

WCED SHOULD STOP BULLYING OF TEACHERS

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WE ARE living in extraordinary times in the world. I thought that in the teaching profession I had experienced everything and there could be no more incidents which would shock me. However, the coronavirus pandemic has shocked the world.

Various countries around the world have closed their schools, reopened them and shut them down again. I may be wrong, but the Western Cape government must be the only government in the world now taking action against teachers who have opposed the opening of schools for very good reasons.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has listened to various stakeholders in the education sector about the school situation with regard to the coronavirus.

Quite rightly, he has indicated that the Grade 12s return to school on Monday, August 3, 2020, and the Grade 7s the following week. I hope he will reconsider the returning of the other grades after four weeks. If the virus curve has levelled off, then he needs to consult with the education stakeholders to decide on the date of return of the other grades.

Sadly, in the DA-controlled Western Cape there is talk that the provincial government will legally challenge the decision by the national government. Education MEC Debbie Schäfer has come out in public against this decision by the president. She has the right to do so but then she must allow others who disagree to criticise her decision in public.

Wesley Neumann, who is a brave principal to come out with other principals in the Western Cape (Noel Isaacs of Floreat Primary, Isaacs Arendse of Steenberg High and Vincent Hendricks of Athlone High) under the Concerned Principals' Group representing 120 principals, called for the suspension of school until the coronavirus peak levels off.

This, surely, is a reasonable demand which the President has partly agreed to. Neumann has been threatened by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) because of his letters to them.

Loren Arries-Hendricks allegedly spoke at a primary school, supporting the stance to close schools; she now faces a WCED disciplinary hearing. To my mind, these are bullying tactics.

The WCED, since 1994, has used its Labour Relations Department (LRD) to terrorise teachers. It was only during a short spell of Cameron Dugmore and Yusuf Gabru (ANC members) that the LRD was reined in. I speak of experience because I was a victim of this DA-controlled Western Cape government. All I did was speak truth to power, which Neumann is doing.

It is time for the Western Cape government to realise that they are part of SA and cannot continue to make decisions contrary to the national government. The national government, in turn, must take the Western Cape government to task publicly. For Ramaphosa to keep quiet and not criticise Debbie Schäfer will leave doubt in the minds of citizens.

I have always been of the opinion that any teacher, including a principal who has raised an issue with the Education Department and is not happy with the decision of the department, should raise it in public if the teacher or principal wishes to do so.

This should be allowed in any workplace. Why are most employers so kragdadig (forceful)? We are supposed to be living in a free, democratic country where we are allowed to speak out.

We have so much corruption in our country because workers are afraid to speak out about their bosses who hide behind labour laws.

Schäfer and Brian Schreuder apply scare tactics to teachers. They believe in a top-down approach. Let me give you two experiences I had with these individuals:

I was still employed by WCED when the Progressive Principals' Association met with Schäfer and Penny Vinjevold.

At the end of the meeting, Schäfer said: "Now this is how I like the meeting to go. You came to talk with me – not like others who run to the press." My retort was: "You are talking about me; I go to the press because you do not listen. "

I have many stories to tell about Schreuder, but I will just mention one. Alexander Sinton High teachers refused to mark the NDBE Grade 7 ANA tests, which they felt was a waste of time.

Alexander Sinton High teachers asked me to accompany them to meet Schreuder because he had summoned them to his office.

When he saw me, he said: "What are you doing here?" I said to him that he needs to address me properly. He then stormed away and said: "This meeting is over!" I left, and I found out that the Alexander Sinton teachers met with him soon afterwards.

The only way to sort out topdown people is to stand up to them. I stood up to their bullying tactics, and I am not sorry I did!

WCED must drop their thoughts of taking disciplinary action against these two brave teachers, Wesley Neumann and Loren Arries-Hendricks. If they continue, they will face the wrath of the parents, teachers and pupils in the Western Cape.
