



EQUAL EDUCATION SUBMISSION TO THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON BASIC EDUCATION REGARDING SCHOLAR TRANSPORT

Equal Education (EE) is a membership-based social movement of learners, parents, teachers and community members. EE works towards achieving quality and equality in South African education, through research, analysis and evidence-based activism. EE is organised in five provinces: we have members in schools in the Western Cape, Gauteng, the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), and Limpopo. Our focus is directed by the interests of our members, who are from working class and poor communities. EE's campaigns include the struggle for access to scholar transport in KZN and in South Africa since 2014. It was members of EE based in Nquthu in northern KZN, who raised scholar transport as a serious barrier to accessing education. EE has since then campaigned around the issue.

The following data from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) corroborate EE's concerns and the continued campaigning for the provision of scholar transport:

- According to the National Household Survey published in 2013, more than two million learners walk to school daily in KZN. Of these learners, 210 000 walk for more than an hour (in one direction) and a further 659 000 learners walk for between 30 minutes to an hour;
- According to the Educational Enrolment and Achievement publication of 2016, it was reported that 12.3 million learners (64.07%) walk to school;
- Among the 12.3 million learners who walk to school, just over 80% indicated that it took them more than 30 minutes, 15.4% indicated that it took them between 30 minutes to an hour, and almost 4% indicated that it took them more than an hour to get to school;
- Among those learners who took the longest to get to school, the largest percentage are located in traditional areas; and
- KZN was reported as having the highest proportion of learners in the country who walk to school for more than two hours each day.

The National Learner Transport Policy

In 2015, the Department of Transport published the National Learner Transport Policy. While EE and EELC welcomed this, the policy has significant gaps and it requires further detail and development in order to effectively realise its stated objectives. EE and EELC submitted a comprehensive analysis of the policy to the Department of Transport and to the Department of Basic Education, raising the following concerns:

- The criteria for identifying beneficiaries of subsidised scholar transport is inadequate;
- The policy does not provide sufficient clarity or coherent mechanisms for multi-

stakeholder coordination;

- There is not sufficient guidance on how planning for learner transport provision will be undertaken;
- The policy does not provide timeframes and deadlines for implementation; and
- There are no mechanisms stipulated to ensure adequate funding and budgeting.

These deficiencies have not been remedied.

Learner Transport Safety Norms, Standards and Operational Guidelines

The National Learner Transport Policy speaks of the development of Learner Transport Safety Norms, Standards and Operational Guidelines. In 2015, the Departments committed to this being done by 2015. However, when EE met with officials from the National Departments of Transport and Education at the end of 2016, the Norms and Standards had not yet been published. There was a commitment to publish regulations by March 2017 - but this has still not happened.

The purpose of the Operational Guidelines includes:

1. Providing guidance to departments, schools and other stakeholders to assist with the daily management of services that transport learners to and from schools.
2. To serve as a reference for all staff involved in the management of learner transport arrangements.
3. To equip service providers with guidelines to render safe transport for learners.

A Conditional Grant for Scholar Transport

Submissions have previously been made by EE relating to the implementation of a conditional grant for scholar transport, and the rationale for this much needed additional, ring-fenced funding.

In 2016 and 2017, EE and EELC made submissions before the Standing Committee on Appropriations on the conditional grant for scholar transport. National Treasury has welcomed the idea of a conditional grant; however the lack of coordination between departments is preventing the implementation of a conditional grant for scholar transport. National Treasury explained that the National Learner Transport Policy gave powers to both the Department of Basic Education as well as to the Department of Transport to oversee the funds. These powers have been awarded and utilised differently in the various provinces with the Department of Basic Education receiving and utilising the money in some provinces and the Department of Transport receiving money in other provinces. National Treasury stated that, as a consequence, it would be impossible to structure a conditional grant under these circumstances.

While EE recognises that the National Inter-Departmental Committee (NIDC) has been established, the NIDC needs to take more effective steps toward ensuring effective

coordination between departments at the provincial and national level, particularly on the issue of funding.

Lived Experiences: EE's KZN Scholar Transport Surveys

Since 2015, EE has undertaken visits to schools in Nquthu, KwaZulu-Natal where its high school members have complained about the lack of scholar transport. Over the past two years, EE has spoken to teachers and principals who complained of having to teach learners who were hungry and exhausted after their long walk to school, and who struggled to concentrate or stay awake in class. They attributed high incidences of late coming, absenteeism, and learners dropping out of school to the lack of scholar transport. Learners traverse dangerous terrain, and are vulnerable to bad weather, to theft, and to violent attack.

In 2017, EE visited schools in Nquthu. These are among our findings:

1. Hlinzeka Primary School: Of the 350 learners enrolled in Grade R to 7, we were able to interview 211. Just over 26% of these learners travelled less than 5km, 50.24% travelled between 5km and 9.9km, and 23.22% of learners travelled more than 10km to get to school.
2. Ukuphumula Secondary School: Of the 370 learners in Grade 8 to 12, we were able to interview 156 learners. Of these learners, 34.19% travelled less than 5km, 47.53% travelled between 5km to 9.9km and 10.69% of learners travelled more than 10km to get to school.
3. Ubongumenzi Secondary School: Of the 1200 learners enrolled from Grade 8 to 12, we were able to interview 506. Of these learners, 16.51% travelled less than 5km, 39.45% of learners travelled between 5km to 9.9km and 21.15% of learners travelled more than 10km to get to school.

The lived experiences of learners in Nquthu demonstrate the urgent need for effective intergovernmental cooperation to ensure delivery and a coherent regulatory framework.

Recommendations

1. Conditional Grant for Scholar Transport

The NIDC should establish effective mechanisms for uniformity and effective coordination between the Departments of Education and Transport in each province, so as to ensure that a scholar transport grant can be implemented.

Possible design features of a conditional grant:

- The grant allocation formula should take into account physical terrain crossed by learners in a province, the number of learners qualifying for scholar transport in a province, and the distance that these learners travel to the nearest school.

- The grant allocation formula should be based on a detailed cost-analysis of overall provincial scholar transport costs and expenditure, with specific consideration to different modes of transport, route accessibility, and the quality and availability of road infrastructure.
- The grant should fund different interventions appropriate to each province.
- The grant should be linked to outputs and performance indicators to ensure effective monitoring and accountability.

2. Publication of Norms and Standards and Operational Guidelines

A timeframe must be formally communicated for the publication of the Norms and Standards and Operational Guidelines. Provincial policies ought then to be revised in accordance with the Norms and Standards and Operational Guidelines, with strict deadlines attached to this process.