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**G E N E R A L N O T I C E S**

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**NOTICE 207 OF 2000**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY ACT, 1996 (No.27 of 1996)**

**NATIONAL POLICY FOR DESIGNING SCHOOL CALENDARS  
FOR ORDINARY PUBLIC SCHOOL IN SOUTH AFRICA**

I, **Kader Asmal**, Minister of Education, after consultation with the Council of Education Ministers, and with national and provincial **stakeholders** with a specific interest in school calendars, hereby announce in terms of section 3(4)(k) of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (No. 27 Of 1996)! the national policy for designing school calendars for ordinary public schools in South Africa.

Prof. **Kader Asmal, MP**  
Minister of Education

## GLOSSARY

**Allocated** time means the amount of time learners attend school in years, days or hours.

Breaking time means the amount of time taken during the school day for recreation and meals.

**Cluster** means **an** organisational unit consisting of two or more provinces that **all** share the same school calendar.

Curriculum according to **Lawton** (1975) is defined as “essentially a selection from the culture of a society: certain aspects of our way of life, certain kinds of knowledge, certain attitudes and values regarded **as** so important that their transmission to the next generation is not left to chance”.

Instructional time means instructional time is the amount of allocated time when instruction is provided in the essential learning areas.

**School** calendar means the annual plan that allocates the total number of days in a school year in a specific pattern, in accordance with the published regulations.

**School day** is defined by a specific number of hours.

**School holiday** means time allocated for learners and teachers to recuperate and also to engage in education related activities such as conferences and sport competitions.

**School term** means the basic sub-unit of time into which the school year is sub-divided. In the four-term system, this amounts to approximately 50 days.

**School year** is defined by a specific number of days.

**School governing body** means

Staggering refers to the planning technique of ensuring that the closing and opening dates of school terms of **provinces** in different clusters are separated by three or more days.

Time **on task** is the amount of instructional time when a student or group of students is attending to an appropriate task or is engaged in learning. (Also referred to as engaged time)

Some of the definitions are adapted from: **Lorin W. Anderson and Herbert J. Walberg (1993) Timepiece: Extending and Enhancing Learning Time** National Association of Secondary School Principals, Virginia, United States.

## 1. BACKGROW TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS POLICY

The school calendar structure the **total** number of days allocated for **teaching** and learning in a **school** year according to a unique pattern. It lays down the **dates** of commencement and termination of the school terms and the length of **school** holidays. The process of constructing the **school** calendar is guided by general principles and a set of **specifications**. In South **Africa**, the amalgamation of a number of different education departments and subdepartments after 1994, **necessitated** the consolidation of the various approaches to designing the calendar for application within the nine new **provinces** that formed the sub-national units of **educational** provision and **management**. Consequently, the document, "Criteria for the Compilation of School Calendars" was developed and utilised in the coordination of the school **calendars** from 1995 to 2000. The current **document**; "*National Policy for Designing School Calendars for Ordinary Public Schools in South Africa*" was drawn up as part of an investigation into the school **calendar**, conducted in 1999 by the Human Science Research Council (**HSRC**).

This document contains:

- the broad principles that should be taken into account in the school calendar design process;
- specific criteria that need to be taken into account in constructing the calendar for any specific **year**;
- definition of some key terms;
- a sample **time-frame** for the construction of the calendar for **any** **particular year**; and
- legislation which has application to **aspects** related to **calendar** construction.

## 2. PRINCIPLES ACCORDING TO WHICH THE SCHOOL CALENDAR SHOULD BE DESIGNED

### 2.1 EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The construction of the school calendar involves taking into account **the sometimes** conflicting needs and interests of various **stakeholders** and interest groups. It will not be **possible** always to accommodate the needs of **all stakeholders**. Education requirements must be **satisfied/given** priority. **This** means that the interests of the learners should receive priority. The interests of teachers and other **education** personnel who serve the immediate needs of learners must also be taken into **account**.

### 2.2 CULTURE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Planning of the school terms should where possible ensure that the allocation of holidays minimises interruptions to the **learning/teaching** cycle.

### 2.3 CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION

Wide consultation must take **place** with **stakeholders** and role-players at the district, provincial and national levels.

The involvement of the organised teaching **profession** and other personnel **engaged** in **education** on planning related to the school calendar is **important**.

The **Provincial Education** Departments should **maximise** the **levels** of participation from **stakeholders** and role players at the provincial level meetings. At the national level, **provinces** should be required to ensure that they are represented at all duly **convened** meetings of the **HEDCOM Sub-Committee** for School Calendars.

### 2.4 CO-OPERATION

The provinces in each cluster must ensure high **levels** of cooperation between each other.

### 2.5 TRANSPORT AND TRAVEL INFRASTRUCTURE

The **school** calendar must take into account the effect that the timing of **school** holidays **could have** on the flow of traffic and the potential road safety implications of the calendar. Similarly, **congestion** of other transport infrastructure such as rail, air and related facilities **needs** to be taken into **account**. This is an important consideration as the numbers of South **Africans** able to engage in **domestic** tourism is increasing rapidly.

In planning the dates on which school terms will close **especially** at the end of the **year**, cognizance should be taken of the dates on which factories and the building and allied industries shut down for their holidays. It should be borne in mind that **the** school holidays during **the end-of-year** period are primarily **determined** by the closing dates adhered to in **the** private sector and not **vice-versa**.

Even though road safety is of great concern to the Departments of **Education**, the Department of Transport should take responsibility for managing road traffic **flows** and reducing **loss** of life on the roads during **school** and public holidays.

## 2.6 CONSISTENCY

The school holiday schedule of each Provincial Education Department should be kept reasonably constant in order to facilitate **planning for** holiday seasons by the tourism industry, **the private sector**, the **road traffic** authorities and parents of **learners**.

## 2.7 UNIFORM APPLICATION OF CRITERIA

The same criteria must be applied uniformly to the calendars for every cluster and province.

## 2.8 ADVANCE PLANNING FOR CALENDAR DESIGN

The calendar for a particular year must be designed sufficiently far **in** advance of the year it pertains to so as to facilitate planning by all affected parties and **stakeholders**. The calendar must be available a minimum of eighteen (18) months in advance of the year it pertains to.

Delayed changes to the compilation of the calendar or late changes to the **calendar** must be avoided. Provinces with proportionally higher numbers of **rural schools** expressed concern over any late changes to the calendar. Communication with outlying schools is difficult and changes will sow **confusion**.

## 2.9 PROCESS OF COMMUNICATING CALENDAR DESIGN OPTIONS

When the draft calendar is sent out for consultation it should be accompanied by a rationale for its composition.

# 3. SPECIFICATIONS ACCORDING TO WHICH SCHOOL CALENDARS MUST BE DESIGNED

## 3.1 ALLOCATION OF TIME IN THE CALENDAR

### 3.1.1 REQUIRED NUMBER OF SCHOOL DAYS PER YEAR

The number of school days must provide sufficient time to enable the educational programs to be completed. Approximately 195- 200 school days per year are considered sufficient for the purposes of teaching and learning.

Educators and learners in each province should as far as possible be allocated the same number of days.

### 3.1.2 NUMBER OF TERMS

The South African school calendar assumes a four-term structure.

### 3.1.3 LENGTH OF TERMS

The length of terms should as far as possible be of equal length. It **is** however, desirable for educational reasons that the third term should be longer than the fourth term.

### 3.1.4 LENGTH OF SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

School holidays should provide learners and educators with sufficient opportunity to **rest**. At the same time, holidays should not be so **long** as to adversely affect learning retention.

### 3.1.5 NUMBER OF HOURS PER DAY FOR **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

According to the terms and conditions of employment of educators as determined in terms of Section 4 of the Employment of **Educators Act, 1998** (Government **Gazette**, Notice 222 of 18 February 1999, Chapter A Number 3), the **workload** of educators should meet the following requirements:

Section 3.1 (d): The expectation is that every **educator** must be able to account for 1800 actual working hours per annum.

Section 3.2 (a): **Workload of Educators** - All **educators should be at school during the formal school day** which should not be **less** than 7 hours per day.

### 3.1.6 DAYS FOR **ADMINISTRATION AND PLANNING**

At the beginning of the year, teachers **should start work at least one** day before the pupils start school and at the end of the year; teachers should stay on for at least three days for administration and planning.

### 3.1.7 **RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS**

In accordance with Item 15 of the Bill of Rights, the **South African Schools Act (SASA)**, No. 84 of 1996 states that with regard to "Freedom of **conscience** and religion at public **schools**" (Para. 7, p.8) "subject to the constitution and any applicable provincial law, religious observances may be conducted at a public school under rules issued by the governing body if such observances are conducted on an equitable basis and attendance at them by learners and members of staff is free and voluntary". The **SASA** does not take into account the possibility of temporary closure of a school for reasons of religious **observance**. However, consonant with the spirit of the Constitution, School Governing Bodies may exercise the **right** to close for religious commemorations **only** where the majority of **pupils** are members of the faith in **question**.

Closure of schools for religious **observance** is **subject to the following** conditions. The number of days may not exceed two days, and must be taken in lieu of **the** two days allocated for Sport and Culture in paragraph 3.1.8, following, Schools must prioritise their activities **in** making choices about which school days to take off, which may not be recovered. The School Governing Body must make application to the Head of Department to exercise this option and must give **details** with **respect to:** the size (in percent and numbers) of the religious majority in the school; the day(s) being applied **for;** and how the school days taken off for such religious **observances** will be made up, if more than two school days have been taken off. Individual schools that make provision for closure on **religious** grounds should under no circumstances be **open** for fewer days **than** the rest of the province.

Simultaneously, the prescription of the Constitution that **cultural**, linguistic or linguistic communities should also respect the rights of others, must also be affirmed through ensuring that minority religious groups within a school community are not disadvantaged in any way. Members of world religions that form a **minority** of learners in schools may be given permission to take two **recognised** religious days off school. Learners of minority religious groups who do not attend **school** on **such school** day(s) **should not be** marked absent for **the** day(s) in question. Learners should not be academically disadvantaged as a result of their absence. For example, assessments such as examinations or tests should not **be** administered on days that they are absent.

In terms of regulations, **educators** are **obliged** to request to take leave should they wish to celebrate published religious days that fall in term time, except where the school is closed on the basis of an application from **the SGB** as provided for above.

### 3.1.8 **SPORTING AND CULTURAL DAYS**

A maximum of two days per year may be allocated to schools for this **purpose**. School Governing Bodies should apply to the Head of Department or **his/her** representative at the District level to utilise such days for school sporting and cultural events. Records will be kept of the allocation of such days with regard **to** numbers of applications, reasons given for applications and numbers of applications granted.

## 3.2 **CLUSTERS AND STAGGERING**

### 3.2.1 **CLUSTERS**

**Within** the South African education system, the provision of school education is a provincial competence. The nine provinces have agreed to be **allocated** into **two "Clusters"**. A cluster refers to a set of provincial education departments that conform to **the** same school calendar.

### 3.2.2 CLUSTER GROUPING

Grouping of **clusters** takes into account the principle that in high population density areas neighboring provinces should be allocated to the same cluster where possible. The grouping also **takes** into account peak season **traffic** flows, and the requirements of the tourism and hospitality industries. The agreed clusters are:

**Inland** Provinces: *Free State, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North-West Province and Northern Province*

**Coastal** Provinces: *Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape and Western Cape*

### 3.2.3 STAGGERED CLOSING AND OPENING TIMES

Clusters should not open their schools on the same date as other clusters. Nor should clusters close their schools on the same date as other clusters. Dates should, where possible, be staggered by three to seven days. There are three considerations that must be taken into consideration in the staggering of school opening and closing times.

First, the structure of the school calendar has to take into account traffic flows. **In** particular, the aim is to allocate different dates to clusters so that peak traffic density after school closing and before opening is kept within acceptable levels.

Second, staggered term closing and **opening** times is required in order to reduce the load on **establishments** offering accommodation on the main mad traffic routes.

Third, *staggering of* holidays promotes optimal utilisation of holiday facilities by spreading demand over a longer period in provinces. **In** this way shortages associated with peak demand are avoided and provincial economies with developed tourism and **hospitality** industries can sustain higher levels of growth and employment.

### 3.2.4 HOLIDAY OVERLAP WITH ALL CLUSTERS/PROVINCES

The **mid-year** holidays for **all** provinces should have an overlap of at **least** one week. This is required to enable the scheduling of events such as sports **code** national tournaments and teacher union national congresses.

For similar reasons five days, which may include a weekend, should overlap from province to province during the September/October holiday.

## 3.3 SCHEDULING OF SCHOOL TERMS

### 3.3.1 AVOID EARLY START IN JANUARY

A very early start to the school term in January should be avoided as this will shorten the holidays of parents who are only able to take leave from Christmas.

### 3.3.2 FIRST DAY OF A SCHOOL TERM

If possible, school terms for learners should not begin on a Monday. This reduces traffic flows on a Sunday. Opening on a Monday does not provide time for school hostel staff to prepare for the return of learners. With the agreement of teacher unions, Monday can be scheduled for educators to engage in planning for the new term.

### 3.3.3 EXAMINATIONS

The **fourth** school term should **not** end too late in December, as late **closure** affects the **final** publication of the Senior Certificate results (Preferably not later than 8 **December**). A late start at the beginning of the year should **also** be avoided as this pushes back **all** the terms, thus producing delays in marking and the publication of results.

## 3.4 SCHEDULING OF SCHOOL TERMS WITH REFERENCE TO PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

### 3.4.1 EASTER HOLIDAYS

Since the dates of the **Easter** weekend differ from year to year, an effort should be made where possible, to have the Easter weekend **fall** in the school holiday **in order** to prevent unnecessary traveling and disrupting of the teaching program.

### 3.4.2 SCHEDULING DATES OF SCHOOL HOLIDAYS IN RELATION TO PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

If a long weekend begins on a public holiday that falls on a Friday, and this weekend coincides with the beginning of a school holiday, schools should close on the Wednesday and not the Thursday. If a public holiday falls on the first Monday of a school holiday, schools should close not later than the previous Thursday.

### 3.4.3 SCHEDULING DATES OF SCHOOL TERMS IN RELATION TO PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Especially at the beginning and end of the school year, an effort should be made to have a gap between the opening and the closing day of a school term and any public holiday falling in the period concerned.

There should preferably be no public holiday in the first week of a school term. Such a holiday prevents a proper start to the new term, as it tends to disrupt the academic work of the school.

### 3.4.4 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS FALLING ON TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS

Where public holidays fall on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the intervening Monday or Friday should not be declared as a school holiday unless the public holiday falls in conjunction with another public holiday that creates a long weekend e.g. 27 April and 1 May.

## 3.5 ADDITIONAL SPECIFICATIONS

### 3.5.1 CLIMATE

Extreme climatic conditions that make school attendance unproductive, uncomfortable, even possibly injurious to health need to be taken into account. Conditions of extreme heat that are experienced in parts of Southern African summer can only to a limited extent be avoided by scheduling the start of school terms later in January. Of greater relevance is the relationship between temperature and humidity. High heat and humidity is a seasonal feature of tropical coastal regions such as along the Kwazulu-Natal seaboard. Principals of schools which are located in areas where high heat and humidity conditions occur should be aware of the conditions that could put children/learners at risk and on what basis to the decision to close their school can be made.

### 3.5.2 DISCRETION OF THE HEAD OF THE PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Certain types of schools under the jurisdiction of Provincial Education Departments such as schools for children with Special Education Needs may require slightly different calendar arrangements to be made from the majority of ordinary schools (eg: on account of transport and accommodation problems).

## 5. TABLE A: TIMEFRAME FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SCHOOL CALENDAR:

1998

Mar	National Department develops a draft Calendar Proposal and sends to provinces Teleconference between cluster members
Apr	*HEDCOM Sub-Committee: Cluster meeting on Calendar Proposal Full meeting discussion of the Calendar Proposal
May	Consultation in Provinces
June	Consultation in Provinces Teleconference between cluster members
July	*HEDCOM Sub-Committee: Cluster meeting on the Calendar Proposal Negotiate Calendar Proposal
Aug	Consultation in Provinces
Sep	Teleconference between cluster members Submission of comments/suggestions. Amendments to Calendar administratively if there is consensus and submit to HEDCOM

OR

**\*HEDCOM Sub-Committee:** Cluster meeting on **Calendar Proposal**  
Full meeting to negotiate Calendar Proposal

Ott	Submit to <b>HEDCOM</b> for consideration (Approval OR request for amendment and <b>re-submission</b> with further consultation)
Nov	Submit to Council of Education Ministers ( <b>CEM</b> ) for approval
Dec	Publication by Department and Minister
1999	Continue with process for 2001 school calendar
2000	Continue with process for 2002 – 2004 school calendars
2001	Implement first school calendar (2001) compiled in accordance with this <b>nartional</b> policy.

## 6. NATIONAL LEGISLATION THAT HAS BEARING ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE SCHOOL CALENDAR

### 6.1 SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS ACT, 1996 (No. 84 of 1996)

Section 4(1): **Exemption from Compulsory Attendance** - A Head of Department may exempt a learner entirely, partially or conditionally **from** compulsory school attendance if it is in the best interests of the learner.

Section 7: **Freedom of conscience and religion at public schools** - Subject to **the Constitution and any** applicable provincial law, religious observances may be conducted at a public school under the rules issued by the governing body if such observances are conducted on an equitable basis and attendance at them by learners and members of staff is free and voluntary

Section 20(1) (f): **Functions of all school governing bodies** – Subject to this Act, the governing body of a **public** school must determine the times of the school day consistent with any applicable conditions of employment of staff at the school

Section 21(1) (b) & (e): **Allocated functions of governing bodies** – Subject to this Act, a governing body may apply **to the** Head of Department in writing to be allocated any of the following functions (b) to determine the extra-mural curriculum of the school and **the** choice of subject options in terms of provincial curriculum policy; and (e) other functions consistent with this Act and any applicable provincial law.

### 6.2 CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, Act 108 of 1996 and amended on 11 October 1996 by the Constitutional Assembly

#### Chapter 2: Bill of Rights

Item 15 (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.

(2) Religious observances may be conducted at state or state-aided institutions provided that -

- (a) **those** observances follow rules made by the appropriate public authorities,
- (b) they are conducted on an equitable basis, and
- (c) attendance at them is free and **voluntary**,

Item 28 (1) Every child has the right -

- (e) to be protected from exploitative **labour** practices
- (f) not to be required or permitted to perform work or provide services that (i) **are** inappropriate for **a person of** that child's age; or (ii) place at risk the child's well-being, education, physical or mental health or spiritual or moral or social development;



- (2) A child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter **concerning** the child.
- (3) In this section "child" means a person under the age of 18 years.

6.3 **MINES AND WORKS ACT**, Act 27 of 1956 prior to Act 13 of 1991

Section 11(1): **Restriction upon employment of juveniles and females** - No male person under the age of sixteen years and no female shall work, and no person shall cause or permit any male person apparently under the age of sixteen years or any female to work underground in any mine.

6.4 **TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT OF EDUCATORS DETERMINED IN TERMS OF SECTION 4 OF THE EMPLOYMENT OF EDUCATORS ACT, 1998** (Government Gazette, Notice 222 of 18 February 1999)

Section 3.1 (d): The expectation is that every educator must be able to account for 1800 actual working hours per annum.

Section 3.2 (a): **Workload per educator** - All educators should be at school during the formal school day which should not be less than 7 hours per day, except for reasons and with the prior permission of the Principal. The principal will exercise **his/her** discretion in this regard in terms of provincial policy.

The 7 hours per day includes the breaks and the periods that the learners are not at school.