

2021 – State of PEPPS Address by Executive Head

20-2-2021

Thobela, Goeienaand, Good evening. Welcome to you all. Like our president's voice, speaking at the SONA, this year was more familiar to our fellow South Africans than in any other year, my voice has been heard or read by the PEPPS community more often in 2020 than ever before. Today I want to focus on what has happened, what is happening and what we hope will happen in the future here at PEPPS. I have delayed my presentation by about a week in anticipation of our 2020 matric results which were released yesterday.

Welcome to the State of PEPPS Address. My talk will be about 25 minutes rather than 1 ½ hours, as PEPPS is a lot smaller than the country.

Let us start with God's word and God's blessing. Paul's letter to the Hebrews chapter 4:16

"Let us draw near with boldness to the Throne of Grace that we may receive mercy and may find grace for help in the time of need."

Let us pray:

Almighty God. Today we, no doubt have challenges, but we ask that You will help us to count our blessings.

Our sincere prayers are shared with those who have been infected and affected by the Coronavirus that currently ravages our country and indeed the world. We pray for Your comfort and strength to those who mourn and we commend each departed soul to Your hands for eternal safekeeping.

We all come here with the common interest of the children in our care. Either as parents or as teachers, we remain focussed on keeping the child at the centre of all that we do. We are humbled by Your generosity to our school and we acknowledge that our success is by Your Grace. We always commend to you each child, each staff member and all their families. May they remain safely close to You. We place the future of our school in Your mighty hands.

Amen

PEPPS's Theme for 2021 is 'By God's Grace'. We firmly believe that we were carried through 2020 by God's Grace and we wish to place the Grace of God in the front of our minds this year too.

PEPPS in Limpopo turns 30 this year. Given the current limits on gatherings, our celebrations will be very low key, but I do wish to pay tribute to those who came before us to initialise this incredible group of schools. Our Board Chairman, Dr Lesibana Arthur Ledwaba, was part of the founding committee of the Limpopo PEPPS Schools. Mrs Carol Anne Melville was the founding Head of the schools and currently serves on our Board. I pay tribute to them and to all those who have served on the Board for their stewardship of PEPPS through the years. We have grown and indeed continued to improve and raise our standards with each passing year.

Nobody owns PEPPS. The schools are overseen by a Trust for the benefit of the pupils. We exist to serve the pupils and ultimately we are accountable to the pupils since they are the beneficiaries of the Trust.

Annually we are audited by DZB. We have had a clean audit for many years and continue to manage our finances conservatively so that we can keep growing our facilities while providing an excellent team of staff who serve your families. There is no hint of corruption or financial mismanagement within our schools and we pride ourselves on this.

I would like the parents to understand that the Trustees get nothing more than words of thanks for the hours of time that they give to our school. Unfortunately with Covid last year, the process of calling for new Board members was interrupted, so it does need to be a priority this year. People who are eligible for election to the Board need to have some previous involvement with the school, such as having served on a Parent Forum for one of the campuses, having been a staff member of the school or a past pupil of the school, or having previously served on the Board itself. If you know of a person who would add value and be willing to serve in this capacity, please nominate him/her when the forms come out later this month.

It is important to recognise that PEPPS is not a school for profit and every cent paid into the school as fees is reinvested into improving our educational offering to our pupils, whom the Trust is intended to benefit.

I need to stress that our fees are structured in such a way that we are able to excellently educate our pupils with no unnecessary extravagance. We charge significantly less than many independent schools around the country which obtain comparable results to PEPPS. No pupils at PEPPS receive bursaries or scholarships and it is essential that every fee is collected in order for us to remain sustainable. No family unfairly or unknowingly carries any other family.

I also hope that families have appreciated a fixed amount being charged over 11 months rather than having bits and pieces continually added to the fee account.

Last year, I made a number of promises in terms of infrastructure development. These have largely come to fruition.

Over the last 12 months, we have invested in two additional classrooms and an administration building on our Mokopane campus. We have also added better security fencing around the classrooms, which keeps our pupils safer on that campus. I am sure all who have been there can agree that PEPPS Mokopane is looking fantastic.

As forecast last year, the Polokwane campus has seen the addition of 10 more classrooms for our Grade 1-3 pupils, thus creating space for us to open an Early Childhood Development School starting at children turning 4. We are very excited about this opportunity to serve more children from an earlier age in Polokwane.

We had a false start on a four-classroom building at our Ga-Ledwaba campus in Lebowagkomo due to tribal disagreements, but these misunderstandings have been clarified and construction has restarted this month. We are very excited about the developments.

This year will see minimal further building on our campuses as we pay off loans and save towards future growth.

Our President quoted Maya Angelou in his Address 10 days ago. He referred to her poem 'I Rise'. This poem talks of one who is at the bottom and needs to be lifted. PEPPS is not down and over the last 30 years has risen into an excellent educational institution already. PEPPS already enjoys

the sunshine on the faces of our community. So, I have chosen another quote from this great poet, writer, activist and philosopher.

I love the quote by Maya Angelou that reminds us that we are always learning to do better and becoming better versions of ourselves.

“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” PEPPS is continually becoming better and better as we learn more.

2020 was the hugest ‘growth curve’ year ever, for us all. Pupils learnt autonomy and grit while developing their technological skills. Parents learnt to be facilitators to their children’s learning and teachers completely reinvented how they teach so that online working could be effective. 2020 was imperfect, to be sure, but we all continually tried to improve. What became increasingly clear throughout the year was how important face-to-face interactions are to the educational process. With this in mind, PEPPS has decided to push the agenda of encouraging every pupil to attend school every day.

We are vigilant in ensuring that our pupils and staff adhere to Covid protocols. Obviously, if pupils or staff are feeling unwell, or a member of their household is awaiting Covid results, they must stay at home. With this in mind, skeleton lessons are posted on myHomework regularly so that pupils can stay up to date if they miss a few days of school.

2020 also empowered us all with the ease of email communication between parents, teachers and in the case of older children, the pupils too. This ability to correspond with one another should allow for a more collaborative effort of us all setting each pupil up for success.

Our president spoke of the need for a fire to revitalise fynbos. I have to say, I did not like the Covid fire at all, but it is said that one should never let a good crisis go to waste.

PEPPS used this time to upskill our team of teachers into becoming competent and capable users of technology to enhance their teaching. PEPPS is committed to staff training. We are proud of our well-qualified experts who facilitate the learning of our pupils, and we also hold our heads high in the number of interns and assistants whom we are enabling to study while working, thus enriching the teaching pool of South Africa. 15% of our staff are studying towards further qualifications.

In addition to these formal studies, PEPPS teachers are engaged in staff development at the start of every term. We often bring in external facilitators to expose our teams to new ideas and we use experts on our own staff to present workshops to their colleagues. We have formal computer and English development programmes that are being run for our staff, to continually allow every member of our team to become the best version of themselves. Our professional staff are arguably PEPPS’s greatest asset. Their abilities enrich our pupils.

Technological integration into lessons has exponentially improved and this can only serve to set PEPPS pupils up to be digital citizens and people on the front foot as we enter the 4th Industrial Revolution. Tomorrow’s Leaders need these skills.

Last year, I spoke about our educational focus areas and I believe that we have honoured our commitment to these and remain beholden to the high standards that we have set for ourselves.

Our Project-Based Learning programme, called 'Creating Tomorrow', will continue to be extended throughout our schools. This programme is designed to allow pupils to learn through research and creativity. PEPPS feels that this is the way of the future.

It is the privilege of our team of staff to serve your children by setting up systems that empower them to succeed.

Our focus on encouraging reading and Maths remains central to what we do at PEPPS. Our matric Maths results continue to be aligned with the IEB average and last year, 21% of our Maths candidates achieved a distinction result in matric Maths.

A focus on leadership skill development is embedded in our curriculum and 'Creating Tomorrow's Leaders' is more than our motto. The philosophy of growing leaders is integral to all that we do at PEPPS from the 3-year-olds through to the matrics.

Learning through play in our Early Childhood Development Schools and Foundation Phases is central to our educational philosophy and we place an emphasis on social and emotional learning through all the grades.

This year I have been reading extensively on the merits of physical activity. The research that shows a clear correlation between exercise and cognitive development, as well as processing, is reaching an overwhelming tipping point. In light of the latest findings, PEPPS recommits itself to developing our pupils holistically and ensuring that they are encouraged to become involved in sporting activities. Covid limits what we can offer at this juncture, but as soon as we are permitted, every pupil will be expected to become involved in our extra-curricular offering.

All schools now have a private tuckshop operating on the campus providing flexibility and convenience for our families.

Uniforms can be purchased at three shops as well as online. We hope this allows for further ease for PEPPS families. It has been decided to outsource the Polokwane campus Uniform Shop. The tender submission deadline is the end of February 2021.

Covid has slowed the process of zoning the Polokwane school as an 'educational township' as opposed to 'agricultural land with permission to run a school'. We still await feedback from the municipality although indications are suggesting that we can expect a positive outcome.

Our president recommitted to cleaning-and-greening our country and PEPPS remains focussed on the same goal. We are an Eco-School and over the last year have been working on some simple water harvesting and reclaiming initiatives. In Polokwane, the hall roof water is being collected in Jojos and then being used to flush the toilets. We are also in the process of collecting ground stormwater in a small dam. Mokopane's wastewater is now all collected centrally and we intend to set up the infrastructure to use it to water the field during this year.

PEPPS is reviewing the viability of producing some of our own solar power, thereby reducing our reliance on Eskom and also preserving our environment. These developments do require some capital outlay and will hopefully become our reality in the next two years.

Returning to our matric results which I hinted at earlier in this address. PEPPS once again achieved a 100% pass rate with an 85% Bachelor Degree rate. Our matric results and IBT results also measure us against other outstanding schools in our country and our pupils are doing us all proud. Our

averages are generally comparable to the IEB and we are delighted by this outcome, especially after the hardships of Covid. I commend the matric pupils and teachers of 2020 who truly worked against the odds to realise this high level of success.

For the 7th consecutive year, PEPPS achieved a coveted PMR Award, recognising that we are admired in the business community of Limpopo. In 2020, we again achieved the highest level of this award with 'Diamond' status.

PEPPS offers a measurably successful education.

Working together as parents and teachers in order to assist all pupils to become the best version of themselves is what we strive towards. I encourage parents to take heed of the latest research which stresses the importance of young people feeling loved. Some pointers towards good parenting include:

- We need to love them for who they are and not only for what they do.
- Sincerely praise children without being indulgent
- Allow for them to make some choices without spoiling them
- Teach them that they do sometimes have to wait for what they want. The world does not need spoilt brats. On this note, all children should be doing some age-appropriate chores.

We walk the tightrope as parents and teachers of allowing some autonomy while ensuring appropriate boundaries. We also need to show abundant care and kindness without letting children do exactly what they want to when they want to. Maintaining this balance is never easy.

Nurturing a child's self-esteem is an important foundation stone in raising emotionally healthy adults who can take their place in society as contributors and leaders.

I think it is fair to hold both parents and pupils up to high standards and do our best, but we need to let go of the concept of perfectionism; for ourselves, our children and the teachers. Perfect is unattainable and if we expect it from others, we set them up for failure.

At PEPPS, we are completely committed to setting our pupils up for success and we look forward to holding physically distanced hands with parents on this journey in 2021. ADAM, myHomework and direct emails have hopefully enabled parents to keep their finger on the pulse of what is happening at school. We truly hope that these tools serve us all in allowing for more finely tuned educational inputs at the right time. If there are concerns, extra assistance can be requested through the teachers.

I continue to stress the importance of all children being made to feel that their home is a safe place, even if the world can sometimes feel chaotic for them. We also believe that the vast majority of pupils at PEPPS feel physically and emotionally safe while they are at school. We certainly all work very hard to make that the case.

Safety is compromised if pupils are left to loiter on campus for many hours after the end of the school day. Please ensure that pupils are collected from school on time. Pupils who cannot be collected at the end of the school day or extra-curricular activities must be enrolled in the aftercare options available on all campuses.

Please help us to keep your child's possessions safe by labelling all of their things. If this is done, we can return lost items to their rightful owners.

We do appreciate hearing the voices of our parents and our Heads are keen to meet about once a term with a small group of committed parents. We are looking for about one parent per class. If you put yourself forward for this Parent Forum, please ensure that you are not extremely busy with your own work or travelling a lot. These small Parent Forum groups worked well over the last couple of years as they raised generalised concerns and conveyed compliments to the Heads.

If you would like to serve on the Parent Forum for your child's school, please send an email to the school Head with the name and grade of your child as well as your name and cell number. You will need to be available for other parents to contact if they have a compliment or concern to raise.

Comment after the State of the Nation Address spoke about good plans but little evidence of action. I truly believe that PEPPS is an organisation of action and we do deliver on our promises. We continue to do more of the same, because what we do delivers excellent outcomes. We are fortunate to have no figurative-rubble to clear away before we can forge ahead with hard work and perpetual growth. We have an all-female team who operationally lead our schools. Our president would be proud.

PEPPS truly does honour our pupils. We treat them with respect and dignity while holding them accountable to high standards.

We firmly believe that God has been instrumental in the success of our school and we are appreciative of the wonderful staff members that have been sent to us and the opportunities that have unfolded for the benefit of excellently educating the children of South Africa.

God bless South Africa and her people and may God bless PEPPS and her people.

I thank you for your attention. Kealeboga, Dankie.



Yours in education,

Annabel Roberts

Executive Head