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Statement on the State of Our Education System and the Urgent Call to Go Back to Basics

The recent **South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) School Readiness Monitoring Report (2025)** and the **Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS)** once again confirm what NAPTOSA has been raising for years: our education system faces deep, systemic challenges that continue to undermine quality teaching and learning – especially in the **Foundation Phase**, where the seeds of literacy and lifelong learning should be planted.

The Funda Uphumelele findings are deeply concerning – by the end of Grade 3, **only about 30% of learners** meet the home language reading benchmarks, and **15% cannot read a single word**. These figures prove that the crisis in reading begins at the foundation, not in the higher grades. NAPTOSA has consistently argued that if South Africa wants to see an improvement in reading, **we must go back to basics in the Foundation Phase**. Teachers need to be supported to focus on **reading for meaning**, not on pushing large quantities of content to meet administrative or assessment pressures.

The SAHRC's report echoes this reality from another perspective – the environment in which our teachers and learners operate is simply not conducive to quality education. The Commission found **severe overcrowding**, with some classes exceeding **80 learners per classroom**, shortages of qualified teachers, and **crumbling infrastructure** in provinces such as the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and North West. Many schools still rely on **pit latrines**, have no clean water, and lack sufficient classrooms and sanitation. These conditions not only compromise safety and dignity but make it impossible for teachers to give the individual attention that early literacy development requires.

NAPTOSA has long cautioned that the current approach prioritises **quantity over quality** – rushing through content without ensuring that learners have grasped the basics. The union has also repeatedly pointed out that **infrastructure backlogs and poor resourcing** continue to disadvantage the very children the system claims to uplift. This raises a sobering question: **Is our national goal truly to build a literate, critically thinking nation – or one that simply complies and does not question?**

We know what the problems are. They have been documented year after year. Yet we are not moving toward **realistic, sustainable solutions** that empower teachers and improve learner outcomes.

NAPTOSA welcomes the recommendations contained in the SAHRC School Readiness Report, including the call for Annual School Service Improvement Plans and interdepartmental collaboration. We are, however, realistic in noting that many of these recommendations are **not achievable in the short term** given the current resource constraints, lack of accountability, and the slow pace of implementation at district and provincial levels.

NAPTOSA therefore calls on the Department of Basic Education to:

1. **Reinvest in the Foundation Phase** by ensuring smaller class sizes, ongoing teacher development in literacy and numeracy, and the prioritisation of reading for meaning.
2. **Address overcrowding and infrastructure backlogs** as a matter of urgency.
3. **Implement a coherent, resourced plan** that allows schools to focus on mastery of core skills rather than administrative compliance.
4. **Listen to teachers** – those who live the reality of the classroom daily and understand that genuine transformation begins with creating the right conditions for teaching and learning.

As NAPTOSA, we remain steadfast in advocating for a system that values **quality, dignity, and true learning**. Our children deserve to read, to think, and to question. And our teachers deserve the tools and environments that make that possible.

Let us return to the basics – not as a slogan, but as a national imperative.

Mr BL Manuel

Executive Director

