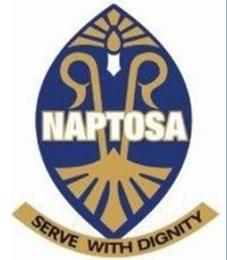




NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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DBE ANNOUNCEMENT ON RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS 2021

Confusing and non-sensical – this is NAPTOSA’s response to the Deputy Minister of Basic Education’s announcement today, 15 January 2021, on the re-opening of schools for the 2021 academic year.

As indicated in National News Flash 1 of 2021, NAPTOSA is in support of delaying the re-opening of schools to see the country through the expected peak period of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. We therefore welcome the announcement by the Deputy Minister that schools, both public and private, are to only re-open on 15 February 2021, because it is in line with the discussions we had with the DBE.

What makes no sense, however, is that the Department seems to believe that partial consultation, opens the way for them to take other, non-consulted, decisions on the same matter. While NAPTOSA and the other recognized education trade unions were consulted on the delayed re-opening of schools, we were clearly not consulted on the Department’s decision around the return to school of SMTs and teachers.

Had we been consulted, our first question would have been “What for?”. What must a SMT now do at school for 21 days prior to the re-opening of schools when this was not required for the envisaged re-opening on 27 January 2021? According to the Deputy Minister they must return to prepare for the return of teachers. These are preparations that were to have been finalized before schools closed in December 2020.

As for teachers, to return 14 days in advance of the re-opening of schools, at the very time when the peak of the infections is expected, and which led to the very decision to postpone the re-opening, is beyond comprehension.

NAPTOSA is not advancing an argument for an extended holiday for teachers, but is calling for logic to prevail in order to protect the health and safety of our members. Or are the lives of teachers less important than forcing them, en masse, to gather at schools for no sound reason?

While the Deputy Minister indicated that the delayed re-opening of schools will also apply to private schools, this was undone by the further statement that it is to apply only to private schools that follow the same calendar as public schools and that the re-opening of those that don’t, will vary

depending on the calendar they follow. The pandemic does not distinguish between private and public school teachers and learners – they are equally vulnerable.

ECD centres were not mentioned by the Deputy Minister at all, leaving those involved in these institutions in the dark as what their position is.

What we need is firm leadership to take decisions that will have universal application.

NAPTOSA will be requesting urgent engagement with the DBE to clarify all the areas of uncertainty and those that defy logic. We reject all decisions that compound the stress and fear of teachers and learners at this time.

BASIL MANUEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR