

To: Ms Debbie Schafer
Minister for Education
Western Cape Government
By email: edumin.edumin@westerncape.gov.za

CC: Mr Lance Abrahams
Western Cape Education Department
By email: Lance.Abrahams@westerncape.gov.za

CC: Ms Patricia van Niekerk
Western Cape Education Department
By email: Patricia.VanNiekerk@westerncape.gov.za

19 March 2021

Dear MEC Schäfer

CALL FOR AN EXTENSION OF THE ADMISSIONS APPLICATIONS DEADLINE FOR THE 2022 SCHOOL YEAR

1. Equal Education (“EE”) is a membership-based, democratic movement of learners, parents, teachers and community members advocating for the provision of both an equal and quality education in South Africa.
2. The Equal Education Law Centre (“EELC”) is a registered law clinic. Its staff of social justice lawyers specialise in education law and policy, through conducting legal research and advocacy, community lawyering and public interest litigation.
3. We note that the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) has opened admission applications for the 2022 school year for a period of one month, starting 26 February 2021 and closing on 26 March 2021.
4. Given the late start to the current school year and the approximately [6 000 learners in the Western Cape who are still unplaced](#), we are concerned that the application period does not allow sufficient time for public communication of the deadline and for parents / caregivers to apply for their children. We therefore call on the WCED to extend the March deadline for 2022 admissions applications. An appropriate extension will allow for adequate time to resolve the existing learner admissions crisis in the province and for public communication and education on the application process.

5. The reopening of schools was delayed, most learners are still not back at school every day and many families face increased economic challenges brought about by the pandemic. Not only does this place parents/caregivers and learners under severe pressure, it also affects the ability of families to access information, to travel where necessary and to access the internet and devices necessary for completing applications.
6. In addition, a month after schools reopened, thousands of learners are yet to see the inside of a classroom - a situation which gravely undermines their right to a basic education. These learners and their guardians are still navigating the difficulties of trying to get into schools, which will affect their ability to submit other applications in time. Section 3(3) of the South African Schools Act requires that the MEC ensure that there are enough school places for every child in his/ her province to attend school, and where this cannot be done due to a lack of capacity, the MEC must take steps to remedy this, and must submit a report to the Minister of Basic Education on the progress achieved in addressing the problem. In light of this, we would like to inquire, what steps, if any, the WCED has taken to ensure that the remaining 6000 unplaced learners are admitted in suitable schools.
7. We noted various systemic factors that contribute to learners not being placed in school, including problems with the online admissions system during the application process. Over the last three years, through the EELC's advice clinic matters and EE's engagement with parents, we have learned that parents have difficulty navigating the online system. We note that the WCED has released online videos to explain how the online system is used, but this is not helpful as it presupposes that parents have access to devices and the internet.
8. Despite the ongoing issues that parents/caregivers experience navigating the online admissions system since it was piloted in 2019, the department continues to keep applications open for only one month. That any application submitted outside of this deadline is considered late and is dealt with once other learners have been placed - and even then, only if there are still places available - unfairly puts those parents / guardians who do not have the resources to apply on time to secure places for learners at their preferred schools, at a disadvantage.
9. The existing challenges highlighted in this letter have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and warrant a reasonable extension of the WCED's 26 March deadline.
10. We request that you provide us with a written response indicating whether the WCED will push out the admissions applications deadline and the reasons for its decision if it does not, by no later than Wednesday 24 March, 2021.

Yours faithfully,



Nontsikelelo Dlulani
Head of Western Cape: Equal Education