

SATURDAY STAR NEWS

## Looming basic education crisis gives South Africans sleepless nights



South Africa - Johannesburg - South Africa - Johannesburg - Sleepless nights for South Africa as Minister of basic education and DA MP Siviwe Gwarube HAS negative impact of budget cuts on SA's basic education system. Picture: Itumeleng English/African Newspapers

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**South Africa's impending financial crisis is giving South Africans sleepless nights since Basic Education Minister Siviwe Gwarube this week announced that austerity measures have posed a severe financial dilemma for her department.**

On Wednesday, the newly-appointed minister revealed that the country was hard

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The minister's address came weeks after several provincial departments of education announced various cost-cutting measures, with the Western Cape saying at least 2 400 teaching jobs will be lost by the end of the year due to a R3.8 billion budget cut.

In KZN, the department said the effects will see only 774 new teachers being employed in the province which has been beset by an unemployment crisis which has seen at least 45 000 entry level 1 teachers remain unemployed in the province.

Gwarube said on Wednesday: "These budget pressures are not just numbers on a spreadsheet - they translate into fewer teachers, reduced textbooks, and fewer admin support staff, which means teachers spend more time on admin work, thereby reducing learning and teaching time. In essence, the very fabric of our children's future is under threat."

Reacting to the minister's statement, the Public Servants Association (PSA) called on Gwarube to urgently convene a meeting with all key stakeholders to

are needed to ensure that the country's basic education system remained stable.

The PSA said the country has seen a surge of more than 290 000 learners over the past five years, which has happened without a corresponding increase in teaching posts.

“The PSA is deeply concerned that these budget cuts will exacerbate the already dire staffing situation in schools, where under-staffing is a critical issue. Reducing the teaching workforce will have catastrophic consequences for both teaching quality and learning outcomes.

“The education sector is a cornerstone of the country's development, and further cuts will not only harm students but also contribute to the country's rising unemployment rate by terminating the contracts of teachers, a move that would severely undermine the economy,” the association said.

The South African Democratic Teachers Union (Sadtu), holding its 10th elective conference at the Birchwood Hotel this week, said it will fight austerity measures.

Speaking to SABC News, the union's general secretary, Mugwena Maluleke said: “Sadtu is very much worried about the budget cuts and we have been very clear that education is an investment for the nation and therefore any budget that impacts negatively on our children and on our future as a country. And what has been happening all along is that since 2020 we're dealing with poverty and it is very critical.”

On Wednesday, the DA's Mark Burke said the party is gravely concerned about the financial crisis gripping South Africa's education system.

“The crisis is not only threatening our children's future but is a symptom of larger financial mismanagement across government that affects all frontline

economic growth, and fiscal mismanagement affirms what the DA has been saying for years: urgent action is needed to safeguard essential public services.

“The current fiscal crisis in basic education is only the tip of the iceberg. Other critical sectors like healthcare and security are also at risk, and patchwork solutions from the Treasury will not be sufficient over the next three years,” Burke said.

Burke said the DA is calling for a comprehensive spending review which will look at government’s spending patterns.

“The review will look at each programme of government, assessing its impact and determining whether it delivers measurable value to South Africans. Programmes that are not fulfilling their intended purposes or are inefficient should be re-prioritised or cut.

“This will allow the government to stop wasteful expenditure and focus its resources on programmes that truly make a difference in people’s lives,” Burke said.

## The Star

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