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Dear member

THE READINESS OF SCHOOLS TO RE-OPEN

Delivery of Personal Protective Measures [PPEs]

Teachers and support personnel in the Eastern Cape are expected to return to school once all PPEs have been delivered, according to the ECDOE Instruction note 18 of 2020.

A number of service providers have been appointed and one of their tasks is to deliver the PPEs to the school. NAPTOSA has been informed that district officials and some service providers are instructing principals to collect the PPEs at district offices or from the warehouse of the service provider. Under no circumstances must our members go and collect the PPEs from the district office or the warehouses. Feedback from our provincial meeting held on Friday 29 May at 16h00 is that many schools have not achieved the required readiness to receive learners. Most observations from our 12 branches highlight the shortage or inadequacy of water and sanitation as well as personal protective equipment. Some even reported that the necessary training was still outstanding. Other observations made are that the levels of readiness for many rural schools are significantly low.

The Occupational Health and Safety Measures in Workplaces Covid-19 (C19 OHS), 2020 sub-regulation 29(2) stipulates that paper towels be provided to dry hands as the use of fabric towels is prohibited. Members are reminded to act with care and not to deviate from the Measures where prohibition is clearly stated. Paper towels is not on the list of equipment provided by the ECDOE, which means either the school or the educator must supply their own paper towels. We cannot allow our members to use their personal finances to ensure the ECDOE meet the requirements of the Covid-19 OHS regulations.

Provisioning of Personal Protective measures [PPEs]

Both Occupational Health and Safety Measures in Workplaces Covid-19 (C19 OHS), 2020 and ECDoE Coronavirus Instruction 13 of 2020 gives the responsibility to provide PPEs to the employer. Any official of the department of education who issues an instruction to school principals to use school funds, be it for a good cause, to buy PPEs for employees of the department is therefore contravening the Occupational Health and Safety Act [OHS] regulations, DPSA Circular 18 of 2020, ECDoE instructions and SASA of 84 of 1996. In terms of the South African Schools Act -section 16 A (1) (a) The principal of a public school represents the Head of Department in the governing body when acting in an official capacity as contemplated in sections 23 (1) (b) and 24 (1) (j). Any instruction to utilise schools funds to procure personal protective equipment must be in writing from the Superintendent –General. If the SGB decides to procure the PPEs, such decision must be

approved by the SGB and the relevant adjustments made to the school budget. The adjusted budget must be approved by the parents of the school.

Cleaning of schools

In line with the compulsory COVID-19 OHS compliance measures and DPSA Circular 18 of 2020, the following health safety practices must always be adhered to:

- The employer must undertake a thorough cleaning of the workplace to ensure it is clean and hygienic. This includes, the disinfecting of all work surfaces and equipment before work begins and cleaning of all toilet, common areas, door handles and shared electronic equipment.

To date this has not been done and the ECDOE as an employer failed to adhere to the compulsory COVID – 19 OHS instructions. Schools have been identified as high – risk areas in terms of the ease of transmission due to the close contact of large numbers of people (See DBE Standard Operation Procedure p.4).As a union, we cannot allow our members being exposed to any health hazard due to the employer shifting the cleaning of schools to support staff that have not yet been appointed.

Additional staff to be employed is required to obtain a police (security) clearance certificate. It takes about 4-6 weeks to obtain. The ECDoE has not indicated an alternative to the requisite police clearance certificate.

One of the requirements in terms of the DBE’s SOP are regular handwashing and cleaning of surfaces, rinsing of food before cooking and fruit before being served to learners. The ECDOE failed to supply NAPTOSA with a lists of schools where water tanks and running water were installed and repairs done to schools vandalised during the lockdown period. Failure by the ECDOE to address these challenges, further exposes our members and learners to an unsafe working and teaching environment.

To date no screeners and testers have been appointed in the province. This is not a function to be fulfilled by education personnel.

DPSA circular 18 of 2020 states that the ECDOE should consider the higher risk COVID -19 poses to vulnerable employees, including those over the age of 60 , those that present with comorbidities and staff who are pregnant.. The comorbidity issues have also not been batted down properly. The DBE rushed to the ELRC this week in an attempt to hammer out an agreement on a policy in this regard. Discussions are still ongoing. This leaves a substantial group of teachers anxious and uncertain, not knowing whether they are expected to return to school or not and principals in the dark as they cannot finalize their timetabling.

The amended curriculum has, yet, not been provided to schools. Teacher’s injustices of the past we all know which schools cannot be expected to start teaching when they have not been orientated on the new curriculum. They could be wasting valuable time teaching in terms of the “old” curriculum, whilst they are expected to be concentrating on other aspects of the curriculum. No teacher should be expected to work in the “dark” and no learner should be taught inappropriate content.

LEARNERS

As per the guidelines each learner must be provided with two cloth masks, and the school supplied with handwashing soap and alcohol – based hand sanitisers for the classrooms. These have not been delivered to schools and therefore schools would be unprepared to receive learners on the 1st of June 2020.

The Eastern Cape Education MEC has acknowledged that only some schools may be in a position to reopen on Monday, while others will likely reopen later in the week. This would further contribute to disparities between schools and would be irresponsible. What is required is that all schools in the Province should move towards reopening at the same time to give effect to the preamble of the South African Schools Act that contemplates a unitary system of school education for the entire country.

NAPTOSA therefore calls on ALL members in the Eastern Cape to remain at home until all safety and health matters have been attended to and the non – negotiables have been delivered. The Provincial Executive Committee also supports the call by both the teachers unions and school governing body associations on all schools, even those that might be ready to re-open, having received all the necessary materials for teachers and learners, not to re-open until the non-negotiables have been delivered to all schools and to inform their learners accordingly.

NAPTOSA will not tire in its efforts to ensure that the return of our members and learners in the Eastern Cape, takes place under safe circumstances.

LP Mbinda

Provincial Chief Executive Officer