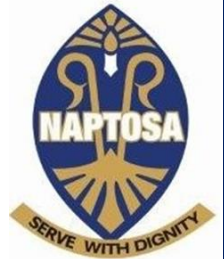


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NAPTOSA MESSAGE OF SUPPORT FOR MATRIC CLASS OF 2021

There was general acceptance last year that the matric class of 2020, the first to write the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination, having endured the full-blown effect of COVID-19 conditions, had been seriously compromised.

While the class of 2021 did not have to contend with the same disruptions (lockdowns) to their academic year, their challenges, if anything, were even greater than that of their 2020 counterparts. Although familiarity with the pandemic conditions, probably lessened the overall fear and anxiety presented by the virus, it could never erase them and as new waves of the pandemic surfaced, the anxiety levels naturally increased. It is, however, the fact that the class of 2021 first had to catch up their incomplete Grade 11 curriculum before they were able to start on their Grade 12 work, that brought about new forms of anxiety and stress, unfamiliar to any matric class that have gone before. And just to make matters worse, the municipal elections called for 1 November 2021, prompted the start of the NSC examination to be brought forward to 27 October 2021.

Amid these circumstances, NAPTOSA wishes to commend our Grade 12 learners and their teachers for all the hard work they put in to prepare for the 2021 NSC examinations. You have truly gone beyond the normal call of duty. We also express our appreciation to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) for the programmes they put in place to assist the matrics of this year.

With nearly 900 000 full- and part-time Grade 12 learners (735 677 full-time and 162 109 part-time) sitting for the 2021 NSC exam (approximately 170 000 more than 2020), the challenges facing the DBE and PEDs are decidedly greater than last year. NAPTOSA accepts the DBE's assurances that they have done their homework to prevent a repeat of the irregularities experienced last year, but only time will tell.

We welcome the approach adopted by PEDs to have learners, sitting for the examination, sign a pledge to refrain from acts of dishonesty during the writing of the examination and to call on the collaboration of parents, but this in itself will unfortunately not guarantee an incident-free examination. We therefore call on the DBE and PEDs to act swiftly and decisively should any irregularity surface. It is concerning that learners who committed acts of dishonesty during last year's examination have still not been properly and appropriately sanctioned.

At the same time, we also hope not to see the knee-jerk reaction of last year when the DBE immediately ordered a national rewrite of the leaked paper before establishing the full extent of such irregularity. The learners have enough to contend with, without having additional stress piled on them by a looming rewrite.

And now, just to potentially add to the stress levels we have the current insensitive ESKOM loadshedding schedule that will impact the start of the examination as it is to continue until Saturday, 30 October 2021. We trust that the DBE and PEDs have contingency plans in place to ensure that this untimely action by ESKOM does not disrupt the examination.

NAPTOSA welcomes the DBE's commitment to continue the strict application of the COVID protocols during the examination and the assurance that candidates who tested positive for COVID-19, or display COVID-19 symptoms, will be accommodated in isolation rooms at examination centres or in specially designated centres in major towns. Especially pleasing are the various concessions granted to LSEN candidates to ensure they will not be disadvantaged during the examination.

NAPTOSA's leadership hereby extends its best wishes to the class of 2021. May you enjoy a successful examination. Use the available time wisely to prepare well and reduce stress levels. Our best wishes also accompany all teachers and departmental officials involved in the various aspects of the examination.

BASIL MANUEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR