

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DepEd's intensified programs led to better performance in 2007

Owing to the relentless efforts to solve the concerns in public education, the Department of Education (DepEd) increased enrollment rate, improved the nutrition of schoolchildren, and registered better student performance in reading and achievement tests.

'Bayanihan' for enrollment increase

The department has been annually conducting the *Brigada Eskwela* and *Oplan Balik Eskwela* that aim to involve the community – most importantly the parents – in getting the schools ready for the opening of the school year. Local businesses and school boards have also been tapped to participate in this yearly event.

"We at the department are working towards the inclusion of as many learners as possible in the basic educational system," DepEd Secretary Jesli Lapus said. "We go the extra mile for every child to learn and finish school," he added.

Oplan Balik Eskwela is an inter-agency convergence effort initiated by DepEd to ensure the smooth opening of classes. On the other hand, *Brigada Eskwela* is a nationwide voluntary effort of teachers, parents, and the community to participate in the repair of school buildings and furniture.

"We are constantly tapping the participation of all education stakeholders to make our schools more conducive for learning," Lapus stressed. "This is one perfect manifestation of the spirit of *bayanihan*, and how everyone is willing to contribute something for our children" he added.

These campaigns have encouraged more parents to send their children to school, as reflected in this school year's enrolment rate. Enrolment in the Preschool Education Program rose from 522,255 to 557,220 learners, or an increase of 6.70 per cent. Meanwhile, pupil attendance rose from 90 per cent in 2006 to 95 per cent in 2007.

More nourished and more active pupils

But the bigger challenge is to encourage these children to stay in school and improve their performance. To do this, DepEd has integrated health and nutrition programs to improve attendance and performance among public school children.

PRESS RELEASE

By expanding its coverage to include more pupils, the School Feeding Program registered a 300 per cent increase in 2007. Having covered only preschool and grade 1 pupils in 2006, this program now benefits all pupils from preschool to grade 6 included in the priority provinces. The number of beneficiaries rose from 676,740 thousand preschool and grade 1 pupils in 2006 to 2.7 million preschool and grades one to six pupils in 2007.

To supplement the distribution of fortified rice, milk, biscuits, and breakfast items to children below the normal nutritional status, pupils and teachers have also availed themselves of a comprehensive medical and dental treatment, with a separate deworming treatment for both pupils and teachers. As an effect, the percentage of schoolchildren below the normal nutritional status decreased from 20% in 2006 to 17% in 2007.

“The department concerns itself not only with the schoolchildren’s academic performance, but also with their physical condition and well-being,” Lapus explained. “We are cognizant of how their nutrition status directly affects their performance in school,” he added.

Consequently, there was an increase in attendance of elementary pupils in priority provinces which was registered at 90% in 2006 to 95% in 2007.

Provinces under Priority One include: Camarines Norte and Masbate in Bicol, Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga Sibugay, and Lanao del Norte in Northern Mindanao.

Also in the list are Sarangani in SOCCSKSARGEN, Mountain Province in the Cordillera Administrative Region, Maguindanao in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, and Agusan del Sur and Surigao del Norte in CARAGA. Priority One provinces are those that need hunger mitigation initiatives the most, as identified by the National Economic Development Authority and the National Nutrition Council.

Improving achievement levels

Critical to raising the achievement level of school children is the improvement of their reading skills. DepEd’s Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP) aims to make every student an effective reader by the third grade, and with comprehension before proceeding to the fourth grade.

The Education Chief stressed that “one of the challenges we at the department face is how to spur the habit of reading among public school children.”

The results of grade three reading tests show that from 2006 to 2007, there was an increase of 9.58 percentage points in English – from 49.98 MPS in 2006, it further rose to 59.56 MPS in 2007. MPS, or Mean Percentage Score, refers to the percentage of correctly answered items in a test. It indicates the ratio between the number of correctly answered items and the total number of test questions.

PRESS RELEASE

As for Filipino, there was an increase of 12.47 percentage points – from 48.43 MPS in 2006 to 60.90 MPS in 2007.

“Reading opens doors to further knowledge and facilitates the learning process,” the DepEd Chief stated. “And we at DepEd are intensifying our ECARP to make our schoolchildren enlightened and learned readers,” he added.

As an effect of these reading programs, grade six pupils who took the National Achievement Test posted a net gain of 9.66 per cent across all five subjects – Mathematics, English, Science, Araling Panlipunan, and Filipino.

These interventions are part of the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda. Among BESRA’s goals is to attain functional literacy among Filipino schoolchildren by 2015. It is also the department’s priority agenda to systematically improve basic education nationwide.

Lapus reiterated that “the myriad problems in our educational system cannot be solved overnight.” But “these modest gains attest to our efforts to bring our resources to scale to gradually upgrade the quality of Philippine public education.”

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