



NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



SERVING EDUCATION SINCE 1887

Visit our website: www.naptosa.org.za

NNF 7 of 2026

13 February 2026

REFLECTION ON THE 2026 STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

NAPTOSA welcomes the 2026 State of the Nation Address delivered by President Cyril Ramaphosa and the practical issues it seeks to address. It speaks directly to the lived realities of South Africans – from crime and water shortages to economic inclusion and education reform. Importantly, it reflects an administration that recognises that progress must be measured not only in macro-economic indicators, but in the daily experiences of communities on the ground.

The emphasis on inclusive growth, a capable state, and social protection signals a commitment to rebuilding trust and restoring functionality across institutions. The true test of this progressive vision will, however, not lie in the articulation of policy, but in the speed, discipline, and integrity of implementation.

Education: Strengthening the Foundation for National Renewal

NAPTOSA particularly commends the clear focus on early childhood development and foundational learning. We have consistently advocated for a stronger and more deliberate investment in the Foundation Phase and early learning. It is therefore encouraging to see funding allocated to expand access to ECD, to increase subsidies, and to make Grade R compulsory.

The President's recognition that "a strong economy relies on a well-educated, capable and skilled population" is undeniable. Yet that strength begins long before matric results are announced. While we celebrate the historic 88% matric pass rate, we must be honest: systemic improvement in education is built in the early years.

Children must learn to read with understanding in the Foundation Phase. Reading with comprehension is the gateway skill – it enables learners to transition from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*. Without this critical shift by Grade 3 and 4, learners struggle to engage meaningfully with content in higher grades, leading to dropout, underperformance in mathematics and science, and limited access to post-school opportunities.

The renewed focus on literacy, numeracy, and mother-tongue based bilingual education is therefore both timely and essential. We urge that this commitment be accompanied by:

- Adequate teacher development and support in ECD and the Foundation Phase
- Provision of age-appropriate reading materials in all official languages
- Structured monitoring and evaluation of literacy benchmarks
- Strengthening of school leadership in early grade instruction

If we get the Foundation Phase right, we alter the trajectory of our nation. If we neglect it, no later intervention can fully compensate.

A Skills Revolution: Ensuring Education Leads to Opportunity

NAPTOSA also welcomes the bold commitment to preparing young people for meaningful economic participation through a skills revolution. The proposed overhaul of the skills development system, particularly the introduction of a dual training model that integrates education with practical workplace experience, represents a necessary shift towards relevance and employability.

The reform and reduction of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) to improve governance, strengthen industry participation, and better align training with labour market needs is long overdue. Strengthening TVET colleges as primary sites for occupational training and artisan development is equally critical if we are to address youth unemployment in a sustainable way.

The decision to restore 40% of the skills development levy to employers to support workplace-based learning, along with transforming the National Skills Fund into a more agile and outcomes-driven instrument, reflects a pragmatic approach. These reforms must ensure that government training programmes become genuine pathways to employment – not administrative exercises that end in frustration.

Expanding access to higher education institutions and building more universities and TVET colleges with specialised focus areas is commendable. The severe shortage of student accommodation, however, remains an urgent barrier that requires immediate, innovative intervention. Access without adequate support infrastructure will not achieve the desired outcomes.

Safe Communities, Safe Schools

NAPTOSA welcomes the decisive deployment of the South African National Defence Force to support the fight against gang violence in affected provinces. In many communities, particularly in parts of the Western Cape and Gauteng, children are caught in the crossfire of gang wars. Schools become collateral damage in lawless environments.

Schools are microcosms of the communities in which they exist. When communities are plagued by crime, substance abuse, and instability, schools cannot operate optimally. When we fix our communities, our schools are strengthened. When we reclaim our streets, we protect our classrooms.

The commitment to integrated law enforcement, additional police recruitment, and intelligence-driven interventions is commendable. We do, however, emphasise that security interventions must be accompanied by sustained social and educational support in vulnerable communities.

Our **Safe Schools, Equal Safe Nation Campaign** speaks directly to this reality. A safe school environment is not a privilege; it is a prerequisite for quality teaching and learning. Protecting learners and educators must remain a national priority, and we stand ready to partner with government and communities in advancing this campaign.

Addressing the Water Crisis: Leadership and Accountability

The water crisis is one of the most urgent challenges facing our country. The President's decision to chair the National Water Crisis Committee personally signals seriousness and accountability at the highest level. This leadership is welcomed.

Water is a constitutional right and an essential resource. When taps run dry, communities suffer – but so do schools. Constant water cuts disrupt schooling, compromise sanitation, affect school nutrition programmes, and undermine the dignity of learners, educators and support personnel. Teaching and learning cannot occur effectively in environments where basic services are unstable.

The allocation of substantial funding for infrastructure, the establishment of a National Water Resource Infrastructure Agency, and the introduction of fines and criminal charges against non-performing municipalities reflect decisive intent. We particularly support the firm stance on accountability for municipal managers who neglect their duties.

For this intervention to succeed, we appeal for:

- A comprehensive, time-bound national action plan
- Clear roles and responsibilities across spheres of government
- Transparent reporting mechanisms
- A robust monitoring and evaluation framework

The water crisis cannot be resolved through rhetoric. It requires disciplined project management, technical expertise, and consequence management.

A Capable State and Ethical Governance

The address demonstrates a recognition that economic growth and social stability depend on a capable and ethical state. The professionalisation of the public service, lifestyle audits, procurement reform, and stronger anti-corruption mechanisms are essential steps.

Communities have grown weary of promises. What distinguishes this address is that it acknowledges systemic dysfunction – particularly in local government – and proposes structural reform. The overhaul of local government, if implemented effectively, could fundamentally shift service delivery outcomes.

History has taught us that strong plans without strong execution yield limited change. The people of South Africa are not asking for perfection – we are asking for visible progress, consistency, and accountability.

From Progressive Vision to Practical Impact

This State of the Nation Address stands out as one of the most progressive in recent years because it addresses the real concerns of ordinary South Africans: crime, water, unemployment, education, infrastructure, and governance.

It acknowledges pain. It outlines reform. It commits resources.

But hope must now be matched with implementation. South Africans have heard many speeches. What we seek now is delivery.

NAPTOSA remains cautiously optimistic. We support the direction outlined. And we commit ourselves, as stakeholders in education and community development, to working collaboratively to ensure that this progressive vision translates into tangible, measurable impact.

Let this not be remembered as a speech that inspired – but as a turning point that delivered.

Mr BL Manuel

Executive Director