

COOL HEADS NEEDED TO SOLVE VIRAL CRISIS

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I TRIED very hard not to write about Covid-19 and the closure/opening of schools and to write about other matters in education. However, it seems as if we have reached the crisis point in education now.

Progressive organisations in the Western Cape and particularly in Cape Town have rallied together over the past month to respond to Covid-19 and the closure/opening of schools. The organisations formed the Progressive Organisations' Formation (POF).

This organisation includes the New Unity Movement, Cosatu, Sadtu, Nupsaw ES, ANC, ANCYL, ANCWL, SACP, Sanco, Sasco, Young Communist League – all the aforementioned organisations are of the WC – Bishop Lavis Action Committee (Blac), Save Our Children (SOC), Parents Against the Opening of Schools, Cosas (WC) and the Covid-19 Coalition.

The POF issued a press statement on Saturday, July 4, in which POF demanded the following:

- Cosatu, Sadtu, Nupsaw ES, ANC, ANCYL, ANCWL, SACP, Young Communist League, Sanco, and Sasco – all of the WC – demand the closing of schools for grades R to 11 until the virus curve flattens. Only grades 7 and 12 pupils to be at school. These organisations feel that the schools will be able to cope with grades 7 and 12 under these trying circumstances and also that these two grades represent exit grades.
- Blac, SOC, Parents Against the Opening of Schools, Cosas (WC) and the Covid-19 Coalition believe that it is too dangerous to send pupils to schools and they demand that grades R to 12 remain at home until the virus curve flattens.

On July 12, the POF also met with the Concerned Principals' Group, the Manenberg Parents' Group and the United Democratic Front.

It is my opinion that it makes good sense that organisations interested in education in the Western Cape get together to plot the way forward as regards the spread of the virus. Individual organisations cannot do it on their own. This virus affects everybody in South Africa. Throughout South Africa this debate is raging.

What is to be done? Government says that, in consultation with its team of scientists, it is safe to send the rest of the grades back in stages. This week the grades 1, 6 and 11 were to return to school. Now if government says that it is going to send all the other grades back to school in the next month, we all know that schools will not be able to accommodate all the grades if the limit is 30 pupils per class. Chaos and panic are going to ensue.

It makes good sense to me to let the grades 7 and 12 pupils remain at school. They have become used to being at school.

The parents, pupils, teachers and non-teaching staff seem to be coping with grades 7 and 12. However, we have seen reports in newspapers that with grades 1, 6 and 11 pupils returning to school, more schools are reporting that grades 7 and 12 pupils are not going to school. I want to appeal to our national government, who were voted into power by the majority, to stop sending grades R to 11 pupils back to school as South Africa heads for its virus peak. The lives of our pupils are important. None of us wish to see the death of any person if we can prevent it.

Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education, is now threatening the nation that she will take the nation to court if the nation prevents pupils from going to school. Surely she cannot be serious.

I appeal to her and President Cyril Ramaphosa to listen to the voices of the people of South Africa. Let us not continue to traumatise the South African community. In a crisis, cool and logical heads must be put together to solve the crisis.

Has our present government not learnt from the past? Mr President, do what is right and logical – close the schools for grades R to 11 and if the virus crisis hits the grades 7 and 12, send them home as well.
