



NFS GROUP

Celebrating Strides in Education

NEWSLETTER

The Power of Giving Back

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ULS & NFS Foundation support of Jolly Phonics Programme in Umlazi District (1)

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, in partnership with Universal Learning Solutions and funded by the NFS Foundation, has expanded its Jolly Phonics pilot programme in the Umlazi district. The latest training took place on the 9th and 10th February and learner assessments were conducted from the 11th to 13th February to gauge the level of English Literacy skills across both implementing Jolly Phonics schools and control schools.



Jolly Phonics is an evidence-based, fast-track English literacy programme that teaches the 42 letter sounds through a fun, child-centred and multisensory approach. Grounded in synthetic phonics, the method develops reading proficiency by helping learners recognise sounds and blend them into words using actions, rhymes, stories and songs. International research identifies synthetic phonics as a key driver of improved literacy outcomes.

KZN Expands Jolly Phonics Pilot to Strengthen Early Grade Literacy in Umlazi

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, in partnership with Universal Learning Solutions and funded by the NFS Foundation, has expanded its Jolly Phonics pilot programme in the Umlazi district.

Celebrating the future of education



Hands That Help, Hearts That Care

The programme provides colourful, practical resources including big books, posters, activity word cards, friezes, and decodable and graded readers. These materials, funded by the NFS Foundation, support teachers in building learners' skills from sound and word recognition to fluent reading and comprehension.

The expansion follows a successful 2025 Grade 1 pilot, which recorded significant improvements in reading and writing performance. All Grade 1 and Grade 2 teachers from participating schools are receiving training, with ongoing online mentorship and classroom monitoring by curriculum advisors and departmental heads through a dedicated app.

A "Jolly Lessons" app also enables parents to reinforce learning at home.

The initiative comes as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) found that 81% of South African Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning, ranking the country last out of 57. Countries using Jolly Phonics, including Singapore and England, have performed strongly.



This project is overseen by the not-for-profit organisation, Universal Learning Solutions and supported throughout the year by the NFS Foundation. The NFS Foundation is supported by the NFS Group of companies, which aims to strengthen early grade learning initiatives that is embedded in lifelong learning. At the NFS Foundation, education is a priority as this ensures the development and growth of a nation. These Assessments will be repeated at the end of the year to note the impact of the programme. The NFS Foundation will continue to work with government and non-profit organisations like Universal Learning Solutions to improve the literacy skills of our early grade learners.