

**SPEECH BY THE MEC FOR EDUCATION, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE,
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE INAUGURAL PREMIER'S CUP KA
NYAMAZANE STADIUM | FRIDAY, 10 JULY 2026**

Programme Director,

The Honourable Premier of Mpumalanga, **Mr. Mandla Ndlovu**,

MEC for Culture, Sport and Recreation, **Ms. Leah Mabuza**,

Executive Mayors present,

Chairperson of Mpumalanga Elite Teams,

Distinguished Guests,

School Principals, Educators and Coaches,

Parents and Members of the Community,

And most importantly, our talented learners,

Sanibonani.

It is indeed a great honour and privilege to stand before you on this historic occasion of the launch of the Inaugural Premier's Cup.

Allow me to begin by expressing our profound appreciation to the Honourable Premier, **Mr. Mandla Ndlovu**, for his visionary leadership and foresight in bringing this remarkable initiative to fruition.

We are encouraged that this Premier's Cup serves as a statement of intent, a demonstration of our collective commitment to developing young talent.

It is a celebration of the immense potential that resides within the youth of the ***Place of the Rising Sun***.

It aligns strategically with our ongoing commitment as the Department of Education to identify, nurture, and showcase the rich and diverse talent that exists within our province.

Today, we gather here filled with excitement and pride as our learners take centre stage to display their abilities, discipline, and sportsmanship.

Indeed, Mpumalanga is a province rich in talent.

We have witnessed this excellence across various platforms, including the recent National ABC Motsepe South African School Choral Eisteddfod, where our schools demonstrated beyond doubt their ability to compete and excel at national level.

The Premier's Cup now adds further momentum to these efforts by creating meaningful opportunities for our learners to shine in the sporting arena.

Programme Director, it is important to emphasize that curriculum enrichment activities, particularly sport, play a critical role in shaping the holistic development of our learners.

It ensures that education must not be confined to classroom walls alone but also manifest on the sports field.

Through sport, learners develop essential life skills such as patriotism, discipline, teamwork, resilience and leadership.

Participation in sport promotes physical health, mental well-being and social cohesion.

It builds confidence, instils a sense of purpose, and empowers learners to unlock their full potential.

We remain firmly committed to supporting curriculum enrichment programmes and ensuring that all learners have access to such opportunities.

In this regard, the Department is advancing its **Focus Schools Policy**, which seeks to deliberately identify and develop schools with specialised areas of excellence, including sport, performing arts, mathematics, science, and technical skills.

Through this policy, we will progressively be establishing Sport Focus Schools, which will be equipped with appropriate infrastructure, specialised coaching support, and structured development programmes to nurture sporting talent from grassroots level to elite performance.

This approach ensures that talent identification and development are systematic, inclusive, and sustainable.

We have already made significant progress in this regard.

A notable milestone is the establishment of a Secondary School for Performing Arts in Msukaligwa Local Municipality named in honour of our musical icon, **the late Lucky Dube**.

This institution is scheduled to be officially handed over on **03 August 2026**, marking his birthday.

This is a clear demonstration of our commitment to creating platforms that allow learners to excel in their areas of talent.

Honourable Premier, this Premier's Cup is a step in the right direction and complements our broader strategic vision of building a balanced and responsive education system that recognizes both academic and non-academic excellence.

We recognize that proper equipment, adequate facilities, and structured training are essential in cultivating a vibrant and inclusive sporting culture.

We will continue to invest in initiatives that empower every learner to participate meaningfully and benefit from these programmes.

This initiative also opens doors for learners to pursue careers within the broader sporting fraternity, while strengthening unity and social cohesion within our communities.

As the late former President Nelson Mandela once said:

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does.”

It is therefore befitting that the actual games will be played on the Nelson Mandela Day—***a truly strategic and symbolic alignment.***

We encourage our learners to participate wholeheartedly, seize this opportunity, showcase their talent and embrace the friendships, discipline, and life lessons that come with being part of sport.

They need to play with passion, integrity, respect free from drugs and any illegal substance.

Parents and guardian support remains invaluable. Their presence, encouragement and belief in their children inspire confidence and instill a sense of pride that drives them to succeed.

We are grateful to our educators, coaches, and support staff, we extend our sincere gratitude. Their dedication, commitment, and tireless efforts in nurturing young talent does not go unnoticed.

Our educators are truly the backbone of initiatives such as this.

Programme Director, through our collaboration with the Department of Culture, Sport and Recreation, we are confident that the Premier's Cup will grow into a flagship programme that continues to uplift and inspire generations to come.

In conclusion, I wish all participants the very best.

May this tournament be a memorable, enriching, and successful experience for everyone involved.

Let us make this Premier's Cup a celebration of excellence, unity, and opportunity in the Place of the Rising Sun and beyond.

Ngiyabonga.