

MEDIA RELEASE **COVID-19: PSA concerned about schools' readiness to open for 2021-school year**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing thousands of Educators and Administrative Staff at schools nationwide, is concerned that schools are not fully prepared to open for the 2021-academic year on 15 February 2021.

According to reports received from PSA structures, most schools only just received masks for new Grade 1 and 8 learners. The last time Educators and learners received masks was in early 2020. These masks need to be replaced but the Department of Basic Education has not allocated additional funding to schools to purchase masks.

Personal protective equipment is crucial to safeguard Educators and learners against COVID-19. The PSA is therefore extremely concerned about reports indicate that schools in the Western Cape received a mere R2 000 each to procure masks for new learners. Funds not utilised must then be used to procure sanitisers. For most schools the R2 000 will not be enough to procure masks, and consequently schools will not receive any additional funding for sanitisers. Similar reports were received from Limpopo and the Northern Cape.

The PSA is further notes that with COVID-19 claiming the lives of many Educators, a shortage of Educators is prevalent with current indications that these vacant posts will not be filled by schools. Even before the pandemic, South Africa was experiencing a shortage of Educators and if provinces do not fill these vacancies, the impact on the quality of education will be severe. The shortage of staff further bears a risk of educator burn out, as they endeavour to make up shortfalls. In addition, the PSA is disturbed about reports that School Assistants who are appointed in the latter part of 2020, have not been paid on time.

The PSA calls on Government to consider the plights of Education sector employees and to prioritise vaccine rollouts to the sector for schooling to continue uninterrupted and ensuring a successful academic year after the trauma of 2020.

END