

# **ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**Submission to the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education**



Photo: Jurgen Schadeberg

**February 2010**

Prepared by



**Contact: Dr. Sabine Strassburg**

2 Upper Park Drive Forest Town 2193 PO BOX 32656 Braamfontein 2017  
Tel +27 11 486 1025 Fax +27 11 486 1029 Email: [sabine@socialsurveys.co.za](mailto:sabine@socialsurveys.co.za)

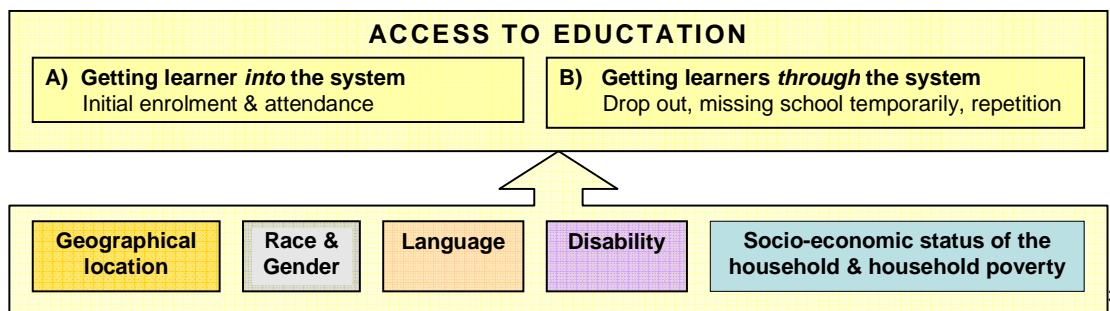
## Introduction

Social Surveys welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education on the issue of access to education. This submission presents findings from a nationally representative household study on access to education in South Africa, undertaken by Social Surveys and the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs). The fieldwork for this study was conducted in late 2007.<sup>1</sup> The findings of the survey were presented to the Department of Basic Education in December 2009 and January 2010, and will be presented to the Minister of Basic Education in March 2010.

The Social Surveys-CALS study conceptualised 'access to education' broadly, to include both getting children *into* the school system and getting them efficiently *through* the school system. We therefore collected data on:

- The proportion of children who are not starting school at the right age
- Enrolment rates;
- The proportion of children and youth who left school before completion of Matric
- The proportion of children who miss school temporarily for extended periods of time;
- The proportion of children who repeat a grade.

The Call for Submissions is clearly concerned with children and youth who may be more likely to be excluded from accessing school education in South Africa. In the following submission we provide an overview of the statistics for the indicators just outlined, and we look at the profile of children (based on our survey)<sup>2</sup> who are most vulnerable to school drop out, missing school temporarily for substantial periods of time and grade repetition. This submission will focus on vulnerabilities that are associated with geographical location, race and gender, home language, disability, and poverty. We conclude with a set of recommendations for increasing retention of these youth in the FET Phase (Grades 10 to 12).



<sup>1</sup> Focusing on the barriers children and youth face in accessing and participating in school education in South Africa, data was gained via a nationally representative survey of 4400 households with interviews amongst caregivers. In addition a separate youth survey was conducted which collected data from 16 to 18 year olds. The survey was complimented by focus group discussions with youth, caregivers and educators in rural and urban communities. The study was funded by Atlantic Philanthropies, Ford Foundation, ELMA Philanthropies, and the Kellogg Brothers Foundation. The reference group for the study included representatives from the Department of Education, the Education Policy Unit (University of the Witwatersrand), the Children's Institute (University of Cape Town), the South African Human Rights Commission, the Centre for Education Policy Development, Link Community Development, and HSRC.

<sup>2</sup> The Social Surveys-CALS study was based on a household survey, and did not include a sample of youth in institutions, such as juvenile detention centres, or youth who lived on the streets, who are no doubt particularly vulnerable to being out of school.

<sup>3</sup> The colours used in the headings to the sections below are associated to the colours used in the graph.

## A) Getting learner *into* the system: Initial enrolment & attendance

In South Africa, almost all children of compulsory school going age are attending school. Only 1.2% of children aged 7 to 15 are out of school. In addition, take up of the Basic Education Phase is high (see table below) as shown by Gross Enrolment Rates of over 100%. South Africa has much to celebrate in terms of our success in ensuring access to basic education.

Participation in schooling by youth aged 16 to 18 (the age that learners should be in Grades 10 to 12 according to the Age-Grade Norms) is lower than the 7 to 15 age group, though still high at 90%. However, just because youth of this age group are in school, does not mean they are in the Further Education and Training Phase – many of this age group are still in Grades 1 to 9 as we will explore later in this submission.

Take up of the Further Education and Training Phase is lower than the Basic Education Phase. Here Gross Enrolment Rates drop to 95% for the FET Phase, with the Gross Enrolment Rate of 83% by Grade 12. This tells us that a fair number of children have left the schooling system before Matric.

Age Group	% OUT of school		
	Social Surveys-CALS Survey 2007	General Household Survey 2007	Community Survey 2007
7 to 15 years	1.2%	2.1%	4.6%
16 to 18 years	<b>9.8%</b>	12.5%	16.1%
7 to 18 years	3.4%	4.8%	7.3%

Age Band	Gross Enrolment Rate
Basic Education Phase (Grades 1 to 9)	110.5%
FET Phase (Grades 10 to 12)	94.9% (Grade 12 = <b>82.7%</b> )

Although access to education is high, as shown above, it does not translate into high completion of Matric. Only 38.8% of 19 to 25 year olds have in fact completed Matric (2 343 112 learners), which is considered to be a vital requirement for entry into the formal job market. The most pressing issue is thus not getting learners *into* the system, but rather getting them *through* the system.

## B) Getting learners *through* the system

In the following section we describe which youth are most vulnerable to:

- Dropping out of school before Matric
- Missing school for a year or more
- Repeating a grade

## DROP OUT

As shown above, drop-out is a problem beyond the compulsory school going age and phase. The Social Surveys-CALS study shows that where children in the 7 to 15 age group are out of school it is the result of very localised, household or child specific experiences, primarily in the context of household poverty. Hence, this section focuses primarily on youth out of school in the 16 to 18 age group.

### Geographical location

In South Africa, the location of a child undoubtedly has an impact on the child's chances of being in or out of school. Geographical location is not simply a marker of where you live, but is related to different living conditions, different levels of household poverty, different access to schools (greater or lesser supply of secondary schools in the area for example), home language, race and class, resources available in schools and access to possible alternatives to school attendance, such as finding work, and so on.

According to our survey, children in **Limpopo** province are the most likely to be in school beyond the compulsory school going age, a finding that matches the Community Survey 2007 data. **North West** province has the lowest attendance rate for children aged 7 to 18.

Over 80 % of Limpopo's population reside in traditional areas, which have shown to have the highest repetition rates in the country (see next section on repetition). Repetition is a main cause for school delays, resulting in the learner being older than their peers – hence the attendance rates appear to be high in junior grades – however, they mask the fact of age inappropriateness.

In South Africa, StatsSA classifies all areas in South Africa according to one of a number of settlement types. The settlement types from which the Social Surveys – CALS sample was drawn were: formal settlements, informal settlements, farms, and traditional areas (primarily former homelands).<sup>4</sup>

The survey clearly showed that school attendance for youth on **commercial farms** in the 16 to 18 age group is far lower than the other settlement types, followed by attendance for youth living in informal settlements. The reason that youth on farms are more vulnerable to being out of school (primarily black and coloured youth) than youth in formal settlements, informal settlements or youth in traditional areas is the result of a complex interplay of factors.

These may include: youth finding low paying work on farms (perhaps one of the few areas in which being in school has an opportunity cost, however low in financial terms), and possibly as a result of the relatively lower provision of schools that go up to Grade 12 in remote rural areas. In 2000, only 9% of farm schools for example, offered tuition at secondary school level.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Sub-place types which were not seen as relevant for the Social Surveys – CALS Study (as approved by the Methodology Experts Workgroup) were: institutional sub-places, recreational sub-places and hostels – the later representing a very small percentage of the population and a particularly small percentage of the school going population. The resultant count in the small-holding sub-place was too small for analysis (one sub-place).

<sup>5</sup> Shindler, J. A Statistical overview of farm schools in South Africa, 2000 in EduSource Data News. No. 45, October 2004, Education Foundation Trust.

## Race and gender

Coloured youth are far more vulnerable to being out of school than black, white or Indian youth: 21.4% of coloured youth were out of school in 2007, versus 4.2% white youth.

**Male coloured youth** are more likely to be out of school in the 16 to 18 age group, than female coloured youth: 29% of coloured boys (aged 16 to 18) were out of school, versus 18% of coloured girls.

## Disability

While very few children in the 7 to 15 age group are out of school, results from the Community Survey 2007 show that 22% of children with a disability were out of school in this age group.<sup>6</sup> Children with communication and emotional disability were most vulnerable to drop-out. This type of disability appears less obvious and hence might be 'over-looked' by teachers and caregivers. Regarding those disabled children in school, *62.6% of these children's caregivers feel that the school does not cater adequately for their child's disability.*

(On a methodological note, disabled children often go undetected in household surveys partly due to the social stigma attached to disability.)

We suggest that vulnerabilities related to school drop out as a result of disability is an area we need to explore further, and research specifically dedicated to disabled children and access to education and a range of other services is urgently needed.

## Socio-economic status of the household and household poverty

Social Surveys developed a composite index of the socio-economic status of the household using a number of indicators, which included:<sup>7</sup> access to infrastructure, living density in the household, the education level of adults in a household and the employment status of adults in the household. The survey found a negative relationship between the composite index of socio-economic status and being in or out of school, with a child's chance of being out of school increasing as the socio-economic status of the household decreased.

According to responses provided by caregivers of out of school youths, and out of school youths themselves, the most common cause of being out of school for youth aged 7 to 18 is household poverty: in terms of not being able to afford the cost of education and in terms of the restrictions poverty places on a household's ability to cope with financial and other traumas (such as a death in the family, or family members falling ill).

<sup>6</sup> Fleisch, B, Shindler, J and Perry, H. 'Children out of school: Evidence from the Community Survey'. Pendlebury, S, Lake, L and Smith, C. (Ed). South African Child Gauge, 2008/2009. Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, 43.

<sup>7</sup> Details can be provided upon request.

The manner in which household poverty causes children to leave school before completing their Matric is complex. School fees may be less of a culprit in creating barriers to access and completion than previously suggested, partly due to the impact of No-Fee schools and the Fees Exemption Policy. Less than 1% of caregivers reported having had their child denied access for non-payment of fees and 32% of children were not charged fees in 2007. Fifty percent of households spent less than R125 on fees per year. Yet the cost of education in the context of household poverty still remains a barrier to school access, as other access costs (apart from fees) remain high – particularly school uniforms, with 50% of households paying up to R600 per annum.

A third, and related, issue in which poverty pushes children out of school is as a result of the child's personal experience of poverty in relation to those around her. This may be caused by social exclusion on the part of the community and school (via the SGB) or directly via teachers and principals. Whilst less than one 1% of children had been denied access due to non-payment of fees, many learners had experienced punishment for non-payment of fees. A third of learners whose caregiver had indicated struggling to pay, or not being able to pay fees, had had their report card or exam results withheld. Youth who participated in our focus groups and in the youth survey pointed to their acute sense of difference as a result of not being able to afford the things that many of their classmates could afford. Other youth indicated that their decision to leave school was due to their embarrassment at not being able to afford the basics like lunch, money for civvies day, shoes and so on.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Other reasons for leaving school provided by caregivers and youth**

Our focus group discussions with youth, educators and caregivers research highlights that the reasons for children and youth being out of school are seldom related to one factor, but to the compounding effects of a complex of social and economic factors, which may first discourage learners from active engagement in their education, then affect their regular attendance at school, and eventually affect their ability to remain in the school system until Matric. These disincentives included the use of drugs in and outside of school, poorly resourced schools and insufficient educators in schools which devalue the experience of education, and the poor prospect of finding employment after school in some communities. Pregnancy was mentioned as the biggest problems facing female youth.

Most common reasons for leaving school in the 7 to 18 age group based on our household survey were:

- Household poverty and the cost of education (as mentioned above)
- Teenage pregnancy (biggest problem facing female youth)
- Disengagement from / lack of interest in schooling
- Repetition and being older than most peers in the grade (see section on repetition below)

<sup>8</sup> For an extended argument on relative poverty and access, see Dieltiens, V and Meny-Gibert, S, 'School drop-out: Poverty and patterns of exclusion'. Pendlebury, S, Lake, L and Smith, C. (Ed). South African Child Gauge, 2008/2009. Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, 46-49.

## Lacking school attachment and teenage pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy was mentioned as the number one reasons for girls to drop out of school. According the Reproductive Health Research Unit (2003), the greatest jump in teenage (15-24 year olds) pregnancy and HIV infection is in fact associated with school-drop-out.<sup>9</sup> While some girls get pregnant and leave school (as shown in our study), most girls leave school (for various reasons – see above) and then fall pregnant (RHRU 2003, HSRC 2009<sup>10</sup>). Dropping out of school not only increases risk of pregnancy, it also significantly increases risk of HIV. The RHRU survey showed that young women who did not complete their secondary school education were four times more likely to be HIV-positive compared to those who had completed high school. Hence, many scholars argued that attending secondary school might help to reduce the risk of teenage pregnancy and HIV (e.g. Hargreaves et. al. 2007)<sup>11</sup>. However, it needs to be considered that it is not access to education per se that influences sexual behaviour and as a result might prevent early pregnancy but rather academic performance and the relationship that teenagers have with their school. 'When teenagers feel a sense of attachment or connection to school and are successful at school, they are less likely to fall pregnant. School attachment, academic achievement and higher aspirations for education offer incentives to teenagers to avoid pregnancy (Kirby 2002<sup>12</sup>). On the other hand, when the relationship with schooling is tenuous, either through dislike of school (Imamura et al., 2007)<sup>13</sup>, poor academic achievement (Cassell, 2002) or poor expectations of furthering education (Imamura et al. 2007) girls are more likely to become pregnant.' (HSRC 2009:21)

'Lloyd and Mensch (1999)<sup>14</sup> contend that *“rather than pregnancy causing girls to drop out, the lack of social and economic opportunities for girls and women and the domestic demands placed on them coupled with the gender inequities of the education system, may result in unsatisfactory school experiences, poor academic performance, and acquiescence in or endorsement of early motherhood.*



*Bunking school, “We were late and they locked us out!”  
(Thembelihle)*

9 Reproductive Health Research Unit 2003. HIV & sexual behaviour among young South Africans: A national survey of 15-24 yr olds. Fact sheet available [online] at URL: [http://rhru.witshealth.co.za/PublicationsDownloads/HIV%20Management%20page/National\\_Youth\\_Survey\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://rhru.witshealth.co.za/PublicationsDownloads/HIV%20Management%20page/National_Youth_Survey_Fact_Sheet.pdf)

10 HSRC 2009. Teenage Pregnancy Report. Available [online] at URL: <http://www.pmg.org.za/files/docs/090901report.pdf>

11 Hargreaves J, Morison L, Kim J, Bonell C, Porter J, Watts C, Busza J, Pronyk P, Phetla G 2007. The association between school attendance, HIV infection and sexual behaviour in rural South Africa. *Journal of Epidemiological Community Health*; 000;1-8;doi.10.1136/jech.2006.053827.

12 Kirby, D. (2002). Antecedents of adolescent initiation of sex, contraceptive use, and pregnancy. *American Journal of Health Behaviour*, 26, 473-485.

13 Imamura, M., Tucker, J., Hannaford, P., da Silva, M. O., Astin, M., Wyness, L. et al. (2007). Factors associated with teenage pregnancy in the European Union countries: a systematic review. *European Journal of Public Health*, 17, 630-363.

14 Lloyd, C. B. & Mensch, B. S. (1999). Implications of formal schooling for girls' transition to adulthood in developing countries. In C. H. Bledsoe, J. B. Casterline, J. A. Johnson-Kuhn, & J. G. Haaga (Eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Schooling and Fertility in the Developing World* (p. 80-104). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

## MISSING SCHOOL TEMPORARILY

Four percent of children at school at the time of the survey had missed a year or more of schooling, with 3.6% of those still in the Basic Education Phase and 6.4% of those in the FET Phase having been absent from school for a year or more. While on average missing school for a year or more is not an issue affecting a large proportion of learners, it is important to note that if we look at children in Grades 10 to 12 who are three or more years above the age they should be for their grade, *one in four of these youth had missed a year or more of schooling.*

Children who have missed school for a year or more are likely to miss school again or to leave school permanently. It is therefore important that we understand the profile of these children and design appropriate interventions to reduce temporary absence from school. In the next section we focus on who is more likely to miss school for a year or more.

### Geographical location

The proportions of children who have missed a year or more of school varies between 2.3% and 4.7% for all provinces other than **KwaZulu Natal**, where the percentage of those children missing a year or more of school is 6.3%.

Many children may miss school temporarily because of serious health problems, migration or because their families require them to assume care or work responsibilities.

KwaZulu Natal has the highest adult HIV prevalence rate in the country. Children may be required to take care of their siblings or sick household members. However, caring and other family responsibilities need to be understood in the context of household poverty experienced by so many South African and the fact that family survival is sometimes dependent on even younger members paying some responsible role in the household.

The survey shows that children in **informal settlements** are most vulnerable to have missed school for a year or more: 8.3% of children in informal settlements had missed school for a year or more versus 3.1% to 4.6% for all other settlement types. These results differ from the profile of children most vulnerable to being out of school at the time of the survey in the 7 to 18 age category (as shown above, children on farms are most vulnerable to leaving school permanently). The reason children in informal settlements are more likely to miss school temporarily is most probably linked to household poverty, and to the more fluid household arrangements of many families in informal settlements which may disrupt school attendance.

### Race

**Black children** were most likely to have been out of school for year or more at some point and then have returned to school: 4.6% of black children have missed a year or more of schooling versus 0.4% of white children). This is most probably as a result of a higher proportion of poor households amongst the black population.



## Socio-economic status of the household and household poverty

The chances of a child missing a year or more of schooling increases as the socio-economic status of the household decreases.

It is primarily within the context of low household income that children leave school in order to look after relatives, as there is no money available to employ the assistance of health care assistants and nurses. In households with better financial capital and higher levels of household income, the cost of assistance may be possible, or an adult household member might be available to look after a relative.

A Thembelihle parent said:

*“Yes, it is happening. I know of my neighbour. Her daughter had to remain behind looking after her. She had to abandon her schooling and look after her mother. There was no one in the house to do that except her. She had to bath and cook for her. Ultimately the mother passed away and then she was able to go to school.”*

## Disability

Disabled children may be more likely to have missed a year or more of school (6.4%) than those children not described as disabled (4.1%). Children with emotional or behavioural disabilities (18.7%) were most likely to be out of school for a year or more.

## REPETITION

South Africa has a large number of over-age learners in the schooling system. Thirty-eight percent of Grade 12 learners are two or more years above their age-grade norm.

As we have seen, one of the reasons for learners experiencing “school delays” is long term absence from school. A small proportion of children are also not entering school at the right age (7.3% started after age 7). The primary reason for school delays in South Africa, however, is due to grade repetition. A third of all the children registered in 2007 had repeated a year at some time in their school career. Twenty one percent of learners in the Foundation Phase in 2007 had repeated, while 52% of learners had repeated by the time they were in the FET Phase in 2007.

Data from 2005 presented in the DoE's Learner Retention Report shows that repetition is high in Grade 1 and in senior grades, especially in Grade 11 (possibly due to pressure on schools to produce good Matric results). Our data suggests that every second learner in Matric in 2007 had repeated a year by the time they reached their final year of schooling.

## Geographical location

Grade repetition is most common in **Mpumalanga and Limpopo** province. The proportion of children who have repeated vary between 24.9% in the Western Cape and 45.6% in Mpumalanga (with a national average of 34.6%).

Considering the settlement type, a far higher proportion of children living in **traditional areas** had repeated a grade by 2007 as compared to children in the other three settlement types (formal areas, informal settlements or commercial farms).. Interestingly, living in a traditional area emerged as the most significant variable in predicting grade repetition. Again, geographical location is a proxy for:

- The living environment – a high number of poverty-stricken households (see section on socio-economic status of household and household poverty) are located in traditional areas, and
- The school environment children experience – it is possible that these high repetition rates are also due to the quality of education provided to children in the former homelands. Learners who were attending better resourced schools (moving up the school quintiles) were less likely to have repeated in 2007: 39.2% of children (all ages) in Quintile 1 schools have repeated once or more versus 18.7% in Quintile 5 schools. Considering that the vast majority of Quintile 1 and 2 schools are located in traditional areas (77%), high repetition rates in those areas are unsurprising.

### Findings from the formative research

The focus group data shows that the differences between the educational resources available to learners in poor communities in the townships and rural areas access and the resources available to many learners in former Model C schools, is stark. Classes in Diepkloof Extension, Lenasia and Phagameng were all overcrowded, with too few desks and textbooks. A Phagameng learner expressed frustration with the fact she had to share a textbook with a learner who did not stay near her home, affecting her ability to do her homework.

Another learner commented: *[Lack of resources at school] affects us badly because sometimes we can't write because we have to share a table and others are standing up because there is not enough space.... We have to go to school early [to] get a seat before others do or else we will stand up.*

In one of the farm schools in Doreen, learners in a number of different grades were being taught in the same class, as the school simply had too few classrooms. This practice was distracting for learners, and older learners ended up helping younger ones, instead of concentrating on their own studies. (Learners used to be taught in separate groups when the school still taught some classes under trees).



Learners from focus group discussion in Doreen, Limpopo

## Language

Language has always been a controversial issue in education in South Africa: from the drive for mother-tongue education to the ever pressing need to be able to use international languages such as English, which has become increasingly important (South African Institute of Race Relations 2002:63, Van Heerden 1994:3). Despite the government's commitment to multilingualism and the promotion of language rights in all spheres of public life (*National Education Policy Act, Act 27 of 1996, Language-in-Education Policy 1997*) school tuition does not totally reflect the multilingual nature of South Africa. The majority of learners struggle to master academic content, partially due to difficulties adapting to the use of English in classrooms from the fourth grade (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir 2004),<sup>15</sup> despite the coping strategies employed by teachers and learners (such as translations, code-mixing and code-switching).

*“A case in point in our own country is the unassailable status of English. Whether we like it or not [...]. It is essential, therefore, to promote at one and the same time both the learning of English by all who want to know the language and the enhancement by linguistic and extra linguistic means of indigenous languages.”* Neville Alexander

It is unsurprising therefore that the Social Surveys-CALS' study found that children residing in households where English was mentioned as one of the home languages were far less likely to repeat a grade than children who did not include English as a home language as shown in the table below.

Home language (all learners in school)	Never repeated	Has repeated
English	88.4%	11.6%
Afrikaans	75.3%	24.7%
Setswana	66.2%	33.8%
IsiZulu	66.0%	34.0%
IsiXhosa	63.2%	36.8%
Sesotho	63.2%	36.8%
IsiNdebele	61.4%	38.6%
Siswati	60.0%	40.0%
Sepedi	59.1%	40.9%
Tshivenda	52.5%	47.5%

Anecdotal evidence suggests that parents want their children to study in English rather than in their own home language. Possible reasons are:<sup>16</sup>

- to ensure a successful financial and social future parents may think it necessary for pupils to know an international language such as English;
- parents may believe that the job market demands knowledge of English;
- studies can not be completed at secondary and tertiary level in African languages;
- schools where African languages are used as medium of instruction might not have the same resources and expertise due to the injustices and policies of the past;
- schools (formerly advantaged or disadvantaged) might not have the infrastructure or even motivation to accommodate more languages

In our youth survey (youth aged 16 to 18) were asked youth to state which language or languages they would most like to be taught in: 85% of youth said English, and English accounted for 74% of all responses (respondents could choose more than one language).

<sup>15</sup> Brock-Utne, B. & Holmarsdottir, H.B. 2004. Language Policies and Practices in Tanzania and South Africa: Problems and Challenges. In: International Journal of Educational Development, v24 n1 p67-83 Jan 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Source: <http://cyberserv.co.za/users/~jako/lang/education.htm>

The results for repetition by home language of the learner may also point to factors associated with class rather than language per se. The Social Surveys-CALS' survey also showed that a child's chances of repeating a grade decrease with higher levels of educational attainment of the household head.

## Race

**Black children** are more vulnerable to repetition than Coloured, or Indian learners,, and six times more likely to repeat than white learners: 6% of white children had repeated versus 37% of black children. The patterns of repetition by race may be partly explained by home language (as explored above), but also to differing access to quality of teaching and school resources.<sup>17</sup> Inequitable access to quality education persists in South Africa. Using the quintile of the school as a rough proxy for the quality of education accessed: 84% of white children go to Quintile 5 (primarily former Model C schools) or private schools, versus 11% of black children. Learners who were attending better resourced schools (moving up the school quintiles) were less likely to have repeated in 2007 (see section on geographical location above).

Anderson, Case and Lam acknowledge that 'there is strong reason to believe that school fees are correlated with school quality in South Africa.' (Anderson, Case, & Lam 2001:5). The differentials in the quality of education (including school and teacher quality) as well as non-school factors like home environment or the education of parents (Anderson, Case & Lam 2001:6) have a negative impact on school productivity and learning outcomes such as exam results, numeracy and literacy tests (Deng & Tjønneland 1996:28). 'As more [...] financially secure families are able to send their children to better quality schools, the traditional township schools will be filled with the children of less [...] financially able families.' (Anderson, Case & Lam 2001:9) 'Hence, [...] class differences appear to be replacing racial differences as a criterion for [school] entry.' (Fiske & Laad 2004:99)

Whilst accessing quality teaching would obviously reduce learners' chances of repetition, learners attending schools where staff morale, skills and / or commitment were low, may have been pushed through a grade rather than made to repeat. High repetition rates are not a direct indicator of learners accessing poor quality schooling (and vice versa), though the patterns above do point to the impact of persistent inequitable access to resources.

Again, language featured as an important factor: Black children who resided in a household where English was mentioned as a home language fared significantly better than those who did not include English as a home language – as shown below.

Home language (black learners in school)	Never repeated	Has repeated
Afrikaans	61.2%	38.8%
English	<b>72.9%</b>	27.1%
African language	63.2%	36.8%

<sup>17</sup> Acknowledging that schools that are under resourced and where education quality may not be high may well push learners through even if the curriculum has not been mastered. Lower rates of repetition may therefore not be an indicator of better schooling.

## Socio-economic status of the household and household poverty

The chances of repeating a grade decrease with an increase in the socio-economic status index of the household. Once again, the education level of the household head featured as an important indicator here. As mentioned above children living in households headed by more educated individuals are at a clear advantage: only 11% of learners residing in a household where the household head had a tertiary education had repeated a grade by 2007, versus 42% of learners living in households where the household head had had no formal education. The education level of the household head is no doubt an indicator of many things, such as higher household income and better access to resources, e.g. better quality schooling for children. The education level of adults may also be an important factor in itself. Caregivers or household heads with better levels of education may be better able to assist children with their homework, and provide an environment where references in the curriculum are reinforced or are already familiar to children as a result of their home environment.

Other studies have also confirmed the positive association between parental education and their children's education (Birdsall 1985, Armitage & Sabot 1990, Anderson, Case & Lam 2001:6). "Omitting family background variables, such as parental education, may also result in biased coefficients [measuring the rate of return to education], either due to the potential correlation between genetics and ability or through the possibility that wealthier and 'better socially connected' parents will secure more education for their children, as well as high-paying jobs." (Keswell & Poswell 2002:17)

## Summary and Concluding Comments

### What are the implications of these findings on drop out and school delays?

This submission has shown that South Africa has high attendance rates for children of the compulsory school going age, and that there is also high take up and completion of Basic Education (Grades 1 to 9). This is indeed something to celebrate: South Africa is essentially meeting its commitment to the Millennium Development Goal on access to education. However, we have also shown that enrolment in the Further Education and Training Phase (Grades 10 to 12) is lower, with Gross Enrolment dropping from Grades 10 to 12.

Although we do not have a large drop out problem in the 7 to 18 age group, we do have isolated areas of vulnerability, and despite high levels of attendance up to the age of 18, and large numbers of over-age learners in the school system, completion of Matric is low. Thirty eight percent of youth aged 19 to 25 had completed Matric or NTCIII, and 17 % were still in school (GHS 2007)

Age (GHS 2007)	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Out of school	31.2%	36.5%	39.0%	40.9%	51.2%	55.6%	56.4%
In school	51.5%	31.4%	20.0%	9.9%	4.9%	3.7%	0.7%
Completed Matric / Diploma	17.3%	32.1%	41.0%	49.2%	43.9%	40.8%	42.9%

**Youth on farms:** We have seen that youth on farms (particularly coloured youth), are more likely to be out of school in the 16 to 18 age group, than youth in other kinds of settlements (formal urban settlements, informal settlements and traditional areas). The reasons causing children to leave school in these areas are complex, and any interventions to change these high statistics will demand a multi-pronged approach, involving interventions to improve general livelihoods for poor households in commercial farming areas. We suggest that a major reason for fewer youth on farms being in school is due to a lack of supply of secondary schools which include tuition up to Grade 12 (exacerbated by the closure and 'rationalisation' of farm schools). Access to full secondary schooling may well increase, as more children are placed in hostel accommodation in large rural towns. However, we suggest that this is a practice that needs to be carefully monitored by policy makers and researchers, as we do not yet know the impact of moving children and youth away from their households, in numbers, to access education. Anecdotal evidence from educationalist and government officials have pointed to unintended social consequences of this practice, including abuse of young learners, and trauma experienced as a result of being separated from caregivers for younger learners. A carefully designed monitoring and evaluation programme should be set up as a matter of urgency.

**Coloured youth:** Numerous surveys have shown a consistent trend in lower attendance rates for coloured youth in South Africa. In-depth and specifically focused research on this topic is scant, and we suggest that this is precisely what is needed. Research in this area would need to take into account both pressures in the community and home to leave school, push factors from within the schools in coloured communities, but also to factors linked to historically better access to labour market opportunities for coloured youth than for black youth (particularly in the artisan sector) as a result of job reservation under apartheid. While these jobs may no longer be available to the same extent, historical patterns of leaving before Matric may persist.

**Youth with a disability:** Results from our survey, as well as the Community Survey and the General Household Survey show that disabled youth are particularly vulnerable to not being in school, and when they are in school, two thirds of caregivers feel their children's disabilities are not being catered for. We suggest that teacher education needs to be reviewed with a view to building diagnostic skills and coping mechanisms to enable them to understand and meet special needs, and give them access to resource persons with expertise in remedial and special education.

**Youth in poor households:** Household poverty is undoubtedly the overarching context in which children of a compulsory school going age are made most vulnerable to leaving school, and an important context for understanding drop out amongst older youth. We have suggested however, that the way in which poverty pushes children out of school is complex, and that fees may be less of a culprit than previously suggested. We need to focus on reducing other access costs, such as school uniforms and transport. Secondly, regarding the comments above on relative poverty and social exclusion, we need to decrease the incentives on the part of schools to punish learners for non-payment of fees. This means, amongst other things, looking at whether all schools are being sufficiently compensated for providing exemptions or moving completely to no-fee status (some schools have seen an increase in available funding per child with their move to no-fee status, others

have not). Closer relations between schools, caregivers and learners will also decrease vulnerability to drop out as a result of “relative poverty”.

**Teenage pregnancy:** Teenage pregnancy is the most common reason for female learners leaving school in the 7 to 18 age group. The causes of teenage pregnancy are complex, and are influenced (amongst other things) by household poverty, access to information and contraception, the nature of gender relations and the often unequal decision making power between men and women in relationships. However, pregnancy is often the end result of a process of alienation from schooling and a complex set of other social issues, rather than the cause of drop out. When teenagers feel a sense of attachment or connection to school and are successful at school, they are less likely to fall pregnant. School attachment, academic achievement and higher aspirations for education offer incentives to teenagers to avoid pregnancy (Kirby 2002<sup>18</sup>). Hence, promoting school attachment<sup>19</sup> may decrease learner’s engagement in risky behaviour (such as unprotected sex and substance abuse) and improve their ability to engage in their education and participate in school.

**Youth who feel alienated and disengaged from their education:** Nearly a quarter of caregivers cited their child’s disinterest in education, and / or associating with the “wrong crowd”, as the reasons their child left school. The response needed here is complex, and involves the role of multi state and civil society sectors to ensure that youth are provided with networks of social support, and with both academic and non-academic stimulation to increase their sense of inclusion in the education process. A focus on quality education provision (though a long term outcome) will no doubt have a major impact on retaining a large proportion of learners in Grades 10 to 12.

**Youth who are over-age for their grade:** As we have seen, school delays (caused by temporary absence from school in the context of household poverty, and by grade repetition) are common in South Africa. The high prevalence of school delays experienced by school children (especially in the higher grades), results in a large proportion of children being a number of years above the ages specified by the age grade norms. Being over-age for your grade, and having repeated a number of times, may increase vulnerability to leaving school before completion of Matric. According to respondents in our youth survey, 10% said that they had left school due to repetition and difficulties associated with being older than classmates (including being humiliated by teachers, difficulties adjusting to their peer group and so on).

Many children in South Africa travel slowly through the education system, with significant cost implications for the state, for the household and possibly, psychologically for many of the over-age learners themselves. The age-grade norms act as an important benchmark for South Africa, but the gap between this ideal and reality is stark.

---

18 Kirby, D. (2002). Antecedents of adolescent initiation of sex, contraceptive use, and pregnancy. *American Journal of Health Behaviour*, 26, 473-485.

19 School attachment is related to a range of factors, such as school climate, overall sense of safety (see section above), structured social integration e.g. sport activities, extracurricular activities, peer relations, teacher support, school / classroom leadership & management (including learners active involvement), and a sense of belonging.

As mentioned, the long term goal is a drastic improvement in the quality of education provided to a *broad section* of children in South Africa. But in the short term, we need to think creatively about the role that older youth in our education system can play: is there greater space for creating roles of leadership and responsibility, where being older than ones peers is turned from a liability to an asset? How can we find ways to engage over-aged learners, build their self-esteem and renew their interest in their education, and attitudes towards school?

Multi-grade classrooms in South Africa may be affecting a small percentage of schools but multi-age classrooms are common, and many teachers are not trained appropriately to attend to classroom heterogeneity. The curriculum for each grade is aimed at a particular pedagogic developmental stage – premised on children being of a certain age. How can we ensure that the curriculum might incorporate this large spread in ages?

Lastly, what are the alternatives available to older youth who are struggling to complete the academic school curriculum? And are these youth aware of, and able to capitalise on, these possible alternatives? Social Surveys will be conducting further research this year on over-age learners in secondary schools in South Africa. We are available to present the results and implications of the Social Surveys-CALS' household survey as well as our further research on over-age learners to the Portfolio Committee in Cape Town should the Committee find this valuable.



SUMMARY TABLE	Group most vulnerable to ... (Data from 2007, Social Surveys / CALS Education Project)					
	DROP OUT		MISSING SCHOOL FOR A YEAR OR MORE		REPETITION	
<b>General</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• YOUTH: 9.8% of youth between the ages 16 to 18 are out of school</li> <li>• Learners that are considerably older than their peers (above the age grade norm) are more vulnerable to drop-out</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affecting 4.2% of learners (all ages)</li> <li>• Affecting 25% of learners 3 or more years above the age grade norm in the FET Phase</li> <li>• Children who have missed school for a year or more are likely to miss school again or to leave school permanently</li> <li>• Children starting school later are more likely to miss school for a period of time than those who start school at earlier age</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repetition primary reason for school delays</li> <li>• High levels of repetition in grade 1/2 &amp; senior grades (8 to 11)</li> <li>• 35% of children in school have repeated</li> <li>• 21% of learners in the Foundation Phase have repeated, while <b>52% of learners have repeated by the time they were in the FET Phase</b></li> <li>• 9% of youth in the FET phase had repeated 3 times or more</li> </ul>	
	Statistics	Possible explanation	Statistics	Possible explanation	Statistics	Possible explanation
<b>Geographical location</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth in the <b>Northern Cape</b></li> <li>• Youth residing on farms: 30.6% out of school</li> <li>• <b>Coloured youth on farms</b>: 48% of coloured youth on farms out of school.</li> <li>• Black children on farms are also more vulnerable to being out of school.</li> <li>• When children on farms leave, they are more likely to leave school <u>permanently</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16.9% of population in NC reside on farms</li> <li>• Access to low-wage labour on farms?</li> <li>• Farms schools not providing tuition up to Grade 12?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children (all ages) in <b>KwaZulu Natal</b>: 6.3% missed school for a year or more of school</li> <li>• Children in <b>informal settlements</b> are more likely to miss school temporarily: 8.3% in informal settlements versus 3.1% missed school for a year or more in formal settlements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migration: household moved to access schooling – 8.8% of those children had been out of school for a year or more, versus 3.7% of those who had not moved to access education</li> <li>• Household specific vulnerabilities? e.g. missing school for a year or more because of serious health problems or because their families require them to assume care or work responsibilities, e.g. take care of siblings / sick household members? Highest HIV prevalence rate in KZN</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children in <b>Limpopo &amp; Mpumalanga</b></li> <li>• Repetition higher in <b>traditional areas</b></li> <li>• Living in a traditional settlement emerged as the variable with the greatest statistical explanatory power in predicting whether a child will repeat.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 80% of Limpopo's population resides in traditional areas</li> <li>• Lacking alternative opportunities in traditional areas?</li> <li>• Low access cost of education?</li> <li>• High number of Quintile 1 and 2 schools in traditional areas</li> </ul>

	Group most vulnerable to ... (cont.)					
	DROP OUT		MISSING SCHOOL FOR A YEAR OR MORE		REPETITION	
	Statistics	Possible explanation	Statistics	Possible explanation	Statistics	Possible explanation
<b>Race</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Coloured youth</b> (21.4% of coloured youth out of school, versus 4.2% white youth)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socio-economic and political history designated by race.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Black children</b> were most likely to have been out of school for a year or more at some point (4.6% versus 0.4% for white children)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Black children</b> are 6 times more likely to repeat than white children (6% of white children had repeated versus 37% of black children)</li> <li>• For black children who include English as a home language: 27% had repeated (versus 37% African languages)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Race: veil through which to view differential / unequal access to quality education, different / inequality i.e. living conditions, socio-economic status, home language (English = advantage)...</li> <li>• The majority of learners attending Quintile 1 schools are black, coming from poverty-stricken households</li> </ul>
<b>Gender</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slightly more boys 10.1% than girls 9.8% (aged 16-18) were out of school, BUT race/gender specific stats: 29% of coloured <b>boys</b> (aged 16 to 18) out of school, versus 18% of coloured <b>girls</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In general, girls have higher rates of completion</li> <li>• Girls are less likely to participate in high-risk behaviour</li> <li>• Gender identity and experiences within socio-political history designated by race</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On aggregate, male and female children appeared to be equally likely to have been out of school for a year or more (4.2% respectively). Girls may be more likely to miss a year or more of schooling in a rural setting and boys in an urban setting, though differences were small.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender identity and experiences within socio-political history designated by race</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boys more likely to repeat than girls (across race, province and settlement), biggest gap between the genders occurring for black &amp; coloured children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In general, girls progress faster in school than boys</li> <li>• Girls are less likely to participate in high-risk behaviour</li> </ul>

	Group most vulnerable to ... (cont.)					
	DROP OUT		MISSING SCHOOL FOR A YEAR OR MORE		REPETITION	
	Statistics	Possible explanation	Statistics	Possible explanation	Statistics	Possible explanation
<b>Disability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth with some form of disability, (especially communication, intellectual &amp; emotional)</li> <li>37% of youth with some form of disability out of school according to GHS 2007</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social exclusion</li> <li>Disability as barrier to learning</li> <li>Note: disabled children often undetected in school &amp; household (diagnostic ability of teachers?), undetected in many household surveys.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children with some form of disability may be more likely to have missed a year or more of school (6.4%) versus those children not described as disabled (4.1%)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children with some form of disability are more vulnerable to repetition</li> <li>45% of children with some form of disability had repeated versus 34% of children without disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social exclusion</li> <li>Disability as barrier to learning</li> </ul>
<b>Poverty &amp; socio economic status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative relationship between socio-economic status &amp; being in/out of school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fees reducing as a barrier.</li> <li>Other access costs a barrier</li> <li>Household poverty is the overarching context in which youth leave school.</li> <li>Multi-dimensional impact of household poverty.</li> <li>Relative poverty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative relationship between socio-economic status &amp; missing school for a year or more</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education level of the household head</li> <li>Impact of household poverty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative relationship between socio-economic status &amp; repetition</li> </ul>	

	DROP OUT	MISSING SCHOOL FOR A YEAR OR MORE	REPETITION (all ages)
<b>Additional Information</b>	<p><b>Common reasons for drop-out (age 7-18):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Household poverty and the cost of education (not fees anymore but other access costs &amp; burden of relative poverty)</li> <li>• Teenage pregnancy (most common reason among female youth!)</li> <li>• Disengagement from / lack of interest in schooling</li> <li>• Repetition and being older than most peers in the grade (over-aged learners)</li> </ul> <p><b>Implications:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children who leave school are more vulnerable to engage in high risk social &amp; sexual behaviour (increased risk of substance abuse, engagement in crime, HIV, pregnancy ...)</li> <li>• Non-completion has serious implications regarding job perspectives</li> </ul>	<p><b>Possible reasons for missing school:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illness</li> <li>• Family responsibilities, e.g. caring responsibilities for sick household members &amp; siblings, domestic chores</li> <li>• Household poverty</li> <li>• Migration for education</li> </ul> <p><b>Implications of missing school temporarily:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children may become substantially older than their class mates (and than the age-grade norm specifies) due to temporary absence from school – might result in impaired peer relationships being older than their class mates, increases in behavioural problems, negative attitudes towards school...</li> <li>• It seems that having missed school for a year or more makes children more vulnerable to repetition.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Implications of repetition:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effects on school attitudes and completion: reduced self-esteem, impaired peer relationships being older than their class mates, increases in behavioural problems, negative attitudes towards school, &amp; temporary absences from school.</li> <li>• Effects on class rooms and school system: Increased class size, increased class heterogeneity, student motivation &amp; classroom management challenges, budgetary and equity problems for schools and school systems</li> <li>• While there is no clear relationship between having repeated &amp; being out of school, having repeated a number of times (and other school delays) may have an impact on whether or not youth go on to complete their education.</li> <li>• Combination of low achievement &amp; alienation from school makes grade repeaters more vulnerable to drop-out.</li> </ul>
<b>Policy Implications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on access cost of education (e.g. uniform)</li> <li>• Alternatives to main stream academic schooling</li> <li>• Increase learners' school attachment to decrease the engagement in risk behaviours (substance abuse, violent or deviant behaviour, and risky sexual behaviour – HIV/Aids, pregnancy)</li> <li>• Engagement of over-age learners</li> <li>• Policies to avoid repetition (as grade repeaters become more vulnerable to drop-out)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review policies in the broader context of household poverty</li> <li>• Ensure that there is a response to every absence</li> <li>• Track learners affected by migration / change of schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher training to attend to classroom heterogeneity, identify learning needs &amp; disability</li> <li>• Find ways to engage over-aged learners</li> <li>• Build their self-esteem and renew their interest in their education, and attitudes towards school</li> <li>• Prevention &amp; early intervention: provide preschool programmes</li> <li>• Language: provide additional English courses</li> <li>• School management: promote partnerships and involvement of caregivers</li> <li>• Create positive classroom climate, supporting grade repeaters</li> <li>• Monitor low-achievers – provide additional learning opportunities</li> <li>• Improve quality of education</li> </ul>