

TIME FOR COMMON SENSE TO PREVAIL AT OUR SCHOOLS

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The Covid-19 pandemic created havoc in education across the world, affecting parents teachers and pupils. Where governments have worked with communities, decisions have been in everyone's favour. Solutions included cancelling examinations and promoting pupils to the next grade based on their performance in previous exams and tests.

Most South Africans, including pupils, parents and teachers, were happy with the lockdown. There was consensus that for our survival, we had to act against the coronavirus.

In our poor country, the tightening economic situation forced workers back to work. We were then left with the question of what happens to the children of the nation.

Initially the government, in my opinion very wisely, called for grades 7 and 12 to return to school. Many organisations agreed and believed that grades 1-11 should return once the curve of the virus had flattened.

The government has now decided that all pupils should be at school. Private schools and former Model C schools (they remain Model C schools in practice) which have a pupil-teacher ratio of 30:1 and even less are capable of bringing all their pupils back to school. Teachers would not have the onerous task of dividing their classes into smaller classes.

At the schools of the poor, the Education Department instructs schools that Grade 12 pupils must attend every day. The department is forced to accept that at schools of the poor, grades 1- 6 and 8-11 will not attend school every day.

So the inequalities in the South African education system continue unabated.

What is more alarming and not educational is that the National Department of Basic Education (NDBE), knowing the unpreparedness of most of the Grade 12 pupils, is now forcing schools to write full-scale September exams for matrics which will last for three weeks.

As soon as this examination is over, the Grade 12s will sit for their final examinations. I tried to get into the minds of the NDBE. We have lost so much time. Does it not make sense to give the teachers as much time as possible to finish the curriculum and prepare the pupils for the final examinations? Schools that feel that they want to write the September examinations should go ahead. A government concerned about its pupils would have allowed September examinations not to be written and postponed final examinations to February 2021.

It is clear to many progressive organisations that government has dug in its heels and is hell-bent on getting the matriculants to write their final examinations in early November 2020. At least what government can do is to allow schools not ready to write September examinations to do so without teachers facing disciplinary action.

I am sure that most schools will welcome a decision that will help our matrics and teachers prepare for the final examinations. It is generally accepted that grade 1-11 pupils will all be promoted to the next year because of the extraordinary circumstances Covid-19 has created.

Let common sense prevail.