

# New Unity Movement



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## STATEMENT BY THE NEW UNITY MOVEMENT ON THE RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS FIASCO: CONFUSION WORSE CONFOUNDED!

Everyone is now familiar with the causes and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that has created a global crisis on a scale that is even worse than that created by the Second World War. It has also exposed the reality of the gross disparities that exist between the haves and the have-nots of this world.

In many respects, our experience of the pandemic here in South Africa is mirrored by that of people living in virtually all countries in the world. Moreover, as in most countries in the world, the unemployed and the poor, the most vulnerable members of society, have had to withstand the worst of the negative effects of the lockdowns that have been imposed to stem the spread of infection by the virus.

As in most other countries where lockdowns have been imposed, the South African government has decided to relax the level of the lockdown restrictions despite a rise in the rate of infection amongst the population. One such relaxation of the level of restriction has been a decision to reopen schools that had remained closed for the past two months.

However, it is this decision that has served once again to demonstrate the stark differences that exist between the poor children and their middle-class counterparts. The crisis that has arisen around the re-opening of schools has emphasised these glaring disparities as they affect the most vulnerable section of the population quite starkly.

The re-opening of schools under the control of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) with Mrs Angie Motshekga at its head have been nothing short of a disaster.

Whilst the decision to re-open schools may have been informed by sound expert medical advice, it is the inept manner in which the DBE set about doing so that has been a total fiasco. In the face of clear evidence that a huge number of schools, mainly in the depressed communities, urban and rural, are far from ready as safe environments to readmit our children, the DBE blunders ahead like a brainless colossus.

All the teacher unions, as well as school governing bodies, have opposed the reopening of schools in the manner as set out by the DBE. We fully support the statement issued by the National Union of Public Servants and Allied Workers, Educational Sector (NUPSAW-ES) on 24 May. In the statement, they propose three broad components of an "action plan to advance the interests of basic education in the current period".

We all value life. Are all schools ready and Covid-19 compliant? Have all schools been issued with enough Personal Protective Equipment? Most schools have differing views on the "return to school". However to return to school and not have a discussion with your pupils/students about the state of education in our country and the world, and particularly the call for a stay-away, would be an abdication of your duty as a teacher. To just return to school and not discuss the state of joblessness in SA would be a grave oversight.

What Covid-19 has pertinently demonstrated are the huge INEQUALITIES in our country. Society cannot be variously compartmentalised, or divorced from the situations in health, housing and sanitation, economics, labour or politics. We are no longer able to ignore these facts. These are the issues that we all will have to attend to both inside and outside of the classroom.

We specifically condemn the stand taken by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) and in particular that of the MEC, Debbie Schäfer and the Head of Department, Brian Schreuder, who have shown themselves to be in the mould of the "kragdadige" functionaries of the old Apartheid system. Little has changed in respect of the ruling class (DA) predilection for maintaining obedience jackboot-style, and for thumbing their noses at community opposition, no matter how widespread and legitimate that opposition.

#### OUR DEMAND

No schools must re-open anywhere in the country until and unless *all* the recognized deficiencies in the schools of the poor have been corrected and that all measures that are required to guarantee the safety of all our children, teachers and the non-teaching staff employed in our schools are put in place. A sad reality that needs to be confronted is that the resource deficiencies of the Apartheid era school system persist in the current reality of having one school system for the rich and one for the poor.

We demand that the disparities that characterise these different "systems of education" be eliminated.

The lives, safety and well-being of our children are paramount.

**Issued by the National Executive Committee of the New Unity Movement**