

Dear Mr. President

As a school principal and leader in my community I am deeply concerned about the devastating impact the Covid-19 pandemic has on our schools and more specifically on our education system.

Being a principal in the Cape Winelands District in the Western-cape we witness daily how more and more of our schools are being affected directly by the virus. As from Friday 19 June 2020 no less than two of my staff members tested positive for the virus and 4 others are waiting anxiously for the results of their Covid tests. At my neighboring school, the principal, his wife, daughter and 4 matric learners tested positive for the virus. And so I can go on and on and give examples of teachers and learners tested positive for Covid-19. With all of this happening we as educationists are still expected to stay positive and calm and just do our job.

When schools are decontaminated today, it is expected of us by the education department to be back at school the next day and continue teaching as if nothing has happened. Nobody takes into account the negative impact that this situation has on the emotional and psychological well being of teachers and learners.

Teachers, non-teaching staff and learners are anxious, scared, uncertain and outright terrified to go back to school, because they fear that they can be next in line to contract the virus. Families of staff fear for their lives because after the school day their father, mother, husband or wife must go back to their homes, and they are uncertain if they arrive healthy at home. Parents are reluctant to send the learners back to school after they hear that a staff member contracted the virus.

For the past 3 days my own family life was shrouded in uncertainty when we have to wait for the outcome of my wife's Covid test result. As a husband, father and school principal I guess you can't guess or comprehend what I have gone through. No matter what personal trauma I have to go through, it is expected of me to be strong for my family, comfort them and still give 100% to my staff, learners and the education department. In my opinion principals and teachers are so exhausted in dealing with all the trauma that this virus brings, that it won't be long before they won't be able to take anymore. It is further expected of teachers not to be scared or anxious. They must clinically deal with this abnormal situation and continue to give 100%. How can there be expected from my staff to give their all if more than one of their colleagues are affected by the Virus. Do you know what you are doing to us? My staff are looking in my eyes for answers and solutions, because the standard answer of the Education department is always: "Sir follow the protocol applicable to your situation or challenge." Mr. President I am working with people, social beings with feelings and concerns. My staff is family to me and not a bunch of persal numbers as they are deemed by the Education department.

Mr. President I just received notice this afternoon that one more of my staff members tested positive for the virus. The consequence of this is that tomorrow my staff and learners won't be able to go to school because another part of our school has to be decontaminated. Today I questioned the capability of the service provider which tendered successfully for the decontamination of our school because they arrived with 3 small machines and within 45

minutes they told us that their job were finished. I believe that there are people that are jumping on the decontaminating band wagon which are definitely not adequately qualified to do the job. I am of the opinion that the procurement of services by the education department should be looked at urgently.

Mr. President we are in the heart of the winter months. A fair amount of my learners are living in informal settlements and suffer great poverty. It is these children and their families that are most vulnerable and more or most likely to contract the virus. At school we can assure that the necessary protocols are being implemented and followed, but when they leave school we don't know what is going on in the communities they live in.

As a school principal I am really deeply concerned about the well being of my learners, staff and their families, and I plea to you to reconsider your decision to open the schools. The Western Cape is a ticking time bomb and a great concern nationally with regards to COVID-19, and I do believe that it is a concern to you as well otherwise you would have not specifically and especially visited our province to get first hand information.

Please my president close the schools until we are sure that we have truly flatten the curve, and we are truly confident that it is relatively safe to open them again.

I can assure Mr. President that there are many more principals and leaders in our schools that share the same sentiment as me, but who are scared to let their voices be heard and maybe be labelled as persons who are not dedicated and willing to do their job.

Concerned Principal

Ruben Rhodes Titus