

**Address by Her Worship, the Executive Mayor of Mopani District Municipality, Cllr Nkakareng Rakgoale on the occasion of the 2018 NCS Excellence Awards, held at Karibu Leisure Resort in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality on Friday, 18 January 2019.**

**Programme Director;**

**Mayor of Greater Tzaneen Municipality, Cllr Maripe Mangena;**

**All mayors present here**

**Speakers and Chief Whips present here;**

**Members of the Mayoral Committee;**

**All Councillors from District and Local Municipalities;**

**Traditional leaders present here;**

**Officials from our District Municipality;**

**District Head for the Department of Education**

**Best performing learners in our district, and their families present here;**

**Principals and educators**

**Organized labour within the Department of Education**

**Representatives of the school governing bodies**

**Leadership of the COSSAS**

**Members of the media**

## **And all invited guests**

Good morning

We gather here today to celebrate excellence amongst our top achievers for 2018. Allow me to start by reading a quote from one of the most celebrated sports personalities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the late Muhammad Ali, when he said, I quote: **“The fight is won or lost far away from witnesses – behind the lines, in the gym, and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights.”**

As we celebrate with you today, we are aware that the hard work did not start when you set behind the desks for the National Senior Certificate exams in October last year. Your presence here is the culmination of the hard work and the extra hours you have put in the past few years, and you are very deserving to be here, and we are equally proud to celebrate your achievements with you.

Ladies and gentlemen

Education has been the apex priority of the democratically elected government over the past years, and our focus now is on improving the quality of basic education. The fifth democratic administration has recorded significant gains, especially around our performance in the National Senior Certificate exams as a country, but also as a province.

We are happy that the province has been recording improvement in the National Senior Certificate over the past few years. In 2017, we were at 65,6% pass rate which was an increase of 3,1 percent from the 2016 results. We registered 69.4% in 2018 which is an increase of two percent from the previous year. What also gives us comfort is that we are amongst the top provinces with the highest percentage of bachelor passes.

We have also seen that most of our “no-fee” schools have produced more distinctions than the fee-paying schools, which proves that hard work pays off even those in our previously disadvantaged communities.

We are aware of the challenges that remain, as inequality still exist between our rural and urban schools. Many of you have had to defy the odds to be here today. As we celebrate your achievements here today, we also need to remind each other of the journey we have travelled as a country since 1994, especially as it relates to our efforts of improving the quality of our basic education and the education system in general. Our ultimate goal is to create an education system that provides equal opportunities for all South Africans, black, Indian, coloured and white.

There are those within our societies who still believe that whites and black kids can't be in the same class, like we have seen with the incident of the picture that went viral from Laerskool Schweizer-

Reneke in the North West Province. We need to isolate and shame those who still perpetuate racial segregation within our communities.

Ours is to teach our kids to grow up loving their country, just like our freedom fighters did. Mandela, Tambo and Mama Winnie loved this country so much hence they were prepared to surrender even their own lives in exchange for the creation of a rainbow nation. We must fight for a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, united and prosperous South Africa by continuing to inculcate the values of love to our learners at an early age.

We have made significant strides to cater for the needs of our previously disadvantaged communities. We have made scholar transport available in the rural areas and our learners are no longer walking land distances to receive education. Our school nutrition programme is running very well at schools across the district and the province at large. Government is also investing on programmes around Early Childhood Development.

Programme Director

The ANC-led government is implementing free higher education as envisaged in the Freedom Charter, which says that the **“The doors of learning and of culture shall be opened.”** The Freedom Charter also states that **“Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; higher education and technical training shall**

**be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit.”**

All new first year students from families that earn a combined income of less than three-hundred – and -fifty thousand (R350 000) per year benefit from the government-funded student assistance fund - NSFAS. Indeed, we have seen that happening at various institutions of higher learning from last year. More and more of our young people from African households have access to higher education. We are aware that the three-hundred – and -fifty thousand bracket still leaves majority of the working class children outside. However, what we need to appreciate is the posture and the commitment from the ANC-led government to deliver free education at all levels.

We have as a district municipality set aside a budget of two million seven hundred thousand rand from our budget to assist learners who are academically deserving from the district. The advert went out late last year, and a panel will sit soon to adjudicate on the applications. Some of our local municipalities also have funds to assist learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, where we are giving them start-ups to their lives at institutions of higher learning.

We have entered into an agreement with the SADC Business Forum, and part of our partnership on the roll out of the Techno-tainer’s project in rural areas.

The plan is to install Wi-Fi hotspot containers in all the offices of our royal councils across the district, which shall enable our communities easy access to internet connectivity. This programme will assist our learners from rural areas to do their research.

Ladies and Gentlemen, particularly to our prospective students for this academic year.

I want to take this opportunity to implore you to go out there and explore your potential to the fullest. I also know that some of you may not necessarily have been the most intelligent, smartest or naturally gifted in your classes, but it was hard work that saw you through. Muhammad Ali says, and I quote **“Champions are made from something they have deep inside them – a desire, a dream, a vision. They have to have last-minute stamina, they have to be a little faster, they have to have the skill and the will. But the will must be stronger than the skill.”**

We are faced with the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality and education is at the centre of our solutions to this challenges.

But we are saying to our learners here today, do not be deterred by the number of people without jobs. Reality is that when you have a tertiary qualification, you have improved your chances of finding a job. The more qualifications you have, the greater the chances. But most importantly when you have a degree or a national diploma you

have a greater chance of earning a higher income than someone with just a Grade 12 certificate.

Our economy is not growing as we had envisaged when adopting the National Development Plan, and may not be able to create enough jobs for our people. While I know that you have already applied your minds on what career paths you shall be pursuing this year, I do hope that you shall be choosing courses or careers that will prepare you, extensively for more than one occupation. It would even be better if you can be choosing careers that will prepare you to be your own employers.

Upon completion of your studies in various universities and TVET colleges, you should be armed with the skills and knowledge to meet the present and future needs of the economy as per the expectations of the NDP.

To our Principals and Educators

As the political leadership in the district, we respect and acknowledge the great strides that are being made by school principals and teachers despite all the challenges we are facing at some schools. We are aware of the extra parental roles you play to these learners. Some of you sacrifice so much of your time for the good of these learners. We celebrate with you today, because we

know how much you value your work, and your commitment to building a better future for our children.

The National Development Plan places a particular emphasis on the importance of building the competency and capacity of school principals, because the common feature of all well-run schools is leadership.

We are urging you to take up the various capacity building programmes initiated by the department. But also of importance is for you to enrol for other leadership courses at your own personal capacity. We can't always wait for the department to initiate capacity building programme for us. You have been given a responsibility to lead, and leading means taking responsibility also for your own personal development.

Programme director

We are happy that we have not had too much disruptions of teaching and learning in our schools in the previous academic year. Our ward councillors working with school governing bodies and other relevant stakeholders must promote community ownership of schools and other public infrastructure.

It can't be that when a community is unhappy about shortage of water, they resort to burning schools or disrupt schooling. School building should be sacred, and respected by everyone in



communities. It must be communities that care for our school infrastructure.

We are also saying that we need to involve all stakeholders to tackle the challenges of substance abuse in our schools, as well as teenage pregnancy. Let us work closely with both the department of health and the department of social development for campaigns against substance abuse and teenage.

Our communities must maintain closer contact with the school and create a safe environment for learners this year. We may even need to strength community policing forums and form street committees to ensure that our learners who go to school in the early hours of the morning feel safe on our streets. The responsibility to create a safer environment for our children resides with us as communities, and we can't relegate it elsewhere.

Programme director

We are going to the general elections in the next few months, and the IEC has announced dates for final registration weekend which is the 26 and 27 January 2019. We are therefore appealing to all eligible voters to go and register to vote in the upcoming national elections. Those of you who have not updated your addresses on

the voters roll, must also do so. Elections are important in safeguarding our democracy.

The first democratic elections on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 1994, gave birth to our constitutional democracy. For the majority of South Africans who had never voted before their dignity was restored and the country transformed to a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society. We can't undermine the significance of that breakthrough, and then becomes important for us to appreciate the importance of participating in elections. Many countries have collapsed in Africa because of elections won through the barrel of a gun, and South Africa remains a shining example of what a constitutional democracy is.

Let us use this opportunity to exercise our democratic rights, which Madiba, Mama Sisulu, Mark Shope, Sharlotte Maxeke, Oliver Tambo and others have spent their entire lives fighting for. We must appreciate and defend with all our might the right to vote for our preferred government.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate our top achievers from the 2018 National Senior Certificate exams, and wish all of you a productive 2019 – the Year of united action.

God bless you, and may God bless the people of Mopani.

Ke a lebogaHa khensa Thank you