



Media Release

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TEACHERS' RIGHTS, STATUS, AND ONGOING SUPPORT MATTER

The South African Council for Educators (SACE) appreciates the Ministers of Basic Education and Higher Education, Science and Innovation's press conference which attempted to clarify the confusion created by various school re-opening and curriculum recovery proposals, along with messages communicated countrywide in the last few weeks. Notwithstanding this, teachers' current recurring questions and frustrations on various platforms, attest to the fact that additional work needs to be done speedily to ensure that the DBE plans and new regulations are unpacked and clarified; and educators are oriented on how teaching and learning should happen in a COVID 19 context. This will empower them to have common understanding on the new normal workplace awaiting them not only in schools, but **SAFE** and COVID 19 compliant schools.

Thus, SACE moves from the premise that many things are temporary in life, but change is constant. Accordingly, the unprecedented COVID 19, correctly so, brought some fears, grief, threats, disillusionment and concerns in the education system and teaching profession in particular. Consequently, these have a bearing on educators as a collective and individuals. It is, therefore, imperative that the alleviation of these fears and uncertainties happen promptly to ensure that on the 18th May 2020 all the education offices and schools across the country are COVID 19 compliant in line with the requirements of World Health Organisation (WHO), Department of Health, and Presidential National Corona Virus Command Council (NCCC). This is particularly critical for SACE, as the custodian of the teaching profession, since it believes that **TEACHERS' WORKING CONDITIONS EQUALS LEARNERS' LEARNING CONDITIONS**. It is also important because at the heart of every education system lies the teacher and hence there is a saying that ***"You Cannot Put Student First if you Put Teachers Last."***

Moreover, while the curriculum recovery and assessment are indisputably important, SACE calls upon the DBE, 9 Provincial Education Departments, School Governing Bodies and independent schools as employers to prioritise fit-for-purpose and context-bound COVID 19 orientation, SACE-Endorsed ongoing development and support activities and programmes on new ways working and leadings, new and revised regulations, policies and possible trimmed curriculum and assessment, when it is safe for teachers to return to the COVID 19 compliant safe schools. This is fundamental for our educators' professional empowerment and autonomy that should assist them in making professional judgements and decisions on

how to teach, assess, manage, and lead effectively in the safe, changed, new normal, digitised, and uncertain schooling environment. In this way, our teachers' **status** will be recognised and be commensurate with the needs of the Education System within the COVID 19 context.

School Management Teams (SMTs) be capacitated, specifically, as adaptive, agile and collaborative managers and leaders in order to serve and support teachers accordingly. Conducive working environment and school-focused plans should be created and nurtured for our educators who are over the age of 60 and those with underlying health conditions. It is also important that the educators' COVID 19 development and support related programmes not to throw the baby with the bathwater. Hence it is vital that the old and new strategies are blended. Also, the support programmes need to recognise that teachers are not empty vessels and therefore, fertile ground should be created and supported for school-based and school-focused resourcefulness, professional collaboration and collegiality among our professional members, as part of continuing development and support.

Furthermore, educators must be provided with access to psychological well-being and support during this time as they face not only the pressure to ensure that the 2020 academic year is not lost but they are undeniably in a position where they not only need to ensure their own safety but that of learners as well. Regular de-briefing sessions or platform for educators must be held during this pandemic so that teachers are able to voice their challenges, concerns and successes.

SACE will also contribute to the ongoing development and support during this COVID 19 period and beyond, by using multi-modal strategies to capacitate educators on the newly developed handbook for educators focusing on their rights, responsibilities and safety in schools. The handbook, which was developed by the educators for educators, aims to bring to the fore, the plight educators face on a daily basis in relation to their rights and safety being eroded, and their dignity and respect being compromised in the schools.

The purpose of the handbook is to:

- Sharpen educators' understanding of rights, responsibilities and safety issues and their ability to act and respond appropriately when their rights and safety are being eroded;
- Provoke thinking, debate and discussion about teachers' rights, responsibilities and safety in the broader education field and teaching profession; and
- Serve as a guideline in the school environment when an issue of safety arises.

Some limitations such as learner-teacher ratio and structural matters which pose a threat to the fight against COVID-19 are already highlighted in the Teachers' Rights, Responsibilities and Safety draft handbook, and the DBE and teacher employers should address them accordingly.

Happy Workers' Day to all our educators.

Issued by the South African Council for Educators