

Calls for Angie to close schools after coronavirus infections

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PSA said it believed educator and learner infection reports within just a week of schools reopening was indication they were opened prematurely LEARNERS at Wierda Independent School. Thobile Mathonsi African News Agency (ANA) Calls for Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga to reconsider the reopening of schools are growing louder after the closure of more schools due to Covid-19 infections. The Public Servants Association union said it believed educator and learner infection reports within just a week of schools reopening was an indication they were opened prematurely. More than 56 Gauteng schools have been closed after educators and learners tested positive. "This trend is sadly only expected to increase and grow worse once more tests are done and learners interact more. Images and videos circulating on social media reflect that schools are not able to maintain physical distancing and fail to use personal protective equipment correctly. "Learners are also transported in buses that exceed the loading capacity. The union believes that with the current daily infection rate increasing, the daily closing of schools will become the norm across the country. This will result in even more disruptions to the academic year and would ultimately not benefit learners," they said. It expressed a concern with the long-term impact infections would have on learner psychological well-being. "Infected learners must be quarantined and those that were in close contact must self-isolate." As an alternative, the union suggested reworking the academic year to run from October to July to enable the department to save lives and ensure learners received quality education. "The completion of the 2020 academic year should not be at the cost of the lives of our educators and learners. Families will not cope with the eventualities of learner mortalities related to Covid-19, as the infection rate is expected to reach its peak while our health systems are not ready." Education Activist Hendrick Makaneta suggested the department looked into camps for Grade 12 learners and the rest of the learners to be progressed to the next grade, as schools reported difficulties experienced during their first week. He said they had already received complaints from teachers who said they found it difficult to teach with face masks and learners were unable to hear properly. "Fear has become the order of the day. How long are we going to wait before we realise that the reopening of schools was a mistake? We just have to accept that this academic year was never going to end well and the sooner we re-close the schools, the better for society. "The learners who contract Covid-19 at school will put the lives of their home caregivers at risk. Moreover, the only people who benefit from the open academic year are owners of private schools," Makaneta said. The National Congress of South African Students has distanced itself from reports that it planned on disrupting schools following the infections of teachers. If anything, it indicated that it had no plans to disrupt schools, but would instead meet with Minister Angie Motshekga this week to engage and come up with solutions that would be beneficial to educators and learners. *For the latest on the Covid-19 outbreak, visit IOL's #Coronavirus trend page. ** If you think you have been exposed to the Covid-19 virus, please call the 24-hour hotline on 0800 029 999 or visit sacoronavirus.co.za Pretoria News.