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Implications of Covid-19 on the management of school financial resources in quintile 5 public schools

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With the promulgation of the South African Schools Act, public education in South Africa was decentralised and communities were made responsible for the governance of public schools. White Paper 1 on Education and Training confirmed the inability of the state to meet the financial requirements of public education. Despite the fact that school governing bodies are responsible for raising substantial funding, their ability to appropriate school funds is limited by legislation, irrespective of the origin of the funds or assets in question. These restrictions have a substantial impact on the way financing is structured and managed by public schools. In 2020 schools were closed for more than 2 months due to the Covid-19 lockdown, and many parents were left questioning why they should pay for services not rendered. Using a qualitative research approach, we aimed to determine the impact of Covid-19 on the management of school fees and resources in public schools. The findings reveal that Covid-19 has had an impact on school budgets, teaching posts and fundraising activities, as well as on the day-to-day running of schools.

Keywords: Covid-19; fee-paying schools; fundraising; governing body; quintiles; resources; school fees

Introduction and Background

Education in South Africa was effectively decentralised with the promulgation of the South African Schools Act (SASA) Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996a). With the promulgation of SASA, communities became more responsible for the governance of public schools. Funding of public schools had to address a system of considerable disparity while recognising constitutional imperatives of equity, access and redress (RSA, 1996b). White Paper 1 on Education and Training (RSA, 1996a) emphasises the fact that the sustainability of the public education system would depend on available funds.

Communities need to take ownership of their schools and build partnerships with other stakeholders for the resourcing of educational needs. This places a responsibility on school governing bodies (SGBs) to use all measures within their power to supplement school resources.

The National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSF) (RSA, 1996b) inform the funding of schools in terms of socio-economic categories, with more public funds allocated to the poorest schools. The least poor schools, quintiles 4 and 5, receive a lower financial allocation from the state. Therefore, these schools depend heavily on school fees, private donations and resources to supplement school budgets in order to maintain education standards. Learners who cannot pay school fees are allowed to be partially or fully exempt from paying school fees (Department of Basic Education, RSA, 2016). These exemptions have a negative impact on the income of fee-paying schools. Limited funding and the success rate of exemptions granted, place schools in a position to mobilise additional funds from their school communities and other sources. Public schools are, therefore, forced to seek other avenues and entrepreneurial ventures to generate private funding to provide for school operations that the state cannot afford.

At the time that this study was conducted, all schools in South Africa were closed in an effort to prevent the spread of Covid-19 among schoolchildren and educators. On 30 April 2020, the Minister of Basic Education urged parents to continue to pay school fees as usual in order to ensure that teachers continue to receive salaries. The question arises whether or not parents should be expected to pay the full school fees even though their children are not physically attending school or benefitting from the school experience through participation in sport, culture and social interaction. Thus, the question is: What are the rights of schools to enforce the payment of school fees under Covid-19 circumstances?

The South African Schools Act No 84 of 1996 (SASA) distinguishes between public and independent schools. Public schools perform the constitutional function of providing basic education in terms of Section 29(1) regarding the refusal of admission, suspension or expulsion of a learner due to the non-payment of school fees, in order not to deprive learners of their rights to basic education. In terms of Section 40 of the Act, parents and learners in public schools are liable for the payment of school fees but can be exempted from the payment of school fees should they be unable to pay. Depending on whether a parent has suffered a reduction in salary or has become unemployed during the Covid-19 lockdown, the exemption may be partial or full. According to a statement made by the Western Cape Education Department, where parents have been rendered unemployed due to the national lockdown, they should apply to the head of the SGB for exemption from school fees in terms of Section 40 (Van Rooyen, 2012). Parents have been urged by various stakeholders to continue paying school fees to cover the salaries of teachers appointed by SGBs.

Conceptual Framework

Based on Powell's framework for decision-making (1993), which includes domination, institutional autonomy and principles of decision-making, a conceptual framework was established. Powell's model (1993) was deemed relevant, and provided structure and guided the investigation on the implications of Covid-19 on financial decision-making and resources in fee-paying quintile 5 schools. Schools' power and authority afforded them by the central and provincial government to make and implement own decisions is regarded as institutional autonomy, which can be described as the power given to SGBs to govern schools and to principals to manage the school's affairs. Principals and SGBs thus have the power to influence in implementing their responsibilities.

Despite the fact that SGBs receive funding from private resources, and are accountable for the outcomes pertaining to procurement (Van Rooyen, 2012), their discretionary ability in the appropriation of school funds is confined by legislation, regardless of the origin of the funds in question. Parents of learners and members of the community in which the school is located are represented in the SGB, which exercises defined authority over some of the school's domestic affairs (Buys, 2016). In a recent judgement by the South African Constitutional Court in the matter between the *Federation of Governing Bodies for South African Schools (FEDSAS) and the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Education in Gauteng* (CCT 209/15) ZACC 14, the final power to overwrite school policy was placed in the hands of the provincial government. In this scenario, communities have experienced a loss of ownership and control over money raised in the interest of the school once it is paid into the school fund. In a time of Covid-19 where SGBs must make important decisions on the spending of funds for school readiness (cleaning, sanitising, personal protecting equipment [PPEs]), et cetera, it is crucial for schools to have the right to make their own decisions in this regard, more so, when the state cannot provide all the equipment necessary to assist with the prevention of Covid-19 at schools. Many schools, especially those that fall in the quintile 5 category, bought equipment at their own expense in order to be ready for the return of learners.

The effective management of finances and resources is critical to the success of individual institutions. Schools cannot regard themselves as separate from their local communities and the various stakeholders who have an interest, often an invested one, in the provision of high quality education (Kovalchuk & Shchudlo, 2014). According to Van Rooyen (2012), financing models of functional public schools in South Africa differ widely, depending on such aspects as a school's functionality and the socio-economic

status of its community. Some schools have effective financial management systems in place, while others do not. SGBs will be challenged to balance their school finances during and after Covid-19. Schools will receive less school fees, as parents themselves will be financially challenged. Parent unemployment will place schools in a difficult position regarding the collection of school fees, thus public schools need to exercise a fine balancing act when managing school fees during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

In the first instance, the Covid-19 pandemic is a health crisis. The fact that many countries decided to close schools during their respective outbreaks, crystallises the dilemma. Policy-makers must decide between closing schools (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020) (reducing contact and saving lives) and keeping them open (allowing workers to work and maintain the economy). All over the world families face severe short-term disruptions: home schooling is both a massive shock to parents' productivity levels and the social lives of children (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). Going to school is the best public policy tool available to raise skills. While school time can be fun and can raise social skills and social awareness, from an economic point of view, the primary point of being at school is to improve a child's ability. However, can we imagine or even estimate the extent to which Covid-19 interruptions influence schools? Over the past 10 weeks (at the time of this research), South Africa (and the rest of the world) has significantly reduced its economic activities, and millions of South Africans have applied for unemployment insurance pay-outs. This will affect state revenues which will result in reduced state spending on education. The following questions are posed: How badly will the South African education system be affected, and how will public schools react to this?

The extraordinary costs of health care investments and social services for those rendered unemployed, homeless and without food by the Covid-19 crisis will absorb much of a shrinking state revenue base, leaving education in the lurch (Staff Writer, 2020). The outlook is uncertain, but forecasts show that government spending on education is likely to suffer because of the pandemic. While economic growth is predicted to rebound in 2021/22, spending on education is likely to stagnate in most countries, and will actually fall in some, such as South Africa, as governments attempt to contain budget deficits brought about by Covid-19. Another shock to education financing will come from families' own spending. Parents in low- and middle-income groups will struggle to maintain the considerable resources they devote to their children's education. This will have a rippling

effect, as parents will not be able to pay school fees, which will affect the school budget. The pandemic is expected to push millions of children into extreme poverty.

Another impact is likely to come from the external financing of education. Assistance from the private/business sector has recently returned to accepted levels. Since Covid-19 is expected to hit the economies of major donors, they will find it challenging to maintain high levels of assistance and support. Many schools rely on support from outside donors and if these donations should diminish, so too will the income of public schools. Schools depend increasingly on community and commercial support to raise funds. Meaningful partnerships between schools and community stakeholders can result in a positive developmental outcome for learners, strengthening public participation and drawing additional resources to schools (Swift-Morgan, 2014). Morris (2000) emphasises the fact that management of donor relationships is key to successful fundraising. Formal communication between schools and donors is crucial in order to maintain their interdependence with donors who share their goals and objectives. Donors can be individuals, companies or trusts. For fundraising to be sustainable, it must be assumed that donors act in their own interest and for the common good when making donations.

To increase their effectiveness, schools will want more control over own funding. The enactment of the SASA (RSA, 1996a) effectively placed schools in the hands of the community. The objectives of decentralised school management were to increase efficient use of resources; to increase the quality of teaching and learning; make parents and learners more aware of their situation; and to promote parents' choices with regard to school matters. Principals (who are members of school governing bodies) should not only motivate educators to obtain sustained commitment and extraordinary performance for the greater good of the school and community it serves, but they have the added task of managing school finances (Blake, 2008). Principals thus have major responsibilities and challenges in leading their schools effectively, which includes being entrepreneurial. An entrepreneurial approach is especially required in face of the challenging changes schools are experiencing now (Karberg, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has put much pressure on school finances. Added to this, one can expect cuts to funding education, and other sectors, during the 2020/21 financial year, which will forever affect the lives of learners. With our nation's attention fixed on the Covid-19 health crisis, leaders are warning of a financial meltdown that could devastate education and set back an entire generation of learners (Burgess & Sievertsen,

2020). For the first full month of Covid-19 lockdowns (April 2020), businesses and government reported shocking declines in tax revenues (Griffith, 2020). Budget cuts will hit the most vulnerable, low-income communities the hardest (Turner, 2020). Government and provinces will stop spending on buildings, transportation, supplies and equipment, followed by staff cuts (especially teachers employed by SGBs). The right to education is a constitutional right, and education must, therefore, continue with or without money. SGBs will have to revisit their annual budgets and projections for 2020. With the increase in unemployment and job losses, bad debts will increase, which will directly impact schools' income. SGBs should manage this process very carefully and need to follow the legal process stipulated by SASA for school fee collections. Many fundraising opportunities have been misused, have had to be postponed or parents may not have had the finances to pay school fees. School principals and SGBs need to prioritise spending and scale down on that which cannot be afforded; luxuries should be cut in schools' budgets (Deacon, 2020). New budgets should be drawn up and for the remainder of the financial year SGBs should spend based on parents' approval.

Legislative framework for funding in public schools

A network of legislation and policies governs SGBs and public schools. Several pieces of national legislation exist pertaining to school governance and the financial management in schools.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, makes some provisions that influence the governance of public schools. Measures to address equity, access and redress have specific implications on the funding of public education and create (Buys, 2016) a right for those who have been disadvantaged in the past to rely on the state to rectify injustices. Obligatory school fees pose a problem in terms of access to a public institution based on affordability. No child may be refused admission to a school because they cannot afford the school fees. A legal obligation was, thus, placed on public schools charging school fees to exempt qualifying learners from the payment of school fees. Covid-19 will put schools under great pressure, especially when more parents apply for exemptions or cease to pay school fees as a result of unemployment or a cut in their salaries.

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996

The South African Schools Act (SASA) (RSA, 1996a) aims to establish a uniform system for school organisation and finance. The funding of

public schools is the joint responsibility of the state (public funds), the parent community (school fees) and other stakeholders (private funds).

According to Section 12(1) of the SASA, the member of the Executive Council must provide for public schools to educate learners from funds appropriated for this purpose by the provincial legislature.

Section 34 refers to the responsibility of the State:

- 1) The state must fund public schools from public revenue on an equitable basis in order to ensure proper exercise of the rights of learners to education and the redress of past inequalities in education provision.
- 2) The state must, on an annual basis, provide sufficient information to public schools regarding the funding referred to in subsection 1, to enable public schools to prepare budgets for the rest of financial year.

The control and management of the finances, property and assets of the school is a function of the SGB, provided for in terms of Sections 20, 37, 38, 42 and 43 of SASA (RSA, 1996a). Sections 37 to 43 of SASA (RSA, 1996a) deal with the responsibilities of SGBs regarding the management of finances at public schools in South Africa. The SGB must establish a school fund, compile financial statements and produce annual statements. To enable SGBs to fulfil their financial responsibilities, Section 36 stipulates as follows:

A governing body of a public school must take all the reasonable measures within its means to supplement the resources supplied by the State in order to improve the quality of education provided by the school to all learners at the school.

According to Section 39 of SASA (RSA, 1996a), school fees may be charged by public schools if a resolution to do so has been adopted by a majority of parents present at an annual general budget meeting (AGM), and Section 40 determines that parents are liable for the payment of school fees, unless exempted to pay such. With the impact of Covid-19, it is expected that cuts in funding to education in general will be made, which will affect public schools and the lives of learners. Unemployment and cuts to many people's salaries will have a direct impact on parents paying school fees. In order to survive, parents will buy and pay for necessities, which will leave schools vulnerable with regard to the receipt of school fees. Funding cuts will hit vulnerable, low-income communities the hardest. Departments and districts will trim spending on buildings, supplies and equipment, which is much needed by schools in vulnerable areas (Karberg, 2020). While we do not yet know what the full impact of Covid-19 will be, we know that the economic hardship, plus the grief and trauma that will ensue from Covid-19 will be unprecedented for today's school learners. In other words, schools will not only need help making up for the dramatic gaps in state spending, they will need extra money to pay for the additional things

they will be asked to do – feed children and families in hard-hit communities, help millions of learners make up lost learning time during the lockdown phases, and ensure that their environments are safe and stay safe when learners finally return to school. Since the promulgation of the Schools Act, SGBs have been delegated the task of managing the school's finances (Bisschoff & Mestry, 2003). SGBs will now have to balance their schools' finances, and re-plan and budget for the 2020 financial year. They will face the challenge of lessened income with which to cover all the obligations of public schools, as the impact of Covid-19 will be felt for years to come.

National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF)

The NNSSF (Department of Basic Education, RSA, 2016), Gazette 40417 Notice 1406 of 2016, addresses the constitutional requirements of access, redress and equity. To address equity in funding school education, the Government introduced the NNSSF policy (Department of Basic Education, RSA, 2016). The NNSSF policy provides a statutory basis for school funding, as schools are now classified into wealth quintiles (Mestry & Ndlovu, 2014) and subsidised accordingly. Schools serving poor communities must receive more state funding than schools serving communities that are more affluent. The operating costs of public schools categorised as quintile 4 and 5, or least poor schools, are funded in part by state subsidies (which are less than the subsidies for quintiles 1–3 schools) and partly by school fees, which are compulsory for all parents, who can afford to pay (Buys, 2016). Quintile 5 schools are seen as being better equipped and resourced, thus, parents are expected to shoulder a much higher responsibility for the financial burden of education provision. The NNSSF policy has placed a greater stress on SGBs and widened the divide between what government expects schools to do, and what schools are able to do. Covid-19 will place great stress on government to fulfil its promises. With much less money in the state coffers (Covid-19 loans and less tax) the government will still need to dig deep to close the gap between the poorest of the poor and wealthier schools. Schools in rural and urban working-class communities will still suffer large classes, poor physical conditions and a lack of learning resources, despite a promising Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Schools have already had to "budget down" in order to survive the financial year, as they (quintile 5) have already spent on Covid-19 equipment, which was not budgeted for, and this will continue for the remainder of 2020. School leadership will be challenged to balance income and expenditure, as communities (parents) will not be able to pay school fees.

Statement of Research Problem

The constitutional space exists for diverse levels of autonomy in public schools (RSA, 1996b), but requirements imposed upon schools by education authorities often make this difficult in practice (Malan, 2010). The role of parents as the primary person/s responsible for the education of their children, and the SGBs' right to decide on the distribution of school funds to promote the objectives and diverse character of schools are in direct conflict with the government's objectives of centralised control of public institutions (Buys, 2016). Public schools strive to maintain their unique character and implement diverse financial management solutions to maintain institutional diversity in education provision, and increase autonomy. Covid-19 ushered in a new dimension to the management of school fees. With learners not attending formal school and receiving an online component of teaching, parents questioned whether they need to pay school fees even though their children are not enjoying the full benefits of all school activities (Karberg, 2020).

The main research question to be investigated was: *What will the implications of Covid-19 be on the management of school financial resources in quintile 5 public schools?*

In this study we attempted to find answers to the following:

- How will the school budget be influenced by Covid-19?
- What are the reactions from parents to paying school fees?
- What plans are in place to balance the budget for the anticipated shortfall?
- How will school activities and resources be influenced by Covid-19?

The aims of study were to:

- Determine how the school budget will be influenced by Covid-19;
- Identify the reactions of parents on the request to continue paying school fees;
- Examine the plans put in place to balance the budget for the anticipated shortfall.

Research Methodology

Advancing from an interpretivist paradigm, this qualitative multiple case study was undertaken by conducting semi-structured interviews with five principals of fee-paying public schools in Gauteng West. The study was approached from a qualitative research paradigm; research findings were arrived at by determining the relationship between variables. The systems theory provided the analytical framework to organise a theory on trends surrounding the impact of Covid-19 on the management of school funds in public schools. Schools are independent legal entities, but do not operate in isolation, neither can they be separated from their environment. This change to the environment (Covid-19) directly affects the

structure of school funding and can affect the organisation and management of a school. The research sample was purposefully selected to include fee-paying public schools from variable income communities. All schools included in the study were quintile 5 schools as defined by the NNSSF (Department of Basic Education, RSA, 2016). One must remember that quintile 5 schools receive the least financial support from the state, and are, thus, dependent upon school fees, additional fundraising and other private funding in order to balance the budget. Interviews were used to capture the personal views (Creswell, 2012) and experiences of school principals who are directly involved in the financial management of the school. Purposeful sampling was used in selecting five fee-paying public schools with Section 21 functions. The rationale to select principals in the respective schools was because the participants are experienced and knowledgeable in school financial management and decision-making. The schools were all quintile 5 schools, situated in an urban area which means that they were at the same level of infrastructure and funding and had similar social economic status. We did not include SGBs or unions in the study, as it was difficult to arrange interviews with them during Covid-19 lockdown. Data collected were organised into workable units to facilitate coding. Data analysis was done thematically and categories were compared for similarities to increase the credibility of the findings. Comparisons of the interview data further verified and confirmed the trustworthiness of the findings.

Discussion of Findings

In presenting the findings, codes (P1–P5) were used to distinguish the five principals. Qualitative data from the interviews are presented with references to observations and the literature reviewed, where appropriate.

The following themes were identified:

- 1) Impact on budget;
- 2) Cost of technology and resources;
- 3) Job losses;
- 4) Social and emotional support for learners and teachers.

Impact on Budget

As schools work to maintain some level of instruction and other support for learners, with school buildings closed since the end of March 2020, there are growing concerns that the economic fall-out from the Covid-19 pandemic could undermine the state budget, which provides for school funding. State revenues depend mostly on income and taxes. The wave of lay-offs and reductions in working hours, because of the closure of “non-essential” business activities, means that wage income will be reduced. Those who have lost income will have less money to spend and those

maintaining their income will have fewer opportunities to shop. This reduces sales and, therefore, sales tax revenues. The loss of tax revenue could mean cuts in funding for public programmes, leading to more unemployment and the reduction of public purchases from the private sector. The downgrading of South Africa by both Moody's and Fitch has not helped the need for investments in a country, which is hopeful for foreign investment in order to boost its economy. In addition, the 500 billion-rand loan to prepare for the Covid-19 pandemic, places the economy of South Africa under great pressure for years to come. In terms of Section 40 of the SASA, parents of learners in public schools are liable for school fees, but can be exempted (RSA, 1996a) if they are unable to pay.

Parents have been encouraged to continue paying school fees wherever possible. However, is this happening?

Our school have [sic] lost 32% of our monthly school fee income in April and May. We [are] under pressure to pay our monthly accounts (P2).

SGBs in schools where data were collected, had Zoom and Teams (online) meetings to ascertain where budgets can be trimmed.

"We never thought that we will spend over R350,000 on getting the school ready for the Covid-19 requirements. This was not budgeted for, and leaves a hole in our budget" (P4). The Education Department issued some equipment and cleaning materials to sanitise the schools, but in many cases, it was a slow process and schools decided to buy their own materials to ensure that the schools were clean and ready for the arrival of the first learners.

We had to cancel all our fundraising plans. We have three big events every year. The income from these events is just over R2 million. This helps us to cover so many things that will now be gone (P5).

I already had many phone calls from parents, either unemployed now, or where they had to take a 30-40% cut on their salaries, who will find it difficult to pay school fees. This will put our budget under a lot of pressure and I cannot see that we will be able to make ends meet within three months. (P3)

The SGB wrote an open letter to parents (the Schools Act prohibits refusal of admission due to non-payment of school fees) to still make provision to pay school fees or to make alternative repayment terms (P1).

The leadership of principals are [sic] under a lot of pressure with the Covid-19 challenges (P1).

If schools are going to suffer losses because of non-payment of school fees, teaching and learning will be affected. In many schools, SGBs have employed teachers and without school fees being paid by parents, SGB posts will be cut. This will result in bigger classes, which will affect learning. The budget for 2021 will still have to be shaped according to Covid-19 challenges.

Cost of Technology and Resources

Schools are increasingly moving into the online environment. Some schools that have been using electronic devices, shifted to online classes. As a result, education has changed dramatically, with the rise in e-learning, teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. Research (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020) suggests that online learning has been shown to increase the retention of information and is more time efficient. These changes brought about by the corona virus might be here to stay.

There are, however, challenges that must be overcome. Learners without reliable internet access and technology struggle to participate in digital learning. This gap is seen across South Africa and between income brackets.

Our school has spent a considerable amount of money to tune in onto the digital learning platform. If we can sustain it, is another matter. With many parents who indicated that they are not going to send their children to school, schools will now be faced by face-to-face and remote learning. Schools need to prepare for that as we cannot say no to teach the learners at home, especially when parents are still paying school fees. (P4)

To change to online learning will cost the school money, which will put a further burden on the school budget. We need to broaden the internet access, teachers must have laptops, and teachers need to be provided with data, which is costly. All things that we never thought of before the Covid-19 pandemic. (P1)

The main advantage of online learning is that it allows learners to participate in high quality learning when distance and scheduling make on-ground learning difficult or even impossible (Turner, 2020). Before any online programme can hope to succeed, the learners must be able to access the online learning environment. The learners who cannot afford the technology that the school employs, are lost as customers, as internet access is costly. If learners' online time is limited by the internet access they can afford, then instruction and participation in online programmes will not be equitable for all learners.

We are paying much more now for internet access than before. Although we are in a more wealthy [sic] position to have an upgraded access, there are still learners, say 15%, who do not have access to internet at home. The SGB is now looking into the matter, to at least support learners with data on a monthly basis, to have access to internet. (P6)

Both learners and teachers must at least have some computer knowledge in order to function successfully in the online environment. This will bring about additional costs, as many teachers need to be trained in online programmes.

We had to buy 30 additional laptops for staff and add to that the data that the school must provide to staff to stay online with learners at home, and one can see that the additional costs because of Covid-19 are increasing every day. Again, we have not budgeted for the additional cost of technology

and need to re-prioritise the budget for the remainder of the year. (P3)

SGBs and principals are under pressure to balance their books for 2020. The budget must be re-organised, and budget posts need to be moved around, for example, the maintenance budget can be re-allocated to Covid-19 spending. Parents also need buy-in, and clear communication with parents and stakeholders is essential.

Job Losses

The current economic downturn will put a large number of public school teachers' jobs at risk. In general, South Africans continue to lose jobs because of the Covid-19 and the resulting lockdown. Staff Writer (2020) reports that the number of consumers who lost jobs has increased significantly since the beginning of April – from 10% in week 1 of the lockdown to 14% in week 3. The numbers of consumers who have experienced reductions in their working hours due to Covid-19 has increased to 37%. Overall, 44% (Staff Writer, 2020) of all consumers report that they will be unable to make their rent payments, 39% will be unable to pay personal loans, 37% will not be able to pay cell phone bills and 32% will not be able to repay credit card debt. All these indicators will have a domino effect. As more and more people lose their jobs, the more it will influence schools' finances, as an increased number of parents will not be able to pay school fees, which will have a devastating impact on school budgets.

We haven't received 38% of our school fees in April and the picture looks even worse for the month of May (P2).

Our school has 35 SGB posts. We will not be able to pay all of them anymore. We might manage to keep them until end of July. Our reserves are drying up and many of our donors said they could not make any donations anymore. All of this affects teaching and learning. If we cannot keep all our SGB posts, it means that our classes will be larger, with more learners in each class. (P5)

Many parents wish to contribute and have approached schools to pay a reduced amount towards school fees in an attempt to assist schools in surviving the Covid-19 pandemic period. If parents are prepared to pay reduced amounts of school fees, schools should consider this and prioritise the budget. SGBs need to re-plan their budgets to fit the needs of the school for the remainder of 2020. Section 40 of SASA cannot be implemented if parents are prepared to pay a portion of the fees. Parents can also be exempted or partially exempted from paying school fees, depending on their circumstances. School leadership will once again be challenged to come up with solid plans to accommodate all the demands and requests from parents.

Social and Emotional Support

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, our interconnectedness has never been as clear. We now understand how important it is to be empathetic and resilient, build long-distance relationships, and depend on our collective resolve to strengthen our schools and communities (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). Upon returning to school (after or during Covid-19), children may struggle with significant adjustments to their routines (for example, schools, social distancing, and home confinement), which may interfere with their sense of structure and security. Learners might have questions and may behave differently in reaction to feelings of fear, sadness and anger relating to the pandemic and related conditions. Learners may worry about their safety and that of their loved ones, how they will meet their basic needs (food, shelter, and clothing) and the uncertainties of the future. Strong school leadership is needed now more than ever before. Teachers (who might need the same emotional and social assistance) must meet the challenge to place learners in a safe social and emotional space. The *in loco parentis* principle of keeping learners physically safe during the pandemic, is a serious challenge to educators, as is care for the learners' emotional health (Collie & Martin, 2016).

We support 45 families with basic grocery items every end of the month. The concern is that with the pressure on our budget and the absence of donations, we will not be able to keep this up, the support to them. We budgeted for the support in the budget, but if we need to prioritise the budget, the school is going to find it hard to make it with the resources in the budget till the end of the year. (P2) The school is still responsible as quintile 5, to pay for the basics every month, like water, electricity and security. This are services a school needs and it comes with a price. Schools are going to have problems to keep up with the financial demands of the Covid-19. (P5)

Many learners will remain at home (grades are phased in at different times of the year) when parents need to start working. Learners might find themselves in the care of someone who cannot support them in their learning routine. Parents might be forced to pay someone to assist learners with their lessons, while still having to pay school fees (as schools will still teach online), which will put a strain on the family budget, and result in a domino effect for the school (Turner, 2020).

For many of our learners, they receive meals at school which I think is sometimes their only meal for the day. We have additional meals or fruit for our learners. It will be difficult to sustain if we are going to see a drop in our school fees as times are going to be tough. (P3)

School leadership has responded to the crisis in providing support to learners – particularly the

vulnerable. Schools collaborate with the education departments, stakeholders and communities to support learners through this crisis. School budgets will remain under pressure as the demands and needs to manage the financial impact of Covid-19 continue to mount.

Recommendations

The lockdown has made it clear that remote learning is here to stay, which will require great improvements in connectivity, education technology, teachers' digital skills and other related investments. During school closures, schools will require even greater levels of investment and strong leadership. Since today's children will pay for the debts incurred by the response to the Covid-19 crisis, it only seems fair and sensible that our government finds ways to protect learning and the financing of education. The Covid-19 pandemic also highlights the need to improve the coverage and quality of data on education finance, to be better able to monitor spending plans and determine whether resources are being used effectively. Extra funding must be made available for schools to cover the unique challenges and financial costs of the Covid-19 outbreak. SGBs need to prioritise spending for the remainder of the school financial year. School leadership needs to work closely with the parent community and donors to find ways to overcome pressure on the school budget. Furthermore, SGBs and school leadership need to look for ways to avoid job losses to staff employed by SGBs. As social distancing will be a challenge in all schools, smaller classes will put less stress on teachers to manage their classes. Schools, aided by the Education Department, must assure services to support teachers and learners emotionally. Donors and communities should protect education assistance and uphold their current commitments to help finance the response to Covid-19. Food banks can provide food parcels to help people suffering from financial difficulties, as a result of job losses, cuts in salaries and unemployment. This is an opportunity to join hands with local communities and businesses to donate surplus stock to schools to distribute to parents/learners in need.

Conclusion

School leadership must aim to successfully complete the 2020 academic year in order to give every learner a fair chance to complete his/her grade (always acting in the best interest of the learner). Real leaders communicate regularly and honestly. Covid-19 can definitely be categorised as a new, changing and uncertain situation for all. School leaders need to know that adaptability is key, as there will be challenges to balance budgets, adjust thinking patterns and attitudes about online teaching and learning, and how technology can be

harnessed to support remote teaching. When teachers perceive their school leaders to be more autonomy-supportive, teachers report that relationships with learners and colleagues are more positive, they experience greater adaptability, greater work-related feelings of well-being and lower levels of emotional exhaustion.

Note

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