

MPUMALANGA READING AND WRITING STRATEGY

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**KEY-NOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE OCCASION OF THE
LAUNCH OF THE MPUMALANGA PRIMARY SCHOOL READING
STRATEGY BY THE MEC FOR EDUCATION,
MRS MMATHULARE COLEMAN ON THE 18 JULY 2008.**

Programme Director

Members of the Executive Council present here

Executive Mayor of Albert Luthuli Municipality

Dr. Anil Kanjee: HRSC

Prof. Sarah J. Howie: University of Pretoria

Representatives from Educator Unions

Representatives of Schools Governing Bodies

Publishers

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Training providers

Officials from the Department

Ladies and gentlemen

I greet you all.

Today, the people of the World celebrate the birth of one of the most outstanding leaders this World has ever had, Former President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. I urge all of you to stand up so that we can collectively wish this marvelous Son of the soil a HAPPY BIRTHDAY:

Happy birthday to you

Happy birthday to you

Happy birthday Madiba

Happy birthday to you!

Thank you. You may sit down.

We are indeed happy that we have lived to embrace the love, warmth, patriotism, altruism and wisdom of this icon of the World. We love you Madiba.

It is befitting that today we have assembled to make an expression of our willingness to enhance reading in primary schools. This we do as a response to a series of research studies which called for the development of an urgent focused programme for the improvement of reading in our schools.

It is in that context that we will present today a Provincial Strategy that seeks to:

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- Focus on developing and promoting reading and writing skills
- Ensure that all learners have solid foundational skills
- Enable learners to gain full access to the curriculum from “learning to read to reading to learn”,
- In addition, the strategy will assist educators to interpret the curriculum and be able to respond to the national call that seeks to increase literacy levels of learners in primary schools.

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Ladies and gentlemen allow me to provoke the conscience and the intelligence of this house by opening this discourse with words of a renowned poet William Butler Yeats in his poem entitled “The Second Coming”. The poem reads thus;

Turning and Turning in widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
More anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

I do not want to sound like a doomsday prophetess nor to dampen the spirit of this house, but the reality of the matter is that we are

facing a bleak and sad reality that **‘the African child cannot read at an appropriate level.’**

As indicated by Dr Kanjee, the systemic evaluations conducted in 2001 and 2004 paint an ugly picture about the future of our learners. In 2001 Grade 3 learners in the province obtained an average score of 38% for Literacy. Surely, we are obliged to act to correct this. For the same cohort of learners in 2004 Systemic Evaluation again draws the following fading landscape about the weak reading abilities of our learners:

- That grade 6 learners scored an average of 49%.
- That only 40% of grade 6 learners came from homes that had between 1 and 10 books.
- That 30% of grade 6 learners came from homes where there are no books at all.
- That very few learners had access to libraries in their schools or communities.
- That almost 70% of our learners do not read newspapers.
- That our teachers did not get an education that prepared them adequately to teach and develop reading skills.

In spite of this I do not think that this negative state of affairs should make us look depressed, bitter and sullen. We have a responsibility to restructure this situation. **Our learners are our future, we**

therefore cannot bury our heads in the sand and hope that this situation will improve or fade away on its own.

I wish to remind the house of the injunction made by the Premier of Mpumalanga, Mr. Thabang Makwetla in his address on the State of Province this year. He boldly implored all of us; officials, business, communities and civil society to commit resources to improving the quality of education and ensure broad access by the majority of South Africans.

It is in those words of the Premier that we get the spirit that rekindles the hope in us, that we can challenge the weakness of our learners in reading a text. South Africa is a country with possibilities; nothing seems to be stronger than the resilient force of the people of this country. Our Province is a province with a pioneering spirit. Let this spirit push our patriotism to its limit, and teach our children to read well.

If we do not do this correctly, I am afraid our conscience will be tormented by the words of a renowned poet from this country Chris Mann, in his poem entitled: “Where is the freedom for which we died?”

Today, we launch the Reading Strategy of the Department of Education in Mpumalanga. This Reading Strategy is the process of constructing meaning from a written context. Out of this strategy, emphasis will be put on the importance of making our children

passionate readers. This is informed by the fact that a child's success in school and through-out life depends largely on the extent of the ability to read.

We are living in the information age which requires that people be literate in order to thrive in spite of the challenges of this cutting edge century. It then calls for public education to provide learners with the best possible reading instruction. For our learners to be able to succeed in the mainstream economy of the country they should be able to comprehend what they are reading, apply their knowledge and skills on what they have learnt, communicate ideas learnt in a particular context and have a strong appetite to read.

For us to achieve this we need the support of every role player; the child, teacher, parent, departmental officials, business and community leaders.

I wish to repeat what I said during the tabling of the Policy and Budget Speech on the 2nd June 2008.

“As Mpumalanga Department of Education we want to call on the private sector and the business community to come forth and partner with us in a pioneering spirit as we discharge our responsibilities to deliver quality public education.” This responsibility of improving the reading ability of the African child needs to be shouldered by one and all.

Our strategy hinges on four beliefs:

Firstly, that reading instruction should be based on the evidence of sound research that has been verified by classroom practices:

- Good research informs educators about the components of an effective reading program.
- Research shows that effective reading instruction compensates for risk factors that might otherwise prevent children from becoming successful readers.

Secondly, that early success in reading is critical for children:

- A child's success in school and through-out life depends to a larger extent on the ability to read
- Reading is the foundation for achievement through-out the school years.

Thirdly, that the teacher is the key factor to the child's success in learning to read:

- Research has proven that the ability of teachers to deliver good lessons is the most influential factor in determining how well children learn to read.

And lastly, that teachers who are critical thinkers and informed are able to make wise choices that consider the needs of the children and accomplish the goals of teaching the art of reading.

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In order to succeed in the classroom, teachers need the co-operation and support of school and circuit management:

- Effective early reading teaching does not happen in isolation.
- Reading lessons do not only involve primary school teachers, but all partners in the education system, the home and the community.

The Department of Education therefore promises that it will assist among others by:

- Supporting early identification and intervention
- provide resources
- enhance human resource capacity
- enhance educator competency in teaching
- mobilize community support
- regulate time for structured teaching and promotion of reading
- support research, monitoring and evaluation for this course.

In conclusion, because we know the importance of our children starting to learn to read at an early age i.e. in the pre-school and primary years, we will make sure that we give them the opportunities to engage in purposeful oral and print activities:

- We will allow them observing others reading.
- We will allow them the opportunity to listen to others reading.
- We will allow them to share their reading experiences with us.
- We will allow them the experience of reading familiar books, alphabet books, poems, rhymes and many more.

Let me invoke the spirit of James Mathew, a fallen stalwart by quoting from his poem entitled,

“Freedom’s child”

His voice is raised and it says:

Freedom’s child
You have been denied too long
Fill your lungs and cry rage
Step forward and take your rightful place
You’re not going to grow up
Knocking at the back door
For you there will be no traveling
Third class enforced by law
With segregated schooling and sitting on the floor
The rivers of our land, mountains top
And the shore
It is yours, you will not be denied anymore
Cry rage, freedom’s child (The end)

Let us lay the spirit of this stalwart and teach the African child to read.

I thank you.