

Minister of Education, Professor Ansu Dao Sonii, Sr outlines the Ministry's activities and collaborative leadership



July 5, 2018

MONROVIA, LIBERIA – In a press conference hosted at the Ministry of Education, Prof. Ansu Dao Sonii, Sr. provided an update on the Ministry's far-reaching initiatives focused on improving the learning environment and transforming education in Liberia.

The Minister and his team of Deputies, Assistant Ministers, Project Coordinator and Directors outlined several policies, plans, and projects that the Ministry will undertake in the next few years.

Speaking about the aim of the reforms, Minister Sonii noted, "our motive is not to instill fear in anyone but to signal that the transformation of the education system will be carried out with robust external and internal appraisal. I can assure you today that this administration will secure significant achievements in its tenure". "

Extension of School Hours

Prof. Sonii emphasized the importance of building a culture of good study and noted that students' minds and attitudes have to be developed to master the curriculum. The Minister cautioned parents to support the Ministry and keep their children in school long enough to cover the daily lessons prescribed in the national curriculum. He continued by announcing that the following measures will be instituted to enhance learning outcomes and reminded that these actions would yield results over time:

- All schools operating only one session/shift will run from 8 AM to 3 PM.
- All schools that are running two shifts will make adjustments to increase school hours by at least one hour. The Bureau of Basic and Secondary Education has been assigned to work with schools operating two shifts to effect immediate adjustments in school hours and develop a mechanism for full extension over the next few years.
- All schools will increase the class hours for natural science courses from 45 minutes to 55 minutes.

The Ministry will also begin awarding principals and schools whose students achieve good marks in the WASSCE/WAEC, to recognize their achievements.

School Feeding

The Assistant Minister for Student Personnel Services, Hon. Othello Nimely noted that it is parents' responsibilities to provide food for their children. He said parents should at least provide start-up feeding for kids before they are sent to school. He expressed gratitude and appreciation to the donors and partners who have remained supportive of school feeding initiatives, and he also emphasized the need for home-grown school feeding programs, which will play a significant role in ensuring sustainability.

Prof. Sonii also thanked the partners and donors who have supported the Ministry's school feeding initiatives and highlighted that the Ministry is working with the World Food Programme (WFP) to continue support to school feeding. He also noted that other supporters such as Save the Children and Mary's Meals are also supporting the Ministry to feed part of the school population.

Curriculum & Academic Calendar

The Assistant Minister for Basic and Secondary Education, Minister Felicia Doe-Sumah announced that the Ministry had completed its curriculum review. She noted that the primary focus is now competence-based, focusing on specific skills such as digital, writing, and reading. She highlighted that reading will now be a stand-alone subject, which is required for grade promotion. She also noted that the curriculum also includes sexuality and gender education. She thanked the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for their support towards this process.

She continued by summarizing the official academic calendar for 2018/2019, noting that all schools are required to open for instructional activities as of September 3, 2018. She added that schools must utilize the time available for instruction and put an end to hosting gala celebration for a week long.

Additionally, Hon. Doe-Sumah reminded school administrators and principals that first graders should not be required to complete an entrance examination for admissions, and schools operating grade 9, 11, 12 are not allowed to accept new students except under exceptional cases.

In closing, she cautioned schools to desist from applying corporal punishment to students.

Higher Education

Prof. Sonii confirmed that the Ministry serves as the head of the Board of Directors of the Commission on Higher Education and remains committed to ensure that all processes are properly coordinated and are in conformity with the Act governing the commission. Meanwhile, he warned that any establishment that has not been duly registered and accredited by the Commission on Higher Education found impersonating shall be held in violation and lawfully reprimanded.

He also added that any school initially permitted as an Associate Degree level granting institution should remain honest and not pose as a level other than their accredited status.

Monitoring & Evaluation and School Assessment

The Minister emphasized the importance of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process and insisted on a comprehensive approach. He added that the Ministry is instituting measures to improve M&E by allowing District Education Officers to report electronically to the Central Office.

He noted that to increase transparency and accountability, the Ministry is also setting up several platforms such as an interactive radio talk show and Facebook broadcast to engage with the public continuously.

Prof. Sonii added that the Ministry would conduct a comprehensive school assessment geared towards placing schools into grade categories based on a set of measurable indicators. The indicators will be made public, and all schools will be required to maintain a “C” performance based on the grading scale of “A to F” to remain functional in the country. He added that the Ministry would work to improve those schools that do not meet the minimum requirement over a period specified.

All issuance of new school permit will be suspended until the Ministry completes its comprehensive school assessment. ,

MoE Call Center hotline announced

The Deputy Minister for Administration also informed the press and public that the Ministry has officially launched a Case Management Call Center to pinpoint problems in the sector and facilitate real-time reporting and expedited remedy.

The Call Center will guide the Human Resource Division on the many issues arising from the various counties, such as teachers’ salaries, malpractice within schools, etc.

Additionally, the Call Center will be used as a medium for active monitoring of school environments where the public will also be a source recommending best practices or reporting malpractice. The Call Center number was announced for Lonestar subscribers as “1416”. Hon. Dathong informed the public that the number for Orange subscribers would be announced shortly.

Liberian Voluntary Education Funds

Hon. Dathong also added that the Ministry is undertaking an initiative to raise funds for the education sector, an initiative he termed as the Liberian Voluntary Education Fund which is designed to enable Liberians and residents within Liberia to contribute voluntarily to the sector. The funds from this project will be used to impact learning outcomes directly, and the public will be kept informed of projects implemented using the funds. He appealed to all Liberians and residents to donate a dollar to education through boxes that will be placed at various locations in and around Montserrado. He emphasized that this voluntary contribution would give Liberians ownership of the improvement of the education sector.

Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL) Restructured and Renamed Liberian Education Advancement Program (LEAP)

The Minister of Education also announced a restructuring of the Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL) program, following extensive consultations with stakeholders.

Prof. Sonii noted that the restructuring would put measures in place to address the concerns raised by some stakeholders while ensuring that the significant learning gains delivered under the program could be maintained.

He announced that as part of the restructuring, PSL would be relaunched as the Liberian Education Advancement Program (LEAP).

The new program will emphasize a collective partnership with CEOs, DEOs, principals, teachers and the central Ministry of Education office team, ensuring that the impact can be felt nationwide and that all stakeholders benefit from their engagement in the program.

Project Announcements

Prof. Sonii also announced several major projects that will be undertaken by the government, many in partnership with international donors, to improve outcomes in the sector over the coming years. Some of these projects include the following:

- The European Union (EU) will develop six (6) 21st-century TVET institutions across the country. In addition to carrying out traditional TVET programming, these institutions will cater for students who left high school years ago and are seeking hands-on skills. The grant will focus on facilitating decentralized TVET programs across the country. As head of the unit, Min. Saku Dukuly, the Assistant Minister for Technical, Vocational and Inclusive Education, emphasized the importance of developing technical capacity to empower Liberians. He mentioned that the grant is expected to begin this academic period. Infrastructure and curriculum development are the first stages. The project has been negotiated to be implemented in five years.
- David Baysah provided an update on the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) grant, which is being used to improve access to quality education and to strengthen national school accountability systems. Project implementation began as of June 19, 2018.
- The Ministry is also in negotiation with other partners for a project which will focus on quality infrastructure and facilities, quality teachers and teachers learning materials, and quality skills and monitoring support. Assistant Minister Dominic N. Kweme stated that the Ministry is concentrated on ensuring that rural teachers have accommodation.

In closing, the Honorable Minister of Education, Minister Sonii signaled that the Ministry is open to exploring partnerships with corporate institutions and private citizens to provide administrative and management support to schools. He referred to this as an “adopt a school model”; whereby an institution would assume operation of a public school and ensure that it is operated effectively and meeting all indicators set by the Government.

Finally, he added that he wants to put in a framework in the education sector that will boost students’ confidence and thereby alleviate bribery and malpractice.

~ END ~

contact@moe.gov.lr

Or visit www.moe.gov.lr

Ministry of Education