

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Lapus: Brigada Eskwela Ensures Smooth Opening of Classes

General Santos City -- Education Secretary Jesli Lapus expressed optimism the opening of classes in June 10 will proceed smoothly due to the active participation of schools and communities in Brigada Eskwela, a nationwide schools maintenance week that prepares schools for the coming schoolyear.

Lapus made his assessment during his visit of public schools in Sarangani province and General Santos City.

Also during the visit, Lapus led the groundbreaking ceremony for a two-classroom school building in Malapatan, Sarangani funded by the US Aid for International Development and Petron Foundation, a showcase of government –private sector partnership in addressing resource gap in public education.

The education chief -- together with USAID mission director Jon Lindborg and Sarangani governor Miguel Dominguez -- was in Sarangani province as part of his nationwide assessment of the Brigada Eskwela.

“I am glad to observe nationwide enthusiasm for Brigada Eskwela. Now our next challenge is to get our kids – our future -- to school,” Lapus said.

In his meeting with DepEd officials in the regions, Lapus also challenged the teachers to increase enrolment/participation rate and reduce drop-out rate. DepEd is currently implementing intervention programs and policy directions aimed at easing the burden of parents while encouraging them to send their children to school. These include acceptance of 6-year olds in Grade 1, food for school program, no collection of school fees, non-compulsory wearing of uniform, and the continuing implementation of the Alternative Learning System for out-of-school learners.

Together with Lindborg, parents, teachers and community volunteers Lapus participated in the school repair of Malapatan Central Elementary School where USAID donated books, paints and building materials.

While Brigada Eskwela accepts no cash donation, materials for cleaning, repair and beautification can be contributed.

Lapus added that the level of participation in this year’s Brigada Eskwela is encouraging and could go beyond the 90% participation level of all schools registered in 2007.

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Only 30% of schools nationwide took part when the Brigada Eskwela was first implemented in 2003 where it generated some P153 million worth of donations. By 2007, over 39, 000 schools participated which generated almost P2.3 billion worth of donations in kind from the community.

Lapus is confident the 100 percent participation rate will be achieved this year. " I can see increased participation based on reports from the ground but still we have a lot of work up ahead,"Lapus shared.

In 2007, all public elementary and secondary schools in Region 8 and CARAGA Region participated in the Brigada for a 100% participation rate. The annual activity is spearheaded by DepEd's Adopt-a-School program.

Brigada Eskwela volunteers do minor repair works such as painting of roofs and walls, cementing of footpath, fixing leaking water pipes, repairing chairs, desks, furniture, toilets and replacing ceiling boards, among others.

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