



NAPTOSA NORTH WEST

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NEWS FLASH

TO THE NAPTOSA NORTH WEST UNION REPRESENTATIVE

Please make this communication available to ALL NAPTOSA members at your school/college/office.

Annual National Assessments (ANA) – much ado about....what?

(and what is NAPTOSA asking of its members?)

Whilst it may seem as though NAPTOSA's refusal to write the ANAs came unexpectedly, simmering tensions have existed around the writing of the ANAs for some time. Repeated requests to the Minister for the process to be reviewed have been ignored and the outcome is what we see unfolding at present.

Media reports over the past two months regarding the ANAs have conveyed a range of perspectives on the systemic assessment of grades one to nine. Various sectors have expressed divided opinions on the matter. **This communication aims to outline NAPTOSA's position.**

What were the reasons for this apparent 'turnabout' regarding the writing of the ANAs in 2015?

Let us firstly consider the PURPOSE of the ANAs.

Media reports include a range of purposes for the ANAs ranging from diagnostic purposes to a means of increased accountability. The Department of Basic Education's (DBE's) policy stipulates that the ANAs are designed to be a diagnostic assessment tool with the **main purpose of monitoring and tracking learner performance.**

NAPTOSA initially supported the writing of the ANAs believing that the diagnostic purpose of the ANAs would enable DBE to plan and implement more effective interventions both for learners and teachers. The information gleaned from these standardised tests would be used to provide relevant professional development opportunities for teachers and increased support and enrichment for learners who most needed it.

NAPTOSA therefore endorsed the writing of the ANAs as a means to enable DBE to **gain accurate and reliable DATA** on the performance of the **system in key subjects.**

What has changed?

Ongoing reports both from teachers involved in the process and from academics who have done research into the writing of the ANAs have indicated that the **focus** for the writing of the ANAs **has changed significantly.**

• NAPTOSA has several reasons **to doubt the reliability and validity** of the data coming out of the tests written during the past few years.

- DBE cannot show that it has used recognised methods such as psychometric testing to develop the test items in the ANAs. There has been a lack of transparency with regard to **how the tests are developed** and as to **how they have been moderated** and **quality assured.** (NAPTOSA members will be able to testify to the poor quality of some of the tests written in the past.)
- Not nearly enough monitors are available to ensure the uniform implementation of the writing of the ANAs countrywide. There is only one monitor for every 260 schools (according to the Annual National Assessments report, page 32). There is both anecdotal and statistical **evidence of cheating.** The question therefore has to be asked: "**How reliable and valid is the data reported from the ANAs?**" Whilst the DBE can assert that it conducts a 'verification process', this did not happen in 2012. Furthermore, a great deal of the information gleaned from this process comes from questionnaires completed by learners, teachers and principals. **We have to question the reliability of 'self report'.**

In order to ensure 'good' results, there are many reports of schools having to introduce "**ANA" Fridays** or school days have been extended in order for teachers to **'teach' the ANAs.** Learners are required to take ANA exemplars home and do these for 'homework'. There are also districts who have instructed schools to stop teaching CAPS two weeks before the writing of the ANAs and to focus entirely on "teaching ANAs". In fact, some districts announce the names of the schools with the best results in the specific ANA tests. **Valuable teaching and learning time is disrupted by the process and teachers are demoralised.** These directives again force us to ask the question: "How reliable and valid

is the data coming out of the writing of the ANAs?" **Are learners demonstrating improved Language and Mathematical knowledge and skills, or are they merely becoming better at writing ANA type tests?**

- **The ostensible 'diagnostic' purpose of the assessment has not materialised.** NAPTOSA's expectation was that schools that performed poorly would receive meaningful support and development opportunities informed and shaped by the data gathered from their test results. Instead, **the results of the ANAs have been used by provincial and district officials for punitive and accountability purposes.** Schools with poor performance records are labelled as "underperforming" or "priority" schools. Schools with adequate or satisfactory performance records are threatened with the possibility of also becoming "priority" schools if they do not maintain satisfactory levels of performance. Principals of "priority" schools have also been publicly humiliated by departmental officials. The impact on morale has been considerable.

What needs to change?

NAPTOSA does not believe that the ANAs should be scrapped. However, it cannot condone the current process.

Increasingly, teachers are being required to 'teach to the test' whilst still having to show evidence of the required pacing and curriculum coverage of the CAPS. Teachers' workloads (and stress levels) have been substantively increased through the implementation of the writing of the ANAs and to what purpose?

We do not have reliable data to inform us going forward. We do not have reliable evidence of better quality learning and teaching in our classrooms and the anticipated improved learner performance.

In short, we have very little to show for the financial investment in the ANAs over the past few years, and the unreasonable demands made on the time, effort and energy of our principals, teachers and learners.

NAPTOSA believes that –

DBE must revisit the purpose of the assessments and develop a long-term plan to implement a system that is credible and reliable and does as little harm as possible.

NAPTOSA proposes that –

the assessments be written for systemic and diagnostic evaluation purposes only and that this be done every third or fourth year. The tests must be conducted using a random sample of learners. This would reduce the cost of running the assessments which currently cost R200 million per annum, and would ensure a much more valid and reliable process.

NAPTOSA has indicated its willingness to DBE to participate in purposeful dialogue and ongoing consultation to ensure that the writing of the ANAs in the future is based on sound and educationally accountable principles of systemic assessment.

Where are we currently with the ANAs?

The stalemate between the Minister of Basic Education and unions still exists. **The Minister is insisting that the ANAs will be administered at the end of the year, while at the same time, acknowledging that the ANA, as it is currently applied, is flawed and should be reviewed by the task team that has already been established for this purpose.** NAPTOSA is demanding that ANAs only be written once the task team has completed its work and all the union's concerns, as stated above, have been addressed.

What is NAPTOSA asking of its members?

At this point in time the Union is asking its members to take a firm stand based on educational principles and NOT to administer the ANAs on 1 to 4 December 2015. It will be unproductive, not educational and senseless to be part of a process that is flawed, is under review, to write tests that have been compromised, to mark tests and analyse results if it will not increase support or enrich learners (and teachers) who most need it.

**GREGG MASONDO
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**