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*Racial Equality
in Education:
How Far Has South
Africa Come?*

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Abstract

A major task of South Africa's new government in 1994 was to promote racial equity in the state education system. This paper evaluates progress toward this goal using three distinct concepts: equal treatment, equal educational opportunity, and educational adequacy. The authors find that the country has succeeded in establishing racial equity defined as equal treatment, primarily through race-blind policies for allocating state funds for schools. Progress measured by the other two criteria, however, has been constrained by the legacy of apartheid, including poor facilities and lack of human capacity in schools serving black students, and by policies such as school fees. The paper concludes with some thoughts on the future outlook.

Keywords: Education reform, racial equality, South Africa

Racial Equity in Education: How Far Has South Africa Come?

Edward B. Fiske and Helen F. Ladd

A major task of the new democratic government that assumed power in South Africa in 1994 was to promote racial equity in the state education system. This was no small feat.

During the apartheid era, which began when the National Party won control of Parliament in 1948 and ended with a negotiated settlement more than four decades later, the provision of education was racially unequal by design. Resources were lavished on schools serving white students while schools serving the black majority were systematically deprived of qualified teachers, physical resources and teaching aids such as textbooks and stationary. The rationale for such inequity was a matter of public record. Blacks were given poor education so as to keep them out of the modern sector of the economy and to ensure a steady supply of cheap labor, particularly for the agricultural, mining and domestic service sectors. As Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, a principal architect of apartheid, had asked rhetorically when he was Minister of Native Affairs, "What is the use of teaching a Bantu child mathematics when it (sic) cannot use it in practice?"¹

The government that won South Africa's first fully democratic elections in 1994 took office with a mandate to reverse policies of overt racial inequity in education as well as in all other sectors of society. The country's new constitution, adopted in interim form in 1993 and in final form in 1996, stated specifically that "everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law." It defined equality as including "the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms," and it explicitly named education among such rights.²

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate how the new government, consistent with this constitutional mandate, went about promoting racial equity in education in the post-apartheid period. In doing so we identify three separate ways of thinking about equity: equal treatment, equal educational opportunity, and educational adequacy. These three concepts have developed out of a rich philosophical tradition and are well recognized in the international literature on education reform. Although the South African education reform has not always been discussed in these terms, they are useful for analyzing the country's progress toward racial equity in education.

In the following sections, we examine the progress toward each of these equity standards using aggregate data for all nine provinces and school level data for two of the country's nine provinces, Western Cape and Eastern Cape. To be sure, each province has its own racial history and other distinctive characteristics, and no province can fully represent all nine provinces. Nonetheless, these two provinces are of interest because they

¹ Jansen (1990, p. 200).

² South African Constitution, chap. 2, sec. 9 (2) and sec. 29 (1).

represent two extremes. Western Cape is one of the country's two wealthiest provinces and from the outset has benefited from strong institutions, including governing structures, schools and universities, established during the apartheid era. By contrast, Eastern Cape is one of the two poorest provinces and was constructed out of two former homelands where such institutions were barely functional prior to 1994.

Our discussion distinguishes students based on the four racial categories used in South Africa during the apartheid period: African, coloured, Indian and white. We use the term "black" to refer collectively to the three nonwhite groups. Africans, who accounted for about 78 percent of the population in 2001, are descendants of the original inhabitants of the southern tip of Africa, including the Khoikhoi and San peoples.³ Coloured persons (about 9 percent) are either of mixed race or descendants of slaves imported by Dutch settlers from Indonesia, Malaya, Indo-China or elsewhere in Africa. Indians (2.5 percent) were initially brought to the country as indentured servants to work on British sugar plantations. White South Africans (10 percent) fall into two general categories: English speakers whose ancestors came from England and Afrikaans speakers of Dutch descent. It was the latter group, called Afrikaners, (which means "people of Africa" in Dutch) who gained control of the government in 1948 and established the apartheid system that permeated all aspects of South African life.

I. Equal Treatment

Equal treatment, which can also be described as "race blindness," means that no one should be treated differently simply because of his or her race. A racially equitable education system would be one in which race played no explicit role in how the system is organized or in decisions made by any of its officials. In a country such as South Africa, with its long history of discrimination against blacks, one can easily understand the appeal of race-blind treatment as an equity standard for education.

Education under apartheid was the antithesis of race blind. There were 15 distinct departments of education, each serving different racially defined groups of students. Separate departments operated schools for each of the four main racial groups living in urban areas, while additional departments operated schools for Africans in each of the ten homelands. The 15th department was a national department that oversaw this complex system but operated no schools. For most of the apartheid period students in each of the four socially constructed racial groups were restricted to attending schools, and also institutions of higher education, operated by the relevant department of education.

Not only were the education systems racially differentiated, they were also differentially funded. At the peak of apartheid, schools serving white students had more than ten times the funding per pupil than the schools serving African students. Even as late as 1994, after the National government had significantly increased spending on black students during the waning years of apartheid, the amount spent per pupil in white schools was more than two and a half times that spent on behalf of black students in the

³ The population percentages are from South African Institute of Race Relations (2001), p. 124.

urban townships and three-and-a half times the spending on Africans in the homelands. In addition, the white schools enjoyed teachers of far higher quality and far superior facilities. It is fair to say, that the education of most blacks – and Africans in particular – was extremely impoverished.

Progress toward equal treatment

After the 1994 election the new black-controlled government moved quickly toward race-blind policies in both the structure and funding of public education. The first step was to abolish the network of racially defined departments of education and replace them with a single non-racial national system. The new intergovernmental system included nine newly established provinces that shared responsibility for primary and secondary schools with the national government. Responsibility for higher education was assigned exclusively to the national government.

Under the new cooperative arrangement, the national government took responsibility for raising revenue and distributing “equitable share” grants to the nine provinces as lump sum grants. Each of the provincial legislatures was then free to allocate the funds among education, health, and social welfare services as it saw fit.

This funding mechanism allowed South Africa to avoid one of the major potential disadvantages of delivering education at a subnational level. Because of their historical patterns of racial and economic development, some provinces would inevitably have had much greater revenue-raising capacity, and, hence, ability to spend, than others. For example, wealthy provinces such as Western Cape in the south, which includes the city of Cape Town, and Gauteng in the heartland, which includes both Pretoria and Johannesburg, would have been able to spend far more than provinces such as Eastern Cape and Limpopo, both of which were formed in part from the impoverished rural homelands for Africans. Instead the funds that were raised at the national level were distributed among the provinces in a race-blind and equalizing manner based on demographic factors including the number of pupils.

In addition, the national government, in consultation with various provincial representatives, was given responsibility for setting national norms and standards related to the distribution of teacher slots and of nonpersonnel spending across schools within provinces. In no cases were any of the new norms explicitly differentiated by the race of a school's students in a school. The one program with progressive funding – national norms and standards - was designed to infuse relatively more funds into poor schools. Salary schedules were negotiated at the national level and were applied uniformly to all teachers regardless of their race.

Thus, since racial considerations were explicitly removed from all the new education policies, it is fair to say that equity defined as race-blindness has been achieved at the policy level. That need not mean, however, that students of all races have equal access in practice to whatever school they might like or that all schools have comparable resources at their disposal.

Lingering inequality by race in access and school funding

Access to schools was made race blind through a provision that schools could not discriminate in their admissions policy against any student based on his or her race. Though equal access exists in principle, however, most African learners are still in African schools. A national study found that, as of 1997, 96 percent of African learners were still in “mainly African schools” in which close to 100 percent of the students were African.⁴ Given that Africans account for the vast majority percent of all students, any other outcome would be surprising.

This pattern reflects the legacies of apartheid. The vast majority of African students continue to live in rural areas where they have access only to the schools formerly managed by the homeland departments of education. Likewise, most African and coloured students in urban areas continue to live in townships which are geographically or otherwise isolated from other parts of the urban area, and their families remain poor. In urban areas the combination of transportation costs and school fees keep all except middle class blacks and coloureds in the schools to which they were restricted under apartheid.

Our analysis of the 2001 enrollment patterns in Western Cape and Eastern Cape illustrates these patterns. In Western Cape primary schools, African learners continued to account for nearly 100 percent of the enrollment in the former Department of Education and Training schools (those operated for Africans under apartheid); coloured learners accounted for 93 percent of the students in the former House of Representatives schools (those operated for coloureds); and white students accounted for 66 percent of the students in the former white schools. Thus, about one in three students in the former white schools was black, with the majority of them being coloured rather than African. Similar patterns emerge at the secondary level.⁵

In Eastern Cape, we found similar concentrations of African students, this time in the former homeland schools in Ciskei and Transkei, and a somewhat smaller proportion – 55 percent rather than 65 percent – of white students in the formerly white schools.⁶ Given that some of the former white schools now serve almost all black students, however, this figure means that the typical white student in the Eastern Cape was likely to be in a school with a proportion of white students far higher than 56 percent.

In sum, white students still attend schools with disproportionate shares of white students, and most black students still attend virtually all black schools. The movement from race-based to race-blind policies with respect to admissions, while symbolically important for all students and practically important for many middle class black students, has had little effect on the schooling opportunities for the large majority of African students in South Africa.

⁴ van der Berg (2001).

⁵ Fiske and Ladd (2004), Table 5-1, p. 89.

⁶ Fiske and Ladd (2004). Table 5-3, p. 91.

Given that black make up such an overwhelming majority of the overall student population, it is unrealistic to expect substantial proportions of blacks to find themselves in racially integrated schools with white students. For most black students, the key issue is the extent to which the new policy of race-blind funding of schools has led to more equal public resources in the schools they attend relative to the resources available to students in the formerly white schools.

Data on public spending per learner show that great progress was made between 1995 and 2001 in equalizing public spending across the country's nine new provinces. Average per learner spending relative to the national average declined precipitously in formerly high spending provinces, especially Western Cape, while it increased in low-spending – and heavily African – provinces such as Eastern Cape and Limpopo. During this period the variation across provinces, expressed relative to average spending, fell by more than 40 percent and, because of the phasing in of the funding policies, has since decreased even further.⁷ Nevertheless, disparities remain. In 2001, average per learner spending in Gauteng exceeded the national average by 42 percent and spending in Western Cape exceeded the average by 30 percent. By contrast, spending in Eastern Cape and Limpopo fell short of the national average by 25 percent or more.⁸

Thanks to the national norms for teacher allocations and for nonpersonnel spending, significant progress has also been made in equalizing public resources across schools serving students of different races within provinces. Although disparities across the groups remain – largely in terms of the qualifications of the teachers – public spending for black students within provinces is now far more similar to that for students in formerly white schools than was the case at the end of the apartheid era. We document this conclusion for schools in Western Cape in Table 1 which groups schools by the department that operated them during the apartheid period.⁹ Thus the headings, African, coloured and white, refer to the races of the students served by those schools in the past. As we noted above, however, those designations still signify the race of the majority of the students in each type of school: African schools continue to serve African students almost exclusively, formerly coloured schools serve mainly coloured students, and formerly white schools now serve a mix of white and black students, with whites still accounting for the majority.

Of most interest here is the top row of table 1 that shows how public spending per learner varied across schools grouped by their former departments in 2001. As indicated by the numbers in square brackets, 2001 spending on behalf of students in the formerly white schools was about 28 percent higher than that for students in the formerly African schools and about 6-7 percent higher than that for students in formerly coloured

⁷ Wildeman, 2003.

⁸ Based on data from the Department of Education and the Department of Finance reported in Perry (2000), table 2.

⁹ Schools that were established after 1994 are grouped with the department that would have operated them in the past. Also note that the table excludes Indian schools since there were so few of them. However, the teachers and students in those schools are included in the totals.

schools. The lower spending in the African and coloured schools reflects their somewhat larger class sizes (as indicated by learners per state paid educator) and the lesser qualifications of their teachers, as shown in the following three rows. Though not trivial, the spending differences are far smaller than the two-and-a-half-fold differential observed at the end of the apartheid period between white and African schools. Thus, given that all provinces are operating under the same norms and standards, these patterns for Western Cape suggest that South Africa's race-blind funding policies have greatly reduced the differences in public resources available to students of different races.

At the same time, lingering differences in the quality of teachers across the different groups of schools, as well as in other dimensions discussed in the next section, suggest that the race-blind funding policies have not led to equal educational opportunities for black compared to white students.

II. Equal Educational Opportunity

Equal educational opportunity could, in principle, be defined in terms of equal educational outcomes, on average, for students of all races. Such an equity standard, though, would be far too demanding in the South African context in that it would require schools to offset all the family, personal and societal problems that make it more difficult for black students to succeed in schools than their white counterparts. Given that the racial disparities in family income and educational attainment bequeathed by colonialism and apartheid are huge, it would seem unreasonable to expect the education sector alone to address them. A variety of noneducation policy initiatives would also be needed.

Hence, we define equal educational opportunity not in terms of equal educational outcomes for students of all races but rather in terms of the quality of education offered in the schools that they attend. Given the historical disparities in educational investments by race in South Africa that need to be rectified, equal educational opportunity would require, at a minimum, that educational policies be "race aware."

We have already noted that during the apartheid period per learner spending in black schools fell far short of that in white schools. This inequality in educational opportunity was exacerbated by significant race-based discrepancies in the quality of the facilities of schools serving the two groups of students. As of 1991, there were shortfalls of 29,000 classrooms in primary schools and 14,000 in secondary schools for black learners throughout the country.¹⁰ Apartheid also left a legacy of underqualified teachers in the schools serving black students. As of 1994, for example, more than one in three teachers throughout the country was underqualified by the standard of matriculation plus three years of training.

¹⁰ These backlogs were based on a learner-educator ration of 40:1 for primary schools and 35.:1 for secondary schools. Reported in Nicolaou (2001, tables 4.1 and 4.2).

Limited, and somewhat mixed, progress toward equal educational opportunity

The post-apartheid period has witnessed at best only limited progress in reducing the shortfalls in school facilities in the poor provinces. On the positive side, between 1996 and 2002, most provinces took steps to increase the number of classrooms and, as a result, the ratio of learners to classrooms declined in most provinces, and especially in the two poorest provinces, Eastern Cape and Limpopo. Major shortfalls remain in those provinces, however, with respect both to classrooms and other school amenities. As of 2000, for example, more than 40 percent of the schools in Eastern Cape still did not have basic amenities such as telephones, water, or electricity and 19 percent did not have toilets. In addition, 90 percent did not have libraries or media centers, and 95 percent did not have computers.¹¹

Figure 1 highlights the situation across all nine provinces with respect to media centers, which are crucial for the successful implementation of South Africa's major curriculum reform effort known as Curriculum 2005. The figure shows that, as of 1996, the proportion of schools in each province with media centers ranged from well below 10 percent in the poor and heavily African provinces of Eastern Cape and Limpopo to more than 45 percent in the wealthier and whiter provinces of Western Cape and Gauteng. Though the proportion of schools with media centers increased in all provinces during the next four years, the data show that the disparities among the provinces were as large in 2000 as in 1996.

Somewhat more progress has been made over time with respect to teacher qualifications. As we noted above, in 1994 more than one in three teachers in South African schools were underqualified. Although this proportion had dropped to one in five by 2001, large disparities remained. Table 2 illustrates the progress over time in Eastern Cape primary schools between 1997 and 2001. Despite the improvement in average teacher quality over the period, however, as of 2001 the average was still slightly below the standard for a qualified teacher, and more than one quarter of the teachers in a typical school were below this standard. Additional data, not shown here, indicate that the average qualification level of teachers in black schools was far below that in the formerly white schools in that province. Thus, the summary figures in Table 2 understate the degree of underqualification of the teachers teaching in the black schools. A further cause of understatement arises from the fact that most black teachers received their training in one of the many low-quality teachers' colleges that have since been shut down because they were so ineffective. Moreover, studies have shown that more than half of the math and science teachers were underprepared in those fields.¹²

The primary effort on the part of the national education policy makers to provide greater assistance to schools formerly run by non-white departments of education than to the formerly white schools was the so-called norms and standard funding for nonpersonnel purposes. Though this program was not specifically targeted at racially defined groups of schools, it had this effect because provincial education departments

¹¹ Department of Education, in *EduSource Data News*, 2001.

¹² Narsee (2002, p. 8).

were obligated to use distribution formulas that favored schools serving impoverished communities, most of which were populated by blacks.

While progressive in concept, this program had a number of drawbacks in practice. The most significant of these was that, given the pressures of rising payrolls for teachers, the funds available for nonpersonnel spending were extremely limited in many provinces. National policy makers were greatly concerned in the late 1990s that in the aggregate only 10 percent of total funds for recurrent expenditures were available for nonpersonnel purposes, a percentage deemed far too low to cover the costs of textbooks, equipment, school maintenance and municipal services such as water and electricity. Funding for such purposes was especially low in impoverished provinces such as Eastern Cape, where it was less than 5 percent in 2000 and 2001. Hence there was little money available to distribute in a progressive, pro-poor manner.

Complicating South Africa's quest for equal educational opportunity was the policy decision to allow significant self-governance of schools in the form of school governing bodies and to encourage such bodies to levy school fees to supplement their allocations from the state. This decision meant that, at the same time that public funds were being distributed more equally across schools, schools serving affluent communities were able use revenue generated from parents to augment the state-provided resources. The fee policy was justified at the time on the ground that by helping to maintain school quality, school fees would keep the children of middle class families – whether they be white or black – from leaving the public schools. Though the policy did succeed in keeping most such families in the public system, it greatly exacerbated differences in the quality of education available to middle class students compared to that available to the majority of poor blacks within that system.

Our analysis of 2001 data for the Western Cape shows that fee revenue permitted the formerly white schools to augment their state-paid teaching staffs by about 30 percent on average and in some cases by more than 100 percent. By contrast, the schools that formerly served – and continue to serve – African learners were hard pressed to raise even limited amounts of money from school fees. Such schools were thus able to augment their state-paid teaching staffs on average by less than 1 percent.

In summary, the majority of African students continue to attend schools that have underqualified teachers and inadequate facilities and face other disadvantages such as a shortage of books and other teaching materials. The quality of the education they receive remains far below what is available to their more advantaged peers who, whether they be black or white, attend schools that raise substantial revenue from school fees to supplement what is already a slight advantage in terms of publicly provided resources.

The practical impact of these differentials on student learning was dramatized as the country rushed to implement Curriculum 2005, a new national curriculum based on the principles of outcomes based education, or OBE. In the spirit of democratic values Curriculum 2005 was designed to promote equal expectations for all learners and gave teachers considerable latitude in shaping the content of instruction.

Not surprisingly, the OBE concept turned out to work best in privileged schools where, in part as a result of revenues from school fees, teachers tended to be numerous and well qualified, enjoyed relatively small classes and had access to quality textbooks and other instructional resources, especially media centers. Teachers in such schools were generally accustomed to the group work and to the emphasis on critical thinking that were central to the OBE approach. Conversely OBE posed difficult, and in some cases insurmountable, challenges for schools that served black learners in low-income communities and that lacked even the most rudimentary libraries or media centers. In the absence of substantial investment in the human and physical resources required to implement OBE effectively, it is difficult to imagine how this new curricular approach, which was so important for symbolic reasons, could succeed in furthering the cause of equal educational opportunity in schooling.

III. Educational Adequacy

Equity defined as educational adequacy shifts attention to educational outcomes and, in particular, to the minimum acceptable – or *adequate* – level of education necessary to assure that all citizens, whether they be black or white, can participate fully in the political and economic life of the country. Though by no means simple to measure in practice, adequacy takes note of the fact that threshold levels are specific to a given institutional and political context. During apartheid, for example, Africans were not represented in Parliament and, as we noted earlier, were typically not expected to advance beyond the level of laborer. By contrast, in the post-apartheid period all citizens are entitled to participate fully in the in the new democracy and thus need the skills required for critical and independent thinking. Because the country's economic vitality depends crucially on its ability to compete in the global knowledge based economy, a typical South African worker today must have a much higher level of education than in the past.

One way to determine the adequacy of the educational system is to look at student achievement and other types of outcome measures such as student progress through school. The question then becomes whether the outcomes – particularly those for black learners – that were so low by design during the apartheid period have been improving during the post-apartheid period. The extremely low outcomes under apartheid were documented by the first two international studies that South Africa participated in after 1994: the Third International Math and Science Study in 1995 and the Monitoring Learning Achievement Study carried out by South Africa's Ministry of Education in 1999 in cooperation with UNESCO.¹³ The results of the latter were particularly discouraging because they showed that South African fourth grade students performed poorly relative to their counterparts in 11 other African countries. South African students scored at the very bottom on the numeracy test, shared the bottom position with Senegal on the life-skills test and outscored only three countries on the literacy test. In some rural

¹³ Ministry of Education (2000, sec. 5.3.4, pp 40-41).

provinces nearly a third of South African learners scored below 25 percent on the various tests. Such results are far from adequate for the post-apartheid South Africa.

Not much progress toward adequacy

Unfortunately, the only measure of achievement that is readily available over time is pass rates on the Senior Certificate, or matriculation, exam that many, but not all, learners take at the end of secondary school. Such rates are deeply flawed as a measure of educational outcomes because pass rates are driven not only by the number of students who pass the exam but by the number of candidates who take it. Despite this limitation, the ready availability of matriculation pass rates has induced policy makers and the media in South Africa to focus on trends in these numbers as a measure of educational progress.

At first blush, the data on pass rates appear to suggest that the country has been making significant progress during the post-apartheid period. In contrast to a clear decline in pass rates during the apartheid period of the 1980s and early 1990s, pass rates turned up in 1997 and continued to rise through 2001, the final year of our data. A closer look, however, suggests a different conclusion. The bottom line of figure 2 shows that, since 1994, the number of students who passed the exam has remained relatively constant. Hence the recent rise in the pass rate is fully attributable to the decline in candidates shown by the top line in figure 2. After rising quite steadily through 1997, the number of candidates has been falling ever since. Further evidence of the inverse relationship between changes in the proportions of candidates and changes in pass rates emerges from provincial data for the 1996-2001 period. For example, the three provinces with the largest gains in their pass rates, Limpopo, Gauteng and Free State, also have among the largest reductions in their candidates. Thus it is hard to avoid the conclusion that a significant component of the increase in their pass rates simply reflects the smaller number of their candidates.

Western Cape, one of the high performing provinces, exhibited pass rates of more than 80 percent in both 1996 and 2001. Even for this apparently successful province, however, closer examination of exam results over time reveals a less than sanguine picture for African and coloured students. Although reported pass rates rose in the formerly African schools from 38 percent in 1996 to 57 percent in 2001, the improvement was in fact illusory. Recalculating the pass rates as the number of passes in any given year as a proportion of the students who were enrolled in grade 10 two years earlier, we find that the pass rate for students in these schools declined from 34 percent in 1998 to 28 percent in 2001. This decline indicates that these schools have been doing an increasingly poor job of moving their tenth-graders all the way through to success on the Senior Certificate exam.

A better measure of educational progress during the post-apartheid period would be trends in achievement data for students in earlier grades, such as grades 4, 5 or 6. In contrast to the situation for students eligible for the matriculation exam, a larger share of the total schooling for these younger student would have occurred during the reform period. In addition a far larger proportion of the students within the relevant age range

would be attending school and thus in a position to be measured. Unfortunately, the Department of Education to date has not started testing students in primary schools in a systematic way.

Our analysis of other outcome measures by race for students in Eastern Cape and Western Cape as of 2001, such as rates of progression through school and enrollment in particular fields such as math and science, reinforce our basic conclusion that most black students are not receiving the education they need to participate fully in the political and economic life of the country. In Eastern Cape the probability of an African student completing 12 years of schooling is far lower than that for a white student, and in Western Cape we find African students repeating grades in secondary school grades at rates of over 20 percent per year. In addition, African students are far less likely than white students to take math courses all the way through secondary school or to take them at the higher level necessary for continuing on to university.

This basic conclusion that South Africa still faces huge challenges in its efforts to provide black students an adequate education should not be surprising. It is unrealistic to expect a country to undo the relentless effects of more than four decades of apartheid in a few short years. The question then becomes one of whether the country has been setting a foundation for improved outcomes for black students in the future. We address this and other questions in the final section.

IV. Concluding Discussion

The transfer of power from white hands to a black-dominated government in 1994 signaled a 180-degree turn in South Africa's official attitude toward racial equity – from a situation in which racial distinctions defined policies in all areas of national life, including education, to one where such distinctions were deemed inappropriate and even illegal. Yet for all of the dramatic changes over the last decade the state education system of South Africa – for better or for worse – retains important continuity with its past.

The educational legacy of apartheid was huge. Apartheid was ruthlessly effective in separating the races geographically and in privileging the interests of white South Africans. Though the homelands in theory provided a place for Africans to pursue their own aspirations, in practice they served to impoverish much of the African population and to subject them to dysfunctional systems of government, poor schools and few opportunities for employment. The apartheid education system underinvested in school facilities, provided poor training for teachers and school principals, and followed an impoverished curriculum. Though a small black middle class was able to develop during the apartheid period, the vast majority of Africans emerged from apartheid with low educational attainment, low income and a scarcity of job opportunities.

The importance of this legacy of inequity for the reform of the education system cannot be overstated. Policy makers did not have the option of simply installing a new breed of managers and teachers imbued with the values of the new era. Rather they had to work with existing educators who in many cases were underqualified and who had

worked within the system at a time of great stress and turmoil. Though many of the schools serving black students were, and continue to be, disorganized and inefficient, any current efforts in the direction of quality assurance and accountability have to be made with sensitivity to the deeply embedded negative attitudes of many teachers toward authority. Efforts to keep children in schools and to succeed on the matriculation exam are complicated by extensive family poverty, child malnutrition, undereducated parents, and, increasingly, the devastation of families caused by HIV/AIDs.

Even under the best of circumstances reform efforts to equalize educational opportunity and to assure an adequate education for students of all races would have been difficult and time consuming. In fact, circumstances were far from ideal, if only because South Africa was not able to generate any significant new funding for education. That was the case because of the new government's decision to respond to pressures from both domestic and foreign investors to adopt an austere budget, the negative effects of which were exacerbated by a slowdown in the world economy. As a result, the economy grew far too slowly in the late 1990s and following years to generate the additional public funds for the investments in school facilities, teacher training and other reforms required to make significant improvements in the average quality of education provided to black students. Without additional funding, the country had no choice but to focus on the more symbolic concept of educational equity: equal treatment.

It is, of course, an open question how much additional investment the state education system could have effectively absorbed over the last decade, especially in the former homelands and townships. Managerial capacity and financial expertise to run large capital projects were sorely lacking in many areas and the post-1994 policy makers inherited a cadre of underqualified teachers and school administrators who could not be easily or replaced.

As for the future, the outlook for educational equity is not clear. On the positive side, some basic structures are in place that could support the ongoing quest for equity. First, most families still have their children in the public school system – albeit in some cases with so much additional fee revenue that the schools are similar to private schools – and thus most families continue to have a stake in the public system. Second, the new federal system is sufficiently well structured to allow more funds to be channeled to the most impoverished provinces or schools should that be deemed a desirable policy to pursue.

Ultimately, however, much will depend, first, on the growth rate of South Africa's economy and its rate of job creation and, second, on how policy makers weigh additional investments in education in relation to those in other areas of pressing need, including health care to deal with the AIDs crisis and the provision of a social safety net. Economic growth is crucial not only because of the associated growth in tax revenues, but also for its role in alleviating the social conditions such as family poverty, malnutrition, and absence of job opportunities for school graduates that undermine the educational process. In weighing investments in education against those for other purposes, one concern is that South Africa may have lost an important window of opportunity to make needed

investments aimed at redressing the inequities of apartheid in education as well as in other social sectors. As time goes by, and the growing black middle class becomes increasingly comfortable in its situation, support for additional spending that has a strong redistributive component and whose benefits will take a long time to emerge may be more difficult to obtain.

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Table 1. Resources in Primary Schools, by Former Department, Western Cape, 2001

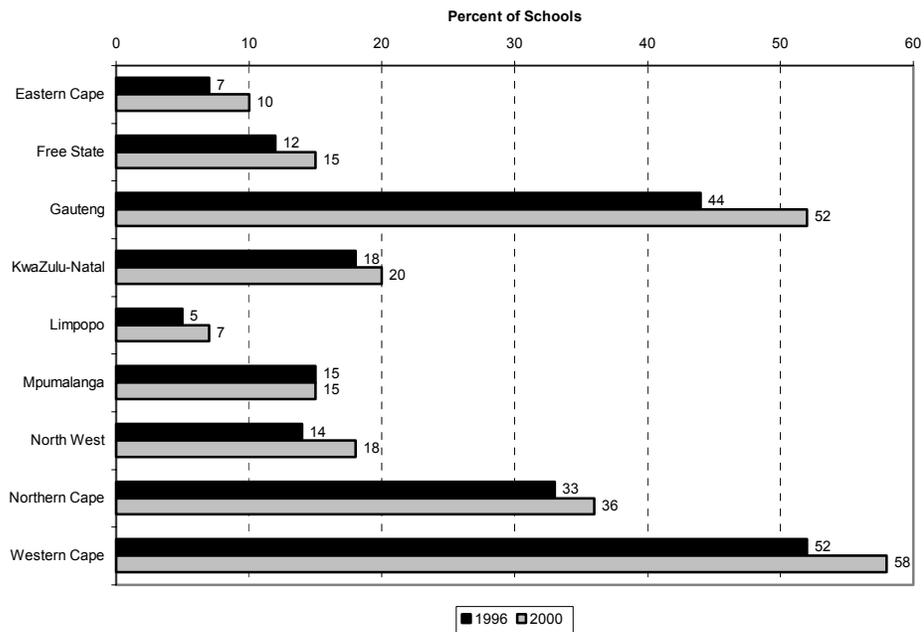
Figures in bold represent the least resources within each row

	DET (African)	HOR (coloured)	HOA (white)	Total ^a
Total public spending per learner in rand [index] ^b	3,002 [1.00]	3,613 [1.20]	3,857 [1.28]	3,594 [1.20]
Learners per state paid educator	38.4	36.3	35.9	36.6
Average qualifications of teachers ^c	13.4	13.1	14.1	13.3
Percent of unqualified teachers ^d	6.5	20.9	0.8	15.0

- a. Total includes students in Indian (HOD) schools not listed separately because of the small number of Indian schools in Western Cape.
- b. Public spending per learner in each department relative to public spending per learner in the DET schools.
- c.. Based on a scale of 10-17, with 13 (which represents matriculation plus 3 years of teacher training) representing a qualified teacher.
- d. Percent of teachers at qualification level below 13.

Source. Calculated by the authors based on data provided by the Western Cape Education Department.

Figure 1. Schools with Media Centers, by Province, 1996-2000.



Source. Department of Education, "Report on the School Register of Needs 2000 Survey," reported in *EduSource Data News* no. 35, December 2001, table 9.

Table 2. Teacher Characteristics in Primary Schools, Eastern Cape, 1997-2001.

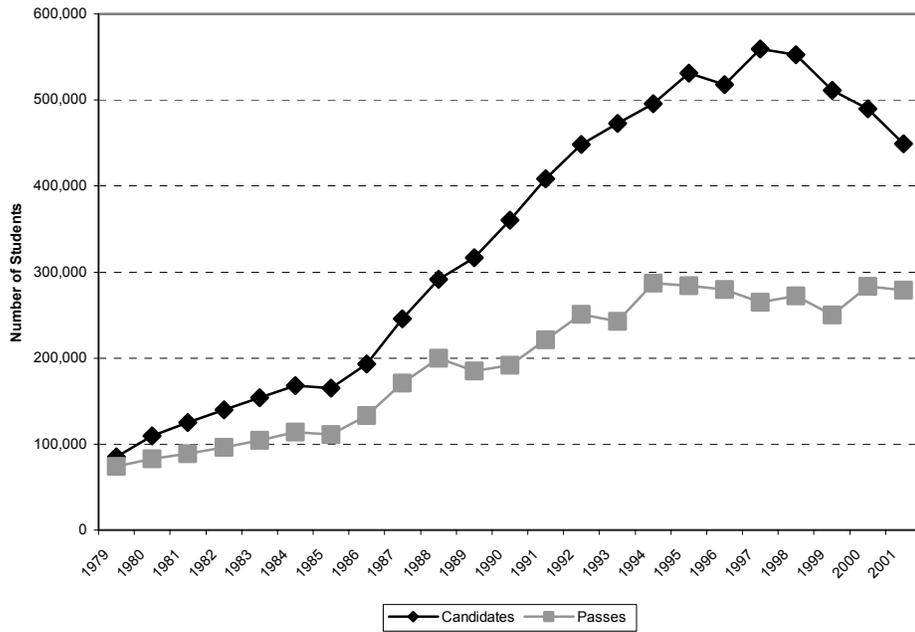
	1997	1999	2001
Primary schools			
Average qualifications ^a	12.6	12.7	12.9
Percent of underqualified teachers ^b	37.3	35.4	26.9
No. of schools	2,567	2,696	2,707

a. Based on a scale of 10-17, with 13 (which represents matriculation plus 3 years of teacher training) representing a qualified teacher.

b. Percent of teachers at qualification level below 13.

Source. Calculated by the authors based on data provided by the Eastern Cape Department of Education.

Figure 2. Senior Certificate Candidates and Passes 1979 – 2001.



Source: South African Institute of Race Relations (2001, p. 156).

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