

5 July 2010

Minister of Basic Education Ms Angie Motshekga

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### **Equal Education Campaign for School Libraries – Request for Meeting**

Dear Minister Motshekga,

Your Response to Equal Education's Memorandum refers:

Equal Education would like to thank you for your letter, dated 1 May 2010, in response to our Memorandum which, inter alia, demanded that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) adopt a National Policy and implementation plan that will provide for functioning school libraries and trained librarians for all public schools in South Africa.

Equal Education would like to thank you for the detail in your response. There is much we appreciate in your response. We note particularly your acknowledgment of:

- “[T]he critical role that school libraries and information services play in developing a culture of reading; information literacy; providing access to much needed information; and providing safe spaces to study for young people.”
- “[The] lack of centralised school libraries in public schools across the country.”

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Registered S10(1)(cN) and S18A(1)(a) Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) (Exemption Number 930 027 221)

Registered Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) (Registration Number 068-288-NPO)

**Equal Education Board:** Prof Crain Soudien, Zackie Achmat, Dr Peliwe Lolwana, Prof Paula Ensor, Moses Masitha, Nathan Geffen, Ntombesizwe Mkonto, Doron Isaacs

**Campaign for School Libraries Advisory Committee:** Prof. Genevieve Hart (UWC); Peter Henshall; Prof. Mary Nassimbeni (UCT); Nkosinathi Mahala (Khayelitsha Librarian); Khosi Mabandla (WCED); Rose Damon (WCED)

**Patrons of the Campaign:** Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Dr Mamphela Ramphele, Lebo Mashile, Sindiwe Magona, Gcina Mhlophe, Nadine Gordimer, Dean Rowan Smith, Simpfiwe Dana, Hip Hop Pantsula, Prof Mary Metcalfe, Vuyiseka Dubula, Graeme Bloch, Elinor Sisulu

- “[The fact] that availability of school library and information services is critical to the effective delivery of the curriculum.”
- “[T]he fact that access to books enhances literacy levels.”
- “[T]hat learners who achieve at higher levels have invariably come from a well-resourced school infrastructure which includes electricity, sanitation, playgrounds, equipment and access to books and resources.”

We are encouraged by the gazetting, on 10 June 2010, of the *National Policy on an Equitable Provision of an Enabling School Physical Teaching and Learning Environment*, through which “...the department will realise the provision of all essential spaces and facilities, including centralised school libraries;” This demonstrates that the DBE is seeking to address the backlogs in school infrastructure, which includes the provision of school libraries. The adoption of this policy marks a clear break from the omissions of the past, where no such policy existed despite the dire need for one.

We also commend the DBE for your commitment to develop the following, which you mention in your letter:

- *The Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure*;
- *The National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services*;
- A strategy to accelerate the delivery of schools infrastructure, and for securing an additional R2bn for the next two financial years to address the infrastructure backlog.

Notwithstanding the above, we kindly request clarity and elaboration on a few issues relevant to these documents.

1. The *National Policy for an Equitable Provision of an Enabling School Physical Teaching and Learning Environment* does not provide for the establishment of librarian posts. Will the *National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services* establish school librarian posts, or will this be done through another policy?

2. With regard to “classroom libraries” and norms and standards:

- 2.1 Please can you briefly define what a classroom library/classroom collection consists of?
- 2.2 As noted, your letter speaks of “the provision of all essential spaces and facilities, including centralized libraries”. Furthermore, you state that “all new schools will have a centralized library”. This seems to indicate that the centralised library model is, as it should be, the preferred and optimum model. However, you later speak about “the roll-out of classroom libraries”. This is



contradictory. Why should this model (centralised school libraries) only apply to new schools and not to all schools?

- 2.3 We support the idea that foundation phase classrooms should have ready access to readers, and that all classrooms should be text-rich. Our concern is that books and materials in classrooms tend not to last because no proper system of organisation exists. A centralised library, with a full-time library administrator is more successful at providing regular and ongoing access to reading materials. Are classroom libraries seen as a step towards centralized libraries? How and when will centralized libraries be introduced?

We would appreciate your written response to the issues raised above, but also wish to make a further request to send a delegation of representatives from Equal Education to meet with you in order to discuss these issues further.

Minister, we thank you once again for the concern you are showing to this issue.

Sincerely,



Zackie Achmat Yoliswa Dwane Doron Isaacs Dmitri Holtzman (PP) Ntombosizwe Mkonto

