



NAPTOSA



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF NAPTOSA

REFLECTIONS ON 2020: A TOUGH, TOUGH YEAR

What a year this has been!! – hopefully never to be repeated, although it is clear that a number of the issues will follow us into 2021.

In education, 2020 started off as per “normal” – general satisfaction about the matric results, thousands of learners not placed in schools and no end to school violence. While the Corona virus issue in China was on the radar, there was no indication that it would become a world-wide pandemic, spreading like wildfire, also reaching our shores, affecting the whole of society and our education system in ways that no-one could ever envisage.

Covid-19 brought with it loads of uncertainty, anxiety, and fears. First, it was the hard lockdown and then the issues pertaining to the re-opening of the economy and the education system. I trust that history will prove that during this extremely tough period, NAPTOSA stood firm, acting in the best interests of all its members and ensuring their health and safety, to the extent that it was within the Union’s power. We engaged the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Provincial Education Departments throughout this period, were party to establishing a set of non-negotiables as a pre-condition for the re-opening of schools and opposed re-opening attempts when there was clear evidence that the required personal protective equipment, sanitizing materials and protocols were not in place.

Sadly, the pandemic took some of our members and staff. We mourn every one of them. I wish to convey NAPTOSA’s sympathy and condolences once again to the families that have lost loved ones to Covid-19.

Our conventional way of teaching had to make way for a new order of teaching in schools and TVET colleges. Educators and lecturers had to adapt to presenting virtual classes and, when these facilities re-opened, to a system of rotational schooling/lecturing. This has placed enormous pressure on members, over and above having had to adapt to revised annual teaching plans, uncertainty about the 2020 and 2021 school calendars and assuming responsibility for health and safety protocols of learners and students. I commend the adaptability and resilience shown by our educator and lecturer members.

But, without the policy development and implementation work of our office-based members and the support of our education support personnel members, the re-opening of schools/colleges would not have been possible. I acknowledge and acclaim your contributions in this regard.

To all our members, thank you for the bravery displayed in ensuring that schooling/lecturing could resume, and the academic year saved, amidst trying circumstances.

As if the Covid-19 challenges were not bad enough, we also had to contend with an employer who showed scant respect for its employees by refusing to implement their agreed salary increases, leaving NAPTOSA and the other public service unions no option but to take legal action. The Labour Appeal Court heard the case on 2 December 2020 and at the time of writing this message we are eagerly awaiting the judgement which we believe has to be in favour of the unions, otherwise collective bargaining in the public service is under serious threat.

And to top off the year, three matric exam papers were leaked by unscrupulous adults adding additional stress and anxiety to the matriculants of 2020, exacerbated by the ill-informed decision of the Minister of Basic Education that the Mathematics Paper 2 and the Physical Science Paper 2 have to be rewritten on a national scale.

Despite the gloom, NAPTOSA can take several positives from 2020. We played a significant role in helping the education system navigate its way through the worst period of the pandemic; our media profile has never been higher; we have relaunched our campaign against School-related Gender-based Violence; and we took on the State as employer for failing to honour the wage agreement.

THE YEAR AHEAD: 2021

If 2020 taught us anything, it is that making predictions about the future could prove to be a fool's exercise. However, as we move into 2021 there are some certainties. Covid-19 is still going to be with us. The National State of Disaster is still going to be in place, having been extended by the President until 15 January 2021. If the current trend of infections continues, the State of Disaster will inevitably have to be further extended. If this situation prevails, the Directions and Standard Operating Procedures issued by the DBE for the operation of schools will remain effective, meaning that the new school year will start as the current one ended.

Members are reminded that the revised school calendar for 2021 was published in the Government Gazette of 2 October 2020 and is the only official school calendar for the year. No provincial education department or district may deviate from this calendar as was already attempted by an overzealous district official.

It is important that all schools/colleges be thoroughly cleaned before the start of the new academic year and that all protective equipment and materials be replenished to ensure that staff and learners/students continue functioning in a healthy and safe environment.

GREETINGS

On behalf of the NAPTOSA leadership I wish all our members and their families a well-deserved rest after a tough, tough year and to those who celebrate the holy period of Christmas, may it be a blessed time.

To all members, enjoy your holiday, but please continue to adhere to all the Covid-19 protocols and avoid any potential super spreading events. Remember, NAPTOSA prides itself in the measure of responsibility always displayed by members.

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PRESIDENT: NAPTOSA