SPEECH

THE ROLE SCHOOLS AND STAKEHOLDERS CAN PLAY IN REDUCING TEENAGE PREGNANCY: KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY GAUTENG EDUCATION MEC: BARBARA CREECY

12 March 2013, Turffontein Racecourse

Hourable Members of the Provincial Legislature;
Head of the Department: Boy Ngobeni;
Associations of School Governing Bodies;
Chairpersons of School Governing Bodies;
School Principals; and
Distinguished guests

Few issues have so divided politicians, policymakers, education officials, school governing bodies, principals, teachers, learners and the public as what to do about teenage pregnancy.

Teenage pregnancy changes a teenagers' life forever. Unfortunately as we all know, this change is seldom in a positive direction. Younger mothers and their babies face greater health risks. In the educational sphere we remain concerned about valuable learning time lost and the ever present threat that the new responsibilities of motherhood may mean some give up their own education for their child. Consequently young mothers miss out on their own development and often shelve educational and career dreams until later in life. Unfortunately, with the best intentions, this will impact on the way they raise their children who will themselves face a greater risk of performing poorly at school.

There are many contributory factors related to the incidence of teenage pregnancy: the fact that in many communities girls are brought up to be submissive to their male counterparts means they are often vulnerable in teenage relationships.

They may agree to engage in early sexual encounters because they fear losing the relationship, they may not be able to negotiate the use of contraception and in some instances they are the victims of rape. We know that girls without loving families of their own are more vulnerable to early sexual encounters.

We also know that girls whose own mothers are victims of abusive relationships are themselves more vulnerable to rape and
abuse. We also know that social prejudice means that sexually active teenagers often have inadequate access to contraceptives or family planning clinics and the accessing of child care grants. We also suspect, based on substantial international research, that girls are less likely to engage in risky sexual practices or become teenage mothers if they have meaningful opportunities to finish school and advance their own careers.

In this sense, it is a well-established fact that being in school and completing school has itself played a major role in reducing learner pregnancy.

One of the primary policy objectives of this government since 1994 has been to achieve gender parity in basic education. This policy has been so successful that girls now make up the majority of enrolments in secondary schools. In 2013 there are 398 472 girl learners in Gauteng secondary schools which represents 51% of the secondary school learner population. Our major concern is that schoolgirl pregnancy undermines the Department’s efforts to ensure that girl children remain in school until matric and leave with a better chance of success in adult life.

**How widespread is this problem in Gauteng?**

The latest official statistics from the Department of Health show the teenage pregnancy rate decreased by 13.2 percent between 2009 and 2010, nationally.

In the DBE commissioned report “Teenage pregnancy in South Africa – with a specific focus on school going learners” highlight that learner pregnancy rates per province between 2004 and 2008, shows that Gauteng has the lowest number of pregnancy per 1000 registered learners.

Gauteng EMIS data shows a decrease in the pregnancy rate from 0.5 percent in 2008 (2009 Annual School Survey) to 0.4 percent in 2011 (2012 Annual School Survey). This is a 20% improvement in reducing the incidence of pregnancies amongst children of school going age.
Despite the reported decline in teenage fertility rates, the Department seeks to strengthen efforts towards addressing this challenge. To this end, the Gauteng Department of Education introduced various intervention programmes to increase access to quality education, and improve learner behaviour through life-skills programmes as well as HIV and AIDS programmes in schools. The healthy living curriculum programmes have been incorporated in the school curriculum to raise learner awareness and deal with change behaviour amongst learners. To ensure that girl learners do not fall victim to early pregnancies, government has put into place a number of mechanisms and programmes to educate all children on reproductive health.

**In respect of statutory provisions**

In a rights-based society, young girls who fall pregnant should not be denied access to education and this is entrenched in law through the Constitution and Schools Act of 1996.

In 2007, the Department of Education released Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy. The guidelines continue to advocate for the right of pregnant girls to remain in school.

**In respect of curricular programmes**

The Life Skills Programme has been implemented in schools since 1998 and outside of the school there are clinics, television, radio and internet which also provide information about HIV and AIDS and pregnancy. Life Skills deals with the holistic development of the learner throughout childhood. It equips learners with knowledge, skills and values that assist them to achieve their full physical, intellectual, personal, emotional and social potential. The subject encourages learners to acquire and practice life skills that will assist them to become independent and effective in responding to life’s challenges. The subject aims to develop learners through three different, but interrelated study areas, that is, Personal and Social Well-being, Physical Education and Creative Arts.

Learner pregnancy and HIV and AIDS is covered in the Personal and Social Well-being component of the subject. In a Behavioural

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2011</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Pregnant</td>
<td>4,874</td>
<td>4,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Female</td>
<td>953.17</td>
<td>1,040.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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Surveillance Survey conducted for youth in school (aged 15-24) in Gauteng in 2007, it was revealed that over 8 out 10 learners had learnt lifeskills through the Life Skills Programme through topics such as self-esteem, decision making, sexuality, sexual abuse, HIV prevention as well as contraception and unwanted pregnancies at school.

In respect of co-curricular programmes

In addition to these interventions, the Department increased curriculum interventions in the form of the Secondary School Intervention Programme (SSIP) to maximise the opportunities for learners to do well in Grade 12 in all critical subjects; and career guidance and family support programmes whereby parents are guided on various strategies to support their own children to perform their educational activities effectively.

In respect of education support programmes

In addition, the Department further introduced poverty intervention programmes to increase opportunities for learners to succeed in life and acquire relevant skills to make meaningful contributions in the socio-economic development of the country. These interventions include scholar transport to deserving learners, free schooling, exemption from paying school fees, and expansion of providing a nutritious meal to secondary schools.

In respect of the Second Chance Programme

The Department provides a number of opportunities for learners to complete their schooling. Increasingly more learners return to the schools they attended to complete their studies, and schools are encouraged to accept these learners. Where learners are two years older than the age/grade norm, they attend Adult Education and Training (AET) centres to complete their schooling. And where parents choose to not send the learners to mainstream schools, these parents have exercised their rights by enrolling learners in the five hospital schools throughout the province.

In respect of Career Counselling

To encourage learners to attend school by teaching them the value of education, we trained and deployed 600 lay counsellors at schools to provide career guidance to learners. A total of 120 000 Grade 9 learners benefited from career exhibitions conducted in all districts. In order to improve the transition from school to further education or the world of work, the Department organised school-based career counselling through office-based psychologists. We conducted psychometric testing to support Grade 9 learners in high-risk communities to identify career paths that match their personalities and attributes in order to ensure that learners select the correct combination of subjects in grades 10, 11 and 12.
In respect of the HIV/AIDS Grant

The Department is implementing the Life Skills: HIV/AIDS Sexuality Programme in schools. The Life Skills programme focuses mainly on Sexuality Health Education and extra-curricular activities that assist children and youth with coping with the impact of HIV and AIDS.

We have implemented peer group education programmes that focus on addressing the challenges that learners face with regard to the pandemic. These are the following:

- Boy Education Movements (BEMs)
- Girl Education Movements (GEMs)
- Partnerships with Soul City Youth programmes, and
- Youth camps

However, we are mindful of the fact that addressing teenage pregnancy is not a challenge facing only one department. Addressing teenage pregnancy is a battle that requires the active involvement of all stakeholders, if it is to be well fought. These stakeholders include other government departments, key organisations in the non-governmental sector; the research community, the religious sector, community leaders and more importantly, parents and the learners themselves. It is for this reason that we invite all stakeholders to engage with the presentations today, and draw from it that which can assist them to respond better to the challenges in their respective schools and sectors.

We must develop a holistic community-based approach with the school as a key component to the strategy. The key pillars that positively affect teenage pregnancy prevention should include:

1. Involving families
2. Strengthening academic skills and opportunities
3. Providing employment counselling and job search support
4. Involving young people in their communities (i.e. volunteer, advocacy, peer training)
5. Involving the community in expanding life options for youth (i.e. network with community organisations)

It appears that campaigns against teenage pregnancy in South Africa are starting to bear fruit but today we are looking at what more can we do in schools and across our communities. We invite each and every one of you here today to join us in this important dialogue to ensure we work more effectively together in schools and in the community. Our common goal is to ensure that fewer and fewer young women face the responsibilities of parenthood before they have completed their own education, have found a decent income and they are in a position to
raise their children in the relative security of adulthood.

For more information contact the Gauteng Department of Education’s Head of Communication, Charles Phahlane on 011 355 1530 or 071 860 4496.

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