

**SUBMISSION TO THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON FINANCE IN THE
KWAZULU-NATAL LEGISLATURE**

APPROPRIATION BILL, 2026

03 JULY 2026

SUBMITTED BY:

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INTRODUCTION

1. Equal Education (EE) is a youth-led mass democratic movement of learners, post-school youth, parents, teachers and community members who use mobilisation and public action, supported by careful research, to empower young activists and ensure equality in South African education. Our campaigns are informed by the experiences of EE members across five provinces and by policy analysis. At EE, we build an understanding of the education system while drawing attention to problems facing school communities and learners.
2. EE welcomes the opportunity to make submissions on the 2026 KwaZulu Natal Province Appropriation Bill (“the Bill”) to the Portfolio Committee on Finance (“the Committee”). Our submission seeks to highlight the social impact of the provincial budget, primarily focusing on basic education.
3. At the crux of our submission, is the request for urgent intervention by the Committee to reject the Bill and refer it for urgent reconsideration.
4. EE contends that the legislature is obligated to make this referral in order to ensure that the right of basic education is immediately realisable, in accordance with Section 29 of the Constitution.

OVERVIEW

5. EE submits that the 2026 KwaZulu-Natal Appropriation Bill must be evaluated against the constitutional obligation to respect, protect, promote and fulfil every learner's immediately realisable right to a basic education. The provincial budget is the primary instrument through which this obligation is given practical effect.
6. This submission demonstrates that the proposed budget does not provide the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (KZNDoE) with sufficient resources to meet that obligation. Chronic underfunding, inadequate provincial allocations, and repeated reprioritisation have culminated in a structural funding crisis that is now translating directly into fewer teachers, deteriorating infrastructure, inadequate learning materials, and declining learner transport services.
7. These pressures are experienced by learners as overcrowded classrooms, unsafe sanitation, unreliable water supplies, shortages of textbooks, and reduced learner transport services, and ultimately reduced access to schools. Evidence collected by Equal Education from schools eNquthu demonstrates that many learners continue to attend schools that fall well below the standards required by the Constitution and national education policy.
8. While the Department's financial management challenges require continued oversight, the evidence presented in this submission suggests that administrative reforms alone cannot resolve the current crisis. The scale of quantified funding shortfalls substantially exceeds the savings expected from existing financial recovery measures. Unless additional resources are provided, further reductions in educational services appear inevitable.
9. Compensation of employees, expressed as a percentage of the KZNDoE's allocation from the provincial equitable share, has risen steadily and is now consuming an ever-larger share of available revenue, leaving progressively less room for goods and services, infrastructure, training, and transfers that support actual service delivery in classrooms and schools.
10. The practical effect of a compensation ratio sustained above 90% is that close to all of the KZNDoE's equitable share allocation is committed to personnel costs before a single textbook, desk, or subsidy to a school is funded.

11. The Department indicates that unfunded wage agreements have contributed to a funding shortfall of approximately R5.1 billion, with budget projections indicating that 8,424 posts are unaffordable in the 2026/27 financial year alone.
12. The budget also reflects significant reprioritisation within programmes, amounting to approximately R607 million, primarily to address pressures arising from compensation costs. While some of these adjustments may be presented as efficiency measures, the available evidence suggests that many are better understood as responses to unavoidable fiscal pressures, including rising personnel costs, the consequences of weaknesses in financial planning and management, and the failure to deliver programmes and services as intended.
13. Over and above drastic reprioritisation, approved posts to the establishment will remain vacant – the budget quantifies a R1.8 billion shortfall for 2026/27 against an assumption that 5418 approved posts will not be filled.
14. In effect, the budget leaves the KZNDoE acutely exposed to two simultaneous risks: the risk that any in-year compensation shortfall (for example, from underbudgeted wage increases or unbudgeted overtime and substitute costs) can only be met by withdrawing funds from already-thin non-compensation budgets; and the risk that the KZNDoE will drastically reduce its basket of posts over the MTEF, leaving schools without sufficient teachers or resources to effectively function.
15. There is evidence that elements of both risks are already materialising, suggesting a distressing outlook for the protection of education rights in the province should current funding trends persist.
16. At the centre of this submission is a request that the Committee reject the 2026 KZN Appropriation Bill and refer it for urgent reconsideration. EE submits that the Committee is constitutionally obligated to make this referral in order to secure the immediate realisation of the right to basic education under Section 29 of the Constitution.

THE DUTY OF THE LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT

17. This submission is made at a significant moment for the legislative framework around provincial budgets. The KZN Legislature is currently processing a new KZN Money Bills Amendment Procedure and Related Matters Bill, intended specifically to strengthen the Legislature's oversight of the provincial budget and to deepen public participation in the amendment of Money Bills.
18. EE welcomes this initiative as recognition, by the Committee itself, that current oversight mechanisms require strengthening. EE submits, however, that the Committee need not wait for this Bill's enactment to exercise some of its oversight duties over the 2026 Appropriation Bill.
19. Section 29 of the Constitution guarantees every person the right to a basic education. The Constitutional Court has held that, unlike other socio-economic rights in the Bill of Rights, this right is immediately realisable and is not subject to progressive realisation or the availability of state resources; the state bears a direct and primary duty to give effect to it¹.
20. Section 195 of the Constitution further requires that public administration be governed by principles of efficient, economic, and effective use of resources, together with accountability and transparency. These are obligations echoed in the Department's duties under the PFMA.
21. Read together, these provisions mean that a provincial budget which actively deepens documented shortfalls in textbooks, infrastructure, staffing, and learner transport is not merely a matter of policy discretion. It implicates the Committee's own constitutional obligation to ensure that the Appropriation Bill it passes is capable of giving immediate effect to learners' rights under section 29(1)(a).
22. On the evidence set out in this submission, the Bill, as tabled, would entrench and in several respects deepen the province's failure to meet this constitutional standard. EE therefore requests that the Committee reject the Bill and refer it for urgent reconsideration, with a view to securing the additional funding necessary to close the shortfalls documented below in respect of (but not limited to) compensation of employees, school infrastructure, Norms and Standards funding, and learner transport.

¹ Governing Body of the Juma Musjid Primary School and Others v Essay N.O. and Others 2011

LETTER FROM THE LEARNERS OF NQUTHU

Dear Premier, Thami Ntuli

We, the learners from eNquthu, writing as Equalisers, would like to respectfully raise our concerns regarding the realities we face at our schools. We listen carefully to your recent State of the Provinces Addresses (SOPAs), where promises are made about improving education infrastructure, ensuring safe learning environments, and prioritising learner development without implementation plans.

However, the situation in our schools does not reflect the progress that was highlighted. We continue to experience serious infrastructure challenges, and classrooms are overcrowded, which affects the quality of teaching and learning. In addition, there are concerns regarding the maintenance of school facilities, including sanitation and learning resources. These conditions make it difficult for learners to perform at their full potential. Promises have been made in previous years about upgrading school facilities, improving safety, and ensuring that all schools have adequate resources. Unfortunately, at our expense, many of these promises have not materialised or been implemented at our schools. As learners, we feel discouraged when repeated promises are not fulfilled, while we continue to struggle daily.

We therefore respectfully outline our demands:

- Promises are kept in the budget allocation and funding
- Immediate assessment and upgrading of school infrastructure
- Provision of adequate learning materials and resources
- Improved safety and sanitation facilities
- Transparent communication regarding timelines for promised developments and
- Regular monitoring to ensure that commitments made to our schools are implemented

We believe that education is a constitutional right, and we deserve an environment that supports our academic success and personal growth. We are not writing to oppose leadership, but to advocate for fairness, dignity, and equal opportunities for all learners.

We trust that our concerns will be taken seriously and that concrete action will follow.

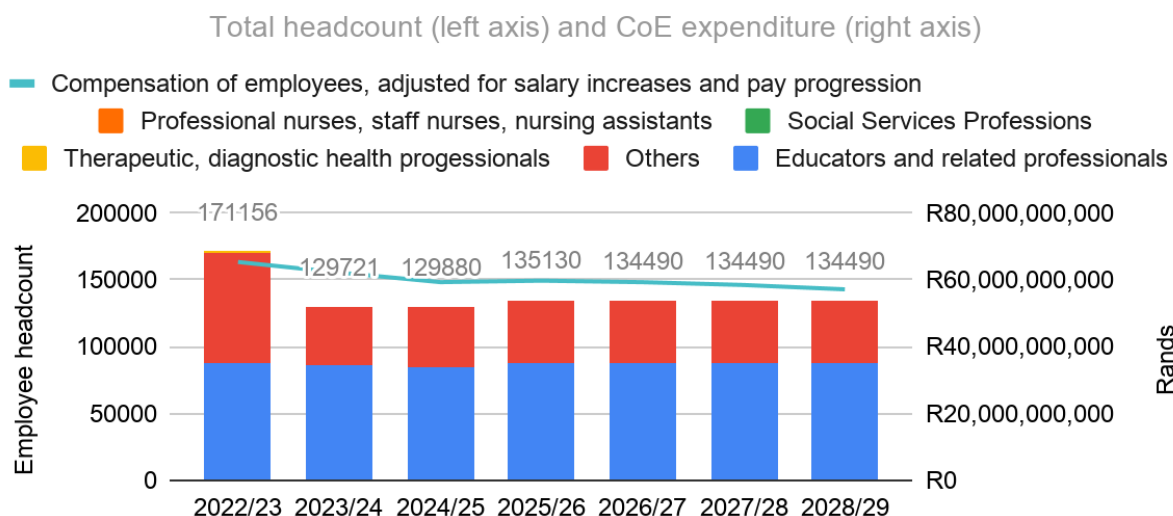
Yours sincerely,
On behalf of Equalisers
Learners from eNquthu

COMPENSATION OF EMPLOYEES

23. The compensation pressures confronting the KZNDoE cannot be understood in isolation from the conditions experienced in schools. KZN has the third highest learner-educator ratio across all ordinary public schools in the country² (30.8 : 1).
24. Across the province, learners continue to attend overcrowded, understaffed schools. These pressures are particularly acute in historically disadvantaged communities, where shortages of teachers and specialist support personnel have direct implications for curriculum coverage, individual learner support, psychosocial services, and the overall quality of teaching and learning.
25. Against this backdrop, recent budget decisions display that the KZNDoE is managing compensation pressures through a strategy of fiscal consolidation that relies heavily on vacancy retention, attrition, and reductions in the real value of expenditure on compensation.
26. *Figure 1: KZNDoE employee headcount and compensation expenditure*

² 2025 School Realities Report. 2026. Department of Basic Education.
<https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Publications/2026/School%20Realities%20February%202025.pdf?ver=2026-03-09-150733-240>

Figure 1: KZNDoE employee headcount and compensation expenditure



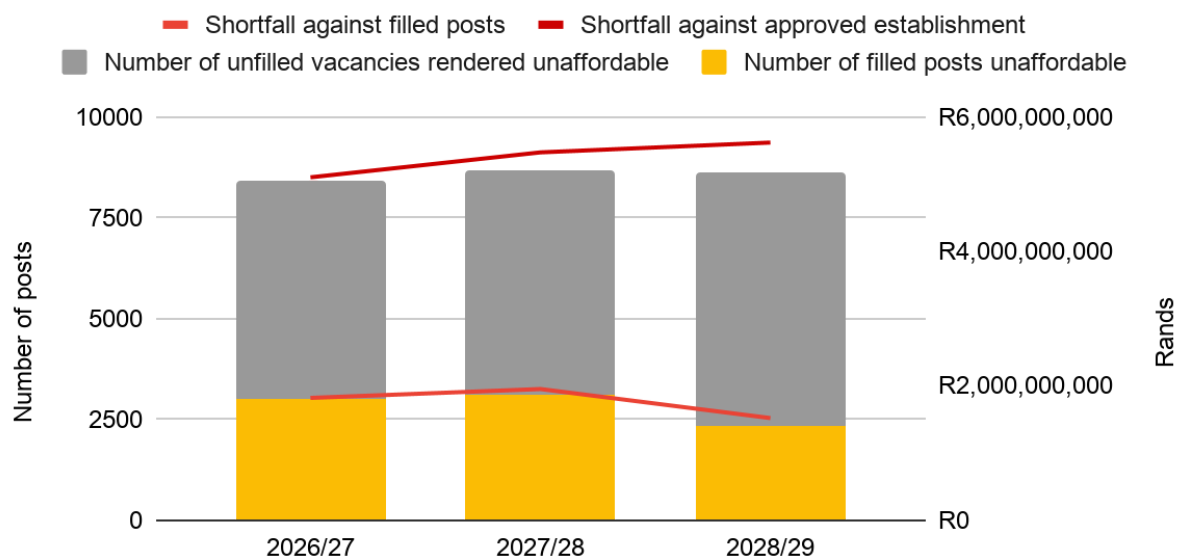
Source: 2026/27 KZN Treasury Estimates of Provincial Revenue

27. Figure 1 illustrates the employee headcount (in columns) and the total money allocated to Compensation of Employees, after adjusting for wage increases in the KZNDoE. The employee headcount declined from 171,156 in 2022/23 to 129,721 in 2023/24, and is projected to remain stagnant at 134,490 over the 2026/27 Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF).

28. Assuming annual cost-of-living adjustments of approximately 4 per cent and pay progression increases averaging 1.5 per cent, projected expenditure on compensation of employees over the 2026/27 MTEF represents an effective real decline of approximately R2 billion. A longer-term assessment reveals a more concerning trend. Applying actual wage settlements and annual pay progression adjustments retrospectively indicates that compensation expenditure in 2022/23 would have amounted to approximately R65.3 billion in 2026/27 prices. The current allocation of approximately R59.3 billion therefore represents an effective reduction of approximately R6 billion in real spending capacity over this period.

29. Figure 2: Compensation of employees shortfall

Figure 2: Compensation of Employees shortfall



Source: 2026/27 KZN Treasury Estimates of Provincial Revenue and

30. Figure 2 illustrates the extent of compensation-related pressures, as quantified in the EPRE. The Department estimates a shortfall of R5.1 billion against its approved establishment in 2026/27, increasing to R5.6 billion by 2028/29. Even if staffing levels are maintained at currently filled posts, a shortfall of R1.8 billion remains in 2026/27. These pressures imply that approximately 3,006 currently occupied posts are effectively unaffordable in 2026/27, while as many as 8,424 posts within the approved establishment cannot be funded. Of these, 5,418 are vacant posts that the Department assumes will remain unfilled, increasing to 6,290 by 2028/29.

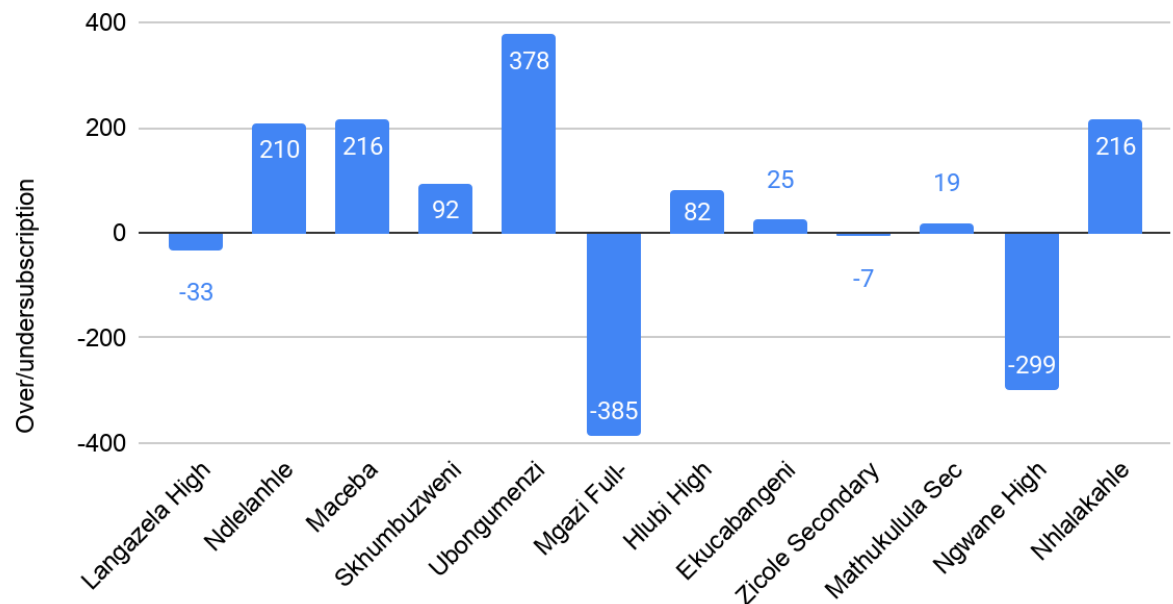
31. The practical effect of these decisions is that the KZNDoE is reducing its effective staffing complement through attrition rather than through explicit adjustments to the approved establishment. This approach may avoid immediate retrenchments, but it nevertheless diminishes the state's capacity to respond to learner demand, fill emerging vacancies, reduce overcrowding, and provide specialist support services. These unfunded vacancies therefore do not represent mere staffing constraints, but rather permanently unaffordable posts. This illustrates the retrogressive nature of austerity budgeting – it has forced the KZNDoE to structurally reduce the extent to which it provides basic education.

32. For learners, these fiscal decisions are experienced as larger classes, fewer subject choices, delayed appointments, inadequate academic support, and ultimately poorer prospects to develop.

33. *Figure 3: School visits – Oversubscription*

Figure 3: Schools over / undersubscribed, 2025

as reported by school principals or administrative staff



Based on school visits undertaken in February 2025

34. As depicted in *Figure 3*, eight of the twelve schools that EE visited eNquthu last year reported to be oversubscribed. One school reported oversubscription by 378 learners.

35. The contraction in staffing capacity is even more pronounced among specialist support personnel. Therapeutic and diagnostic professionals remain virtually static at around 177 posts across the MTEF, while social service personnel are projected to plateau at only 68 posts for a provincial schooling system serving millions of learners. The reduction in professional nurse posts from 219 to only 24 positions in 2025/26 is particularly concerning. Notwithstanding this substantial decrease in personnel, compensation allocations for nurses do not appear to decline proportionately, suggesting that the Department may be experiencing inefficiencies in planning, redeployment, or budgeting that warrant further scrutiny.

36. The limited availability of specialist support personnel within the KZNDoE is particularly concerning in the context of South Africa's profound literacy crisis and the Department's obligations under the 2014 *Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)* Policy. SIAS

recognises that many learners require differentiated forms of support in order to participate meaningfully in learning and envisages a continuum of assessment, therapeutic, psychosocial, and curriculum support services to identify and address barriers to learning as early as possible. In practice, however, incomplete resourcing has significantly constrained the implementation of inclusive education in KwaZulu-Natal, limiting the KZNDoE's ability to identify and support children at risk of not acquiring foundational reading skills, particularly in overcrowded classrooms where educators already face substantial workload pressures.

37. Evidence suggests that specialist support services remain severely under-resourced. Employment data from 2019 indicated that the KZNDoE employed only seven office-based educational psychologists or psychometrists, despite estimates that approximately 208 such professionals would have been required to meet the 2018 district staffing norms and funding guidelines for resourcing inclusive education. The 2026/27 EPRE raises concerns that staffing levels may have regressed further. While the Public Special School Education programme reports 178 therapists and specialist staff, the EPRE's personnel statistics indicate that only 177 therapeutic and diagnostic health professionals are employed across the KZNDoE as a whole. This suggests that specialist support services may be overwhelmingly concentrated within special schools, leaving ordinary public schools with little or no access to the expertise required to identify barriers to learning, support curriculum differentiation, and provide timely interventions for learners at significant risk of not learning to read.
38. Taken together, these trends raise serious concerns about the credibility and sustainability of the KZNDoE's compensation framework. While the EPRE quantifies substantial shortfalls against both the approved establishment and currently filled posts, it does not identify how these gaps will be financed over the MTEF. Further reprioritisation is untenable, as the severity of existing shortfalls will illustrate below. Although the EPRE alludes to envisaged savings through the identification of ghost employees, eliminating irregular incumbents does not eliminate the educational need for the posts themselves. In the absence of a credible funding strategy, the budget effectively assumes that thousands of vacancies will remain unfilled and that posts will eventually be reduced. This would further constrain the KZNDoE's ability to reduce overcrowding, provide specialist support, and fulfil learners' right to a quality basic education.
39. We strongly recommend that the Committee explore avenues to reprioritise the provincial budget, and further request additional funding from the National Treasury, to increase the adjusted allocation to the KZNDoE and prevent further harm to learners.

Recommendations

- Reject reliance on attrition and unfilled vacancies as a substitute for a funded, transparent post-provisioning policy.
- Review post-provisions and vacancy information for specialist educators, psychologists (including psychometrists), nurses, and social workers to resource and support an inclusive education system.

- The Committee should support, and where necessary formally request, additional funding from National Treasury to fund unavoidable wage-agreement carry-through costs rather than requiring these to be absorbed through further cuts to goods, services, and posts.
- The Committee should request full transparency on the outcomes of the PERSAL and employee-headcount verifications, and ensure that approved posts are funded and maintained with teachers allocated to schools in need.

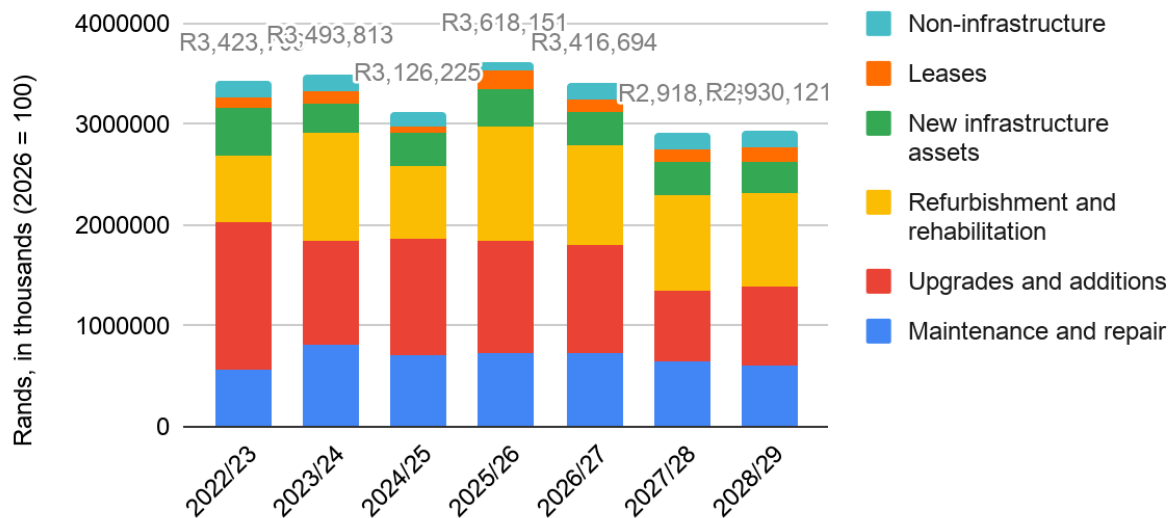
SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE:

40. This section sets out evidence gathered by EE from some of the schools it organises eNquthu, alongside an analysis of provincial infrastructure expenditure estimates, to demonstrate that current budget decisions in the 2026 KZN Appropriation Bill risk entrenching the infrastructure backlogs that continue to define the schooling experience of many KwaZulu-Natal learners.
41. It considers, in turn, the trajectory of real infrastructure expenditure over the MTEF, the state of water and sanitation facilities, the credibility of infrastructure project planning and expenditure, the implications of reprioritising funds away from new infrastructure under Section 18, and the underfunding of schools through the Norms and Standards for School Funding.
42. These factors clearly demonstrate that the provincial budget will fail to adequately provide for the right to basic education. The committee is urged to take immediate action to ensure that implementation systems are strengthened and greater transparency is provided regarding infrastructure planning and prioritisation. By exercising this oversight, the committee can be emboldened to ensure that funding levels for school infrastructure are increased no later than at the 2026 Adjustments Appropriation.

Declining real expenditure over the MTEF

Figure 4: School Infrastructure Spending

Summary of provincial infrastructure payments and estimates by category, adjusted for



Source: 2026/27 KZN Estimates of Provincial Revenue

43. Figure 4 demonstrates that real expenditure on school infrastructure is projected to decline over the MTEF. Allocations for maintenance and repair decrease in the outer years, while expenditure

on upgrades and additions falls sharply — from over R1 billion in 2024/25 to below R800 million by 2028/29. Although allocations for refurbishment and rehabilitation remain comparatively stable, spending on new infrastructure assets remains modest relative to the scale of backlogs in the province.

44. Part of this trend is attributable to declining allocations from the Education Infrastructure Grant. Grant funding was temporarily elevated due to disaster relief allocations and the merger of the Education Infrastructure Grant and School Infrastructure Backlogs Grant, but these increases are not sustained over the medium term. Compounding this, provincial own-funding for school infrastructure is also projected to decline, further limiting the KZNDoe's ability to address longstanding deficits.
45. In a context where the credibility of provincial infrastructure data remains contested — the Department does not, for example, appear to have accurate statistics on the number of schools reliant on plain pit latrines — these funding shortfalls risk further obscuring the visibility of backlogs and weakening accountability for their eradication.
46. Compounding these concerns is the fact that provincial own-funding for school infrastructure is also projected to decline, further limiting the KZNDoe's ability to address longstanding deficits.
47. It is overwhelmingly evident that infrastructure backlogs in KwaZulu-Natal are at risk of being reproduced and deepened through current budget decisions. Unless funding levels are increased, implementation systems strengthened, and greater transparency provided regarding infrastructure planning and prioritisation, many learners will continue to be denied access to safe, dignified and adequately resourced learning environments.

Conditions on the ground: water and sanitation

48. EE surveyed twelve schools in 2025 and eight schools in 2026 where EE members are organised eNquthu. For the purposes of this submission, data from the same eight schools present in both surveys are referenced in *Figures 5-12*. The names of the schools are not included in this public submission for fear of potential reprisal against learners or school officials.
49. The conditions observed in schools surveyed in 2025 and 2026 by EE eNquthu reveal an infrastructure crisis that continues to undermine learners' dignity, health, safety, and access to meaningful education.

50. Figures 5 & 6: Water Supply Sources

Figure 5: Water Supply Source

2025 School Survey at sample of 8 Nquthu schools conducted by EE

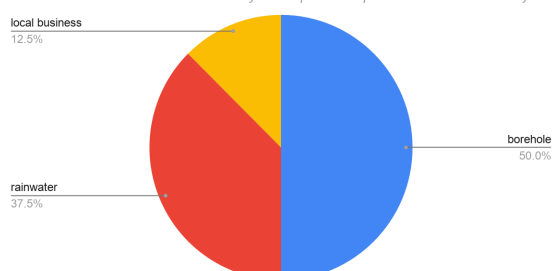
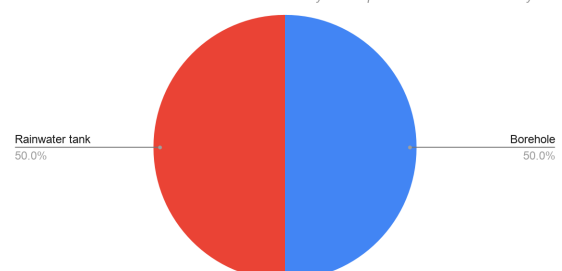


Figure 6: Water Supply Source

2026 School Survey at 8 Nquthu schools conducted by EE



51. Figures 7 & 8: Sufficient Water Supply

Figure 7: Sufficient Water Supply

2025 School Survey at sample of 8 Nquthu schools conducted by EE

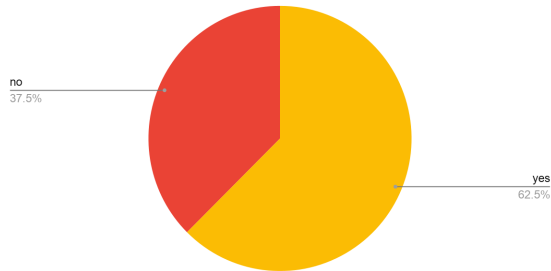
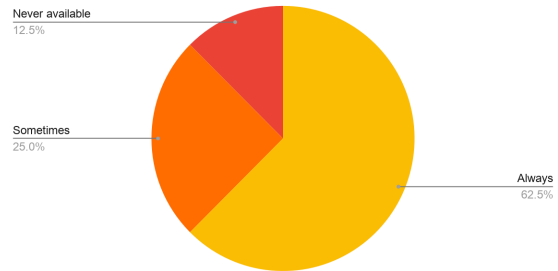


Figure 8: Sufficient Water Supply

2026 School Survey at 8 Nquthu schools conducted by EE



52. Figures 9 & 10: State of Water Facilities

Figure 9: Broken or unusable water facilities

2025 School Survey at sample of 8 Nquthu schools conducted by EE

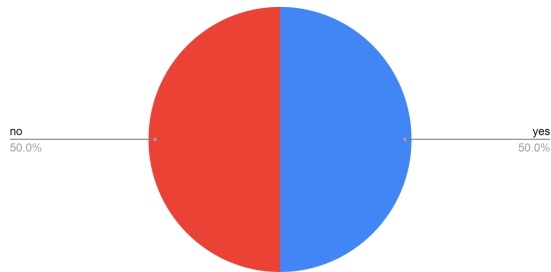
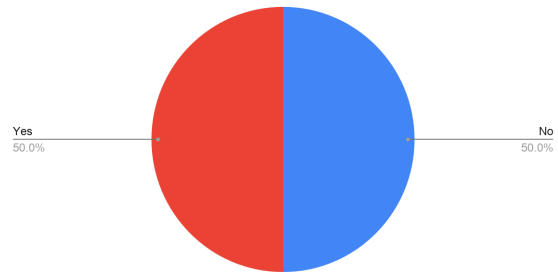


Figure 10: Broken or unusable water facilities

2026 School Survey at 8 Nquthu schools conducted by EE



53. Figures 11 & 12: Type of sanitation facilities

Figure 10: Type of Sanitation

2025 School Survey at sample of 8 Nquthu schools conducted by EE

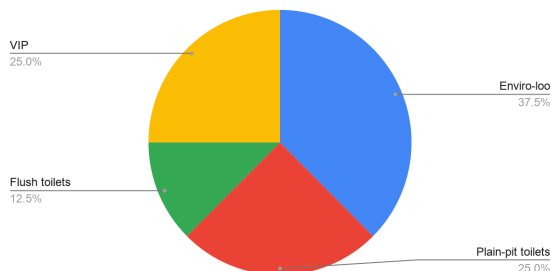
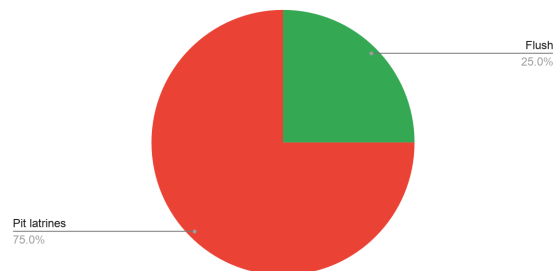


Figure 12: Type of Sanitation

2026 School Survey at 8 Nquthu schools conducted by EE



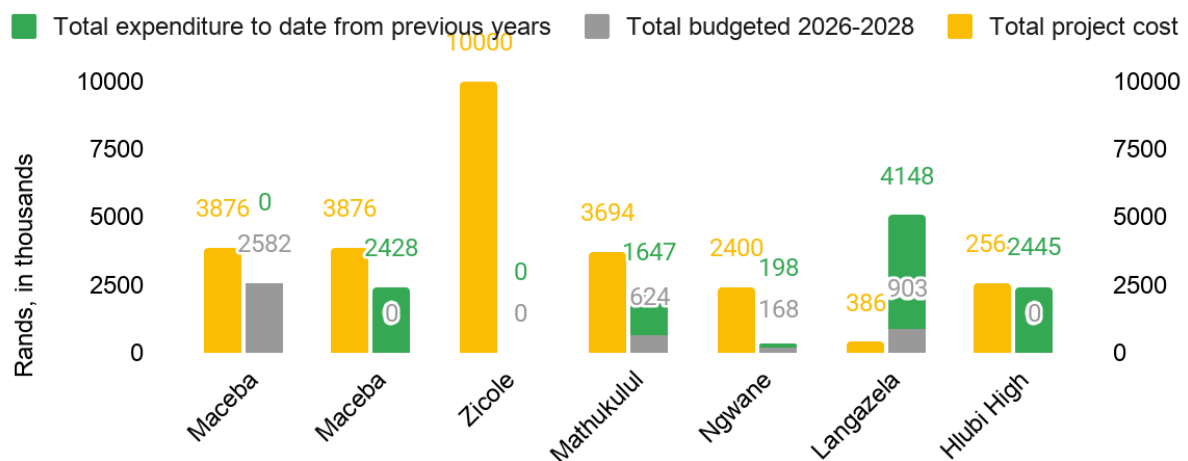
54. Of eight schools visited in 2025, four relied on rainwater harvesting as their primary source of water, and another was required to purchase water from a local business. A significant proportion of the schools indicated that available water supplies are unlikely to sustain learners throughout the academic year, while half reported broken or inoperable water infrastructure. At least two schools relied on plain pit latrines and only one school had access to flush toilets.

55. 2026 shows no signs of improvement, and even plausible retrogression. Four of the eight schools relied on rainwater harvesting. Three of the schools did not have enough water – with one of the eight schools reporting never having access to water in the school. Half of the schools surveyed report having broken or unusable water facilities. 75 per cent of schools surveyed reported having pit latrines on site. It is likely that VIP/Enviroloo facilities at these schools were not adequately maintained and are thus now effectively operating as plain-pit latrines.
56. These findings suggest that many schools continue to operate in conditions inconsistent with the constitutional right to a basic education and the Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure.

Infrastructure planning, costing, and delivery: evidence from Nquthu

Figure 13: School infrastructure project costs vs money allocated/spent

All projects are upgrades / additions, own calculations

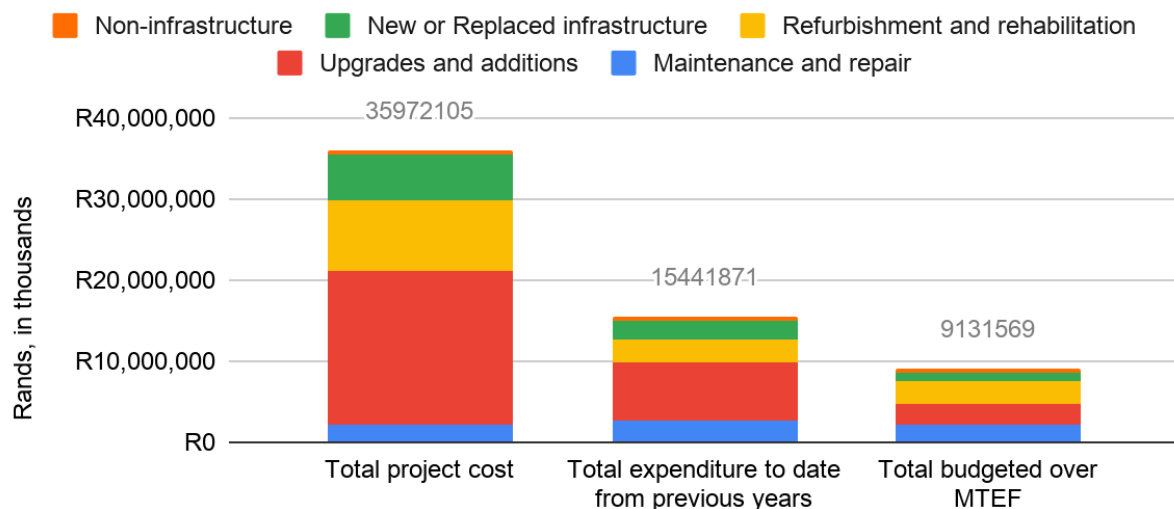


Source: 2026/27 KZN Estimates of Capital Expenditure B5

57. Figure 13 draws from Table B5 in the KZN Estimates of Capital Expenditure (ECE) to present the status of infrastructure projects at schools eNquthu in which EE organises. The data raise serious concerns regarding the planning, costing and implementation of school infrastructure programmes. Several projects have substantial unfunded balances despite having been underway for many years.
58. Ngwane Secondary School's upgrading project commenced in 2013 and is scheduled to conclude only in 2028, yet only R366,000 of a R2.4 million project cost has been spent or budgeted to date, leaving a funding gap of over R2 million.

59. Zicole Secondary School has a project cost estimate of R10 million, but no expenditure has been recorded and no funding has been allocated over the 2026/27 MTEF.
60. Maceba Secondary School has been subject to parallel funding arrangements since 2018, with significant shortfalls remaining under both funding streams.
61. Expenditure at Langazela Secondary drastically exceeds the estimated project cost. R5.05 million was spent against a cost estimate of R386,000.
62. At Mathukulula Secondary School, a contractor was appointed to replace plain pit latrines. After only laying the foundations for the new toilet blocks, the contractor subsequently abandoned the site. No construction has occurred since. This, despite Table B5 showing that R1.65 million has been spent with a further R624,000 budgeted for this financial year, against an estimated project cost of R3.7 million.
63. Taken together, this sample presents clear evidence of weaknesses in project costing, data quality, and expenditure controls. The prevalence of lengthy implementation periods, substantial funding gaps, and apparent inconsistencies between estimated costs and actual expenditure calls into question the credibility of planning assumptions and the adequacy of systems used to manage school infrastructure delivery.
64. More concerning still, is that *Figure 12* depicts the state of just six projects, out of 2,973 listed under the Education Vote in the ECE.

Figure 14: Total school infrastructure project costs vs money allocated / spent



Source: 2026/27 KZN Estimates of Capital Expenditure B5

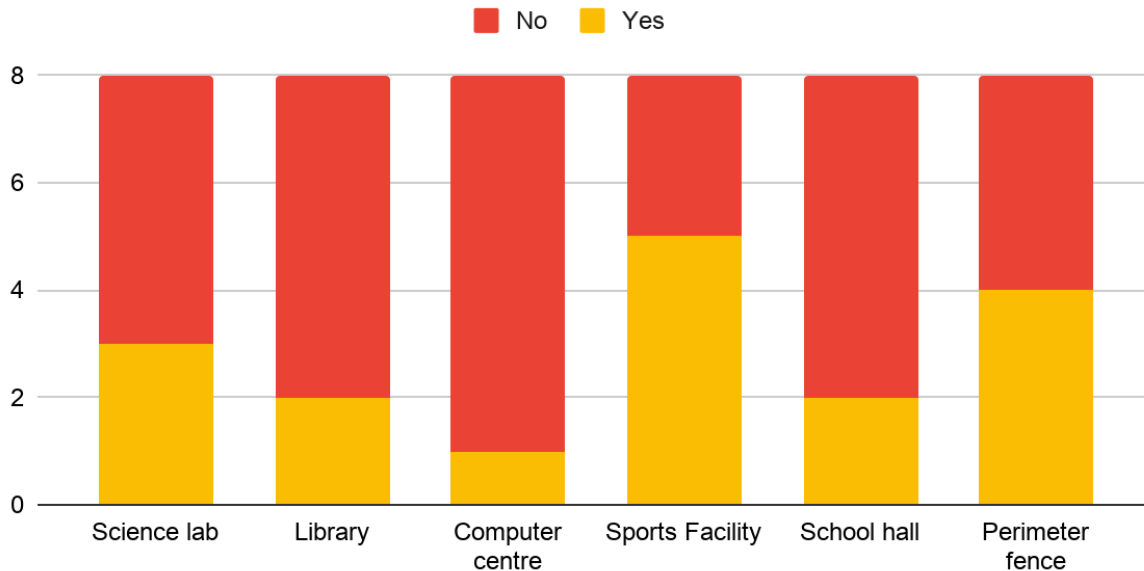
65. Figure 14 depicts the aggregated budgetary information for all 2,973 education infrastructure projects listed in Table B5³. The picture is extremely concerning. The estimated project cost of these listed projects amount to R33.7 billion, while the combined incurred and planned expenditure totals to R19.9 billion. This represents an immense shortfall of R13.8 billion for present projects.
66. Data from Table B5 thus provides clear evidence of weaknesses in project costing, data quality, and expenditure controls. The prevalence of lengthy implementation periods, substantial funding gaps, and apparent inconsistencies between estimated costs and actual expenditure calls into question both the credibility of planning assumptions and the adequacy of the systems used to manage school infrastructure delivery.

New infrastructure needs

67. These conditions are particularly concerning in light of recent budget decisions. The 2026/27 EPRE indicates that approximately R761 million will be reprioritised out of school infrastructure sub-programmes over the next two financial years, ostensibly due to the "fact that no new projects are being allowed under Section 18"⁴.

Figure 15: Infrastructure backlogs

2026 School Survey at 8 Nquthu schools conducted by EE



³ 2026/27 KZN Estimates of Capital Expenditure. 2026. Note that data for one project – Collingwood Primary School – has been excluded due to a likely error in the estimated project cost.

⁴ 2026/27 KZN Estimates of Provincial Revenue and Expenditure. 2026. p205.

<https://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/provincial%20budget/2026/3.%20Estimates%20of%20Provincial%20Revenue%20and%20Expenditure/KwaZulu-Natal/Vote%20%2005%20-%20EDUCATION.pdf>

68. To illustrate why this is of urgent concern, EE draws on data from its 2026 survey of schools it organises eNquthu. Beyond the harrowing water and sanitation backlogs documented above, there is a dire need for new facilities at these schools in order to comply with the Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure. As *Figure 15* illustrates, the overwhelming majority of schools surveyed have no access to a science lab, school library, computer centre, or school hall. These are critical infrastructure requirements, many of which should have been afforded to all schools by 2023, under the previous iteration of the Regulations Related to the Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure. Just half have secure perimeter fencing and three have no sports facilities at all.
69. The Committee should seek urgent clarity on this matter. Given the extensive infrastructure deficits documented above, the KZNDoE should be obligated to expand infrastructure funding and delivery. In circumstances where learners continue to attend schools without reliable water, safe sanitation, or adequate buildings, withholding investment in new infrastructure appears difficult to reconcile with the state's constitutional obligation to progressively eradicate unsafe and inadequate school environments.

Underfunding through the Norms and Standards for School Funding

70. A further problematic budget choice is the continued underfunding of schools through the provincial implementation of the Norms and Standards for School Funding, which have not increased for no-fee schools in the province since 2015. The EPRE indicates that schools will receive an allocation of approximately R955 per learner, substantially below the nationally prescribed target amount of R1,835 per learner for 2026.
71. This shortfall significantly constrains schools' ability to undertake routine maintenance and repair minor damage to windows, doors, and ceilings. The impact is likely to be felt most acutely in rural schools with relatively small enrolments, where school allocations are already insufficient to absorb the costs of maintaining ageing infrastructure.
72. The impact of these shortfalls will be dealt with more extensively in a section to follow.

Conclusion

73. Taken together, the evidence presented in this submission points to systemic shortcomings in both the financing and delivery of school infrastructure in KwaZulu-Natal. Learners continue to attend schools without reliable water, safe sanitation and essential educational facilities, while longstanding projects remain delayed, apparent weaknesses in project management and expenditure oversight persist, and infrastructure budgets are projected to decline over the medium term. At the same time, inadequate school funding limits schools' ability to undertake routine maintenance, increasing the likelihood that infrastructure will continue to deteriorate. Unless these trends are reversed through increased investment, more credible planning, stronger implementation and improved transparency, the province will fail to meet its

constitutional obligation to immediately provide all learners with safe, dignified and adequately resourced learning environments.

Recommendations

- Require the Department to reconcile the R13.8 billion shortfall reflected in Table B5 against a credible, published implementation plan for the 2,973 listed infrastructure projects.
- Require urgent clarification of the R761 million reprioritised out of infrastructure sub-programmes from the KZNDoE's equitable share revenue, and liaise with the Provincial Treasury to ensure the Section 18 intervention does not undermine the delivery of critical school infrastructure.
- Direct the Department to produce accurate, updated, and verified data on the number of schools experiencing critical infrastructure backlogs – including those without water, electricity, and those reliant on plain pit latrines – and a costed, time-bound plan for their eradication.
- Increase funding for new infrastructure projects at schools that currently lack a science lab, library, or computer centre, in line with the Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure.

NORMS AND STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL FUNDING

74. Adequate school-level funding through the Norms and Standards for School Funding is a precondition for learners to exercise their right to basic education in practice. The KZNDoe's failure to meet the funding norms therefore directly impedes learners' rights to basic education.

75. This section draws on EE's 2025 and 2026 school surveys in Nquthu to show how chronic underfunding under the Norms has left schools without textbooks, stationery, and the means to carry out even minor maintenance, with the result that families are increasingly being pressed to fund shortfalls the state is constitutionally obliged to cover.

Access to textbooks and stationery

Figure 16: Did the school receive enough textbooks or stationery for all learners

2025 School Survey at sample of 8 Nquthu schools conducted by EE

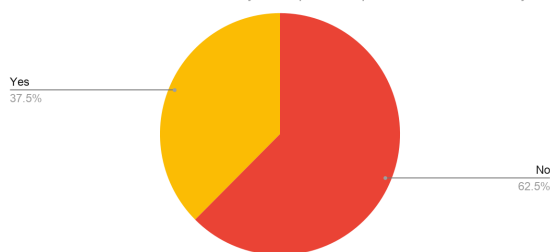
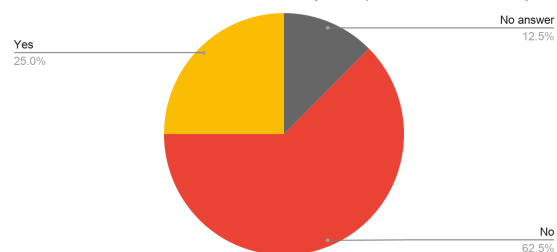


Figure 17: Did the school receive enough textbooks or stationery for all learners

2026 School Survey at 8 Nquthu schools conducted by EE



76. Of eight schools surveyed in 2025, only three had been provided with enough textbooks and stationery as depicted in *Figure 16*. In the majority of schools, respondents reported learners needing to share textbooks, not having access to textbooks, or not being able to do their work because they were not provided with stationery.

77. *Figure 17* shows that 2026 saw no improvement: five of the eight schools surveyed had not received sufficient textbooks or stationery — and in some cases had received none at all — to provide education to all their learners.

78. This directly violates learners' rights. In *Basic Education for All and others vs the Minister of Basic Education and others*, the Supreme Court of Appeal expressly held that the right to basic education under Section 29 of the Constitution requires each learner to be able to access a

textbook for every subject studied. *“If there is one learner who is not timeously provided with her textbooks, her right has been infringed.”*

Maintenance, infrastructure, and the cost of underfunding

79. Norms and Standards funding is also expected to contribute to minor maintenance and upkeep of schools. Conducting routine maintenance and minor repairs – to windows and doors, furniture, and the like – are generally expected to be the responsibility of the school. Without sufficient resources to do so, this becomes impossible. As a result, facilities deteriorate faster and infrastructure costs for major maintenance, repairs, rehabilitation, upgrades and additions will necessarily increase. Allocating more money to schools now is likely to save costs in the future, and also free up spending for new infrastructure and upgrades in areas of growing demand.

Figure 18: Facilities in disrepair

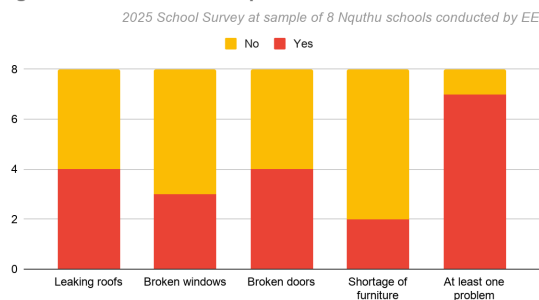
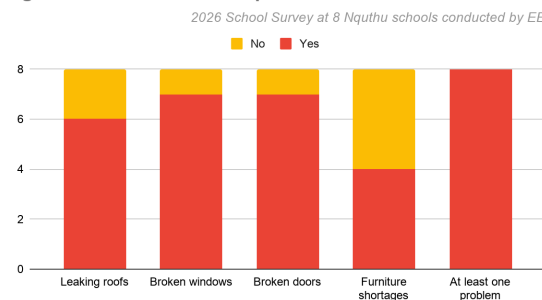


Figure 19: Facilities in disrepair



80. Of the schools surveyed in 2025, *Figure 18* shows that all but one of them had either a leaking roof, broken windows, broken doors, or furniture shortages. Under normal circumstances, schools would be expected to address these problems with the money allocated to them by the Norms and Standards for School Funding. However, years of chronic underfunding and austerity mean that this is simply not possible.

81. This trend worsened in 2026. Of the eight schools included in this survey, all eight reported at least one aspect of their facilities in disrepair. Six reported leaking roofs, seven had broken windows, and seven schools had broken doors. Significant broken furniture – amounting to hundreds of tables and chairs – were reported in four schools.

Coercive “voluntary” contributions

82. A further consequence of inadequate school funding is the enforcement of so-called "voluntary" contributions from families. Reports from learners, together with anecdotal evidence from sister organisations, indicate that families are increasingly being pressed to supplement school resources by contributing cash or providing in-kind office supplies, stationery, and other donations to schools.
83. There are cases where learners' reports have been withheld, or learners have been denied their right to attend classes, because their families were unable to make such contributions. This practice is blatantly illegal and constitutes a direct violation of the constitutionally enshrined right to basic education.
84. It is clear that these violations do not stem purely from the malevolence of school managers, but rather from the desperate situation caused by chronic austerity imposed upon schools in KwaZulu-Natal.

Conclusion

85. The evidence from EE's 2025 and 2026 surveys demonstrates that the KZNDoE's underfunding of schools through the Norms and Standards for School Funding constitutes a direct and ongoing violation of learners' constitutional rights.
86. It leaves learners without textbooks and basic learning materials, it accelerates the deterioration of school facilities in ways that will increase costs to the province over time, and it drives the unlawful practice of coercing families into funding the state's own constitutional obligations.
87. The Committee should treat adequate Norms and Standards funding as a matter requiring urgent compliance, and should support the Department to set out a credible plan to close this funding gap.

Recommendations

- Increase the per-learner Norms and Standards allocation for no-fee schools toward the nationally prescribed target, with a costed timeline for closing the gap between the current R955 and the R1,835 benchmark.

- Investigate and take preventative and corrective action against the practice of coercive "voluntary" contributions, including incentivising compliance by funding schools adequately and issuing clear guidance to School Governing Bodies that this practice is unlawful.

LEARNER TRANSPORT

88. The need for learner transport in South Africa cannot be understood outside the legacy of apartheid-era spatial planning. That system deliberately pushed black South Africans to the peripheries of urban and economic life, into areas that were largely inaccessible. This spatial legacy remains largely intact in rural provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal, and it continues to determine which learners can physically reach a functioning school and which cannot. Learner transport is therefore a precondition for the right to basic education to be realised, especially in historically under-resourced areas. It is against this backdrop that the funding decisions set out below must be assessed.

89. EE has campaigned for several years to secure learner transport for schools not just eNquthu, but in the province more generally. This right was ultimately secured through litigation, when courts ordered learner transport policies to be formalised and transport to be provided to affected schools.

90. In practice, this right is being eroded. First, by years of inadequate provisioning leading to overloaded, poorly-maintained, and unsafe buses; and now by reducing the number of buses serving a school.

91. Learners who once had access to learner transport are now being deprived of it. This constitutes retrogression against an immediately realisable right, and a flagrant violation of the constitution.

Fragmented and unsafe transport arrangements on the ground

92. EE's own survey findings from schools in Nquthu illustrate what this looks like in practice. Despite the existence of a KZN Learner Transport Policy intended to clarify the respective roles of the KZNDoE and KZNDoT, scholar transport in practice remains an unclear, fragmented system in which responsibility is split between the two departments, School Governing Bodies, and schools themselves. Of seven schools surveyed, none reported having a fully state-subsidised transport system covering all eligible learners; all seven instead relied on some combination of parental arrangements, private minibus taxis, and occasional departmental support. Based on total enrolment across these schools, this affects an estimated 5,500 learners.

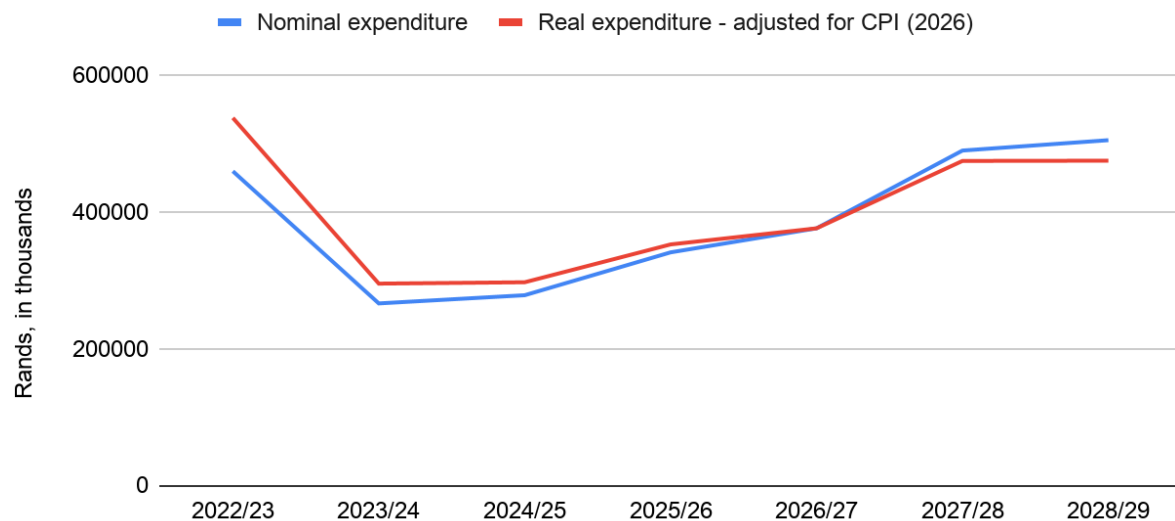
93. Schools consistently identified overloading as a critical and recurring safety concern. This requires urgent intervention, with vehicles frequently carrying more passengers than legally permitted putting learners at risk of accidents. No school surveyed reported having formal safety measures in place: None checked drivers' Professional Driving Permits, vehicle roadworthiness, or regular overloading checks.
94. This unreliability translates directly into disrupted attendance and punctuality. Learners arrive late or miss school entirely when transport breaks down, whether due to vehicle unavailability, cost barriers, or overloading-related delays, and no school reported a formal late-arrival policy that accounts for transport disruptions – meaning learners are routinely penalised for delays entirely outside their control. Grade 12 learners are disproportionately affected, given that early morning classes and examination sessions are most easily disrupted by late arrival.
95. This is the lived, everyday counterpart to the provincial budget shortfalls set out below.

Historical backlogs

96. In 2021, 1,148 schools across the province were on the waiting list for scholar transport, representing 157,538 learners who had been assessed as needing it but were not receiving it.
97. At the time, the KZNDoE was transporting 67,163 learners, from a ring-fenced Treasury budget of R459 million.
98. The estimated funding shortfall to provide transport to all learners on the waiting list was R1.2 billion.
99. It is against this baseline of already-inadequate coverage that the province's more recent budget decisions must be judged.

Figure 20: Dept of Transport: Learner Transport

Nominal and real expenditure on scholar transport, own calculations



Source: KZN Appropriations and Adjustment Appropriations Bills, 2022-2026; KZN 2026/27 EPRE

100. Figure 20 illustrates the trajectory of ringfenced spending on learner transport as budgeted for by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport (KZNDOT). The learner transport budget was cut substantially in 2023/24 to R266 million, down from an adjusted appropriation of R459 million the year before. Since then, the budget has grown: this year's allocation stands at R376 million, up from R341 million the previous year – well above an inflationary increase.
101. The 2026/27 EPRE explicitly confirmed this trajectory of gradual, budgeted recovery, with the budget rising to R376.337 million this year, R490.129 million in 2027/28, and R505.323 million in 2028/29.
102. The EPRE, in the Education Vote and the Transport Vote, explicitly identify targets to provide learner transport to 433 schools and 76,598 learners respectively for 2026/27. These figures largely reflect a stable or improved outlook against previous years' outcomes. The EPRE does not make any mention of reducing the amount of learners or schools benefiting from state-subsidised learner transport.
103. However, a February 2026 letter issued to District Directors and District Learner Transport Coordinators appears to contradict the departments' budget documents. The letter instructs that learner transport provision be reduced by 200 buses across 12 education districts. It justifies this reduction by citing a shortfall between a KZNDOT allocation of R366 million and a KZNDOT estimated requirement of R523 million.

104. Neither figure reconciles with the Department's own published budget documents. Nowhere in the EPRE or supporting documentation is a reduction in the number of learners transported anticipated against the status quo, nor is a budget requirement of R523 million reflected anywhere in the numbers set out above.
105. This has real-life implications. Four buses currently transport learners who attend Esikhumbuzweni Secondary School. Without learner transport, learners would have to travel between 18km-22km to access school. This year, the school has been notified that its allocation of buses would be reduced to three buses – meaning that some learners would not be able to benefit from learner transport, and may thus be unable to attend school.
106. It is not reasonable that coverage would retrogress, given that the published budget increased, not decreased, from R341 million to R376 million between 2025/26 and 2026/27. The reduction in service is, on the Department's own published figures, unexplained.

Conclusion

107. Learner transport sits at the intersection of South Africa's spatial history and the practical realisation of the right to basic education, and the KZNDoE's own data confirm that provincial funding has never come close to meeting documented need. Despite not achieving universal coverage as necessary, learner transport is provided to a significant number of learners in need.
108. Against this backdrop, a February 2026 letter to directors, apparently unsupported by the Department's own budget documents, now threatens to retrogress against learners' hard-fought rights to learner transport and basic education.
109. The decision to reduce the numbers of buses allocated to schools mean that learners at Esikhumbuzweni Secondary School, among others, may now be unable to attend school.
110. The Committee should require the KZNDoE and KZNDoT to publicly reconcile the figures underpinning the letter to districts with the EPRE, to halt the planned reduction of 200 buses pending that reconciliation, and to set out a credible, funded plan to close the province's long-standing learner transport shortfall rather than deepen it through unexplained administrative reversal.

Recommendations

- Require the KZNDoE and KZNDoT to publicly reconcile the R376 million budget increase against planned delivery reductions
- Require clarity on the R366 million and R523 million figures underpinning the KZNDoE's February 2026 letter to districts with the published EPRE, before any reduction proceeds.

- Halt the planned reduction of 200 buses across 12 districts pending that reconciliation, with particular urgency at schools such as Esikhumbuzweni Secondary School.
- Set out a credible, funded plan to close the province's long-standing learner transport shortfall, consistent with the EPRE's own targets and the shortfalls to universal coverage for all learners in need.

FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT AND THE PROVINCIAL FINANCIAL RECOVERY PLAN

111. The analysis presented in this submission, coupled with the KZNDoE's own reports to the provincial legislature⁵ leave little doubt that its financial crisis is primarily structural, and caused by austerity budgeting.
112. This does not mean oversight measures are unwelcome. EE supports efforts to strengthen accountability and spending efficiency, including the Department's Financial Recovery Plan, its Persal and creditor-verification exercises, and the tighter procurement controls imposed under Section 18 of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA). But such interventions must demonstrably improve outcomes for learners.
113. On the KZNDoE's own admission, this is not yet happening: its Financial Recovery plan includes employee and learner verifications, accruals and payables verifications,, non-implementation of infrastructure projects from equitable share funding, and a water and energy shared savings exercise. Not accounting for the fact that some of these – like the infrastructure projects – are necessary expenditure, these were initially estimated to bring in savings of R1.4 billion per-annum. The KZNDoE now asserts that no such savings will materialise.
114. Place this against the KZNDoE's quantified R10.36 billion in unfunded and unaffordable education mandates – including Norms and Standards funding, learner transport costs, compulsory Grade R provisioning, and wage-bill shortfalls — and it is clear that intervention beyond stricter administrative oversight is urgently necessary in order to protect the right to basic education in the province.
115. The risks of unmonitored, slow-moving oversight are material. Procurement delays under Section 18 have already left LTSM textbook funding unapproved, and over R81 million in submissions and requisitions – covering items from school library materials to toilet paper to leaking roofs – remained stuck before the Provincial Treasury as at December 2025. R761 million in infrastructure reprioritisation has also been attributed to Section 18-related budget pressures, while learners continue to attend schools that are reliant on plain pit-latrines.

⁵ KwaZulu-Natal Education. 2026. *Vote 5 2025/26 - Q3 Budget and Expenditure Presentation to the KZN Legislature*.

116. Where oversight measures produce delay, reprioritisation away from constitutionally necessary spending, or unexplained service reductions rather than genuine efficiency gains, they compound rather than resolve the underlying crisis.
117. The Committee should therefore require that progress under the Financial Recovery Plan and the Section 18 PFMA intervention be reported publicly, regularly, and in quantified terms: the specific savings identified and realised to date; the value and status of outstanding Section 18 submissions; and the trajectory of accruals, payables, and unauthorised expenditure. Absent such transparency, the Committee cannot distinguish between an intervention that is improving efficiency and one that is simply deferring or displacing constitutionally required spending onto learners.
118. The Committee must also make sincere attempts to address the root causes of the financial crisis – namely ongoing austerity measures – that lie at the heart of educational dysfunction and rights violations in our schools.

Recommendations

- Treat the Department's own request for baseline relief as an urgent matter requiring engagement with National Treasury, rather than an internal administrative matter to be resolved through further cuts.
- Require public, regular, quantified reporting on the Financial Recovery Plan's progress against its targets.
- Require public, regular, quantified reporting on the Provincial Treasury's Section 18 intervention against its targets, by identifying any savings that have occurred and instituting corrective consequences against transgressions.

SPECIFIC RELIEF REQUIRED AT PARTICULAR SCHOOLS

119. Attached below is a report based on 2026 visits to seven schools eNquthu.
120. In addition to the schools listed in the report, we wish to draw the Committees attention to two additional schools whose conditions have already been highlighted in this report: Mathukulula Secondary School and Esikhumbuzweni Secondary School.
121. Mathukulula Secondary School relies on plain-pit latrines, has no access to water, and is in a general state of extreme dilapidation. A contractor was previously appointed in 2024 to replace the sanitation facilities at the school, but has subsequently abandoned the site, after only laying down foundations. No new contractor has since been appointed.
122. Esikhumbuzweni Secondary School will have the number of buses allocated to its learners reduced from four to three. Learners at the school who are beneficiaries of scholar transport currently travel between 18-22km to attend classes at the school. Without intervention to protect learner transport at the school, many of these learners might not have access to education.
123. The Committee is urged to study these cases and recommend urgent interventions to protect learners' rights to basic education at these specific schools.

EQUAL EDUCATION KWAZULU-NATAL: SCHOOL READINESS SURVEY REPORT

Survey Period: 27-29 January 2026

Schools Surveyed: 7

Report Date: 09 Feb 2026

Summary: State of School Infrastructure in KZN

The findings from seven schools across KwaZulu-Natal reveal a critical and systemic crisis in basic school infrastructure, hindering the constitutional right to basic education. While the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) shows relative stability (despite the challenges faced by schools in 2025) deficits in water, sanitation, classroom functionality, and safety are the norm, not the exception. Schools operate in a perpetual state of infrastructural emergency, relying on inadequate, often broken, facilities.

Key Provincial Findings:

- **Overcrowding:** 6 out of 7 schools are operating over their designed capacity, with one school (Ekecabangeni Secondary) reporting an enrolment of 1,062 learners against a capacity of 45*, indicating a possible data error but highlighting extreme strain.
- **Water Insecurity:** 4 out of 7 schools reported an unreliable ("Sometimes" or "Never") water supply. Reliance on rainwater tanks and boreholes is common, but vandalism and insufficient capacity leave many learners without adequate water for drinking or hygiene.
- **Sanitation Crisis:** A majority of schools rely on basic pit toilets. Access to functional handwashing facilities with soap is nearly non-existent, and toilet paper is scarce. Vandalism is a primary cause of broken facilities.
- **Dilapidated Learning Environments:** Most schools lack functional specialised facilities (libraries, labs, computer centres). Broken furniture, leaking roofs, broken windows, and non-functional classrooms are widespread, directly impacting the teaching environment.
- **Funding & Resource Shortfalls:** Schools are almost entirely dependent on government Norms funding, with minimal parental or donor support. This funding is universally reported as insufficient to cover basic operational costs like water, electricity, and urgent repairs, let alone learning materials. Severe shortages of 2026 textbooks were reported in 4 schools.

The data paints a picture of a system under immense pressure, where schools and educators are forced to navigate daily crises in basic services, diverting energy from their core mandate of teaching and learning.

School-by-School Summary of Conditions

School 1: HLUBI SECONDARY SCHOOL

Enrolment: 702 (Capacity: 650) | Survey Date: 27 Jan 2026

- Priority Needs: Classrooms, Water, Fencing.
- Critical Issues: No reliable water supply (rainwater only, vandalised). 9 out of 18 pit latrines are broken. No hand-washing basins, soap, or toilet paper. Classrooms are overcrowded with 100 broken tables/chairs. Leaking roofs. Lacks a library, lab, hall, fence, and internet. The 2026 textbooks have not been received.
- Positive Notes: NSNP food supply is sufficient. Received roofing upgrades (condition unclear).

School 2: NDLELANHLE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Enrolment: 678 (Capacity: 600) | Survey Date: 28 Jan 2026

- Priority Needs: Roof repairs.
- Critical Issues: Leaking roofs, broken windows/doors. 2 mobile classrooms. 70 broken tables, 150 broken chairs. Lacks a library, lab, hall, fence, and internet.
- Positive Notes: Excellent water & sanitation: Reliable borehole, all flush toilets functional, always cleaned, with 21 basins, soap, and toilet paper. 2026 textbooks received.

School 3: NGWANE HIGH SCHOOL

Enrolment: 550 | Survey Date: 27 Jan 2026

- Priority Needs: Water, Classrooms, Toilets.
- Critical Issues: Intermittent water supply (tanks), insufficient for learners. 5 classrooms non-functional. Pit toilets, no hand-washing basins or soap. Broken windows/doors. Lacks a library, lab, computer centre, hall, fence, and internet. Overloaded scholar transport.
- Positive Notes: Has a sports field. Received recent upgrades in good condition.

School 4: UBONGUMENZI SECONDARY SCHOOL

Enrolment: 1,200 (Capacity: 2,000) | Survey Date: 27 Jan 2026

- Priority Needs: Water, Classrooms, Toilets.
- Critical Issues: 8 classrooms non-functional. 10 mobile classrooms. 5 broken pit toilets. No hand-washing basins, soap, or toilet paper. Leaking roofs, broken windows/doors. No internet.
- Positive Notes: Reliable borehole water. Has several key facilities: science lab, computer centre, sports field, hall, and perimeter fence. Stationery and textbooks received.

School 5: EKECABANGENI SECONDARY SCHOOL

Enrolment: 1,062 (Reported Capacity: 450) | Survey Date: 27 Jan 2026

- Priority Needs: Windows, Books, Doors, Chairs.
- Critical Issues: Extreme overcrowding suggested. Unclean water from vandalised rainwater tanks, supply insufficient. 5 classrooms non-functional. Pit toilets, no hand-washing basins, soap, or toilet paper. Broken windows/doors. 2026 textbooks not received.
- Positive Notes: Has internet, a science lab, sports field, and fence. NSNP funding specified (R10,500).

School 6: MACEBA SECONDARY SCHOOL

Enrolment: 1,042 (Reported Capacity: 480) | Survey Date: 28 Jan 2026

- Priority Needs: Windows, Books, Doors.
- Critical Issues: Extreme overcrowding suggested. Intermittent, unclean water from vandalized tanks. 4 mobile classrooms. 50 broken tables/chairs. Poor floor state. Pit toilets never cleaned, no basins, soap, or toilet paper. Leaking roofs, broken windows/doors. 2026 textbooks not received. No recent upgrades.
- Positive Notes: Has a library, hall, sports field, and fence. NSNP funding specified (R9,600).

School 7: IZICOLE HIGH SCHOOL

Enrolment: 260 (Capacity: 600) | Survey Date: 28 Jan 2026

- Priority Needs: Science Lab, Computer Lab, Library.
- Critical Issues: 6 classrooms are non-functional. Leaking roofs, broken windows/doors. Poor internet. No NSNP funding received (relies on food deliveries). Shortages of textbooks and stationery. Overloaded scholar transport.
- Positive Notes: Reliable borehole water. All toilets are accessible and cleaned daily. Has a perimeter fence and a library.

Thematic & Provincial Overview

A. Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

- Reliability: Only 3/7 schools have a consistent ("Always") water supply. 4 schools face intermittent or no water, relying on vulnerable systems like rainwater tanks.

- **Quality & Sufficiency:** 2 schools reported unclean water. 4 schools stated their water supply is insufficient for their learner population.
- **Sanitation:** Pit latrines are the most common type. A critical finding is the near-total absence of basic hygiene: 6 out of 7 schools have NO hand-washing facilities with soap at toilet blocks. 6 out of 7 schools lack a reliable toilet paper supply. This constitutes a major public health risk.
- **Maintenance:** Vandalism is repeatedly cited as the leading cause of broken water and sanitation facilities.

B. Learning Infrastructure & Environment

- **Overcrowding:** 6 schools are over capacity. The average over-enrolment for the 5 schools with plausible capacity figures is 22%.
- **Classroom Deficit:** 4 schools reported a total of 27 non-functional classrooms. Unfinished structures were not reported, but reliance on 16 mobile classrooms across 3 schools indicates a permanent stopgap solution.
- **Dilapidation:** Leaking roofs (5 schools), broken windows (6 schools), and broken doors (5 schools) are commonplace. Significant broken furniture was reported in 4 schools.
- **Lack of Facilities:** No school reported having all of the following functional facilities: science lab, library, computer centre, and hall. 0 out of 7 have a functional computer centre. 1 out of 7 has a functional science lab.

C. Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM)

- **Textbooks:** A severe shortage exists. 4 out of 7 schools had NOT received their 2026 textbooks, or reported they were insufficient.
- **Funding Model:** All schools are primarily funded by government norms. Parental contributions are minimal or non-existent. No school reported meaningful NGO/business donor funding. This creates a fragile financial base where unexpected repairs or costs cannot be met.

D. National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP)

- This is a relative strength. 6/7 schools reported receiving their first food delivery and that it was sufficient. However, Izicole High does not receive NSNP funding, and most schools reported past shortages affecting learners. No school offers a breakfast program.

E. Scholar Transport

Fragmented and Unsafe Transport Arrangements

The survey reveals that despite the existence of a KZN Learner Transport Policy that seeks to clarify the roles of the KZNDoE and KZNDoT in the provision of this transport, scholar transport is still managed through an unclear, fragmented system with responsibility split between the Department of Education, Department of Transport, School Governing Bodies, and schools themselves. No school reported a fully subsidised, state run transport system.

- Fully state subsidised transport: None of the 7 schools reported having a dedicated, government funded scholar transport system covering all eligible learners
- Partially subsidised or parent managed transport: All 7 schools rely on a mix of parental arrangements, private minibus taxis, and occasional departmental support
- Estimated learners affected across surveyed schools: Approximately 5,500 learners (based on total enrolment of approximately 5,500 across the 7 schools)

Overloading and Safety Concerns

Schools identified overloading as a critical and recurring safety issue. Learners are being transported in vehicles that carry more passengers than legally permitted.

- Ngwane High School reported that overloaded scholar transport is a concern. Vehicles frequently carry excess learners, increasing accident risk and compromising learner safety.
- Izicole High School also cited overloaded scholar transport as a priority issue requiring intervention.
- No school reported having formal safety measures in place, such as checking driver Professional Driving Permits, verifying vehicle roadworthiness, or maintaining driver registers.
- No school reported conducting regular overloading checks or coordinating with local transport authorities on enforcement.

Attendance and Punctuality Disruptions

Transport unreliability directly affects school attendance and academic punctuality, though specific data on strike-related disruptions was not reported in KZN.

- Learners arrive late or miss school entirely when transport arrangements break down, whether due to vehicle unavailability, cost barriers, or overloading delays.
- No school reported having a formal late arrival policy that accounts for transport disruptions. Learners are penalised for delays outside their control.
- Grade 12 learners are disproportionately affected, as early morning classes and exam sessions are most easily disrupted by late arrivals.

Management and Responsibility Gaps

The survey identified a critical lack of clarity on who is responsible for scholar transport provision, oversight, and funding.

- Responsibility is fragmented across the Department of Education, Department of Transport, School Governing Bodies, and schools themselves.
- No school reported a clear, written protocol for transport management, including routes, vehicle standards, driver qualifications, or emergency procedures.
- No school reported receiving dedicated departmental funding for scholar transport. Costs are borne by parents or schools themselves, diverting resources from other priorities.

Conclusion

The 2026 School Readiness Survey reveals that learners in these KZN schools are trying to learn in environments that fail to meet the most basic standards of safety, health, and dignity. The systemic nature of these failures, from water and toilets to classrooms and textbooks, demands urgent, coordinated provincial intervention.

The right to basic education is being fundamentally compromised by the state of school infrastructure in KZN. These conditions are not merely inconvenient; they actively undermine learning, health, and equality.

CONCLUSION

124. The evidence presented throughout this submission demonstrates that the challenges confronting education in KwaZulu-Natal cannot be understood as isolated administrative failures. They are symptoms of a structural funding crisis that has progressively weakened the state's ability to provide quality public education.
125. Learners are experiencing this crisis every day through overcrowded classrooms, deteriorating infrastructure, shortages of teachers, inadequate learning materials, and unreliable learner transport. At the same time, the Department itself acknowledges substantial funding shortfalls that cannot be resolved through existing financial recovery measures alone.
126. The Portfolio Committee on Finance now has an obligation to ensure that the provincial budget reflects the constitutional priority accorded to basic education. Approving a budget that knowingly entrenches these shortcomings would amount to endorsing further retrogression in the realisation of learners' rights.
127. Equal Education therefore respectfully requests that the Committee reject the Appropriation Bill in its current form, require revised allocations for basic education, strengthen oversight of implementation, and ensure that the final budget places the rights and dignity of learners at the centre of provincial decision-making.

END