



NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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POSITIVE START TO SCHOOL YEAR

Unlike 2020 and 2021 we have a positive start to the 2022 school year with the announcement by Cabinet on 31 January 2022 that changes to Adjusted Alert Level 1 of the COVID-19 regulations have been approved, *inter alia* the resumption of schooling to fulltime learning in all schools.

NAPTOSA has for a considerable time been agitating for the return to school of all learners on a daily basis and the discontinuation of rotational school attendance in order to arrest the further loss of teaching time. We therefore welcome the decision of Cabinet.

To accommodate the overcrowding pressures experienced by many schools, Cabinet's decision is accompanied by a total relaxation of the 1-meter social distancing requirement in schools. Whilst this is an inevitable consequence of a full return to schooling, it does not mean that there should be a let up on maintaining the other essential elements of the non-pharmaceutical COVID prevention measures. The compulsory wearing of mask and the sanitation regimes need to still be strictly adhered to by staff and learners in schools.

We, however, caution the Department of Basic Education (DBE) not to allow the social distancing relaxation to now rest on their laurels in urgently addressing the issue of overcrowding in schools. The Department has already missed an opportunity during the pandemic period to tackle this grave problem. If the Department was able, in a short space of time at the start of the pandemic, to provide water infrastructure (albeit water tanks in many instances) to school that did not have these facilities, they surely could have done something during the last 2 years to alleviate the overcrowding of schools. What is needed is a constructive plan from the DBE going forward and the Department can be sure that NAPTOSA will be there to constantly remind them of their obligation in this regard.

We can ill afford to return to a situation where schooling is again disrupted due to a resurgence of infections because of overcrowding in schools and the non-adherence to the COVID protocols.

The disruptions in schooling the past two years have had a serious impact on school attendance. It is therefore imperative that, as we return to a pre-pandemic schooling system, all role players in education work together to re-inculcate the culture of regular school attendance as a primary priority.

NAPTOSA fully supports catch-up programmes to make up for the loss of teaching time, but believes that not all elements of the curriculum lost during the pandemic period were necessarily calamitous. It has caused education to focus on the most fundamental elements such as reading, maths and science and this has been positive.

While supporting catch-up programmes, it needs to be balanced with the prevention of teacher burn-out. NAPTOSA believes that in many instances unrealistic expectations have been placed on teachers in regard to catch-up programmes. We will raise this matter when we meet with the Minister tomorrow to discuss the implementation modalities of a return to fulltime learning in all schools.

NAPTOSA' stance on vaccination (unapologetic pro-vaccination) is well known. We therefore encourage parents of children that fall within the cohort that qualifies to be vaccinated, to ensure that their children do so. Similarly, we call on all education staff to vaccinate. We are seeing arbitration awards coming out of the CCMA finding that employers have **not** committed an unfair labour practice in requiring employees to be vaccinated.

BASIL MANUEL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR