



Basic Education Budget Brief  
South Africa

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2020



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# Preface

This budget brief is one of **six** that explore the extent to which the 2020 national and provincial budgets address the needs of children under 18 years in **South Africa**. The briefs analyse the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on allocations for children by comparing the baseline budget introduced in February 2020 with the special adjusted budget presented to parliament in June 2020. Each brief considers the evidence and draws conclusions about how the government's emergency public finance response affects services and programmes that benefit children.



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# Key messages and recommendations

**After more than a quarter of a century of democracy, significant inequalities in educational outcomes persist between and within provinces.** An important component of the strategy to address education inequality relates to ensuring greater efficiency in the expenditure of financial resources. This is especially important in the current fiscal crisis.

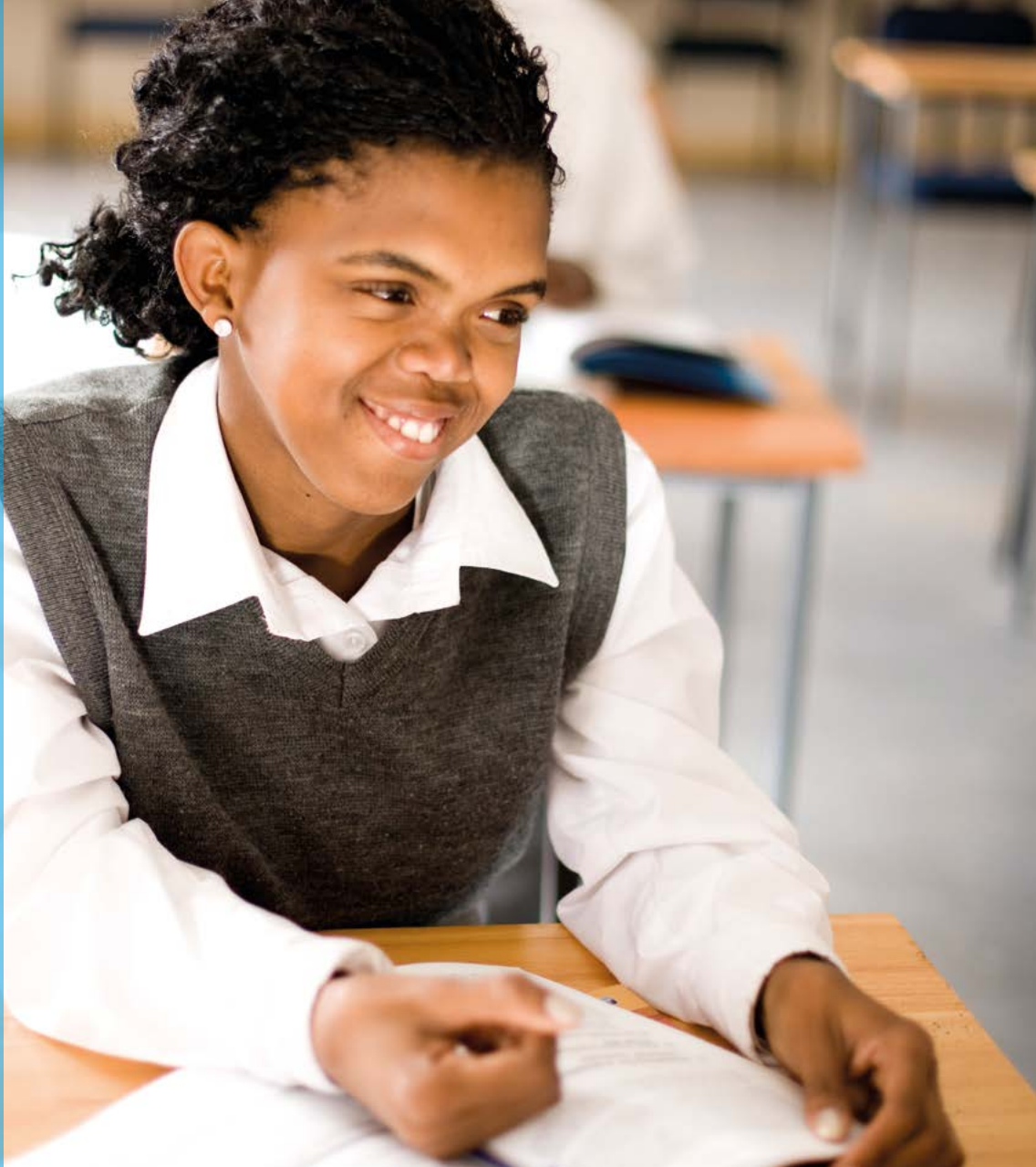
**The supplementary budget of June 2020 was necessitated by the deepening of the South African fiscal crisis as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to a downward spiral in economic growth, and a severe rise in the levels of unemployment and poverty.** Basic and higher education were given an additional R12.5 billion 'to fund COVID-19-related spending and catch-up programmes in the basic and higher education and training sectors.' Provincial grants of R13.8 billion were suspended, of which the education infrastructure grant was hardest hit, to the tune of R6.6 billion.

**In general, the provinces have acted timeously to fundamentally safeguard the education budgets while ensuring adequate resources for addressing the challenges to schooling as a consequence of the pandemic.** The most drastic changes have occurred in the reduction of the amounts allocated for the conditional grants, specifically for education infrastructure, the school infrastructure backlog, mathematics, science and technology, and HIV/AIDS (life skills) grants.

**The reduction in the infrastructure grants will undoubtedly impact on the building and maintenance of schools and the installation of water and sanitation infrastructure.** However, it would appear that this was unavoidable under the circumstances. These necessitated, inter alia, finding additional resources for addressing the consequences of COVID-19 for education in a severely constrained fiscal environment.

**Global estimates of the number of children in developing countries whose education will be affected by the pandemic are around 258 million.** There are justifiable concerns that many developing countries will fail to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4 relating to free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education. The World Bank points to the immediate costs to the education system, specifically a decline in learning and an increase in drop-outs, as less funding is made available for educational inputs. Limited educational resources will thus primarily affect teachers, to the possible detriment of the quality of education. The longer term costs include preventing children from realising their true potential, resulting in lower lifetime productivity and earnings. Lower investments in the education and health of the poor will undoubtedly intensify the cycle of poverty and inequality.

**In South Africa, there is no doubt that fiscal pressures, at least over the period covered by the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework 2020–2022, will at best ensure that resources for education and health are maintained at their current projected levels, at least in nominal, if not in real terms.** The implication of the fiscal crisis on basic education, therefore, is that the urgently needed resources for improving the quality of learning will be lacking in the foreseeable future. A similar scenario is likely for the health sector. In sum, the short- and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on education and health imply that the all-important task of reducing social inequality becomes much more difficult.



Given the current state of play, the government is encouraged to:

- Engage in more innovative thinking about closer collaboration between national and provincial governments, to address what is undoubtedly one of the most important policy issues in South Africa, namely improving the quality of educational outcomes.
- Recognise that the impact of school closures has been greatest on the 'poorest of the poor'. The government should declare access to wi-fi and the Internet a 'public good' in the same way that education, health, water and sanitation, and electricity are defined. To ensure that this is done as a matter of urgency, the government should negotiate with the private sector on the most feasible way to achieve this important objective.
- Continue to improve the efficiency of education expenditure in provincial education departments. This does not negate the fact that the education sector needs more funding to address the inter- and intraregional disparities evident in South African education.
- Explore creative and bold ways to increase the fiscal space available to the social sectors, especially basic education, social welfare and health. Given the disruptions caused by the pandemic, it might present an ideal opportunity to persuade both the government and the wealthy about the need for and the viability of increased financing for basic education.

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# 1: Introduction

## Structure and policies in basic education<sup>1</sup>

**The basic education system has three levels: early childhood development (ECD); primary education; and secondary education.** ECD is provided for children aged between 0 and 6 years of age. Children 4 years and under attend ECD centres. Until now, these centres have been funded and managed by the Department of Social Development. The management of the ECD centres is currently being transferred to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) with the requirement that two years of preschool education is mandatory.

**The national government, through the DBE, is responsible for developing the ECD curriculum as well as the budget and procurement processes for training ECD practitioners. Provincial education departments are responsible for implementing ECD policy including training,**

**implementing and monitoring curriculum-related activities.**

**The second and third levels of basic education (primary and secondary) cater for children aged 7–18 years.** The primary level includes Grades 1–7 and the secondary level provides education at Grades 8–12. As with ECD, the DBE is responsible for policy development, resource allocation and oversight for both the primary and secondary levels. Provincial education departments implement the policy.

**The Department of Higher Education and Training is responsible for all post-school education and training, including adult education and training.** The latter is funded through the sector and education training authorities, tertiary education (universities), and technical and vocation education and training (TVET colleges) for students who want to pursue the TVET track at the end of Grade 9.



**As in other sectors, during the past 26 years of democracy the South African Government has developed a range of progressive policies in education that are in line with leading international trends.**

These include the following key pieces of legislation for the basic education sector.

- The National Education Policy Act, 1996, provides the DBE with its mandate and clarifies the respective roles of the national and provincial authorities.
- The South African Schools Act, 1996, ensures access to quality education without discrimination and provides compulsory schooling for 7–15-year olds.
- The Employment of Educators Act, 1998, regulates the professional, moral and ethical responsibilities of educators as well setting out their competency requirements.
- The National Curriculum Statement Policy of 2002 defines the curriculum for Grades R–9.
- The National Education Information Policy of 2003 provides for the coordinated development of education information systems.
- The Education Laws Amendment Act, 2005, authorises the declaration of schools in poor areas as ‘no-fee’ schools (quintiles 1–3).
- The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy of 2015 provides for equitable access to ECD services, and adequate budgeting and monitoring of ECD services.
- The Basic Education Laws Amendment Act, 2017, amends the South African Schools Act and the Employment of Educators Act, which, inter alia, reduces the authority of school governing bodies to manage school resources without approval from the DBE (UNICEF Budget Brief, 2019).<sup>2</sup>



**Table 1: Summary of the DBE’s goals and policy objectives**

DBE’s 2030 targets	DBE’s priorities
Universal access to phase one of ECD, namely Grade R	Improve teacher competency, supply, availability and utilisation
Ninety per cent of children in Grades 3, 6 and 9 achieve 50 per cent or more on the annual national assessments*	Increase access to high quality learning materials and infrastructure, including information and communication technology
Improvement in South African learners’ comparative performance in international standardised tests by providing performance benchmarks	Establish a quality standardised national assessment system for Grades 1–9
No infrastructure backlogs by 2030	Universal access to Grade R and improve the quality of ECD
Schools are funded at the minimum per learner levels determined nationally, and funds are utilised transparently and effectively	Ensure a focused planning/accountability system by strengthening school management, promoting functional schools and enhancing the capacity of district offices

Source: Action Plan to 2030, quoted in UNICEF Basic Education Budget Brief, 2019

\*The annual national assessments have now been abandoned by the DBE.

Table 2: Summary of South African learners' TIMSS (2016) and PIRLS (2016) scores

Test	Average score and country position	Actual impact of learner achievement
TIMSS, Grade 9, mathematics, 2015	372 (scores 400 and 475 are achievements at low level). Second-last position of 39 countries	34% of Grade 9 learners demonstrated minimum competency
TIMSS, Grade 5, mathematics, 2015	376 (centre point is 500). Second-lowest of 48 countries	39% demonstrated the minimum competency
PIRLS, Grade 4, 2016	Mean score of 320 (centre point is 500). Lowest of 50 countries	78% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning and retrieve basic information from text to answer simple questions, compared to four per cent internationally

Source: UNICEF Basic Education Budget Brief, 2019

## Key indicators on the health of the basic education system: Quality of basic education

**The 2019 UNICEF Basic Education Budget Brief (citing Spaul, 2019)<sup>3</sup> suggested that the trends in international mathematics and science study (TIMSS) and the progress in international reading learning study (PIRLS) showed that learning outcomes had improved between 2002 and 2011 but had subsequently stagnated.** Improving the quality of education is a key outcome of the country's National Development Plan.

**Gustafsson and Nuga Deliwé (2020)<sup>4</sup>, however, argue that the rates of improvement in these two programmes and the regional programme, SACMEQ5, are 'equal to the highest rates possible, albeit from a low base'.** These authors go on to argue that 'while South Africa's level of quality remains low when compared internationally, the country's rate of improvement has been among the fastest.' They go on to say that the current trajectory would place South Africa's reading in 2040 (i.e.

two decades from now) on a par with Iran in 2016 and Indonesia in 2011. In terms of South African learners passing the 'low international benchmark in PIRLS, ...the trajectory implies moving from the still very low 22 per cent of learners passing in 2016, to around 65 per cent reaching this benchmark in 2040.'

**Government policy on ECD is that it is a fundamental and universal human right to which all young children are equally entitled without discrimination.** Currently, ECD facilities in South Africa vary in quality and level of operations. These services are mostly delivered by private service providers, non-profit organisations, day parents, and through community development programmes that offer mobile ECD programmes such as book and toy libraries and community playgroups. However, early learning and care programmes are not universally available or equitably accessible to vulnerable children.

## Key indicators on the health of the basic education system: Efficiency

**According to the DBE (2019),<sup>6</sup> completion rates varied considerably between Grade 7 (95 per cent) and Grade 12 (50.7 per cent) in 2017.** However, the latter figure has improved considerably since 2002 when it was 40.3 per cent.

Of concern, however, is the fact that repetition rates are increasing steadily from Grade 8, reaching their peaks in Grades 10 and 11 (Table 3). Moreover, the repetition rates are consistently and significantly higher for males, except in Grade 12.

Table 3: Grade 8–12 repetition rates by gender, 2017 (percentage)

	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Female	7.7	8.2	18.2	20.0	10.6
Male	13.1	14.2	26.5	21.0	9.7

Source: DBE, 2019

## Key indicators on the health of the basic education system: Poverty

**The South African government, to its credit, has adopted a number of pro-poor strategies to address the historical inequities in the provision of education.** These pro-poor strategies include the following:

- The introduction of no-fee schools in 2007 – two-thirds of children now do not pay fees
- Daily meals provided for more than 9 million children through the national school nutrition programme
- Expansion of the learner transport programme
- Greater attention being paid to special needs children.

**More than three-quarters (77.1 per cent) of learners who attended public schools benefited from school feeding schemes in 2018, compared to 63.1 per cent in 2009.**

Learners in Limpopo (91.2 per cent), Eastern Cape (89.7 per cent), Mpumalanga (87.8 per cent) and Northern Cape (82.6 per cent) were the most likely to benefit from this programme. By comparison, only 53.6 per cent of learners in the Western Cape and 55.3 per cent of learners in Gauteng benefited from this type of programme. The percentage of children that used food schemes declined slightly in the Northern Cape (-3.2 percentage points) (Statistics SA, 2019).<sup>7</sup> However, there may be scope for increased efficiency gains in the overall management of the NSNP through, inter alia, reducing administration costs and negotiating better prices with food producers and retailers.

## Basic education and equity

**In the 2017 national certificate examinations, more than 80 per cent of quintile 5 schools achieved pass rates of 80 per cent or higher.**

In the poor schools (quintiles 1–3; non-fee schools serving mainly black children in less affluent communities), less than one-third achieved pass rates of 80 per cent or more, reflecting the important but often neglected issue of intraregional (e.g. within provinces, within urban areas) inequity.

**Regional inequity thus manifests itself in two forms.** First, there are the historical and continuing disparities between provinces in terms of educational outputs and outcomes (e.g. Gauteng and Western Cape vs. Limpopo and Eastern Cape). Second, there is the equally pressing challenge of intraprovincial inequality (as highlighted above) between quintile 5 and quintiles 1–3 schools. Some education experts in South Africa have argued that it is difficult to address this aspect of inequality because a relatively large proportion of financial resources is directed towards personnel expenditure with little left to address the quality of education and learning challenges.

After more than a quarter of a century of democracy, significant inequalities in educational outcomes persist between and within provinces





## Takeaways

- While universal access to Grades 1–9 has been achieved in South Africa, improving access to ECD, raising the quality of learning at all levels of basic education, and reducing the repetition rates in secondary schooling remain important challenges for policy makers and implementers.
- Effective pro-poor strategies in basic education include the introduction of no-fee schools, the national school nutrition programme, and the expansion of the learner transport programme.
- Repetition rates are still high in Grades 8–12, with the rates for males significantly higher than those for females.
- After more than a quarter of a century of democracy, significant inequalities in educational outcomes persist between and within provinces.
- An important component of the strategy to address education inequality relates to ensuring greater efficiency in the expenditure of financial resources. This is especially important in the current fiscal crisis.

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# 2: The special adjustment budget and the basic education sector

## Relevant budget process considerations

**Legal authority for the supplementary budget tabled in June 2020 is provided through the country's Public Finance Management Act (PFMA), Act No. 1 of 1999.** Section 30 of the PFMA provides for the Minister of Finance to introduce an adjustment budget to provide for emergency expenditures (Section 16), to account for significant and unforeseeable social and economic events, the shifting of funds within and between votes (spending units) in Section 42, and utilising savings under a vote to defray expenditure in the same vote (but different programme) in Section 43. Similar provisions are made for the provincial level of government using Section 31 of the PFMA.

**The special adjustment budget, the Supplementary Budget Review (SBR), is an ad hoc budget tabled in Parliament, specifically**

**in response to COVID-19. As an addition to the budget process, the SBR does not provide for changes to overall budget priorities or the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework.**

The Minister of Finance will still table the adjusted estimates of national expenditure (in-year changes for FY2020) and the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement in October 2020. The policy that informed the 2020 budget, therefore, remains in place and the SBR is purely a response to the unforeseen state of disaster as declared by the government on 15 March 2020. The 2020 Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement will include any changes to policy and government programmes that are needed to support the economy's recovery and bolster the social protection net over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework 2021 period.

**The purpose of the SBR is to provide clarity on: (1) the extent and scope of the emergency response; (2) how the emergency response**



will be funded; and (3) the extent to which the emergency forced reprioritisation of the proposed allocations that were made in February 2020.

### The special adjusted budget and national Department of Basic Education

The supplementary budget of June 2020 was necessitated by the deepening of the South African fiscal crisis as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to a downward spiral in economic growth, and a severe rise in the levels of unemployment and poverty.

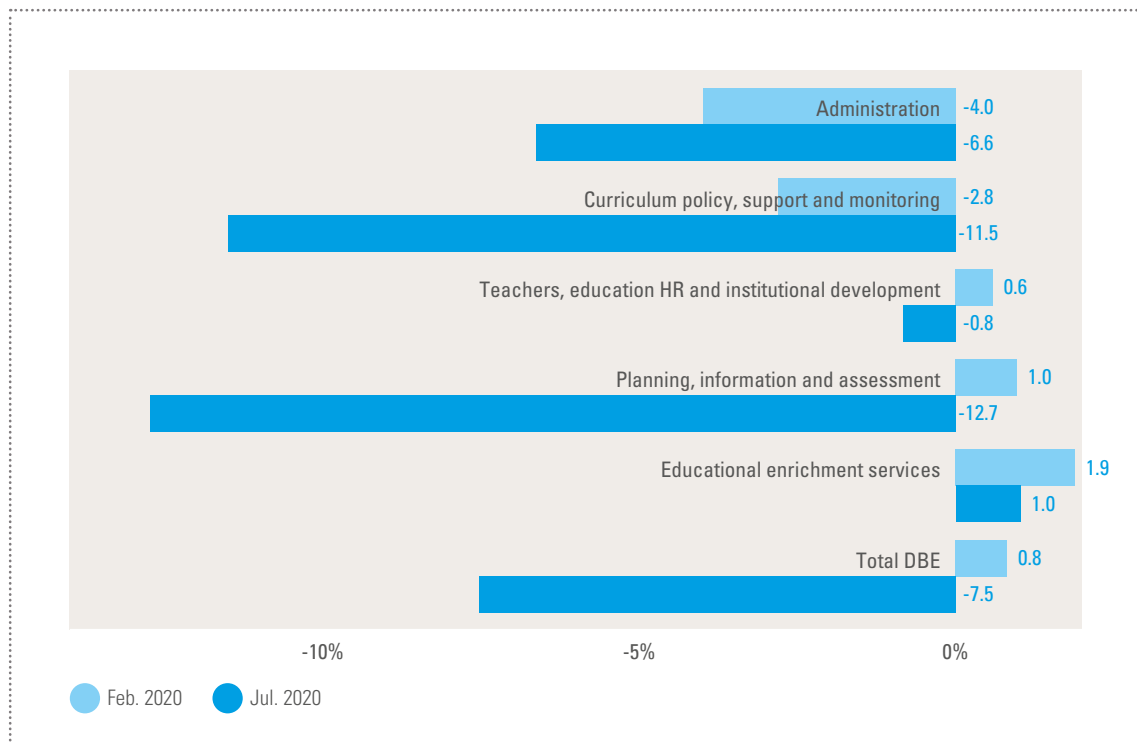
Basic and higher education were given an additional R12.5 billion 'to fund COVID-19-related spending and catch-up programmes in the basic and higher education and training sectors.'

For FY2020, the basic education national budget has been revised down by more than R2 billion. Most of the revisions were

made to the conditional grant framework, thus freeing up resources to be deployed to finance the department's COVID-19 response. The education infrastructure grant was hardest hit, with more than R2 billion suspended and roughly R4 billion repurposed to address COVID-19 issues in schools. While the changes are perfectly understandable, the DBE will have to find a way of reintroducing much-needed infrastructure spending, especially in schools with poor water and sanitation facilities.

Changes to the budget of the DBE were dominated by revisions to the conditional grant framework to finance the emergency response. More than R2 billion was suspended from the education infrastructure grant, while smaller suspensions were made to the HIV/AIDS and the mathematics, science and technology grants. No suspensions were proposed for the national school nutrition and learners with profound disabilities grants. However, all conditional grants in the basic education sector were repurposed to help with the country's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1: Change in the growth of the DBE FY2020 budget – impact of COVID-19 adjustments (FY2019=100)



Source: Estimates of National Expenditure 2020 and National Treasury Supplementary Budget Review 2020<sup>12</sup>  
 Note: Conditional grants destined for provincial education departments have not been netted out

Table 4: Changes in the conditional grant framework between February 2020 and June 2020

R billion	Budget Feb 2020	Revised June 2020	Adjusted allocation	Amount repurposed
DBE	19.6	-2.3	17.2	4.5
Education infrastructure grant	11.0	-2.2	8	4.4
HIV/AIDS (life skills) grant	25	-0.06	0.19	0.04
Learners with profound disabilities grant	0.24	-	0.24	0.02
Mathematics, science and technology grant	0.40	-0.07	0.33	0.03
National school nutrition programme	7.7	-	7.7	-

Source: National Treasury Supplementary Budget Review 2020

## The special adjusted budget and provincial departments of education

**The education budgets of the provinces have not been radically adjusted so far in response to the supplementary budget.** In fact, most of the provinces have reprioritised expenditure to their departments of education (and departments of health) to address the challenges of COVID-19.

**In general, the responses from the provincial governments were to prioritise health expenditure, followed by that of basic education.** Health expenditure was increased substantially everywhere, given the COVID-19 crisis. On the other hand, education budgets were also seriously considered, particularly in the light of the challenges associated with returning to school.

**Because the bulk of additional funding in the adjusted budget has been allocated to the health sector and local government, the changes to provincial education budgets in FY2020 do not deviate radically from average funding over the present Medium-Term Expenditure Framework period.** The general trend of low real annual growth in the basic education budgets is set to continue over the medium term, raising questions about the long-term impact of spending cuts on the basic education agenda in provinces. Only the Gauteng Department of Education plans to grow more

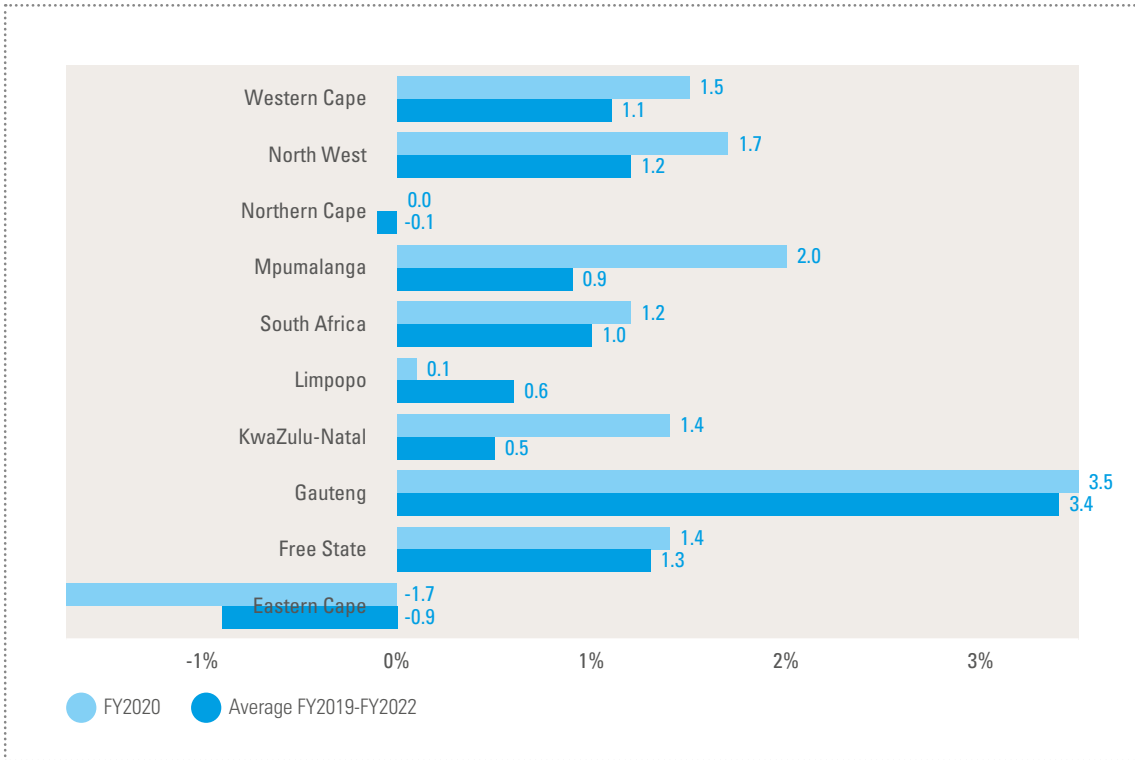
than 3 per cent on average over the medium term, while most provincial education budgets are projected to grow by 1 per cent or less over the same period.

**Provincial education departments have acted timeously to largely safeguard their education budgets, while ensuring adequate resources for addressing the challenges to schooling as a consequence of the pandemic.<sup>8</sup>**

The most drastic changes have occurred in the reduction of the amounts allocated to the conditional grants, specifically the education infrastructure, school infrastructure backlog, maths and science technology, and HIV/AIDS (life skills) grants.

**The impact of the reduction in the infrastructure grants will undoubtedly impact the building and maintenance of schools and the installation of water and sanitation infrastructure.** However, it would appear that this was unavoidable under the circumstances, which necessitated, inter alia, finding additional resources for addressing the consequences of COVID-19 to education in a severely constrained fiscal environment.

Figure 2: Inflation-adjusted spending and allocation trends in provincial education departments, FY2016–2022 (FY2019=100)



Source: National Treasury 2020 (provincial budgets 2020 obtained from National Treasury)



## Provincial Supplementary Budget Changes – Education

### Eastern Cape

- Reprioritised R2.6 billion<sup>9</sup>
- The education budget was increased by
  - R325–R341 million for temporary teachers
  - R16 million for mobile connectivity for educators and learners prioritising Grades 6–11.

### Free State

- R45.5 million provided for schools preparation
- Conditional grants decreased by R461 million, which include
  - Education infrastructure grant – R140.2 million
  - HIV/AIDS – R2.86 million
  - Mathematics, science and technology grant – R5.1 million.

### Gauteng

- The original education budget of R142.4 billion was adjusted to R146.4 billion
- The Department of Education reprioritised R5.2 billion with R1.2 billion new money.

### KwaZulu-Natal

- A COVID-19 budget of R2.8 billion was allocated for repairing schools, chemicals, water and sanitation, personal protective equipment and cleaners
- R1.2 billion came from reprioritisation, with an additional R1 billion from the wider provincial budget
- Conditional grant cuts were as follows: education infrastructure grant – R497.2 million; HIV/AIDS (life skills) – R15.1 million; mathematics, science and technology – R5.1 million.

### Limpopo

- Reprioritised R3.5 billion
- The education budget was increased (reprioritised) by R397.6 million for return to school-related projects
- Conditional grants were cut as follows: education infrastructure grant – R280.3 million; mathematics, science and technology – 8.7 million; HIV/AIDS Life skills grant – R6.8 million (total conditional grant cut: R295.8 million).

### Mpumalanga

- Conditional grants cut by R706.6 million
- ECD funding reduced by R15.7 million.

### Northern Cape

- Provincial equitable share remained virtually unchanged (R14.289 billion to R14.296 billion)
- education infrastructure grant reduced by R82m
- R193.5 million shifted to address COVID-19 challenges including R64 million for school hygiene packs; R27.7 million for disinfecting buildings; R5.5 million for repairing vandalised schools; R47 million for water and sanitation; R20 million to address overcrowding in schools; R24.8 million for the appointment of COVID-19 screeners; and R1.5 million for installation of alarm systems in schools
- In addition, the Department of Social Development provided R11.5 million for nutrition support for 15,000 children and R8 million to assist ECD centres comply with COVID-19 regulations in terms of safety measures and basic hygiene.

### North West

- Provincial equitable share remained unchanged but has been reprioritised
- Provincial grant allocations have decreased by R459.4 million, including R197.26 million from the education infrastructure grant and R5.892 million from the mathematics, science and technology grant
- R200 million added for school COVID-19 preparation
- Main budget for 2020/21 of R18.380 billion decreased to R18.063 billion (-R317 million) in the supplementary budget.

### Western Cape

- R18 million emergency funding allocated for the mobilisation of school feeding schemes
- The HIV, tuberculosis and malaria community outreach grant increased by R552.2 million for COVID-19
- The education infrastructure grant was cut
- An additional R310 million was provided to the provincial DOE for personal protective equipment and sanitisation of schools.



## Takeaways

- In the July supplementary budget, total expenditure of R1.95 trillion (February 2020) was increased to R2.04 trillion, with an additional R145 billion allocated to address the COVID-19 response.
- Basic and higher education are given an additional R12.5 billion 'to fund COVID-19 related spending and catch-up programmes in the basic and higher education and training sectors.'
- Provincial grants were suspended or repurposed to the tune of R13.8 billion with the education infrastructure grant being hit by a R6.6 billion reduction (R2 billion suspensions and R4.5 billion repurposing).
- In general, the provinces have acted timeously to largely safeguard the education budgets, while ensuring adequate resources for addressing the challenges to schooling as a consequence of the pandemic.
- The most drastic changes have occurred in the reduction of the amounts allocated to the conditional grants, specifically the education infrastructure, school infrastructure backlog, maths and science technology, and HIV/AIDS (life skills) grants.
- The impact of the reduction in the infrastructure grants will undoubtedly impact on the building and maintenance of schools and the installation of water and sanitation infrastructure. However, it would appear that this was unavoidable under the circumstances, which necessitated, inter alia, finding additional resources for addressing the consequences of COVID-19 for education in a severely constrained fiscal environment.

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# 3. Basic education and the immediate impact of COVID-19

**In the World Bank's view (2020),<sup>10</sup> fiscal pressures across the developing world as a consequence of reduced economic activity will undoubtedly lead to lower investment in education.** Limited educational resources will then focus primarily on teachers, to the possible detriment of the quality of education. In South Africa, Gustafsson and Deliwe (2020) point to substantial learning losses, reduced access to educational materials, and lower participation in preschools in poor communities unable to afford fees. In the long term, learning losses incurred by children from poor families will likely result in lower lifetime productivity and incomes.

**On the basis of a recent 'rapid results survey' (CRAM),<sup>11</sup> Gustafsson and Deliwe suggest better targeting of the national school**

**nutrition programme resources (to reduce hunger), presumably on the basis that this survey shows that only half of learners are from households unable to properly feed their children.** While a strategy to reduce hunger to enable better educational outcomes is undoubtedly welcome, resorting to better national school nutrition programme 'targeting' is fraught with political challenges. Given that the national school nutrition programme caters for the poorest schools (quintiles 1–3), how would one distinguish between the 'poor' and 'non-poor' in such schools?

**Most analyses of the impact of COVID-19 on education have focused, both internationally and in South Africa, on the links to poverty and unemployment.** Little analysis, if any,





has been undertaken on the likely impact of COVID-19 on social inequality resulting from its effects on education. The limited evidence gathered so far suggests that inequality will intensify in South Africa as more poor children drop out of school, and the quality of learning declines.

**Importantly, there is no doubt that fiscal pressures, at least over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework 2020–2022 period, will at best ensure that resources for education and health are maintained at their current projected levels, at least in nominal, if not in real terms.** The implication of the fiscal crisis on basic education therefore is that urgently needed resources for improving the quality of learning will be lacking in the foreseeable future. A similar scenario is likely for the health sector. In sum, the short- and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on education and health suggest that the prognosis for the all-important reduction of inequality in its various manifestations is not an optimistic one.



It is generally agreed that **learning losses are a widespread consequence** of the closing of schools during the pandemic.

As is often the case, the impact has been **greatest on the 'poorest of the poor'** because of inadequate access to the internet.

## Takeaways

- Due to a lack of sound research on the impact of COVID-19 on basic education, most analyses have focused on children's lack of access to nutritious food as a result of the national lockdown.
- There have been calls for stricter and improved targeting of the national school nutrition programme, but given the widespread negative economic impact of COVID-19, finer targeting strategies might be counterproductive.
- It is generally agreed that learning losses are a widespread consequence of the closing of schools during the pandemic. As is often the case, the impact has been greatest on the 'poorest of the poor' because of inadequate access to the internet.
- The current squeeze on resources for the social sectors is likely to continue over the medium term, thus potentially rolling back the educational quality gains achieved in the last decade.



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## Endnotes

- 1 Drawn largely from UNICEF, 2019/20 Basic Education Budget Brief.
- 2 UNICEF, *South Africa Basic Education Budget Brief 2019/20*, United Nations Children's Fund South Africa, Pretoria, 2019.
- 3 Spaul, N., *Priorities for Educational Reform in South Africa*, Note for the National Treasury, 2019.
- 4 Gustafsson, Martin and Nuga Deliwe, Carol, *How is the COVID-19 pandemic affecting educational quality in South Africa? Evidence to date and future risks*, Insight Brief, Pretoria and Stellenbosch, 2020.
- 5 SACMEQ, the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Education Quality, is a collaborative network that conducts education policy research for government decision-makers, focusing on mathematics and reading.
- 6 Department of Basic Education, *A 25 Year Review of Progress in the Basic Education Sector*, Government Printers, Pretoria, 2019.
- 7 Statistics South Africa, *General Household Survey*, Statistical Release P0318, Pretoria, 2019.
- 8 Information from provincial supplementary budget speeches 2020.
- 9 Not all provinces have indicated their reprioritisation in this regard.
- 10 World Bank, *The COVID-19 Pandemic: Shocks to Education and Policy Responses*, Washington, D.C., May 2020.
- 11 NIDS-CRAM is the National Income Dynamics Study's Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey undertaken under the auspices of the University of Cape Town. The survey investigates the socioeconomics of the national lockdown during the state of disaster declared in South Africa in March 2020, and the economic and social consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. It is a broadly representative survey of 7,000 South Africans, conducted every month. The questions relate to income and employment, household welfare and related issues.
- 12 National Treasury, *Budget Review and Supplementary Budgets*, Government Printers, Pretoria, February and June 2020.



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