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'From happiness to despair': Top 100 matrics awarded bursaries left high and dry

Prega Govender

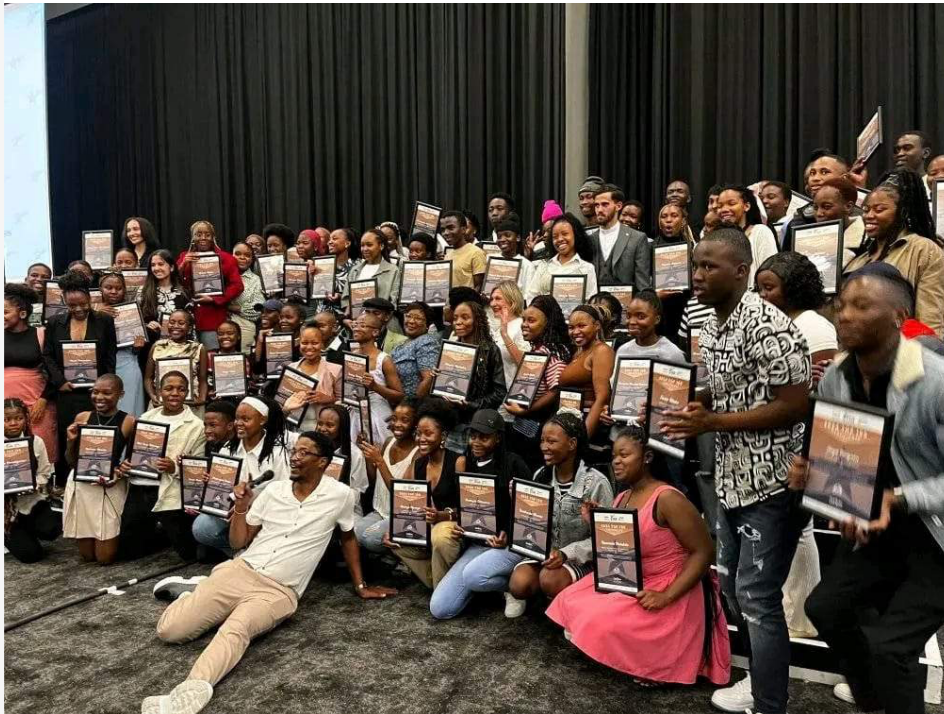
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The 2024 Schools Star Top 100 recipients were announced during a function at Birchwood Hotel in Ekurhuleni, Gauteng, on 15 January

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- About 100 students were informed on Monday by the

organisation, Schools Star, that they would not receive funding for bursaries because of budget cuts.

- **Schools Star honoured about 100 students with certificates in January and informed them they would be given “fully paid bursaries”.**
- **However, the Gauteng government said there was no provision in the Gauteng City Region Academy policy that stated it would fund Schools Star beneficiaries.**

About 100 students who completed matric in Gauteng in 2024 have been left in the lurch after an organisation informed them that they would not receive funding for bursaries awarded to them because of budgetary cuts.

The organisation, Schools Star, honoured the top 100 students from Gauteng with certificates during a function at the Birchwood Hotel in Ekurhuleni, Gauteng, on 15 January.

The students were informed of the date of the function “where we will be announcing our Top 100 who will be awarded with fully paid bursaries”.

In its promotional material, Schools Star stated that, in partnership with the Gauteng government, successful applicants would have access to “a network of like-minded and talented Grade 12 learners from public and private schools”.

According to the promotional material, they would receive a “full living expenses paid bursary from the Gauteng City Region Academy [GCRA] to any SA tertiary institution”.

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The CEO of the academy, Percy Moleke, told guests during the January function, “We are proud to partner with Schools Star to recognise the potential of our young people while they are still at school.”

However, in a two-line communique to the students on 23 June, the CEO of the Schools Star programme, Laura Barker, informed them that “it is with great regret that we are writing to inform you that due to budget cuts, the GCRA will not be funding the 2024/25 Schools Star bursaries as previously communicated”.

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She wrote that Schools Star “has tried every avenue available to us but, unfortunately, to no avail”.

However, this is of little comfort to students enrolled at higher education institutions, who have been saddled with enormous tuition and accommodation costs.

Lloyd Minyuku, 18, a first-year chiropractic student at the Durban University of Technology, was disappointed that no bursary funding would be available.

He owes R106 040 for tuition fees and accommodation.

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Minyuku, who matriculated at Southview High School in Lenasia South, said he was excited when he received a certificate from Schools Star in January, which effectively meant he had qualified for the bursary.

The certificate, titled “2024 Top 100 certificate”, stated: “We recognise your outstanding achievements and the hard work that has brought you to this milestone. Your success so far is inspiring, and we look forward to seeing the positive impact you will make in shaping South Africa’s future and contributing to its growth and success.”

Minyuku told News24 his happiness at being given a bursary had turned into despair.

“The university has not asked me for any money, but it’s only a matter of time before they do.”

His mother told him to focus on his studies and not to stress over the unpaid fees.

Minyuku said:

“What I am not going to do is drop out of school because of the promises that were made and not kept.

He added when he last checked his application status, it stated “processing”.



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- ☐ Bring in the Public Protector
- ☐ Launch an urgent SIU probe
- ☐ Move Mchunu to another ministry

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"I did very well in my tests and passed all of them."

Tshiamo Goeieman, 20, a first-year legal studies student at Rosebank College in Johannesburg, said: "I am so disappointed. I can't even explain how I am feeling."

She added while she wanted to continue with her studies, she was struggling with how she would pay for tuition.

"I don't receive an income, and my parents will be able to help, but it won't be that much," Goeieman said despairingly.

She completed her matric at Chris J Botha Secondary School in Bosmont, Randburg.

"A teacher told me last year about the Schools Star programme, where matriculants were funded with full bursaries, and I decided to try it."

Esther Tivane, the mother of Sylvane Netswinganani, 18, a graphic design student at the Eduvos campus in Bedfordview, said they were disappointed about not receiving funding for the bursary.

"When I saw my daughter receiving her certificate in January, I was so proud of her because she was one out of 100 from Gauteng to get a bursary through Schools Star. The students were happy, but now it's very sad and painful."

She said her daughter had been interested in studying at Eduvos, and because she received a bursary, they decided to enrol her there.

Tivane paid her daughter's registration fee of R7 200 so that she could secure a place for her.

She said:

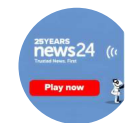
"I need to pay R8 000 by 28 June. I'm a single parent and am self-employed. It's difficult for me to raise that money."

Tivane said if she had known her daughter would not be getting bursary funding, she would have enrolled her at a cheaper college.

"I took her to Eduvos because I knew she had a bursary for tuition, transport, food and books."

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Rand - Aus dollar	11.79	▼ -0.9%
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Netswinganani said when her applications to study at public universities were turned down at the beginning of the year, she was ecstatic when Schools Star chose her as one of the top 100 pupils, as she could now enrol at a private university.

"I patiently waited for my college fees to be paid. However, on 23 June, we were informed by Schools Star that we would not be receiving any funding, and all I could think about was how my mom would manage to pay the debt we owe.

"Did this mean I would have to drop out half-way through the year? Was it the end of my academic career? These thoughts have crossed my mind."

Tivane paid R2 800 per month for transport for her daughter to Eduvos because she could not afford to keep her in the hostel.

She said she received a notice from the school's finance team on Wednesday stating that her daughter's results for the second term tests would not be released unless outstanding fees of R28 327 were paid.

"I don't even know if my daughter will continue her studies," Tivane added.

Barker told News24 she "can't" advise publishing the story without fact-checking.

"Unfortunately, I cannot comment without authorisation from the GCRA. Schools Star does not provide the funding, and all funding enquiries must be directed to the GCRA."

Gauteng government spokesperson Vuyo Mhaga said the entity funded young people to study at both private and public universities as part of its talent management strategy to build a skills pool for the Gauteng City Regional economy.

Mhaga added:

“The GCRA funds these young people through a bursary policy. There is no provision in the GCRA policy that states it will fund Schools Star beneficiaries.



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He said the bursary policy targeted the top three pupils from no-fee-paying schools in Gauteng.

“Based on the budget availability, the bursary also considers numbers four and five from no-fee paying schools. If any young person meets the criteria, they are provided with a bursary, whether they come from the Schools Star programme or not.”

Mhaga added if any Schools Star beneficiary met their criteria, they would have received funding from the GCRA.

“The government is facing serious fiscal challenges, and the Gauteng provincial government is also part of the institutions affected by these cuts.”

He said that the entity received thousands of applications for bursaries and had funded only 3 600 students this financial year.

“It will not be possible to fund students outside the stipulated policy. All students who have a GCRA bursary letter that promises to fund them, their fees will be paid.”

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