

Parents must get involved

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Our schools need parents who will take responsibility for the education of their children. It is imperative they avail themselves to serve on school governing bodies. All of us want schools in our communities to be well managed and excel academically - and to achieve this we have to make it a societal responsibility...



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Elections for school governing bodies were introduced after the advent of democracy in 1994 to ensure active participation in school affairs and to enrich the culture of teaching and learning. Before 1994, schools' management was authoritarian and parents, especially at traditionally black schools, were excluded from having a say in how they should be managed.

At the time, schools were managed by committees and boards which reported directly to the then apartheid government. This exclusion was partly to blame for the below - par performance in some schools. It also resulted in most parents leaving the education of their children in the hands of teachers.

The South African Schools Act of 1996 changed the course of our education. It mandated that schools should actively involve community members and have a democratically elected school governing body. According to the Department of Basic Education, there are currently more than 25,000 public schools in South Africa and every school has a school governing body that is democratically elected.

The three-yearly cycle of nationwide school governing body elections ended on 28 March. The elections which started on 6 March were overseen by the Independent Electoral Commission to ensure that they were free and fair. Not every parent could be elected, but all parents were able to participate in the elections to determine who governs the schools our children attend.

These elections came at a time when the country is celebrating 21 years of freedom. They also coincided with the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Freedom Charter, which proudly proclaimed that the "doors of learning and culture shall be opened".

Elected members can be teachers, parents, staff members and pupils from Grade 8 upwards. School governing bodies make allowance for the fact most parents have full-time jobs.

These bodies play an important role in the running of schools. They support the principals, teachers and other staff to improve the quality of education; ensure good governance and combat racism, sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance. Other responsibilities include creating a school development plan, determining the policies, managing finances and budgets and the appointment and promotion of teaching staff.

In addition, they rely on a number of people who volunteer to assist the bodies. We must become responsible for our children's education and ensure homework is completed. We should also support school governing bodies to ensure decisions are taken in the best interest of pupils.

Parents should use this opportunity to become directly involved in the education of their children and ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. Instead, we must play an active part in moving the country forward.

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