

# Building the Future through Quality Education



Education International  
6<sup>th</sup> World Congress

## WELCOMING ADDRESS BY PREMIER HELEN ZILLE AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE 6th WORLD CONGRESS OF EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL

CAPE TOWN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE

22 JULY 2011

Executive Deputy President of South Africa Mr Kgalema Motlanthe,  
Minister of Basic Education, Min Angie Motshekga,  
Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande,  
Western Cape Minister for Education, Mr Donald Grant,  
President of Education International Ms Susan Hopgood,  
Vice-President of Education International, Ms Irene Duncan Adanusa  
General Secretary of Education International Mr Van Leeuwen,  
Members of the Education International Executive Board,  
Presidents and representatives of Teachers' Unions.

Distinguished guests,

Colleagues of the teaching profession,

Ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to welcome Education International and so many education experts, policy-makers, teachers and opinion-formers to our province and to the beautiful city of Cape Town. You have a full programme and will be dealing with complex issues of fundamental importance to the future. Indeed, it is absolutely apposite to say that building a future for all, world-wide, depends on quality education. This is the theme of your conference.

I think it is true to say that in many developing countries we have too often focused exclusively on extending access to education, without paying enough attention to the quality of schooling that is offered.

This Congress, I hope, will go some way to address this.

The impact of quality education on individual development, life-long learning and earning opportunities and the needs of society are indisputable. A nation develops if its institutions serve all its people and offer them real opportunities to shape their lives and determine their future.

In economic terms, two quick examples will suffice. In her recent book, 'The Flat World and Education', Linda Darling-Hammond quotes OECD research that for every year the average schooling level of the population is raised, there is a corresponding increase of 3,7% in long term economic growth. And we know that one can never sustainably increase employment without long term economic growth.



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Closer to home, a recent report by the Stellenbosch University Economics Department on the costs of illiteracy in South Africa found that, if the quality of schooling in South Africa was where it should be (at a level befitting a country of our economic development), our Gross Domestic Product would be R550 billion higher or 23% above the current level. The benefits of such increased economic activity in a society still characterised by unacceptable levels of poverty and inequality are obvious.

But getting our education system right is not just about the economic well-being of our nation as a whole. It is about taking the rights of every learner seriously, and improving their life chances.

This is not just a moral issue. It is a constitutional imperative. As section 28 (2) of our Constitution states: “A child’s best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.”

The right of every learner to a quality education underpins our approach in the Western Cape. No other consideration can be more important than this fundamental right.

We are fully committed to overcoming the legacy of apartheid and shifting resources in favour of the poor. That is why we allocate far higher subsidies and more teaching posts to schools that serve our poorest communities. The 1 500 extra teachers allocated to these schools are worth R 367 million in redress.

Since coming into office in 2009, we have developed and published a clear set of strategic, measurable priorities that allow us to monitor progress towards our objective of improving the quality of education in the Western Cape.

We have set targets for:

- The retention of learners in the school system
- Improved literacy and numeracy results by testing from the Foundation Phase onwards
- The number of candidates passing the public examinations in Grade 12
- The number of candidates passing with access to higher education
- The number of candidates passing mathematics and the sciences.

We have a long way to go, but I am pleased to say that, after 2 years in office, the indicators in all these areas are positive. Most notably, we have arrested the year-on-year decline in education standards that the province experienced over the last seven years.

There is no single ‘silver bullet’ for improving quality. It is the result of a number of interrelated interventions.

These include:

- The creation of text-rich classrooms. This year, for the first time ever, anywhere in the country, every child in grades 2-7 will have access to their own maths textbook.



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We also provide reading books for grades 1-6 in the 258 primary schools that serve our poorest communities.

- Ensuring that schools are first and foremost places where learning and teaching takes place. We protect classroom time vigorously, even using school holidays as an opportunity to provide additional support.
- An extensive infrastructure plan aimed at building schools more quickly and efficiently, while at the same time reducing building costs per school through the issuing of group tenders and through maximising economies of scale. Over the next three years, we will have built 45 new schools.
- A renewed focus on accountability throughout the system. Where schools fail learners by repeatedly producing poor results, additional resources and training are made available in order to rectify the situation. We have also strengthened our legislative framework to enable the department to intervene more directly and to apply corrective measures. And we will apply these.

I have deliberately set out our strategies without reference to the most vital component of all – the teacher.

This is what you might call saving the most important for last. There are thousands of heroic, competent, committed teachers in our province and across the country. Our good teachers are doing more than any other professional to build the new South Africa. We salute them.

For our part, we have to ensure good management of the system. There is a long way to go, but we are, for instance:

- Advertising and filling teaching posts in the shortest time possible in the interests of security and stability in teachers' working environment.
- We have allocated R91 million for in-service teacher development in this financial year and have focused on improving the management skills of our school leaders and the classroom skills of our teachers. Over 3000 attended the Foundation Phase literacy and mathematics sessions held over the recent three week holiday in Cape Town, and many commented on their increased empowerment as professionals better equipped to respond to the needs of their pupils.
- Overall, every effort has been made to reduce administrative demands to the essential, and provide appropriate support.

The Western Cape Education Department respects teaching professionals and takes its responsibility as the employer of over 31000 teachers, with clearly defined labour rights, very seriously indeed.

We will continue to support our teachers to be the best they can be so that our learners can become the best they can be. The rights of teachers and the rights of learners are therefore wholly compatible.

This is the point of departure of every professional teacher.



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But there are some who don't agree. Not only do they differ with us, but they try to prevent us from exercising our right to free speech at important Congresses like this.

Well, if there are differences, let us debate them. Let's have an open and honest conversation about our respective priorities when it comes to education.

In my experience as a former Provincial Minister of Education, there are at least two categories of teacher: those who put their pupils' rights first, and those that don't.

We salute the former and the professional unions that represent their rights and interests.

We cannot allow vested interests to block our plans to improve the quality of education. If we do, we will have fallen short of our constitutional obligations, and betrayed our country. As your Congress theme recognises: Everybody's future is at stake.

That is why we have provided for a range of accountability measures – including the signing of performance contracts linked to learner outcomes – in schools. The life blood of all true professions – teaching included – has always been accountability. The price of failing the children in our schools is simply too high a price to pay.

President Hopgood, the programme for your Congress covers many of these and other important issues. We will follow the informed debates with great interest and wish you every success as you and the delegates grapple with the ongoing challenges.

Thank you.

