



MEDIA RELEASE

June 14, 2019

EMBARGO: IMMEDIATE

AUTOMATIC PROGRESSION IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE: PRINCIPLE, OBFUSCATION OR FRAUD?

There has been much comment and speculation over the past few days on the intention of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to apply automatic progression in the Foundation Phase.

The SAOU does not accept the principle of pass-one-pass-all and believes that this action by the DBE will further harm learners – and especially those learners who would benefit from consolidation. Why would the decision be taken to promote learners in this phase when all research clearly confirms the necessity to consolidate? Essential consolidation of basic concepts and language is part of building any child's development and if there is not enough opportunity for such consolidation and mastering, the following rows of developmental 'building bricks' simply cannot be laid. The gaps in learners' "walls" become a reality later when they struggle to achieve the goals required in Grades 4 and 8 and have to repeat grades which eventually leads to the drop-out rate rising.

The question has to be asked: Will educators and the quality of education be prejudiced by this decision or not? Is this action not a financial consideration used by the DBE to cut the education budget? If the throughput of learners can be accelerated, it means fewer learners, fewer teachers and fewer classrooms are needed in the system. Hundreds of thousands of rands may be saved: But at what price?

The artificial manipulation of the flow rate means that the number of learners sitting in school desks in Grade 12 without having ever passed one year, will increase dramatically and the quality of prospective students will most certainly be reduced. The following questions can justifiably be asked: "If the DBE wants to account for this step educationally, at what stage should learners be kept back and (perhaps even more pertinently), why are there any pass requirements at all? According to the Minister of Education, the automatic progression principle applies in many other countries, including China, Korea, Finland, Singapore, New Zealand, Japan and Canada. What is being overlooked is that those countries have successful education systems where there is genuine support and investment in the sector. If the view is expressed that repetition in the South African education system does not have sufficient value and does not deliver the required results, then the current intervention provided to learners and the DBE's support to schools should be seriously and urgently questioned. Inadequate support from the DBO has frequently been pointed out as one of the weak links in the education chain. What the South African Education System does NOT need is ignorant officials who confuse guidance and support to educators with excessive monitoring, an even greater administrative burden and an education department that places new Band-Aid patches in the wrong places.

The matric pass rate which is used as a barometer of success creates a distorted image. The automatic progression of learners is going to make this image even worse. Parental involvement and parents' responsibility in the education partnership can be expected to decrease.

It is clear that this one-sided decision has not been communicated to all the role-players and that the Department of Basic Education has a hidden agenda evidenced by flash curriculum decisions that are increasingly putting the entire education system under pressure and at risk

Education is in trouble. A chain is as strong as the weakest link - how is it possible that a country's education system can be hijacked by random, political decisions and that learners and educators can be thrown to the wolves under the guise of progress?

END

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