MEDIA RELEASE **COVID-19: PSA hopeful that Department of Basic Education will be ready for 2021-school year**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), which represents thousands of Educators and Administrative staff in schools nationwide, is optimistic that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) will be ready by 15 February 2021 when the school year is set to commence.

The PSA trusts that the additional time afforded to the DBE and schools will be used wisely to ensure that schools can be opened safely for educators, Administrative and support staff, learners, and parents without repeating the mistakes made in 2020.

The PSA is, however, still concerned about the risk these employees and learners are exposed to by utilising public transport and essentially the distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE). Learners and educators were issued with masks during the 2020-academic. These masks are now more than six months old and must be replaced. The Department will also receive around two million Grade 1 and 8 learners as well as newly appointed educators who need to be issued with masks to ensure compliance with COVID-19 regulations. In addition, sanitisers meeting the required alcohol content also need to be provided to schools.

The Education sector was not spared from the COVID-19 pandemic and has lost many educators who will be difficult to replace to ensure that learners receive quality education. The PSA is remains extremely concerned about educators with comorbidities who were required to work from home in terms of ELRC Collective Agreement 1/2020 during lockdown level 3 in 2020. The PSA views this agreement as still valid and in compliance, the Department needs to continue allowing vulnerable educators to work remotely.

During the 2020-academic year, educators had to put in tremendous efforts to ensure a successful academic year. This burden was compounded by COVID-19 infections amongst educators. These sacrifices unfolded against the backdrop educators and other public servants not receiving salary increases that were due in April 2020. The PSA again implores Government to be honourable and pay all public servants the salary increases that are due to them.

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