



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
State Department for Basic Education
Office of the Principal Secretary

**SPEECH BY THE PRINCIPAL SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION,
PROF (AMB.) JULIUS BITOK, CBS, DURING THE SENATE
ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING RETREAT FOR THE 5TH
SESSION HELD ON 27TH FEBRUARY 2026 AT SAWELA
LODGE NAIVASHA**

PROTOCOLS

- **The Hon Speaker of the Senate**
- **Chairperson, Senate Committee on Education,**
- **Chairpersons of Other Senate Committees**
- **Honourable Senators,**
- **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

TOPIC:

**THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN KENYA: MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATION
POLICY AND STANDARDS**

Mr Speaker, Hon Senators,

Introduction and Appreciations

At the onset, please allow me to express my profound gratitude to the Senate for the wisdom of hosting this assessment and planning retreat. Inviting the Ministry of Education alongside other key national government ministries is walking the talk on the essence of consultative and complementary relationship between the different arms of government in

oiling the cogs of a functional and robust democracy. More importantly, it speaks to a shared recognition and appreciation of our nation's most vital resource: our children.

Secondly, it is a bold statement of your value attachment to education. Indeed, yourselves, as well as myself, are but a living testimony of what education can do. Your journey to the August House began with **foundational learning**. Arguably, it is education which bought you the ticket to sit in this audience today.

II. The Status of Kenyan Education

Mr Speaker, Hon Senators;

Our country is at the cusp of fundamental shifts in education. Last year, the pioneer cohort of Grade 9 learners under Competency Based Education sat for the Kenya Junior Secondary Education Assessment (KJSEA). I am happy to report that we are very close to 100% transition to Grade 10. We have also successfully retooled majority of teachers to align their pedagogical skills to CBE demands. I also confirm that we have kept our promise to hire 100,000 teachers to ease the classroom burden and move our ratio of learners to teachers closer to global standards. The Ministry has also invested heavily in expansion of infrastructure in schools including in the construction of classrooms, laboratories and wash areas. For the first time in our public schools, capitation arrived before learners this term! Now that we have successfully identified and expunged ghost learners from our records in the recently concluded enrolment verification exercise, we are confident that we have reliable data to inform better planning and resource allocation in our schools.

III. Perspectives on Foundational Learning

Mr Speaker, Hon Senators,

The framers of our constitution vested in the Senate an important role in overseeing County governments which are responsible for many aspects of foundational learning. Educationists agree that basic literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills — is the mother of all learning. Whereas Kenya ranks high in pre-primary enrolment globally at 94.2%, there are worrying statistics crying for our urgent interventions. For instance, three in ten Grade 6 learners cannot solve a Grade 3-level math problem. Equally, nearly half of Grade 6 learners cannot comprehend a Grade 3 English story. We

must therefore reflect on how to strike a healthier quantity vs quality balance.

Mr Speaker, Hon Senators,

The adage that education is the key still holds true. But do we have enough doors for the key to open? Those of us privileged to be in leadership have a responsibility to not only design the right key but to also provide enough doors. The 2010 Constitution, (**Article 43 and 53**) states that every child has the right to free and compulsory basic education, nutrition, and healthcare. The **Basic Education Act (2013)** promotes and regulates free basic education and standardizes school management while the **Early Childhood Education Act (2021)** governs the provision and regulation of pre-primary education. These legal delineations underpin the importance of our foundational learning.

The architects of our Constitution evidently anticipated grey areas due to the duality of responsibilities between the national and county governments in the implementation of foundational learning. They therefore unpacked the respective roles as follows in the Fourth Schedule.

- **National Government:** Funding, policy formulation, curriculum development, quality control, and national assessments.
- **County Government:** Implementation and management of Pre-Primary Education (PPE) and childcare facilities, including infrastructure development, hiring of teachers and school feeding programs.

The National government is doing its best to meet its obligations. This week, for instance, I appeared before the Education Committee of the National Assembly to defend the **Ksh.245.9B** Basic Education budget. Collectively, the Education Ministry's budget has hit a historical annual high of above **Ksh700B**. As I brought to the attention of the Committee, we still have a deficit of **Ksh111B** to optimally fund basic education especially the Free Primary Education, the school feeding program and national assessments. I am also aware of the raging emotive debate around the future of the training and certification of ECDEs tutors. This debate is timely and healthy. The Ministry is committed to ensuring that the eventual policy position is reflective of a genuinely consultative process that respects the realities of local and global current and future education needs.

Mr Speaker, Hon Senators,

May I now turn the spotlight on the expected role of county governments in effective foundational learning. The 2010 Constitution entrusted ECDEs to the County Governments. This was intended to bring the most critical stage of human development closest to the people. Essentially therefore, you are the ultimate guardians of the **four million Kenyan children** currently enrolled in our pre-primary centres.

We have a duty of care to provide reasonable infrastructure and dignity in our ECDE centres. Regrettably, pre-primary learning in some counties is still being held under trees or in dilapidated structures. I urge this House to exercise its **oversight mandate** to ensure that County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) prioritize the construction of child-friendly, safe, and modern ECDE centres.

We must also put our house in order in the important matter of our ECDE teachers. The current status of many of our ECDE teachers is unacceptable. In many counties, delayed salaries, lack of pension schemes, and a take-it-or-leave-it 'volunteer' mentality toward these professionals is common. An unhappy teacher cannot be entrusted with nurturing a child's mind. The Senate should prioritize pushing for the **harmonization of schemes of service**. We need to abandon stop-gap, short-term contracts to terms that attract and retain competent, well-trained professionals. I dare say the National Government is already holding the how-to candle on this. County governments should match that energy at the entry point of our education system.

Mr Speaker, Hon Senators,

Equally pertinent is the issue of providing food to our pre-primary learners. You cannot teach a hungry child. While some counties have pioneered impressive **School Feeding Programmes**, others have no provision at all. This creates a 'lottery of birth' where a child's nutritional health depends on the county of birth or residency. I urge the Senate to advocate for a **National-County Nutritional Framework** that guarantees at least one fortified meal a day for every ECDE learner across all 47 counties.

As inch closer to the end of presentation, I want to reflect on equity in our ECDEs. There is a policy disconnect between the ECDE-level managed by Counties and the Primary level managed by the National Government. The ideal long-term solution to this would be in establishing start-to-finish comprehensive basic education schools. As a meanwhile, the Senate can support the education sector by insisting on and causing the implementation of a uniform curriculum across the CBE, supporting operationalisation of KEMIS to create a reliable, integrated and trackable

data and in equitable resource allocation and accountable utilisation especially in ASAL and urban-poor regions.

Hon Senators

It is not in doubt that a legal framework that is clearer on the roles of the national and county governments in education is welcome. I am therefore glad to note that the proposed **Basic Education (Amendment) Bill, 2025** offers a historic opportunity to clarify these roles while strengthening coordination and resource allocation. I therefore appeal to Members to give the Bill the attention it deserves when the right time comes.

Conclusion: The Senate's Legacy

Honourable Senators, I thank you for your continued oversight of county governments, particularly in the management of ECDEs. Your oversight is the bridge between a child's potential and their reality. By holding County Governments accountable, you help assure that funds meant for our youngest learners actually reach the classroom. Together, we can give our youngest citizens the start they deserve.

Thank you!