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Reaction to the 2025/26 Basic Education Budget Vote Speech

NAPTOSA welcomes the delivery of the Basic Education Budget Vote speech under the theme *“Rooted in Purpose, Weathering the Storm, Growing Towards the Light.”* We commend the Minister’s acknowledgment of the complex realities facing the education sector and her commitment to grounding reforms in purpose-driven and learner-centred principles.

Commendable Commitments

1. Early Childhood Development (ECD) as a National Priority

NAPTOSA applauds the Department’s strategic shift towards foundational learning, particularly the focus on expanding access to quality ECD. The increase in the ECD Conditional Grant and targeted investments in infrastructure, nutrition, and professionalisation of the sector are essential to closing early learning gaps. We further support the emphasis on registering 10,000 ECD centres and the development of a national Human Resource Development Strategy for ECD practitioners.

2. Literacy and Numeracy

The Minister’s admission that 8 out of 10 learners cannot read for meaning by Grade 4 is sobering, but the response – including the Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education programme and the R1.2 billion Workbook Programme – is a step in the right direction. NAPTOSA supports the renewed focus on literacy and numeracy as critical building blocks of lifelong learning. The reality, however, that many teachers are not adequately trained or qualified to teach reading is deeply concerning and must be redressed with urgency to ensure meaningful progress.

3. Inclusive Education and Infrastructure Modernisation

We welcome increased allocations for assistive devices and inclusive education, along with progress in reviewing White Paper 6. The elimination of 97% of pit toilets and increased Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG) funding, including targeted top-ups to high-performing provinces, is a tangible achievement.

4. Teacher Development and Support

NAPTOSA appreciates the R1.8 billion allocated to teacher development, the realignment of the Funza Lushaka bursary scheme to Foundation Phase and rural areas, and the review of Post Provisioning Norms. These efforts align with NAPTOSA’s long-standing advocacy for better teacher support, equitable post distribution, and professional development.

5. Partnerships and Accountability Measures

The launch of the revived national School Safety Protocol with SAPS and efforts to review National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) models are welcomed. NAPTOSA acknowledges the establishment of an advisory body to address systemic concerns such as the administrative burden on teachers and outdated progression policies.

Areas of Concern and Ongoing Challenges

1. Fiscal Strain and Underfunding at Provincial Level

NAPTOSA remains gravely concerned about the acknowledged financial strain on provinces, resulting in unfilled posts, infrastructure backlogs, and non-payment of school allocations. These undermine teaching and learning and demoralise educators. The sector cannot continue to “*weather the storm*” without sustainable fiscal reform.

2. Compulsory Grade R Implementation Without Dedicated Funding

The Minister’s admission that there is no additional funding for compulsory Grade R is alarming. This mandate, now enshrined in law, risks failure if it is left to provinces to absorb the cost. NAPTOSA calls for immediate engagement between DBE and Treasury to secure adequate resources.

3. Over-reliance on Teacher Accountability Without Systemic Reform

While teacher development is necessary, NAPTOSA urges the Department to avoid framing education outcomes solely through the lens of teacher performance. Without systemic investment in support staff, learner welfare, and safe environments, educators will remain overburdened and under-resourced.

4. Lack of Concrete Action on Violence in Schools

The revival of the School Safety Protocol must be matched by adequate resources and effective implementation. Rising violence against educators and learners demands urgent and tangible action. NAPTOSA remains committed to being part of the solution and working collaboratively to ensure safe learning and teaching environments.

NAPTOSA acknowledges the Minister’s consultative approach, and the vision set out for foundational learning and inclusive, quality education. However, these aspirations must be matched with bold, accountable, and adequately funded action — especially at the provincial level where the real battles are being fought daily.

NAPTOSA remains committed to engaging the Department of Basic Education constructively but will continue to hold both provincial and national leaders accountable for the realisation of every learner’s right to quality education and every teacher’s right to work in a safe, supported, and professional environment.

Mr BL Manuel

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