



COVID-19 and the South African curriculum policy response

RESEARCH NOTE

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SCHOOL CLOSURES AND LEARNING LOSSES

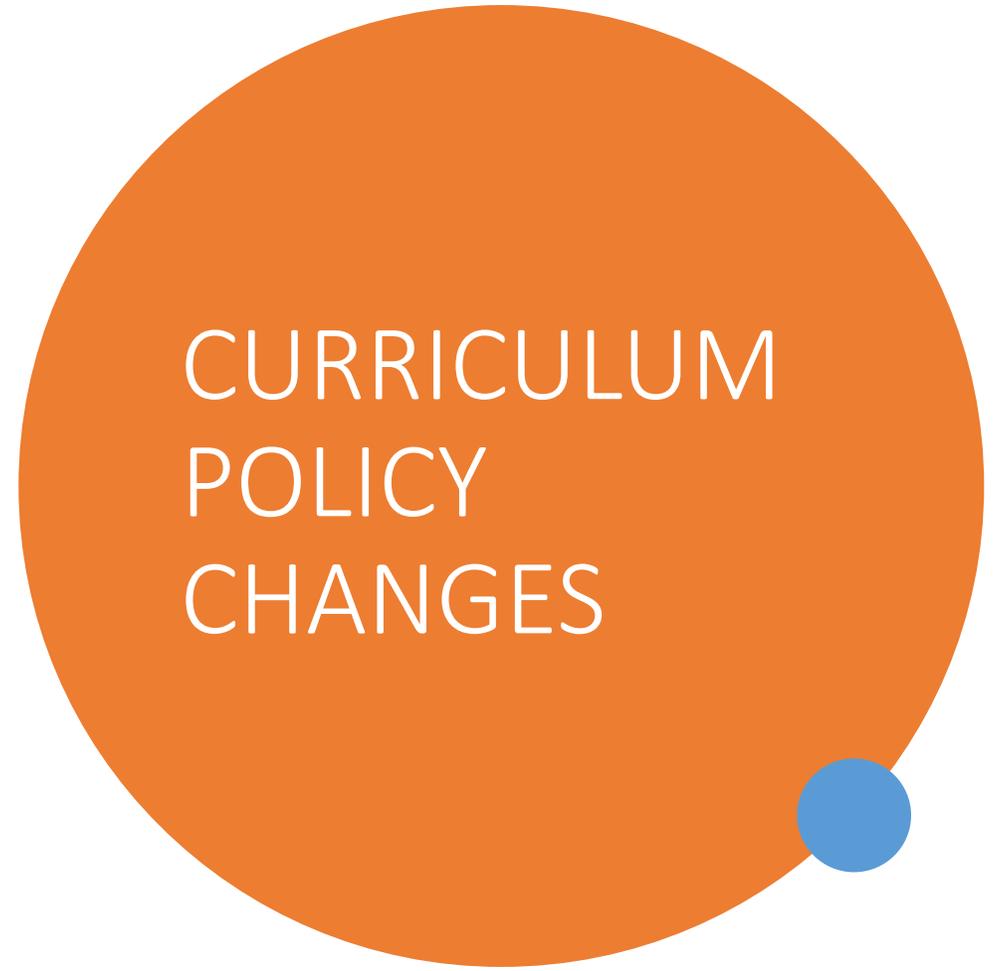
- **LOSS OF INSTRUCTIONAL TIME**
 - School closures, rotational timetabling, delayed opening, absenteeism
 - 2020 → 52% of time lost
 - 2021 → 22% of time lost
 - Differed greatly between schools, grades
 - Students in poorer schools lost more time
- **LEARNING LOSSES**
 - Language → 40 – 70% of a year of learning lost
 - Mathematics → 95 – 104% of a year of learning lost
 - Early grade reading → 46% and 118% of a year of learning lost

INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Instructional time
 - Act quickly
 - Acceleration (extend instructional time)
- Instructional content
 - Simplify / trim curriculum
 - Target foundational learning / gateway subjects
- Focus on early grades
- Remote solutions
 - Targeted, *additive*, low-tech strategies
- Assessment
- Psycho-social needs

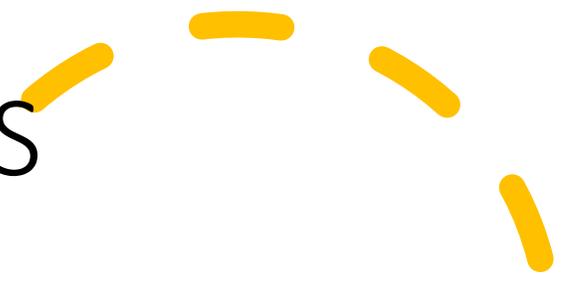


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- CAPS highly specified – content is tightly bound to time
 - 2020 – trimming and identifying ‘fundamentals’
 - 2021 – Recovery ATPs
 - 2023 – 2023/2024 ATPs
 - Minimal subject targeting (2020 only)



CURRICULUM POLICY CHANGES

ASSESSMENT CHANGES



- Fewer assessments across 2020 – 2022
- Higher SBA mark
- Moderation weakened
- Test only what is taught
- Progression requirements relaxed

"Larger numbers of less prepared students with significant learning losses in the final grades of high school were provided with little curriculum support and additional time for remediation. Strategies for catch-up were left to the school and teacher".

CURRICULUM & ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES

- Curriculum coverage and assessment decisions left to the teacher.

“Given a very unequal system, this meant that curriculum coverage and learning losses mapped onto and deepened pre-COVID-19 patterns of educational disadvantage”.

- Large disparities in what was taught and assessed.
 - Many more underprepared children moving onto next grade
 - Much higher ability ranges in classrooms
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REMOTE STRATEGIES

- Piecemeal, uncoordinated and available to minority of learners
- Emphasis on self-directed learning / at home learning

“An emphasis on self-directed learning and digital offerings shifted responsibility for addressing learning losses away from the DBE to the vagaries of learners’ access to social and educational supports”.



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- Assessment
 - Baseline assessments important
- Psycho-social needs

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

- Provincial
 - WCED #BackOnTrack programme
 - Budget and plan including additional time, targeting of subjects, special focus on foundations and other key transition grades.
- National
 - No national, funded plan for catching up learning losses
 - Learning Recovery Programme guidelines “the skill of teachers in using assessment for learning (AfL) is at the heart of the LRP”
 - No additional time, no targeting of subjects, no accelerated learning programme, no special focus on foundations

DEEPENING INEQUALITIES

- Government' inertia in the face of the COVID-19 learning losses has led to a deepening of inequalities.
- Leaving curriculum, assessment and catch up decisions to schools and teachers meant that learners in schools with less capacity and fewer resources would fall further behind.
- This is confirmed in research which shows that patterns of learning losses map onto levels of educational disadvantage.
- There were no existing remedial structures to draw on even though the problem of learning backlogs pre-dated COVID-19. We urgently need these, now, and for future disruptions to schooling.