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ANA tests postponed, department leaves schools in the dark

By: Sabelo Nsele

Durban - Pupils across the country will not be writing Annual National Assessment (ANA) tests from Tuesday.

In a last-minute move, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on Friday announced that the 2015 Annual National Assessment (ANA), which was scheduled to start on Tuesday and be written by 8.6 million pupils, has been postponed until February next year.

Teachers across the country have been left in the dark, eagerly awaiting official word from the government after its surprise decision.

ANA, which tests numeracy and literacy, had come under severe attacks from teacher unions who expressed concerns relating to the administration of the tests which they said did not give them enough time for improvement strategies to take place before pupils are re-assessed.

After negotiating with the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (Sadtu), the National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (Naptosa) and the South African Onderwysersunie (SAOU), the DBE gave in to the pressure by the unions.

"The DBE considers the postponement to be in the best interest of schooling stability and will also assist in improving the quality and the thrust of the national assessment programme," DBE national spokesperson Elijah Mhlanga said yesterday.

According to Sadtu deputy secretary Bheki Shandu, the roll-out of ANA costs the department R300 million.

But Mhlanga is not concerned about the financial implications of the postponement.

"There will be no additional costs because they were going to write ANA anyway," said Mhlanga. He said the papers which had been distributed would be sent back to the district and circuit offices and be redistributed next year. "That's why we want schools not to open [the bundles]."

Naptosa said they will be working with DBE to improve ANA.

"Naptosa is pleased that the DBE is committed to working on remodelling the assessment system for future implementation," said Anthony Pierce, provincial chief executive officer.

SAOU CEO Chris Klopper said he hoped this will bring positive results.

"I truly believe that the above is a win-win for all parties and that conflict in the various staff rooms between the members of the different unions will be avoided and, most importantly, that we will be able to address problems with ANA," said Klopper.

A DEPUTY principal at a Pietermaritzburg high school said both Sadtu and Naptosa sent SMS notifications to members saying that the ANAs were postponed after meetings were held during the week.

However, the deputy principal said that the school has received no notifications from the Department of Education confirming this.

"Our school is due to write the assessments from September 15 to 18 and we have already received the question papers," he said.

In a SMS notification sent to members on Thursday, Sadtu said their general secretary confirmed that at a meeting held in Durban, it was agreed that the ANAs would be postponed to 2016. "We wish to sincerely thank you for your loyalty and commitment to the Union. Whilst you are bold and courageous in challenging issues that are prejudicial to pupil and teacher, others piggyback on your efforts and try to steal the glory," the SMS read.

"Congratulations to all Sadtu members. Today you stand tall knowing that you have made a difference and a positive contribution to people's education."

In a similar SMS, Naptosa told its members that "ANA will be remodelled in the next three months and implemented in 2016".

Another local school principal, who asked not to be named, said they have not yet received word from the Department of Education regarding the delay of ANA. The principal said: "Naptosa and Sadtu have SMSed us to say that there will be no ANA this year. However, we are still waiting for the department's instructions. This is absolute nonsense because everyone was geared up and ready for the assessments and now at the last minute people are causing drama," said the principal.

She said that her school had already collected the assessment papers and they remain sealed until the department's instructions are sent.

"We just have to wait for the department to tell us what to do. If they need the papers back then we will return them sealed. In our school, this assessment is used as a yard stick to determine how our school is performing. The children are meant to start the assessments on Tuesday but now we have to only wait until Monday for word on what to do," she said.

Source: News 24

<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/ANA-tests-postponedEducation-Department-leaves-Schools-in-the-dark-20150911>