

FEATURE STORY

Project DORP: DepEd catches dropping out students

Paolo Velasco, a 17-year old fourth year student of the Marikina National High School is in danger of not graduating because he is hard-up going to school while working in the meat shop of his uncle. Working long hours, he earns a measly P100 a day which he shares with his younger sister for their food.

Paolo stopped going to school when he was first year because he had to look for their mother who deserted them when he was three years old, just after their father died. He grew up with his aunt who also soon died. Through dogged determination, he found a way to continue his schooling.

Paolo has no family to count on to support him as a young student. In the book of the Department of Education, he is considered a student at the risk of dropping out (SARDO) from school. At his age, he cannot combine work and regular schooling. MNHS's Guidance Counselor Jose Baldozar says "Paolo is to graduate this March but that won't happen if he remains in the regular program."

On the initiative of the school's principal, Victoria Naranja, Paolo's papers are now being processed for him to be absorbed in the Open High School where he can continue going to school once a week while working. He can finally graduate this coming March.

The Open High School Program (OHSP) is one of the alternative schemes under the Drop Out Reduction Program (DORP) of the DepEd. Through OHSP, students can complete their high school education even if they find themselves in circumstances that would not allow them to continue going to school under the regular system.

The OHSP is considered formal and structured. Students learn the eight core subjects in English, Science, Mathematics, Filipino, Aralin Panlipunan, Edukasyon sa Pagpapahalaga, and Music and Arts and Physical Education and Health (MAPEH). They graduate by completing the four levels from first year to fourth year.

The grading system is the same with the regular program. Students in the OHSP also graduate with the regular students at the end of the school year.

It started in 1998 with a few high schools initially offering it. Today, more and more high schools nationwide are offering the program as part of the scheme to address the issue on school drop-outs.

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Since the DORP was implemented, there has been a significant change in drop-out rate in the secondary level. From 12.51 % in 2005-2006, this went down to 7.45% in 2007-2008.

The DORP was formulated to respond to the needs of students who cannot report to class regularly because they are working either as part time or full time or for any other reason.

There are about five to six million Filipinos of school age who are out of school. Many are willing to finish high school but are constrained by family, individual, community and school concerns. Rightly so, the DORP focuses on these four risk factors that lead to the dropout problem.

The DORP has three major components namely the Effective Alternative Secondary Education or EASE, the Open High School or Distance Education Program (OHSP) and the School Initiated Interventions (SII).

DORP was designed to address the problems faced by students which prevent them from completing their elementary and high school education. For instance, many students cannot report to class regularly because of various reasons like work, physical handicap, family and health problems, among others.

The students have a choice among three modes in continuing their schooling. One mode is the modular system where teachers use learning modules which the student can bring home for their self study. The content of the modules are similar to the textbooks used by regular students.

The EASE plan is applied to short-term and seasonal SARDO while the OHSP is recommended for SARDOs who permanently cannot attend regular classes. The SII is utilized based on the felt needs of the SARDO and to the existing available school resources.

The EASE program caters to the regular high school students. "Of those in the formal system, there are those who may absent themselves intermittently from school especially during planting and harvest seasons. Ang iba nagtitinda sa kalye" says Prudence Sanoy of the DepEd Curriculum Development Division and DORP Coordinator.

The students together with their parents and the teachers agree on the schedule of classes and the date of examination. This is adjusted depending on the availability of the student considering his/her situation. The teacher or learning facilitator adjusts to the need of the learner where both agree to a common schedule. The student is given a module on what he is supposed to study in school while he/she is absent. When he/she comes back to school, he/she will be tested on how well he/she learned his/her lessons.

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“Hindi added burden ito kasi lessons are in modules. Pareho ang test at recitation na ibibigay sa bata pagbalik niya sa school. The teachers are trained how to use the module, grade the students, evaluate and others” Sanoy explained.

Another mode is the internet-based learning which is still being pilot-tested in selected schools. “We will launch the on-line Open High School or the internet-based Distance Education Program (iDEP) but we are verifying first the modules for on-line use”, Sanoy said.

The other scheme on blended technology is a merger of the modular type and the internet-based mode of teaching and learning.

In the School Initiated Interventions (SII), there are programs implemented by the schools to address the drop-out problem. These are homegrown initiatives and are mostly unrecorded. There are no means of verification as there are no documents to show results and the systems used.

“Under the SII, we put a system and established means of verification or MOVs. We are doing something to ensure that the students are studying and learning” Sanoy said.

These are the alternative delivery modes (ADM) that the DepEd is adopting in its relentless move to reduce the drop out rate.

The OHSP is not specific to certain schools. Public high schools all over the country offer this program. A student from a certain area can continue his studies in another school where he/she moved in and currently resides.

For instance, three students coming from different provinces have found themselves pursuing their studies at the MNHS.

Maricris M. Dealagdon is from Samar. “Nahinto ako sa high school dahil sa hirap ng buhay. We are ten in the family. Lagi akong absent sa klase. Ayaw akong papasukin ng Tatay ko dahil pinapatulong ako sa bukid.” When she left their place she worked first for eight months in Pampanga. She worked while going to school. Then she finally found her way to the MNHS.

“Maganda ang mag-aral sa Open High School. Focused ang mga teachers sa pagtrato sa amin. Sa OHS may oras ako para maghanapbuhay. Natutuwa ako dahil over-aged na ako para sa high school pero dahil sa OHS hindi ako gaano exposed sa mga other students na mas bata sa akin kaya tuloy-tuloy ang aral ko.”

Bless Ciah Joy F. dela Cruz is from Nueva Ecija. “Maganda ang programa dahil kung ano ang tinuturo sa regular high school yun din ang tinuturo sa amin. Mas focus pa nga pagturo sa amin dahil kaunti lang kami. Binibigyan kami ng attention dahil may mga anak ang iba sa amin. “

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Rhealyn G. Babala is from Camarines Norte in Bicol. She is now in 4th year at the MNHS. She also stopped going to school in Bicol because her father made her work in the farm. She tried working as a house helper but was hard-up not being used to the kind of work she did. “Lagi akong napapagalitan dahil mali ang gawa ko, hindi po ako kasi sanay”.

One of the teachers at MNHS Ms. Joyce Reyes got her and sent her to the OHS together with her sister. “Malaki ang tulong ng Open High School. Hindi na kasi kami pinapagaral ng magulang namin. Habang nagtatrabaho ako nagaaral ako para makakuha ng magandang trabaho balang araw at makatulong sa parents namin.”

“When we have all schools finding ways to make their students continue their schooling, we move closer to DepEd’s goal of making quality basic education accessible to all,” says Sanoy.

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