**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 2648**

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**2648. Ms A M Siwisa (EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:**

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(a) What is the total number of young persons who have dropped out of school over the past 20 years, (b) at which grade do most dropouts take place and (c) what interventions has her department made to curb the rate of school dropouts?

# Response

1. While dropping out is a matter that the Department of Basic Education monitors closely, it would be difficult to provide a response to question (a) for two reasons. Firstly, how the Department has monitored dropping out over the years, has changed as methodologies and data have improved; meaning that there is no comparable number for each of twenty years which can simply be added together. It should be pointed out that dropping out is seldom, if ever monitored in the manner implied by the question. Secondly, even if an attempt were to be made to standardise values over time, this would have to be in response to a question that defines clearly who is a dropout. There is no universally accepted definition of this. Young people, who leave school before obtaining the ‘Matric’ to find work, or to further studies somewhere else, are not easily identified or defined.

It should be clarified that the Department takes the matter of dropping out very seriously, and reports transparently and frequently on this. The annual report on the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations, available on the Department’s website, provides comprehensive analysis of who obtains and who does not obtain the National Senior Certificate (NSC). For example, the report for the 2020 examinations indicates that ‘the percentage of youths successfully completing Grade 12, has increased from about 45% in 2005, to around 57% in 2019’. The 57% implies that around 420 000 in one youth age cohort, do not obtain the NSC. Statistics South Africa data indicate that a further 3%, do not obtain the NSC; but do obtain some other national qualification outside the schooling system, for instance at a college. (This is explained in, for instance, the Department’s *Action Plan to 2024.*)

The 2020 NSC examinations report, moreover makes the important point that successful completion of twelve years of education in South Africa is roughly to similar to that found in other middle income countries. The key point is that the situation is improving in South Africa. A growing percentage of young South Africans, have been obtaining the NSC, and the NSC with a Bachelors-level pass in particular.

1. Most dropping out, occurs between Grade 10 and Grade 11, and between Grade 11 and Grade 12. Figures in this regard appear in the 2020 NSC report.
2. Dropping out is caused mostly by learners not coping academically. By far the most important interventions implicitly aimed at combatting dropping out, focus on improving the quality of learning and teaching. Such interventions include upgrading the skills of teachers at the secondary level, and initiatives aimed at ensuring that learners have all the textbooks they need, as well as the support / remedial programmes they require. Important longer-term interventions, include improving the way reading, writing and numeracy are taught in the earliest grades. Details appear in the Department’s Annual Performance Plan and other documents on the Department’s website.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic poses immense threats to educational quality. In this regard, the Department has focussed strongly on returning learners to regular daily attendance, for instance by insisting on the prioritisation of teachers in the national vaccination programme.