

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DepEd's Food for School Program improves school attendance, student performance

The Department of Education's Food for School Program (FSP) started in 2005 resulted to a significant drop in the incidence of malnutrition among public elementary school children from 21 percent to 17 percent. School attendance thus improved from 90 percent in 2006 to 95 percent in 2007.

Aimed to mitigate hunger among the families in the priority provinces, FSP provides school children with one kilo of iron-fortified rice per class day for 120 days in a school year. Undernourishment is one of the main causes of pupils' poor performance and dropping-out.

"The results of our school feeding program are encouraging and if this continues we hope to further reduce the number of students dropping out from school because of poor health and nutrition. Malnourishment or hunger hinders the child from participating in classroom activities resulting in a slow learning curve," DepEd Secretary Jesli Lapus said.

DepEd studies show that first-grade pupils are the most nutritionally in need group. They are still developing physically, mentally and emotionally. Most drop-outs occur between the first and third grades.

"Children who drop-out from school early are more likely to suffer from low levels of literacy later on," Lapus disclosed.

In all the regions, dietary energy intake, elementary participation rate, and elementary cohort survival rate are directly related. The nutritional status of the beneficiaries is measured before and after the feeding to determine nutritional improvement. Health services such as health appraisal, treatment that includes de-worming, referral and counseling are provided to all program beneficiaries.

School feeding is also utilized as an avenue to develop desirable health and nutritional habits among the children.

The FSP targets six schools in each division with the highest incidence of malnutrition and the most number of pupils coming from low-income families as feeding program beneficiaries.

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DepEd said there was an increase in the number of FSP beneficiaries from 676,740 preschool and grade 1 pupils in 2006 to 2.7 million preschoolers and grade 1 pupils when the program was expanded in 2007. Priority provinces and NCR had all its public elementary school children as recipients.

From 2005 to early 2008, a total of over 268 million kilos of rice have already been distributed with over 6.7 million school children as beneficiaries. The government spent over P5.3 billion for this initiative.

Meanwhile, Deped gives assurance that the current rice situation in the country will not affect the feeding program as the National Food Authority has already allotted the rice requirements of the FSP.

For 2008, the DepEd's FSP will expand its coverage to 30 new divisions and 599 new districts.

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