



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, at the 2022 World Read Aloud Day held at Albertina Sisulu Special School in Orlando West.

2 February 2022

Programme Director

MEC for Gauteng Education

School Principals, Teachers and Learners

Representatives of Various Non-Governmental Organisations

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Fellow South Africans

As Basic Education Minister, I am privileged to be asked to reflect on the sector's vision towards building a reading nation as we celebrate the 2022 World Read Aloud Day (WRAD).

As we say in the basic education circles: a reading nation is a winning nation.

As a country, we must never underestimate the critical role of basic education, of which reading is its core in society.

Programme Director, it warms my heart that many stakeholders and learners have gathered here to celebrate the 2022 World Read Aloud Day.

Today's event is courtesy of our Department of Basic Education, National Reading Coalition (NRC), Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) and Nal'ibali.

Furthermore, this event is supported by Fat Cat, University of Johannesburg, Oxford University Press, University of Pretoria and the Nal'ibali mascot.

The vast array of partners is a testament to our conviction to deliver improved quality education in our lifetime, of which reading for meaning is the apex priority.

This event is critical in our collective endeavours to improve basic education.

Mainly because a United Nations report once cautioned that many children in school would not learn enough to acquire the basic skills needed to lead successful and productive lives.

Furthermore, the UN report said some learners would leave school without a basic grasp of reading and mathematics.

This multi-stakeholder reading initiative seeks to avoid this eventuality of learners without literacy foundations although they are at school.

We have to do everything in our power as social partners to ensure that all learners in our basic education ecosystem acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Hence, our support for World Read Aloud Day, which is about celebrating the power of reading aloud.

The power of migrating words.

We must use our classrooms as a conduit to create a new tale for the African child.

We must help our learners to make a clean break with the Bantu Education that ensured the impoverishment of their parents.

We owe this generation of learners and posterity to birth a new basic education ecosystem that enables at least one learner, one book, a classroom and a teacher across the country.

As one Judge once opined: "It cannot be emphasised enough that basic education should be seen as a primary driver of transformation in South Africa".

The learned Judge added: “We must guard against failing those who are most vulnerable.”

Needless to say, the Judge had found us wanting on the delivery of books to schools in Limpopo.

Thus, we can no longer postpone the need to cement the building blocks of a high performing basic education system.

Sustained reading initiatives like today’s event can help us guard against failing the vulnerable in our society.

Programme director -- in 2013 alone, when Nal’ibali’s first made the call to action, i.e. to read aloud, 13 401 children were reached.

Fast forward to 2021, the campaign, together with its partners, read aloud to over three million children.

However, this year’s target is slightly different; we aim to sign up 1 million families, with the help of partners, to join the reading aloud movement over and above reading to 3 million children.

We envisage that this year’s campaign will reach millions of learners at hundreds of public schools across the country.

The *Read to Lead* Reading Champions supports the 2022 World *Read Aloud* Day with a network of teacher mentors and partners; hence we envisage huge success.

These partners include The Learning Project, Room to Read, Activate Leadership, Read Education Trust, A Better Africa Foundation, Penreach, and Funda Wandu.

Our mission is to ensure that by 2030 all 10-year-olds can read for meaning as per the directive of His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa.

The growth of this initiative, i.e. the World Read Aloud Day, suggests that South Africans are slowly embracing the call to action, i.e. to read aloud on the day.

Reading is the foundation of education, and the Department, Na'ibali and partners work hard to promote reading and literacy throughout the year.

We hold a view supported by scholars that literacy is a fundamental human right and the foundation for lifelong learning.

Thus, literacy is essential to social and human development and transforming lives.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) chief economist Ayodele Odusola makes the following interesting point:

“Quality education is key to social mobility and can thus help reduce poverty, although it may not necessarily reduce [income] inequality.”

Yet, globally, women account for two-thirds of the 750 million adults without basic literacy skills.

As we converge here as partners on this World Read Aloud Day, it gives us the mileage we need to ignite a love and regular practice of reading and story sharing in our classrooms, homes and beyond.

This sustained reading initiative responds to the caution from experts that “reading is not a portion of education, but education itself”.

At the heart of today’s event is to gently nudge children and adults to grab a book, find an audience and read aloud!

In its 13th year, World Read Aloud Day has ignited a reading revolution across the globe.

Despite the event not being a United Nations initiated or inspired, over 173 countries worldwide now celebrate the World Read Aloud Day.

Truth be told, this event is the work of civil society as it was created by a non-profit organisation called LitWorld to bring people and communities together through the power of words.

It is a further testament to civil society’s power to impact public policy positively.

As a sector, we have just emerged from a three-day Basic Education Sector Lekgotla where the issue of reading for meaning foregrounded many discussions.

For instance, one commission recommended that we need a standalone reading policy that instructs teachers what exactly is expected of them.

Overall the 2022 Lekgotla reaffirmed the 2019 Basic Education Sector Lekgotla's decision to continue strengthening the foundations of learning in the early grades.

We correctly say that Reading and Mathematics are to continue to be our apex priority.

The recent Lekgotla further lamented the early grade literacy and numeracy outcomes that aren't in tandem with the massive investment in the basic education system.

Lekgotla blamed the dearth of books in the hands of learners and large classes.

In a last-ditch effort to right the wrongs of the past, Lekgotla resolved that we must form a reference group on Foundations for Learning to tackle the early grade literacy and numeracy conundrum.

The advice is clear: The Reference Group must cut across various functions and include the ECD, reading and numeracy directorates.

Programme director, speaking at a UNESCO World Literacy Day event on 6 September last year, I said that reading for meaning is one of the 11 priorities the (6th Administration) to take the basic education sector to the next level.

To this end, I am glad to say that the National Reading Sector Plan launched in 2019 is an evidence-based strategy to alter the entire reading landscape in our country.

I always emphasise that the National Reading Sector Plan compliments rather than replaces all existing reading initiatives, including the *Read to Lead* Campaign.

The main thrust of this comprehensive sector reading plan is to ensure reading for meaning across the curriculum, in all grades, and all schools throughout the country.

We plan to teach all our learners to read well and, most importantly, read for meaning.

I agree that we need to pay attention to sector funding and human capital development to take early learning to higher levels of growth and excellence.

The best place to start is Early Childhood Development.

I am happy to announce that an overhauled and much improved Early Childhood Development sector will be launched on 1 April this year under the aegis of the Basic Education Department.

This means that the function shift of the Early Childhood Development sector from Social Development to Basic Education is now complete.

Today, we are called upon to be midwives of bring back fun due to reading stories to children.

As midwives of improved basic education, we must birth a new learner who learns in a safe and engaging environment and ample learning opportunities.

Ideally, each learner must access high-quality learning materials, fit-for-purpose furniture, clean portable water and modern ablution facilities.

This is no longer the ideal state of the future, but now.

Any lacklustre performance on our side as a Government should be considered an affront to the children's inherent right to basic education and intrinsic dignity.

In fact, we should be personally distressed if some of our children are not getting the basic education they need and deserve.

Every South African child and child of immigrants must have an equal chance to succeed in basic education by ensuring everyone has age-appropriate reading materials.

All our plans, strategies and wishes of a better future of our basic education won't succeed unless there's a strong partnership with social partners.

Equally important is consequence management.

Throughout the system, the relevant line functions must ensure that this happens from the national up to the classroom level.

At the risk of repeating myself, Programme Director, if the basic education sector wants to be a high-performance system, there must be no room for mediocrity, ineptitude, and corruption.

For every action, there must be consequences.

Meetings of all School Governing Bodies (SGBs) must hold the School Management Teams (SMTs) accountable for improving learning outcomes, not tenders.

Only when the system works well can our learners flourish and succeed in reading for meaning and academic purposes in peace.

I urge all principals, teachers and parents to consider reading for meaning a critical ingredient in improving learner outcomes.

In conclusion, I thank our partners and all other stakeholders for their continued support and wise counsel for this event and the sector as a whole.

I thank you.