MEDIA RELEASE **COVID-19: PSA concerned about learners and educators testing positive**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), which represents thousands of educators and administrative staff at schools nationwide, is extremely concerned about recent reports showing that more than 1 000 learners in Gauteng have tested positive for Covid-19 during the past week.

More concerning to the PSA is the fact that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) plans to return all primary school learners to daily attendance from 26 July 2021 just after the winter holiday break. It is well documented that schools have a tremendous problem with overcrowding and if all learners return to daily attendance, it can safely be assumed that the infection rate will increase even further amongst learners and educators. This will have a catastrophic ripple impact on communities and the risk of the country being placed on a higher lock-down level.

The PSA believes that the current COVID-19 infection rate amongst learners and educators should be a warning to the DBE that the third wave is currently being fuelled by schools that act as super-spreader institutions. The PSA values the importance of education and understands the need for learners to attend classes more regularly. The health and safety of educators, support staff, learners and their families are, however, of paramount importance. South Africa already experienced a shortage of quality educators before the pandemic with thousands of educators passing away. Failure by the DBE to acknowledge the danger will result in a drastic, negative impact on the quality of the education in South Africa in coming years.

The PSA calls on the DBE to ensure that all educators, regardless of age or medial background, have access to vaccines without delay to curb the impact of the third wave of infections on the schooling system. The PSA further advised the DBE to proactively reconsider the current proposal for primary schools return to daily schooling from 26 July 2021 in view of current infection rates.

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