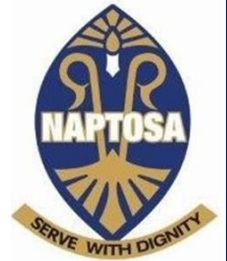


NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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The Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Bill

For almost 10 years the Bela Bill has been on a roller coaster with calls for comment and debates from a variety of interests groups. Over time, it has traversed a convoluted path, passing through countless hands, and undergoing numerous unfounded claims, especially about things like vaccinations and sexuality education, the latter which finds no expression in the bill but created unnecessary hype and succeeded in drawing attention away from some of the more important issues.

Where are we now?

NAPTOSA has over the years made various inputs into the bill, both during the public comment phase as well as the comment phase afforded to education Unions. We have seen the bill change and improve in many ways. This by no means suggests that we don't still have concerns. In the past week the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Education has gone through an exercise of clause- by- clause analysis of the bill. This has resulted in some clauses being scrapped from the bill such as, the clause allowing the sale of Alcohol on school premises and the compulsory declaration of interest by every member of the School Governing Body.

Other clauses that have raised concern, such as the Provincial Head of Department having the final say on school language policy and admissions remains. Even though the department was at pains to explain that they were 'simply' giving effect to the Constitutional court and other court judgements, we are not entirely convinced.

We do however agree that if schools followed the prescripts of the law on admissions, interference by the HOD should be eliminated. NAPTOSA is of the view that school leadership and management with their School Governing Bodies are best placed to create an admissions policy. Schools should guard against inviting interference by the unlawful and unnecessary inclusion of discriminatory clauses. **NAPTOSA cannot and will not defend these practices.**

The clause on the language policy is equally if not more divisive and the good intentions are misconstrued and misinterpreted. We must acknowledge that school communities are changing and that schools cannot 'belong' to any language group. At the same time, while we are seeking to include the marginalized languages, we must not inadvertently destroy the existing languages of preference.







While we agree that it has always been the duty of the principal and school to oversee and manage learner attendance, we are concerned about the expectations being placed on the shoulders of principals and teachers.

This is certainly not the sole preserve of the principal. The role of parents and the department of education is largely underplayed. Curbing the high dropout rate demands more than simply making it the responsibility of the principal.

We remain opposed to central procurement as there are sufficient examples of its failure as well as the inability of the department to effectively and efficiently manage this.

The most exciting part of the bill must certainly be the inclusion of Grade R into the compulsory schooling phase. NAPTOSA has long called for this inclusion. What this means exactly, must still be spelled out. What, however, is obvious is that this is an exercise that demands financial, human, and physical resources to make it a reality.

The process going forward:

-  The Department of Education will now 'clean up' the bill and resubmit it by 28 August 2023.
-  Thereafter the Portfolio Committee will consider the draft and examine any changes and new clauses.
-  The bill will then be tabled in the National Assembly for debate.
-  The provincial legislatures will then examine the bill.
-  Thereafter it will go to the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) for debate.
-  And finally, it will go to the President for signature.

This naturally assumes that all challenges will be ironed out.

NAPTOSA will continue to keep members updated.

Mr BL Manuel

Executive Director