

Children’s access to education

Updated by Ariane De Lannoy and Lori Lake (Children’s Institute)

Section 29(1)(a) of the South African Constitution states that “everyone has the right to a basic education” and section 29(1)(b) states that “everyone has the right to further education” and that the State must make such education “progressively available and accessible”.

Article 11(3)(a) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child says that State Parties to the Charter “shall take all appropriate measures with a view to achieving the full realisation of this right and shall in particular ... provide free and compulsory basic education”.

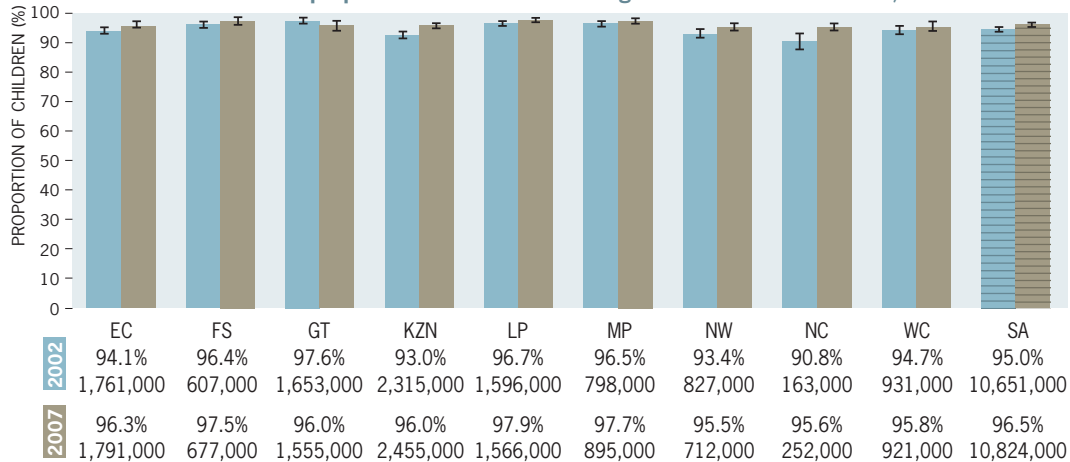
Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises “the right of the child to education” and also obliges the State to “make primary education compulsory and available free to all”.

Number and proportion of children attending an educational institution

This indicator reflects the number and proportion of children aged 7 – 17 years who are reported to be attending a school or educational facility. This is different from ‘enrolment rate’, which reflects the number of children enrolled in educational institutions, as reported by schools to the national Department of Education early in the school year.

Education is a critical socio-economic right that provides the foundation for lifelong learning and economic opportunities. Basic education is compulsory in grades 1 – 9, or for children aged 7 – 15. Children who have completed basic education also have a right to further education (grades 10 – 12), which government must take reasonable measures to make available.

Table 3a: Number and proportion of children attending an educational institution, 2002 & 2007



Sources: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2008) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household 2007*. Pretoria, Cape Town: StatsSA. Analysis by Double-Hugh Marera & Katharine Hall, Children’s Institute, UCT.

Notes: ① Children are defined as persons aged 0 – 17 years. ② Population numbers are rounded off to the nearest thousand. ③ Strengths and limitations of the data are described on pp. 103 – 104. ④ The confidence intervals, shown on the graph as a vertical line at the top of each bar, represent the range into which the true value may fall. See p. 69 for more details on confidence intervals. ⑤ See www.childrencount.ci.org.za for more information.

At a national level, it is extremely positive that a high proportion (96.5%) of children of school-going age (7 – 17 years) attended some form of educational facility in 2007. Since 2002, the national attendance rate has seen a one percentage point increase. Of a total of 11.2 million children aged 7 – 17 years, nearly 400,000 are reported as not attending school.

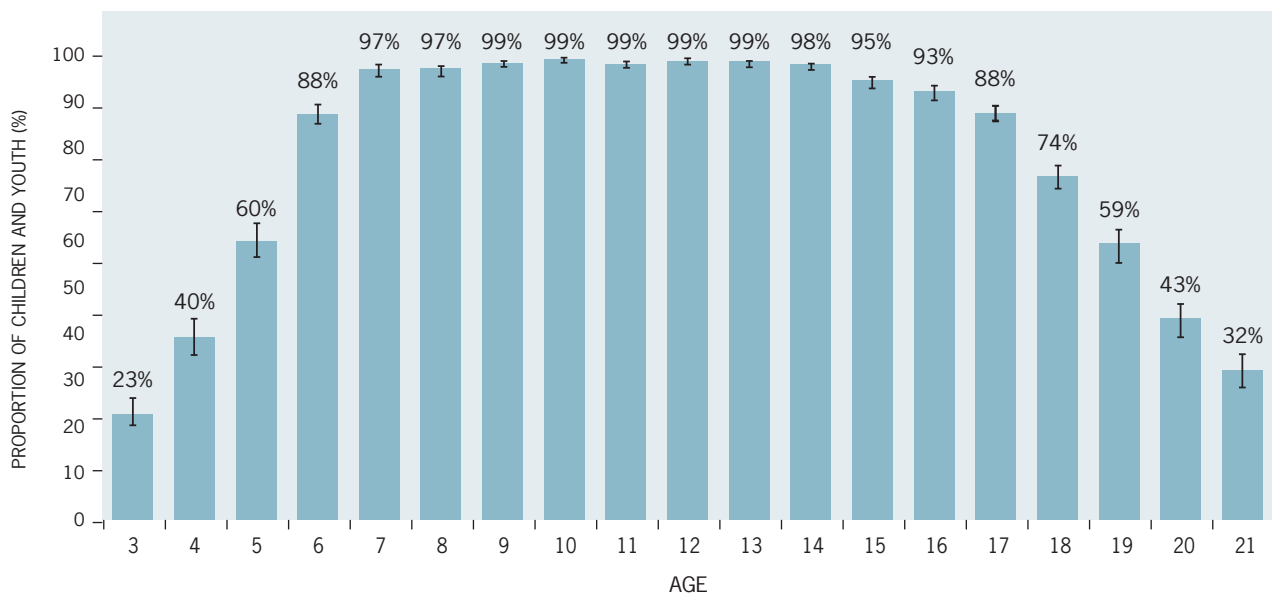
At a provincial level, the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal have all seen significant increases in attendance rates. In the Northern Cape, attendance increased by five percentage points from 91% in 2002 to 96% in 2007, while attendance in KwaZulu-Natal increased by over three percentage points and attendance in the Eastern Cape by nearly two percentage points. In July 2007, four provinces had attendance rates that were slightly lower than the national average: Gauteng, Northern Cape, North West,

and Western Cape each had rates of just below 96%.

Attendance rates among African (97%) and Coloured (94%) children remain lower than those for Indian (99%) and White children (99%). It is encouraging, however, that there has been a significant increase in attendance among African and Coloured children over the past five years.

Attendance rates alone do not capture the regularity of children's school attendance, or progress through school. Overall attendance rates also tend to mask the problem of drop-out among children older than 15. Analysis of attendance among discrete age groups shows a significant drop in attendance amongst children older than 14. Whereas 98% of 14-year-olds were reported to be attending an educational institution in 2007, attendance dropped to 95% of 15-year-olds, 88% of 17-year-olds, and 59% of 19-year-olds.

Table 3b: Proportion of children and youth attending an education institution, by age, 2007



Source: Statistics South Africa (2008) *General Household Survey 2007*. Pretoria, Cape Town: StatsSA.

A comparative analysis indicates that the drop-out problem is most severe among Coloured and African youth. At the age of 14, 100% of White children, 98% of African children and 95% of Coloured children were reported as attending an educational institution. At the age of 18, the difference in attendance rates is striking: 80% of White children, 77% of African, and only 45% of Coloured children attended an educational institution in 2007.

These results indicate relatively low levels of enrolment in further education and training, and point to ongoing racial inequality in education outcomes. Research has shown that children from more 'disadvantaged' backgrounds — ie with limited economic

resources, lower levels of parental education, or who have lost one or both parents — are less likely to enrol in school and are more likely to drop out or progress slowly than their more advantaged peers (Crouch 2005; Lam & Seekings 2005). Until we understand, and find solutions for, the various factors that push or pull 'disadvantaged' youth out of school, it is impossible to state that everyone's right to further and even basic education has been realised.

It is, nevertheless, encouraging to note that 40% of children (just over 1.2 million) in the pre-school age group (3 – 5-year-olds) were attending some kind of educational institution in 2007.

The number and proportion of children living far from the nearest school

This indicator reflects the distance from a child's household to the nearest school. Distance is measured through a proxy indicator: length of time travelled to reach the nearest school. The nearest school is regarded as 'far' if a child would have to travel more than 30 minutes to reach it, irrespective of mode of transport. For children aged 7 – 13, distance is measured to the nearest primary school. For children aged 14 – 17, distance is measured to the nearest secondary school.

Access to schools and other educational facilities is a necessary condition for achieving the right to education. The location of a school and the distance between school and home can pose a barrier to education. Access to schools is also hampered by poor roads, transport that is unavailable or unaffordable, and danger along the way. Risks may be different for young children, for girls and boys, and are likely to be greater when children travel alone.

For children who do not have schools nearby, the cost, risk and effort of getting to school can influence decisions about school attendance. Those who travel long distances to reach school may wake very early and risk arriving late or physically exhausted, which may affect their ability to learn.

According to the General Household Survey 2007, there are approximately 7 million children of primary school age (7 – 13 years) in South Africa. Seventeen percent of these children would have to travel more than 30 minutes to reach the nearest primary school. The highest proportions of children living far from the nearest primary school are in the North West (27%) and KwaZulu-Natal (25%).

Just over 4 million children in South Africa are of

secondary school age (14 – 17 years). Twenty-nine percent of these children live far away from their nearest high school. In five of the nine provinces more than 30% of the children live far away from a secondary school: Eastern Cape (41%), North West (41%), KwaZulu-Natal (35%), Limpopo (31%) and Mpumalanga (33%).

The Western Cape was the only province that showed a significant improvement in physical access to educational institutions — both primary and secondary — over the six-year period.

Access to school thus remains a problem for many children in South Africa, particularly those living in rural areas. Some rural schools have been merged or closed down, making the situation worse for children in these areas. It appears that the problem is greater for children of secondary school age than for younger children. The data also indicate that African children are more likely to be faced with large distances to the nearest primary and secondary schools (19% and 33% respectively) compared to, for example, 8% and 10% respectively of White children.

It is important to note that children do not necessarily attend the school closest to their home for many reasons, including over-crowding, poor facilities and quality of education. The school fee exemption policy aims to remove financial obstacles to education in fee-charging schools. In theory the exemption makes it possible for children living in poor areas to attend better schools in areas further away. The proportion of learners who actually travel far to school is therefore likely to be higher than reflected in this indicator.



Table 3c: Number and proportion of children living far from the nearest primary school, 2002 & 2007

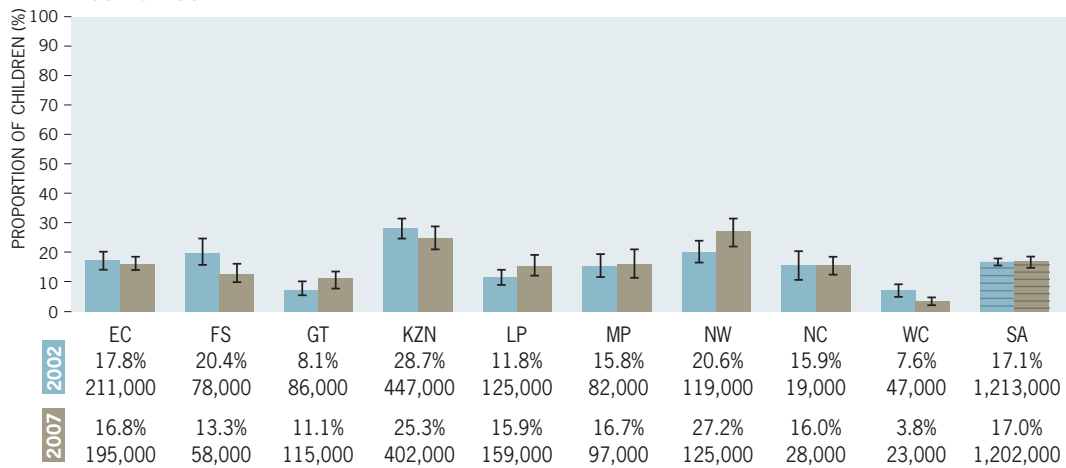
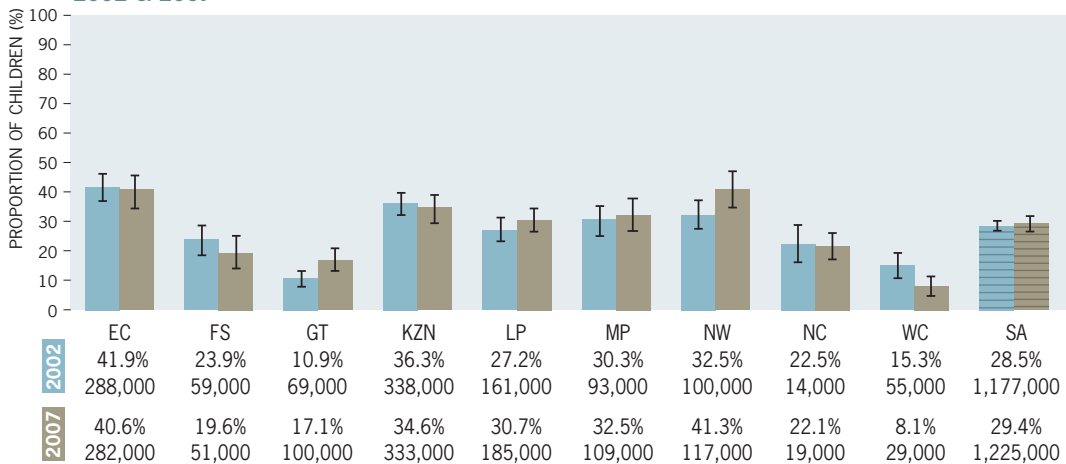


Table 3d: Number and proportion of children living far from the nearest secondary school, 2002 & 2007



Sources: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2008) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2007*. Pretoria, Cape Town: StatsSA. Analysis by Double-Hugh Marera & Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

Notes: ① Children are defined as persons aged 0 – 17 years. ② Population numbers are rounded off to the nearest thousand. ③ Strengths and limitations of the data are described on pp. 103 – 104. ④ The confidence intervals, shown on the graph as a vertical line at the top of each bar, represent the range into which the true value may fall. See p. 69 for more details on confidence intervals. ⑤ See www.childrencount.ci.org.za for more information.

Learner-to-educator ratio in public schools

The learner-to-educator ratio (LER) is the average number of learners per educator in a given school year. It is important to note that the number of educators may include principals and other support staff in schools, and therefore tends to over-estimate the number of teaching staff in relation to learners.

Realising the right to education for all children is not just a matter of universal access to schools. The quality of the learning environment is also crucial. Research shows that educators play a key role in determining educational outcomes, and the LER contributes directly to the quality of schooling offered (Van der Berg 2006; Crouch & Mabogoane 2001).

A low LER is not the only factor that impacts on quality. Educators' professional competence, subject knowledge, regular attendance at school and the proportion of time they and the learners spend 'on task' are all important in determining educational outcomes.

The more crowded the classrooms, the less educators are able to give personal attention to individual learners. Learners in over-crowded classes may find it difficult to follow the lesson, or to ask questions when they do not understand. Moreover, in the context of HIV/AIDS, educators can play an important role in identifying and supporting children who are particularly vulnerable, and in linking them to appropriate support services. The larger the class, the harder it is for educators to know the circumstances of individual learners.

Department of Education data show a slight increase in the LER for public schools between 2000 and 2004, but a decrease since 2004. The average LER in public schools was 32.4 in 2007, with slightly higher (worse) ratios in primary schools than in secondary schools.

The national and provincial average LERs in public schools are in line with national and international recommendations — set at a maximum of 40 learners per educator in primary schools and 35 learners per educator in secondary schools (Crouch & Perry 2003). However schools — and classes — vary enormously in size, and some educators have classes of 50 learners or more (Phurutse 2005). In 2007, the National Education Information Management System reported that 25% of classrooms were over-crowded, with more than 45 learners per classroom.

One factor influencing the LER is the ability of schools to employ more educators when needed. Some schools are able to employ additional educators, using school fees that they raise. Schools that cannot collect (high) fees from their learners, are likely to have high LERs.

There are huge differences in the LER between public and independent (private) schools — at a national level, the LER in independent schools is approximately 16. Table 3e reflects the LER in public schools only.

Table 3e: Average learner-to-educator ratios for public schools, 2000 – 2007

Province	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 ^①	2007 ^①
Eastern Cape	32.1	33.3	31.8	32.9	33.6	33.0	33.2	32.6
Free State	32.6	31.4	31.6	31.2	30.2	29.7	29.5	29.1
Gauteng	33.2	33.0	33.2	33.6	34.2	31.6	33.8	32.6
KwaZulu-Natal	36.5	37.2	37.4	39.6	36.3	34.4	33.0	33.2
Limpopo	33.6	31.8	32.9	33.7	35.6	34.1	33.4	33.5
Mpumalanga	34.5	36.9	36.9	36.4	35.7	33.6	34.5	33.1
North West	30.6	30.7	30.1	29.7	30.0	31.1	29.8	29.5
Northern Cape	30.7	31.4	30.6	32.8	34.0	31.9	30.2	31.2
Western Cape	32.1	35.5	36.3	36.9	37.7	31.5	31.2	31.4
South Africa	33.4	33.9	33.8	34.6	34.5	32.8	32.7	32.4

Source: Department of Education (2002 – 2009) *Education Statistics in South Africa at a Glance 2000 – 2007*. Pretoria: DoE.

Notes: ① From 2006, the data are delineated according to new provincial boundaries and may not be directly comparable to the previous years. ② Strengths and limitations of the data can be found on pp. 103 – 104. ③ See www.childrencount.ci.org.za for more information.

Gender Parity Index in schooling

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) reflects girls' level of access to education compared to that of boys. This is calculated for each school phase. A score of 1 reflects equal enrolment rates for boys and girls. A GPI less than 1 indicates that there are proportionally more boys than girls in the formal education system. A GPI greater than 1 means that there are proportionally more girls than boys attending school.

Gender inequities continue to exist in many parts of the world and girl children are actively discouraged from pursuing an education in certain cultures and traditions. UN Millennium Development Goal No. 3 aims to promote gender equality and eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

In South Africa, girls — by and large — do not experience discrimination when measured by access to school. In 2007, South Africa had a combined GPI of 1.01 for primary and secondary schools. This indicates that almost equal proportions of girls and boys are enrolled in the education system. However, the combined index masks different trends for primary and high school age groups.

While there are slightly more boys enrolled at primary school than girls (GPI = 0.98), the pattern shifts at the secondary school level, where girls are more likely than boys to attend school (GPI = 1.10). This change in the GPI may indicate that fewer boys

than girls are progressing from primary school to secondary school, or that boys are more likely than girls to drop out of high school. This suggests that teenage pregnancy is not the primary cause of high school drop-out, although it may be a significant factor for girls.

This pattern is mirrored in the provinces, where the GPI for primary school is slightly below 1 in most provinces. Overall, there has been little change in the index over the six-year period, with GPIs for 2000 to 2007 remaining almost identical across the provinces, and nationally.

Although gender-based discrimination is not a huge problem in terms of access to school in South Africa, a recent study found that 5% of girls at secondary school were likely to have been raped or sexually assaulted (Burton 2008). The experience of violence at school can influence girls' decisions about schooling and can negatively impact on their schooling outcomes.

A 2006 South African Human Rights Commission inquiry found a clear relationship between school-based violence and school drop-out, academic underperformance, teenage pregnancy and the transmission of HIV/AIDS. Gender parity data therefore mask a number of other gender-related issues that must be dealt with in order to provide truly equal and safe access to education for boys and girls.

Table 3f: Gender parity index of learners in all schools, by province, 2000 – 2007

Province	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 ^①	2007 ^①
Eastern Cape	1.05	1.05	1.04	1.03	1.05	1.04	1.04	1.09
Free State	1.00	0.99	1.00	1.00	1.01	1.00	1.01	0.99
Gauteng	1.01	0.99	0.98	0.97	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
KwaZulu-Natal	0.99	0.99	0.97	0.98	0.98	0.98	0.99	1.00
Limpopo	1.00	0.99	0.99	0.98	1.00	0.99	0.99	1.07
Mpumalanga	1.02	0.98	0.98	0.96	0.99	0.98	0.99	1.00
North West	1.01	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.99	1.00	0.99	0.92
Northern Cape	1.00	1.00	0.99	0.98	0.99	0.99	0.99	1.00
Western Cape	1.04	1.03	1.00	1.00	1.03	1.04	1.04	1.01
South Africa	1.01	1.00	0.99	0.99	1.00	1.00	1.01	1.01

Source: Department of Education (2002 – 2009) *Education Statistics in South Africa at a Glance 2000 – 2007*. Pretoria: DoE.

Notes: ① From 2006, the data are delineated according to new provincial boundaries and may not be directly comparable to the previous years. ② Strengths and limitations of the data can be found on ppp. 103 – 104. ③ See www.childrencount.ci.org.za for more information.

Number and proportion of schools with access to water on or near site

This indicator shows the number and proportion of schools with access to water on or near site. Data for 2006 include schools serviced by a municipality and schools depending on boreholes on site, or rainwater-harvesting systems.

Children need reliable access to safe drinking water to prevent illness and promote health and hygiene. As most children attend school for seven hours a day, five days a week, it is crucial that they have access to an adequate supply of potable water while at school.

If children do not have access to safe drinking water at school, their right to water is not being realised. This also impacts on their right to health, as illnesses spread rapidly in crowded conditions. Poor water supply can also impact on children's right to basic nutrition because water is needed to prepare food and the nutritious drinks provided by the National School Nutrition Programme.

South Africa seems to have made good progress in increasing the number of schools with on-site water. In the 1996 School Register of Needs Survey, 65% of South African schools had potable (clean drinking) water on site. In the 2000 survey, 71% of schools had potable water. In a different survey of

schools (National Education Infrastructure Management System — NEIMS), conducted by the Department of Education in 2006, 89% of schools had access to clean water on or near site. The extent to which this apparent increase reflects improved water provision is unclear, because the surveys are not directly comparable.

Based on 2006 figures, nearly all schools in the Western Cape, Northern Cape and Gauteng had water on or near site. The worst serviced provinces were the Eastern Cape and Free State, where a fifth of schools did not have access to water on site.

It is important to note that a third (34%) of schools classified as having water on/near site did not receive municipal water but relied on alternative sources, such as rainwater tanks, and nearly one in every five schools (18%) had an unreliable water supply — where water was available for less than half the time. The data do not indicate the quantity of water available. The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry defines the minimum standards for basic water supply at schools as 15 – 20 litres per learner per day (assuming the use of flush toilets) and one water supply terminal per 130 persons (within 200 meters of the main building).

Table 3g: Water provision in ordinary public schools, 1996, 2000 & 2006

Province (2006)	Ordinary schools No.	Schools with water on or near site		Schools served by municipality	
		No.	%	No.	%
Eastern Cape	5,724	4,589	80	2,274	40
Free State	1,717	1,397	81	885	52
Gauteng	1,972	1,940	98	1,854	94
KwaZulu-Natal	5,822	5,174	89	2,943	51
Limpopo	4,037	3,640	90	2,449	61
Mpumalanga	1,981	1,757	89	1,280	65
North West	1,796	1,708	95	1,201	67
Northern Cape	620	607	98	433	70
Western Cape	1,476	1,442	98	1,344	91
South Africa 2006*	25,145	22,254	89	14,663	58
South Africa 2000**	27,148	19,331	71	not available	
South Africa 1996**	26,734	17,366	65	not available	

Sources: * Department of Education (2007) *National Educational Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS)*. Pretoria: DoE.

** Department of Education (2007) *School Register of Needs*. In: *National Educational Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS)*. Pretoria: DoE.

Notes: ① Data from the School Register of Needs and the NEIMS are not directly comparable. See www.childrencount.ci.org.za for a more detailed discussion of the indicator. ② Strengths and limitations of the data can be found on pp. 103 – 104.

Additional sources for education

- Burton P (2008) *Merchants, skollies and stones: Experiences of school violence in South Africa*. Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, Monograph Series No. 4, April 2008.
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Number and proportion of schools with adequate sanitation facilities

This indicator reflects the number and proportion of schools with adequate sanitation facilities. 'Type of toilet' is used to determine the adequacy of sanitation. For the purposes of this indicator, 'adequate' sanitation facilities include flush toilets, ventilated improved pit latrines (VIPs) and Enviroloops. Inadequate sanitation facilities include ordinary pit latrines, buckets or no toilets.

Access to adequate sanitation is essential for children, as their rights to health and survival depend on it. The danger of the spread of disease increases greatly when large numbers of children are brought together on a daily basis at school. It is therefore critical that learners are taught about the importance of sanitation and personal hygiene practices and that adequate sanitation facilities are provided at school.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAFF) considers flush toilets, VIPs and Enviroloops (urine-diversion or composting toilets) as acceptable sanitation facilities (2008). While many people prefer flush toilets, VIPs and Enviroloops offer a safe and healthy alternative in areas without sufficient water or suitable infrastructure to support waterborne sanitation. Ordinary pit latrines and bucket toilets are considered inadequate as they fail to stop the spread of disease.

In 2006, 61% of schools had acceptable sanitation on site in the form of flush toilets (40%) and VIPs or

Enviroloops (21%). Nearly four in every 10 schools had unacceptable sanitation — mostly in the form of ordinary pit latrines, but nearly 1,400 schools used the bucket system or had no toilets on site at all.

Data show a clear urban–rural bias. Predominantly urban provinces such as Gauteng and the Western Cape have the highest proportion of schools using flush toilets at 94% and 97% respectively. Schools using dry sanitation options such as VIPs and Enviroloops are concentrated in provinces with large rural populations, such as Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. The Eastern Cape has the poorest level of school sanitation: Only four out of 10 schools have adequate sanitation, and 11% have no toilets at all, or use the bucket system.

On the whole, it appears that children's access to basic sanitation facilities at schools has improved since 1996, but it is clearly not enough as nearly 40% of schools still had inadequate sanitation in 2006.

Although the majority of schools nationally had adequate sanitation facilities, it is unclear whether these toilets are clean and in working order, or if there are enough toilets to meet learners' needs. The Department of Education does report on learner-to-toilet ratios, but is currently using a minimum standard of 50:1. This falls well below the minimum standard, recommended by DWAFF (2008), of 25 learners to one toilet.

Table 3h: Sanitation provision in ordinary public schools, 1996, 2000 & 2006

Province (2006)	Ordinary public schools	Adequate sanitation				Inadequate sanitation			
		Flush toilets		VIP / Enviroloo		Pit latrines		Bucket / none	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	(N)	(%)
Eastern Cape	5,724	1,126	20	1,086	19	2,884	50	628	11
Free State	1,717	854	50	159	9	589	34	115	7
Gauteng	1,972	1,861	94	14	1	54	3	43	2
KwaZulu-Natal	5,822	1,583	27	1,753	30	2,251	39	235	4
Limpopo	4,037	805	20	1,564	39	1,577	39	91	2
Mpumalanga	1,981	961	49	397	20	511	26	112	6
North West	620	430	69	101	16	67	11	22	4
Northern Cape	1,796	936	52	185	10	571	32	104	6
Western Cape	1,476	1,436	97	7	0	5	0	28	2
South Africa 2006*	25,145	9,992	40	5,266	21	8,509	34	1,378	5
South Africa 2000**	27,148	10,361	38	15,398 (57%)				2,691	10
South Africa 1996**	26,734	8,867	33	16,120 (60%)				3,674	14

Sources: *Department of Education (2007) *National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS)*. Pretoria: DoE.

** Department of Education (2007) School Register of Needs. Reported in: *National Educational Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) (2007)* Pretoria: DoE.

Notes: ① Data from the School Register of Needs and the NEIMS are not directly comparable. See www.childrencount.ci.org.za for a more detailed discussion of the indicator. ② Strengths and limitations of the data can be found on pp. 103 – 104.

- Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (2008) *Minimum Requirements for Ensuring Basic Water Supply and Sanitation in Schools and Clinics*. Pretoria: DWAFF.
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