



29 May 2020

## JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT BY EDUCATION TEACHER UNIONS AND NATIONAL GOVERNING BODY ASSOCIATIONS ON THE READINESS OF SCHOOLS TO RE-OPEN

The National School Governing Body Associations (Federation of School Governing Bodies of South Africa, National Association of School Governing Bodies and the Governing Body Foundation) met with the Education Trade Unions (SADTU, NAPTOSA, SAOU, PEU and NATU) on 28 May 2020 to consider and discuss the state of readiness of schools to re-open on 1 June 2020 as announced by the Minister of Basic Education.

Information gained from members of the Unions and Associations on the ground guided the discussions and led to a unanimous position that the education system, as matters currently stand, is not ready for the re-opening of schools.

Section 28(2) of the Constitution provides that the best interests of children are of paramount importance in every matter concerning children. Whilst we acknowledge that the right to basic education and the necessity for children to return to schools are extremely important rights and considerations, these considerations cannot trump the best interest principle entrenched in the Constitution. We do not believe it to be in the best interest of children to return to schools when we know that uncertainty concerning their health and safety reigns.

Furthermore, Article 16 of Convention No. 155 of the ILO states that employers must ensure that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the workplaces, machinery, equipment and work processes under their control are safe and without risk to health. Ensuring health and safety in workplaces must be the highest priority as people return to work emerging from COVID-19 restrictions and closures. Good occupational health and safety protect workers, members of their households and the public.

Most Provincial Departments have not been able to deliver Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), or at least sufficient PPEs, for all returning SMT members and teachers. PPEs for learners have not arrived at schools, despite earlier assurances that they are housed in warehouses in the provinces. Many schools have not been cleaned and disinfected as per the direction of the Department of Employment and Labour. Today is the last working day before schools are due to open on Monday. If the PPEs have not been delivered by now, chances are slim that all schools will have them on Monday. Was this the reason that media reports quoted the Minister as saying that schools that do not have the equipment in place will not re-open? As a collective we wish to highlight our rejection of a staggered opening of schools. No school must be left behind, especially not because of incompetence and tardiness. Given the historical injustices

of the past it is obvious which schools will be left behind should a staggered approach to schools reopening be followed. This we cannot allow no matter the justification.

The amended curriculum has, yet, not been provided to schools. Teachers injustices of the past we all know which schools cannot be expected to start teaching when they have not been orientated on the new curriculum. They could be wasting valuable time teaching in terms of the “old” curriculum, whilst they are expected to be concentrating on other aspects of the curriculum. No teacher should be expected to work in the “dark” and no learner should be taught inappropriate content.

Over and above the curriculum, teachers also need time to be trained on how to operate in the COVID-19 environment. With so many teachers not returning to schools this week, this essential training is seriously lacking.

The comorbidity issues have also not been batted down properly. The DBE rushed to the ELRC this week in an attempt to hammer out an agreement on a policy in this regard. Discussions are still ongoing. This leaves a substantial group of teachers anxious and uncertain, not knowing whether they are expected to return to school or not.

Taking all these conditions into consideration, unions and national school governing body associations agree that it would be a grievous mistake to force the re-opening of schools on 1 June 2020. **It is believed that the Minister should retract her announcement in this regard and delay any further announcement to give the system more time to ready itself for a common re-opening, because if not, we will see a haphazard re-opening situation.** Already one province, Northern Cape, announced that schools in that province would only be reopening for learners on 8 June.

What is required is that all provinces should move towards reopening at the same time to give effect to the preamble of the South African Schools Act that contemplates a unitary system of school education for the entire country.

As a collective of Unions and SGB Associations we have agreed to meet with the Minister of Education and MECs on Saturday 30 May to express our concerns and place on record that the system needs more time to fully ready itself for the opening of ALL schools. We cannot support a piece - meal approach to the reopening of school or the leaving behind of the most disadvantaged schools in our country.

We therefore call on all schools, even those that might be ready to re-open, having received all the necessary materials for teachers and learners, not to re-open until the non-negotiables have been delivered to all schools and to inform their learners accordingly. To further contribute to disparities between schools would be irresponsible. The reaction of the Western Cape to the call not to commence with the opening of schools will be closely scrutinised, especially whether they will show solidarity with the plight of other provinces and indeed, sympathy with the plight of thousands of our teachers and children across the nation.

Parents, learners, teachers and education workers can be assured that we all wish schooling to resume as soon as possible, but not at the expense of their health and safety.

**\*\*\*\* END OF JOINT STATEMENT \*\*\*\***

*Issued by the following Teacher Unions and National Governing Body Associations:*

**SADTU:** The General Secretary - Mugwena Maluleke - 0827832968

**NAPTOSA:** The Executive Director - Basil Manuel – 0795086228

**NATU:** The President - Alan Thompson - 0736078141

**PEU:** The General Secretary - Ben Machipi - 0795151165

**SAOU:** The Executive Director - Chris Klopper – 0837087733

**FEDSAS:** The Chief Executive Officer-Paul Colditz – 082414-5359

**NASGB:** The Chief Executive Officer- Matekanye Matakanye- 072 283 4653

**GBF:** The Chief Executive Officer- Anthea Cereseto – 082619 5756