

Overview

Children's right to basic education (page 19)

Drawing on the Constitution and international conventions, this essay provides a framework for interpreting the right to education. It also argues that ordinary people have a vital role to play in holding government accountable and ensuring that rights become a reality for all children in South Africa.

Meaningful access to basic education (page 24)

South Africa has made significant progress in improving access to education, and over 96% of children of school-going age attended some form of educational facility in 2007. But extensive enrolment has not resulted in improved educational achievements. Meaningful access to education extends beyond access to schools and includes access to the basic skills, knowledge and values that schools are supposed to teach. This essay outlines some conditions for meaningful access, identifies some of the barriers, and proposes some strategies for increasing meaningful access to basic education.

Education funding: Budgeting for meaningful access (page 30)

A range of policy and funding mechanisms have been put in place by the Department of Education to mediate poverty and increase access to education. This essay explores the strengths and weaknesses of the current budgetary framework and whether this impedes or improves meaningful access to education.

Addressing quality through school fees and school funding (page 35)

School-fee exemptions and no-fee schools aim to alleviate financial barriers to education, but do these policies enhance meaningful access? This essay examines the impact of these policies on school funding and schools' capacity to deliver quality education.

Children out of school: Evidence from the Community Survey (page 41)

Poverty is often identified as one of the main reasons why children drop out of school, yet South Africa's high enrolment rate, suggests a more complex relationship between poverty and school drop-out. This analysis of the 2007 Community Survey examines the distribution, family and individual characteristics of children out of school and identifies a number of potential barriers to education.

School drop-out: Poverty and patterns of exclusion (page 46)

The essay draws on the qualitative findings of the Barriers to Education Project to examine some of the more complex reasons for school drop-out. The essay explores how relative poverty, social exclusion and poor quality education account for patterns of enrolment and drop-out at different points in children's school careers.

Schools and communities: Building effective partnership (page 50)

The relationship between schools and communities can either enable or impede access to education. This essay draws on findings from the Caring Schools Project to explore these dynamics and to introduce a number of strategies that enable schools and communities to build effective partnerships and promote child well-being.

Count one count all: Numeracy in the foundation phase (page 55)

The Count One Count All research project identifies key classroom practices that impact on children's ability to learn about numbers. This essay explores how these practices account for learners' poor performance on the grade 3 national assessment and identifies what needs to be done to strengthen numeracy practices in the foundation phase. Some concerns about the Foundations for Learning Campaign are also raised.

Building a strong foundation: Learning to read, reading to learn (page 60)

Literacy is the key to learning. Yet, the recent grade 3 national assessment results indicate that there is an urgent need to address literacy in the foundation phase. The Human Science Research Council's recent study of 20 schools in Limpopo identifies some of the root causes of the problem and proposes a number of strategies to foster a culture and practice of reading.

Note: As this issue of the *South African Child Gauge* went to press, the new State President announced the creation of a Ministry of Basic Education. In terms of current policy and legislation, basic education comprises grades R – 9. It is unclear whether grades 10 – 12 will now be included as part of basic education. If they are, this will increase the burden on government to meet its constitutional obligation to provide basic education for all.