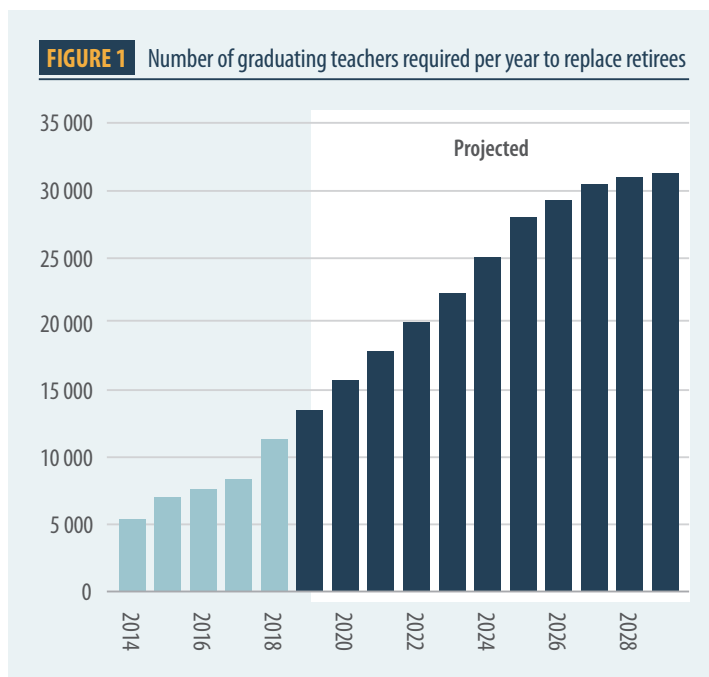


# THE CHALLENGE AND THE OPPORTUNITY

## HALF OF ALL TEACHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA WILL RETIRE IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS

With 48% of public school teachers retiring in the next 10 years, the number of graduating teachers will have to double. A substantial 48% of public school teachers are over the age of 50 and will retire in the next 10 years. This is according to recent analysis of payroll data from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) done by Research on Socio-Economic Policy (Resep). To replace the retiring teachers and maintain a stable students-to-teacher ratio, the number of graduating teachers per year will need to double, from 30 540 as recorded in 2020 to 59 034 by 2030 (see Figure 1), according to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2022).



The DBE is the largest employer in the country. At R208bn, teacher wages make up 4% of South Africa's GDP (DHET, 2022). The DBE is the largest employer in the country, employing 407 000 public sector teachers – four times as many as the 92 000 employees working for the largest private-sector employer, Anglo American (DHET, 2022).

The retirement wave will accelerate the already rapid increase in class sizes. Analysis shows that the per cent of Grade 5 students in classes with more than 50 students doubled from 16% to 34% between 2015 and 2019 (Spaull, Courtney and Qvist, Forthcoming). This was partly due to inefficient student and teacher allocation. Fewer teachers per student will substantially increase this problem.

Despite the obvious challenge, the retirement wave also presents the opportunity to address current education system constraints. It is unclear how the South African higher education system will increase the number of graduating teachers at the required pace. However, demographic transitions also provide the opportunity to address some of the binding constraints to ensure a flourishing basic education system. Researchers at Resep are exploring the challenges and opportunities presented by the teacher retirement wave. This is the first policy note on this issue. More notes on the implications and potential solutions will follow.

THE CURRENT SCALE OF TEACHER RETIREMENTS IS UNPRECEDENT IN SOUTH AFRICA'S HISTORY: HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF ADDITIONAL TEACHERS WILL NEED TO BE TRAINED.