

# Press Release

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SOUTH AFRICAN  
INSTITUTE OF  
RACE RELATIONS

South Africa's Leading Research and Policy Organisation

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**29 January 2013**

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## **Only 1 in 5 matrics get more than 50% in maths and science**

Only 20% of pupils writing matric mathematics and physical science achieve more than 50%, according to the latest *South Africa Survey*, published by the South African Institute of Race Relations in Johannesburg last week.

Since the introduction of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) in 2008, the proportion of pupils achieving a pass in mathematics of between 70% and 100% fell from 8.3% in 2008 to 5.9% in 2011. This means that in 2011, only 13 223 pupils achieved 70% and above for mathematics. The proportion of pupils achieving between 50% and 69% increased slightly from 12.4% to 12.7%. The data also revealed that more than half of all pupils who have written mathematics since the introduction of the NSC have failed (receiving a mark below 30%).

The Institute's analysis was based on data supplied by the Department of Basic Education. A breakdown of the 2012 NSC results by mark was not available at the time of going to print.

More encouragingly, the quality of passes in physical science has improved. The proportion of pupils achieving a pass mark of 70%-100% increased from 3.4% in 2008 to 6.6% in 2011. During the same period, the proportion of pupils achieving a mark of between 50%-69% increased from 11.5% to 13.9%. However, as is the case with mathematics, more than half of all pupils who have written physical science since the introduction of the NSC have failed.

Jonathan Snyman, a researcher at the Institute, described the failure rates as a cause for concern. 'The 30% threshold for a pass mark has been criticised for being too low, and the fact that 50% of pupils who write mathematics and physical science cannot achieve even that low threshold indicates not only that there are problems with the quality of teaching in these subjects, but also that pupils have not grasped core concepts by the time they reach matric.' Mr Snyman added that if the pass mark had to be improved to 50%, in line with university standards, the real rate of failure for mathematics and physical science would be closer to 80%.

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