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SCHOOLS DEMOCRACY PROGRAMME LAUNCHED TO EMPOWER YOUNG CITIZENS IN SEKHUKHUNE

By Katlego Mashula

The Independent Electoral Commission, in collaboration with the Limpopo Department of Education, officially launched the Schools Democracy Programme (SDP) at Tlhako Secondary School, marking a significant step in promoting civic education and active citizenry among learners.

The Schools Democracy Programme now in its 14th year, advocates for an institutionalized and integrated approach to intervention programmes within annual school plans. It aims to encourage active participation among learners across the country by engaging them in civic and democracy education, ensuring they understand their

role in shaping society. The democracy Education is prioritized in the month of April because of its significance for ushering the new dispensation in the country.

The launch emphasised the IEC's 2026/27 campaign message, "Get up, show up and vote," reinforcing the importance of participation in democratic processes. Through interactive activities and simulation materials, learners were given practical exposure to electoral systems, enabling them to engage critically with democratic values and apply them to their everyday lives. The initiative highlighted that democracy does not require spectators, but active and informed

participants. Nkaro Mateta, the IEC Provincial Electoral Officer highlighted the importance of registering and voting as a young person. “We are here to plant a seed of democracy on a fertile ground. Young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow but the present. Democracy is not just about voting, it is about accountability, respect and stand for what is right while building a culture of participation among young people. To all learners, I encourage you to take full advantage of all the resources and information provided today,” she said.

Delivering the keynote address, MEC for Education Mavhungu Lerule-Ramakhanya encouraged learners to take ownership of their civic responsibilities. “Today we are no longer on the history lane but the Democracy lane. As we emphasise on democracy it is important to understand that

democracy means refraining from bullying in schools it is beyond voting, this includes free education as every learner should have access to free education enabling a society that can read and write. To all learners, you are not the future but the present. The vote is your voice. Learn how your government works, take this day to echo in your lives and know what you want to make better choices,” MEC concluded.

The Schools Democracy Programme continues to play a vital role in nurturing informed, responsible, and engaged young citizens. By embedding democratic values within the education system, the initiative ensures that learners are not only aware of their rights but are also prepared to actively contribute to South Africa's democratic future. The Programme will be extended to all the remaining nine education districts.







A PROVINCE REFLECTING, RE-ALIGNING AND RISING

By Conny Mabunda

In a bold step towards excellence, the Head of Department Maropene Seshibe, led a focused three-day resolution session for the first-term academic review in Bela-Bela Warmbaths, within the Waterberg Education District. He was joined by the MEC for Education Mavhungu Lerule-Ramakhanya and the DDG for Institutional Governance and Coordination Calvin Molongoane, bringing together leadership committed to strengthening education outcomes across the province.

With eyes firmly set on a historic milestone, the session was meant to reflect the gains of the first academic quarter. Limpopo is maintaining its ambition to achieve 90% pass rate in the 2026 National Senior Certificate examinations.

In a moment of honest reflection and renewed focus, districts presented their performance, challenges and practical strategies to improve results, while also celebrating progress made. Capricorn North stood out as a leader in Mathematics, while Capricorn South achieved 88.7% with six circuits surpassing 90% for the first time in history. Mopani West reached 90%, Mogalak-

wena achieved 92.1%, Sekhukhune East recorded 90.1% with 10 out of 16 circuits performing above 90%, Sekhukhune South reached 90%, Vhembe East achieved 88.8%, Mopani East 87.2%, Vhembe West 86.4%, and Waterberg 83.8%.

Marking a near-breakthrough achievement, Pedro Masetla confirmed that the province has reached 89.1% with just 0.9% to reach the 90% target.

Turning dialogue into decisive action, HoD Seshibe urged stakeholders to move beyond discussions and commit to practical implementations. He emphasised that educators across the province have consistently demonstrated their capability through quality results in both public and private schools.

“Let us not leave here without a plan but with a renewed pact to be the bedrock and the well-spring for every child in our care. Let us roll up our sleeves, continue the great work and ensure that we reach 90% and beyond.” Said Seshibe Facing reality with courage and clarity,

MEC Mavhungu Lerule-Ramakhanya called for transparency and accountability, stressing that challenges must never be concealed but rather confronted head on. She highlighted ongoing social issues such as bullying, drug use and substance abuse which continue to impact learner performance in some areas. "These sessions are to reflect and realign. "Challenges must be faced head-on not hidden. For one to receive help, they must first acknowledge their shortcomings." She emphasized.

Driving accountability at every level, she further urged District Directors and Circuit Managers to

speaking openly about resource constraints, ensuring that schools receive the necessary support to improve performance and deliver results, she concluded.

With momentum building and purpose renewed, the session concluded with a unified commitment to push beyond current achievements. With Limpopo now at 89.1%, the province stands closer than ever to its goal. And with determination leading the way, the foundation has been laid, the strategies are in place and the journey toward 90% and beyond is firmly underway.





MOPANI WEST LEARNERS SHOVALAKULA TO SCHOOL

By Katlego Mashula

Led by MEC Violet Mathye, the Department of Transport and Community Safety in Collaboration with Limpopo Department of Education rolled out of the Shovakalula Bicycle Handover Programme in the Mopani West Education District.

The impactful rollout began at Gwambeni Secondary where 60 bicycles were handed over, the programme proceeded to Sevwengwana Secondary where 28 bicycles were handed to learners and concluded at Mugwazeni Secondary School where 89 bicycles were handed over. A total of 177 bicycles were handed over to deserving learners, providing them with safer, faster and more dignified access to education.

The Shovakalula Programme is a national scholar transport initiative of the Department of Transport, designed to support learners who walk long distances to school, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas. It specifically targets learners who travel less than 5km and do not qualify for formal scholar transport. By easing the burden of long daily commutes, the intervention seeks to reduce fatigue while improving punctuality,

school attendance and overall academic performance.

Nhlamulo Modiba, the RCL president gave a picture of how learning was for learners living far from school. "Learners used to get to school late and exhausted and were unable to actually concentrate on their studies. I am grateful to the department for what they have done for us as a school. These bicycles will enable learners to get to school in time and increase focus in class, said Nhlamulo.

Beyond mobility, the initiative reinforces the importance of learner safety and well-being. Each bicycle handover was accompanied by a road safety awareness session, equipping beneficiaries with essential knowledge on safe cycling practices. The programme also ensures sustainability, as all bicycles remain the property of the respective schools for future use by other qualifying learners.

Speaking during the handover, MEC Mathye emphasized on the broader impact of the initiative. "I am grateful to the team Education, school

leadership and community for support. A society that does not care for its children is like a dead nation. These bicycles belong to learners, and I urge you to take care of them just as you take care of your books. Shovakalula is more than transport, it is about restoring dignity, protecting teaching time and keeping learners safe on our roads,” she said.

The programme underscores government’s commitment to building a future where every learner can arrive at school safe, on time and ready to learn. By addressing transport challenges faced by rural learners, the initiative continues to play a crucial role in promoting equal access to education and improving learning outcomes across Limpopo.



SIR DADDY SHAPING YOUNG MINDS WITH PASSION

By Hanedzani Mbedzi



In the busy community of Nkowankowa outside Tzaneen in Limpopo, a dedicated educator is quietly transforming the future, one young learner at a time. Hlulani Thokwe popularly known as Sir Daddy, a Grade R teacher at Ritavi Senior Primary School is more than just an educator; he is a builder of dreams, a nurturer of confidence and a firm believer in the power of early childhood development.

Born and raised in a community that valued education despite limited resources, Thokwe's journey into teaching was shaped by both circumstance and inspiration. He began his schooling at Bombeleni Primary School and later attended Bankuna High School. Driven by a deep passion for working with young children, he pursued an ECD National Diploma and is currently advancing his qualifications with a Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase Teaching at STADIO Higher Education.

Since 2021, Thokwe has been serving as an SGB educator at Ritavi Senior Primary School, where he teaches Grade R. From the moment he stepped into the classroom, he embraced the opportunity with enthusiasm and purpose. Over the years, he has developed the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to equip his learners with foundational abilities, recognizing sounds,

colours, shapes and numbers, preparing them for a confident transition into formal schooling.

For Thokwe, teaching is not just a profession, it is a calling rooted in personal experience. He vividly recalls his Grade 1 teacher, Ms. Mabuza, whose warmth and care made him feel safe, valued and capable. That experience planted a seed that would later grow into his own passion for education. Today, he strives to offer that same sense of belonging and inspiration to his learners.

His teaching philosophy is simple yet powerful, "Learn through play, sing and move." Understanding that young children learn best through active engagement, Thokwe incorporates music, rhythm, storytelling and hands-on activities into his lessons. Whether it's using concrete objects to teach mathematics or rhythmic patterns to introduce letters, his classroom is alive with energy and purpose. His focus on literacy is particularly strong, ensuring that learners not only recognize letters but also understand their sounds and proper formation.

A firm advocate for mother tongue education, Thokwe teaches in Xitsonga, recognizing its critical role in early development. He believes that children learn best in the language they think and dream in. Through Xitsonga, his learners can express themselves freely, grasp concepts more quickly and build a strong literacy foundation that supports future learning, including the transition to English.

Beyond academics, Thokwe's classroom is a safe and nurturing environment built on patience, love and respect. As both a father and a pastor, he understands the lasting impact of words and actions on a child's emotional well-being. He approaches each learner with care, treating them as he would his own child. His belief is clear: patience is practiced daily and love must be consistently shown.

Creating an engaging learning environment is central to his approach. He combines routine with creativity, maintaining structured daily activities that provide stability, while introducing excit-

ing “wow” moments such as mystery boxes, storytelling props and themed learning corners. His classroom is thoughtfully organised with spaces dedicated to literacy, mathematics, life skills and play, all aligned with CAPS requirements. Importantly, learners are involved in setting up their environment, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging.

Confidence-building is another cornerstone of his teaching. Thokwe celebrates small victories, encouraging learners through positive reinforcement and opportunities to take on responsibilities such as being a “teacher’s helper.” In his classroom, mistakes are not criticised but embraced as part of the learning process. This approach allows children to grow without fear, developing both confidence and independence.

His impact extends beyond the classroom through strong parental involvement. By maintaining open communication, particularly through a WhatsApp group where he shares voice notes in Xitsonga, he ensures that parents are active participants in their children’s learning journey. This collaboration has yielded visible results, with parents expressing pride in their children’s progress and enthusiasm for school.

Social media, particularly TikTok, has further amplified his influence. Through his content, Thokwe showcases the depth and skill involved in Grade R teaching, challenging the misconception that it is “just play.” His work has inspired fellow educators and highlighted the excellence present in rural schools.

Despite his success, the journey is not without challenges. Overcrowded classrooms, limited resources and learners arriving without basic needs are realities he faces daily. Yet, he meets these challenges with resilience, creating teaching materials from recycled items, implementing group work strategies and collaborating with the school and community structures to support learners. Above all, he remains focused on what he can control: creating a safe, joyful and meaningful learning environment.

Thokwe strongly believe in the power of mother tongue education, noting that it enhances comprehension, encourages expression and builds confidence. For him, preserving a child’s language is preserving their identity and self-worth.

To fellow educators, his message is both practical and inspiring: teach with love, remain structured and use available resources creatively. He emphasizes the importance of continuous assessment, patience, punctuality and positive reinforcement. Above all, he reminds teachers that their role goes beyond academics, they are shaping lives and nurturing future leaders.

In Hlulani Thokwe’s classroom, teaching and learning are intertwined with care, creativity and commitment. His work stands as a testament to the profound impact one passionate educator can have not just on individual learners, but on an entire community. In his world, teaching is not just about ABCs, it’s about building confident and capable human beings.



FROM LOCAL COURTS TO INTERNATIONAL DREAMS: YOUNG NETBALL STAR SECURES SCHOLARSHIP TO ENGLAND

By Katlego Mashula



Mashaba Ntlakuso, a young and determined learner has turned her passion for netball into a life-changing opportunity, earning a prestigious scholarship to England. Her journey, marked by discipline, resilience and consistent support from her coach, is an inspiring reminder of what dedication can achieve.

Currently a Grade 8 learner at Frans du Toit High School, the talented athlete discovered her love for netball at the age of 9 in Grade 4. What began as a simple interest quickly developed into a serious pursuit, driven by her commitment to improving her skills and excelling both on and off the court. Playing in the Goal Attack (GA) position, she has shown remarkable ability in shooting, movement, and teamwork.

Her coach, Ayonda Ceko who has worked closely with her for the past two years, describes her as a standout player.

“What really stood out is her discipline and her ability to never give up, no matter how tough the game is. My role has always been to ensure that learners develop the necessary abilities to perform, and she embraced every opportunity to

grow, she said.

Through structured training sessions focusing on passing, shooting, footwork, and overall fitness, Ntlakuso steadily refined her game. Beyond physical training, she also benefited from mentorship in understanding game tactics, building teamwork and developing mental strength. These are key components that prepared her for competitive environments.

Despite the excitement surrounding her scholarship, the journey was not without challenges. The achievement also highlights the broader challenges faced by young athletes, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds. Limited access to facilities, equipment and funding often stands in the way of talent reaching its full potential. However, she believes that school sports programmes play a crucial role in shaping not only athletes but disciplined individuals.

Ntlakuso draws inspiration from professional players, particularly Kamogelo Maseko of the Proteas, whom she regards as her role model. Watching her play motivated her to pursue the same position and strive for excellence.

As she prepares to take her talent to England, her message to other young people is simple yet powerful. “Dream big, stay focused and work hard, Your dedication will pay off,” she said.

For Coach Ayonda, the journey has also been a learning experience.

“I’ve learned to be patient. There is no perfect child, you just must understand their strengths and weaknesses and guide them,” she reflected.

Her hope is that more young athletes will recognize their potential and take it seriously.

This milestone not only marks a personal victory for the learner but also serves as an inspiration to many others. It proves that with the right support, determination and belief, even the biggest dreams, like playing sport on an international stage, can become a reality.



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