

A close-up photograph of a child's hand, wearing a blue and white striped long-sleeved shirt, placing an orange block on top of a stack. The stack consists of three blocks: a blue block at the bottom with a cartoon animal in a car, a green block in the middle with a cartoon animal holding a red umbrella, and a red block partially visible behind the orange one with a cartoon animal's face. The orange block being placed has a grid of small yellow and green vehicle icons. The background is blurred, showing a wooden chair.

The current Basic Education Act in South Africa compels parents to send their children to school (under threat of a fine or imprisonment not exceeding six months). Yet, despite this, only 50% of children enrolled in the school system complete their schooling. Therefore, the Department of Basic Education is busy drafting new legislation that, according to Basic

Education Deputy Minister Reginah Mhaule, will introduce additional measures to hold principals, parents, and governing bodies accountable for non-attendance. The bill especially holds parents accountable and is specifically focused on learners between Grades 1-9.

According to [Business Tech](#), a 2017 version of the Basic Education Laws Amendment Bill proposed a longer penalty for the parent of a learner, or any other person, who prevents a learner from compulsory school attendance. The penalty would be increased from six months to as much as six years.

It also states that, “The bill also proposes to make it an offence for any person to wilfully interrupt or disrupt any school activity or to wilfully hinder or obstruct any school in the performance of the school’s activities.”

Although the intentions of holding teachers, schools, and the community more accountable for attendance of learners, these measures may prove more hindrance than help. Factors such as household poverty, migration and health-related challenges, early development learning, as well as larger socioeconomic factors, contribute to the dropout number and can’t be solved by simply implementing stricter rules.

The opposite might prove true: parents struggling financially, who are found guilty and sentenced, will be worse off than before, meaning that their children will also suffer as a consequence. The more effective solution would be to provide support and relief for families that struggle with problems and thereby mitigate the need to implement stricter rules.

Despite all of the challenges, the reality is that education is an important aspect of a child’s life. Be it in the early stages or later stages like Grade 9. Stricter rules will not solve our problems. We as a South African community need to realise the importance and offer support to those NPOs that demonstrate sustainability, provide quality education, and exercise high standards of ethical and financial governance.

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