

April 1, 2017

Dear Stakeholder,

The Government of Liberia and the Ministry of Education, are delivering a transformational initiative that will revolutionise the Liberian Education system. Bridge International Academies (Bridge) is one of eight committed partners of Partnership schools for Liberia (PSL).

Last week, The Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education (COTAE) published a report criticising the government's revolutionary education initiative, making inaccurate assertions about one of its partners, Bridge. It is important for the contextualisation of any report about PSL, that those commenting on the programme are reminded that in Liberia, 42% of primary aged children are currently out of school -it is even higher for children in the poorest quintile - more than half of young adults are illiterate, and over two-thirds of girls do not have basic reading skills. Moreover, only 20% of children enrolled in primary school complete secondary school, while 50% of children join three to six years late. The Government has recognised that this is a human rights imperative that must change; and that the key is making that change scalable and sustainable. Partnership schools for Liberia is attempting to address this and in her 2017 state of the nation address the President of Liberia herself said that "Preliminary results from the Partnership Schools are encouraging. The children and their families are the programme's strongest advocates, and that, to me, says it all."

The findings of the COATE report are largely based on inaccurate assumptions about Bridge operations and role as a partnership schools for Liberia operator which, should not be allowed to remain unchallenged:

**1. Competitiveness & transparency of processes leading to the recruitment of providers**

Bridge was the inaugural partner within the PSL initiative, after having undergone vetting by various offices and Ministries in Liberia. After PSL was inaugurated, the Ministry rightly sought additional partners to grow the program so that more children could benefit from greater spending on education by donors, and greater attention and support to public schools.

Contrary to the claims of the COTAE report this was a transparent process. President Sirleaf and the Ministry hosted a national education meeting in January 2016, seeking input from all stakeholders in education which informed the creation of the PSL program. An additional national education meeting was hosted in April 2016, and then halfway through the first year of

the program, a third major national education meeting was hosted in February 2017. We believe this is demonstrative of the Government of Liberia's commitment to good governance and inclusive policy making.

The MOE has also commissioned two essential bodies of research to inform policy on PSL. The first is a study comparing the differences in learning over time at six Bridge PSL public schools and six independently selected traditional public schools. The second study is a randomized control trial comparing all the partners in PSL with 94 other traditional public schools that is due in August of 2017.

## **2. The development and compensation of teachers**

Bridge always teaches the national curriculum of the countries in which it operates and this remains the case in Liberia. All teachers that teach at Bridge schools go through an intensive training programme and continue to receive ongoing training and support throughout their career at Bridge. 98% of the teachers in Bridge partnership schools have government qualifications whilst the other 2% come from community schools.

Under the MOU, the government assures and pays the salaries of Principals and Teachers in Liberia. To date, 85% of the 258 teachers teaching at Bridge schools have payroll numbers and are receiving pay. Bridge continues to work closely with government to ensure that all of our teachers receive payroll numbers and salaries, and remain in the classroom. To date, the Ministry has identified over 1,000 teachers on the ghost payroll, the removal of which have ensured that gaps and vacancies can be accurately identified- giving room for actual replacement needs to be identified.

## **3. Status of funding/financial support of PSL**

Attracting and securing new financing models in Education systems across Africa is a necessity in being able to deliver truly inspirational change for developing nations like Liberia. The Government of Liberia and Ministry of Education have asked the world to contribute to improving its public schools through bringing in new donor support. This is an effort to be applauded – and those donors who have come forward to support Liberia are to be celebrated for their commitment to creating a strong, high-performing school system and future for Liberian children. Specifically, PSL and its revolutionary aspirations for education have attracted and enabled new philanthropic money to come into the country. As part of this, Bridge PSL has been able to attract philanthropic support that has enabled us to create visible and measured change in learning for children across the public schools we serve and provided over 29,673 text books, 16,000 teacher guides and 3,500+ desks.

#### **4. Citizen's access to relevant information/participation in key discussions**

Bridge believes in transparency. It welcomes scrutiny and inspections and is involved in several independent evaluations to ensure that it is delivering learning gains. Bridge has active and ongoing conversations with the parents, teachers and communities that it serves and is always happy to provide information and access to schools. Programmes such as the School and Community initiative, enable strong Parent Teacher Associations and community leaders with a voice in the education space.

Bridge actively wants to see monitoring and evaluation maintained with support from District Education Officers and County Education Officers. Accountability and transparency is a core principal of school management, which is enabled by Bridge's use of technology. The technology enables Bridge to track and improve teacher attendance, pupil performance, and the effectiveness of lessons. As a partner of the Ministry for Education, Bridge also provides the ministry with access to this information.

#### **5. Equity, access, and quality concerns emerging from introduction of the programme, mainly at a non-partnership school, logistical support to schools to operate; provisions of uniforms and learning materials to students; and welfare status of students denied access to Bridge schools owing to limited class size.**

#### **From February to March 2017, major achievements can be measured and evidenced at Bridge PSL:**

- 17,000 books delivered for Semester 2 learning in schools
- Over 80% of teachers attend class to date as compared to an absenteeism level of 60% prior to the start of partnership schools for Liberia.

It is early stages but all indications of learning gains are positive. An internal midline assessment conducted shows significant learning gains for students at Bridge schools compared to their peers in traditional public schools. A full RCT is being conducted by the Center for Global Development (CGD) - midline due June 2017. Free uniforms have been provided to over 9,000 students.

Bridge is committed to supporting teachers and working in partnership with the Liberian Government to deliver better education outcomes for children. It is an innovative and revolutionary initiative which has the potential to change the educational outcomes for thousands of children across Liberia. We would hope that organisations such as COATE would seek to correct factual

inaccuracies and furthermore meaningfully engage in this initiative as the programme progresses.

As President Sirleaf said: "We may not be able to do all we want to do, but we will do as much as we can recognizing that when we educate a population, we ensure equity, equality, and opportunity for every Liberian child."

Sincerely,

Bridge Partnership Schools for Liberia  
Management

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