

**Media Release:
Minister of Education Donald Grant
Western Cape**

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MEDIA RELEASE: NUMBER OF NO-FEE SCHOOLS TO INCREASE IN 2014

Every year, thousands of parents at fee paying public schools either fail to pay their school fees or have to apply for fee exemption.

The reality is that we are living in tough economic times, and in this kind of climate, many parents simply cannot afford to pay their school fees. This ultimately affects some schools' income and places a burden on the school management to find the funds necessary to pay for services, equipment and materials.

In order to assist these schools the WCED has supported initiatives that compensate schools for exempted school fees. We have also increased the norms and standards funding for many of our fee-paying schools beyond the amounts prescribed in the Norms and Standards. These funds have helped at least some schools most in need with the financial challenges that they face.

Despite these initiatives the Department continues to receive numerous pleas from schools regarding the nationally prescribed quintile system. Many schools believe that they have been ranked inappropriately and have asked for their Quintile status to be changed.

The WCED cannot easily change the Quintile status of any school as we have to remain within the poverty percentages per quintile as prescribed by the Minister for Basic Education.

I have therefore lobbied the Minister Angie Motshekga to have this system reviewed on a number of occasions. We are pleased that the National Minister has taken this into consideration. Last month, in a briefing in Parliament, Minister Motshekga announced that the Department was planning to do away with the quintile system in favour of a two-category system.

The details of this system are not yet clear and progress in this regard has been slow. Therefore, until changes to the current quintile system become a reality, the Western Cape Government is determined to find ways in which to assist our schools serving poorer communities.

Steps to alleviate the funding challenges of a number of fee-paying schools in the Western Cape.

1. Increase in the number of no-fee schools

Today I am delighted to announce that the Western Cape Education Department plans to increase the number of no-fee schools in the province in 2014.

These steps will significantly alleviate the funding challenges of many of our fee-paying schools serving poorer communities and will reduce the heavy burden of trying to obtain and collect school fees.

While it is difficult for the WCED to change the Quintile status of a school, the provincial Minister of Education may declare additional schools as no-fee schools in terms of Section 39 (13) of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996), after consultation with the relevant school governing bodies.

The WCED has therefore offered more than 200 schools in Quintiles 4 and 5 the opportunity of applying to become no-fee schools from 1 January 2014.

This opportunity has been given to schools that currently charge annual school fees of R400 or less.

Essentially, this offer means that parents at over 200 schools accommodating nearly 170 000 learners could opt for their schools to become no-fee schools and will therefore now not have to pay school fees. They will also not have to apply for exemption from paying these fees.

The WCED has set aside allocations that will cost the WCED R19 million for the remainder of the 2013/14 financial year and R46 million in 2014/15.

The schools concerned will still remain in their current quintile ranking and will be required to prepare budgets in line with Section 38 of the SASA and to keep records of funds received and spent in terms of Section 42 of the Act.

Parents will have to agree to the application for no-fee status at a meeting held according to Sections 38 (2) and 39(1) of the SASA. The identified schools have to apply in writing for this status.

Schools will be requested to inform the Department of their decision by the 31st of October 2013.

The department will consider offering more schools this opportunity in future as funds become available.

2. Top-ups for additional schools

In addition to the proposal made above, the WCED will also be offering funding top-ups to selected quintile 4 and 5 schools that have not been selected at this stage to apply to become a no-fee school.

These schools will still qualify to receive top-up funding to 100% of the no-fee threshold amount if the sum of the school fees charged and the norms and standards funding allocated is less than

the no-fee threshold amount of R1 059 per learner for 2014-2015. These schools may also apply for compensation for school fee exemptions granted.

Once again, the additional financial support given to these schools can be of the upmost importance in improving resources for learning and teaching.

Conclusion:

A circular has been sent to all schools in the province informing them of these new initiatives. The schools directly affected will be notified during the course of the week and be given time in which to make their decision.

We are very excited about these initiatives to help some of our schools serving poorer learners that have been categorised in poverty quintiles 4 and 5.

We believe that this step will produce a positive reaction from these schools, and I am sure, an even greater reaction from parents who struggle to pay school fees.