

03 JULY 2020

PEU MEDIA STATEMENT ON STATE OF READINESS BY PROVINCES TO RECEIVE ADDITIONAL GRADES IN SECOND PHASE OF SCHOOLS RE-OPENING, SCHEDULED FOR 06 JULY 2020

The Professional Educators' Union (PEU) has just consolidated reports from its provincial structures across the country, to assess the state of readiness by various Provincial Education Departments, as they prepare to receive the second cohorts of learners on 06 July 2020.

We must be upfront in stating that our misgivings in the ability of Provinces to comply with the delivery of PPEs to schools within some few days, drawing lessons from incidents during reopening in June, for schools for Grades 7 and 12, has unfortunately become a living reality, as schools in the EC, KZN, LP, MP, NW and NC have not received additional masks, ablution facilities and sanitizers, to cater for the second cohorts of learners, expected to be in their schools on 06 July 2020. This further corroborates and vindicates our joint survey results, sampled from school principals on 29 June 2020, that majority of provinces are not ready to receive the learners.

We therefore call upon all Provincial Education Departments that have failed to live up to their promise of supplying the much needed PPEs to schools, to make prompt announcements to parents, so that they do not send their learners to schools on Monday, only to get messages to come and collect them within some few minutes, as there will be no schooling in all schools that shall be found to be non-complying with the safety containment measures, as directed by the Occupational Health Safety Act and the COVID-19 Regulations.

As we welcome and appreciate the Council of Education Ministers (CEM) 's move to significantly reduce number of grades in the second phasing-in of school reopening, like many South Africans,

PEU is equally baffled by the inclusion of grade R in the group. These are innocent souls who do not even comprehend what is currently happening in the country. They are naturally social beings, who believe in playing and sharing everything that you might think of, including face masks and to ask them about social distancing will just be asking too much from them. These are the most vulnerable group at any given school, who, even under normal conditions, require extra-care from teachers and further need a special session to make announcements that would ordinarily be made to other learners at the assembly. These are the group of learners who emulate their brothers and sisters, and it will be difficult if not impossible for them to attend schooling when their siblings are at home. Furthermore, their body stature make them susceptible to cold and influenza at this period of the year, which is detrimental to their health .We therefore call-upon the Minister, to carefully reconsider the decision and replace these learners with either grade 1 or 2. We thank the KZN Province for sharing our thinking, for having excluded grade R learners from reopening and urge other provinces to adopt the same stand.

As these cohorts of learners are reopening under the above-painted scenario, PEU further notes with concern that DBE and Provincial Education Departments are reneging from their previous lofty promises below, which they vigorously canvassed to have schools to reopen:

- i) That mobile classes will be supplied to all schools with shortage of infra-structure to accommodate extra-classes.
- ii) That additional teachers will be hired, for schools to cope with extra-classes created by further sub-divisions of existing ones, to comply with physical distancing.
- iii) That schools will be closed, in a situation where the country experiences exponential cases of infections, which is currently the case.
- iv) That teachers and learners will be provided with psycho-social services as soon as signs of trauma and anxiety creep in.

The deafening silence by Department of Health (DOH), which is the custodian of medical advices for the country under the COVID-19 environment is mind- boggling and defies the existing protocols, as some schools continue to operate amid flaring infections of COVID-19 , wherein some provinces are already approaching their pick period earlier than expected. DOH 's inertia in expediting closure of schools when positive cases are reported, defies their fundamental mandate of leading in flattening the infection curve, as more and more people become infected in the process. We therefore call upon DOH to be responsive and unequivocal in providing clear protocols to schools on what to do when positive cases of COVID-19 are reported. DOH should further weigh-in and advise the country on the safety of teachers and learners from the pandemic when schools are continuing to operate under spiking infections.

The Professional Educators' Union wishes to point out that, as we grapple to navigate our way out in ensuring that the academic year is safe, there is no meaningful learning and teaching in many of our schools, due to the following, which require DBE's immediate attention:

- i) That most teachers and learners are severely traumatized as more positive cases of COVID-19 at their schools are reported and schools becoming closed.
- ii) That as the above happens, no psycho-social services are provided to calm their trauma and anxiety.
- iii) That in many of our schools' teachers with comorbidities are not replaced or allocated alternative duties to work remotely as they are currently not at school.
- iv) That the above make teachers to be over-burdened and severely stretched to the limit as they find it difficult to cope with more work.
- v) That many schools experience regular interruptions as feeding schemes are not functioning.

As we conclude, PEU shares the flexibility of DBE in continually assessing the situation as the country is at pains to flatten the infection curve and further urges all teachers with underlying conditions to work from home, after they shall have satisfied the

dictates of Collective Agreement NO 1 of 2020 and never engage in any makeshift arrangements to continue with their normal work as if nothing is happening, in the name of appearing patriotic at the expense of their lives. We further urge our school principals to report with fail and with no fear of any apparent or real intimidation, all positive cases without any delay and desist from concealing such critical information as that amounts to gross dereliction of duty and treasonous, as it endangers the lives of innocent teachers and learners.

We urge all teachers and learners, to continue with their adopted extra-meticulous and vigilance attitude all the time, as currently the battle against the pandemic can only be won at the non-pharmaceutical level.

-END OF STATEMENT-

ISSUED BY GENERAL SECRETARY. Cell No: 079 515 1165