

**Speech by the MEC for Education, Mr. Bonakele Majuba Delivered at the Occasion of the 10th Year Celebration of the National Education Collaboration Trust on Tuesday, 08 August 2023**

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**Ladies and Gentlemen**

**Sanibonani**

I am honored to be here today to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). We are also happy that as a response to the call by the National Development Plan (NDP) for increased collaboration among stakeholders to improve educational outcomes the NECT was established in July 2013.

The work of the NECT is informed by the six themes presented in the Education Collaboration Framework (ECF) which guide its programme design and interventions.

This 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a great milestone and as the Mpumalanga Department of Education, we are excited to be part of this collaboration that has achieved so much in the past 10 years since the NECT's inception.

With its colourful track record, the NECT has proven itself as a powerful, successful and dependable organization that is dedicated to strengthening partnerships within civil society and government in order to achieve South Africa's national goals for basic education.

Through forging a collaboration of purpose, we have seen the objectives of the NECT being realized through the improvement of quality schooling and systems and monitoring support. We have also realized and learnt the how the NECT manages its collaborating partners by providing governance platforms for joint initiatives by civil society, business, trade unions and government to improve education delivery.

Programme Director, we are also fascinated at how the NECT embraces educational programmes to ensure that the goal of ensuring a South Africa where 90% of learners pass Mathematics, Science and languages with at least 50% by 2030 is made possible.

Our belief and inclination towards the achievement of this goal has been strengthened by how the NECT has embraced strategies and practical programmes in mitigation of the damning report of the 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

This international study assesses reading (comprehension) achievement in 9-10-year-olds. It has been conducted every five years since 2001 by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

The study involved more than 12,000 South African learners from 321 schools that participated in the 2021 round of PIRLS and has concluded that **81% of** South Africa's grade 4 children could not read for meaning in Home Language (Setswana and Sepedi) being in the bottom of the table of performance. South Africa's average PIRLS score dropped from **320 points attained in 2016 to 288 points in 2021, and this is a drop of 32 points on the scale.**

In the province, we have collaborated with NECT in this regard by launching the MEC Book Reading Club which in Standerton, Lekwa Local Municipality at Jandrell Secondary School on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2023 as a direct response to this study and in line with the NECT objective to oversee implementation of collaborative education programmes and to ensure sustainability to the situations they seek to address.

We are really grateful to the NECT under the leadership of CEO Godwin Khosa that through this intervention, the culture of reading has been extended to all communities across the province.

As the Mpumalanga Department of Education, we recommit to this collaboration of purpose as it has proven to be a viable vehicle to achieve educational goals, objectives and set goals and targets.

The NECT aims to improving government capacity to deliver, improving the resourcing of education and enhancing support for learners and promoting their wellbeing, as the Mpumalanga Department of Education, we have received our fair share of these benefits.

Through the District-based improvement programmes which are the backbone of the NECT, which has prioritised some of the country's poorly performing districts for concentrated attention.

In our Province, the NECT's district development interventions have reached all the districts covering support for the development and review of district development plans through the fundamentals of Performance programme. To this end over 110 district officials have been trained from the four district of the province

The inception phase of the district based improvement programme in Bohlabela started in July 2014 and included profiling the districts, setting up projects and building relationships with the district offices. At the start of 2015, the work of the NECT in the district moved into its implementation

phase through the provision of intense support to the 58 (15%) Fresh Start Schools (FSS) which serve as test sites for NECT innovations.

Through its business and civil society collaboration the NECT has contracted the Price Waterhouse Coopers Consortium (PWC, Class Act, PSA and Penreach to see this programme through.

As we speak, Bohlabela is a top achieving district in the province and it is our intention to not let the other districts leg behind.

Programme Director, I want to express our gratitude to the NECT for the distribution of reading material and books throughout the province in collaboration with the Department of Basic Education.

As part of the Reading Improvement Intervention strategy, the One million story books project supported by the National Reading Coalition, which aims to provide high quality Foundation Phase stories while emphasizing the importance of vernacular reading at is highly appreciated.

This intervention has ensured the distribution of 346 00 books, deployment of 6407 reading champions to 12 687 primary schools in the province is a great feat. We are highly grateful that we benefited as a province from this project to develop the love for reading for pleasure at this tender age.

It is also a great honour to us that the launch of this programme by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs. Angie Motshekga happened within our borders on 02 September 2022 at Hlalisani Primary school in Tweefontein, Thembisile Hani Local Municipality.

The NECT's reading programmes have made a huge impact in the province. Introduced in 2017, the reading improvement interventions have reached 77% of our primary school and we are thus hopeful that this will definitely break the neck of the camel of reading without understanding of our grade 4s as indicated in the PIRLS report of 2021.

Programme Director, we subscribe to the code for quality education which strives to bring together all stakeholders. Through the National Collaboration Framework, the NECT has played a pivotal role in bringing these stakeholders together with government to drive the education agenda forward, improve co-ordination of projects and increase their effectiveness and value.

Taking que from the National Development Plan, the role of the NECT in driving the Quality Learning and Teaching campaign taking along government and non-government organisations on board thus cannot be overemphasized.

It is also our belief that education is a societal phenomenon that needs everyone to pull their weight behind education programmes to see them to fruition. Hence the power to improve education lies with all of us; all department officials, teachers, students, parents, business, teacher labour formation, Teacher associations and community members.

As the Mpumalanga Department of Education, we are convinced beyond reasonable doubt that we indeed have a reliable and trustworthy partner in the National Education Collaboration Trust who increases our power as

a nation to secure the changes we urgently need to deliver good education to all our children.

It should be noted that the education intervention programmes provided by the NECT through technical support to government and civil society organizations has a lasting legacy to the development of children of South Africa and Mpumalanga in particular.

Since 2013, the NECT has expanded its footprint across the country, with a focus on implementing systemic programmes that drive education improvement. These programmes have created value for schools, teachers and learners and remain important vehicles which pursue education reform and transformation in line with the National Development Plan.

As part of your social capital building programmes for the past ten years, in the year 2015 to 2019, the NECT has scaled up its programmes reaching 17 645 schools and 93 409 teachers in the nation.

Advancing Teachers professionalization, the NECT has trained and resourced 7886 teachers, 199 Subject advisors on structured Learning Programmes which has helped teachers with pacing, pitching and sequencing for Mathematics, Science and Languages.

In the same period, you launched the safe project to provide ablution facilities to 679 schools across the country as part of the intervention to rid the nation of pit toilets.

In line with teachers' development programmes the NECT has assisted with the introduction of Reading Improvement Programmes which have reached over 42 000 teachers.

We also want to express our appreciation to the NECT that over the ten years' period, it introduced the modernization of school administration system in line with the 4th Industrial Revolution, to advance a data backed decision making education.

The Covid-19 pandemic has done a great deal of damage in schooling in the whole world ad South Africa in particular. The NECT has been instrumental in bringing recovery programmes to leverage education delivery and rebuilding of the education system after the destructive aftermath of the pandemic.

The NECT has brought the South Africa Competency Framework as part of its practical technical support, providing functionality studies in 50 schools on the return to normal time tabling and levels of curriculum coverage.

This programme was even extended to the greater school communities with 662 community members trained to respond to the psychosocial impact of the Covid 19 pandemic.



## Conclusion

Programme Director, let me conclude by expressing gratitude to the NECT's efforts in ensuring that quality education delivery is made possible to the growth of our collaboration, the well-being of our teachers and learners as well as the increasing numbers of learners who improve in their learning experience.

Please allow me to borrow the words of the founder of Missionaries of Charity, the late mother Teresa who once said, **“None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful.”**

The NECT has mobilized 85 stakeholder’s representatives across the province to ensure that the working together philosophy is actualized. This intervention intended to establish and encourage the involvement of various stakeholders including SGBs, Teacher Unions, local business, youth organisations and district officials and is much welcomed and appreciated.

We are quite aware that through these effort more children are now attending school, more children are learning, and more children are graduating from school with the skills they need to succeed in life.

I would like to commend the NECT for its outstanding work over the past 10 years as a valuable partner in the fight to improve education in South Africa.

CEO Khosa, we wish the NECT the best for the future and look forward to working with you in the years to come to make sure that all children in South Africa have access to a quality education.

Happy 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Thank you.