



NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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THE RESPONSIBILITY IS YOURS, MINISTER!!!

NAPTOSA can proudly claim that it has successfully engaged the Minister and Department of Basic Education (DBE) to ensure that the best possible health and safety measures for members and learners are in place when schools re-open.

In the absence of guidance and policy directions from the Minister and the DBE, NAPTOSA has had to step in several times to stop the re-opening of schools when there was overwhelming evidence that school readiness measures were non-existent, flawed and, in many cases, in a shambles. This was despite the Minister's announcements that schools were compliant when they clearly were not. NAPTOSA has consistently said that we will not allow the lives of our members to be placed in danger.

By calling for the uniform re-opening of school, NAPTOSA, together with other education stakeholders, has also done all in its power to ensure that no learner was disadvantaged because his/her school was unable to re-open, because the health and safety materials had not been supplied to the school. We have consistently raised the plight of the learners of these schools with the Minister and with the Department.

By formally announcing 8 June 2020 as the date on which schools will re-open, the Minister, as the highest authority in education, must realise that the responsibility for those learners who will be left behind because of the tardiness of education departments to ensure that their schools are ready to re-open, as well as the responsibility for the teachers and learners in those schools declared "fit" for re-opening, falls squarely on her shoulders. NAPTOSA will ensure that the Minister is held accountable for her decisions, especially in light of her decision to declare the date for the re-opening of schools, knowing full well that she had agreed not to make such declaration before again meeting with stakeholders.

Although we remain opposed to any unsystematic re-opening of schools, we take comfort, however, that we have been able to protect the health and safety of our members as evidenced from the Minister's Direction of 29 May 2020 that prohibits the re-opening of schools where all health, safety and social distancing measures are not in place.

The Direction stipulates as follows:

“(2) Only those schools and offices that have complied with the minimum health, safety and social distancing measures on COVID -19, as contemplated in these Directions and the Regulations, will be allowed to open as contemplated in subdirection 1;

(3) A school or office that has failed to comply with the minimum health, safety and social distancing measures on COVID -19, as contemplated in these Directions and the Regulations, will remain closed until all the health, safety and social distancing measures are in place.”

Linked to the Minister’s Direction is the letter of the Honourable President of the Republic to the nation, on 1 June 2020, in which it was clearly stated that “...no school should re-open until all the necessary precautions are in place. There needs to be transparency about the level of preparedness of each of the schools. Everyone who is a key role player, be they a parent, a school governing body member, a teacher or a government official should be able to have the correct information about the state of preparedness of each school.”

Because deliveries of Personal Protective Equipment to schools that have not been fully equipped are still, apparently ongoing, it will only become clear on Monday which schools are adversely affected. Let us, however, not be lulled into a false sense of security that most schools are ready to re-open only because the Minister said so. Every member, upon returning to school, must verify for him/herself that his/her school does, indeed, comply with the health and safety protocols. In line with the Minister’s Directive and the President’s message, members are not to enter schools if they have not been assured by the Principal that all the required health and safety material have been received and the required measures have been adhered to.

Any member who is being forced to return to a school that has not complied with all the requirements must inform the relevant NAPTOSA provincial office, in order for NAPTOSA to take up the matter with the Minister.

The re-opening of schools on Monday for Grades 7 and 12 is but a small step in a complex journey that lies ahead. The DBE produced a Standard Operating Procedures document, which, in itself, means very little unless it is made practicable for the circumstances of each and every school. For a school to wait until the next cohort of learners return to school, before giving attention to this, will be disastrous. Members of NAPTOSA are therefore urged to ensure that these matters are attended to if your school has not done so.

Although we cautiously accept the re-opening of schools as announced, there are still a number of matters that must be addressed by the Department in the coming days and weeks. We insist on, *inter alia*, the following:

- A plan, to be publicised by the Department, on how the schools that are unable to open on 8 June 2020 are going to be assisted to ensure their earliest re-opening.

- A plan to temporarily replace staff who have tested positive for COVID-19 and those who comply with the co-morbidity requirements, as per ELRC Collective Agreement 1 of 2020.
- The prioritisation of psycho-social services to give support to teachers and education support personnel that have to start work in the COVID-19 environment.
- A further refinement of the curriculum as the current version does not adequately take into account the later start of schooling and the fact that the schooling model has to accommodate the issue of social distancing.
- Ensuring that provincial education departments have plans in place to ensure ongoing COVID compliance – e.g. the timely and sufficient replenishment of PPE's.

We will be giving more detailed views on these matters in future National News Flashes, but for now we wish our members a safe re-opening of schools. Stay vigilant and keep the health and safety measures operating optimally.

BASIL MANUEL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR