

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON THE

GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO REOPEN SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

BY THE

HON. MINISTER OF GENERAL EDUCATION (DR WANCHINGA), MP

Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to make a ministerial statement on the Government's decision to reopen schools and colleges of education as well as universities and colleges of training under the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (TEVET) System.

Madam Speaker, as you are aware, the vision of the Ministry of General Education is to provide quality and lifelong education for all and education that is accessible, inclusive and relevant to individual national and global needs value systems. This implies that it is the responsibility of the Government and other stakeholders to provide and ensure that education is accessible to all.

Madam Speaker, during the Official Opening of the Fifth Session of the National Assembly on 11th September, 2020, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Zambia, Dr Edgar Chagwa Lungu announced the reopening of all learning institutions between the dates, 14th September, 2020 and 28th September, 2020.

Madam Speaker, I now wish to give a ministerial statement on the details of reopening of schools and colleges of education as well as the universities and colleges under the TEVET System. Following this announcement by His Excellency the President to reopen all learning institutions in the country, the ministry did announce a timetable for the reopening of all learning institutions. The Ministry of General Education announced that all examination classes (those

classes which had reopened and had continued under the new normal, but had a two week-break) were to reopen on 14th September, 2020. The non-examination classes were to reopen on 21st September, 2020. The universities and colleges under the TEVET System would reopen on 28th September, 2020.

Madam Speaker, I wish to emphasise that the dates for reopening is Monday, 14th September, 2020 is for the continuing classes (examination classes). Non-examination classes as well as colleges of education under the Ministry of General Education would reopen on 21st September, 2020. Universities and colleges under the TEVET System will also reopen on the 28th September, 2020.

Madam Speaker, I let me make reference to the opening of tertiary institutions, the universities and colleges under the TEVET System in my capacity as Acting Minister of Higher Education.

Adherence to Health Guidelines

Madam Speaker, the focus of this statement is on the guidelines under which these institutions will reopen. The first cluster of guidelines will relay to the adherence to the health guidelines which have been provided by the Ministry of Health.

Madam Speaker, the House may wish to note that all schools were availed with the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) health guidelines which were developed by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of General Education. To this effect, all Provincial Education Officers (PEOs) have been instructed to ensure that all schools continue to strictly adhere to the provisions in the guidelines so as to ascertain the safety of learners and staff. In addition, schools have been instructed to focus a close work relationship with health institutions within the vicinity of the schools and the local communities to ensure effective surveillance.

Provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Madam Speaker, the second cluster of guidelines provided relates to provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs).

Madam, PPEs are a prerequisite for ensuring the safety of our learners. In this regard, the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU) in collaboration with the ministry have provided the face masks to all provincial officers for distribution to all the schools. This is in order to ensure continued availability of face mask and hand sanitizers as well as the utilisation of PPEs. The school authorities will continue to collaborate with parents to promote adherence to the health guidelines.

Madam Speaker, there should be no excuse at all for a pupil to fail to wear a mask as this can be made cheaply at home or they can be made locally through local tailors and also through the domestic science departments at schools where these are available.

Monitoring of Schools

Madam Speaker, the Provincial Education Officers (PEO) have been directed to intensify monitoring of schools as they reopen not only to ensure that schools are safe havens for the learners and staff but also to ascertain that effective teaching and learning is going on. The Ministry of Health has been engaged to partner with the Ministry of General Education for the monitoring exercise in this regard.

Payment of school fees

Madam Speaker, with reopening of schools the ministry has provided additional guidelines in this area. Madam, as you are aware, the provision of quality education at secondary school level is complemented by enforce from parents and guardians through payment of school fees for their children. It is every parents or guardian's responsibility to pay schools fees for their children.

The PEOs have been instructed to encourage parents and guardians to pay schools in order to facilitate the provision of quality education. The new normal entails that there is need for flexibility of school fees payment modalities. In this regard, schools have guided to receive payments either in full or partial or in kind were parents or guardians have proof that they are facing financial challenges.

Workshops and Meeting for Teachers

Madam Speaker, given the learning time already lost as a result of the premature closure of schools and colleges of education due the COVID-19 pandemic there is need to optimism the available learning time. In light of the foregoing the ministry has guided the PEOs to regulate the holding of workshop and meeting for teachers with the exception of meetings that border on examinations and those that support curriculum implementation.

Teaching and Learning

Madam Speaker, in this respect, the House may wish to learn that teachers will start teaching from where they ended at the time of the premature closure in March, 2020, for non-examinations classes. Further, teachers have been advised to utilise teaching strategies that will foster accelerated learning without compromising the quality of teaching and learning in order to ensure adequate syllabus coverage. For high learning institutions, this should not be a challenge because the in these institutions it is easy to arrange lectures early in the morning or during lunch time and it is also easy to arrange for prolonged period of lectures in the evenings.

School Calendar and Adjustments

Madam Speaker, the following adjustments have been made to the school calendar. Firstly, term three for the Grade 7, 9 and 12 examination classes, which commenced on 14th September, 2020, will end on 4th December, 2020.

Term two for non-examination classes, which commences on the 21st September, 2020, will end on Friday, 4th December, 2020. Term three for non-examination classes commence on the 4th January, 2021, will end on Friday, 19th March, 2021.

Madam Speaker, this means that term 1 for all grades in 2021 will commence on Monday, 29th March, 2021. With these adjustments, there is hope that the schools will be able to catch up reasonably on lost time.

Teaching and Learning Schedules

Madam Speaker, with regard to the teaching and learning schedules, schools will depend largely on the learner population, the availability of classrooms and the staffing levels at the individual school. Schools with small sizes that are with small population of each of pupils and with adequate classrooms as well as staffing will require minimum or no adjustments to their timetables. This is because they can accommodate the pupils and ensure the guidelines of health are followed. However, the schools with large learner populations, those with inadequate classroom and with low staffing levels will have the liberty to devise their own system that works well baring in mind the requirement for social distancing in addition to the adherence to other health guidelines.

Madam Speaker, the following strategies have been proposed to which the schools can adapt. Firstly, it has been proposed that schools can split their classes that are large so that learners can attend school either in alternative spaces or at different times. The use of two or three learning sessions in a day has also been recommended. It is also encouraged that learners should be assigned tasks to engage them constructively during the time they are not formally engaged in class just to ensure that they use their time meaningfully and productively.

Madam Speaker, the last cluster of guidelines given in relation to the opening of schools relate to foreign examining bodies. Concerning foreign examining bodies, the Provincial Education Officers have been guided to allow foreign examining bodies operating in their respective

provinces to proceed with their scheduled examinations and assessments subject to adherence to COVID-19 health guidelines.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, , I wish to reiterate that schools and colleges of education, universities and colleges under the Technical, Entrepreneurial, Vocational Education and Training (TEVET) system will adhere to health guidelines provided by the Ministry of Health. Further, institutional managers will provide appropriate leadership to ensure the safety of our children and staff in learning institutions.

Madam Speaker it is comforting to mention that during the entire period that examination classes were in session, there were no reports of COVID-19 cases among pupils indicating that children are perhaps safer in schools than at home. For this, I wish to applaud both the parents and the teachers for this important achievement.

Madam Speaker, may God bless our learners, teachers, school administrators and parents as they ensure that the provision of quality education in our country continues under the new normal.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.
