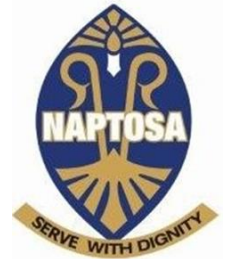


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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

“LET’S BE COVID-19 HEALTH ACTIVISTS”

The COVID-19 has, like all crisis situations, brought out the best and tragically the worst in people. On the one hand we have banded together with single purpose to fight an enemy we did not know or understand. On the other, some have callously acted in ways that are detrimental to all of us.

I wish to acknowledge our thousands of members who are the education frontline workers - teachers, and Education Support Personnel (ESP) - who get up every morning, sometimes filled with anxiety and dread, but still dutifully show up. They are faced with inadequate support from authorities, substandard protective gear, situations that rob them of their dignity, but still they are there. Thank you for caring.

Our principals and managers too, have faced a barrage of unclear and often misguided instructions and regulations, frequently shouldering the blame that should be at the door of districts and provincial offices who, themselves, sometimes fail to heed those very instructions and regulations. Thank you for standing firm, supporting our teachers and ESP workers and standing up to officials who have never walked in your shoes.

A special shout-out goes to those district officials who always stand on the side of what is right and continue to be the pillars of support our schools need.

We are all painfully aware that the pandemic situation in South Africa is worsening daily as was predicted by scientists. When we will reach the pinnacle of infections remains uncertain.

Whilst NAPTOSA is desperately concerned, we believe that this is the time for us to show the country our value, commitment and courage as a union by taking up the mantle of health activists and pushing through this tough time.

Let us not be the employees who conceal their COVID-19 status. Those teachers who know they are infected and, having interacted with colleagues and learners, merely disappear from school without so much as a word, not caring who they might have infected. No, let us be the ones who declare to our school/principal/district when we display the symptoms, have gone for testing and especially when we have tested positive for the virus.

It is high time that people stop caring only about their own health and safety, but when it comes to others they act recklessly. Fearing stigmatization is also a feeble reason to keep quiet about being infected. If ever we needed to display the spirit of Ubuntu, it is now. Remember, silence about one’s COVID-19 status could become a killer to someone else.

Principals in particular, carry the added weight and responsibility for teachers, ESP workers and learners. Trying to protect the image of a school and therefore not making known when a staff member or learner has tested positive for the virus, borders on illegal behaviour. Even worse, is when principals are instructed by departmental officials to maintain silence about the situations at their schools. This, while many of these officials work from the safety of their homes, or when they do work from the office, are the first to close the office when someone tests positive.

Do we really want to be participants in a potential “genocide”?

We urge principals to continue standing their ground against departmental officials who attempt to bully them into painting a picture of “all is well” so as to underplay the impact of positive cases on schools. Principals who are subjected to this type of intimidation should immediately approach the union for guidance and assistance.

NAPTOSA has given its qualified support to the re-opening of schools because we believe the science that says it is safer for children to be at school than roaming the streets. We definitely did not lend our support to recklessness and will therefore not hesitate to call for the closure of schools where a province fails to manage and/or provide the required basics. If the Minister’s Directions prescribe two masks per learner, we will not accept only one mask being issued. Relaxation of the daily cleaning/ sanitization regime will not be condoned, nor failure to replenish essential materials and products.

If Education Departments believe that people who feel unsafe in their working environments can function properly, they are sadly mistaken. We can therefore never allow these Departments to evade their responsibility of providing and maintaining safe working and learning environments. NAPTOSA will not tire in its efforts to keep them accountable.

NAPTOSA will continue working for the wellbeing of our members in our engagements with the DBE and Provincial Education Departments. We call on members not only to look after their own health and safety, but to also do everything in their power to care for the health and safety of colleagues and learners.

N F NTANTALA
PRESIDENT: NAPTOSA

B L MANUEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR