

MEC of Education, Mac Jack

Press Briefing – Re-Opening of Schools

Thursday, 28 May 2020

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HOD of the Department, Mr GT Pharasi

Senior Management present,

Members of the Media

All listeners tuned in on Community Radio Stations.

We are gathered here today, under very unpredictable conditions, when the world and our country and the entire basic education sector are confronted by a global pandemic. President Cyril Ramaphosa has declared this global pandemic faced by the world, called COVID-19 a National State of Disaster in South Africa on the 15th of March 2020. Since the nationwide lockdown, the basic education sector has lost 42 schooling days (14 days short of a full school term).

In the past few weeks, there has been a lot of criticism, an increase in anxiety and confusion in relation to the status of schooling, and questions on when learners will be allowed to go back to school. We have therefore deemed it necessary and important to convene this media briefing to inform the public on the continuous work of the Department in relation to the announcement

made by Minister Angie Motshekga on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2020 on the reopening of schools.

The National Coronavirus Command Council has approved the reopening of schools under the Alert Level 3. This will happen when all conditions in terms of safety and hygiene had been met. President Cyril Ramaphosa said: “We will be resuming classes for grades 7 and 12 learners from 1 June.

Strict infection control measures and, where necessary, additional water and sanitation infrastructure are being put in place to enable social distancing, regular hand washing and learner safety”.

## **Overview of Province**

### **Number of Schools per District**

- Frances Baard- 130 schools
- John Toalo Gaetsewe -173 schools
- Namakwa - 74 schools
- Pixley Ka Seme - 87 schools
- ZF Mgcawu - 98 schools

In total, the Northern Cape has 562 schools, which constitutes our public ordinary, independent and special schools.

### **Educator and Learner numbers**

- We have registered 306 267 learners for the 2020 school academic year.

- The Province has a total of 10 047 educators.

## **Provincial and District Offices**

The Department has developed a management plan in relation to the COVID-19 National Regulations to ensure all the systems and measures are in place:

- One third of the Office-based staff has returned to work from the 11th May 2020.
- The Department of Health provided training to Senior Management of the Department, who then trained members of staff who are responsible for screening on a daily basis.
- All our offices, including District offices have been disinfected and cleaned, and are operational.
- We have issued all office based staff with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- All offices have been re-organised to allow for 1.5 metre social distancing.
- We are busy conducting an audit for staff with co-morbidities and those that are 60 years and older. The DPSA Circular 18 of 2020 indicates that, in deciding an employee's appropriateness to work remotely, the Head of Department should consider the higher risk COVID-19 poses to vulnerable employees, including those over age 60 and those with co-morbidities.

## Re-Opening of Schools

- A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) manual for schools has been developed for offices and schools to provide guidance on the prevention of the spread of COVID-19.
- School Principals and School Management Teams will return to work on Monday, 1 June 2020, as opposed to the original date of the 28th of May 2020. The Principals and SMT's must receive PPE's and prepare the schools for receiving the Educators, Grade 7's and Grade 12's.
- The Educators will return to work on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2020.
- On Monday, 8 June 2020, we are expecting 12 606 Grade 12's and 24 995 Grade 7 learners to return to 562 public ordinary schools, independent schools and special schools.
- It is important to note, that all Educators must return to work when schools reopen.
- The National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) will commence on the 1st day of schooling and food handlers will receive the training.
- We are working with the Department of Health to ensure that School Management Teams and Educators will be orientated and trained on COVID-19.

- In collaboration with the Department of Social Development, 21 qualified Social Worker graduates will assist with psycho-social support in schools.
- As part of our contingency plans, the Department has made provision to cater for substitute educators for a minimum of 3 months.
- We have compiled a database of Unemployed Educators for substitute Educators. To date we received a total of 720 applicants.

### **Hygiene Packs for Schools**

- Items for the basic hygiene packs includes liquid soap, hand sanitizers, surgical gloves, protective face shield, cloth masks, plastic aprons, disinfectant, thermometers and biohazard bags.
- By the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 439 schools received their basic hygiene packs.
- We are supplying face shields to all educators, ECD Practitioners, food handlers and deaf learners in Special Schools.
- The remaining items of the basic hygiene packs will be sent to all schools between 28-30 May 2020.
- Our Partnership with Bidvest has assisted in addressing the shortage of items through the donation of cleaning PPE's.
- We expect the delivery of PPE to be at 90% by the end of business today.

## **Learner Transport**

- 1 967 Grade 12's and 1 562 Grade 7's are dependent on Learner Transport.
- To ensure that health and safety of learners making use of Learner Transport, the Department sanitizers to operators to disinfect their vehicles on a daily basis before transporting learners.
- A total of 349 vehicles transporting Grade 7 and Grade 12 learners will benefit from this programme.

## **Progress on the Appointment of Screeners**

- We have determined a need to appoint 1 976 screeners at schools, based on the learner enrolment per school.
- The screeners were appointed as follow:  
Frances Baard: 572  
John Toalo Gaetsewe: 532  
ZF Mgcawu: 347  
Pixley Ka Seme: 322  
Namakwa: 203
- The Department has thus far finalised the appointment 1 478 out of school youth to assist with the daily screening of educators and learners;

## **Cleaning of schools**

- The disinfection process has been concluded and schools will be cleaned and prepared for occupation.

- A total number of 645 critical cleaner posts have been identified for appointment in schools.  
Frances Baard: 167  
John Toalo Gaetsewe: 234  
ZF Mgcawu: 122  
Pixley Ka Seme: 80  
Namakwa: 42
- To date, we have recruited 543 cleaners for a period of 6 months.
- The appointment of the outstanding 102 cleaners will be finalised during the course of this week.

### **Disinfecting of Offices and Schools**

- We have partnered with the Department of Roads and Public Works to provide the disinfection services to Offices and Schools.
- All Districts have been 100% completed, except for 4 schools in the Namakwa District.

### **Water and Sanitation**

- 99 schools have been vandalised or broken into during the COVID-19 Lockdown period thus far. It pains me that our communities resort to this type of actions to institutions where we prepare our children for success. Our school communities should be the first line of defence and must take ownership of our learning institutions.

The Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) and the Love your School Campaign were established to strengthen parental and community involvement in our schools. We condemn these barbaric acts of vandalism and theft at our schools in the strongest terms and call on law enforcement agencies to bring these perpetrators to book.

- We have commenced with the maintenance and repairs to these schools and it is progressing very well.
- We have no water supply at 4 schools (Van Der Waltspoor PS, Swartskopdam VKK PS, Cornelius Jansen PS and Taudiarora PS) and we are providing water tanks.
- In addition to this, we are also supplying 39 schools with additional water points and water tanks to provide additional storage facilities at schools.
- In total, we have 103 water and sanitation as well as 91 maintenance and repair projects underway at schools.

### **Phasing in of Special Schools**

- 3 Special Schools will be opening during the First Phase.
- Kleinzee Special School for 25 Grade 7 learners, Elizabeth Conradie Special School for 23 Grade 7 learners and Retlameleng Special School for 27 Grade 7 learners.



- We have identified 1849 learners with co-morbidities or pre medical condition.
- Parents of learners with co-morbidities have been advised to keep their children at home.
- We are finalising our discussions on the support that will be provided to these learners.
- We further appeal to parents to inform your school of any underlying medical condition your child might have so that the necessary support can be provided in this regard.

### **Progress on phased in approach of re-opening**

- A recovery plan has been developed for both GET (Gr 1-9) and FET (Gr 10-12) as per the phased in approach.
- The Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) which is informed by the Re-organised and trimmed Curriculum is currently being distributed to schools.
- The mediation of these ATP's will commence and schools will be informed accordingly.
- Circulars will be issued to schools to outline the extension of teaching time as well as how COVID-19 must be incorporated across the Curriculum.
- Curriculum Recovery Strategies will include:
  - a) Extension of teaching and learning time;
  - b) Curriculum interventions;
  - c) Review of assessment and examination requirements

- Additional activities planned for on-site support for educators and learners include:
  - a) Extra classes;
  - b) Spring Camps;
  - c) Weekend Lock-in sessions;
  - d) E-learning solutions;
  - e) Provision of learning and support material and;
  - f) Communities of Practice working sessions.

## **Examination and Assessment**

- We have developed a revised plan to accommodate the merging of the May/June and October/November external examination.
- The enrolment number for this year's final examination stands at 23 888 candidates.
- The revised timetables will be issued to all stakeholders and candidates.

## **Home Education**

- Parents who want to take the route of Home Education must register their child by applying to the Head of the Department.
- Parents may apply only for their **own children** to be home educated, and not parents or people who intend to "home school" other parents children at his or her home, as this is the process for independent schools with different policy directives.

- The home education you can offer your child must be within the scope of the following compulsory phases of education:
  - a) Foundation Phase (Grades 1-3);
  - b) Intermediate Phase (Grade 4-6); and
  - c) Senior Phase (Grade 7-9).

The Northern Cape Department of Education created the Corona Virus Downloadable Application. This is to provide users a resource for accessing general information on health and safety, It will spell out roles and responsibilities of various role-players and will assist locating and navigating to Web-based resources that support educational endeavours.

These resources may include illustrations of concepts including animations, communication tools, and other electronic resources employed in training as well as for teaching and learning.

The Application serves as a public gateway to information which the Department deems current, relevant and informative and is updated regularly.

As I conclude, we are busy conducting monitoring visits to all our District to assess the readiness of our schools to reopen.

Yesterday, I was accompanied by Worker and Teacher Unions as well as Members of the Media to 7 schools in the Frances Baard District. Last week I visited the John Toalo Gaetsewe District.

Over the next two days I will be visiting the ZF Mgcawu and Namakwa District. I will conclude my Monitoring visits next week with the Pixley Ka Seme District.

We appeal to the public at large to remain calm, exercise extreme caution, remain vigilant and practice good hygiene and safety, whilst at home.

We further encourage parents to ensure that those learners who will remain at home, use this time optimally to do school related work.

We depend on our parents to fulfil their responsibility and assist learners with schoolwork whilst at home. After all our homes are the first institutions of learning.

We will update the public on a regular basis on the progress made to establish a conducive environment for teaching and learning during this difficult time.

We have scheduled meetings with our stakeholders, teacher unions and partners in education to appraise them of our plan and provide them with updates on our progress. Education is a societal matter, and therefore collectively we must plan together to beat the COVID-19 pandemic.

I thank you!