



**MINISTRY IN THE PRESIDENCY
FOR WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**ADDRESS BY MINISTER SINDISIWE CHIKUNGA MP
DURING THE uMSHWATHI MUNICIPALITY MATRIC
EXCELLENCE AWARDS.**

Date: 28 JANUARY 2025

Venue: TORWOODLEA LODGE, WARTBURG

- **Program Director, Mr Mdunge**
- **Your Worship Mayor GM Zondi**
- **Councillors of the uMshwathi Municipality**
- **Pastor Vidima**
- **The representative from the Department of Education, Mr Mvubu,**

- **Representatives from our School Governing Bodies, the South African Democratic Teachers' Union, National Teachers' Union**
- **Principals and educators from our schools here in uMshwathi Municipality**
- **Parents and members of the community here present today**
- **Ladies and gentlemen**
- **But most important of all, the reason why we are here today, our dear learners**

Sanibonani!

1. EDUCATORS AND PRINCIPALS: CELEBRATING LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

Your Worship, government officials, distinguished educators and support staff, families and friends gathered here today to celebrate our top achievers, and to the Graduating Class of 2024 and all our Top

Achievers, I am deeply grateful and honoured to have the opportunity to share this special day with you.

Academic Excellence awards mark a significant milestone in one's educational journey, a culmination of hard work and sacrifices endured as much by the student as they have by families, friends and those who held your hand throughout this journey. So, I congratulate all the uncles, aunties, neighbours and entire communities that make up both the visible and invisible efforts that your village of support put into your journey.

In South Africa, a learner's success is always a collective achievement. It reflects the sacrifices, love, and time of those who believed in their potential. Schools thrive when they are supported by an engaged community. **It truly takes a village to raise a child.**

Our gathering today is therefore not just about celebrating the achievements of learners but also about acknowledging the pivotal role of educators and principals in shaping these success stories.

2. HONOURING THE EDUCATORS AND PRINCIPALS WHO BUILD OUR NATION

To our dedicated educators and principals, your commitment to excellence, discipline, and leadership is the foundation upon which our education system stands. Teaching is more than a job; it is a calling—one that demands patience, dedication, and a deep love for shaping young minds. Without you, we would not be celebrating these young people today.

Having said that, I now wish to turn a special attention to the excellent Class of 2024, and invite a deserving round of applause , for you have stayed the

course. **President Nelson Mandela** had your generation and its potential in his mind when he said:

“Education is the great engine of personal development. **It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine;** that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation”. After-all, he said, “What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”

I have no doubt that , having stayed and completed the course at this wonderful school, you are now in a position to then employ the knowledge and the competencies you have acquired not to conform to, but to change the world you have inherited.

3. OUTSTANDING EXCELLENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT BY TEACHERS, LEARNERS AND PARENTS

Programme Director,

President Nelson Mandela is surely smiling at the historic achievement of **615,429 learners who passed the National Senior Certificate (NSC)**—the highest number in our history. This resilient group of learners, whose schooling was disrupted by a pandemic at some point, has pushed South Africa's national pass rate **from 82.9% in 2023 to an outstanding 87.3% in 2024**. Let's give them a well-deserved round of applause.

According to the Department of Basic Education, 47.8% of candidates qualified for admission to Bachelor studies. This is a significant improvement

from last year's 40.9% and represents the highest number of Bachelor passes ever recorded in South Africa's history.

To put this into perspective, **in 2014, we produced 150,752 Bachelor passes.** Just a decade later, this number has more than doubled, reaching an incredible **337,158 Bachelor passes in 2024.**

To make this victory even sweeter, it is the learners, teachers, and parents from **rural schools with the least resources, armed with determination and a resolve to excel**, who have propelled our country to this historic achievement.

It is testament to the unflinching drive and determination of our teachers, parents and learners that the province of KwaZulu Natal, a predominantly

rural province, achieved the highest number of **Bachelor passes with 84 470**, followed by **Gauteng with 66 979** and the **Eastern Cape, also a rural province, with 45 662**.

Moreover, approximately **67% of the Bachelor passes achieved in 2024 came from Quintile 1 to 3 schools**, schools typically found in poorer communities.

The Class of 2024 achieved an impressive number of **319 651 distinctions**, an increase of over **65 000 distinctions** from 2023. Once again, KwaZulu Natal gave South Africa the **Lion's share** of these distinctions.

Programme Director,

The former President of Ghana once said “***Those who would judge us merely by the heights we have achieved*** would do well to remember the depths from which we started”.

Looking back at the depths from which we have emerged, I speak with no fear of contradiction, when I say the teachers, families and learners of the class of 2024 represent the best amongst us, the best to ever do it.

I say all of this in order to urge this community to resist any effort to downplay the significance of these results and what we have collectively achieved as a 30 year old democracy.

This is a historic victory for this democratic dispensation. Your Worship, **on the 70th**

Anniversary of the Freedom Charter, the teachers in our school have given practical expression to the provision of the Freedom Charter that declared that:

“The doors of learning and culture shall be opened for all.... All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands; The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace”.

4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CAREER GUIDANCE

Programme Director,

As our learners continue to excel, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that they have sound career

guidance to lead them to sustainable and rewarding opportunities.

Career guidance is important because, even when the doors of learning and culture are widely opened to all through Government's fully subsidised free higher education and training for the poor and the working class, many social-cultural, digital and institutional barriers to access post schooling opportunities remain firmly entrenched for most of our families and communities.

Due to the historic prevalence of unequal access to information, technology, career guidance and related educational resources many talented young South Africans living in rural areas and townships either do not consider or are unable to access institutions of higher learning and training.

The existing educational information and technology gap creates a spirit of hopelessness and results in many underprivileged youth leaving the education system without realising their full potential.

Throughout this year, we are committing to nationwide career guidance and post-schooling transitions programs and campaigns that will match the energy and aspirations of our learners. Working together, we should be able to meet our children halfway through these campaigns to motivate those in lower grades to excel even more.

5. THE IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONALISM AMONGST OUR TEACHERS REGARDING TEACHING AND LEARNING AND ANTI-GBV WORK

Programme Director,

Our entire education system stands and falls on the back of the conduct and professionalism of our educators, school management and School Governing Bodies. The future of every sector of our economy and every sphere of life is dependent on the quality of human being who pass through the hands of an effective, responsible and professional educator.

The teaching and learning environment that our teachers occupy on a daily basis is no different from a factory floor from which the dreams and aspirations of this nation are carefully manufactured. Our very survival as a society is contingent on what happens in that teaching and learning environment.

Therefore, in addition to encouraging, resourcing and incentivising our teacher adequately for them to take

on this responsibility, **we must also demand the highest level of professionalism.**

I have seen, through my Back-to-School oversight visits, that some schools struggle with tensions between principals, SGBs, educators, and communities. These divisions only hinder the progress of our learners. **School leadership must be inclusive, collaborative, and focused on one goal: ensuring every child succeeds.**

This is particularly urgent given the rise in rates of Gender-Based Violence. Teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and gender-based violence (GBV) continue to threaten learners' futures. These issues start in our communities, and schools cannot address them alone. We need stronger partnerships between parents, Political Organisation, Civil Society, Community Policing Forums, the local police station,

faith-based organisations, and community leaders to create safe, nurturing environments. Together, we must protect learners, guide them through challenges, and ensure they stay in school and succeed.

The HSRC recently published a study on the prevalence of Gender Based Violence, the findings are shocking. In addition to bearing the face of poverty and landlessness, women across our country, particularly those in rural and farming communities, continue to live under the terror of despicable levels of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide.

We must therefore ask ourselves the questions:

- (a) What role is our teaching and learning environment playing in the prevalence of GBVF?

- (b) But most importantly, what role should our educational settings be playing in combating the scourge of GBVF in order to future proof South Africa?

Our schools need to be at the forefront of mobilising men and boys as allies the fight against the abuse of women and girls. This lesson ought to be taught repeatedly, not only by Teachers, School Governing Bodies must be at the forefront.

I am committing here that, as a department, we will be working with you to:

A. Implement Anti-GBV School-based programs promoting healthy relationships and gender equality.

These programs, implemented in primary and secondary schools, could help challenge harmful gender stereotypes at an early age. **They will include:** Interactive workshops on topics like *consent*, *respectful communication*, and *challenging gender-based power imbalances*.

B. We will also work with you to capacitate teachers and SGBs for on identifying and addressing bullying and other forms of violence within the school environment

C. We will Implement public awareness campaigns to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and promote gender-equitable relationships.

D. We will collectively develop targeted interventions for men and boys that challenge harmful

masculinity norms and promote positive behaviours.

E. These interventions will include **workshops, mentorship programs, or community dialogues facilitated by our department alongside civil society.**

F. We will also work with **male role models and community leaders** to advocate for gender equality and non-violence.

The success of all these interventions will depend on us cultivating professionalism of the highest order amongst our Teachers, School Management and School Governing Bodies.

6. RESTORING COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY

One concern is the growing trend of learners attending schools far from their communities. While parents seek better opportunities, this often weakens community ties and accountability. Neighbours can no longer recognise or protect children in their area, parents miss school meetings, and learners face unsafe transport arrangements. **We must rebuild accountability**, ensuring every child is supported and known within their community.

7. EDUCATION AS AN APEX PRIORITY AND ENABLER OF A CAPABLE AND DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

As we race to provide our children with the best possible education for the times ahead, we are doing so under global and domestic conditions that are far

from ideal. We are witnessing an unfortunate era marked by disparities, discontent, and democracies at a crossroads.

Our government understands that our fate in both **Domestic and Global balance of forces** is dependent on us igniting a **bold Skills Revolution** that advances our national sovereignty, competitive advantage and self-determination.

Our very **Peace and Stability** requires that we skill and arm an army of youth into Cybersecurity professionals who will protect critical infrastructure and courageously advance our national interests.

In an era of growing misinformation and disinformation campaigns, similarly, our fate in the **battle of ideas** is dependent on us training and upskilling our youth and communities at large to

discern facts from fiction, seek truth from facts and win over hearts and minds.

Importantly our odds of **addressing housing poverty and building resilient livelihoods** requires that we train communities to build their own homes and grow their own food. At a fraction of the cost, we can empower our youth **by providing land, building materials, seeds and farming equipment and have our communities partner with their governments** to fast track the implementation of our pro-poor policies.

A bold Skills Revolution is required for us to take advantage of the African Free Trade Agreement. Only an army of skilled youth will ensure benefaction, staff competent and productive factories that supply the continent, the region and the world.

Programme Director,

Allow me to conclude by the words of Truman when he said:

‘If the ladder of educational opportunity rises high at the doors of some youth and scarcely rises at the doors of others, while at the same time formal education is made a prerequisite to occupational and social advance, then education may become the means, not of eliminating race and class distinctions, but of deepening and solidifying them’.

We cannot and will not fail our children.

I wish to assure you that for who will not make it to Universities and colleges, we are working around the clock to prepare an SANDF-Led National Service

program that **carries immense potential** to capacitate and propel the productive capabilities of Youth in the **NEET Group** (particularly unemployed TVET and University Graduates, those who good Matric sitting at home), into thousands of **AI, Coding and Robotics Instructors (at schools), industrial component manufacturers** (for automotive, pharmaceutical, energy and construction industries), **market-Oriented Small-holder Agricultural Producers and Agro-Processors; Primary Healthcare Practitioners and Artisans** paving rural and small town roads.

Once again , we congratulate the village that raised the stars we are here to celebrate today.

I thank you.