

**Speech to be delivered by the MEC for Education, Mr  
Bonakele Majuba at the occasion of the Celebration of the  
Literacy Day at Floreat Riverside Lodge on 08 September  
2023**

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Programme Director

District Director

Representatives from NECT, Mr. Baile Nkuna

All Represented Publishers and Authors

Circuit Managers

**Sanibonani,**

We are truly grateful and honoured to be in your warm company to celebrate this special day.

This celebration aims to remind the public of the importance of literacy as a matter of dignity and human rights, and to advance the literacy agenda towards a more literate and sustainable society.

Reading and writing is a basic human right, which leads to the empowerment of an individual towards self-actualisation contributing to the betterment of society.

It is therefore very saddening when finding from the International Reading Literacy Study 2021 (PIRLS 2021) conducted by the University of Pretoria has found that 81% of South African Grade 04 learners are struggling to read for comprehension at age 10.

This therefore calls for all of us to encourage learners to read. The formal teaching of reading skills by schools is crucial, but learners learn to read well with understanding by reading. The more they read with enjoyment, the better their reading becomes.

Reading for pleasure develops vocabulary, complex language structures, general knowledge and a wider frame of reference. Our learners need support, not only in school but in our communities.

As a community we ought to encourage our children to read more, reading daily to young children, starting in infancy can help with language acquisition, communication skills, social skills and literacy skills.

As parents and guardians at home, we need to set time aside specifically dedicated to reading. Let this be a part of our daily routine.

At home, let there be books available to read, children 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.

As government, the Mpumalanga Province has birthed the MEC Book Club to mitigate factors of the 2021 Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS).

The MEC Book Club was launched in collaboration with the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) to coordinate the development and implementation of a comprehensive reading improvement strategy.

The Book Club will also solicit partnership in the development and reading agenda by encouraging writers to write books, business people to partner and provide resources for children to read and to provide book donations for children of all communities to access the book to read.

Once a year, the MEC will coordinate a book Reading Club discussion to inculcate the culture of reading culture in every home across the province. It is only when we embark in a reading revolution that the idea of getting all South Africans to read will be realized.

As I conclude, let us make it a habit of telling success stories of individuals who never gave up in reading and writing, stories such of Mr. Lavis Vilakazi, from the Gauteng Province, who at the age of 77 wrote and passed his matric examinations.

These are stories that our children must know, so that they realise the value of reading.

Let us tell stories of a grandmothers who can now read messages on her phone with understanding, because they never gave up on learning to read, as reading is the cornerstone of education.

We must remember that a reading nation, also reaps economic benefits. A well – read population is more likely to be skilled, innovative and adaptable.

In an age dominated by rapid technological advancements and an avalanche of digital distractions, the act of reading might seem to be losing ground. It is for this reason therefore, that I urge this august house to ignite in our learners and children a desire and a yearning that can only be satisfied by the smell of a new book, or in the modern times, by clicking at a book App.

Learners need to know that a leader is born through reading. Joseph Addison once said ***“Reading is to the mind; what exercise is to the body.”***

I thank you.