



## POST-SONA 2019 STATEMENT: IMPROVED PERFORMANCE OF THE BASIC EDUCATION CRITICAL FOR THE 6<sup>TH</sup> ADMINISTRATION

On 20 June 2019, President Cyril Ramaphosa delivered the first State of the Nation Address (SONA) of the 6<sup>th</sup> administration. This followed the 2019 General Elections and his speech during the last SONA of the 5<sup>th</sup> administration. Therefore, the first SONA of the 6<sup>th</sup> administration was the second one in just over four months. The Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM) notes the following in relation to the President's pronouncements on basic education:

PSAM welcomes the inclusion of education as one of the [seven priorities](#) and the implementation of the [Early Grade Reading Programme](#) to include an integrated package of lessons, additional reading materials and professional support to Foundation Phase teachers. This is important in the context where the 2016 results of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS) global assessment, indicated that 8 out of 10 children in South Africa cannot read and, [that 78% of SA Grade 4 students cannot read for meaning in any language](#). The President mentioned that the Early Grade Reading Programme “forms part of the broader efforts to strengthen the basic education system by empowering school leadership teams, improving capabilities of teachers and ensuring a more consistent measurement of progress of grades 3, 6 and 9”<sup>1</sup>.

However, while we welcome this step, the President did not outline plans for strengthening technical capacity in government to ensure that projects move faster, as he mentioned in the last SONA of the 5<sup>th</sup> administration. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) continues to underperform. For example, according to the 2018 Adjusted Estimates of National Expenditure (AENE), 64 schools were provided with sanitation against a target of 286 in the first half of 2018/19. Therefore, given this underperformance, it is unlikely that the DBE will achieve the target of providing 717 schools with sanitation in 2019/20, as reported in the [February 2019 Budget Review](#).

Given these perennial problems – it is imperative the more decisive steps are taken to address the clear systems problems that serve to weak governance and undermine service delivery. In addition to technical expertise and leadership in schools and district offices—financial management and oversight are key. In the period between the February 2019 SONA – it is not unreasonable to expect some progress in the National Treasury to provide comprehensive support and assistance to the DBE to improve performance.

We also note that lack of emphasis on addressing the problem of insufficient funding for the implementation of the Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/sona2019-read-president-cyril-ramaphosas-full-speech-26866635>

In addition, in his speech in the last SONA of the 5<sup>th</sup> administration, the President mentioned the [movement of responsibility for Early Childhood Development \(ECD\) centres from the Department of Social Development \(DSD\) to the DBE, and the process of two years for compulsory ECD for all children before grade 1](#). However, it is surprising that he did not explain – in the first SONA of the 6<sup>th</sup> administration – how and when this migration will take place. Therefore, while the ECD received attention in the SONA presented in February 2019, - the President was remiss in not providing further details.

Therefore, there needs to be urgent improved performance of the DBE in providing basic services to schools. We noted in our [pre-SONA statement that there should be adequate funding for the implementation of the Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure](#). Also, the needs to be implementation of the ECD policy and introduction of oversight for expenditure of the ECD grant.

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