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Enquiries: A Siyengo

Research Minute: 0003/2016

To: Deputy Directors-General, Chief Directors, Directors (Head Office and district offices),  
Chairpersons of Governing Bodies and Principals

**Subject: 2016 WCED Systemic Tests**

1. The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) has noted with concern that the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) has called for a boycott of the WCED Systemic Testing Programme.
2. This call is disturbing as it appears to be largely informed by misconceptions about the nature and intentions of WCED systemic tests. Furthermore, systemic testing is compulsory as it measures the wellness of the education system in the province.
3. The key analytical variable is the school and not the individual learner. Each learner is tested only once every three years. Tests take half of one day and cover core sections of the curriculum.
4. Tests identify systemic problems that will exist beyond the cohort of learners that are tested. This means that the availability of test results after the tested cohort has already passed that grade is not an issue because these are not learner-focused tests.
5. We have received reports that some officials use the data from the tests inappropriately. We wish to emphasise that the performance data of each school should be used to support the school in its efforts to improve. Inappropriate use of the data creates unnecessary resistance and hostility to the programme. District officials have been advised of this important principle and the Head of Education will address the matter with the management of every district.

6. It will be wrong for the WCED to abandon the testing programme at this point as it shows positive trends for our education system. The tables below show the improvement in pass rates over time:

GRADE	MATHS 2011	MATHS 2015	IMPROVEMENT		GRADE	LANG 2011	LANG 2015	IMPROVEMENT
GRADE 3	47.5	57.6	10.4		GRADE 3	30.4	42.4	12
GRADE 6	23.4	37.6	14.3		GRADE 6	31.5	36.8	5.3
GRADE 9	10.4	22.2	11.8		GRADE 9	44.2	53	8.8

7. The WCED uses and has used the data from the systemic tests as follows to improve curriculum delivery:
- In 2006 the WCED published a LitNum Strategy, which was largely informed by the analysis of performance trends between 2002 and 2006.
  - The WCED has completed a six-year training programme for language and Mathematics teachers, reaching about 800 primary schools.
  - In 2015 a revision of the LitNum Strategy was published as separate Mathematics and Language strategies. These have been informed by the performance trends between 2008 and 2014.
  - In addition to these interventions, the WCED is currently running a support programme for Grades R to 3 in 105 schools and has an ongoing High School Intervention Programme to support targeted high schools.
  - A course on the interpretation of systemic test school reports is offered to all newly appointed Heads of Department, Deputy Principals and Principals to assist with the improvement of planning strategies.
8. The LitNum Awards are not different from the award systems for the National Senior Certificate or Adult Education and Training. They recognise excellent performance with a certificate but without financial incentives. In addition they recognise those schools that have improved with a certificate and a minimal financial incentive for the purchase of learning and teaching support material (currently R10 000 subject to budget availability).
9. The strength of the WCED Systemic Testing Programme lies in the fact that the tests are independently administered and that no form of departmental bias affects the reporting of results.

10. All principals are requested to put systems in place to ensure that testing is not disrupted. The WCED also wishes to reiterate that systemic testing is compulsory and that schools (principals and educators) will be subject to disciplinary action if they do not allow the tests to be administered or disrupt them or cause them to be disrupted in any way, for example by encouraging learners to stay away.
11. Please bring the contents of this minute to the attention of all staff members.
12. I appreciate your understanding and support of this process.

**SIGNED:** BK SCHREUDER  
**ACTING HEAD: EDUCATION**  
**DATE:** 2016-10-08