

State's best speller to be decided today

Four months of hard work and preparation will come to an end today when the winners of the 2008 Premier's Spelling Bee are decided at the state final of the competition.

Premier Nathan Rees said 64 students from across NSW have converged on Sydney today with one common goal – to be crowned the State's best Junior or Senior speller.

"I wish all the students competing in the final the best of luck and regardless of the result, I congratulate each and every one of them on their success so far," Mr Rees said.

"These finalists recently competed against more than 2,400 students at the 32 regional finals, so to make it this far in the competition is an amazing

achievement. "I would also like to congratulate the record 72,000 students who competed in the 2008 Premier's Spelling Bee - you are all winners."

The Premier's Spelling Bee encourages students to improve their spelling and promotes improved literacy in combination with the English K-6 Syllabus.

"The Spelling Bee allows students to strive for their personal best and is one of the reasons behind NSW's impressive literacy rates, which are amongst the highest in the world," Mr Rees said.

"The Spelling Bee is achieving such great results that this year there was an increase of more than 20 per cent in the number of NSW students participating in the challenge.

"It is further proof that the Government's \$616 million four-year investment to improve literacy and numeracy standards in NSW public schools is paying off.

"Our commitment is to ensure all students have access to opportunities that will help them develop and improve their literacy."

As part of today's final, the finalists are asked to spell words provided by editors of the Macquarie Dictionary. There are five categories:

- General;
- Science/Mathematics;
- the Arts;
- the Environment; and
- Sport.

100 Toilet Art Exhibition For World Toilet Day

Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, Bob McMullan, spoke at the launch of an innovative art exhibition to celebrate World Toilet Day. The 100 Toilet Art Exhibition is an Engineers Without Borders initiative showcasing toilet bowls decorated by local artists and designers.

The aim of World Toilet Day is to break the "toilet taboo," help raise awareness of the needs of the 2.5 billion people worldwide who still lack access to adequate sanitation facilities and get people talking about what can be done.

Mike Cleary Sprints at Wentworth Park Greyhounds

The Wentworth Park greyhound meeting on Saturday night November 29 will have the added attraction of professional athletics racing. Greyhound racing on this night will feature heats of the Group 3 Rapidvite Potential Stakes over the 520m, an age restricted race for the stars of the future. In addition the NSW Athletics League will be joining the NSW GBOTA to conduct the "Mike Cleary Sprints", a heats and final series of sprint racing over 100 yards.

The inaugural Mike Cleary Sprint was conducted at the venue as part of the NCA's Wentworth Park greyhound race meeting on December 8, 2007. Following the NSW GBOTA taking over the conduct of all race meetings at the Glebe circuit this popular athletics promotion will take place again this year with the GBOTA and the athletics body joining forces to repeat last year's promotion.

The Mike Cleary Sprint is named



after the man involved in Australia's most famous match race, when dual league and rugby international Cleary, also winner of a Commonwealth

Games track bronze medal, raced against Rugby League legend Ken Irvine at the famous Glebe race track.

The clash generated substantial public interest and a crowd of 11,000

spectators turned out on Easter Saturday in 1964 to see the two Rugby League legends in the 100 yards dash.

On that occasion Cleary the South Sydney winger celebrated a narrow win over his North Sydney rival to take the purse of 1000 pounds (which Cleary is reported to have split with Irvine).

The November 29 program at Wentworth Park will involve a top shelf ten race greyhound program with the Mike Cleary Sprint heats conducted in between early races and eight contestants will line up for the final later on the program after race 6 or 7.

It is hoped that SKY Channel may be able to show the final live, subject to program commitments. As occurred last year, subject to government approval race goers will be able to bet on course with the bookmakers on the athletics events.

GBOTA Chairman Bill Mangafas said his Association was delighted to be hosting this sprint race series in conjunction with the NSW Athletics League.

"This is an exciting promotion and there's lots of nostalgia attached to this event named in honour of one of our most exciting footballers and former NSW Racing Minister," Mr Mangafas explained.

"Mike Cleary will be our special guest on the night and will making the presentation for this event which carries a total purse of \$5000", Mr Mangafas added.

Free eye-screening for all 4 year olds in NSW

Premier Nathan Rees today launched a state-wide eyesight screening program

for every preschooler in NSW.

Mr Rees said the State-wide Eyesight Preschooler Screening (StEPS) program

will offer every four year old child in NSW free eye screening at their local preschool, day care centre or Child & Family Health Centre.

"With some eye conditions, early correction can avoid a lifetime of sight problems," Mr Rees said.

"It's a priority for my government to deliver new health care services for our children, so they can get the best possible start in life.

"We are investing just over \$14 million in the StEPS program over the next four

years to deliver better health servic-

es for every community.

"Specially trained nurses and staff have already begun visiting four year olds across the state to screen for any possible sight problems.

"It's about detecting problems early, so parents can get the help their child needs."

The StEPS program was developed after the success of the SWISH program, which offers free hearing tests to all newborn babies in NSW.

"If some eye problems in children are not treated before they turn eight, it's likely they'll have poor sight in that eye for the rest of their life," Ophthalmologist Dr Frank Martin said.

"It's very difficult for a parent or carer to pick up if a child has vision problems, as it can occur in just one eye and not affect their day-to-day

activities.

"Research proves that if you have poor eyesight in one eye, you are two to three times more likely to lose the eyesight in your good eye, a situation we want to avoid," Dr Martin said.

NSW Minister for Health, John Della Bosca, said the program would be offered to every four year old in NSW through a staged roll-out.

"We hope to offer 84,000 children eye screening over the next year, by targeting pre-schools and child care centres," Mr Della Bosca said.

"Special needs children will also be included in StEPS and will have their sight screened using testing equipment specifically developed to suit them," he added.

For more information about StEPS, please contact your local Area Health Service or visit www.nswhealth.gov.au