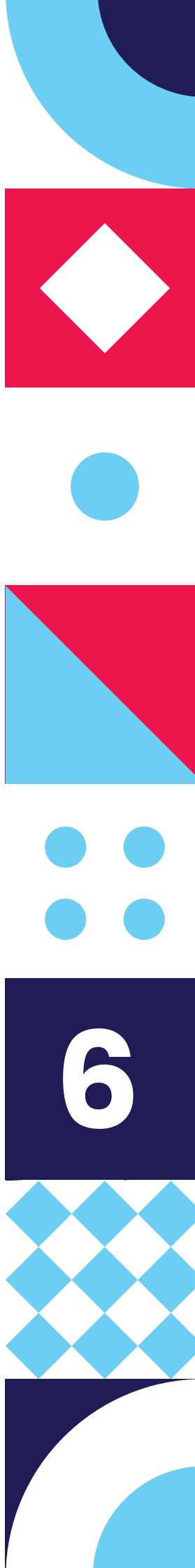




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Mpumalanga province Grade R Capacity Building Programme (MP-R)

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1. Background and Context

The Mpumalanga Province Grade R Capacity Building Programme (MP-R) is a collaborative programme that combines interventions and partners, has multiple funders, and is implemented at scale across the province. It is a direct response to the urgent need to strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy learning, aligned with national and provincial strategic goals for Early Childhood Development (ECD). Research consistently shows that quality early learning is the most critical lever for breaking the cycle of educational underachievement, a cycle evident in Mpumalanga, where many children enter Grade 1 without the necessary cognitive, linguistic, and mathematical foundations, creating deficits that are difficult to overcome later. By focusing on school readiness, the MP-R Programme directly addresses the root causes of poor reading performance identified by the 2030 Reading Panel, as the foundational skills established in Grade R are the very building blocks upon which Grade 4 literacy outcomes depend.

The MP-R Programme was launched in 2025 and aims to systemically address this challenge through a strategic investment in the foundational pillar of early learning: the province's Grade R teachers. The Programme is embedded within the Mpumalanga Department of Education's (MPDoE) broader foundational learning strategy, ensuring alignment with provincial priorities and creating a pathway for sustainable integration beyond external funding cycles.

The Programme aims primarily to improve school readiness at scale in Mpumalanga through enhanced quality of Grade R teaching and strengthened data-driven management of Grade R at provincial level. In addition, the programme seeks to improve cost efficiency and the effectiveness of development interventions through increased collaboration and digitalisation.

2. Programme Overview

Scale & Duration

- **Geographic Reach:** Province-wide, targeting 965 Quintile 1-3 primary schools in Mpumalanga.
- **Direct Beneficiaries:** 2, 004 Grade R teachers, impacting more than 53,000 learners annually.
- **Programme Duration:** Initial implementation phase launched in 2025, with a strategic scaling and sustainability plan established for 2026 to 2028.

3. Partnership Model

The Programme adopts a collaborative consortium model, building on the legacy initiatives, such as the Western Cape Emergent Literacy Project (ELIT) and the Gauteng Grade R Language and Mathematics Improvement Project. Each partner contributes expertise to a specific component of Grade R delivery. These components include learning through play, Mathematics and Home Language teaching, child assessment and tracking, and parental engagement in the learning process. The organisations responsible for each component work collaboratively to integrate their respective programmes and classroom tools, ensuring that teachers receive a cohesive, layered intervention delivered progressively over time.

This integrated approach enables partners to share costs and expertise, resulting in more strategic, efficient, and innovative outcomes. Importantly, it also ensures that programme beneficiaries receive a holistic intervention, rather than fragmented, siloed, or duplicative support.

All four programmes within the partnership are implemented through a combination of training, resource provision, and on-going teacher support. These delivery modalities constitute the primary cost drivers of the interventions. Leveraging the Department's provincial mandate, Subject Advisors are trained and equipped to capacitate and support teachers in schools, with additional direct teacher support provided through the deployment of change agents.

The Programme is currently in the process of integrating and digitalising all programme resources onto a single device already in use in Grade R classrooms. This is being implemented through tablets provided to participating schools, enhancing programme integration while generating long-term cost savings through reduced reliance on printed materials.

4. Instructional Model & Training Approach

The MP-R Programme model uses a multi-layered, play-based approach:

4.1 School Readiness Initiative (Penreach and the Roger Federer Foundation)

This component provides training on the developmental domains (physical, cognitive, social-emotional), the developmental journey towards being ready for Grade 1, learning through play, and parent engagement. This is offered through a digitalised version of the official CAPS assessment requirements, including play-based assessment activities with rating criteria, which helps teachers to consistently monitor and track a child's development throughout the year. Implementation is supported by a digital monitoring system that provides visibility to departmental officials at head office on curriculum implementation and child outcomes.

4.2 Stellar Home Language (Wordworks)

This component strengthens oral language, vocabulary, and early literacy by training teachers on how to teach emergent literacy in home language at Grade R level, and it comes with a complete set of lesson plans and resources. The Stellar Home Language Programme includes a Concept Guide, four Term Activity Guides, a resource pack made up of templates and gameboards and 19 story packs which includes big books, sequence cards and puppets.

4.3 Grade R Mathematics (R-Maths: RED INK)

This component strengthens early Mathematics by developing content and improving teachers' knowledge and understanding of foundational Mathematics at Grade R level. The R-Maths Programme includes a Concept Guide, four Term Activity Guides, an A3 poster book and a box of concrete manipulatives.

4.4 Trackosaurus

This component is a tablet-based assessment game for children and is in a pilot phase. It strengthens the connections between instruction, assessment, and reporting through thoughtful User Experience design, while introducing innovative game-based assessments to more reliably measure early mathematics and home-language skills. The aim is to help teachers translate assessment data into clear, actionable next steps, while making data collection faster and less burdensome.

4.5 Training-of-Trainers Cascade and Support:

- Master Trainers train Change Agents (CAs) (CAs are deployed via the NGO partners) and Provincial Subject Advisors (SAs).
- CAs and SAs co-facilitate monthly training workshops for Grade R teachers.

- Direct, ongoing support for teachers is delivered through Circuit-based Communities of Practice (CoPs), which are monthly peer-learning sessions for teachers to share practices and challenges, with targeted onsite coaching for those needing extra support.
- All the training components are endorsed by SACE for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) points.

4.6 Materials & Resources

- **Digital:**
 - » Tablet devices are provided to all participating teachers.
 - » The SRI component of the programme is designed to use digital device applications for teacher development and for tracking attendance and learner assessments.
 - » Maths and Language resources for teachers are being digitalised and added to the devices, while classroom and teaching resources are kept in print.
- **Physical:**
 - » Play-based activity guides, teacher manuals, concept guides, and practical classroom resource kits for Home Language and Mathematics provided to all teachers.
 - » We are currently in the process of transitioning our materials from print to digital distribution. However, select resources will continue to be provided in printed format, including resource packs, story packs, and practical classroom resource kits.
 - » Playgrounds and toys made by parents and communities
- All materials are aligned with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) and emphasize play-based, learner-centred methodologies.

5. Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning (MERL)

The MP-R Programme applies a comprehensive Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning (MERL) system to track implementation quality, measure progress toward outcomes, and support evidence-informed decision-making across all four districts in Mpumalanga. MERL is embedded throughout programme delivery and is aligned with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) frameworks and provincial priorities for Grade R improvement.

- **Baseline assessments were** conducted in all participating schools, to establish existing conditions related to school readiness, classroom environments, teacher practices, learning resources, playgrounds, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and parent-teacher dialogue.
- **School support visits** are conducted by Change Agents to monitor classroom implementation, provide coaching, and observe teacher practice following training.
- **Digital monitoring tools** are used to capture implementation and assessment data in real time. This tool also allows for GPS tracking of school visits.
- **Real-Time Data:** The digital learner assessment dashboard provides immediate data on learner progress for teacher and district-level decision-making.
- **Training and participation tracking:** documenting attendance and engagement in workshops, orientation sessions, and Communities of Practice (CoPs) for teachers, Subject Advisors, principals, SGBs, and circuit managers.

Overall, the MP-R MERL system provides a robust framework for tracking progress, validating early outcomes, and fostering continuous learning. By combining baseline data, ongoing monitoring,

digital tools, structured reporting, and reflective learning platforms, the programme ensures that evidence consistently informs implementation, supports accountability, and strengthens the quality and sustainability of Grade R teaching and learning across Mpumalanga.

6. Implementation Partners and their responsibilities

	Partner	Role
1.	Mpumalanga Department of Education (MPDoE)	Government Partner and Custodian
2.	Penreach	Lead implementation partner, leads programme coordination, provincial stakeholder engagement, financial management, and MERL, and consolidate reporting. Implements the School Readiness Initiative (SRI) component to strengthen the full Grade R ecosystem — teachers, schools, parents, circuits, and districts.
3.	Wordworks	Provides expertise, support and resources for the training and implementation of the Grade R Stellar Home Language component.
4.	RED INK	Provides expertise, support and resources for the training and implementation of the Grade R Maths component.
5.	Trackosaurus	Developing new technologies to serve as a “connective tissue” for the programme while also developing and testing innovative game-based assessments for Grade R learners.

Funders

- Roger Federer Foundation
- Get It Done Foundation
- Thungela Resources

Other Partners

- **NASCEE:** Appointed by Roger Federer Foundation as the Project Management Office (PMO) for the programme, ensures coordination, reporting, and strategic alignment between all partners and the programme Steering Committee.

7. Overall Programme Cost and Funding

MPR is currently supported through a combination of committed funder contributions and institutional partnerships.

As the programme expands in reach and depth, additional funding is being mobilised to sustain quality implementation and enable phased growth across priority districts.

The programme has an estimated total cost of R100 million over its four-year lifespan, dependent on fundraising. This translates to R500 per child for the three interventions combined, and inclusive of the AI gamified assessment. This estimate includes projected in-kind contributions from partners. To maximise impact and sustainability, the programme is actively innovating to control costs, including the digitalisation of content and the development of new, scalable teacher support methods.

To date, R45 million has been secured to support implementation through to the end of 2026, with a portion of funding already allocated for 2027. The programme partners continue to engage additional funders to secure the resources needed for the next phase of expansion and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the intervention.