



NEWSFLASH

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS RELATING TO COVID-19 AND EDUCATION

1. May educators' contact information be provided to parents without their consent?

It is widely believed that parents wish to have educators' contact details to get answers to their curriculum inquiries in the light of the current Lockdown. There is full understanding for parents who would like to pursue the best interest of their children regarding additional educational assistance. However, it is not permissible under the right to privacy and the POPI legislation for private and personal phone numbers as well as other personal contact details, to be provided without the express permission of the educators concerned. The SAOU records that it /will seriously question the provision of such information. The SAOU's recommendation is that the matter should first be discussed with educators on a personal level in a professional manner and that the voluntary consent of the educators concerned be obtained.

2. When does the period of Lockdown end?

The matter was again discussed with the Minister of Basic Education, Ms Angie Motshekga on 8 April, 2020 during a telephone conference. There is great concern that schools may be considered as nodal points of infection in the light of the approaching winter period during which viral infections are more easily transmitted. The DBE is striving to provide every school with a complete sanitation and hygiene package before the schools reopen, but given that there are more than 25,000 schools, it will not be possible to do so within the next two weeks. A Special Cabinet Meeting will be held on 15 April 2020, during which the latest and most relevant information on the infection rate will be thoroughly considered before an objective decision regarding the continuation of the Lockdown will be taken. It is expected that the President will make a formal announcement shortly thereafter - in all likelihood on national TV on 15 or 16 April 2020. An important consideration at the moment is the severely negative impact that the Lockdown is having on the country's economy and growing unemployment. The Minister has repeatedly stated that it is impossible for her to provide a definitive answer at this time regarding the reopening of schools.

3. Catch-up programme after the period of Lockdown

The SAOU is aware of several curriculum catch-up programmes that are in circulation. The SAOU has convinced the DBE that there is a great need for a national framework for an overarching curriculum catch-up programme that is not too prescriptive and that adheres to specific principles to prevent each of the nine provincial education departments moving in their own direction. The first meeting of a joint task team consisting of representatives of the DBE and the five education unions will begin work on such a framework on 9 April 2020. Among other things, the following issues will be given serious consideration (note, that these are only options to be considered):

- Revision of the school calendar;
- Double shifts for classes ("platooning");
- Extended school days and utilization of Saturdays;
- Examination with reference to the traditional June exam, as well as the Preliminary exam for Grade 12;
- Sanitizing schools and maintaining social distances of 1.5m between people ("social distancing");
- How it will be ensured that infected learners and schools are not allowed onto school premises;
- A phased reopening of schools with the emphasis on which grades should receive priority;
- The cancellation of extra-curricular programmes for sport and culture;
- Adjustments to SA-SAMS; and

- The provision of an additional pool of educators to the value of 0.5% of the monetary value of the establishment.

Once more information is available, it will be communicated to members without delay.

4. The use of school facilities for the homeless and quarantine purposes

The Minister of Basic Education was adamant that school facilities could not be used. This is not at all a case of insensitivity to people who have to live in difficult circumstances, but a case of pragmatism and the optimal utilization of scarce resources and infrastructure. She undertook to discuss this with the nine Education MECs and put an end to speculation. If there are still education officials perpetuating intimidation tactics, the SAOU must be informed immediately.

5. Unfair instructions by school governing bodies (SGBs) to departmental educators

The SAOU has the highest regard for SGBs of schools who do really excellent work under very difficult circumstances and in the process create positive working environments for SAOU members. The SAOU pays tribute to such SGBs. However, the practice of a very small percentage of SGBs giving educators so-called instructions to offer online programmes from their own pockets and to finance the associated data costs because they do not currently have to pay petrol fees, is clearly extremely unfair. SGBs are not the employer of departmental educators and such instructions are out of order. SAOU members who are exposed to such intimidation tactics must immediately report it to the SAOU, after which the matter will promptly be taken up with the recognized governing body organizations with whom the SAOU maintains excellent relationships.

6. Payment of governing body appointments' salaries

Schools are a microcosm of society and are subject to the same acute economic realities of the present Lockdown. This is reflected in declining cash flows due to parents being unable to pay school fees. It has come to the attention of the SAOU that some SGBs have notified their school's educators of employment problems regarding either reduced salaries or termination of employment. The SAOU has an excellent track record of dealing with such difficult situations in collaboration with SGBs. Members who already experience or anticipate the aforementioned risks are requested to contact the SAOU without delay. Efforts will be made to address the matter in the spirit of partnership.

SAOU SERVICE CENTRE

Please note that the SAOU Service Centre is still functioning.

You may contact us at 012 023 1333

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