Empowering Philanthropy, Creating Impact. Together.

SAPF Newsletter
January 2026

Image by: Aaron Burden(Unsplash)

Message from the CEO: Southern Africa Philanthropy Foundation (SAPF)

From Early Learning to Lifelong Pathways and Learner Safety: What January Taught Us About Education

As we mark International Day of Education, I am reminded that education is not only about classrooms, curricula, or results. It is also about the systems we build to support children, teachers, families, and communities over time.

South Africa enters 2026 at a pivotal moment. While we see renewed attention to early childhood development and growing recognition of the pressures facing teachers, we are also confronted with persistent barriers to post-school opportunity and the urgent responsibility to keep learners safe.

These realities call on us to move beyond short-term fixes and to focus instead on strengthening the structures that shape opportunity.

Education must be at the heart of this effort. From early learning to post-school pathways, from supporting teachers to ensuring learner safety, progress depends on collaboration and shared ownership of outcomes. No single organisation or sector can do this alone.

As we move through 2026, SAPF remains committed to supporting resilient institutions and collective action that allows young people and the organisations that serve them to thrive. While this approach requires more effort than pursuing short-term gains, it is essential for achieving lasting and equitable progress.

Best,
Gill Bates

Articles

Lekgotla Outcomes and the Push for Early Childhood Development

The 2026 Basic Education Lekgotla concluded with a clear reform agenda focused on early development, foundational learning, innovation, and partnerships. Minister of Basic Education Siviwe Gwarube confirmed that early reading and mathematics will be prioritised, alongside expanded teacher training in effective literacy and numeracy methods especially in the early grades.

Reinforcing this direction, President Cyril Ramaphosa has placed Early Childhood Development at the centre of government's education strategy. Grade R is now compulsory, and efforts are underway to register and subsidise more ECD centres nationwide.

While celebrating an 88% matric pass rate, the President highlighted persistent challenges: nearly 500,000 learners who entered Grade 1 in 2014 did not reach Grade 12, and performance in key subjects such as mathematics continues to decline

The message is clear: investing early is not optional. Strong foundations in reading, numeracy, and teacher development are essential to improving completion rates, strengthening skills for a changing economy, and ensuring every child has a fair chance to succeed.

Image by: Yan Krukau(Pexels)

Why a Bachelor's Pass Doesn't Guarantee University Admission

While a matric bachelor's pass is often seen as the gateway to higher education, it is only a minimum requirement. Universities select students using the Admission Point Score (APS), which is typically much more competitive.

A learner can technically qualify for a bachelor's pass with an APS as low as 23, while most degree programmes require around 28 or higher with competitive fields demanding even stronger results in subjects like mathematics and science.

As a result, many learners with bachelor's passes are unable to secure university placements. Alternative pathways include extended degree programmes, diplomas and higher certificates at universities of technology, TVET colleges, private institutions, or rewriting matric to improve results.

Early APS tracking and practical academic planning are especially important for Grade 10 and 11 learners. The main takeaway is that how well you perform, not merely passing, influences your post-school opportunities.

The International Day of Education — The Vital Role of Teachers

South Africa spends over R330 billion on education, yet 81% of Grade 4 learners still cannot read for meaning. While infrastructure and learner results dominate public debate, teachers' professional development and well-being often receive far less attention

Education experts note that teacher empowerment is vital for quality learning. With increasing workloads and diverse classrooms, ongoing flexible training and adequate support are crucial to keep teachers motivated and effective.

On this International Day of Education, the call is clear: investing in teachers is not a secondary concern. It is one of the most direct ways to improve learner outcomes and build resilient school communities.

Image by: Yan Krukau(Pexels)

Learner Safety Cannot Wait

Approximately 22% of South African learners' experience violence at school, including bullying, drugs, and sexual harassment.

The recent crash in Vanderbijlpark that claimed fourteen young lives has brought renewed focus to scholar transport and broader learner safety challenges

In response, authorities have begun impounding unroadworthy vehicles and enforcing stricter compliance, while the National Learner Transport Policy is set for review. The South African Human Rights Commission and parliamentary committees continue to highlight systemic failures: unsafe and overloaded vehicles, inconsistent transport services, and weak regulatory oversight.

Protecting learners requires coordinated action across departments, stronger regulation, adequate funding, and community-level vigilance. Without decisive intervention, preventable risks will continue to threaten young lives.

Closing Reflection and Looking Ahead

January's education discussions highlight that progress relies on connecting early childhood development, post-school opportunities, teacher support, and learner safety. At SAPF, we view education within a systemic context encompassing institutions, communities, policy, and collaboration. Building a resilient and inclusive system requires cross-sector partnerships, investment in organisational strength, and tackling root causes. In 2026, SAPF will continue to bring partners together and support sustainable, effective education systems.

In February, SAPF will highlight the power of volunteering to strengthen communities and civil society. Volunteers bring skills, insight, and energy that complement formal systems, driving social cohesion and sustainable impact. We will explore ways partners can engage and co-create solutions for a stronger, more resilient society.

Discover More

Visit **www.sa-pf.org.za** to explore our services, flagship programmes, governance framework, research, and impact stories.