

MEDIA RELEASE **COVID-19: Limpopo Department of Education far from ready to receive learners**

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As schools throughout the country opened from 15 February 2021, the Public Servants Association (PSA) has noted with concern the lack of support offered to Senior Management Teams (SMT) in preparing for operations by the Limpopo Department of Education.

Although SMTs were on duty from on 25 January 2021, they did not receive assistance from the Department to prepare schools to receive learners. The PSA was shocked to learn during a recent meeting with the Department that the basics were not in place whilst the Department expected learners from all grades to report back on Monday, without putting the necessary safety measures in place to ensure the protection of employees and learners.

The problems range from non-delivery of stationery, mobile toilets, non-procurement of sanitisers and masks, delivered mobile classes are still without furniture, as well as water and sanitation challenges that are still to be resolved. Schools are yet to receive funding but are expected to procure masks and pay Educators Assistants and Cleaners. Despite the Department clearly indicating that around 119 schools have infrastructure challenges, there is no clear plan to address these problems. Yet, the Department believes that it was ready to open schools on 15 February 2021. Educators with co-morbidities and deceased Educators have not yet been replaced, which will impact on the provision of quality education.

What is even more concerning is that the post-provisioning norm of the Department does not take the “new normal” into account. Despite the increase of classes owing to social distancing, there are fewer Educators. Furthermore, there is no clarity when the Department will open special schools, which again gives the impression that learners with special needs are second-grade citizens and that their right to education is not respected.

Although the PSA believes that it in the interest of everyone that schools are reopen, it is equally critical to ensure that lives are protected against COVID-19. The COVID-19 Regulations further provide that schools that do not meet basic safety measures should remain closed and there must be constant monitoring of schools to ensure compliance. The PSA calls on the Limpopo Department of Education to urgently ensure the provision of sanitisers, masks, stationery, and adequate human resources in the interest of a successful 2021-academic year.

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