

# Swaziland National Association of Teachers



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AFFILIATED TO: EI, SATO, TUCOSWA

ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO BE  
ADDRESSED TO THE  
SECRETARY GENERAL  
SNAT CENTRE  
OPPOSITE WILLIAM PITCHER  
PO BOX 1575  
MANZINI, SWAZILAND  
[+268] 2505 2603  
[+268] 2505 6267  
E-mail: [snatcentre@gmail.com](mailto:snatcentre@gmail.com)  
[snatgs02@gmail.com](mailto:snatgs02@gmail.com)  
Web: [www.snat.org.sz](http://www.snat.org.sz)

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### DEPUTY PRESIDENT

Dlamini Celucolo Dino  
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## UPDATE ON THE CONSULTATIVE MEETING BETWEEN THE SNAT AND MOET TODAY (18-02- 2021) ON THE RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS

### I. PREAMBLE

The Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) National Executive Committee (NEC) held a consultative meeting with the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), today (18-02-2021) at 1000hrs.

### II. GIST OF THE STATEMENT

During the meeting, the NEC presented results of the survey that was carried by the SNAT on Friday (12-02-2021) to determine the state of readiness by some schools around the country. This information was collected by SNAT Representatives and by members of the Swaziland Association of School Administrators (SASA), a wing of Headteachers for the SNAT. A total of 259 schools formed the sample and this translates to 28 % of the total number of schools. Three (3) issues emerged from this survey. They are as follows;

1. A total of 233 schools are not ready for schools re-opening for the current calendar year, in terms of



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facilities, services and infrastructure that are needed to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Main facilities that were considered in this survey were, handwashing sinks, Water Supply, classrooms and furniture. Handwashing sinks have not been constructed in some schools whilst in some schools they were still under construction. Some schools have short supply of water, learning rooms [classrooms] and classroom furniture.

2. A total of 200 schools have vacant posts. These have been created by retirements, deaths, promotions and those teachers whose contracts expired in December 2020. The number of vacant posts ranged from 1-12 in the different schools. This clearly means that the employment of teachers before the reopening of schools is fundamental for the Government. As the SNAT, though we are pushing hard for the re-opening of schools by the second week of March 2021, it is important to note that our kids need a teacher in front of them right from the first day of schools re-opening. With so much time lost due to the Coronavirus pandemic, teachers will have to work hard to adequately cover the 'compressed' syllabi. The MoET was requested to push this issue so that the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) does not wait for schools to re-open first before the long process of employing teachers resumes. If the employment of teachers waits for the re-opening, by the time the process of engaging the teachers is completed, those kids who would be without teachers would have been negatively affected.

3. Since there is now a dire need for the schools to re-open, it is imperative for the Government to expedite the inoculation of teachers during the first phase of the vaccine roll-out, alongside health workers and all other frontline workers. Teachers shall quickly become frontline workers when schools re-open and due to the nature of school gatherings, schools are highly likely to be super-spreaders of the virus as well, hence the prioritization of the vaccination of teachers, along-side health professionals. The Ministry of Education and Training [MoET] was requested to engage the Central Government for the consideration of this reality. Our main aim as the SNAT is that when schools re-open, we do not want them to be closing abruptly again as a result of surges in the cases within the school set up. Our kids are already lagging behind and the pressure keeps on mounting on our members. Since, as the SNAT, we are cognizant of the fact that it may be impossible for the Government to capacitate schools in the same way within a very short space of time, the SNAT suggested a workable solution that will assist in attaining the issues raised in paragraphs one (1) and two (2) above.

- i. The Government needs to pay all outstanding fees for the 2020 and 2021 school Calendar years for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) and Free Primary Education (FPE).



- ii. Parents must not be made to pay 'outstanding' fees for 2020 since they had already paid deposit before the lockdown was commissioned in March 2020. Moreover, some learners have already lost their parents through the virus, whilst other parents have lost their jobs due to the economic challenges that were posed by this virus on humanity.
- iii. Parents should only pay fees for the current year (2021). The reason why Government has to pay fees even for last year (2020) is because in essence, education, as a public good, is supposed to be state funded, accessible and be of high quality. This could be a best way by the Government, of assisting the Nation.
- iv. The MoET must then issue a circular directed to all Administrators of schools to the effect that they must use the OVC and FPE Funds deposited by the Government to secure all necessary COVID-19 materials and equipment, in preparation for schools re-opening. Such materials and equipment can be put in place within seven (7) working days and therefore all schools [Primary and Secondary] will be at the same level of preparedness. This will ensure that once schools re-open, there will not be closures. As a country we still have a duty to produce kids who will have a sharp competitive edge when compared to their counterparts in the outside world. We need to do justice.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

As the SNAT, we commend the positive spirit of collaboration that has been exemplified by the Ministry of Education and Training [MoET] during such consultations, ever since they started. We also hope that all our suggestions, as a recognised education sector stakeholder in terms of what needs to be done, shall be taken into serious consideration. COVID-19 took all of us by surprise and no one was ready for such a challenge; however, we cannot afford to fold our arms and sit quietly whilst other countries forge ahead. No wonder, there is still no definite date as to when schools will re-open. On the flip side, we need to be innovative as well, so as to get things on track. Be that as it may, the health and safety of teachers, their learners, support staff, parents of the learners and that of the wider society must be prioritised.

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**SIKELELA J. DLAMINI**  
**(SECRETARY GENERAL)**

**SWAZILAND NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS**  
P. O. BOX 1575, MANZINI  
TEL: 2505 2603



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