



Background document and review of key South African and international literature on school dropout

Dr Andrew Hartnack

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1. Introduction: Background and definition of school dropout

The South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996, section 3[1]) states that all children in South Africa must “attend school from the first school day of the year in which such learner reaches the age of seven years until the last day of the year in which such learner reaches the age of fifteen years or the ninth grade whichever comes first”. Within this band of compulsory education from grades 1-9, South Africa has a very high rate of participation (over 95%), even by global standards (Branson et al. 2013: 12; Fleisch et al. 2009: 41; Sabates et al. 2010: 2). Moreover, national school attendance rates have improved by three percentage points since 2002, such that the “vast majority” of children of school-going age (97%) “attended some form of educational facility” by 2013 (Hall 2015: 119). Yet such a positive picture “tends to mask the problem of drop-out among older children”, with attendance among children aged over 14 dropping steadily, especially after school ceases to be compulsory (ibid.).

School dropout (also known as early “withdrawal”, or “attrition”) has been defined as “leaving education without obtaining a minimal credential” (De Witte et al. 2013: 1). In South Africa, that minimal qualification is the National Senior Certificate (NSC), or “matric” qualification, written at the end of grade 12. Most school dropout in South Africa occurs in grades 10 and 11, resulting in 50% of learners in any one cohort dropping out before reaching grade 12 (Spaull 2015: 34). The situation is even more worrying when NSC graduation rates are taken into account. In 2013, only 40% of those who had commenced school 12 years previously passed matric, while in 2014 the figure fell to 36% (ibid. 36).¹ This pattern means that around 60% of young South Africans effectively drop out of school, with no school-leaving qualification to their names. This compares unfavourably with patterns in other countries: for example Turkey has a 53% graduation rate, Brazil and Chile have rates of 67% and 72% respectively (Gustafsson 2011; Spaull 2015: 36), while in the European Union 77.3% of young

¹ These figures differ markedly from the NSC yearly pass rate, which sits at around 76% in recent years, but only reflects the 50% of learners who actually make it as far as writing matric (Spaull 2015: 36).

people graduate from high school, a level similar to that experienced in the United States of America (De Witte 2013: 1).

Levels of dropout in South Africa differ significantly by race, a result of racist colonial and apartheid social, spatial and economic policies which continue to produce injustice, exclusion and severe inequality in the present (see Moses et al. 2017). According to the results of the 2011 General Household Survey, “there are large racial inequalities in matric attainment: only 44% of Black and Coloured youth aged 23-24 had attained matric compared to 83% of Indian youth and 88% of White youth” (Spaull 2015: 35). There are also slight provincial differences in the number of young people attending school. Poorer provinces such as Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Free State have a higher proportion of grade 1-9 children in school than wealthier provinces such as Gauteng, the Northern Cape and the Western Cape (Fleisch et al. 2009: 42).² More children tend to be out of school in cities compared to rural areas, although there are very high numbers of children out of school in the rural farming districts of the Western Cape (ibid.).

Understanding the causes and nature of dropout requires such historical, social and spatial nuances and complexities in South Africa to be taken into account, as must potential measures to address dropout in the country.

2. Causes and factors contributing to dropout

There is a consensus in local and international literature on school dropout not only that there “is no single risk factor that can be used to accurately predict who is at risk of dropping out” (Hammond et al. 2007: 1), but that dropout should not be understood as a single event, but rather the result of a long process of disengagement; a cumulative, multidimensional process caused by the convergence of a number of factors over time (Branson et al. 2013; De Witte et al. 2013; Dockery N.D.; Hammond et al. 2007; Sabates et al. 2010). In fact, over 40 different risk factors relating to dropout have been identified, which makes both identifying the cause of a specific case of dropout, and tracking such risk factors, a very difficult task (Dockery N.D.: 8).

In trying to make sense of this large number of risk factors, various authors (such as Rumberger 2004) have attempted to come up with analytical frameworks, such as the popular framework which distinguishes between “individual factors” causing dropout and “institutional factors” (related to the family, school or community) (De Witte et al. 2013: 7). Others, such as Sabates et al. 2010: 12) have made the distinction between “supply side causes of drop out” (at the school level), and “demand side” causes located in the community or individual. Ultimately, such binary frameworks risk putting too much weight on one set of factors, when such factors are “inextricably bound up with each other...[and] interact in

² This apparent contradiction has been explained by the fact that schools in very poor and rural communities “provide food and shelter which act as substantial incentives to attend, especially for poor learners” (Branson et al. 2013: 12).

countless ways.” (De Witte et al. 2013: 8). Understanding the causes – and risk-factors – of school dropout rather requires an analysis of how factors at community, family, school and individual levels interact during the process of disengagement and dropout. One useful way of trying to conceptualise the ways in which these complex risk factors interact is to identify and understand how “push-out factors” and “pull-out factors” (Dockery N.D. 11) interact. Pull-out factors refer to experiences and conditions outside of school which influence a learner’s decision to drop out (e.g. community, family, peer and individual influences), while push-out factors refer to influences within schools which impact on dropout (e.g. school structure, policies, environment and “vibe”, curriculum etc.). In the following discussion, pull-out factors are discussed first, followed by push-out factors at school level.

2.1 Community/broader factors

International literature, primarily from the USA, on community-related factors focuses commonly on factors such as neighbourhood characteristics (high dropout rates for people from poor neighbourhoods where social amenities are limited, housing is run-down and rented rather than owned, crime is high etc.) (De Witte et al. 2013; November 2010); positive or negative influences of peers groups (high achieving and motivated peers versus peers involved with crime, drugs and violence) (Ekstrom et al. 1986; Hammond et al. 2007); the pull of early employment opportunities (especially in poor households where the opportunity-cost of schooling is high) (De Witte et al. 2013; Rumberger 2004); and social discrimination and prejudice, especially that aimed at minority or underprivileged learners (Herbert and Reis 1999).

In South Africa, with its colonial/apartheid legacy of “separate development”, labour migration, “Bantu education”, family and social disarticulation, coupled with continued spatial injustice and extreme levels of inequality post-1994 (see Beinart 2001; Bond 2005), community-related factors of school dropout are particularly profound, and are inextricably linked to individual, family and school-related factors. Moses et al. (2017) show in detail how the structure of South Africa’s economy perpetuates poverty along racial and spatial lines, with black South Africans living in former “Homelands” remaining the most poor, while black and coloured communities living in townships remain similarly marginalised. They argue, along similar lines to Spaul (2015), that most black and coloured South Africans are trapped in a spatial and structural position in which access to a quality education is nearly impossible, perpetuating their poverty and inability to be upwardly mobile.

Yet, as Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert (2009) argue, while absolute poverty does play a role in school dropout (inability to afford uniforms, transport and stationary – even when school fees are covered by the state), it cannot on its own explain why learners leave school early.³ As discussed in the previous section, South Africa has very high participation rates in primary and

³ See Fleisch et al. (2009) on absolute poverty (the minimum standard of goods and services needed to meet basic needs) and its link to dropout.

early secondary schooling, with poor rural provinces experiencing the highest numbers of children in school. Dieltiens and Meny-Gilbert (2009: 49) argue that while absolute poverty may account well for why poor learners commence school late and repeat grades, “relative poverty” – and how children experience poverty in their daily lives – offers a much more convincing explanation for why learners leave school prematurely, as “inequalities between learners [make them] more vulnerable to drop out”. For poor families, female learners may be forced to be habitually absent or even to drop out due to lack of access to sanitary pads during their menstrual cycles – which is a common problem throughout Africa (see Tegegne and Molla 2014).

For many black South Africans living in poor rural and urban communities, teenage pregnancy is a particular risk factor, and according to Spaull (2015: 37) it “accounts for 33% of drop-out amongst female learners”. While it is against government policy to exclude pregnant learners from school (ibid.), many schools have continued to discriminate against those who become pregnant. Even where schools support pregnant learners and welcome young mothers back, other problems such as family, community or peer stigma, breastfeeding and other childcare responsibilities, and lost learning time among other things, may cause dropout (Mnguni 2014: 32).

Related to high levels of teenage pregnancy is the role of negative peer pressure, sucking young people into drug/alcohol abuse, anti-social or delinquent behaviour and negative attitudes towards remaining in school (ibid.). While De Witte et al. (2013) found that positive pressure from high-achieving peers can have a beneficial effect, the opposite is true where negative peer influences predominate, as they have been found to do particularly in poor urban communities in South Africa (Mnguni 2014). In the context of growing unemployment and the knowledge that the education on offer is highly unlikely to translate into opportunities for social and economic advancement, young people are facing a crisis of expectations, which can cause many to leave school early (Spaull 2015: 37; Moses et al. 2017: 3). With pressure on households to earn enough for survival and other pressing needs, young people withdraw from schooling early in search of income-generation opportunities (Gustafsson 2011: 23; Sabates et al. 2010: 13).

In South African townships, particularly in the Cape, drugs and gangsterism also pose a very powerful “pull-out” factor for school-going youth. The above-mentioned “crisis of expectations”, where teenagers (and whole communities) lose faith in the value of school, and fail to envisage a healthy life and career path, not only pushes many into drug use, but also provides fertile soil in which gangs exploit young people with an alternative source of belonging, self-esteem and livelihood (Steinberg 2004; Pinnock 2016). The activities and culture established by these gangs also have profoundly negative impacts on individuals, families, and schools, reinforcing the risk of dropout on many levels. Even where gangsterism may not be pervasive, high levels of alcohol and substance abuse have also been linked to

high rates of school dropout, for example in farming districts of the Western Cape (Fleisch et al. 2009: 41).

2.2 Family factors

Located within this broader context, family dynamics also provide a number of “pull-out” factors in relation to school dropout. Families of low socio-economic status, especially those with limited social capital, in socially and geographically marginalised positions, and where key adult members are unemployed (De Witte et al. 2013: 10), certainly struggle the most to keep their children in school – despite the government’s provision of Child Support Grants and fee waivers to such families. According to Fleisch et al. (2009: 43-4), “65% of out-of-school children are not receiving social grants”. They go on to argue that “These children in all likelihood are eligible for social grants, but their parents, grandparents or heads of household do not have the means to access them.” Where families stay at some distance from the nearest school, and cannot afford transport, uniforms, stationary and other additional costs of schooling, dropout becomes a high risk (Branson et al. 2013: 17; Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert 2009; Sabates et al 2010: 12).

That some families cannot even access state social welfare is due to a number of factors, not least pervasive family disarticulation due to the legacies of labour migration and apartheid spatial and economic planning (Moses et al. 2017). Indeed, high family mobility – a phenomenon created by the colonial labour migration system and perpetuated after 1994 – has been found to be a key risk factor for school dropout (Hammond et al. 2007: 31). Likewise, family structure is important when it comes to staying-in or dropping out of school (Branson et al. 2013: 13): children living in a home “where the head of the household is a parent or grandparent are much more likely to attend school than those living in other types of homes”. In international literature, it has been found that dropout is lowest amongst children growing up with two biological parents (Rumberger 1983). Learners with large numbers of siblings, however, have been found to be more at risk of dropping out (Hammond 2007: 4).

South Africa is a country which has experienced one of the highest rates of HIV infection, and deaths from AIDS, in the world. This disease, along with related illnesses such as tuberculosis, has had an impact on families – both in terms of the deaths of breadwinners and parent-figures, but also the burden this has placed on young people. As Richter (2004: 26) found, HIV/AIDS has placed a burden on children who have been needed not only to care for sick family members, but also to become breadwinners in their own right. Orphanhood is a major risk factor: as Fleisch et al. (2009: 44) found, 32% of children out of school have one or both parents dead (see also Case and Ardington (2006). Children living in child-headed households are also much more likely to be out of school, or drop out of school, than counterparts living with close adult relatives (Fleisch et al. 2009: 44). “Shocks” at family level, such as illness, death and loss of employment can play a major role in the decision to drop out (Branson et al. 2013: 12).

The educational levels of parents has also been found to be a key factor related to the risk of dropout (De Witte et al. 2013: 10), with studies showing that girls with more educated mothers received more schooling than those whose mothers were poorly educated (Sabates et al. 2010: 13). Similarly, Rumberger (1983) found that more reading material in the house resulted in less dropout (quoted in November 2010: 8). For marginalised communities in South Africa, with their multi-generation legacy of low quality “Bantu Education”, low levels of education among older generations poses a very clear risk relating to school dropout.⁴

Another important family factor is whether or not the family is relatively free from stressors, and is warm and supportive (Frank 1990). A family in which there is high stress and limited support and warmth creates an environment in which school dropout becomes more of a risk. Furthermore, the level of parental support and involvement with a child’s education and life in general, as well as the “emotional climate” of the parent-child relationship has been found to impact school dropout, either positively or negatively depending on the nature of the relationship (De Witte et al. 2013: 11; Duchesne et al. 2009).

Lastly, children born outside South Africa – to migrant and refugee families – have been found to have a much lower attendance rate than South African learners (Fleisch et al. 2009: 44). Language and cultural differences experienced by minority learners, along with the risks experienced by them because of their family history and socio-economic situation, put them at higher risk of dropping out.

2.3 Individual factors

Absolute poverty (inability to afford basic resources), it has been suggested, may have a major role to play in delayed entry into school and high repetition rates (Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert 2009: 49). For individual learners, one of the most important predictors of school dropout “if not the strongest” (De Witte et al. 2013: 8) is grade retention, and being past the typical age in a grade (Entwistle et al. 2004; 2005). Not only do being older than classmates and the repeating of grades come with their own stigma, but older learners are more susceptible to other “pull-out” factors such as pregnancy and the need to work. In South Africa, where delayed school commencement is common, and there are high rates of grade retention – widely used as a strategy by schools to keep weaker learners from affecting their NSC results (Branson et al. 2013: 4) – this factor is particularly potent. The same authors (ibid.: 19) found that “learners who are behind for their age are 25 percentage points more likely to dropout of school without completing grade 12 than learners on track”.

Of course, there are other reasons for falling behind and not keeping “on track”, including learners who have learning disabilities or emotional disturbances (Hammond et al. 2007;

⁴ Yet it must be pointed out that children from families where parents are poorly educated have also been found to perform well enough in high school to qualify for university and go on to graduate with tertiary qualifications (see Hartnack and Muteti 2016, among others). Again, it is how family background interacts with a number of other factors (personal, school, community) which determines dropout.

Fleisch et al. 2009: 42). Yet in South Africa, much as cognitive disorders such as foetal alcohol syndrome have been found to cause learning deficits (Fleisch et al. 2009: 42), it is often simply the profound and widespread lack of basic foundational numeracy and literacy skills (due to poor participation in early childhood development programmes and the poor quality of early childhood education) which disadvantages children from an early age and ensures they struggle later in their school careers (Spaull 2015: 36). Physical disability can also present a problem because most schools are not able to meet the special needs of such learners, raising their risk of dropout. Fleisch et al. (2009: 43) found that “children with disabilities account for nearly 10% of the total number of children who are out of school”, and that they had a much lower attendance rate than children without disabilities (22.5% were out of school).

Along with low achievement in class and grade retention, poor attendance or frequent absenteeism is a third important predictor of who is at risk of dropping out (Hammond 2007). This pattern of sporadic and irregular attendance has been called “stop out” (de Witte et al. 2013: 2) and can be caused by a number of issues at family, community, school or individual level. Other related individual predictors are lack of effort, no commitment to school, limited participation in after school programmes, and low educational expectations (Hammond 2007). On the latter factor, it has been found that “Perceptions of how education will influence lifestyle and career possibilities/probabilities [and] life chances in the labour market are shown to be factors in both early withdrawal and sustained access in different contexts” (Sabates 2010: 13). With the labour market shrinking in South Africa and young people losing faith that education will result in a good job (Moses et al. 2017: 9; Spaull 2015), many academically able young people are at risk of losing interest and drifting away from school before completing (Dockery N.D. 10).

For others, warning signs of disengagement are to be found in misbehaviour, early aggression and delinquency at school (Dockery N.D.; Hammond 2007; Wallace 2016), factors enhanced by academic struggles and grade retention/being older than peers. Being part of a high-risk peer group and engaging in high-risk social behaviour such as taking drugs and alcohol and engaging in early sexual activity also significantly increases the chance of dropout (Mnguni 2014). Teen pregnancy, discussed above, is a result of such high-risk social behaviours among teenagers, and contributes greatly to dropout rates of girls in particular (Gustafsson 2011: 21-2; Spaull 2015: 37; Mnguni 2014).

2.4 School factors

The “pull-out” factors discussed above interact in complex ways with “push-out” factors from within the school system. In South Africa, the most glaring reason for “push-out” is the poor quality of foundational, basic and secondary education available to the majority of people (Gustafsson 2011; Moses et al. 2017). Over 75% of learners in South Africa are from families of low socio-economic status, and attend schools which perform poorly and offer a poor quality education (Spaull 2015: 37). Struggling learners in schools which perform poorly in the NSC are at a much higher risk of dropping out than struggling learners in schools which

perform better (Branson et al. 2013: 17) and it has been found that poor quality education after grade 9 is a particularly important causal factor in dropout among senior secondary school learners (Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert 2009: 48). Indeed, “By grade 9, learners in poor (mostly black) schools, have a [learning] backlog of approximately 3.5 years relative to their rich school counterparts” (Moses et al. 2017: 3).⁵ Thus, while education system and school-level “push-out” factors are a factor globally (see De Witte et al. 2013), South Africa has a particularly potent mix of school factors contributing (in relationship with “pull-out” factors) to dropout.

The major factors contributing to the poor quality of education include large class sizes, which make teaching difficult, even for good and committed teachers (Gustafsson 2011: 42), and lack of resources such as desks, chairs and text books in under-resourced schools (ibid.: 41; De Witte et al. 2013: 12). In South Africa the quality of teaching in poor schools is also low, with research consistently showing that “teachers lack the basic content knowledge and pedagogical skill to teach the subjects they are teaching” (Spaull 2015: 39). Under-resourced schools also tend to be large and particularly difficult to manage, posing a great challenge to school Principals and management teams who may not have the skills or resources required to run a well-functioning and performing school, or create a positive and productive school atmosphere (Wills 2015). Indeed, a school environment in which there is bullying and violence, alcohol and substance abuse and other anti-social behaviours also plays a role in learner disengagement and withdrawal (De Witte et al. 2013; Gustafsson 2011: 24-6; Mnguni 2014). At many schools where the school environment is poor, there is also a deficit in “school social capital” (De Witte et al 2013: 13): the presence of caring teachers and others (such as social workers or counsellors) who may offer psycho-social support to at-risk learners. Even where these exist, the large number and overwhelming nature of psycho-social issues undermines their effectiveness (violence, pregnancy, drugs, deviance). A troubled learner is more likely to be “facilitated out” rather than helped in this environment (De Witte et al. 2013: 17; Dockery N.D. 8).

Pressure on schools to perform well in their NSCs also contributes greatly to pushing learners out of school in grades 10 and 11. A 2001 Department of Education directive setting national pass rate targets resulted in many struggling schools simply “culling” or “weeding” weaker learners out before they reached matric, either by retaining them in lower grades for multiple years (Branson et al. 2013: 4) or by pressurising them in other ways to leave prior to grade 12 (Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert 2009: 49).⁶ Other authors (Gustafsson 2011: 39) have pointed to poor and inappropriate subject choice and combinations as a factor causing learners to disengage and leave school early. Pregnant learners, meanwhile, have also experienced

⁵ Spaull (2015: 36) argues that grade 9 learners at the poorest 60% of schools are “five years’ worth of learning behind their wealthier peers”.

⁶ A more recent directive has since stipulated that a learner may only be kept back for one year in any three year cycle (regardless of ability), effectively limiting the practice of “weeding”.

pressure to leave school from school authorities, despite this being against policy (Spaull 2015: 37).

Finally, it is clear that for learners to remain committed to school, they need an engaging and diverse school programme and curriculum which is relevant to their cultural context and career aspirations and possibilities (De Witte et al 2013: 12). Some authors (e.g. Pinnock 2016: 235-6) argue that South Africa's adoption of a curriculum that is too heavily focussed on academics and "the Western view of what kind of knowledge is important" has disadvantaged many young people. Certainly, the curriculum's focus on maths and science skills, often at the expense of the arts and more practical skills, does make it difficult for learners whose aptitudes are not aligned to these priorities to remain engaged and to perform adequately (Gustafsson 2011: 43). Even though vocational subjects (e.g. tourism; engineering graphics and design; electrical technology) are offered, they are often not available as choices in the very schools where learners would benefit most from taking them (ibid.). In light of the changing labour market (Spaull 2015), young people are losing faith in school qualifications as a key to the future.

3. South African government policy and school dropout

South Africa's policy relating to the rights of children and youth, including to education, are guided by both international law and the South African Constitution.⁷ Section 29 of the Constitution focusses specifically on the right to education, stating that "everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education, and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible." The Children's Act (38 of 2005) gives effect to certain rights of children as contained in the Constitution, including education. It states that parental responsibilities include giving due consideration to a child's wishes in any decision that will impact on the child's education, bearing in mind the child's age, maturity and stage of development (section 31(1)b iv).

Legislation relating to education is further elaborated in the South African School's Act, which makes education compulsory from grades 1-9. According to section 3(6)5 a learner who is subject to compulsory attendance and fails to attend school can be investigated, leaving the parents or any other person who is preventing the learner from going to school liable for a fine or imprisonment of up to six months. According to section 5(3)a, no learner may be refused admission to a public school on the grounds that his or her parents are unable to pay the school fees. Language policy can be determined by the governing body of a public school, but may not be used as a form of racial discrimination (section 6(2)). Sign Language counts as

⁷ Relevant international policies to which South Africa is a signatory include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and the African Charter of Rights and Welfare of Children (2011). The latter charter includes article 11(16), in which member states pledge to take "all appropriate measures to ensure that children who become pregnant before completing their education shall have an opportunity to continue their education".

an official language in this regard (section 6(4)). Section 9 outlines the process for suspension and expulsion, during which the interests of the learner must be safeguarded and, in the case of expulsion, a learner subject to compulsory attendance must be placed elsewhere in a public school.

According to the National Education Policy Act (27 of 1996), the Minister of Education is responsible for outlining any policy regarding education, and for the general functioning of the education system. This includes policy on education support services, including health, welfare, career and vocational development, counselling and guidance for educational institutions, as well as curriculum frameworks and learning standards (Act 27 Of 1996, section 3(4) L and O). Thus, the department of education is expected to play a crucial role in any policy regarding school dropouts.

As is apparent from the foregoing outline of key policy instruments, these legislative documents do not explicitly mention school dropout as an area of concern. While there are general regulations around the provision of education and the welfare of children, this does not include specific measures to address youth dropping out of school due to factors in the school system, or any others. However, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of this issue, with the current National Youth Policy 2015-2020 addressing “high drop-out rates and inadequate skills development” as its second situation analysis and challenge. Poor quality results in primary school are seen as the cause for weak participation in other school levels. Improving literacy and numeracy levels at the primary school level is seen as a key intervention to improve participation overall.

Several other pieces of legislation are relevant in so far as they attempt to improve the school environment and support learners who are at risk of dropping out. The most recent white papers on education, numbers 5 and 6 (2001), have addressed Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Special Needs Education respectively. The white paper on ECD is based on the premise that government is to help break the cycle of poverty by providing access to ECD programmes, which will help children from birth to nine years old to thrive and to reverse the effects of early deprivation and maximize the development of potential. The white paper on special needs education aims to address the situation where many learners with disabilities had fallen out of the system, because “the curriculum and education system as a whole have generally failed to respond to the diverse needs of the learner population, resulting in massive numbers of drop-outs, push-outs, and failures.” To remedy this, the white paper advocates a single, inclusive education system integrating special needs and support services throughout the system.

The Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Public Schools (2008) have been developed to support schools and school communities in responding to cases of sexual harassment and sexual violence that are perpetrated against learners. The guidelines seek to create a “safe, caring and enabling” teaching environment,

recognizing that sexual harassment or sexual violence can lead learners to suffer serious emotional consequences, amongst others, and create a general atmosphere of fear and aggression in the school environment. As discussed above, such school environments greatly increase the risk of dropout.

In March 2017 the Council of Education Ministers approved a National Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy. The Policy addresses the high rates of pregnancy among learners; the familial and social context within which this occurs; options for reduction of unintended and unwanted pregnancies; management of its pre- and post-natal implications; limitation of associated stigma and discrimination; and, importantly, the retention and re-enrolment of affected learners in school. These guidelines supersede the 2007 Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy, which focused heavily on prevention, and in the case of unplanned pregnancies emphasized the need to balance the pregnant learner's needs with those of the rest of the school (which in practice could potentially be interpreted as grounds to prevent a pregnant learner from attending school).

The National School Nutrition programme was implemented in 2010 to provide a school feeding scheme for primary schools whose student body is in need of additional food. The funding is supplied by national government and distributed through the provincial departments of education. On a daily basis 9.2 million learners are provided a meal at schools, in an effort to improve nutrition and encourage school attendance (South African Government Newsroom 23 April 2017). Although there are some accounts of corruption and delivery can be erratic, there are signs that the strategy is effective in improving nutrition and increasing classroom attendance (Graham et al. 2015: 49; Iversen et al. 2011: 75).

4. Important approaches and interventions for addressing dropout

International and, to a lesser extent, South African literature on school dropout make a number of recommendations regarding how school dropout should ideally be tackled. It has been pointed out (Rumberger 2004) that interventions can be aimed at systemic changes (e.g. to the school system, or social welfare system) or be programmatic, in that they try to effect change at family or individual level. As far as government efforts are concerned, the consensus in the literature is that "Any policy decision of relevance must necessarily focus on the whole aggregate of factors at the level of students, families, schools and the broader environment...there is neither a single or simple solution to be found" (De Witte et al. 2013: 15). In other words, both systemic and programmatic interventions are needed, and these must address structural, social and academic reasons for dropout.⁸

⁸ See <https://www.edutopia.org/student-dropout-retention-strategies> for an overview of strategies used in the USA.

The George Washington University's Centre for Equity and Excellence in Education (GW-CEEE) (2012: 8) argues that there is a need for multi-level "tiered interventions" which include learners, teachers, peers, families and government agencies, to be effective. They point out (ibid.) that an "integrated approach to keeping students in schools [should replace] a patchwork of independent programs that often allow students to fall through cracks, or even work at cross-purposes with one another in a fragmented, ineffective manner". Furthermore, as Hammond et al. (2007: 47) point out, programmes aimed at addressing dropout must be evidence-based – designed based on evidence about the problem and its specific context, and gathering evidence on impacts on an ongoing basis.

The following approaches to tackling dropout are recommended in the literature:

4.1 Systemic Interventions

Restricting grade retention: Grade retention has been referred to as "the worst culprit among all student-related factors with regard to early school leaving" (De Witte et al. 2013: 15). There are therefore repeated calls in the literature to restrict grade retention (ibid.; Branson et al. 2013: 19) and to reduce the number of overage learners attending school (Sabates et al. 2010: 18). In South Africa, a recent Department of Education directive is seeking to limit retention by restricting schools from keeping struggling learners back for more than one year in any three year phase. This should help to reduce the practice of "weeding", but more needs to be done to ensure children start school at the correct age and keep up with their age cohort throughout their school journey.

Improved quality and access to Early Childhood Development: As Spaul (2015) argues, a national reading campaign targeted at early childhood is a crucial intervention for South Africa. De Witte et al. (2013: 16) agree that interventions to improve literacy and numeracy must start early and find ways of getting parents to become more engaged in the early childhood development and education of their children (see also November 2010). Programmes trying to achieve these goals, such as the Nal'ibali literacy campaign,⁹ already exist in South Africa, but they must be taken to a scale where they can have a systemic impact.

Improving the quality of education and the school curriculum: The South African literature on dropout is united in its conclusion that the quality of education offered to marginalised learners must improve radically (Branson et al. 2013; Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert 2009; Gustafsson 2011; Moses et al. 2017; Spaul 2015). Amongst other interventions, Spaul (2015: 39) calls for improved teacher content knowledge and teaching skill and a countrywide audit of district officials and curriculum advisors. Going hand-in hand with better quality teaching is the need for a "curriculum that is relevant and keeps students engaged and motivated" GW-CEEE (2012: 4): it needs to encourage high standards and be relevant and better linked to the career prospects of learners from poor communities, as well as culturally relevant,

⁹ See <http://nalibali.org/>

rigorous and challenging (De Witte et al. 2013; Dockery N.D.: 32). According to Gustafsson (2011: 43) and Pinnock (2016: 235-6), more focus should be put on vocational training.

There is also a need for vastly improving school structure and systems, enabling “Schoolwide reform to enhance student engagement” (Dockery N.D.: 13;17) by creating a caring environment, a culture of support, a good school vibe, high expectations, a strong connection to post school options and “a cohesive, student-centred learning environment” in which there is a positive relationship between learners and teachers. School bullying prevention programmes and counselling for bad behaviour rather than expulsion (ibid.: 20) are recommended. De Witte et al. (2013: 16) argue that schools need to cater for the needs of a diverse range of students and be sensitive to minority learners (see also GW-CEEE 2012: 4). Of course, smaller schools with more manageable class sizes are the optimal environment in which to create a positive school and classroom environment (De Witte et al. 2013: 16); something of a luxury in many schools in South Africa.

Moreover, good school leadership is needed in order to foster an orderly and nurturing learning environment. In South Africa Partners for Possibility is a programme increasingly recognised as improving school leadership and thereby the whole learning culture and environment of participating schools.¹⁰ Likewise, Columba Leadership (based on an exemplary programme from Scotland), attempts to have a similar impact on schools by fostering youth-adult partnerships which take action to improve school environments and the engagement of learners.¹¹ Both of these programmes have claimed to have had a positive impact on dropout in schools where they work.

Early warning tracking systems: Another dropout prevention strategy at a systemic level is to introduce tracking systems at school level, district level and provincial level to identify and track potential dropouts (Dockery N.D.: 13). Such early warning systems, it is recommended, should track a number of indicators over time relating to learner attendance, grade retention, academic performance, social engagement and behaviour, and “data must be up-to-date and easily accessible (ibid.: 14; GW-CEEE 2012: 3; 8). Although South African schools might struggle to implement and manage such systems, there are examples from the USA, such as the School-wide information system (SWIS), which helps schools track students and provides practical information about discipline issues (GW-CEEE 2012: 5). In the Western Cape, SAILI has been working with 20 schools since 2010, assisting them to better track data on learner performance and teacher effectiveness in order to improve learning outcomes.¹² SAILI is currently piloting an intervention to assist circuit managers to assist schools in a similar way.

¹⁰ See <http://www.pfp4sa.org/>

¹¹ See <http://www.columba.org.za/>

¹² <http://saili.org.za/website/>

4.2 Programmatic interventions

According to Dockery (N.D.: 23; 32) programmatic interventions should focus on schools, families and individual learners and focus not only where problems become noticeable – later in secondary school – but in the earlier grades where the process of disengagement and dropout has its foundations. Furthermore transitions, between grades and between junior and secondary school in particular need attention as learners need the most support in managing new environments, routines and expectations.

Academic interventions: Seemingly the most obvious interventions are those seeking to strengthen academic performance of learners still in school, particularly those who are struggling. Not only do teachers need to be equipped for high-quality instruction (GW-CEEE 2012: 4) but learning backlogs need to be addressed at all levels (Spaull 2015). Recommended interventions are one-on-one and small group tutoring; after school programmes and homework support; and catch up programmes for learners who are falling behind (De Witte et al. 2013: 15). Organisations such as Ikamva Youth are addressing the academic needs of struggling learners in South Africa through small-group tutoring led by peers and near-peers, and the model has had impressive results (Spaull 2015: 39). Other NGOs, including Columba Leadership, have fostered peer-to-peer academic support, while Vantshwa Va Xivono in Tzaneen, Limpopo, is piloting a catch up programme for grade 8 and 9 learners in maths and English. Another important model is that adopted by the Sumbandila Scholarship Trust, through its Outlier programme, in which learners from under-resourced schools around Makhado, in Limpopo, attend the private Ridgeway College for intensive holiday tutoring.¹³ As important as academic interventions are in South Africa, a survey of 50 exemplary dropout prevention programmes in the USA found that only 26% incorporated academic support, including tutoring, homework support, computer laboratories and experiential learning (Hammond et al. 2007: 54).

Psychosocial and adult support: As the literature shows, dropout is as much about social, psychological and relational factors as it is about learning deficits. The provision of psychosocial support (PSS) is recommended, through the use of trained advocates (Dockery N.D.: 14) who, more than mentoring, “provide substantial support such as aligning services to address academic and social concerns, advocating for the students, communicating with parents and school personnel, and meeting frequently with the student.” (ibid.: 15). Also important is to ensure that learners enjoy sustained and meaningful relationships with caring adults since this “is one way to promote student engagement in school and mentoring has reduced risky behaviours and absenteeism while promoting communication, social, and academic skills (ibid.; De Witte et al. 2013: 15; Sabates et al 2010: 14-16). GW-CEEE (2012: 8) call for adults and near-peer young adults to provide targeted and intensive support to learners, including home visits, social services referrals, counselling, group work and peer support. This work includes efforts to reduce absenteeism and truancy. Most of the

¹³ See <http://sumbandila.org/>

organisations involved with the current DG Murray Trust pilot project on school dropout are providing PSS along these lines, including the Community Action Partnership (Swellendam); National Association of Childcare Workers (Pietermaritzburg); James House (Hout Bay); Khula Development (Paarl) and Masibumbane (East London).

Social and life skills development: Developing the social skills of young people is another crucial aspect in dropout prevention, including communication skills, problem solving, emotional intelligence, goal setting, conflict resolution, peer resistance and appropriate behaviours (Charmaraman and Hall 2011; Dockery N.D.: 16; Hammond et al. 2007: 53). As De Witte et al. (2013: 15) point out, facilitating social attachment among learners, especially in key transitions periods, is important. Life skills programmes are also key (Mihalic 2005; Charmaraman and Hall 2011), and of 50 exemplary dropout programmes identified in the USA, lifeskills development was the most common activity (a core activity of 60% of interventions – Hammond et al. 2007: 53). It has been pointed out by Spaul (2015: 39) that life skills training around teenage sex and pregnancy is crucial to stem the prevailing problem of dropout caused by teenage pregnancy and childbirth. Equally important are programmes which encourage learners to develop a positive view of their future prospects, and what they must do to achieve realistic goals. Also part of the DG Murray Trust’s dropout pilot programme, Bottom Up Social Development is trailing a “Futures Focussed” programme on the Cape Flats to this end.

After school programmes (ASPs): After school programmes are crucial in building social skills and life skills, in addition to contributing to academic and behavioural interventions. As Charmaraman and Hall (2011: 5) have found, “dynamic arts-based programming that engages youth” in community programmes and ASPs contribute positively in particular. The Western Cape Government have included ASPs as one of the priorities in its “Game-changer” initiative, and the Hout Bay Partnership is currently piloting an incentive scheme to involve more learners in ASPs.

Targeting high risk behaviours: Working with learners who display high-risk and anti-social behaviours, such as aggression, disruption, bullying, drug and alcohol taking, and sexual activity is also an important prevention measure. Active and strong school counselling services, peer education and dropout prevention taskforces are recommended approaches for addressing such behaviour in a way which does not drive troubled learners out, but rehabilitates them (Dockery N.D.: 19). In South African public schools, state social workers are available, but generally they must divide their time between all the schools in a particular circuit: often 20-30 schools. School leaders and teachers are thus left with the main task of dealing with troubled learners, a task they often lack the time and skills to perform effectively. Organisations such as Ikamva Youth are assisting to address behavioural problems in schools through its peer-to-peer model (Spaul 2015: 39), while LoveLife and other NGOs similarly work with youth to encourage positive behaviour and identity formation. Of identified exemplary programmes in the USA, 20% targeted behavioural interventions such as cognitive

behavioural therapy. Most programmes include behavioural issues in a broader focus on life skills. For example, the Check and Connect and Check-in/Check out approaches (GW-CEEE, 2012: 8) involved close monitoring of at-risk learners to address the “ABCs” – absenteeism, behaviour and course failure. Another American example is the Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programme, which provides a school-wide prevention programme (ibid.).

Family intervention: Family interventions that build strong connections to learner’s families are also a crucial aspect of dropout prevention and reintegration strategies, since the involvement of parents is vital (De Witte et al. 2013: 16; GW-CEEE 2012: 4). In the USA, 64% of exemplary school dropout programmes involve both learners and their families and family strengthening is the second most common characteristic in exemplary programmes (46% of programmes are involved in this activity) (Hammond et al. 2007: 54). Interventions include family counselling, parenting and family management workshops, communication skills workshops and parent discussion groups – with the aim of improving parenting skills and home environments (Dockery N.D.: 19; Hammond et al. 2007: 54). There is also a need for interventions which simply engage with parents or primary carers – from when their children are young – to encourage them to be as involved as possible in their child’s life and education, and to have “high and unambiguous expectations” and assist their children academically (ibid.). In the current DG Murray Trust dropout pilot programme, most of the programmes are working with families, including James House (Hout Bay); Community Action Partnership; Khula Development; Bottom Up (Lotus River); NACCW and Masibumbane.

Re-engagement and reintegration: Much as dropout prevention is important, finding ways to re-engage and reintegrate those who have already dropped out is also crucial (Moore 2016), especially since their life and career prospects without a school-leavers certificate have been shown to be meagre (Moses et al. 2017: 42). Given that learners who are older than their classmates are at the highest risk of dropping out, and often become frustrated and cause disruptions, reintegrating dropouts back into the conventional schooling system is not easy. While in the USA re-engagement is becoming a large focus with some notable successes (see Moore 2016), schools without the human and financial resources, or the necessary systems (such as most under-resourced South African schools), might struggle to reintegrate dropouts to the same extent. Second-chance programmes which work with dropouts and those who are struggling to complete their NSC are one method by which to re-engage those who have dropped out (Hartnack 2014).¹⁴ Organisations such as Gadra Matric (Grahamstown), Midlands Community College (Nottingham Road) and the Star Schools have achieved impressive results in their work with learners who have failed their NSC exams (ibid.). The National Youth Development Agency also supports learners looking to re-write their exams. As others have argued, including dropouts from the mainstream education

¹⁴ See <http://dgmt.co.za/the-case-for-national-senior-certificate-second-chance-programmes-evidence-from-dg-murray-trust-partners/>

system in vocational and experiential educational opportunities – so that they may obtain an “alternative credential” (De Witte et al. 2013: 17) is also crucial (Dichaba 2013; Gustafsson 2011; Pinnock 2016).

5. Emerging opportunities:

It is not easy to obtain a clear sense of emerging opportunities in addressing school dropout from either the international or South African literature – aside from the fact that there are increasing calls for more integrated approaches which combine interventions at all of the levels and from all of the angles discussed above. One emerging area of focus, however, has been highlighted by teacher-turned psychologist Angela Duckworth, who has found (in studies at schools and other settings) that talent is less important than a focussed persistence she calls “grit” (Duckworth 2016).¹⁵ Duckworth calls for more attention on how to get vulnerable learners to develop the quality of “grit” – in other words, to develop a very clear sense of their long-term goals and to develop passion, determination and resilience to reach these goals, and never give up even when they face setbacks. Interventions which include “grit” as a focus – over and above PSS, academic supports and other aspects – are therefore highly advisable.

The South African literature is very much focused on learner performance and the school system (much is written by economists), often at the expense of a more holistic focus on all the factors which contribute to dropout. The DG Murray Trust’s addressing school dropout pilot programme (October 2016 – January 2018) – in which nine organisations are piloting complex projects around South Africa – is in itself an emerging opportunity, with the lessons coming out of the programme set to clarify approaches which can work best in the South African context. It is clear that if South Africa wishes to address the fact that only 40% of learners who start school in grade 1 leave school with a National Senior Certificate, much must be done to address problems in the schooling system, and within communities, families and individual learners. Unlike in the USA, South Africa has no national dropout prevention taskforce. High participation rates in grade 1-9, and a misleadingly high NSC pass rate, mask the fact that 60% of learners effectively drop out of the school system from grade 10 onwards, and obtain no minimal credential. Given the magnitude of this problem, a national dropout prevention taskforce is a priority. There is also currently no national dropout prevention strategy. Drawing up such a strategy is clearly the first business that a dropout prevention taskforce must undertake.

¹⁵ See also her TED talk at:
https://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_grit_the_power_of_passion_and_perseverance

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- Children's Act (38 of 2005) - http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/a38-05_3.pdf
- Child and Youth Care Workers Regulation - http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/38135_rg10301_gon838.pdf
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National Youth Policy 2015-2020 -

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South African Constitution Chapter 2 Section 28 - <http://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/chapter-2-bill-rights#28>

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South African Government Newsroom - <http://www.gov.za/speeches/basic-education-holds-national-school-nutrition-programme-best-school-and-district-awards>

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals - <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

***Andrew Hartnack** is the Projects Director & Senior Researcher at the Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation, a Cape Town based development research and advocacy non-profit company. Andrew is a social anthropologist who holds a PhD from the University of Cape Town. He has 16 years of experience in conducting social/developmental research and evaluations around southern Africa. Among other interests, Andrew's current focus is on understanding the challenges faced by young people in South Africa around obtaining a good education and developing positive and sustainable future prospects, and in identifying opportunities and solutions which may help them to overcome such challenges.*

Table of key facts and issues

Key fact	Reference
School dropout (also known as early “withdrawal”, or “attrition”) has been defined as “leaving education without obtaining a minimal credential”	De Witte et al. (2013: 1).
The problem	
South Africa has a very high rate of participation (over 95%), in the compulsory grades 1-9	Branson et al. (2013: 12); Fleisch et al. (2009: 41); Sabates et al. (2010: 2)
But most school dropout in South Africa occurs in grades 10 and 11 , resulting in 50% of learners in any one cohort dropping out before reaching grade 12	Spaull (2015: 34).
In 2013, only 40% of those who had commenced school 12 years previously passed matric. Thus, 60% of young South Africans effectively drop out of school , with no school-leaving qualification to their names.	Spaull (2015: 36)
“There are large racial inequalities in matric attainment: only 44% of Black and Coloured youth aged 23-24 had attained matric compared to 83% of Indian youth and 88% of White youth”.	Spaull (2015: 35).
The causes	
There “is no single risk factor that can be used to accurately predict who is at risk of dropping out”.	Hammond et al. (2007: 1)
Over 40 different risk factors relating to dropout have been identified: identifying the cause and tracking such risk factors is a very difficult task.	Dockery (N.D.: 8).
Dropout should not be understood as a single event, but the result of a long process of disengagement ; a cumulative, multidimensional process caused by the convergence of a number of factors over time.	Branson et al. (2013); De Witte et al. (2013); Dockery (N.D.); Hammond et al. (2007); Sabates et al. (2010).
One useful way of trying to conceptualise the ways in which complex risk factors interact is to identify and understand how “push-out factors” (in the school) and “pull-out factors” (in the individual, family, society) interact.	Dockery (N.D.: 11)
Causes can be identified at community, family, individual or school levels	
Community/broader factors:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbourhood characteristics (high dropout rates for people from poor neighbourhoods where social amenities 	De Witte et al. (2013); November (2010)

<p>are limited, housing is run-down and rented rather than owned, crime is high etc.);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive or negative influences of peer groups (high achieving and motivated peers versus peers involved with crime, drugs and violence); • The pull of early employment opportunities (especially in poor households where the opportunity-cost of schooling is high); • Social discrimination and prejudice, especially that aimed at minority or underprivileged learners • Most black and coloured South Africans are trapped in a position where access to a quality education is nearly impossible, perpetuating their poverty and inability to be upwardly mobile. • Teenage pregnancy “accounts for 33% of drop-out amongst female learners” – schools are not supposed to discriminate but stigma is high. • Female learners may be habitually absent or drop out due to lack of access to sanitary pads during their menstrual cycles. • Negative peer pressure, sucks young people into drug/alcohol abuse, anti-social or delinquent behaviour and negative attitudes towards school. • Drugs and gangsterism pose a very powerful “pull-out” factor for school-going youth. 	<p>Ekstrom et al. (1986); Hammond et al. (2007)</p> <p>De Witte et al. (2013); Rumberger (2004)</p> <p>Herbert and Reis (1999)</p> <p>Spaull (2015) Moses et al. (2017)</p> <p>Spaull (2015: 37)</p> <p>Tegegne and Molla (2014)</p> <p>Mnguni (2014: 32)</p> <p>Steinberg (2004); Pinnock (2016)</p>
<p>Family factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where families stay far from school, and cannot afford transport, uniforms, stationary and other additional costs of schooling, dropout becomes a high risk • High family mobility (common in SA) is a key risk factor for school dropout. • Family structure: Those living with a parent or grandparent are much more likely to attend school and dropout is lowest amongst children growing up with two biological parents. Learners with large numbers of siblings are more at risk of dropping out. • HIV/AIDS: children need to care for sick family members and become breadwinners. • Orphanhood: 32% of children out of school have one or both parents dead. Children living in child-headed households are also much more likely to drop out. • “Shocks” at family level, such as illness, death and loss of employment play a role in dropout. 	<p>Branson et al. (2013: 17); Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert (2009); Sabates et al (2010: 12)</p> <p>Hammond et al. (2007: 31)</p> <p>Branson et al. (2013: 13) Rumberger (1983)</p> <p>Hammond (2007: 4)</p> <p>Richter (2004)</p> <p>Fleisch et al. (2009: 44) Case and Ardington (2006)</p> <p>Branson et al. (2013: 12)</p> <p>De Witte et al. (2013: 10) Sabates et al. (2010: 13)</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent’s educational levels: Lower education levels increase the risk of dropout. • More reading material in the house results in less dropout. • High stress and limited support and warmth at home creates increases the risk of dropout. • The “emotional climate” of the parent-child relationship also plays a role. • Children born outside the country are more at risk of dropping out. 	<p>Rumberger (1983) November (2010: 8)</p> <p>Frank (1990)</p> <p>De Witte et al. (2013: 11) Duchesne et al. (2009)</p> <p>Fleisch et al. (2009: 44).</p>
<p>Individual Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade retention and being past the typical age in a grade are one of the most important predictors of school dropout. • “Learners who are behind for their age are 25 percentage points more likely to dropout of school without completing grade 12 than learners on track”. • Physical disabilities, learning disabilities and emotional disturbances, including foetal alcohol syndrome. • Poor foundational learning: Lack of numeracy and literacy foundations by high school. • Poor attendance and frequent absenteeism are an important predictor of who is at risk of dropping out. • Low educational expectations and associated lack of effort, no commitment to school, limited participation in after school programmes. • Misbehaviour, early aggression and delinquency at school. • High-risk peer groups and high-risk social behaviour (drugs, alcohol, early sexual activity) significantly increases the chance of dropout. 	<p>De Witte et al. (2013: 8) Entwistle et al. (2004; 2005)</p> <p>Branson et al. (2013: 19)</p> <p>Hammond et al. (2007) Fleisch et al. (2009: 42)</p> <p>Spaull (2015: 36)</p> <p>Hammond (2007)</p> <p>Hammond (2007)</p> <p>Dockery (N.D.); Hammond (2007); Wallace (2016)</p> <p>Mnguni (2014)</p>
<p>School Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor quality of foundational, basic and secondary education available to the majority of people. • Struggling learners in schools which perform poorly are at a much higher risk of dropping out than struggling learners in schools which perform better. 	<p>Gustafsson (2011); Moses et al. (2017)</p> <p>Branson et al. (2013: 17)</p> <p>Moses et al. (2017: 3)</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “By grade 9, learners in poor (mostly black) schools, have a [learning] backlog of approximately 3.5 years relative to their rich school counterparts”. • Large class sizes make teaching difficult. • Lack of resources (desks, chairs, text books in under-resourced schools. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Teachers lack the basic content knowledge and pedagogical skill to teach the subjects they are teaching”. • Large schools: Difficult to build a well-functioning and performing school, or create a positive and productive school atmosphere. • Bullying and violence, alcohol and substance abuse cause learner disengagement and withdrawal. • Lack of “school social capital”: caring teachers, social workers or counsellors who offer psycho-social support to at-risk learners. • The “facilitating out” of learners who might bring down the NSC result: the “culling” or “weeding” of weaker learners before they reached matric. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inappropriate subject choices. • Pregnant learners being pressurised to leave school, despite this being against policy. • Disengaging and irrelevant curriculum: too heavily focussed on academics, maths and science at the expense of the arts and more practical skills. 	<p>Gustafsson (2011: 42)</p> <p>(Gustafsson (2011: 41); De Witte et al. 2013: 12).</p> <p>Spaull (2015: 39)</p> <p>Wills (2015)</p> <p>De Witte et al. (2013); Gustafsson (2011: 24-6); Mnguni (2014)</p> <p>De Witte et al (2013: 13)</p> <p>De Witte et al. (2013: 17; Dockery (N.D. 8); Branson et al. (2013: 4)</p> <p>Gustafsson (2011: 39)</p> <p>Spaull (2015: 37).</p> <p>Pinnock (2016: 235-6) Gustafsson: 2011: 43).</p>
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The Solutions	
<p>“Any policy decision of relevance must necessarily focus on the whole aggregate of factors at the level of students, families, schools and the broader environment...there is neither a single or simple solution to be found”</p> <p>The only policy which specifically addresses policy is the National Youth Policy 2015-2020 where “high drop-out rates and inadequate skills development” as its second situation analysis and challenge. Improving literacy and numeracy levels at the primary school level is seen as a key intervention to improve participation overall.</p> <p>Multi-level and integrated approaches work better than a patchwork of independent programmes</p> <p>Systemic Interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restricting grade retention: And limiting overage learners. 	<p>De Witte et al. (2013: 15).</p> <p>South African National Youth Policy 2015-2020</p> <p>GW-CEEE (2012: 8)</p> <p>De Witte et al. (2013: 15); Branson et al. 2013: 19); Sabates et al. (2010: 18)</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved quality and access to Early Childhood Development • Improved quality of education and the school curriculum • The curriculum must be more culturally relevant, rigorous and challenging with more focus on vocational training. • Vastly improved school structure and systems, enabling “Schoolwide reform to enhance student engagement”: creating a caring environment, a culture of support, a good school vibe, high expectations, a strong connection to post school options and “a cohesive, student-centred learning environment” in which there is a positive relationship between learners and teachers. • School bullying prevention programmes and counselling for bad behaviour rather than expulsion are recommended. • Early warning tracking systems: at school level, district level and provincial level to identify and track potential dropouts 	<p>Spaull (2015)</p> <p>Branson et al. (2013; Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert (2009); Gustafsson (2011); Moses et al. (2017); Spaull (2015) De Witte et al. (2013); Dockery (N.D.: 32); Gustafsson (2011: 43); Pinnock (2016: 235-6)</p> <p>Dockery (N.D.: 13;17)</p> <p>Dockery (N.D. 20)</p> <p>Dockery (N.D.: 13); GW-CEEE (2012: 3; 8).</p>
<p>Programmatic Interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on schools, families and individual learners and focus not only where problems become noticeable but in the earlier grades where the process of disengagement and dropout has its foundations. Transitions, between grades and between junior and secondary school need particular attention. • Academic interventions: Improving teaching; addressing learner backlogs through catch-up programmes; small group tutoring, academic after school programmes; homework support; experiential learning. • Psychosocial and adult support: Provision of PSS through trained advocates and the creation of meaningful and supportive relationships with adults; support through home visits, social services referrals, counselling, group work and peer support. • Social and life skills development: Developing the social skills of young people, including communication skills, 	<p>Dockery (N.D.: 23; 32)</p> <p>GW-CEEE (2012: 4); Spaull (2015); De Witte et al. (2013: 15); Hammond et al. (2007: 54).</p> <p>Dockery (N.D.: 14); De Witte et al. (2013: 15; Sabates et al (2010: 14-16); GW-CEEE (2012: 8)</p>

<p>problem solving, emotional intelligence, goal setting, conflict resolution, peer resistance and appropriate behaviours. Life skills programmes are also key.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After school programmes (ASPs): are crucial in building social skills and life skills, in addition to contributing to academic and behavioural interventions. • Targeting high risk behaviours: Working with learners who display high-risk and anti-social behaviours. Active and strong school counselling services, peer education and dropout prevention taskforces. • Family interventions: Family interventions that build strong connections to learner’s families are crucial. Interventions include family counselling, parenting and family management workshops, communication skills workshops and parent discussion groups, to improve parenting skills and home environments. • Re-engagement and reintegration: Finding ways to re-engage and reintegrate those who have already dropped out is also crucial especially since their life and career prospects without a school-leavers certificate have been shown to be meagre. Second Chance programmes and the availability of an alternative minimal credential (vocational) are important. 	<p>Charmaraman and Hall (2011); Dockery (N.D.: 16); Hammond et al. (2007: 53). Mihalic (2005); Charmaraman and Hall (2011).</p> <p>Charmaraman and Hall (2011)</p> <p>Dockery (N.D.: 19)</p> <p>De Witte et al. (2013: 16); GW-CEEE (2012: 4)</p> <p>Dockery (N.D.: 19); Hammond et al. (2007: 54)</p> <p>Moore (2016); Moses et al. (2017: 42)</p> <p>De Witte et al. (2013: 17); Dichaba (2013); Gustafsson (2011); Pinnock (2016).</p>
<p>Emerging Opportunities</p> <p>Programmes which focus on inculcating “grit” into vulnerable learners.</p> <p>South Africa must seriously consider a National School Dropout Taskforce, and draw up a National Prevention Strategy on School Dropout.</p>	<p>Duckworth (2016)</p>