



basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Recorded Message by the Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga at the South African Human Rights Commission's Right to Read and Write Campaign Launch

My name is Angie Motshekga. I am the Minister of Basic Education in South Africa.

I would like to thank the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) for inviting me to launch the Right to Read and Write campaign.

It is most appropriate that the Commission has chosen to launch this campaign on International Literacy Day, the 8th of September 2021.

I have spent much of today, as have many others worldwide, promoting and celebrating projects and programmes aimed at improving literacy.

As far as we are concerned, literacy is a fundamental human right.

As you know, early grade reading is close to my heart and central to the work of our Department of Basic Education.

So, I read with interest the paper prepared by the Commission's Section 11 Committee on the Right to Read and Write.

I am delighted to see that several panellists have a long history of supporting our Department in its efforts to improve the reading and writing of Foundation Phase learners.

Our Government has long recognised the need to improve the quality of early grade reading in the country.

Exactly 20 years ago in 2001, and again in 2004, the Department of Education conducted national systemic evaluations to establish literacy and numeracy levels across primary schools in South Africa.

These evaluations showed low levels of reading ability and suggested that large numbers of our children did not read at the levels required to progress through school.

In response to these low levels of reading ability, the Department of Education has, over the last 20 years, endeavoured to understand

the reasons for the low levels of reading of many children and sought ways to address the problem.

Understanding the problem

To understand the nature of the reading problem in South Africa, the Department of Basic Education has done the following:

- Conducted Annual National Assessments in literacy and numeracy for the foundation phase (grades 1 – 3).

The Department supplied the question papers and marking memoranda (exemplars), and schools managed the conduct of the tests, marking and internal moderation.

- Participated in local and international tests of reading – PIRLS and SACMEQ. Although we have seen substantial improvement in these reading achievement tests, they still show that our learners are not reading at the required levels in their home language or in the language of learning and teaching (LoLT).
- Led the Early Grade Reading Studies (EGRS), a series of large-scale evaluations in collaboration with academics at various universities and international donor organisations. The project aims to build evidence about improving the learning and teaching of early grade reading in South African schools.

Supporting the improvement of reading and writing

To support teachers and learners, DBE has done the following:

- Launched the National Reading Plan in February 2019. The National Reading Plan is an overarching evidence-based strategy that will alter the entire reading landscape in the country.
- It complements rather than replaces all existing reading initiatives, including the *Read to Lead Campaign*.
- The thrust of the National Reading Plan is to ensure reading for meaning across the curriculum, in all grades, and in all schools throughout the country.
- Our plan is to ensure that we teach all our learners to read well, and most importantly, read for meaning.
- By 2024, the plan would have been successfully implemented throughout the system.
- I mean wall-to-wall coverage, circuit by circuit, district by district, and school by school.
- Provided, on an annual basis, two language workbooks to every child in Grades R to 6, a total of over 12 million books per year.

Therefore, it is evident that we are determined to improve early grade reading and writing in South Africa.

We, therefore, welcome the Commission's paper which argues that 'one of the minimum 'core' outcomes concerning the right to a basic education, is that a child must be able to read and write with understanding at a basic level, in their home language, by the age of ten.'

This gives content and weight to President Cyril Ramaphosa's announcement in 2019 that one of the Government's "five fundamental goals for the next decade" is that all children should read for meaning by age ten.

We welcome the fact that the Commission's Paper aims 'to provide a clearly articulated, evidence-based, and measurable definition of what it means to "read and write, with understanding, at a basic level."

We agree on the need for 'a shared framework for understanding reading comprehension and how it can be measured.'

The proposed shared framework supports the proposal that the conceptual framework used for reading comprehension should be based on the PIRLS reading literacy framework.

As the paper points out, this supports the existing work coordinated by the Department of Basic Education on benchmarking early grade reading

We will study the SAHRC paper with interest and consider how it may enhance our work in achieving adequate reading and writing across the country's schools.

I thank you.