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## **‘Schools for excellence’ in Leyte breed achievers**

Sixteen new buildings in Leyte welcome incoming students in Tongonan Elementary School in Ormoc City and Tongonan Elementary School in Kananga which could further boost the academic performance of the students in the two schools.

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus recently inaugurated these buildings in Leyte called “Schools for Excellence (SFE), which include two computer labs, two audio-visual rooms, two Home Economics Buildings, and two Industrial Arts Buildings, one each for the two schools.

The SFE project was spearheaded by the Energy Development Corporation (EDC), whose geothermal project is located in Leyte. SFE aims to enhance the competency and proficiency of pupils in the two localities.

The EDC management proposed the seven-year pilot school project to the DepEd in March 2005. EDC and DepEd held a series of project design and planning sessions with the Local Government Units (LGUs) and Parent-Teachers Associations (PTAs).

Lapus said the SFE project with EDC is expected to develop other critical factors in improving the educational system. He expressed appreciation to EDC for partnering with DepEd to come up with a comprehensive approach to improve the school performance of public school students.

The SFE model addresses the proper nourishment of pupils, enhanced capability of public school teachers, strong involvement of parents and community members, and well-managed schools with modern facilities and conducive learning environment.

In August 2005, the first set of new school facilities was inaugurated.

Now on its third year, the SFE project has mustered the active participation of almost every community segment, creating more cohesive communities in the process.

Based on the evaluation conducted by DepEd in March 2008, the project showed encouraging results such as 52.9% increase in enrollment; 1.9% decrease in drop-outs; 5.7% increase in pupil attendance; 10.6% increase in retention; 8.8% increase in participation; 27.3% increase in cohort survival.

Reports also show a 16-24% increment for proficiency level from 1st to 4th grading.

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There are also zero non-readers in both schools since 2006; and 15% weight increase and 6% increase in attendance, which is mainly attributed to the feeding program.

In the last three years, SFE Tongonan, Kananga ranked no. 1 in 2007 in NAT achievement in district, division and regional levels for obtaining an increase of 30% performance in the 2007 NAT.

Meanwhile, SFE Tongonan, Ormoc has received 44 academic and non-academic achievements/awards.

Lapus stressed that private sector and LGUs are key allies in upgrading the quality of education. "Providing quality education has become our shared responsibility.

Some livelihood opportunities have also flourished in the area, such as egg production, swine raising, and tilapia farm put up by local farmers associations to address school feeding program's requirements.

Complementary projects have also been initiated by the barangays such as the upgrading of surrounding infrastructure and the new high school program to accommodate SFE graduates.

Accordingly, SFE's gains were noticed as commendations from the business sector, the academe, government agencies and non-government organizations have poured in.

The SFE project has also received an Award of Merit from the Gold Quill Philippines as best practices and highest level of achievement by communicators in thought leadership, technical skills, and sustainable solutions.

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