



NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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NNF 34 of 2020

14 July 2020

NSC CONSIDERATION OF CONTINUED OPENING OF SCHOOLS - CLOSE SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 VIRUS PEAK!!!

The National Standing Committee (NSC) of NAPTOSA met today in preparation for a meeting that the union will attend with the Minister of Basic Education tomorrow, 15 July 2020.

The NSC considered a number of matters, *inter alia* the following:

- The current situation in schools where a substantial number (of schools) have still not opened as a result of the required non-pharmaceutical measures not being in place. Equally disturbing is the battle to keep those schools that have re-opened, open. Closures, due to staff members or learners having tested positive, are now a daily occurrence.
- Question marks that are being raised over the quality of PPEs supplied to some schools.
- The serious psychological effect that the exponential number of infections is having on teachers, education support personnel and learners.
- The changing science which now supports the possibility that there could be an airborne spread of the virus and an indication that the quarantine period could be shorter than initially established.
- The World Health Organisation's (WHO) advice that schools should not remain open when the expected peak of the pandemic in a country is at hand.

In National News Flash 31 of 2020 (1 July 2020) NAPTOSA cautioned the Minister and her Department on the return to school of the next cohort of learners. The Minister was implored not to be fixated on the school calendar and to read the signs of the times. She was called on to take sober decisions based on the body of evidence available at any given time. Considering the above-mentioned issues debated by the NSC, it is clear that the time to read the signs is here.

The NSC agonised over the current situation and the wisdom of keeping schools open in the face of the current projections that indicate that provinces will reach the peak of infections at different times between the end of July and late September.

Having considered all the available information, the NSC decided that NAPTOSA should call on the Minister, as unfortunate as it will be, to close schools, as per the advice of the WHO, until the peak of the pandemic has passed. This is essential if we are to protect the physical and mental health of our teachers, education support personnel, learners and parents, who, it must be emphasised, are already taking acute strain, whilst, in the President's words, we are now heading into "the storm".

NAPTOSA is not calling for the abandonment of the school year. That would be as irresponsible as keeping schools open in the period lying ahead. We are calling for the closure coupled with a plan on how to take the school year to a close. A period of closure should not be wasted. NAPTOSA wishes to offer its assistance to the Minister, and the Department of Basic Education, to draft such a plan that will be ready for implementation, once it is evident that a stage has been reached in the flattening of the Covid-19 infection curve. Specific attention should be given to the issue of assessments and the position of our matriculants, and other grades, for whom it will be essential to complete the academic year.

Will the re-closure of schools be disruptive? Yes, but NAPTOSA is not prepared to compromise the physical and mental health of our members, in particular, and whole communities, in general, under the current circumstances.

B L MANUEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR