

MEDIA RELEASE	PSA warns the Department that schools are not ready to open on 1 June
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The Public Servants Association (PSA) representing thousands of Educators and Administrative Staff across the country is adamant that schools will not be ready to accept learners as of 1 June 2020, warns the Department of Basic Education is acting irresponsible by re-opening schools on 1 June 2020

The PSA evaluated the readiness of schools in each province which is set to open on 1 June 2020. It is alarming that despite the overwhelming evidence that confirms that schools will not be ready, the Department is still forging ahead with its plan to re-open schools.

According to reports received, from the PSA's Provincial Offices, several schools have been vandalised during the lock down period and have not been repaired yet, but learners are expected to return to such poor conditions. The challenge of access to water is still not resolved in some areas. Water tanks that were promised are still not delivered and installed and affected schools could not indicate when will these water tanks be delivered, installed and ready to be used.

Since there is currently no cure or vaccination against COVID-19, the Department and the country rely on nonmedical interventions such as good personal hygiene that includes regular washing of hands. Therefore, the safe and healthy state conditions of the schools are essential in the fight against the pandemic.

Many schools are still without the required infrastructure that will ensure compliance with the regulations and thereby the safety of educators, learners and eventually the community. In most cases, children might not be as severely affected as adults, but are indeed carriers of the virus. This can spread easily from household to household and affect and infect the most vulnerable. The PSA believes that these issues need to be addressed first before any schools can be opened.

There are also reports that to date some schools have not received their Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and others did not receive enough to maintain continued operations. Media reports about stolen PPEs in schools also raises a huge concern about the physical safety of learners and employees as the schools can be targets for criminals.

Most educators are still to be educated on the correct handling of PPE and COVID-19 related matters. This training is crucial to ensure educators can identify potential cases quickly and implement correct measures without risking their lives and the live of learners.

Provinces further reported that school cleaners are responsible to clean the school to sanitize schools before learners can return. The PSA demands clarity for schools on the required standards and directives since schools do not possess Certificates of Compliance indicating that the appropriate cleaning has taken place. It is also still not clear if schools must utilise their operating budget to procure the additional PPE's and other related items to combat the spread of the virus. Should this be the case, schools run the risk of not being able to provide or pay for the necessities such at electricity, toilet paper and stationery bringing about another crisis only a few months later.

The PSA is very concerned about educators who suffer from various medical conditions such as hypertension, diabetes asthma and others that places them at higher risk should they be infected. With more than 100 000 educators with some form of comorbidity it will place tremendous strain on the remaining educators to conclude the academic year. This will further be accentuated should an outbreak occur in a school and educators needs to be placed in isolation. Two COVID-19 positive cases were already identified in the first two days after educators had to return and with more set to return it is only a matter of time before schools become the epicentre of the virus. With a shortage of educators in South Africa a mass infection amongst them will only be disastrous for the future of quality education for learners.

The statement from the Minister of Basic Education that all stakeholders were consulted on the opening of schools, this is totally devoid from the truth. The PSA have made numerous attempts to ensure that they are consulted and have brought its concerns and input to the attention of the Minister without any response.

The PSA maintains its stance the schools needs time to prepare and ensure compliance, its only sensible that the school calendar be amended to resume schooling from October to June 2021.

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