

# The data and politics of accountability for learning in South Africa

*September 2022*

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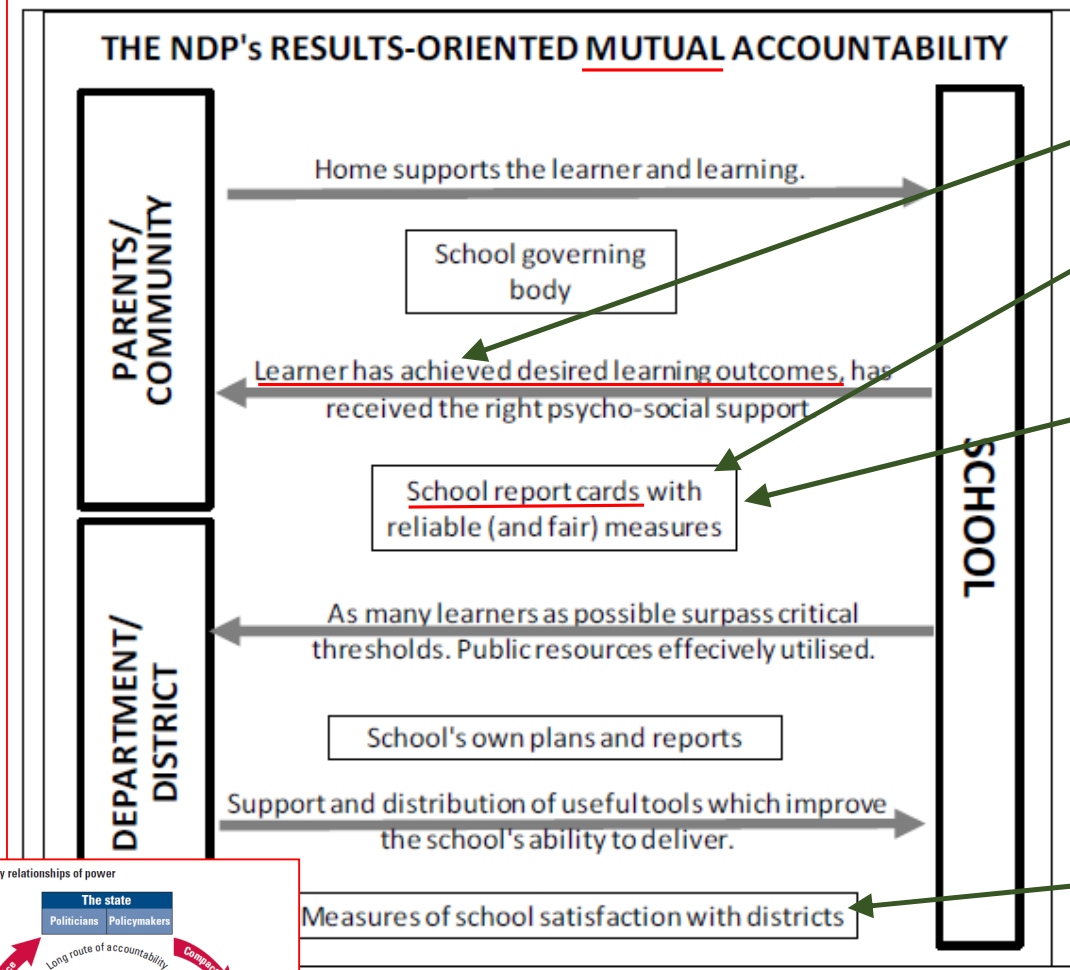
## ***Topics***

- The evidence on accountability for learning
- The politics of accountability
- Accountability and data in our schooling system
- How we compare internationally
- Evaluating policies on the way forward

# The evidence on **accountability** for learning

boikarabello  
ukuziphendulela  
vhudifhinduleli  
aanspreeklikheid

Figure 1: The NDP's envisaged accountability system



2 **Learner-level outcomes data**  
Lower need for standardisation.

1 **Data for school-level outcomes**  
Requires good standardisation.

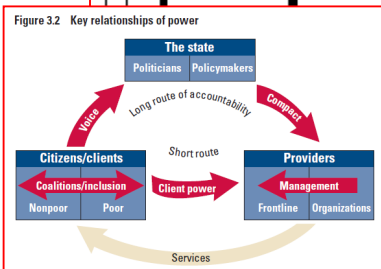
3 **Data for school-level SES measures**

4 **Teacher-level professionalism data**  
Difficult to standardise, but should be sufficient.

Largely separate accountability arrangements

5 **District-level service data**  
Difficult to standardise, but should be sufficient.

6 **Education International**  
focus largely on teacher- and learner-level data. Raises concerns around: usability of data (MCQ); levels of teacher involvement in design; ideological underpinnings.



Department of Basic Education (2020); Dieltiens and Mandipaza (2014); World Bank (2003); Bruns et al (2011); Education International (2019).



## The evidence on accountability for learning (contd.)

### MACRO (ACROSS-POLITY)

**Hanushek and Raymond (2005)** examine NAEP data from the United States and demonstrate associations between the staggered introduction of new school accountability reforms across the states and test score improvements.

**Hanushek and Wößmann (2007)**, in examining PISA data, present findings on the positive complementarity of (a) school **accountability** and (b) school **autonomy**.

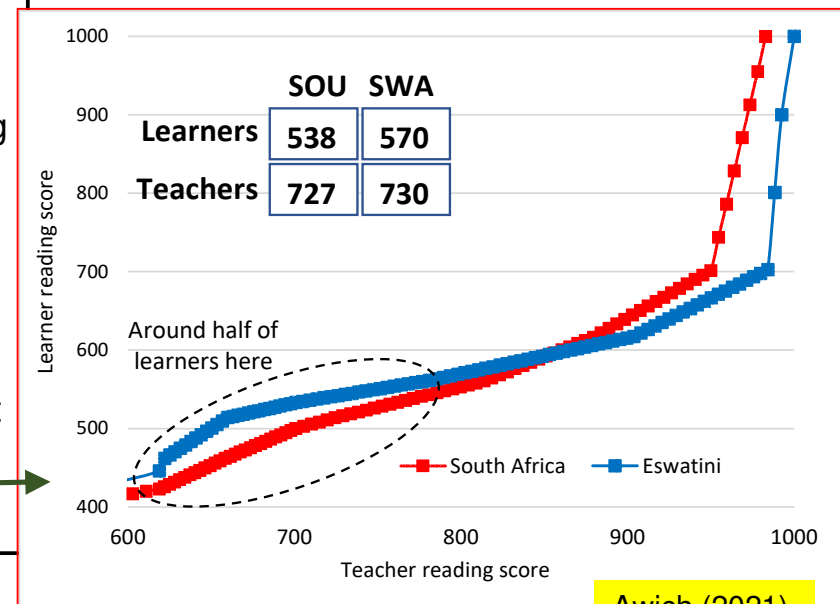
**Bergbauer, Hanushek and Woessman (2018)**, using six waves of PISA data find an increase in **externally run**, but not **internally run**, testing improves results.

**Department of Basic Education (2013)**, using SACMEQ 2007 data, argued that in a comparison to Swaziland, South Africa's teacher abilities did not appear a **binding constraint**. This is also seen in the 2013 SACMEQ data:

### MICRO

**Bruns et al (2011)** draw from 22 studies and present findings on the complementarity of: (a) **information for accountability**; (b) **school-based management** and (c) **teacher incentives**.

**Taylor et al (2017)** find impacts of parental involvement in South Africa, though this is not directly a test of accountability mechanisms.



# The evidence on accountability for learning (contd.)

The first absence of improvement since 2006

## THE ROLE OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN SOUTH AFRICA'S POST-2002 IMPROVEMENTS

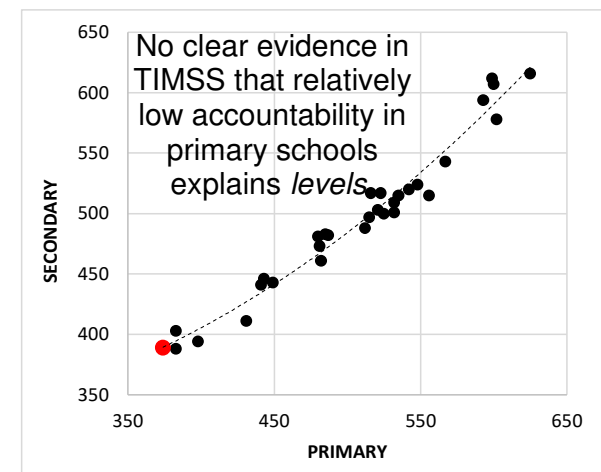
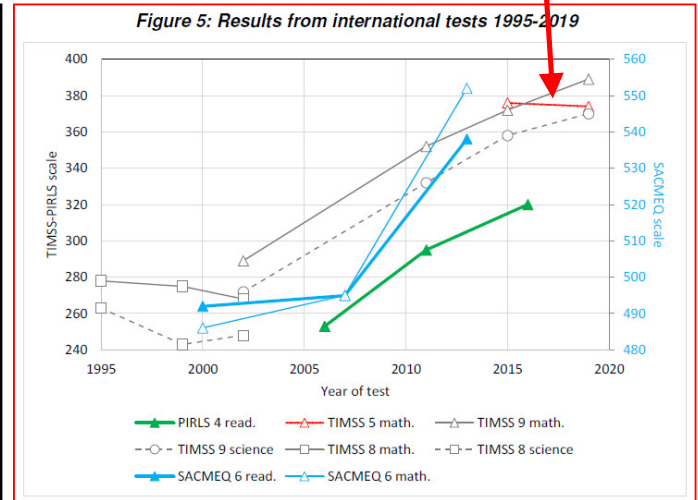
A mix of **support, accountability, home background** advantages.

Department of Basic Education (2020):

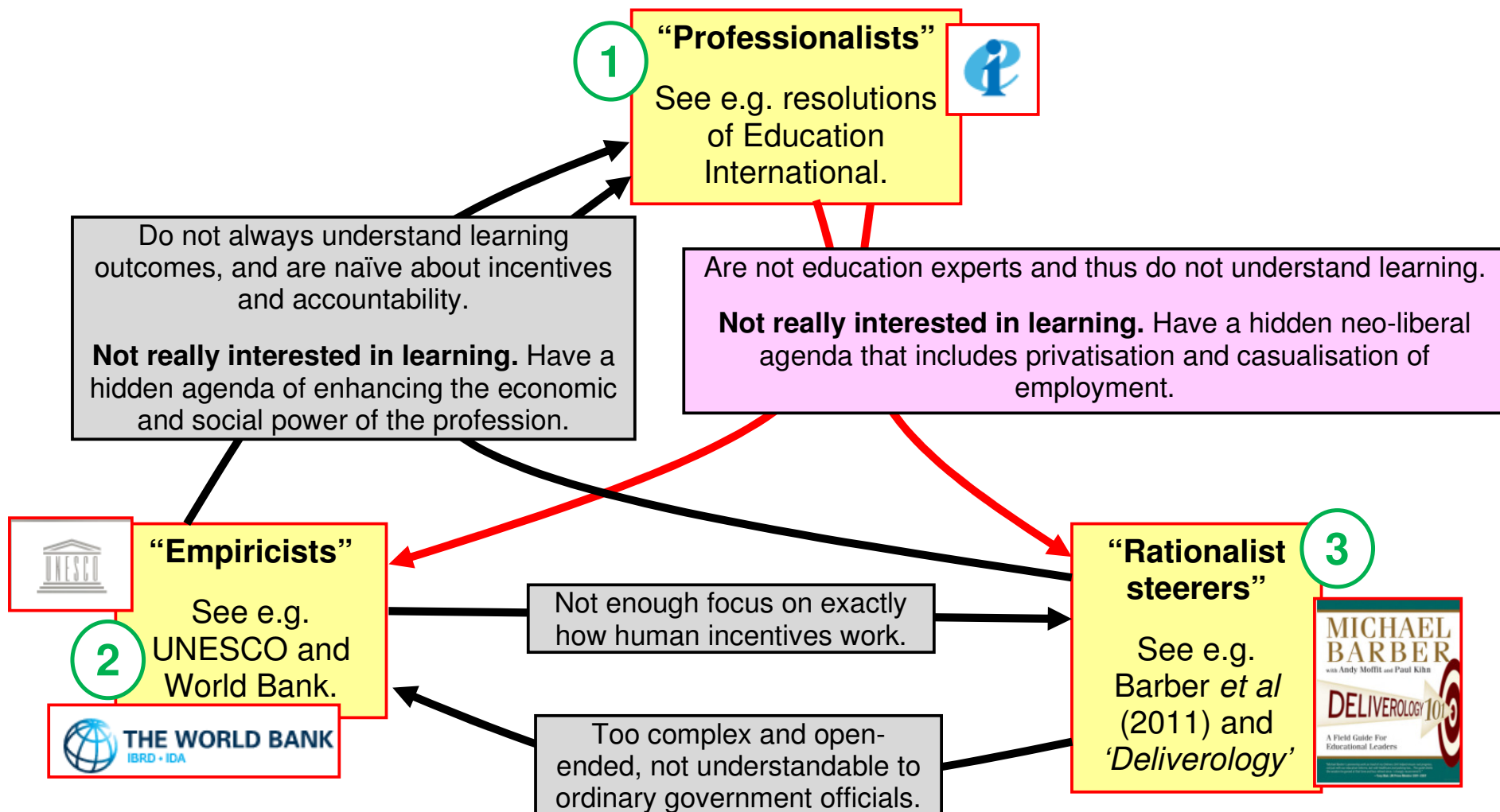
1. The tools of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
2. Access to high-quality books
3. Assessment practices
4. Improved subject knowledge among teachers
5. Access to both Grade R and pre-school below Grade R

Gustafsson and Taylor: (2022):

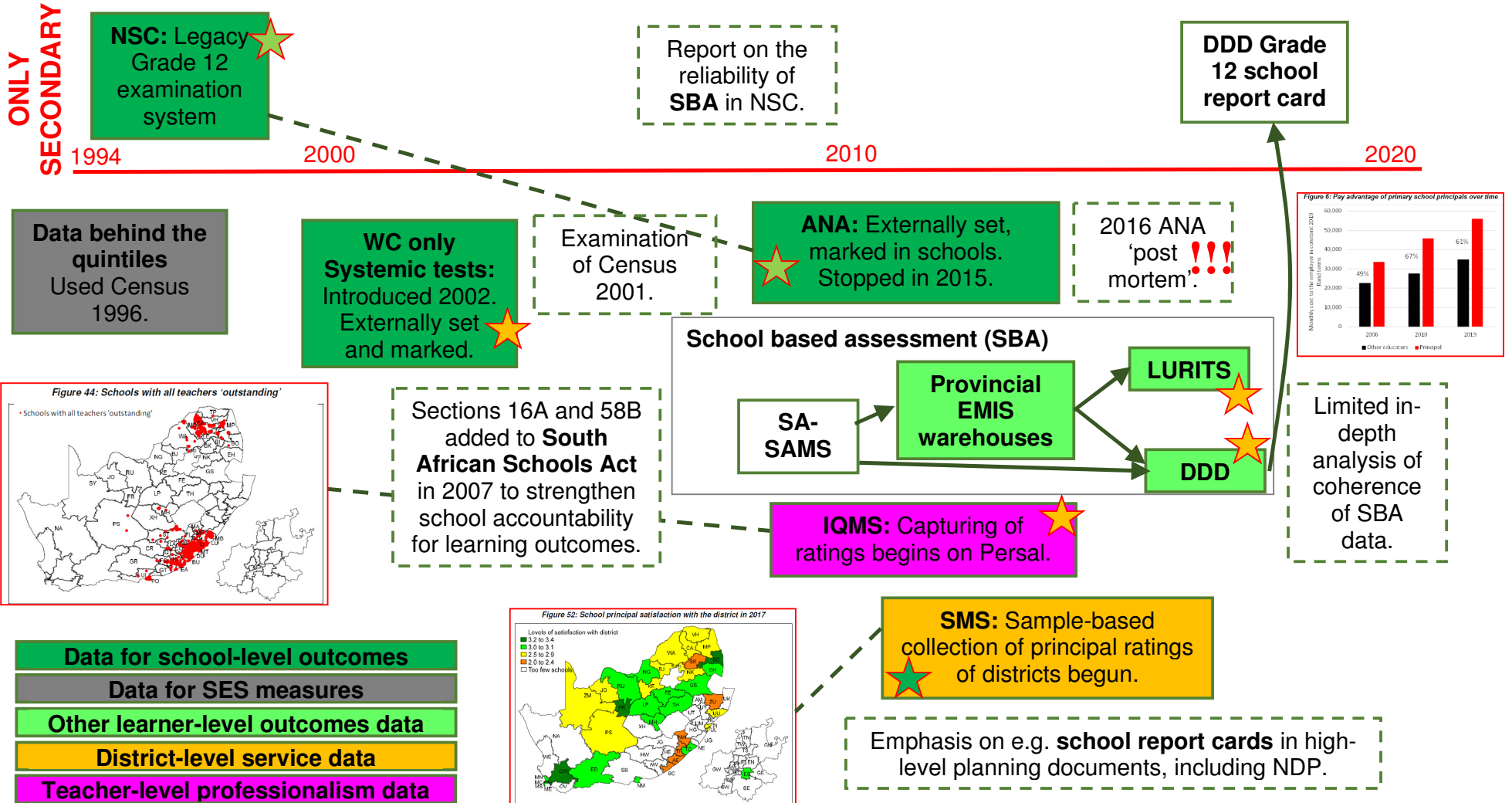
Oaxaca-Blinder analysis applied to PIRLS 2011 and 2016 data suggest **home background** explains much of the change.



# The politics of accountability



# Accountability and data in our schooling system



Van der Berg *et al* (2021); Van der Berg and Shepherd (2008); Department of Basic Education (2016, 2020); Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (2020); Noble *et al* (2006); Zoch (2017).

# How we compare internationally



**Ben Piper** on the Kenya example (Levy, 2018)

What one sees in rural Kenya is an expectation for kids to learn and be able to have basic skills ... Exam results are far more readily available in Kenya than other countries in the region. The 'mean scores' ... are posted in every school and over time so that trends can be seen. Head teachers are held accountable for those results to the extent of being paraded around the community if they did well, or literally banned from school and kicked out of the community if they did badly.

## Primary-level assessments and examinations in SADC countries

*Name of assessment/examination (for assessments, whether it is sample-based or a census is indicated – no indication in brackets means an examination taken by all learners)*

Country		Grade
Botswana	Standard Four Attainment Test (census)	4
	Primary School Leaving Examination	7
Comoros	Certificat d'études primaires élémentaires	6
Congo (DR)	Test national de fin d'études primaires	6
Lesotho	Lesotho National Assessment of Educational Progress (sample)	3, 6
	Primary School Leaving Examination	7
Madagascar	Évaluation des acquis scolaires des élèves de CM2 (sample)	5
	Certificat d'études primaires élémentaires	5
Malawi	Monitoring Learning Achievement (census)	2, 4, 7
	Early Grade Reading Assessment (sample)	2, 4
	Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination	8
Mauritius	Certificate of Primary Education	6
Mozambique	National Assessment (sample)	3
	National Examination Grade 5	5
	Primary Education Certificate	7
Namibia	Standardised Achievement Test (census)	5
South Africa	Annual National Assessment (census)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Swaziland <sup>68</sup>	Swaziland Primary Certificate	7
Tanzania	Early Grade Reading Assessment (sample)	2
	Standard Four National Assessment (census)	4
	Primary School Leaving Examination	7
Zambia	National Assessment Survey of Measuring Learning Achievement Levels (sample)	5
	Grade 7 Composite Examination	7
Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe Early Learning Assessment (sample)	3
	Grade Seven Examination	7

Gustafsson (2018).



# Evaluating policies on the way forward

Strategy

## MTSF (2020)

“Introduce a better accountability system for principals, which should be fair, based on appropriate data, and take into account the socio-economic context of schools.” This is said in relation to grades 4 to 9.

Operational policy

## South African Schools Act (2007 amendments)

Section **16A** refers to each school’s “**academic performance improvement plan**”.

Section **58B** refers to province’s obligation to notify schools when they are underperforming, and to take remedial action.

**(Integrated) Quality Management System ([I]QMS):** School principal evaluated by circuit manager.



**South African Human Rights Commission (2021):** A focus on “**contextually appropriate writing benchmarks**” and a minimum set of resources needed in a class. A concern: “**Very little research has been carried out in South Africa involving the assessment of children’s writing**”.

EELC

**Equal Education Law Centre (2022):** Call to revise SASA 16A and 58B to broaden scope of monitoring beyond “**excessive focus on academic performance**”. A concern around a “**culture of blame**”.

## SOME PROPOSALS BASED ON SYSTEMS AND EVIDENCE WE HAVE

1. Accept that in terms of ‘big systems’, the new **Systemic Evaluation** receives much attention – don’t drop that ball (as in ±2010).
2. In the area of early grade reading, focus on identifying **measurement tools of a sufficient quality** and advocating their use – here tools for accountability to both parents and the bureaucracy are important (MTSF).
3. Pay careful attention to **Gauteng’s ‘light touch’ reading monitoring work**: small random samples of Grade 3 learners per school; assessment of **words correct per minute** (wcpm); capturing of data into simple online system; feedback and support.

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