

# ANNUAL REPORT

# 20 24



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EDUCATION



"One Goal, One Vision, One Team"

AXIUM EDUCATION 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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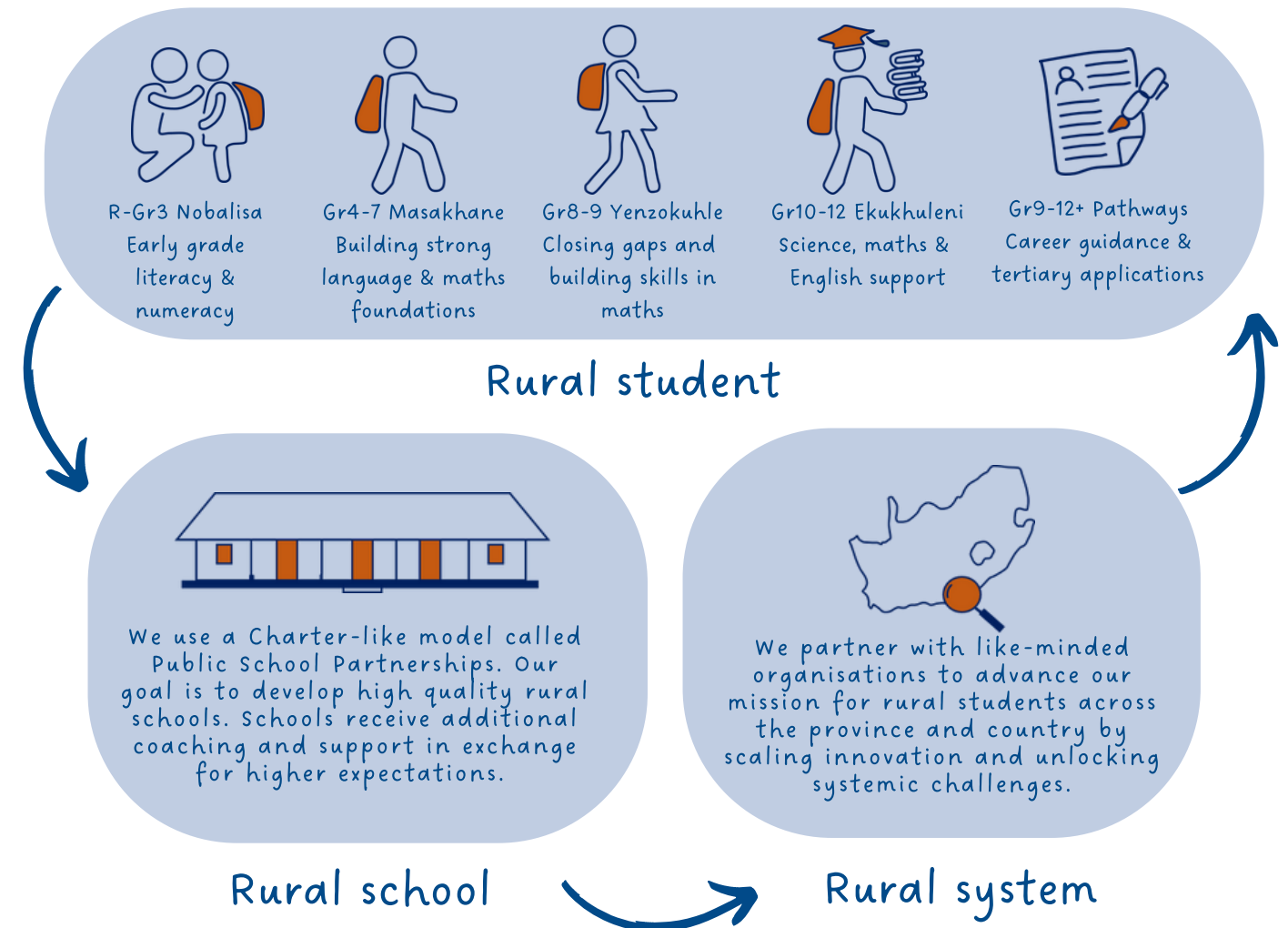
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Our mission is to raise student achievement in rural South African communities.

We choose to work at three different, but connected levels: student, school and system. Our student-focused programmes have a direct and immediate impact on student learning, while our school and systems work is often longer term and involves working with and through others, but is equally important if we want to raise achievement levels for all rural learners.

In 2024, our grade R-12 programmes provide 7000+ rural students with a range of additional supports.



## How do we know if we're succeeding?

As an organisation we use these 7 questions to measure our success, with answers carefully supported by data - essentially our yardstick for whether we're succeeding or not.

1. Are we growing the number of students we serve?
2. Are our students on track for success in earlier grades?
3. Are our students completing school?
4. Are our students leaving school with purpose, agency and options?
5. Are our alumni accessing further study or meaningful work?
6. Are we building an effective talent pipeline?
7. Are we building a sustainable operating model?



# Greetings to all our friends and supporters in South Africa and around the world.

We are thrilled to be able to share our reflections on 2024 with you all. “One Goal, One Vision, One Team” was 2024’s theme, capturing the team’s focus and alignment behind our vision to reach every rural learner with more opportunities to learn.

In 2021, we launched a growth plan that would take our Nobalisa Programme and Public School Partnerships (PSP) work to over 10 000 learners by the end of 2025. During 2024 we implemented the Nobalisa Programme at 9 new schools and welcomed an additional Partnership School at our Zithulele site, taking our total reach beyond 7000 learners, and well on track to hit our target. Of course, it has never been only about the numbers. We wanted to grow in order to obtain some proof of concept on a bigger scale and to learn about what it would take to expand further. 2024 ticked both those boxes.

After three years in the Nobalisa programme, the percentage of grade 3s reading for meaning is 2 to 3 times greater than in comparable schools in other parts of the country.. Given that reading is a national crisis, this is incredibly exciting, and is fuelling our belief that every rural school would benefit from the Nobalisa Programme. We were equally thrilled by one of our newest PSP schools, Dudumayo High School, which achieved stellar Grade 12 results, comparable with much wealthier schools in the city. Many years ago, the school’s founding principal, Mr. Petse, shared his vision for this remote, rural school with me: that it would become a “shining star” example of what rural schools could achieve. I think he would have been proud of these results!

Having proved that strong achievement is possible, the challenge now is to build consistency and the models required to grow the work further. This brings me to the second goal for this growth, which is to ensure we “Never stop learning” (one of our core values!). 2024 taught us important lessons in **three** areas:

1

**Partnerships:** In four of those new schools, we are working with neighbours, the Bulungula Incubator, to implement our Nobalisa programme. While we have a long history of working collaboratively with partners, this is the first time we’ve implemented through others and it represents a fantastic opportunity for us to learn how to do this well.

2

**Data:** We are increasingly being seen as a thought leader in the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) community, and our assessment data is being used in research papers and reports. We believe that this research will have influence well beyond South Africa, as many countries adopt the TaRL methodology.

3

**Growth:** As our footprint has expanded we’ve needed to think carefully about rural logistics, launching satellite offices, and the capacity required to support growth.

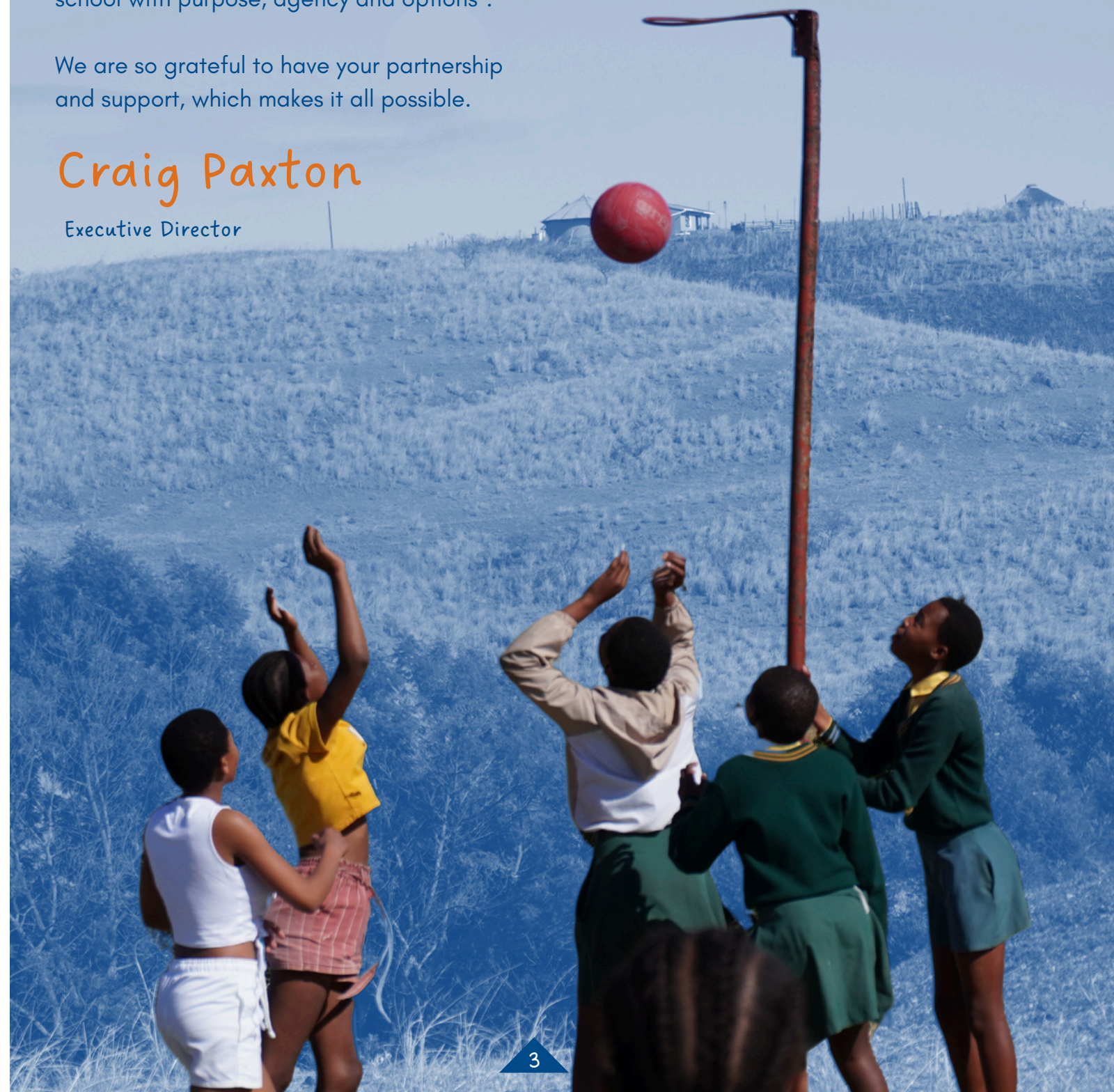
These lessons are informing our approach to the next five years, for which we spent significant time planning during 2024. Emerging from this strategic planning work is the idea of being a “small giant”, where we shift from “operating at scale, to influencing at scale”. This thinking has been boosted by our successful application to the Global Schools Forum’s Labs at Scale, cofunded by the Gates and Michael and Susan Dell Foundations, a structured programme that is helping us turn the Nobalisa Programme into a scaleable model for all rural schools.

With a growing footprint in the country, an increasingly robust evidence base and important learning informing what comes next, 2024 advanced Axiom’s vision of “every rural learner leaving school with purpose, agency and options”.

We are so grateful to have your partnership and support, which makes it all possible.

**Craig Paxton**

Executive Director









# From the Chief Operations Officer

**At the centre of Axiom’s work is the rural learner.**

If we are serious about education in South Africa, then we must be serious about rural education. When a rural learner is properly supported and has access to strong teaching, a stable school environment, and the basics they need to succeed, it is not only a win for that learner or their community – it is a win for the whole country. That is why I often say, *“If we are truly committed to enriching and supporting the rural learner, then we have enriched the entire nation.”*

**Partnerships allow us to turn this vision into real, lasting change.**

We are deeply grateful to the many partners who make this work possible. In 2024 in particular, key partnerships with government, the Global Schools Forum's Labs at Scale, and our School Development Managers helped us deepen and expand our impact.

- Through meaningful collaboration with *government*, we reached more learners and placed Nabalisa facilitators in schools with the systems and support they need to thrive.
- Being selected for the *Global Schools Forum Scaling Cohort* gave us space to reflect on how we grow – not just by reaching more schools, but by staying true to the values that guide our work.
- Our *School Development Managers* walked closely with school leaders, supporting them to clarify their vision, strengthen identity, and build learner leadership in ways that are often invisible, but deeply transformative.

As you read this report, I hope you don’t just see an organisation working in a few rural schools. I hope you see a clear commitment to walking alongside teachers, school leaders, government, parents and caregivers, supporters, education advocates, community members, and learners – because lasting change happens when we move forward together. My hope is that as you turn these pages, you come away with a sense of shared responsibility. Rural learners are not on the margins. They are central to South Africa’s future.

Sithembele Zondeka

Chief Operations Officer



2024 has been a season both of **growth** and **gearing for growth** as we’ve looked forward to adding a large new cohort of schools at the beginning of 2025. In the Central Education unit, we’ve been simultaneously looking inwards and outwards as we’ve strengthened our own systems and capacity – such as adding some much needed administrative and content creation specialisation in the team – and capacitated the rest of the organisation in preparation for all that 2025 holds in store for us.

As we looked ahead to the 2025 growth plans, **a major 2024 focus area has been enhancing accountability mechanisms organisation-wide.** Tools and practices for organising, implementing and monitoring our training, coaching, curriculum and evaluation activities have been systematically developed and piloted. These include bespoke apps, a new database (to be completed in 2025), refreshed consultancy structures and a few adjustments to how we organise the work internally.

Strengthening leadership development has been another focus in the Central Education team in 2024. We ran four Emerging Leaders training cohorts, focused on capacitating new and aspiring leaders, and two Established Leaders cohorts, focused on building motivation and refreshing our more experienced leaders. These engine-rooms have paid dividends in terms of increasing our organisational alignment in values, culture and practices, and we are delighted by how our leaders, both new and experienced, are bringing new energy to serving rural children.

Joanna Reynolds

Head of Education

# From the Central Education Team



# Our Core values

At Axiom, our values shape how we learn, lead, and work together every day. Whether we're sitting in a classroom, gathering as a team, running a training, or walking alongside a school, these values guide how we relate to one another and make decisions. The numbers on this page give a small but meaningful snapshot of what our values looks like in action across the organisation.

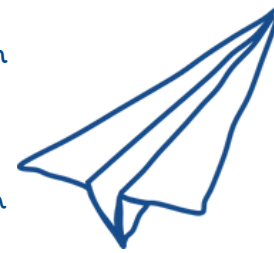
## 1. Striving for Excellence

**93%** of the team agreed with the statement: "My fellow employees are committed to doing quality work."

Dudumayo High School matrices celebrated a pass rate!

**91%**

We hosted our first Rural Education Conference which brought together a wide range of stakeholders to reflect, learn and collaborate under the theme "Partnerships in Practice: Improving Rural Education in the Eastern Cape". While we had planned for 60 delegates, over 120 people attended. This high turnout showed a shared commitment to working towards excellence in rural education.



## 2. Never Stop Learning

**240**

hours of professional development, training & coaching sessions with Axiom staff.



**534**

hours of training teachers, School Management Teams & School Governing Bodies.

**82%**

of staff responded positively to the statement: "this last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn & grow."

**4**

staff completed tertiary qualifications.

## 3. Understand First

**1-2**

'Difficult conversations' trainings held per term

equipping team members to navigate differences & challenging topics with open, respectful dialogue.



## 4. Do What We Say

**4**

Big rocks monitoring sessions with 70 leaders to align on organisational priorities.



**44**

School improvement planning & monitoring sessions across our 11 partner schools.

## 5. Masambeni

'Masambeni' means "we move forward together", with trust, honesty, and clear communication, toward a shared, audacious goal."

This year we collaborated across teams to successfully pull off

**100** events per term across the organisation...from programmes to partnerships including:

workshops, retreats, bootcamps, trainings, professional development, leadership camps, education council meetings, conferences, spelling bees, awareness campaigns, career expos, flag-raising ceremonies and prize-givings. A reflection of what's possible in the spirit of 'masambeni'.



## 6. Child-Centered

**4035**

learners reached on average each week through our programmes, clubs & schools.

**486**

learners assisted with tertiary applications.

**2035**

tertiary applications.

**8853**

additional hours of maths & numeracy, science, English and isiXhosa literacy lessons.



**35990**

sandwiches provided at after-school programmes.

## 7. Motivated Motivators

**1776**

team shoutouts in our weekly whatsapp meetings.

**66%**

of staff responded positively to the statement:

"In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work."

**86%**

of staff felt that "there is someone at work who encourages my development."

**16**

staff were promoted in their roles.



## 8. Servant Leadership

**3,360**

hours of one-on-one check ins between leaders and team members.



We facilitated **4** emerging leaders training cohorts, developing our next generation of leaders.

**87%**

of people responded positively to the statement:

"my supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person."



# Meet the Team

From an initial team of two, Axium has grown to a team of 318, united by a mission to raise student achievement in rural South Africa.





# Public School Partnerships

In 2024, our Public School Partnerships continued to demonstrate the power of collaboration in improving education outcomes in rural contexts. By bringing together government, funders, non-profit partners, and no-fee schools, PSPs are reimagining what's possible in public education—grounded in the belief that **every child, no matter their background, can learn and thrive.**

This year, we've seen real momentum: school leaders and School Management Teams (SMTs) have grown in confidence and capability, with many principals now independently leading and monitoring their School Improvement Plans. Initiatives like coaching, now embraced as “the new normal,” are helping educators refine their practice and deepen their impact. In 2024, we shifted from a model led largely by Axiom's Instructional Coaches to one where school-based leaders—especially Departmental Heads—are stepping into the role. Our 53 Coaching Champions across the 11 PSP schools receive ongoing training and support through Axiom's coaching and school development team, embedding sustainability into schools' own systems.

Governance has also been a strong focus, with greater involvement of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and Representative Councils of Learners (RCLs), contributing to more accountable, learner-centered school cultures. Celebrations like vision launches, learner awards, and leadership camps have helped build pride and belonging in schools, while activities such as Maths quizzes, Spelling Bees, and awareness campaigns have kept learners engaged and inspired.

The official launch of the Education Council of Mqanduli in August marked a significant milestone in fostering thought partnership and collaboration among key stakeholders. Principals, School Governing Body (SGB) chairpersons, Axiom, funders and community education advocates now have a platform to engage and share best practices. As the number of PSP schools in Mqanduli is set to increase in the coming year, this structure will play a vital role in promoting accountability and is expected to have a

positive impact on school leadership and governance, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes in the region.

As we prepare to welcome new schools into the PSP cohort in 2025, we are proud of how far we've come. The dedication of principals, teachers, learners, and community partners remains at the heart of this work. Improving rural education is no easy task, but together, we are making meaningful strides and we look forward to building on this momentum in the year ahead.

## Jacob Junior

Head of Schools Development and Coaching

“The reaction of one of the principals to Axiom's 2024 planned intervention program for intersen was, ‘We appreciate the infrastructure and other improvement projects that Axiom does for our schools, but our core business is curriculum.’ This was quite an encouraging shift from the usual demands of tangible non-teaching resources. The incremental growth in stature of the Education Council Amajingqi (ECA) as an accountability structure was obvious when one of the principals proposed that the Council begins to take a role in holding schools within the group accountable.”

- Mkhusele Ngcube,  
Eastern Cape PSP project manager and ECA representative



# Nobalisa Literacy

In 2024, the Nobalisa program grew meaningfully, not only by reaching more schools, but by deepening its foundation for long-term impact. We expanded into nine additional schools bringing the total number of partner schools to 31. Every school in the programme is supported by a Team Leader and a Mentor, all of whom have risen through the ranks as Nobalisa facilitators. This growth from within signals the program's sustainability as it continues to nurture both literacy and leadership, while creating employment pathways for the young people from the same communities as the children they serve.

An important milestone this year was the preparation for a Pilot Study of the Nobalisa programme. The study will assess literacy outcomes across 31 schools, with 17 receiving the intervention and 14 serving as a control group. Preparing for this kind of evaluation required patient relationship-building, particularly with schools in the control group who would not immediately benefit from the intervention. Through school cluster meetings and individual discussions with principals and School Management Teams, we saw a growing willingness to engage with the idea of rigorous, evidence-informed practice. The study not only supports our own learning but also contributes to the broader movement for evidence-based strategies in foundational literacy. It aligns closely with the Department of Education's priorities and creates an opportunity for rural Eastern Cape schools to contribute to a broader movement toward research-led practice in early literacy.

In classrooms and reading corners, the facilitators gather small groups of children and engage them using home-language books, interactive storytelling and playful, levelled activities designed to spark interest and build confidence. These are often the first structured encounters many learners have with books, and they make a noticeable difference. For children who begin school unable to recognise letters or follow a story, the presence of a caring adult who knows their name, understands their language and takes joy in their progress is often what shifts their experience of learning.



While we are not yet where we want to be, our goal remains that at least half of all learners reach reading fluency by the end of Grade 3. We continue to see encouraging signs, especially among children who begin the year with no reading ability at all and end it with growing fluency and comprehension.

Among the most anticipated and cherished moments in the Nobalisa calendar are the Literacy Festivals. Held as a culmination of a year's work, these events bring together children, families, facilitators and community members in a vibrant celebration of language, learning and performance. Children from as young as four to as old as eighteen share poems, stories, drama and song, all grown out of the afternoon reading clubs that run across Nobalisa sites. The presence of male facilitators, the support of parents, the energy of the crowd, and the participation of inspiring guests all help show that these festivals have a deeper impact than just reading. As Nosipho Waqu, Nobalisa Project Manager, reflected, "The Literacy Festivals continue to be the most moving part of our year. They show us that literacy is not just about decoding words—it's about joy, confidence, expression, and children finding their voice in spaces that belong to them."

Ultimately, Nobalisa is not only a reading program. It is a model where children begin to see themselves as readers, young adults find meaningful work and growth, and where entire communities come together in support of something bigger than themselves. It is both a response to urgent challenges and an investment in long-term change. As we look ahead, we remain grounded in evidence, guided by relationships and energised by the growing belief that every child can learn to read with the right support.

Nosipho Waqu

Nobalisa Project Manager



# Programmes

Our student-facing programmes continue to be the heartbeat of our organisation. Staffed by vibrant alumni, energetic community members and highly motivated young leaders, these programmes touch children's lives in meaningful and practical ways, on a daily basis. We have a song that we love to sing as a team "i-Axium iyayenze lentoni?" (What is

Axium up to now?), as keeping track of the myriad activities and innovations of our programme teams can really be a challenge, as they continually strive to do better.

Here's a small snapshot of what the programme teams have been up to in 2024:

## Masakhane: after-school maths and language

**Masakhane** means "let's help build each other". This name speaks to the programme's focus on building robust, skillful learners who are able to thrive personally & academically. At Masakhane we nurture the skills that learners in gr 4 - 7 will need to thrive in a complex, multilingual schooling environment. We focus on developing bilingual skills, agency and basic Maths, using holistic approaches aimed at building agency and buy-in amongst students and their caregivers. This includes providing access to much needed digital skills such as computer literacy. On the academic side, 2024 saw the team preparing to launch the next iteration of Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) in English, with several former staffers coming back onboard as a curriculum consultants to assist with materials and lesson planning. We're looking forward to expanding this part of the Masakhane offering to more learners in 2025 and beyond.

"This year's TaRL English results show a greater number of learners progressing to higher literacy levels. This is very promising, as it suggests that by the time this year's Grade 4s reach Grade 6, they could all be reading at Story or Story Plus level — where learners can read short paragraphs and full stories with comprehension."

-Ayanda Parafini,  
Masakhane Programme Manager

## Grades 4-7



# Grades 4-9

"We motivate our learners by playing games with them. They love doing social media dance challenges – yoh! We use that energy and their excitement of those challenges to connect back to the maths problems we're tackling in class."

-Mihle Makeleni,  
Yenzokuhle Facilitator

**Yenzokuhle** means **"do it well"**. This speaks to the programme's focus on building skills in mathematics and developing learners' agency, motivation and determination to succeed. In 2024, the implementation of TaRL Maths really gained momentum in the 13 partner schools. In particular, primary school learners showed rapid progress in mastery of foundational skills, and we are excited to see what will be possible for these young people as they steadily close the backlogs in their Mathematics capabilities. While progress in junior high schools has been slower, as the backlogs are more significant, we're starting to see success as the implementation team work hand in hand with schools to motivate and nurture these young people, who are at a very sensitive stage of their personal development.

## Yenzokuhle: in-school maths



## Senior Schools / Ekukhuleni: additional maths, English and science

This programme creates pathways to success for already motivated and academically strong learners in their final three years of school. This means honing their Maths, Physical Sciences and English skills through 60 additional days of extra classes at **Ekukhuleni (place of growth)**, a remarkable commitment, given that a typical school year is usually around 200 days. These extra classes provide exposure to other highly motivated learners from neighbouring schools, and encouraging diligent study habits through the facilitation of weekly study groups in which they pass their knowledge on to their peers. In 2024, the team built on strong foundations to ensure that implementation remained steady, despite the inevitable twists and turns. The alumni from this programme continue to provide a strong support base for our organisation, and include many of our promising young leaders.

"Having a strong **'why' factor** is essentially your motivation. Maintaining a strong student mentality and fostering healthy relationships with your teachers and classmates' are crucial elements for academic success and personal growth."

- Sibulele Ndabeni, a DCHS Alumni currently pursuing a Bachelor of Electrical Engineering at Nelson Mandela University

# Grades 10-12



# Grades 9-12+

**“Pathways data is essential for self-awareness: understanding interests, skills, career options and enabling learners to make informed decisions”**

-Felix Pagona,  
Amajingqi Senior & FET Phase

The Pathways programme provides learners with access to the skills and knowledge they require to make informed decisions about their futures and next steps after school, whether that is university, college, internships or employment. During 2024, the Pathways team welcomed 2 new Pathways officers and 3 assistants. With this robust staff, we were able to support a record number of students in the difficult period of decision making as they think about their futures. The team took careers counselling systems and data gathering to a whole new level. This has provided us with some important insights as we navigate an increasingly complex post-school system, which is challenging students nationwide. The Pathways team has been able to accurately pinpoint barriers to access, enabling our coaches and school-based teams to target their interventions more effectively going into 2025.

**“What I love about teaching is watching my learners grow in confidence and curiosity. It’s especially meaningful in a rural context, where even small efforts can have a lasting impact in the classroom and the community.”**

- Mr Mkontwana,  
Mathematics Teacher , Dudumayo S.S.S.

## Pathways: career guidance and tertiary application support.





# Hear from our Alumni

My name is Mvuyisi Qobongwana, a proud graduate of Dumalisile Comprehensive High School (DCHS), Class of 2023, and now a first-year student in Professional Marketing Management at the Central University of Technology (CUT). The road from rural Eastern Cape to university life has been full of twists and lessons. One of the key constants in my journey has been Axiom Education.

At DCHS, I was lucky to be surrounded by teachers who went beyond the textbook. They helped shape my thinking and character. But it was through Axiom that I began to truly discover who I was and what I could become. Their programmes opened up opportunities I never imagined. I found myself stepping into leadership roles, gaining confidence, and realising my passion for marketing and communication. Axiom did not just support our school, they believed in us as individuals and invested in our growth, inside and outside the classroom. Like many others, my high school journey was not always smooth. Balancing academics with responsibilities and navigating self-doubt sometimes felt overwhelming. But with the backing of Axiom, my teachers, and my family, I kept going. That support made all the difference.

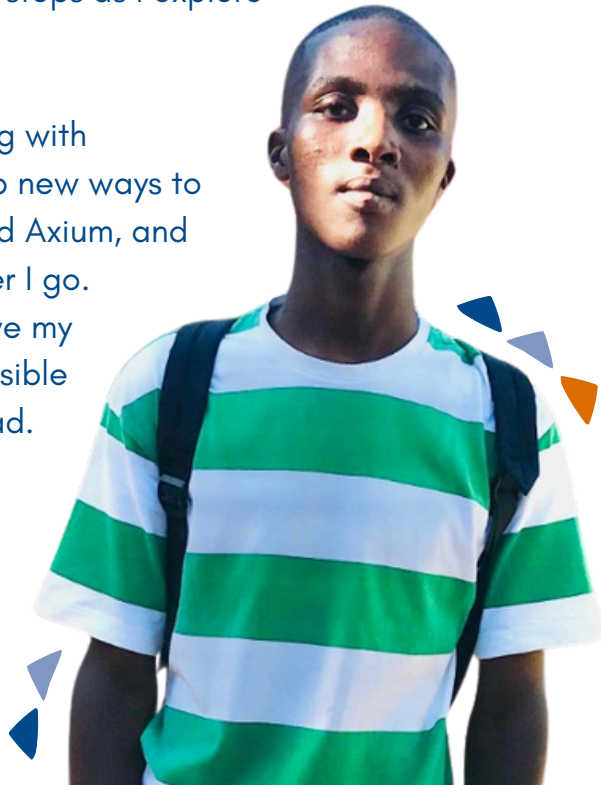
Now, at CUT, I am thriving in a new world, one filled with fresh challenges, big ideas, and exciting possibilities. University life is fast-paced and demanding, but I have learned to adapt, manage my time, and lean into my creativity. The values Axiom instilled in me — discipline, curiosity, innovation — continue to guide my steps as I explore marketing strategy and problem-solving.

Outside the lecture halls, you will find me brainstorming with classmates, staying on top of trends, and dreaming up new ways to make an impact. I am proud to represent both CUT and Axiom, and I carry their belief in rural talent and potential wherever I go. I know this is just the beginning, and I am ready to leave my mark, not just in marketing, but in showing what is possible when young people are given the tools and trust to lead.

Thank you, Axiom, for seeing us, believing in us, and walking the journey with us.

Mvuyisi Qobongwana

Class of 2023



Alulo Mgcwaba

Class of 2020



My name is Alulo Mgcwaba and I was born and raised in Zithulele. I completed my primary, junior and high school years at Seaview High School, and I am currently studying towards a Bachelor of Science degree at Rhodes University. I first joined Axiom in 2014 when I was in Grade 6. At the time, I joined simply because I loved school and enjoyed learning. I didn't fully understand what the organisation was about or the bigger picture. I couldn't even speak English back then, but through Axiom, I've learned so much. Over time, I began to understand Axiom's purpose, even though not everyone around me did. Some learners stopped attending because they couldn't see the opportunity in front of them. They didn't realise how fortunate we were to have an organisation that supported us so generously, not just as students, but as a community, without asking for anything in return. In many places, students have to pay for extra lessons, but with Axiom, all they ask is that we show up and be willing to learn. Axiom played a big role in supporting me through high school. It was a challenging time, but I made it through. When it came time to apply for university, I didn't know where to start or what to expect. Thankfully, Axiom was there with a careers team who guided and supported us through the process. They helped us with applications and made sure we were prepared. Before we knew it, we were off to universities in big cities we never imagined ourselves living in. I will always be grateful for everything Axiom Education has done for me.



Molweni (Greetings)!

My name is no longer just a name – it's attached to a degree (Bachelor of Medicine in Clinical Practice). I am now *Clinical Associate Likhona Bambeni*. With pending qualification in Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (*future Dr Bambeni*). I am a proud Axiom alumni. To a person who is a competitor like myself, Axiom's teaching and learning styles groomed me. At the end of each term I would wait eagerly for the awards and be praying that I get one. Even with tertiary institutions applications, I knew Axiom had my back. Fast forwarding to when I got admitted for MBChB, Axiom was there by my side to support me on my new journey. I am grateful that I chose the program and that it chose me back.

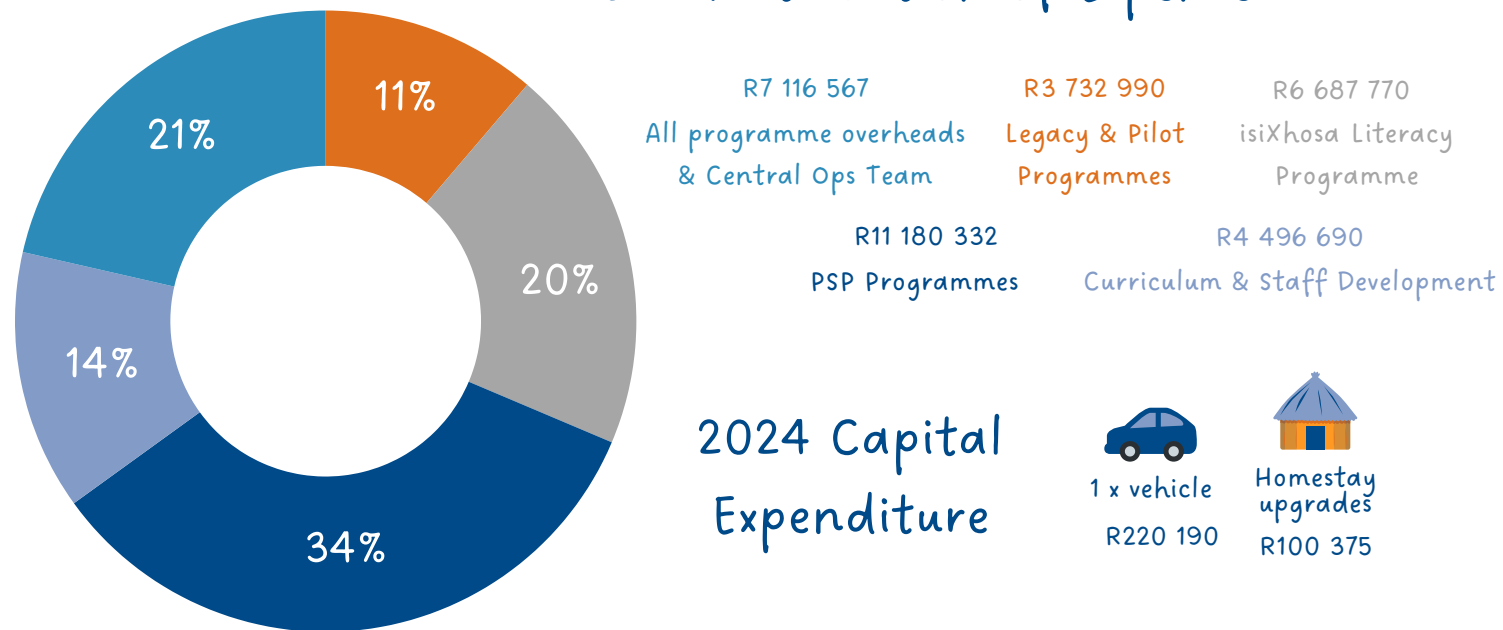
Likhona Bambeni

Class of 2021

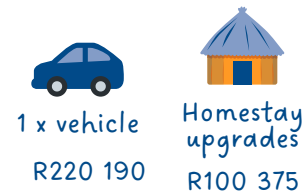


# Finances

## 2024 Distribution of Expenses



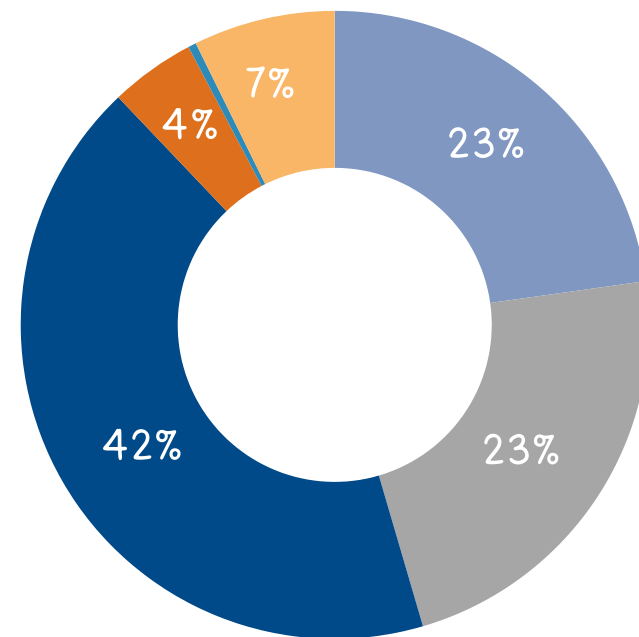
## 2024 Capital Expenditure



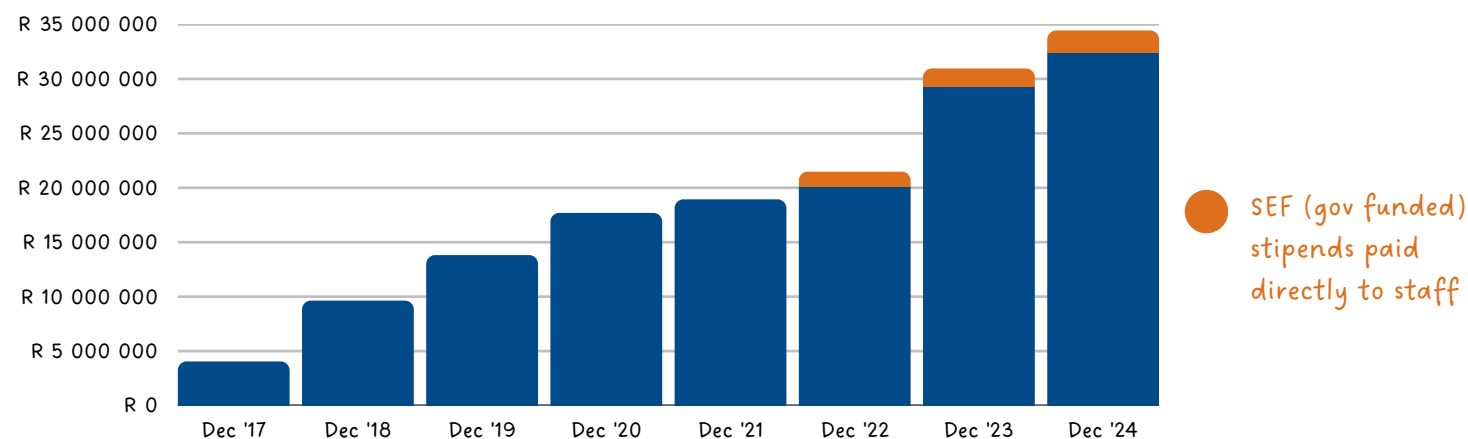
## 2024 Income Streams

R143 228	R2 512 930*	R7 817 231
SA Individuals	Government	Overseas
R14 615 621	R1 512 207	R7 843 795
Public School Partnerships	Interest, Rent & Other	SA Corporations & Foundations

\*Including SEF salaries paid directly to staff



## Historical Income



"My strategy for success is making sure learners and parents understand the value of education—because when they do, everything changes."

– Mr Madotyeni,  
Deputy Principal – Dumalisile Comprehensive H.S.







"I just want to say thank you for the support Axiom has given to my child's education. When he first joined the programme, he didn't believe in himself. Reading was a struggle, he'd get scared just being asked to read a book. But now, he's able to read in English and even explain the content to me clearly. He also used to have a really hard time with Maths too, but now he's managing well. What I'm most grateful for is the confidence he's gained. I can see he's trying in class now. He used to hold back, especially around other kids, but I've noticed such a big change. Thank you." - proud Axiom parent

"Ndifuna ubulela ngenxaso yeMasakhane kwimfundo yomntanam. Uqala kwakhe kule-programme ibingumntana ongazithembanga kwimfundo yakhe, uba uthi makafunde incwadi bekubabanzima ngenxa yokoyika. Ngoku, uyakwazi ukufunda i-english aphinde andicacisele ukuba ithetha ukuthini ngokuchanekileyo. Futhi nakwizibalo ebesohluleka kakhulu kodwa ngoku uyakwazi. Enye into endinombulelo kuyo kukuzithemba kwakhe, ndiyabona uyazama umntana e-klasini ngoba ebekade engazithembi, ingakumbi xakukho abanye abantwana kodwa ngoku ndiqaphela utshintsho olukhulu. Enkosi."

## Our Partners & Supporters

Thank you to the incredible support and generosity of our partners who believe in our vision and without whom this work would not be possible.