



NAPTOSA

National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa

2020.04.07

Report on the Teleconference with the Director General and Unions

The DG various DDG's, the COVID-19 Workstream members and unions were present.

None of the SG's were included

1. General Comments and Observations:

The DG reminded all about the provisions of the Disaster Management Act; The powers of the President and how much hinges on the success of the Lock Down(LD).

By today the 12th day of LD the data is still not decisive on the success of the LD. 5400 Fieldworkers are out doing mass testing out of the initial 10 000. This number must be upscaled to 52 000 to test the targeted 15 million people by 12 April.

This will be a vital determinant for the ending alternatively the extension of the LD period.

I raised the issue of COVID-testing in schools. The DG could not respond as this is in the domain of the department of Health. We will receive feedback.

At this stage ending LD by 20 April looks unlikely. Possibilities of partial lifting to allow for limited economic activity is being explored but that excludes the opening of schools. However, the DBE must plan for 20/21 April 2020. Modelling by various credible international institutions suggest that the curve will flatten in July/August 2020 closer to the end of our winter. In short unless many things come together and work in harmony, the future looks bleak.

2. Funding for Essentials of Covid-19

Treasury is managing all transversal procurement matters. (those impacting more than one department)

Essentials will be provided by Treasury to provinces, including hygiene packages and basic sanitation and Personal Protection Equipment. Every school irrespective of quintile will get these.

The issue of deep cleaning is now a debate. The department is unable to deep clean all schools weekly. But rather wish to provide materials for this to be done by schools.

Glib reference was made to training etc. There was no answer to schools not having support staff and on whose shoulders such a task would fall.

The poor track record of government/ DBE wrt. delivery of items was raised. Capacity and poor history dictate that there are looming problems. It was indicated that Treasury was delivering to provincial warehouses for further distribution.

Provinces needed to indicate how and by when these deliveries would happen.

Deliveries should be informed by school opening dates.

Schools would not be ordering materials. These would be provided to all. Water as an essential was raised. We were asked to report to the DG if any school did not have running water or water tanks. Reports from provinces indicate that such schools do not exist. We contested this.

3. NSNP (Feeding Scheme)

The DG clarified that NSNP Grants could not be used for purposes other than what they were intended for. This was stated at the outset of the lockdown by the minister. Because the NSNP is funded with a grant the conditions for its use, limited to in-school funding could not be changed.

Answering to what was being done for children that are now without the daily meal, the DG indicated that Social Development had been given money and with the assistance of the UN was handing out Monthly hampers to families on the SASA database. In so doing feeding the family rather than one child.

The case of the W Cape was raised, the exposure of principals and Food preparers and the lack of adherence to the presidential decree.

The DG and Dr Whittle indicated that WC has indicated that it is using additional money from provincial treasury. Discussions with the MEC and SG will be finalised tomorrow.

Use of NSNP money would be a violation of the PFMA.

Much time was spent on the Food Basket, Food Banks of the UN and the fact that none of us know about them.

4. Readiness for Reopening of Schools.

- i) Mapping and Scoping of the Curriculum: Dr Maboya and a team have done preliminary work. Hema and the NCATT team will now be involved. All NINE provinces must be doing the same thing and NOT make side arrangements. Assessments; SASAMS; e-learning programmes; etc were all referred to this committee for finalisation. The first telecon will be before Friday. Documents will be circulated before then. The limited reach of e-lessons, radio programmes and TV lessons was acknowledged. The strength of the DBE is in classrooms.

ii) 2020 School Calendar:

Not finalised. The preliminary date for reopening is 20 April for teachers and 21 April for learners. All this will change if LD is extended.

iii) Circulars for the Reopening of Schools/ Standard Operating Procedures.

The DG was asked to ensure that this is managed Nationally. KZN has already issued a circular which may conflict with national guidelines.

An undertaking to this effect was given. The national draft circular and Standard operating procedures will be forwarded to us within the week.

iv) Deconcentrating and Social Distancing in Schools and district offices.

This document will also be forwarded to us.

It is not based in reality and demonstrates a shocking ignorance about the condition in most schools.

This point steered the discussion to other modes of delivery including Platoon classes etc. Much more thinking must go into this issue. What is evident is that we have a national problem with overcrowded classrooms and schools with no easy solution.

v) Substitute Posts for Teaching and Non-teaching staff.

We were assured that all provinces have been instructed to increase the substitute pool to accommodate short term substitution. The DG was short on detail but promised a response after tomorrow's meeting with the SG's. We asked that by the time we meet with the minister we have more detail.

The roll over of substitutes whose forms were not submitted because of the sudden closure was discussed. Principals are urged to submit forms now as district officials are working.

vi) Psychosocial Support Service for Learners and Staff.

There aren't enough psychosocial counsellors. The department is setting up a call centres to assist with the service. Details and numbers will follow.

vii) Norms and Standards allocations.

These are due by 15 May 2020. The DG undertook to ask provinces cash flow permitting to release these moneys early. In addition to approach treasury to allow for salary payments from these funds.

5. Meeting with The Minister of Basic Education.

This will take place tomorrow at 12pm.