

**MEDIA RELEASE**                      **COVID-19: PSA concerned about surge of infections amongst learners and educators**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), which represents thousands of educators and administrative staff at schools nationwide, is extremely concerned about the surge in COVID-19 infections at schools amongst learners and educators.

The PSA believes this can be directly attributed to the fact that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has deviated from the norm of 1.5 to 2 m of social distance to only 0.5 m social distance in schools. This was done to accommodate all primary learners at schools at the same time. Without reducing the social distance requirements to 0.5 m, most primary schools will not be able accommodate all learners at school.

The current spike in infections amongst learners and educators is testimony that the DBE's decision to return all primary learners full time was wrong. The PSA calls on the Minister of Basic Education to act swiftly and reverse the decision to prevent further infections. The PSA values quality education but not at the expense of lives. Recent media reports described the anguish of a mother who lost her 12-year-old daughter after being infected at school. The Minister must realise that learners are not immune to new variants of the virus and people without co-morbidities are also falling victim. Everyone is at risk, making the Minister's decision to reduce the social distance requirement even more ludicrous.

The PSA is aware that the DBE is considering cancelling the October 2021 school break. This will not benefit learners and educators who are all in real need of a recess. Exhausted educators and learners will not support the goal of quality teaching and learning and may even fuel infections as fatigue impacts on immunity. Many parents have already invested money towards holiday arrangements to contribute to families' emotional wellbeing. In addition, a cancellation of the school break will negatively impact on the distressed tourism sector. Employees in this sector depend on visitors for an income to support their families and fund their children's education.

The PSA therefore calls on the Minister not to cancel the October 2021 school break. Consideration should rather be given to adjust the school year, which may have to be extended into the next calendar year.

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