

MEMORANDUM

1st PIECE of CAKE:

Program for Individualized Engagement and Curriculum Enhancement of COVID-19 Adapted K-12 Education

TO: BUREAU OF EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

and the

**Education for Learners with Special Needs Office (ELSNO),
BUREAU OF LEARNING DELIVERY**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DepEd)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES**

FROM: Julia Umapas

SUBJECT: Special Learning Needs and Improving Online Teaching

DATE: 2021 February 21

Executive Summary

Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) is a significantly disenfranchised population in contemporary Philippine society that has experienced further marginalization during the COVID-19 Pandemic, with increasing lack of access to education given the one-size-fits-all delivery of the Department of Education (DepEd)'s remote- / blended- / online learning program for students as a response to the sudden change in the functioning and day-to-day life of society. This policy paper aims to review and address the demand for inclusive education (IE) in the Philippines during the COVID-19 Pandemic and suggests changes for DepEd to implement in ensuring free, fair, and equitable access to education for all.

Introduction and Background

Numerous research studies has shown that social and physical barriers have a huge role in disability, making PWDs disabled by society other than by their bodies, thus shifting the view of disability from a "medical model" to a "social model" (WHO, 2011)¹. Consistent with evidence, Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CPRD)² describes a person with disabilities as:

"those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." (Child Rights Network (CRN), N/A)³

¹ https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/chapter1.pdf

² <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-1-purpose.html>

³ <https://childrightsnetwork.ph/advocacies/inclusive-education-for-children-and-youth-with-disabilities/>

In the Philippines, as of 2010, there are 1.4 million persons with disability (PWD) that comprise 1.57% of the 92.1 million national population (2010 CPH)⁴, wherein one of five (20%) PWDs are school-aged children and adolescents aged 5-19 years, of whom children aged 10-14 years (7.2%) constitute the largest proportion across the different age groups. (Child Rights Network (CRN), N/A)⁵

According to the Disability Rights Promotion International (DRPI)⁶ and the National Federation of Organizations of People with Disabilities in the Philippines [*Katipunan ng Maykapansanan sa Pilipinas, Inc. (KAMPI)*]⁷ in a 2009 report:

the rights of a disproportionate number of PWDs across the country were regularly violated and that they face discrimination and other barriers which prevent them from full social participation, immediate access to health services, inclusion in the educational system, and gainful employment. (Child Rights Network (CRN), N/A)⁸

Similarly, the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (WHO ICF) defines disability as

“[a] complex, dynamic, multidimensional, and contested [...] [it] understands functioning and disability as a dynamic interaction between health conditions and contextual factors, both personal and environmental” (WHO, 2011)⁹.

The ICF adopted the “bio-psycho-social model” representing “a workable compromise between medical and social models. Disability is the umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions, referring to the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a health condition) and that individual's contextual factors (environmental and personal factors).” (WHO, 2011)¹⁰ This shift in perspective shaped policy direction globally and in the country.

What is Inclusive Education?

Inclusion is the process and system of addressing and responding to a diverse multitude of needs and specific contexts that learners have that influence and affect their ability to participate and to learn. Inclusion aims to foster an accepting culture, an accommodating environment and learning community, and to avoid exclusion of learners from education and/or their educational systems. (Child Rights Network (CRN), N/A)¹¹

⁴ <https://psa.gov.ph/tags/2010-cph>

⁵ <https://childrightsnetwork.ph/advocacies/inclusive-education-for-children-and-youth-with-disabilities/>

⁶ <http://www.yorku.ca/dmpi/files/PhilippinesLawsRep.pdf>

⁷ <https://library.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/human%20rights%20of%20PWD.pdf>

⁸ <https://childrightsnetwork.ph/advocacies/inclusive-education-for-children-and-youth-with-disabilities/>

⁹ https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/chapter1.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/chapter1.pdf

¹¹ <https://childrightsnetwork.ph/advocacies/inclusive-education-for-children-and-youth-with-disabilities/>

Inclusive Education (IE) is part of the fundamental human right to education. UNESCO (2005) views IE as “a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning.” It involves constant and consistent adaptability and customizability of content, approaches, structures and strategies in delivering educational programs, with a common vision which covers all learners of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the system to educate all. (Child Rights Network (CRN), N/A)¹²

Legislative Policy and History

According to the Child Rights Network (CRN)¹³, the following is a list of current existing laws and policies (items 1 to 7) that support and promote IE in the Philippines, followed by international treaties and other international documents (items 8 to 11), of which the Philippines is a signatory, on the adoption of IE for the country:

1. 1987 Philippine Constitution¹⁴;
2. the Child and Youth Welfare Code (PD 603)¹⁵;
3. the Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act (RA 7610)¹⁶;
4. the Early Years Act (RA 10410)¹⁷;
5. the Enhanced Basic Education Act (RA 10533)¹⁸;
6. the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons amended by RA 9442 (RA 7277)¹⁹;
7. the Policies and Guidelines in Special Education²⁰;
8. the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989)²¹;
9. the World Declaration on Education for All (1990)²²;
10. the Incheon Strategy to Make the Rights Real for PWDs in Asia and Pacific²³;
11. the UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994)²⁴;
12. and the country also signed and ratified the UNCPRD²⁵ in 1998 and became the 23rd country that committed to fully implement the provisions of the Treaty. (Child Rights Network (CRN), N/A)²⁶

¹² <https://childrightsnetwork.ph/advocacies/inclusive-education-for-children-and-youth-with-disabilities/>

¹³ <https://childrightsnetwork.ph/advocacies/inclusive-education-for-children-and-youth-with-disabilities/>

¹⁴ <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/1987-constitution/>

¹⁵ <https://pcw.gov.ph/presidential-decree-no-603-the-child-and-youth-welfare-code/>

¹⁶ <https://pcw.gov.ph/republic-act-7610-special-protection-of-children-against-abuse-exploitation-and-discrimination-act/>

¹⁷ <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2013/03/26/republic-act-no-10410/>

¹⁸ <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2013/05/15/republic-act-no-10533/>

¹⁹ <https://www.ncda.gov.ph/disability-laws/republic-acts/republic-act-9442/>

²⁰ <https://www.deped.gov.ph/1987/12/05/do-117-s-1987-policies-and-guidelines-for-special-education/>

²¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

²² <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000127583>

²³ <https://www.unescap.org/resources/incheon-strategy-make-right-real-persons-disabilities-asia-and-pacific-and-beijing>

²⁴ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427>

²⁵ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

²⁶ <https://childrightsnetwork.ph/advocacies/inclusive-education-for-children-and-youth-with-disabilities/>

Philippine Laws that delineates the rights of people with disabilities

<i>Laws</i>	<i>Definitions</i>
1987 Constitution Article XIV Sec. 1-2	Education, Science and Technology, Arts, Culture and Sports Education
Commonwealth Act No. 3203 Articles 356 and 259	The Right Of Every Child to Live in an Atmosphere Conducive to his Physical, Moral and Intellectual Development" and the Concomitant Duty of the Government "to Promote the Full Growth of the Faculties of Every Child."
Presidential Decree 603	The Child and Youth Welfare Code
Republic Act No. 3562	An Act to Promote the Education of the Blind in the Philippines
Republic Act No. 7277	Magna Carta for Disabled Persons
Republic Act No. 344	An Act to Enhance the Mobility of Disabled Persons By Requiring certain Buildings, Institutions, Establishments, and Public Utilities to Install Facilities and Other Devices

Table 1. from Dabi Toquero (2020, 163) highlighting the specific key legislation which defines the rights of PWDs in the Philippines. Aside from these, there is also a Bill²⁷ in the Senate specifically on Inclusive Education, under the Committee of Education, Arts and Culture sponsored by the Chairperson himself, Senator Chiz Escudero.²⁸ (Child Rights Network (CRN), N/A)²⁹

The UNCRPD³⁰ states that PWDs should be guaranteed the right to inclusive education at all levels, regardless of age, without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. Specifically, State Parties should ensure that:

1. children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education;
2. adults with disabilities have access to general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning;
3. persons with disabilities receive the necessary support, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education; and

²⁷ <http://legacy.senate.gov.ph/lisdata/27528237581.pdf>

²⁸ http://legacy.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2017/0503_escudero1.asp

²⁹ <https://childrightsnetwork.ph/advocacies/inclusive-education-for-children-and-youth-with-disabilities/>

³⁰ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

4. effective individualized support measures are put in place to maximize academic and social development;

and that States Parties should take appropriate measures, such as:

1. endorsing the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring;
2. supporting the learning of sign language and promoting the linguistic identity of the deaf community;
3. advocating that education of persons, particularly children, who are blind and/or deaf, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and means of communication for the individual; and
4. employing teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train education professionals and staff about disability awareness, use of augmentative and alternative modes and formats of communication, and educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.

COVID-19 Pandemic (2020-Present)

According to Dabi Toquero (2020, 158-177), the COVID-19 pandemic is challenging especially for PWDs as their situation of being unheard has been heightened, with government policies during the pandemic excluding and being extra non-accommodating for PWDs.

In the Philippines, women and children with disabilities were found to have lower literacy and school participation rates, and generally have lower educational attainment, than male PWDs and non-disabled children (Agbon & Mina, 2017, 1). As early as 2019, the Department of Education (DepEd) has said that it will expand its offering of programs for special education (SPED) students and urges that more mobile schools will be created (Rappler, 2019). The issue of inclusive education that caters to different needs of learners has always been in the agenda of development in the Philippines. Thus, devising ways so that PWD children can attend school regularly until they learn the basic skills needed to maximized their potentials must also be part of any development agenda. (Agbon & Mina, 2017, 30) There exists an internal gap, social exclusion, and digital divide among people with disabilities as they are not given the provision that they need before, during, and possibly after the pandemic. (Dabi Toquero, 2020, 162)

Policy Proposal

There are four (4) key elements of inclusion, according to the UNESCO Guidelines for Inclusion³¹:

1. inclusion is a process;
2. inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers;

³¹ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000140224>

3. inclusion is about the presence, participation, and achievement of all students;
4. inclusion involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement.

This Policy Memo thus proposes the following:

1. that the Department of Education release a department order directing all schools nationwide to institutionalize inclusion in the online learning setup during this Pandemic, acknowledging that there is currently no directive order or publicly-available nationwide-policy that may be consulted as to how teachers are to accommodate learners with different, special conditions in the delivery of their “blended learning”;
2. that DepEd create separate channels and corresponding online learning modules, in partnership with the Department of Health (DOH), Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC), and the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) to accommodate the different types of special needs of learners, such as for those with:
 - a. visual disabilities:
 - i. braille modules for the blind;
 - ii. enhanced digital modules for the visually impaired, like materials with bigger fonts, higher or lower color contrasts, and dyslexia-friendly fonts;
 - b. hearing disabilities:
 - i. that video lectures have subtitles or transcripts provided;
 - ii. that video lectures have a FSL (Filipino Sign Language) and ESL (English Sign Language) counterpart for schools, teachers, and parents or guardians to give to the learners;
 - c. cognitive disabilities;
 - d. learning disabilities;
 - e. psychological disabilities;
 - f. tactile or sensory disabilities which prevent them from physically interacting with the modules;
3. that DepEd recognize that the usual learning period may not be applicable the blended- / remote- / online learning setup during the COVID-19 Pandemic;
4. that DepEd coordinate with schools, parents, and/or guardians, on the adjusted learning period for the learner with special needs;
 - a. that this adjusted learning period have an attached adjusted academic calendar with:
 - i. suggested lesson plans and pacing;
 - ii. adjusted exams or assessment periods;
 - iii. postponed submission deadlines to account for the continued lockdowns, that children are discouraged from leaving their homes

and that adults may not be able to submit requirements on behalf of their learners;

5. that despite having an adjusted academic calendar and postponement of submission deadlines, DepEd shall accept and implement a “pass-for-all” system wherein learners will be allowed to continue their education and access materials moving forward so as to not interrupt the learning progression of the students despite the challenges in the remote learning setup in this Pandemic.

Scope and Limitation

This is limited to the K-12 Program of which the Department of Education (DepEd) has jurisdiction in the Philippines. Schools of higher education offering programs beyond K-12, such as colleges, universities, and technical and vocational schools, are not included as those are under the jurisdictions of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). Despite this, DepEd is strongly urged to communicate and collaborate with its counterparts in higher education and in other educational programs to advocate to adapt the proposed policies and changes for the latter’s implementation, to broaden the reach of COVID-19-adapted IE in the Philippines.

Impact and Conclusion

The proposed policy and changes in and for the Department of Education to implement is expected to yield good results as it will:

1. make education more accessible as it will be more considerate of the special needs of learners;
2. allow learners with special needs to continue and progress with their education despite the uncertainty of the situation they face in this pandemic;
3. provide a more structured, institutionalized, inter-departmental, whole-of-government approach to providing education for learners with special needs by having DepEd work with the DOH, CWC, and NCDA in addressing the situation of PWD learners in the Philippines during COVID-19;
4. help mitigate the stress experienced not just by the learners but also their teachers and parents or guardians alike in administering online education amidst the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring that there will be guaranteed access to context-specific special needs modules and that assessment and promotion in the K-12 system will adjust and accommodate learners with special needs during the pandemic.

References

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MEMORANDUM

2nd PIECE of CAKE: Program for Individualized Engagement and Curriculum Enhancement of COVID-19 Adapted K-12 Education

**TO: BUREAU OF EDUCATION ASSESSMENT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DepEd)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES**

FROM: Julia Umapas

SUBJECT: Student Mental Health and Assessment & Accountability

DATE: 2021 February 21

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 Pandemic is an unprecedented threat not only to the physical, physiological health of the global population but also to the mental, psychological wellbeing of communities that have had trouble adapting an effective and efficient pandemic response, and have had to endure numerous lockdowns that greatly affected many civil liberties. These effects on physical and mental health influence, if not directly affect, the learning and academic performance of students who are still able to continue their education during this Pandemic.

This policy paper aims to explore and address the mental health toll of the pandemic on both students and teachers, and how the Department of Education may adapt certain policy changes to alleviate the impending mental health pandemic that might ensue after COVID-19 should the compounded stress and trauma of COVID-19 endure past 2021.

Introduction

The COVID-19 Pandemic has brought to the spotlight the Sisyphean struggle of the Philippine educational system with ensuring the protection of mental health of its students.

In a 2017 World Health Organization (WHO) report³², it was stated that around 3.3 million Filipinos already suffer from depressive disorders, one of the highest cases in Southeast Asia, and adds that the mental health crisis has been called by professionals “the next pandemic.” (Bello, 2020)³³

Last August 2020, in a National Center for Mental Health report released by the Department of Health (DOH), a rapid rise in suicide-related calls were recorded since April, with an average of 53 calls a month compared to a monthly average of 33 calls from January to March 2020.³⁴

³² <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/254610/WHO-MSD-MER-2017.2-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

³³ <https://blogs.bmj.com/ebn/2020/10/04/is-a-crisis-in-mental-health-the-next-pandemic/>

³⁴ <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/8/26/Mental-health-anxiety-suicide-hotline-Philippines-COVID-19.html>

Department of Health (DOH) spokesperson Maria Rosario Vergeire said a high volume of calls were observed in the months of April, May, June, and July 2020. From around 300 to 400 calls in May 2019 to February 2020, it spiked to at least 1,000 calls from April to July. The Philippines started seeing increasing numbers of new COVID-19 cases in March; this was also the start of the world's longest lockdown.³⁵ The data from National Center for Mental Health showed that from an average of 13 to 15 daily calls before the pandemic, mental health providers are now receiving around 32 to 37 calls per day. Vergeire said the majority of the calls are due to anxiety-related concerns, and that suicide-related calls peaked in July 2020, with 115 calls.³⁶

Aguilar (2020) reports that the mental health of students and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic is a big challenge for the Department of Education (DepED) as admitted by Education Secretary Leonor Briones upon confirming the suicide of a student, saying that:

“On the matter of these psychosocial problems which have emerged, so far among K-12 learners, one case has been documented where we can see the relation to COVID. They say the child committed suicide because of COVID[.] We believe, Mr. President, that big challenge for our people in government under the present psychosocial conditions are the children and the teachers — the general mental health issues” [Briones said in Filipino during a taped televised meeting with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte]³⁷

Secretary Briones said this prompted the DepEd to further strengthen its psychosocial support program by partnering with the Psychological Association of the Philippines. (Aguilar, 2020)³⁸

Clinical psychologist and private practitioner Beatrix Aileen Laguisma-Sison notes that given the crisis, schools are also in the process of understanding the situation and figuring out their next steps, leading them to hold onto old structures.³⁹

Last September 2020, the Department of Education dismissed calls for “academic freeze” as “shortsighted’ solution”⁴⁰ to the learning issues raised. A month after, the Department of Education (DepEd) welcomed 24.7 million students from public and private schools in October 2020, around 3 million fewer enrollees from the previous school year, amid growing public resistance to pursuing classes given the pandemic. (Bello, 2020)

Since then, educational institutions nationwide have been constantly hounded by the pleas and criticisms of parents, students, and concerned organizations with students

³⁵ <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/8/26/Mental-health-anxiety-suicide-hotline-Philippines-COVID-19.html>

³⁶ <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/8/26/Mental-health-anxiety-suicide-hotline-Philippines-COVID-19.html>

³⁷

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1329506/depd-confirms-one-student-died-by-suicide-says-mental-health-a-big-challenge-amid-pandemic>

³⁸

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1329506/depd-confirms-one-student-died-by-suicide-says-mental-health-a-big-challenge-amid-pandemic>

³⁹ <https://cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/2020/12/10/leave-of-absence-school-pandemic.html>

⁴⁰ <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/9/9/DepEd-opposes-academic-freeze.html>

on social media trending the hashtags *#AcademicFreezeNOW* and *#LigtasNaBalikEskwela* (loosely translated to a call for a “Safe Back-to-School” in English), with some students resorting to what is the online equivalent of begging and asking for alms and release for help, much like the *#PisoParaSaLaptop* (which translates to “One Peso for a Laptop”) campaign, where students post their online wallet details to solicit donations of a minimum amount of One Philippine Peso (PHP) -- or roughly 0.021 USD -- to be able to buy a laptop for their upcoming online classes, a campaign which began a few months before the resumption of classes and saw thousands of minors posting personal information online for strangers to freely see. (Bello, 2020)⁴¹. As Bello (2020) writes, “mental health is a learning issue warranting attention, especially given the unprecedented changes and long-standing societal challenges magnified by the COVID-19 outbreak.”⁴²

Working with schools across the country, Laguisma-Sison (Bello, 2020) states that some institutions have become more aware of the students’ mental health issues in recent years but she firmly believes that the school and home have to be partners in raising further awareness and arriving at a dynamic understanding on mental health.⁴³

Laguisma-Sison, who was also an online counselor with the Philippine Mental Health Association at the beginning of the lockdown, emphasizes that efforts addressing mental health are more urgent than ever, with the increasing cases of anxiety attacks, physical abuses within homes, and adolescents attempting to harm themselves.⁴⁴ (Bello, 2020)

Policy Proposal

In light of the background of students’ mental health struggles amidst ongoing the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Philippines, this policy paper proposes the following:

1. that the Department of Education recognize that the usual learning period of previous academic years may not be applicable the blended- / remote- / online learning setup during the COVID-19 Pandemic;
2. that DepEd coordinate with schools, parents, and/or guardians, on the adjusted learning period;
 - a. that this adjusted learning period have an attached adjusted academic calendar that is largely self-paced with:
 - i. suggested lesson plans and pacing;
 - ii. adjusted exams or assessment periods;
 - iii. postponed submission deadlines to account for the continued lockdowns, that children are discouraged from

⁴¹ <https://cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/2020/12/10/leave-of-absence-school-pandemic.html>

⁴² <https://cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/2020/12/10/leave-of-absence-school-pandemic.html>

⁴³ <https://blogs.bmj.com/ebn/2020/10/04/is-a-crisis-in-mental-health-the-next-pandemic/>

⁴⁴ <https://blogs.bmj.com/ebn/2020/10/04/is-a-crisis-in-mental-health-the-next-pandemic/>

leaving their homes and that adults may not be able to submit requirements on behalf of their learners;

3. that despite having an adjusted academic calendar and postponement of submission deadlines, DepEd shall accept and implement a “pass-for-all” system wherein learners will be allowed to continue their education and access materials moving forward so as to not interrupt the learning progression of the students despite the challenges in the remote learning setup in this Pandemic.
4. that the Department of Education utilize national government funds to allow for a mass-scale student loan program for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic wherein students will be allowed to enroll in their respective learning institutions without paying the full amount of their tuition and other fees to ensure continuity of learning;
5. that DepEd, in utilizing national government funds for a mass-scale student loan program, allow students to apply for the said student loan program without the need to rigorously examine the students academic merit in accessing the fund, unlike scholarships, to ensure free, fair, and equitable access to this opportunity for all.

Scope and Limitation

This is limited to the K-12 Program of which the Department of Education (DepEd) has jurisdiction in the Philippines. Schools of higher education offering programs beyond K-12, such as colleges, universities, and technical and vocational schools, are not included as those are under the jurisdictions of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). Despite this, DepEd is strongly urged to communicate and collaborate with its counterparts in higher education and in other educational programs to advocate to adapt the proposed policies and changes for the latter’s implementation, to broaden the reach of the proposed policy changes to ensure mental health protection of students in the Philippines.

Impact and Conclusion

The proposed policy and changes in and for the Department of Education to implement is expected to yield good results as it will:

1. make education more accessible as it will remove financial capability as a challenge in continuing education amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic;
2. allow learners to continue and progress with their education despite the uncertainty of the situation they face in this pandemic through the “pass-for-all” provision;
3. and help mitigate the stress experienced not just by the learners but also their teachers and parents or guardians alike in administering online education amidst the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring that there will be more-open, freer access to education, unburdened by the rigorous

demands of standardized assessments and the question of promotion in the K-12 system.

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LETTER

Program for Individualized Engagement and Curriculum Enhancement of COVID-19 Adapted K-12 Education

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DepEd)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES

FROM: Julia Umapas

**SUBJECT: Special Learning Needs and Improving Online Teaching;
Student Mental Health and Assessment & Accountability**

DATE: 2021 February 21

***Dear Undersecretary Diosdado M. San Antonio
and Assistant Secretary Alma Ruby C. Torio,***

The COVID-19 Pandemic is an unprecedented threat not only to the physical, physiological health of the global population but also to the mental, psychological wellbeing of communities that have had trouble adapting an effective and efficient pandemic response, and have had to endure numerous lockdowns that greatly affected many civil liberties. These effects on physical and mental health influence, if not directly affect, the learning and academic performance of students who are still able to continue their education during this Pandemic.

In light of this, Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) remain to be a significantly disenfranchised population in contemporary Philippine society that has experienced further marginalization during the COVID-19 Pandemic, with increasing lack of access to education given the one-size-fits-all delivery of the Department of Education (DepEd)'s remote- / blended- / online learning program for students as a response to the sudden change in the functioning and day-to-day life of society.

Attached to this letter are two policy papers which aim to explore and address:

- (1) the demand for inclusive education (IE) in the Philippines during the COVID-19 Pandemic and suggests changes for DepEd to implement in ensuring free, fair, and equitable access to education for all

(2) the mental health toll of the pandemic on both students and teachers, and how the Department of Education may adapt certain policy changes to alleviate the impending mental health pandemic that might ensue after COVID-19 should the compounded stress and trauma of COVID-19 endure past 2021.

Aptly titled “Program for Individualized Engagement and Curriculum Enhancement of COVID-19 Adapted K-12 Education” (PIECE of CAKE), the attached policy memos after careful review conclude that DepEd must coordinate an interdepartmental government response to the demand for accessible IE in the Philippines during the COVID-19 Pandemic, creating special customized modules for learners with special needs and adjusting the curriculum in a way that would allow for continuous progression through K-12 despite the postponement of deadlines and submissions to ensure the right to education and protect students’ physical and mental wellbeing in line with the Constitutional mandate of the Department.

I am grateful for your appreciation of the first and second PIECE of CAKE I have sent. I hope to continue this discussion with you to implement these much needed reforms as soon as possible. Thank you very much for your time and kind consideration.

Sincerely,

Julia Umapas
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