

MEDIA RELEASE

COVID-19: PSA urges President Ramaphosa to intervene and close schools amidst soaring infection rate

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EMBARGO None

ENQUIRIES communication@psa.co.za

The Public Servants Association (PSA), which represents thousands of educators and administrative staff in schools across the country, still maintains that schools should be closed during the Covid-19 pandemic and upward surge in the infection rate.

To date, more than 25 555 people have tested positive for COVID-19 and 219 succumbed to the virus over the weekend. Should schools remain open and all grades return, some 18 million learners will move around daily to attend school. This will result in more parents and other family members being exposed to the virus.

The PSA has addressed a letter to President Cyril Ramaphosa, urging him to intervene and close schools with immediate effect. The PSA highlighted the fact that educators have already succumbed to the virus, many principals and support staff are infected and experience severe symptoms. With more grades returning to the schooling system and the current infection rate increasing steeply, more educators and supports staff will run the risk of being infected. There is no rationale for limiting the number of people who attend church services and funerals, but schools with more than 1 000 learners will be open. Many schools now have deceased educators and learners who are traumatised.

The plan to continue with the academic year is further fails to make sense when considering that the Higher Education sector has already amended its current academic year to only conclude in March 2021. With the new student intake only taking place from March 2021, the Department of Basic Education effectively has leeway until early 2021 to conclude the academic year. Currently, schools will continue to open and close owing to infections in schools with a severely disrupting impact on teaching and learning.

It seems that other than the Minister, the only group that are happy for schools to remain open are cleaning companies that, through their connections, do deep cleaning every time a school has to close. This is regarded as a waste of money that could have been spent on ensuring that all schools have the required infrastructure to ensure the safety of every learner, also post COVID-19.

The PSA therefore urges President Ramaphosa to urgently intervene and close schools and amend the academic year for schools to coincide with the Higher Education sector to curtail the spread of the virus to lessen the impacts on the health system and prevent the loss of lives.

END

