

CLOSE OUT REPORT

DBE MINISTERIAL VIRTUAL SEMINAR ON TEACHER WELL-BEING

DATE: 23 JULY 2021

DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION (DBE) SEMINAR ON THE 2021 TEACHER WELL-BEING IN COLLABORATION WITH ELRC, TEACHER UNIONS AND INTERNATIONAL AND MULTILATERAL PARTNERS: TEACHER APPRECIATION AND SUPPORT PROGRAMME (TASP)

Theme

Educator-well-being to ensure quality teaching and learning in the Basic Education Sector

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1. Overview

Teacher wellbeing has always been part of the international and domestic education sector priorities prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. As such, UNESCO made a call as follows:

“We call on governments to protect teachers’ safety, health, and wellbeing, as well as their employment, to continue improving teachers’ working conditions, and to involve teachers and their representative organizations in the COVID-19 educational response and recovery” -Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO.

At the same time, the DBE supports the delivery of public health services and monitors the performance of the educators’ health system by providing timely advice, research and administrative support. Education wellbeing is fundamental to the overall health of an individual which has been influenced more by the outbreak of the pandemic. Despite the experiences caused by the pandemic, many teachers have always had challenges impacting on their wellbeing as physical or emotional trauma following specific incidents.

Teacher mental health and wellbeing has long been an issue in South African schools due to teacher workload, overcrowding etc that continues to be a cause of concern for all affected educators. The scourge of Covid-19 exacerbated the stress and anxiety that comes with the school timetable differentiation and other related Covid-19 challenges that affect educators daily.

Amid these challenges, the DBE and Teacher unions that are admitted in the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC), realised a need to address the well-being of educators to capacitate them on different ways and methods of dealing with it thereof.

To address these challenges, the DBE collaborated with the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), Suid Afrikaanse Onderwysers Unie (SAOU), National Teachers Union (NATU) and the Professional Educators Union (PEU) in hosting the first Ministerial Virtual Seminar on the Teacher Well-Being on 23 July 2021 post the rollout of the Education Sector National and Provincial vaccination and presented papers on

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the subject. The Seminar would have been incomplete without tapping on the experiences of the International and Multi-lateral countries. The International organisations such as the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the African entities; the Educational International (EI) Africa- Region and Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) who shared their views.

To seal the Teacher Well-Being deal, the Seminar was nourished by a presentation from the local Key Note speaker from Wits University, Dr Portia Mutevedzi, Senior Epidemiologist.

This report, therefore, provides a summary of the proceedings covering the main topics as well as the key recommendations on the way forward.

2. Aims of the report

2.1. This document aims to mark the completion of the Ministerial Virtual Seminar on Teacher Well-Being, the impact of the Seminar on the educators and the education sector as a whole as well as identifying the lessons learnt and confirming that the DBE cares for the Well-Being of its employees;

2.2. To present the recommendations adopted at the seminar; and

2.3. The ultimate goal is to provide a common strategic direction and providing guidelines on how the department can ensure that teacher wellness is implemented within the sector, in a manner that allows commonality of application across different line functions.

3. Problem Statement

The implementation of employee well-being in government is not new and is well documented. For example, as part of a wellness programme in the public sector, a Guide for Government Departments on HIV/AIDS in the workplace was developed. The guide was developed as a practical and user-friendly resource to assist

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government departments to plan, implement and monitor appropriate and effective responses to HIV/AIDS within the Public Service working environment.

It is also widely recognised that government departments develop and implement various programmes within their social context. What becomes apparent is a need for an integrated approach to employee health and wellness which recognises the importance of linking individual health, safety and wellness, organisational wellness, environmental sustainability, quality management to productivity and improved service delivery outcomes.

The DBE recognises and appreciates that educators and education support personnel are at the forefront of daily schooling. Among others, educators create lesson plans, marking papers, attend to learners' social and emotional needs which contribute to the immense teacher workload. The teaching profession is no longer seen as rewarding but stressful.

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption of education globally, including in South Africa. The pandemic has exposed the world's inequalities; amplifying the inequalities of race, gender, class, disabilities, geographies etc. In South Africa, it has added to the countries existing struggle and suffering of the poor by shocking their fragile ecosystem into meltdown. It has impacted adversely on equitable and quality teaching and learning across countries in Africa and the world as a whole. However, it has also presented an opportunity for an honest self-introspection and test the sector readiness to deal with the aftermath of the pandemic.

In the main, educators are often focused on taking care of and supporting others, but without prioritising their own wellbeing. Their mental health is not only important to them as teacher wellness is also linked to stability in schools and student achievement.

Whilst educators are providing support to learners on their health and well-being, there is less focus on maintaining their mental and emotional health to assist them to try and find a balance within this newly acquired way of living and remote teaching and learning.

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As such, both the NDP and the sector plan enjoins stakeholders in the Basic Education sector to prioritise teacher well-being. This is with the view to ensure that the sector maintains a work that is healthy and enjoys job satisfaction. It is against this background that the DBE, working with and through its stakeholders, organised and hosted the First of many Seminars on Teacher Well-Being.

4. Alignment of Teacher Wellbeing Programmes and the Sector priorities

4.1 The National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030

The NDP emphasises that teachers are central to education and teaching should be a highly valued profession. This places an obligation to the Education sector to ensure that teacher well-being is prioritised and educators enjoy job satisfaction. It is tacit knowledge that Teacher Well-Being is beneficial to learner outcomes and ultimately the performance of the sector.

4.2 Sector Priorities: Goal 17-Teacher Well-Being and job satisfaction

Goal 17 implores the sector to strive for a teacher workforce that is healthy and enjoys a sense of job satisfaction. While there has been notable progress on teacher well-being in the sector, more work needs to be done to ensure that Teacher well-being receives the attention it deserves. The DBE Action Plan emphasises that the key challenge lies in improving the working environment and professional development opportunities available to teachers. In order for this to be realised, a concerted effort from all the DBE stakeholders is required.

The basis of realising this goal is through developing a comprehensive implementation plan with clear directives and targets. At the heart of it, is driving the common understanding of the Teacher Well-Being as a concept through advocacy in the sector.

5. Key issues

Some of the key issues identified and central to addressing teacher well-being issues were:

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- 5.1. Control the uncontrollable during the pandemic;
- 5.2. Create time for self-care to maintain mental health and wellness;
- 5.3. Use body movement to help mental wellness;
- 5.4. Model self-compassion;
- 5.5. Develop a reasonable expectation for self and others;
- 5.6. Build communication strategies that could assist in maintaining their mental health;
- 5.7. Reach out to others for emotional and mental support; and
- 5.8. How together they can establish a healthy workplace where individuals feel valued and supported, how to ensure a positive workspace.

The Seminar provided the DBE with an opportunity to examine how educators could more thoughtfully and deliberately respond to the stressful outcome of COVID-19 and its negative impact on their well-being by asking thought-provoking questions about the purpose, relevance and importance of their well-being.

6. Seminar logistics

6.1. Entities that formed part of the seminar:

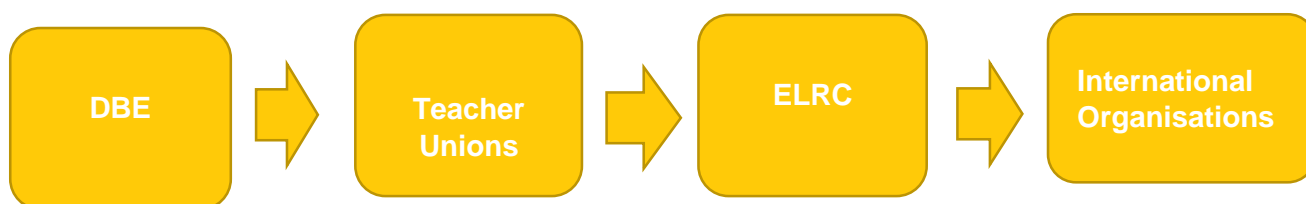
The Department of Basic Education has as part of its strategic plans for Vision 2030 GOAL 17: “Strive for a teacher workforce that is healthy and enjoys a sense of job satisfaction”. Teachers understand the importance of their profession for the development of the nation and do their utmost to give their learners a good educational start in life.

For timeous consultation, the DBE collaboratively worked with its social partners and ensured that both internal/domestic and international partners are utilised. That is, for this seminar International entities inviting them to attend the seminar to form part of the delegation of speakers during the seminar.

The international speakers invited were from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Africa region, Educational International, Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD);

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6.2 List of organisations that formed part of the Virtual Teacher Well-Being seminar on 23 July 2021:



6.2.1 Department of Basic Education;

6.2.2 Teacher Unions:

6.2.2.1 SADTU

6.2.2.2 NAPTOSA;

6.2.2.3 SAOU;

6.2.2.4 NATU; and

6.2.2.5 PEU

6.2.3 Education Labour Relations Council;

6.2.4 International and Multi-Lateral Organisations:

6.2.4.1 OECD;

6.2.4.2 ADEA;

6.2.4.4 AFT; and

6.2.4.5 EI-Africa Region.

6.3 Roles

6.3.1 The DBE was responsible to host the seminar;

6.3.2 The ELRC was the co-host of the seminar responsible for ensuring that all activities related to the IT services were conducted satisfactorily;

6.3.3 The teacher unions were responsible for presenting papers on the following topics:

- ***Is teacher well-being important for teaching and learning in education?***
- ***Can Human behavior contribute positively or negatively to teacher well-being?***

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6.4 International and Multi-Lateral Organisations were responsible for presenting papers and sharing their national and regional experiences and best practices on teacher wellbeing on the following topics:

- ***“Teacher Wellbeing”***
- ***Is educator well-being important for teaching and learning in Education?***

7. Attendees

The following DBE stakeholders were invited and attended the Seminar:

- Members of the Executive Council (MECs);
- Heads Of Provincial Departments;
- DBE Stakeholders: South African Council for Educators (SACE), Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA) and the National Collaboration Education Trust (NECT);
- Leaders and members of Teacher Unions and School Governing Bodies;
- Provincial Department of Education (PEDs) officials and NTA -Coordinators;
- Teachers and Education Assistants; and
- Invitations – Platforms for invitations: DBE invite, MS Teams link, Facebook, YouTube and Teacher Connect which offered the connection at a zero rated format.

8. Summary of the proceedings

8.1 The programme was directed by the Director: Labour Relations Management and Conditions of Service Mr MJ Galorale with the Vote of thanks delivered by Mr M Cele ELRC, Deputy Chairperson.

8.2 Ministry – setting the tone

The Minister delivered the keynote address where she appreciated the first seminar on Teacher Well-Being and amongst others, she also indicated the following:

- Encouraged the DBE and ELRC to develop consensus both at a theoretical level and practical measures to protect the most critical asset in the

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schooling system – which is our teachers. Further engagements Collaborative Approach of working together;

- Engage entirely on measures, institutional, legislation - put teacher wellness on the centre
- Thanked the teacher unions and appreciated their support in driving the vaccination programme.

8.3 Guest Speaker

The Seminar Key note speaker was Dr. Portia Mutevedzi a Senior Epidemiologist at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital, Soweto. During her presentation² she encouraged the Department of Basic Education to conduct more activities around Teacher well-being and prioritise the Teacher Well-Being initiative since teachers are responsible for their well-being and that of their learners.

8.4 Office of the DBE Director-General

The DBE was represented by Dr Faith Kumalo who in her presentation emphasised that “the sector needs to underpin everything it does with a good measure of care and support”.

In her presentation, she also indicated that South African educators and the nation at large had challenges on their health status prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This presentation displayed the urgency of conducting more well-being activities.

- 8.5 The Director for Continuing Professional Teacher Development, Ms Hofmeester presented the recommendations for the Seminar citing that how the DBE will take forward the discussions from the Seminar and ensure that they turn into strategies for future plans for the sector.

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In addition, she mentioned that teachers have to take control of their mental health and the sector needs to capacitate them with effective strategies, techniques and coping mechanisms to manage their stress and general mental wellbeing.

NB: The full speech of the Minister and all the Seminar presentations are accessible from the DBE website at www.education.gov.za

9. Teacher Wellbeing seminar coverage

In preparation for the Seminar some of the key mandates were to reach out to as many teachers, Employee Assistant Programme (EAP) and frontline officials at national and Provincial Departments of Education.

As a result, the records proved that the Seminar had reached out to different officials who joined through Microsoft Teams as well as the Social Media.

The table below reflects the viewership per platform in addition for those that have joined the through the Social media:

Table 1: Reflection of viewers per platform

Platform	Number of viewers
MS Teams	1507 - Registration page views -ELRC
Facebook	1184
YouTube	134
Teacher Connect	A large number of teachers utilised this zero rated facility. offered by Ecubed.

10. Recommendations emanating from the Seminar

Recognising the challenges around teacher well-being, the Seminar recommended a need to:

10.1 Development of teachers

- Equip teachers with knowledge of and access to formal support networks, such as Employee Assistance Programs
- Embark on ongoing holistic discourses on Mental Health and wellbeing activities for teachers;
- Constantly acknowledge and appreciate teachers; and
- Create mental and psychosocial support that is ongoing and not once-off.

10.2 Improved School Management skills

- Assist School Management Teams (SMTs) to provide resources for peer mentoring, and encourage professional relationships among all at the schools
- For excellent leadership in supporting the well-being of teachers;
- Acknowledge voice of teachers around their well-being; and
- Customise training and support programs related to teacher morale, motivation and support.

10.3 Mental and Psychological Support

- Develop a clear policy directive on Teacher Well-being;
- Explore ways to reduce the class sizes;
- Urgently address teacher poor working conditions;
- Appropriately prepare novice teachers to deal with their own well-being first to enable them to deal with the contextual challenges they will be confronted with in all schools (e.g. through induction programmes); and
- Create a workplace environment where teachers can voice their concerns around their well-being.

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10.4 **Research**

Conduct research that will lead to appropriate strategies in different contexts in support of teachers wherever they are.

10.5 **Interference and/or intervention of the society**

- Adopt measures to confront the realities in communities that spills over to schools
- The perceived value of society of teachers needs to be improved;
- Dedicated time for teachers and learners for pastoral care; and
- Recognise non-teaching activities (extra-curricular) to deal with admin and overload stress.

In essence, all recommendations point to a systematic approach in dealing with Teacher Well-being. Three main courses of action could be deduced, namely:

- A thorough introspection on the workload and work environment of teachers;
- Policy review with special attention to Teacher Well-being; and
- A need for a comprehensive implementation plan detailing activities of all role players in the sector in order to address all concerns raised.

11. Implications of the Seminar on the educational sector

11.1. The Seminar provided the DBE with an opportunity to examine how educators could more thoughtfully and deliberately respond to the stressful outcome of COVID-19 and its negative impact on their well-being by asking thought-provoking questions about the purpose, relevance and importance of their well-being;

11.2. As the education sector, we have witnessed that teacher wellbeing has always been a challenge globally and in South Africa. DBE will use blended approaches to manage the current challenges faced by teachers beyond the seminar by reaching out to all the teachers nationally;

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- 11.3. Investment in teacher wellbeing contributes to improved health and wellbeing for teachers and students, and ultimately, to positive learning outcomes. The education of children and young people is at the core of teachers' work and learner success underpins the daily effort, enthusiasm, and commitment from teachers;
- 11.4. Managers have to increase knowledge and awareness of health-promoting behaviours;
- 11.5. The importance of developing systems for the mainstreaming of care and support for teaching and learning;
- 11.6. There is a need to increase wellness knowledge, skills and decision making among educators and school support staff for the benefit of the learners; and
- 11.7. Utilisation of Teacher Connect will be essential so that teachers may be able to connect even during the pandemic at a zero-rated platform. As part of the going forward strategy, more engagements will be done with Ecubed for Teacher Connect utilisation.

12. Way forward

- 12.1 The DBE, will prepare a presentation to all PEDs on the recommendations and outcomes of the seminar for consideration and implementation in provinces;
- 12.2 The PEDs are expected to conduct a similar Seminar and advocacy campaign under the auspices of the PELRC in provinces before the end of 2021; and
- 12.3 Teacher wellbeing should be a standing item on the agenda of PELRC meetings.