



12 May 2020

JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT ON THE CONSULTATIONS BY THE MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION WITH THE TRADE UNIONS ON THE REOPENING OF THE PRE-SCHOOLS, SCHOOLS

On the International Nurses Day we join the world in celebrating and appreciating the nurses risking their lives doing their job to take care of the sick. We urge the employers to put the safety of these workers on the front line as a priority in providing the PPEs. We stand in solidarity with our colleagues in the Nursing profession and we wish them peace and safety.

The Education Trade Unions had a 'consultation' meeting with Minister of Basic Education on the 11th May as agreed in the last meeting of the 26 April 2020.

The meeting received a one week's progress report which was noted. We have noted the report and agreed to allow the Minister 24 hours to provide a summary of issues the unions have raised.

We wish to correct the impression created by the statement attributed to the DBE's spokesperson that the unions were consulted and agreed on the plan. This is malicious and goes against the spirit of the meeting's conclusion to allow the Minister 24 hours to help us with a summary. The Unions are disturbed by this 'we are all in this together' if it means that the DBE is consulting to legitimize its top down decisions. We are all in this together must mean unity of purpose and consultations in the true sense of the word and not for grandstanding.

We noted the following from the summary presentation by the DBE on 12 May 2020:

Readiness

The report presented was said to be a one week's work and had only two provinces ready to receive the School Management Teams by the 13th and not earlier announced by the Minister. This relates to the cleaning and disinfecting the schools and the delivery of the PPEs in compliance with the OHS and COVID19 regulations. The Unions noted the report and emphatically told the minister that even the two provinces claiming to be ready were not ready if they are going to use the SMTs members as screeners. The meeting agreed to use the whole of this week(11-15 May 2020) to allow the provinces to comply with the non-

negotiables. To avoid confusion we agreed that the schools must be having the essentials such as the PPEs, sanitizers and education support personnel to help the SMTs to prepare to receive the teachers. The date of the 18th was then set as the date for the SMTs to report for duty taking into account all the safety precautions in compliance with the OHS and the COVID19 regulations. That the principals may be requested during this week to receive the essentials and report on progress in relation to the cleaning and disinfecting of the schools.

On the facilities:

The report painted an unbelievable picture when only two provinces were ready despite the insistence of the department that workers must report for duty on the 11th. The provinces themselves reported that they were ready and needed time to fix the damaged schools. The provision of emergency water and ablution was way behind schedule and therefore not in compliance with the COVID19 regulations. The reason advanced was that it was one week's work.

The positive issue on infrastructure was that during the first phase of Grade 7 and 12 there will be enough classrooms to observe and comply with social distancing and the matter would remain on the agenda to look at other models including rotational attendance by learners when more grades are phased in.

The critical matter was that there will be no sharing of the desk by the learners.

On HR issues:

The report was not clear on how the SMTs will access the newly appointed education support personnel in those schools that had no such staff for the past 26 years. The education support personnel are critical for the frequent cleaning of the schools and the surfaces in the schools.

The DBE committed to address all issues about comorbidities in the summary we were promised. That would have included how substitute teachers would be appointed in the place of those who might be working from home as a result of severe pre-existing conditions. The summary would have provided guidelines to how additional teachers would be appointed to address the reduction of the class sizes in compliance with the directive of the department of Employment and Labour of social distancing for both the workers and the learners. No information was received from the Department on these issues.

As far as on the workers who travel between two provinces and within the districts concerned, the DBE reported that the principals will be having the authority to provide permits for such employees. The appointment of the screeners was left to the Department of Health. The unions welcomed the latter because the changing of SMTs roles to be

screeners when they have no expertise in health issues was undermining the fight against the virus.

The meeting noted the report which in brief was painting a gloomy picture, but the reasons were again advanced that it was just one week's work. The rush to announce dates before assessing the practical situation is damaging to the reputation of the education system. It's eroding public confidence, and this has to stop. The meeting agreed to have a weekly meeting to receive reports and monitor progress. The next meeting is on the 18th May 2020 for the two week's report. The only date agreed upon was the 18th for the SMTs to fully report for duty and any other tentative date would be considered, based on the readiness check list.

We wish to state that for the Minister to address the nation before addressing all the areas that are still not compliant, will further erode the confidence in the public education system.

The unions stressed the need for a single national calendar and rejected the idea of a phased approach to provinces and schools reopening.

We placed on record our concern at the increasing infection rate in the country and the impact this could have on the schools returning.

The manner in which the department is conducting itself on the consultations is causing trust deficit with the unions and this must be addressed. The DBE desist from misleading the public about unions having agreed on everything. We all want to see a smooth reopening of the schools.

Issued by the following unions:

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