

AN OPEN LETTER TO GEORGE WERNER, MINISTER OF EDUCATION, LIBERIA

We are writing to express deep concern about both your reluctance to permit independent research of the Partnership Schools for Liberia pilot programme and your rush to expand the pilot before evidence is available.

Education International, with support from ActionAid, commissioned an independent research team from the University of Wisconsin to conduct qualitative research which was designed to complement the Randomised Control Trial evaluation that is already underway in Liberia with the Center for Global Development in partnership with Innovations for Poverty Action. We understand that, having indicated your support for this complementary research, you withdrew that support at the last moment (just as the researchers were due to fly to Liberia) and will not now permit the researchers to access the pilot schools.

The Partnership Schools for Liberia pilot has a very high profile internationally and warrants detailed study. We understand that a lot has been invested in the Randomised Control Trial (RCT) evaluation, but no single evaluation, however well-designed, will ever provide a comprehensive picture of a pilot programme as complex as the one you have initiated. By blocking independent research, you are depriving the academic and policy community important opportunities to fully understand this pilot.

It is our view that permitting and facilitating independent academic inquiry is a precondition for transparency and good governance, particularly when you are seeking to challenge established practices and norms.

You will be aware of the widespread concerns about how Bridge International Academies blocked independent research in Uganda and have failed to allow external evaluation of their schools whilst making bold claims for their success based on their own internal data. This is very poor practice and we would be very concerned if the Ministry of Education in Liberia played a role in extending such practices.

Our second major area of concern relates to your plans to scale up the initial pilot programme even before findings from the evaluation and research come through. You have previously gone on record stressing that any scaling up would be subject to the findings from the initial pilot programme —over three years — but you are now planning a significant expansion from September 2017, without any of those findings being ready. This flies in the face of evidence-based policy making and suggests that you are only paying lip-service to the importance of research and evaluation. Such a move makes the pilot programme appear to be one driven largely by ideology. Indeed, it undermines the RCT evaluation as well as the value of any complementary research.

We urge you to move away from this present damaging path, to reassert the importance of using evidence to inform your policy choices and to commit publicly to

supporting and facilitating independent research at the start of the new school year in September.

Yours sincerely,

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