

**Speech to be Delivered on the Occasion of the Celebration of the International Literacy Day by the MEC for Education, Mrs Reginah Mhaule at KaMhlushwa Primary School on 08 September 2015**

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Mahlangu – Mabena

The Executive Mayor of Nkomazi Local Municipality, Cllr Thulisile Khoza

Bukhosi BakaShongwe

Members of the Portfolio Committee

Ward Councillors

Head of Department of the Department of Education, Mrs. Mahlasedi

Mhlabane

Head of Department of the Department of Culture, Sport and Recreation,

Mr. SW Mnisi

Chairperson of the Moral Regeneration Movement

Members of the Mpumalanga Writers Association

Members of Senior Management of the participating Departments

Chief Executive of Nelson Mandela Foundation, Sello Hatang

Representatives from The Banking Association South Africa led by Ms.

Fikile Kuhlase

Provincial Manager of Old Mutual, Mr. Tlou Keetse and his team

Ms. Andre Eva Bosch

Authors in our midst

Representatives from the IDC

District Management Team

MEC Book Club Members

University of Mpumalanga

Circuit Managers

Principals

Teacher Librarians

Members of the School Governing Bodies

Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign representatives

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Representatives from the Media

Officials

Learners

Members of the Community

## **Sanibonani**

We meet at the right time in the history of our country and the world to celebrate the International Literacy Day as declared by the United Nations and to conscientise our communities about the importance of reading and writing under the theme, Literacy and Sustainable Societies. This day is thus important to all of us as it seeks to eradicate illiteracy in the whole world. It is thus our responsibility to ensure that our own geographic areas are also covered in this regard.

I am really happy that in this part of the world, Mpumalanga, as Government, we have formed a formidable partnership with civil society and business to advocate for the literacy and to move this programme forward.

I also want to forthrightly give thanks to the Executive Mayor, Cllr Khoza for the wonderful hospitality rendered for the Celebration of International Literacy Day as well as the support given to us in our effort to propagate the promotion of reading and writing. Executive Mayor, to you and your team Siyabonga.

## **Drop All and Read Campaign**

As government, we regard literacy, both reading and writing as a basic human right leading to the empowerment of an individual towards self-

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actualisation contributing to the betterment of society. Fortunate as we are, Government has noted that our people are not reading as they should.

Government then mandated the Department of Basic Education to do something to address this, hence the **Drop All and Read Campaign** which is driven in pursuit of realising our long term goal.

“A Reading Nation is a Winning Nation”, the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga announced the implementation of the National Reading Campaign and the 1000 Schools Library Project in her 2015/16 Policy and Budget Speech.

Reading statistics indicate that only 14% of South Africans are readers of books and only 5% of parents read to their children.

In contrast, the citizens of successful countries are readers.

In 2007, the Department of Education initiated the Drop All and Read programme that is targeted at Grade R and Grade 1. It called for teachers to read and tell stories for half an hour each day.

However, it is important that all learners in a school and all members of a community should set time aside each day for reading and storytelling.

This year the programme has been resuscitated and expanded. Schools have been encouraged to observe at least 30 minutes per week of mandatory reading as part of this programme.

We are encouraging schools, families and communities to make Drop All and Read a regular, established part of their daily routine.

### **Why Drop All and Read?**

The formal teaching of reading skills by schools is crucial, but learners learn to read well and with understanding by reading. The more they read with enjoyment, the better their reading becomes. Children need support

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and encouragement to discover the pleasure of reading and to become lifelong readers and learners.

Reading for pleasure develops vocabulary, complex language structures, general knowledge and a wider frame of reference.

Krashen in his influential book, *The power of reading* summarises the extensive research which has confirmed the positive results of free voluntary reading for learners' reading performance and other measures of literacy in first and additional languages.

Better reading skills have a positive impact on all aspects of learning. Learners are able to understand the content of textbooks. They are able to interpret test and examination questions and respond to what has been asked.

Learners must have access to a range of reading material which stimulates their interest. The reading resources must be at and just beyond their reading level. They must have a choice to ensure that they enjoy what they read. They must also be given time to read in quiet and comfort. Giving learners time to read results in them reading more.

Every child should have time every day to read independently. During the time set aside for **Drop All and Read**, the teachers, parents or other relevant adults should also be reading for pleasure. This enables the adults to set a good example of the behaviour they expect from learners.

In the Foundation Phase the teacher can read aloud at the beginning of the period to set the mood. The length of time given to silent reading should be increased as learners' reading skills and attention span improve. Picture reading is also reading and can be done by learners in the very first stage of reading to develop a love of reading and books. The silent reading aspect must be included from the very beginning if only for a short time.

Even slow and reluctant readers can become willing to read more if they are given access to easier reading material, just below their reading level, to boost their self-confidence.

The benefits of reading for pleasure do not only apply to children, but also to youth and adults. Reading improves language skills, increases general knowledge, opens doors, benefits careers and enables people to become active and productive members of society.

### **What parents and caregivers can do**

Parents should read to children from when they are small, even before they can talk. Parents talk and sing to babies, and that is how they learn to talk. Reading to them is part of this process. If parents read to children daily, even after they have learnt to read themselves, they associate reading and books with closeness, caring and happiness. They develop a love for books that is likely to last throughout life. They also learn how a book works and how it is handled. This gives them a head start when they go to school.

Parents or caregivers who cannot read should tell their children stories and let the children look at picture books and make up their own stories. Listening to stories, whether they are read or told, is enjoyable and creates an appetite for more stories, which encourages children to learn to read and to read.

It is just as important that crèches and preschools should read, tell stories and allow children to become familiar with books.

When children have learnt to read, every household should have at least half an hour reading time in the evening where everybody in the home, including the adults, read for pleasure. This is just as important as homework or household tasks.

The example set by the adults is very important. Reading materials can be any suitable written matter – newspaper or magazine articles (if suitable for the age level), library books including storybooks and non-fiction or comics. Even during exams learners need this period of relaxation.

Parents and caregivers should try to ensure, if at all possible, that there is a quiet, comfortable place to read in the home. Allow the children to read in bed. This increases the amount of material they read.

It is important for children to own their own books. Parents should consider buying books rather than expensive toys, branded clothes or snacks.

Giving books to children as presents is a good idea. “A Book is a Gift of Life.”

If at all possible, parents should join and make use of the public library and assist their children to join the library, visit it and borrow books. This can happen even before they go to school.

Public libraries often have enjoyable activities for children that further promote reading.

If the school has a library, parents should encourage their children to make use of it and borrow books to read at home.

Encouraging your child to read and making it pleasant to read is probably the most valuable thing a parent can do to help a child with school and in life.

### **What religious and community organisations can do**

We want to encourage the church and the religious community to emphasise the importance of reading for personal and social

development, not only of religious and informative literature, but also for pleasure.

Please encourage parents and caregivers to read and tell stories to children and to allow them time and space to read. Promote members to set aside time in their homes to drop all and read and suggest that all members join and make use of the public library if possible.

Members of religious and community organisations can play a very useful role in promoting reading by setting up and running reading clubs for children and adults.

It is more effective if reading clubs are not seen as part of the school programme, but as something that is done for fun.

The facilities of churches and other organisations can be used fruitfully during the week by being made available as quiet and comfortable reading spaces, under supervision of course.

The venues of religious and community organisations can also be used as collection points for book donations. These organisations can encourage their members and others to donate suitable books and magazines in good condition.

At the end of the month these books can be taken to a community library or school library of your choice. The books can also be kept to be used for the reading clubs, books for little ones can be donated to crèches and preschools, and suitable magazines and books of which there are extra copies can even be donated to families.

The members of religious organisations that have contacts with businesses can approach the business for donations for the reading clubs.



A person does not have to be a teacher or a librarian to help ensure that the library is open outside of school hours, cover books, paste in date sheets and book pockets, keep the library tidy or even issue and return books.

Members of the community can also volunteer to read or tell stories to learners in schools. It is very important that adults in the community serve as reading role models.

We are looking forward to working together for a successful nation.

### **Gratitude to our Partners and Sponsors**

To assist the efforts to promote reading in the community the Department of Basic Education is donating a collection of books for children to read.

The Mpumalanga Department of Education and the Mpumalanga Department of Culture, Sport and Recreation are expressing gratitude to the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Banking Association South Africa, Shutter and Shutter, Mpumalanga Writers Association, the Industrial Development Corporation, The Winkler Protea Hotel, Old Mutual, Exclusive Books and a number of institutions for their patriotic action of availing resources for this programme to go forward.

We are quite aware that this programme will create both tangible and intangible output. In the main what is important to us is that this programme will count in history as a turning point in nation building.

My plea to all our partners and sponsors is that we should find each other and work co-operatively to advance the course for the eradication of illiteracy in this part of the nation. We have deliberately chosen to host this day in this Municipality as it is one of our CRDP municipalities with a passion for teaching and learning. We are confident that literacy programmes will thus take off like wild fire in the whole province.

I am also grateful to the members of the print and electronic media, the SABC radio stations; Ligwalagwala and Ikwekwezi FM, Rise FM, Radio Pulpit, the 13 Community Radio Stations, MiTV, Soweto TV and SABC TV for propagating our campaign throughout the nation.

## **Conclusion**

As I conclude, I want to make an informal appeal to the Executive Mayor, Cllr. Khoza to also bring in the municipality in this venture. I believe that the local municipality is also fertile ground for book exchanges, readathons, host a speaker, open mic nights, writing and reading competitions and many other activities as a programme to eradicate illiteracy in their geographic sphere of influence.

Please also note that on page 5 of your programmes there is an advertorial for the MEC Book Club. I have initiated this book club to encourage reading amongst us. I also request that you join the MEC Book Club, we brought along Brochures to provide you with more information. Also visit the Departmental website, like our Facebook Page and follow us on Twitter.

Once more, thank you very much for the opportunity God Bless you.

## **Ngiyabonga**