

PRESS RELEASE

Br. Armin reports on his first 100 days

When President Benigno S. Aquino III assumed office, he announced reforms in education as one of his top priorities. As the President puts it, “education is the key to the long-term problems of the country. If we fix basic education, we fix the long-term problems of the country. And if we fix the country’s problems, we will build a truly strong society we can proudly call the Philippines.”

Anchored on this vision, Department of Education Secretary Br. Armin Luistro FSC hit the ground running in implementing the President’s ten-point education agenda. These include the 12-year basic education cycle, universal pre-schooling for all, Madaris Education, technical vocational education, “Every Child a Reader” by Grade 1, Science and Math proficiency, assistance to private schools as essential partners in basic education, rationalization of the medium of instruction, quality textbooks, and partnering with Local Governments to build more schools.

The President also instructed the department to reassess its programs in keeping with the country’s commitment to democratize access to quality education as a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that has pledged to meet the Education For All (EFA) goals as well as our Millennium Development Goals (MDG) targets by 2015.

All these entail a lot of work but Luistro is unfazed. “Although this as a big challenge, we join the entire Aquino administration in contributing for the common good of our real boss – the Filipino people, in general, and the children youth, in particular.”

During Luistro’s first 100 days as DepEd chief, the department has strengthened partnerships with the private sector, local government units, legislators, the academe, and development partners to address urgent needs.

For Luistro, the only way to achieve reforms in education is to engage all sectors of society. “The department recognizes that addressing problems in education require the engagement of various stakeholders. As we always say, education is not only the concern of DepEd but the concern of all.”

He said the President instructed him to plug all the resources gaps within two years. These include shortages in teachers, classrooms, textbooks, school seats, and water and sanitation facilities.

After setting its targets, the new administration initiated new partnership modalities on top of its successful Adopt-A-School Program. Recently, agreements with the ABS-CBN Foundation and Filipinas Dravo Corporation were signed for the donation and construction of two three-storey school buildings with 15 classrooms, each amounting to PhP38.3 million and a two-storey school building with six classrooms worth PhP6.3 million.

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To improve student nutrition and school performance, Nutri-Asia provided free breakfast meals worth P5M to 700 Grade 1 to 3 pupils for six months. Moreover, DepEd likewise engaged IBM for a project worth some P10 million. This included advanced learning tools called KidSmart Young Explorer to 38 elementary schools in Metro Manila and capacity building for teachers and ICT schools coordinators on the use of the learning tools.

Partnerships are not limited to the private sector. DepEd has already met with the League of Provinces and League of Municipalities in the Philippines on the building of more classrooms and the funding of locally hired teachers, among others. Partnerships are also being pursued with the League of Corporate Foundations (LCF), the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), and other groups to channel their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs towards education.

Luistro is also looking closely into teachers' welfare, saying that, "to deliver quality education, we should always prioritize the professional advancement and personal welfare of our hardworking teachers."

DepEd and the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) entered into an agreement to put in order the service records of DepEd teaching and non-teaching personnel to protect their benefits and entitlements.

Also, DepEd, with Bayer Philippines, Philippine Heart Association, and Philippine Society of Hypertension, Inc., launched "*BP ng Teacher Ko Alaga Ko*" to address the prevalence of hypertension among public school teachers. The project will run for a year and will provide health services to 300 public elementary teachers and non-teaching personnel per site.

PLDT-Smart Communications has partnered with DepEd and the local government unit of Daet, under the Gabay Guro (2G) program. The telecommunications giant provided financial assistance worth P3M to complete the establishment of "*Teachers' Farm Village*".

DepEd has also taken bold steps to enhance the basic education curriculum. The Philippines is the only remaining country in Asia with a 10-year basic education program. To enhance the competencies and skills of students and to ensure that they are employable after graduation from high school, or are well-prepared for the university, and be at par with global standards, DepEd has proposed the "Enhanced K+12 Basic Education Program."

K+12 means Kindergarten, six years of elementary education, four years of junior high school (Grades 7 to 10) and two years of senior high school (Grades 11 to 12). The two years of senior high school will enable students to consolidate academic skills and competencies. The curriculum will allow specializations, in science and technology, music and arts, agriculture and fisheries, sports, business and entrepreneurship, etc.

The K+12 proposal will go through a series of consultations with stakeholders such as parents, students, teachers, business groups, development partners, legislators, and the academe among others.

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Luistro said the enhanced K+12 is a free, pro-poor, multiple intelligence program for graduates to be equipped with skills necessary to be gainfully employed after high school graduation. “It will also provide them the necessary competencies that will allow them to pursue a college degree and be adequately prepared to live a productive life.”

On students’ health, Luistro has instructed school officials to intensify their anti-dengue campaign by coming up with an information drive and preventive alert system in schools in collaboration with the Parents-Teachers Associations, Local Government Units, and Municipal Health Offices.

DepEd, as an organization, was also made more responsive under Luistro’s watch. In response to President Aquino’s Memorandum Circulars 1 and 2, a review process was instituted for some 300 non-Career Executive Service incumbents prior to recommending their appointment to the President. Luistro has also ordered the review of all capacity-building activities in the department for a more frugal and prudent use of public resources. Priority is given to programs and projects that are worth scaling up to improve the teaching and learning processes.

Likewise, Luistro directed all senior officials to conduct unannounced visits to schools on a regular basis to monitor the state of public schools and see both the engagement between the teachers and their students and the resource gaps that need to be urgently addressed. “This will reassure them that we are serious in pushing for education reforms. Nothing can stop DepEd in delivering frontline service to the people,” Luistro said. To date, Luistro has already visited some 30 schools across Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

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