



# Repetition and dropout in South Africa before, during and after COVID-19

COVID-Generation Research Report

By Gabrielle Wills and Jess Qvist  
December 2023



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### ABSTRACT

In this research report, we collate existing and new evidence on grade repetition and school dropout in South Africa before, during and two years after the COVID-19 pandemic. In a context of greater leniency in assessment and grade promotion, significant declines in grade repetition were experienced in South Africa during the pandemic. Repetition rate declines were experienced by both boys and girls and by learners in both poorer and wealthier households. Post-pandemic, repetition rates have since risen but remain below pre-pandemic levels. While reduced secondary level repetition rates have encouraged higher levels of school completion, further research is needed to understand what the implications are of lower repetition rates in the early grades for learning at the primary level. Despite initial concerns about rising school dropout among adolescents during the pandemic, this did not occur in South Africa. Administrative data does not support rising dropout at the secondary school level during the pandemic even though there were periods of extended absenteeism in 2020 and 2021. Household survey data points to declines in the percentage of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary education during the pandemic although these estimates had reverted closer to pre-pandemic levels by the start of 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> This research report was prepared for the Covid-Generation Project led by Resep at Stellenbosch University. This research was made possible by financial support from Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropies. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the author's and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of Allan & Gill Gray Philanthropies.

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# SUMMARY

In this research report, we collate evidence on grade repetition and school dropout in South Africa before, during and after the pandemic. This summary highlights the key findings of this enquiry.

**Grade repetition rates in South Africa declined during the pandemic at all grade levels but particularly in grades 10 and 11.** Encouraged by greater leniency in school-based assessments and more lenient promotion requirements, grade repetition rates in all grades declined at the end of 2020 compared to previous years. As calculated by the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2023) using national learner unit record data, the Grade 10 repetition rate was 31% in 2019 but almost halved to 17% in 2020. The Grade 11 repetition rate in 2019 of 24% had more than halved to 11% in 2020 (DBE, 2023).

**After the pandemic in 2022, grade repetition rates have settled at lower levels than before the pandemic but have generally risen relative to pandemic repetition rates (2020 and 2021).** Relative to 2018, lower grade repetition rates in 2022 are observed for grades 1 to 12, among both boys and girls and among poorer and wealthier households using household survey data. Additionally, recent analysis of administrative data from three provinces shows rising repetition rates at the end of 2022 relative to 2020, although repetition rates remain lower than before the pandemic (Van der Berg et al., 2023a, 2023b).

**Lowered repetition rates during the pandemic, particularly in Grades 10 and 11, have encouraged higher levels of survival to Grade 12.** Unprecedented numbers of candidates wrote the 2021 and 2022 National Senior Certificate examinations.

**Even in the Foundation Phase (grades 1-3), repetition rates declined during the pandemic and were lower in 2022 than pre-pandemic levels.** On the one hand, the Grade 1 repetition rate decline is warranted. Grade 1 repetition rates in South Africa have been high by middle-income and Sub-Saharan African comparisons. Early grade repetition also has direct cost implications for provinces and raises early grade class sizes. On the other hand, new research suggests that one cannot completely rule out that severely containing Grade 1 repetition may limit foundational reading development. It appears that Grade 1 repetition is a response to a lack of school readiness, yet evidence about the effects of Grade 1 repetition on learning remain inconclusive (Wills, 2023).

**School dropout among youth of non-compulsory school age (over 15 years of age) did not increase during the pandemic.** Declining dropout among Grade 10s at the end of 2020 relative to 2018 is implied by lower Grade 10 departure rates in 2020 vs 2018 as calculated from learner unit record data (DBE, 2023). Enrolment in secondary grades and among 15- to 19-year-olds also increased during the pandemic. Furthermore, Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) data suggests a decline in the percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary education during the pandemic (2020-2021) relative to pre-pandemic years.

**While the percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary education declined during the pandemic, post-pandemic (2022 and 2023) these estimates have reverted closer to pre-pandemic levels.** At the start of 2020, just before the pandemic, about 11% of youth aged 15-19 were not in school and did not have a completed secondary education. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2021 this estimate had declined to 8.6% but reverted to 10.2% by the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2023.

**Before, during and after COVID-19 there were inequalities in school dropout along the lines of gender and socio-economic status.** Over all three periods, males aged 15-19 are more likely to be out of school and without a completed secondary education than females aged 15-19. Over all three periods, youth aged 15-19 are more likely to be out of school and without a completed secondary education if they live in less educated households.

**Among youth aged 15-19, enrolment in non-school based education such as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges or home-schooling is not a major contributor to their departures from the schooling system.** In the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2023, of youth aged 15-19 less than 0.4% were attending a TVET or other college and just 1% were in some other form of education such as a home-based schooling.

# CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Tables and Figures</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>2 Background</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1 International context.....	7
<b>3 Grade repetition in South africa</b> .....	<b>10</b>
3.1 Large reductions in repetition rates during the pandemic: Evidence from administrative data.....	10
3.2 Repetition rates rise post-pandemic but remain lower than pre-pandemic levels	11
3.3 Greater leniency in School Based Assessments (SBAs) during the pandemic .....	15
3.4 Implications of reduced repetition rates and greater leniency in SBAs at the Grade 10 and 11 level for survival to Grade 12.....	16
3.5 Implications of reduced repetition rates in the early grades for reading .....	17
<b>4 Dropout and non-school attendance among youth aged 15-19 in South Africa....</b>	<b>19</b>
4.1 Administrative records: Rising enrolment and lower school dropout at the secondary school level during COVID-19 .....	19
4.2 Household data: Youth aged 15-19 years not in school and without a completed secondary education before, during and after the pandemic .....	23
4.2.1 Are COVID-19 related changes to the QLFS sample driving these results?.....	25
4.2.2 Gender and socio-economic differences in the percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary education.....	26
4.2.3 Activities of youth aged 15-19 not in school.....	28
<b>5 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>6 References</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>7 Appendix</b> .....	<b>35</b>

# TABLES AND FIGURES

## Tables

Table 1: The percent of Grade 10 learners in three provinces achieving 40% or more in four subjects in term 4 of 2019 and 2020 from Van der Berg et al. (2023b).....	15
Table 2: The percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary education, regressions using the QLFS.....	26
Table 3: Activities of youth aged 15 to 19 by completed secondary education status, 2014, 2021 and 2023 (2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter).....	29
Table A 1: Some studies reporting dropout rates or non-enrolment rates in LMICs.....	35
Table A 2: Response rates in the Quarterly Labour Force Surveys, 2019-2023.....	36

## Figures

Figure 1: South African repetition rates as calculated from learner unit records (from DBE, 2023).....	10
Figure 2: South African repetition rates in Grade 10 and 11 as calculated from learner unit records, by province (from DBE, 2023).....	11
Figure 3: South African repetition rates from the General Household Survey (GHS).....	12
Figure 4: South African repetition rates by gender and wealth, General Household Survey 2018 and 2022.....	13
Figure 5: Repetition rates in LURITS vs. household survey data.....	14
Figure 6: Repetition rates by grade and year in Gauteng and Limpopo, 2016-2022 from administrative data.....	14
Figure 7: Trends in the National Senior Certificate Examination, 2013-2022.....	16
Figure 8: Foundation Phase repetition and reading trajectories in Setswana, EGRS I.....	18
Figure 9: The percent of learners departing at the end of each grade, national rates, LURITS (from DBE, 2023).....	20
Figure 10: School enrolment growth among youth aged 15-19 from 2020-2021.....	21
Figure 11: Secondary level enrolment numbers by grade, 2018-2022.....	22
Figure 12: School enrolment growth in higher grades (index year 2018 = 100).....	22
Figure 13: The percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school (or any education) and without a completed secondary education, QLFS.....	23
Figure 14: The percent of youth aged 15-19 not in education and without a completed secondary education before, during and after the pandemic by age. QLFS.....	24
Figure 15: The percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary education before, during and after the pandemic by gender, QLFS.....	27
Figure 16: The percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary education before, during and after the pandemic by highest qualification level in the household, QLFS.....	28

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, with its far-reaching implications for society, economic growth and education, has triggered significant shifts in key indicators of educational progress across the globe. Impacts of COVID-19 disruptions on education have extended beyond teaching and learning to patterns of enrolment and progression (or flows) of children through schooling systems. South Africa is no exception.

From 18 March 2020 until the end of 2021, the South African schooling sector experienced a combination of total shutdowns, partial openings and rotational timetabling or platooning. Upon the initial reopening of schools in mid-2020, with a phased return by grade, a significant portion of schools adopted rotating attendance schedules for more than 18 months, resulting in further decreases in face-to-face teaching time. Opportunities for remote learning were limited to a privileged few (Statistics South Africa, 2022a). It was only in February 2022 that daily school attendance returned to normal. In the face of school closures, the school system was forced to reduce assessments and examinations, and reduce content covered in those assessments to the limited amount that was taught. More lenient promotion policies were also applied (Hoadley, 2023). This had significant implications for student flows through the schooling system. Furthermore, as the economy contracted and lockdowns restricted mobility, opportunities in the labour market were significantly reduced, especially for youth (Köhler, 2023). This in turn would have negatively impacted on the attractiveness of out-of-school options for adolescents and youth.

Against this backdrop, this report focuses on grade repetition and school dropout in the developing country context of South Africa. We collate existing and new evidence on these patterns before, during and after the pandemic.

The next section provides international context against which to position the South African evidence on changes in enrolment, dropout and repetition. Section 3 then focuses on South African evidence on grade repetition (or retention). Trends in repetition before, during and after the pandemic are documented, and the implications of reduced repetition rates for school completion and early grade learning are considered. Section 4 then focuses on school enrolment, dropout and non-attendance at the secondary school level and among adolescents. In both sections 3 and 4, findings are drawn from existing analyses of administrative data and new analysis of household survey data.

## 2 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 International context

In nearly 95% of countries worldwide, schools remained entirely closed for an average of 17 weeks from the onset of the pandemic until the beginning of 2022 (UNESCO, 2021). This not only led to learning losses (Patrinos et al., 2022; Betthäuser et al., 2023; Mullis et al., 2023), but a burgeoning international literature identifies impacts on enrolment, school dropout and grade repetition. In this brief review, we focus largely on impacts on enrolment, dropout and repetition in low-to-middle-income countries (LMICs), examining disparities in impacts by factors such as age, socioeconomic status, gender, and schooling type (private versus public).

Across studies, the time point at which enrolment was measured relative to when school closures occurred mattered considerably for the interpretation of changes to enrolment and dropout statistics. Drawing on panel phone survey data collected just after school closures in 2020 (between April and June 2020), Dang et al. (2021) compared participation rates – identified as the share of households with children engaged in any learning activity – with participation rates before the pandemic. Participation rate declines were very large, ranging from more than 30 percentage points in Uganda to almost 80 percentage points in Malawi with Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia falling somewhere in between. Given the size of these changes, the impact of school closures on student attendance was very strong or disruptions to school schedules were still being experienced.

Results from surveys conducted a few months after the reopening of schools, suggest less severe impacts. Identifying enrolment changes<sup>3</sup> among children aged 6-14 in LMICs in 2020 and 2021 relative to pre-pandemic enrolment trends, Sabarwal et al. (2023) concluded that impacts were more negative in lower-income countries than in middle-income countries. In Ethiopia and Pakistan, for example, enrolment of children aged 6-14 years dropped by 4 and 6 percentage points respectively, yet in Colombia and Brazil the enrolment declines were slightly lower at 1.3 and 1 percentage point respectively and close to zero in Indonesia, Argentina and Uruguay (Sabarwal et al., 2023).

Drawing on the review by Moscoviz and Evans (2022), Appendix Table A1 summarises findings on dropout and enrolment in LMICs where studies had some national coverage and where it was possible to examine changes in enrolment or dropout with comparative pre-pandemic rates. In Malawi, the dropout rate across grades 1-12 rose considerably from 1.2% pre-pandemic to 4.3% by March 2021, further increasing to 5% by mid-2022 (Kadzamira, 2021, 2023). In Pakistan, the dropout rate among children aged 6-16 years in 2021 was around 6.4%, up from 5% pre-pandemic (ASER Pakistan, 2021). In Ghana and

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<sup>3</sup> This is the difference between predicted enrolment, given by historical trends in nationally representative labour force surveys, and actual student enrolment after schools reopened after pandemic-related disruptions.



Senegal, however, the dropout rate remained quite constant at about 2% after school closures relative to a pre-pandemic situation (Abreh et al. 2021; Mbaye et al. 2021).<sup>4</sup>

A key issue globally in the interpretation of enrolment statistics during the COVID-19 period is whether lower enrolment and higher dropout trends were permanent or just reflected extended absenteeism from school. This issue is discussed in the South African context by Shepherd & Mohohlwane (2022). Reviews based on 2020 data or only one or two data points are also less revealing about post-pandemic recovery. In the United States, Chatterji and Li (2021) estimated that the likelihood of students reporting that they had enrolled in high school in April 2020 dropped by 1.8 percentage points compared to previous years but it had already rebounded back to previous levels by October 2020. In Malawi, however, only 86% of adolescent students returned to school in 2021 (Kidman et al., 2022).

Referring to the experiences of Ghana and Senegal, it is also worth highlighting that not all countries experienced rising dropout. In Hungary, a lower dropout rate at an upper secondary level was also identified in 2020 compared to previous years, with concurrent reductions in repetition rates at the primary and lower secondary level<sup>5</sup> (Hermann, 2022). Impacts on repetition rates, which are less often reported than dropout statistics, were also varied. Malawi saw a decline in repetition rates in the COVID-19 year in almost all grades compared with the previous full academic year, with particularly large reductions in early primary grades (Kadzamira, 2021). By contrast, repetition rates rose considerably in Senegal in 2021 relative to a pre-pandemic year (Mbaye et al. 2021).

**A key issue globally in interpreting enrolment statistics during the COVID-19 period is whether lower enrolment and higher dropout trends were permanent or reflected extended absenteeism.**

There is a consensus that adverse effects on school dropout (Malawi, Ethiopia and Pakistan) and enrolment (United States) were magnified for older students (Kidman et al., 2022; Bayley et al., 2023; ASER Pakistan, 2021; Chatterji & Li, 2021). In Nigeria, declines in attendance rates were higher among older school children aged 12-18 (9 percentage point decline) and aged 15-18 (11 percentage point decline) compared to children aged 5-

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<sup>4</sup> Averaging across grades, the dropout rate in Ghana was 2% in 2021 relative to a pre-pandemic dropout rate of 2.1% (Abreh et al. 2021). In Senegal, the dropout rate was 1.6% in May 2021 which was slightly lower than a pre-pandemic dropout rate of 1.9% (2018-2019) (Mbaye et al. 2021).

<sup>5</sup> In 2020, the repetition rate in Hungary fell to around two-thirds of the previous year's level in both lower and upper primary schools.

11 (a 5 percentage point decline) (Dessy et al., 2021). In Central America (Belize), Näslund-Hadley et al. (2023) using Ministry of Education data from 2016/2017 through to 2021/2022 identify that the net primary enrolment rate fell by 6.7 percentage points from 96.3% in the 2019/20 school year to 89.6% in 2021/22 but the secondary primary enrolment rate remained stable at 56.5%.

Other patterns of inequalities in dropout and enrolment are mixed across countries. Adverse effects on school enrolment were magnified for male students in the United States (Chatterji & Li, 2021) while in Malawi (Kidman et al., 2022) and Ethiopia (Bayley et al., 2023), dropouts were more pronounced for girls. In Pakistan, gender differences in dropout rates were not statistically significant (ASER Pakistan, 2021).

In Indonesia, Mexico and Pakistan, Sabarwal et al. (2023) find that the impacts of COVID-19 for rising dropout rates were larger for students from less educated households. In the United States, enrolment declines were also more pronounced among students without a college-educated household member (Chatterji & Li, 2021). In Tasmania, secondary school attendance rates pre-pandemic and during COVID-19 were relatively unchanged for students with a high socioeconomic status but were lower during the pandemic for those with a lower socioeconomic status (Tomaszewski et al., 2023). In Malawi and Ethiopia, weaker performers were more likely to drop out (Kidman et al., 2022; Bayley et al., 2023).

There were also some differential effects on enrolment across private and secondary schools (Alam & Tiwari, 2021). In rural India, for example, among children aged 6-14 the share of students enrolled in private schools decreased from 33% in 2018 to 24% in 2021 while there was a corresponding increase in the share enrolled in government schools (64% to 70%) and the share not currently enrolled (2.5% to 4.6%) (ASER India, 2021). Contrastingly, across 15 states in the United States, 70% of private schools experienced increases in enrolment numbers in the latter part of 2020 (Scafidi et al., 2021).

When viewed together, these studies point to some common trends and yet highlight the need to closely examine country (and within country) specific trends. COVID-19 impacts on schooling, enrolment and dropout were often context specific, differing across locales or by factors such as gender, age and socio-economic status.

Against this international backdrop, we collate existing and new evidence on how student flows were impacted in South African education during COVID-19 and examine, where possible, what the situation looks like post-pandemic.

**COVID-19 impacts on schooling, enrolment and dropout were often context specific, differing across locales or by factors such as gender, age and socio-economic status.**

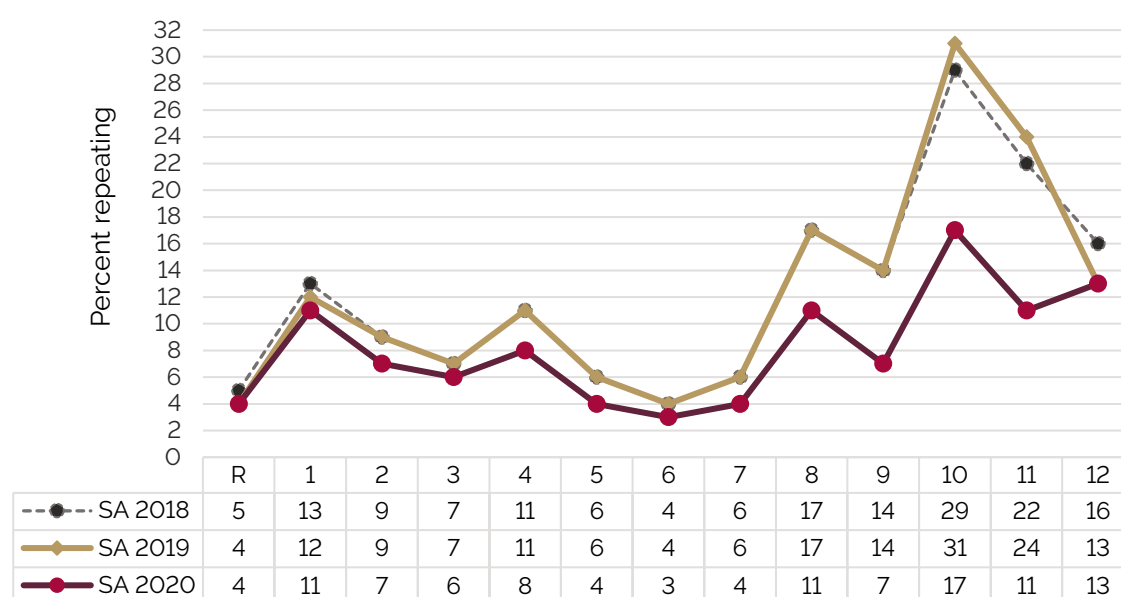
## 3 GRADE REPETITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

### 3.1 Large reductions in repetition rates during the pandemic: Evidence from administrative data

In South African schooling in 2020 and 2021, assessments were reduced; examinations (except the final year National Senior Certificate) were cancelled; moderation processes were eased and the contribution of school-based assessments (SBAs) to learners' final marks (relative to examination marks) was raised significantly in all grades. With the cancellation of examinations, the SBA component of the promotion requirements for Grades 10 and 11 was raised from 25% to 60% (Hoadley, 2020:15; 2023). School assessments were also less challenging than in previous years due to the trimmed curriculum that covered less content, as teachers were told to focus assessments only on those parts of the work that had been covered. Together these factors led to more learners being promoted to the next grade than before the pandemic. Conversely, repetition rates declined.

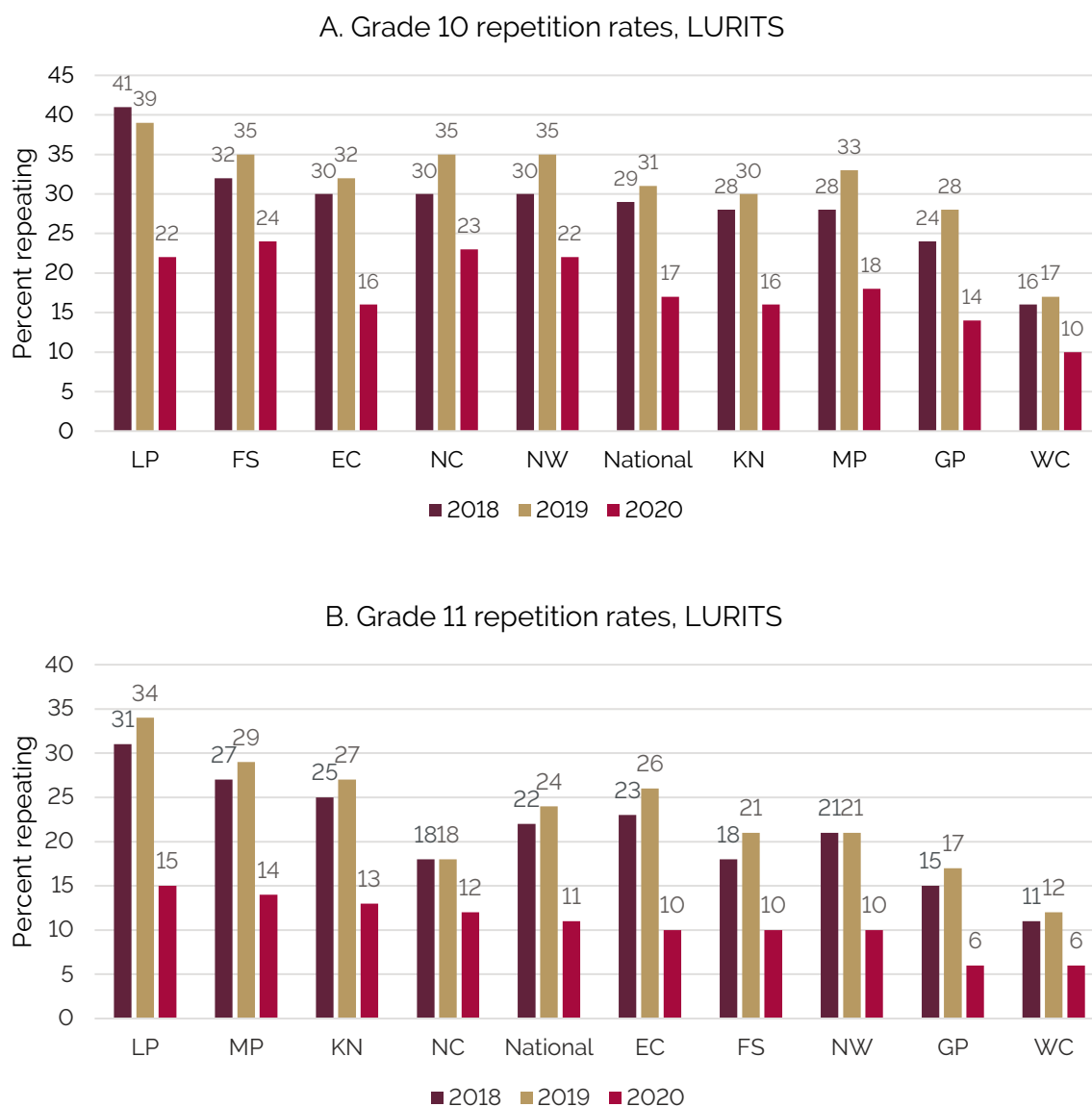
Large reductions in repetition rates at all grade levels, and particularly in Grades 10 and 11, at the end of 2020 are shown in Figure 1. For instance, in 2019, the Grade 10 repetition rate calculated, from learner unit record data across almost all public schools, was 31% but almost halved to 17% in 2020 as identified in research by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (DBE, 2023). The Grade 11 repetition rate in 2019 of 24% had more than halved to 11% in 2020 (DBE, 2023). The lowered repetition rates in 2020 in grades 10 and 11 are unprecedented in South Africa and were observed in all provinces (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: South African repetition rates as calculated from learner unit records (from DBE, 2023)



Data source: DBE (2023) using the Learner Unit Record Information Tracking System (LURITS).

Figure 2: South African repetition rates in Grade 10 and 11 as calculated from learner unit records, by province (from DBE, 2023)



Data source: DBE (2023) using data from the Learner Unit Record Information Tracking System (LURITS).

### 3.2 Repetition rates rise post-pandemic but remain lower than pre-pandemic levels

Household survey data confirms reductions in grade repetition rates during the pandemic. Although repetition rates have risen in a post-pandemic context, across all grades these rates are still lower relative to a pre-pandemic period. We use General Household Survey (GHS) data for the years 2021-2022 relative to 2016 and 2018 to identify changes to self-reported repetition rates as seen in Figure 3. Repetition rates in the GHS 2022 are significantly lower compared with pre-pandemic years 2016 and 2018 at almost all grade levels. The GHS 2022 repetition rates are higher than those in 2021 but have settled at lower levels relative to a pre-pandemic period. The Grade 10 and 11 repetition rates in the GHS 2022 are two-thirds to three quarters of the repetition rates in the GHS 2018. At the

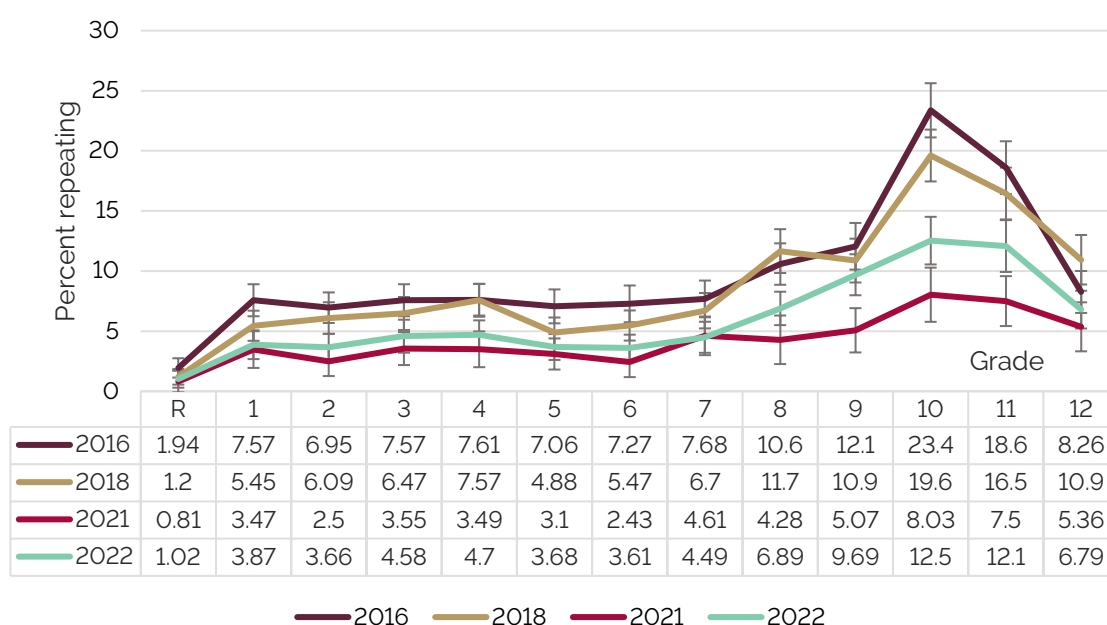


grades 1-7 level, the repetition rates in the GHS 2022 are 60% to 75% of what they were in 2018.

Lower grade repetition rates in the post-pandemic period compared to a pre-pandemic period are experienced by both learners in the poorest 60% of households and the wealthiest 40% of households as shown in Figure 4 (right panel). However, repetition rates remain higher among learners in poorer contexts compared to wealthier contexts both pre- and post-pandemic. In 2022 compared to 2018, repetition rates were lower for both boys and girls despite higher rates among boys in both years (refer to Figure 4, left panel). This pattern is also observed in administrative data (DBE, 2023). Post-pandemic (2022) boys' repetition rates in the GHS mirror the pre-pandemic (2018) repetition rates of girls.

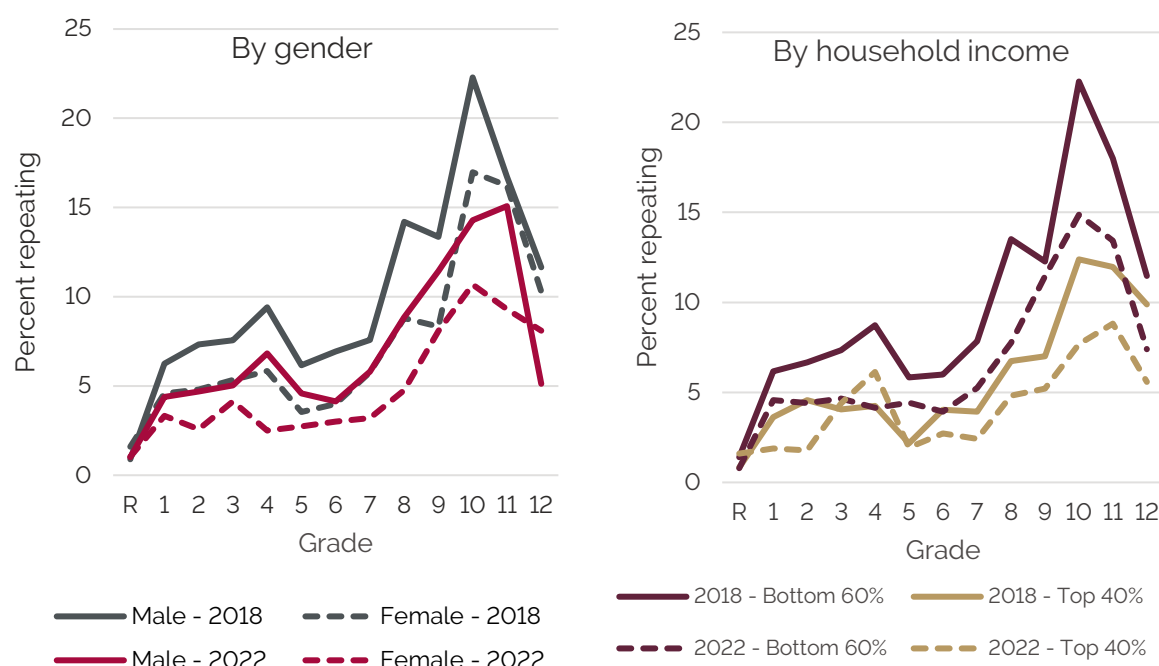
## Lower grade repetition rates in the post-pandemic period compared to a pre-pandemic period are observed for learners in the poorest 60% and wealthiest 40% of households.

Figure 3: South African repetition rates from the General Household Survey (GHS)



Data source: General Household Survey 2016, 2018, 2021 and 2022, own calculations. Notes: Survey weights applied. 95% confidence intervals shown.

Figure 4: South African repetition rates by gender and wealth, General Household Survey 2018 and 2022



Data source: General Household Survey 2018 and 2022, own calculations. Notes: Survey weights applied. 95% confidence intervals shown.

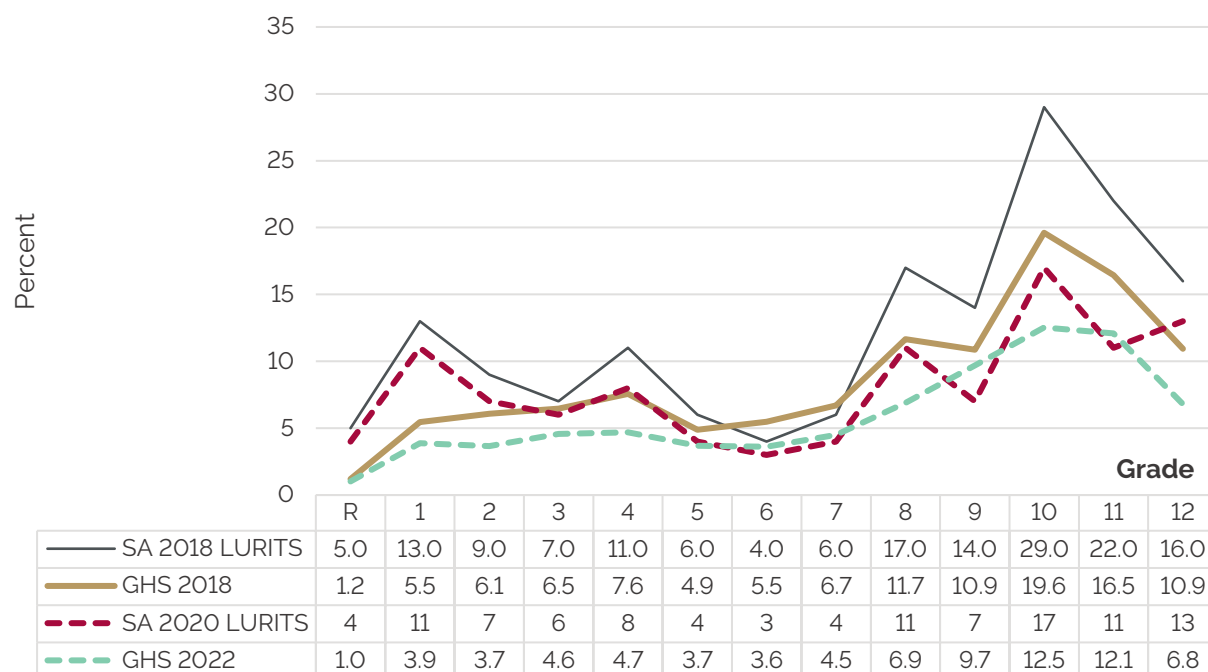
It is worth highlighting that repetition rates derived from self-reported household survey data underestimate repetition compared to deriving repetition rates from administrative data.<sup>6</sup> The lower repetition rates in the GHS 2018 compared to those derived from the 2018 Learner Unit Information Tracking System (LURITS) demonstrate this difference as seen in in Figure 5. While repetition rates from the GHS are lower relative to actual repetition rates in administrative data, the GHS estimates are still useful for observing the overall patterns and trends in repetition rates which tend to align with LURITS. Notably, the higher Grade 10 and 11 repetition rates observed in LURITS relative to other grades are consistent with findings in the GHS.

Support for lower repetition rates in 2022 relative to before the pandemic is also evident in administrative data from three provinces (Limpopo, Eastern Cape, and Gauteng), as found by Van der Berg et al. (2023a, 2023b). As an example, Figure 6 exhibits grade 1 to 12 repetition rates in Limpopo and Gauteng. Compared to before the pandemic (2016 and 2019), both provinces saw large declines in repetition rates during the pandemic (2020), particularly in Grade 10 and 11. By 2021, there had been some reversion to pre-pandemic levels, and this continued into 2022 in Limpopo. In Gauteng, at the secondary level repetition rates in 2021 and 2022 are relatively similar but are higher than 2020 and lower

<sup>6</sup> A potential reason for this is that repetition is not deemed socially desirable. The household respondent is not necessarily the child or teen referred to and may not have completely accurate information on the child's school progression status.

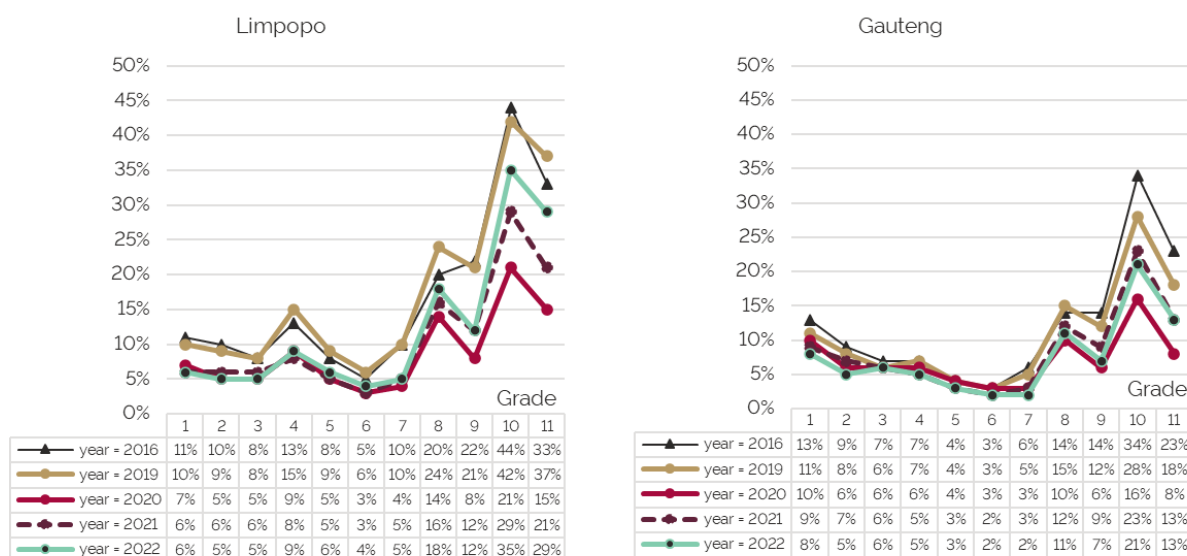
than 2019 or 2016. Even with rising repetition rates in 2021 and 2022 relative to 2020, post-pandemic repetition rates remain below pre-pandemic levels in the three provinces.

Figure 5: Repetition rates in LURITS vs. household survey data



Data source: DBE (2023) using LURITS and own calculations using General Household Survey. Notes: Survey weights applied to GHS. 95% confidence intervals not shown.

Figure 6: Repetition rates by grade and year in Gauteng and Limpopo, 2016-2022 from administrative data



Source: Van der Berg et al. (2023b) using Data Driven Districts (DDD), SA-SAMS data.

### 3.3 Greater leniency in School Based Assessments (SBAs) during the pandemic

During the pandemic, grade repetition rates declined as school marks rose rather than fell. Drawing on evidence from the Eastern Cape and Gauteng, Van der Berg (2023a, 2023b) found that school-based assessment (SBA) marks improved during the pandemic period. Using administrative data from Data Driven Districts (DDD) for three provinces (Gauteng, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo), Van der Berg et al. (2023b) examined average end-of-year Grade 10 SBA marks in Mathematics, Mathematical Literacy, Physical Science and English as First Additional Language (EFAL) for the period 2019 to 2022.

In all three provinces, they found that in 2020 there was a notable increase in the proportion of Grade 10 learners attaining pass levels in all subjects compared to the previous year, 2019. The percent of learners in three provinces who scored 40% or higher in 2019 and 2020 across four subjects is seen in Table 1. Particularly remarkable is the significant improvement in pass rates for Grade 10 Physical Science, especially in Limpopo where it rose from 17% in 2019 to 40% in 2020. English exhibits higher pass rates than other subjects but showed additional increases of over ten percentage points in 2020 across all provinces.

Improved progression and higher school-based marks should not constitute evidence that there were no major learning losses. There is growing evidence of significant learning losses in South Africa as reflected in reductions in Grade 4 performance in the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) of 2021 compared to 2016 (Mullis et al. 2023; Böhmer & Wills, 2023). There were also language and mathematics declines in grades 3, 6 and 9 in the Western Cape Systemic Tests in 2021 relative to 2019 (Van der Berg et al. 2022) and significant reductions in reading skill acquisition in pandemic years (Ardington et al. 2021; Kotze et al 2022).

Table 1: The percent of Grade 10 learners in three provinces achieving 40% or more in four subjects in term 4 of 2019 and 2020 from Van der Berg et al. (2023b)

Province	Year	Mathematics pass rate Gr 10	Maths Literacy pass rate Gr10	Physical Science Gr 10	English First Additional Language (EFAL) pass rate Gr 10
Eastern Cape	2019	10%	16%	18%	70%
	2020	31%	36%	33%	83%
Gauteng	2019	16%	24%	28%	69%
	2020	29%	36%	41%	80%
Limpopo	2019	12%	15%	17%	72%
	2020	30%	33%	40%	85%

Source: Van der Berg et al. (2023b) calculated from DDD data.

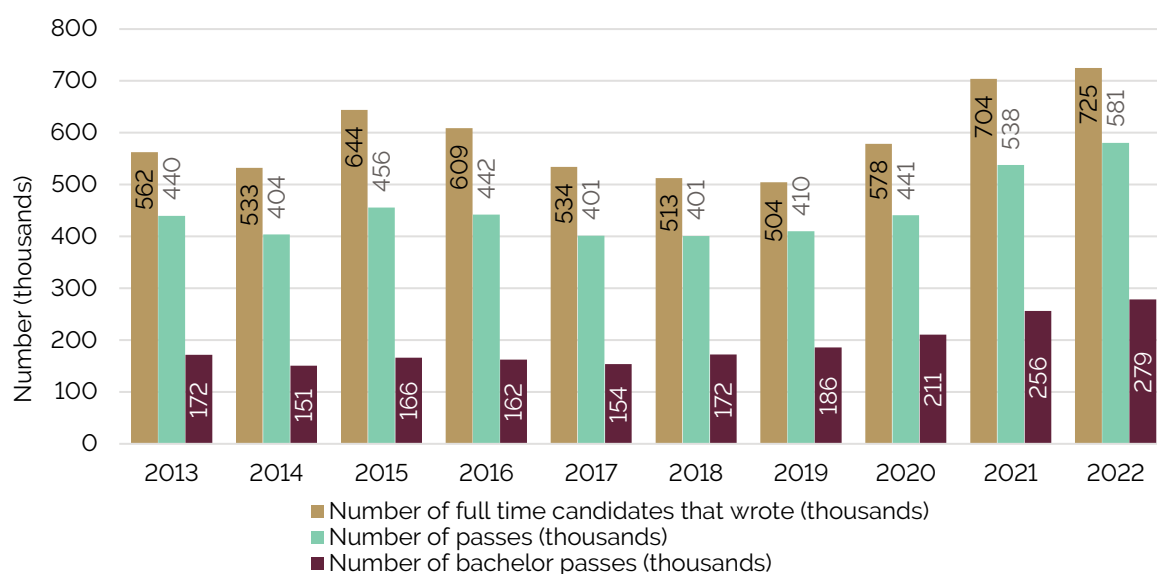


### 3.4 Implications of reduced repetition rates and greater leniency in SBAs at the Grade 10 and 11 level for survival to Grade 12

The very large increase in learners being promoted to Grade 12 in 2021 and 2022 (partly attributed to reductions in Grade 10 or 11 repetition rates) has substantially raised learners' chances of 'survival' to matric. As is discussed in the next section, the years 2021 and 2022 saw substantial increases in Grade 12 enrolment numbers. Compared to 2018, there were roughly 17% and 20% more Grade 12s enrolled in 2021 and 2022 respectively. Furthermore, as seen in Figure 7, unprecedented numbers of candidates wrote the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination in 2021 and 2022. As many as 704 000 full-time candidates wrote the NSC in 2021, rising to 725 000 candidates in 2022 - 30% more than the 2013-2019 average. Concurrently, the number of candidates achieving a Bachelors-level pass in 2021 and 2022 rose to their highest levels at about 256 000 and 279 000 as seen in Figure 7.

It is noted that two additional contributing reasons for higher numbers of NSC candidates in 2021 and 2022 include a larger population<sup>7</sup> of 18-year-olds in 2021 and 2022 than previous years. More candidates were also registered as full-time candidates with the removal of the Multiple Examinations Opportunity<sup>8</sup> in 2020.

Figure 7: Trends in the National Senior Certificate Examination, 2013-2022



Source: Anonymised learner-level NSC subject data (2013-2021). Only learners with seven or more written subjects and a non-missing pass status are included, and numbers may differ slightly from officially reported statistics. Data for 2022 is drawn from official reports.

<sup>7</sup> In the period 2003-2005, South Africa's birth rates unexpectedly rose by 13% (Gustafsson, 2018).

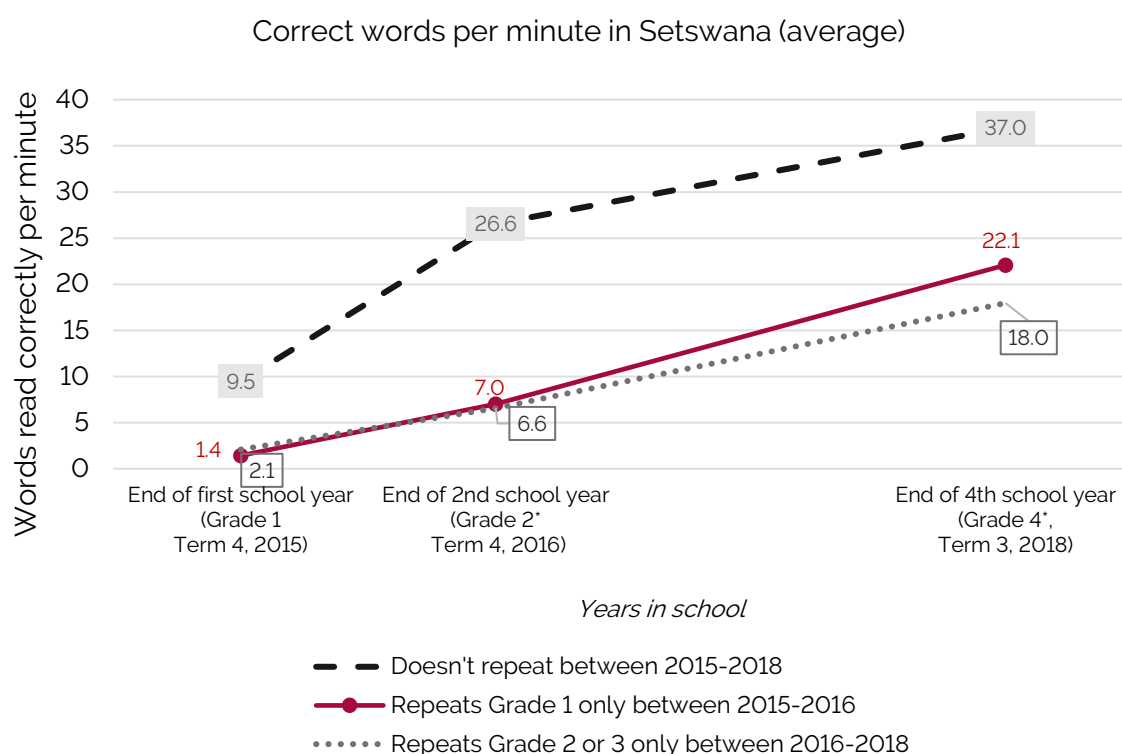
<sup>8</sup> The Multiple Examination Opportunity is a programme to support learners who had failed a grade at least twice but are then progressed to the next grade. They are given the option to split their subjects, for the final NSC examination, over the final exam period and the following year's June exam period.

### 3.5 Implications of reduced repetition rates in the early grades for reading

In another paper by Wills (2023) produced for the Covid-Generation project, she examined what the implications are of reductions in early grade repetition rates for learning. If repetition is viewed as a substitute for a programme of systematic remediation – which largely does not exist across most South African schools – there are potential concerns about declining repetition trends in the early grades. The extent of these concerns depends on whether there are any benefits of early grade repetition relative to the high costs of repetition, both in terms of direct costs and larger early grade class sizes. To explore this, Wills (2023) examined patterns of repetition and how this is linked to reading improvements. Her analysis was based on data from early grade reading studies in no-fee paying schools in two provinces (North West and Mpumalanga). We highlight the key findings from this analysis below:

- **Early grade repetition rates, particularly in Grade 1, have been too high.** Nationally, trends point to a reduction in Grade 1 and 2 repetition rates during the COVID-19 pandemic but even these lower pandemic era rates are high by middle-income standards and relative to some other Sub-Saharan African countries.
- **Early grade repetition on the whole is not random or ill-informed as some might believe but is a response to a lack of school readiness.** On average, children held back at the end of Grade 1 are found to have considerably lower alphabetic awareness, and lower phonological awareness levels, both at the start and end of Grade 1, than promoted peers.
- **Repetition beyond Grade 1 yields diminishing effectiveness for reading improvements.** Repeating Grade 2 or 3 appears to be less efficacious (and potentially more harmful) for reading improvements than repeating Grade 1.
- **One should be very cautious in drawing hard and fast conclusions about whether Grade 1 repetition is harmful or beneficial for learning.** The conclusions drawn depend on the approach or methods used to estimate the relationship between repetition and learning outcomes. By example, this issue is explained using Figure 8. When comparing fluency levels across a 2015 first-time Grade 1 cohort at the same point in time, promoted learners always have higher fluency levels than repeaters. Even after four years of schooling, Grade 1 repeaters lag far behind their promoted peers. However, when assessing Grade 1s after they repeat Grade 1 (i.e at the end of 2016), their fluency levels are roughly in line with the fluency levels at the end of 2015 of promoted Grade 1s.

Figure 8: Foundation Phase repetition and reading trajectories in Setswana, EGRS I



Source: Wills (2023) using EGRS I wave 2-4. Notes: Balanced panel. There are 333 repeaters at the end of 2015, 395 repeaters between 2016 and 2018, and a total of 1856 non-repeaters between 2015 and 2018. Any repeaters in 2015 are excluded. \*Reflects highest grade possible if no repetition in any Foundation Phase grade. Trajectories for learners repeating more than once between 2015 and 2018 are not shown as this is a small sample ( $n = 43$ ). There is no assessment point available at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of school. A linear trend is assumed between the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> year and end of 4<sup>th</sup> year assessment.

In a regression context, when comparing a Grade 1 cohort of peers at the same point in time, Grade 1 repetition appears to have a negative short-run effect on decoding skills: repeating learners sound 10-13 fewer correct letters per minute and read almost 7 fewer additional words during their 2<sup>nd</sup> school year (repeating grade 1) relative to promoted peers. However, a same-grade comparison which evaluates the achievement of repeated learners against promoted learners at the same grade level yields more positive results. The home language reading levels of Grade 1 repeaters could potentially surpass the reading levels of those (assessed a year earlier) who advanced to Grade 2 (without repeating) by as much as 11 correct letters sounded per minute or 4 correct words per minute. **Therefore, one cannot rule out that Grade 1 repetition could facilitate a recovery in foundational decoding skills, contributing to overall reading development.**

Given the prevalence of repetition and its costs for the South African education system, further research is needed on this topic using longitudinal data. We need further clarity on the longer-term effects of being held back in Grade 1 and to examine repetition effects in mathematics.

## 4 DROPOUT AND NON-SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AMONG YOUTH AGED 15-19 IN SOUTH AFRICA

Early in the pandemic in 2020 there were concerns that the shut-down could lead to large-scale dropouts from the schooling system in South Africa. Estimates in June 2021 suggested an additional 1.9% of children above pre-pandemic levels, had not returned to school and were potentially at risk of dropping out (Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021). However, these fears of dropout proved to be unfounded. Non-participation at school occurred but this was mostly due to extended absenteeism rather than dropouts from the school system. There is also some evidence that a small proportion of parents delayed entry of their children into Grade R and Grade 1 (with enrolment lower by about 27,000 learners in term 1 of 2021 compared to enrolment in public schools of about 1.86 million learners in Grade R and Grade 1 in 2019<sup>9</sup>). There were also a few additional drop-outs at the primary level (enrolment declined marginally by about 19,000 learners) (DBE, 2023). Conversely, secondary level enrolment increased, in large part due to more lenient progression requirements, but potentially supported by fewer economic alternatives outside of school while school feeding schemes (when running) may have encouraged school attendance in a depressed economic context.

As more lenient progression requirements were applied, repetition rates declined. This in turn is expected to have implications for school dropout (Gibbs and Heaton 2014). A failure to proceed through schooling at the standard pace has been found to be strongly associated with learners dropping out of school even after controlling for socio-economic status (SES) and school quality (Branson et al. 2014). The converse is also likely to hold true with implications for higher enrolment numbers. Against this context, it is not unexpected that school dropout rates among adolescent youth did not increase during the pandemic in South Africa.

### 4.1 Administrative records: Rising enrolment and lower school dropout at the secondary school level during COVID-19

A report by the Department of Basic Education (2023) estimates “departure” rates from the South African public schooling system before and during the pandemic using LURITS data. The term “departure” rather than “dropout” is intentionally used in the report because learners may not be identified in the public education administrative data from one year to the next for reasons unrelated to dropping out. Other reasons include data limitations that constrain linking of records across years; learners moving into private education or the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system; moving out of the country or premature death. The report is also cautious to calculate departure rates

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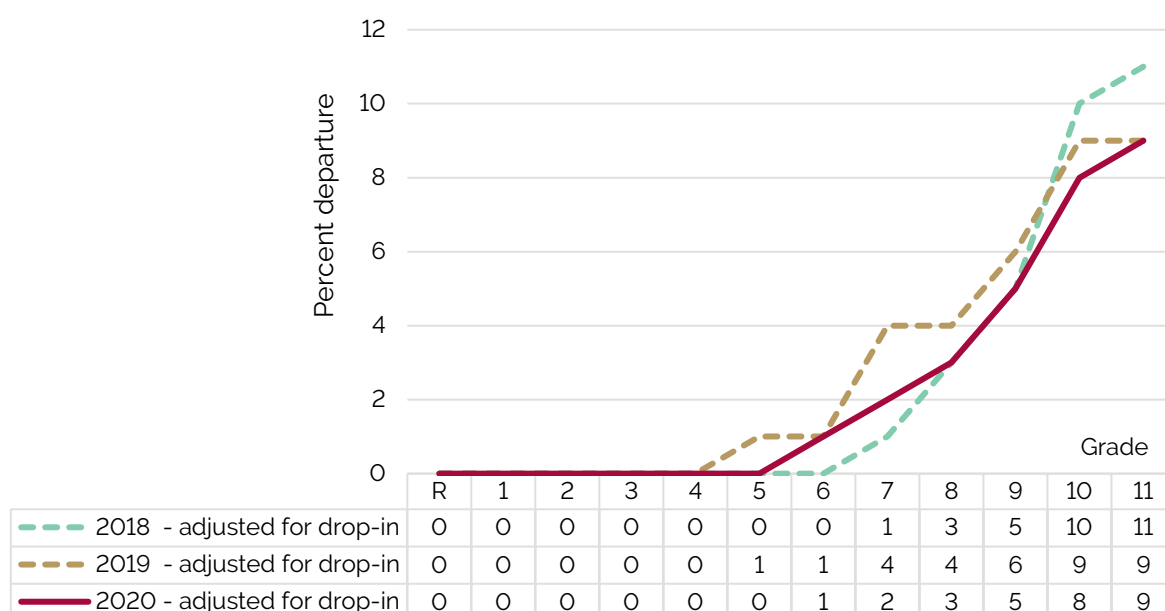
<sup>9</sup> This is a very small decline considering that about 815



adjusting for “drop-in” which occurs if learners are identified again in later years in the administrative data after having seemingly dropped out in prior years.

In the early primary grades, departure rates are virtually negligible as seen in Figure 9 but increase slightly in the last three years of primary school. The highest departure rates occur in grades 10 and 11 once learners have typically reached non-compulsory school age (over 15 years of age). Declines in grades 10 and 11 departure rates at the end of 2020 compared to 2018 are evident. Age-specific analysis of departure ratios from this same data, however, suggests that the pandemic decline in departure rates was driven more by older learners (over 19 years of age).

Figure 9: The percent of learners departing at the end of each grade, national rates, LURITS (from DBE, 2023)

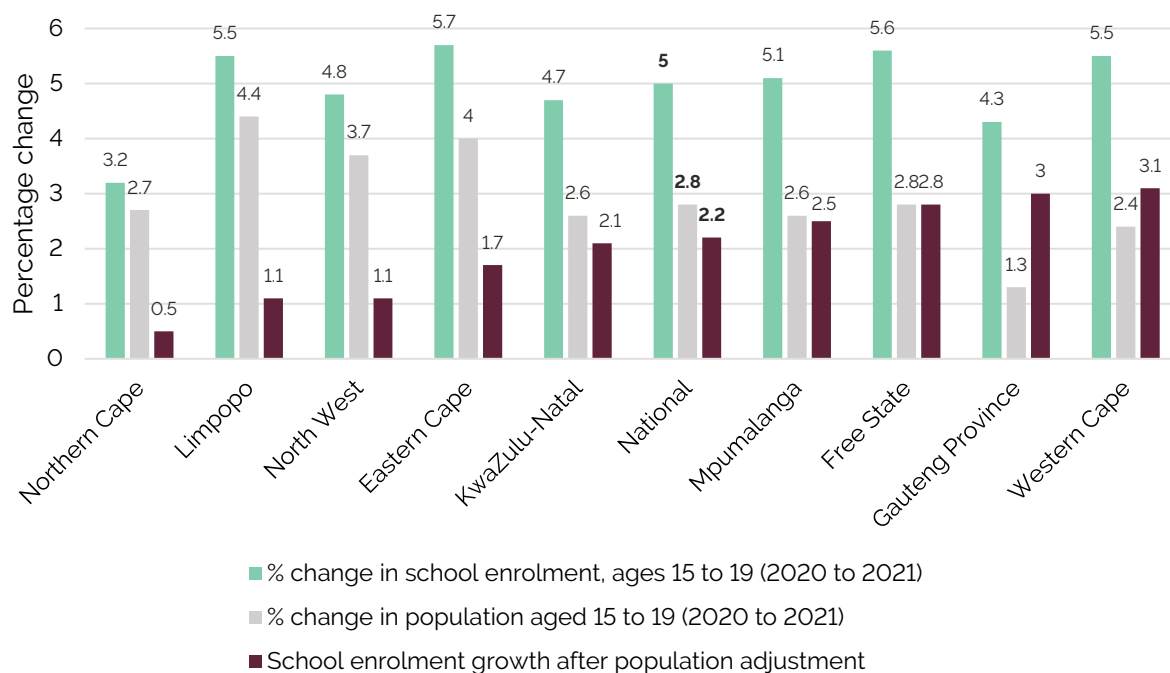


Data source: DBE (2023) using LURITS.

Furthermore, administrative data points to national school enrolment growth among youth aged 15-19 from 2020 to 2021 in all nine South African provinces. After adjusting for anticipated growth in the population of adolescents aged 15-19, an analysis conducted by the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2022, p15) reveals that nationally there was a 2.2 percentage point increase in school enrolment growth for this age group from 2020 to 2021 (refer to Figure 10).<sup>10</sup> In all provinces, among youth aged 15-19, enrolment growth outpaced population growth.

<sup>10</sup> An analysis of enrollment data further indicates a notable 20% rise in Grade 12 enrollment, with age-specific increases in Grade 12 enrollment for individuals aged 17–25 surpassing the population growth estimates provided by Statistics South Africa for these age groups (DBE, 2022, p14).

Figure 10: School enrolment growth among youth aged 15-19 from 2020-2021



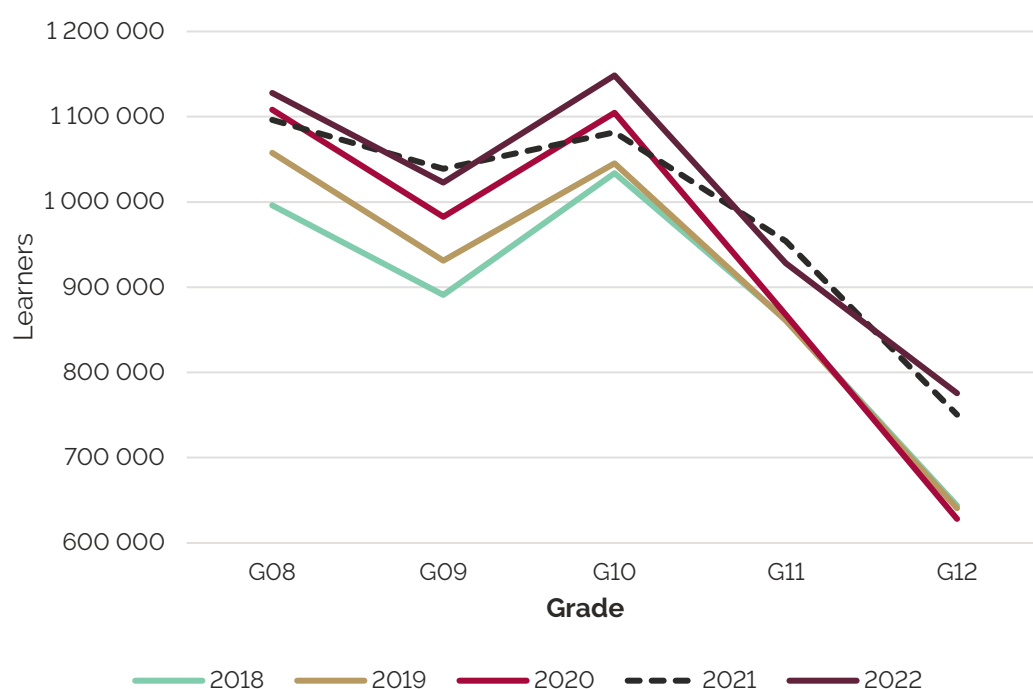
Data source: DBE (2022). Table 12. Enrolment data derived from SA-SAMS, using data from the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2020 and 2021, and cleaned for duplicates. Population changes for those aged 15 to 19 are from Statistics South Africa's mid-year population estimates.

Total enrolment numbers in secondary school grades are also shown in Figure 11. There have been significant increases in enrolment in the secondary grades in 2021 and 2022 relative to 2018-2020. Noteworthy is the significant improvement in survival to Grade 12 due to rising repetition and lower dropout. Compared to Grade 12 enrolment in 2018, there were roughly 17% more Grade 12s in 2021, and 20% more Grade 12s in 2022 (see Figure 12).

An analysis of household data also implies a decline in school dropout among youth aged 15-19 during the pandemic period as discussed in the next section.

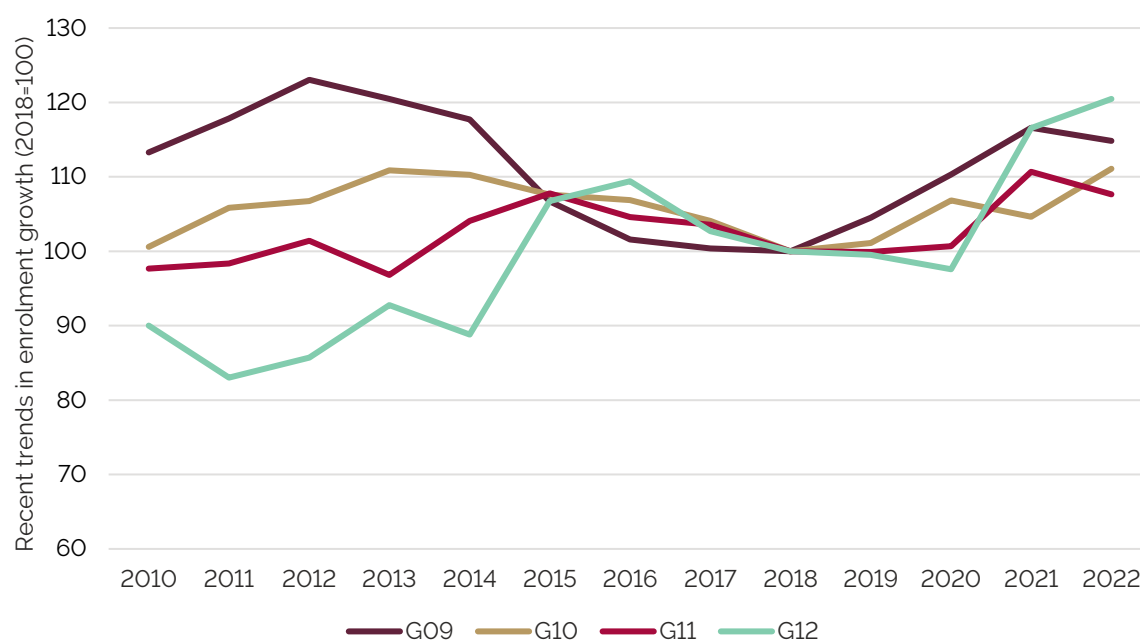
**National school enrolment grew among youth aged 15-19 from 2020 to 2021 in all nine South African provinces.**

Figure 11: Secondary level enrolment numbers by grade, 2018-2022



Data source: DBE School Realities reports. G = Grade. Enrolment in public and independent ordinary schools.

Figure 12: School enrolment growth in higher grades (index year 2018 = 100)



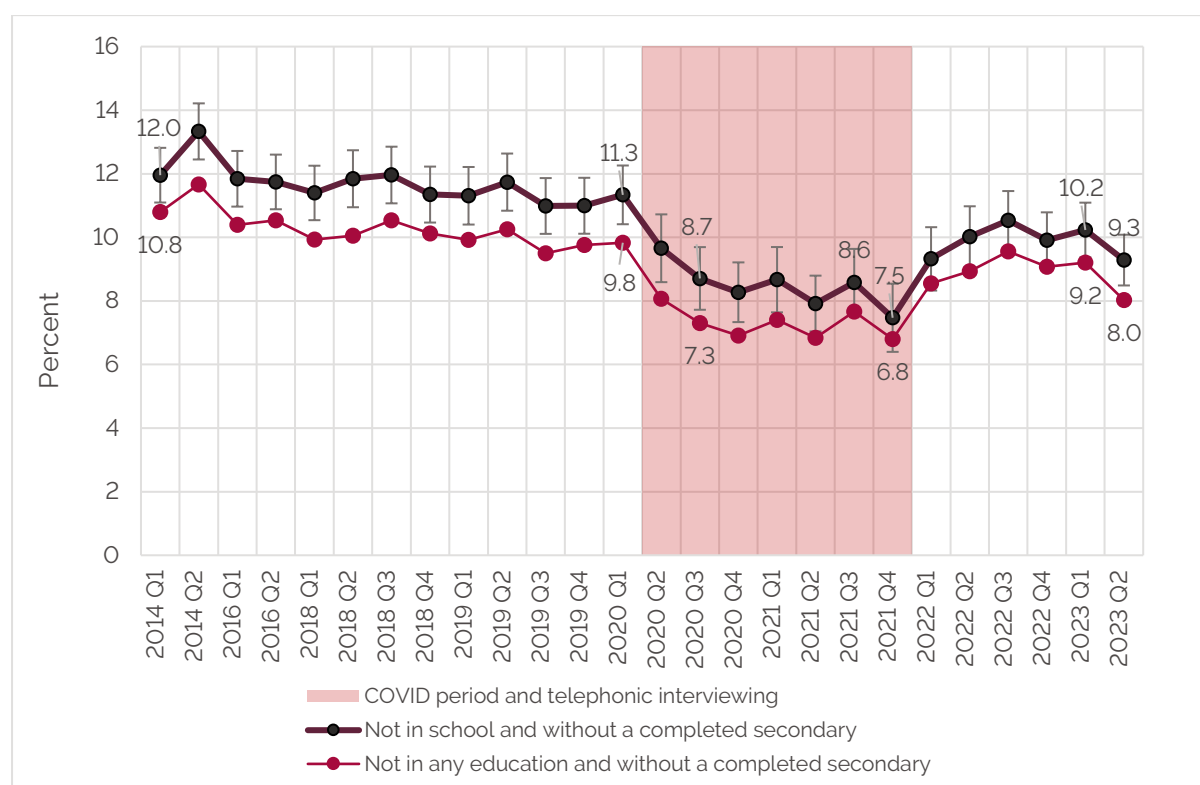
Data source: DBE School Realities reports, own calculations. G = Grade. Public and independent ordinary schools.

## 4.2 Household data: Youth aged 15-19 years not in school and without a completed secondary education before, during and after the pandemic

Another approach to investigate how patterns of school dropout may have changed during, and after the pandemic relative to a pre-pandemic period is to use household data to analyse trends in the percent of youth aged 15-19 years who are not in school and are without a completed secondary education (abbreviated here as NSWCS). (Being without a completed secondary education is equivalent to not having passed the National Senior Certificate).

Using the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), we show these estimates in Figure 13. Importantly, these NSWCS estimates are not the same as annual departure or dropout rates from school. These NSWCS estimates will capture the cumulative effects of decisions to leave school in previous years or more recently and are therefore expected to be higher than annual dropout rates from school among an age group. Additionally, the limitations and cautions of using household survey data, and specifically the QLFS, for such analyses are discussed below.

Figure 13: The percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school (or any education) and without a completed secondary education, QLFS



Data source: QLFS, weighted and stratified. 95% confidence intervals based on standard errors shown for first series only. Own calculations. Q = quarter.

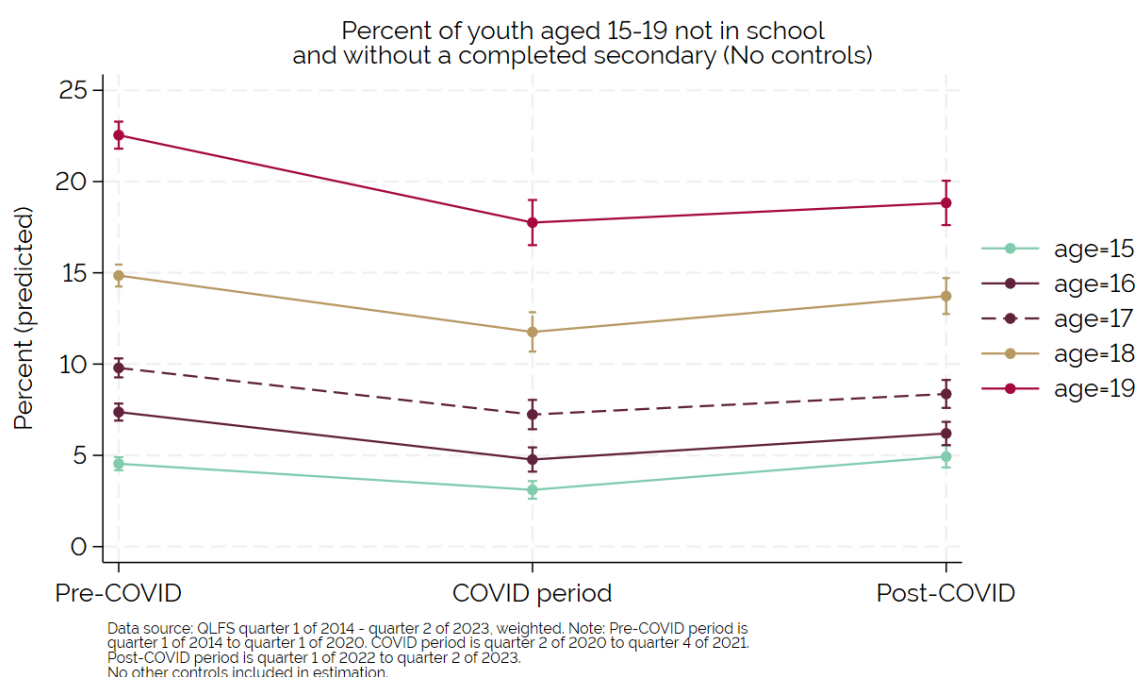


During the COVID-19 period, the incidence of youth aged 15-19 years not in school and without a completed secondary declined relative to pre-pandemic years in the QLFS. At the start of 2020, just before the pandemic, approximately 11% of youth aged 15-19 years were not enrolled in school and lacked a completed secondary education. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2021, this estimate had declined to 8.6% (see Figure 13).

Compared to the pandemic period, these NSWCS estimates have risen but may not have fully reverted to pre-pandemic levels. For instance, lower NSWCS rates during the pandemic among youth aged 15-19 years reverted closer to pre-pandemic levels at 10.2% by the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2023 but remained slightly lower than 11.3% at the start of 2020, as depicted in Figure 13. It is noteworthy that nearly all data points from the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2022 to the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2023 are lower than those recorded in the pre-pandemic period (from the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2014 to the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2020). Although, some confidence intervals do overlap.

According to the QLFS, around 1 in 10 youth aged 15-19 were not attending school and did not possess a completed secondary education at the start of 2023. However, breaking down these estimates by discrete ages in Figure 14, we see that much higher percentages of 18- and 19-year-olds (14% and 19% post-COVID) are not in school and without a completed secondary, compared to 15- or 16-year-olds (5% and 8% post-COVID). During COVID-19, larger declines in NSWCS rates in percentage point terms were observed among 19-year-olds compared to adolescents aged 15, 16, 17 or 18.

Figure 14: The percent of youth aged 15-19 not in education and without a completed secondary education before, during and after the pandemic by age. QLFS



In conclusion, the QLFS does not point to increasing departure rates from school among youth of non-compulsory age during the 2020 lockdown and general pandemic period. This agrees with rising enrolment in higher grades in administrative data.

#### **4.2.1 Are COVID-19 related changes to the QLFS sample driving these results?**

It is possible that changes to the QLFS sample during the COVID-19 period may be influencing the trends observed from the QLFS.<sup>11</sup> There were changes to the administration of the QLFS as it shifted to a telephonic data collection mode from the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2020 to 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2021, with a smaller sample size that was not refreshed over the pandemic period (Statistics South Africa, 2022b). QLFS response rates were also low over the pandemic period (see Appendix Table A2). If there is a bias in the sample towards retaining youths less likely to drop out over the pandemic period, and sample weights do not address this, the resulting estimates may overstate the decline in the percent of youth not in school and without a completed secondary (NSWCS) education.

To partly address this concern, we examine how much lower NSWCS rates were for the 15-19 age group during COVID-19 relative to a pre-pandemic scenario (the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2014 to the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2020) in a regression context. We also examine in a regression context whether there has been a return to pre-pandemic levels in a post-pandemic period. The regressions are designed to control for variations in province of residence, individual characteristics (such as gender, age and population group) and household characteristics (urban, highest qualification in household, household size, number of children, female only household and any employed household members). The regressions are unable to adjust for any changes to the unobserved characteristics of the youth sample.

In model 1 of Table 2, without any controls, the significant coefficient on the variable "COVID period" is -3.21 and the significant coefficient on the variable "Post-COVID period" is -1.79. However, when accounting for potential variations in the samples over time, including province of residence, individual and household characteristics, this attenuates the size of the coefficients. In model 4, the NSWCS rate during COVID-19 is only lower by 1.5 percentage points relative to a pre-pandemic scenario but in the post-pandemic period is slightly higher by 0.07 percentage points (but not significant) compared to a pre-pandemic situation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Declines in the percent of youth aged 15-19 out of school and without a completed secondary in 2020 cannot be explained by higher repetition rates during the pandemic which encouraged more school completion. These effects would only have been felt from 2021 onwards.

<sup>12</sup> Similar trends hold if we restrict the sample to youth aged 15-19 without a completed secondary rather than all youth aged 15-19.

Table 2: The percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary education, regressions using the QLFS

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
COVID period	-3.21*** (0.24)	-3.26*** (0.23)	-2.56*** (0.23)	-1.47*** (0.22)
Post-COVID	-1.79*** (0.23)	-1.84*** (0.23)	-1.21*** (0.22)	0.07 (0.22)
<b>Controls</b>				
Province		X	X	X
Individual			X	X
Household				X
Observations	144,992	144,992	144,992	144,978
R-squared	0.00	0.01	0.07	0.11

Data source: QLFS 2014-2023, own calculations. Notes: Stratified and weighted. Individual characteristics include population group, age, gender and whether individual is employed. Household characteristics include the maximum educational qualification in the household, female only household, household size, any other employed persons in household and number of children aged 0-6. Standard errors are in parentheses.

After adjusting for variations in sample characteristics, the QLFS indicates that the percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary education declined during the pandemic period by 1.5 percentage points compared to a pre-pandemic period. However, it appears that post-COVID, similar percentages of youth aged 15-19 are not in school and without a completed secondary education as in a pre-pandemic period after controlling for variations in household characteristics.<sup>13</sup> This will be best verified by more recent enrolment data from the Department of Basic Education when available.

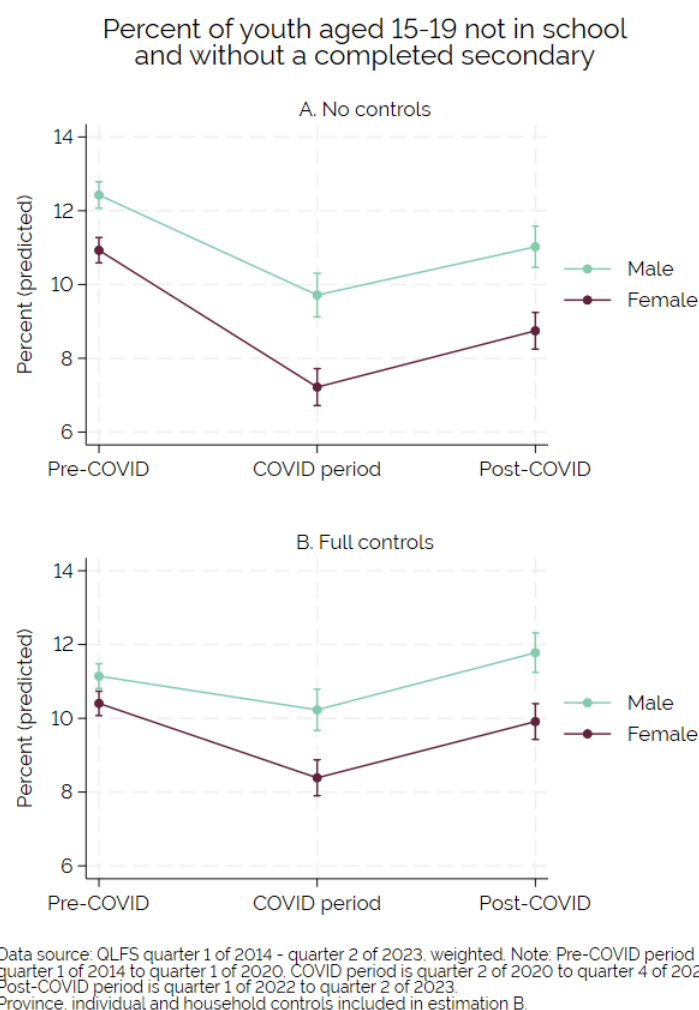
#### 4.2.2 Gender and socio-economic differences in the percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary education

Extending the analysis above, we find that before, during and after the pandemic, males aged 15-19 are significantly more likely to be out of school and without a secondary education compared to their female counterparts. This points to higher rates of school dropout and lower rates of school completion among males than females.

For example, the QLFS indicates that 11% of males aged 15-19 were not in school and without a completed secondary education over the period 2022 to 2023. The comparative estimate for females aged 15-19 was 8.7%. These estimates were lower for both males and females during the pandemic, yet gender gaps were slightly more pronounced during the pandemic. This is seen in the plotted estimates in Figure 15. Gender gaps are observed even after accounting for differences in individual and household characteristics across male and female samples.

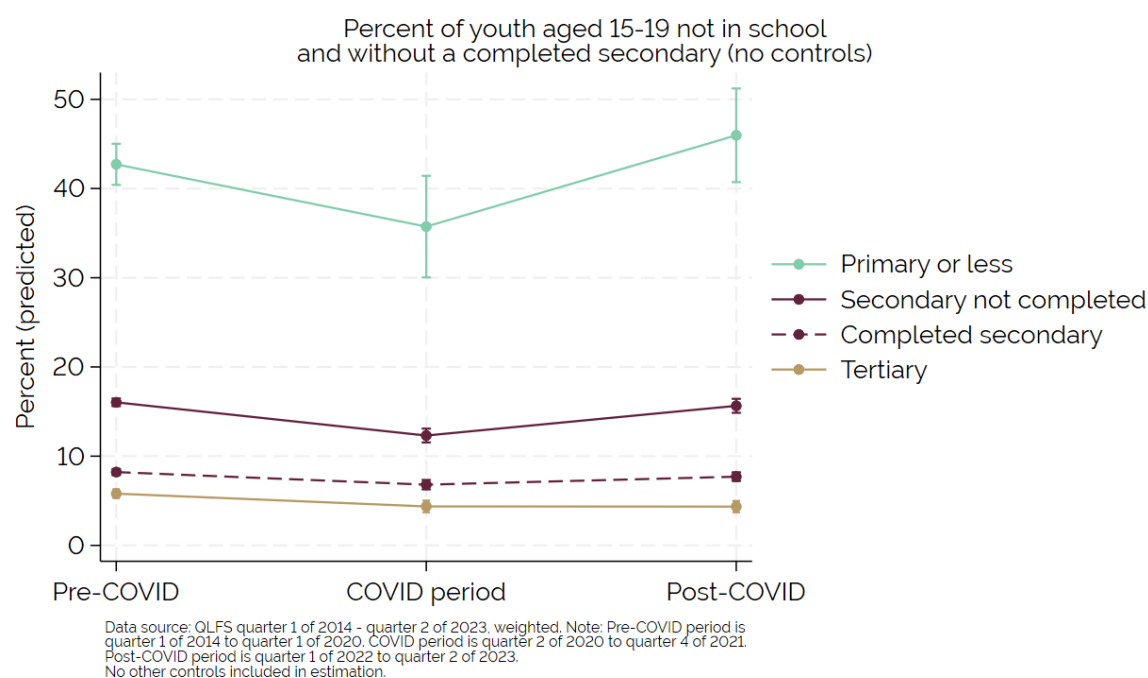
<sup>13</sup> Similar results hold if the outcome variable used is the percent of youth aged 15-19 years not in any form of education and without a completed secondary education.

Figure 15: The percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary education before, during and after the pandemic by gender, QLFS



We also disaggregate NSCWS rates among youth aged 15-18 by the highest educational level of household members (see Figure 16) as a proxy for household socio-economic status. As expected, youth aged 15-19 are more likely to be out of school (yet without a completed secondary education) if they come from less educated households. Post-COVID (2022 and 2023), youth aged 15-19 were half as likely to be out of school (and without a completed secondary education) if the highest education level in the household was a completed secondary compared to an incomplete secondary.

Figure 16: The percent of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary education before, during and after the pandemic by highest qualification level in the household, QLFS



#### 4.2.3 Activities of youth aged 15-19 not in school

One possible reason for premature departures from school is that youth may be completing their education in non-school environments such TVET related colleges or through home-schooling. To examine this, Figure 13 also plotted the percentage of youth aged 15-19 that are not in any form of education at all and do not have a completed secondary using the QLFS. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2023, 9.2% of youth aged 15-19 were identified as not being in any form of education and without a completed secondary. This estimate is just one percentage point lower than the 10.2% of youth aged 15-19 not in school and without a completed secondary. Therefore, enrolment in non-school based education such as TVET colleges or home-schooling is not a major contributor to departures from the schooling system among youth aged 15-19.

Table 3 also provides a breakdown of the activities of youth aged 15-19, distinguishing between youth with and without a completed secondary. Of youth aged 15-19 without a completed secondary, about 89% were in school in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2023. At the same time, just 0.4% were attending a TVET or other college, around 1% were in some other form of education such as a home-based schooling and less than 1% were employed. The remaining 9% were not in employment, education or training (NEET). The estimates of the percentage of youth in TVET do not notably differ well before, during and after the pandemic as seen in estimates from the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2014, 2021 and 2023.



Attendance at a TVET college is much more common among youth aged 15-19 that have completed secondary schooling, although this sample size is small as the majority share of this age group are still in school. During and after the pandemic, roughly a half of youth aged 15-19 with a completed secondary education were NEET (between 49-50%), up from 39% in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2014.

Table 3: Activities of youth aged 15 to 19 by completed secondary education status, 2014, 2021 and 2023 (2<sup>nd</sup> quarter)

2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2014				2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2021			2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2023		
No completed secondary education									
	mean	95% CI		mean	95% CI		mean	95% CI	
Not in education	13.1	12.1	14.0	7.8	6.8	8.7	9.3	8.5	10.2
Ordinary school	85.1	84.1	86.1	91.0	90.0	92.0	89.2	88.3	90.1
TVET or other college	0.6	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.6
Higher education institution	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other education	0.8	0.5	1.0	1.0	0.6	1.3	1.1	0.7	1.4
Missing	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.0			0.0		
NEET	11.9	11.0	12.8	7.2	6.3	8.1	8.7	7.9	9.5
Employed	1.3	1.1	1.6	0.7	0.4	0.9	0.7	0.5	1.0
7127				4171			5126		
Completed secondary education									
	mean	95% CI		mean	95% CI		mean	95% CI	
Not in education	46.6	42.6	50.6	52.1	48.0	56.1	53.9	50.4	57.4
Ordinary school	8.9	6.7	11.2	8.4	5.8	10.9	8.1	6.2	9.9
TVET or other college	18.6	15.6	21.7	16.7	13.8	19.7	16.9	14.3	19.6
Higher education institution	25.3	21.4	29.2	22.3	18.8	25.7	20.3	17.5	23.1
Other education	0.5	0.2	0.7	0.6	-0.1	1.2	0.8	0.2	1.4
Missing	0.1	-0.1	0.3	0.0			0.0		
NEET	39.3	35.5	43.2	50.2	46.1	54.2	49.2	45.7	52.7
Employed	7.6	5.9	9.3	1.9	0.9	2.9	5.6	3.8	7.4
485				385			628		

Data Source: QLFS, 2014, 2021 and 2023, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter. Notes: Stratified and weighted. TVET = technical and vocational education and training. NEET = Not in employment, education or training. CI = confidence interval.

**Enrolment in non-school based education such as TVET colleges or home-schooling is not a major contributor to dropout from the schooling system among youth aged 15-19.**

## 5 CONCLUSION

While international evidence from low- and middle-income countries typically points to rising non-participation and dropout after schools reopened following pandemic related closures, there are exceptions to this pattern. Along with Senegal and Ghana (Mbaye et al. 2021; Moscowiz & Evans, 2022), this has not been the case in South Africa. Dropout rates did not increase at the secondary level in South Africa in 2020 and 2021, even though higher absenteeism rates were experienced (Gustafsson, 2022).

Rising promotion rates and declining grade repetition rates in South Africa across all grades, but particularly in grades 10 and 11, were experienced at the end of 2020 and 2021. Malawi and Hungary are two other country examples where repetition rates also fell (Hermann, 2022; Kadzamira, 2021).

Post-pandemic, grade repetition rates in South Africa have been rising relative to the pandemic period but have yet to revert to pre-pandemic levels. This has significant implications for the education system. Reduced secondary level repetition rates have encouraged higher levels of school completion and higher enrolment in secondary grades. Lower repetition rates in early grades may help to reduce early grade class sizes (and direct costs on the system) but containing Grade 1 repetition could also have implications for learning in the foundational years in the absence of alternate remedial programmes (Wills, 2023). Evidence shows that learners that are held back in the foundational years are academically weaker and have not mastered basic reading skills that are only taught in the Foundation Phase (grades 1-3). More research is needed to understand how grade repetition, particularly in the early grades, impacts on learning both in the short-term and long-term.

It also appears that the percent of youth aged 15-19 that are not in school and without a completed secondary education is reverting to pre-pandemic levels after declining somewhat during the pandemic. It is noted though that this finding should be confirmed against administrative data as this becomes available. Despite improvements in school completion in recent years, gender inequalities in non-school attendance remain in a post-pandemic context with boys aged 15-19 far more likely to be out of school and without an NSC pass than females aged 15-19 years.

It will be necessary to continue to track learner flows going forward. Increased learner flows through the system, and higher levels of school completion, present new challenges for the education system and the labour market. This is especially the case in a depressed economic environment struggling to absorb school leavers into the labour market.

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## 7 APPENDIX

Table A 1: Some studies reporting dropout rates or non-enrolment rates in LMICs

Country	Author	COVID-19 rate	Pre-pandemic rate	Age/grade/phase	Period when COVID-19 rate was measured	Source
Ghana	Abreh et al. (2021)	2% dropout rate	2.1% dropout rate	Primary to upper secondary school students	Not enrolled in March 2021 but were enrolled in 2020	Nationally representative phone survey
Ghana	Montonya et al. (2021)	3.7% dropout rate	None but lower dropouts relative to when schools reopened after Ebola epidemic	N.A.	January-March 2021	Phone survey of caregivers of children across 103 government and private schools managed by RAN
Sierra Leone		3.1% dropout rate				
Liberia		2.3% dropout rate				
India, rural	ASER India (2021)	4.6% not enrolled in government or private school (2021)	2.5% not enrolled in government or private school (2018)	Age 6-14	October 2021	Household survey (phone-based in 2021), 25 states, 581 districts
India, rural	ASER India (2021)	6.6% not enrolled in government or private school (2021)	12.1% not enrolled in government or private school (2018)	Age 15-16	October 2021	Household survey (phone-based in 2021), 25 states, 581 districts
Malawi	Kadzamira et al. (2021, 2023)	4.3% dropout between Feb 2020 and March 2021, rising to 5% in mid-2022.	1.2% between March 2019 and February 2020	Grades 1-12	May-June 2021 & then mid-2022	Nationally representative phone survey
Nigeria	Dessy et al. (2021)	16.9% non-attendance	10% non-attendance	Age 5-18	October 2020 (5 months after school reopening)	National Longitudinal Phone Survey, measuring school attendance
Pakistan	ASER Pakistan (2021)	6.4% dropout rate	5% dropout rate	Age 6-16	2021	Household based survey, 16 rural districts
Senegal	Mbaye et al. (2021)	1.6% dropout rate	1.9% dropout rate (2018-2019)		About May 2021	Face to face household survey in May 2021

Source: Updated and adapted from Moscoviz & Evans (2022)

Table A 2: Response rates in the Quarterly Labour Force Surveys, 2019-2023.

Year	Quarter	Response rate (%)	Mode of collection	Other notes
2019	Q1	87.7	face to face	sample rotation
	Q2	89	face to face	sample rotation
	Q3	89.2	face to face	sample rotation
	Q4	88.9	face to face	sample rotation
2020	Q1	87.7	face to face until 19 March*	Q1 2020 sample
	Q2	57.1	telephonic	Q1 2020 sample
	Q3	57.6	telephonic	Q1 2020 sample
	Q4	60.9	telephonic	Q1 2020 sample
2021	Q1	57.4	telephonic	Q1 2020 sample
	Q2	60	telephonic	sample rotation
	Q3	53.7	telephonic	sample rotation
	Q4	44.6	telephonic	sample rotation
2022	Q1	64.7	face to face	sample rotation
	Q2	78.7	face to face	sample rotation
	Q3	85.4	face to face	sample rotation
	Q4	88.2	face to face	sample rotation
2023	Q1	88.6	face to face	sample rotation
	Q2	89.3	face to face	sample rotation

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Statistical Release reports. \*Imputations for remainder of March 2020 or carried over 2019 responses on panel members.

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