

**2 February 2022 (8am)  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

The inaugural 2030 Reading Panel, chaired by Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, calls for “fundamental reforms” to ensure that all children read for meaning by age 10 by 2030. Currently 78% of children cannot read for meaning.

At current rates of progress it will take 80 years before all children learn to read in SA.



*Panel of experts calls for reforms to initial teacher education and moving from slogans about reading to implementing well-funded programs to improve reading outcomes.*

**2 February 2022** – The 2030 Reading Panel is a civil society initiative of the former deputy President Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and aims to ensure that by 2030 South Africa reaches the goal set out by President Ramaphosa, that all children will read for meaning by age 10 by 2030. The panel is made up of 18 eminent South Africans and includes those from academia, NGOs, business and faith communities, including Prof Njabulo Ndebele, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Bobby Godsell, Michael Sachs, Elinor Sisulu and Jay Naidoo.



The 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2022 was the inaugural Reading Panel attended by 100 delegates from government, business and civil society. This is the first annual meeting of the panel, who will continue to meet once a year every year until 2030 to monitor progress towards the goal of all children reading for meaning by 2030. The Secretary of the Panel, Prof Nic Spaul, presented the [2022 Background Report](#) summarising the main challenges to reaching the 2030 goal, including challenges regarding initial teacher education, teacher retirements, funding and COVID-19 learning losses.

The main new findings presented in the background report released on 1 February 2022 were:

1. **SA 10-year-olds in 2021 know less than SA 9-year-olds before the pandemic:** Due to rotational timetables and school closures in 2020 and 2021 children in South Africa have lost 1,3 years of learning. New assessments show that children in Grade 4 in 2021 knew less than children in Grade 3 in 2018.
2. **Half of teachers (45%) will retire in the next 10 years – this is ‘unprecedented’ and currently there is no plan to address this wave of retirements.** The report showed that due to the aging of public school teachers there is a bulge of teachers about to reach retirement age (60). It will require universities to increase teacher production from 26,000 in 2018 to 44,000 by 2025 to 50,000 by 2030.
3. **Before the pandemic South Africa’s education system was improving slowly but steadily:** The report showed that for children who were enrolled in Grade 1 from 1994 onwards, their reading and mathematics outcomes were consistently improving, although levels were still low.
4. **On SA’s current trajectory it will take 80 years before all 10 year olds can read for meaning:** Although President Ramaphosa committed his administration to ensuring that by 2030 all 10 year olds will read for meaning, *on current projections only 36% will be able to read for meaning by 2030* (currently only 22% of 10 year olds can read for meaning in any language).
5. **University B.Ed students scored 50% on primary school maths test:** Assessments of primary school mathematics teachers showed that first year B.Ed students across three universities scored 52% on a primary school maths test and final year B.Ed students scored 54%. The panel called for an audit of university programs training primary school teachers.
6. **Current reading plans are “slogans” because they lack funding:** The report showed that most of the DBE’s current plans for reading were primarily slogans (“Read to Lead”, “Drop All and Read”, President’s Virtual Reading Circle) and there was currently “negligible” budget allocated to reading.

Dr Mlambo-Ngcuka called on each panellist and each of the 100 delegates to take responsibility for finding a solution to the different areas that have been identified for improvement: “Although schooling is primarily the responsibility of government, we all have a role to play here. Business, civil society, we all need to come together to tackle this issue”

The four recommendations from the background report were:

1. **Establishing a universal external Grade 2 assessment of reading.**
2. **Moving from slogans to budgets.** It was estimated that government would need to spend R1,3-billion per year to provide high-quality reading materials and support to teachers
3. **Providing a standard minimum set of reading resources to all Foundation Phase classrooms (Grade R-3) as a matter of urgency.**
4. **A university audit of preservice teacher education programs.**

The full background report is available [here](https://www.readingpanel.co.za/) and more information is available on the reading panel website: <https://www.readingpanel.co.za/>

Additional quotes:

- “We have come to respond to the fact that 78% of 10 year olds can’t read for meaning. We need to respond in the most effective way.” – **Dr Mlambo Ngcuka** (Founder of the Umlambo Foundation)
- “Schooling is about what happens in the classroom, which means pre-service training, in-service training and resource issues are all very important,” **SAHRC Commissioner for Education Andre Gaum**
- “Reading for enjoyment is as important as reading for meaning.” – **Prof Njabulo Ndebele**
- “All of us have a crucial role to ensure that by 2030 we have made a significant difference,” **Dr Mlambo-Ngcuka.**
- “How can we make teaching a respectable profession in our society? How do we ensure they are properly trained, adequately equipped and supported to discharge their responsibilities” **Prof. Sizwe Mabizela** said about the importance of teachers.

- “Reading is like a house, if you don’t get the foundation right, the structure is shaky.” – **Elinor Sisulu** told the Panel
- “We need to move away from these slogans that don’t really mean anything. What does “Read to Lead” mean? We need costed and budgeted programs” – **Prof Nic Spaull**
- “For me we need simple scalable and sustainable solutions. We cannot each be doing our own small things in a few schools here and a few schools there” – **Nangamso Mtsatse (CEO Funda Wandu)**

Professional photos of the event are available [here](#). These photos may be used by media who are reporting on this event.

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#### **For more information, editors may contact**

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#### **About The 2030 Reading Panel:**

The 2030 Reading Panel is a civil society initiative that brings together respected experts and thought leaders to address the issue of reading skills among South African children. Its express aim is to help meet the national goal of ensuring that, by 2030, all children can read for meaning by age 10. The panel hosts an annual Reading Lekgotla to address issues, commission research and proposes to raise awareness around progress or lack of progress, and the constraints to reaching the goal. The panel is chaired by Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka who has appointed Professor Nic Spaull from Stellenbosch University to be the Panel’s Secretariat.

For more information see [www.readingpanel.co.za](http://www.readingpanel.co.za)

#### **Panel members**

- 1. Chair: Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka - Former Deputy President of South Africa**
- 2. Andre Gaum** - SAHRC Commissioner: Education
- 3. Colin Coleman** - Banker, Academic, Public Figure.
- 4. Bobby Godsell** - Chairman of Business Leadership South Africa
- 5. Prof Jonathan Jansen** - Former Vice-Chancellor and Professor at Stellenbosch.
- 6. Prof Sizwe Mabizela** - Vice-Chancellor; Rhodes University.
- 7. Noncedo Madubedube** - General Secretary of Equal Education
- 8. Archbishop Thabo Makgoba** - South African Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town.
- 9. Nangamso Mtsatse** - CEO of literacy NGO Funda Wandu
- 10. Jay Naidoo** - Founding General Secretary of COSATU (1985 - 1993)
- 11. Prof Njabulo Ndebele** - Chairman of the Nelson Mandela Foundation.
- 12. Prof Vuyokazi Nomlomo** - Deputy VC for Teaching and Learning at the University of Zululand.
- 13. Hulisani Ravele** - Seasoned Broadcaster and Reading Advocate
- 14. Umunyana Rugege** - Head: Section27
- 15. Prof Michael Sachs** - **Adjunct Professor at Wits School of Economics** and Former Deputy Director General (DDG); National Treasury (2013-2017).
- 16. Judy Sikuza** - CEO of The Mandela Rhodes Foundation.
- 17. Elinor Sisulu** - Founder and Executive Director of Puku Children’s Literature Foundation.
- 18. Prof Catherine Snow** - Educational psychologist and applied linguist; Harvard University.
- 19. Prof Nic Spaull** - 2030 Reading-Panel Secretariat and Associate Professor Stellenbosch University.