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**DepEd Tech-Voc continues to produce nationally-certified graduates**

The Department of Education's strengthened technical vocational (tech-voc) curriculum continues to produce a new generation of high-skilled workforce as it has generated a total of 1,751 holders of competency certificate after hurdling various skills tests administered by a national certifying body.

"With the kind of training and preparation we are providing our students, we anticipate an increase in the number of tech-voc graduates who pass the highly-competitive skills test of Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)," said Education Secretary Mona Valisno.

Under the Strengthened Technical-Vocational Education Program (STVEP), DepEd supervises a total of 282 tech-voc high schools where students can take specialization in automotive, computer hardware service, cosmetology, furniture and cabinet-making, garments, air conditioning and refrigeration, food production, crop production, food processing, fish culture, and fish capture, among others.

These fields of specialization are taken alongside academic subjects, thus producing graduates who are ready for both the world of work and higher education whichever they choose.

There are more than 4,000 tech-voc graduating students nationwide that have yet to complete this school year's TESDA-administered skills assessment. Expectations are high that a significant number will pass TESDA's skills test this year.

"We know that we have achieved a level of success in this program because we've been having 95 to 100 percent passing rate in our competency assessments," Valisno added.

DepEd continues to raise the quality of the tech-voc program through the provision of competency-based curriculum, teachers' training, acquisition of physical facilities, development of instructional materials, provision of manpower requirement, and other logistics support.

Tech-voc high schools are distributed all over the country, and their specialization depends on what is suitable in particular regions, whether fishery, agriculture, or arts and trade.

Despite initial good results, DepEd wants to thoroughly evaluate the program for which Memorandum No. 11 was issued. This is specifically to assess the efficiency of the use of a P461 million fund allocated for these schools' acquisition of new tools and equipment (P410 million) and competency assessment subsidy (P51.05 million).

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“We have to know the absorptive capacity of the schools on their use of the tools and equipment that we have downloaded to them,” said Dr. Ricardo de Lumen, DepEd tech-voc head.

These are other aims of the evaluation: Monitor the status of utilization and disbursement of funds downloaded to schools; determine the status of the competency-based curriculum; assess the progress of teachers and students; monitor the competencies acquired by school head teachers and non-teaching staff; gather best practices and models; and identify gaps and challenges in the program.

DepEd believes the tech-voc high school program will play a significant role in raising the quality of high school graduates in the country toward employment here and abroad or toward entrepreneurship. Through it, they can contribute more significantly to revenue generation, jobs creation, and to national development as a whole.

Graduates in these schools have more options in life—immediate employment after high school since they already have the skills for livelihood; take further four or five-year college course; take higher but short-course (one or two-year) technical education; or become an entrepreneur in their field of expertise.

DepEd is satisfied that the program has exceeded expectations.

“Three years ago, we were only aiming for a COC (certificate of competency) level for the graduates. But students have been getting NC1 and NC2 certifications from TESDA, equaling or even exceeding the performance of second year college students,” said Charlie B. Tayas DepEd tech-voc program officer.

As of school year 2008-2009, there were 311 students that obtained a COC 1 certificate from TESDA; 311, NC (National Certificate Level) 1 certificate; and 1,129, NC 2 certificate.

The tech-voc program also supports DepEd’s program to institutionalize the National Career Assessment Examination (NCAE) as part of its aim to address job mismatch, cut unemployment rate, and reverse the local “brain drain” phenomenon.

The job-skills mismatch in the country is evident with an unemployment rate of 7.1 percent, an underemployment rate of 19.4 percent. There is also an estimated 10 percent, or around nine million overseas Filipino workers (OFW) that rather found a suitable job match abroad rather than from local job openings.

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