



OFFICE OF THE MEC
FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Budget Vote Speech: 2026/2027 – The Free State Department of Education, Delivered by Honourable MEC, Dr MJ Maboya – Date: 05 May 2026

[Dr R Cingo Secondary School - Maokeng, Kroonstad]

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Deputy Speaker
Honourable Premier of the Free State Province
Members of the Free State Provincial Legislature
Members of the Executive Council
Executive Mayors, Speakers and Councillors
Morena e Moholo Moremoholo Mopeli
Morena e Moholo Montoeli Mota
Marena a Rona a Hlomphehileng
Organised Labour and School Governing Bodies,
Partners in Education
Civil Society Organisations
Principals, Teachers, and Learners
Distinguished Guests,
The people of the Free State, Ladies and Gentlemen, greetings to you all.

Honourable Speaker, it is with a deep sense of accountability, revolutionary humility and untiring commitment to the people of the Free State that I stand before this Honourable House to table the **Budget Vote of the Free State Department of Education** for the **2026/2027** Financial Year.

Honourable Speaker, we deliver this Budget Vote in a year of profound historical reflection as we commemorate seventy years (70) since the **1956 Women’s march**, fifty (50) years since the **1976 Youth Uprising** and thirty (30) years since the adoption of the **Constitution of the Republic**. The message from these women and youth as well as the constitution, that **“education must liberate, and never subjugate”**, remains timeless even today. As we marked Workers' Day on 1 May, we honoured the enduring struggles and sacrifices of workers, whose labour remains the foundation of our democracy and development. We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to advancing a just economic order that protects workers’ rights. As President Oliver Reginald Tambo once reminded us, and I quote: **“The fight for freedom must be waged on many fronts, but education remains its most enduring weapon.”** This Budget is firmly aligned with the **2026 State of the Nation Address (SONA)**, the **2026 State of the Province Address (SOPA)**, the **Basic Education Sector Priorities** and the **Medium-Term Development Priorities (MTDP)**.

It is significant, therefore, to recognize that these policy statements do not only serve as policy and strategic trajectory for the year ahead of us. But rather, they equally reaffirm that education remains central to South Africa's developmental agenda.

OVERVIEW FOR 2025/2026 & OUTLOOK FOR 2026/2027 - Key Highlights and Achievements

Honourable Speaker, the **2025/2026** financial year marked important progress in strengthening both the quality, inclusivity and responsiveness of our education system. Across the province, we are beginning to see the results of deliberate policy choices, focused leadership, and sustained investment in teaching and learning. The 2025 National Senior Certificate results reflect quiet but determined transformation taking place within our public schooling system.

Through our pro-poor policies and programmes such as **no-fee paying schools, the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), provision of Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM), and learner transport**, a total of learners in quintiles 1 to 3 schools and special schools have access to quality education. Increasingly, the historic quality gap between former Model C schools and Township schools is steadily closing, and in the overall, girls achieve higher quality passes than boys. In the previous financial year, we recorded several achievements:

- **Academic Excellence:** Exceptional performance of schools such as Cedar Secondary in Zamdela (**100%; 85.4%**), Thuto ke Lesedi in Zamdela (**99%; 74% Bachelor**), Qibing Secondary School (**100%, 73% Bachelor**), Bluegumbosch Secondary in Qwaqwa (**99.6%, 76% Bachelor**), Kgethatsebo-Khethulwasi (**99.%; 74% Bachelor**), demonstrates that township schools are not only achieving high pass rates, but are increasingly producing strong Bachelor outcomes that signal real academic excellence.
- **Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Achievement:** Sentinel Primary School represented South Africa at the World Robot Olympiad in Singapore, competing against 101 countries and securing an impressive 15th position, with support from the Kagiso Shanduka Trust - demonstrating the growing importance of robotics and digital skills in preparing learners for the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

- **Digital Skills Expansion:** In partnership with MTN Group, the Department distributed 29,920 tablets to 247 Quintile 1–3 schools, significantly advancing digital access and curriculum delivery.
- **Thrive by Five Progress:** The Free State outperformed national averages in the 2024 Thrive by Five Index, with **56% of 4-year-olds on track** (vs 42% nationally), **27% falling behind** (vs 28%), and only **17% falling far behind** (vs 29%), reflecting strong progress in expanding access to quality early learning programmes.
- **Skills Development & TVET Pathways:** The Multi-Certification Programme enabled 495 learners to obtain accredited skills-based certificates in areas such as welding, sheep management, and agricultural production, combining academic completion with practical competencies.
- **Mother Tongue-Based Learning (MTbBE):** The MTbBE programme was piloted in 2025 across **214** primary schools, focusing on Mathematics and Natural Sciences and Technology (NST) to strengthen foundational learning, comprehension, and cultural identity through indigenous languages. As a result, we have seen improvement in Mathematics and Physical Sciences in 2025.
- **Second Chance Programme Expansion:** The Second Chance Matric Programme was reconfigured, not discontinued, with **20 centres now opened** under the new model across the province, accommodating more than 6000 learners who will be supported to meet minimum requirements or to improve their NSC Results.
- **Learner Safety Innovation:** The Scholar Patrol Mobile Application was introduced to strengthen learner safety through real-time monitoring, reporting, and improved coordination between schools, communities, and law enforcement.

Honourable Speaker, even as we celebrate our progress, we must remain mindful of the surmountable obstacles that still stand in the way of delivering the quality education that every child deserves. **These challenges include:**

- persistent budget constraints, especially on compensation of employees (CoE)
- conversion of eligible Grade R Practitioners to permanent teaching posts,
- delayed completion of infrastructure projects and protracted procurement processes,
- aging school buildings and overcrowded classrooms,
- low throughput rates which mean poor learner progression and completion rates,

- low participation and performance of learners in STEM subjects,
- limited Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure and uneven connectivity to schools,
- shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in critical subjects and in rural areas, and the safety of our learners, teachers and schools.

Honourable Speaker, we pause to pay tribute to the following departed members of the Free State education community:

- Four dedicated ECD Practitioners from the Lejweleputswa Education District, who tragically lost their lives in an accident on the N3 near Harrismith on 30 October 2025;
- Ms Mulalo Nndwa, an intern in Infrastructure Development, whose life was cut short at the threshold of attaining her master's degree.
- Mr Mosweu Mokgobo, Chief Director for District Management and Governance, a committed public servant whose leadership and contribution strengthened district systems and improved service delivery across the province;

The Department extends its heartfelt condolences to their families, colleagues, and loved ones during their profound loss. **Honourable Speaker**, we dedicate this Budget Vote to the memory of Mr Mosweu Mokgobo, in honour of his immense contribution to the advancement of education in our province. May his soul rest in peace.

MEDIUM-TERM DEVELOPMENT PLAN (MTDP) AND EDUCATION SECTOR PRIORITIES

What Lies Ahead of Us: 2026/2027

Honourable Speaker, the strategic direction of the Free State Department of Education is anchored in the **Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029** and is guided by three mutually reinforcing strategic priorities:

- **Reducing poverty and tackling the high cost of living** through equitable access to quality education and learner support programmes;
- **Driving inclusive growth and job creation** by expanding skills development, technical and vocational pathways, digital learning and infrastructure investment; and

- **Building a capable, ethical and developmental education system** through professionalised teaching, strong leadership, ethical governance, data-driven planning and modernized systems.

The provincial department has adopted the following **six sector priorities** for the current administration:

1. Improved access to Early Childhood Development (ECD).
2. Improved literacy and numeracy skills across all phases of schooling.
3. Improved access to inclusive education and strengthened social cohesion.
4. Improved access to training and professional development opportunities for Teachers and School Management Teams.
5. Improved safety and quality of schooling environments and infrastructure development.
6. Curriculum recovery and offering of skills and competencies for the changing world.

These priorities will broaden **access to quality early learning, reinforce the foundations of literacy and numeracy, advance inclusive education, and strengthen teacher development** – ensuring that every child has a strong start and is ready for diverse pathways in a technological world.

FISCAL CONTEXT AND BUDGET ALLOCATION

Honourable Speaker, in the **2026/2027** financial year, the Department is allocated twenty-point zero five six billion rands (**R20.056 billion**), twenty-one billion rands (**R21 billion**) in **2027/2028**, and twenty-one point seven billion rands (**R21.7 billion**) in **2028/2029**. In total, the Department is projected to spend approximately **R62.8 billion over the 2026 MTEF period**. While this increase is welcomed, resources remain limited, which means we must spend wisely, improve efficiency, and focus on high impact tasks in improving learning outcomes (**Pareto principle 80/20**). The total allocation of twenty billion rands (**R20.056 billion**) distributed to each programme as follows:

ALLOCATION PER PROGRAMME	AMOUNT
1. Administration	R1 457 474 000
2. Public Ordinary School Education	R14 658 829 000
3. Independent Schools Subsidies	R135 555 000
4. Public Special School Education	R784 391 000
5. Early Childhood Development	R949 468 000

ALLOCATION PER PROGRAMME	AMOUNT
6. Infrastructure Development	R1 087 365 000
7. Examination & Education Related Services	R983 081 000
Total	R20 056 163 000

ON SYSTEM PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY (2025/2026)

Honourable Speaker, in the **2025 National Senior Certificate** examinations, the Free State achieved a pass rate of **89.3%**. While the pass rate reflects a marginal decline of **1.67%** from our 2024 performance, our results remain exceptionally strong, demonstrating both competitiveness and sustained excellence. The results clearly reflect a system that remains resilient, consistent and principled under fiscal and social pressure. A powerful illustration of this is **Mr Lerato Ramabodu**, a Physical Sciences teacher at **Makwane Comprehensive School**, who has achieved nine consecutive years of **100% matric passes** since **2017**. Similarly, Bokang Thabang Molefe, the province's top Quintile 3 Mathematics learner, achieved **97%** in Mathematics and Physical Sciences and was **also recognised nationally as one of the top performers in Quintile 3 schools in South Africa**, affirming the calibre of excellence emerging from township and rural contexts.

Honourable Speaker, it must be stated without ambiguity: **the Free State does not compete with other provinces; we compete with ourselves**. Our target is to improve the quality of learning outcomes across the system. It is therefore important to appreciate that the **91% record that we set for the country in 2024 remains unbroken**, and that over more than a decade, even where rankings fluctuated, the Free State remained among the **top-performing provinces nationally**. This is not mediocrity - it is **systemic strength**, rooted in leadership, stability and continuous improvement.

PROGRESS ON 2024/ 2025 COMMITMENTS AND SECTOR PRIORITIES FOR 2025/2026:

ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION (ECCE)

Honourable Speaker, early childhood education forms the bedrock upon which all future learning and development are built. Therefore, universal access to quality early learning programmes by children (0-4 years) remains our priority. The **STATS-SA report (2024)** indicates that there are **263 108** children from birth to four years of age in the Free State, whilst only **97 540 (EMIS)** children are accessing ECD programmes from registered ECD Centres. This gap highlights the urgent need to ensure that all children benefit from structured early learning.

During the **2025/26** financial year, the Department registered **189** new **ECD Centres** through the **Bana Pele Mass Registration Drive**, bringing the provincial total **up to 1 642**. Through professionalization efforts, additional **1 000 ECD Practitioners** trained on the National Curriculum Framework, supported by district roadshows, while infrastructure delivery included the refurbishment of **49 ECD centres** and an opening of the **Lindobuhle ECD Centre in Botshabelo**, alongside continued progress on pit toilet eradication at ECD sites. Complementing this work, through the **ECD Maintenance Grant**, **13 ECD Centres** were fully refurbished, with health and safety packs provided to **40 Centres** across the province.

Honourable Speaker, for the **2026/27** financial year, we will increase the number of learners accessing **Early Learning Programmes (ELPs)** to **103 500** and the number of **ECD Centers** to **1 720**.

Our plans for the new financial year will include:

- 1) Awareness Campaigns:** Quarterly campaigns across all five districts will engage communities, parents, caregivers, and municipalities to raise awareness on the importance of early childhood learning and increase enrolment in ECD programmes.
- 2) Support for Unfunded Programmes:** During the Nelson Mandela Month, **10 unfunded ECD programmes** (two per district) will be identified and assisted through the provision of **LTSM, play equipment, utensils, blankets, and mattresses**.

To further improve outcomes, the Department will:

- Train **1 500 practitioners** on the National Curriculum Framework;
- Upskill **200 practitioners** to NQF Level 4;
- Provide focused training on **Maths stimulation** for **500 practitioners**;
- Procure learning resources for **300 ECD centres**;
- Conduct awareness campaigns with **1 500 parents**, focusing on developmental milestones and simple, low-cost activities to reinforce learning at home.
- These campaigns will be strengthened by conducting the **National Parenting Skills Programme** targeting **2 000 parents**.
- Conduct three sessions targeting young women in the ECCE sector targeting **300**.
- Training **350 ECCE** matrons on Financial Management.

To support this, **R9.4 million** has been allocated to ECCE, ensuring that every young child in the Free State has access to **quality, structured early learning**, guided by skilled practitioners, supported by engaged parents, and nurtured within safe and stimulating learning environments.

ON GRADE R

Honourable Speaker, following the enactment of the **Basic Education Laws Amendment Act (BELA, Act 32 of 2024)**, the Department strengthened its institutional capacity by successfully training and inducting **Grade R practitioners**. This represents a deliberate step towards ensuring that our youngest learners receive quality foundational support at the very start of their educational journey. The Department trained **600 Grade R Practitioners** in perceptual skills with structured early learning manuals, **300 Grade R teachers in ECD Centres**, and **650 Practitioners** on numeracy content and methodology, while also inducting **20** newly appointed **Grade R Practitioners**. We intensified our efforts to strengthen **Grade R through the provision of learning materials, classroom furniture, and the expansion of structured early learning opportunities** across the province.

Honourable Speaker, the department has been allocated **R3.5 million in 2026/27, R7 million in 2027/28, and R11.9 million in 2028/29** to support the progressive equalization of remuneration for qualified Grade R Practitioners. To address existing disparities, this allocation will progressively reduce the stipend shortfall through structured increases of **3% plus a 4% cost-of-living adjustment** in this financial year, **6% plus a CPI-linked adjustment** in 2027/28, and **10.2% plus a CPI-linked adjustment** in 2028/29.

In this financial year, school readiness assessments will be conducted in **70** public schools and **30 ECD Sites** to monitor progress on mainstream integration. This will be coupled with a target of **400 Practitioners** who will upgrade their qualifications through Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (**ETDP-SETA**), and **900 Grade R Practitioners** who will receive structured **Home Language training** to strengthen foundational learning in the early years.

ON FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING

Honourable Speaker, over the past financial year, the Department implemented targeted literacy and numeracy recovery programmes in response to persistent learning gaps highlighted by international assessments such as the **PIRLS study**, which continues to show that many learners struggle with reading comprehension and foundational mathematical skills at the appropriate grade level. In response, we implemented targeted literacy and numeracy recovery programmes.

A total of **1 965 Grade R to 7 Mathematics** teachers were trained, while **270 teachers** were capacitated in reading proficiency, and a **further 610 in creative writing** – this is a clear investment in both numeracy and literacy development. Learner participation in Maths and Reading competitions has equally been strengthened, with **3 470 Grade 3–7 learners** competing in the **Provincial Mental Maths Competition** and **950 Grade 4–6 learners** participating in the **Provincial Reading Competition**, reinforcing a culture of academic excellence and confidence.

Through the implementation of the **Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)**, we successfully assessed all Grade 1–3 learners, and through **Oral Reading Proficiency**, all grades 4–7 learners were assessed in both Home Languages and English First Additional Language in June and November, with comprehensive reading reports issued accordingly. The results affirm that our interventions are yielding impact. By the end of the year, **44.2% of Grade 3 Sesotho learners - 9 761 out of 22 203** - met the national benchmark of **60 correct words per minute**, in line with the **Funda Uphumelele National Survey benchmarks**, while **23.4% - 5 185 learners** - achieved the more rigorous provincial benchmark of **80 correct words per minute**. By Grade 4, where expectations rise to 100 correct words per minute, **34.1%** of Sesotho Home Language learners reached this standard in Term 4, demonstrating that over a third of our learners are reading with the fluency and comprehension required for academic success.

2026/2027 Focus

Honourable Speaker, a total of four million rands (**R4 million**) has been allocated for **2026/2027** financial year to deepen literacy, numeracy and bilingual education. The Department has identified **150 Primary Schools** to be transformed into the “150 Primary Schools That Work” - a **strategic provincial intervention aimed at strengthening foundational learning and improving overall school performance**. Through this initiative, these schools will integrate ICT to enhance teaching and learning, including the use of webinars for continuous support.

The programme further provides **targeted academic support** for learners, **improves the quality of School-Based Assessment**, and **institutionalizes quarterly moderation** throughout the academic year. In addition, School Management Teams will be systematically capacitated to drive **instructional leadership**, while meaningful community participation will be actively promoted to sustain a culture of accountability and excellence.

In building strong literacy and numeracy skills, we will do the following:

- The Department will pilot **parental involvement in reading activities**.
- Moderation of **School-Based Assessment (SBA)**.
- Train 390 Sesotho Grade R teachers, 901 Grade 1 Sesotho teachers, 72 Afrikaans Grade R teachers, and 58 Grade 1 teachers through Operation Tharollo jointly with **Foundational Learning Outcomes at Scale (FLOAT)**.
- Train 550 Grade 1–3 teachers and 650 Grade 4–7 teachers on language content and reading literacy.
- Jointly with PANSALB, train 400 Grade 4–7 teachers on the morphology of African languages. and 1 100 Grade R–7 teachers on Mathematics content and methodology.
- Conduct provincial learner activities to promote a love for reading, and to develop coding and mathematical skills among learners.
- Monitor the reading fluency of learners from Grade 1–7 and issue reading reports to track their progress.

ON COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS FOR A CHANGING WORLD – PROGRESS AND EXPANSION

Honourable Speaker, education today must prepare learners not only for the present, but for a rapidly evolving and technology-driven future that demands adaptability, creativity, and innovation. In **2025/2026**, therefore, the Department created an environment to nurture **curiosity, foster critical thinking, innovation** and prepare learners for a rapidly changing digital future by providing: -

- Mobile laboratories for Natural Sciences to sixty **(60)** Primary schools to stimulate analytical and critical skills

- Coding and Robotics kits to 60 Primary schools to develop the programming skills this resulted in 466 grade 4-7 learners participating in the 5th edition Provincial Coding and Robotics Competition. We trained 100 on the use of the new Coding and Robotics kits.
- **Technology kits** to 90 Technical schools offering grade 8 and 9.
- Practical Assessment Tasks (PATs) to **32 Technical schools and 26 Agricultural schools to expose learners to industry related skills.**

In addition, Honourable Speaker,

- A total of 545 grade 10-11 learners and 113 teachers participated in the 8th edition of the Provincial Skills Competition.
- We also trained **530 Grade 10–12** teachers in Engineering Graphics and Design (EGD) across nine **specialisations**. To date, the Department has supplied **240** Coding and Robotics kits, benefiting **240** primary schools across the province.

2026/2027 Focus

Honourable Speaker, for 2026/27, **R53.3 million** has been allocated from the Maths, Science and Technology (MST) grant. In building a strong pipeline for Mathematics and Physical Sciences, we have identified **100 Secondary Schools** to focus on the teaching of these subjects in Grade 8 and 9, with the purpose of increasing a pool of learners who will pursue these subjects in Grade 10 to 12. In improving learner attainment in these subjects, we will:

- conduct centralized marking sessions
- strengthen professional learning communities (PLCs)
- conduct weekly classes through the virtual learning recovery project (VLRP),
- conduct training in setting high-quality assessment tasks,
- equip 40 schools with Mathematics kits.

Honourable Speaker, following the adoption of our **5-Year Plan to expand skills-based programmes through the Three-Stream Model**, I am pleased to announce that, in addition to the **32** secondary schools offering Grade 10–12 multi-specialization, the following technical subjects linked to the Free State Economic needs have been introduced in Grades **8 and 9**:

- 31 Secondary Schools offered **Civil Technology in grade 8** in 2025, the number of schools increased to 58 in 2026, that is, an increase of 27 schools
- **23** Secondary Schools offered **Electrical Technology in grade 8 in 2025, this year the number increased to 49 Schools**, an increase of 26 schools □ 29 Secondary Schools offered **Mechanical Technology** in grade 8 in 2025, the number increased to **59 schools in 2026**, an increase of 30 schools
- **21** Secondary Schools offered **Digital Technology** in grade 8, and we saw the number of schools increased to **28**.

Furthermore, we have expanded subject offerings that are linked to the agricultural and tourism sectors as follows:

- **27** Secondary Schools offered **Agricultural Studies** in grade 8 in 2025, the number increased to 53 Secondary Schools in 2026 an increase of 26 schools. This increase gives us hope that our children will work the land and be the rightful and skilled owners of means of production.
- We expanded **Hospitality Studies** in Grade 8 to 8 secondary schools in 2026, while **Consumer Studies** is offered across 8 secondary schools in both 2025 and 2026.

We affirm that the 32 schools already offering more than two technical subjects will continue to receive targeted support to ensure their optimal functioning and sustained performance.

Honourable Speaker, I am equally elated to announce that for the first time, Rammolutsi, Viljoenskroon will have a technical school, as **Kgabareng SS** introduced a Grade 10 technical stream in 2026, unlocking new pathways to skills and opportunity. The school will be equipped with workshops and equipment to transform it into a full technical school. Already, the following schools offer technical vocational subjects in grades 8 and 9 and will implement technical subjects in grade 10 from 2027: **Navalsig CS/S** in Bloemfontein, **Langenhovenpark C/S** in Bloemfontein, **Kwetlisong S/S** in Petrus Steyn, **Khotso Uxolo S/S** in Reitz, **Mashaeng S/S** in Fouriesburg and **Mmathabo S/S** in Qwaqwa.

ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Honourable Speaker, inclusive education is essential in ensuring that every learner, regardless of ability or background, has equitable access to quality learning opportunities within a supportive and enabling environment.

In the **2025/2026** financial year, we significantly scaled up inclusive education with measurable impact. We trained **2 058 teachers and 189 officials** on the **Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy (SIAS)** to strengthen early identification and support. We invested **R6.1 million** in assistive devices, specialised LTSM, and equipment to support motor development, mobility, and learning for deaf and blind learners in centres serving learners with severe to profound intellectual and physical disabilities. We strengthened inclusive education support by filling key specialist posts at provincial level we appointed: 2 Occupational Therapists, 2 Social Workers (Social Pedagogues), and 1 Psychologist. Our **Learner Transport Programme** benefited **1 030 learners** across seven special schools - Boitumelong, Qelo School of Skills, Pholoho, Bartimea, Bloemfontein School of Autism, Mphatlalatsane, and Leboneng - with **100% of the allocated budget fully spent**. We also appointed **48 young people as Education Change Agents for Teaching and Learning (ECATLs)** to strengthen classroom support.

Honourable Speaker, we reached **75 835 learners** through psychosocial support programmes addressing GBV, teenage pregnancy, HIV and AIDS, and TB. In addition, **479 817 girl learners** from Quintile 1 schools, care centres, hostels, and special schools benefited from the **Sanitary Dignity Programme**. We continue to implement the **Five-year Boy Learner Support Programme**, initiated in 2023 for **100 learners from 11 hotspot schools**, now in Grade 11 - providing academic and psychosocial support to improve gateway subject performance, prevent substance abuse, violence and bullying, and prepare responsible citizens.

Commitments for 2026/27

Honourable Speaker, in the 2026/2027 financial year, we will deepen inclusive education. We have allocated one-point seven million rands (**R1.7 million**) for expanded **SIAS** training, and thirty-five point six million rands (**R35.6 million**) through the **Learners with Severe to Profound Intellectual Disability (LSPID) Grant** to strengthen assistive devices, specialised LTSM, and targeted support. We will appoint **22 additional young people as Change Agents for Teaching and Learning (ECATLs)** to enhance classroom level support. A key priority underway is the **repurposing of schools into Schools of Skills**, including Monyatsi Primary (Mangaung, Bloemfontein), Refihlile Primary (Botshabelo), Dirisanang Primary (Thabong, Welkom), Villiers Combined, Boitumelong Special School (Thaba Nchu), Tsatsi Primary School (Zamdela, Sasolburg) and Ikanyegeng Combined (Jacobsdal).

These schools offer **Technical Occupational Curricula** in Agricultural Studies, Consumer Studies, Civil, Mechanical and Electrical Technology, Hairdressing, Personal Care, and Ancillary Health Care - enabling **employment and self-reliance**.

ON TEACHER DEVELOPMENT, CAPACITATION & RECOGNITION

Honourable Speaker, in the **2025/2026** financial year, the Department advanced teacher development in line with the **South African Schools Act 84 of 1996**, which mandates the provision of quality education. This work is guided by the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (ISPFTED) and the Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) System. Within this framework, targeted programmes were implemented in 2025/26 to strengthen teacher capacity, curriculum delivery, and learner outcomes as follows:

- **1,184 ECD Practitioners** were trained on the **National Curriculum Framework (NCF)** and related Matters. This being complemented by the training of matrons, social workers, and Departmental officials who support ECD centres,
- **1674 Foundation Phase teachers** were trained on effective subject content and methodology, as well as on the teaching of reading,
- **1,019 teachers** were trained on inclusive education, ensuring all learners, including those with barriers to learning, receive quality support,
- **611 Grade 10–12 technical school teachers** were supported by quarterly workshops across all technical specialisations, including Engineering Graphics and Design (**EGD**),
- **1557 teachers** were trained on digital literacy and ICT integration
- **161 newly appointed Departmental Heads and 133 newly appointed Deputy Principals** were subject to a five-day induction programme to ensure they were ready for their new managerial roles.
- **409 newly appointed teachers** were inducted through the **New Teacher Induction Programme**, a sector programme aimed at ensuring that newly appointed teachers are taken through a structured, coordinated and induction programme
- **School Governing Bodies (SGBs)** on financial management to ensure improved governance and accountability

Honourable Speaker, in 2025, the number of teachers participating in the **National Teaching Awards** increased from 204 in 2024 to 343 in 2025. The Provincial winners for 2025 in, coming from 5 various districts were as follows:

Category	Full Names	School	District
PROVINCIAL CATEGORIES			
1. Excellence in Teaching Accounting FET	Banyane Malebona Victoria	Reatlehile Secondary School	Lejweleputswa
2. Excellence in Teaching Agricultural Subjects	Coetzee Anna Magrietha	Hendrick Portgieter Agricultural School	Xhariep

The province was represented nationally by **14 outstanding teachers nationally** across **14 categories**.

Honourable Speaker, we take this opportunity to congratulate the following educators who performed excellently at the national level:

NAME	CATERGORY	POSITION	SCHOOL
1. Mr Mofokeng MI	Kader Asmal Lifetime Award	1	Letlotlo Naledi Primary School
2. Ms Masienyane NN	Excellence in Primary School Leaders	1	Letlotlo Naledi Primary School
3. Ms Strauss G	Excellence in Teaching Mathematics GET	2	Rouxville Primary School
4. Ms Tlake L	Excellence in Special Needs Leadership	3	Mphatlalane Special School
5. Mr Tshabalala T	Excellence in Secondary School Leadership	3	Kopanong Secondary School
6. Mr Lekhooa SR	Excellence in Teaching Physical Science FET	3	Popano Secondary School

We will continue to recognise excellent teaching through the National Teaching Awards by increasing participation from **343 to 400**.

Honourable Speaker, the following Teacher Development Programmes will be implemented in **2026/2027**:

- Induction of newly appointed Teachers and SMT Members
- Training of teachers on digital skills and ICT integration
- Registration of teachers on the DBE Online Teacher Development Platform
- Launching of the African Languages Association

- Strengthening of Teaching Practice to ensure that our schools contribute to the production of quality teachers.
- Training School CPTD Coordinators to strengthen the implementation of the CPTD Management System
- Provision of structured training in technical specialisations.

ON SCHOOL SAFETY

2025/2026 Progress

Honourable Speaker, the safety of learners, educators and non-teaching staff remains a priority for this Department. Our work continues to be guided by the **Provincial School Safety Protocol**, first signed between the Free State Department of Education and SAPS in 2016, and strengthened through the **national protocol signed in June 2025** by the Minister of Basic Education and the National SAPS Commissioner. The province is currently reviewing this protocol in consultation with stakeholders.

During the past financial year, the Department intensified school safety interventions through strengthened partnerships with SAPS and communities. **Parent engagement in hotspot areas reached two thousand and ninety-six (2 096) parents** through structured meetings in **Thabo Mofutsanyana and Mangaung districts**, addressing issues such as bullying, learner pregnancy, substance abuse, gang recruitment, educator–learner relations, and the protection of schools against vandalism.

Honourable Speaker, **Youth Month in June 2025** was used as a platform to amplify learner voices and promote safe schools. The provincial launch at **Tjhebelopele Primary School in Mangaung Education District** brought together **500 delegates**, including **320 learners, 91 parents and 89 stakeholders** from government, civil society and faith-based organisations. District launches in **Lejweleputswa, Xhariep, Thabo Mofutsanyana and Fezile Dabi** each hosted **350 participants**, including learners, parents and stakeholders, creating platforms for dialogue and solutions to address social ills affecting schools. The Department also implemented **anti-crime awareness campaigns** in partnership with **SAPS, the NPA, the Department of Health, Community Safety, Roads and Transport, Community Police Forums** and civil society partners, reaching **41 228 learners in 160 schools** across five districts.

These campaigns focused on substance abuse, gangsterism, bullying, possession of dangerous weapons, crime prevention and road safety. Preventative measures were further strengthened through **17 joint search-and-seizure operations** with SAPS in Fezile Dabi and Mangaung districts, reaching **6 209 learners**, during which dangerous weapons and illegal substances were confiscated. A further targeted intervention was conducted in **18 secondary schools** around the Kagisong policing precinct in Mangaung, in collaboration with SAPS anti-gang units, to address gang-related activities affecting schools and surrounding communities.

2026/2027 Focus

Honourable Speaker, curbing social ills in schools requires a **whole-of-society approach**. During the **2026/2027 financial year**, the Department will intensify collaboration with SAPS and social partners to:

- Reach **800 parents** through community mobilization programmes aimed at strengthening parental involvement in addressing substance abuse, gang recruitment and behavioural risks among learners.
- Engage **10 000 learners** through structured dialogues and prevention programmes addressing social ills in schools.
- Conduct **search-and-seizure operations targeting approximately 2 000 learners** in hotspot schools in partnership with SAPS.
- Partner with the **Department of Social Development and SAPS anti-gang units** to implement support camps for **60 learners** identified as vulnerable to gang recruitment.

Through coordinated policy implementation, strategic partnerships, and sustained community mobilization, we are building safer learning environments that ensure every learner can travel to school, participate fully in their education, and return home with dignity and security.

ON INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Honourable Speaker, in the **2025/2026** financial year, the Department delivered tangible progress on its infrastructure commitments. We completed two new schools - **Dr Sello Primary in Viljoenskroon and Tiholo Primary in Botshabelo** - as well as the replacement of **Dr Blok Secondary School in Bloemfontein**. At the same time, six new schools and one replacement school remain under construction across the province.

Progress is steady and encouraging. Father Balink Primary stands at **78%**, Matlafalang Primary at **70%**, and Katleho Mpumelelo Secondary in Zamdela is nearing completion at **95%**. Other major projects, including Trompsburg Special School, Morena Tshohisi Moloji II Primary School, Bergman Secondary School and Olympia Primary Replacement School continue to advance - representing a significant capital investment in expanding access to quality infrastructure. We have also moved decisively in ending contracts of under-performing contractors and we are at an advanced stage of sourcing new contractors at Tsebo-Ulwazi Technical, Western Holdings Primary and Tshehetso Primary schools. Three new schools - **Kgotso Taole Technical Secondary in Botshabelo, Thuto ke Lesedi Technical Secondary in Zamdela, and Langenhoven Park Comprehensive School in Bloemfontein** - have been handed over for procurement, with a combined investment exceeding **R320 million**. These projects, to commence in the third quarter of 2026/2027, will directly ease overcrowding and expand access to technical vocational stream for our learners.

Honourable Speaker, these investments are part of a deliberate transformation through the Three-Stream Model. In the technical stream, schools such as **Kgabareng, Esizibeni, Kgotso-Uxolo, Navalsig and Kwetlisong** are being equipped with workshops - preparing learners with practical, job-ready skills. In the agricultural stream, schools including Boiphihlelo, Boitumelo, Bainsvlei, Vierhoek, Thahameso and Unicom are being strengthened - ensuring the Free State sustains its role as the food basket of the country. In the creative sector, **Makwane Comprehensive School** is being converted into an Articon School - unlocking pathways into the creative economy. In the same breath, underutilized schools in every district are being converted into Schools of Skills to support learners with moderate intellectual disabilities - ensuring inclusion, dignity, and access to economic opportunity.

Honourable Speaker, we continue to expand learner accommodation. Additional boarding facilities are underway at Boitumelong and Trompsburg Special Schools. Importantly, learners at Leboneng Special School in Thabong have now moved into new facilities while the remaining work is being concluded.

Honourable Speaker, many of our school facilities are deteriorating, with most built over forty years ago, requiring significant investment to extend their lifespan.

Accordingly, a **significant amount** of the current financial year's infrastructure budget is directed towards **rehabilitation, refurbishment and maintenance** - an investment not just in infrastructure, but in dignity, access, and opportunity for every learner across the Free State. For this financial year, the Department will invest over **R615 million** in critical infrastructure at existing schools. This includes **refurbishment of 31 schools, building 84 classrooms in 11 schools, 17 laboratories in 9 schools, ablution facilities in 12 schools, fencing in 39 schools, as well as administration blocks and a nutrition centre**. We will continue with construction of the following programmes:

- **The rolling out of technical workshops, agricultural facilities, and expand Schools of Skills across districts**
- **42 new Grade R classrooms in 14 schools**
- The Mooifontein ECD centre in Zastron, valued at five million rands (**R5 million**), while continuing with ECD refurbishments at 14 centres.

Honourable Speaker, in cases where municipal water and electricity supply remains unreliable, disrupting teaching and learning, the Department will continue to prioritize alternative solutions, including **generators, solar energy, and groundwater systems**. In this financial year, **30 schools** will be provided with water interventions, **while 10 schools** will receive solar backup systems in the most affected municipalities. This is not just infrastructure delivery, it is a deliberate investment in dignity, access, and opportunity. It is how we build a system that works - for every learner, in every community across the Free State.

VALUES IN EDUCATION/ SYRAC

On Sports and Recreation

Honourable Speaker, our flagship **Magnificent Wednesday School Sports League** has grown from **248 township schools in 2024 to 500 in 2025**, and we are targeting **50 additional schools in 2026**, with a focus on **mass participation** and disciplined sports activities. New codes – **drum majorette, drills, and indigenous games** – will be piloted in **150 schools**, with an emphasis on increasing **the participation** of girl learners.

The league has already produced national success: **St Anne Combined School won first place** and **HTS Louis Botha third place** at the National Kay Motsepe Championships, winning money prizes to the value of one million rands (**R1 million**) and six hundred thousand rands (**R 600,000**) respectively. Our **Free State U/15 football team** also won the National Pan African Championship, with **5 learners, 2 coaches, and 1 head of delegation** selected for **COSAFA International Championship**, achieving **second place** for South Africa. Additionally, chess will be introduced in the **Foundation Phase** in **50 primary schools** to enhance cognitive function, strategic thinking, memory, creativity, focus, patience, emotional resilience, and decision-making skills.

Honourable Speaker, I confirm that the Department will implement the **Democracy Education Programme** intended to promote active citizenship and democratic participation by ensuring eligible learners obtain identity documents to fully exercise their rights as citizens, including the right to vote. A build-up session was held just yesterday here at Cingo SS, where learners had opportunity to apply for and collect their IDs. Similar sessions will be rolled out across all districts in **2025/26** to expand reach, access and impact.

On Values in Education

The Values in Education programme has identified prevalent social ills in schools, including **GBV, gangsterism, bullying, and racism**. To address these in **2026/2027**, **300 schools** will receive **four social-ills awareness charts** each and South African Flags. School beautification and cleanliness will be a priority in 2026/27. The **Moral Regeneration Movement** will be restored, focusing on the welfare of the boy child while continuing **girls' empowerment programmes**, promoting inclusivity and curbing social ills through the **Boys and Girls Empowerment Movements in schools**.

ON OUR DIRECT CONTRIBUTION TO EMPLOYMENT CREATION

Honourable Speaker, the Department in partnership with various SETAs has created **269 job opportunities** for young people participating in structured Internship, Learnerships and Work Integrated Learning programmes that will run until 2027. During the 2025/2026, the **Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)** created **486 work opportunities** across the Department, and these will **continue beyond 2026**, ensuring that young people benefit from sustained professional development rather than short-term placements.

Honourable Speaker, under the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, the Basic Education Employment Initiative has become a powerful instrument for both social support and economic inclusion in the Free State. Through this programme, the Department created **11,117** youth work opportunities across **780** no-fee paying schools in **Quintiles 1 to 3**, directly targeting the most vulnerable communities. Of these opportunities, **7,450** were taken up by young women, representing **66%**, while **3,852** were taken up by young men, accounting for **34%**, reflecting a deliberate commitment to advancing gender equity. These young people were not merely placed in schools but were meaningfully engaged and exposed to a range of skills and competencies that will endure beyond the lifespan of the programme, strengthening their future employability. The deployment of teacher assistants significantly enhanced school functionality, while simultaneously equipping young people with practical workplace experience. In the 2026/2027 financial year, the Department will deepen this work by appointing **22** additional young people as e-Cadres for Teaching and Learning (ECATLs), aimed at strengthening classroom-level support and improving learning outcomes. Furthermore, the Department will create **506** work opportunities through the EPWP programme, with a deliberate focus on the general assistants' programme in the Xhariep Education District.

Honourable Speaker, taken together, these initiatives reflect a coherent and deliberate strategy to connect education, skills development, and employment - ensuring that young people are not only supported in the present, but are equipped with the capabilities required to actively build and sustain the economy of tomorrow.

ON STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS/ CORPORATE SOCIAL INVESTMENT (CSI) INITIATIVES

Honourable Speaker, strategic partnerships with the private sector continue to expand opportunities for learners and communities. In 2025/26, the Department, in collaboration with **CHIETA and DHET**, established the **Smart Skills Centre at Tshiya District Teacher Development Centre in QwaQwa**, bridging the digital divide through virtual reality pods that offer experiential learning in welding, mechanical, and electrical engineering. The **Promaths Maths and Science Programme**, co-funded by **Investec, CHIETA, Harmony Gold Mine, Telkom Foundation, and Old Mutual Foundation**, supported over **3,800** learners across multiple centres and schools, providing structured academic support, digital platforms, and specialised tuition. Infrastructure and targeted support were also strengthened.

Harmony Gold Mine completed a fully equipped **science lab at Thabang Secondary School – Rammolutsi, Viljoenskroon**, while **Sibanye Stillwater** converted two classrooms into **Maths and Multi-Media Centres at Refihletse Combined School in Tshepong, Verkeerdevlei**. **ENGIE South Africa** provides extra tuition in Natural and Physical Sciences for Grades 8–12 at **Kheleng Secondary School in Phomolong, Henneman**, ensuring learners receive critical support in gateway subjects. In 2026/27, the **Promaths programme** will continue across all existing centres. **Sibanye Gold Mine will be building ECD hub centres** in Brandfort, Theunissen, Verkeerdevlei, and Winburg respectively, and upskill **40 ECD Practitioners**. **Harmony Gold Mine** will be constructing three **Grade R classrooms with ablution facilities at Dihwai Primary School in Allanridge**. FLOAT, through Operation Tharollo, will be implementing five-year **R105 million** interventions across 458 Quintile 1–3 Sesotho and Afrikaans schools, integrating structured pedagogy, learner materials, lesson plans and quarterly teacher development to improve early literacy and numeracy skills in grade R and 1.

IN CONCLUSION

Honourable Speaker, this Budget Vote reflects a **clear line of accountability** from **2025/2026 commitments**, through **measurable progress**, to **focused priorities for 2026/2027**, aligned to the State of the Nation, the State of the Province Address and the Medium-Term Development Plan.

Honourable Speaker, this budget frankly acknowledges the profound and persistent challenges that continue to confront the education sector - challenges that demand unwavering system resilience, greater efficiency, and firm fiscal discipline. As Nelson Mandela wisely reminded us, ***“It always seems impossible until it is done.”*** Indeed, education remains our long walk to freedom - an enduring journey that calls for courage, consistency, and collective resolve to overcome every obstacle in pursuit of a just and empowered society. Through education, we honour the sacrifices of **1956 and 1976**, give life to the Freedom Charter, and secure the future of our democracy. As Mama Charlotte Maxeke reminded us: ***“If you can rise, bring someone with you.”*** **Honourable Speaker**, before I leave the podium, allow me to take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to the Head of Department, Advocate Malakoane and his team for their invaluable contribution towards this budget vote.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to my organisation, the African National Congress, the Premier of the Free State – Mme MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae, Members of the Executive Council, and Members of the Portfolio Committee for their consistent support and guidance. We remain deeply grateful to the people of the Free State, District Management Teams, School Governing Bodies, organised labour, QLTC structures, School Leadership Teams, teachers, corporate partners, NGOs, CBOs, municipalities, provincial departments, universities and churches for their valuable contribution and unwavering support. To my family and friends, thank you for always being my pillar of strength. **Honourable Speaker**, I hereby table the **Department of Education's Budget Vote for 2026/2027. Thank you!**