Good morning, colleagues, MECs present today and members of the provincial legislature.

An old joke told in Europe goes like this:
Q: What do you call a person who speaks two languages?
A: Bilingual.
Q: What do you call a person who speaks many languages?
A: Multilingual.
Q: What do you call a person who speaks just one language?
A: American.

Whether the facts support the generalization that Americans are less fluent than the rest of the developed world in more than their mother tongue is a matter of some dispute. However, that never stopped once US Presidential candidate, the late, Paul Simon to call the United States a "linguistically malnourished" nation.

This kind of jokes and fierce debates emerge whenever nations debate the introduction of a foreign language in schools, particularly public schools. That is why we are here today.

When many of us started schools, we did not have many options of whether or not we wanted to learn a foreign language. In my case, I had no option but to register for Northern Sotho, English and Afrikaans.

But today, in this hard earned democracy, as more children are being raised bilingual or multilingual, you must be wondering, "Should my children learn another language? Should they even add a foreign language?

Yes, it is extremely important that our children learn a foreign language. The languages our children study should not be limited because we cannot predict which one will be more beneficial to them in the future.

Therefore too those who say, the introduction of Mandarin
in South African schools would compromise our cultural heritage in any way by side-lining any of our official languages: I say NO, the South African cultural heritage will not be compromised.

In terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the government is obliged to promote and ensure respect for all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa.

The National Education Policy gives the right to the Minister of Education to determine national policy on language. The Language in Education Policy constitutes that our cultural diversity is a valuable national asset and hence the Department of Basic Education is tasked, amongst other things, to promote multilingualism. Mandarin as a Second Additional Language is another language which a learner can learn, and that enables broader communication in a globalizing world and promotes multilingualism as enshrined in the Constitution and the Language in Education Policy.

Here is a background of why and how Mandarin will be introduced from January 2016: On 26 March 2013 an agreement was signed between the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the People's Republic of China on co-operation in the field of Basic Education. Article 8 of the agreement states that the Parties involved shall co-operate in the facilitation or introduction of the teaching and research of Mandarin at selected South African Schools for the purpose of promoting cultural exchanges and research on Sinology by South African teachers.

Then Minister of Basic Education initiated the formulation of the Mandarin policies, a process that was completed with the publicizing of the relevant Gazettes: Policy and Regulations on 20 March 2015. (Gazette No 38589 (Amendments to the Regulations Pertaining to the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12 to provide for the listing of Mandarin Second Additional Language); and No. 38590 (Amendments to the Policy document, National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12 to provide for the listing of Mandarin Second Additional Language).

The requirements for inclusion of Mandarin Second Additional Language (Grades 4-12) in the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 have been met and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements have been approved by the Council of Education Ministers (CEM) to be offered in the:

- Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6);
- Senior Phase (Grades 7-9); and
- FET Phase (Grades 10-12)

Lest we forget that 14 non-official languages are currently offered on second additional language level in South African high schools, i.e. Arabic, French, German, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Serbian, Spanish, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. Mandarin will be the fifteenth language to be offered on second additional language level.

Schools, who want to offer Mandarin Second Additional Language, which will be the 15th language offered, will be able to do so from January 2016. The offering of Mandarin as a non-official language in the Intermediate and Senior Phases, is subject to the following conditions:
(a) The optional Language will be regarded as an additional subject not to be taken into account for promotion requirements as contemplated in paragraphs 14 (Intermediate Phase) and 21 (Senior Phase) of the policy document, National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12.

(b) Schools offering an optional language in the Intermediate and Senior Phases on at least Second Additional Language level may not use the 27, 5 hours official teaching time allocated to both the Intermediate and Senior Phases.

(c) Optional languages may only be offered in the Intermediate and Senior Phases if the school is able to make an arrangement for the allocation of additional time to the allocated 27, 5 hours teaching time in both said phases.

As the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga told parliament recently, learners in the FET Phase (Grades10– 12) may offer a maximum of one subject developed by an assessment body other than the Department of Basic Education and approved by the Minister of Basic Education and accredited by Umalusi, in addition to the required seven compulsory subjects in Grades 10-12 for the National Senior Certificate.

Ladies and gentlemen, the introduction of the official language of China, Mandarin, in Gauteng and South African schools will be implemented as a non-official language on second additional language level only in a selected number of schools.

As a nation, we must realize the importance of being multilingualism.

So how does and will multilingualism benefit a child in the future?

First, speaking more than one language helps with cognitive development, and can help increase a student's foreign language scores. Secondly, our children will have a better understanding of people and other cultures.

Third, many businesses are looking for multilingual employees, so this will give our children an edge in the corporate world in the future.

It doesn’t take an oracle to see that if we don’t improve our fluency in the languages and cultures of a post-emergent global marketplace, our ability to compete economically -- not to mention cooperate productively -- with people of other countries will slide precipitously.

Schools, naturally, must be the front line advancing our role in the world economy.

The goal, of course, is not to replace other languages, nor even to diminish their positions as the dominant languages of South African culture. But multilingualism can help South Africans operate more successfully in a multicultural world, as well as help our children to become more proficient in the languages and cultures of other countries.

The brutal economics of our time have to figure into our education strategic plan, of course. But the developing world economy is no joke, and if we are to prepare our children to play a significant role in it, their familiarity with other languages and cultures can’t be a joke either.
In the 21st century, where our economy is truly global, that indifference can no longer be acceptable. The globalization phenomenon has changed how we and other countries must think about educating their children.

A thorough knowledge of foreign languages, a skill once thought optional by some, is now essential in today’s global village.

Without multilingualism, our companies will struggle to get international contracts, our scientists will miss important collaborations, international assistance organizations will fail to understand local customs, and average South Africans will be deprived of cultural enrichment when we fail to embrace the study of other languages.

Unfortunately, there is no short cut to becoming fluent in another tongue. It is a process that takes hard work, individual commitment and proper support. Mandarin will not be different.

We must place a greater emphasis on foreign-language instruction in our schools. Making foreign languages a priority will ensure that we increase the supply line of students who have strong language skills and the professional development for educators to teach them.

Learning a foreign language like Mandarin - not just in snippets but as a sustained education – will allow our children to take on an alternative identity and see the world in different ways. This is especially true for less privileged students like many here in our beloved country.

We owe it to our children to help them learn another language and gain a better understanding of the world in which they live.

The Gauteng Department of Education will continuously collaborate with embassies and organisations to promote multilingualism in schools which will have important advantages for the entire South African society.

I thank you.