

**“The Promise of a Young, Talented, and Dynamic Philippines:
The K to 12 Program and Reforms in Basic Education”**
Sponsorship Speech for The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2012 (SBN 3286)

Senator Edgardo J. Angara
Chair of the Senate Committee on Education, Arts and Culture

The Good News

After years as a laggard country, the Philippines is back on track. Filipinos – here and abroad – now have a renewed sense of promise and hope. Our outlook is positive as we register gains ranging from our competitiveness rankings to tourist arrivals; from GDP to household consumption.

But there is also good news about our educational system. Between June 2010 and the first half of 2012, 23,646 classrooms were built; 29,261 new teachers were hired; and millions of textbooks and seats were provided.

Through GASTPE (Government Assistance for Students and Teachers in Private Education), more than half¹ of the 1.4 million private high school students in the country benefit from direct government funding.

In January of this year, we made pre-school education open to all Filipino children through Republic Act No. 10157, bringing universal Kindergarten one significant step closer to reality.

Support and engagement from the private sector grow stronger as well. Through initiatives like the Public-Private Partnership for School Infrastructure Project (PSIP), Adopt-A-School Program, and *Bayanihang Pampaaralan*, thousands of classrooms will be available to students, even with the resource constraints we face in government.²

¹ Specifically, 724.06 thousand beneficiaries for ESC. DepEd (August, 2012). Status of Implementation of GASTPE.

² DepEd (August 2012). 2013 Budget Presentation to the Senate.

We also started giving our teachers the compensation they deserve. From a starting salary of PhP12,000 in 2008, teachers now receive at least PhP18,500. This increase over the last five years underscores the importance we place on our teachers' benefits and welfare.

Through the continuing efforts of the Department of Education (DepEd), some of the most pressing issues are being addressed.

Possibly, for the 1st time since the 1940s, all deficits in classrooms, water and sanitation facilities, and teacher items may be eliminated by the end of 2013.³

Seemingly unprecedented and ambitious, this is the goal that DepEd and Sec. Luistro have set for themselves – for the benefit of every Filipino child and learner. We must do what we can to support them.

The Goal

Soon, infrastructure gaps will be covered and the challenge remains for us to continue improving our educational system.

But what kind of system should we aspire for – that every Filipino deserves and can be proud of?

For starters, it should be both learner- and community-centric. It should be relevant and contextualized. Overall, it must be student-friendly. School activities and lessons must be localized and reflect local realities to be easily understood, and at the same time impart to the learner and student we are all inter-connected to the wider world.

³ DepEd (August 2012). 2013 Budget Presentation to the Senate.

It should also produce lifelong learners who know how to navigate the complexities of modern life, and contribute to the development of our country.

This is the goal that lies before us and the challenge that we will confront head on and surpass.

The Opportunity

Apart from the rewards of sustained economic growth and sound fiscal management, the Philippines stands to benefit from its demographic dividend⁴. The median age is only 23.1 years old⁵—pointing to a young and highly trainable pool of human resource.

We can improve our nation's productivity if we maximize this window through policies that harness and hone human capital, particularly through basic education.

Prolonged economic development is within our country's reach if we equip our citizens with the means to maximize their innate talents and intellect.

The Imperative

Once again, we face a fork in the road. One path will lead to continued growth and development, while another will lead to more of the same—a prevalence of mediocrity and ineptitude, of potential left unrealized and promise left unfulfilled.

⁴ Yap, Karl, et al. (July 2012). Philippines Leads In Demographic Dividend Of Supply Of Young Workers. <http://www.mb.com.ph/articles/367314/philippines-leads-in-demographic-dividend-of-supply-of-young-workers>. Accessed 18 September 2012

⁵ Central Intelligence Agency (2012). The World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2177.html>. Accessed 18 September 2012

We should choose the path toward shared prosperity and a significantly better quality of life for every Filipino. That route begins with developing and nurturing our human capital.

Governments the world over have long assumed this sacred obligation: that of providing every citizen—regardless of race, background, belief, creed, and means—with sufficient preparation and guidance to lead productive and meaningful lives.

No less than our Constitution guarantees this inalienable right: “The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels, and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all” (Art. XIV Sec. 1).

Developing our human capital begins with our basic education system—and the State must intervene and work towards improving it.

I invite all of you my esteemed colleagues to support one of the flagship programs and the top-most priority in the Aquino administration’s ten-point education agenda: the K to 12 Basic Education Program.

The K to 12 Basic Education Program

Basic education provides the foundation by which every child begins to define him/herself. At its core, K to 12 aims to produce Filipino graduates with holistic, 21st century skills. They will be prepared for higher education, middle-level skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship.

K to 12 is about enhancing the curriculum that better prepares every Filipino child, and about innovating on how lessons are taught to each learner.

The enhanced curriculum is a product of thorough researches, benchmarked against our neighbouring countries⁶. Insights were drawn from decades of experience in our schools and communities.

Best practices from the region were culled out and adapted to fit local contexts, informed by the successes and failures the DepEd encountered in the field. What emerged was a curriculum made for and by the Filipino – or as Sec. Luistro refers to it, *“isang curriculum na gawa ng Pilipino, para sa Pilipino, at pang-tapat saan man sa mundo.”*

Here are some key features of this program:

1. ***K to 12 strengthens early childhood education.*** Education during the beginning years of a child serves as the foundation for his/her continuing development.⁷ Pre-school weans and familiarizes the child to the structured environment of formal education. The lack of sufficient preparation is best exemplified by the dismal retention rate from Grades 1 to 2, by far the lowest rate within the basic education cycle.⁸

Through Universal Kindergarten, children are given the proper time to adjust and the opportunity to develop their psychosocial skills. This is the K in K to 12.

⁶ Brunei, Malaysia, New South Wales of Australia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam

⁷ SEAMEO-Innotech (May 2012). K to 12 Toolkit: Reference Guide for Teacher Educators, School Administrators, and Teachers

⁸ From SYs 2010-2012, Grades 1-2 retention rate was at 83%; Grades 2-3, 3-4, 4-5, 5-6, at 95%, 97%, 97%, and 96%, respectively.

2. *K to 12 makes the curriculum relevant to all types of learners.* The enhanced curriculum is responsive to the needs of the learner and his/her community. It is age-appropriate, culture- and gender-sensitive, and does not assume that one size fits all. The latter half of the program is then designed to address present and emerging demands of the local market.

3. *K to 12 builds proficiency through language.* Adeptness in language begins with one's mother tongue and provides the strong base for acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies across all other learning areas including new languages. No longer will a child be forced to learn how to read or count through an unfamiliar language.

4. *K to 12 ensures integrated and seamless learning.* Standards and competencies across grade levels are linked and build up from the simplest to more complex concepts. Learners are exposed to knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes of increasing depth and sophistication.

This seamlessness extends beyond basic education, as K to 12 is a program not just of DepEd but also of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

5. *K to 12 is forward-looking.* The Senior High School program, in particular, provides for specialized upper secondary education that prepares learners for various career tracks.

We are the last country in Asia and one of only three countries in the world with a ten-year pre-university cycle. All other economies have also made the commitment to provide free upper secondary education for their citizens. This is at the heart of the legislation for K to 12. And this is what I implore each of you to support.

Delivering Solutions & Investing in Our Future

Mounting a reform as extensive and as bold as K to 12 comes with vast challenges. Let us take note of the scale we face – 24.8 million learners nationwide; close to 46 thousand public and private schools; nearly half a million public school teachers required; more than 13 thousand private elementary and secondary schools with more than 55 thousand teachers.

So immense is the challenge that adjustments will have to be made. These changes demand flexibility, ingenuity, resilience and vision.

The implementation plan for public schools is straightforward – the enhanced curriculum is introduced in phases beginning with Grades 1 and 7 this school year, Grades 2 and 8 next school year and so on. Given this plan and with approval of this legislation, nationwide Senior High School (SHS) will be first rolled out beginning with Grade 11 in SY 2016-2017.

What remains to be defined is how much of our public high schools will offer Grades 11 and 12, and the roster of their respective specializations.

To answer this very important question, DepEd is in the process of mapping the capacity of its schools vis-à-vis the demands of the communities they serve. This mapping extends to other sectors, those of Higher Education and Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

Addressing the concerns of non-DepEd schools – be they private basic education schools, public or private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) or Technical-Vocational Institutions (TVIs) – requires more creativity and innovation.

What DepEd has articulated, and what our proposed legislation contains, is a three-pronged approach to respond to these schools' needs and concerns.

1. First, non-DepEd schools may offer SHS from SY 2016-2017 up to the final year of transition in SY 2020-2021. They may continue to operate SHS, or only do so during this five-year transition period.
2. Second, DepEd is currently studying various partnership and financing schemes which will allow DepEd-funded but externally-provided SHS, along the lines of education service contracting and other Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models.
3. Third, of paramount concern to HEIs and TVIs is the potential displacement of professors and instructors during the initial introduction of SHS. There is also the overall lack of qualified teachers.

Through this measure, graduates, professionals, and experts who have not met the teacher licensure requirement will be allowed to teach in SHS during the transition years. These provisory teachers may stay in SHS provided that they eventually comply with the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) requirement or meet the equivalent standards⁹.

On top of transition concerns are issues regarding cost. Allow me to reframe the debate. While sizeable resources must be allocated for this program, they should be considered investments rather than mere expenditures.

K to 12 specifically –and basic education in general– is about developing our human capital. UNESCO recommends that governments invest the equivalent of 6% of GNP and 20% of national budget on education.¹⁰

Since the new millennium, we have been spending below 3% of GNP and only 12-13% of the national budget on basic education.

Note that the cost of implementing Grades 11-12 amounts to an estimated yearly average of PhP 46.2 billion from 2016 to 2020, assuming all cost are borne by the government¹¹. Strong support and participation from HEIs, TVIs, and other private institutions will afford us enough resources and time to finance SHS completely.

Passing this bill swiftly will enable DepEd, together with CHED, TESDA, the private sector, education associations, and other stakeholders to execute immediately the implementation plan for K to 12 – one that will give our children and our children's children the kind of basic education system they richly deserve.

⁹ For example, the bill includes provisions allowing current full-time HEI faculty members with relevant Masters Degrees to teach in SHS after the transition period without the need to pass the LET (SEC. 8c).

¹⁰ UNESCO (2010). Reaching the Unreached in Education in Asia Pacific. UNESCO Bangkok.

¹¹ Manasan, Rosario (April, 2012). Medium Term Spending Plan for Basic Education, 2012-2017: Enrolment Projections and Cost Simulations Under Alternative Scenarios. DepEd.

The Way Forward

This is more than just about expanding basic education from ten years to twelve. This goes beyond improving the curriculum we as a country teach and the pedagogies our noble teachers employ. This is about the State—the Filipino people as a single polity—fulfilling its solemn duty to educate and nurture its citizens to the best of our collective abilities.

Rarely can we say that we are on the cusp of making history with joyful confidence in the truth. Proposals to expand basic education date back to 1925 – 87 years ago. This is the closest we have gone to fulfilling this promise in nearly three generations.

May history remember this 15th Congress as one that did everything it could to build a just, humane, more prosperous, and more equitable Philippines.

Let us make the most of this privilege and begin the historic journey to K to 12. Let us act quickly and decisively.

Maraming salamat at mabuhay po tayong lahat!