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## PRESS STATEMENT

### INCREASING SCHOOL TIME NOT A PANACEA FOR IMPROVEMENT IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The Institute of Education Studies (IFEST) has read the news report of the plans of the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service to extend the closing time of Basic schools in the country from 2:00pm to 4:00pm. This plan was first revealed by the Minister of Education, Hon. Dr. Matthew Opoku Prempeh during the Meet the Press session of the Ministry of Education when the implementation plan for the Free SHS policy was announced. Subsequently, the Minister reiterated this comment at the National Education Sector Review Forum held in Accra. Among the reasons given for such a decision was, in the view of the Minister, schools close very early and as such parents/guardians (public servants) would have to leave their work schedules to pick up their kids which in his view affects productivity. He is reported to have further bemoaned the current quality of education, especially at the basic level.

This proposition coming from a Ministry which is responsible for Education in the country is not only unfortunate but also very revealing. It is revealing because, it is a lazy approach to addressing the pressing issues of quality in our educational system. It is revealing because it is not grounded in research. In an era where school closing periods are being reviewed downwards in other parts of the world to give students enough time to explore and carry out projects by themselves and also to enable teacher to reflect on the day's activities and think about how to improve teaching and learning (what we call Reflective Teaching), we in Ghana, are thinking of doing the direct opposite.

It would interest the Minister of Education to know that, research reports on school closing around the globe by international research organisations are inconclusive on the impact of long hours in school on students' academic achievement. In fact, one recent study of instructional time usage conducted by the World Bank in four countries including Ghana and Tunisia revealed that students in Ghana are engaged in learning only 39% of the time during school hours as compared to Tunisia 79%. Again, out of the 197 days officially available for learning task, only 76.3 was devoted to learning tasks while Tunisia uses 148.1 days out of the 190 days for learning (Abadzi, 2007). This clearly shows that, there is already a problem of quality use of instructional time in Ghana as compared to other countries. Thus, 61% of the time, students are engaged in other activities in the school instead of undertaking a learning task.

We challenge the Ministry to produce any research work conducted by them which supports the assertion of the Minister. It is our fervent conviction that, education policies

should be grounded in research and not on the intuitions of the policy maker. It must be accentuated that, a Ministry of Education should be the last ministry that will embark on a policy direction without recourse to a rigorous scientific process or scientific basis.

In the light of this proposition, it will also be prudent to ask for the cost implications of this proposal. Are teachers going to be paid for the extra time they are going to spend in the classroom?

In our view, keeping students in school without:

1. the needed school leadership
2. stringent monitoring and supervisory system
3. institution of a robust accountability system to ensure that time on task is increased
4. cutting down on unnecessary closures
5. providing adequate teaching and learning resources and
6. proper remuneration for our hard working teachers;

will not only prove futile but also increase the burden on the teachers. Again, there is the need to take a second look at the curricula of our teacher education programmes and revise it to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century teacher who is supposed to be a master in all three areas of pedagogy, content and personal disposition.

The problem with our basic education is not about the inadequacy of the instructional time, it is about the quality of the use of the instructional time. It is about inadequate teachers in the deprived areas of Ghana and more importantly very poor infrastructure.

It is our believe that, the Ministry would focus on addressing the more pressing issues facing our educational system and not embark on policies that will only compound the difficulties of our disgruntled teachers.

Signed  
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