



# NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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## UNIONS' SURVEY ON READINESS OF SCHOOLS TO RE-OPEN

As we did last year on several occasions, NAPTOSA and the other recognized education trade unions, have, in mid-January 2021, conducted a survey among more than 7 000 Principals (a very representative sample of 32,4% of public schools nationally), to determine the readiness of schools to re-open for the 2021 academic year.

The results are of major concern, especially in view of the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) Direction on re-opening of schools that is still firmly in place, namely that only those schools that have complied with the minimum health, safety and social distancing measures on COVID-19 will be allowed to open and that those that fail to comply, will remain closed until all these measures are in place.

Overall, only 37% of the schools that participated in the survey indicated that they are ready to open for term 1 on 15 February 2021. This is a shocking revelation, because a lot of this is linked to the health and safety measures and materials required to prevent and combat the spread of COVID-19 in schools.

Particularly worrisome is the fact that 60% of schools that participated in the survey do not have a requisite supply of hand sanitizers and surface sanitizers and that 80% of them report not having a sufficient number of face masks. Even more concerning is that an extremely small percentage of those that have insufficient supplies believe that the deficiency will be addressed before learners return to school on 15 February 2021 (8% in respect of sanitizers and 9% in respect of face masks).

In discussing the survey with the DBE, NAPTOSA called on the Department to ensure that Provincial Education Departments address this matter on an urgent basis, otherwise the opening of schools could become a disastrous event with thousands of schools being prevented from opening in terms of the Department's own Directions.

As far as curriculum issues are concerned, the survey indicated that only 58% of schools nationally (i.e. of those that participated in the survey) completed most of the trimmed curriculum for most subjects in most grades in 2020. This is not surprising because the trimmed Annual Teaching Plans for 2020 failed to take into account the alternating timetable models, and consequent loss of time, when the estimated days of teaching were determined. Also, our education system has not yet worked out how to effectively support learning at home on the days/ weeks when learners are not at school. Teacher shortages due to death, illness or working from home (comorbidities) are further contributing factors.

It is clear that non-completion of the trimmed 2020 curriculum will pile huge pressure on the 2021 academic year that already has a late start. We have therefore also requested the DBE to pressurize Provincial Education Departments to put measures in place to assist schools with the curriculum “catch up”.

Schools, like the rest of society, unfortunately cannot escape the impact of mortalities due to COVID-19 and it is expected that as many as 1 in 10 school communities will be processing grief of the loss of a member of staff when staff return to school. This again emphasizes the importance of psycho-social services in schools that is regrettably insufficient at this stage. We continue our battle with the DBE to enhance this service in our education sector.

Only when schools re-open on 15 February 2021 will it be possible to determine what the impact of learner drop-out from 2020 will be. It is, however, troubling that 7% of the participants to the survey indicated that they had lost touch with more than 25% of their learners, while 14 % of the respondents expect that between 11 and 20% of learners may not return to school in 2021 because of difficulties or anxieties associated with COVID-19.

For those members who wish to have sight of the results of the National School Readiness Survey, please access the following link:

<https://www.naptosa.org.za/doc-manager/overall/2507-20210118-post-dbe-union-readiness-survey/file>

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