



# NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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## NATIONAL YOUTH DAY MESSAGE: 2021

Education in South Africa has come a long way since the 1976 youth uprising against the education system of the apartheid government of the time.

The advent of the new democratic dispensation in 1994 saw a massive expansion of the education system in South Africa under a policy of universal access. The policy made provision for increased and improved access by marginalised, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups such as learners with HIV/AIDS, those with special education needs, pre-school children, and the poorest learners.

This laudable achievement is, however, offset by the disjuncture between education spending and the results achieved. For a country in which the largest share of government spending is allocated to education (R 387.2 billion in 2021/22) it is a serious indictment that many Gr 4 learners still cannot read for meaning or that our country performs so poorly in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS).

NAPTOSA has many times criticised the ineffective way the education budgets of the Department of Basic Education and those of provincial education departments are being utilised.

And now, to compound matters we must contend with “a scorched earth” situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Already phrases like “lost generation” are being used. Add to this the results of the recent published unemployment rate for the country which showed that the official unemployment rate among the youth (15 to 24-year-olds) is a shocking 46,3%, with that of university students a further elevated 9,3% and it is obvious that the situation for our youth looks bleak.

In this gloomy situation, the chosen theme for this year’s Youth Day celebrations, “**Youth Power; Growing South Africa Together In The Period Of Covid-19**”, might seem odd. However, in a situation like this, one can either despair or defy the odds by investing even more than ever before in the future of our youth.

Coretta Scott King once said, “The failure to invest in youth reflects a lack of compassion and a colossal failure of common sense”, while according to Diogenes “The foundation of every state is the education of its youth”.

As NAPTOSA, we have adopted a charter of professionalism through which we pledge to live up to the ideals of teaching and to engage in the holistic education of each child in our care so as to enable all learners to develop their skills, knowledge, values and attitudes in a changing environment. Our commitment to the investment in our youth is therefore beyond question. If only this same commitment would prevail throughout the whole education fraternity, we would be well on the way to “Youth Power; Growing South Africa Together”.

Despite all the negative aspects of the pandemic, it has at least placed renewed focus on the importance of education in a developing country like ours. No longer will education be taken for granted. That is why we cannot afford to let slip any of the hard-fought gains made during the pandemic, nor can we allow a total shutdown of the education system as has happened in some other developing countries.

With this in mind, we have to remind ourselves of some recent developments that have brought hope to the plight of learners of our country. The fact that the education system was able to salvage the academic year in 2020, especially for the Gr12's, was a huge achievement. The envisaged return to school of all primary school learners at the start of the third term (provided it remains safe to do so) will go a long way in stabilising the education system and if the urgent and smooth roll-out of the vaccination process for education staff could be achieved, we could see our education system back to full operation and the hopes and aspirations of our youth restored.

Now, if only we could get the economy moving and young people into sustainable jobs, we could approach next year's National Youth Day celebrations with a far greater positive frame of mind.

In a recent cartoon, NAPTOSA was depicted as one of the organisations that bully the DBE. While we reject the allegation, we do not apologise for wanting to see our education system succeed, being efficient and being internationally competitive. If our efforts to ensure the efficient and effective utilisation of resources, the health and safety of our members and learners and proper school infrastructure are seen by some as “bullying”, then so be it.

We will not allow facetious commentary to detract us from our goal of empowering our youth so that they can take their rightful place in growing South Africa.

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**PRESIDENT: NAPTOSA**