

MEDIA RELEASE **PSA cautions DBE Minister about the re-opening of schools**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), which represents thousands of educators and administrative staff in schools across the country, is deeply concerned about the Department's decision to re-open schools starting with grade 12 and 7 on 1 June 2020.

The PSA believes that schools' readiness to open must be evaluated against the school with the least amount of infrastructure and it be used as a basis on which to determine the re-opening of schools. Provinces are not equal and schools in each province are also not equal. The Department cannot discriminate against schools and learners in poorer communities who do not have the required infrastructure to ensure the safety of learners and educators. If the Department adopted the approach that no learner will be left behind, then a uniform approach must be implemented that is based on the compliance to the regulations by the most ill-equipped school.

The Department is yet to indicate how educators and learners with co-morbidities will be catered for and protected against being infected. The Disaster Management Act Regulations and Directives issued by the Department of Public Service and Administration places great emphasise on the fact that people above 60 years of age and those with co-morbidities should not risk exposure as the virus has a greater mortality rate for such individuals. If one takes into consideration the age demographics of educators one will realise that a vast number of educators falls within the above categories and with a shortage of educators, this will place the schooling system under severe pressure.

The PSA believes that in view of all the challenges the schooling system faces, the Department will not be able to apply the required social distancing in schools. Daily screenings will take too long and will only result in learners being grouped together without proper control over social distancing. The use of bathrooms facilities and cleaning of these facilities will pose a huge challenge for schools.

The recent daily infection rate is an area of concern and taking into consideration that winter season is here that will undoubtedly increase the infections, pose another enormous challenge for the Department.

The PSA is also concerned as to how the nutrition programme will operate under these conditions considering that the serving of warm food is a concern under the current lockdown rules.

The PSA calls on Minister Angie Motshekga to reconsider her plans to open schools and rather implement a schooling year that will run from October 2020 to June 2021.

END

