

**MEDIA RELEASE**                      **School reopening to collapse health capacity to handle COVID-19**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing thousands of educators and administrative staff in schools across the country, believes that educator and learner infection reports, indicate that schools were opened prematurely. In just the first five days of reopening, reports show that Western Cape has more than 90 educators and more than 250 learners infected with COVID-19. In Gauteng, more than 56 schools were closed due to either educators or learners in the schools being infected. This is the trend across the country with more schools being closed daily. Media reports have shown that School Governing Bodies and COSAS, have pleaded with parents not to send their children to school and has approached the Department of Basic Education to close these schools in their communities due to the positive cases identified.

This trend is sadly only expected to increase and grow worse once more tests are done and learners interact more. Images and videos circulating on social media reflects that schools are not able to maintain social distancing and fail to use Personal Protective Equipment correctly. Learners are also transported in busses that exceeds the loading capacity. The PSA believes that with the current daily infection rate increasing, the daily closing of schools will become the norm across the country. This will result in even more disruptions to the academic year and would ultimately not benefit learners. This will certainly traumatise learners and will have a much more negative impact on learner's psychological well-being, a price that society will pay for years to come. Infected learners, that must be quarantined and those that were in close contact who must self-isolate, will fall behind during the recovery and incubation period, therefore further disadvantaging them.

During 2019, the unemployment rate was around 27.32 percent with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic the unemployment rate is set for a huge increase. The PSA therefore fails to understand why the Minister of Basic Education continues risking educators and learners lives only for them to join the unemployment line. The academic year can be reworked to run from October to July. This will save lives and ensure that learners still received quality education and continue with the next phase of their lives. The completion of the 2020 academic year should not be at the cost of the lives of our educators and learners. Learners are our future and they must one day lead the country, but they cannot do this, if are left behind.

The PSA calls on the Minister of Basic Education, to rectify her mistake of prematurely reopening schools, misled by other unions. Families will not cope with any eventualities of learner mortalities related to COVID-19, as the infection rate is expected to reach its peak while our health systems not ready.

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