

MEDIA RELEASE	Safeguarding teaching profession essential to South Africa's future
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With World Teachers' Day 2026 marking 60 years of global commitment to teachers' status, the Public Servants Association (PSA) calls for decisive action to protect educators, improve their working lives, and recognise their essential role in shaping the South Africa's future.

Every 5 October, the world honours the people who develop minds, widen opportunities and help societies progress. Established by UNESCO in 1994, World Teachers' Day commemorates the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, a landmark framework for professional rights, working conditions, standards and continuing development. Its 60th anniversary is observed under the theme: *"Standing with teachers: 60 years of protecting the profession, advancing its status, and shaping our futures"*.

More than a profession

Teachers are amongst South Africa's most important public servants. They educate future doctors, engineers, scientists, public administrators and community leaders. In every lesson, they nurture knowledge, critical thought and citizenship - the foundations on which the Country's constitutional and development ambitions depend.

South Africa's history shows how closely education, equality, and freedom are linked. Under apartheid, teachers faced severe shortages, ideological interference, and state repression. Yet many continued to inspire learners and support the pursuit of a fairer society. The 1976 Soweto Uprising remains a defining reminder that classrooms are never isolated from the wider struggle for dignity and justice. That responsibility continues. Education sits at the heart of the National Development Plan 2030 and its goals of reducing poverty, advancing equality, and promoting inclusive growth. More than 13 million learners attend public schools, supported by over 400 000 educators. Although the national learner-to-educator ratio is about 30:1, the reality in many rural and township schools is overcrowding, scarce resources, and too little individual support.

Pressure beyond the classroom

Educators do far more than deliver the curriculum. They identify learners who need academic or psychosocial help, encourage inclusion, reinforce discipline, and equip young people to participate constructively in society. Yet the conditions under which many teachers work undermine their well-being and the quality of education they can provide.



Crowded classrooms and unequal resources

Large classes make classroom management harder, limit individual attention, and increase marking and preparation demands. In historically disadvantaged communities, shortages of textbooks, libraries, laboratories, reliable internet, and proper sanitation deepen the challenge. Equal education requires more than a common curriculum - it requires fair access to infrastructure, resources, and staffing that reflect the actual needs of schools.

Workload and wellness

Administrative and compliance duties continue to consume time that should be used for preparation, teaching, assessment, and learner support. According to the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey 2024, 30% of South African teachers reported high job-related stress, compared with an OECD average of 19%. A further 17% said their work had significantly harmed their mental health. Awareness campaigns alone are not enough. Teachers need reasonable workloads, effective administrative assistance, and confidential, accessible psychosocial support.

Safety is not negotiable

Violence, threats, and assaults against educators demand firm intervention. Schools need robust safety procedures, suitable security, consistent consequences for offenders, and readily available trauma care. Educators harmed in the course of duty must receive appropriate occupational protection. An attack on a teacher does more than injure an employee - it weakens professional authority and disrupts the public education system.

Teaching for a changing world

Technology and artificial intelligence are reshaping how people learn and work. Teachers must now help learners build digital literacy, creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. Coding, robotics, and online learning can enrich education, but only when schools have appropriate devices, dependable connectivity, and technical support, and educators receive sustained professional development. Technology should strengthen skilled teaching, not replace professional expertise or widen existing inequalities. Staffing stability is equally important. Unfilled posts, heavy workloads, safety risks, and limited career progression threaten retention and increase the burden on those who remain. Teachers in special schools face additional pressures, often providing extensive care and support that formal workload models do not fully recognise. Keeping experienced educators in the profession requires conditions that reflect the full scope and value of their work.

From appreciation to action

In support of teachers, the PSA continues to advocate for the following interventions:

- **Fill vacancies:** Appoint qualified educators to funded posts and align staffing with learner needs.
- **Protect teaching time:** Simplify compliance requirements and provide adequate administrative support.
- **Make schools safer:** Strengthen security, tackle intimidation, and ensure occupational and trauma support.
- **Develop the profession:** Sustain high-quality training for curriculum change, inclusion, and digital learning.



- **Support well-being:** Address burnout through practical workplace measures and confidential psychosocial services.
- **Improve service conditions:** Promote competitive pay, accessible career paths and recognition of teachers' care responsibilities.
- **Strengthen social dialogue:** Involve teachers and unions meaningfully in policy, curriculum reform, and workplace decisions.

Investment in South Africa

South Africa cannot build an inclusive, prosperous and equitable society without a strong education system and it cannot strengthen that system whilst neglecting the people who deliver education every day. The PSA confirms the Union's commitment to stand with educators, defend their rights, and advocate for the structural reforms needed to improve public education.

Teachers prepare future generations for a changing world. They should not carry that responsibility without adequate support. On World Teachers' Day 2026, the PSA calls on government, employers, communities, and society to stand with teachers through meaningful investment and sustained action. Protecting the profession and advancing its status is an investment in South Africa's people, democracy, and future.

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