

OPENING ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR EDUCATION, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE, AT THE AMESA 31ST NATIONAL CONGRESS UNIVERSITY OF MPUMALANGA, MBOMBELA CAMPUS | MONDAY, 13 JULY 2026

Programme Director,
Leadership of the Association for Mathematics Education of South Africa (AMESA),
Leadership of the University of Mpumalanga,
Distinguished delegates, educators, researchers, and curriculum specialists,
Esteemed partners and stakeholders,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to participate in the Opening Ceremony of the 31st National Congress of the Association for Mathematics Education of South Africa, hosted here at the University of Mpumalanga.

I would have preferred to be physically present however issues beyond my management came into play. I hope you will bear with me.

We commend AMESA for convening this important platform that brings together leading minds committed to advancing mathematics education.

This Congress is not only a gathering of experts it is a call to action for all of us to reshape the future of teaching and learning in this critical subject.

Programme Director, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 is unequivocal in its pronouncement: South Africa's future growth, development, and global competitiveness depend on a strong foundation in education, particularly in Mathematics, Science, and Technology.

The NDP calls for improved learner performance, increased participation in Mathematics, and the development of a skilled and capable workforce that can drive innovation and economic transformation.

In responding to this national imperative, we as a province are implementing a comprehensive framework aimed at improving both the intake and performance of Mathematics. This framework is anchored on four key pillars:

Firstly, **early exposure and foundational competence**, ensuring that learners develop strong numeracy skills from the Foundation Phase.

Secondly, **increased learner participation**, through targeted encouragement and support to ensure more learners take Mathematics beyond Grade 9.

Thirdly, **teacher development and curriculum support**, equipping educators with the necessary content knowledge, pedagogy, and tools to teach Mathematics effectively.

And lastly, **sustained learner support interventions**, including extra classes, digital learning platforms, and structured academic support programmes.

Through this deliberate and coordinated approach, we seek to expand the pipeline of learners who not only take Mathematics but excel in it.

We are already witnessing encouraging progress. Our provincial Mathematics pass rate has improved steadily—from 52.8% in 2022, to 58% in 2023, and to 66.37% in 2024. This upward trajectory demonstrates that with the right interventions, support, and commitment, success in Mathematics is not only possible—it is achievable at scale.

Programme Director, as we reflect on the teaching of Mathematics, we must confront a critical and often overlooked issue—the role of language.

For many of our learners, Mathematics is taught and assessed in a language that is not their mother tongue.

This creates an additional cognitive barrier that affects comprehension, confidence, and ultimately performance.

It is for this reason that we are advancing Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education, supported through our ongoing advocacy and community-based roadshows.

We believe that learners grasp mathematical concepts more effectively when they are first taught in a language they understand, while progressively acquiring proficiency in the language of learning and teaching.

We therefore appeal to this Congress to deliberately engage with the question of language in Mathematics education. Let us collectively explore practical, research-informed strategies that integrate linguistic inclusivity into classroom practice. If we are to improve outcomes, we must teach not only the content—but also teach it in a way that learners can fully access and internalize.

Distinguished delegates, we also draw inspiration from one of our greatest leaders, Oliver Reginald Tambo, who himself was an astute Mathematics teacher.

He once said:

“A nation that does not value education does not deserve its future.”

This profound statement reminds us that education and indeed Mathematics education is central to nation-building. It is through education that we unlock human potential, confront inequality, and build a prosperous society.

In Mpumalanga, we are investing meaningfully in this future.

The OR Tambo Mathematics, Science and Technology Academy in Emalahleni stands as a beacon of excellence, supported by an allocation of **R78 million** this year alone to strengthen innovation, teaching, and learning in STEM education.

However, we recognise that infrastructure and funding alone are not enough. We must also change mindsets. We must demystify the perception that Mathematics is a subject reserved for a select few. Every learner has the potential to succeed in Mathematics provided they receive the necessary support, encouragement, and opportunity.

Distinguished delegates, this Congress, attended by participants from across South Africa and beyond, presents a unique opportunity to exchange ideas, share best practices, and shape the future of Mathematics education.

Let this be a Congress of solutions that strengthens collaboration, placing the learner at the centre of all we do.

As government, we remain steadfast in our commitment to building a capable, skilled, and future-ready generation. We are confident that through partnerships such as the one we share with the University of Mpumalanga, and through platforms such as AMESA, we will continue to make meaningful progress.

Programme Director, as you engage in robust discussions and knowledge-sharing over the coming days, we also encourage you to take time to experience the rich and scenic beauty of our province.

Mpumalanga Province is a tourism destination of choice, offering breathtaking landscapes, wildlife, cultural heritage, and warm hospitality.

We invite you to explore our province during your stay and more importantly, to return with your families and loved ones to fully enjoy all that Mpumalanga has to offer.

In doing so, you become ambassadors of our province- ***the Place of the Rising Sun*** and partners in showcasing its beauty to the world.

In closing, I wish to thank AMESA, the University of Mpumalanga, and all partners for organising this important gathering. I encourage all delegates to engage robustly, think boldly, and act decisively in advancing Mathematics education.

It is my honour and privilege to officially declare the AMESA 31st National Congress open.

I thank you.