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DepEd inks partnerships in Agusan del Sur

Various kinds of support for education reform efforts poured from both the public and private sector in Agusan del Sur. The agreements signed during the launching of Model of Excellence (MOE) Schools Essential Health Care and Nutrition Program and Silya sa Eskwela Program in Trento West Central Elementary School aim to improve students' health and address resource gaps such as textbooks and school furniture.

DepEd Assistant Secretary and Chief of Staff Reynaldo Laguda attended the ceremonies on behalf of Secretary Armin Luistro. Also present in the event were Governor Adolph Edward Plaza, District I Representative Maria Valentina Plaza, District II Representative Evelyn Plaza-Mellana, LMP-Agusan del Sur President Salimar Mondejar, Trento Mayor Johnmark C. Billanes, Caraga Regional Director Gloria Benigno, Schools Division Superintendent Crucita Montejo-Taala, and representatives from Fit for School and Books for the Barrios, Inc (BftB).

"We keep on saying that education is everybody's business and not DepEd's concern alone. This is precisely why we are strengthening our partnerships with the provincial government, our lawmakers representing Agusan del Sur, the League of Municipalities, the Liga ng mga Barangay, the Provincial Federation of General Parents-Teachers Association and non-government organizations Fit for School and the Books for the Barrios," said Laguda.

All three agreements will help uplift the education status in the province, particularly the education resource gaps and the students' welfare.

"I thank the people of Agusan del Sur not just for the warm welcome you have given me, but more importantly, for giving special attention to education and for practicing the spirit of "bayanihan" for the cause of education," said Laguda.

In line with the Republic Act No. 9155 or the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA), First Congressional District Representative Maria Valentina Plaza and Second Congressional District Representative Evelyn Plaza-Mellana partnered with DepEd and BftB, through its Philippine implementing arm, Libro Para Sa Barrio – Pilipinas Foundation, Inc. (LPSBPFI), together with the entire provincial government of Agusan del Sur, its LMP, and the GPTA to achieve vast improvements in the quality of education in their locality.

Guided by the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA), the provincial government of Agusan del Sur initiated the move to forge a strategic alignment of development priorities and synergy of plans and actions among its local government units (LGUs), congressional districts and other stakeholders to ensure harmony in implementation and greater impact to the people and communities. BESRA specifically identifies the reforms needed by the Philippine public school system to enhance and improve the quality of education. On the other hand, BftB had initiated and implemented the MOE Schools Program in several areas in the country that have resulted to significant improvements in the learning capacities of the recipient

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school children as well as in the teaching and supervisory capabilities of teachers and school administrators.

Seeing education as the key for development, one of its strategic thrusts is to provide quality social services particularly in education, hence it launched its banner education program, *"Pagtuon Alang sa Masanag nga Kaugmaon"* (Education for a Bright Future) Project, adopting the Model of Excellence Schools Program and implementing the same in the province in partnership with DepEd and BftB.

In the agreement, the provincial government of Agusan del Sur shall shoulder P250,000 per recipient school in the 14 component municipalities for the first stack of educational books and learning aids and materials, and facilitate the allocation of additional funds from the provincial special education fund (PSEF) or other sources to support related human resource capability enhancement activities of MOE Schools Program. Likewise, LMP, through its local executives, shall shoulder P250,000 for the second stack of educational books and other learning materials intended for their respective MOE School and facilitate the allocation of funds from their respective municipal special education fund (MSEF) or other sources intended to fund the preparatory physical requirements for the establishment of a library, a computer and speech laboratory and other necessary school facilities.

BftB shall ensure the availability of books and other educational materials needed by the recipient MOE schools for six years and ensure that these books are most relevant and best fit the requirements of diverse learners in the recipient schools. On the other hand, DepEd shall identify, assess, evaluate, and recommend schools that meet the requirements and quality to be recognized as an MOE School. It shall also designate permanent teachers to be trained as regular librarians, computer and speech instructors, or facilitate the possible opening of a regular item for such functions to ensure adeptness in the management and supervision of Pagtuon libraries as well as the computer and speech laboratory in the recipient school.

LMP and GPTA shall assist in other financial and administrative needs of the projects.

"Our partnership has a long way to go, giving us more time to positively touch other people's lives and save their future. This is a good start but a lot needs to be done. We want to see that our efforts are being translated into improving school attendance, producing learners who read with greater comprehension, and an upward trend in school performance," Laguda stressed.

Meanwhile, Fit For School entered into an agreement with DepEd, the congressional districts and the provincial government of Agusan del Sur to promote health and welfare among the students.

Reinforcing the Philippine Health Promotion Program through Essential Health Care Program (EHCP), the agreement aims to create an environment in school and day care settings that will be helpful to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

"We believe that to be able to make our schools a healthy environment for everyone, efforts from government and non-government agencies, private organizations, and

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other stakeholders should be present. Through this partnership, we expect learning outcome to improve among the students of Agusan del Sur as we see a significant reduction in sickness and absenteeism,” Laguda told.

All parties commit to finance and implement EHCP for Filipino Children in public schools particularly the implementation of daily group tooth brushing with fluoride toothpaste, daily hand washing with soap, bi-annual deworming, annual delousing, and improvement of water and sanitation facilities.

Fit for School shall promote EHCP and support DepEd by providing technical assistance in the sustainability of the program. DepEd shall supervise the over-all quality of implementation, appropriate utilization of materials, and achievement of program objectives.

On the other hand, the provincial government and the office of the congressional districts shall promote the advocacy and implementation of EHCP as a school-based health program through Project Pagtuon and also provide financial assistance to ensure timely procurement of EHCP materials for use in schools.

Laguda was very pleased with his visit to the province. “This is a day full of goodwill and a day of thanksgiving as well for our partners here. Truly, channeling resources to improve basic education is one of the best investments we can do to secure the future of Agusan del Sur. I am most confident that together with our partners here, that vision is possible”

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