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## DepEd chief calls for stepped-up community partnership

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus called on barangay chairpersons to intensify their partnership with the DepEd to improve literacy within their constituency, and make education accessible to as many learners in the community.

Lapus met recently with some 1,200 members of the Liga ng mga Barangay (LNB) - Pangasinan during the 5<sup>th</sup> LNB Provincial Convention held in Subic Bay, Olongapo City where he outlined the role of barangay chiefs in bringing more learners in the education mainstream.

DepEd reported that for every 100 pupils that enter grade 1, only 66 will finish elementary. Of the 66, only 58 will enroll in high school and only 43 will graduate.

The dwindling number of school enrollees and the high drop-out rate are attributed to widespread poverty aggravated by the rising cost of fuel and food. At present, the participation rate in elementary school increased from 83% in 2006-07 to 85% in 2007-08.

To encourage parents to send their children to school, policies were relaxed. DepEd has strictly prohibited collection of fees and wearing of uniform is now optional to lessen the financial burden of parents. DepEd is also implementing the Food for School Program where schoolchildren are given a kilo of rice every school day so they will not go to school on an empty stomach.

Lapus emphasized the pivotal role the barangays play in pushing for Education For All (EFA) agenda. "We can do so much together to make education for all a reality... to make education inclusive of many and not exclusive to a few," he said.

Lapus explained that the barangay can shoulder the honorarium of alternative learning teachers or a portion of it. "Our local officials can also set aside a venue for community learning center, or provide transportation or security so ALS teachers can reach even the farthest barangays," he suggested.

He noted that without DepEd's Alternative Learning System, the government can never achieve its Education For All targets –"at least, not within the timeframe that we have set for ourselves."

He said that DepEd and the barangay officials can work together in convincing the unreached and those at risk to go back and stay in school.

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He also stressed the need of educating the out-of-school children and youth (OSCY) any time, any place and in any way. “Together, we should know what and understand why and how the OSCY are learning outside the school so we will know how to address their unique needs,” he added.

In a related development, the Department of Interior and Local Government through Memorandum Circular No. 95, has urged the local school boards to provide supplemental funding to pay for the maintenance and utilities of pre-schools. The directive was addressed to provincial governors, city and municipal mayors, vice governors and DILG regional directors

Lapus recently urged Congress to pass a law that would jail parents who fail to send their children to school even as he enjoined barangay officials to likewise make localized anti truancy ordinances.

“All these measures are meant to increase school participation and compel parents to send their school age children to formal schooling,” Lapus said.

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