



**basic education**

Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**Address by the Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga  
at the Virtual Seminar on Teacher Well-Being in  
Collaboration Key Stakeholders, 23 July 2021**

Programme Director;

Members of Executive Council;

Heads of Education Departments (HoDs)

Leaders of Organised Labour;

The ELRC;

Leaders of Constituencies represented in this seminar;

Distinguished Guests in our midst, from;

the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA);

the Organisation for Economic Corporation for Development (OECD);

the American Federation of Teachers (AFT); and

Education International (EI)-Africa Region.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Programme Director, we are brought together here in this seminar by the global call to action to relentlessly improve the status of our teaching cohort in particular and the teaching profession in general.

We meet in times of trouble.

Our country, and by extension our democracy, has in recent days been tested to the limit.

The past week's events have left a big hole in my heart as over 300 of our people died, needless death.

Our collective psyche as a nation is distressed after witnessing on a mass scale the wanton destruction of lives and livelihoods.

We need healing.

We need to rebuild and regroup.

We bemoaned the destruction of private property, but we are left speechless by the careful targeting of our schools.

The looting/burning frenzy occurred during what should be a solemn period to pause and honour the birthday month of our fallen founding father, President Nelson Mandela.

In him, we had the brightest star to lead us to the Promised Land.

In him, we saw the best of ourselves.

To celebrate his birthday is an act of self-love, not vanity.

However, Madiba would disapprove of our new ways of doing politics.

Madiba would not celebrate the destruction of our infrastructure, lives and livelihoods.

In his name, let's rebuild, renew and most importantly, begin the healing journey.

Programme Director; often times the health and well-being of teachers time and again compete with the contentious issues of remuneration, safety in schools, increasing learner ill-discipline and social ills.

I am glad that today we meet to discourse entirely on measures, institutional, legislative and otherwise needed to move the teacher well-being to the centre of the teachers' human resource practice.

We are driven by a shared determination that no teacher should be hospitalised, resign or even die as a consequence of preventable occupational hazards.

In this first-of-its-kind seminar focussing on teacher well-being, we seek to achieve broad consensus on the effectiveness or otherwise of existing measures and need to rethink the whole teacher well-being space.

In a nutshell, we seek to develop a consensus both at a theoretical level and practical measures needed to protect the most critical asset in the schooling ecosystem, our teachers.

The issue of teacher well-being is more urgent today amid the Covid-19 pandemic that seeks to undo the gains we have made as a global education fraternity in the last two decades.

I am happy to report that we prioritised teachers and teaching officials in the sector-wide vaccination programme as a country, South Africa.

It was not a knee-jerk reaction but a well-thought-out policy decision taken to protect our teachers, officials and the schooling ecosystem at large.

The vaccination of teachers is a crucial step to achieve optimal occupational safety and restore confidence in the sector.

By 08 July, we had vaccinated just over 400 000 of the initial target of 582,000.

Due to the programme's success and enthusiasm in the sector, we extended the vaccination programme to all auxiliary staff in the basic education sector.

These include food handlers, janitors, and other types of support staff from independent schools and ECD centres located within school premises.

This second vaccination phase takes the target from the initial 582 000 to a whopping 789,554.

I would love to commend the vaccinators and applaud all our staff members, especially teachers who took the job.

In the wake of Covid-19, teachers worldwide are facing unprecedented challenges, including the disruption of established instructional programs and routines.

In some parts of the world, they have had to make a rapid transition from in-person teaching to remote learning.

From anecdotal evidence, the sudden change to the status quo has had a negative effect on some teachers' emotional well-being.

In the past, certainly before Covid-19, teaching could be considered contact sport; teachers were there to provide a warm hug to their learners and emotional support, all that is gone.

Medical scientists have advised us that we must practice social distancing and sometimes teach online to keep the virus at bay.

My view is that this goes against the ethos of the teaching profession that requires us as teachers to connect with our learners, emotional and sometimes physically.

Thus, in these trying times, we need to do more for our teachers to ameliorate the sense of isolation, and I dare say, loss of touch.

The measures in place to keep Covid-19 at bay are necessary for the interest of public health; ours is to reimagine teaching and teacher support mechanisms thereto.

We must encourage our teachers to build and strengthen caring relationships with one another and with their learners while physically apart.

Soon, perhaps, we would need to redesign classrooms of the future where everyone will feel emotionally attached yet physically apart.

In theorising about teacher well-being, we must move from the premise that teachers are also emotional beings.

Teachers are members of the community before they become teachers.

Thus, teachers might face the same pressures faced by the schooling community, including their learners.

The present danger of Covid-19 is a perfect example.

Therefore, at the heart of any teacher well-being programme must be the measures to ramp up psychosocial and emotional support.

We need early warning systems to pro-actively facilitate interventions to mitigate personal, psychosocial and work-related problems.

We must confront the reality that we live in a violent and crime-ridden country.

Our teachers need support to deal with the trauma that they carry from their homes and communities.

A well-structured wellness programme that addresses the overall health and occupational safety is key to improving the morale of our teachers.

We have a responsibility as a sector to understand that teacher well-being isn't divorced from learner well-being.

As we know, learner- well-being is in large part derived from the emotionally stable and supportive teacher.

By cultivating teacher well-being, teachers and the school community can create happier, healthier, and more sustainable education systems.

Programme Director, I implore all participants to think soberly about;

(i) Strategies to improve teacher well-being include ways to build better professional relationships to the degree that it positively impacts teacher wellness and learner outcomes.



(ii) How to create a positive school environment that allows teachers to have a voice.

(iii) The Provincial Education Departments working together with the Provincial Education Labour Relations Council (PELRC), can create province-specific wellness programmes.

I wish you fruitful and a successful first-of-its-kind teacher wellness programme.

“Let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend.”

I thank you.