posts by SADTU officials who have hijacked provincial education departments is not the only example of corruption in our schools. According to Corruption Watch, nearly 1 500 different instances of corruption were reported. Some 29% of such instances were linked to theft of funds, with a quarter of reports citing corruption around employment. Financial mismanagement was identified in 28% of the cases, with corruption around procurement accounting for 14% of the reports to the NGO. In the majority of cases, principals, or principals with the help of others, were identified as the culprits.^{xviii}

In a country with as contested a history as South Africa's, there will often be culture clashes, and this has also been the case in our schools. Although there is a right to receive education in the language of choice, this is tempered by restrictions on resources. A number of Afrikaans-medium schools have used the issue of language to restrict access to (particularly black) children, which is unacceptable. When a school is capable of taking additional children, this should happen, and a school should become dual-

medium if necessary. Many formerly whites-only schools were dual medium during apartheid, and there is no reason why these schools cannot be common again today. However, it is clear that often the issue of language is used as a political football. Schools use it as a means to remain exclusive, while the government uses it as a rod to beat those it disapproves of.

The case of Mr Lesufi and Höerskool Overvaal in Vereeniging is one such example. At the beginning of the school year, 55 grade 8 children who wished to be taught in English wanted to attend Overvaal, an Afrikaans-medium school. The school said that it did not have the capacity for the children nor teachers to teach them in their chosen language, and, after the department had demanded that space be found for the 55, the matter ended up in court. The court ruled in favour of the school, saying that the department had tried to ‘force [the school] in an arbitrary fashion on very short notice to convert to a double medium institution when it is not practically possible to do so’. Mr Lesufi has said that he will take the matter as far as the Constitutional Court. Subsequently, it emerged that Mr Lesufi and the provincial education department had bullied two English-medium schools in the area to claim that they were at capacity, when they were not, forcing the 55 children to try to get into Overvaal.^{xix} The principals of the two schools were accused of being racist and threatened with dismissal if they did not say that their schools were full.^{xx}

The policy of deploying SADTU cadres to various positions throughout schools and the education department has been harmful to the young learners whom they teach. The quality of a teacher plays a crucial role in the quality of education the child receives. It should be noted that even if the official pass rates have been improving in South Africa, the question remains: how many more children from impoverished backgrounds in no-fee schools could have passed with a bachelor’s pass if teachers had been appointed through more transparent and accountable processes?

Wasteful spending

As widely reported, the Education Annual Report by the Auditor-General for 2017/18 revealed that the Gauteng had incurred R900 million in irregular expenditure.^{xxi} The magnitude of this sum would be concerning under any circumstances but made the more concerning by the context of a provincial education system under strain. Vast amounts of

financial resources are also spent on repairs to schools damaged from vandalism and criminality where equipment is destroyed,^{xxii} and in some cases, whole schools are burnt down^{xxiii}. Given this, the wasteful spending by the Gauteng Department of Education should be seen in the most serious light.

Additional to the point of wasteful expenditure, the Gauteng Department has also made questionable spending decisions which would likely not qualify to be considered irregular – recently with relation to the construction of a website aimed at providing online educational resources.^{xxiv} In October 2019, Mr Lesufi, announced the launch of a website aimed at providing access to new online curriculum resources. Announcing the website on Twitter, Mr Lesufi stated that the website’s development took six years. The easing of access for teachers, especially those from poorer areas suffering under the cruel legacy of apartheid, to educational resources and curricula is undoubtedly a laudable development all South Africans should welcome, and for this initiative, the Gauteng Department of Education deserves credit, but it is a duty of government to ensure the efficient spending of scarce resources. This duty of efficiency in the spending of resources is of even greater importance than usual in the area of education precisely because of the vast disadvantages suffered by countless South Africans. These resources are made all the more precious by the hopes pinned on them by millions hoping to see their children receive the education denied them by decades of racially discriminatory and uncaring government.

It is therefore unfortunate and worrying that the website launched by the Gauteng Department of Education in October 2019 (found at gdecontent.co.za) is of such quality that incredibly serious questions must be asked regarding its creation and any resources and monies spent thereon, especially considering the length of time stipulated by Mr Lesufi on social media.

Overview analysis of the website done by members of the public found several shortcomings indicating substandard development and creating a strong suspicion of inefficient expenditure and maladministration of resources. Among these are the website’s lack of HTTPS protocol in service of privacy and data integrity, layout elements indicating usage of an open-source and free learning management system, and an antiquated open-source platform web server software. These elements and their proper consideration in practice lead to the conclusion that the website is badly designed.

To quote a member of the public regarding the software design of the website: “In simple English: It took them 6 years to set up a bunch of free software, then customize it to the point where supporting it is likely a fool’s errand, and by the time they launched it, literally everything inside it is out of date.”

This analysis is cause for great concern and necessitates investigation into the Department’s expenditures incurred in the creation of this website and all matters hereto related. Taxpayers have the right to know if vainglorious politicians spend hard-earned taxes on overpriced and badly developed vanity projects, or whether politicians honour their duty to put public money to the best use possible.

The diagnosis and the treatment

While the above three aspects of the department’s shortcomings are all seemingly different, they can all be tied together with a common fundamental cause: an increase in government control.

To begin, the data surrounding public versus private schooling sends an unambiguous message that private schools in South Africa are far more successful than public schools on a number of levels. From 1994 to 2017, private schools consistently achieved higher rates of passes and much higher rates of bachelor passes than public schools. In 2017 private schools achieved an 89% bachelor pass rate while public schools achieved just 29%.^{xxv} Research by the IRR shows how pass rates differ between state schools in townships, compared to privately-run, low-fee township schools.^{xxvi}

Consider the freedoms which private schools have as opposed to public schools. Strong powers invested in school governing bodies means that teachers can be hired on merit without the departmental interference from SADTU and their cadres. This ensures that merit and not political affiliation determines the appointment of educators. A private school which manages its own finances can spend them efficiently without have an enormous government bureaucracy staffed by cadres wasting R900 billion rand.

The wastefulness in by the Gauteng Government can be blamed on a number of factors, but fundamentally, government departments are almost always wasteful because they do not have to abide by the market forces which drive efficiency in the private sector. If a private business spends R900 billion over budget, it goes broke and people lose their

jobs. If a government department spends R900 billion rand of tax-payers money irregularly, it gets a stern report by the Auditor-General and promises not to do so again. In a country with such as South Africa where there is relatively little threat of electoral defeat on the ruling party, this is even more the case and accountability is left up to the public to spend in lawyer's fees litigating so that the government will spend the money in the way that they said they would.

By freeing education through liberalising legislation, giving power to schools and school governing bodies and parents, and making it as easy as possible for the public to organise and build schools, South Africa can satisfy its need to educate its populace – both at a basic and an advanced level. The above problems are created when the government has too much power and influence. South Africans should be having that same power and influence in their own hands – after all, it is the learners, parents and teachers themselves who know far better than bureaucrats in Pretoria what the situation on the ground is at any given school.

There is certainly place for governmental assistance in the form of funding – particularly at schools poorer or rural areas of the country – but this funding should be done without overburdening agendas attached to it. The idea of school vouchers is often mentioned by South African liberals because it is a way of government funding which does not include government incompetence.

Gauteng is a unique province in South Africa. It is wealthy, diverse, industrialised and it should be a beacon of success in this country. The incompetency and inefficiency of the Gauteng Education Department has had negative effects, but these can be remedied by freeing up education in the province. It is only once the residents of Gauteng stop believing gerrymandered statistics trotted out by backslapping politicians, stop employing incompetent staff deployed as ideological cadres and stop spending other people's money without consequence that they may truly free education.

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- ^{xiii} *South African Institute of Race Relations*, *The South African Education Crisis: Giving Power Back to Parents*, <https://irr.org.za/reports/occasional-reports/files/the-south-african-education-crisis-31-05-2018.pdf>, pp. 7-8
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