

MEDIA RELEASE **COVID-19: PSA concerned about start of 2021-school year amidst second-wave infections**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), which represents thousands of educators and administrative staff at schools nationwide, is extremely concerned about the Department of Basic Education's readiness to open schools for the 2021-school year at the end of January 2021 amidst a soaring COVID-19 infection rate.

The PSA hopes that the Department has learnt vital lessons from 2020 and has adapted its approach to prevent a repeat of previous mistakes and risking the lives of educators, administrative staff, learners and parents in the process. There can be no compromise on personal protective equipment needed in schools to ensure the safety of all stakeholders. Recent media reports have confirmed that many educators have passed away owing to COVID-19. The Department therefore needs to ensure that protocols implemented will provide the required protection as the country's strained education system cannot afford a further loss of educators.

The PSA has further noted media reports indicating that the Department wishes to open an online school to alleviate the admission pressure on the current schooling system, specifically in Gauteng schools. The PSA believes such an offering is a step in the right direction. It will also assist parents who had to adapt their personal and working arrangements whilst schools could not accommodate learners at school every day.

The PSA, however, cautions the Department that such a public online school system should not further disadvantage the huge number of learners in rural areas who will not be able to access such a system. Rural schools are over-crowded and have a severe lack of infrastructure. Learners also walk long distances between school and their homes. The PSA believes that learners in rural areas stand to gain greatly from such an online offering in conjunction with finding permanent solutions to address other current daily challenges.

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