

MEDIA RELEASE **PSA warns Eastern Cape School Principal on violation of learners' rights**

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EMBARGO None

ENQUIRIES communication@psa.co.za

The Public Servants Association (PSA) is shocked by allegations that the Principal of Xolilizwe Senior Secondary School in the Eastern Cape directed learners to submit pregnancy and drug results when reporting back to school in January 2022.

Whilst teenage pregnancy and substance abuse are at unacceptable levels in the Eastern Cape (i.e., 26% of teenage pregnancies in the country), the decision is extreme. Treating learners as suspects and forcing them to take such tests without any concrete evidence is not only embarrassing, but also amounts to a waste of government resources. The PSA is further concerned about the consequences for learners who may test positive.

South Africa is experiencing a huge problem with high-school dropouts and this approach may cause more learners not to return to school with the unintended consequence of condemning them to poverty. According to the Principal, the School is providing efficient psychosocial services and implemented a demerit system for learners found to have used drugs, making compulsory testing illogical. Furthermore, the Principal has acknowledged that drug usage is not a major problem at the School and there is thus no need to subject all learners to drug tests.

The rationale for these tests may be to detect problems early to enable timeous intervention, however, rampant testing is tantamount to intimidation. The School Governing Body and parents may have agreed with the testing but this decision borders on the violation of learners' rights. Learners without test results must be allowed to access the School as they have a constitutional rights to education.

The PSA calls on the School to reconsider its stance for learners to produce these tests as there are other ways and methods to address these matters without embarrassing all learners. The School needs to ensure that the psychosocial section creates a conducive environment to enable learners to voluntarily come forward for intervention. Constant engagement with learners and the involvement of professionals will not deter learners from using drugs.

The PSA will visit the School on opening day to assist learners and educators, who could find themselves in trouble with the law for infringing on the learners' rights.

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