



NAPTOSA STATEMENT ON DBE PRIORITIES

NAPTOSA has taken cognizance of the Minister of Basic Education's brief to the Portfolio Committee in Parliament on the priorities of her Department in the short to medium term.

According to the Minister, reading comprehension in the first years of school will top the list of priorities - and rightly so. NAPTOSA was very pleased when the President highlighted this in his State of the Nation Address (SONA) and expressed the union's support for the announced Early Grade Reading Programme.

Equally pleasing is the fact that the Department will, in line with the President's identified priority areas, be focusing on the migration of the responsibility for Early Childhood Development centers from Social Development to itself, enhancing the National School Nutrition Programme and completing a number of Inappropriate Schools and sanitation projects.

While NAPTOSA understands and acknowledges that there must be a causal link between the Presidents's SONA (two SONAs this year) and the identified priorities of the Department, it is true that it is impossible for the President to highlight all the priority areas of all the departments. If, therefore, a certain matter or area falling within the jurisdiction of a department is not mentioned by the President in the SONA, it does not mean that it is not a priority.

In its comments on the second SONA of 2019, NAPTOSA indicated that, whilst it was disappointed that the President had not highlighted the issue of school violence in his speech, it was accepted that the Minister would be prioritising this matter. It is therefore extremely disheartening that this issue has not been elevated to the same

level as the reading comprehension, but is merely one of the identified areas that the Department will be working on over the next five years.

We ended last term with a spate of incidents of school violence with little indication that it will abate. Just because there has been a lull in this national crisis due to the school holiday period, does not mean that it should not be one of the highest short term priorities of the Department.

The police cannot be protecting schools in gang-ridden areas on a permanent basis. Other expedited and more sustainable solutions must be found.

NAPTOSA calls on the Minister to reprioritise so as to give equal status to the issue of school violence as to reading comprehension. Teachers and learners have worked and schooled under the effects of school violence, in all its forms, for far too long.

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