



Reference: COVID-19/20200720/02  
Enquiries: BK Schreuder

**TO: ALL PRINCIPALS AND STAFF OF PUBLIC SCHOOL**

**FOR INFORMATION: SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES  
FOR INFORMATION: PRINCIPALS OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**

Dear Principals and Staff

You are all working under very difficult circumstances, with a variety of voices being heard about the reopening of schools and the resumption of schooling for more and more learners. Thankfully infections seem to be stabilizing somewhat in the Western Cape, but infection rates are on the rise elsewhere in the country. I am very conscious of how difficult it is for teachers and principals to keep a positive frame of mind amidst the various issues that are raised.

The following is worth noting:

- Ninety-nine percent of schools in the Western Cape have re-opened successfully.
- The majority of schools have done a great job in getting schools ready and putting plans in place for the safe return of learners.
- Health and safety protocols are in place.
- Temporary Revised Education Plans (TREPs) have been developed by all schools to deal with the need for physical distancing. This could include alternating attendance at schools to limit overcrowding.
- The WCED has activated rapid plans to temporarily close and decontaminate schools or school spaces, as the need arises. We have decontaminated over 600 schools, but in the majority of cases this has been because one or two people that have subsequently tested positive for Covid-19 have been on the school premises.
- In the handful of schools where more infections have occurred, we need to examine how the safety protocols are observed to curb the spread of the virus in the school that is brought into the school.
- There have been some calls for the closure of schools, mainly by teacher unions (and mainly nationally), some SGBs that are not associated with any SGB Association, various groups that seem to be politically aligned, or individuals that seem to have political or other ulterior motives.

- In many of the instances, it appears as if it is not the parents of the particular school that are calling for schools to close, but others.
- The Directions, published by the Minister of Basic Education make provision for parents who decide to keep their learners at home, to do so legally for a period of time. As these options are in place, it seems as if it might be other people trying to force schools to close.
- In many communities parents have put a stop to school disruptions and insisted that schooling continues.
- There has been support for schools to remain open by principals, SGB associations representing parents, individual parents and Education NGOs.
- The WCED has continually called for the feeding of all children that qualify for the National Schools Nutrition Programme and more and more feeding is happening according to strict health and safety protocols.
- There have been a few principals who have opted for expressing their dissatisfaction with schools being declared open by the national Cabinet and national Minister of Basic Education. Some of these have done so through representative channels, such as the Provincial Principals Forum (PPF). Others have elected to launch public and social media campaigns, while not raising their concerns with me or seeking a meeting with me to discuss their views.

I do not know what lies ahead, whether Cabinet will decide to close schools for the rest of the year, temporarily, or to continue with the phased in reopening of schools for all grades. I do not know and I do not take those decisions. What I do know is that that decision is not taken by me, not by the Provincial Minister, not by a SGB, not by a Principal, not by parents, not by teacher unions, not by activists and not by any political party. That decision is taken by Cabinet. Whatever the decision, the WCED will manage it to the best of our ability.

I am very aware that our teachers are stressed and tired, are anxious and fearful. Both I and Minister Schäfer have brought this fact to the attention of the Heads of Education Departments Committee (HEDCOM) and the Council of Education Ministers (CEM). I also know that we do not want learners to drop out of the system because of extended closure.

It is in the context of the above that I want to express my heart-felt thanks and appreciation for the hundreds of principals and teachers that have done the right thing – that have ensured that the focus gets back to learning, while optimal safety measures are adhered to. I recognize how difficult this is, given our own anxieties and fears. I cannot express my pride enough in all those who, despite these challenges, are getting stuck in and putting the interests of learners first, as the Constitution of our country requires.

If there is a principal who does not see her/his role as a public servant in carrying out the decisions of Cabinet, or any decisions of the provincial government, and who wishes to express their opinion about it, I again invite her/him to engage with me so that we may discuss their role

as a school leader and as an employee of the state. I will, as always, protect the right of any person to their opinion, but I am also obligated to manage and run a public education system, funded by public money and which operates within legal frameworks and obligations. Principals of public schools are appointed by the Head of Education in a province and Principals of public schools are therefore my voice in their schools and in the SGBs.

I therefore call upon any principal that disrupts, or causes schooling to be disrupted, directly or indirectly, or influences or causes to influence any learner or learners to stay away from school, to stop doing this immediately. I call on all principals to lead and guide School Governing Bodies in their mandate and roles as elected representatives of parents.

Colleagues, I again want to express my warm appreciation for the more than 1500 principals who are working tirelessly to ensure the safety of learners and teachers in our schools. Thank you to all of you for showing courageous leadership in leading our schools and for helping parents, teachers and learners to have the facts and a positive mindset to deal with these great challenges. I ask that you all do everything possible to avoid transferring the anxieties of our adults onto our children. If we are not successful as an education system of principals and teachers in achieving this, our children might carry a burden for a long time. Thank you that I may bring these matters to you. Thank you for the work that you all do as a large and important system.

Please take care, look after yourselves as best possible and let us lead our institutions and especially our learners as is expected of us as a teaching profession.

Thank You!

With appreciation

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'BK Schreuder', with a horizontal line underneath.

**BK SCHREUDER**  
**HEAD: EDUCATION**  
**DATE: 18 JULY 2020**