**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 1251**

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**1251. Mrs N I Tarabella Marchesi (DA) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:**

Whether she has found that the drop-out rate of 13 to 17,5%, as stated by her department’s Director-General at the meeting of the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education on 8 October 2019, is a true and accurate reflection of the actual drop-out rate; if so, on what evidence is this drop-out rate based; if not, what is the actual current drop-out rate? NW2463E

There is a lot of confusion about drop-out rates – how these are defined and measured. Often what South African people have in mind when loosely referring to “the drop-out rate” is something along the lines of the proportion of children who leave the schooling system without completing Grade 12. However, another way in which drop-out rates are conceived is the proportion of children exiting the school system after each grade. This is how the UNESCO Institute for Statistics defines dropout rates. In this sense, there is no single dropout rate, but there is a different dropout rate for each grade. It would be helpful for questions about retention in the school system or grade completion rates, or dropout rates to be specific.

Whenever matric results are released some critics refer to the so-called “real pass rate”, which attempts to measure the percentage of all children who started school that went on to complete matric. Figures in the range of 37% to 40% are usually mentioned in this regard. This is inaccurate and is caused by the perpetual mistake of comparing grade 1 enrolments (which are inflated due to grade repetition) to matric passes. The high rate of grade repetition in grade 1 is the main reason why this method is flawed, but another reason is that a substantial number of people complete matric through supplementary June NSC exams (or the Multiple Exam Opportunity since 2015) and other equivalent FET qualifications, and these are not reported in the NSC technical reports.

A more careful analysis of household survey data indicates that in recent years ***at least 50% of youths complete grade 12***. An alternative method of comparing the number of matric passes for a particular year to the 18-year-old population of the same year suggests that ***the figure could be as high as 56%***. But whichever method one uses there has been a consistent ***improvement over time***.

Table 1 shows the percentage of 22-25 year-olds who have completed at least Grade 12 for each year since 2009, using General Household Survey data. For these calculations one needs to select an age range which is old enough so as to avoid including large percentages of youths still in school and therefore possibly still going to complete Grade 12 (this would cause an underestimate of grade 12 completion) but which is still young enough so as to reflect recent trends in school completion. For this reason the age range of 22-25 year-olds has been selected. According to this methodology, the percentage of youths who have completed grade 12 has increased from about 44.9% in 2009 to about 53.8% in 2018. It should also be emphasized that these are *estimates* based on a nationally representative sample of households.

Table 1: Percentage of 22 to 25-year-olds who have completed at least Grade 12 or equivalent by population group, 2009-2018

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Population Group** | **2009** | **2010** | **2011** | **2012** | **2013** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **2018** |
| African | 40.1 | 41.1 | 43.2 | 43.6 | 44.4 | 48.4 | 47.0 | 46.7 | 48.8 | 51.6 |
| Coloured | 45.2 | 48.8 | 43.9 | 46.7 | 45.5 | 47.6 | 49.7 | 51.5 | 45.8 | 52.5 |
| Indian | 83.2 | 80.3 | 84.6 | 74.6 | 81.8 | 81.2 | 78.5 | 86.5 | 81.3 | 81.9 |
| White | 85.9 | 85.6 | 89.1 | 89.0 | 86.9 | 87.9 | 85.6 | 83.4 | 79.2 | 81.1 |
| **Total** | **44.9** | **45.6** | **47.1** | **47.4** | **47.9** | **51.4** | **50.1** | **50.0** | **50.7** | **53.8** |

***Source:*** *Statistics South Africa, General Household Survey (GHS), DBE own calculations*

**Drop-out rates for each grade**

Another way of measuring drop-out rates is to look at the percentage of learners who drop out after each grade. These can also be estimated using STATS SA’s GHS data. The table below shows the drop-out rates and survival rates for those born during 1992-1994 (and surveyed between 2016-2018). This specific age cohort was chosen because nearly all these individuals would have been old enough to have completed school at the time when the GHS data was collected. The survival rates in the table show the percentage of individuals who reached each grade. The rate was then converted to show the number of individuals, out of a 1000 individuals who reached each grade. The final column also shows the percentage of all individuals reaching particular grades who then drop out before attaining the next grade. This methodology is more in line with commonly used international definitions of dropout rates.

Note that several years are data have been combined for this analysis in order to ensure that there are sufficient sample sizes in each of the cells. It is also important to note that whilst this method provides the most reliable available estimates of dropout rates by grade, it does not reflect the dropout that happened in a particular year – the data may have been collected from 22-26 year-olds between 2014-2016 but those youths may have dropped out of school in an earlier year.

**Interpretation of Table 2**:

An estimated 0.68% of youths were reported to have no schooling. Of the 99.32% of youths who do complete Grade 1, it is estimated that 0.10% dropout after Grade 1 without completing grade 2. It is evident that the dropout rates are low in the earlier grades, but increase significantly throughout secondary school. For example, it is estimated that 24.08% of those who reach grade 11 drop out of school without completing Grade 12. A similar pattern exists for Grade repetition rates (as shown in Table 3), where these also increase significantly in grades 10 and 11. A comparison with previous analysis conducted by the department indicates that dropout rates are now considerably lower than they were previously.

Research would indicate that the high dropout and repetition rates towards the end of secondary are symptomatic of weak learning foundations which become more apparent as learners get closer to the National Senior Certificate examination. The department is therefore prioritizing interventions both to keep learners in school and to improve the quality of learning outcomes throughout the school system so that learners reach grades 10, 11 and 12 better equipped for the National Senior Certificate examination. Furthermore, the department is aiming to ensure that more youths who do not complete the National Senior Certificate still do obtain some form of educational qualification and gain access to other post-schooling education and training opportunities, such as technical and vocational education.

**Table 2: Survival rates and drop-out rates, associated with each grade**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2016-2018 Pooled datasets (For those born 1992-1994)** | | |
|  | **Survival Rate** | **Survival per 1000 youths** | **Percentage dropping out after attaining this Grade** |
| Total cohort | 100% |  |  |
| No schooling |  | 1000 | 0,68% |
| Grade 1 | 99,32% | 993 | 0,10% |
| Grade 2 | 99,22% | 992 | 0,23% |
| Grade 3 | 98,99% | 990 | 0,31% |
| Grade 4 | 98,68% | 987 | 0,34% |
| Grade 5 | 98,34% | 983 | 0,58% |
| Grade 6 | 97,77% | 978 | 1,31% |
| Grade 7 | 96,49% | 965 | 2,69% |
| Grade 8 | 93,89% | 939 | 4,37% |
| Grade 9 | 89,79% | 898 | 10,51% |
| Grade 10 | 80,35% | 804 | 14,84% |
| Grade 11 | 68,43% | 684 | 24,08% |
| Grade 12 | 51,95% | 520 |  |

**Data Source:** General Household Surveys 2016-2018, DBE own calculations

Figure 3: Percentage of repeaters by grade and gender, 2018

***Source:*** *Statistics South Africa, General Household Survey (GHS), DBE own calculations*