

**MEDIA RELEASE**                      **COVID-19: PSA appeals to Minister of Basic Education to close schools**

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ENQUIRIES                              communication@psa.co.za

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), which represents thousands of educators and administrative staff in schools across the country, appeals to the Minister of Basic Education to close schools before more learners return amidst rocketing COVID-19 infection rates.

Since the easing of lockdown to level three, infection rates have soared. Since schools opened on 8 June 2020 the PSA has noticed increasing infections amongst parents, educators and learners being reported. In Limpopo, more than 40 schools are still without the infrastructure to implement the required health protocols. In the Eastern Cape, more than 200 learners of Makaula Secondary School tested positive with a further 131 schools being closed. On 13 June 2020, it was reported that two educators had already passed away owing to COVID-19 and more than 100 educators and 1 787 learners tested positive. These statistics clearly predict that with more learners returning to schools, the virus spread rapidly. This will result in a stop-start schooling system with educators and learners being placed on repeated self-isolation and hinder quality education being delivered. Learners remaining at schools will continue with the curriculum and absent learners will fall behind. This situation will have a negative impact on the psychological well-being of learners and educators. Productivity cannot be expected in a school environment where constant uncertainty and anxiety are present. Resuming school in mid-winter is not a wise decision as flu-like illness will flare up amongst learners and create confusion with COVID-19 symptoms. It is reported that more than 100 000 educators could qualify for a concession owing to comorbidity that places them at high risk if infected. This places tremendous pressure on remaining educators. With some educators to be placed in self-isolation and others on sick leave owing to infection, the schooling system will be under extreme strain to finalise the academic year.

The PSA believes that the Minister has not taken the financial cost into account and if schools will be able to afford the constant closing of schools to be deep cleaned after the identification of each positive case. In the current economic climate and government claiming to not be able to pay public servants and educators their agreed salary increases this year it is unclear how this financial burden will be absorbed.

The PSA has constantly reminded politicians that some of them are not in touch with the feelings of ordinary citizens in their constituencies. Parents fear that their children's lives are at stake. Teachers are treading very cautiously at school and the fear of infection impact on their ability to perform their duties. Citizens must utilise public facilities to attend to their basic needs with a risk of contracting the virus. Politicians seem to be removed from these realities and the PSA calls upon them to refrain from making rash, ill-informed statements. The PSA furthermore pleads with the Minister of Basic Education to see the writing on the wall and close schools to prevent further chaos and loss of lives.

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