



NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS - THE READINESS BAROMETER YO-YO

All schools will be ready to re-open. Many schools are not yet ready to re-open. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) are stored in warehouses in provinces and will be available at schools when Gr 7 and 12's return to school on 1 June 2020. Schools who do not have PPEs on 1 June 2020 will not be allowed to re-open until such materials have been delivered. Parents who do not feel comfortable to send their children to school can elect not to do so. Parents who elect not to send their children to school must obtain permission to home school.

This is how the school readiness barometer has yo-yoed over the past number of weeks. And now on the eve of re-opening nobody is any the wiser.

The education trade unions and the school governing association bodies, jointly, met with the Deputy Minister of Basic Education and the Director-General of the DBE on Friday 29 May 2020 to once again discuss the readiness of schools re-opening on 1 June 2020. Whilst it was acknowledged that progress had been made with the delivery of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), the unions and school governing body associations raised their concerns, based on evidence obtained from their members on the ground, that there were still too many schools that had not received their PPEs, or had not received sufficient quantities, that would allow the safe return to school of teachers and/or learners.

The meeting agreed that the unions and school governing bodies should meet with the Minister, MECs and Heads of Department on Saturday, 30 May 2020. When we did, we reiterated our concerns and pointed out to the Minister's that her own Regulations, published on 29 May 2020, confirmed what the unions and governing body associations have been saying. In terms of the Regulations "...only those schools and offices that have complied with the minimum health, safety and social distancing measure on COVID -19, as contemplated in these Directions and the Regulations, will be allowed to open...", whilst those that have failed to comply will remain closed until all the health, safety and social distancing measures are in place.

What clearer evidence could there be that universal school readiness is nothing but a myth. In fact, a report from the Minister's own consortium corroborated the evidence that we presented to the Minister.

It was put to the Minister that to re-open schools in these circumstances would be to exacerbate the inequalities and disparities that exist in the education system. It does not take a genius to know which schools are likely to be ready to re-open and which are not.

Apart from the whole PPE issue, the provisioning of water also remains a major obstacle in achieving school readiness. Even in areas where water is accessible, the delivery of water tanks have not taken place. How much worse in the areas where water will have to be brought in?

Consensus was reached that we would again meet with the Minister on Thursday, 4 June 2020, to assess the situation and that an announcement on the re-opening of schools would be delayed pending the outcome of the meeting. What a surprise therefore to receive a media statement late on 31 May 2020 that **all learners** are now to return to school on 8 June 2020, as if the Minister is clairvoyant to know that by the time we meet with her on 4 June the school readiness process would have been completed for universal re-opening of schools on 8 June 2020. This type of action by the Minister and the Department puts a definite strain on the relationship with the unions.

The Department's statement probably has more parents worried tonight, believing that all their children have to return to school on 8 June. Hopefully, the Minister will in her media briefing tomorrow, clarify that it is still only Gr 7 and 12 learners that will return to school as the first cohort and not all learners as per the statement of the Department. For parents and learners, to be treated in this manner, is totally unacceptable.

Our position as the Teacher Unions remains: As a collective we wish to highlight our rejection of a staggered opening of schools for our children. 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.

As far as our members are concerned, we expect teachers not to return to school on Monday. The collective of teacher unions will issue a joint statement after our consultation this evening.

**BASIL MANUEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**