

MEDIA RELEASE **COVID-19: PSA concerned about impact on schools**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), which represents thousands of educators and administrative staff at schools across the country, has noted a drastic increase in the number of schools closed owing to COVID-19 infections. The impact of the first ten days of schools since re-opening is yet to be determined and tests results for the past week are still awaited.

The PSA is aware that more than 160 schools are currently closed as either educators, learners or parents are infected with the virus. Despite statistics on infection rates in schools not being revealed, these are rapidly growing. At least 42 schools in Limpopo remain closed as they are without water and proper toilets. Learners and educators at Mainganye High School at Muwaneni in the Tshitale area, for example, must share two pit toilets and are faced with cracked, unsafe classrooms. As reported in the media, over 180 learners at Makaula secondary school, Mount Frere, Eastern Cape tested Covid positive.

The PSA has noted widespread rumours of corruption during the pandemic. These include a 5 000-litre water tank being procured for R170 000 being 3 300% above the average price. The PSA calls on the Minister of Education to provide details on the total expenditure on personal protective equipment and water tanks as well as the quantities supplied.

The constant closing of schools will further impact on the delivery of quality education to learners. The PSA has, however, not seen any plans by schools on how infected learners in self-isolation will be assisted to ensure that the Department's slogan that no student will be left behind is honoured.

The country is experiencing a rapidly increasing infection rate in lockdown level three with more than 3 500 new cases per day. Scientists furthermore predict that infections will peak during and just after the winter months. This makes the opening of schools during this phase concerning. Schools are normally heavily impacted by ordinary influenza infections and the PSA is of the opinion that this pattern will be the same for COVID-19 infections. If schools remain open, the Minister of Basic Education must accept that most schools' staff and learners will at some stage be infected. The question that the Minister needs to answer is how many educators and learners she is prepared to sacrifice before she accepts reality and closes schools. In the face of grim statistics, the PSA advises the close schools immediately to curb the spread of the virus and a further loss of lives.

END

