

Ms Angelina Motshekga, MP
Minister of Education
Department of Basic Education
222 Struben Street
Pretoria Central, Pretoria
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16 July 2020

PRE-QUESTIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY CONSULTATION ON 17 JULY 2020

Dear Minister

The request, received via the NECT, for a set of questions to be considered for the consultation between the DBE and civil society refers. We appreciate this opportunity and we have canvassed our members on short notice. Our main points are briefly summarised below.

POINT 1: Differentiated approach to the opening and closing of schools

NASCEE supports the DBE position in that school going children are at low risk of contracting the virus, and that if teachers with comorbidities are protected, schools should ideally stay open.

Options to consider: There is a trust deficit in society related to this matter – this is not a time to be defensive about the reasons for the problem, but we would strongly encourage an approach wherein provinces with high and increasing infection rates are allowed to close their schools. The criteria for closing and opening should be provided based on quantitative measures to be determined by the DBE, and communicated clearly, unambiguously and in accessible language to the public and other key stakeholders. While these measures will inevitably be disputed, they will provide certainty and enable parents and employers to plan for the weeks and months ahead. Nutritional support should be continued for qualifying learners even if schools are closed.

Support that NASCEE can offer: We are able to provide technical support and also advocate the position through communication and on-the ground support to schools through our members.



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POINT 2: Support for learning at home

In cases where schools are closed, it is evident from many recent polls that more advantaged schools can transition to online modes, but less resourced schools are not able. The DBE has excellent workbooks that can be taken/sent to homes. This is not entirely risk free and a level of attrition will have to be expected.

Consideration: A coordinated approach for children to take hard copy materials home from schools before they close is needed. Together with this, the continued progress towards zero rating of approved platforms, and national radio and TV broadcast options, should be pursued and championed by the DBE. Greater focus on training and development is needed in the use of cellphone apps and accessible educational materials.

Support that NASCEE can offer: Easy-to-use parents guides (1-2 pages/posters) to provide structure for homeschooling can be developed to be made available at scale, in hard copy. Delivery of hard copies can also be arranged where other options have been exhausted. NGOs have been very active in distribution of grocery parcels and hygiene products to communities and have experience in managing this safely in many communities.

POINT 3: Psychosocial support to learners at home

Learners, and in many cases their parents and/or caregivers, are under huge emotional stress, and this will become more acute if schools are closed again. Innovative measures are needed to provide at-home support.

Consideration: Young people can be trained and supported to provide first level psychosocial support with a referral system where escalation is required. NGOs working in this area and that have a presence in the affected provinces can be mobilised.

Support that NASCEE can offer: We can mobilise funding and on-the-ground capacity, as well as necessary training and support, to provide this service at scale in a short space of time. NGOs are well positioned to train and support teachers in the processes of online emotional support.

POINT 4: Curriculum fragmentation and truncated examinations

The pandemic has necessitated a more differentiated and phased approach to examinations. Grades 7 and 12 are the most critical at this time, while other grades are also impacted, but gaps could be addressed over a longer period. This is not to say that



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other grades are less important, but these could be addressed through other means (see our earlier points).

Consideration: Stay focused on ensuring that Gr 7 and 12 examinations continue in 2020 by using the existing national and provincial processes. Actively work with NGOs and other actors to support Gr 7 and 12 learners where school closures have, and are, impacting on their curriculum coverage during 2020. Also consider truncated examinations that focus more on competence and understanding, and less on the knowledge components of CAPS.

Support that NASCEE can offer: We can mobilise funding and curriculum support for Gr 7 and 12 learners. While this is a massive undertaking, it is more focused and will allow for better coordination and pooling of resources. Many after-hours support NGOs can be commissioned to run Saturday classes and after hours support programmes.

POINT 5: Guide and support the ECD sector in a visible manner

The ECD sector is weak and coordination is historically problematic. The sector urgently needs guidance from the DBE, in collaboration with DSD.

Consideration: Clearly communicate guidelines and measures within the ECD sector. Joint statements with the DSD will go a long way to rebuild trust. A champion and visible DBE official that engages the media and the public is urgently needed – this person should focus on ECD only.

Support that NASCEE can offer: We can mobilise funding and support for the ECD sector for clear communication and guidance. We can also lobby ECD associations and groupings to support this effort.

We are appreciative of the convening function of the NECT, and fully understand its important role and support it provides to the DBE, but it is equally important to emphasise that the NECT does not speak on behalf of civil society, nor should it be positioned to oversee funding sources to and from the NGO sector. National consultation and advisory processes, overseen by the NECT, should be utilised to support the broader public education sector, and the sustainability of NGOs to play their part.

We look forward to an ongoing constructive engagement that will support this exceedingly difficult process.

James Keevy

On behalf of the NASCEE Board of Directors



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