NORMS & STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

We will not live up to our claim that every child is a national asset if we do not concentrate our efforts on tackling our immense infrastructural challenges.

– Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga

EE is campaigning for minimum norms & standards for school infrastructure. This fact sheet will explain why. But first…

WHAT IS SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE?

*Infrastructure* - the parts that make up a working system. For example, infrastructure for hospitals include operating theatres, x-ray machines, ambulance bays, wards for patients, electricity and running water. Without these things, a hospital cannot run properly.

So *school infrastructure* is everything from electricity, toilets, safe buildings, libraries, computer rooms, safe classrooms, sports halls and fields, laboratories for science experiments, running water and fencing. Without these things, a school cannot work properly. For schools, we can also call infrastructure *resources*.

All schools in South Africa should have these things. But right now, the majority of schools in South Africa don’t have these things. It is mainly rich schools that do. This needs to change.
WHAT ARE NORMS & STANDARDS?

Norms & standards are regulations that are passed by Ministers. Ministers are given the power to pass regulations by-laws, such as the South African Schools Act. The South African Schools Act gives the Minister of Education the power to create regulations (norms & standards) for school infrastructure.

Regulations give effect to laws. In other words, without regulations some laws do not make an impact on society. The law says, for example, that all learners have the right to a quality education. But that doesn’t explain what to do about mud schools. In other words, without regulations, the law can be quite vague about how to actually deal with problems in South Africa.

THERE ARE ALSO POLICIES, WHICH THE DEPARTMENTS USE TO GUIDE THEIR WORK OF CARRYING OUT THE LAW. HOWEVER, POLICIES ARE NOT LAW. THEY CANNOT BE USED TO HOLD THE GOVERNMENT LEGALLY RESPONSIBLE. BUT REGULATIONS CAN BE USED TO HOLD THE GOVERNMENT LEGALLY RESPONSIBLE.

Regulations (norms & standards) give the different departments a plan to follow. They help to apply the law to everyday life. But most importantly, once these regulations are signed into law, the government has to follow them. When the government does not follow the law, people can take the government to court to make them follow it.

The regulations EE is struggling for are the norms & standards for school infrastructure. They are regulations that list all the physical resources that schools need to run properly and give a quality education to learners. The regulations will also mean that no school can remain open without a certain level of basic resources.

WHY IS EE CAMPAIGNING FOR NORMS & STANDARDS?

Education is very unequal. Apartheid created inequalities along racial lines. The Bantu Education Act meant that education under apartheid did not escape this. Under apartheid, learners from different races were provided different levels of school infrastructure. A black child received much less than a white child. Many of these inequalities are still with us today, seventeen years into our new democracy.

DEFINITIONS

Regulations: A set of laws or rules.
This is vital when we consider the fact that school infrastructure, or resources, impacts on how well teachers are able to each and learners are able to learn. Learners attending schools with better infrastructure tend to perform better than learners who come from schools with not enough resources.

EE has seen the importance of school infrastructure in creating a suitable environment where teaching and learning can happen. For this reason, EE is putting pressure on the Minister to sign into law norms & standards (regulations) for school infrastructure.

In 2010, the Minister adopted a policy that these regulations would be law by April 2011. However, five months after that date has passed they are still not law.

The Minister has said she needs the permission of all the MECs for education to make the norms & standards law. But this is not true. All she has to do is speak to them about it and get their thoughts.

**CURRENT SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE SITUATION**

The most recent government report on school infrastructure in South Africa, called the NEIMS report, found that in 2011, of all public schools in South Africa:

- **ONLY 7% HAVE LIBRARIES.**
- **ABOUT 500 SCHOOLS ARE BUILT OUT OF TOTALLY UNSAFE STRUCTURES. THESE ARE THE MUD SCHOOLS. THEY ARE MAINLY IN THE EASTERN CAPE.**
- **3,544 HAVE NO ELECTRICITY SUPPLY**
- **2,402 HAVE NO WATER SUPPLY**
- **11,450 STILL USE PIT-LATRINE TOILETS**
- **90% HAVE NO STOCKED COMPUTER CENTRES**
- **95% OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS HAVE NO STOCKED AND FUNCTIONING LABORATORIES.**

If there is no access to water, electricity or toilets, can we expect learners to concentrate on learning?

If there are no laboratories, libraries or computer rooms in schools, can we expect teachers to teach properly?

**DEFINITIONS**

**MEC**: MECs are people like Donald Grant. He has a similar job to Minister Angie Motshekga but only in the Western Cape.
In 2009, EE began the Campaign for School Libraries. This was to bring attention to the fact that most schools in South Africa do not have libraries.

But this is only part of bigger problem. EE has seen the importance of all school infrastructure in creating a suitable environment where teaching and learning can happen. Having norms & standards will mean that, in time, the government will have to give every school a library. But the government will also have to give every school running water, fencing, safe buildings, electricity, laboratories and computer rooms.

It is important to note that EE never thought that libraries were the silver bullet that would fix education in South Africa. We know that there are no silver bullets because there are so many problems in education. Campaigning for norms & standards is a way of focusing EE’s struggle.

WHAT WILL IT MEAN TO HAVE NORMS & STANDARDS?

What will it mean to have norms & standards for school infrastructure? Getting minimum norms & standards won’t solve all our problems. We won’t have quality schools over-night. It will take some time for the government to make all schools look like proper schools. But the different provincial departments of education (PEDs) will have to make sure that all schools eventually look like proper schools. They will do this by following very exact timelines and targets. If they don’t, then learners, teachers and schools can take the government to court. They are not able to do this now because norms and standards are not yet law.

Most importantly, all schools in South Africa will have a clear understanding of what facilities and resources they should have to provide a quality education to learners. They will be able to hold the PEDs responsible in making sure they are supplied with the necessary infrastructure and resources.

FACT SHEET CHALLENGE

1. What is the difference between policies and regulations?
2. Who passes norms & standards into law?
3. Whose permission does the Minister need to sign into law the norms & standards for school infrastructure?
4. Why do you think it makes sense for EE focus on school infrastructure right now rather than making sure South Africa’s teachers are motivated?

DEFINITIONS

Silver Bullet: When something is the only answer to a problem, it can be called a ‘silver bullet’. The word ‘silver bullet’ comes from the story that only silver bullets can kill werewolves, and other mythical creatures.