

MEDIA RELEASE **COVID-19: PSA concerned about primary schools' ability to accommodate all learners**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing thousands of Educators and Administrative Staff at schools across the country, remains concerned that primary schools cannot continue to have all learners back at school at the same time.

Primary schools were expected to return to normal classes with all learners back in classrooms from 2 August 2021. Over the past few days, the PSA through the Union's provincial offices, observed numerous challenges being faced by schools. These reports are a clear indication that many schools are not ready to accommodate all learners.

Most provinces also observed that several schools were vandalised during the recent violent lootings when schools were closed. This had a further impact on accommodating more learners owing to infrastructure damage. It has been further observed by the PSA that schools cannot comply with social distancing requirements in terms COVID-19 regulations. The Minister of Basic Education reported that Cabinet will be approached to reduce the current regulations on social distancing to 0.5 m in classrooms. This, however, creates a risk for spreading the virus as the new variant of the virus has also impacted young people. Reducing social distancing could increase infections in schools and with a ripple effect on communities. In addition, it will be difficult to keep young children apart on playgrounds.

The PSA has noted an increase in the number of Educators and learners testing positive for COVID-19 the past few days. For example, in Bahlaloga circuit in Limpopo, Kgakoa and Nare High Schools were forced to close owing to high infection rates because of overcrowding and the fact that, in many instances, primary and secondary school learners share space at home and school transport. Further that this can directly be attributed to all learners being back at school and non-adherence to social distance requirements. As a result, numerous schools have closed, which impacts on the quality of learning. The PSA believes that the continuation of schools with all learners back in classes will fuel the next wave of COVID-19 infections and may result in stricter lockdown regulations and a negative impact on the economy.

The PSA therefore calls on the Minister of Basic Education to revisit earlier arrangements where schools rotated learners and kept infections under control as far as possible. In addition, the amendment of the curriculum and a re-alignment of the academic year must be considered.

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