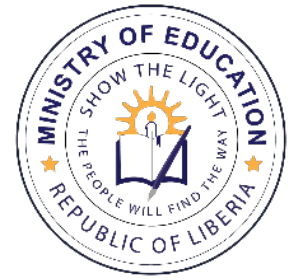


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Minister of Education Prof. Ansu D. Sonii Sr. Takes Swift Action on Reform

In his first press conference, Prof. Sonii outlined his priorities for the education sector and set the tone for strong and collaborative leadership

March 2, 2018

MONROVIA, LIBERIA – In his first press conference since being confirmed as Minister of Education, Prof. Ansu D. Sonii, Sr. signaled that swift action is being taken to accelerate the reform of the education sector.

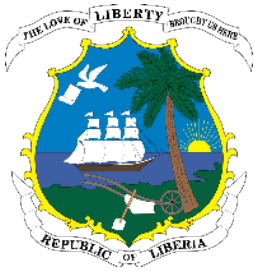
Speaking about his determination to tackle the difficult challenges facing the sector, Prof. Sonii said: “This Ministry affects the lives of everyone in this country in some way. Whatever can be done, must be done by us. We shall have no excuses. Even with the limitations, whatever they may be, we intend to use the opportunities that we have for the benefit of *all* the people of this country, in line with the government’s Pro-Poor Agenda.”

Prof. Sonii outlined several immediate policy priorities:

Licensing Educators & Improving Payroll

Prof. Sonii announced that a new system will be introduced to license all teachers, principals, and school administrators. Noting that degrees alone do not always confer the skills and ethical framework needed to be entrusted with students’ education, he said that within the next two years anyone who enters into a classroom will be licensed. He also emphasized that a process would be put in place for suspending or revoking licenses in instances where misconduct has occurred. In the case of suspension, educators would be given the opportunity to have their licenses restored. However, cases of gross misconduct or betrayal of trust would result in licenses being revoked and a lifetime ban on re-entering the educational profession. The Minister noted that the licensing process was crucial for the protection of the teaching profession, by ensuring that people could not simply enter the profession without sufficient training and take positions from qualified teachers.

Further, Prof. Sonii and Deputy Minister for Administration Hon. Latim Da-thong disclosed that the Human Resources System of the Ministry will be digitized for the smooth identification of teachers and educational workers. The digitized system will help ensure that teachers on



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supplementary payroll are regularized and that teachers' salaries are commensurate with their qualifications.

Accrediting Schools

Prof. Sonii also announced that the Ministry would be implementing a process to accredit all schools in the country, including private schools. He emphasized that no school would be accredited without a thorough assessment and a visit from the Ministry. He further noted that accreditation would be denied or revoked for any private school that did not have sufficient facilities or teaching and administrative capacity.

Improving Supervision

The Minister noted that improving supervision of schools would be a top priority for the Ministry. He said that under his watch, Ministry staff will be much more involved in supervision, highlighting that he himself would take part in order to set an example. He highlighted the fact that District and County Education Officers are often given oversight responsibilities over areas that are simply too big for one individual to manage effectively.

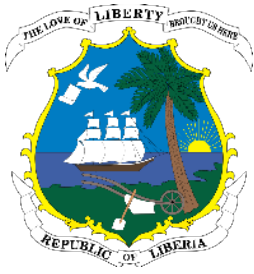
Emphasizing the need for teamwork, he said: "We cannot play tennis. Tennis is a one-man game. We are playing soccer or American football, when there are many people playing and winning depends on all of us together."

Enhancing Enforcement

Prof. Sonii signaled that the days of lax enforcement of regulations were over. He noted he is currently working with the legislature on a bill that would grant the Ministry greater powers to enforce regulations in all schools. He further announced that the Ministry was seeking to establish an Academic Crimes Court, which would punish anyone found guilty of any academic crimes in schools. He also noted that schools would be held to account for maintaining the national Academic Calendar dictated by the Ministry and would no longer be allowed to open late, jeopardizing students' education.

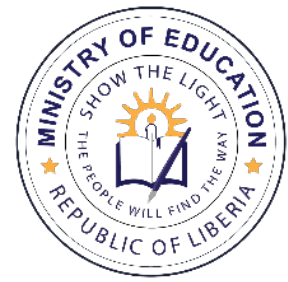
Aligning Partners' Activities with Ministry Priorities

The Minister announced that he and his team have held meetings with all providers in the Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL) program, both collectively and individually. Based on the evaluation conducted thus far, he said that he intended to maintain the program, under conditions that the Ministry would provide. He noted that those providers who are willing to work with the Ministry and bring their activities into alignment with the Ministry's priorities will



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be allowed to remain. However, those that will not work with the Ministry will not be allowed to remain, no matter how they have done things in the past.

He noted that the Ministry will soon be commencing a tour of all schools, including PSL schools. During that tour, Prof. Sonii and his team of 3 Deputy Ministers and 8 Assistant Ministers will assess any changes that need to be implemented in order to reconcile existing methods with the Ministry's needs and priorities.

Providing Opportunities for All Young People to Succeed

Finally, Prof. Sonii announced a range of reforms aimed at ensuring that all young people have opportunities to succeed. First, he stated that the Ministry intends to introduce a Three-Track High School System. When students are preparing to complete 9th Grade, their skills and academic performance will be assessed in order to determine whether they are best suited to follow a learning path focused on: (1) Natural Sciences, (2) Social Sciences, or (3) Vocational Training. All three tracks will last for three years, and all three will conclude with a high school diploma. This will ensure that no matter their academic ability, all students are put on a path towards developing a meaningful career.

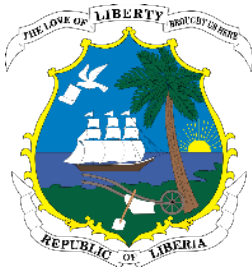
He also re-emphasized the government's decision to pay all WAEC fees for 12th graders, instructing schools to institute processes to refund students' advance payments.

Further, Prof. Sonii announced that changes will be made to school policy to lessen instances of students being turned away from school. He noted that schools would be encouraged to implement in-school punishments for tardiness, rather than turning students away.

And, he noted that civics education would be re-introduced into the upper basic curriculum, ensuring that all students are sufficiently prepared to be productive citizens.

Charting the Course Forward

Prof. Sonii announced that the Ministry's nationwide assessment tour would commence on March 6th, 2018. He noted that the intent of the tour is to assess school infrastructure, and to gauge the needs and priorities of teachers, parents, and students. Those taking part in the tour include Ministry staff and members of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA), Principal Association of Liberia, and the National Teachers' Association of Liberia (NTAL).



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The tour will be followed by an Education Summit, to be held in May. The summit will bring together all education stakeholders for a robust discussion about the reform process and will result in a roadmap charting the course forward.

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