

Media statement: Release of Equal Education Law Centres report on its admission Imbizo which sheds light on challenges contributing to learners without a school place

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On Wednesday, 20 March 2024 the Equal Education Law Centre (EELC) will release a report “*A crises on top of a crises*”. The report offers a memorialisation of the lived realities and perspectives of various education stakeholders, and in particular parents with the aim of shedding light on the complexities contributing to challenges in learner placement.

Despite three decades of constitutional democracy, at the beginning of every academic year, thousands of learners across South Africa are denied their key to access basic education as they find themselves without a school space. Many parents, caregivers, and learners, approach the EELC’s law clinic seeking assistance. Propelled by a desire to foster grassroots informed and consultative approach to identifying and understanding the challenges faced with admissions, we held an Admissions Imbizo, on 23 November 2023. At the Imbizo we initiated dialogues with government and other education stakeholders to devise solutions to challenges relating to the administration of school admissions. The report detail highlights from the dialogues and records some of the key issues that were raised by stakeholders as contributors to the on-going admission crises.

Administration of learner admissions into schools is not as simple as one may assume. The report offers perspectives and experiences on current challenges from parents, teachers and a representative of the Department of Basic Education (“DBE”).

The unheard voices of parents and caregivers

Many parents and caregivers are frustrated with the process for administration of admissions that exist in certain provinces, where they must navigate inaccessible online system, or are sent from pillar to post trying to find a school space for their children.

Carving a way towards solutions

The imbizo sparked a discourse about the admissions challenges, with an acknowledgement that there are no easy solutions to the challenges raised and that they are multifaceted. It is the hope that these experiences will inform future recommendations. One central issue is that there are simply not enough quality schools, especially in under-resourced communities where they’re most needed. Other issues that feed into or exacerbate this central problem include:

- Inadequate and inequitable budgeting and spending;
- Inadequate data capturing and forward planning, including failure to make proper provision for “late” applications;

- The lack of regulation of school and classroom capacity, including a lack of the definition of ‘oversubscribed’ schools;
- Lack of adequate communication between education districts and schools;
- Discriminatory admissions policies at school-level and at province-level; and
- Inequitable online admissions systems.

Sadly, those who find a school space well into the school year in under-resourced schools are often enrolled in already overcrowded classrooms, with dilapidated infrastructure and lack of proper sanitation, or where safety issues are rife. **A crisis on top of a crisis**, largely informed by continued spatial inequality and justice.

The EELC remains steadfast in its commitment to addressing these challenges in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. By fostering ongoing dialogue and advocacy efforts, the EELC endeavours to safeguard the right to basic education and promote equitable access to quality schooling for all learners in South Africa.

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