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## DepEd, partners team up to make robust school kids

The Department of Education (DepEd) today signed an agreement with the National Competitiveness Council (NCC) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Kabisig ng Kalahi in order to push supplementary programs and decrease the dropout rates of Grade I and II pupils by as much as 30 percent by 2010.

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus said, "Malnutrition is one of the most unabated health problems among public elementary school children."

He noted that currently 16 percent of the pupils in public schools are undernourished. Absenteeism due to undernourishment is a major deterrent to consistent productivity of students.

Dubbed: "Pasiglahin ang Estudyanteng Pinoy (PEP)," the project is geared towards improving the nutritional status of target beneficiaries and school attendance in Grades I and II.

"We hope that this partnership will be sustained in the five regions and expanded to other areas of the country," Lapus added.

A total of P6 Million has been allotted for the project at P60,000 per school. PEP will benefit selected schools in the National Capital Region, Region IV A, Region IV B, Region VI, and Cordillera Autonomous Region with 20 beneficiary schools per region. PEP program will run for 12 days and benefit 30 school children in 100 schools.

According to DepEd's School Health and Nutrition Center, the one kilo of rice given daily to pupils as part of its Food for School Program during SY 2007-2008 can be attributed to a 12% improvement in school attendance (from 85% - 95%).

NCC is a public-private taskforce aimed at improving the country's international competitiveness to the top third by 2010. The council will coordinate the program implementation in target areas provided by DepEd and source out funds for this endeavor.

Meanwhile, Kabisig ng Kalahi will conceptualize the working details of the program, link with sponsors, and manage the funds. Kabisig is a non profit organization that invests in health and education of children in the poorest communities of the Philippines.

**END**