FIXING THE FOUNDATIONS

A Matter of National Survival

EDCOM II YEAR TWO REPORT

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
4Ps	Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADM	alternative delivery mode
AERO	Australian Education Research Organisation
AFF	agricultural, forestry, and fisheries
AI	artificial intelligence
ALS	Alternative Learning System
AO	administrative officer
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASP	Adopt-a-School Program
BAC	Bids and Awards Committee
BAE	Bureau of Alternative Education
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao
BECEd	Bachelor of Early Childhood Education
BEDP	Basic Education Development Plan
BEEd	Bachelor of Elementary Education
BHROD	Bureau of Human Resources and Organizational Development
BIR	Bureau of Internal Revenue
BLE	Bureau of Local Employment
BLEPT	Board Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers
BLGF	Bureau of Local Government Finance
BLP	Basic Literacy Program
BOC	Bureau of Customs
BOR	Board of Regents
CAR	Cordillera Administrative Region
CDC	child development center
CDT	child development teacher
CDW	child development worker
CDW/T	child development worker/teacher
CELLS	Comprehensive Education and Leadership Learning System
CHED	Commission on Higher Education
CICA	Congress-Initiated Changes/Adjustment
CLC	community learning center
CMO	CHED Memorandum Order
COA	Commission on Audit
COCOPEA	Coordinating Councils for Private Education Associations
COD	Center of Development
COE	Center of Excellence
CPC	child protection committee
CPU	Child Protection Unit
CREDe	Child Rights in Education Desk
CSC	Civil Service Commission
CSO	civil society organization
DA	Department of Agriculture
DBM	Department of Budget and Management
DECS	Department of Education, Culture, and Sports
DepEd	Department of Education

DILG	Department of the Interior and Local Government
DO	Department Order
DOF	Department of Finance
DOH	Department of Health
DOLE	Department of Labor and Employment
DOST	Department of Science and Technology
DOST-FNRI	Department of Science and Technology–Food and Nutrition Research Institute
DPWH	Department of Public Works and Highways
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
DTS	Dual Training System
EBET	Enterprise-Based Education and Training
EBT	enterprise-based training
ECCD	early childhood care and development
ECCDC	Early Childhood Care and Development Council
ECE	early childhood education
ENNS	Expanded National Nutrition Survey
EO	Executive Order
EPB	Employment Planning Board
EQAAs	External Quality Assurance Agencies
ESC	Education Service Contracting
eSF7	Electronic School Form 7
FAAP	Accrediting Associations of the Philippines
FAPE	Fund for Assistance to Private Education
FLEMMS	Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey
FLO	flexible learning options
FY	fiscal year
GAA	General Appropriations Act
GASTPE	Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education
GDP	gross domestic product
GIDA	geographically isolated and disadvantaged area
GPPB	Government Procurement Policy Board
GPPB-TSO	Government Procurement Policy Board–Technical Support Office
HAEI	higher agricultural education institution
HEDF	Higher Education Development Fund
HEEG	Health Employment and Economic Growth
HEI	higher education institution
HRH	human resources for health
HRIS	Human Resource Information System
IBACS	Industry-Based Assessment and Certification System
IC	independent contractor
ICT	information and communications technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMPACT	Instructional Management by Parents, Community, and Teachers
INSET	In-Service Training for Teachers
IPR	intellectual property rights
IRR	implementing rules and regulations
ISA	Institutional Sustainability Assessment
IT	information technology
ITB	Industry TVET Board
IU	implementing unit
JHS	junior high school
KCFI	Knowledge Channel Foundation, Inc.
KIST	Knowledge, Innovation, Science, and Technology

LAC	Learning Action Cell
LCP	Learning Continuity Plan
LET	Licensure Examination for Teachers
LFS	Labor Force Survey
LGSF	Local Government Support Fund
LGSF-FA	Local Government Support Fund–Financial Assistance
LGU	local government unit
LLL	lifelong learning
LMI	labor market information
LMICs	low- and middle-income countries
LMIS	Labor Market Information System
LRPO	Learner Rights and Protection Office
LSB	local school board
LUCs	local universities and colleges
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MISOSA	Modified In-School Off-School Approach
MOOE	maintenance and other operating expenses
MORPHE	Manual of Regulations for Private Higher Education
MPSS	Minimum Performance Standards and Specifications
MTB-MLE	Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education
NAFMIP	National Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization and Industrialization Plan
NAST	National Academy of Science and Technology
NAT	National Achievement Test
NC	National Certificate
NCC	National Coordinating Council
NCCE	National Coordinating Council for Education
NCR	National Capital Region
NEAP	National Educators' Academy of the Philippines
NEDA	National Economic and Development Authority
NEP	National Expenditure Plan
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NHA	National Housing Authority
NHRHMP	National Human Resources for Health Master Plan
NIC	National Innovation Council
NLRP	National Learning Recovery Program
NNC	National Nutrition Council
NQESH	National Qualifying Examination for School Heads
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NTESDP	National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIC	officer in charge
PAGASA	Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration
PB	principles-based
PBIS	performance-based incentive system
PCNC	Philippine Council for NGO Certification
PCR	pupil-classroom ratio
PD	Presidential Decree
PDIS	Professional Development Information System
PDO	project development officer
PDP	Philippine Development Plan
PEF	Punjab Education Foundation
PEIS	Public Employment Service Office (PESO) Employment Information System

PEJA	President Edgardo J. Angara
PESO	Public Employment Service Office
PHIVOLCS	Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology
PIDS	Philippine Institute for Development Studies
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PNSL	place with no SUCs or LUCs
PPP	public–private partnership
PPSSH	Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads
PPST	Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers
PQF	Philippine Qualifications Framework
PRC	Professional Regulation Commission
PSA	Philippine Statistics Authority
PSF	Philippine Skills Framework
PSG	policies, standards, and guidelines
PSGC	Philippine Standard Geographic Code
PSHS	Philippine Science High School
PSIP	Public–Private Partnership for School Infrastructure Project
PSOC	Philippine Standard Occupational Classification
PTA	parent–teacher association
PTR	pupil–teacher ratio
QA	quality assurance
R&D	research and development
R&I	research and innovation
RA	Republic Act
RB	rules–based
RDO	Revenue District Office
REI	recommended energy intake
RIE	research, innovation, and enterprise
ROW	right of way
RPMS	Results-Based Performance Management System
RR	Revenue Regulation
RTD	roundtable discussion
s.	series
SAPSR	Skills Anticipation and Prioritization of Skills Requirements
SBCC	Social Behavior Change Communication
SBFP	school-based feeding program
SBM	school-based management
SCP	Special Curricular Programs
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDS	schools district superintendent
SEA-PLM	Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics
SEF	Special Education Fund
SETG	Study on the Employment of TVET Graduates
SFP	Supplementary Feeding Program
SG	salary grade
SHDP	School Head Development Program
SHS	senior high school
SLM	self-learning module
SNP	supervised neighborhood play
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
SUCs	state universities and colleges
SY	school year
TEACH	Therapy, Education, and Assimilation of Children with Handicap
TEC	Teacher Education Council
TEI	Teacher Education Institution

TEMIS	Tertiary Education Management Information System
TES	Tertiary Education Subsidy
TESDA	Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
TIC	teacher in charge
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TPTE	Technical Panel for Teacher Education
TR	training regulation
TTI	TESDA Technology Institution
TVET	Technical-Vocational Education and Training
TVI	technical-vocational institution
TWG	technical working group
UAQTEA	Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UniFAST	Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education
UP	University of the Philippines
UP ACTRC	UP Assessment, Curriculum and Technology Research Centre
UPCAT	UP College Admission Test
UPRI	UP Resilience Institute
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAID ILO-PH	United States Agency for International Development Improving Learning Outcomes for the Philippines
UTPRAS	Unified TVET Program Registration and Accreditation System
VAT	value-added tax
WASH	water, sanitation, and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

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Preface

As we present the Year Two Report of the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM), we stand at a pivotal moment in the journey to transform education in the Philippines—a journey that demands bold vision, decisive action, and unwavering unity.

The first year of our work was a critical reckoning. We confirmed what many have long felt and experienced: The Philippine education system is in crisis. But as we have consistently stated, recognizing the crisis was not the end; rather, it was the starting point of a determined and systemic response to dismantle barriers that have long impeded progress and innovation.

This crisis, marked by decades of missed opportunities for reform, demanded urgent and transformative action. It called us to move swiftly, to act decisively, and to dream beyond the constraints of the past.

In our second year, we engaged even more closely with so many of you—teachers, parents, schools and universities, nongovernment organizations, research fellows, and international partners, uniting with us in our call for urgent change.

In the halls of Congress, we saw and felt the strong support of our colleagues and the leadership of both houses, helping pass key legislative measures in education to address the Commission's recommendations.

The first year of our work was a critical reckoning. We confirmed what many have long felt and experienced: The Philippine education system is in crisis. But as we have consistently stated, recognizing the crisis was not the end; rather, it was the starting point of a determined and systemic response to dismantle barriers that have long impeded progress and innovation.

In the executive branch, we built robust partnerships with government agencies, easing our continued consultations, research, and solution-finding. Particularly in the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), we worked in lockstep with our former colleagues Secretary Sonny Angara and Secretary Kiko Benitez, who have since taken our collective call for change to the executive branch. This year, no less than the President has also expressed his full support, himself acting on measures to ensure coordination of the education agencies and stressing the need for greater focus on the first 1,000 days.

This report reflects the lessons, insights, and strategies of the past year as we focused on the remaining 16 out of 28 priorities of the Commission. Undoubtedly two years since our convening, our understanding of the factors that impede learning for our students has truly deepened, serving as the basis for the refinement of policies, programs, and systems of government. **This is due, in no small part, to the at least 97 studies contributed by 60 research partners—perhaps one of the largest assembled to understand Philippine education**. While this body of work is housed under EDCOM II, it is undoubtedly larger than the Commission. We fervently hope that this initiative will endure beyond EDCOM II's lifetime, fostering the continuous improvement of education policy through the rigorous analysis of data.

Armed with better data and a stronger sense of collective purpose, we approached these impediments with clarity and conviction. **This year alone, we have put forward 32 policy recommendations and 37 bills, resulting from countless studies, hearings, site visits, and consultations, while also seeing through the amendments and recommendations from Year One**. We commend the tireless members of the Advisory Council, the Standing Committees, and the Technical Secretariat for their unyielding dedication.

Equally, this report is a testament to the countless educators who contribute to this mission. Amidst all the challenges, we have witnessed on the ground the unyielding dedication of teachers making learning possible against all odds, as well as the inspiring successes of communities driving learning recovery in the face of adversity.

Undoubtedly, our collective resolve is grounded in an unshakable belief in the brilliance, resilience, and potential of the Filipino people. Worldwide, the talent, discipline, and hard work of our people could not be mistaken—as long as they are supported and given ample opportunities to succeed. It is this fundamental belief that sustains us in our work as we enter our third and final year: to act swiftly in fixing the foundations of our system, assembling the parts that are in disarray, so that each Filipino is able to learn and to thrive.

As we release our Year Two Report, we renew our call to action. **We urge everyone to read the two EDCOM reports closely to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by our system, and to do their part in addressing its ills**—whether by ensuring that children below 5 are able to get ample nutrition, supporting learners who are bullied or have difficulty reading at Grade 3, or raising funds to help build classrooms, so we could more quickly address our two-decade backlog. After all, real change does not happen in reports or in legislative chambers; it happens in every classroom, in every home, and in the hearts and minds of every learner and educator across the nation.

Together, let us rise to the challenge. Let us unite to ensure no Filipino is left behind.

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Representative Pablo John Garcia
Commissioner

Executive Summary

The first year of EDCOM II laid bare the deep fractures in the Philippine education system—underinvestment, disjointed governance, and inequitable access that have persisted for decades. It was an act of truth-telling, where data illuminated systemic failures, from the stunted growth of early learners to foundational deficits in literacy and numeracy that cascade across lifetimes. These revelations demanded the acknowledgment of a crisis and the clarity of purpose required to confront such a crisis. The message is this: Education reform can no longer remain a mere slogan or aspiration; it is an alternative upon which our nation's progress—and survival—depends.

Year Two sharpens our vision, homing in on the structural roots of our challenges. "Fixing the foundations" is not a tagline but a call to action. *First*, **to realign priorities toward the foundational stages of learning**: on early childhood education and nutrition, and on primary education during which critical competencies are built. *Second*, **to strengthen the foundations of our education system**, foremost, ensuring the adequacy of classrooms so that students can properly learn, prioritizing that all schools have principals and nonteaching personnel, and empowering them with the resources and support to effect change.

Two years hence, these two EDCOM reports, *Miseducation: The Failed System of Philippine Education* **and** *Fixing the Foundations: A Matter of National Survival***, jointly tell the story of our education system and pinpoint the factors that have impeded the learning of Filipino students for decades.** Armed with the understanding of the ills of our system, we enjoin all to take part in the work of rebuilding and retrofitting our system to ensure that it is one that befits the potential of generations of Filipino learners to come.

Early Childhood Care and Development

Despite the critical role of early childhood care and development (ECCD) in improving student achievement and reducing dropout rates, it remains unattended, receiving the lowest attention and support. There is an abundance of studies from the World Bank, UNICEF, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM), and the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) that highlight the importance of ECCD in boosting literacy and math achievement by Grade 3, enhancing academic success in later grades, as well as increasing earning potential once in the workforce. Despite this, many Filipino children continue to suffer from severe malnutrition, high stunting, and low early childhood education participation.

Only 25% of Filipino children meet the recommended energy intake between ages 6–12 months, with particularly low rates among those from impoverished households. A landmark PIDS study reveals that Filipino children aged 3–5 had a diet that relied mainly on carbohydrates while consuming 20% less protein, 40% less fat, and 35% less carbohydrates than recommended. Notably, children from the bottom 40% quintile consumed significantly less protein, a nutrient critical for growth and stunting prevention. Studies show that while 23% of children benefit from the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) Supplementary Feeding Program, only 28% of these beneficiaries actually require the intervention. Worse, there was no difference in the energy intake between those who received the government intervention and those who did not.

On the demand side, most parents do not yet understand the criticality of ECCD, with 97% of parents believing that children under 5 were "too young" for school. Many are also challenged by the distance of child development centers (CDCs) from their homes, limiting their ability to bring their children to centers. Meanwhile, few are also able to support education at home, with only only 50% of children aged 3–4 engaged in reading activities. Migration of parents is another issue: Preliminary findings from the Philippines Socioeconomic Panel Survey[1] show that 40% of parents migrated for work when their children were young (defined as below 18 years of age). This coincides with findings from PIDS that in many households, ECCD depends on "parent-substitutes," such as older siblings, grandparents, and domestic workers.

Financing of ECCD in the country is inadequate and inequitable. The government's allocation of only Php 3,870 per child for health-related ECCD services is significantly lower than the average Php 8,700 in low- and middle-income countries. Disparities in funding across local government units (LGUs) also impede effective ECCD program implementation, limiting the ability of low-income municipalities to implement ECCD.

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1   Preliminary findings from the first round of the Philippines Socioeconomic Panel Survey, 2023-2024
     (Note that the survey was conducted across 9,661 households in Aklan, Antique, Capiz, and Iloilo.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority Area 1: Nutrition and Feeding
- Strengthen coordination between the National Nutrition Council, the Department of Health, the DSWD, and DepEd in the implementation of nutrition interventions.
- Apply program convergence budgeting for nutrition in the early years, ensuring that the first 1,000 days are prioritized.
- Improve targeting of government programs.
- Conduct monitoring and evaluation to ensure efficacy of interventions.

Priority Area 2: Supply-Side Factors
- Ensure availability of at least one CDC in every barangay, with the ECCD Council focusing on supporting at least 10% of the total number of municipalities without CDCs, specifically targeting those classified as fifth-class municipalities.
- For TESDA and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), develop (a) education and training pathways, and (b) scholarship programs to strengthen the pipeline of ECCD professionals.
- Create plantilla positions for child development teachers (CDTs) and CDWs.

Priority Area 3: Demand-Side Factors
- For the ECCD Council, launch community awareness campaigns and invest in the development of quality ECCD learning resources.
- Leverage existing programs (partner with barangay nutrition scholars and barangay health workers, and with the DSWD's Parent Effectiveness Program) to increase understanding of ECCD needs.

Priority Area 4: Governance and Financing of ECCD
- Include the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) in the ECCD Council, given their indispensable role in ensuring close coordination with LGUs as implementers.
- For the national government, provide resources to support low-income municipalities that do not have the capacity to implement nutrition and ECCD based on local funds alone.

Basic Education

Most Grade 3 students were 1–2 years behind curriculum expectations during the foundational years of learning (Kindergarten to Grade 3). This means that students are progressing to Grade 4 despite being only at Grades 2 or 3 in terms of actual competencies. This is anticipated to snowball further in later years, with the Commission finding Grades 8 and 9 students who struggled with basic subtraction and multiplication in the recent DepEd learning camps.

The MATATAG curriculum reforms are welcome, but its implementation has been challenged by the late delivery of textbooks and lack of teacher training and resources. Despite recent reforms, DepEd continues to experience challenges in learning resources: For the MATATAG Curriculum Grades 4, and 7, only 35 out of 90 textbooks titles have been fully delivered as of January 2025, halfway through school year (SY) 2024–2025.

Almost half of all learning days are lost due to class suspensions, with the worst cases seen in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) and Regions IV–A, II, and I. While PIDS found that in 2023–2024 about 53% of 180 teaching days were lost due to calamities and local holidays across the country, DepEd data as of November 2024 find that for the school year, students have already lost as many as 42 learning days in CAR, followed by Region IV-A (38 days), Region II (36 days), and Region I (33 days). Studies have underscored the profound consequence of such losses on learning, with student achievement at Grade 4 (for math and science) declining by up to 12%–14% of a standard deviation, or equivalent to half a year of learning.

Learning recovery programs need to be revamped to support the students that need interventions the most. The policies for the National Reading Program, National Math Program, and the National Science and Technology Program have been pending since July 2023. Meanwhile, Catch-Up Fridays and the National Learning Camps need to be revisited. DepEd data show that the camps reached only 10% of those needing intervention, on top of an already limited pool, with only 54% of target students able to take the assessments.

There is limited oversight and support for Special Curricular Programs (SCPs), restricting inclusivity in education and hampering the country from strategically nurturing the best and brightest learners. Despite hosting a range of SCPs focusing on arts, foreign languages, journalism, sports, science, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), intended outcomes for these programs are unclear, policies are confusing, and resources have been uneven if not sporadic.

In the past 3 years alone, the Philippine Science High School (PSHS) system has turned away 5,807 of the "brightest students" due to limited slots. Admission in the PSHS system is extremely competitive. Out of 49,481 applicants for the 16 Pisay campuses from SYs 2022–2025, only 11,351 (23%) qualified. Of this however, only 5,544 are able to eventually pursue their studies in PSHS, with the remaining 5,807 being "turned away" due to lack of slots. Notably, private school students outperform public school students (43% vs. 17%) in the PSHS National Competitive Examination (NCE).

The backlog in classroom construction is at 165,000 classrooms, with many schools resorting to multiple shifts as well as alternative delivery modes. Regional disparities exist between urban and rural areas, with the former facing congestion due to high population density. Likewise, only 30% of school buildings are in good condition.

Progress since the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Act of 2020 remains modest, with many implementing guidelines still pending. Three years hence, guidelines to enable LGUs to tap the Special Education Fund (SEF), and revenue regulations to allow private institutions to receive tax incentives for contributions to ALS remain unavailable. DepEd has also not yet released guidelines to enable recognition of private ALS providers.

Out of 4.9 million out–of–school youth, the ALS Program has reached only around 600,000 (12.2%), of which only 50% complete their studies. Funding support has also been modest and not strategic. The ALS program also continues to suffer from inadequate funding, with all regions receiving a uniform amount of Php 7 million per year regardless of the number of ALS learners they need to cater to or the number of out-of-school youth that could be reached. Meanwhile, 58.1% (13,713 out of 23,603) of community learning centers are classified as Type 1, or makeshift temporary spaces.

Bullying continues to be a silent and persistent issue in basic education, with the country ranking as the "bullying capital of the world" due to the high prevalence of

bullying reported by students. PISA 2018 results show that 65% of Grade 10 students in the country experienced bullying a few times a month—the highest among all participating countries. Meanwhile, resolution of bullying cases moved at a glacial pace, with only 38 out of 339 cases resolved (11%) between November 2022 and July 2024.

The implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 is outdated and not responsive to school level realities. Teachers have lamented difficulties due to its outdated definition of bullying, the lack or inconsistency of localized anti-bullying policies, and the insufficiency of funding and training support for guidance counselors/designates who take on most of the work in the Child Protection Committees. This is due and is aggravated by the lack of personnel in DepEd offices (central, regional, and divisional) that focus on anti-bullying efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority Area 5: Learning Resources
- Develop a comprehensive textbook policy.
- Decentralize processes, streamline budget execution, and build capacity of field offices for localized procurement.

Priority Area 6: Measurement of Learning Outcomes
- Establish an independent assessment body.
- Rationalize existing assessments by focusing on key stages.
- Implement Learning Progression Assessments and modernize practices through computer-based assessments.

Priority Area 7: Curriculum and Instruction
- Ensure availability of teacher training and resources for MATATAG rollout.
- Monitor learning days lost due to class disruptions while studying mechanisms to ensure learning continuity through alternative delivery modes (with an emphasis on monitoring and evaluation of learning outcomes).
- Revamp the National Learning Recovery Program to ensure proper targeting, prompt support, and proper assessment of students that require urgent intervention, with a focus on those lacking foundational competencies
- Release the policies on the National Reading Program, National Math Program, and the National Science and Technology Program.
- Review relevance of SCPs and rationalize policies and resource allocations to match intended targets.
- Clarify the relationship between DepEd's Special Science Programs in elementary and secondary, vis-a-vis the PSHS system, while ensuring identification and support of emergent talent in the earlier years.
- Expand capacity of the PSHS system to increase the number of gifted students supported from only 1% to 3%.

Priority Area 8: School Infrastructure
- Clarify data on actual classroom backlog to enable proper planning.
- Prioritize resolving classroom congestion in areas with multiple shifts as well as "isolated public schools."
- Resolve backlog issues and clarify delineation of accountabilities between the Department of Public Works and Highways and DepEd.
- Improve coordination between DepEd, the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development, the National Housing Authority (NHA), and the DILG relative to the allocation of schools in low-cost, socialized, and resettlement housing projects, to ensure that later congestion is prevented at the onset.

- Amend policies to ensure consideration of education implications: Batasang Pambansa No. 220, NHA Memorandum Circular 2015-0015, DILG Memorandum Circular No. 143-08, and DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2023-113.
- Strategically leverage Education Service Contracting and senior high school (SHS) vouchers to address severe congestion in public schools by amending DepEd policies to clearly indicate targets.
- Explore public-private partnerships to ramp up construction of classrooms.
- Provide context-responsive designs of school buildings relative to the known and projected vulnerabilities of different areas in the country.
- Ensure coherence of efforts to address school congestion, disaster risk reduction, as well as the DepEd Computerization Program to leverage education technologies strategically.
- Prioritize electrification of 1,500 last-mile schools.

Priority Area 9: Alternative Learning System
- For DepEd and the DILG, collaborate swiftly to update the Joint Guidelines on the SEF to clearly allow using said fund for ALS.
- For DepEd and the Bureau of Internal Revenue, work closely to issue the Revenue Regulations to implement Section 21 of Republic Act (RA) No. 11510, or the ALS Act of 2020.
- Issue guidelines on the recognition of private ALS providers.
- Ensure allocation of slots for SHS vouchers for ALS learners.
- Provide teacher training and ensure career progression of ALS teachers.

Priority Area 10: Home and School Environment
- Amend the IRR of the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 (DepEd Order No. 55, s. 2013).
- Ensure the formulation and implementation of localized anti-bullying policies in all schools, with sufficient guidance and support from DepEd.
- Delineate roles of guidance counselors/designates and a new position for discipline officers to focus on implementing localized anti-bullying policies.
- Provide sufficient resources and training to enable implementation of these policies at the school level.

Higher Education

While higher education participation rate in the country is high at 34.89%, this remains lower than the ASEAN average of 41.10%. This also varies significantly across regions, with the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) (18.7%), Bicol (24.6%), and Central Luzon (25.1%) having much lower rates. Studies find that the top deterrents to pursuing higher education today are employment/looking for work (44.17%), lack of personal interest (24.94%), and financial limitations (20.98%).

Higher education attrition rates are alarmingly high: at 39% nationally but reaching 93.4% in BARMM, followed by Region VII (60.7%), Region IX (59.5%), and CAR (54.9%). This underscores the need for CHED to closely monitor and understand factors contributing to severe dropouts, and to initiate programs to address attrition.

RA 10931 has improved access to higher education among the poor through free higher education in state universities and colleges (SUCs) and local universities and colleges (LUCs). Between 2014 and 2022, participation of the lowest 3 deciles in public higher education institutions (HEIs) improved by 10.97 percentage points, with

LUCs showing the strongest correlation in relation to increased participation of the poorest. Notably, increases in enrollment in SUCs may have already exceeded their "optimal carrying capacity" (RA 10931 IRR), while the surge in enrollment in LUCs may have the unintended consequence of limiting students to courses in education and business administration, which represent the bulk of their offerings.

Recent reforms to the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) guidelines have refocused interventions on the poorest of the poor, increasing the share of the poorest grantees from zero in 2022–2023 to 27% in 2023–2024. This is in light of EDCOM findings in Year One that the proportion of the poorest receiving TES declined markedly from 74.24% in 2018 to just 30.74% by 2022. On the other hand, DSWD data shows at least 683,822 college-eligible students from Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) families who could benefit from the TES.

Reductions in TES amounts (from Php 60,000 to Php P10,000) may ease out the poorest, affect student completion rates, and limit program choice. Data show that current figures may force the poorest from pursuing higher education. Further, it would only realistically allow the poorest to choose from five courses on average, most of which are already oversubscribed: (a) Elementary Education, (b) Technology and Livelihood Education, (c) Criminology, (d) Industrial Technology, and (e) TVET. This will also disproportionately disadvantage public HEIs.

On average, college courses are only reviewed and updated every 11 years, limiting the ability of higher education to adapt to socioeconomic developments. A review of CHED policies, standards, and guidelines for the top 10 courses in terms of student enrollment find: (a) uneven reductions in required units following the introduction of K to 12, (b) lack of uniformity in internship requirements, (c) lack of sufficient detail or guidance in relation to majors and concentrations, and (d) lack of planned monitoring and review of policies.

Most higher education policies follow a one–size–fits–all approach, limiting the diversity of higher education institutions in the country. Most CHED policies implicitly direct HEIs toward a "research-oriented university" track, thereby obliging institutions to conform with requirements (e.g., faculty with PhDs and research publications) that may not necessarily align with their character and goals. Empirical analysis finds that at least half of all HEIs in the country are in fact small, with limited course offerings and faculty, and zero research and extension activities.

The Philippines has only 172.01 researchers per million inhabitants compared to the World Bank average of 322.51 for low– and middle–income countries. Data show that graduate students only comprise 18.02% of student enrollment in the country, with even top universities primarily offering bachelors programs.

In 2022, the country welcomed 17,337 international students to our universities—a far cry from the 100,437 students who went to Singapore and the 63,308 who studied in Malaysia. The bulk of international students in the country are from India (55.8%), China (27.8%), and Nigeria (4%). Many of the challenges faced, including complex immigration and visa requirements and stringent government regulations, remain unaddressed despite the passage of RA 11448 (Transnational Higher Education Act) in 2018.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority Area 11: Access to Quality Higher Education

- For CHED, proactively monitor factors leading to high attrition and to initiate programs to address dropouts.
- For CHED and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), (a) work closely to identify and implement the "optimal carrying capacity" of SUCs and (b) review the funding formula for SUCs vis-a-vis their respective charters and horizontal typology.
- For the Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education, continue prioritizing the poorest of the poor in the implementation of the TES.
- Amend the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act to improve targeting of benefits toward low-income households.
- Guarantee support for the poorest (4Ps beneficiaries) as early as high school, conditional on completing SHS and gaining acceptance in a CHED-recognized HEI.
- Restore original subsidy amounts (previously at Php 60,000) for TES grantees to enable successful completion.
- Provide additional incentives for those pursuing government-identified priority programs.
- For SUCs, allocate a proportion of slots for the poorest of the poor as as affirmative action
- Amend the LGU cap in Personnel Services expenditures to enable LUCs to meet CHED requirements and recruit needed faculty in line with their respective charters and horizontal typology.

Priority Area 12: Quality Assurance

- Review CHED policy on horizontal typology to better match national goals; after which, policies relating to policies, standards, and guidelines for courses, standards for excellence, bases for autonomy, as well as resourcing must be amended accordingly.
- Develop a framework to harmonize quality assurance standards across both private and public HEIs.
- Institutionalize internal and external quality assurance processes.
- Conduct harmonization workshops to ensure consistency and standardization across educational quality assurance assessments.

Priority Area 13: Digital Transformation and Educational Technologies

- Invest in infrastructure for digital transformation in HEIs.
- Promote access to educational technologies to enhance teaching and learning.

Priority Area 14: Graduate Education, Research, and Innovation

- Foster human resource development partnerships between research-intensive institutions.
- Implement a research capacity incubation program to enhance research capabilities.
- Address public procurement challenges so that a more robust research environment may flourish.

Priority Area 15: Internationalization of Higher Education

- Streamline immigration processes for foreign faculty and students to facilitate internationalization of HEIs.
- Develop incentives to attract reputable foreign HEIs to partner with local institutions.

Teacher Education

The Teacher Education Council (TEC) has since made progress on key deliverables following the appointment of its executive director. In the past months, the Council has swiftly moved to identify Centers of Excellence (COEs) in teacher education, began the process of updating the preservice teacher education curriculum, initiated partnerships with key universities and government bodies, and launched its roadmap for innovative programs. However, challenges persist in clarifying the relationship between the TEC and CHED's Technical Panel for Teacher Education, especially following RA 11713.

A significant gap in the oversight of the teaching profession persists due to insufficient monitoring and coordination by CHED and the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC). Despite their shared mandate under the PRC Modernization Act of 2000 (RA 8981) to monitor school performance and teaching conditions, underperforming teacher education institutions (TEIs) continue to operate despite consistently poor licensure examination outcomes.

CHED has since adopted stricter policies to address underperforming TEIs in line with EDCOM II recommendations. Through CHED Memorandum Order No. 10, s. 2024, CHED has promulgated guidelines, criteria, and sanctions for TEIs that consistently fail to meet standards. Evaluations focus on the Board Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (BLEPT) performance, school leadership, faculty qualifications, curriculum, and resources. TEIs with potential for improvement will receive technical assistance to address gaps and enhance program quality.

A steady enrollment in COEs and Centers of Development (CODs) contrasts with a concerning decline in their share of graduating education students, raising doubts about their capacity to produce top-performing graduates consistently (Sinsay-Villanueva et al., 2024). The limited effectiveness of the COE and COD initiatives in assisting underperforming TEIs, along with regional disparities, compound this issue. Most COEs and CODs are located in Luzon, particularly in the National Capital Region, leaving Visayas and Mindanao (and especially Region XII and BARMM) underserved.

Sixty-two percent of high school teachers teach subjects outside their college major. This misalignment between preservice training and school-level needs undermines the quality of instructional expertise in the basic education system. Compounding this issue, 62% of high school teachers who are expected to specialize teach subjects outside their college major. The problem is particularly pronounced in the sciences, with a 98% mismatch in the physical sciences and an 80% mismatch in the biological sciences, highlighting a critical gap in subject-specific expertise. This lack of knowledge extends to Key Stages 1 and 2, where 13% and 16% of science teachers, respectively, teach science outside their specialization.

The teacher education curriculum requires only a minimum of six units each for field studies and practice teaching, which is among the shortest practice teaching requirements in the world. Evidently, this impacts teacher preparation quality and necessitates stronger specialized training by DepEd, through the National Educators' Academy of the Philippines (NEAP).

However, the absence of a strategic framework for continuing professional development within the NEAP has limited further opportunities for professional growth. The lack of a strategic framework, clear priorities, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms has stalled NEAP's transformation into an effective professional development institution.

It takes teachers 15 years to move from Teacher 1 (Salary Grade 11 at Php 27,000) to Teacher 3 (Salary Grade 13 at Php 31,320). Teachers face limited career advancement opportunities, often transitioning into administrative roles for higher pay, reducing the presence of experienced educators in classrooms. Transitioning into nonteaching roles is often seen as the only available option for career growth, as Master Teacher roles are limited in number. Notably, DepEd must be commended for finally issuing the IRR for the Career Progression System (Executive Order No. 174, s. 2022) following 2 years of delay.

While administrative officers (AOs) have provided some relief, two out of three teachers still report working more than 40 hours per week, mostly due to ancillary tasks. Since 2020, DepEd has allocated AO II personnel in tranches, totaling 24,519 as of 2024. This means that enough items have been created for a 1:1 ratio of AOs to schools. Research by IDinsight has shown however that this remains generally insufficient, especially for large schools with more than 500 students. Teachers have also expressed the need for project development officers for program coordination responsibilities.

Fifty-five percent of public schools have operated without fully designated school principals. School leadership offers a corrective, if temporary, measure to the problems plaguing teachers. However, the quantity, quality, and qualifications of school leaders are in a dismal state. Data reveal that only 45% of public schools have a designated school principal, with 12,057 schools with incorrect school head items, contrary to DepEd's own policies. School leaders have also received limited professional development support from DepED or NEAP since 2018. Notably, this is a binding constraint that critically limits the ability of DepEd to realistically pursue decentralization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority Area 16: Alignment of CHED, the PRC, and DepEd on Teacher Education and Development
- Clarify the functions of the TEC and CHED's Technical Panel for Teacher Education to avoid duplication and enhance governance.
- Amend RA 8981 to strengthen oversight of the teaching profession.
- Amend the Teacher Professionalization Act of 1994 to update it based on the current needs of the education system and the learnings in the past 30 years.
- Encourage TEIs to pursue COE and COD designations with incentives and a streamlined application process. (Measures such as scholarships for students, international incentive models for faculty, and targeted exemptions can help elevate learning quality while reducing barriers.)
- Strengthen partnerships and mentoring programs between COEs, CODs, and underperforming TEIs.
- Address regional disparities in the distribution of COEs and CODS since this is critical for improving teacher education nationwide.
- For CHED and the TEC, focus on long-term outcomes and impact indicators in monitoring and evaluation of COEs and CODs.

Priority Area 17: Preservice Education
- Extend and structure the practicum for teacher trainees to include meaningful teaching experiences.
- Shift to specialization in preservice education, particularly for Key Stages 1 and 2, to improve content mastery and pedagogical skills.
- Address critical supply-side constraints among teachers specializing in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics; Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao; and Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health through alternative pathways to the BLEPT.

- For TEC, work closely with DepEd and CHED in mapping out and projecting the supply and demand of teachers.
- For DepEd, revisit its hiring guidelines to specify actual vacancies (in terms of grade level and subject specialization) and/or preferred educational qualification (in terms of course completed in college, e.g., Bachelor of Early Childhood Education for vacancies in Key Stage 1).

Priority Area 18: In-Service Training and Development

- For DepEd, develop a centralized Human Resource Information System that integrates a Professional Development Information System for tracking teachers' continuing education needs and incorporates Electronic School Form 7 data for real-time monitoring and analysis.
- For DepEd and the DBM, review and update the 1997 DBM Organization and Staffing Standards, and other guidelines related to the allocation and deployment of nonteaching positions to address the growing complexity of school operations at all levels.
- For NEAP, create relevant and impactful professional development programs aligned with career progression.
- Institutionalize teacher career progression through legislation.
- Ensure every school has a dedicated principal by revising allocation policies.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training

While TVET graduates are highly employable (95.5%), Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data show that many of them end up underemployed (15.2% as of October 2022). Bersales also finds that a large proportion of TVET completers end up in the informal sector (30.3%). Notably, since 2020, TESDA data show that the highest number of completers are in two areas: Bread and Pastry Production NC II (20.33%) and Driving NC II (17.76%).

In general, TVET graduates earn slightly lower in daily basic pay than non–TVET graduates (Php 519 vs. Php 556), and they are likely to be employed in elementary occupations and service and sales work. Further analysis by PIDS shows that, consistent with EDCOM findings in Year One, there is a significant and positive improvement in mean hourly wage of TVET graduates for those with only secondary education and lower. Meanwhile, the effect on wage is negative for those with postsecondary education.

Critically, wages of TVET graduates are higher in the following sectors: automotive; construction; electrical and electronics; information and communications technology; tourism; and social, community development, and other services. Graduates in these areas are likely to earn beyond the minimum wages set per region, and higher compared to graduates of agriculture-related training programs.

Enterprise-based training was held back due to outdated guidelines as well as inadequate oversight and support since the 1990s. EDCOM analysis found that many of the implementing guidelines to operationalize provisions under the Dual Training System law were outdated and unaddressed by the concerned agencies (among them, TESDA, NEDA, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Finance [DOF] Revenue Operations Group, the Bureau of Internal Revenue, and the Bureau of Customs), with the complex processes leading to a series of dead ends.

Notably, many of these constraints have been addressed in RA 12063, or the Enterprise-Based Education and Training (EBET) Framework Act of 2024. Championed by EDCOM Commissioners, the new law resolves the multiple

bottlenecks found during the consultations. It likewise streamlines the processes and incentives, clarifies responsibilities of agencies, and includes additional support and incentives to companies to encourage them to participate in EBET.

Lack of coordination and fragmentation impede the country from providing useful Labor Market Information to guide policies and decision-making. Despite many efforts to gather information and to project training and labor demands across the PSA, the Department of Labor and Employment, and TESDA, agencies operate in silos, insights are not complementary, and analysis is too generic to actually inform the decision-making of educational institutions and learners on the ground.

Many sectors still do not have industry boards, limiting their capacity to engage critically with TESDA and ultimately to formulate relevant training. Since the EDCOM Year One Report, only one national industry board for the creative sector has been established, with critical sectors such as energy and transportation remaining unrepresented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority Area 19: Needs-Based System Projecting the Demands in Workers' Upskilling
- Establish a unified Labor Market Information System (LMIS) to consolidate fragmented labor market data from various government agencies, enhancing the alignment of training programs with industry needs.
- Promote skills needs anticipation as a key component of the LMIS to improve the matching of labor market demands with training.

Priority Area 20: Industry Involvement and Investment in Upskilling
- Issue the IRR for the EBET Act of 2024 and ensure adequacy of staffing/personnel within TESDA and resources to implement its provisions.
- Simplify and streamline processes associated with tax benefits and EBT-related incentives to encourage broader industry participation.
- Implement the Adopt-Adapt Strategies to expedite the development of training regulations.

Priority Area 21: Ensuring Quality in the Provision of TVET
- Support the establishment of more industry boards to enable industry to take a proactive/leadership role in developing training, especially in priority industries identified as key employment and economic generators.
- Ensure the quadripartite composition of Industry TVET Boards (ITBs), including representation from government, industry, academia, and labor.
- Establish a clear and sustainable framework for ITBs to define roles, functions, and relationships tailored to local contexts.

Priority Area 22: Framework for Equivalency and Recognition of Nonformal and Informal Learning
- Fast-track the work of the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) National Coordinating Council to ensure the fulfilment of its mandate, in line with RA 10968.
- Urgently establish the PQF Permanent Secretariat to accelerate the full implementation of the PQF and the operationalization of the Ladderized Education Act (RA 10647, s. 2014).
- Review the PQF level descriptors to ensure alignment with changing contexts and needs of industries and Filipino learners.
- Integrate the Philippine Skills Framework within the PQF.

Governance and Finance

While trifocalization has improved subsectoral attention, it has not improved learning outcomes. Despite the increased attention given to respective sectors, completion rates and student achievement rates remained the same as in the 1990s. The separation of education governance into three agencies, while intended to provide focused oversight, has instead created silos, with DepEd, CHED, and TESDA operating in isolation rather than working toward cohesive policy development. The absence of a formal coordination mechanism has led these agencies to craft policies independently, consequently hampering sectorwide planning and prioritization.

Private school enrollment drops by 20% as public–private complementarity remains unclear. The lack of clear operationalization of the Constitutional provision on "complementarity" between public and private education has led to inefficiencies and confusion within the education system. This situation is underscored by a concerning decline in private enrollment, which dropped from 68% in 2000 to 48% in 2015.

Too many targets have been set for basic education, while there has been too little emphasis on learning outcomes. Despite the high number of targets, only 8 out of the 88 targets in the BEDP are about learning outcomes, which is indicative that learning outcomes are not given sufficient attention in the system. Targets are also inconsistent when reviewed against those articulated in the National Expenditure Plan, the General Appropriations Act, and the Philippine Development Plan. There is also no clear mechanism through which targets set at the school, division, and regional level connect to overall targets set centrally. Finally, targets are set relative to available resources and without any system through which accountability in meeting said targets could be monitored, encouraged, or enforced.

The Philippines's education budget growth still fails to keep pace with global standards, and basic education receives the lowest share in the budget despite its foundational role. Our education system suffers from underinvestment. Currently, the Philippines allocates an average of 3.2% of its gross domestic product to education, below the recommended 4%–6%. Further, though the education budget has doubled in real terms from 2013 to 2024, once inflation is accounted for, the growth has actually been flat.

Most increases in budget have been for SHS and higher education, with primary education being the least resourced despite its importance in ensuring strong foundations for learning. In 2013, the government spent about Php 10,459 per student in primary education and Php 28,122 per student in higher education. By 2022, this improved to only Php 18,066 for primary while reaching a high of Php 48,688 per student in tertiary. This contradicts the strategy of many countries, such as Vietnam and Peru, that successfully turned around their education system by first and foremost focusing on the basics at Key Stage 1 (Kindergarten to Grade 3).

Schools receive limited funding for maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), accounting for only 5% of the DepEd budget in 2024. An Asian Development Bank study finds that the Boncodin Formula used to compute per school budget is biased against congested schools, leaving them with little resources to address their needs. On average, for elementary, this equates to just Php 1,127 per student per year while amounting to Php 1,500 for secondary. Many schools report that these funds are typically depleted by electricity costs and/or the cost of teaching or office supplies, which are used to reproduce additional learning resources. This forces schools to depend on the SEF and allocations of Parents-Teachers Associations to complement meager funds. **Notably, DepEd has since implemented the revised school MOOE formula, which shall result in an average of 30% increase in the budget of schools.**

RA 9155's intent to decentralize education governance has resulted in more centralized control and reduced innovation. Despite its intent, RA 9155's resulting structure has instead led to greater centralization and compliance with most decision-making and resource allocation powers lodged at the central office. "Memocracy" has thus undermined the potential for local innovation and responsiveness. Worse, the culture of "compliance" and "obedience" has limited the ability of local players to contextualize, as they end up being penalized or publicly criticized.

While there are at least 30 mechanisms for people's participation in DepEd's education governance based on policies, most of them are true only on paper. In reality, many stakeholders, including parents, volunteers, and organizations, cite dead ends in civil society participation due to lack of timely and open data and of dedicated personnel to engage with partners, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority Area 23: Ensuring Seamless and Integrated Delivery of Education
- Establish a Cabinet Cluster for Education to enable system-wide planning and coordination, specifically to formulate and implement a National Education and Workforce Development Strategy for the country.

Priority Area 24: Complementarity Between Public and Private Education
- Explore policy tools and best practices that would enable the government to strategically engage private education while ensuring access to quality education and supporting student choice.

Priority Area 25: Integrated Performance Management and Accountability System
- For DepEd, focus on a smaller number of headline targets that are outcomes oriented and which put an emphasis on ensuring learning.
- For DepEd, establish a lean, cross-functional, and high-performing internal delivery unit to support these aims.

Priority Area 26: Efficiency and Equity in Financing, Resource Mobilization, and Delivery of Education
- Increase investments in education, particularly in addressing urgent gaps in early childhood and primary education.
- Develop a robust framework for monitoring and reporting educational expenditures, ensuring transparency and allowing stakeholders to track how funds are being utilized at various governance levels.
- Formulate financing strategies that address the specific needs of vulnerable sectors and localities with less resources.
- Conduct an annual system-wide planning and prioritization of resources between DepEd, CHED, and TESDA in partnership with the DBM and NEDA.
- Amend RA 8525 (Adopt-A-School Act of 1998) to encourage philanthropy in education.
  On the revised school MOOE formula of DepEd:
  - Adjust budget amounts based on context-dependent expenditures such as electricity.
  - Review policies on SCPs as well as assumptions made in relation to resourcing.
  - Review program support funds across the department to ensure nonduplication of resourcing.
  - Amend and update DepEd Order No. 8, s. 2019.
  On the SEF:
  - Amend the joint memorandum circular to include ALS*.*

□ Clarify the relationship between provincial and municipal school boards, especially in supporting low-income LGUs with low SEFs.
□ Institutionalize equity mechanisms that will allow the national government to provide resources to support low-income LGUs.
□ Strengthen/harmonize reporting and monitoring mechanisms through enhanced collaboration between DepEd, the DOF Bureau of Local Government Finance, and the DILG.

Priority Area 27: Decentralization and Participatory Governance
■ For DepEd, adopt a phased, selective, and iterative decentralization process based on a clear framework of reform readiness.
■ Ensure adequacy of resources to enable local actors to implement reform.
■ Integrate monitoring and evaluation in the reform process.
■ For DepEd, CHED, and TESDA, adopt an open education data policy.
■ Establish clearer communication pathways and feedback mechanisms within and between different levels of educational governance.
■ Foster an inclusive governance framework that encourages active participation from all stakeholders, including parents, students, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector.

Accomplishments in Year Two

The year has also been productive in terms of EDCOM's advocacy of legislative measures, as well as its collaboration with relevant government agencies on key reforms and interventions:

Priority Area	Policy Updates
Priority Area 1: Nutrition and Feeding	■ Recommendation of the NEDA Social Development Committee to include nutrition in the early years in the Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) Agenda. ■ Inclusion of the First 1,000 Days and nutrition-related funding in the early years under **DBM's Program Convergence Budgeting** for FY 2026. ■ Increase in cost per capita of DSWD's Supplementary Feeding Program in the 2025 National Expenditure Plan from Php 15 per hot meal to Php 27 per hot meal. ■ Quadruple increase of DOH's nutrition budget in the 2025 GAA from Php 235 million to Php 977 million.
Priority Area 2: Supply-side Factors	■ Allocation of funding for the CDWs and for CDCs in the 2025 GAA □ Php 80 million for TESDA scholarships so that child development workers (CDWs) with only a high school diploma may be upskilled toward gaining a National Certificate (NC) III in ECCD. □ Php 24 million was allocated to establish CDCs in at least eight fifth-class municipalities without. ■ TESDA Board approval for the prioritization of Child Development Workers Training Regulations (TR) development to create an NC III in ECCD on November 13, 2024.

Priority Area	Policy Updates
Priority Area 4: Governance and Financing of ECCD	■ **House Bill No. 10142** – An Act Strengthening the Early Childhood Care and Development System, and Appropriating Funds Therefor ◻ House Bill No. 8393 filed by former Rep. Kiko Benitez on May 29, 2023 ◻ House Bill No. 10142 filed in substitution of House Bill No. 8393 by Rep. Roman Romulo, former Rep. Kiko Benitez, et. al. on March 13, 2024 ◻ Approved on third reading on March 18, 2024 ■ **Senate Bill No. 2575** – An Act Further Strengthening the Early Childhood Care and Development System, Repealing For The Purpose Republic Act No. 10410, Otherwise Known as the "Early Years Act (EYA) of 2013", and Appropriating Funds Therefor ◻ Filed by Sen. Win Gatchalian on February 27, 2024 ◻ Approved on third reading on December 16, 2024
Priority Area 5: Learning Resources	■ Issuance of **DepEd Memorandum No. 049 s.2024** that mandates Early Procurement Activities to expedite processes and budget utilization for DepEd projects, including the procurement of textbooks, modules, activity sheets, and teacher's manuals. ■ **Senate Bill No. 2712** – An Act Strengthening the National Book Development Board, Amending For The Purpose Republic Act No. 8047 or the Book Publishing Industry Development Act ◻ Filed by Sen. Loren Legarda on June 13, 2024 ◻ Referred to the Committees on Basic Education; Ways and Means and Finance
Priority Area 7: Curriculum and Instruction	■ **Republic Act No. 12028 – An Act Establishing an Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program and Appropriating Funds Therefor** signed into law on October 16, 2024 ◻ Implementing Rules and Regulations signed on December 16, 2024 ■ **Republic Act No. 12027 – An Act Discontinuing the Use of the Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction from Kindergarten to Grade 3, Providing For Its Optional Implementation In Monolingual Classes, and Amending For The Purpose Sections 4 And 5 of Republic Act No. 10533, Otherwise Known As The "Enhanced Basic Education Act Of 2013"** ◻ Lapsed into law on October 10, 2024 ■ **Republic Act No. 11984 – An Act Mandating Public and Private Educational Institutions to Allow Disadvantaged Students with Unpaid Tuition and Other School Fees to Take the Periodic and Final Examinations and For Other Purposes** ◻ Signed into law on March 11, 2024 ■ **House Bill No. 9936** – An Act Allowing The Department Of Education The Flexibility To Determine The Pedagogical Approaches To Be Implemented In The Basic Education Curriculum, Amending For The Purpose Section 5 Of Republic Act No. 10533, Otherwise Known As The "Enhanced Basic Education Act Of 2013" ◻ Filed by Rep. Roman Romulo on February 14, 2024 ◻ Approved on third reading on March 19, 2024

Priority Area	Policy Updates
	■ **House Resolution No. 260** - Resolution Urging The Department Of Education To Suspend, After A Comprehensive Preparation, The Regular Academic Program For Eight To Twelve Weeks And Implement An Effective Learning Intervention Recovery Program For K To 12 Learners To Ensure That They Shall Attain Functional Literacy And Numeracy □ Filed by Rep. Roman on September 18, 2024 □ Adopted on November 6, 2024
Priority Area 8: School Infrastructure	■ **House Bill No. 11214** - Private Basic Education Vouchers Assistance Act □ Filed by Rep. Roman Romulo, Rep. Mark Go, et. al. □ Pending with the Committee on Rules (Included in the Order of Business on December 17, 2024) ■ **House Bill No. 10823** - An Act Establishing Public Basic Education Schools In Geographically Isolated And Disadvantaged And Conflict-Affected Areas, Providing Access Roads Leading To Last Mile Schools, And Appropriating Funds Therefor □ Filed by Rep. Roman Romulo on August 27, 2024 □ Approved on third reading on September 19, 2024
Priority Area 10: Home and School Environment	■ **Institutionalization and approval of plantilla positions for the Learner Rights Protection Office (LRPO)** - 9 plantilla items were created at the Central Office level, and 16 items at the regional level (1 item per Regional Office). ■ **Republic Act No. 12080** or the "Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act" signed into law on December 06, 2024
Priority Area 11: Access to Quality Higher Education	■ **GAA 2024 special provision on TES prioritization of the poorest, and the subsequent increase in the share of the 4Ps/Poorest grantees** ■ **Senate Bill No. 2905** - An Act Amending Section 7 Of Republic Act No. 10931, Otherwise Known As The Universal Access To Quality Tertiary Education Act, To Enhance The Efficiency, Equity, And Accountability Of The Tertiary Education Subsidy Program □ Filed by Sen. Loren Legarda on December 17, 2024 □ Referred to the Committee on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education on December 18, 2024 ■ **CHED has fast-tracked the reconstitution of Technical Panels, from only 15 in 2023 to an additional 72 in 2024, leaving only 19 more panels to be reconstituted**.
Priority Area 12: Quality Assurance	■ **Senate Bill No. 2829** - An Act Strengthening the Establishment and Operation of All Public and Private Higher Education Institutions □ Filed by Sen. Loren Legarda on on September 18, 2024 □ Referred to the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education and Ways and Means on September 23, 2024 ■ **House Bill No. 9982** - An Act Strengthening the Establishment and Operation of All Public and Private Higher Education Institutions □ Filed by Rep. Mark Go on February 26, 2024 □ Approved on third reading on March 19, 2024

Priority Area	Policy Updates

Priority Area 14: Graduate Education, Research, and Innovation	■ **Republic Act 12009 or the New Government Procurement Act**
	  ▫ now includes provisions to support the science community through the streamlining of procurement processes and reduction in excessive bureaucracy that has previously limited productivity in research, development, and innovation
	  ▫ signed into law on July 20, 2024

Priority Area 15: Internationalization of Higher Education	■ **Senate Bill No. 2733** - An Act Amending Section 5 (3) Of Republic Act No. 9225, Otherwise Known As The Citizenship Retention And Re-Acquisition Act Of 2003
	  ▫ Filed by Sen. Win Gatchalian and Sen. Joel Villanueva on July 17, 2024
	  ▫ Referred to the Committee on Justice and Human Rights on July 31, 2024
	  ▫ Conducted a Technical Working Group on October 9, 2024
	■ **House Bill No. 10251** - An Act Allowing For The Appointment Of Faculty, Researchers, And Administrators With Dual Citizenship In Public Higher Education Institutions Amending For The Purpose Section 5 (3) Of Republic Act 9225, Otherwise Known As The Citizenship Retention And Re-Acquisition Act Of 2003
	  ▫ Filed by Rep. Mark Go on April 11, 2024
	  ▫ Approved on third reading on August 13, 2024

Priority Area 16: Alignment of CHED, PRC, and DepEd on Teacher Education and Development	■ **The Teacher Education Council has begun its full operationalization consistent with RA 11713, beginning with the appointment of its Executive Director last September 6, 2024.**
	■ Issuance of **CHED Memorandum Order 10 s. 2024,** which empowers CHED to impose sanctions, such as program termination and institutional closure, based on a TEI's performance
	■ **House Bill No. 9979** - An Act Further Amending R.A. No. 7836, Otherwise Known as the "Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994" as Amended by R.A. No. 9293
	  ▫ Filed by Representatives Mark Go, Roman Romulo, Khalid Dimaporo, Pablo John Garcia, and former Rep. Kiko Benitez on February 26, 2024
	  ▫ Approved on third reading on March 19, 2024
	■ **Senate Bill Nos. 2830, 2840, and 2913** - SBN 2830: An Act Further Amending R.A. No. 7836, Otherwise Known as the "Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994" as Amended by R.A. No. 9293, SBN 2840: An Act Further Amending R.A. No. 7836, Otherwise Known as the "Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994" as Amended by R.A. No. 9293, and SBN 2913: An Act Further Amending R.A. No. 7836, Otherwise Known as the "Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994" as Amended by R.A. No. 9293
	  ▫ SBN 2830 Filed by Sen. Loren Legarda on September 18, 2024
	  ▫ SBN 2840 Filed by Sen. Win Gatchalian on September 25, 2024
	  ▫ SBN 2913 Filed by Sen. Joel Villanueva on January 14, 2025
	  ▫ Referred to the Committee on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; Subcommittee created and chaired by Sen. Win

Priority Area	Policy Updates

Priority Area 18: In-Service Training and Development	■ The **Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) for Executive Order No. 174 s. 2022 on Career Progression of Teachers** signed on July 26, 2024
	■ **House Bill No. 10270** - An Act Institutionalizing The Career Progression System For Public School Teachers And Appropriating Funds Therefor
	  ❏ Filed by Rep. Roman Romulo April 19, 2024
	  ❏ Approved on third reading on September 4, 2024
	■ **Senate Bill No. 2827** - An Act Institutionalizing The Career Progression System For Public School Teachers And Appropriating Funds Therefor
	  ❏ Filed by Sen. Win Gatchalian on September 17, 2024
	  ❏ Referred To The Committees On Civil Service, Government Reorganization And Professional Regulation; Basic Education And Finance On September 23, 2024
	■ **Senate Bill No. 2831** - An Act Institutionalizing The Career Progression System For Public School Teachers And Appropriating Funds Therefor
	  ❏ Filed by Sen. Loren Legarda on September 18, 2024
	  ❏ Referred To The Committees On Civil Service, Government Reorganization And Professional Regulation; Basic Education And Finance On September 23, 2024

Priority Area 19: Needs-based system projecting the demands in workers upskilling	■ **Funding of Php 10 million for the development of a generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered labor market researcher in the GAA of 2025.**
Priority Area 20: Industry involvement and investment in upskilling	■ **Republic Act No. 12063 - An Act Instituting the Enterprise-Based Education and Training Framework and Appropriating Funds Therefor** ❏ Signed into law on November 7, 2024
Priority Area 21: Ensuring quality in the provision of TVET	■ **Funding of Php 40 million for the acquisition/development of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered TVET course builder for Philippine TVET in the GAA of 2025.**
Priority Area 22: Framework for equivalency and recognition of nonformal and informal learning	■ **Establishment of the PQF NCC Permanent Secretariat** and Opening of Nominations for **Economic/Industry Representatives** last January 2025
Priority Area 23: Ensuring Seamless and Integrated Delivery of Education	■ **House Concurrent Resolution No. 31 - Concurrent Resolution Urging the President to Create a Cabinet Cluster for Education** Adopted on August 30, 2024 ■ **Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 21 - Concurrent Resolution Urging the President to Create a Cabinet Cluster for Education** ❏ Filed by Senators Win Gatchalian, Alan Peter S. Cayetano, Koko Pimentel, and Joel Villanueva on July 30, 2024

Priority Area	Policy Updates

Priority Area 26: Efficiency and Equity in Financing, Resource Mobilization, and Delivery of Education	■ Bills on the Adopt-A-School Act of 1998
	  ❑ **Senate Bill No. 2731** - An Act Further Strengthening The Incentives For Private Sector Participation In Public Educational Institutions By Amending Certain Provisions In Republic Act No. 8525 Otherwise Known As The "Adopt-A-School Act Of 1998"
	    ■ Filed by Sen. Win Gatchalian and former Sen. Sonny Angara on July 15, 2024
	    ■ Referred to the Committees on Basic Education; Higher, Technical And Vocational Education and Ways And Means on July 30, 2024
	  ❑ **Senate Bill No. 2809** - An Act Further Strengthening The Incentives For Private Sector Participation In Public Educational Institutions By Amending Certain Provisions In Republic Act No. 8525 Otherwise Known As The "Adopt-A-School Act Of 1998"
	    ■ Filed by Sen. Loren Legarda on September 3, 2024
	    ■ Referred to the Committees on Basic Education; Higher, Technical And Vocational Education and Ways And Means on September 4, 2024
	  ❑ **Senate Bill No. 2852** - An Act Further Strengthening The Incentives For Private Sector Participation In Public Educational Institutions, Amending For The Purpose Republic Act No. 8525, Otherwise Known As The "Adopt-A-School Act Of 1998"
	    ■ Filed by Sen. Joel Villanueva on October 17, 2024
	    ■ Referred to the Committees on Basic Education; Higher, Technical And Vocational Education and Ways And Means on November 4, 2024
	■ **Senate Bill No. 2845** - An Act Expanding The Purpose And Application Of The Special Education Fund, Amending For The Purpose Section 272 Of Republic Act No. 7160, Otherwise Known As The "Local Government Code Of 1991 And For Other Purposes"
	  ❑ Filed by Sen. Joel Villanueva on October 3, 2024
	  ❑ Referred to the Committees on Local Government and Basic Education on November 4, 2024
	■ **Senate Bill No. 155** - An Act Furthering Local Leadership And Accountability In Basic Education Governance To Achieve Quality Inclusive Education Through The 21st Century School Boards And School Governing Councils, And For Other Purpose
	  ❑ Filed by Sen. Win Gatchalian on July 7, 2022
	  ❑ Referred to the Committees on Local Government and Basic Education and Finance on August 1, 2022
	  ❑ Conducted a Technical Working Group on March 7, 2024

Priority Area 27: Decentralization and Participatory Governance	■ DepEd signed a MOA with Delivery Unit on piloting decentralization

Acknowledgments

Introduction

When we began our work in January 2023, the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) held firm to a fundamental truth: No solution would be possible without a thorough diagnosis. The path forward required confronting the full depth and often uncomfortable complexity of the problem. With this as our guiding principle, EDCOM embarked on a journey— conducting rigorous research with an army of partners, and diving deep into consultations with teachers, principals, students, and parents. The Year One Report left many stunned with its revelations: a fractured foundation, decades of neglect, and the accelerating downward spiral of the country's education system.

As we complete EDCOM's second year, the main impediments to achieving learning at scale have crystallized even further: (1) **We have spread ourselves too thinly**; (2) **We did not consistently track learning outcomes of students, and at times were distracted by less important indicators**; and (3) **We have lacked the ability to enforce accountability and enable prompt intervention in our "system".** These impediments echo through the 16 of 28 priorities pursued in 2024, revealing a stark reality: Many reforms—even those conceived decades ago—remain aspirations rather than achievements.

> *(1) we have spread ourselves too thinly; (2) we did not consistently track learning outcomes of students, and at times were distracted by less important indicators; and (3) we have lacked the ability to enforce accountability and enable prompt intervention in our "system".*

Policies well intentioned and hopeful—among them the Dual Training System Act of 1994 and the Adopt-a-School Act of 1998—were crafted following the first EDCOM in the 1990s; they remain aspirational to this date. Likewise, the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, the First 1,000 Days Law of 2018, and the Alternative Learning System Act of 2020 falter under the weight of scarce resources, weak accountability frameworks, and untrodden steps, in the case of implementing guidelines that never emerged from the crucible of policymaking bodies. **The story is clear: Without addressing these foundational gaps, meaningful and sustained change will remain elusive**.

Resources Have Been Spread Too Thinly While Facing Many Critical Gaps in Basic Education

Despite well-meaning policies and programs, the reality is that our budget has not kept pace with the growth in student numbers and the ever growing aspirations of our education system. A casual observer might note some bold increases in the budget. A deeper look, however, will reveal that these were brought about mainly by the introduction of senior high school in 2016 and the passage of the free tuition law (RA 10931) in 2017–2018. In actuality, accounting for inflation, allocations have stagnated.

FIGURE 1
Total National Government Allocation for Education (2013–2023) (Nominal vs. Real Values in Constant 2018 Prices)
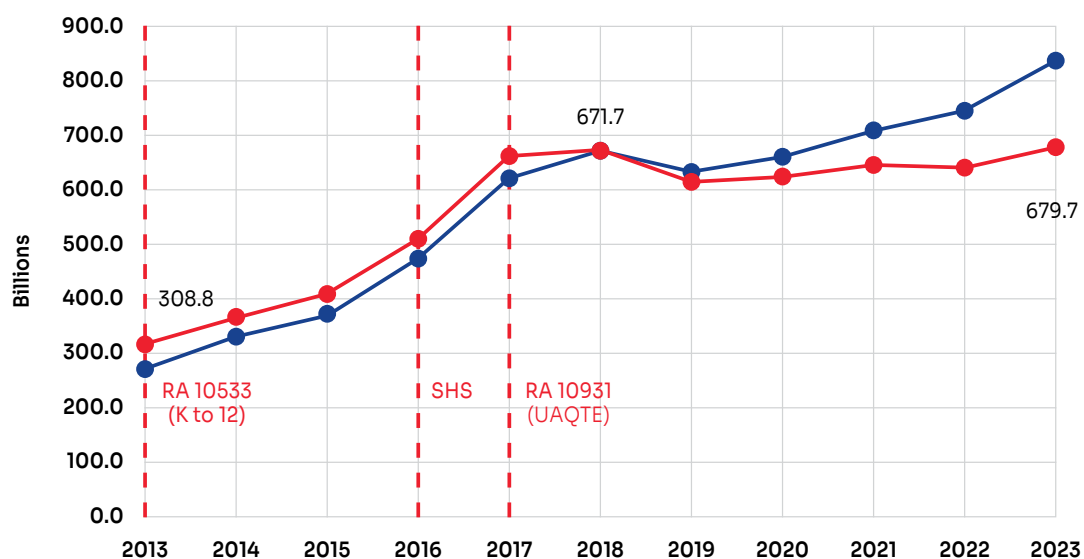
Abbreviations:
K = Kindergarten, SHS = Senior High School,
UAQTE = Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education

The contrast with countries that have decisively turned around poor education performance—such as Vietnam and Peru—is stark: **They prioritized foundational learning in the early years, addressed learning gaps at the onset of education, and refused to allow the system's base to erode**.

Compare this with the situation in many barangays where child development centers remain a promise unfulfilled since 1978. Participation in early childhood education is abysmal at 18%, and stunting rates have hovered stubbornly at 20% since 2000. Backlogs in classrooms have forced schools to implement multiple shifts; public schools remain understaffed, with teachers bearing the brunt of nonteaching responsibilities; half of all our public schools do not have principals; and promotions for teachers have come at a glacial pace, with most having to wait 12 years to move from Teacher 1 to Teacher 3.

We Need to Focus on the Foundational Years

While the many competing priorities remain, the central revelation is that **attempting to address all addresses none**. The task before us precludes a relentless and razor-sharp focus on path-dependent, long-horizoned interventions; Resources must flow toward the early years—addressing stunting in the first 1,000 days, improving access to early childhood education, and ensuring that every learner achieves foundational literacy by the end of Grade 3.

Emerging data only underscores this imperative. A forthcoming UNICEF study (see Figure 2) finds that prior to the pandemic, Filipino students exiting Grade 3 lagged a full year behind curriculum expectations in terms of literacy. The pandemic widened the gap to up to three years. Unchecked, these deficits compound into lifelong handicaps.

FIGURE 2
**Literacy Performance of Students in Key Stage 1
(Before and After Pandemic)**
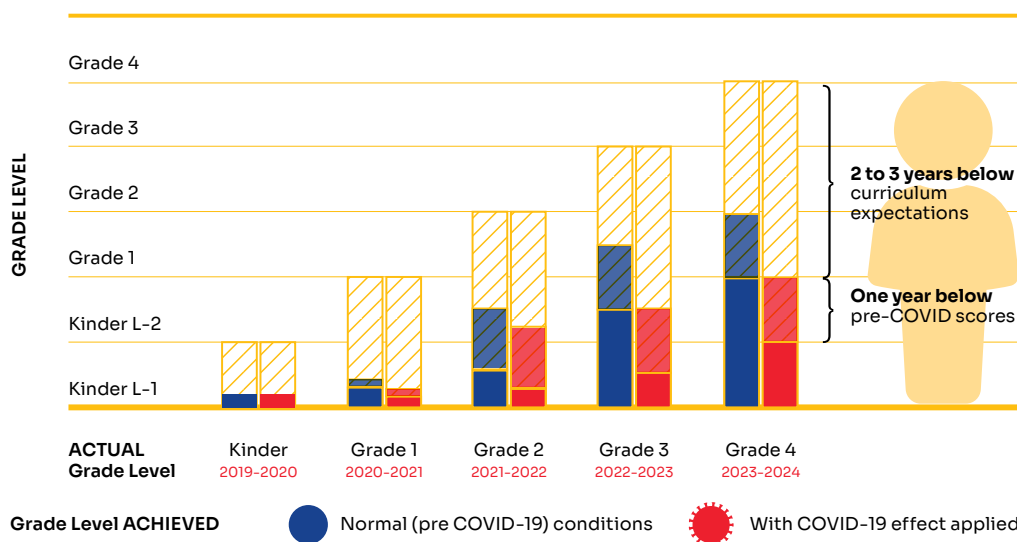
In school visits this year, we found some Grades 8 and 9 students struggling to meet competencies that they should have learned as early as Grade 4. The Philippine Statistics Authority's recomputation of the Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey revealed a sobering truth: Even among college graduates, only as little as 31% had the basic literacy skills of reading and writing. Notably, this was worse for those aged 50 to 70 years old (see Figure 3), suggesting that **our learning crisis has in fact gone on, perhaps also unchecked, for much longer than we have noticed**.

FIGURE 3
Recomputed Literacy Levels by Age Group and Educational Attainment (Percentage of Population)

HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

AGE	High School	TVET	College
10-17	67 / 27 / 4%	67 / 33	
18-20	68 / 27 / 3%	70 / 24 / 3%	75 / 22 / 2%
21-30	64 / 31 / 3%	71 / 27 / 2%	76 / 22 / 1%
31-40	62 / 33 / 3%	69 / 28 / 2%	76 / 22 / 1%
41-50	58 / 35 / 4%	66 / 30 / 2%	71 / 26 / 1%
51-60	55 / 36 / 6%	57 / 38 / 3%	67 / 29 / 3%
61-70	53 / 37 / 6%	58 / 37 / 4%	68 / 27 / 3%

PERCENTAGE

Legend: Functional Literacy | Basic Literacy | Illiterate / Low Literacy | Undetermined
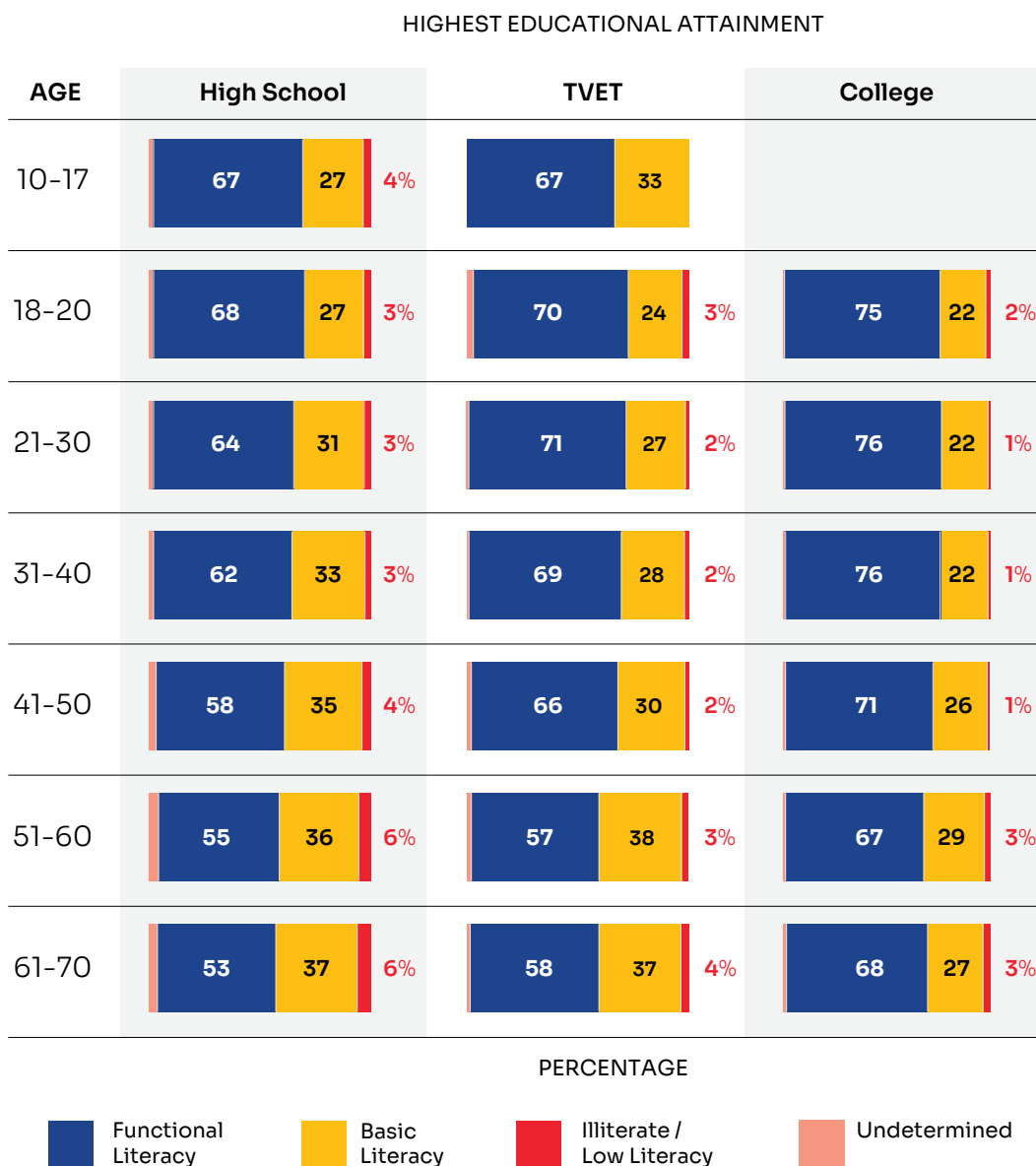
Abbreviation: TVET = Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Even among college graduates, only as little as 31% had the basic literacy skills of reading and writing. Notably, this was worse for those aged 50 to 70 years old

The Demographic Window Will Close Within a Generation

Economic growth like that achieved by our neighboring East Asian tigers hinges on a workforce that is not only large, but also one that can produce and innovate; therefore, one that is educated. We are at the cusp of a demographic sweet spot: Various studies (including those from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Philippine Statistics Office, the World Bank, and the United States Census Bureau) project that between 2045 and 2055, the Philippines's working-age population will peak at 66% to 69% before beginning to decline (see Figure 4). **The Philippines therefore has less than a generation to harness the opportunity that this demographic window provides**.

As Senator Pia Cayetano warns, we face a choice between "the pain of discipline and hardship, or the pain of regret". The urgency is clear: **Addressing learning gaps for our students, and even for our working-age adults, is both a social development and an economic imperative**.

FIGURE 4

Demographic Window Projections for the Philippines
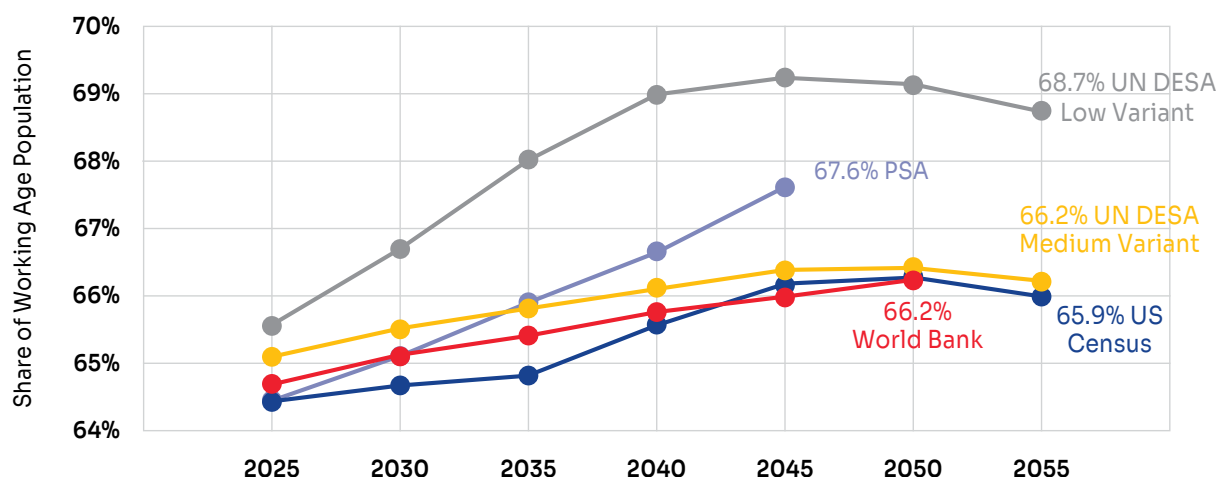
Abbreviations: UN DESA = United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, US = United States

Source: The Philippines Human Capital Review: Investing in the Early Years to Boost Human Potential, World Bank Group, 2024

YOU HAVE TWO HANDS.
ONE TO HELP YOURSELF, SECOND
TO HELP THE OTHERS.

We approach our third and final year ever mindful of the larger picture. We remain fully committed to our mandate: To deliver "a roadmap with clear key performance indicators and results framework to address the learning crisis", with "shortterm and long-term policy and program recommendations" (Sec. 7 of RA 11899).

We Can Fix Our Education System, But We Need to Prioritize

Much has changed since the release of the EDCOM Year One Report in January 2023. As we presented the report to Congress and to the general public, "Thank you for telling the truth" and "Thank you for your bravery" were comments frequently received from international organizations, civil society groups, and most importantly, teachers and school principals. This gratitude has sparked action and even deeper commitment from our many partners and champions. We have seen swift action from government partners, particularly DepEd and TESDA , where the appointments of former EDCOM Commissioners have driven policy coherence. Many agencies have also fully supported our efforts and recommendations, including the National Economic Development Authority, the Department of Budget and Management, the Department of Finance, the Department of Health, the Civil Service Commission, and the Professional Regulation Commission.

The Year Two Report presents EDCOM's findings on the remaining 16 out of 28 priorities, alongside explorations of issues typically overlooked, such as the ALS, our science high schools, and education in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Through this, we hope to tell the story of the education system as a whole. And as with last year, we are guided by the best available data and methods, while welcoming feedback.

We approach our third and final year ever mindful of the larger picture. We remain fully committed to our mandate: to deliver "a roadmap with clear key performance indicators and results framework to address the learning crisis", with "short-term and long-term policy and program recommendations" (Sec. 7 of RA 11899).

The path forward demands that we build a system that is capable not only of success but also of self-correction. **And as with any system, as with any effort to build anything of significance, we must return to the foundations.**

The education crisis we face has been decades in the making. It has festered for many years and will not be undone in a single stroke. Our task now is to excavate the bedrock, to uproot the dead vines that choke the dynamism out of our system, and to lay a new foundation. Only then can we build an education system that fulfills the promise of our people and the demands of this period of our history and the next. **Our task is nothing less than nation building one level at a time, beginning with the foundations—both of our education system and of learning itself**. Join us in rebuilding from the ground up and shaping an education system that the Filipino people truly deserve.

Karol Mark R. Yee, PhD
Executive Director
EDCOM II

Priority Areas

Building on the 28 Priority Areas established in January 2023, based on the Standing Committees and their Sub-Committees, EDCOM II continued to address these priority areas and related issues throughout Year Two, as highlighted.

Priority Areas	Issues
Early Childhood Care and Development	
1. Nutrition and feeding	▪ Challenges in governance, implementation, and resourcing of health and nutrition programs ▪ Aligning incentives to address challenges / look into quality
2. Supply-side factors	▪ Lack of child development centers to attain universal coverage of ECCD ▪ Producing high quality child development workers/teachers ▪ Materials and resources for ECE
3. Demand-side factors	▪ Understanding barriers that relate to parental perceptions and engagement in ECCD
4. Governance and financing of ECCD	▪ Mechanism of finance ▪ Addressing governance challenges

Priority Areas	Issues
Basic Education	
5. Learning resources	• Textbook development, production, and distribution • Using media to enhance learning
6. Measurement of learning outcomes	• Adequacy of the assessment system to track learners' progress and inform system reforms • Reporting and utilization of assessment results for improving learning outcomes
7. Curriculum and instruction	• Medium/language of instruction • Validation of the K to 10 (and eventually 11–12) curriculum towards decongestion, encouraging flexibility and innovation, and reviewing the spiral curriculum
8. School infrastructure	• Inventory of facilities (public and private) • Strategies to address the gaps
9. Alternative Learning System (ALS)	• Access and delivery • Curriculum content, quality, and assessment, towards preparing learners for employment
10. Home and school environment	• Safe, secure, conducive, and supportive learning environment • Improved mechanisms for partnerships and shared accountability between families, schools, and communities
Higher Education	
11. Access to quality higher education	• Develop CHED's regulatory framework to enhance its developmental and regulatory functions • Ensure closer coordination between industry and academe • Improving access to quality higher education • Enhancing the quality of higher education • Improving the quality of higher education programs (quality in terms of enhancing learning outcomes and program relevance)
12. Quality Assurance	• Map the current Philippine quality assurance (QA) system in general and higher education. In particular, delineate the functions of government and voluntary QA bodies and study the creation of a separate QA agency. • Contextualize the current Philippine QA system within the QA models/systems of other countries. • Institutionalization of internal and external QA/QA of academic programs and administrative processes • Typology- and outcomes-based QA and the grant of autonomous and deregulated status • Institutionalization of PQF in higher education • Governance of Philippine QA

Priority Areas	Issues
13. Digital transformation and educational technologies *(cross cutting)*	• Infrastructure for digital transformation, research clouds, and educational technologies • Access to educational technologies and sharing of resources • Establishment of smart campuses in SUCs
14. Graduate education, research, and innovation	• Poor quality and uptake of graduate education in the country • Lack of capacity to produce quality research in universities • Lack of capacity for research translation into innovations and technologies
15. Internationalization of higher education *(cross cutting)*	• Constraints to internationalization of students and faculty • Transnational education per RA 11448 • Issues of global rankings
Teacher Education and Development	
16. Alignment of CHED, PRC, DepEd (including TEC) on teacher education and development	• Alignment of CHED, PRC, DepEd on teacher education and development
17. Pre-service education	• Gaps in preservice training • Quality of TEIs • Encouraging more students to enter the teaching profession • Board Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (BLEPT)/ licensing of teachers
18. In-service training and development	• Teacher welfare • Training and development of teachers and school heads
Technical-Vocational Education & Training (TVET) and Lifelong Learning	
19. Needs-based system projecting the demands in workers' upskilling	• Understanding current and future "middle-skill" needs of the country • Understanding the future generation of the Filipino workforce
20. Industry involvement and investment in upskilling	• Understanding the labor market outcomes of TVET graduates • Encouraging companies to invest in upskilling of workers and offer enterprise-based training and apprenticeship programs • Reconsidering rural industry development
21. Ensuring quality in the provision of TVET	• Ensuring quality assurance in TVET • Rationalizing TVET provision and support (by TESDA, LGUs, and private TVIs)
22. Framework for equivalency and recognition of non-formal and informal learning	• Lifelong learning framework

Priority Areas	Issues
Governance and Finance	
23. Ensuring seamless and integrated delivery of education	• Lack of a coherent plan/roadmap/vision for the education sector • Lack of effective coordination among education agencies towards agreed upon goals • Using measures of quality to ensure attainment of agreed upon goals
24. Complementarity between public and private education	• Lack of clarity on the government's primary roles • Education delivery strategy informed by public and private absorptive capacity across all levels of education • Expanding Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education (GASTPE)
25. Integrated performance management and accountability system	• Lack of integrated ecosystem performance management system where funding is tied to performance versus student outcomes
26. Efficiency and equity in financing, resource mobilization, and delivery of education	• Efficiency in education finance and resource mobilization • Equity in the delivery of education and the extent that the needs of vulnerable sectors are addressed
27. Decentralization and participatory governance	• Highly centralized governance structure which limits the participation of local governments and stakeholders in education governance and hinders agility and innovation within the system • Participation of education stakeholders (students, parents, community, NGOs, CSOs, business sector and industries, LGUs, NGAs, and development partners) in education governance
Cross-cutting	
28. Connectedness of learner pathways throughout the system	

Year 2 Findings

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT

Safeguarding the Vital Window: Creating Solutions for ECCD

Introduction

The EDCOM II Year One Report emphasized how early childhood care and development (ECCD) is a critical window of opportunity to shape the holistic development of children aged 0–8. This window is pivotal for laying a robust foundation that enables children to reach their full potential. Consistent with global perspectives and practices, the Philippine Early Years Act of 2013 designates the ECCD Council as responsible for children aged 0–4, underscoring the importance of comprehensive care and education in these formative years.

ECCD in the Philippines encompasses a broad spectrum of programs focused on health, nutrition, early education, and social development—all designed to nurture children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Global evidence demonstrates that well-designed and well-implemented ECCD programs have substantial positive impacts on child outcomes across multiple domains, and these extend to future academic success and higher earning potential later in life (UNICEF, 2023; WHO, 2018; World Bank, 2019).

A 2022 UNICEF longitudinal study revealed that preschool attendance remained positively associated with higher achievement in literacy and math at Grade 3. Students who attended preschool or day care consistently outperformed peers without early childhood education across all rounds of assessment in literacy, math, and social and emotional skills. Longer preschool attendance was associated with higher achievement. However, the gap between those who attended preschool and those who did not narrows over time. This suggests the benefits of preschool persist but may diminish without sustained support (UNICEF, 2022).

Similarly, Orbeta et al. (2020) showed the correlation between early schooling and higher test scores at age 15. This was consistent with findings from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2023) reported that 94% of students in its member countries attended at least 1 year of pre-primary education, leading to better math outcomes in PISA 2022. In contrast, only 84% of Filipino students had similar access, highlighting the need to expand primary education in the Philippines.

The results of the 2019 SEA-PLM illustrate a compelling comparison of academic performance between Filipino fifth-graders with and without preschool experience. The data reveals a clear advantage for students who participated in early education programs (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Philippines SEA-PLM 2019 Results:
Mean Scores in Reading, Writing, and Math by Preschool Education

Attended Preschool (%)			Philippines	Average of Six Countries
			94.8%	**74%**
Average reading performance by preschool attendance		Attended preschool	289	302
		Did not attend preschool	279	294
		Score difference (attended – did not attend)	10	8.3
Average writing performance by preschool attendance		Attended preschool	289	302
		Did not attend preschool	277	293
		Score difference (attended – did not attend)	12.4	8.7
Average mathematics performance by preschool attendance		Attended preschool	289	302
		Did not attend preschool	279	294
		Score difference (attended – did not attend)	9.8	7.8

Abbreviation: SEA-PLM = Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics

"In the Philippines, 84% reported that they had attended pre-primary education for one year or more (OECD average: 94%). On average across OECD countries, students who had attended pre-primary education for one year or more scored higher in mathematics at the age of 15 than students who never attended or who had attended for less than one year, even after accounting for socio-economic factors."

—Excerpt from the PISA 2022 Results: Country Notes: Philippines

*"Raising quality of education and protecting health, **especially in the early years,** will equip the next generation with the skills they need to meet the demands of higher productivity and higher paying jobs. **Investing in the skills of this young population is essential** to fuel future growth and increase household incomes."*
—*Excerpt from the PISA 2022 Results: Country Notes: Philippines*

Across three critical areas—reading, writing, and math—children who attended preschool consistently achieved higher average scores in the 2019 SEA-PLM. This pattern was not just noticeable but also statistically significant (ranging from 9.8 to 12.4 score differences) and underscores the profound impact of early educational experiences. These findings offer strong support for the value of preschool education in the Philippines and show that early learning opportunities can play a crucial role in shaping a child's academic journey, thus potentially influencing their performance well into their primary school years. This evidence highlights the importance of making quality preschool education widely available as it appears to set a strong foundation for future academic success (SEA-PLM, 2021).

Furthermore, ECCD plays a crucial role in addressing the learning poverty in the Philippines. Nine out of 10 Filipino children cannot read proficiently, reflecting the depth of the country's educational challenges (World Bank, 2022). Filipino students lag by 6 years compared to learners in other countries in achieving academic milestones (Bautista & Aranas, 2023). These disparities emphasize the urgent need for sustained and holistic ECCD interventions to close the learning gap and improve educational outcomes.

As its first priority area, the Commission underscores the role of nutrition and feeding as the foundation of quality education. Positive learning outcomes require addressing the root causes of problems. Promoting good nutrition from the womb through early childhood would secure and enhance the well-being and future potential of millions of Filipino children. The first 2 years of life, often referred to as the "golden window," are particularly critical for providing infants and toddlers with nutritious, varied, and adequate food.

The Commission actively works to establish evidence-based policy targets in addressing chronic malnutrition and stunting. It also collaborates with stakeholders from various sectors to invest in and implement strategic ECCD approaches.

Although the Philippines has made strides in improving the well-being of Filipino children in recent years, millions of Filipino children remain chronically malnourished, facing challenges such as poor health, inadequate nutrition, and limited learning capacity. One in four Filipino children under 5 years old still experiences stunting. Furthermore, the country's annual decline in child mortality—2.5% on average—lags behind the 4% reduction seen among regional peers (World Bank, 2024).

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> *Research shows that early childhood investments particularly during sensitive periods of development can lead to optimum outcomes that far surpass what can be achieved through later interventions or recovery efforts (Walker et al., 2011).*

Socioeconomic disparities further exacerbate these challenges, limiting many children's access to essential ECCD services. These inequities hinder their ability to achieve optimal health, learning, and productivity outcomes. Addressing these disparities demands a comprehensive approach that integrates quality early childhood education, health, and nutrition programs.

With multiplier and latent effects, investing in ECCD programs on child health and early childhood education not only enhances individual outcomes; it is also becoming widely recognized as one of the best indicators for a country's human development (Ulep et al., 2024).

FIGURE 1
Early Years Investments Can Make a Big Difference
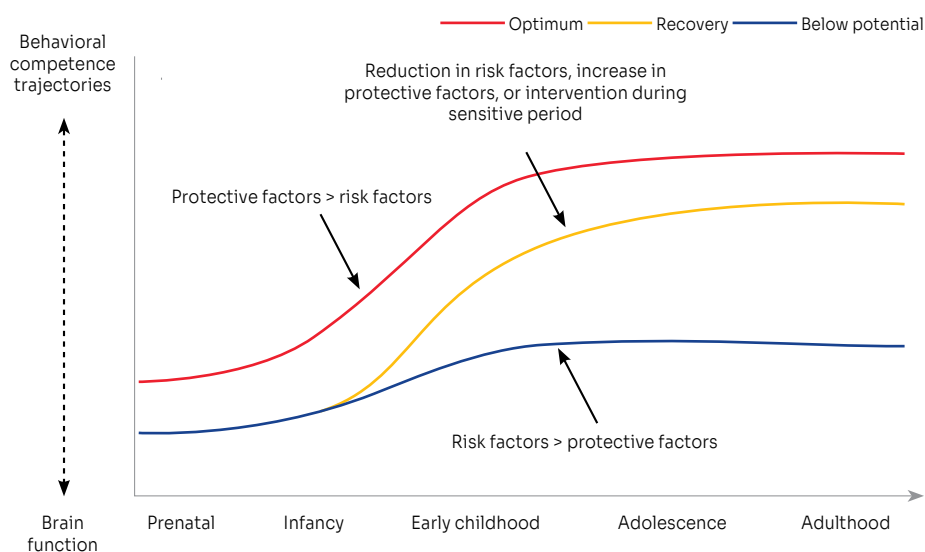
Source: World Bank Group, Philippines Economic Updates Development Dialogues, December 12, 2024, Cubao, Philippines

The timing of developmental interventions plays a crucial role in maximizing their impact on human potential as illustrated by the dramatic differences in behavioral competence trajectories from prenatal stages through adulthood (see Figure 1). Research shows that early childhood investments particularly during sensitive periods of development can lead to optimum outcomes that far surpass what can be achieved through later interventions or recovery efforts (Walker et al., 2011). This scientific understanding underscores why focusing resources and support during these critical early windows—from prenatal care through early childhood—yields the greatest returns for both individuals and society (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007; Hoddindott et al., 2008; Martorell et al., 2010; Stein et al., 2008).

Year One Updates

Priority Area 1: Nutrition and Feeding

A 2024 study by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) led by Dr. Valerie Gilbert T. Ulep, *Behind the Slow Start: An Assessment of Early Childhood Care and Development in the Philippines*, found that severe underinvestment in ECCD, weak institutions, and fragmented governance also hinder the implementation of ECCD programs.

EDCOM II partnered with IDinsight to publish a policy brief on undernutrition in early childhood. The brief provided a detailed analysis of the policy landscape and existing programs on health and nutrition in the country. To maximize its impact, it was shared with national government agencies and relevant stakeholders, leading to the Commission's coordination efforts with the National Nutrition Council (NNC) and the Department of Health (DOH).

Priority Area 2: Supply-Side Factors

Progress was made in addressing supply-side challenges. The ECCD Council secured a bigger budget in the General Appropriations Act (GAA), enabling the establishment of more child development centers (CDCs). Additionally, the DOH received a Php 300 million allocation in 2024 for a comprehensive nutrition intervention program targeting nutritionally-at-risk pregnant mothers and children below 5 years old in fifth- and sixth-class municipalities with stunting rates ≥15% in non-Food Stamps sites to complement the Philippine Multisectoral Nutrition Project.

The Year One findings showed the need to improve the pipeline of child development workers/teachers (CDW/Ts) and enhance the qualifications of the existing workforce. EDCOM II has been working with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to create support mechanisms for workforce professionalization to improve ECCD learning delivery. Key initiatives include

- Developing a course under TESDA and exploring how CDW/Ts can be best trained to address the gap in professionalization;
- Developing training regulations for a National Certificate (NC) III in ECCD with TESDA; and
- Exploring the establishment of an associate degree in ECE for CDTs in collaboration with the CHED Technical Panel for Teacher Education.

These developments identify the challenges and opportunities in ECE, presenting and validating the skills map of the workers in this field, and setting the training requirements for effective program delivery.

Priority Area 3: Demand-Side Factors

To better understand the demand-side factors to ECCD, particularly the widespread parental perception that children under 5 are too young for early education, EDCOM II commissioned a study undertaken by PIDS, and conducted a focus group discussion with parents in Tacloban City on August 13, 2024. Dialogues were also held with the City Social Welfare and Development Office to discuss good governance practices in ECCD,

along with challenges related to public awareness and information dissemination. These provided valuable ground-level insights on effectively addressing parental hesitation, and strengthening local government involvement in ECCD implementation.

Priority Area 4: Governance and Financing of ECCD

Amendments to the Early Years Act of 2013 are underway. Two priority bills were introduced through the legislative work of the EDCOM II:

1. **House Bill No. 10142:** An Act Strengthening the Early Childhood Care and Development System and Appropriating Funds Therefor (approved on Third Reading on March 18, 2024)
2. **Senate Bill No. 2575:** An Act Further Strengthening the Early Childhood Care and Development System, Repealing for the Purpose Republic Act No. 10410, Otherwise Known as the Early Years Act (EYA) of 2013, and Appropriating Funds Therefor (approved on Third Reading on December 16, 2024)

These bills propose provisions to

■ Professionalize CDWs and CDTs;
■ Assess and enhance competencies by reskilling, upskilling, awarding certifications, and providing scholarships for continuing education;
■ Develop equivalency mechanisms to recognize the work experience of incumbent CDWs and CDTs, enabling credit transfers across programs; and
■ Institutionalize scholarships for CDWs pursuing technical and vocational training or associate degrees, with a requirement of returning service to CDCs.

The Commission's key recommendations for governance and financing include

■ Expanding the ECCD Council Governing Board to include the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), TESDA, and CHED;
■ Strengthening local ECCD governance by establishing ECCD offices in each local government unit (LGU);
■ Institutionalizing plantilla items and standardized salary grades for CDTs and CDWs; and
■ Proposing equitable financing mechanisms through program convergence budgeting and allocations from the Local Government Support Fund (LGSF).

Significant strides were made for ECCD in Year Two in allocating funds for nutrition interventions targeting the poorest municipalities. EDCOM II's advocacy to increase the per capita cost of hot meals in the DSWD's Supplementary Feeding Program resulted in a budget adjustment from Php 15 to Php 22 in the 2025 National Expenditure Program. The Commission also successfully advocated for a substantial increase in the DOH's nutrition budget, from Php 234.5 million to Php 977 million, particularly for critical interventions during the first 1,000 days of life, as reflected in the approved 2025 GAA. However, the Commission emphasizes that malnutrition is caused by multiple factors requiring multisectoral solutions and cannot be solved by the health sector alone. Current funding from the national government and LGUs remains inadequate, failing to reach enough children to create significant impact.

LGU service packages and grants are shaped by local demands and needs. This underscores the need to strengthen the capacity and accountability of the local nutrition councils in prioritizing health and nutrition for the first 1,000 days of life.

EDCOM II identified persistent issues of fragmentation, lack of coordination, and shortsightedness in planning and implementing nutrition and feeding programs. Lack of data, insufficient and slow utilization of public funds, and dependency on a faulty commodity supply chain further hindered progress, particularly in micronutrient supplementation and management of wasting.

To address these gaps, EDCOM II facilitated multistakeholder consultations with national government agencies concerned, LGUs, and civil society organizations, aiming to improve data collection, coordination, and program delivery.

Year Two Overview

In the second year, EDCOM II continued its work on ECCD in the following areas:

- Under Priority Area 1, furthering efforts in early childhood nutrition by developing nutrition and maternal health models;
- Under Priority Area 2, examining issues relating to the materials and resources for early childhood education;
- Under Priority Area 3, understanding demand-side factors influencing ECCD;
- Under Priority Area 4, exploring further opportunities with the DILG in embedding ECCD indicators in local government policies and programs; and
- Under Priority Area 4, understanding LGU best practices, incentives and disincentives, and resource constraints.

Priority Area 1:
Nutrition and Feeding

Millions of Filipino children remain chronically malnourished, facing the challenges of poor health, inadequate nutrition, and limited learning capacity. Although the country has made significant strides in improving the well-being of children in recent years, one in four Filipino children under 5 years old are stunted, a condition that profoundly affects their potential and the nation's future.

FIGURE 2
Nutrition Data for Children Under the Age of 5

Children under 5 years old	
Low birth weight infants	**14.5** (2017, NDHS)
Stunted children under 5 years old	**26.7** (2021, ENNS)
Wasted children under 5 years old	**5.5** (2021, ENNS)
Overweight children under 5 years old	**3.9** (2021, ENNS)
Vitamin A-deficient children 6 months to 5 years old	**15.5** (2018–2019, NNS)
Subgroup on infants and young children	
Exclusively breastfed infants less than 6 months	**60.1** (2021, ENNS)
Children 6–23 months with minimum acceptable diet	**13.3** (2021, ENNS)
Children 6–23 months with minimum diet diversity	**13.8** (2021, ENNS)

Normal Height for Age
(WHO Growth Standards)

Normal
Normal weight
and height

Wasted
Thinner
than normal

Stunted
Shorter
than normal

Wasted & stunted
Thinner and Shorter
than normal

Abbreviations: ENNS = Expanded National Nutrition Survey, NDHS = National Demographic and Health Survey

Source: Adapted from the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrtion 2023-2028, National Nutrition Council; Adapted from the Malnutrition Chart, Trust for Malnutrition and Stunted Growth, 2023

ECCD represents more than a program—it's a commitment to shaping the future of society by investing in its youngest members. Providing children aged 0–4 with high-quality nutrition, health care, and education, especially during the first 1,000 days of life, not only ensures physical growth but also fosters cognitive development. This critical period lays the foundation for an individual's ability to thrive in society and achieve lifelong success. Equipping parents and caregivers with skills in nurturing care and positive parenting is equally important (UNICEF, 2017).

The Philippines's commitment to improving health and nutrition began in 1974 with Presidential Decree (PD) No. 491. This decree acknowledged the impact of malnutrition on children's mental and physical development and highlighted the strong link between education and nutrition, leading to the establishment of the NNC (see Figure 3). This was followed 2 years later by PD No. 996, which encourages timely vaccination against vaccine-preventable diseases. A decade later, in 1986, Executive Order (EO) No. 51, or the Philippine Milk Code, championed breastfeeding as a cornerstone of early nutrition. The passage of the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012 (RA 10354) was a pivotal moment, ensuring people's access to reproductive health information, facilities, and services. This was followed in 2018 by RA 11148, or the First 1,000 Days Law, which ensures comprehensive health and nutrition support for mothers and children during pregnancy through the child's first 2 years of life; and RA 11037, known as the Masustansyang Pagkain Para sa Batang Pilipino Act, which institutionalized a national feeding program in public day care centers, kindergartens, and elementary schools. Most recently, the Universal Health Care Act of 2019 (RA 11223) broadened health care access by making it affordable for all Filipinos.

FIGURE 3
History of ECCD Legislation in Health, Nutrition, and Early Learning

PD 491 creates the NNC

PD 603 establishes a nursery for children aged 6 and below

PD 996 encourages timely vaccination against common vaccine-preventable diseases

RA 6972 establishes a day care center in every barangay

EO 51 offers guidance on optimal breastfeeding practices during the first 6 months of life

RA 7160 devolution of functions and responsibilities to LGUs

1974   1976   1986   1990 1991

■ = *Health and nutrition-related legislation,* ■ = *Early learning-related legislation*

Nurseries for children aged 6 and below were established in 1974 with PD 603, or the Child and Youth Welfare Code, recognizing the importance of early learning. A significant development occurred in 1990 with RA 6972, or the Barangay-Level Total Development and Protection of Children Act, which mandated a day care center in every barangay, while the Local Government Code of 1991 (RA 7160) devolved key responsibilities to LGUs. The turn of the millennium saw RA 8980, or the ECCD Act of 2000, which led to the implementation of a national ECCD system. This was later bolstered by the Kindergarten Education Act of 2012 (RA 10157) that made pre-primary education at age 5 as a prerequisite for Grade 1—a groundbreaking move. The Early Years Act of 2013 (RA 10410) reorganized and strengthened the ECCD system to ensure that every child's developmental needs are met.

While these developments have progressed in parallel, there appears to be limited intersection between health and nutrition programs and early childhood education initiatives (see Figure 3). Policies crafted in silos have led to fragmented implementation, limiting their full potential. EDCOM II's key findings underscore the need for an integrated approach combining education, health, and nutrition to deliver more impactful outcomes for young Filipino children. Bridging this disconnect is a policy imperative, to ensure that every child has an equal shot at success.

In 2024, EDCOM II commissioned PIDS to conduct a comprehensive study to assess the ECCD system toward an integrated and evidence-based policy approach. The PIDS study by Ulep et al. (2024) highlighted three key principles for optimizing ECCD returns: (1) timely provision of crucial interventions during critical life stages; (2) comprehensive access to essential services; and (3) upholding quality standards for lasting impacts on health, nutrition, and education outcomes. The study identified these pillars as the bedrock of meaningful reform, promising a brighter future for the nation's youngest citizens.

RA 8980
creates a comprehensive policy and a National ECCD System

RA 10354
ensures access to reproductive health information, facilities, and services

RA 10157
institutionalizes pre-primary education at age 5 as a prerequisite to entry to Grade 1

RA 10410
reorganizes and strengthens the ECCD system

RA 11148
safeguards mother-child health in the first 1,000 days

RA 11037
institutionalizes a National Feeding Program in public day care centers, kindergartens, and elementary schools

RA 11223
provides accessible, affordable, and comprehensive health care services to all Filipinos

2000   2012 2013   2018 2019

Abbreviations: EO = Executive Order, PD = Presidential Decree, RA = Republic Act

Source: Authors' illustration of the policies based on various legislations

Child survival has improved in the Philippines over the past 50 years through nutrition-sensitive interventions, but high chronic malnutrition continues to hound the overall development of young children in the Philippines despite various nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions[1] being implemented in the country (Ulep et al., 2024). Meanwhile, improvements in health outcomes of children are also thwarted by undernutrition and issues relating to maternal health, where 14% of women of reproductive age are underweight, a figure that increases to 20% among poor adolescents (Ulep et al., 2024). These challenges ripple across generations, underscoring the need for decisive action.

The prevalence of stunting in the Philippines remained persistently high from 2000 to 2020, with 26.7% of children under 5 affected as of 2021. This despite significant improvements in countries like Peru, Bangladesh, and Vietnam (Ulep et al., 2024).

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1 Nutrition-specific programs are those that were planned and designed to produce nutritional outcomes. Complementing these nutrition-specific interventions are nutrition-sensitive programs, which are development programs and projects that will be tweaked to produce nutritional outcomes based on the National Nutrition Council (NNC) definition.

FIGURE 4
Scale of Poor Health and Nutrition

Stunting prevalence, Philippines with comparator countries (2000–2020)
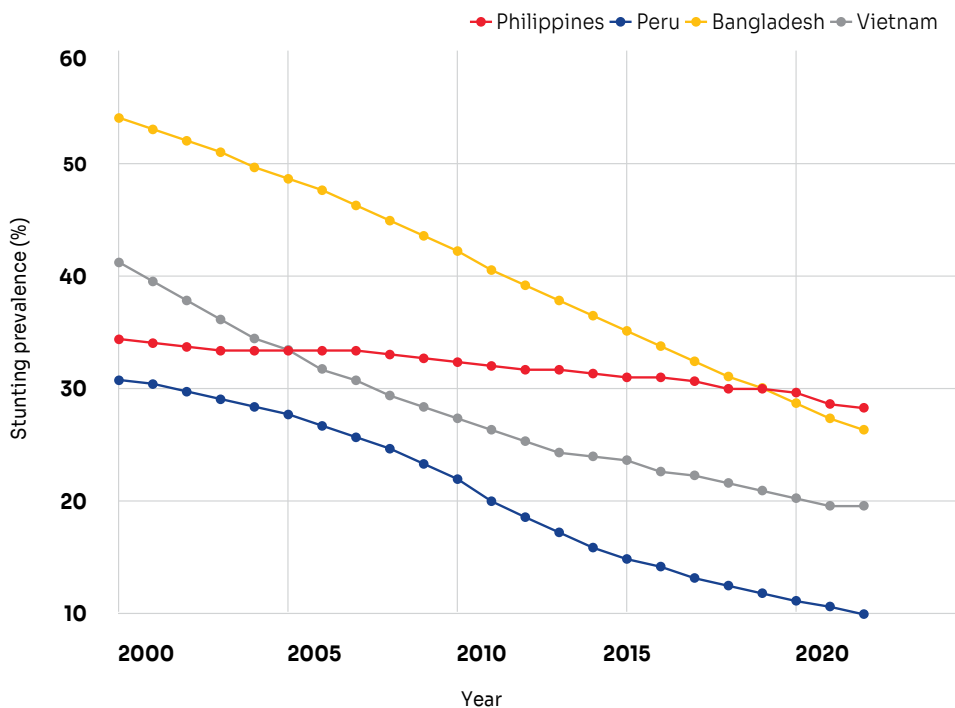
Source: Ulep et al., 2024 analysis and visualization of the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2024)

Annual growth of stunting rates and annual growth of GDP per capita, Philippines and comparator countries (2000–2015)
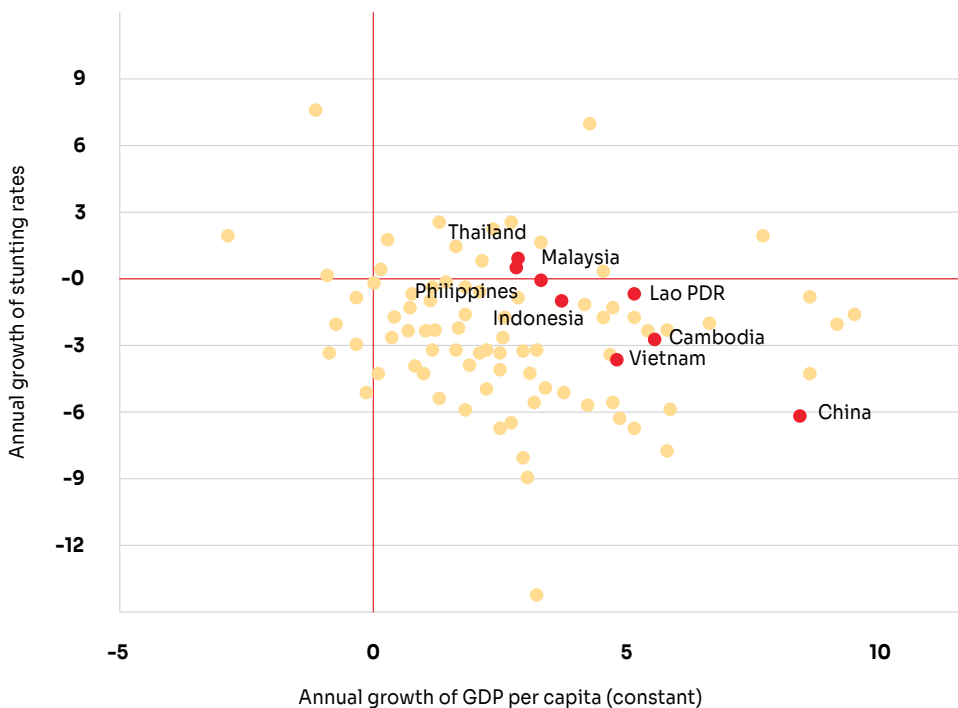
Source: Raw data from the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2018) and the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2018)

The PIDS study notes that this high prevalence carries an economic cost of Php 174.4 billion annually. Despite decades of economic growth, progress in reducing stunting has been alarmingly slow, with only a 1% annual decline compared to 5%–6% in neighboring countries. Socioeconomic disparities paint a starker picture: Forty-two percent of children from the lowest wealth quintile are stunted. This contrasts sharply with 11% in the highest quintile. This disparity becomes pronounced after 5 months of age and accelerates until 24 months. This finding highlights the urgent need for interventions that target the most vulnerable during the first 1,000 days of life.

However, regional variations further complicate the picture, with some areas showing increased stunting rates despite overall economic advancement. This paradoxical relationship between economic growth and persistent malnutrition underscores the need for targeted and multifaceted interventions that address socioeconomic inequalities and focus on the crucial early years of child development to effectively combat stunting in the Philippines (Ulep et al., 2024).

Issue 1: Only 25% of Filipino children meet the recommended energy intake (REI), indicating challenges in meeting nutritional needs, particularly for 6- to 12-month-old infants from poor households.

The nutritional status of Filipino children presents a pressing concern, with only a quarter meeting the REI. Ulep et al. (2024) reveal that this challenge is particularly acute among children aged 6–12 months in low-income households, where merely 24.8% achieve the recommended intake. The minimum acceptable diet, an alternative metric that considers both food quality and quantity, paints an equally concerning picture: Only 12% of children aged 6–23 months met this criteria in 2019. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted nutritional interventions, especially for vulnerable populations, to address the persistent challenge of malnutrition and its long-term implications for child development and national progress.

FIGURE 5

Share of Children Meeting Energy Intake of Children Under 5 from the Top 20% and Bottom 20% Wealth Quintiles, by Age, in 2018–2019
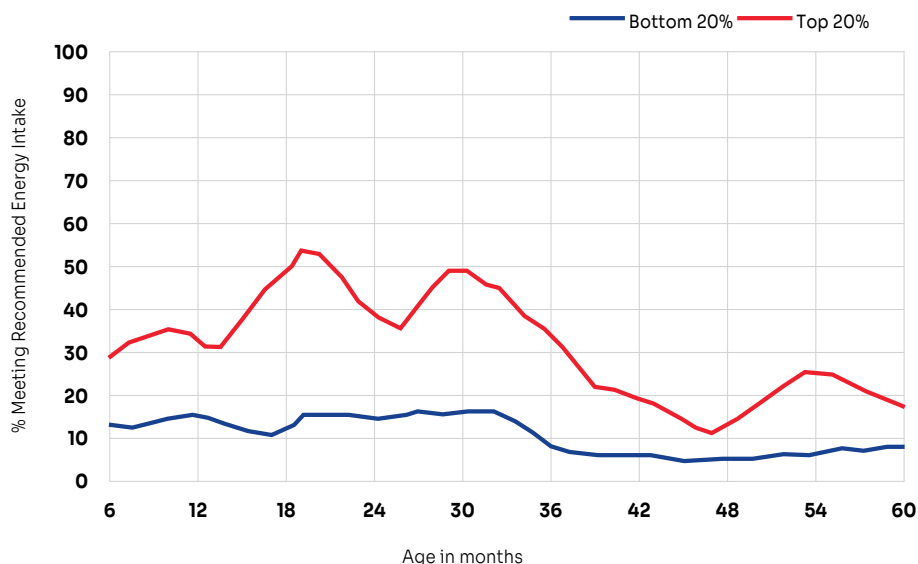
Source: Ulep et al., 2024 analysis and visualization of pooled 2018–2019 Expanded National Nutrition Survey (DOST-FNRI, 2019)

Calculations using the Philippine Dietary Reference Intakes reveal that underweight Filipino children aged 3 to 5 consume around 20% less protein, 40% less total fat, and 35% less carbohydrates than the recommended intake levels for both males and females.

While children under 5 from wealthy households tend to have a higher energy and macronutrient intake compared to the bottom 20% wealth quintile, only around 30% of those aged 6–12 meet the recommended levels (see Figure 6). This highlights how cost is not the only impediment to early childhood nutrition.

Calculations using the Philippine Dietary Reference Intakes reveal that underweight Filipino children aged 3 to 5 consume around 20% less protein, 40% less total fat, and 35% less carbohydrates than the recommended intake levels for both males and females. The results of the study by Ulep et al. (2024) also reveal that macronutrient distribution indicates a diet heavily reliant on carbohydrates, with an average intake of 230 grams, followed by protein (45 grams) and fat (25 grams) (see Figure 6).

Stark socioeconomic disparities are evident in protein consumption, with children from the bottom 40% quintile consuming significantly less protein—a critical nutrient for growth and stunting prevention—compared to their affluent peers. These findings underscore the urgent need for family and community awareness of macronutrients required in order to stimulate the optimal growth and development of children in the early years of life.

FIGURE 6
Macronutrient Intake Across Wealth Quintiles
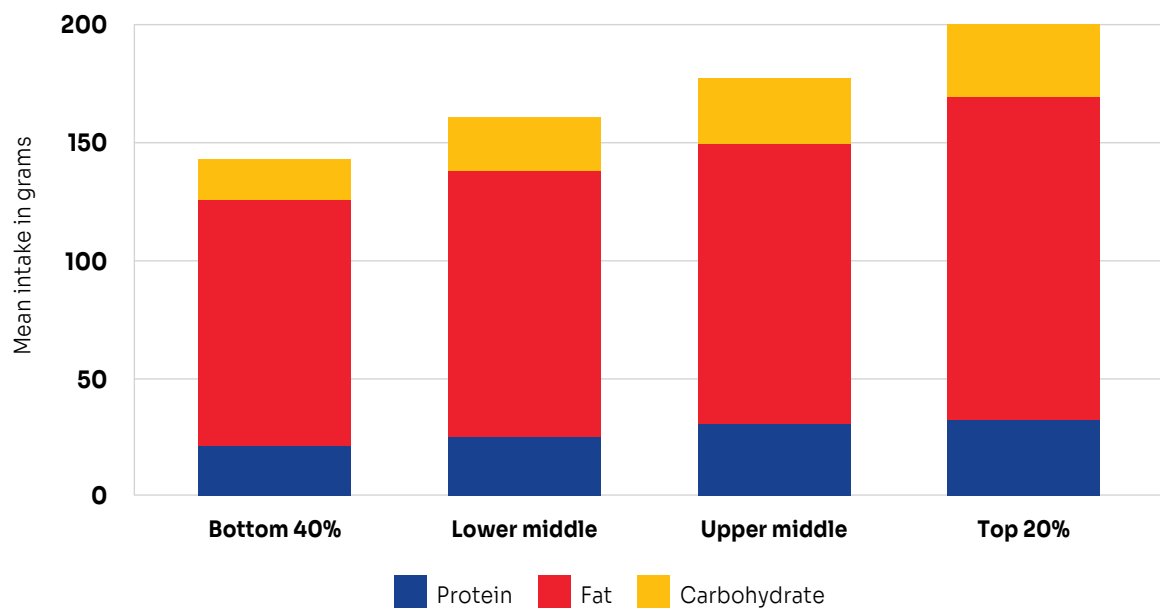
Source: Ulep et al., 2024

There have been efforts to increase the nutritional intake of Filipino children through government feeding programs. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Supplementary Feeding Program (SFP) has evolved significantly since its inception in 2009 with the Healthy Start Feeding Program (see Figure 7). Initially targeting the poorest provinces, the program gained momentum in 2011 through funding in the GAA. It was further institutionalized in 2018 through RA 11037.

The program has since expanded to include milk feeding for identified undernourished children in its attempt to demonstrate a more targeted approach to addressing malnutrition. DSWD plans to further raise the per capita budget for both hot meals and milk by 2025 in its continued commitment to enhance the program's effectiveness.

FIGURE 7
Brief History of Supplementary Feeding Program
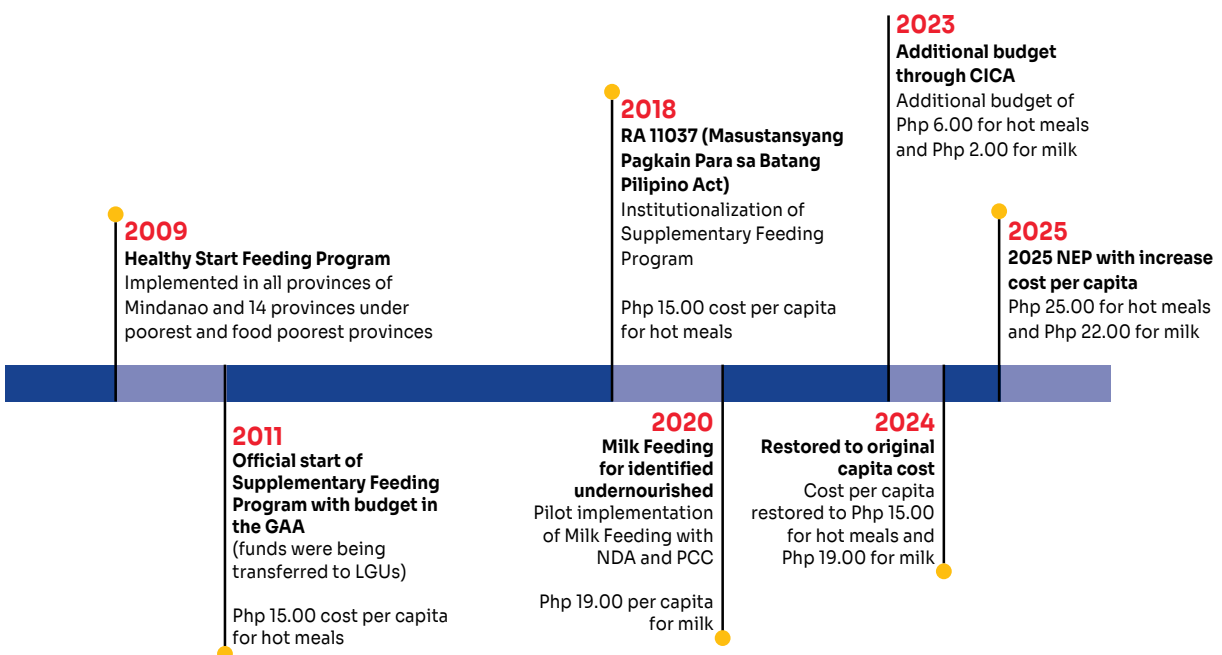
Abbreviations: CICA = Congress-Initiated Changes/Adjustments, DSWD = Department of Social Welfare and Development, GAA = General Appropriations Act, LGUs = local government units, NDA = National Dairy Authority, NEP = National Expenditure Program, PCC = Philippine Carabao Center

Despite these advancements, participation remains low: Data from the 2022 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey revealed that only 23% of children benefited from any government feeding program. From an equity perspective, only 28% of poor children in need of feeding support have received assistance, while a considerable proportion of beneficiaries were found to belong to the wealthiest quintile (Ulep et al., 2024). This low percentage of poor children benefiting from the SFP, also reflected in the administrative data of the DSWD (which is lower than estimates from national surveys), signals gaps in program targeting and outreach.

The PIDS study on ECCD found that the national SFP implemented by the DSWD falls short of addressing malnutrition effectively, with limited impact on meeting the REI of Filipino children (Ulep et al., 2024). Data show that the DSWD struggles to meet its legal mandate of providing at least one fortified meal to undernourished children aged 3–4 in day care centers for 120 days in a year. Participation rates remain alarmingly low, from less than 10% to less than 30% across regions (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 8

Percentage of Children Aged 3–4 Years Old Participating in the Supplementary Feeding Program, Philippine Regions, 2022–2023
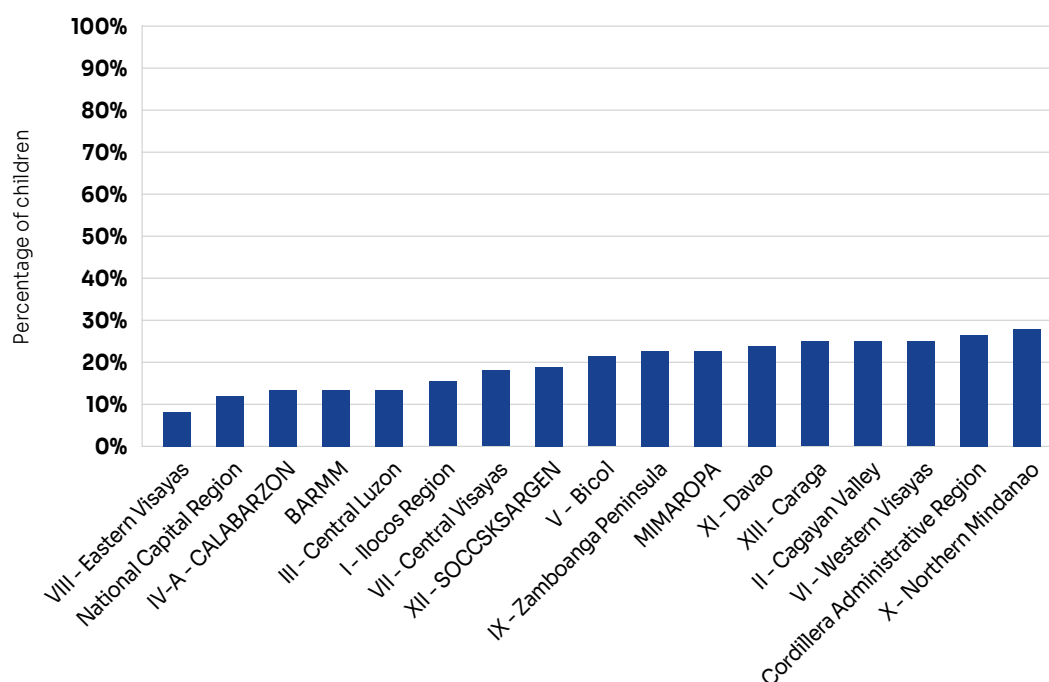
Source: Ulep et al. (2024) compilation and visualization of 2023 DSWD program data

Recommendations

The government must (a) strengthen targeting mechanisms for high–risk children, (b) ensure integrated delivery of services across agencies, and (c) conduct rigorous monitoring and evaluation to assess outcomes. Numerous assessments through EDCOM II's commissioned research continue to show that supplemental feeding programs, a common nutrition-specific intervention among national government agencies, are insufficient and fall short of providing universal access for children aged 3–4 to ECCD services (Ulep et al., 2024). The situation is particularly critical for children aged 6–12 months from poor households, where only a quarter meet the REI. To address chronic malnutrition effectively, feeding programs require better targeting, rigorous monitoring, and a revised set of performance indicators to improve their impact. These should measure both immediate impact (such as nutritional status improvements) and long-term outcomes (such as reduced stunting rates) to ensure sustainable program effectiveness. Relevant agencies must identify and prioritize high-risk children, ensure consistent program delivery and quality standards, track nutrition outcomes beyond attendance and participation metrics, and establish clear mechanisms for program adjustment based on measured results.

As advocated by EDCOM II in the 2024 and 2025 DOH and DSWD budget deliberations, agencies should strengthen the complementary feeding program with age-appropriate fortified food supplements; enhance nutrition counseling for parents and caregivers on proper infant feeding practices; provide sustained food assistance to poor households with infants; and ensure regular growth monitoring to identify and address nutritional deficiencies early and significantly improve the REI among vulnerable infants. These interventions should be integrated into existing health and social protection programs to ensure sustainability and maximize resource utilization.

EDCOM II has found that the allocated DSWD budget is sometimes insufficient to cover all enrolled children in CDCs and supervised neighborhood play (SNP) areas of the LGU. The DSWD's budget has also not kept pace with inflation and rising cost of nutrition.

Issue 2: Government feeding programs have limited impact and need rigorous monitoring and evaluation to ensure efficacy.

Budgeting and liquidation challenges impede the efficacy of the DSWD SFP.
Insufficient funding and outdated per capita allocations hinder the ability of the agency to provide nutritionally balanced meals. EDCOM II has found that the allocated DSWD budget is sometimes insufficient to cover all enrolled children in CDCs and supervised neighborhood play (SNP) areas of the LGU. The DSWD's budget has also not kept pace with inflation and rising cost of nutrition. Consequently, based on consultations done by EDCOM II, a number of these CDCs and SNP areas forgo implementing the SFP altogether. Further, per capita funding has not increased since 2011, limiting the ability of the agency to provide nutritionally balanced meals. The Commission also found that several LGUs failed to utilize allocated funds due to the tedious liquidation process. This created a backlog of unliquidated funds, and left some CDCs and SNPs unable to implement the SFP.

In a meeting with EDCOM II held on May 13, 2024, DSWD secretary Rex Gatchalian disclosed that the current budget cost per hot meal was only Php 15—a rate unchanged since 2011. The DSWD SFP team lamented that this budget could support subsidizing hot meals for only 60 days annually, far short of the requirement to combat malnutrition in the country. In this meeting, the DSWD proposed increasing the budget per hot meal to Php 27 based on the Department of Science and Technology-Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-FNRI) computation, and expanding the number of feeding days to 180 days annually.

RA 11037 mandates milk consumption in feeding programs. However, the DSWD reported to EDCOM II that there is only limited fresh milk availability from the National Dairy Authority and the Philippine Carabao Center, especially in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. There is also a lack of cold storage facilities for fresh milk during transport and in LGUs and CDCs. This leads to unnecessary spoilage and wastage.

TABLE 2
DSWD Supplementary Feeding Program Budget, 2019–2023

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Budget	3,341,245,000	3,350,722,289	3,380,416,000	4,161,542,000	4,980,161,000
Utilization	84.85%	95.45%	97.96%	96.27%	98.04%
Beneficiaries (Children Enrolled in the CDCs and SNP Areas)	1,881,979	1,881,979	1,937,378	1,936,868	1,754,637
Per Capita Cost	Php 15 for one hot meal	Php 15 for one hot meal; Php 19 for fresh milk	Php 15 for one hot meal; Php 19 for fresh milk	Php 15 for one hot meal; Php 19 for fresh milk	Php 15 for one hot meal; Php 19 for fresh milk Additional Php 6 for hot meal and Php 2 for fresh milk through Congressional insertion

Abbreviations: CDCs = child development centers, SNP = supervised neighborhood play

Limited access to feeding programs stems largely from gaps in distribution networks and insufficient community infrastructure. The scarcity of day care centers and neighborhood play spaces significantly reduces the reach of DSWD's nutrition initiatives, as these facilities typically serve as crucial hubs for implementing feeding programs. Without these established gathering points, many vulnerable children miss out on vital nutritional support that could enhance their health and development

School–based feeding programs are beset by implementation challenges and poor monitoring and evaluation of outcomes. The School-Based Feeding Program currently provides one meal daily to over 2.1 million undernourished Kindergarten up to Grade 6 students, helping alleviate their hunger and enabling them to better participate in their classes. While the feeding program may offer immediate benefits such as temporary alleviation of hunger, delays in food delivery particularly for milk (according to DepEd's response), quality issues, and inadequate caloric content undermine effectiveness.

Even if the program's obligation rates are high, the Commission on Audit has flagged the Department of Education (DepEd) "over its feeding program in 2023 after it discovered delays in the delivery, or at times, the nondelivery, of nutribun and milk intended for students in three regions" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 3, 2024). According to the DepEd, this was the case for 26 out of 218 School Division Offices only, but that the agency responses have since been accepted by the COA.

As a result, school-based feeding programs fail to tackle the underlying nutritional issue of stunting. Further research is needed to understand the program's effects on nutrition and education outcomes. While RA 11037 mandates DepEd to serve one fortified meal for at least 120 school days, current implementation falls short: DepEd has set the minimum average caloric content for food commodities at only 350 calories per week. Although the implementing rules and regulations of RA 11037 requires each fortified meal to provide at least one-third of the daily requirement based on the Philippine Dietary Reference Intakes (see Table 3), the current DepEd policy is only meeting approximately 10%-16% of the recommended weekly caloric intake that schools should be providing for K–6 learners aged 5–12.

According to DepEd, the quality of meals provided will be improved to be appropriate to the needs of school-age children given the increase in the budget for food costs: previously the program was only provided Php 16 per meal in 2019. This was increased to Php 18 per meal from 2020 to 2023, and is now at Php 22.

TABLE 3
Recommended Energy Intake per Day from the Philippine Dietary Reference Intakes

Age Group	Weight (kg)		Energy (kcal)	
	M	F	M	F
3-5	17.5	17.0	1,350	1,260
6-9	23.0	22.5	1,600	1,470
10-12	33.0	36.0	2,060	1,980

Preliminary analysis using the REI also shows no difference in terms of meeting total energy and protein intake between children who participated in supplementary feeding programs compared to those who did not (Ulep et al., 2024). Significant resources are allocated to school feeding but are unable to address systemic issues and only underscore the institutional challenges in the delivery of comprehensive and holistic provision of health and nutrition services. Despite these findings, funding for school-based feeding programs has continued to increase, with a recent surge from Php 5.6 billion in 2023 to Php 11.7 billion in 2024.

"Some of the food items were also found to be unfit for consumption due to molds, pests, or because these were past their expiration date."
—"COA flags P5.6-B DepEd feeding program in 2023," Philippine Daily Inquirer, September 3, 2024

Recommendations

Government agencies must align and coordinate their efforts to deliver comprehensive nutrition programs that effectively reach vulnerable children under 5 through synchronized health, education, and social services. Through extensive multiagency consultations and workshops, EDCOM II has strengthened coordination initiatives among key nutrition stakeholders such as the DOH, the NNC, and the DSWD. These efforts culminated in a presidential directive from a sectoral meeting held last December 3, 2024, to address program overlaps and gaps, improving how nutrition interventions target the country's youngest learners.

Given the alarming rates of stunting and wasting among Filipino children under 5 years old, strong multisectoral coordination ensures that critical interventions—from maternal nutrition counseling by health workers to supplementary feeding in schools to sustainable food security programs in communities—reach the most vulnerable families at the right time. Different agencies must synchronize their efforts because a child's nutritional status is affected by multiple factors that no single department can address alone, such as access to clean water, proper sanitation, primary health care, and diverse, nutritious food sources. Joint planning and implementation among agencies is also vital to stretch the government's limited nutrition budget and prevent situations where some municipalities receive overlapping programs while other high-need areas get left behind. Effective addressing of child malnutrition requires strengthened multisectoral coordination among government agencies to ensure synchronized delivery of targeted interventions for vulnerable children in the early years.

Issue 3: Limited accountability measures prevent the NNC from effectively executing its legal mandate to coordinate multiagency ECCD initiatives.

EDCOM II finds that the lack of coordination among key agencies—the DOH, the DSWD, and DepEd—continue to hamper the delivery of nutrition programs. At the heart of the issue is the NNC, tasked by law to provide leadership in nutrition governance and policy coordination.

RA 11148, or the First 1,000 Days Law, seeks to institutionalize the convergence and scale-up of programs from different sectors around the critical first 1,000 days of life; it also focuses on strengthening the implementation and enforcement of the existing nutrition-related laws and policies. RA 11148 specifically mandates NNC to act as the focal point for developing and integrating nutrition policies, monitoring programs across public and private sectors, and managing joint planning and budgeting of nutrition initiatives among member agencies.

Since its establishment in 1974, the NNC has been facing significant challenges in fulfilling its mandated responsibilities, especially in providing comprehensive nutrition governance and policy coordination across various sectors as outlined in various laws, including RA 11148 (First 1,000 Days Law), RA 11037 (Masustansyang Pagkain Para sa Batang Pilipino Act), PD 491, and EO 234. Consultations with EDCOM II have revealed that the NNC has struggled to effectively coordinate nutrition plans and budgets across various government agencies. In addition, it notably lacks comprehensive systems to monitor and evaluate nutrition programs effectively.

In an EDCOM II hearing on nutrition on July 4, 2024, when asked if they had data readily available on the services for nutrition offered across LGUs, the NNC reported that they had yet to request this information from their regional offices. These gaps in monitoring hinder the ability of the NNC to assess the impact of interventions and make data-driven decisions for program improvements and resource coordination. This has resulted in fragmented approaches to nutrition interventions and inefficient use of resources.

The NNC's role in shaping nutrition policy has been less prominent than mandated, resulting in missed opportunities to address emerging nutritional challenges through evidence-based legislation and programs. Limited scope and reach in information awareness campaigns have led to missed opportunities in public knowledge about proper nutrition and its importance for national development. Despite these challenges of being unable to fulfill many of their responsibilities, the NNC has initiated program delivery activities, most notably the Tutok Kainan Supplementation Program.

Tutok Kainan was launched in 2020 as a response to the persistently high rates of stunting and wasting among Filipino children. The program aims to provide intensive nutrition interventions for the first 1,000 days of life, covering pregnant women and children up to 2 years old. The program's coverage has gradually expanded, starting with pilot areas in selected provinces and municipalities. As of 2023, Tutok Kainan has only reached approximately 30% of its target beneficiaries nationwide, with plans for further expansion.

"Since addressing undernutrition is multisectoral in nature, agencies should work together closely and communicate often. Their responsibilities should be clear so accountabilities will be delineated. Walang turuan kung sino ang dapat may hawak ng ano."
—Sen. Win Gatchalian

"More often than not, when it comes to health, there is really a gap between the national and local. The battleground is not in your [NNC] office, it is in the LGUs."
—Sen. Win Gatchalian

TABLE 4
NNC Tutok Kainan Budget, 2020–2023 GAA

Year	No. of Beneficiaries	Allotment (Php)	Obligated (Php)	Obligation Rate	Disbursement (Php)	Disbursement Rate
GAA 2020 (Phase 1)	24,311 pregnant women	139,042,383.00	125,392,191.96	90.2%	93,725,909.58	74.7%
DOH–CFP 2021 (Phase 2)	10,646 children 6–23 months	62,000,000.00	58,108,098.05	93.7%	55,339,748.26	95.24%
DOH–CFP 2022 (Phase 3)	13,113 children 6–23 months	100,000,000.00	52,892,462.00	52.9%	33,375,233.75	55.13%
GAA 2021 (Phase 4)	15,510 children 6–23 months	110,000,000.00	62,212,901.87	56.6%	40,328,914.06	55.85%
GAA 2022 (Phase 5)	20,892 pregnant women	116,000,000.00	2,231,993.70	1.9%	334,799.05	13.8%
CONAP 2022	-	113,968,100.00	6,830,305.50	6.0%	-	-
GAA 2023 (Phase 6)	10,426 pregnant women	75,429,140.00	13,832,802.00	18.3%	-	-

Abbreviations: CFP = certified family physician, CONAP = Continuing Appropriations, DOH = Department of Health, GAA = General Appropriations Act, NNC = National Nutrition Council

Although LGUs are mandated to develop their local nutrition action plans as mandated in Section 17 of the 1991 Local Government Code, it was assessed that the NNC currently lacks sufficient capacity to effectively monitor the implementation of these plans. This may be attributed to the limited staffing of the NNC, with only 93 personnel out of 126 authorized positions across the country according to the FY 2024 DBM Staffing Summary, as well as the lack of oversight mechanisms between the NNC and the LGUs. Consequently, the lack of data monitoring of the status of the local implementation of these nutrition-related programs has become a barrier to evaluating the effectiveness of these local plans. The Commission also pointed out the confusion among LGUs as to the roles of the NNC and local health offices, which leads to challenges in tracking progress and comparing outcomes across different regions and interventions.

Another area of concern in nutrition and feeding programs is the lack of consistency in measurement tools used to weigh children, such as bathroom scales, beam balances, and suspended weighing scales. This variability can affect the accuracy of data on child growth and development.

Recommendations

Effective ECCD governance requires strengthening the NNC's operational capacity and authority alongside establishing clear interagency coordination mechanisms at both national and local levels. Due to the NNC's inability to track and evaluate program implementation at the local level, where the actual work happens, EDCOM II reiterates its recommendation to strengthen the NNC's operational capacity and authority through filling the 40 vacant positions, with priority for monitoring and evaluation roles. The NNC must prioritize the rollout of the National Nutrition Information System, which requires quarterly reporting from all LGUs on local nutrition program implementation and creates a central dashboard accessible to all implementing agencies such as the DOH, the DSWD, and DepEd. The NNC should also mandate the standardization of measurement tools in local nutrition action plans by including equipment standards and regular calibration schedules.

EDCOM II has initiated the development of a joint memorandum circular to address critical governance challenges in ECCD. The circular brings together nine key agencies: the DOH, the NNC, the DSWD, the DILG, the DBM, DepEd, the DA, the ECCD Council, and NEDA. Through this circular, these agencies will

- Define clear roles and responsibilities in ECCD governance while setting up formal coordination mechanisms at both national and local levels;
- Create formal coordination mechanisms for streamlined communication and collaboration;
- Develop robust reporting and accountability structures to drive effective program implementation; and
- Aim to harmonize efforts and improve overall coordination among these agencies.

"It has been very difficult to work on this. We have also been working with many groups to address hunger and malnutrition. . . and the Early Years have been the toughest because we didn't know who could we really work with in government. We talked to NNC and they said they get budgets, but they don't have the means of delivery, and then we talked to the DOH people, and the DOH people said hindi klaro sa kanila that feeding is their mandate. . . **For the Early Years, it has fallen through the cracks***."*
—Fr. Ben Nebres

Priority Area 2:
Supply-Side Factors

Issue 1: Poor accreditation and uneven distribution of quality ECE resources across LGUs hinder ECCD delivery in the Philippines.

In addressing the supply-side factors affecting ECCD in the Philippines, and in light of varying LGU capacities, it is crucial to consider innovative approaches that can expand access and improve quality. One promising strategy is integrating ECE into emerging distance education platforms.

Recognizing the connectivity challenges in many areas of the Philippines, a multimodal approach to content delivery is essential. Support materials and learning resources for both parents and children can be disseminated through various channels, including video broadcasts, radio programs, social media platforms, mobile applications, and offline tools such as USB drives and SD cards. This diversified strategy bridges the digital divide and ensures that even communities with limited internet access benefit from these educational initiatives.

ECE begins at home, and access to reading materials plays a crucial role in a child's development. Research has consistently shown that the presence of books in the home environment significantly impacts a child's educational trajectory (Evans et al., 2010). A comprehensive study (Manu et al., 2018) spanning 35 nations revealed a striking finding: The mere presence of a single children's book in a household nearly doubled the likelihood of a child achieving grade-level literacy and numeracy skills. This held true even when accounting for factors such as maternal education, family wealth, and area of residence.

It is worth noting that oral language development precedes formal schooling, and this emphasizes the need for early intervention and support (Reed & Lee, 2020). The long-term effects of home literacy environments are equally compelling. Children raised in homes with abundant reading materials tend to remain in formal education for approximately 3 additional years compared to their peers from households lacking books (Evans et al., 2010).

Quality multimedia resources also play a pivotal role in ECCD. The World Bank shared a longitudinal research demonstrating the efficacy of high-quality educational content delivered through television in fostering both cognitive development and socioemotional skills in young learners. Nevertheless, Ulep et al. (2024) reveal that only around 50% of children 0–36 months frequently read and watch educational media with their caregivers (see Figure 9).

FIGURE 9

Percentage of Children by Age in Months and Wealth Quintile* Who Frequently Read and Watch Educational Media with Their Caregivers, 2019

Reading

Top 20% — Bottom 40%

Watching
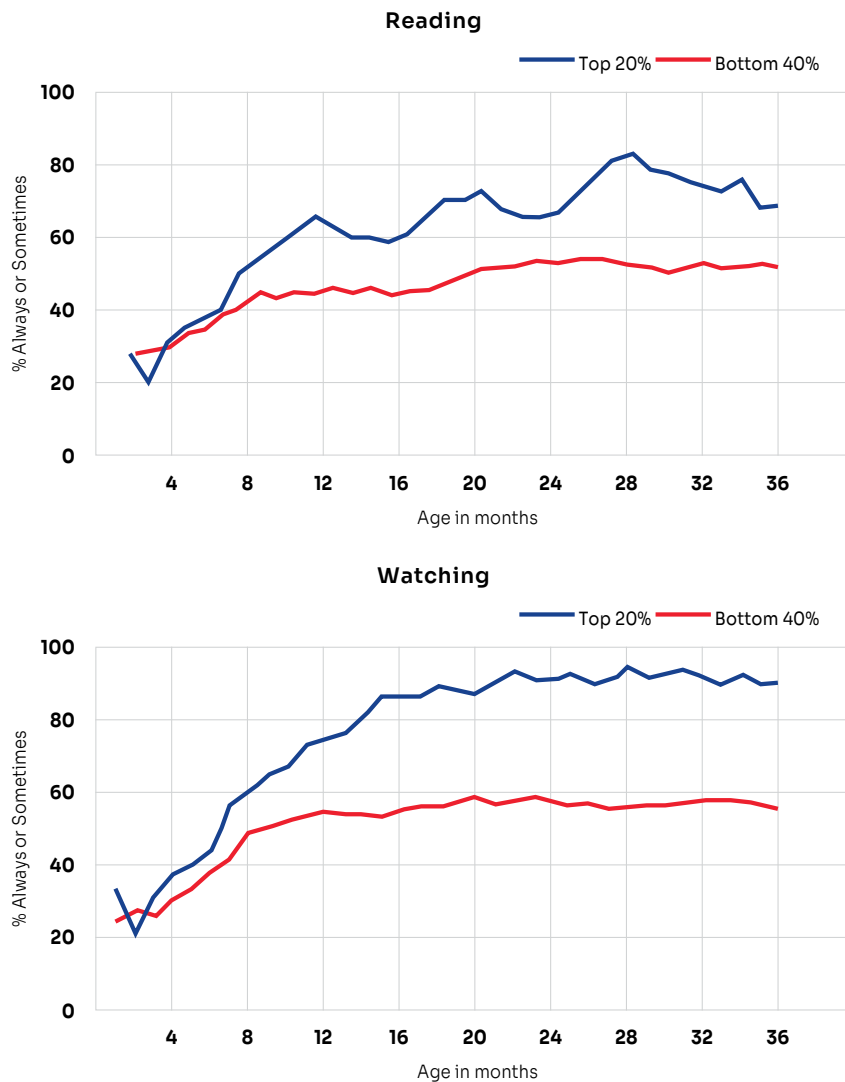
Top 20% — Bottom 40%

Top 20% and bottom 40% Source: Ulep et al. (2024)analysis and visualization of pooled 2019 Expanded Nutrition Survey (DOST–FNRI, 2019)

In the context of Philippine early childhood education centers, these insights highlight the critical need to assess and enhance the accessibility and quality of educational materials and resources in early learning centers. This assessment must take into account the varying resource capacities of LGUs to ensure equitable access for all children regardless of their socioeconomic background or geographic location.

Recommendations

The Philippine government should invest in culturally relevant educational multimedia programming as a scalable and cost-effective strategy to expand access to quality early childhood education particularly in underserved areas. During the EDCOM II ECCD Symposium held on October 23, 2023, the World Bank posited that high-quality television programs that blend education with entertainment have emerged as powerful tools for child development. Studies demonstrated that when children watch well-crafted educational shows, they gain valuable thinking skills and learn better ways to handle emotions and social situations (Calvert & Kotler, 2003; Close, 2004; Huston et al., 2001; Huston et al., 2007; Mares & Woodard, 2001).

While creating these programs requires significant upfront resources, their ability to reach and engage a larger number of children makes them cost-effective in the long run. Many regions have found success by carefully adapting established shows to fit their cultural context, rather than starting from scratch. This approach allows communities to provide enriching content that both children and their parents can enjoy and learn from together. This medium presents a unique opportunity to supplement traditional ECE methods, especially in areas where access to physical learning materials or trained educators may be limited.

The Impact of Quality Media Resources
Through the Knowledge Channel Foundation, Inc.
In the Philippines, the Knowledge Channel Foundation, Inc. (KCFI) is a nonstock, nonprofit organization that aims to improve teaching and learning in the country through developing relevant and engaging video lessons for Filipino children. To date, they have produced and acquired more than 3,500 video lessons for ECCD, K to 12, the Alternative Learning System, as well as for Filipino parents. In addition, they have provided access to more than 13,000 CDCs and public schools. The UP Statistical Research Foundation (2008) study reveals that videos developed by KCFI increased National Achievement Test scores by at least 2%, improved student attendance, and reduced dropout rates. The LaSallian Institute for Development and Educational Research (2015) study also shows that schools using KCFI media resources enhance teacher training performance by up to 75%, and schools using these media resources outperformed nonusers by up to 45%.

Issue 2: The insufficient number of CDWs with recognized accreditation credentials remains a pressing concern.

A shortage of accredited CDWs is a critical challenge in achieving universal access to ECCD services in the Philippines. Current estimates reveal a need for approximately 240,000 additional workers to achieve universal access to ECCD (Ulep et al., 2024). However, compensation and qualifications for these workers vary widely, highlighting the need for legislative support to standardize these aspects.

The ECCD Council 2022 Annual Report indicates that only 6,788 CDWs possess valid accreditation. Compounding this issue is the absence of professional certification, leaving many CDWs without industry-recognized credentials.

Most studies show that there is a significant positive relationship between teachers' qualifications and the quality of ECCD. A meta analysis of 48 studies reveals that the qualification of teachers positively correlates with quality early learning environment (Manning et al., 2017). This highlights the need for a policy on the required qualifications for CDWs, both incumbent and incoming, to raise the quality of foundational learning in the early years.

Throughout Year Two, EDCOM II has been working closely with TESDA and various industry stakeholders to open up pathways for CDW/Ts for educational and career growth. The process of developing standardized training regulations is rigorous and long, and continued engagement and participation is imperative to keep up this legwork.

> *"The supply issue is even worse in population-dense cities than in low-income municipalities."*
> —PIDS, 2024

In April 2024, EDCOM II conducted a skills mapping exercise, bringing together policymakers, local governments, development partners, and field implementers to design training regulations (TRs) for upskilling CDWs. A Technical Working Group has been created under TESDA and other ECCD stakeholders, to ensure that TRs align with TESDA's existing processes and are responsive to sector needs while anticipating provisions in pending legislation. As stated in Special Provision No. 10 of the 2024 GAA, "The TESDA shall prioritize the development of a training regulation for a qualification in Early Childhood Care and Development for the existing and incoming CDWs, in coordination with the Early Childhood Care and Development Council." These activities also followed the request of EDCOM II to convene a meeting with TESDA for the development of TRs for CDWs. The TESDA Board finally approved the prioritization of CDWs for TR development in November 2024.

Furthermore, consultations organized by EDCOM II have highlighted a major discrepancy between Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECEd) degree programs and ECCD competency standards. While BECEd graduates are trained and qualified to teach up to primary school levels (Grades 1–3), ECCD competencies "are centered on teaching children aged 0–4 years" (UP ACTRC presentation to EDCOM II on August 31, 2023), reflecting a mismatch between the general design of ECE degree programs and the competencies needed to teach in the early years, specifically for children below the age of 5.

The pending ECCD bills also propose that a CDW shall be a holder of at least an associate degree in early childhood education, at least a senior high school graduate and has passed the national competency assessment for CDWs, or a high school graduate who has finished 2 years of tertiary education and has passed the same assessment of TESDA for CDWs. TESDA shall provide such assessment and certification free of charge.

Recommendations

To address the limited professional qualifications of CDWs in the Philippines, where nearly 13,000 of the CDW workforce have completed only high school education, TESDA and CHED must (a) collaborate with LGUs to establish local training hubs and scholarship program, and (b) engage NGOs and academic institutions to develop and deliver accessible national certification programs and higher education pathways specifically designed for the existing ECCD workforce. The *Philippines Economic Update* December 2024 edition highlights prioritizing financing for our early years workers, rolling out a targeted training program, and professionalizing our early years workers as key recommendations to address the shortages in the CDW workforce and to build their capacity in delivering ECE (World Bank, 2024). Through the efforts of EDCOM II, and with the support of the new TESDA leadership, the proposed 2025 GAA includes a provision for scholarships for an NC III in ECCD. These are offered to incumbent CDWs whose highest educational attainment is a high school diploma.

Priority Area 3:
Demand-Side Factors

The global focus on providing optimal early life opportunities for children has intensified, and recent empirical studies from diverse economic contexts have consistently demonstrated the enduring positive effects of participation in high-quality ECCD programs on child development outcomes (OECD, 2015; Onyango et al., 2021; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Rao et al., 2014).

Over the past decade, participation rates in formal pre-primary education programs have steadily increased worldwide (Global Partnership for Education, 2020). However, significant disparities in access and enrollment persist. These inequities are primarily influenced by geographical location, household economic status, and various other socioeconomic factors. Pre-COVID 19 pandemic data collected by UNICEF and UNESCO from 196 countries revealed that global ECCE enrollment for children aged 3 to primary school entry stood at 54%. However, this figure varied significantly across economic strata, ranging from 21% in low-income countries to 79% in high-income countries (McCoy et al., 2017).

A significant proportion of the global young child population—approximately 40%, or equivalent to 350 million children from birth to school entry age—is currently deprived of access to quality childcare services (Devercelli & Beaton-Day, 2020). This deficiency has far-reaching implications beyond child development as it exacerbates familial economic hardship by restricting parental employment opportunities and elevating levels of parental stress.

Compounding this issue is a notable lack of demand for ECCD services in many communities. This insufficient demand often stems from a complex interplay of factors, including limited awareness of the benefits of early childhood education, cultural preferences for home-based care, and financial constraints faced by families (Ejuu, 2012; Lasco, forthcoming; McCoy et al., 2018; PIDS, 2024; UNICEF, 2012).

Issue 1: There is very low demand from parents and families to enroll their children in early childhood programs.

In 2019, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported that around 97% of parents surveyed believe that children below 5 years of age are "too young to go to school" (see Table 5). The dual challenge of inadequate supply and insufficient demand for ECCD presents a multifaceted problem. This situation underscores the critical need for comprehensive policy approaches that address ECCD accessibility and quality while simultaneously working to increase awareness and stimulate demand for ECCD services. Such strategies are essential components of both child welfare and broader socioeconomic development initiatives (Ulep et al., 2024; Vargas-Baron et al., 2022; Yoshikawa et al., 2018).

TABLE 5
Top Reasons for Nonattendance in Schools
for Children Aged 3–4, by Wealth Quintile, 2019

Top Reasons	Bottom 40%	Top 20%
Too young to go to school	97.30%	99.07%
Financing reasons	0.61%	0.00%
Supply-side issues (e.g., distance, transportation)	0.61%	0.00%
Others (e.g., lack of personal interest, illness, disability)	0.90%	0.00%

Source: 2019 Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey data (PSA, 2019)

Cultural norms and lack of awareness of ECCD benefits limit participation. Supply-side challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure and trained professionals, exacerbate the issue. Discussions with parents in specific regions highlight disparities (Ulep et al., 2024). There are also disconnects between parental knowledge and practice regarding health and nutrition, especially concerning breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices.

Since the 1990s, the proportion of children aged 3–4 attending Pre-Kindergarten has increased from 3% to 40%. Kindergarten participation also increased significantly from 49% of Grade 1 students attending Kindergarten in 1998 to 98% in 2017 (Abrigo & Francisco, 2023). While the increase in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten participation is remarkable, challenges of providing universal access to high-quality early childhood education programs persist.

Data from DepEd show that 75% of elementary school dropouts in school years 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 occurred between Kindergarten and Grade 4, with about 60% of these happening between Kindergarten and Grade 1. This underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive framework for early childhood education and a robust assessment of its quality and performance indicators.

The limited number of CDCs in local areas creates significant barriers for families. Many must travel long distances, resulting in higher transportation costs and scheduling difficulties, especially for working mothers. Most parents prefer CDCs to be within a 10-minute walking distance from their homes.

The inadequate and delayed access to high-quality early childcare and parental interventions has profound implications for children's learning and cognitive development in later years. With timing of utmost importance in nutrition-specific interventions, particularly the first 2 years of a child's life or the first 1,000 days, the period from prenatal care to the child's second birthday is crucial for receiving essential services. The significant gaps in the delivery of necessary health and nutrition interventions during this critical window persist, also compounding the alarming levels of stunting among Filipino children.

Lack of nearby CDCs prevents families from enrolling their children in early childhood education programs. During EDCOM II consultations, parents lamented the lack of CDCs as one of the primary reasons that has impeded participation. The limited number of CDCs in local areas creates significant barriers for families. Many must travel long distances, resulting in higher transportation costs and scheduling difficulties, especially for working mothers. Most parents prefer CDCs to be within a 10-minute walking distance from their homes.

Analyzing the 2023 DSWD dataset of the list of CDWs from the ECCD Information System and the Philippine Standard Geographic Codes (PSGC) of all the barangays in the country, EDCOM II has found that there are 36,152 barangays with CDW IDs matched with the 2023 fourth-quarter PSGC dataset. Assuming each CDC should have one assigned CDW, there are still 5,822 barangays without a matched CDW, while 2,799 CDWs remain untagged with CDC IDs. This gap highlights the pressing need to expand CDC coverage to meet the needs of underserved communities.

Local leaders play a critical role in addressing this issue. However, many barangay officials are unaware of their responsibilities under the various laws that include tapping into different funds to establish a day care center in every barangay.

CDC activities and supplementary feeding programs are not enough incentives for parents to bring children to day care centers. ECCD programs must account for the logistic realities of parents. Through insights gathered from EDCOM II consultations, parents cited that the short duration of CDC activities, typically lasting 30 minutes to 2 hours, is a deterrent due to the opportunity cost of missing work. Some also explained that supplementary feeding programs, vitamin distribution, and vaccinations—though helpful—were not enough incentives to offset the logistic and financial burdens families face. Thus, we need to reevaluate how we design our ECCD programs, not only in addressing access, but also in rethinking how services are structured to better support the needs of Filipino families in order to drive the demand for ECCD services.

Global research underscores the broader benefits of accessible childcare. A 2023 study by Anukriti et al. on childcare regulation and its impact on women's workforce participation offers valuable insights for policymakers worldwide, including the Philippines. Researchers examined data from across 95 countries using the World Bank's *Women, Business, and the Law* childcare database to assess how childcare laws affect female labor force participation. The study reveals a promising trend: Countries that implement comprehensive childcare laws see a notable increase in women joining the labor market. On average, female labor force participation rises by 2% following the enactment of such laws, with the effect growing to 4% after 5 years.

The findings underscore the crucial role that ECCD policies play in advancing women's economic opportunities. By focusing on improving childcare accessibility and affordability through legislation, nations can effectively support women's engagement in paid work. This aligns with previous research from both high-income and developing countries, which consistently shows a positive correlation between robust childcare systems and improved maternal employment outcomes (Halim et al., 2023; Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017).

A rigorous study by Calderón (2014) examined the effects of Mexico's Estancias Infantiles para Apoyar a Madres Trabajadoras program, which significantly expanded subsidized childcare from 2007 to 2010 especially for children aged 4 and below and children with disabilities up to age 6. Childcare centers were privately owned and were required to meet the minimum quality standards and caregiver requirements in order to receive a monthly subsidy per child. These centers also receive a one-time subsidy ranging from $3,970 to $5,560 for improvement costs. The research found that Estancias Infantiles increased women's probability of working by 1.5 percentage points (a 4.3% increase) and reduced time spent on child-rearing by 54 minutes per week (Calderón, 2014). The program also led to more stable employment and higher labor incomes for eligible women.

Recommendations

Policymakers must develop a comprehensive ECCD framework that harnesses the untapped potential of diverse home-based caregivers to strengthen early childhood development outcomes. A holistic perspective on ECCD presents an opportunity for Philippine policymakers to craft more comprehensive and culturally relevant strategies by recognizing and leveraging the full spectrum of caregivers. A forthcoming EDCOM II Policy Brief explores the multifaceted nature of ECCD in the Philippines by highlighting the importance of recognizing caregivers beyond parents and guardians (Lasco, forthcoming). This study, based on interviews and literature review, emphasizes the Philippines's unique cultural context, where child-rearing is often a communal effort. It identifies key figures such as older siblings, domestic workers, grandparents, and early childhood educators as pivotal in shaping young minds, and notes the influence of extended family, local health workers, and faith-based groups in the ECCD landscape.

The study advocates for a shift in policy focus. It suggests moving away from parent-centric approaches to embrace a more inclusive model that acknowledges and supports all contributors to a child's development. The recommendations it puts forth include innovative ideas such as integrating caregiving skills into educational programs, enhancing the status and training of household staff involved in childcare, creating support systems for grandparents, and bolstering public day care services.

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Effective communication campaigns are critical to boosting ECCD enrollment and improving parenting practices. Effective communication strategies are crucial for promoting enrollment and demonstrating the value of early learning programs. The Philippines can create impactful communication campaigns that ultimately contribute to better outcomes for young children across the nation through a comprehensive strategy that incorporates advocacy, interpersonal communication, community mobilization, and mass communication. This multipronged approach ensures messaging reaches various stakeholders through diverse channels.

Campaigns should be evidence based by utilizing data to inform messaging and track impact. This allows for targeted interventions and continuous improvement of communication efforts. Rapidly expanding access to ECCD without addressing demand can result in low enrollment. Thus, effective campaigns must not only inform about available services but also cultivate desire for early learning among families and communities. Successful campaigns go beyond awareness-raising to promote lasting behavior change in parenting and nutrition practices. This requires sustained and culturally sensitive messaging that addresses local beliefs and barriers (Lasco, forthcoming).

Alongside developing a national ECCD communication strategy that aligns with the country's education goals and cultural context, the Philippines can also engage and leverage families and community leaders to amplify messages and model desired behaviors. Parenting programs must emphasize skills building and practical application to support caregivers effectively. The Early Learning Partnership of the World Bank shows that empowering caregivers entails building self-confidence, developing skills through role playing, providing group support, and encouraging application at home.

Integrating these strategies into ECCD communication efforts can amplify their impact. Programs for caregivers can create a ripple effect that improves both parenting practices and children's education outcomes and overall wellbeing.

TABLE 6
**Core Delivery Methods/Essential Components
of Parenting Programs, Early Learning Partnership**

Build self- confidence	▪ Build upon families' strengths and goals ▪ Establish a positive relationship between facilitators and families ▪ Positive feedback from facilitators
Practice and develop skills	▪ Demonstration and modeling ▪ Practice and rehearsal ▪ Role-playing
Group support	▪ Peer support ▪ Group discussion ▪ Ongoing support from facilitators
Apply at home	▪ Homework ▪ Setting parenting goals ▪ Review progress

Source: World Bank Group presentation, "Providing Strategic Advice on Philippines Education System's Issues Advisory Services and Analytics," EDCOM II ECCD Symposium, October 23, 2023

Priority Area 4: Governance and Financing of ECCD

The current composition and structure of the ECCD Council require a thorough review, focusing on its capacity to fulfill its mandates outlined in the Early Years Act.

Issue 1: Current policies fail to adequately address the fragmented governance structures and insufficient financing mechanisms that hinder the delivery of quality ECCD services.

The governance of ECCD in the Philippines faces significant practical challenges that require legislative support to address. Key issues include unclear roles and responsibilities among agencies, weak coordination mechanisms, and insufficient funding for ECCD initiatives.

Key players like the NNC and the DOH face overlapping mandates and resource constraints. Despite both being members of the ECCD Council and the NNC, opportunities for coordination during these council meetings are often missed, leading to duplicated efforts and inefficient resource allocation.

The NNC, as mandated by EO 234 (s. 1987), plays a crucial role in coordinating nutrition-related efforts across various sectors. However, its capacity to address ECCD effectively is limited by functional overlaps with other agencies and resource constraints. There is a pressing need to clarify and strengthen the NNC's role in ECCD governance to ensure effective implementation of nutrition programs for young children.

Similarly, the DOH is legally mandated to lead and oversee nutrition efforts through RA11148 (First 1,000 Days law). However, the DOH struggles to align health and nutrition interventions with early education initiatives due to fragmented interagency coordination. Strengthening the DOH's capacity to lead interagency collaboration on ECCD-related health and nutrition programs is essential.

Recommendations

Governance and financing of ECCD must be strengthened through the amendment of RA 10410 (Early Years Act of 2013). The EDCOM II priority bills for ECCD, House Bill No. 10142 and Senate Bill No. 2575, aim to establish a more robust ECCD system in the Philippines. Both bills propose to attach the ECCD Council to the DILG to reinforce the role of LGUs in the implementation of ECCD programs and services. Both bills also propose creating dedicated ECCD offices in cities and municipalities to manage local implementation.

The proposed legislation, likewise, mandates funding through a combination of public and private sources with specific provisions for supporting underserved areas. The House version includes a provision on adopting a program convergence approach from the funds of the DILG, the DSWD, the DOH, DepEd, CHED, and TESDA. The Senate

version includes a line-item allocation in the LGSF, specifically for establishing CDCs and hiring CDTs and CDWs in fourth- and fifth-class municipalities.

The bills also institutionalize professional development and standardize qualifications for ECCD workers by setting minimum salary grades (SG 11 for CDTs and SGs 8–10 for CDWs in the Senate version) and requiring regular competency assessments.

Additionally, the bills establish clear monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including mandatory annual reporting to Congress and regular curriculum reviews. Private sector participation is also encouraged through tax incentives under the Adopt-a-School program, and a fund for an ECCD Program Contracting Scheme with private service providers.

These reforms collectively aim to create an efficient, inclusive, and sustainable ECCD system.

Issue 2: Severe underinvestment and inequities in financing continue to hinder access to ECCD programs and services.

As shown in the research undertaken in Year Two, the country's overall supply of capital investments for ECCD falls short of meeting the goal of universal access for children aged 3–4 to ECCD services (Ulep et al., 2024). Findings suggest that the government allocates only Php 3,870 per child for health. This is significantly below the average government spending per person of approximately Php 8,700 on health in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Ulep et al., 2024).

TABLE 7
Nutrition Outcomes: Philippines vs. Other Low- and Middle-Income Countries with Similar GDP Per Capita

Country / Outcome Indicator	Indonesia	Vietnam	Philippines	Ghana	Senegal	Cambodia	Myanmar	Nepal
GDP per capita (2021, USD)	4,332.71	3756.49	**3460.53**	2363.30	1636.89	1625.24	1209.93	1208.22
% Government budget spent on health	8.51	9.35	**6.60**	6.42	4.26	5.21	3.49	4.58
Maternal mortality ratio	173		**78**		261	218	179	174
Prevalence of low birth weight	9.9	6.30	**21.1**	14.40	17.2	11.5	12.5	19.7
Infant mortality rate	18.9	16.4	**20.5**	32.6	29.1	21.3	33.7	22.8
Children stunted	24.4	19.6	**26.7**	12.7	17.0	22.3	24.1	26.7
Children wasted	7.1	5.2	**5.5**	4.7	8.1	9.6	7	7.7
Under–5 mortality rate	22.2	20.6	**25.7**	44.0	38.6	24.8	41.8	27.2

Note: Data across countries may belong to different years. The information has been compiled from various sources: the Demographic and Health Survey Program (2023) for 2014–2022, the DOST-FNRI (2021), and the UNICEF-WHO- World Bank Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates (2023).

In 2021, 6.6% of government spending in the Philippines were on health, which is higher than many LMICs with lower gross domestic product (GDP). Note that Ghana, with a lower GDP per capita, still has a similar health expenditure as the Philippines; and Vietnam, with a similar GDP per capita, has a significantly higher health expenditure.

There is also a need to vastly improve participation rates in early education and essential health and nutrition services by piloting public-private partnership financing models like vouchers and implementing innovative, science-based behavioral change communication campaigns targeted at diverse groups.

In the Philippines, ECCD programs are mainly funded by the national government, with household out-of-pocket spending on pre-primary education reaching Php 8 billion and nearly half of attendees paying participation fees. Despite mechanisms for decentralization, the national government continues to be the primary source of financing for early education, health, and nutrition services, with its contribution steadily increasing.

Under a decentralized system, local governments are tasked with financing and delivering primary health care services. In contrast, the national government, including agencies like the DOH and the NNC, sets standards and provides technical and financial support. As the national purchaser, PhilHealth offers limited primary health care services through various benefit packages. However, overlaps and ambiguity in delineating these services create inefficiencies. For early education, both national and local governments contribute to pre-kindergarten funding, with the national government providing technical and financial assistance.

Inequities in nutrition financing need to be addressed. There is also a need to address inequities brought about by the dependence of nutrition interventions on local government resources, apart from improving the strategic allocation at the national to better support the first 1,000 days and other nutrition intervention programs.

The current financing structure for ECCD initiatives presents significant practical limitations, especially for LGUs. Analysis of the Special Education Fund (SEF) reveals stark disparities in available resources among different LGU classes. For instance,

- Municipalities have a median SEF income of only Php 1.6 million—merely 4% of the median SEF income of cities and provinces; and
- First class municipalities have SEF incomes 68 times greater than their sixth-class counterparts.

These disparities significantly impact the ability of low-income LGUs to implement ECCD programs effectively. Moreover, legislation over the years has expanded the mandated functions of LGUs in education and nutrition program delivery without corresponding increases in funding sources.

FIGURE 10
LGU ECCD Financing Challenges

Inadequate fiscal resources and low prioritization of human capital	including reliance on national transfers, low local revenue mobilization, and lack of prioritization of the early years
Coordination failures and unclear accountability	Including both vertical and horizontal coordination, as well as blurred lines of accountability
Capacity challenges in public financial management	Including planning and connecting plans to budgets

Source: World Bank, Philippines Economic Updates Development Dialogues, December 12, 2024, Cubao, Philippines

To address these inequities, EDCOM II recognizes the critical need for enhanced national government support while strengthening LGU engagement. This approach aligns with the principles of the devolved functions of ECCD while ensuring effective implementation of ECCD programs nationwide.

In a September 11, 2024 meeting led by EDCOM II with DOH secretary Teodoro Herbosa to discuss improvement mechanisms in the implementation of health and nutrition programs for young children, the DBM put forth a recommendation to consider a LGSF allocation focused on fifth-class municipalities and geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. This funding will incentivize LGUs to allocate counterpart funding for nutrition initiatives, fostering sustainability ECCD program delivery/ especially for low-income LGUs. This approach will spur LGUs to augment the funds through alternative funding sources, encouraging LGU commitment and ownership of ECCD programs.

Tying national support to LGU commitment allows for more equitable distribution of national resources for resource-constrained LGUs while encouraging LGUs to prioritize ECCD in their local development plans and budgets.

Recommendations

Beyond financial resources, effective ECCD implementation demands strategic investment in local government capacity, particularly in strengthening low-income LGUs' ability to deliver services. While priority must be given to low-income LGUs, the prevalence of stunting and lack of ECE participation remains a problem across cities and municipalities in the country. For instance, Bansud, in Oriental Mindoro, despite being a second-class municipality, has an alarming stunting rate of 30.57% among children under 5 (Operation Timbang Plus, 2023).

EDCOM II emphasizes the importance of comprehensive capacity-building initiatives through the provision of continuous technical assistance from national agencies to LGUs. EDCOM II recommends adopting a "hand-holding" approach, not only to low-income LGUs, but also to LGUs that require additional technical support in program planning, financial management and budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation of ECCD programs and services. Increasing the local governance capacity development in the systematic and efficient implementation of ECCD can be included in the Newly Elected Officials orientation course, as well as a program in the Local Government Academy of the DILG. To address LGU financial challenges, policymakers can refer to the equity-focused measures from both versions of the ECCD bill, particularly the program convergence budgeting approach and Local Government Support Fund.

Successful ECCD programs underscore the importance of taking an integrated approach to ECCD—one that combines quality education, proper nutrition, and community engagement. When local governments commit to these comprehensive strategies and engage their communities effectively, as demonstrated by exemplary LGU programs, they create sustainable initiatives that significantly improve outcomes for its youngest citizens and build stronger foundations for their communities' future.

Local government initiatives across the Philippines have demonstrated remarkable success in transforming ECCD through innovative and comprehensive approaches. By examining these exemplary programs, we can identify distinct strategies and best practices that have created lasting positive impact in their communities.

Muntinlupa City's Early Childhood Education Division exemplifies strong institutional framework and comprehensive service delivery. Created through Ordinance No. 04-139, the division operates with its own Annual Investment Plan and distinct organizational structure. Its professionalization of early childhood workers through clear career progression paths has elevated service quality; while its multistakeholder approach enables extensive services including health programs, supplementary feeding, and educational initiatives. Its innovative use of multiple funding streams has resulted in a robust Php 72.9 million budget by 2023, serving over 8,000 children annually through 90 child development centers.

The Naga Early Education and Development Program demonstrates excellence in transforming traditional day care services into quality early education centers. Its innovative approach includes establishing Montessori-type day care centers in each *sitio* with trained workers and modern learning equipment. The program's success lies in its creative use of the Local Government Code through implementing a "counterpart" policy where barangays and parents contribute to operational costs. Its integration of special education services, including therapy for handicapped preschoolers, showcases their commitment to inclusive education. Its achievement in doubling day care centers from 30 to 54 and reaching one-fourth of potential beneficiaries in just 2 years demonstrates the program's effective expansion strategies

Barangay Taloot's "Kapurok Ko, Karamay Ko" program in Argao, Cebu, demonstrates effective community-driven initiatives. Its innovative *purok* system combines education, health, and nutrition programs through community-based approaches. The program's integration of its Food Available in the Home initiative with *purok*-based feeding activities has created sustainable nutrition solutions. Its "Tabo sa Purok" initiative allows families to sell surplus produce, consequently creating an economic benefit alongside nutritional improvements. The program has significantly reduced malnutrition rates from 7.03% to 1.78% and decreased nonreaders from 6.01% to 1.48% between 2013 and 2023.

Taguig City's award–winning ECCD programs integrate free day care, nutrition intervention, and innovative physical activities to foster holistic early childhood development. In 2022–2023, the City of Taguig demonstrated exemplary ECCD practices through its award-winning child-friendly and nutrition programs. The city's comprehensive approach includes free day care services with learning materials and supplementary feeding; the AlagaNutri Program, which provides tailored nutrition interventions and health monitoring for 6- to 9-year-old students; a 120-Day Dietary Supplementation Program focusing on children aged 1–5 years in Barangay Lower Bicutan; and an innovative Overweight and Obesity Management Program featuring physical activities like push biking. These integrated initiatives, which earned Taguig the Sixth Seal of Child-Friendly and Nutrition Honor Award in Metro Manila, showcase how local governments can effectively combine education, nutrition, health monitoring, and physical activity promotion to support early childhood care and development.

Starting with the Basics: Filling Persistent Gaps in Basic Education

Introduction

In 2024, the basic education sector had to hurdle the continuing challenge of addressing pandemic-induced learning loss. While learners have returned to school, many remain unprepared for their current grade levels. A recent UNICEF study (Parker et al., forthcoming) found that, even before the pandemic, most Grade 4 students were performing at least a year below curriculum standards in math and literacy; this gap has now widened to 2–3 years due to COVID-19 impacts.

Frequent class cancellations due to rising heat indices toward the end of school year (SY) 2023–2024, as well as flooding at the start of the current school year, have compounded pandemic-induced learning loss, increasing pressure on schools to innovate. To meet learning outcomes despite these disruptions, schools must foster conducive learning environments and provide adaptive support for their students. At the system level, policy enhancements and key learning inputs are essential, especially as the Department of Education (DepEd) begins the phased implementation of the new MATATAG curriculum.

Continuing its mandate to assess the basic education system and recommend necessary reforms, the EDCOM II Basic Education Subcommittee has focused on three priorities: Priority Area 8 (School Infrastructure), Priority Area 9 (Alternative Learning System, or ALS), and Priority Area 10 (Home and School Environment). This chapter delves into these priorities and also provides updates on the Year One findings on Priority 5 (Learning Resources), Priority 6 (Measurement of Learning Outcomes), and Priority 7 (Curriculum and Instruction).

Year One Updates

Priority Area 5: Learning Resources

The Year One Report highlighted significant challenges in textbook procurement, with only 27 titles acquired in the past decade. This shortfall has led to the chronic underutilization of allocated funds, leaving only Grades 5 and 6 with complete sets of books. Other grade levels have had to rely on learners' manuals, self-learning modules (SLMs), activity sheets, and teacher-made resources. The report also identified the barriers faced by book publishers in the procurement process and recommended solutions, such as pivoting to procuring textbook titles already available in the market rather than commissioning custom manuscripts.

To advance its recommendations, EDCOM II facilitated coordination with the Government Procurement Policy Board - Technical Support Office (GPPB-TSO) to secure their policy opinion on preselecting textbook titles. Since its first hearing on learning resources on June 1, 2023, EDCOM II has been engaging the GPPB-TSO through activities and meetings and requesting their comments and insights. On June 19, 2024, the GPPB issued a clarification confirming that preselecting textbook titles does not equate to prequalification and is therefore a valid procurement option. Prequalification is the process of evaluating prospective bidders' qualifications against identified requirements to determine their eligibility to submit bids (Non-Policy Matter No. 054-2013); this process has been replaced by a simple eligibility screening under the Government Procurement Reform Act (Republic Act [RA] No. 9184) to improve the efficiency of the procurement process.

Despite recent changes by DepEd—such as combining manuscript procurement with textbook printing and delivery—challenges persist in procuring and delivering textbooks for the MATATAG curriculum rollout.

A study on textbook procurement, commissioned by EDCOM II with support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Australian Government and the Philippine Business for Education, has further examined these issues. Malaluan and Maribojoc (2024) outlines several recommendations for the improvement of the procurement process for textbooks, including the following:

- **Develop a textbook policy for public schools**. A comprehensive textbook policy will contribute to system improvement by aligning curriculum, pedagogy, textbooks, and assessments. The policy would serve as a road map for the short- and long-term planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the whole procurement cycle—i.e., the evaluation, selection, acquisition, distribution, and use of textbooks for public schools. By formalizing this through legislation, the commitment to improving educational resources can be institutionalized.
- **Introduce a system of pre-evaluation and preselection of textbooks before procurement**. This system will ensure thorough reviews, early preparation, teacher participation, expedited procurement, and responsiveness to local needs. This process can also stimulate growth in the book publishing industry.
- **Amend the Book Publishing Industry Development Act (RA 8047) to allow DepEd to develop textbooks under extraordinary circumstances**. This amendment would give DepEd the flexibility to respond effectively to unique challenges in educational resource development.

- **Conduct a study on textbook procurement decentralization**. Investigating the potential for decentralizing procurement processes could lead to more localized and responsive educational resources.[1]
- **Closely monitor the entire life cycle of the textbook/teacher's manual and gather feedback**. Systematic and continuous monitoring and feedback collection will ensure that textbooks and teacher's manuals remain relevant and effective in classrooms.
- **Arrange continuing dialogues among DepEd, the National Book Development Board, and publishers**. Regular communication among these stakeholders will foster collaboration and innovation in textbook development and procurement. Further research and consultations should also be conducted as the New Government Procurement Act (RA 12009) is rolled out.

These findings and recommendations, presented to key DepEd officials and staff, will inform policy development, including target setting, for Priority Area 5.

Issue: Insufficient textbooks and learning resources hinder recovery.

Learning loss recovery efforts face significant obstacles due to insufficient resources. The PISA 2022 results highlight a direct correlation between learner performance and the availability of learning resources, yet EDCOM II has identified persistent textbook shortages for Grades 1–10 despite budget allocations. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the update on the procurement status of textbooks and teachers manuals in Grades 1, 4, and 7. Several challenges have been identified, including inadequate time for textbook development, high participation costs for publishers, and pricing issues related to paper quality and production timelines. During the pandemic (fiscal years 2020–2023), DepEd deprioritized the printing of textbooks and instead focused on providing self-learning modules. Based on the data submitted by DepEd, most of the bottleneck delays are caused by technical reviews of the textbooks. EDCOM II recommends that DepEd consider procuring textbooks already available in the market and systematizing internal review to expedite the procurement process.

The Year One Report also emphasized that successful learning loss recovery efforts required several key elements: holding regular and timely assessments to track learner progress, grouping learners based on their actual proficiency rather than their grade level, and prioritizing foundational skills.

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1   Notably, during the House hearings in the Committee on Education, Arts and Culture, the difficulty in regional procurement of books has also been observed in the pilot for the MATATAG textbooks. This highlights the need to further study and strengthen local capacity of both DepEd as well as publishers/bidders regionally.

FIGURE 1
Status of Procurement: Grade 1 Textbooks and Teacher's Manuals

**GRADE 1 TEXT BOOKS &
TEACHERS MANUALS**

Region

For Rebid | For Revision | For Review | For Finalization | Sign Off & Printing | Ongoing Delivery | 100% Delivered

NCR – Filipino
- Good Manners and Right Conduct
- Makabansa
- Reading & Literacy
- Language

5 – Bicolano
- Good Manners and Right Conduct
- Makabansa
- Reading & Literacy
- Language

8 – Waray
- Good Manners and Right Conduct
- Makabansa
- Reading & Literacy
- Language

RO 1*
- Good Manners and Right Conduct
- Makabansa
- Reading & Literacy
- Language

RO 6*
- Good Manners and Right Conduct
- Makabansa
- Reading & Literacy
- Language

RO 10*
- Good Manners and Right Conduct
- Makabansa
- Reading & Literacy
- Language

* ROs 1, 6, & 10 experienced failure of bidding for Ilokano, Hiligaynon, & Sinugbuanong Binisaya, respectively; hence, they are now procuring Filipino TXs and TMs.

For Grade 1 Mathematics, lesson exemplars and worksheets are provided.

FIGURE 2
Status of Procurement: Grades 4 and 7 Textbooks and Teacher's Manuals

GRADE 1 TEXT BOOKS &
TEACHERS MANUALS

Grade 4

- Araling Panlipunan
- Good Manners and Right Conduct
- Filipino
- Science
- Music and Arts
- English
  - Regions I–V, CAR, NCR
  - Regions VI–XII, Region XIII
- Math
  - Regions I–IV, IX–XII, CAR, Region XIII
  - Regions VI–VIII, NCR
- Physical Education and Health
  - Regions I–IV, VI–VIII, CAR
  - Regions V, NCR
  - Regions IX–XII, Region XIII
- Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan
  - Regions I–V, IX–XII, CAR, NCR, Region XIII
  - Regions VI–VIII

Grade 7

- Araling Panlipunan
- English
- Maths
- Filipino
- Music and Arts
- Physical Education and Health
- Techology and Livelihood Education
- Values Education
  - Regions I–IV, CAR, NCR
  - Regions VI–XII, Region XIII
- Science
  - Regions I–IV, CAR
  - Regions V–XII, NCR, Region XIII

Column headers: For Rebid | Review of Revised | Preproduction Inspection | For PDI | Ongoing Delivery | 100% Delivered

NONE 100% DELIVERED
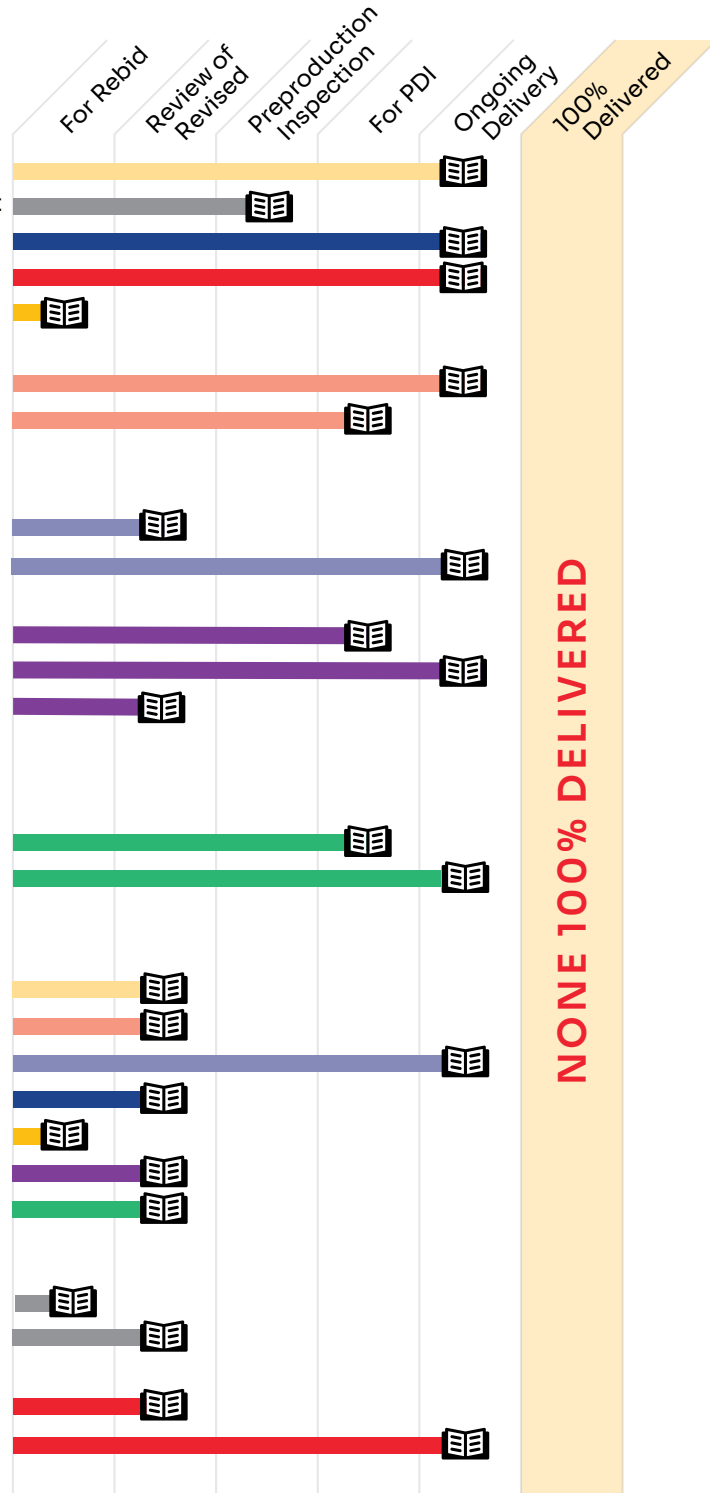
Note: Data from DepEd submission (January 6, 2025)

Priority Area 6: Measurement of Learning Outcomes

The call for more large-scale assessments as a foundation for educational reforms was first championed in *Making Education Work: An Agenda for Reform* (1994) by the original EDCOM. The report recommended creating and administering the National Achievement Test (NAT) to evaluate student progress: functional literacy by the end of Grade 4, scholastic achievement by the end of Grade 6, and readiness for vocational and tertiary education by the senior year of high school.

Nearly 3 decades later, EDCOM II's Year One Report highlighted a new challenge: an overabundance of assessments at various levels. The lack of access to the results of national system assessments has prompted local and external stakeholders to develop and administer their own tools, creating redundancies and inconsistencies. **Teachers lament that the increase in assessment tasks consumes instruction time without informing teaching strategies, as critical data often remain inaccessible to those who need it most.** This is based on various EDCOM II consultations with teachers, including the following:

- **2023 July 10–11.** Teacher consultations and curriculum validation; focus group discussion with 104 teachers, i.e., 33 private school teachers and 71 public school teachers, representing 74 schools (19 private, 55 public) across nine regions.
- **2023 Oct 23, Iloilo.** Focus group discussions with teachers and school heads from schools division offices of Davao City and Iloilo City.
- **2023 Jul 28, UP BGC.** Consultation with teachers.

This inconsistency is starkly illustrated by a contradiction in insights from the different assessments. For example, the 2019 FLEMMS by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported basic literacy at 96.5% and functional literacy at 91.6%. However, international large-scale assessments tell a different story. In the PISA 2022, only 24% of students performed at Level 2 or higher in reading literacy, which means that only one in four students could identify the main idea in a text of moderate length, find information based on explicit, though sometimes complex, criteria, and reflect on the purpose and form of texts when explicitly directed to do so.

Specifically, EDCOM II highlighted that functional literacy should include the comprehension of texts. EDCOM II also pointed out that common tasks (e.g., writing the respondent's name) should not count toward functional literacy. Finally, EDCOM II recommended considering the framework of the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies as a reference for refining the FLEMMS. Table 1 shows the approved definitions alongside the previous ones.

These recommendations led to the PSA's Board Resolution No. 2024-13, which updated the definition of basic and functional literacy for the first time since 1989. Basic literacy now includes numeracy, and functional literacy now requires comprehension.

TABLE 1
Updates on the 2024 FLEMMS

Previous Definition, 1989–2019			Approved Definition		
Literacy Level	Description	Classification	Literacy Level	Description	Classification
0	Cannot read and write	Illiterate	0–A	Cannot read and write	Illiterate
			0–B	Can read and write only	Low literate
1	Can read and write only	Basic	1	Can read, write, and compute	Basic literate
2	Can read, write, and compute	Functional	2	Can read, write, compute, and comprehend	Functional literate
3	Can read, write, compute, and comprehend	Functional			
4	High school graduate*	Functional			

Note. The previous classification automatically assigns high school graduates and those with higher qualifications as functionally literate.

Source: PSA, 2024

While the new definitions of basic and functional literacy will be implemented in the next round of the FLEMMS, the PSA has provided simulations of possible changes in the basic and functional literacy rates using the revised standards. The results show a 7-point decline in basic literacy and a 30-point drop in functional literacy rates (see Figures 3 and 4). The results of the next FLEMMS cycle will most likely reflect similar results.

The shift is expected to result in more substantive interventions through adult literacy programs, including the ALS. Improved adult literacy education can improve the subjective quality of life in economic, familial, intrapersonal, and interpersonal aspects (Mtika & Abbott, 2023). Not only do highly literate adults have more economic opportunities, they also make better informed decisions for their families and support their children better in their formative years (World Bank Group, 2018). Results of international large-scale assessments, such as the PISA and Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM), have established that the educational attainment of parents, especially of mothers, significantly impacts student performance.

FIGURE 3
Comparison of Basic Literacy and Functional Literacy Rate

FLEMMS 2003–2019

Basic literacy   Functional literacy
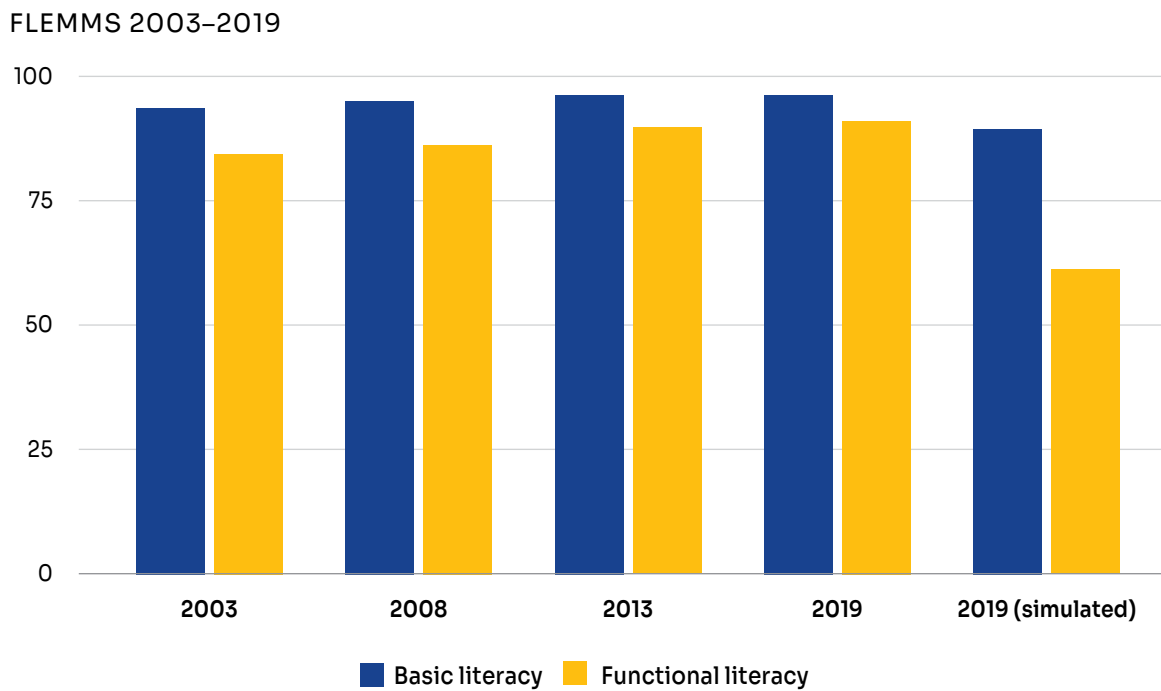
FIGURE 4
Comparison of Basic and Functional Literacy Rates by Highest Educational Attainment: Previous vs. Approved Definitions

FLEMMS 2003–2019

Basic literacy (based on previous definition)
Basic literacy (based on approved definition)
Functional literacy (based on previous definition)
Functional literacy (based on approved definition)
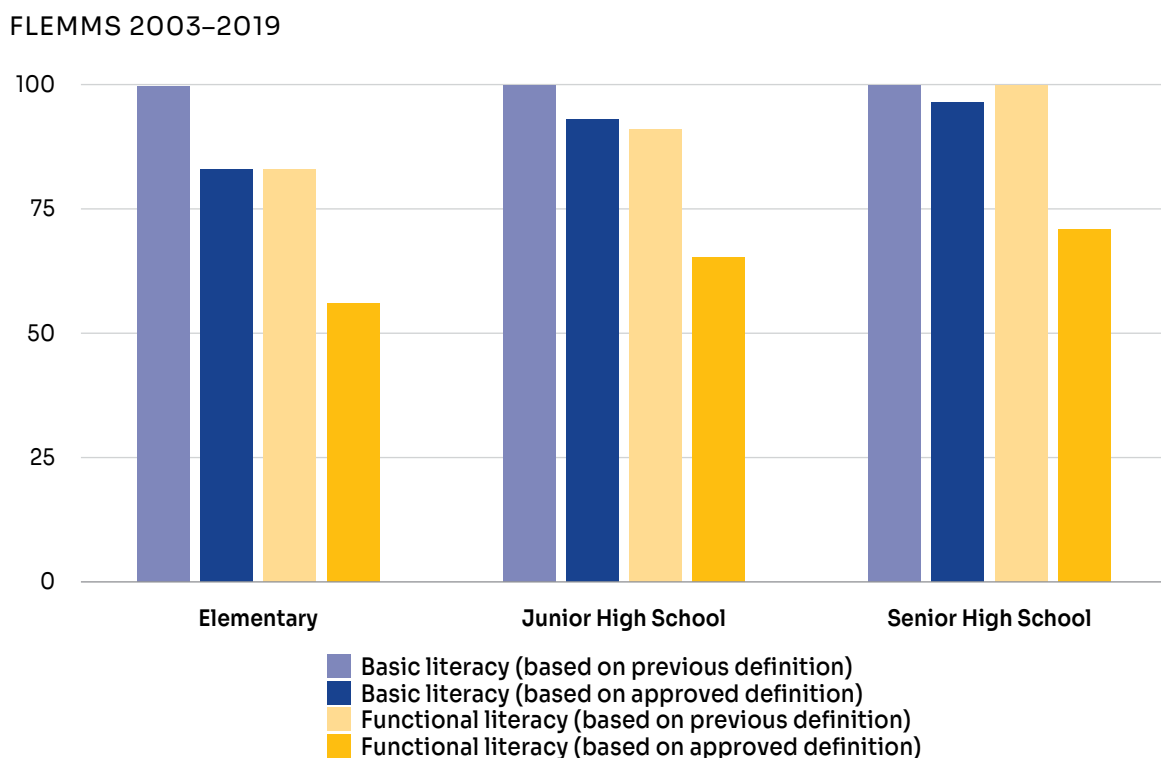
Note: Figures based on FLEMMS 2019. The previous definition was used for all FLEMMS cycles from 1989–2019.

To enhance assessment practices, the Commission recommends rationalizing existing key stage assessments, introducing a learning progression assessment, and modernizing testing through computer-based modalities.

For rationalization, the key stage assessments should not only inform system enhancement and accountability, but also be used to improve learners' mastery of essential topics. These assessments should focus on literacy and numeracy in Grade 3, expand to include scientific thinking in Grades 6 and 10, and evaluate readiness for tertiary education or work in Grade 12. The results should further guide targeted interventions for students, such as well-funded learning camps for underperforming Grades 3, 6, and 10 students before allowing them to proceed to the next grade level. Finally, it is important to highlight that students with extremely low scores even after attending the learning camps and being provided with additional support should be retained in their grade level until they show mastery of core competencies or referred to special education services and further assessment to determine presence of disability.

Meanwhile, the learning progression assessment refers to a formative evaluation of key competencies in literacy and numeracy over time, distinct from curriculum-based assessments. It should be developed and standardized at the national level but administered by the teachers in their classrooms thrice a year—i.e., at the start, middle, and end of the school year for Grades 1 to 3 and potentially extending to Grade 6. Individual progress reports should be shared with students, parents, teachers, and schools to inform targeted interventions and critical skills development.

To enable efficient processing and timely reporting, DepEd has to transition to computer-based assessments. Although schools still face challenges like limited internet and computer access, investing in digital infrastructure is essential for assessments and learning delivery. While the resources are not yet universally available, test administration can adapt in the interim by establishing testing centers in schools division offices and extending testing windows to accommodate all students.

The Commission, in collaboration with DepEd, is studying possible solutions to harmonize assessment activities and standards, including establishing an independent assessment body as a government-owned or -controlled corporation. This body would oversee learning outcomes across the education sector, starting with basic education and eventually encompassing technical-vocational and higher education. As a government-owned or -controlled corporation, it would have the potential to attract and retain measurement experts by offering competitive personnel benefits and utilizing flexible procurement processes, which will build up its capacity for data analysis and research. This independent body would ensure the integrity of assessments and increase accountability through regular, unbiased reporting, free from the influence of education agencies.

For basic education in particular, this body would focus on planning, test development, and data analysis for key assessments, including international large-scale tests and national achievement exams (the NAT, the ALS Accreditation and Equivalency, National Career Assessment Examination, and teacher evaluations). Meanwhile, the Bureau of Education Assessment can be retained to facilitate test administration, following standards set by the independent assessment body.

Insights from Learning Visit in Vietnam

From March 21 to 23, 2024, an EDCOM II delegation visited Hanoi, Vietnam, to benchmark education policies, reforms, and practices. The delegation met with Vietnam's National Assembly and Ministry of Education and Training, visited three public schools, and held a focus group discussion with Filipino teachers working in Hanoi and nearby cities.

Members of the Commission visited Vietnam to study their education system's success, focusing on access and equity, teacher development, assessments, and governance. **Vietnam was selected for its outstanding PISA performance in math and reading, achieving better academic outcomes than many wealthier nations despite having GDP levels similar to the Philippines. Their high enrollment and completion rates offer valuable insights for Philippine education reforms.**

A highlight of the visit was an expert meeting with education specialists from the World Bank in Hanoi who provided an overview of Vietnam's systemic approach to education reform. This approach, implemented across 4 decades, comprised the following components:

- **Central specification**. The reform began by defining clear learning standards or competencies to establish a clear framework for educational goals.
- **Achievement goals**. Following the identification of learning competencies, achievement goals (performance standards) and target proficiency levels were set to ensure that expectations were transparent and measurable.
- **Alignment**. Once the goals were set, school resources, curricular content, and teaching strategies were aligned with the performance standards to foster an environment conducive to learning.
- **Accountability measures**. With the appropriate resources and support systems in place, necessary accountability measures were designed to enforce standards, identify system weaknesses and breakdowns, and facilitate targeted improvements.

- **Continuous learning**. The Vietnamese system prioritizes continuous learning from continuous reflection and adaptation to enhance educational practices and outcomes.

Based on the discussions during the trip, the Commission identified some of the key drivers of Vietnam's success in education:

- **Prioritizing primary education.** Vietnam allocates significant resources to primary education to ensure that students receive adequate support during the foundational years. In 2022, Vietnam spent USD 745.8 per student in Grades 1–3—more than double the regional average (USD 328). The Vietnamese education system also emphasizes early school readiness. Various nursery-level programs designed for children aged three months to three years are widely available and typically accessed by the public. These programs focus on holistic development encompassing physical, cognitive, linguistic, emotional-social, and aesthetic skills. In 2010, the government established a development framework for 5-year-old children, comprising 120 indicators. Moreover, the Vietnamese government ensures equitable distribution of resources by prioritizing students in remote and disadvantaged areas through affirmative action programs and teacher incentives.

- **Strong emphasis on the timely provision of input and support services.** Schools provide essential resources and support services, including meals for learners and teachers. Workbooks for students are provided with a 1:1 ratio and distributed a few months before classes to allow students to prepare and study for their upcoming school year. Public school classrooms are typically air-conditioned and designed for dynamic learning. Another key priority of the Vietnamese government is attracting top professionals to the sector as teachers. Teaching is esteemed in Vietnam, even if the starting salary is fairly similar with the Philippines. The government strategically invests in human development by providing teacher training and hiring capable individuals, particularly in sectors and regions that need the most support.

- **Enforcing an assessment and accountability system.** Vietnam's robust assessment system informs educational interventions, enabling the timely delivery of learning resources and teacher training opportunities based on data. Despite having a heavily centralized political system, local government units (LGUs) are primarily accountable in making sure that schools in their respective areas receive necessary input and perform well in assessments. This data-driven approach is complemented by a strong testing culture, evident in high-stakes exams at the end of the lower secondary level, which determine progression to upper secondary schools.

Parents also play an active role in supporting education and ensuring accountability. They contribute financially to nursery and preschool improvement initiatives; invest in tutorials, extra lessons, and learning materials for their children; and expect regular homework and personalized feedback from teachers. Government initiatives, such as providing phones and internet connectivity for teacher-parent communication, further empower parents to hold educators accountable.

Adherence to international standards further strengthens the education system. Schools openly align their curricula with top-performing schools in the United Kingdom, and foreign teachers (including Filipinos) are hired to enhance foreign language instruction.

Year Two Overview

Priority Area 7: Curriculum and Instruction

In Year One, EDCOM II identified several critical issues, including the overwhelming workload for students and teachers under the MATATAG curriculum and inefficiencies in learning loss recovery efforts. The centralized governance structure of DepEd was also highlighted as a barrier to the successful implementation of Mother Tongue–Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). Additionally, a lack of sufficient learning resources, such as textbooks, exacerbated learning disparities across regions. These findings underscored the need for reform to ensure inclusivity and resilience in the education system.

In 2024, EDCOM II focused on addressing these issues through legislative and policy measures. For the MATATAG curriculum, assessments highlighted the need for teacher training, reduced administrative burdens, and access to quality learning materials.

Furthermore, EDCOM II supported the passage of RA 12027, or the Act Discontinuing the Use of Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction to amend the MTB-MLE program, proposing Filipino and English as the primary mediums of instruction while maintaining regional languages as auxiliary tools. This change aimed to address the challenges of implementing mother tongue instruction in a linguistically diverse nation. The Commission also advocated decentralization and enhanced local flexibility to improve resource allocation and curriculum delivery.

RA 12027 lapsed into law on October 10, 2024.

Efforts to enhance learning recovery were bolstered by House Resolution No. 1805, authored by EDCOM II Co-chairperson Cong. Roman Romulo, urging DepEd to suspend regular academic programs for 8–12 weeks to implement focused interventions addressing the alarming learning gaps.

Issue 1: Excessive academic demands and lost teaching days impede student performance and well-being.

A study by Dabbay and Largoza (2024) from De La Salle University found that Filipino students endured excessive academic demands compared to their regional counterparts. Junior high school (JHS) students in the Philippines spent longer instructional hours per week than students in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam yet performed the poorest in the 2018 PISA. Senior high school (SHS) students reported spending 12 hours more than the recommended weekly homework time, with total academic learning hours exceeding standard full-time working hours for employed adults.

These findings necessitate a reexamination of the extensive academic learning time prescribed for Philippine schools. The study indicated that elevated stress levels surpassed optimal thresholds for academic performance, suggesting that this may be counterproductive and detrimental to students' well-being.

This underscores the need for a more balanced approach to academic scheduling, one that considers both the quality of learning and the well-being of students and teachers alike.

Issue 2: Overlapping topics and low proficiency levels of students weaken the senior high school curriculum.

Further examination of the SHS curriculum is necessary to eliminate overlapping topics and ensure better alignment with the K–12 program's four exit points. Unpacking prerequisite skills is essential, as many competencies listed are still at higher-order thinking levels.

DepEd has initiated a comprehensive four-phase review process that includes a comparative analysis of educational systems from six selected countries. Consultative forums with academia, industry stakeholders, regional councils, technical-vocational-livelihood supervisors, and private SHSs have resulted in three proposed SHS curriculum models aimed at enhancing implementation.

Moreover, DepEd has developed an ALS SHS curriculum based on the most essential learning competencies; it mirrors the structure and content of formal education while addressing the unique challenges of ALS learners, such as time constraints and contextualizing these competencies for instruction. It is also recommended that Disaster Readiness and Risk Reduction be made a core subject for all students, not just those enrolled in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math strand or the General Academic Strand.

Low proficiency levels among SHS students are evidenced by below-proficient NAT 2022 scores for Grade 12 and poor reading and writing skills among incoming SHS students as indicated by the PISA 2022. In response, DepEd has established the National Learning Recovery Program (NLRP) to enhance learner performance.

Issue 3: The lack of a unified learner progression framework impedes educational continuity.

Learning progressions, as per Duschl et al. (2007), describe successively more sophisticated ways of thinking about and understanding a topic over a broad span of time.

A learning progression workshop held on August 22, 2024, surfaced that while a strategy for curricular progression exists and that DepEd has developed curriculum guides for each grade level and subject area, there is no clearly articulated learning progression that connects educational stages—from early childhood care and development to higher education and technical and vocational education and training—for both formal and nonformal systems. Hence, because learning progression is not clearly articulated, guidance for teachers and other stakeholders is likewise limited.

The absence of tools and processes to measure learner progression exacerbates these challenges. Across basic education, early childhood care and development, technical and vocational education and training, and higher education, there is a pressing need for clearly defined minimum competencies and a consistent scale for measuring progression. Improving the reliability and validity of assessments, along with alignment across subsectors, is necessary to bridge gaps.

A learning progression workshop held on August 22, 2024, surfaced that while a strategy for curricular progression exists and that DepEd has developed curriculum guides for each grade level and subject area, there is no clearly articulated learning progression that connects educational stages—from early childhood care and development to higher education and technical and vocational education and training—for both formal and nonformal systems.

Finally, as far as policy is concerned, there is a need to adopt enabling legislative and executive policies and to include an implementation plan to address issues in continuity and leadership. Key prerequisites to this include the promotion of shared commitment across the education system and the clear articulation of the learning progression in developmental domains—literacy, numeracy, and 21st century skills—in the formal system, as well as their counterparts in the informal system.

Issue 4: Our best learners are left behind due to lack of government support and attention.

According to a study by Reis and Renzulli (2011), gifted and talented children need additional support because their unique needs are often unmet in traditional classrooms, thus leading to underachievement, disengagement, and even dropout risks. It is critical that emergent talent is spotted and nurtured early on (NAGC, 2012). Without differentiation and opportunities to further improve their talents, the potential of talented students is unfulfilled. Research shows that effective support strategies include instructional grouping, acceleration through curriculum compacting or grade skipping, and enrichment models like the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM), which offers advanced, interest-based opportunities. These interventions ensure gifted students are challenged and engaged, helping them reach their full potential.

TABLE 2
**Students in Special Science Programs and
Science High Schools vs. Universe of All Learners**

Special Science Programs (Elementary)	Regional Science High School	Legislated Science High Schools	Special Program on Science, Technology, and Engineering	Philippine Science High School System	Universe of ALL Learners	% of "Best and Brightest" Learners Supported in SY 2023–2024
106,670	9,428	10,230	143,118	10,350	27,081,292	**1.03%**

Source: EDCOM II, 2024, October 13

Comparatively, countries such as China and South Korea target their top 3%, while Australia and Europe support up to the top 10%. For the Philippines, this would mean the need to support an additional 533,502 to 2.43 million learners.

Data shows that the government supports only 1.03% of 27,081,292 learners considered to be the "best and brightest" in the country.

Several gifted and talented learners in the Sciences and Mathematics are catered by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST). Under the DOST is the Philippine Science High School (PSHS) system, which exemplifies specialized education with a research-oriented curriculum focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. This is as compared to the DepEd Regional Science HS and Special Science Program Curriculum which provides learners with enriched science, mathematics, and English curricula in addition to the existing secondary high school curriculum.

TABLE 3
The PSHS Curriculum

Grade			
Gr 12	**Specialization Years** — Enhanced engagement in the chosen area of specialization, while fostering innovation and STEM integration	Service, Creativity, Action, Leadership Enhancement (SCALE) *Science Immersion Program	Institutional Celebrations
Gr 11			Field Trips
Gr 10	**Advancement Years** — Deepening of knowledge, skills, and values in the various disciplines that prepare scholars for their own specialized course of study	Alternative Learning Experiences (ALA)	
Gr 9			Student Activities
Gr 8	**Foundation Years** — Fundamental knowledge, skills, and values in the different content areas		Competitions
Gr 7			Outreach Programs

Source: PSHS, 2024

Compared to the DepEd curriculum which follows a spiral progression across grade levels in high school and does not transition seamlessly from JHS to SHS, the PSHS curriculum is strategically designed to scaffold skills and knowledge in STEM education. As testament to the rigor of its curriculum, the PSHS system is one of the top feeder schools to the University of the Philippines campuses. The figures below illustrate the proficiencies of the University of the Philippines College Admission Test (UPCAT) takers across different subjects during the tests in 2020 and 2024, with consideration to where students were enrolled at the time of testing. Notably, DepEd Science High Schools, or schools given by DepEd the liberty to implement entrance exams and other selection procedures to ensure that they admit the most qualified students also perform well in the exam, as shown in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5
UPCAT Performance

Legend: Private Schools ■ (dark blue)   Philippine Science HS ■ (red)   Public Schools ■ (yellow)   DepEd Science HS ■ (light pink/salmon)

2020

UPG	Private	Public	PSHS	DepEd Science HS
	2.849	2.832	1.996	2.461

Chart (MEAN SCORE, y-axis 0–80):
- Language Proficiency: Public 48.1, PSHS 64.1
- Science: Public 48.9, PSHS 70.1
- Mathematics: Public 48.8, PSHS 71.1
- Reading Comprehension: Public 48.7, PSHS 62.9

2024

UPG	Private	Public	PSHS	DepEd Science HS
	2.812	2.851	2.225	2.530

Chart (MEAN SCORE, y-axis 0–80):
- Language Proficiency: Public 48.1, PSHS 62.3
- Science: Public 48.1, PSHS 69.0
- Mathematics: Public 48.4, PSHS 69.2
- Reading Comprehension: Public 48.5, PSHS 62.4

Note: The UPG is the combined score of an applicant's weighted UPCAT score and the weighted average of their grades in high school.

Abbreviations: UPCAT = University of the Philippines College Admission Test, UPG = University Predicted Grade, PSHS = Philippine Science High School

FIGURE 6
PSHS System, SY 2022–2023 to SY 2024–2025

Number of Slots vs. Number of Applicants

☐ Slots   ■ Principal Qualifiers   ■ Applicants

REGION / CAMPUS	SLOTS	Principal Qualifiers	Applicants
I. Ilocos	347	533	3,943
II. Cagayan Valley	360	668	2,465
III. Central Luzon	360	755	1,952
IV-A. CALABARZON	360	786	3,298
MIMAROPA Region	148	318	3,953
V. Bicol	328	643	2,772
VI. Western Visayas	360	697	3,021
VII. Central Visayas	330	579	3,152
VIII. Eastern Visayas	270	551	3,080
IX. Zamboanga Penisula	252	365	1,816
X. Central Mindanao	360	690	3,632
XI. Southern Mindanao	360	686	2,319
XII. SOCCSKSARGEN	360	658	4,095
NCR (Main Campus)	719	3,234	4,540
CAR	270	469	2,119
XIII. Caraga	360	602	2,645
BARMM	0		679

However, gaining admission into PSHS is competitive, with limited slots for a sizable pool of applicants. As what can be seen in Figure 6, there are only 90 to 120 slots allocated in each regional campus of the PSHS system, with the exception of 240 slots in the Main Campus (NCR), which leaves other qualified applicants with no opportunity to enter the PSHS. While there were 49,481 applicants for the 16 Pisay campuses from SY 2022–2023 to SY 2024–2025, only 11,351 (23%) qualified. However, only 5,544 were able to eventually pursue their studies in PSHS, with the remaining 5,807 "turned away" due to lack of slots (see Figure 6). Notably, private school students outperform public school students (43% vs. 17%) in the PSHS National Competitive Examination (NCE).

FIGURE 7
DepEd Special Curricular Programs (SCPs)

SCP Special Curricular Program

SPS Special Sports Program

SPA Special Program in the Arts

SPFL Special Program in Foreign Language

SPJ Special Program in Journalism

SPTVE Special Program in Technical-Vocational Education

DM 173 and 242
SPS piloted, aimed to enhance school sports and train teacher-trainers

DO 63
Allocated funding for the Special Programs in arts, sports, and education

DO 54
Strengthened the implementation of **SPA** and **SPS**, with further integration into the overall curriculum framework

DM 135
SPA established, focused on developing talents in music, dance, drama, visual arts, and media arts

DM 490
Introduced Spanish as an elective language in high schools under the **SPFL**

DO 25
Provided detailed guidelines for the implementation and evaluation of the **SPS**

DM 560
Officially launched the **SPFL**; expanding to include languages such as French, Nihongo, and Mandarin

DO 46
Established comprehensive policy guidelines for **SCP**s across secondary education, embedding them as career pathways

DO 21
Introduced **SCP**s as supplementary subjects rather than replacements for Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE), aligning them with the K–12 basic education Program.

DO 37
Introduced the Redesigned Technical-Vocational High School Program, emphasizing digital literacy and inventive thinking within **SPTVE**

DM 103
SPJ piloted, emphasizing the cultivation of ethical and competent campus journalists

Finalized **SCP** Manuals of Operations in response to the MATATAG Curriculum

DO10 and 12
Enacted policy guidelines for **SCP** implementation under the MATATAG Curriculum

2000 2001 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2012 2015 2019 2020 2024
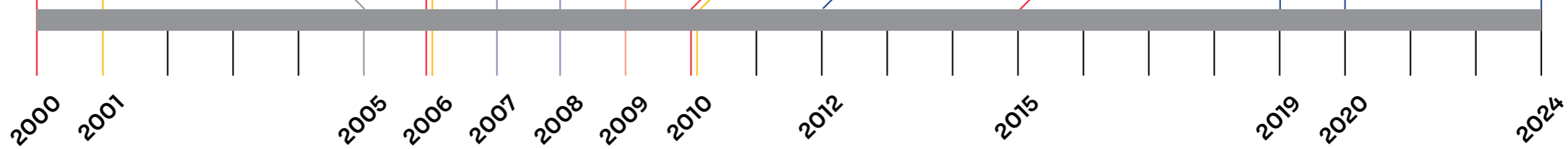
FIGURE 8
Timeline of Special Science Programs in the Philippines

Late 1950s

Creation of **National Science Development Board** to advance research, foster innovation, and harness science for national progress

1960's

Creation of **Philippine Science High School** (main campus) and other science high schools

1990's

Creation of the **ESEP (Engineering and Science Education Project)**, which supported the construction & upgrading of 110 high school science laboratories

2000's

Launching of the **Special Program in Science, Technology, and Engineering (SPSTE)**, which allowed regular schools to offer enhanced science curricula for students showing aptitude in these subjects

2010's

Creation of the **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)** Track under **K–12**.

RA 3589, s. 1958

Passed to coordinate and promote cooperation in the scientific research and development activities of government agencies and private enterprises; grant scholarship in mathematics, science, technology and science teaching to deserving citizens; undertake, in collaboration with the Department of Education, a thorough survey of the educational system and to determine, as well as to recommend to the corresponding authorities, the measures which may be necessary to make it an effective instrument for scientific advancement; and creates the National Institute of Science and Technology to implement and conduct programs of scientific and technological research and development as may be directed by the Board

DepEd Special Science High School

RA 3661, s. 1963
An act to establish the Philippine Science High School

To prepare its students for a science career

DepEd Regional Science High Schools

DO 69, s. 1993
Science High Schools established

To provide a more intensive and advanced secondary education focused on science

DepEd Provincial Science High Schools

DO 44, s. 1995
Establishing Provincial Science High Schools

To expand the establishment of science HS to all provinces

DepEd Special Science Programs (High School)

DO 54, s. 1996
Guidelines for the Implementation of Special Science Classes Under the Engineering and Science Education Project

To improve the quality of science and mathematics education, and to develop a strong science culture among high schools

DepEd Special Science Programs (Elementary)

DO 51, s. 2010
Guidelines on Strengthening Science Education at the Elementary Level

To develop students with higher aptitude for science and mathematics

Meanwhile, in public schools outside the Philippine Science High School system, the Department of Education has introduced a variety of special curricular programs for gifted and talented learners (see Figure 8):

- Special Program in the Arts;
- Special Program in Foreign Language;
- Special Program in Journalism;
- Special Program in Sports;
- Special Program in Science Technology and Engineering; and
- Special Program in Technical-Vocational Education.

Evidently, these special programs were not borne out of a cohesive and deliberate framework to support the best and brightest learners. Instead, these are different initiatives that emerged over 24 years and were eventually grouped under one category and office. Some SCPs still operate under policies and implementing guidelines that date back to the era of DECS, the predecessor of DepEd. To illustrate the different milestones on SCPs, refer to Figure 7

In consultation with implementing units in the DepEd Central Office, several gaps in the implementation of these programs were identified:

- **Limited financing.** Following DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2016, the budget allocation for special curricular programs (SCP) has been embedded in the MOOE of implementing schools. Based on the data submitted by DepEd, allocation for SCP learners in 2024 was at a measly Php 150 per elementary learner and Php 202 per high school learner. Both allocations suffered a decrease of around 9 to 11% for the 2025 fiscal year, considering the increase in the number of learners for both levels. It was also raised that the Central Office is unable to monitor if the MOOE allocation is in fact used for SCP-related activities only.

TABLE 4
MOOE Allocations to Special Curricular Program Learners at the Elementary and Junior High School Levels

		2024	2024 Allocation per SCP Learner	2025	2025 Allocation per SCP Learner
Elementary	No. of learners	124,79	**Php 150**	131,304	**Php 137**
	MOOE allocation	18,719,250		17,988,648	
Junior High School	No. of learners	280,80	**Php 202**	1,672,294	**Php 180**
	MOOE allocation	56,722,408		301,012,920	

Source: DepEd submission as of December 2, 2024

In addition, the central office downloads Program Support Funds (PSF) for the regional offices, which they can use to provide additional support for the SCP implementation. Based also on the submitted data of DepEd last December 2024, for SY 2024–2025, a total of Php 143,022,678.00 were downloaded as PSF, catering to 358,642 learners in 2,267 schools, amounting to an average of Php 398.79 per learner for the school year. During consultations, the rationale for the amounts was unclear, and it was evident that they did not lead to significant improvements in resource allocation.

- **Few opportunities for specialized teacher training and learning resources.**

Largely due to limited funds, teacher training and learning resources for special curricular programs depend heavily on support from external partners. While extremely helpful for beneficiary schools, the result is uneven implementation of these programs. Although Capacity Building for Specialized Teachers is part of the allowable expenses for the program support funds, there is no mechanism for monitoring to ensure that teachers of special curricular programs are prepared to deliver specialized instruction.

- **Absence of mechanisms for identification of specialization in earlier years.** Studies show that it is critical that emergent talent be nurtured early on, not only to nurture talent strategically but also to ensure equity for the poorest, who otherwise would not have opportunities to compete in special programs at the secondary level. But notably, very few special curricular programs extend to elementary levels. Worse, it is typically offered only in areas where a neighboring high school also offers the same special programs.
- **Lack of cohesive vision for curricular progression of special programs.** Because these programs are often implemented in silos, the curriculum at the elementary level does not effectively transition into the secondary or tertiary levels. For example, the curricula of Special Science Elementary Schools (SSES) and the Special Program on Science, Technology, and Engineering (SPSTE) do not transition seamlessly to the curricula of Special Science High Schools (SSHS) or even the PSHS system. The development of these special science programs across decades have been disjointed.

Moreover, as SCPs are predominantly designed for Junior High School learners, learners who attend these programs have few opportunities to further advance their skills when they transition to senior high school. To illustrate, even if Special Program for the Arts completers take the Arts and Design track for senior high school, the SHS curriculum may not significantly be more advanced than the special program curriculum in JHS.

- **Lack of clear delineation and structure of manpower throughout the DepEd governance levels.** During consultations, it was noted there is no clear and established staffing pattern for program implementers and holders, spanning from the Central Office to the Field Offices. At present, the personnel identified for the implementation of SCPs consist primarily of Focal Persons from the Central Office, as well as Division Education Program Supervisors assigned to various subject areas.
- **Absence of assessment mechanisms such as tracer studies to determine the effectiveness or impact of the program relative to its set goals and objectives.** Although the DepEd BLD provides formative tools for classroom-based assessments, the evaluation of SCPs is not standardized. Available tests mostly lean toward measuring science and mathematics skills, lacking space for measures in arts, foreign language, journalism, sports, and technical-vocational skills. These exams are conducted without accounting for learners' SCP involvement, thus providing no opportunity to assess the long-term impact of the programs on learners.

Recommendations

■ Increase the slot allocations for the PSHS to ensure all qualified students are admitted.

■ Review and expand the DepEd policies on Special Science High Schools and SCPs in order to increase slot allocations and ensure additional resources such as teacher training, laboratories, and learning materials.

■ Establish a DepEd program to identify and support emerging talent as early as Grade 3, with a focus on discovering and nurturing gifted students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

■ Encourage CHED to create a scholarship program supporting top graduates to pursue higher education abroad, similar to initiatives in countries like Vietnam and Singapore.

■ Review related DepEd policies and programs to ensure coherence of policies including the selection and rotation of principals; selection of teachers; assignments in non-teaching personnel, among others.

■ Conduct graduate tracer studies to assess learner outcomes of the various programs.

■ Rationalize, update, and improve coherence of DepEd SCPs.

Issue 5: Design flaws undermine the National Learning Recovery Program.

On July 3, 2023, DepEd released Order No. 13, s. 2023, outlining plans to implement the NLRP within 90 days. However, additional policies are still pending, particularly for the National Reading Program, National Math Program, and National Science and Technology Program.

To address learning gaps and enhance reading proficiency, DepEd introduced Catch-Up Fridays as part of the MATATAG agenda (DM 1 s. 2024). This initiative dedicates Fridays to activities aimed at improving reading skills and comprehension, as well as integrating values, health, and peace education. Despite initial efforts, Catch-Up Fridays appeared to lack robust teacher training, adequate lesson guides, and clear guidelines on research-based reading interventions. The absence of reliable assessment and support for teachers to enhance their reading literacy skills has hampered progress.

The Comprehensive Reading and Literacy Assessment, administered to Grades 1–3 twice a year, highlights the scale of the challenge. It indicates that about 4% of learners from Regions IV-B, V, VI, VIII, and the National Capital Region (NCR) require full intervention, 24% need moderate intervention, and the remainder need light intervention.

The DepEd's NLRP faces significant criticism and is in need of massive reforms, as highlighted during a Senate Committee on Basic Education hearing chaired by Senator Win Gatchalian (February 22, 2024).

"Tingin ko ho sa intervention, it has to be incorporated in the school year—bahagi na siya ng school year. I don't think ma-cu-cure ng camp yung problema. The mere fact na may Grade 7 and 8 who cannot do basic addition and subtraction"
—Senator Nancy Binay, August 7, 2024, hearing of the Senate Committee on Basic Education, on the National Learning Camps

The content of intervention camps often does not align with the required grade-level competencies—e.g., focusing on basic arithmetic for Grade 8 students instead of more advanced topics, such as algebra and quadratic equations. This discrepancy leaves learners lagging behind in both current and earlier grade-level proficiencies.

Additionally, the program suffers from a lack of critical data to assess the program's effectiveness. Senators Win Gatchalian and Nancy Binay have expressed frustration over the absence of key metrics, such as the number of learners needing intervention and detailed screening results.

The program's voluntary structure and inadequate data collection have resulted in the inefficient allocation and utilization of resources.

Recommendations

Drawing from consultations conducted with the groups that led learning loss recovery efforts after the pandemic, EDCOM II has identified key elements for implementation. The Committee urges DepEd to integrate these into the NLRP.

To improve the situation, producing lesson exemplars that allow teachers flexibility in pedagogy and ensure quality lessons is suggested.

While the new decongested curriculum provides more teaching time, it is not sufficient on its own. **There is a need to continue capacitating teachers, reducing administrative tasks, and providing necessary resources.** The MATATAG curriculum should aim to ensure that the 180 days of teaching actually result in 180 days of learning.

EDCOM II has filed House Resolution No. 1805, authored by EDCOM II Co-chairperson Cong. Roman Romulo and former Cong. Kiko Benitez, urging DepEd to suspend the regular academic program for 8–12 weeks to implement an effective learning recovery program for K–12 learners. The resolution calls for comprehensive assessments before and after the intervention to determine learners' proficiency levels and the need for additional interventions. It also stresses the need for continuous, targeted, and differentiated remediation throughout the schoolyear to address both current and earlier grade-level proficiencies, as current programs such as the NLRP and Catch-Up Fridays are deemed insufficient.

DepEd is considering recalibrating the NLRP to focus solely on those needing intervention and potentially incorporating these interventions into the regular school year rather than relying on camps. However, the overall challenge remains significant, with concerns that addressing these learning gaps may take years or even decades.

Priority Area 8:
School Infrastructure

Good school infrastructure is critical to ensuring quality education. In the Philippines, regional disparities and environmental vulnerabilities have significantly impacted the availability and quality of school buildings, affecting educational outcomes (Figueroa et al., 2016). Based on hearings facilitated by the Commission on October 10, November 21, and November 28, 2024, centralized governance and resource allocation remain impediments to addressing the classroom backlog and improving facilities, with additional challenges brought about by population growth, disasters, and project implementation inefficiencies.

Issue 1: Classroom construction is slow, inefficient, and unsustainable, emphasizing the urgency for more diverse and effective solutions.

Of the 24 million learners in public schools, over 5.1 million are classified as aisle learners,[2] indicating a significant shortage of learning spaces in overcrowded public school classrooms. This indicates a significant shortage of learning spaces in overcrowded public school classrooms. At the national level, classroom construction has been the default solution to addressing congestion in public schools. However, the process of building new classrooms has been slow, inefficient, and unsustainable. Moreover, population growth, finite buildable space, and changing needs continue to outpace the government's capacity to build, emphasizing the urgency for more diverse and effective solutions.

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2   Those in excess of the ideal number of 25 to 45 learners in a classroom.

Public schools across the Philippines face a substantial infrastructure gap, with a reported shortage of 165,443 (as per DepEd).[3] The completion rate of classroom construction has been declining over the past 5 years. In 2022, no new classrooms were constructed from new appropriations. Only 847 classrooms or 12% of the required number were slated to be completed by December 2024.

Historical increases in funding and attempts at long-term planning seem to be inadequate. Historically, the Philippine government has tried to ensure the adequacy of classrooms in public schools through long-term planning and continuous funding. As early as 1953, RA 836 had allocated Php 20 million annually for 5 years to construct, repair, and improve school buildings, emphasizing equitable distribution and public bidding for large projects. This was followed by RA 1411 in 1955, which extended funding with a 5-year public works appropriation that included the School Building Program.

Under the Macapagal administration, RA 4171 (1964) provided Php 50 million annually for 20 years, establishing a nationwide school building plan and reinforcing protocols for equitable fund allocation and project implementation. These laws stressed proper land ownership, limits on administrative costs, and the reversion of unspent funds to the National Treasury to be allocated for the same purpose in the following year.

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3   In hearings on October 10, 2024, and November 21, 2024, as well as in DepEd submissions on November 25, 2024, and December 4, 2024, the DepEd Education Facilities Division and the DepEd Finance Division reported conflicting figures regarding classroom construction targets, accomplishments, and backlogs from 2014 to 2024. The range of this discrepancy is attributed to the: (a) mismatched timelines of DepEd's budget cycle and its data validation and site prioritization processes; and (2) planning and construction challenges, including projects being abandoned, reverted, or terminated.

Another policy aimed at adequacy and equity in the provision of classrooms is RA 7880 (Fair and Equitable Access to Education Act of 1995), known in the field as the Roxas Law. This law stipulates that the annual public funding from the General Appropriations Act (GAA) for classrooms should be allocated based on specific criteria: 50% based on student population, 40% to address classroom shortages, and 10% based on DepEd's implementation of the policy. This allocation aims to balance resource distribution, prioritizing both population density and existing classroom deficits.

The Roxas Law became the basis for the process of the School Building Program in the years that followed, with the Secretary of Education responsible for the identification of the schools that will receive the additional classrooms, although the actual construction fell under the responsibility of the Secretary of Public Works.

To facilitate the prioritization of schools, in 2003, DO 29 introduced a color spectrum based on congestion level. Color assignments were as follows: school buildings that had at least one classroom with 45 students or less were "blue"; those with 46–50 students were "yellow"; those with 51–55 students were "gold"; those with 56 students or more were "red"; and those with no students were "black." Priority was given to "hot"-colored schools, namely those assigned gold, red, and black. These priority lists were prepared by field officials and district engineers, and then assessed and approved by the schools district superintendent (SDS), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) District Engineer, and District Representative.

To create well-informed classroom construction plans, the 2016 GAA had a special provision of Php 1 million for DepEd to form site development plans. These would comprehensively map out school sites, buildings, and land area, particularly documenting the remaining buildable space, and be used to build a multiyear plan for classroom construction. DepEd fully utilized this fund to create site developments for 20% of its schools at that time (around 9,400 schools), but the fund was never renewed again.

Thus, during the 1990s, the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports (DECS) addressed classroom shortages by increasing the class size to 56 students, promoting paired teaching and multigrade classes, and implementing two-shift schedules in elementary schools and up to four shifts in secondary schools (e.g., DECS Order Nos. 22, s. 1994, and 26, s. 1995).

The policy has been reinforced through DO 62, s. 2004, which mandates double shifting as the default arrangement for all secondary schools and congested elementary schools. This policy is a direct response to the ongoing classroom shortages and aims to maximize the use of already existing facilities. This rule has been reiterated through DO 54, s. 2008, which emphasizes the need for strict compliance to ensure that schools can effectively manage the high number of students and limited classroom space.

Twenty years after the said policy, there are now 2,591 public schools (5.4%) having double shifts, particularly in Region IV-A, the NCR, and Region III, and some even implement triple or combinations of shifts. For instance, Ciudad Nuevo de Naic High School in Naic, Cavite, operates six shifts, including morning and evening sessions. A small number of schools implement triple shifts or combinations of two or more shifts.

FIGURE 9
Schools with Multiple Shifts, SY 2023–2024

Data from DepEd Learner InformationSystem as of January 31, 2024
■ Double Shift ■ Triple Shift (with combination of two or more shifts)

Region	Double Shift	Triple Shift	Total
Region IV-A	648	64	712
NCR	566	10	576
Region VII	211	27	238
Region III	196	14	210
Region XI	116	1	117
Region VI	90	3	93
Region X	73	3	76
Region V	57	12	69
Region XIII	41	–	41
Region XII	29	–	29
Region I	24	–	24
MIMAROPA	12	–	12
Region VIII	13	–	13
Region IX	8	–	8
CAR	4	–	4
Region II	1	–	1
BARMM	–	–	–
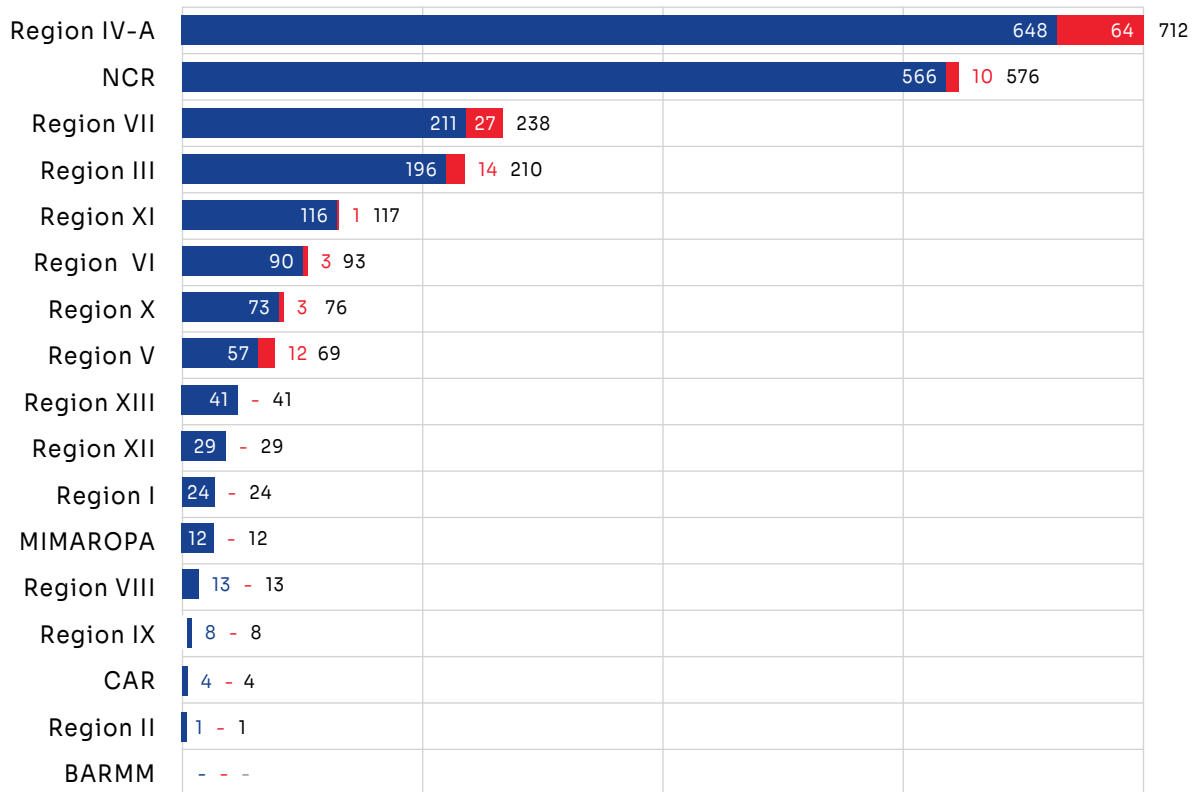
Source: DepEd Learner Information System, as of January 31, 2024

Interestingly, a 2019 study by Cacho et al. that examined the impacts of a month-long double-shift class schedule on Grade 4 students, teachers, and parents during a temporary classroom shortage found improved student engagement and behavior both inside and outside the school. Parents and teachers generally viewed the adjusted schedule positively, citing benefits such as family engagement, rest, recreation, cost-efficiency, and improved learning outcomes. While parents identified more disadvantages than teachers and students, all groups successfully adapted to the new arrangement. Teachers creatively optimized their teaching strategies, such as integrating Values Education into different subjects to make the most of limited time and resources. The study suggests implementing double-shift schedules in schools with classroom shortages as an interim solution provided that challenges are proactively addressed.

The Local Government Code of 1991 devolved school building construction to LGUs.
Prior to this, until 1990, school construction fell under the mandate of the DPWH, while minor repairs that cost less than Php 20,000 were delegated to DepEd schools district superintendents (SDSs). In 1991, DECS secured control over the school building budget at the division level. This decentralization continued with the Third Elementary Education Project, which empowered principals and LGUs to lead school building efforts, fostering local ownership through a counterpart funding scheme that required LGUs to contribute a portion of the costs.

Despite policy, funding, and governance innovations, classroom construction has been slow due to bottlenecks in the project cycle. Currently, the system operates through a collaborative framework between the DPWH and DepEd through the Basic Education Facilities Fund. This fund, which peaked at Php 118 billion in 2017, had been drastically reduced to Php 28 billion by 2025 due to underutilization. In contrast, the total budget requirement to address classroom shortage by 2023 was Php 413.6 billion. DepEd further estimates that Php 105 billion would be needed annually, assuming a constant need for 12,000 classrooms each year. But the proposed budget for 2025 only included Php 7.2 billion for constructing about 6,648 new school buildings, way below the target.

The Basic Education Facilities Fund is underutilized due to bottlenecks in the project cycle. Planning and procurement delays, design modifications, failed biddings, and contract cancellations hinder the delivery of classrooms. Data used in determining classroom shortage (or "forward estimates" for the budget call) are outdated, with a delay of at most three years; for the 2024 forward estimates, DepEd used enrollment data from SY 2022–2023 and school building inventory data from SY 2021–2022.

Bottlenecks also include limited budgets forcing prioritization of construction over maintenance; standard specifications not being applicable in all regions; and issues with a lack of buildable space, site availability, cost mismatches, and subpar quality. Costing for classrooms is not aligned across agencies: DepEd uses a Php 2.5 million cost per classroom, the average of its planning parameters, but DPWH uses a Php 3.5 million baseline cost per classroom, which accounts for current material costs, the availability of materials, transportation costs, and site access for machinery. These are complicated by budgets not being adjusted for current material costs and DepEd's limited visibility in project implementation. Last Mile Schools face construction delays due to poor road networks and security risks despite funds being downloaded to field offices.

The collaborative roles of DPWH and DepEd in managing school infrastructure highlight systemic inefficiencies. In 2024, DepEd allocated Php 23.87 billion to DPWH for constructing, repairing, and rehabilitating school facilities. Joint validation and planning processes were established to ensure project feasibility and efficient fund utilization. However, challenges persist, including delays in budget releases,

Construction delays have resulted from various factors, including the need for necessary permits from agencies such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and LGUs, shortages of materials, third-party issues, unworkable site conditions, difficulties in accessing remote areas, and challenges related to right of way (ROW), such as demolition, clearing, and utility relocation, particularly in remote areas.

site ownership disputes, limited buildable spaces, logistical errors in project documentation, limited capacity to project student population growth especially in urban areas, unprogrammed lists of validated schools, and errors in school names or locations. These systemic inefficiencies underscore the need for streamlined coordination and enhanced planning to ensure timely and effective delivery of classroom infrastructure.

In 2011, the **National and Local Government Counterparting Program for Classroom Construction** was established through Department Memorandum No. 50. This program, which would run until 2017, involved memorandums of agreement between DepEd and LGUs, where LGUs would provide 50% of the cost of classroom construction. This collaborative approach aimed to leverage local resources and accelerate the construction of classrooms, ensuring that funding was utilized efficiently and effectively.

Innovative public–private partnerships (PPPs) for school infrastructure have emerged in subsequent years. The Public–Private Partnership for School Infrastructure Project (PSIP) adopted Build-Lease-Transfer and Build-Transfer models between 2011 and 2019, leveraging private sector expertise to address infrastructure gaps. The first phase, from 2011 to 2015, utilized the Build-Lease-Transfer model, where private sector partners would build the school infrastructure, lease it to the government for a specified period, and then transfer ownership to the government. The second phase, from 2013 to 2019, adopted the Build-Transfer model, where private partners would build the infrastructure and then transfer it to the government upon completion. These PPP models brought in private sector expertise and funding, helping bridge the gap in school infrastructure needs.

The voucher system offers a possible, although limited solution for classroom decongestion. Public schools continue to grapple with overcrowding, an issue that worsens at higher levels of basic education. Regions such as IV-A, NCR, and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) are particularly affected and face the highest number of aisle learners.

The absorptive capacity of private schools under the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education is insufficient to address the problems. Nonparticipating private schools—which present a significant untapped resource—are glaringly excluded from capacity calculations.

For instance, in congested regions such as the NCR, Region III, and Region IV-A, 1,605 public schools operate on shifting schedules to accommodate learners, while 5,760 private schools—both Educational Service Contracting (ESC) and non-ESC—have 136,573 free seats available for surplus elementary learners.

However, ESC schools alone can accommodate approximately 50,399 students—just 9.4% of the 536,057 surplus elementary learners in overcrowded public schools. This is equivalent to 1 out of 1,175 congested public schools. By including both ESC and non-ESC schools, the number of learners who could be accommodated jumps significantly to 121,036, or 22.5% of the surplus. This translates to 181 out of 1,175 congested public schools.

These findings underscore the need to broaden the scope of the voucher system to include non-ESC schools, maximizing private-sector capacity. However, even with this expansion, vouchers only alleviate congestion to some extent and remain an incomplete solution when weighed against the sheer scale of the problem. Broader strategies are needed to optimize resources and resolve systemic limitations.

Policy gaps and insufficient coordination between the National Housing Authority (NHA) and DepEd stall school construction within resettlement sites, making access difficult for displaced children and congesting nearby schools. The implementing rules and regulations of Batas Pambansa Blg. 220, last updated in 2008, only mandates the inclusion of schools in housing sites with more than 1,500 dwelling units. This implies a threshold of 3,000 school-age children, as the PSA estimates that roughly half of households have children in school. This provision therefore delays access for smaller or incrementally developed sites.

NHA Memorandum Circular No. 2015-0015 highlights the importance of educational services in social housing sites but lacks guidelines for DepEd and NHA coordination on key aspects, such as site selection, suitability, and planning. **The lack of clear guidelines on interagency collaboration could create gaps in ensuring that educational facilities are appropriately integrated into housing sites**, highlighting the need for more detailed and coordinated planning between these two critical agencies.

Similarly, DILG Memorandum Circular No. 143-08 on the Creation of Local Housing Boards does not include representation from the education sector, which is critical in responding to the educational needs of displaced communities. Local housing boards act as the sole clearing house for eviction and demolition activities involving informal settlers in danger zones, public places, and government projects. A representative from the education sector is critical in ensuring that the educational well-being of affected communities is protected. Furthermore, the checklist for the compliance certificate lacks any provision for data collection or reporting on educational needs, and there are no provisions for mandating the establishment of educational facilities or ensuring continuous service delivery after the initial relocation of informal settlers. This oversight underscores the need for a more comprehensive approach that integrates educational considerations into the relocation process.

Through Memorandum Circular No. 2020-160, the DILG sought to establish the responsibilities of LGUs in managing the relocation of informal settler families. Sending LGUs were tasked with ensuring that all qualified families were relocated

to resettlement sites equipped with basic utilities, facilities, and services, and they were also required to provide financial assistance to these families. Receiving LGUs, through their local interagency committee, were responsible for formulating the plan and undertaking the provision of necessary social services for relocated families.

However, this framework was revoked in 2023. **DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2023-113 has since assigned the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) to supervise resettlement governance.** According to RA 11201 (DHSUD Act of 2019), the department is designated as the sole and main entity responsible for planning, policymaking, regulation, program coordination, and performance monitoring in all matters related to housing, human settlement, and urban development. This mandate is primarily focused on ensuring access to and the affordability of basic human needs, which are fundamental to the well-being of the population. While this change aims to enhance efficiency, its impact on ensuring integrated education infrastructure has yet to be fully realized.

The effects of these policy shortcomings are particularly felt in regions such as CALABARZON, an economic growth corridor distinguished by its highly industrialized landscape. This region is home to a significant number of economic zones and industrial estates, with 17 already in operation, 8 proclaimed, and 30 in various stages of development. Rapid urbanization and interregional migration have intensified the strain on existing schools in the area. In Cavite, the population growth rate of up to 16% (in Dasmariñas) is due to housing resettlements and employment-related migration and has led to severe school congestion.

Addressing these challenges requires more robust interagency collaboration and planning frameworks.

To address the socioeconomic needs and cultural activities of housing beneficiaries, as well as to promote the implementation of environmental management programs in housing sites, appropriate community facilities, such as schools and child development centers, must be included in housing projects and incorporated into site plans.

Recommendations

With migration and population growth, the shifting demands continue to exceed the government's capacity to plan and build classrooms and schools that are responsive to the needs of communities.

The classroom shortage is projected to take over 20 years to resolve with the current average annual budget of Php 24 billion. The shortage affects not only physical infrastructure but also education quality, with many students being taught in makeshift or temporary classrooms and significant teacher shortages exacerbating the issue.

Creative solutions are needed not only to accelerate ongoing construction projects but also to design decongestion schemes especially in the context of limited funding. Moreover, innovative funding strategies must be in place to ensure that Filipino students in the next decades are able to thrive in conducive learning environments.

The following recommendations are for ongoing and future construction projects:

- Contractors must submit **catch-up plans** to mitigate delays in current projects. This should be supported by the use of concrete blocks, advanced project management software, and inspections to avoid deficiencies. Priority

must be given to schools with makeshift structures and those with high classroom shortages. For 2025, discussions with DepEd should focus on the implementation of calamity-resilient school buildings to address vulnerabilities in disaster-prone areas. To address ROW and site ownership issues, clear protocols for resolving site-related conflicts, including security permits and facilitating ROW processes in coordination with LGUs and other agencies, must be established.

- **Technology for prefabricated school buildings** is being explored to accelerate the construction process. DepEd is also looking into building mid-rise multistory buildings to maximize buildable spaces, especially in urbanized cities and areas with limited land availability.

Improving the effectiveness of funding and governance for construction projects will involve the following:

- **The school congestion analysis can be seamlessly integrated into the regular planning processes** at the divisional, regional, and even national level. For instance, Region III successfully simulated the integration of school congestion analysis into their 2015 budget plan, demonstrating how classroom allocations could be adjusted in favor of more appropriate strategies, such as acquiring land.

Without these measures, housing policies will continue to worsen school overcrowding, contribute to facility gaps, and delay educational access to relocated families. Coordinated governance is needed to ensure that housing developments are responsive to the basic human rights of citizens, including their right to education.

FIGURE 10
School Congestion Analytical Tool
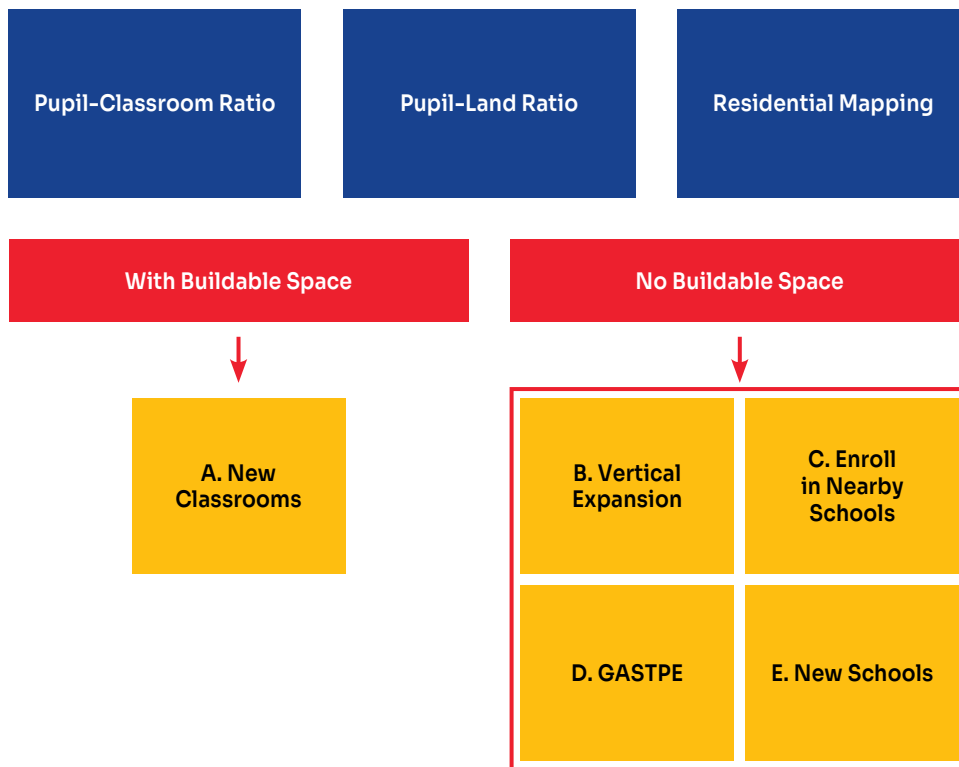
School Type		Appropriate Strategy					
Pupil-Classroom Ratio	Pupil-Land Ratio	New Class rooms	Redistribute Enrollment to Nearby Schools	GASTPE	Retrofit for Vertical Expansion	New School	Others
			x	x		x	
			x	x	x	x	
		x	x	x	x		
		x	x	x			
			x	x		x	
			x	x	x	x	
		x	x	x	x		
		x	x	x			

Source: The Asia Foundation, 2017

The School Congestion Analytical Tool is a planning framework that determines the type of congestion problem faced by a school based on readily available data and matches it with an appropriate program. It aims to generate five reports: (a) an analysis of pupil-classroom ratio and pupil-land ratio; (b) congested school analysis; (c) spacious school analysis; and (d) private school analysis. Based on the reports, the School Congestion Analytical Tool is designed to support proper identification and target setting of the various strategies (The Asia Foundation, 2017).

Reprogramming allocations from the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education with input from school congestion analysis is another area that DepEd should consider. This strategy has the potential to optimize the use of support given to private schools, ensuring it complements the needs of public schools more effectively. This approach can help optimize resource allocation and ensure that educational needs are met more effectively.

- **Analyzing schools as interconnected networks rather than isolated units allows for a more precise assessment of their capacities.** This approach has yielded significant refinements in data accuracy. For instance, in Cavite Province, the actual capacity of private schools was found to be 22,053 students—less than half of the initial estimate of 44,436. Accurate measurements are crucial for effective resource allocation and targeted interventions, ultimately aiding education planners in making informed decisions.
- **Attention should be given to isolated public schools,** which are not part of a networked system and are more vulnerable to issues such as community relocation, overcrowding, and poor urban planning. This is illustrated in Figure 11, the school mapping on the municipality of Naic, Cavite. Unlike networked schools that can redirect extra students to nearby private schools through subsidies, isolated schools do not have this option. For these schools, the only viable solution to handling increased student numbers is to build additional school infrastructure. This underscores the need for targeted infrastructure development in areas where networked solutions are not feasible.
- Senator Win Gatchalian suggests implementing **a counterpart program where LGUs share 50% of construction costs with the national government.** This approach, similar to one he implemented as mayor of Valenzuela City, could facilitate the simultaneous construction of more classrooms. DepEd has tried a 50-50 funding scheme, where LGUs certify the availability of their funds before DepEd releases its share. However, this has been unsuccessful in many cases due to LGUs' inability to deliver their portion.
- An alternative is the **matching (1–1) scheme** for classrooms, and there have been successful instances where LGUs, such as in Nagpayong, have purchased land, built buildings, and covered the costs of soil testing when they had the necessary funds.
- **Expanding SDS responsibility and authority by allowing LGUs to construct classrooms simultaneously, with flexible funding arrangements not necessarily limited to a 50–50 split, will enhance the counterparting mechanism.** This approach aims to leverage the capabilities of LGUs, especially in regions such as the NCR, to expedite classroom construction.

For areas without buildable spaces, the following complementary strategies to decongest public schools are proposed aside from the voucher system:

- A **referral system at the LGU or schools division office level** must be established to facilitate the transfer or referral of students from congested public schools to more spacious public schools, thereby distributing the student population more evenly.
- The regional analysis also highlights **the potential of certain private schools to act as hubs that will accommodate surplus students from congested public schools**. Some private schools are connected to over 30 congested public schools, making them prime candidates to absorb additional students if subsidies, including those provided through programs such as Enhanced Education Service Contracting and the SEF, are available. These subsidies could facilitate the transfer of public learners to these private schools, helping reduce overcrowding.

FIGURE 11
School Mapping Case Study: Naic, Cavite

Legend:

- Public School with Surplus Learners
- Private School with Capacity
- Shortest Paths to Private Schools
  20-minute travel time via vehicle
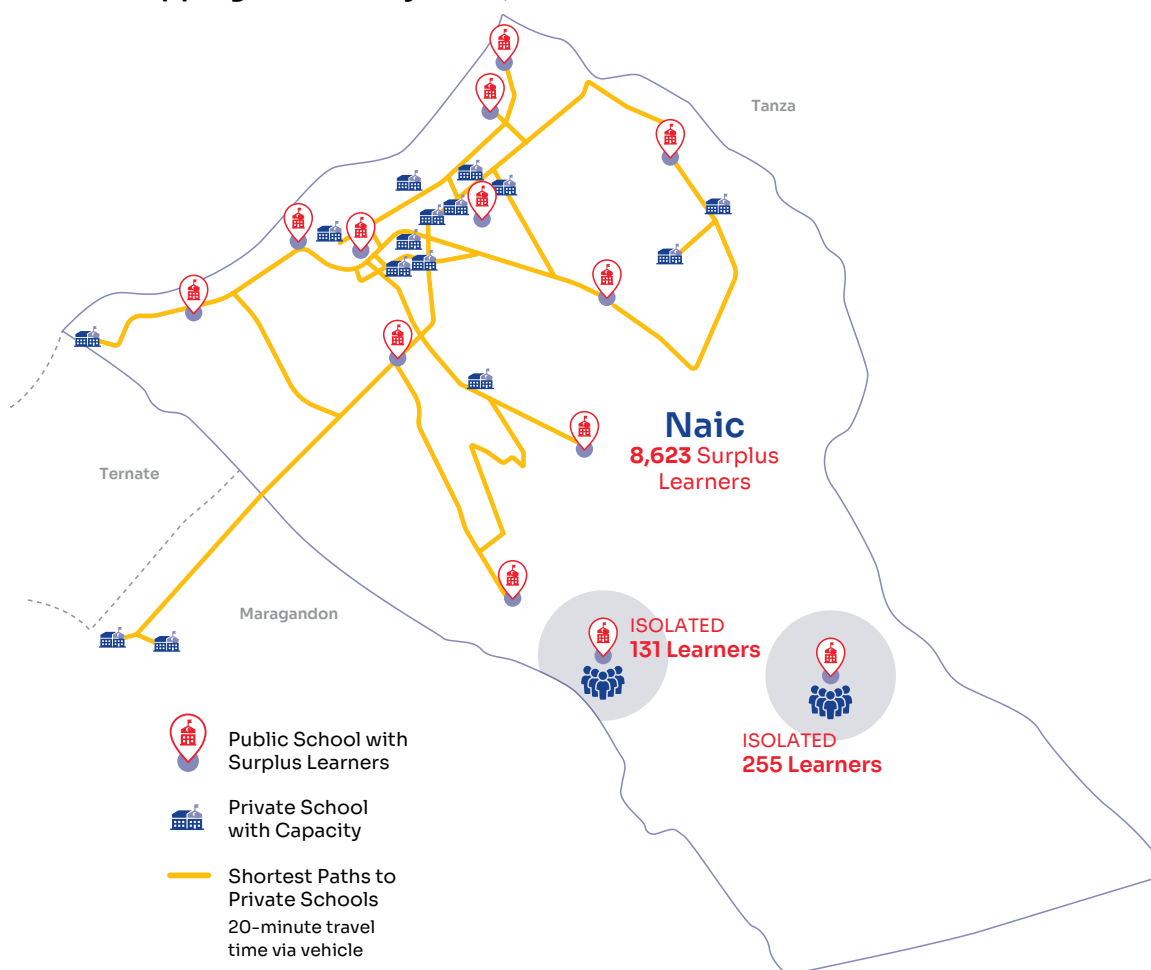
Issue 2: Regional disparities in the quality of classrooms result in learning inequalities among Filipino students.

The quality of school infrastructure in the Philippines is shaped by geography, climate, and societal conditions (Figueroa et al., 2016). For example, schools along the eastern seaboard, which are exposed to the Pacific Ocean and prone to natural hazards, are generally in poorer condition compared to buildings in the northern provinces that are protected by a mountain range. Decades of civil unrest have also resulted in severe infrastructure deterioration in the southern provinces.

Maintenance is a challenge due to limited capacity and funding at the school and local government levels. Decentralized management often results in inefficiencies, as many municipalities lack the necessary resources for infrastructure improvements. Currently, only 30% of all school buildings are in good condition. More than half of concrete and all wooden school buildings in the country will be beyond their useful life by 2040. Without new construction or maintenance, only 16% of classrooms would remain in good condition by 2040.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) initiatives are also complicated by water systems falling under LGU jurisdiction. This limits DepEd control despite its capacity to fund WASH facilities through the WASH in Schools program. Public schools in most regions lack sufficient sanitary facilities, with toilet-to-student ratios falling below recommended standards.

Over 2,000 schools lack adequate or upgraded electrical connections, leading to safety issues. Off-grid schools face barriers to connection with local electric cooperatives. As shown in Figure 12, the majority of schools without electricity are located in North Cotabato, Palawan, Sulu, Zamboanga del Sur, and Negros Occidental. By 2020, most public schools (98%–99%) already had electricity access through the Basic Education Facilities Program, but challenges remained in terms of universal access and modernized infrastructure.

Off-grid schools are often located far from the available tapping points of local electric cooperatives, making traditional electrical connections impractical. In such cases, solar panels emerge as a viable alternative source of electricity. DepEd plans to conduct a thorough assessment of the feasibility of solar power as a steady and reliable supply for large-scale implementation.

Around 39,335 schools need upgrades to support the demands of modern education programs, especially those with technical-vocational requirements. Modernization upgrades encompass improvements to power systems, the installation of new transformers, and the integration of solar power systems.

FIGURE 12
Schools Without Electricity Map
Data submission from DepEd as of October 10, 2024

1 North Cotabato
127 schools
- Cotabato Electric Cooperative, Inc. (95)
- Cotabato Electric Cooperative, Inc. – PPALMA (32)

2 Palawan
118 schools
- Busuanga Island Electric Cooperative, Inc. (8)
- Palawan Electric Cooperative, Inc. (110)

3 Sulu
118 schools
- Basilan Electric Cooperative, Inc. (4)
- Siasi Electric Cooperative, Inc. (23)
- Sulu Electric Cooperative, Inc. (91)

4 Zamboanga del Sur
84 schools
- Zamboanga City Electric Cooperative, Inc. (4)
- Zamboanga del Sur I Electric Cooperative, Inc. (75)
- Zamboanga del Sur II Electric Cooperative, Inc. (5)

5 Negros Oriental
75 schools
- Negros Oriental I Electric Cooperative, Inc. (37)
- Negros Oriental II Electric Cooperative, Inc. (38)

Number of schools without electricity

0
30
50
80
120

Last Mile Schools, which cater to 1.6 million learners, lack all these basic amenities. Out of 9,000 schools, 1,500 do not have electricity and 1,000 do not have toilets (Data from DepEd submission as of October 10, 2024). Fifty percent of these schools are located in BARMM. The increasing trend for unobligated allotments in the Quick Response Fund, which should be used to provide relief and rehabilitation to disaster-affected communities, further complicates the situation.

Pupil–to-classroom ratios reveal regional spatial inequality. Classroom shortages were already a serious problem in the 2000s, with ratios of 40.14 elementary pupils per classroom and 55.44 secondary students per classroom in SY 2002–2003, indicating overcrowding in schools. Although the Philippines has shown significant progress in addressing classroom overcrowding, regional ratios reveal spatial inequality (Figueroa et al., 2016).

The NCR and its surrounding areas, while having well-maintained infrastructure, face severe overcrowding. Congestion in the NCR and Region IV-A can be attributed to highly populated areas where rapid enrollment growth has outpaced the construction of new classrooms. For JHS in Region XI and junior and senior high school in BARMM, congestion may be caused by the schools being geographically dispersed and remotely located,, such as in Indigenous people's communities. Historically, addressing the underdevelopment of physical infrastructure, including school infrastructure, has been difficult in these regions. (Figueroa et al., 2016)

Classroom congestion negatively impacts assessment scores (Navarro, 2024)
The 2005–2010 period saw a significant increase in resource inequality in schools, particularly in terms of PCRs, pupil-teacher ratios (PTR), and per-pupil teacher salaries. A substantial portion of this inequality stems from within-division disparities, especially in noncity or rural divisions, where the allocation of resources varies more widely than across different divisions. This disparity highlights the uneven distribution of educational resources within the same administrative areas. (David et al., 2018)

In rural schools, the PCR and PTR have a significant effect on NAT scores, indicating that infrastructure and teacher availability are critical factors in these areas. In contrast, teacher experience and salary, which are indicators of human capital quality, have a more pronounced impact on performance in urban schools, although this effect is relatively weaker compared to the influence of PCR and PTR in rural schools.

Recommendations

Geographic and social factors beyond the control of local school boards have created disparities in school quality and quantity. Therefore, national government interventions are essential to minimize inequities and ensure equal access to education. It is important that local authorities are adequately supported and equipped to manage and maintain school infrastructure effectively. The continuous monitoring and adjustment of school facilities are necessary to reduce disparities and provide equitable educational opportunities across all regions.

Resources should be reallocated within divisions to address inequities and improve average test scores. The benefits from allocating additional resources to under-resourced schools yield greater improvements. The government must invest more in the maintenance and upgrade of school buildings that are prone to degradation. There should be a focus on building stronger, disaster-resistant school buildings in high-risk areas to ensure the safety and continuity of education.

Navarro (2024) emphasizes a need for greater focus on JHS and SHS classrooms to address acute school congestion, although more classrooms in elementary are needed despite projected decline in elementary school enrollment.

Studies also suggest that reallocating resources based on the specific conditions of each province can help reduce disparities. Urban schools often face overcrowding due to migration; while 1,175 public schools, mostly in rural areas, have surplus capacity, suggesting that they have more space than needed. However, rural schools struggle with teacher shortages.

Deploying less experienced teachers to rural schools initially and then transferring them to urban schools as they gain experience may offer a more effective strategy for addressing regional disparities in teacher allocation. This approach challenges the conventional wisdom that prioritizes experienced teachers for rural areas, but it could be more effective in addressing the specific needs of these regions.

Research shows that reducing the number of students per classroom is associated with better student learning outcomes, particularly in rural schools (Yamauchi & Parandekar, 2014). Developing mechanisms to reallocate excess classrooms should also be explored, such as referral systems for student redistribution across public schools, as piloted by Angeles City, Pampanga, with The Asia Foundation (City of Angeles Resolution No. 7186, s. 2015).. Flexibility in current allocation practices will enable better responses to changing population dynamics. Despite widening resource inequality, student achievement inequality, as measured by NAT scores, actually decreased during the same period. This suggests that there may have been some leveling effects, possibly due to improved resource utilization in underprivileged schools. However, more targeted interventions are necessary to sustain and enhance these improvements.

Issue 3: The Philippine education infrastructure faces severe vulnerabilities to climate change, with frequent disasters causing school closures, learning losses, and structural damage.

The Philippines ranks as the most disaster-prone country in the world. The country's high exposure to natural hazards, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, typhoons, and floods, results in substantial costs and disruptions to the education system. Even if all school buildings were in optimal condition, DepEd still faces annual losses of Php 17.98 billion due to the high hazard exposure.

Disasters lead to frequent class suspensions, resulting in significant learning losses, particularly when schools are used as shelters (Abrigo et al., 2024). During SY 2023–2024, 11 million learners lost over 20 school days. The NCR lost 27 school days, while the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) lost a staggering 42 days (see Figure 13). Despite efforts to recover these lost days through in-service training days, additional weekday hours, and Saturday classes, it is impossible to fully compensate for the time missed.

Visayan and Mindanaoan regions experienced even more learning losses, exacerbating regional inequities. Test performance declined, ranging from 10% to 20% of a standard deviation. This translates to 4–8 months of lost learning (David et al., 2018).

The climate crisis is projected to intensify, resulting in more school days lost, as demonstrated by the already higher numbers in the first two quarters of SY 2024-2025. This is based on the presentations of representatives from DOST PAGASA and DOST PHIVOLCS during a hearing on November 28, 2024.

Significant learning losses from short-term school closures are driven more by a drop in student interest and engagement rather than teaching inefficiencies. This is consistent with previous findings that show increased psychological distress among displaced children after disasters, underscoring the need for postdisaster psychosocial interventions for children.

Efforts to address these include the use of alternative delivery modes (ADMs), such as the learning modules and online lessons used during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, implementation gaps persist. For example, only 37% of teachers have laptops, and just 17% of students have access to the gadgets necessary for online learning (DepEd submission on October 10, 2024). Additionally, regions lack a uniform monitoring tool for ADMs, leading to inconsistent practices. To address this, SLMs are being produced under the MATATAG curriculum, with those for certain grade levels already completed.

FIGURE 13
Impact of Disasters: School Days Lost Out of 80 Days

SY 2024–2025 so far, or two quarters

Students lose up to a month's worth of school days, with the highest at 35 days lost in CAR

42% (11 million learners) of the entire public school K–12 student population lost over 20 days due to class suspensions in SY 2023-2024

Cordillera Adminstrative Region 35

Region I **Ilocos Region** 31

33 Region II **Cagayan Valley**

Region III **Central Luzon** 29

31 **Region IV-A** CALABARZON

National Capital Region 20

22 **Region V** Bicol

MIMAROPA 16

6 Region VIII **Eastern Visayas**

Region VI **Western Visayas** 6

Region VII **Central Visayas** 6

3 Region XIII **Caraga**

Region IX **Zamboanga Peninsula** 11

Region X **Northern Mindanao** 2

3 Region XII **Northern Mindanao**

5 Region XI **Davao Region**

The impact on learning has been profound: it may be that for every day of school closure, the Math and Science achievement of Grade 4 students declined by 12%–14% of a standard deviation—equivalent to half a year of learning (Abrigo, et al., 2024). This is comparable to, or even exceeds, the cumulative effects seen in countries with the longest pandemic-induced school closures.

DepEd's disaster funds are insufficient and constrained by procedural limitations, hampering proactive disaster preparedness and effective response efforts. In a hearing on November 28, 2024, DepEd undersecretary Annalyn Sevilla underscores the difficulty of utilizing the Quick Response Fund proactively before disasters occur due to restrictive procurement processes. This limitation hampers the department's ability to prepare and respond effectively.

In Region V, where disaster risks are acute, DepEd undersecretary Revsee Escobedo reveals that the Disaster Preparedness and Response Program funds for 2023 and 2024 in Region V were exhausted. The pooled funds covered only 10%–15% of regional needs, indicating a significant shortfall.

According to Undersecretary Sevilla, schools are allocated Php 20,000 for clean-up activities and Php 50,000 for minor classroom repairs under their maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE). There have been appeals to the Commission on Audit to exempt clean-up funds from strict audits to facilitate quicker response times.

Preparedness activities, including personnel training and the procurement of necessary equipment, are prioritized under disaster funds, but their scope is limited. Response funds are utilized for setting up temporary learning spaces, performing clean-up and minor repairs, distributing learner and teacher kits, and providing psychosocial first aid. However, the scale of these efforts remain inadequate.

Flooding, storm surges, and landslides pose major risks to school infrastructure, particularly in low-lying areas. Assessments by the University of the Philippines Resilience Institute (UPRI) reveal that climate change is expected to worsen rainfall intensity, increasing infrastructure strain. UPRI's hazard maps identify vulnerable schools, with Region VIII being the most exposed to storm surges.

UPRI has assessed 59.7% of LGUs using high-resolution hazard maps for community planning. The SAFER-U Project has been instrumental in conducting impact assessments on schools, calculating potential repair costs for damage from flooding, landslides, and other hazards. This targeted approach ensures more effective disaster response and infrastructure planning, enabling authorities to allocate resources more efficiently.

Intensifying weather events underscore the need for updated hazard maps, as those based on historical data may become insufficient for future planning. For example, UPRI assessments specifically focused on 100-year rainfall and typhoon conditions provide valuable insights but do not account for emerging projections of shifts from 2-day to 5-day rainfall events.

As extreme weather conditions are expected to worsen in the coming years due to climate change, the educational sector in the Philippines will continue to face significant challenges in maintaining consistent and effective learning environments for its students.

The *Climate Change and Education Playbook* (ADB, 2024) examines the implications of climate change on education systems in Asia and the Pacific, highlighting how education is affected by and must adapt to climate risks. This adaptation is crucial for enabling the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy. Climate-resilient education systems are essential for safeguarding learning outcomes amid extreme weather and preventing an exacerbation of the learning crisis.

Recommendations

To address climate-related challenges to school infrastructure, education policymakers must prioritize building climate-resilient structures and designing innovative learning solutions. Schools need weather-resistant buildings; updated hazard maps; real-time disaster preparedness data from UPRI, PAGASA, and PHIVOLCS; and data-driven program planning tools, such as PlanSmart for Safe

Schools. Additionally, the school building design should be tailored to the specific vulnerabilities of each area, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach, ensuring that they effectively address local risks.

Investments in solar energy for off-grid schools, structural reinforcements, and intersectoral collaborations can bolster resilience. Integrating climate resiliency into the curriculum and promoting green skills development in technical-vocational programs can further prepare students for a low-carbon future.

The urgency to adapt is clear: By strengthening school infrastructure and adopting proactive policies, the Philippines can reduce educational disruptions caused by climate change and secure a safer and sustainable learning environment for future generations.

To optimize disaster funds, EDCOM II and DepEd will study mechanisms to improve the timeliness and accessibility of the Quick Response Fund for schools.

Addressing postdisaster psychological distress and learning losses among children requires engagement beyond the traditional education sector. It involves the broader community and necessitates postdisaster psychosocial interventions to support the well-being and educational recovery of affected students.

Priority Area 9: Alternative Learning System

The ALS is DepEd's nonformal education program designed as a critical lifeline for out-of-school youth and adults who have not completed basic education. Managed by the Bureau of Alternative Education (BAE), the key programs of ALS include the Basic Literacy Program, aimed at eradicating illiteracy; and the Accreditation and Equivalency Program, which enables learners to obtain certifications equivalent to formal education levels in elementary, JHS, and SHS.

Issue 1: The ALS remains underfunded, underprioritized, and poorly integrated into the broader education system.

The ALS program has existed in various forms since 1948 through the Bureau of Nonformal Education (The World Bank, 2018). Its components, however, were recently institutionalized through RA11510 (ALS Act). While supported by law, in reality, ALS remains sidelined in the education space, often treated as secondary to formal education. This lack of prioritization has significant consequences on resource allocation, program implementation, and the overall support to ALS learners.

Enrollment and participation in ALS are inconsistent and misaligned with regional needs. Enrollment in ALS averages around 600,000 learners annually, with most participants enrolled in the Accreditation and Equivalency Secondary Program (see Figure 14). Meanwhile, Figure 15 shows a comparison of the number of ALS enrollees per region using SY 2022–2023 data from the Learner Information System and the estimates of out-of-school youth (OSY; from 17 to 24 years old only) using the 2022 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey. These two graphs show that ALS enrollments are lower than the number of OSY who need to be in the program. For instance, in Region IV-A, only around 52,000 OSY (6.7%) were enrolled; while more than 700,000 were not.

Funding distribution does not reflect the number of OSY in the area, causing disparities. Based on a consultation with DepEd on August 1, 2024, regions also receive a uniform amount of Php 7 million per year, regardless of the number of ALS learners or OSY in their areas. This means that we spend about Php 783 per learner in CAR and only Php 112 per learner in Region V, resulting in the inequitable distribution of resources and inconsistent and unfair coverage of demand.

FIGURE 14
Number of Out-of-School Youth, Covered vs. Not Covered by ALS

Region	ALS	OSY Not Covered by ALS
Region IV-A	52,427	761,01*
Region III	48,149	568,651
NCR	45,714	546,083
Region VII	43,499	341,304
Region VI	46,404	286,257
Region V	62,896	196,761
Region XI	54,135	205,485
Region I	23,201	206,674
Region XII	39,544	179,826
Region X	46,799	154,926
BARMM	33,364	167,712
Region VIII	35,025	154,385
Region IX	29,238	142,397
Region II	22,103	123,390
MIMAROPA	23,253	100,634
Region XIII	29,751	91,932
CAR	8,946	54,145

■ ALS   ■ OSY NOT COVERED BY ALS

Abbreviations: ALS = Alternative Learning system; OSY = out-of-school youth
Source: DepEd, 2023; PSA, 2022

FIGURE 15
Average ALS Enrollment in the Past 5 Years

Legend: ■ A&E Secondary   ■ A&E Elementary   ■ BLP

School Year	BLP	A&E Elementary	A&E Secondary
2019–2020	52,008	132,128	575,587
2020–2021	33,617	105,362	460,386
2021–2022	22,834	84,384	365,651
2022–2023	33,168	125,377	481,903
2023–2024	32,617	118,976	460,240
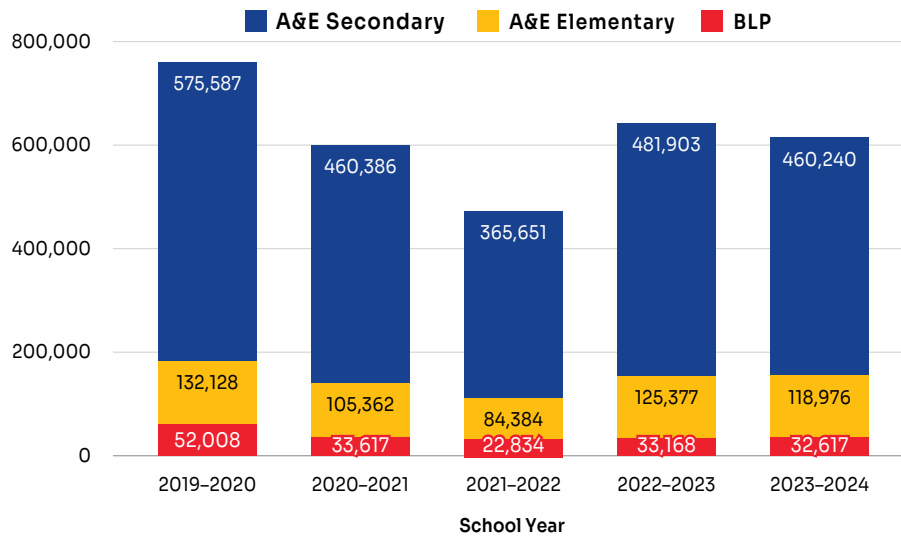
Abbreviations: A&E = Accreditation and Equivalency, BLP = Basic Literacy Program

Issue 2: Reaching target groups is challenging due to insufficient data and monitoring systems.

Notably, the ALS Act (RA 11510) not only identifies OSY as potential ALS beneficiaries; it also mandates that the program prioritize indigenous peoples, learners with disabilities, teenage mothers, socioeconomically disadvantaged learners, children in conflict with the law, persons deprived of liberty, rebel returnees, learners in emergency situations, and out-of-school children in special cases (Section 3 of RA 11510). However, targeting these groups has been difficult due to a lack of data and monitoring mechanisms.

The ALS Act assigns LGUs as responsible for providing technical support to ALS teachers, conducting program monitoring, identifying out-of-school children and adults, managing community learning centers (CLCs), and securing funding for ALS programs by allocating funds from the SEF within their jurisdiction, among others (Section 16 of RA 11510). In practice, however, the identification of learners, referred to as literacy mapping by DepEd field units, relies heavily on the initiative of ALS in conducting information and advocacy activities.

Completion rates in ALS are alarmingly low. In SY 2023–2024, only 302,807 learners (46.2%) completed the program out of 655,517 enrollees. UNICEF (2021) finds that socioeconomic challenges, such as a lack of financial support, the need to work, a lack of interest, early marriages, vices, and bullying, contribute to high dropout rates. These reasons mirror the factors that lead students to drop out of formal school to begin with, suggesting that despite the flexibility of the ALS program, it still fails to fully address the needs of many learners.

Issue 3: Inconsistent funding and governance undermine ALS implementation.

While RA 11510 mandates that LGUs use the SEF for ALS, **implementation depends heavily on the interest and commitment of local executives.** In some consultations, it was raised that some LGUs refused to spend on ALS using their SEF because they used outdated guidelines that did not explicitly require ALS expenditure.

Some LGUs refer solely to DepEd-DBM-DILG Joint Circular No. 1, s. 2020, which is an addendum to the Revised Guidelines on the Use of the Special Education Fund. This joint memorandum circular was published before RA 11510 was enacted and does not explicitly include ALS-related activities as allowable expenditures under the SEF. Monitoring at the national level has also proven difficult because while the Bureau of Local Government Finance of the Department of Finance collects data on SEF spending, its data collection tool does not explicitly require LGUs to identify and itemize expenditure items for ALS.

DepEd funding for ALS is poorly targeted. In contrast to formal schools that are funded through the school MOOE, ALS depends solely on program support funds that are downloaded from the central office. EDCOM II learned in consultations that the program support fund for ALS was evenly distributed across regions at Php 7 million each without considering the actual number of enrollees per region. DepEd has acknowledged this issue in a congressional hearing and plans to implement a revised funding formula in the coming year.

Fragmented governance hinders coordination between ALS and other learning options. Flexible learning options (FLOs) aim to service learners unable to attend regular schools. However, governance silos at the DepEd Central Office prevent effective harmonization. Learners often lack guidance on which program best suits their needs, with ALS being perceived as the last resort rather than a complementary option.

According to DO 21, s. 2019, DepEd has institutionalized FLOs to provide a menu of learning interventions and pathways that are responsive to the diverse needs, context, and circumstances of learners. FLOs allow for variations in teaching and learning modalities, organization, and approaches. There are two main types of FLOs: ALS and ADMs (see Figure 16) ADMs are further subdivided into five different types in the prevailing policy: Home School; Instructional Management by Parents, Community, and Teachers; Modified In-School Off-School Approach; Night High School; and Open High School. Table 5 summarizes the description and target beneficiaries of each of these programs.

FIGURE 16
Types of Flexible Learning Options
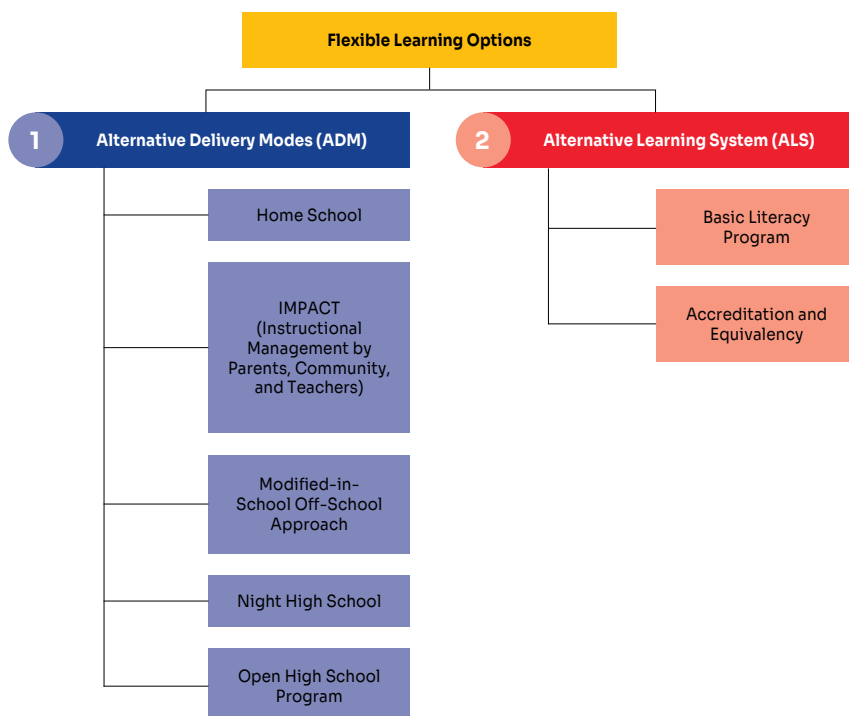
According to DO No. 21, s. 2019, DepEd has institutionalized Flexible Learning Options to provide a menu of learning interventions and pathways that are responsive to the needs, context, circumstances, and diversity of learners.

FLOs allow for variations in organization, approaches, and modalities of teaching and learning.

TABLE 5
ADM Types and Target Beneficiaries

ADM	Description	Target Beneficiaries
Home School	Home schooling provides basic education to learners in a home-based setting with parents, guardians, or tutors as learning facilitators, under supervision by DepEd and designated licensed teachers.	Learners unable to attend school but have someone capable of delivering instruction
IMPACT	IMPACT provides basic education to learners in a school-based setting wherein multigrade learners are grouped for learning facilitated by peers, parents, or community members under the guidance of an instructional supervisor. It also allows for independent learning.	Learners in congested schools where there are community-based volunteers and teachers
MISOSA	This approach involves the provision of formal education in school and off-school to learners from Grades 4 to 6 with the capacity for independent learning and who could not be fully accommodated in school. They receive blended instruction. The in-school group is in the classroom or with subject teachers while the off-school group is with a teacher-facilitator in a separate venue.	• Learners in overpopulated schools • Learners unable to attend school regularly due to economic, physical, and social constraints
Night High School	Learners attend classes after regular school hours. This learning option allows program completion beyond the prescribed number of years.	High school learners unable to go to school during the day
Open High School Program	This program provides an opportunity to all high school learners capable of independent learning to complete basic education through quality distance education.	High school learners incapable of going to or staying in school

Abbreviations: IMPACT = Instructional Management by Parents, Community, and Teachers; MISOSA = Modified In-School Off-School Approach

Source: DO 21, s. 2019

The ALS and ADMs were designed to complement each other and support learners unable to attend formal schooling during regular hours. The key difference lies in their target beneficiaries and curriculum design: ADMs adhere to the formal curriculum and are intended for learners at risk of dropping out or those returning from dropping out, while the ALS runs a distinct yet parallel curriculum and is tailored for out-of-school youth and adults who have already dropped out and are beyond the typical school age.

In the national budget, funding for both programs is combined into a single line item. However, the implementation of these programs has not been strategically aligned. The DepEd Central Office separates their management, which has made it difficult to harmonize the two programs. The ALS is managed by the BAE, and ADMs remain under the Bureau of Learning Delivery.

On the ground, learners hardly receive guidance on whether they should be placed in ADM or ALS programs. Consultations reveal that ALS learners struggle to access information about learning centers and enrollment procedures despite efforts of ALS teachers and field personnel to conduct literacy mapping. Additionally, ADMs have become closely associated with the use of SLMs, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and disasters, and are not seen as complementary to ALS.

The effective coordination of the ALS and ADMs is crucial to better support learners facing challenging circumstances. By offering more flexibility through ADMs, more students closer to the typical school age can remain in the formal education system, which should reduce dropouts and, consequently, the need to transition to the ALS. This strategic coordination will ensure that learners will not be left behind and have the resources and opportunities to succeed regardless of their context and situation.

Issue 4: Inadequate learning spaces significantly hinder ALS program delivery and affect learner dignity and engagement

In consultations conducted by EDCOM II, learners highlighted that proper learning spaces, with chairs, desks, toilets, and other WASH facilities, are particularly important for them. Such spaces not only make studying easier but also help restore their sense of dignity. Many ALS learners have dropped out of school due to financial hardships or family-related challenges, so being in well-equipped learning environments makes them feel valued and treated equally as other students in their communities.

Currently, 57.5% of the CLCs for the ALS are Type 1, or makeshift facilities, described under the ALS Act as "a simple, temporary meeting place with tables and chairs or any open multipurpose area or any private property temporarily lent for learning purposes" (see Figure 17 and Table 5).

FIGURE 17

Number of ALS Community Learning Centers per Type
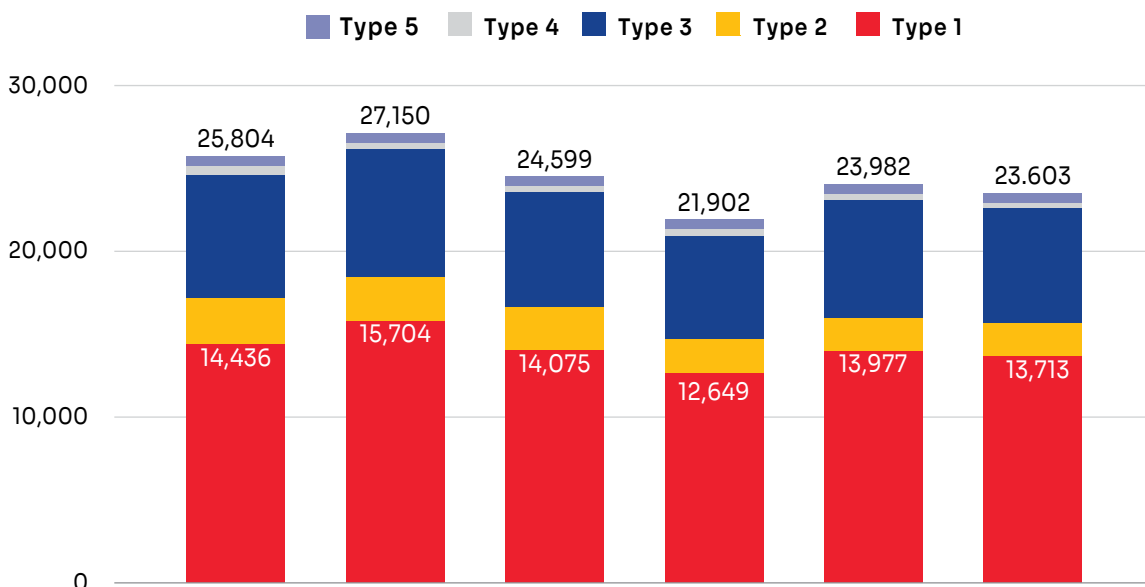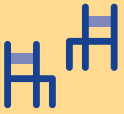
TABLE 6
Types of ALS Community Learning Centers

	TYPE 1 CLC	A simple, temporary meeting place with tables and chairs or any open multipurpose area or any private property temporarily lent for learning purposes
	TYPE 2 CLC	A semipermanent structure made mostly of light materials (e.g., nipa, softwood) and equipped with basic furnitures and learning equipment, dedicated to ALS learning sessions and related activities
	TYPE 3 CLC	A typical barangay learning center that is permanent and secured, mostly made of cement and other heavy building materials and equipped with basic furniture and learning equipment dedicated to ALS learning sessions and related activities
	TYPE 4 CLC	A two- or three-story building fully equipped with basic furniture and advanced information and communication technologies for learning (e.g., computers), dedicated to ALS learning sessions and related activities
	TYPE 5 CLC	A permanent building equipped with ALS and other learning materials, utilized by learners and other members of the community, functioning as resource centers where materials are either transported from house to house or borrowed by individual interested community members

Moreover, in field consultations, learners and teachers lamented that in some areas, local officials refuse to accommodate ALS classes in barangay facilities, thus forcing them to conduct classes in makeshift facilities and public areas such as basketball courts. These unsuitable environments exacerbate the challenges already faced by ALS learners and educators.

Efforts to establish high-quality CLCs face financial and logistical challenges. During the EDCOM II hearing on ALS (August 1, 2024), the BAE stated its goal to build at least one Type 5 CLC per municipality or per division office. Type 5 CLCs are envisioned as fully equipped learning centers designed to provide better infrastructure, resources, and support for ALS programs, ensuring that learners' needs are met. However, each Type 5 CLC costs approximately Php 14 million, raising concerns on efficiency and sustainability, considering that such centers may not necessarily be accessible to all learners, especially in large divisions. Since fiscal year 2022, funds have been allocated through the GAA for this purpose; but none of the planned Type 5 CLCs have been completed, with a number still under construction.

Issue 5: The lack of support for ALS teachers undermines the program and its ability to engage learners.

ALS teachers play a vital role in creating a sense of belonging among ALS learners, particularly adolescents and youth who may feel neglected and discouraged because of the difficulties that caused them to leave formal schooling in the first place. Without strong teacher support, the program risks losing its ability to connect with learners and fulfill its mission of offering a second chance at education.

There are no specialized professional development programs tailored for ALS instruction. Often, ALS teachers are asked to attend in-service training designed for special education or formal school teachers, which do not address the unique needs of ALS learners. Consequently, many DepEd Mobile Teachers and District ALS Coordinators are ill equipped to handle the distinct contexts and challenges of their students.

The challenge is even more pronounced in ALS SHS programs, which are typically implemented in school-based CLCs. Because these require advanced competency levels, teachers from formal classes are often assigned to deliver classes for the ALS. As such, the delivery of the program becomes more formal and with flexibility provided only in the scheduling of classes. In these cases, the setup merely mirrors ADMs.

ALS teachers also shoulder responsibilities beyond teaching. They are often required to deliver learner support services, including counseling, basic nursing, career guidance, and mental health support—services often delivered in schools but not extended to ALS learners. During consultations, many teachers revealed that they used their own salaries to print learning materials or cover expenses, such as food and transportation for their students, especially those who have no income and are at risk of dropping out due to financial constraints.

Issue 6: Private sector support for ALS remains limited due to a lack of clear guidelines for implementing tax incentives.

Private providers are critical to the ALS, especially in reaching underserved populations, specifically OSY. By SY 2023–2024, at least 668 CLCs were being run by non-DepEd organizations, including local governments, private schools, faith-based groups, and community-based organizations. In that school year, these centers served 16,802 learners who completed the ALS program. While this represents only 5.5% of the 302,807 completers, these centers often operate in the most hard-to-reach areas, bridging educational gaps that the formal system struggles to fill.

The ALS Act (RA 11510) incentivizes private sector involvement by exempting donations from donor's tax and allowing for their deduction from the donor's gross income, in line with the National Internal Revenue Code of 1997, as amended. However, this provision has not been implemented due to a lack of specific Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) guidelines. EDCOM II recommends issuing a dedicated BIR regulation to guide implementation and urges DepEd to establish a mechanism to promote awareness and ensure partners' access to these incentives.

Recommendations

To address the identified challenges, EDCOM II recommends the following to improve ALS implementation:

- **Revise budget allocation for ALS program support funds** to align with the actual needs of each region. Integrate the ALS in the normative MOOE formula for school-based CLCs, ensuring that allocations are based on clear and well-documented data on program implementation standards.
- **Update SEF guidelines.** Update the DepEd-DBM-DILG joint circular on the use of the SEF to explicitly include ALS-related expenses. This will enable consistent funding support for ALS programs.

ALS: A Lifeline for Learning and Second Chances

"It's never too late to graduate," declared a barangay captain from Cagayan de Oro during the May 2024 commencement ceremonies of Alternative Learning System (ALS) students. She said that with the ALS, anyone can now get an education regardless of age.

The kapitana is not just a public figure but also a student of Teacher Pinky Marris Fabria, an ALS educator in Region X. For 15 years, Teacher Pinky has seen how adult learners, burdened by the demands of earning a living to feed their families, struggle to prioritize education, which is why she beams with pride whenever one of them completes the program.

"Retaining students is extremely difficult. Many easily choose daily survival over basic education," declares Teacher Pinky. Despite this challenge, she has devoted herself to bringing education to the places where it's needed most.

Teaching Where Learners Work

Teacher Pinky started as a night school teacher for out-of-school youth through Xavier University's social outreach project. Since then, her classrooms have taken many forms. She has taught abandoned women at the local DSWD office, given lessons to a group of teenage mothers at a community learning center, and provided basic literacy and numeracy to young workers atop a mountain of garbage.

In the ALS, the school goes where the students are. Teacher Pinky meets her students where they work, breaking down barriers to education.

Like her, Teacher Hazel Galabo also adapts to this unconventional setup for giving education. Teacher Hazel has been doing the ALS since 2006 in the same region as Teacher Pinky.

"In the ALS, there are no Mondays to Fridays. There are no fixed school hours or proper classrooms. Everything depends on when and where students are available," says Teacher Hazel. She has done classes literally under a mango tree. She once taught barangay tanods at their ronda outposts. She also did classes by the docks while port workers wait for the boats to arrive.

Among these dock workers was a 54-year-old who recently passed the Accreditation and Equivalency exam, enabling him to enroll in TESDA courses. He praised Teacher Hazel for helping him open doors to new opportunities.

These success stories are what kept both Teacher Pinky and Teacher Hazel going, even after nearly 2 decades in the ALS.

"I feel an indescribable joy to be part of someone's learning journey," says Teacher Hazel.

Teacher Pinky echoes that sentiment. She adds, "The ALS program has changed lives, including mine. It has made me become a different but better kind of teacher."

A safe space for learning
For Ruby, not her real name, the ALS was more than just an alternative to formal schooling, it was a refuge. After being relentlessly bullied in her former public school in Cagayan de Oro, she was forced to leave and chose to enroll in ALS instead.

A transferee from another school, Ruby felt unwelcome by her new Grade 8 classmates. The discomfort grew worse when she reported several students for cheating during an exam. The backlash was swift and brutal. Physically attacked in the halls and verbally assaulted online, she was left feeling isolated, afraid, and unwilling to return to school.

"The ALS gave me a second chance. Here, the teacher listens and understands each student's situation, which makes the learning environment more comfortable," Ruby shares. This support was something she found lacking in her previous school, where neither the teacher nor the guidance counselor adequately addressed her bullying experience.

Surrounded by classmates much older than her, some old enough to be her parents, Ruby found a supportive community that helped her heal and process what she had gone through. ALS helped her become more open-minded and ready to return to regular school.

"In the ALS, I learned to be less competitive because everyone was just there to learn, no matter their age or circumstances," she says.

- **Separate budget line items for the ALS and ADMs.** Recommend for the DBM to assign the ALS and ADMs separate line items in the national budget to enable more accurate monitoring and reporting.
- **Harmonize ALS and ADM implementation.** Develop mechanisms to better integrate ALS and ADM programs, ensuring that learners are provided flexible access to education tailored to their needs.
- **Engage stakeholders on pending ALS policies.** Conduct thorough consultations on pending ALS policies, including the recognition of private ALS partners and the ALS SHS policy, to ensure that these policies are responsive and effective.

Priority Area 10:
Home and School Environment

DepEd has long recognized the critical importance of creating a safe and positive learning environment for Filipino learners. In 2012, it issued DO 40: Policy and Guidelines on Protecting Children in School from Abuse; Violence, Exploitation, Discrimination, Bullying and other Forms of Abuse, or the DepEd Child Protection Policy, which reiterates DepEd's "zero-tolerance policy for any act of child abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of abuse."

To further strengthen efforts in addressing bullying in schools, DepEd issued DO 55, s. 2013, or the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 (RA 10627). This policy requires all public and private schools to adopt bullying prevention programs and a child protection and anti-bullying policy. Noncompliance may result in the suspension or revocation of the permit or recognition of a private school.

However, it was not until 2021 that DepEd established the Child Protection Unit (CPU) and the Child Rights in Education Desk (CREDe) through DepEd Order No. 003, s. 2021 to establish a mechanism to fully operationalize, implement, and coordinate programs, projects, and activities on child protection (DepEd website, 2024). Eventually, the CPU would combine with the CREDe to form the Learner Rights and Protection Office (LRPO), the office currently mandated to plan, implement, and coordinate child protection activities at all department levels. The LRPO operates under the Office of the Undersecretary for Operations.

The LRPO launched the Learners TeleSafe Contact Center Helpline on November 24, 2022, to provide an avenue for learners, teachers, nonteaching personnel, and stakeholders to raise learner protection concerns and bullying incidents. This helpline uses various communication platforms, such as calls, text messaging, Facebook Messenger, email, website forms, and service walk-in clients. Here, they can seek assistance, intervention, and referral to appropriate offices for immediate action, ensuring that the necessary support is promptly provided.

Despite these initiatives, bullying remains pervasive in Philippine schools. The 2018 PISA study reported that 65% of Filipino students experienced bullying a few times a month, the highest among participating countries. A significant observation from the reported cases is that the majority involve physical bullying, more likely to be reported because it is usually more apparent.

But bullying takes various forms—verbal, physical, relational, and cyberbullying—each influencing how victims respond and cope. This diversity highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach to defining and addressing bullying.

In the Philippines, there is no significant difference in reports of bullying between high and low achievers, a pattern that contrasts with findings in other countries. This suggests that bullying impacts students across all academic performance levels equally (Bernardo, 2024).

Schools play a critical role in shaping the bullying dynamic, as variations in the school social environment significantly affect students' mental health and academic performance. However, limited focus on antibullying programs at the school level complicates efforts to address the relationship between bullying and academic experiences.

While the PISA 2022 indicated a slight decline, one in three students still reported weekly bullying. Data from the LRPO helpline further demonstrate the insufficiency of the systems to address bullying cases. It revealed that only 38 out of 339 (approximately 11%) of reported cases were resolved between November 2022 and July 2024. (DepEd LRPO submission, June 13, 2024)

As of June 2024, the regions with the highest number of reported cases were the NCR, Region IV-A, and Region III. In contrast, regions such as IV-B, BARMM, and XII each had only one reported case. This disparity may not necessarily reflect actual differences in the incidence of bullying but rather the effectiveness of the reporting mechanisms in place. It suggests that some regions may have more robust reporting systems, while others may need improvement to ensure that all cases are accurately reported and addressed.

Issue 1: The IRR of the Antibullying Act is outdated and urgently needs revisions to address bullying challenges and ensure effective antibullying interventions.

One of the key success factors noted by UNESCO (2019) in their comprehensive research on ending school violence and bullying is that "a supportive legal and policy framework is essential, to convey a clear message that violence and bullying are unacceptable and to provide the foundation for planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the national response."

However, since its release more than a decade ago, there has not been any policy on revisions to DepEd DO 55, s. 2013, also known as the IRR of the Anti-Bullying Act, despite significant and numerous policy developments (see Table 7). These subsequent policies, while strengthening the overall child protection framework have not been reviewed and understood in relation with the Anti-Bullying Act. This gap becomes more critical given the changing context of the learning environment, particularly with the rise of cyberbullying incidents that go beyond the limited definition provided in the original IRR, and the lack of standardized implementation guidelines for schools in handling such cases.

Given the prevalence of bullying and its impact on students' well-being, EDCOM II has prioritized bullying under Priority Area 10 and focused on revising the IRR to address policy gaps and enhance the effectiveness of antibullying interventions.

EDCOM II has convened a technical working group (TWG) to work on the revision of the IRR. It includes representatives from DepEd, child protection advocates, educational researchers, and other stakeholders. Meetings were conducted from January to July 2024, with field consultations in NCR and Region VIII, as well as workshops to refine proposed policy changes.

Outdated and incomplete definition of bullying limits the scope of school interventions. The IRR narrowly defines bullying as repeated acts, focusing on traditional forms such as physical and verbal bullying. It lacks provisions for modern challenges, such as cyberbullying, indirect bullying (e.g., gossip or veiled remarks), and emerging forms of peer pressure. The absence of a comprehensive definition constrains schools from implementing comprehensive interventions.

Schools are required to develop their own antibullying policies and programs, but the IRR provides little guidance. Provisions indicate that these policies and programs must encompass prevention, intervention, and reporting mechanisms. However, there is no centralized framework or template to ensure consistency, leaving schools to interpret requirements individually. This results in fragmented programs or suboptimal policies.

The monitoring processes and standards of success indicators for the implementation of these policies are also not defined. In addition, there is no clarity on the frequency or regularity of mandatory activities, such as the review of the personnel's code of conduct.

Furthermore, it may not be necessary for each school to have a unique antibullying policy and program. Instead, schools could adopt similar policies and programs but prepare different operational plans to suit their specific needs. An alternative approach could be for the DepEd order to provide a range of tools and guidance that schools can select from and adapt for their use, thereby ensuring consistency and effectiveness in antibullying efforts.

The IRR designates the Child Protection Committee (CPC) to manage bullying complaints. The CPC handles both child protection and bullying cases in schools. Its members include the school head/administrator as chairperson, a guidance counselor or teacher as vice chairperson, and representatives from the faculty, parents, students, and the community. The CPC's responsibilities encompass raising awareness about bullying, implementing the school's anti-bullying policy, monitoring bullying incidents, and making referrals to appropriate agencies.

However, the CPC faces several challenges in effectively addressing bullying. Many schools, such as those in Navotas and Tacloban, have limited access to registered guidance counselors. They often rely on full-time teachers to handle bullying cases, which may dilute their capacity to focus solely on these issues. CPC allocation is also dependent on whether schools prioritize it. This means CPCs often lack the financial support and capacity building to function fully. Additionally, PTA and student council officers change yearly, meaning capacity building needs to happen each year.

The IRR does not address how school heads, teachers, and CPCs should be trained and supported. Schools often lack the expertise to implement evidence-based and localized prevention and intervention strategies, and there is no clarity on how DepEd will support capacity-building efforts given the highly decentralized nature of implementation. The decentralized approach places a significant burden on schools, many of which lack the personnel, budget, and tools to enforce policies effectively.

Teachers express a need for better training on antibullying strategies and support mechanisms. Teachers, who often serve as the first responders in bullying situations, require specific guidance on how to handle the incidents of bullying that occur in their classrooms. While the law mandates schools to develop and implement their own antibullying policies, it would have been more effective if it provided detailed guidance based on widely accepted principles. Although the IRR outlines procedures on Section 10.B (Subitems a and b), it would be more helpful to include specific guidance tailored for teachers rather than addressing school personnel in general.

While the importance of training is acknowledged, there is no guidance on the key content, structure, modality, frequency, and quality of training programs. This lack of detail leaves schools without a clear road map for implementing comprehensive and effective training initiatives. Given this, it is essential to provide more specific guidelines to ensure that training programs are robust, relevant, and regularly updated to address the evolving needs in managing bullying incidents.

Reporting systems and platforms vary across divisions. Students lack clarity on what constitutes bullying, as well as where and how to report it. The handling of bullying varies significantly based on school leaders' and teachers' practices, and reports frequently fail to stop the behavior, creating a cycle of incidents.

There is no guidance on how bullying as a topic can be effectively integrated into the curriculum. This integration is crucial in introducing key concepts in a developmentally appropriate manner. To enhance the effectiveness of these programs, prevention interventions should be updated to reflect best practices from more recent research.

Staffing issues both in the central and field offices make policymaking as well as monitoring and evaluation functions difficult to fulfill. Prior to the establishment of the LRPO, there was no dedicated office for addressing bullying-related issues. It is also just recently that its plantilla items were approved by the DBM. Its full operationalization and resourcing is critical for the agency to effectively carry out its mandate under the law.

Sanctions for failure to comply with the Anti-Bullying Act are vague. The IRR outlines sanctions for schools and personnel that fail to comply with the Antibullying Act. For public schools, noncompliance can lead to administrative cases being in accordance with civil service rules. For private schools, disciplinary actions will be taken by the school itself, but these actions must be reported to the DepEd division office. This ensures compliance and accountability across both public and private educational institutions.

However educators report that sanctions are vague and may be perceived as unreasonable or unfair, particularly given the limited support mechanisms available to those responsible for implementing the act. Clearer and more specific guidelines on sanctions, coupled with adequate support for implementers, would help ensure fairness and effectiveness in enforcing compliance.

TABLE 7
Other DepEd Policies That Cover Bullying

Other DepEd Policies That Cover Bullying	Scope	Limitations
DO 40, s. 2012 **DepEd Child Protection Policy**	• Landmark policy stating the zero-tolerance policy of DepEd for any act of child abuse, exploitation, neglect, violence, discrimination, and bullying • Includes guidance on the establishment of CPCs in schools	• Limited policy scope on cyberbullying • Asks CPCs in schools to create their child protection policy with a code of conduct and school-based referral monitoring system with no common policy basis from the Central Office
DO 18, s. 2015 **DepEd Guidelines and Procedures on the Management of Children-At-Risk and Children in Conflict with the Law**	• Provides procedures for dealing with serious cases of students who are alleged as, accused of, or adjusted as having committed an offense under Philippine laws • Appoints CPCs as the restorative judgment panel	• Does not specify the source of funding and support for activities in its implementation
DO No. 032, s. 2017 **Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy**	• Acknowledges the prevalence of gender-based bullying	• Still tasks CPCs to take on the work
DepEd DO 43, s. 2018 **Guidelines on the Release, Use, Reporting, and Monitoring and Evaluation of Fiscal Year 2018 Child Protection Program Funds for Capacity Building**	• Still tasks the CPCs to take on the work	• No mention of DO 55, s. 2013 | BE 197 in the document, which still refers to DO 40, s. 2012 | BE 198 when there have been some revisions in terms of reporting, such as on the role of the designated personnel (teacher or guidance counselor) to fill out the intake sheet
DO 3, s. 2021 **Creation of the Child Protection Unit and the Child Rights in Education Desk**	• Establishes the CPU and CREDe • Puts the CPU under the Office of Undersecretary for Field Operations • Puts CREDe under the Office of Undersecretary for Legal Affairs	• CPU and CREDe are currently lodged in the LRPO under the Office of the Secretary, but their organization is only mentioned in DO 1, s. 2023—i.e., the revised designation of undersecretaries and assistant secretaries to their strands and functional areas of responsibilities and revised signing authorities. It will be good to have all elements in one DepEd order.

Issue 2: Source of funds for implementing child protection policies is unclear, as well as how much support schools can get to implement anti-bullying initiatives.

Funding for child protection and antibullying initiatives has undergone significant changes. The substantial funding increased from 2022 to 2024 (from Php 14,170, 400.00 to 54,910,133.00) for implementing DepEd Order (DO) No. 40, s. 2012 and DO 55, s. 2013 (DepEd, June 24, 2024). However, since the funding depends on the programs and activities identified by LRPO, it is not clear whether this increase will be sustained. Moreover, it is also unclear where the budgetary support for SDOs and schools to implement their anti-bullying initiatives, such as informing parents and learners, will come from. While LRPO can support some SDO and school initiatives, and the LGU can also provide support, not all schools/SDOs can access this support.

Currently, zero bullying cases are included as an indicator in the Individual Performance Commitment and Review Form and the Office Performance Commitment and Review Form. The Results-Based Performance Management System is under review to address this aspect. Funding requests for antibullying programs are managed at the division level by LRPO focal points. Additionally, previous school grants for innovations have been absorbed into the MOOE, now primarily used for school utilities.

Recommendations

Expand the definition of bullying is a critical step in addressing policy gaps. Cyberbullying, indirect bullying, and peer pressure must be included to reflect the evolving nature of bullying. It is recommended to clarify whether bullying should be defined strictly as repeated behavior or if severity and impact should also be considered. Bullying behaviors should also be classified to guide interventions and distinguish them from other problematic behaviors. Emphasis should be placed on school-level responses with clear intervention guidelines rather than relying on technical jargon.

Schools require an antibullying framework to ensure consistency while allowing for localized adaptation. This framework will provide much-needed guidance for schools, reducing inconsistencies in policy application. There is also a need to distinguish the Antibullying Policy from the Child Protection Policy, given that they are guided by different laws despite both falling under child safety.

A new learning model is being developed to enhance mental health programs, integrating social and emotional learning and addressing bullying concerns. This broader scope of these topics in the curriculum can help address the underlying causes of bullying. Insights from the Department of Health on healthy learning institutions should also be incorporated.

DepEd is currently developing a Code of Conduct/Learner's Handbook at the central office that will include antibullying guidance. A potential challenge at the division level is ensuring the quality of localized antibullying policies across a large number of schools.

Policies should be localized and contextualized, with flexibility for private schools to adopt them, using broad inclusive language. Potential challenges in implementing catchall policies at field offices should be acknowledged, and concrete prevention and intervention initiatives during classroom hours, along with examples of programs, should be included in the IRR annexes.

The roles and responsibilities of implementers of antibullying policies and programs must be clearly defined. This clarity on job function, including on workload and qualifications, will help teachers and guidance designates. CPCs should be assigned to handle bullying cases with specific functions.

Capacity-building measures for school heads, teachers, and CPCs are imperative. Teachers need to be capacitated on antibullying programs through both in-service and preservice training. Regular training and workshops will equip these key personnel with evidence-based strategies and best practices for prevention and intervention. CPCs must be reconceptualized to better address bullying-specific behaviors. Proposed actions include assigning full-time personnel for guidance and discipline, who can provide counseling and assistance to learners and teachers. The implementation of RA 12080 is expected to attract mental health professionals to schools, further strengthening the support network by adding dedicated experts to manage learner concerns, including bullying.

Additionally, reducing the teacher-student ratio in schools, where possible, could help mitigate bullying based on existing studies.

Orienting learners about reporting procedures is crucial, ensuring they know who to approach and how to report incidents. Launching an information campaign on bullying through school signages and online awareness campaigns can educate students and parents. Maintaining a hotline for reporting bullying cases, with the option for anonymous reporting, could mitigate fears of retaliation and increase reporting rates.

The Learner Rights and Protection Division has contributed by developing and distributing Social Behavioral Change materials on antibullying, which include details on reporting channels such as the Learners TeleSafe Contact Center Helpline. This helpline, accessible through the easily remembered contact number "#33733 (#DepEd)," provides a direct and safe way for students to report bullying.

However, while these resources are vital, what is most crucial is implementing comprehensive antibullying policies that involve the entire school community (Gaffney & Farrington, 2021).

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be clearly defined. These must identify clear metrics for monitoring the implementation and assessing the effectiveness of antibullying measures. To address underreporting, the reporting process should be streamlined, and the relevant DepEd orders should be clearly referenced. While it is commendable that the Results-Based Performance Management System is being reviewed to improve bullying case reporting as a performance indicator, a comprehensive, coded intake sheet is also needed for better data management and privacy.

Guidance must be provided in integrating bullying prevention into the curriculum. The content and pedagogy of the MATATAG curriculum should be reviewed to ensure it covers antibullying principles. Developmentally appropriate modules on empathy, conflict resolution, and bullying prevention must be embedded in classroom instruction.

Efforts should be made to prevent the normalization of bullying in schools. This involves creating a school environment where such behavior is not tolerated and where students feel safe and supported. According to Nob et al. (2024) on understanding bullying in the Philippines, school climate, structure, and the presence of adult support significantly affect bullying rates and student belongingness.

DepEd must allocate adequate resources, including funding for the personnel, training, and tools needed for schools to enforce antibullying policies effectively. The LRPO needs to be fully established, requiring plantilla items for central and regional office staff and a detailed DepEd memo from the CPU outlining its establishment. Additionally, a clear budget line should be established for the capacity building of parents and parent-teacher associations within DepEd.

Effective antibullying practices include a comprehensive definition of bullying, the accessible documentation of cases, consistent enforcement, tiered sanctions, stakeholder involvement, and LGU involvement in augmenting limited school resources and supporting antibullying policies (Baloloy & Zapanta, 2024).

Access, Equity, and Progress: Advancing Philippine Higher Education

Introduction

Many Filipino parents dream of sending their children to college, yet insufficient income has prevented more than half from achieving this goal. According to the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), 74% of Filipinos aspire to see their children earn a college diploma, yet 51% cite financial constraints as a significant barrier (AmBisyon Natin 2040, 2016).

A college education has long been linked to intergenerational social mobility, driving the widespread aspiration for higher education. This preference is further reinforced by employers who often use a college degree as a screening tool for employment, even for roles that do not require one. This practice diminishes the perceived value of Philippine technical qualifications and delay the development of advanced technical education, which could strengthen local economies while enhancing the country's national development and global competitiveness.

Using a college degree as a universal employment filter and the lack of alternative pathways for socioeconomic mobility have reinforced the view that higher education is as essential as basic education. This belief has driven the legislation of free tuition in public higher education institutions (HEIs), benefiting all socioeconomic classes. However, the EDCOM II Year One Report highlights an urgent education crisis, emphasizing early nutrition, access to early childhood education, quality basic schooling, and diverse training opportunities. In this context, the sustainability of a universal free tuition model requires reevaluation to address broader systemic needs.

In terms of income elasticity, Alba (forthcoming) identifies that higher education is a luxury good, where expenditure increases with household income—unlike the relationship between food and income. This "luxurification" has exacerbated the hardships of poor Filipino households. Additionally, Albert, Punongbayan, and Muñoz (2024) documented a sharp decline in the returns to higher education in terms of logarithmic hourly wages, dropping from 141.4% in 2010 to 93.7% in 2022—a 47.7-percentage-point decrease in just 12 years compared to those with no formal education. This decline highlights inequities across income levels: The first income decile experienced a 64-percentage-point drop in returns, compared to only an 18.2-percentage-point decline for the 9th decile. These disparities indicate that higher education may not mitigate but instead exacerbate income inequality.

Notably, the institutionalization of universal access to higher education in state universities and colleges (SUCs) and eligible local universities and colleges (LUCs) under Republic Act (RA) No. 10931 (University Access to Quality Tertiary Education) has led to a 5.7% decrease from 2014 to 2022 in the proportion of young respondents citing financial concerns as a reason for not attending school (Figure 1)[1]. Conversely, other reasons for nonparticipation in higher education have increased during the same period. The proportion of respondents citing lack of personal interest rose by 10.28%, while those citing employment or job seeking increased by 12.59%. These trends highlight evolving challenges that require targeted policy responses.

FIGURE 1
2014 vs. 2022: Cited Reasons for Not Attending School
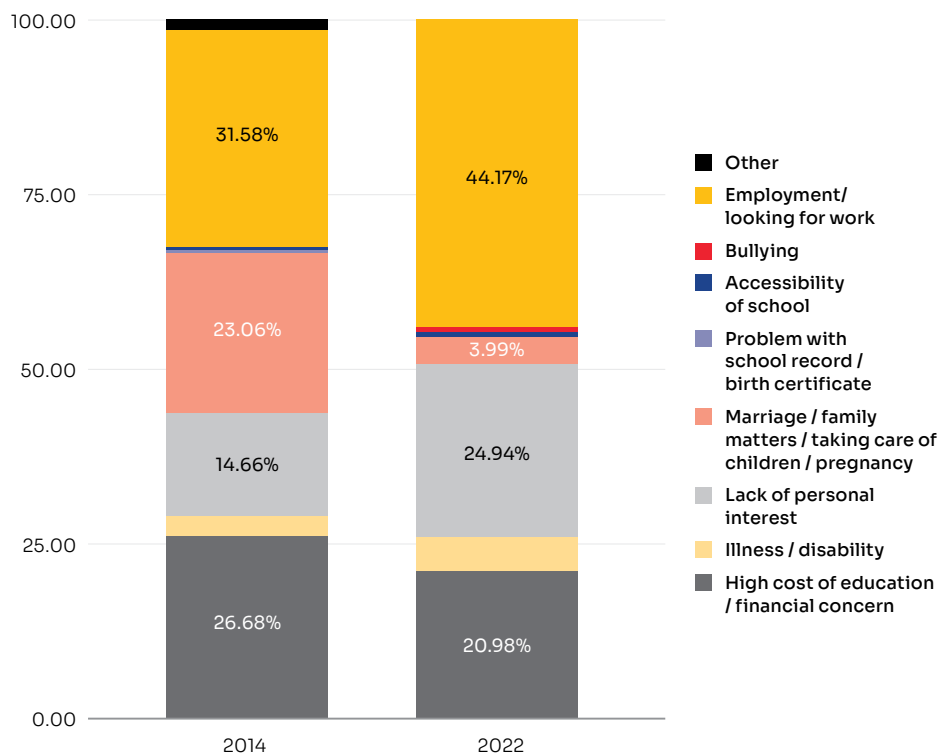
Source: PSA (2014, 2022), as cited by Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024)

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1   This reduction was more pronounced among males, with an 8.6% decline. Similarly, the proportion of young respondents citing marriage, family responsibilities, childcare, and pregnancy as barriers to higher education dropped by 25.1%—a larger reduction than that observed for financial concerns (19.07%)—and was particularly significant among young females.

A key policy question remains: Continue providing full subsidies to learners in public HEIs, regardless of their socioeconomic status, or not? Regardless of the decision, ensuring equitable access to higher education is vital for achieving economic and human development goals, such as job security and economic empowerment. Notably, facilitating the transition of young Filipinos to higher education and the workforce is key to leveraging the Philippines's demographic dividend (The World Bank, 2024).

The Human and Social Development section of the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028 also emphasizes the development of a knowledge economy. This vision requires globally competitive and inclusive technical-vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education sectors capable of producing the human capital necessary for socioeconomic transformation. Higher education is pivotal in preparing the workforce for 21st-century demands and contributing to the country's underdeveloped research, innovation, and enterprise (RIE) ecosystem.

Global innovation benchmarks highlight the Philippines' strengths in specific areas. For instance, the country ranks third among lower-middle-income nations in the Global Innovation Index ranking. It performs well in the Innovation Output Index Ranking, reflecting the ability of the country to make costly innovation investments into more higher-quality innovations. However, within Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Oceania, the Philippines ranks 11th out of 17 in economic performance on the Global Innovation Index, revealing gaps in regional competitiveness (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2024).

Year One Updates

Priority Area 11: Access to Higher Education: Review of Free Higher Education and Amendments the Commission on Higher Education's Tertiary Education Subsidy

Prioritizing the poorest of the poor in implementing the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) has been a key recommendation of EDCOM II since Year One. Following this, the 2024 General Appropriations Act (GAA) included a provision to prioritize TES grantees under the Listahanan 3 database and students from low-income households. This action addressed a notable gap: many TES grants were awarded to students enrolled in private HEIs in places with no SUCs/LUCs (PNSLs), who may not necessarily belong to impoverished households.

Consequently, the 2024 GAA provision was included to realign budget allocation with the intent of the Universal RA Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act of 2017, ensuring equitable access for impoverished learners.

In a motu proprio hearing held on May 6, 2024, at the House of Representatives, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST) affirmed their commitment to prioritize the poorest of the poor in allocating TES grants. **Complying with the GAA provision, the TES implementation for the academic year (AY) 2024–2025 resulted in a significant increase in the share and number of poor TES grantees. Specifically, the number of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) TES grantees rose from 495 in AY 2022–2023 to 160,032 in AY 2023–2024, representing a 27% share of TES recipients under**

the 4Ps category relative to the total number of TES grantees (see Figure 2). However, this expansion of TES coverage came with a reduction in the amount of individual grants. Previously set at Php 30,000 for private HEIs and Php 20,000 for public HEIs, TES grants were standardized to Php 10,000 across all HEI types. Despite this shift, most TES slots (65%) continued to be awarded to PNSL grantees.

FIGURE 2
TES Grantees Allocation by Eligibility Criteria
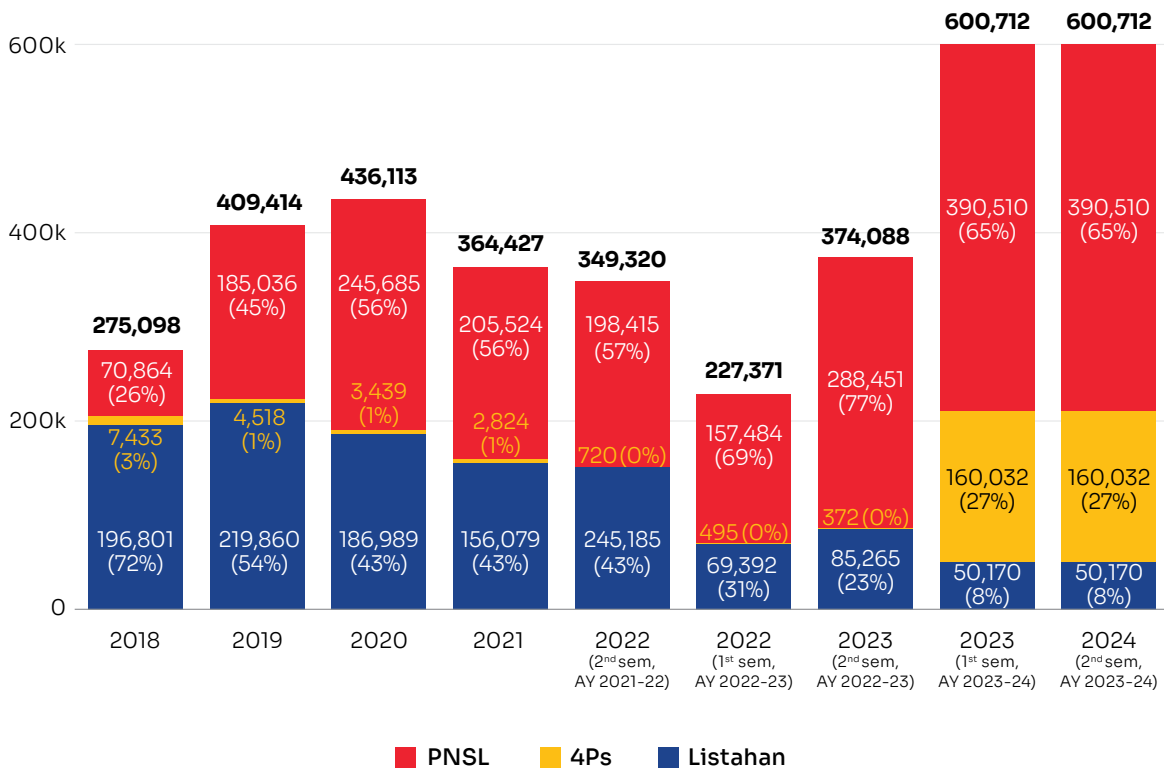
Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024b) assert that comparing the regional distribution of PNSL with the estimated population of poor students enrolled in private HEIs within the same region helps identify areas of potential leakage or areas where nonpoor PNSL obtained TES. Accordingly, nine out of 17 regions exceeded the estimated population of poor students observed in private HEIs, with Region XII (SOCCSKSARGEN) exhibiting the highest number of leakages (29,384), followed by Region III (Central Luzon) (14,682). **This observation highlights the need to refine the targeting mechanism of the TES to focus on those in economic need rather than solely on residency and the absence of SUCs and eligible LUCs**.

Priority Area 12: Quality Assurance

Since the start of EDCOM II, its higher education agenda has emphasized the articulation of the country's quality assurance (QA) system and the review of CHED's QA policy, particularly the horizontal and vertical typologies outlined in CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 46, s. 2012, which mandates outcomes-based and typology-based QA. The Year One report identified the next steps, including workshops for accreditation bodies supported by EDCOM II and the reconstitution of the remaining Technical Panels.

Mapping the Higher Education Quality Assurance System
In mapping the higher education QA system, EDCOM II adopted the description of the prevailing system as outlined in the ASEAN-endorsed 2018 Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) Referencing Report to the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF). In 2018, the DepEd secretary formally submitted this report to the AQRF Committee on behalf of DepEd, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), CHED, the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), and the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), as chair of the PQF National Coordinating Council. All relevant stakeholders unanimously approved the report's depiction of the education system's QA of qualifications before submission.

The report identifies CHED as the external QA body responsible for registering private HEIs, certifying SUCs for compliance before their conversion into universities, and granting institutional recognition to LUCs as an HEIs. CHED also sets minimum standards for all higher education programs and qualifications, excluding law, marine transportation, and marine engineering. These standards are developed by Technical Panels composed of experts from various discipline clusters, industry representatives, professional organizations, and the PRC for regulated professions. Furthermore, CHED monitors and evaluates compliance with these standards and administers voluntary assessments that surpass minimum requirements, such as the establishment Centers of Excellence and Centers of Development for programmatic QA, vertical typology for private HEIs, and SUC levelling (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Quality Assurance by CHED

Setting, Monitoring, and Evaluating Compliance with Minimum Standards	Voluntary Assessment of Quality Beyond Compliance with Minimum Standards
Commission on Higher Education (CHED)	**Programmatic QA** ▪ CHED Center of Development (COD) ▪ CHED Center of Excellence (COE)
	Institutional QA ▪ CHED Institutional Sustainability Assessment (ISA) ▪ CHED Autonomous or Deregulated Status (for private HEIs) ▪ CHED State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) Levelling

Source: Modified Table 6, Criterion 6 of the Philippine Referencing Report to the AQRF (22 May 2019)

In addition to CHED and the government agencies responsible for law and maritime programs, the QA bodies for Philippine higher education include local voluntary accreditation agencies classified as peer-/school-based or professional organization-based—which are either international or local bodies with international links.

The report's official portrayal of CHED as a QA body holds significant implications in the Philippine context. While government-led QA systems are standard in European and ASEAN countries, QA in the Philippines was initially perceived as being driven primarily by voluntary accreditation conducted by local and international accreditation bodies. This perception led to strong opposition from some stakeholders against CMO 46, s. 2012, which alludes to CHED as an external QA body.

The Philippine Referencing Report addresses this misconception by highlighting the government's central role in assuring the quality of Philippine qualifications. It aligns the country with the AQRF's QA concept, which encompasses four core processes: the registration of education and training providers, the supervision of assessment systems leading to qualifications, the accreditation of qualifications, and the regulation of certificate issuance. By clarifying these roles, the report challenges the prevailing belief that QA in the Philippines is predominantly voluntary.

Toward a Functional Horizontal Classification of HEIs
While CMO 46, s. 2012, differentiates professional institutions, colleges, and universities in its horizontal typology, its vertical typology relies on the same accreditation-based indicators for academic excellence, albeit with varying weights.

Since the issuance of the CMO, little progress has been made in refining the operationalization of each HEI type. Moreover, the horizontal typology has seen limited implementation. In practice, CHED has largely adopted a one-size-fits-all regulatory approach to QA and other program and policy matters.

Following these consultations, Dr. Allan B. I. Bernardo and his team at the De La Salle University reviewed horizontal classification systems from other countries and conducted a cluster analysis using data from CHED and a nonrandom sample of HEIs. This analysis aimed to establish a functional HEI classification system and promote a diversified higher education ecosystem, where distinct HEIs fulfill specialized roles aligned with national and societal development goals.

The proposed horizontal classification system offers a foundation for developing and implementing comprehensive strategic programs for higher education in the Philippines. The preliminary findings from Dr. Bernardo's team are detailed in the Situationer section of this report.

Harmonization Workshop Series of School-Based Accreditation Bodies
In 2024, EDCOM II supported initiatives to enhance voluntary QA by facilitating five workshops led by Dr. Maria Cynthia Rose Bautista and Dr. John Christian Young for the Sub-Committee on Higher Education. Organized by school-based accreditation bodies, now referred to as External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAAs), the workshops addressed common concerns and focused on harmonizing criteria, approaches, and metrics. These initiatives aimed to align with global trends in higher education and QA while establishing a collegial EQAA network to collaborate with CHED on QA policies, promoting mutual understanding and clear terms of engagement.

- **Quality is conceptualized as purposeful, exceptional, transformative, and accountable.**
  - **Purposeful**: conformance to a stated mission, vision, or standards.
  - **Exceptional**: achievement of distinction through the fulfillment of high standards.
  - **Transformative**: positive change in student learning and personal and professional potential.
  - **Accountable**: accountability to stakeholders in the optimal use of resources and delivery of educational products.
- **CHED serves as the external quality assurance agency responsible for accrediting qualifications.** According to the AQRF briefer, accreditation is the process by which a qualification gains national recognition within a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). This involves endorsing the complexity and volume of learning as appropriate to the qualification type. Achievement

standards—whether competency based, educational, or occupational—form the foundation of qualifications and include completion rules. These standards may be established by public providers, a single agency, or multiple industry agencies, encompassing activities such as granting permits, setting standards, and other related processes.

- **Accreditation is a voluntary and collegial process founded on principles of academic self-governance.** It involves evaluating the quality of an institution's or program's services, operations, and outcomes against established standards and its mission or objectives. Independent peer judgment follows this internal review. In the Philippines, accreditation provides formal recognition by an external agency that an educational program or institution exceeds the minimum quality standards set by regulatory bodies. Conversely, profession-based accreditation is a voluntary process where programs are internally examined against national or international industry/profession standards and subjected to independent judgment by non-peer-based accreditors or auditors. This grants formal recognition by an external industry/profession-based accreditation agency that an educational program complies with industry or professional standards.

- **The EQAAs decided to pursue a principles-based (PB) quality system instead of a rules-based (RB) one, recognizing that these systems represent opposite ends of a spectrum. Key differences include:**
  - **Focus**: PB focuses on improvement; RB focuses on compliance.
  - **Primary purpose**: PB is formative, aiming to develop; RB is summative, focusing on final outcomes.
  - **Improvement objective**: PB is open-ended; RB is more limited.
  - **Reviewers**: PB uses skilled peers; RB relies on technical experts.
  - **Trust**: PB operates on trust and verification; RB works to eliminate distrust.
  - **Feedback**: PB offers evaluations; RB conducts audits.

- **The EQAAs decided to align their practices with the 7S Framework (adapted for EQAAs) and the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF), focusing more closely on the AQAF**. Key actions include
  - Staying updated on quality assurance developments as part of continuous improvement
  - Collaborating with national and international stakeholders, all five EQAAs agreed to join the Asia Pacific Quality Network and the AQAF.
  - Offering regular training for assessors and inviting each other's assessors to build a community of accreditation practice.
  - Ensuring professionalism and ethics by developing a common Manual for Accreditors or Code of Ethics.
  - Regularly assessing their quality assurance practices, starting with peer assessments, to promote continuous improvement.

- **Harmonization of accreditation areas:** The EQAAs started the process of identifying areas of convergence and divergence in their accreditation practices by
  - Creating an inventory of accreditation areas assessed by the five agencies, broken down into subareas.
  - Comparing how their instruments assess these areas and subareas
  - Identifying core accreditation areas and subareas to be standardized, as well as those that may differ based on the unique characteristics of each EQAA, the programs accredited, and the clients served
  - Agreeing to work toward obtaining ISO certification as an initial commitment

- **The EQAAs agreed to establish guidelines for justifiable deviations from the requirements set by PSGs.** They discussed several accreditation issues, including
  - **Faculty qualifications and full-time–part-time ratio:** The need to reassess qualifications for professional programs, especially for experienced practitioners without formal academic degrees, and the rationale for requiring a specific full-time faculty ratio
  - **Teaching, learning, curriculum, and instruction:** The importance of properly assessing outcomes-based curricula, effective teaching methods, and learning outcomes
  - **Libraries:** The need to explicitly broaden the concept of a library to include other learning resources available to learners, including online databases, electronic publications, and otherinformation technology (IT) resources beyond the current requirements, e.g., one full-time licensed librarian and one full-time support staff for every 1,000 users—which HEIs have found difficult to meet
- **EQAAs agreed to draft a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to guide subsequent harmonization efforts independently of and beyond EDCOM II.** The MOU includes
  - Reviewing and determining areas for harmonization
  - Formulating an overall plan with timelines for future harmonization workshops

Reconstitution of the Technical Panels
The fast-tracking of the constitution of the Technical Panels is an ongoing process. These panels assist CHED in setting standards and in program institution monitoring and evaluation, as mandated by Section 12 of the Higher Education Act (RA 7722, s. 1994). From 2020 to 2023, only 15 out of the 98 Technical Panels were reconstituted. By November 2024, an additional 72 Technical Panels have been approved, leaving 19 still awaiting reconstitution.

Recognizing the urgency of this matter, EDCOM II strongly recommends the immediate reconstitution of the remaining 19 Technical Panels. This step is crucial for ensuring that academic programs align with the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It also ensures that the policies, standards, and guidelines (PSGs) for each discipline reflect evolving local and international professional and industry standards, the paradigm shift to lifelong learning, innovative programs and learning delivery modes, the PQF, which includes the recognition of learning, equivalencies, and an institutionalized credit transfer system, as well as ongoing changes in the senior high school (SHS) curriculum and other developments.

These actions are essential to creating a more agile and responsive higher education system that supports the country's social and economic development goals.

TABLE 2
Technical Panels to Be Reconstituted as of November 2024

Discipline	To Be Reconstituted
Arts and Humanities	1. Religious Studies
Business and Management	2. Customs Administration, Logistics & Supply Chain Management 3. Legal Management
Criminal Justice	4. Criminology, Law Enforcement, Administration, Industrial Security
Engineering and Technology	5. Agriculture and Biosystems 6. Aeronautical and Aviation Related 7. Ceramic, Metallurgical and Materials 8. Chemical 9. Civil 10. Computer 11. Electrical 12. Electronics 13. Geodetic 14. Industrial 15. Mechanical 16. Mining 17. Sanitary 18. Manufacturing 19. Engineering Technology

Source: CHED (Received 22 November 2024)

Priority Area 14: Graduate Education, Research, and Innovation

EDCOM II's Year One Report outlined two key tasks for Year Two: conducting research to further refine the literature on the state of research and innovation (R&I) and its policy recommendations—that included studies on R&I models, best practices among HEIs, challenges faced by existing science and technology parks; and discussions with key government agencies—such as the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department of Energy, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources—to enhance synergies within the Philippine innovation ecosystem.

Recognizing the 3-year timeframe of EDCOM II, the Higher Education Subcommittee chose to collaborate with the National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST), the DOST,, and the Secretariat of the National Innovation Council (NIC) to advance their evidence-based policy advocacies rather than embark on new research.

The "low-hanging fruit" for EDCOM II in Year Two were supporting provisions advocated by the science community during the enactment of RA 12009 (New Government Procurement Act). **RA 12009 mandates that the NIC, in coordination with the Government Procurement Policy Board (GPPB), streamline procurement processes and reduce excessive bureaucracy, thereby accelerating research, development, and innovation. This provision aims to identify and eliminate regulatory barriers that hinder the growth of the R&D, technology, and innovation ecosystem over the medium to long term. It allows the NIC and the GPPB to craft flexible policies that address previously unrecognized obstacles unique to R&D and innovation**.

Year Two Overview

The total number of HEIs and enrollments in the Philippines has grown significantly over the years. Since AY 1990–1991, the number of HEIs rose from 868 to 2,410 institutions by AY 2023–2024—a 178% increase. The public sector experienced over 200% growth, expanding from 231 to 696 institutions, including satellite campuses. Similarly, the private sector grew by 171%, from 637 to 1,714 institutions, during the same period.

In terms of enrollment, total numbers increased by 47% within a decade, from AY 2011–2012 to AY 2021–2022. Public sector enrollments grew faster, nearly doubling with an 84% increase, while private sector enrollments saw a more modest growth of 22%.

TABLE 3
Type of HEI Distribution from AY 1990–1991 to AY 2023–2024

Type of HEI	1990–1991	2000–2001	2010–2011	2019–2020	2019–2020
Total public (including SUC satellite campuses)	231	389	633	667	696
Total public (excluding SUC satellite campuses)	174	166	219	246	263
SUC main	81	107	110	112	113
SUC satellite	57	223	424	421	433
LUC	34	40	93	121	137
Others	59	19	16	13	13
Total private	637	1,214	1,604	1,729	1,714
Private sectarian	225	312	334	339	349
Private nonsectarian	412	902	1,296	1,390	1,357
Total HEIs (including SUC satellite campuses)	868	1603	2237	2396	2410
Total HEIs (excluding SUC satellite campuses)	811	1380	1823	1975	1977

Source: Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2023; Commission on Higher Education, 2023

TABLE 4
Distribution of Enrollments by HEI Type

Type of HEI	AY 2011–2012	AY 2011–2012	% Change
Total public	1,055,949	1,942,250	83.93
SUC main	552,291	860,522	55.81
SUC satellite	370,466	735,068	98.42
LUC	128,961	345,635	168.02
Others	4,231	1,025	-75.77
Total private	1,565,798	1,907,528	21.82
Private sectarian	470,520	432,466	-8.09
Private nonsectarian	1,095,278	1,475,062	34.67
Total	2,621,747	3,849,778	46.84

Source: CHED (2015, 2023)

Regional variation in higher education enrollments and participation is evident, as shown in Figure 3. The National Capital Region, the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), and Region VII: 47.2%, 44.1%, and 35.2%, respectively report the highest participation rates. In contrast, Region V, Region XI, and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) have the lowest share of college-age students enrolled in higher education: 24.6%, 24.6%, and 18.7%, respectively.

Attrition rates also vary significantly across regions. Regions II, V, and MIMAROPA record the lowest attrition rates at 36.3%, 37.4%, and 37.9%, respectively, while Regions IX, VII, and BARMM experience the highest attrition rates at 59.5%, 60.7%, and a staggering 93.4%.

FIGURE 3
Share of College-Age Students Enrolled in Higher Education and Attrition Rates, by Region
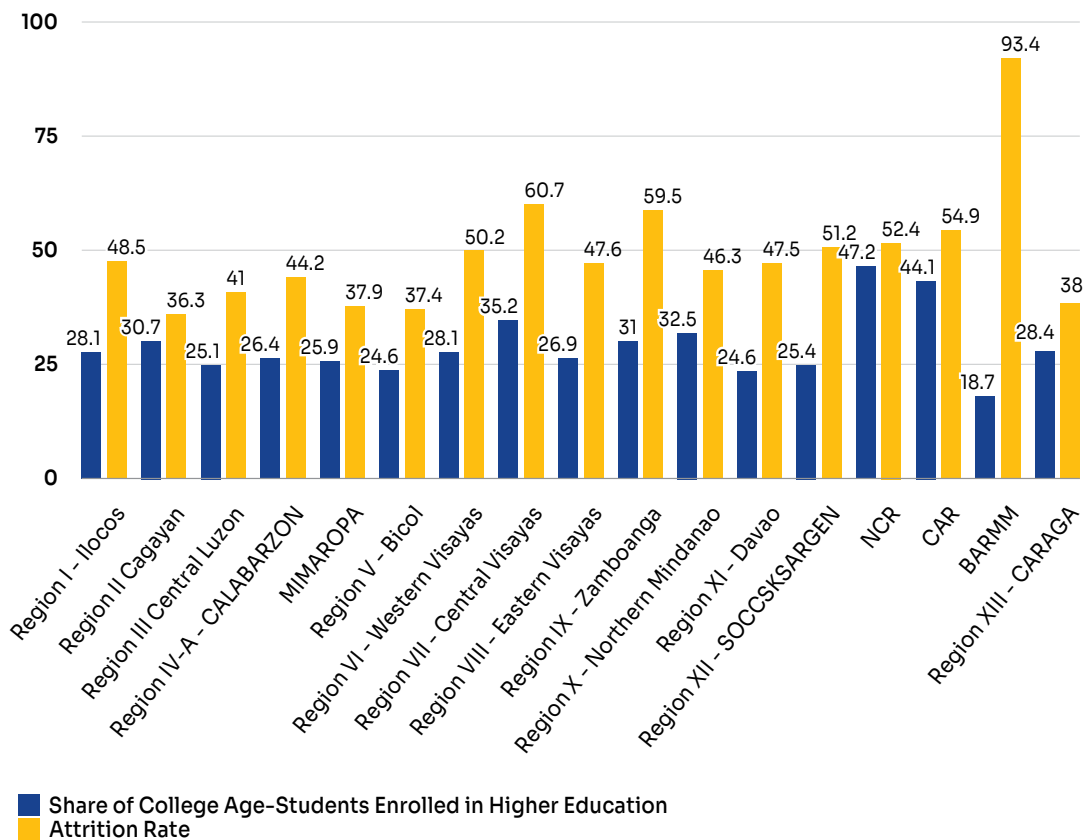
Note: Share of college-age population in higher education are for the year 2020 and attrition rates are for the year 2022.

Source: Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024), CPRBD (2024)

TABLE 5
Quality Indicators of Higher Education Sector

Indicator	Academic Year						
	1997–1998	2000–2001	2004–2005	2008–2009	2009–2010	2014–2015	2018–2019
Faculty qualifications							
% with MA/MS	25.3	26.1	30.6	34.8	35.0	40.8	37.6
% with PhD	7.5	8.3	9.1	9.8	9.7	12.5	16.6
Accreditation of programs							
Number of HEIs			297	407	428	606	701
% of HEIs			18.0	19.6	19.6	25.4	29.3
Number of HEIs with accredited programs excluding candidate status (%)							
Level I			20.3	26.0	26.9	33.8	25.0
Level II			67.8	51.4	47.0	37.8	43.6
Level III			11.9	22.7	26.1	24.7	26.8
Level IV						3.7	4.6
Passing rates in licensure examinations across all disciplines							
Overall takers	32.6	37.2	32.9	38.8	36.2	40	38
First time takers					50	60	56

Sources: For AY 2010-10 to AY 2018-19 (CHED 2020b); for AY 2004-05 (CHED 2015); AY 1997-98 to AY 2000-01 (CHED 2005), as cited by Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024b)

Without other publicly available quality measures, the primary indicators cited are the faculty's highest educational attainment, accreditation, and passing rates in the licensure examinations. Regarding faculty qualifications, the PSGs and the CMO 40, s. 2008 (Manual of Regulations for Private Higher Education, or MORPHE) indicate that many programs require faculty members to possess at least a master's degree. However, by AY 2018–2019, only 54.2% of faculty held advanced degrees, albeit an improvement from 32.8% in AY 1997–1998.

While accreditation has become more common, progress has been modest. The proportion of HEIs with accredited programs increased by only 11.3 percentage points, from 18.0% in AY 2004–2005 to 29.3% in AY 2018–2019. Disaggregated by level, the percentage of HEIs offering programs with Level I, Level III, and Level IV accreditations rose during this period, while the share of Level II accreditations declined (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024b).

Licensure exam passing rates across all disciplines have shown steady but limited improvement. For all examinees (first-time and repeaters), the passing rate increased from 32.6% in AY 1997–1998 to 38.0% in AY 2018–2019, a gain of just 5.4 percentage points. Among first-time test takers, the passing rate improved by 6 percentage points, rising from 50% in AY 2009–2010 to 56% in AY 2018–2019 (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024b).

Under Section 10 of RA 7722, the Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF) was established "exclusively for the strengthening of higher education in the entire country," which implies "enhancing the quality of educational services." However, as shown in Figure 3, the allocation of HEDF funds has shifted significantly since 2016. In that year, 86.63% of HEDF funds were directed toward the developmental functions of CHED, but by 2022, this allocation had sharply decreased to 11.43%. Meanwhile, the proportion allocated for regulatory functions increased from 11.32% in 2016 to 88.57% in 2022. Funds of policy services remained negligible, declining from 2.04% in 2016 to 0.00% by 2022.

The data further reveals that the total funding allocated to higher education services fluctuates yearly. For instance, there was a 65.41% decrease from Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 to FY 2018, while FY 2020 to FY 2021 saw a sharp increase of 118.52%.

FIGURE 4
Higher Education Development Fund Allocation
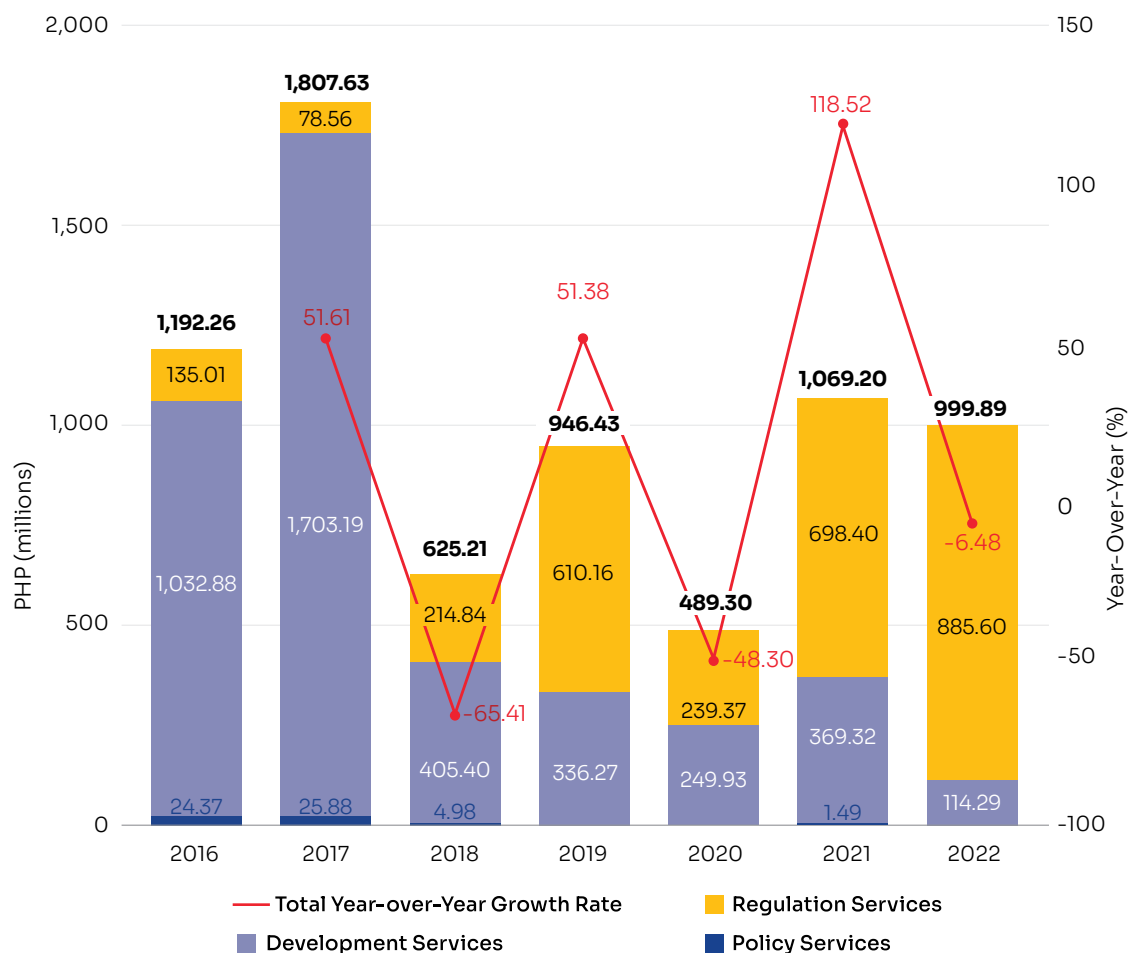
Source: Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024b)

Priority Area 11:
Access to Quality Higher Education

Issue 1: Ensuring improved access to higher education

Access to higher education is essential in promoting social equity and mobility. By fostering inclusion of individuals from various backgrounds, higher education contributes to poverty education and inequality. It enables individuals to improve their socioeconomic standing and participate more actively in the democratic process, fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry.

Against this backdrop, data shows an increasing participation of students from the poorest segments of the population relative to the richest in both public and private higher education sectors. As illustrated in Figure 5, the share of students from the poorest six deciles in the private sector has increased between 2014 and 2022, as indicated by a positive differential. Conversely, the share of students from the wealthiest three deciles in private HEIs shows a negative differential, with the decrease becoming more pronounced in the higher deciles. Notably, the wealthiest decile exhibits a 10.53% negative differential, indicating a 10.53% reduction in the proportion of students from this group enrolled in private HEIs compared to other deciles within the same sector.

In public HEIs, the proportion differentials for 2022 relative to 2014 are favorable for the first three (poorest) deciles and negative for the remaining seven (richest) deciles. This trend indicates that the share of students from the poorest three deciles has increased relative to the rest of the public HEI student population. The cumulative differential for the poorest three deciles shows a 10.97% increase in their share of enrollment in public HEIs.

FIGURE 5
Distribution of Students by Income Decile in Private HEIs
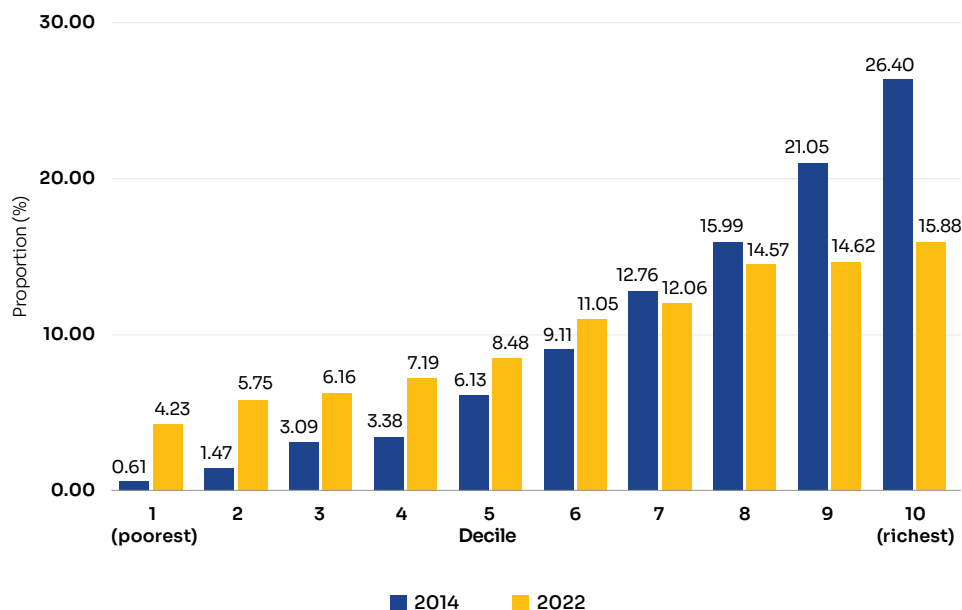
Source: Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024b)

FIGURE 6
Distribution of Students by Income Decile in Public HEIs
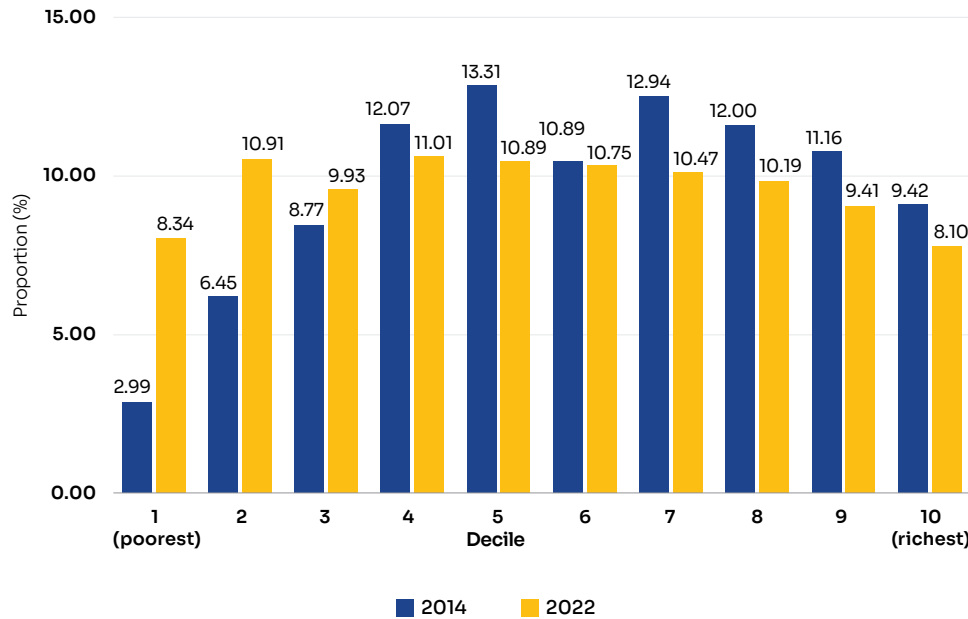
Source: Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024b)

Despite the higher overall participation of poorer students, data reveals that educational opportunities remain unevenly distributed across regions, effectively limiting student choice. With the projected increase in the college-age population by 2030 (see Figure 6), Yeban (forthcoming) highlights a significant shortfall in the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) needed to meet population projections for 2025 and 2030. This disparity is even more pronounced at regional and provincial levels, where access to HEIs varies significantly. Many provinces lack sufficient institutions to meet the educational needs of the 20–24 age group. Rural provinces, in particular, are notably underserved.

FIGURE 7
Population Projection 18–21 Years Old (College-Age) in Thousands
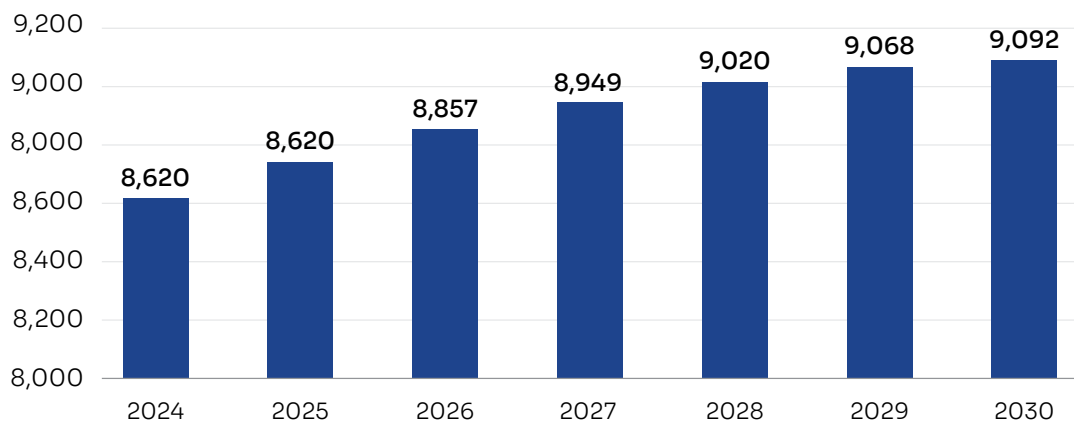
Source: UN DESA World Population Prospects (2022), as cited by Ducanes (forthcoming)

While many provinces currently have an adequate number of HEIs, Yeban's (forthcoming) analysis reveals that several provinces are expected to fall short in future years. For instance, Agusan del Sur faces a significant shortfall, requiring approximately nine additional HEIs by 2025 and nearly ten by 2030 to meet the needs of its growing 20–24 age group population. Similarly, Zamboanga del Norte, which is projected to be adequate in 2025, will become only moderately adequate by 2030, highlighting the need for additional HEIs to sustain adequacy as the population grows. This underscores the urgent need for promoting access to higher education, especially by the regional populations, while also being cognizant of their local projections the upcoming years.

Public Provision of Higher Education

State and local universities and colleges (SUCs and LUCs) are the primary public higher education providers. According to Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024a), the 30-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of public HEIs, including satellite campuses, slightly outpaced that of private providers at 3.44% and 3.38%, respectively. However, the difference in 29-year CAGR for enrollment is more pronounced, with public HEIs showing a 6.3% growth compared to 1.8% for private institutions.

Notably, LUCs experienced an 11.9% surge in enrollments during the same period. **A correlation analysis reveals that the number of public HEIs is closely linked to the 15–24 age population, with the strongest correlation observed in LUCs (0.62), followed by SUC satellites (0.57) and SUC main campuses (0.22).**

Public HEI Expansion

SUCs primarily establish satellite campuses to improve access for remote populations, but their institutional missions limit their expansion. In contrast, LUCs are established to address the specific needs of local communities, often serving as a critical means of access to higher education. Despite the growth in public HEIs, program expansion has primarily been concentrated in business administration and education disciplines at both undergraduate and graduate levels. SUCs, particularly their main and satellite campuses, have also seen increased enrollment in engineering, technology, and IT-related programs.

Both SUCs and LUCs encounter challenges in expanding their capacities, but the nuances differ by institution type:

TABLE 6
Capital Constraints Faced by Public HEIs

	SUCs	LUCs
Human Capital	■ Reports of closing down programs due to non-compliance with CHED requirements, highlighting the importance of plantilla positions and job security.	■ LGUs are subjected to expenditure caps under Section 325 of the Local Government Code, limiting personnel spending to 45% (for first- to third-class LGUs) or 55% (for fourth- to sixth-class LGUs) of total annual income, which results in reliance as part-time faculty. This leads to LUCs being less preferred as employers by teaching professionals. ■ LUCs are vulnerable to local political dynamics.
Physical Capital	■ Limitations in physical infrastructure and budgetary constraints are exacerbated by surging enrollments.	
	■ Addresses the issue of the surge in enrollments by adopting distance learning models to accommodate increased demand.	

Source: Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024a)

Quality and Access: Differentiated Roles of LUCs and SUCs

EDCOM II identifies distinct roles for LUCs and SUCs in promoting access and quality. LUCs emphasize affirmative action more by incorporating socioeconomic factors, such as family income and household education profiles, into their admission processes. For example, an LUC administrator reported implementing bridging programs to support disadvantaged students, raising completion rates (Bohol Roundtable Discussion, July 30, 2024).

SUCs, on the other hand, "have more stringent admission and retention policies, which can be significant barriers for students with limited resources." SUC administrators acknowledge that merit-based admissions often favor students with more financial resources, as they have better access to preparatory and support mechanisms. Some SUCs have begun introducing affirmative action policies, but balancing expanded access with maintaining quality standards remains challenging (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024a).

RA 10931 Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education: Free Higher Education

The resulting upward budgetary pressures and inefficiency of the UAQTEA in its current form necessitate amendments to RA 10931 to alleviate the fiscal burden of free tuition in SUCs and LUCs while better targeting the program's benefits toward lower-income groups. Findings indicate that SUCs and LUCs have generally enrolled and accepted more students since the implementation of UAQTEA compared to the AY 2015–2016 baseline.

As shown in Figure 7, from AY 2015–2016 to AY 2022–2023, the average annual enrollment growth in SUCs and LUCs was 4.3%, significantly outpacing the 1.5% growth rate in private colleges and universities (Ducanes, forthcoming). By comparison, the college-age population grew by only 0.9% annually during the same period.

> *"We are talking about intellectual capability to meet the demands of academic work and the kind of support they need, like allowance for school, money for good laptops, and books to sustain schooling. [...] Now students come to me, and they say that they have problems with allowances and fares."*
> —SUC administrator (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024a)

FIGURE 8
Enrollments, AY 2015–2016 to AY 2022–2023
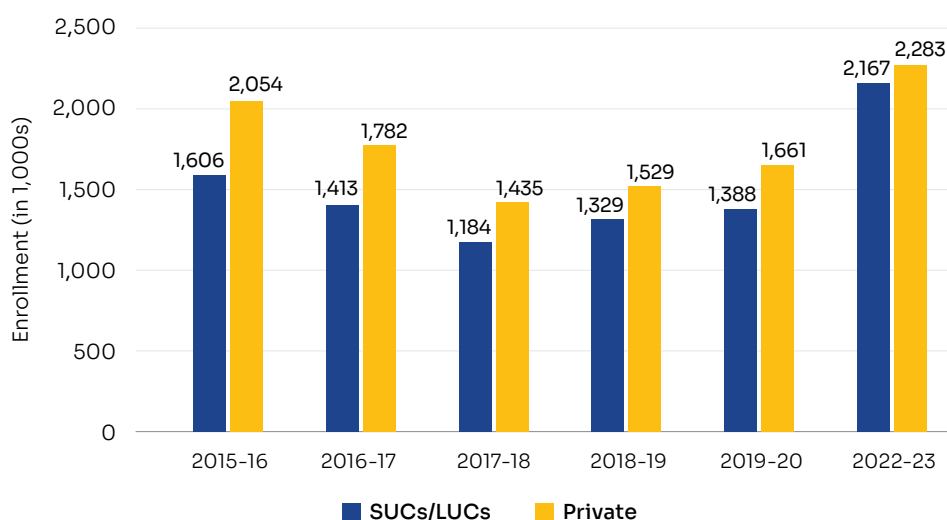
Source: CHED Website, as cited by Ducanes (forthcoming)

The UAQTEA implementing rules and regulations (IRR) Section 10 stipulates that funding for free higher education is contingent upon adherence to not exceed the institutional carrying capacity. To mitigate potential risks to educational quality, CHED and the UniFAST should conduct a thorough evaluation of current enrollments against available resources and capacities in state and local universities, and refine the operationalization of carrying capacity as outlined in the IRR. This will enable the effective implementation of the Free Higher Education program while maintaining academic standards and promoting sustainable institutional development.

Despite efforts to accommodate growing enrollment, universal free tuition significantly strains public finances. With projections of a rising college-age population, an increasing preference among senior high school graduates for higher education (Ducanes & Ocampo, 2019), the potential establishment of new higher education programs in LUCs or new LUCs to tap into the availability of free tuition and rising demand driven by increasing per capita income, the current scheme remains fiscally unsustainable (Ducanes, forthcoming).

Implementing socialized tuition could direct more resources toward low-income students, in line with RA 10931's mandate to prioritize "academically able students from low-income families." However, implementing such a system presents challenges, including verifying income data, collecting accurate proxy indicators,

and managing administrative costs. These challenges require further analysis, and the research team working with the Higher Education Subcommittee is prepared to explore solutions in Year Three.

RA 10931 Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education: Tertiary Education Subsidies

The Tertiary Education Subsidies, a key component of RA 10931, aims to support underprivileged Filipino students in higher education financially.

The TES program follows a five-step process flow, as seen in Figure 8, from (1) application, (2) validation, (3) selection, (4) awarding/disbursement, and (5) liquidation. Each step has its different process owners and instruments, delivering an output that will be used in the next step.

FIGURE 9
TES Process Flow

	Application	Validation	Selection	Awarding/Disbursement	Liquidation
Process Owner	HEIs	CHEDROs	UniFAST	CHEDROs to: • HEIs • DBM • Students	HEIs
Instruments	Online Portal	Documents submitted by students	Listahan, PNSL	Advice billing invoice → Notice of cash allocation → Signature of student on the payroll	Receipts for the administrative support cost
Output	Applicant List	Validated List	Grantees' List	Subsidy release	Liquidation report to CHEDROs

Source: Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024b)

EDCOM II has identified critical issues regarding the targeting of TES grants. Initially, subsidies for poor students were intended to focus on those in private HEIs to mitigate the adverse impact of the UAQTEA on private education. However, recognizing that poor students also attend SUCs and LUCs, the TES program expanded its coverage to include these public institutions.

Under Section 7 of RA 10931 and its IRR, TES beneficiaries are prioritized based on: on (a) Listahanan (subject to fund availability) and(b) per capita income (for students not in Listahanan). However, due to budget constraints, UniFAST rarely applies the second criterion. Furthermore, in PNSLs, students are deemed eligible for TES subsidies regardless of household financial capacity. This has resulted in a significant increase in the share of TES grants allocated to PNSL students over time, raising concerns about the efficient use of limited resources.

The EDCOM II Year One report highlighted a sharp decline in TES grants for the poorest households, dropping from 74.24% in AY 2018–2019 to 30.74% in AY 2022–2023, while PNSL grantees' share rose to 69.26%. In response, EDCOM II recommended a provision in the 2024 General Appropriations Act to prioritize the most economically disadvantaged 4Ps beneficiaries, increasing their TES share from 0% in AY 2022–2023 to 27% in AY 2023–2024.

Figures 10 to 12 present the TES Availment Paths[2,3] for the different types of TES grantees.

For the 4Ps TES grantees, Figure 10 shows that the significant bulk (7,433) of the intake of new 4Ps TES grantees in AY 2018–2019 and AY 2019–2020 belonged to 4Ps families compared to only 23 new grantees from this group in AY 2019–2020.. Of these, 2,811—including grantees who discontinued but eventually renewed the grant to complete by AY 2022–2023—enjoyed the subsidy for 4 academic years. **This reflects a 37.70% rate among 4Ps of availing the TES subsidy for 4 years for the 2 academic years. On the other hand, the discontinuation rate, or the number of TES grantees who availed of TES for less than 4 academic years, for AY 2018–2019 was 25.16% and 13.04%, for AY 2019–2020.**

FIGURE 10
TES Availment Path for 4Ps TES Grantees
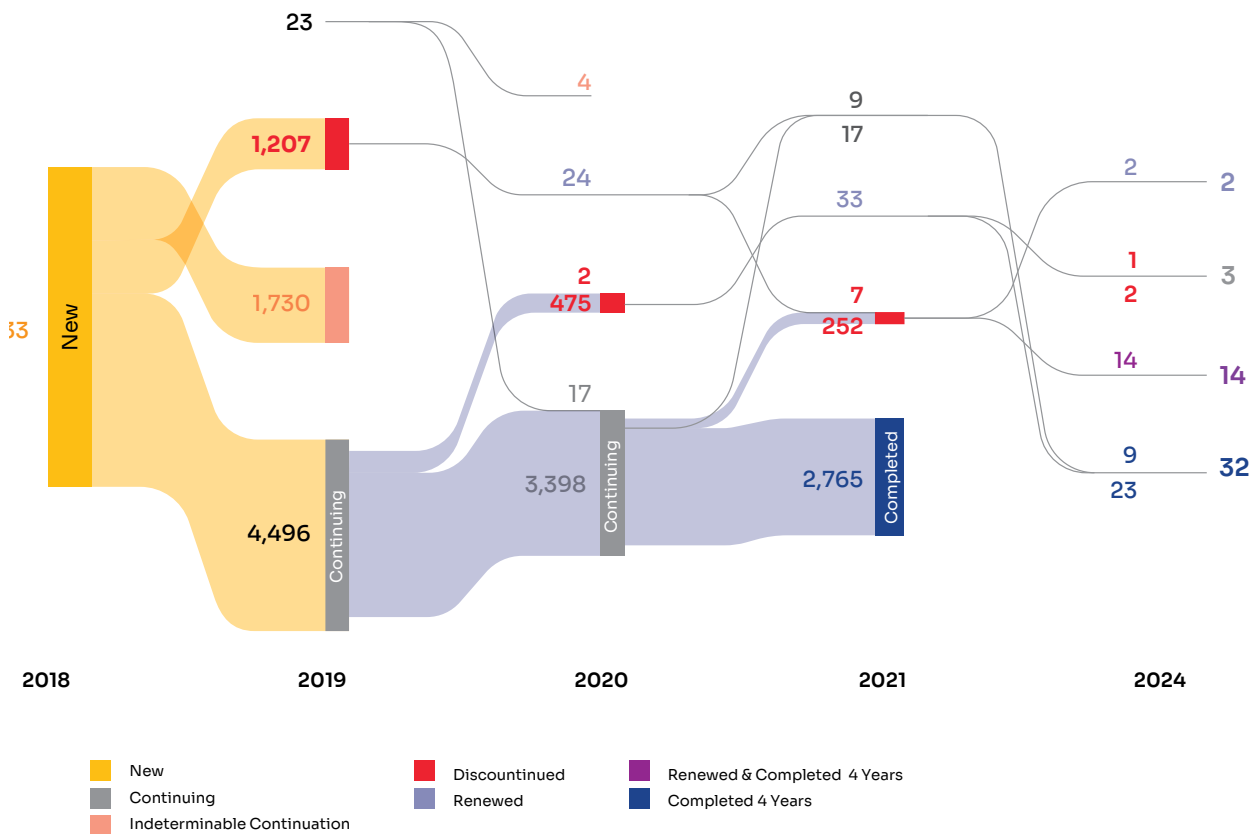
Note: Data visualization provided by Innovations for Poverty Action (2024)
Source: UniFAST (July 2024)

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2   To visually simplify the Sankey diagrams that illustrate the TES availment paths per eligibility criteria, observations were dropped if their paths were less than 10% of the year with the highest recipients, except when (1) paths ended in New, Continuing, Discontinued, or Completed 4 Years, or (2) paths originated from New or Discontinued.

3   Indeterminable continuation is operationalized as fourth year or older students availing TES, hence being unable to determine their continuation or four year completion upon availing TES.

Unlike the 4Ps TES grantees, many Listahanan grantees—excluding the 4Ps who may have been on the list—were observed across multiple academic years, though the numbers decreased over time. In 2018–2019, there were 196,801 grantees; in AY 2019–2020, this dropped to 89,098 grantees; in AY 2020–2021, it dropped further to 15,118 grantees, and in AY 2021–2022 to just 77 grantees (Figure 11).**The 4-year TES availment rates in AY 2021–2022 and AY 2022–2023 were 40.81% and 50.13%, respectively.** These rates include grantees who discontinued but eventually renewed to complete the 4 years. **Discontinuation rates for the same 2 academic years were 17.06% and 26.78%, respectively.**

FIGURE 11
TES Availment Path for Listahanan Grantees
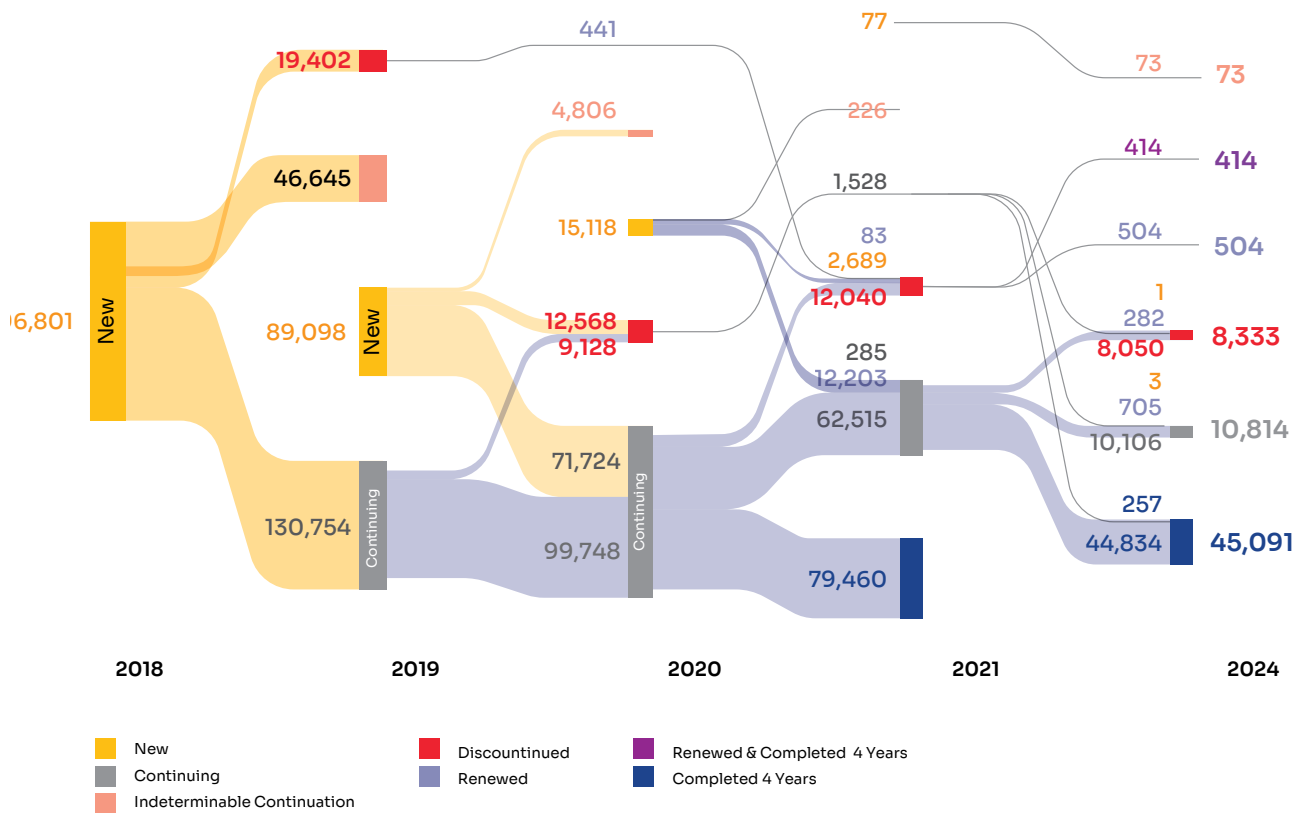
Note: Data visualization provided by Innovations for Poverty Action (2024)
Source: UniFAST (July 2024)

Unlike the 4Ps and Listahanan TES grantees, the number of intakes for PNSL increased steadily from AY 2018-2019 to AY 2021-2022. In 2018, there were only 70,864 new PNSL TES grantees, which grew to 182,003 in AY 2019-2020, 103,628 in AY 2020-2021 and 136,966 in AY 2021- 2022, as seen in Figure 12. **The four-year TES availment rate for the AY 2018-2019 PNSL new grantees was abysmally low at 1.83%, including those who temporarily discontinued but renewed the grant to complete four years. This low completion rate was coupled with a relatively high discontinuation rate of 62.29%. For new PNSL TES grantees in AY 2019-2020, the completion rate improved significantly to 43.60%, while the discontinuation rate decreased to 22.95%.**

FIGURE 12
TES Availment Path for PNSL Grantees
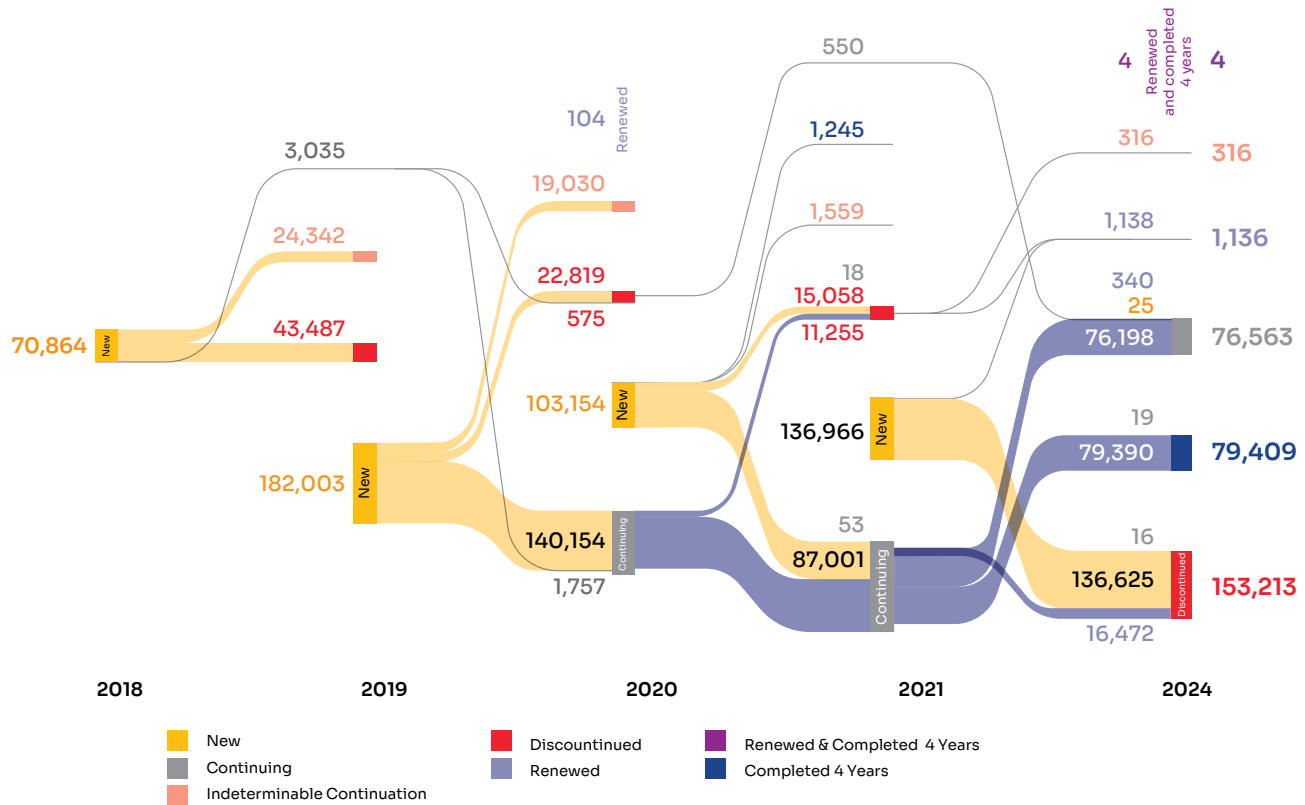
Note: Data visualization provided by Innovations for Poverty Action (2024)
Source: UniFAST (July 2024)

To strengthen the targeting of TES grants, EDCOM II underscores the need to prioritize poor students in both public and private HEIs. While Listahanan identifies households in geographically poor areas, it includes both poor and nonpoor households. Therefore, eligibility should be based on estimated household income, not mere inclusion in the Listahanan. For areas without SUCs or LUCs, prioritization should still follow the principle of targeting the poorest households; specifically,

1. Guarantee support for the poorest segments (e.g., 4Ps beneficiaries); and,
2. Rank eligible students from near-poor households based on household income to prioritize those with the greatest financial need.

To improve the targeting of the TES program toward the poor, EDCOM II recommends that UniFAST coordinate with DepEd and DSWD to identify and guarantee support to potential 4Ps grantees. As illustrated by Figure 13, in AY 2018–2019, one in 85 monitored 4Ps SHS students received a TES grant for higher education. By 2021, this figure had dropped significantly to one in 1,014.

This decline, coupled with comparable numbers of total TES grantees and monitored 4Ps SHS students, underscores the urgent need to refine the program's targeting mechanism. Enhanced coordination and information dissemination among UniFAST, DepEd, and DSWD can help guarantee support for monitored 4Ps SHS students, increasing their likelihood of pursuing higher education and ensuring that TES benefits reach those who need them most.

FIGURE 13
Monitored 4Ps SHS Students, TES Grantees, and 4Ps TES Grantees
UniFAST (2024), DSWD (received May 2024)
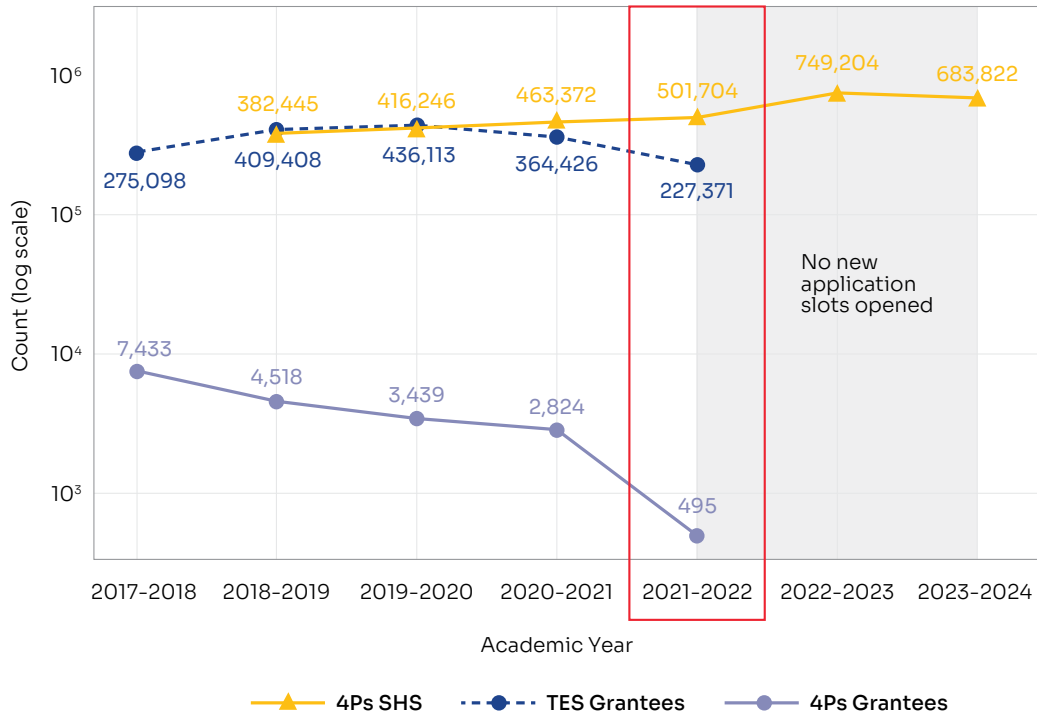
[1] Count of 4Ps, Listahan, & PNSL Grantees in HEIs are lagged a year from its original academic
     year. For example, 4Ps grantees in AY 2018-2019 are lagged to 2017-2018 to show that they were
     learners from SHS during the lagged year. (i.e. AY 2017-2018_

The categorization and misprioritization of TES grantees have resulted in enrollment patterns skewed toward private institutions, disrupting the intended complementarity between public and private HEIs. By definition, PNSL grantees automatically enroll in private institutions. However, a significant proportion of 4Ps and Listahanan grantees are observed to prefer public institutions. In AY 2022–2023, 71.1% of 4Ps and Listahanan students attended SUCs and LUCs. This trend is likely driven by the combined benefits of FHE and TES programs. When these students enroll in a public HEI, the TES subsidy functions as an additional allowance, as they already enjoy free tuition and other school fees under the FHE program.

The issue of complementarity between public and private HEIs is further exacerbated by UniFAST Memorandum Circular No. 5, 2023 (Section 3: New TES slots for the 1st semester, AY 2023–2024), which reduced the TES subsidy to Php 10,000 per semester for students in both private and public HEIs. **This change disadvantages students in private HEIs, as they must allocate the subsidy toward tuition fees, whereas students in public HEIs can use it as an allowance, given that their tuition and other school fees are already covered under the FHE program.**

Moreover, the reduced TES subsidy significantly limits the number of programs that can be financed in private HEIs. With a projected 18-unit semester, the Php 10,000 TES amount can only cover 26.36% of undergraduate programs currently offered by private institutions, greatly diminishing its utility for private HEI students.

FIGURE 14
Programs Enrolled by TES Grantees, AY 2022–2023

Legend:
- Other Programs
- Computer Science
- Accountancy
- Other Teacher Education
- Information Technology
- Hospitality Management
- Elementary Education
- Criminology
- Secondary Education
- Business Administration

AY 2018–2019:
- 36,196 (13.2%)
- 25,249 (9.2%)
- 36,942 (13.4%)
- 34,723 (12.6%)

AY 2022–2023:
- 26,585 (11.7%)
- 28,015 (12.3%)
- 33,400 (14.7%)
- 35,007 (15.4%)
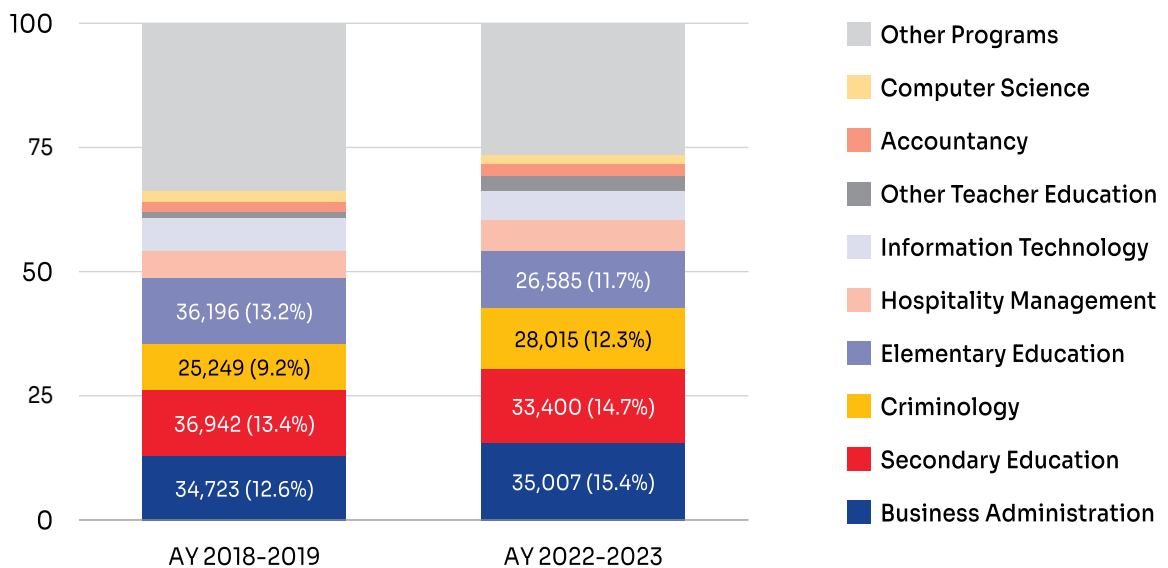
Source: UniFAST (2024)

The distribution of programs attended by TES grantees remained relatively stable from AY 2018–2019 to AY 2018–2019 (see Figure 4). However, notable changes were observed in specific fields. The share of TES grantees enrolled in business administration programs, including its various majors, increased by 2.8 percentage points. Among education programs, there were slight increases in secondary education and other teacher education programs (e.g., early childhood, technical-vocational, physical education, and special education teacher education), which grew by 1.3 and 1.5 percentage points, respectively. In contrast, elementary education saw a decline, with its share dropping from 13.2% to 11.7%. Criminology experienced a relatively significant increase, with its share rising from 9.2% to 12.3%.

Specifically, with the new subsidy amount of Php 10,000 per semester, and assuming TES grantees allocate their entire subsidy toward tuition, they would only be able to afford five programs: Elementary Education (Php 9,955.62), Technology and Livelihood Education (Php 8,920.26), Criminology (Php 8,834.40), Industrial Technology (Php 7,866.00), and Technical-Vocational Teacher Education (Php 6,702.48), as shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7
Average Tuition Fee Projections per Semester

Degree	Average Cost/Unit *(in Php)*	18 Units	24 Units
Business Administration	726.3	13,073.40	17,431.20
HRM/Hospitality/Tourism	682.79	12,290.22	16,386.96
Accountancy/Accounting Information Systems/Management Accounting	711.61	12,808.98	17,078.64
Secondary Education	567.39	10,213.02	13,617.36
Elementary Education	553.09	9.955.62	13,274.16
Early Childhood Education	719.78	12,956.04	17,274.72
Technical–Vocational Teacher Education	372.36	6,702.48	8,936.64
Technology and Livelihood Education	495.57	8,920.26	11,893.68
Special Needs Education	831.89	14,974.02	19,965.36
Physical Education	675.3	12,155.40	16,207.20
Civil Engineering	927.25	16,690.50	22,254.00
Industrial Engineering	437	7,866.00	10,488.00
Mechanical Engineering	1,058.96	19,061.28	25,415.04
Criminology	490.8	8,834.40	11,779.20
Information Technology	666.26	11,992.68	15,990.24
Computer Science	742.58	13,366.44	17,821.92
Information System	771.37	13,884.66	18,512.88
Nursing	786.52	14,157.36	18,876.48
Medical Technology	823.76	14,827.68	19,770.24
Medicine	2,547.30	45,851.40	61,135.20
Number of Programs Financeable by Php 10,000		5	1

Note: Cells highlighted in yellow indicate that the projected average total tuition cost exceeds the new TES amount of Php 10,000, hence unaffordable.

Source: CHED-OPKRM (Received 15 November 2023)

Limiting the TES subsidy reduces the number of programs that students can afford, disproportionately disadvantages private institutions, and places the burden of living costs—such as books, dormitories, and other expenses—on students and their families. This financial strain increases the likelihood of students dropping out before completing their education.

To address these issues, EDCOM II recommends adjusting the TES subsidy amount to reflect current realities, including living expenses and tuition fees, especially in private HEIs. This adjustment would provide a more equitable set of choices for grantees, enabling them to select programs and institutions based on their preferences rather than financial limitations. Additionally, the TES subsidy amount should be regularly reviewed and updated to account for inflation and the increasing costs of education, ensuring its ongoing effectiveness in supporting students. At the end of Year 2, EDCOM II Commissioner Senator Loren Legarda has filed the EDCOM II-drafted bill 2905, or the Enhancing the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, which incorporates the policy recommendations in improving TES targeting, providing guidelines on setting the TES amount, implementing quality assurance and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Paving the Path of an Educator: The Story of a Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) Scholar in Batangas

In the push for universal access to higher education, the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) has played a pivotal role in enabling countless Filipinos to achieve their academic aspirations. This grant-in-aid program covers the full or partial cost of tertiary education for priority students.

At the Batangas State University (BSU), one TES scholar's journey from student to educator encapsulates the program's impact, highlighting its role in shaping not just individual lives, but the future of education itself.

Growing up in a financially challenged household, this scholar's story mirros the reality of many TES grantees. Her family was part of the Listahanan social welfare programs and the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). Covering her tuition and academic needs, the TES scholarship lifted a significant burden, allowing her to focus on her studies.

"*Malaking tulong talaga 'yung* TES (TES was a really big help)," she says. She also credits the support of the BSU, which ensured continued access and efficient delivery of the TES funding, even and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After earning her bachelor's degree in education, she returned to the BSU, as a lecturer under the College of Teacher Education. Today she teaches courses in the humanities and social sciences, covering subjects like Ethics, Rizal, and World History. She also serves as a mentor to current TES scholars, offering guidance drawn from her own challenges and experiences.

"What I give back is service," she reflects. She views teaching as a powerful vocation that shapes the consciousness and lives of students. Her philosophy centers on the belief that education is a social responsibility. It's not just about reading textbooks or receiving a degree for the sake of it. "*Para sa taumbayan talaga. Sila ang dahilan*. (It's for our country's people. They are the reason)," she emphasizes.

In a time when STEM fields often dominate educational priorities, she passionately advocates for the humanities, which she enjoys teaching. "*Kailangan talaga ng* humanities. STEM is focused on building . . . *pero nawawalan na tayo ng* sense ng humanity. It keeps us grounded. (We really need the humanities. STEM is focused on building . . . but we are losing our sense of humanity. It keeps us grounded)," she explains.

The scholar's journey shows the broader significance of programs like TES. They do not only address financial barriers but also form educators who give back to their communities. Her commitment to "enlivening civic participation" through education reflects the lead role that teachers play in shaping generations of Filipinos.

Her story is also a reminder of how the vocation of teachers is ultimately that of service—one among many that can be encouraged and strengthened through comprehensive reforms and solutions in the country's education system.

Issue 2: Enhancing the quality of higher education programs improving learning outcomes and program relevance)

Public Offerings of Programs

Access to higher education must be complemented by quality learning outcomes and the relevance of programs for the sector to thrive. Program expansions must cater not only to constituent demands, but must also be based on industrial, regional, and national relevance. Local relevance can be seen in the significant program offerings under Education Science and Teacher Training and Business and Administration and Related (see Figure 15).

For instance, during a regional roundtable discussion, school administrators in Bohol shared that they offer hotel and restaurant management and tourism programs due to the importance of these fields in a tourism hotspot like Bohol. Additionally, they highlighted their nursing programs, driven by the high global demand for nurses (Bohol Roundtable Discussion, 30 July 2024). However, for programs such as Engineering and Technology, Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, and Natural Science, SUCs (main and satellites) offer them more relative to LUCs (Figure 23).

FIGURE 15

Program Offerings of Public HEIs (AY 2022–2023)
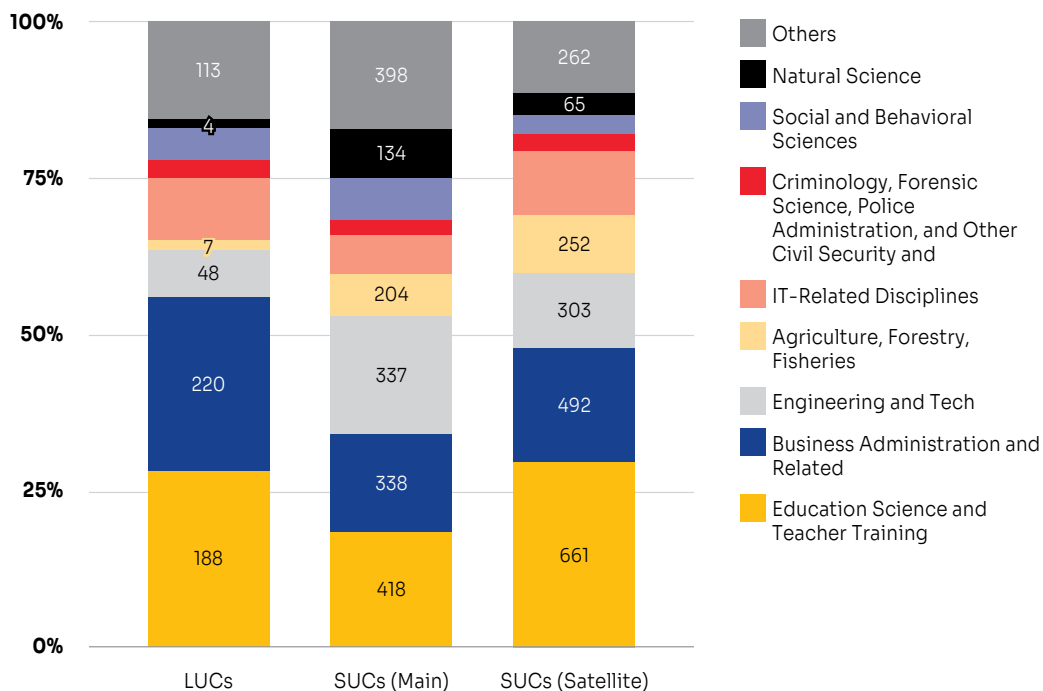
Source: (CHED, 2024)

In SUCs, new programs must be approved by the Board of Regents (BOR). Administrators conduct feasibility and marketability studies to assess input requirements, such as human capital and facilities, and the program's relevance to local communities and industries. Additionally, administrators emphasize the need for higher education institutions to supply the basic education sector with human power.

However, program offerings must be strategic and complementary to those already provided by neighboring institutions to avoid unnecessary competition. In some cases, SUC administrators ensure their programs align with this principle by checking if nearby SUCs offer similar programs. This approach fosters complementarity, as revealed in a regional roundtable discussion. School administrators shared that they intentionally avoid duplicating programs offered by nearby institutions. This practice is often formalized through a gentleman's agreement among administrators (Bohol Roundtable Discussion, 30 July 2024).

Rather than offering entirely new programs, SUCs have shared that they often merge existing programs or adopt degree offerings from their constituent units to ensure they remain relevant to local needs and industry demands (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024a).

The Role of Policies, Standards, and Guidelines
in Learning Outcomes and Program Relevance
CHED ensures the quality of programs offered by higher education institutions by establishing policies, standards, and guidelines (PSGs) developed by technical panels. According to a survey conducted by the UPSKILL program of USAID (forthcoming), the review of existing PSGs was shaped by significant educational policies, including the RA 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (K–12); and RA 10968, or the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) Act of 2018. Other key factors included the transition to an outcomes-based education system (CMO 46, s. 2012) and the reduction of units in the New General Education Curriculum (CMO No. 20, s. 2013), which decreased from 63 to 36 units.

Despite these efforts, the study indicates inconsistent integration of K–12 and PQF policies across various programs. For instance, only the Hotel and Restaurant Management (HRM) and Elementary and Secondary Education programs have recognized the K–12 and PQF laws into their revisions. The updated PSGs for HRM (CMO No. 62, s. 2017) outlined differentiated requirements for senior high school graduates based on their track, with students from the Academic Track for Business Management (ABM) facing fewer requirements than non-ABM tracks.

The study also revealed an average of 11 years for programs with the highest enrollments before PSGs are revised/updated. For example, the Nursing PSGs were updated after eight years, while the PSGs for Teacher Education and Criminology were revised only after 13 years. Furthermore, internship hours requirements were observed to vary among programs which can be further studied. Table [x] illustrates the summary of changes in the PSGs of the top 10 programs in terms of enrollments.

TABLE 8
Summary of Changes in PSGs of the Top 10 Programs

Program	Revision History		Variance	Total GE Courses		"Variance (in Units)"	Internship Units		Total Units	
	Existing PSG	Previous PSG		New	Old		New	Old	New	Old
Business Administration	2017	2006	11 years	36	51	(-15)	6 (600 hours)	6	122	138
Criminology	2018	2005	13 years	36	61	(-15)	6 units	6 (540 hours)	177	179
Secondary Education	2017	2004	13 years	36	63	(-27)	6	6	155–65	174
Hotel and Restautrant Management	2017	2006	11 years	36	51	(-15)	6 (600 hours)	14	137	136–37
Information Technology	2015	2006	9 years	54	54	0	3 (162–486 hours)	3 (162–486 hours)*	146	140
Elementary Education	2017	2004	13 years	36	63	(-27)	6	6	152	174
Nursing	2017	2009	8 years	36	87	(-51)	8 (408 hours)	10 (540 hours)	192	202
Civil Engineering	2017	2007	10 years	50	53	(+3)	3 (240 hours)	Optional	171	200
Accountancy	2017	2007	10 years	36	51	(-15)	6	3 (160 hours)	73	210
Industrial Technology	2023	NA		36	NA		12	NA	155	NA

Source: (USAID, forthcoming)

Given the presented data, the study raises awareness in reviewing PSGs and aligning them with existing applicable laws (PQF and K–12). Additionally, flexibility in determining the minimum number of units required per program can be considered, depending on the nature of the concentration/major. Moreover, the variance in internship requirements may also require further probing to determine optimal real world learning opportunities.

Priority Area 12: Quality Assurance

Issue 1: Typology-/outcomes-based quality assurance toward more autonomous and deregulated HEIs for innovations in teaching, research, and public service

EDCOM I recommended establishing a "typology of tertiary institutions with corresponding levels of accountability" (pg. 194, 1993). In response, CHED introduced, after more than ten years, both a horizontal and vertical typology system, as outlined in CMO 46, s. 2012. The horizontal typology groups HEIs based on their mission and profiles, while the vertical typology classifies them based on prestige and reputation (Teichler, 2007).

Since 2012, CMO 46 has been implemented minimally. Of the few HEIs that applied and have been classified, 73.5% are colleges, 12.7% are universities, and 6.3% are professional institutes (see Figure 16). Among the SUCs systems (i.e. inclusive of main and satellite campuses), 78 systems are classified as universities and 35 systems are classified as colleges—there are no SUCs classified as professional institutes. (see Figure 16). For the private sector, the majority (71.9%) are colleges; 10.7% are universities and 8.0% are professional institutes (see Figure 16). The low proportion of professional institutes is misleading because of the very limited number of HEIs that sought to be classified.

Among private HEIs that applied for vertical classification based on indicators of academic excellence and institutional sustainability, less than 1% of colleges and 3.27% of universities attained autonomous status, while 26.16% of universities were classified as **deregulated**.

FIGURE 16
Distribution of Horizontal Typologies Based on CMO No. 46, s. 2012
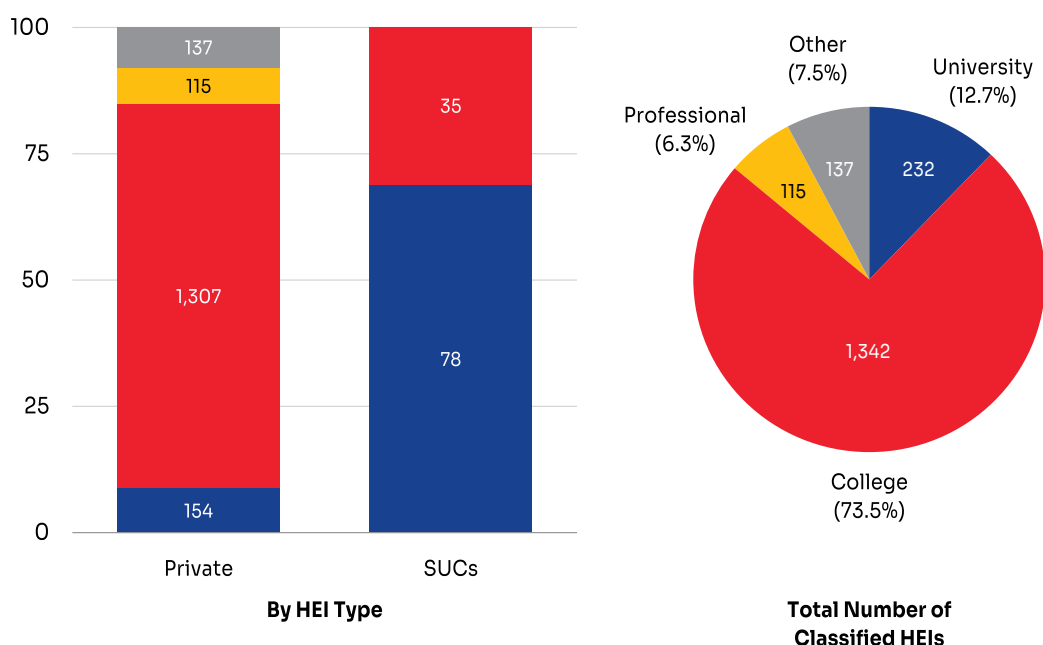
Source: CHED OIQAG (2025) and OPRKM (2024)

In this typology, 10 SUCs are classified as Level I, 21 SUCs as Level II, 55 SUCs as Level III, and 20 as Level IV (CMO 12, s. 2018). In terms of equivalency, SUCs at Levels III and IV are roughly comparable to private HEIs with deregulated and autonomous status, respectively. This comparison is based on CHED's listing of such autonomous and deregulated private HEIs and the recognition of SUC Levels III and IV as automatically eligible to accept foreign students due to their presumed quality.

Implementing a one-size-fits-all policy in quality assurance has presented significant challenges, often privileging universities over other institutional types. **To address this, a revised horizontal typology must embrace diversity, as it allows the higher education system to adapt effectively to the rapidly changing global knowledge society and respond to the varied needs of students, families, communities, industries, and other stakeholders. A diverse typology also enhances institutional effectiveness, fosters innovation, and encourages experimentation (Bernardo, 2024)**. When coupled with a well-designed incentive and rewards structure, HEIs can be guided in their evolution toward autonomy, deregulation, and innovation.

Building on efforts from Year One, EDCOM II conducted an empirical study to recommend a revised classification based on observed characteristics of HEIs. The following six clusters were derived from a non-random sample of 870 HEIs:

- **Cluster 1: Small focused HEIs.** These HEIs offer limited bachelor's programs, attract few students from local communities, and have faculty members who mostly lack post-baccalaureate qualifications. They engage in little to no research or community outreach.
- **Cluster 2: Focused HEIs.** Similar to Cluster 1, these institutions provide a handful of post-baccalaureate programs and non-career-focused undergraduate courses. Their community outreach and research activities are minimal.
- **Cluster 3: Comprehensive Undergraduate HEIs.** Primarily serving local students, these institutions have small but notable master's enrollments. They participate more in community outreach and international faculty exchanges than Clusters 1 and 2.
- **Cluster 4: Comprehensive HEIs (Research and External Focus).** These institutions offer mostly bachelor's level programs in career-related areas but with a sizable master's, and some doctoral programs. They are significantly involved in community outreach, cultural activities, and internationalization efforts for students. They also have a strong focus on research, with many faculty members actively participating.
- **Cluster 5: Comprehensive HEIs (Research–Oriented).** These institutions prioritize research with a more positive research growth trajectory, demonstrating growth in publications and citations. They maintain a small but sizable master's and doctoral programs and have fewer outreach activities compared to Cluster 4.
- **Cluster 6: Comprehensive State Universities.** These HEIs are distinguished by their broad program offerings, high enrollment, extensive outreach efforts, outbound internationalization for faculty, and a significant trajectory for research growth.

The six clusters were further grouped into three types: focused HEIs, comprehensive HEIs, and continuous HEIs (see Table 9). The proposed horizontal HEI classification typology is under review through stakeholder consultations. Additional consultations in Year Three would help further refine and nuance the aforementioned preliminary clusterings.

While the national goal is to cultivate a more diversified higher education sector, Bernardo's cluster analysis shows limited diversity within the Philippine higher education landscape. Most institutions primarily offer undergraduate programs that are largely career- or profession-oriented, with little focus on research and extension functions, which are either underdeveloped or nonexistent (Bernardo et al., 2024).

EDCOM II reinforces the advocacy put forward by EDCOM I for a policy shift away from a one-size-fits-all approach to higher education, advocating instead for a system that embraces diversity to address the unique needs at the local, provincial, regional, and national levels. To effectively implement the proposed horizontal typology, both public and private support for HEIs must be aligned and rationalized, fostering a diversified system that prioritizes relevance and quality tailored to each institution's specific typology:

1. **Incentive and Reward Structures**
   Institutional accreditation, grants of autonomy, and deregulation should be tailored to align with the functional roles of each HEI type. This ensures that HEIs receive support appropriate to their specific missions and objectives.

2. **Program Accreditation**
   Accreditation processes should be developed to reflect the horizontal typology of HEIs. For example, an undergraduate biology program at a comprehensive university—intended as a pathway to medical programs—should be evaluated differently from a program at a continuous university, which focuses on preparing graduates for advanced research in the field. This differentiation ensures that program assessments are aligned with the intended outcomes of each institution type.

3. **CHED Policies and Programs**
   Regulatory and developmental policies must be rationalized to match each HEI type, incentivizing institutions to allocate resources toward their specific functions. CHED's policies should ensure responsiveness to stakeholder needs and encourage the growth of HEIs in ways that reflect their typological classifications.

4. **External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAAs)**
   Accreditation instruments and quality indicators must be aligned with the proposed HEI types to assess their core characteristics and targeted outcomes adequately. This alignment will enable EQAAs to provide more precise and meaningful evaluations that reflect the diversity of HEIs.

Additionally, CHED's policies, particularly those related to resource allocation and support for higher education functions, must be reviewed, refined, and tailored to align with each horizontal type's distinct characteristics and functions. This approach will foster greater acceptance and utilization of the typology by higher education institutions (HEIs). Key areas requiring refinement include permits for opening schools and programs at various levels, allocating scholarships, and providing faculty development grants. Furthermore, support for research and innovation programs must be enhanced, focusing on initiatives such as open and distance learning, internationalization efforts, partnerships, consortium agreements, and joint degree programs. **Aligning these policies with each horizontal type's specific needs and objectives will ensure that resources are effectively allocated and that institutions are better equipped to meet their missions.**

The Philippines can advance a more diversified and effective higher education system by adopting these measures. This will ensure that HEIs are better equipped to meet the diverse needs of their stakeholders and contribute meaningfully to national development goals.

TABLE 9
Summary of the Proposed Simplified Empirically Based Horizontal Typology

Elements	Focused HEIs	Comprehensive HEIs	Continuous HEIs
Mission	Professional skills education for regional development needs	Professional skills and holistic development of 21st century skills for broad national and international needs	Specialized technical, professional, and scientific skills education for national and international innovation systems
Degree program offerings	Few selected bachelor's programs aligned with human resource needs of province/region	Broad range of bachelor's programs to develop skilled professional with transversal competencies aligned with national and international human resource needs	Higher proportion of master's and doctoral programs for research and innovation needs of region and country
Student body	Proportionately small enrollment of students from province and region	Proportionately larger enrollment of students from local and surrounding regions	Higher ratio of post-graduate enrollment; students from local and surrounding regions
Faculty profile	Continuous and recent professional experience in relevant industries	Relevant professional experience and/or disciplinal training	Post-graduate (doctoral) education, research experience and outputs
Principal academic degree programs	Professional programs linked to local industry with strong OJT component	Programs linked to local industry & other local organizations, with relevant capstone projects	Programs with research and innovation components

Priority Area 13:
Digital Transformation

Issue 1: Digital transformation in Philippine HEIs

Building on its Year One initiatives, EDCOM II researched digital transformation and educational technologies, specifically focusing on artificial intelligence (AI) to support under-resourced communities and stakeholder groups in the Philippine education system, particularly public school teachers. The study by Rodrigo and Talandron-Felipe (2023) examined how AI could assist teachers in both academic and administrative tasks, including reducing administrative burdens, and proposed a supportive agenda for integrating AI into education.

The research revealed that teachers generally had limited knowledge of AI and faced significant challenges due to insufficient access to software, hardware, and reliable internet infrastructure. Despite these barriers, teachers expressed optimism about AI's potential to improve education and demonstrated a strong willingness to learn and adopt AI tools (Rodrigo, 2024).

The study identified several key features of current AI applications in education, including task automation, data collection, and support for diverse teaching approaches. To enhance AI accessibility in developing countries like the Philippines, the research recommended specific features that would address local challenges. These included adapting AI tools to local contexts, enabling offline functionality to address connectivity issues, facilitating teacher collaboration, managing high student-to-computer ratios, and ensuring that AI tools require minimal technical skills for implementation (Rodrigo, 2024).

These findings highlight the transformative potential of AI in addressing educational challenges in under-resourced settings. They also emphasize the importance of developing targeted strategies to support the adoption and integration of AI tools in Philippine HEIs and schools, paving the way for a more equitable and efficient education system.

Priority Area 14:
Graduate Education,
Research, and Innovation

Issue 1: Underdeveloped research and innovation ecosystem

R&D are critical economic growth and development drivers. Studies demonstrate a positive correlation between GDP per capita and innovation in both OECD and non-OECD countries (Ulku, 2004). However, in 2018, the Philippines spent only 0.32% of its GDP on R&D, significantly below the 1% benchmark recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). To meet this benchmark, the Philippines must triple its current R&D spending.

HEIs are central to building a robust R&D ecosystem. According to Quitoras and Abuso (2021), HEIs fulfill three fundamental functions: instruction, research, and extension. Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1997) expand on this by introducing the triple helix model of innovation, which underscores the synergistic interactions among government, academia, and industry. In this model, academia generates knowledge through research, while government and industry provide the necessary funding and investment. Innovation emerges from dynamic feedback loops, cross-sector interactions, and the positive externalities generated by these collaborative efforts.

The Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023–2028 recognizes the importance of R&D, technology, and innovation in driving long-term economic development, as detailed in "Chapter 8: Advance Research and Development, Technology, and Innovation." However, research productivity in the Philippines lags significantly behind that of other ASEAN member states. Using Scopus-indexed papers as a proxy for research output, the Philippines ranks below Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam and remains significantly below the ASEAN average, as shown in Figure 17. Projections indicate that, at its current pace, the Philippines will continue to fall behind the ASEAN average forecast (Demeterio III et al., 2024) (see Figure 18).

FIGURE 17
Scopus Papers Production of the ASEAN Countries as of June 2023
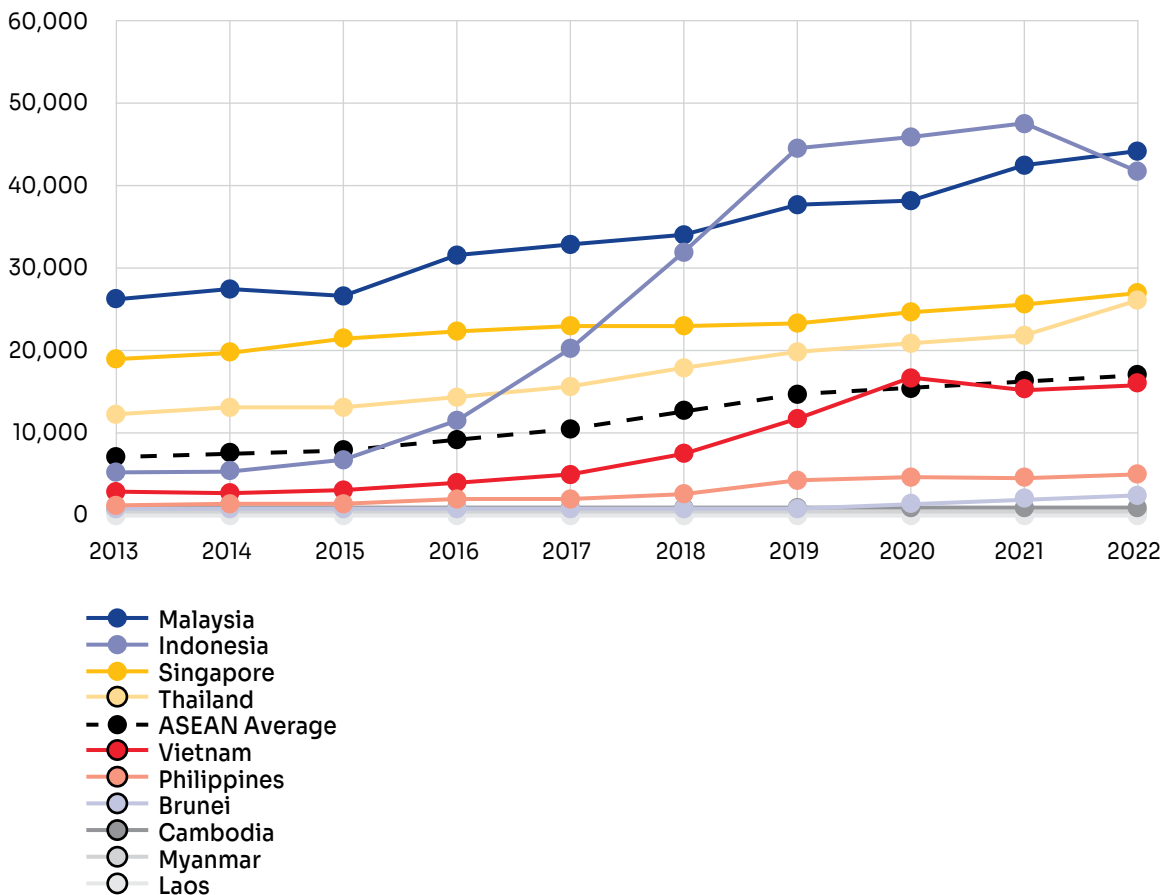
Source: Demeterio III et al., 2024

FIGURE 18

Statistical Forecasts of the ASEAN Average Research Production and of the Philippines's Research Production
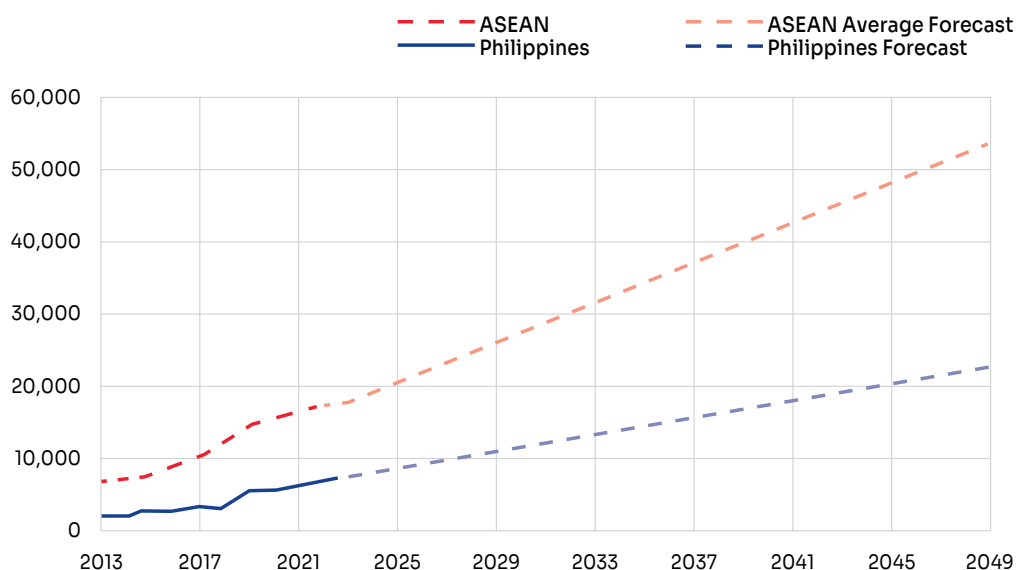
Source: Demeterio III et al. (2024)

The PDP 2023–2028 identifies several critical challenges to advancing R&D, technology, and innovation in the country. Among these challenges are the inadequate number of human resources in science, technology, and innovation; an underdeveloped research culture and low productivity; insufficient investment in R&D; weak linkages among stakeholders in the R&D ecosystem; limited focus on market information and user needs; a weak intellectual property culture; and barriers to fostering an innovative and entrepreneurial mindset.

HEIs play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges. CMO 46, s. 2012 positions universities as institutions that drive the development of new knowledge and skills through research, extending from undergraduate to doctoral levels. This emphasis on research enables HEIs to contribute to nation-building by producing experts, generating knowledge, and advancing technological innovations essential for long-term development in a globalized context. The Institutional Sustainability Assessment (ISA), part of CHED's indicators for vertical typology, further underscores research and innovation as key areas under the framework for Quality of Professional Exposure, Research, and Creative Work.

Additionally, under Section 8(f) of RA 7722, Centers of Excellence (COEs) and Centers of Development (CODs) within HEIs are designated as leaders in research, publications, and stakeholder linkages. These departments, supported by grants from the Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF), are tasked with conducting research on emerging trends and fostering partnerships with relevant stakeholders. Research and publication output, accounting for 30% of the evaluation criteria for COE and COD selection, plays a critical role in accessing funding for developmental projects. These initiatives aim to strengthen academe-industry collaborations and elevate the research capabilities of HEIs.

Despite these measures, Demeterio III and colleagues (2024) point out that HEIs in the Philippines often prioritize teaching over research, signaling the need for functional research universities. The country has only 172.01 researchers per million inhabitants, far below ASEAN peers and the World Bank's benchmark of 322.51 researchers for

lower-middle-income countries in 2021. To achieve its goal of becoming an upper-middle-income country by 2025, the Philippines must significantly increase its researcher count. **Demeterio III and colleagues recommend fostering partnerships between first-tier comprehensive research-intensive HEIs—those producing at least 150 Scopus-indexed papers annually—and second-tier SUCs on track to meet this standard. These collaborations aim to build research capacity, strengthen national research networks, and enhance productivity through mentor–mentee relationships and human resource development.**

Procurement Policies Revolving Around Research, Development, Technology, and Innovation

A significant challenge of the Philippine research and innovation ecosystem is attributed to the regulatory red tape and bureaucratic procurement policies. According to the US Agency for International Development (RTI International, 2020), the lagging performance of the Philippines in R&D is closely linked to the complexity of government regulations, particularly procurement regulations. As a major component of an enabling environment, procurement issues disincentivize industry to collaborate with research and development institutes. The procurement-related challenges include:

1. **Limited Suppliers for Specialized Equipment**
   Highly technical and specialized equipment essential for research and innovation is difficult to procure, particularly in the local market, as highlighted in surveys by Navarro and Tanghal (2017) and Querijero et al. (2022).
2. **Underutilization of RA 9184 Sec. 53(6)**
   Section 53(6) of the 2016 IRR of RA 9184 offers an alternative negotiated procurement process specifically for scientific, academic, and research-related goods and services. Procurement officers cited the vague language of Sec. 53(6) as a barrier, particularly the absence of explicit terms like "scientific equipment" (Querijero et al., 2022). This ambiguity discouraged its use, as procurement officers feared non-compliance.
3. **Lack of Capacity–Building for Procurement Officers**
   Continuous capacity-building for procurement officers, including members of the Bids and Awards Committee (BAC), is critical to improving the efficiency of procurement processes in HEIs and government agencies.

Addressing the challenges in the research and innovation ecosystem entail reforms that EDCOM II in collaboration with the NAST and the Secretariat of the National Innovation Council advocated for inclusion in RA 12009 New Government Procurement Act, authored and sponsored by former EDCOM II Commissioner and current DepEd Secretary Juan Edgardo Angara.. This legislation introduces critical provisions designed to support research, development, and innovation more effectively.

One of the key changes under **RA 12009** is the flexibility in intellectual property rights (IPR) ownership. In the previous framework, IPR defaulted to the procuring entity, which often discouraged expert suppliers from participating in procurement processes. RA 12009 allows ownership to remain with the supplier when they make significant investments in expertise and resources for product development. This provision aligns with Section 6(a) of RA 10055, the Philippine Technology Transfer Act, which assigns ownership to research and development institutions if they are better positioned to identify the economic potential of the intellectual property. By ensuring that R&D institutions and suppliers are incentivized to innovate, this reform helps avoid delays in research processes and strengthens the overall innovation ecosystem.

The Act also mandates the NIC, working alongside the Government Procurement Policy Board (GPPB), to create streamlined procurement policies that eliminate excessive bureaucratic obstacles. This includes identifying and removing barriers that hinder growth in R&D, technology, and innovation while allowing flexibility to address previously unanticipated challenges unique to the research environment. These provisions aim to create a more adaptive and efficient procurement system, better suited to support the dynamic needs of research and innovation in the Philippines.

Priority Area 15: Internationalization

Issue 1: Constraints to internationalization

Internationalization has become a defining feature of the evolving global higher education landscape. While some regions have seen a resurgence of nationalism, the globalization of the 1990s brought significant changes that continue to influence higher education (Hsieh, 2020). Among these are the strengthening of regional blocs like the European Union and ASEAN, the promotion of student, professional, and labor mobility across regions, and the establishment of national and regional qualifications frameworks to build trust in the qualifications of mobile individuals (Bautista, 2016a, 2016b, & 2019; De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Mikulec, 2017). These developments are further fueled by the aging populations in the Global North, creating a demand for skilled professionals worldwide.

Internationalization encompasses various strategies to foster global perspectives, enhance cross-cultural understanding, and facilitate academic collaboration across borders. The motivations for internationalization are as follows: (1) broadening student horizons, (2) enhancing educational quality, (3) strengthening institutions, and (4) contributing to the global society.

The Philippines as a destination for inbound student mobility poses factors that make it attractive to international students. (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024c) cite factors such as "English as a second language; richness of the Philippine culture; home of the world's budget English teacher; and, relatively low tuition fees, low cost of living, and (for some overseas markets) good geographical location."

In terms of student mobility, UNESCO Institute for Statistics reports that the number of inbound students in the Philippines is increasing from 12,276 in 2017 to 17,337 in 2022, equivalent to a 41.23% increase. However, this figure is lower than its ASEAN counterparts such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, but higher than Indonesia and Vietnam, as seen in Figure 19.

FIGURE 19
Total International Student Inflows in Select ASEAN Member States

■ 2017 ■ 2018 ■ 2019 ■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022
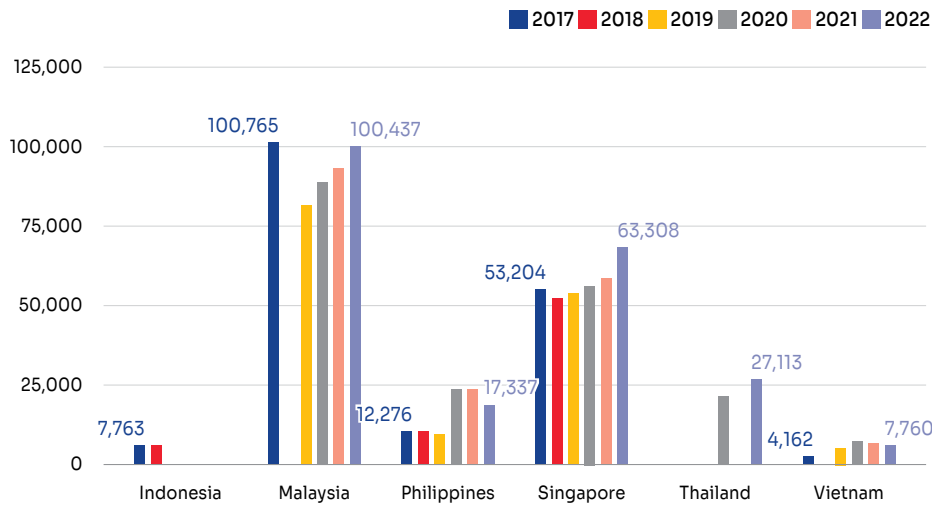
Note: No data for Indonesia 2019-2022, Malaysia 2018, Thailand 2017-2018 and 2021, and Vietnam 2018.
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, as cited by Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024c)

Despite a slight decline in inbound foreign student numbers during the pandemic, CHED reports that the overall trend has been upward since 2017 (see Figure 20). By 2022, the number of inbound foreign students increased by 57.42%, rising from 14,132 in 2017 to 22,247. While the current figures have surpassed pre-pandemic levels, they remain lower compared to those of the Philippines' regional counterparts.

FIGURE 20
Number of Inbound Foreign Students in the Philippines
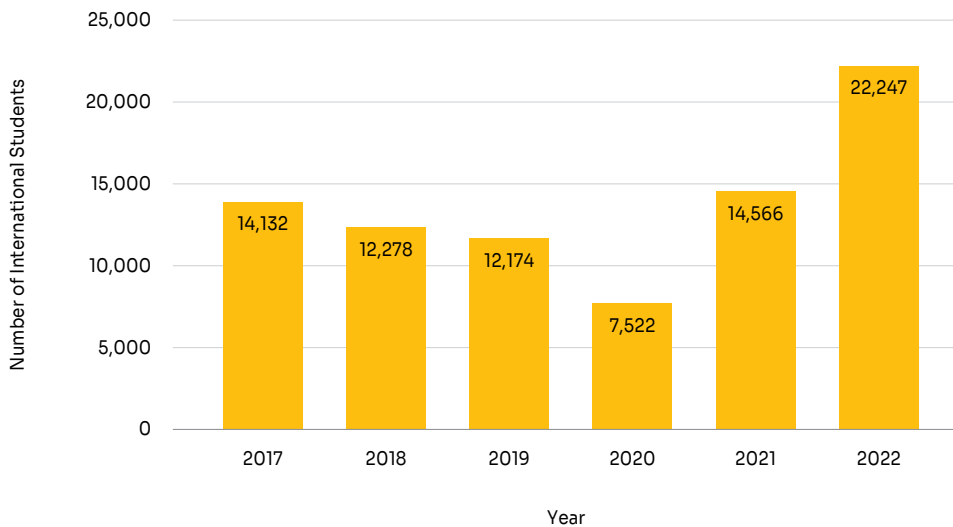
Source: CHED, as cited by Apply Board, 2023

It is important to note that the number of inbound foreign students reported by CHED to the Apply Board does not align with the number of student visas issued by the Bureau of Immigration, **hence there is a need to align and harmonize the data on inbound foreign students across agencies.**

However, in 2023, the Bureau of Immigration reported a significant surge in the number of Chinese students granted student visas, increasing from 819 in 2022 to 16,190 in 2023—an almost twenty-fold increase (Table 9).

TABLE 10
Top 10 Nationalities Issued a Student Visa in 2023

Nationality	Number of student visas issued
China	16,190
India	5,414
Nigeria	945
Korea	164
USA	131
Thailand	116
Myanmar	100
Nepal	92
Indonesia	82
Sudan	71

Source: Bureau of Immigration, received July 2024

As illustrated by Figure 21, the share of inbound foreign students taking programs under health and welfare has generally been increasing. In AY 2013/2014, the share of foreign students in health and welfare fields was 28.79%—equivalent to 1,322 students—, and in nine years, this increased to 61.25%, or 10,619 students, hence increasing in share and in number. Furthermore, In AY 2018–2019, there is a notable increase in the proportion of inbound foreign students taking programs under education at 34.71%, which is larger than the proportion of inbound foreign students taking health and welfare programs at 29.57%.

FIGURE 21
Programs Enrolled by Inbound Foreign Students
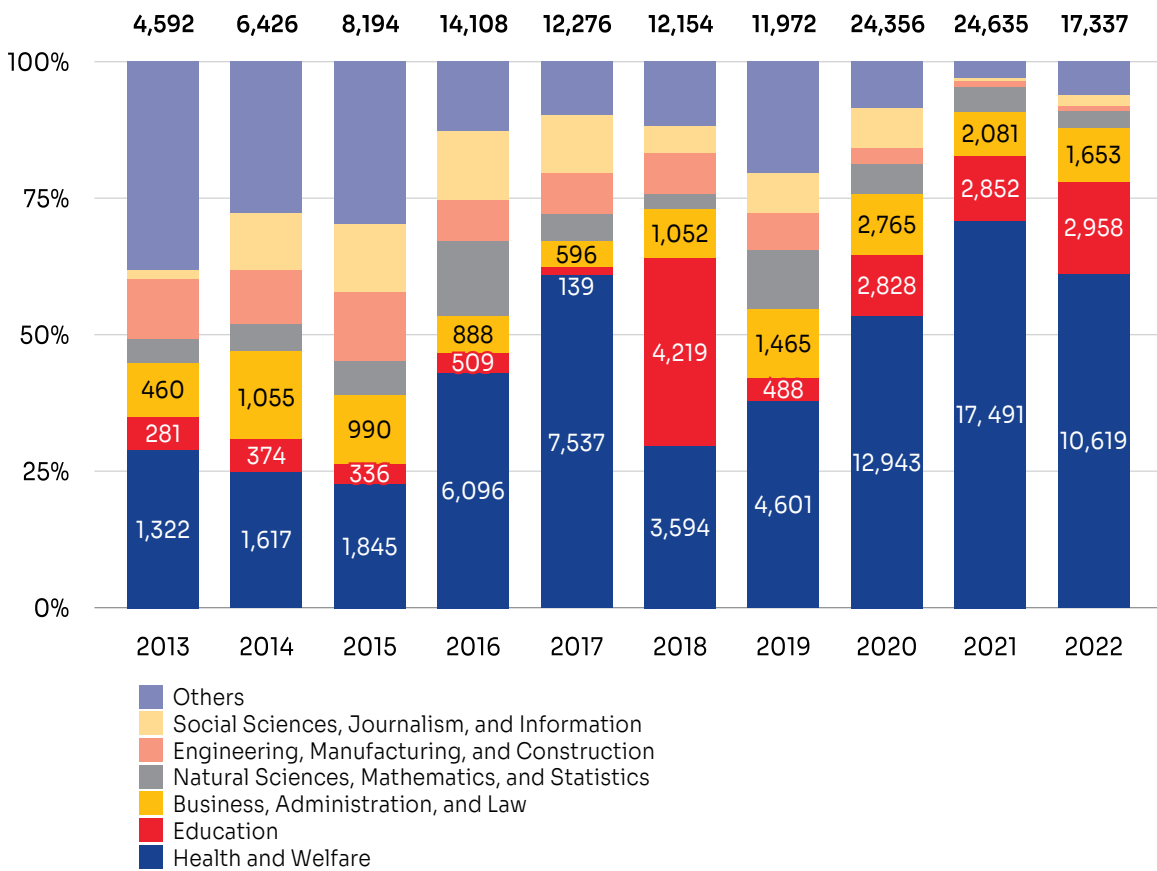
Source: CHED OPSD, as cited by Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024c)

Historically, Indian students have dominated the share of inbound foreign students in the Philippines, followed by Chinese and Nigerian students, as seen in Figure 22. Indian students comprise 55.8%, equivalent to 9,673 students in AY 2022. Chinese and Nigerian students comprise 27.8% (4,815 students) and 4.6% (791 students), respectively.

Due to the lack of reliable data on the mobility of Filipino students, available figures from AY 2016–2017 indicate that out of 14,696 Filipino outbound students, the majority (30.2%; 4,432 students) went to Australia, followed by the United States (20.7%; 3,037 students) and New Zealand (7.5%; 1,105 students) (Figure 38). The most popular Asian destinations, in decreasing order, were Saudi Arabia (4.7%; 693 students), the United Arab Emirates (3.1%; 455 students), and South Korea (2.9%; 432 students).

FIGURE 22
Top Inbound International Students, AY 2022

Top inbound
- 🔴 more than 5,000
- 🟡 501 – 5,000
- 🔵 101 – 500
- 🟣 51 – 100
- 🟠 less than 50

United States of America 0.9%
China 27.8%
Japan 0.3%
Korea 0.7%
Nepal 1.1%
Vietnam 0.9%
Myanmar 0.4%
India 55.8%
Thailand 1.5%
Yemeni 0.7%
Sudan 0.6%
Nigeria 4.6%
Somalia 0.2%
Indonesia 0.6%
Papua New Guinea 0.3%
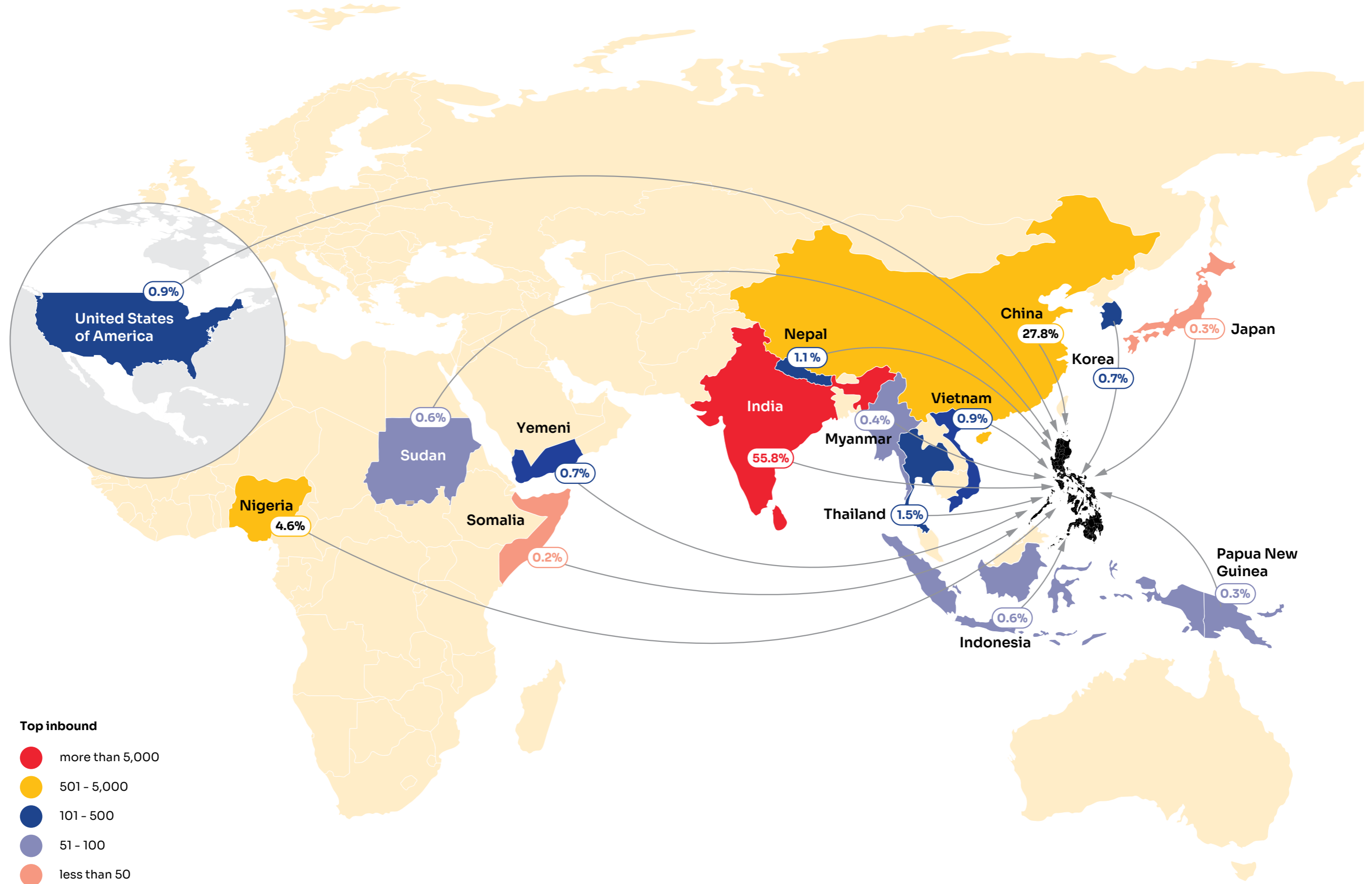
Source: CHED OSDS (Feb, 2024), as cited by Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024c)

FIGURE 23
Destinations of Outbound Filipino Students, AY 2016–2017
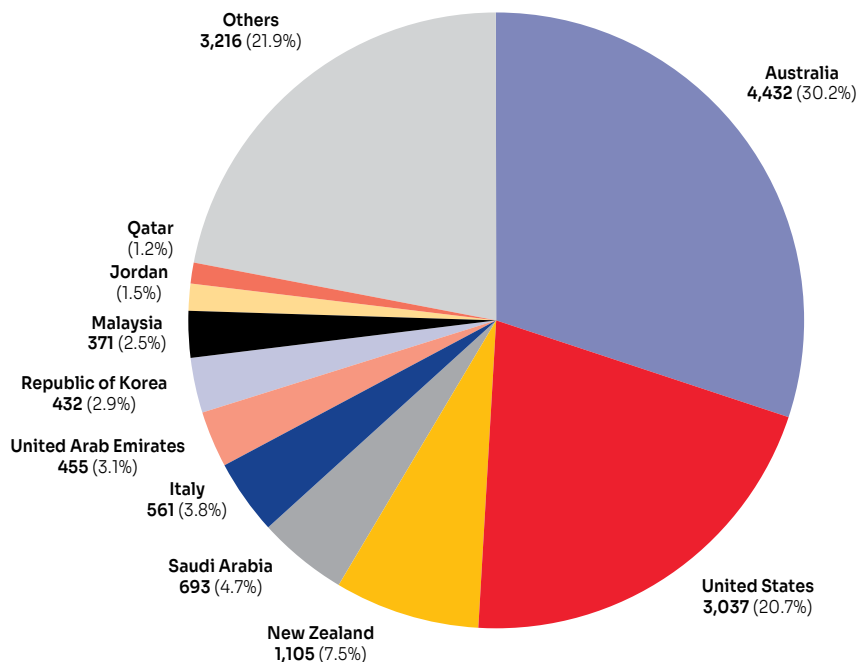
Note: The most updated academic year for outbound Filipino students is AY 2016- 2017 in Project Atlas.
Source: Project Atlas

The low levels of student mobility can be attributed to the complex and bureaucratic immigration and visa requirements (British Council, 2015; SHARE Project Management Office, 2020). Currently, student visas or special study permits are issued based on the following conditions:

TABLE 11
Types of Visas for Foreign Students

Student Visa	- If in a foreign country: Philippine HEI endorses the foreign student to the DFA for the issuance of a Student Visa - If in the Philippines already: Philippine HEI endorses the application for a change of visa type from a Temporary Visa to Student Visa at the BI - Validity duration: initially one year; extendable at BI with an endorsement from the Philippine HEI
Special Study Permit	- For foreign students taking up short-term courses - Validity duration: same as training duration - Advised to first obtain a Temporary Visitor's Visa

Internationalization enhances the quality and global competitiveness of higher education. According to Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al.[3], (2024), its benefits include improved instructional and research capacity, enhanced international standing and revenue, increased cultural diversity and intercultural understanding, and the development of soft skills. However, several barriers hinder the expansion of internationalization. Centralized implementation and bureaucratic processes, local and national regulations that constrain program innovation and foreign hiring, and limited funding and support that favors public HEIs are some of the challenges faced by higher education institutions. Additionally, security concerns and poor

infrastructure in the Philippines also discourage international students from choosing the country as a study destination. Furthermore, restrictive foreign regulations and the lack of mutual recognition agreements between the Philippines and foreign partner countries pose another obstacle to internationalization. Overall, these challenges need to be addressed in order to fully realize the benefits of internationalization in higher education.

Engaging dual citizens as faculty, researchers, and administrators of public HEIs
Restrictive immigration policies have been found to be a deterrent to professionals and experts wishing to teach in the country. Dual citizens are a potential source of increasing human resources, being naturalized Filipinos in other countries who have re-acquired their citizenship by virtue of RA 9225 or the Citizenship Retention and Re-acquisition Act of 2003.

During Year Two, EDCOM II drafted HB 10251/SB 2733 proposing amendments to RA 9225 to permit Filipino dual citizens to be hired as faculty, researchers, and administrators in public higher education institutions, which were filed by Congressman Mark Go in April 2024 and Senators Sherwin T. Gatchalian and Joel Villanueva in August 2024. The amendment aims to increase human resources in public HEIs, particularly for science-technology-innovation (STI), and R&D. Natural-born Filipino scientists, engineers, researchers, professors, and administrators can become employed without renouncing their oath of allegiance to their foreign country of citizenship. Their knowledge and expertise can enhance the quality of higher education by facilitating the exchange of knowledge, innovation, and creativity through cross-pollination of ideas, as well as address the human resource deficiencies in the country's public higher education institutions. Should this requirement of law be amended, dual citizens can be enticed to work for the public education sector, bringing their knowledge and expertise to the Philippines that can advance excellent education, research, and innovation.

Issue 2: Transnational education issues

Many ASEAN countries have adopted transnational education (TNE) strategies involving partnerships with reputable international universities to enhance their education systems, foster international collaboration, and attract foreign investment in education. In Malaysia for instance, the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015–2025 spearheaded the development of EduCity Iskandar Malaysia, an education hub supported by incentives such as tax exemptions on educational equipment, reduced withholding taxes on royalties to non-resident franchisors, and a special building allowance. Malaysia has also implemented twinning programs with prestigious universities, serving as a foundation for establishing branch campuses.

Similarly, Singapore aims to position itself as a global education hub through initiatives like the World Class University Programme and Global Schoolhouse Programme. It supports these efforts with direct and indirect subsidies, discounts on land and rent, streamlined work permit access, and housing for university staff. Singapore has also invested in strategic partnerships, such as the National University of Singapore-Duke University medical program, and established joint programs with top-tier universities.

Despite the passage of RA 11448 Transnational Transnational Higher Education Act, according to the British Council (2015; 2016), the Philippines has the strictest policy on foreign ownership in the education sector among ASEAN member states. Accordingly, the 1987 Philippine Constitution imposes a 40% cap on foreign equity ownership in education institutions under Article XIV, Section 4(2). This cap is deemed to limit opportunities for international collaboration and investment, posing a significant barrier to transnational higher education in the country.

The policy question is whether to raise the foreign equity ownership cap or allow 100% foreign ownership to attract reputable foreign institutions. According to EDCOM II analysis, crafting the policy must consider the substantial benefits other countries have derived from TNE and the risk of attracting subpar institutions that could compromise the quality of Philippine higher education. It would entail a comprehensive strategic plan to advance TNE and internationalization while safeguarding educational standards.

This plan could target reputable foreign higher education institutions (HEIs) to offer programs aligned with the country's faculty development goals and incentives, such as tax reductions, fiscal and non-fiscal benefits, and streamlined recognition processes. Policies to enable foreign faculty and researchers to contribute to teaching, research, and initiatives like Science and Technology Parks and Knowledge Innovation Centers would further strengthen collaboration. Merely simplifying immigration regulations for foreign academics, researc hers, and students would go a long way in promoting institutional mobility and international partnerships.

TABLE 12
Foreign Equity Ownership in ASEAN Member States

ASEAN Country	Maximum foreign investment share	Foreign land ownership	Regulatory environment
Malaysia	100%	Yes	**Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1995** Requirements include approved application, incorporation of company, approved registration, approved course(s) of study, and permit to teach for the faculty and staff. Incentives include Investment Tax Allowance (ITA) and 100% foreign ownership of equities.
Vietnam	100%	No	**Decree No. 86/2018 ND-CP; Decree No. 99/2018 ND-CP** Strict regulatory requirements against foreign institutions, such as minimum capital requirement of USD 21.5 million, qualifications of teaching staff, land area and gross floor area per student, prevent foreign investment in the education sector. To apply for the operation license, foreign-owned schools must satisfy the regulatory requirements within four years.
Singapore	100%	Yes	**Private Education Act; Private Education Regulations 2009** There are no land ownership restrictions in terms of nationality, but high costs dissuade foreign institutions. The Singaporean government addresses this by reducing land costs toward high-end higher education providers. Restrictions in the basic education sector also apply in the higher education sector.
Myanmar	100%	No	**Notification 7/2018** The private school is at liberty to teach the curriculum prescribed by the Ministry of Education or an international curriculum. If they adopt the local curriculum, it is subjected to the government's regulatory framework.
Cambodia	100%	No Foreign ownership of land is constitutionally NOT permitted.	Relatively few regulatory barriers exist, which include approval for curricular offerings, faculty, and facilities by target student body and purpose. Various tax incentives to educational providers from early childhood to higher education, as well as technical and vocational training centers.
Thailand	50%	Yes	**Foreign Business Act B.E. 2542 (1999); Private Institution of Higher Education Act B.E. 2546 (2003)** The Thai higher education sector is fairly restrictive. A Council of Institution with policy formulating and supervisory roles over the foreign HEI in Thailand must be 50% Thai nationals, but ownership of capital need not be of Thai nationals. In addition, a provider must obtain a foreign business license or certificate on top of other requirements. In addition, a private HEI granted a license is a juristic person, and the licensee has an obligation to assign ownership and/or long-term lease of the land to the private HEI.
Indonesia	0% The Indonesian education sector is non-profit by law.	No Land will be under the ownership of the local partner.	**Omnibus Law; Law No. 12 of 2012 on Higher Education** With a cooperation requirement, foreign institutions can establish a foreign university through foundations, associations, or other non-profit entities that operate a university. A notable requirement for the establishment of a foreign university in Indonesia is that it must be established in a special economic zone.

Source: Mayer Brown (2021); Zico Law (2020)

TEACHER EDUCATION

From Classroom to Career: Reducing Barriers to Expertise and Leadership

Introduction

The evolution of teacher education in the Philippines reflects a rich history of reforms and innovations, spanning the establishment of normal schools during the colonial era to the current network of teacher education institutions (TEIs) offering baccalaureate and graduate programs (Savellano, 1999).

Key legislative milestones have sought to professionalize and enhance teacher education, including the Philippine Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994 (RA 7836 as amended), which tasked the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) with administering licensure examinations for teachers. In 2017, the development of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) followed the shift to a learner-centered K to 12 curriculum, which emphasized students' needs and interests at the core of the teaching-learning process. The PPST defines the competencies that educators should acquire and continually improve throughout their careers. The Excellence in Teacher Education Act of 2022 (RA 11713) further bolstered this progress by strengthening the Teacher Education Council (TEC) to enhance the teaching workforce.

Despite these advancements, significant challenges remain in teacher education. EDCOM II's Year One Report highlights three priority areas critical to addressing these challenges: (a) Priority Area 16, which focuses on the alignment of key government agencies involved in teacher education and development, including the TEC; (b) Priority Area 17, which addresses preservice education, particularly the quality and performance of TEIs; and (c) Priority Area 18, which emphasizes continuing in-service training and development, with a strong focus on teacher welfare.

In Year One, EDCOM II particularly focused on addressing the excessive administrative duties and community service obligations that burden public school teachers in the Philippines, detracting from their main role of teaching. These demands limit teachers' time for lesson planning, professional development, and teaching itself, contributing to burnout and dissatisfaction (EDCOM II Year One Report). The combined effect of this excessive workload, low salaries, and limited career advancement makes teaching less attractive.

The findings also indicate that low passing rates in teacher licensure exams have persisted from 2009 to 2023. This suggests a misalignment between the teacher education curricula and the exam content, indicating incomplete curriculum reforms at TEIs or misaligned examination questions (EDCOM II Year One Report).

Furthermore, concerns about the quality and relevance of in-service training programs persist, despite widespread participation among teachers. Teachers often cite a lack of focus on subject matter expertise, inadequate guidance in pedagogical development, and poor career support through improved salaries or promotions (EDCOM II, 2024; World Bank, 2023). Teachers also face barriers such as limited training slots, high fees, and the absence of a computerized tracking system. The frustration among teachers is exacerbated by the limited number of master teacher positions, capped since 2004, which restricts career progression and drives qualified individuals to leave the profession (EDCOM II Year One Report).

Career progression is further hindered by the scarcity of master teacher positions, capped at 10% of total district roles for elementary schools and only one for every five to seven positions in secondary schools. The quota system was established under the Position Classification and Compensation Scheme (PCCS) (DBM Manual on PCCS, Chapter 6, 2004). This lack of opportunities discourages and frustrates many qualified teachers, forcing them to leave the profession altogether (EDCOM II, 2023, Oct 26; EDCOM II, 2024).

School leadership is a crucial factor in educational outcomes and teacher development. The EDCOM II Year One Report emphasized the need to review and improve the pipeline for school principals to ensure that leadership roles are filled by competent individuals who can support both educators and teachers effectively.

Year One Updates

CHED has implemented stricter policies to address nonperforming institutions in response to EDCOM II recommendations. CHED approved the Amendment to Section 25 of CMO Nos. 74 to 80 and 82, series of 2017 – *Adopting a Quality Assurance Mechanism for Pre-service Teacher Education Degree Programs*, designed to ensure the quality of pre-service teacher education in the country. By issuing CMO 10 s. 2024, CHED can actually impose sanctions, such as program termination and institutional closure to non-performing TEIs.

Evaluations will be based on the TEI's Board Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (BLEPT) performance in the last three years, specifically for first-time takers, and the TEI's compliance with critical quality indicators, such as school leadership, faculty qualifications, curriculum, facilities, and learning resources. TEIs showing potential for improvement will receive technical assistance to address deficiencies and raise program quality (CHED, 2024).

TABLE 1
Status and Performance of Nonperforming TEIs

Total No. of TEI Monitored	169 TEIs
Total No. of Programs	389 Programs
Total No. of Programs that have been phased out/closed/ceased operation	9 Programs
Total No. of TEIs with deificies (with ongoing compliance)	318 Programs
Total No. of Programs recommended for phase-out	37 Programs from 16 TEIs (NCR- 14; VII- 1; X- 1)

Source: CHED, Dec. 18, 2024

DepEd responded swiftly to EDCOM II's findings on administrative burdens by issuing DO 2, s. 2024, which aimed to remove all non-teaching tasks from public school teachers, and to enable them to focus on teaching. DepEd instructed schools division offices (SDOs) to implement the order within 60 days, transferring administrative tasks to school heads and nonteaching staff. For schools with limited non-teaching personnel, clustering up to three schools was mandated, with administrative support personnel deployed or urgently hired. Schools that could not be clustered for geographic reasons were assigned administrative support staff under contract of service. This strategy aims to support school heads in managing these tasks while hiring dedicated administrative personnel is underway. To bolster this initiative, the DBM announced the creation of 10,000 new administrative positions for 2025, in addition to 5,000 positions created for 2024.

DepEd followed up in April with DO 5, s. 2024, reiterating that teachers should not be required to render more than six hours of actual classroom teaching per day. The order clarified that public school teachers, as civil servants, are subject to the eight-hour workday rule, as specified in CSC Resolution No. 080096, on Working Hours for Public School Teachers and consistent with RA 4670 or the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers. The order further instructs that the additional two hours of work

should be dedicated solely to ancillary tasks, such as preparing lesson plans, creating instructional materials, grading test papers, and serving as class adviser or reading/literacy coordinator. Ancillary tasks also include parent-teacher conferences, home visits, and mentoring fellow teachers. These tasks may be performed either in-school or remotely, and teachers are no longer required to submit an accomplishment report on how they spent these two hours of incidental work (DepEd, 2024b).

Challenges in implementing these reforms prompted EDCOM II to convene a TWG composed of DepEd, DBM, and CSC to review staffing structures, focusing on school typology and teaching workload, and to establish common staffing and hiring standards for nonteaching personnel. The TWG will also provide recommendations on the rationalization of positions, recruitment, selection, and deployment, while considering long-term budget implications and DepEd's organizational structure. These recommendations aim to ensure that DepEd schools are adequately supported during this transition (Technical Working Group Meeting on DepEd Hiring and Teacher Ancillary and Administrative Tasks | March 11, 2024).

Efforts to enhance teacher professional development include integrating data from the electronic School Form 7 (eSF7) into career progression frameworks (EDCOM II, 2024, August 2). By capturing teacher demographics, years of service, areas of specialization, and current teaching assignments, the eSF7 will allow DepEd, the National Educators' Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), and TEIs to design targeted interventions that support the professional growth of teachers across different career stages and geographic locations. As of June 2024, approximately 87% or 39,339 public schools submitted their eSF7 and were included in the database. These submissions have accounted for about 78% or 712,698 teachers based on specific parameters.

The eSF7 has been instrumental in identifying teachers who are teaching outside their specialization areas. This data should be further studied by NEAP to support program design and address gaps. However it must be emphasized that eSF7 remains a standalone spreadsheet rather than an online web form that is fully integrated into the department-wide information management system (DepEd, 2023c).

Data from the eSF7 also confirms EDCOM II findings that more than 80% of elementary and secondary-level teachers specialize in general education (DepEd, 2024, July 11) (See Figures 1A–1B). Additionally, many teachers in Teacher 1 positions are in the age brackets 30-39 and 40-49 and have remained in Teacher 1 position for decades, highlighting barriers to teachers' promotion and career growth (DepED, 2024, August 14).

Other key areas that have been highlighted by the eSF7 data include teachers in the 30–39 and 40–49 age groups who remain in Teacher I positions and those who have been in the Teacher I position for an average of 20 years. Both trends indicate that promotion and professional growth have been difficult to attain for many teachers (DepEd, 2024, July 11).

Year Two Overview

In Year Two, EDCOM II continued its probe into the alignment of key agencies overseeing teacher education including CHED, the PRC, DepEd, and the TEC. The focus shifted to potential amendments to the PRC Modernization Act of 2000 (RA 8981) and how these could enhance the PRC's regulatory function over the teaching profession. Amendments to the Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994 (RA 7836 as amended) were also proposed. Proposals included exploring alternative licensing pathways to broaden access to the profession.

EDCOM II reviewed the initial findings of the EDCOM-Research Institute for Teacher Quality profiling study and the Philippine Institute for Development Studies' evaluation of the roles of Centers of Excellence (COEs) in teacher education. These studies highlight best practices of high-performing TEIs, QA mechanisms for TEIs, and collaborations between DepEd and TEIs to prepare preservice teachers. EDCOM II also examined the limitations of the generalist nature of preservice education, emphasizing the need to shift toward specialization to improve teaching effectiveness.

EDCOM II discussed policies and in-service training programs that influence teachers' professional development and career advancement, gathering insights to inform and improve the draft bill on career progression.

In response to teacher workload concerns, EDCOM II worked toward the creation of a TWG that would help implement DO 2 and DO 5, s. 2024, which removed nonteaching tasks from teachers. While this order and the addition of administrative personnel were positive steps, further measures are needed to systematically alleviate the administrative burden on teachers.

A hearing on the School Heads and Principal Workforce Pipeline highlighted gaps including a shortage of school principals, delays in hiring, reliance on interim school heads, and unclear performance evaluation guidelines. The low passing rates and inconsistent delivery of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) were huge concerns in creating the supply of school principals. While the School Head Development Program (SHDP) under DepEd Memorandum No. 192, s. 2016, provides some support, the absence of a standardized induction program leaves new principals underprepared for their roles.

Frequent turnover of school heads, driven by a 5-year tenure limit, disrupts leadership continuity and hinders long-term initiatives. Stakeholders recommend evaluating school heads based on performance before reassignment and providing extended tenure to high-performing principals to help institutionalize their innovations and maximize their impact. Support mechanisms for underperforming school heads were suggested. A review of policies on school head rotation and succession planning was also advised to ensure stable leadership and sustained improvements in school management.
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Priority Area 16: Alignment of CHED, the PRC, and DepEd (including the TEC) on Teacher Education and Development

Since 1994, the PRC has administered the BLEPT as mandated by RA 7836 as amended. Passing the BLEPT is required for all incoming teachers, ensuring candidates meet minimum standards of knowledge and competence (Abdallah & Musah, 2021, as cited in PBEd, 2023; Libman, 2016, as cited in PBEd, 2023). To qualify for the exam, candidates must complete a bachelor's degree in education or a related field from a recognized higher education institution (HEI) and fulfill other qualifications specified by law.

As such, the BLEPT not only assesses the competence and aptitude of incoming teachers but is also a measure of the performance of HEIs offering teacher education programs (PBEd, 2023) (see Figure 1). Under RA 11713, the PRC is required to be transparent in the conduct of the BLEPT by releasing examination questions and their corresponding answers, item analyses, and test statistics immediately after each exam. This feedback mechanism helps HEIs improve Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) programs.

CHED supervises and monitors HEI and TEI annual performance in the BLEPT and submits a status report to the TEC, as mandated by RA 11713 (EDCOM II, 2023; RA 11713). This report includes licensure exam results and the development of teacher education programs.

In 2017, CHED issued the current policies, standards, and guidelines (PSGs) for preservice teacher education through Memorandum Orders Nos. 74 to 83. These PSGs, covering programs from the Bachelor of Elementary Education to the postbaccalaureate diploma in Alternative Learning Systems, intended to align the teacher education curriculum with the outcomes-based education framework as stipulated under CMO 46, s. 2012, and to emphasize 21st-century skills.

FIGURE 1
Performance of Teacher Education Institutions 2019 vs. 2022

Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd)
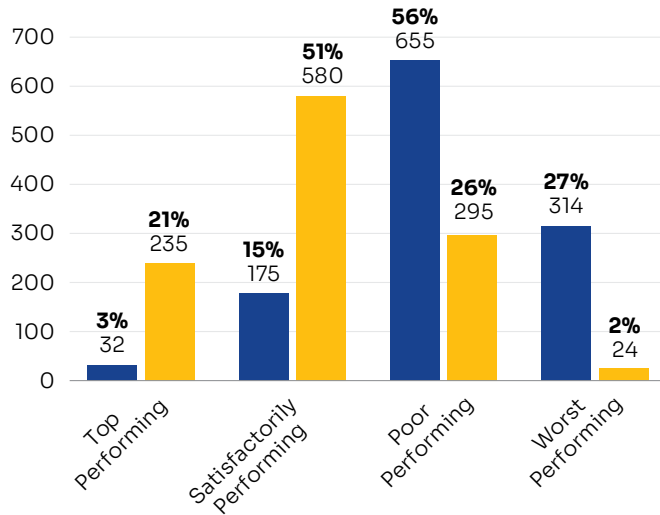
TEI CATEGORY	% SHARE OF LET PASSERS
Top Performing	75% – 100%
Satisfactory Performing	50% – 74.99%
Poor Performing	20% – 49.99%
Worst Performing	< 20%

Number of TEIs with 0% Passing Rate:
2022 – 1
2019 – 15

• Includes TEIs which had at least 10 LET takers for each year.
• Total Number of TEIs considered for 2019 is 1,176 and 2022 is 1,134.

Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd)
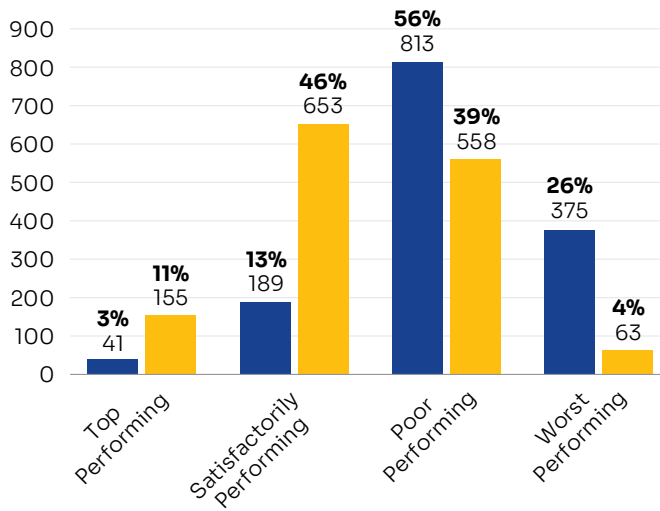
TEI CATEGORY	% SHARE OF LET PASSERS
Top Performing	75% – 100%
Satisfactory Performing	50% – 74.99%
Poor Performing	20% – 49.99%
Worst Performing	< 20%

Number of TEIs with 0% Passing Rate:
2022 – 2
2019 – 33

■ 2019 ■ 2022

• Includes TEIs which had at least 10 LET takers for each year.
• Total Number of TEIs considered for 2019 is 1,418 and 2022 is 1,429.

Source: EDCOM II, 2024

Despite BLEPT's role in certifying teachers, DepEd considers the exam as only one of several criteria for hiring (DepEd, 2023b). As the largest employer of teachers, with approximately 900,000 public school teachers as of 2022, DepEd leads the way in establishing teacher employment guidelines, ensuring that hiring practices adhere to merit, competence, and equal opportunity principles. DO 7, s. 2023, outlines the revised criteria for hiring Teacher I positions, where licensure examination scores account for only 10 points, while PPST-based observable indicators in and out of the classroom constitute 60 points. This reflects a shift away from relying solely on licensure examination results towards alternative assessments that could better capture the competence and capability of teachers.

Issue 1: A nonfunctional TEC exacerbates weak coordination among education agencies, overlapping roles in monitoring teaching institutions, and a lack of transparency and reforms in the licensure examination.

Transforming teacher education to meet the evolving demands of modern classrooms requires seamless coordination among DepEd, CHED, and the PRC. However, as highlighted in the Year One Report, substantial progress in aligning these agencies has been limited, leaving significant gaps in the overall quality of teacher education and professional development. Persistent poor results in the BLEPT over the past decade underscore this disconnect, reflecting a misalignment with teacher education curricula and licensure examination content.

A key issue is the PRC's failure to update the BLEPT to align with the CHED's revised PSG, which currently applies to only two out of the nine education bachelor programs (EDCOM II, 2023). Meanwhile, there is a need for further review of the integration of the PPST into the PSG and consequently, a more systematic monitoring of its implementation in TEIs. These shortcomings have contributed to the low passing rates in licensure examinations and low graduation rates from teacher education programs (PBEd, 2023).

Despite the passage of RA 11713, which aimed to strengthen the TEC and resolve these coordination challenges, the TEC has yet to be fully operationalized. This continued delay has perpetuated misalignments among key agencies.

EDCOM II has prioritized rationalizing and unifying the disparate roles of CHED, DepEd, and the PRC in preservice and in-service training, as well as in the governance of teacher education. A comprehensive systems-thinking approach is critical to address these interconnected issues and achieve long-term improvements.

Streamlining the overlapping roles of the TEC and CHED's TPTE remains a critical challenge following the enactment of RA 11713 (EDCOM II, 2024, April 6). While the TEC is now mandated to lead teacher education governance, CHED's continued management of the Centers of Development (CODs) and COEs creates ambiguity. EDCOM II has formally urged CHED to clarify these functions and prevent duplication of efforts.

The persistently poor results in the BLEPT over the past decade indicate this disconnect, suggesting a misalignment between teacher education curricula and licensure examination content.

Under RA 11713, the TEC has been granted full authority over the development of teacher education, superseding any or all functions previously assigned to CHED's TPTE, including the identification and development of CODs and COEs. However, this transfer of functions is not explicitly spelled out in the new law (EDCOM II, 2024, April 6).

One proposed solution is to redefine the TPTE's role to focus on monitoring CODs and COE performance, while the TEC primarily takes charge of these centers (EDCOM II, 2024, April 6). This delineation is especially urgent given PRC's lack of monitoring for TEIs, which allows underperforming TEIs to evade accountability and hampers targeted interventions (Bautista, 2023).

Performance data from 2010 to 2022 underscore these concerns. Over two-thirds of COEs and CODs recorded BLEPT passing rates below 75%, with elementary and secondary levels showing particularly alarming underperformance. Specifically, 68% of COEs and 87% of CODs failed to meet the treshold for elementary education, while 81% of COEs and 91% of CODs fell short at the secondary level (PBEd, 2023) (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2
COEs and CODs with Less Than 75% Overall BLEPT Passing Rates, 2010– 2022
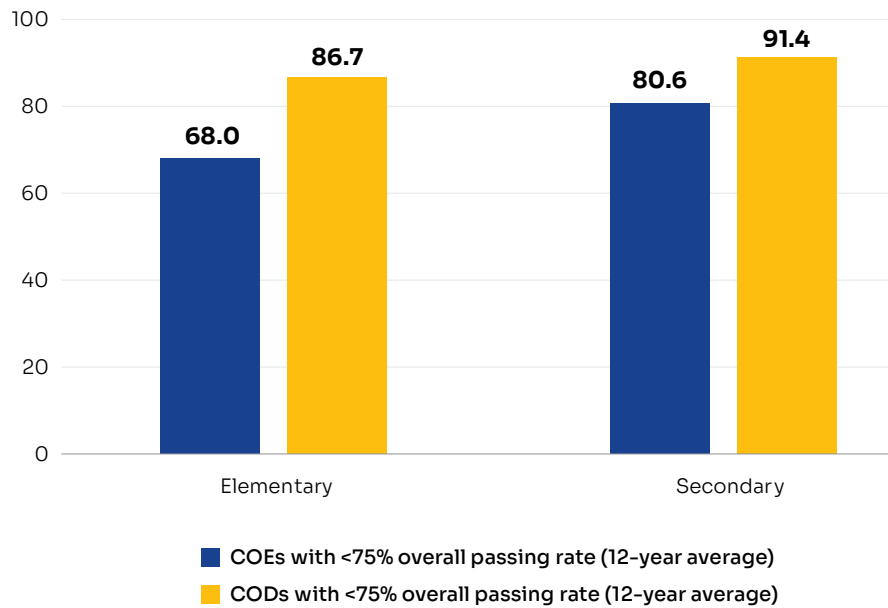
Source: PBEd, 2023

These statistics challenge the credibility of COEs, institutions purportedly recognized for excellence in teacher preparation. While some COEs and CODs can be considered low-performing, they do perform better in the BLEPT (Sinsay-Villanueva et al., 2024). These results have similarly exposed significant weaknesses in CHED's supervision and regulation of these institutions (PBEd, 2023).

A steady enrollment in COEs and CODs contrasts with a concerning decline in their share of graduating education students, raising doubts about their capacity to consistently produce top-performing graduates (Sinsay-Villanueva et al., 2024). This issue is compounded by the limited effectiveness of the COE and COD initiatives in assisting underperforming TEIs. Furthermore, the benefits of being designated as a COE or COD are not clear or motivating enough for institutions, which may discourage them to pursue or maintain these titles.

Regional disparities exacerbate these issues. The majority of COEs and CODs are located in Luzon, particularly in the NCR, leaving Visayas and Mindanao underserved (see Figure 3). This uneven distribution limits access to quality educational resources and opportunities for aspiring educators in these regions and contributes to lower BLEPT performance, particularly in areas such as SOCCSKSARGEN and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim MIndanao (BARMM) (Sinsay-Villanueva et al., 2024).

One proposed solution is to redefine the TPTE's role to focus on monitoring CODs and COE performance, while the TEC primarily takes charge of these centers.

FIGURE 3
Regional Distribution of COEs and CODs

Luzon: 25
(69.44%)

NCR: 7
(19.44%)

Visayas: 5
(13.89%)

Mindanao: 6
(16.67%)
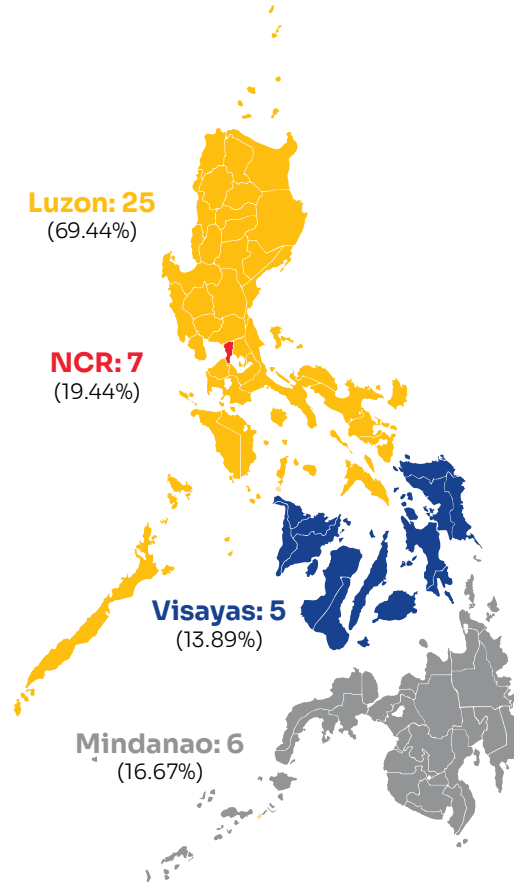
Source: Sinsay-Villanueva et al., 2024

To address these challenges, activating clear lines of governance, redistributing resources, and prioritizing collaboration among agencies and communities will be essential. Without these steps, the goal of producing high-quality educators across the Philippines will remain out of reach.

A significant gap in the oversight of the teaching profession persists due to insufficient monitoring and coordination by CHED and the PRC. Despite their shared mandate under the PRC Modernization Act of 2000 (RA 8981) to monitor school performance and teaching conditions, underperforming TEIs continue to operate despite consistently poor licensure examinations outcomes. Failure to implement an effective monitoring system limits accountability and undermines efforts to improve teacher quality. Left unchecked, underperforming TEIs produce graduates who either struggle to pass the licensure examinations or whose training quality is questioned due to low examination scores.

Effective teacher education and professional development requires the cohesive collaboration among the TEC, the PRC, CHED, and NEAP. These agencies must work together to establish a seamless system that aligns preservice and in-service education with national professional standards.

Table 2 outlines specific roles of these offices under RA 11713, emphasizing responsibilities in preservice education, professionalization, curriculum development, QA, licensure, and professional development. Coordination among these bodies is critical to standardizing policies and practices across the teacher education continuum.

TABLE 2
Roles of the TEC, the PRC, CHED, and NEAP Based on the Excellence in Teacher Education Act of 2022 (RA 11713)

Agency	Preservice Teacher Education	In-Service Teacher Education
TEC	**Policy Development and Monitoring** ■ Establish a roadmap for teacher education aligned with national higher education and development plans. ■ Set and monitor basic requirements for teacher education programs to ensure compliance with professional standards. **Designation and Quality Assurance of TEIs** ■ Identify and designate Teacher Education COEs and formulate plans to develop COEs regionally. ■ Maintain a list of TEIs in coordination with CHED. **Professionalization and Career Development** ■ Prescribe examinations and assessments to ensure readiness for licensure and teaching. ■ Develop and monitor systems that recognize teacher career stages and link them to professional standards.	**Strengthening Preservice and In-Service Linkages** ■ Collaborate with NEAP and other stakeholders to strengthen the connection between preservice and in-service teacher education programs. ■ Monitor and evaluate the implementation of professional standards, including in-service professional development programs. **Research and Innovation** ■ Serve as a central repository of research on teacher education and conduct studies to inform policy and planning. **Collaboration and Coordination** ■ Coordinate with CHED, the PRC, DepEd, TESDA, and UniFAST to align teacher education policies and initiatives. ■ Encourage partnerships among public and private TEIs for shared resources and improved programs.
PRC	**Licensure and Assessment** ■ Administer the BLEPT and analyzing its content and results. ■ Ensure transparency in licensure exams through item analyses and results publication. **Reporting** ■ Provide TEC annual reports on licensure exam results and other relevant data to improve teacher education programs.	**Support for Professional Development** ■ Align licensure exams with TEC-prescribed standards. ■ Recognize NEAP programs for continuing professional development.
CHED	**Curriculum Development and Program Standards** ■ Incorporate the TEC roadmap into the national higher education roadmap. ■ Ensure compliance with TEC-mandated standards by TEIs. **Quality Assurance and Regulation** ■ Supervise, monitor, and regulate Teacher Education COEs. ■ Report annually to the TEC on TEI performance, curriculum implementation, and student outcomes.	**Collaboration with TEC** ■ Develop strategies to attract and recruit top-performing high school graduates into teacher education programs.
NEAP	**Collaboration with TEC and Stakeholders:** ■ Aligning in-service programs with TEC policies to ensure coherence with pre-service education. ■ Coordinating with PRC for recognition or accreditation of professional development programs.	**Professional Development** ■ Design and implement professional development programs aligned with professional standards. ■ Monitor NEAP-recognized programs offered by other institutions. ■ Provide scholarships and fellowships for advanced studies in specialized fields. **Resource and System Management** ■ Develop a professional development information system to track programs, providers, and participant achievements. ■ Manage resources and funding to support teacher and school leader development.

Abbreviations: CHED = Commission on Higher Education, COE = Center of Excellence, DepEd = Department of Education, BLEPT = Board Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers, NEAP = National Educators' Academy of the Philippines, PRC = Professional Regulation Commission, TEC = Teacher Education Council, TEI = Teacher Education Institution, TESDA = Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, UniFAST = Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education

In Year Two, EDCOM II prioritized the review of RA 7836 as amended to reform the PRC and improve accountability. This review focuses on restructuring the licensure examination process, introducing third-party assessments to restore public trust, exploring alternative teacher accreditation pathways, and ensuring closer coordination between the PRC, CHED, and the TEC (EDCOM II, 2024, February 9b). Strengthening alignment among these agencies is critical for updating examination formats and requirements, centralizing regulatory frameworks, maintaining high institutional accreditation standards, and mapping the specific skills and competencies required for the regulation of the teaching profession.

Recommendations

CHED should align teacher education policies with the TEC's and effectively communicate these across institutions to ensure cohesive sector-wide implementation (EDCOM II, 2024, April 6). RA 11713 mandates the TEC to establish offices that coordinate the nationwide adoption of best practices in teacher education and ensure compliance with professional standards. With TEC's new offices in place, close collaboration between CHED and the TEC is needed, with the latter possibly funding some of the former's TPTE activities.

The PRC should undergo reforms to improve coordination with CHED and the TEC and enhance its regulatory role. The current regulatory framework of the PRC has often been criticized for its protectionist approach, which focuses heavily on compliance and control rather than fostering growth and adaptability. This has particularly affected the teaching profession, where rigid policies have hindered its development and responsiveness to evolving educational demands. To address these issues, targeted reforms must balance regulatory oversight with encouraging professional growth.

RA 8981, originally enacted to modernize the PRC's regulatory functions and enable process computerization, requires further amendments to enhance its oversight capabilities. These reforms should improve coordination with CHED and the TEC, create a more flexible regulatory framework that supports professional development, and align PRC's functions with current national education goals to ensure the teaching profession evolves to meet future needs.

RA 7836, as amended, which tasked the PRC with regulating the teaching profession and established the Board for Professional Teachers, has been criticized for its protectionist and unresponsive policies. To make the regulation more supportive of professional growth, the following reforms are recommended:

Enhancing Transparency and Accountability in Teacher Licensure Exams
- Release examination papers and answer keys within 48 hours after the licensure exam to enhance transparency and allow Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) to adjust their curricula accordingly.
- Publicly identify the names of licensure examination makers to reduce conflicts of interest and build trust in the system.

Third-Party Assessments
- Introduce third-party assessments before and after the administration of licensure exams to improve validity and reliability, ensuring fairness and accuracy in measuring competence.

Multiple Accreditation Pathways

- Establish alternative accreditation options such as portfolios, TEI accreditation (e.g., designation as Centers of Excellence), and competency assessments. These alternatives address the limitations of current examinations, which cover only two out of eight teaching disciplines.
- Expand entry pathways for teacher licensure to include noneducation majors with relevant teaching experience or those who have completed an 18-unit certificate course in teaching. For instance, the Philippine Science High School model, where specialized teachers do not need a license to teach their assigned subjects effectively due to their advanced degrees and regular training, can be adopted.
- Introduce a separate examination for Early Childhood Education due to its unique competency requirements.

Tracking and Accountability for TEIs

- Publish the 10-year track record of TEI licensure examination performance in coordination with CHED. Sanctions will apply to low-performing schools.
- Disaggregate licensure results for education course graduates and noneducation course graduates (e.g., teaching certificate holders). Results for noneducation graduates will be credited to the TEI where the certificate was obtained.

PRC Board Member Selection

- Review the PRC Board member selection process to diversify representation and ensure transparency.
- Prioritize candidates with strong ethical backgrounds and allow nominees without endorsements from professional organizations. Endorse seconding full-time members for the licensure process.

Refresher Courses for Examination Failures

- Require targeted refresher courses for candidates who fail the licensure examination more than three times, addressing specific areas of weakness instead of allowing unlimited retakes under the current three-strike rule.

These amendments are included in House Bill No. 9979, which was approved on third reading on March 19, 2024, and the three Senate bills filed for amending this law.

Fully operationalizing the TEC is urgently needed. The TEC has made progress on several deliverables based on its powers and functions. One of the key efforts is establishing a system for identifying and designating Centers of Excellence (COEs) in Teacher Education, tailored to regional contexts. The TEC has also provided technical support in reframing the preservice teacher education curriculum, prioritizing the alignment of educational programs with contemporary needs. In addition, the TEC is launching a Teacher Education Roadmap to guide the design of innovative, responsive, and collaborative teacher education programs. As part of its commitment to ensuring high-quality programs, the TEC has mandated basic requirements for teacher education institutions (TEIs) and initiated the formation of consortia to encourage collaboration and improve educational outcomes.

Furthermore, the TEC is establishing a comprehensive quality assurance (QA) system, including professional development programs for educators. To promote equitable access to teacher education, the TEC has expanded its scholarship programs, particularly for underserved areas and foundational education levels, including early childhood care and development. These scholarships aim to attract talented individuals into teaching, addressing shortages in critical subject areas and regions.

The TEC has also supported research in teacher education by funding thirteen priority research projects in partnership with nine TEIs, underscoring its dedication to advancing knowledge and improving educational practices.

While CHED and the TEC have started to implement more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of COEs and CODs, **there is a need to focus on long-term outcome and impact indicators to ensure accountability and continuous improvement, and to reinforce COE and COD mandates.**

The process for obtaining COE and COD designations should be incentivized to encourage more TEIs to apply. This could include streamlining the application process, using international incentive models for teachers, offering scholarships for students and specific programs to promote the quality of learning, and granting exemptions to certain requirements to elevate learning quality (Sinsay-Villanueva et al., 2024). By reducing barriers and providing tangible benefits, TEIs would be more motivated to seek higher standards.

Stronger partnerships and mentoring programs between COEs, CODs, and underperforming TEIs should be established, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities to ensure effective collaboration and support. With the enhanced TEC in place, this should be easier to do. The incentives, coupled with clear roles and responsibilities, could encourage COEs to be more proactive in fulfilling their mandates to assist underperforming TEIs through targeted initiatives, such as curriculum development, professional development for faculty, and resource sharing. These efforts should be aligned with the specific needs of the institutions they aim to support.

Addressing regional inequalities in the distribution of COEs and CODs is critical to improving teacher education across the Philippines. COEs and CODs are heavily concentrated in Luzon, while regions such as SOCCSKSARGEN and BARMM have fewer of these institutions, limiting access to quality educational resources and opportunities for aspiring educators. This uneven distribution not only exacerbates existing disparities in teacher preparation but also contributes to lower performance in the BLEPT in underserved regions.

Targeted interventions must be developed to address the unique challenges faced by these regions, particularly in Visayas and Mindanao. These interventions should include equitable resource allocation, capacity building for underperforming TEIs, and tailored support programs to address region-specific needs. Bridging these gaps will also require enhanced collaboration among government agencies, TEIs, and community stakeholders to contextualize the implementation of teacher education programs.

By prioritizing underserved regions, enhancing stakeholder collaboration, and addressing systemic weaknesses, the Philippines can create a more equitable and effective teacher education system. These efforts will not only improve teacher preparation but also produce highly qualified teachers nationwide.

Significant regional disparities exist in the distribution of COEs and CODs for teacher education across the Philippines, with most located in Luzon and fewer in Visayas and Mindanao. This uneven distribution limits access to quality educational resources and opportunities for aspiring educators in underrepresented regions (Sinsay-Villanueva et al., 2024).

Priority Area 17: Preservice Education

Issue 1: There is misalignment between the generalist focus of preservice education and teacher specialization on one hand and distribution needs across the regions on the other.

CHED has long recognized the need to realign Philippine education with both national and international standards. In response to global shifts in the educational paradigm and the emerging need to become economically competitive in the ASEAN region, CHED issued CMO 46, s. 2012, adopting an outcomes-based education framework for higher education programs, including teacher education, which accounts for the second highest number of enrolled HEI students. This marked a significant shift from traditional content-based education to a more competency-driven approach, ensuring that graduates acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the demands of the new global economy (CHED, 2012).

TABLE 3
Higher Education Enrollment by Discipline Group, Academic Year 2019–2020

Discipline Group	SUCs	LUCs	OGs	Private	Total	% Share
Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries	107,337	2,060	446	5,615	115,458	3.39%
Architecture and Town Planning	14,369	462		27,930	42,761	1.25%
Business Administration and Related	287,359	91,673	684	498,945	878,661	25.78%
Education Science and Teacher Training	289,766	66,777	1,321	313,557	671,421	19.70%
Engineering and Tech	259,607	11,086	419	170,952	442,064	12.97%
Fine and Applied Arts	5,859	337		10,713	16,909	0.50%
General	1,637	815	818	2,396	5,666	0.17%
Home Economics	3,279		33	270	3,582	0.11%
Humanities	18,951	3,233		17,218	39,402	1.16%
IT-Related Disciplines	126,996	31,157		166,543	324,696	9.53%
Law ang Jurisprudence	4,694	1,564		20,243	26,501	0.78%
Maritime	5,414	203		80,497	86,114	2.53%
Mass Communication and Documentation	11,173	2,511		16,648	30,332	0.89%
Mathematics	10,545	577		1,503	12,625	0.37%
Medical and Allied	27,150	8,047	2 00	198,807	234,204	6.87%
Natural Sciences	23,729	498		9,202	33,429	0.98%
Other Disciplines	64,192	15,486	1,220	171,926	252,824	7.42%
Religion and Theology				7,906	7,906	0.23%
Service Trades	18,828	3,573		50,805	73,206	2.15%
Social and Behavioral Sciences	40,479	8,672		61,104	110,255	3.23%
Trade, Craft, and Industrial	409				409	0.01%
Grand Total	**1,321,773**	**248,731**	**5,141**	**1,832,780**	**3,408,425**	

Abbreviations: IT = information technology, LUCs = local universities and colleges, OGs = other government schools, SUCs = state universities and colleges
Source: CHED, 2020

This outcomes-based approach was adopted in the new teacher education curricula promulgated via CMO 74–82, s. 2017. In particular, these nine new curricula were developed to align with salient features of the enhanced K–12 curriculum, the PPST, and the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF), producing educators that are proficient in 21st-century skills, can demonstrate mastery of subject matter, and are able to innovate and adapt instructional approaches based on the learning environment context (CHED, 2017).

To complement this, CHED also issued CMO 17, s. 2022, which strengthened the QA framework for HEIs. This QA system promotes internal QA mechanisms and external oversight to ensure alignment with the PQF and other national and ASEAN standards. This underscores CHED's commitment to enhance TEIs by mandating continuous program improvement and rewarding institutions committed to quality (CHED, 2022a).

Despite ongoing efforts, the Year One Report revealed significant gaps in preservice education, showing poor performance across many Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in licensure exams. In response, EDCOM II has urged CHED to revisit guidelines for underperforming institutions and recommended phasing out those with BLEPT scores below 30% over the past three years.

Preservice research studies focused on the following drivers needed to improve preservice training quality: experiential learning, TEI educator profiles, QA, and coursework focusing on specialization.

Experiential Learning
A key component of effective preservice teacher training is practice-based training.
TEIs must carefully design their preservice teacher training programs based on what students need to learn. Beyond subject knowledge, preservice teachers must also develop pedagogical skills and gain experience in managing classrooms. The quality and relevance of practicum placements are also critical, as teachers tend to perform better when their first year of teaching closely resembles their student-teacher placement experience (World Bank, 2024). **Experiential learning opportunities, such as practicums and internships, allow aspiring teachers to develop essential classroom management skills and gain real-world experience in interacting with learners.** However, in the Philippines, CHED PSGs require only a minimum of six units each for Field Studies and Practice Teaching or Teaching Internships, which is among the shortest practice teaching requirements in the world.

Practicum duration in the Philippines is notably shorter compared to top-performing education systems worldwide, such as those in Finland and Shanghai, China, where prospective primary and secondary teachers undergo at least six months of practicum (IBRC-World Bank, 2019). In many less-developed countries, the absence of a national policy defining practicum features—including minimum duration, supervision, and support structures—leaves individual institutions to set their own policies and standards. This lack of uniformity limits the ability of teacher training centers and schools to provide consistent high-quality practical experiences.

TEI Educator Profiles
A survey of teacher educators gathered responses from 3,257 teacher educators, representing 468 out of 1,553 TEIs nationwide (30.13% response rate). Most responses came from Region VI (397), Region I (379), and Region III (354), while the least came from Region XIII (46), MIMAROPA (48), and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR; 64). Among the respondents, 62.85% were female, and the median age was 37. Region

XII had the youngest median age (29), while CAR and the NCR reported the oldest (44). This survey was part of EDCOM II's broader National Profiling Study of TEIs and Teacher Educators, conducted in partnership with the Philippine Normal University through the Research Institute for Teacher Quality.

Initial results indicate the following:

- Regarding qualifications, 93.43% of teacher educators were Licensed Professional Teachers, with CAR achieving 100% representation. Conversely, MIMAROPA, Region IV-A, and BARMM had the highest percentages of respondents without any professional license. About 74.24% of teacher educators held at least a master's degree, with CAR (92.19%) leading, while Region XII (61.73%), Region XI (44.86%), and BARMM (42.67%) lagged behind.
- Employment data show that 65.54% of teacher educators were regular (tenured) faculty. MIMAROPA (83.33%), CAR (82.81%), and Region XIII (78.26%) had the highest rates of tenured faculty, while Region VII (52.66%), Region XII (51.02%), and BARMM (45.33%) had the lowest.
- Most respondents had teaching experience in secondary education (64.5%), followed by elementary education (30.09%) and early childhood education (13.87%).
- **Their professional experiences in basic education were largely learner–oriented, such as teaching basic education learners and developing materials for these learners, with less involvement in teacher–oriented development activities.**
- Teacher educators generally rated themselves as competent in content knowledge, pedagogy, the provision of enabling learning environments, the alignment of curricula with mandates, and the exercise of teacher agency, though institutional support for teacher agency varied.
- **Notably, CAR excelled across most indicators, while BARMM consistently faced challenges, including low percentages of licensed, graduate–degree–holding, and tenured faculty, reflecting broader disparities in regional teacher education performance.**

While the TEI and teacher educator study has yet to be finalized, the gathered data will serve as a basis for identifying research or policy interventions that can help the TEC and CHED in their mandates to support quality preservice teacher education.

Quality Assurance

According to an EDCOM II-World Bank symposium on teacher preparation held on June 5, 2024, **strong education systems implement QA mechanisms for initial teacher education to ensure that teacher candidates are well prepared.** QA helps manage training quality and balances the supply and demand for teachers, especially in the context of teacher shortages.

QA can occur at various levels, including institutional, program, course, and individual student teacher levels (World Bank, 2024). It can be conducted both internally by institutions and externally by government or affiliated agencies and encompasses the following aspects:

- Attracting and selecting candidates for ITE;
- Evaluating training content and processes, including curricula;
- Assessing suitability to the purpose of institutions and programs; and
- Ensuring that training effectively builds the skills and knowledge of student teachers.

Experiential learning opportunities, such as practicums and internships, allow aspiring teachers to develop essential classroom management skills and gain real-world experience in interacting with learners.

In terms of assuring the quality of institutions and programs, in some contexts, monitoring is sufficient, while in others, regulatory strategies are needed to enforce alignment to quality standards. Depending on enforcement capacity, institutions and programs that do not meet quality standards may be shut down, and inadequate communication efforts may discourage candidates from attending these institutions.

Since Year One, EDCOM II has emphasized the need for stringent monitoring of underperforming teacher education providers, especially given the Philippines's learning crisis and the significant impact of teacher quality on student learning. This requires heightened vigilance in quality assurance across all TEIs nationwide

In November 2024, CHED approved amendments to Section 25 of CMO 74–80 and 82, s. 2017, establishing a QA mechanism for preservice teacher education programs to address persistent issues of underperformance among TEIs. Under CMO 10, 2024, TEIs will be assessed based on their board performance (first-time takers from 2021–2023) and compliance with CHED standards, including critical quality indicators outlined in the relevant CMOs. Nonperforming TEIs may face interventions such as technical assistance to help them comply with quality standards. Persistent failure to improve performance will result in program phaseouts, barring these institutions from admitting new students into their preservice teacher education programs (see Figure 1 in the PA 16 section). This proactive QA mechanism underscores the urgent need to address the poor performance of TEIs to elevate the overall quality of teacher education in the Philippines.

Specialization-Focused Coursework
The generalist nature of preservice education has contributed to low-level content mastery among teachers in Key Stages 1 and 2, as it fails to equip them with the specialized subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills necessary to address the distinct developmental needs of younger learners (EDCOM II, 2024 , January 18) (see Figure 4). The Year One Report revealed that many DepEd teachers are underprepared to effectively deliver core subjects within the K–12 curriculum, specifically English, Filipino, math, and science. Teachers also lack critical higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, which are required to foster deeper learning in students (Year One Report).

FIGURE 4

Percentage Distribution of Grade 5 Students by Their Teacher's Specialization

Teacher of another subject	**33.7%**
Social Studies teacher	**6%**
Language teacher	**11.4%**
Mathematics teacher	**9.1%**
Generalist Grade 5 teacher	**38.8%**

> Most learners had teachers who were Generalists who were usually expected to teach in all or most of the key learning areas in the curriculum.
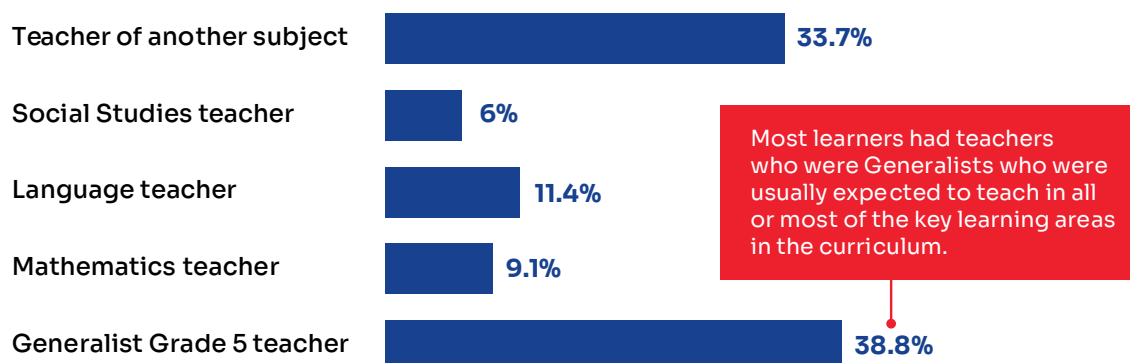
Note: Teacher of another subject means the teacher is not teaching his/her/their specialization

Source: UNICEF and SEAMEO. (2021).Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics 2019 National Report of the Philippines. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

FIGURE 5

DepEd Key Stages 1 and 2

KEY STAGE 1				KEY STAGE 2		
Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6

Pre-School

Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (CMO No. 76, s2017)

Bachelor of Elementary Education (CMO No. 74, s2017)
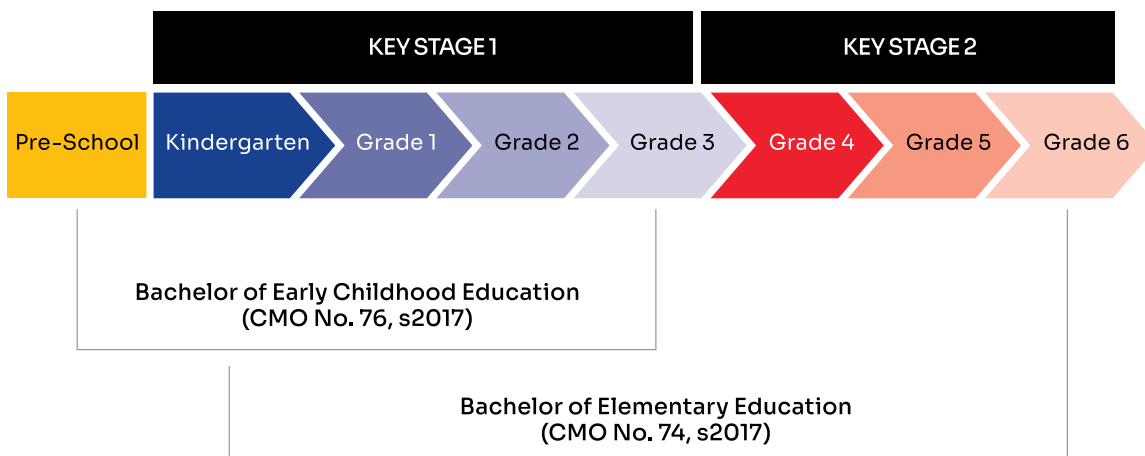
Source: EDCOM II, January 18, 2024

Key Stage 1 (Kindergarten–Grade 3) and Key Stage 2 (Grades 4–6) represent critical developmental phases in the K–12 program (DepEd, 2024c). Assessments at the end of each stage ensure that students meet the developmental and learning outcomes specific to that stage (DepEd, 2024c). However, consultations regarding the teaching pipeline for these key stages revealed that teachers are frequently assigned to grade levels that do not align with their specialization or competency (EDCOM II, 2024, January 18).

However, in the Philippines, CHED PSGs require only a minimum of six units each for Field Studies and Practice Teaching or Teaching Internships, which is among the shortest practice teaching requirements in the world.
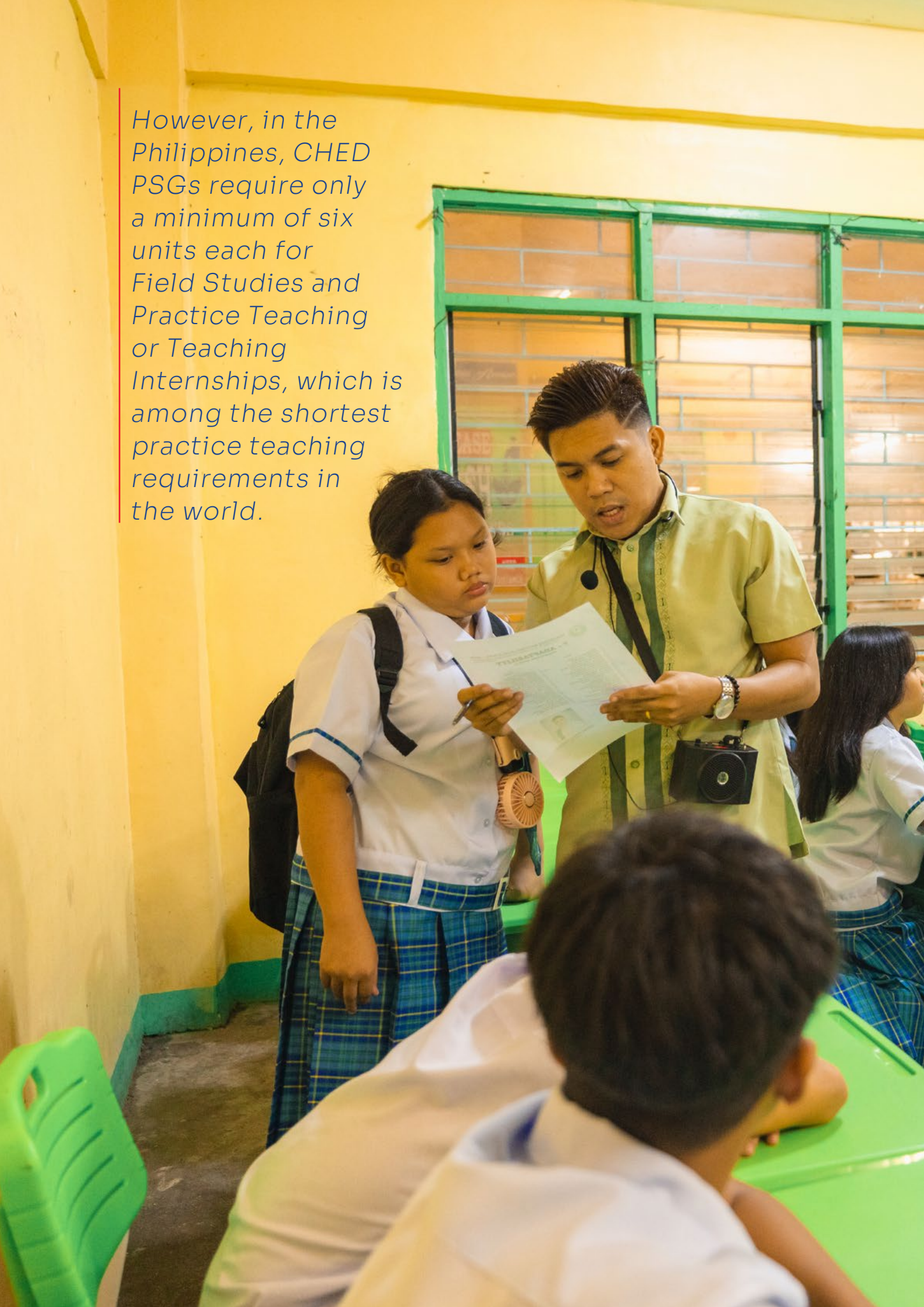
Although the BEEd program is designed to produce generalists for elementary education, BEEd graduates are often placed in Key Stage 1 classrooms, where specialized training in early childhood education, now supposedly provided by the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECEd) program, is more appropriate (EDCOM II, 2024, January 18) (See Figure 5). This mismatch is partly due to a lack of clear distinction between BEEd and BECEd graduates in both licensing and hiring processes. The BECEd PSG do not align with RA 7836, resulting in BECEd graduates being forced to take the same licensure examination as BEEd graduates, which may not adequately assess their specialized competencies. The shortage of BECEd graduates (see Figure 6) has also led to the hiring of BEEd graduates to teach in Key Stage 1, even though the pedagogical approaches required for this level differ significantly from those needed for later stages.

The current BECEd degree covers primary education from preschool to Grade 3, which has raised concerns about how effective the program is for its target students (Year One Report). However, child development experts advocate this broader scope, not just because it ensures developmental continuity and consistency, in line with practices in other countries, but also because focusing on early childhood in this way enables TEIs to concentrate on developing specializations for Grade 4 and beyond (EDCOM II, 2024, January 18).

FIGURE 6
Bachelor of Early Childhood Education
Enrollees vs. Graduates by Academic Year
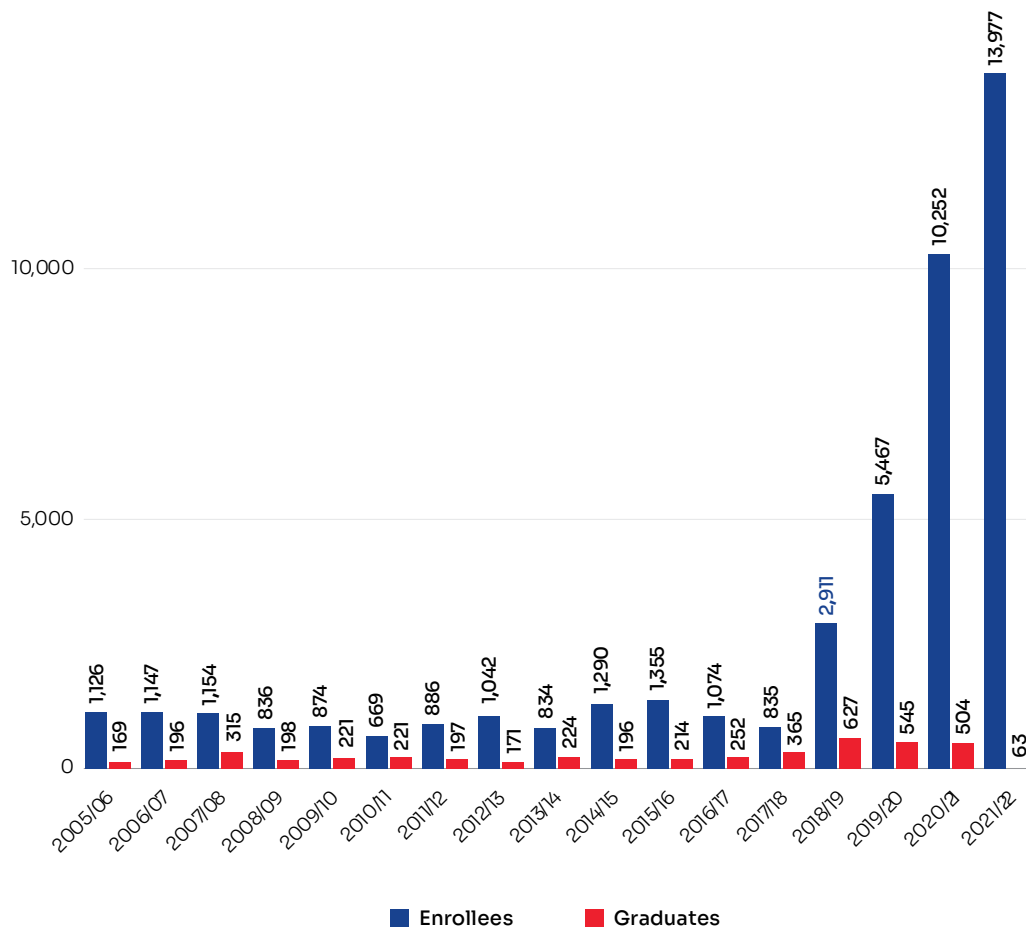
Source: EDCOM II, January 18, 2024

TABLE 4
**Policies and Standards for Undergraduate Teacher Education Curriculum
(CMO 30, s. 2004)**

Section 115. Content Course for BEEd
For the BEEd program, students have to complete 57 units of consent courses that correspond to the various learning areas in the elementary education curriculum. These courses, which are in addition to the related GE requirements, are distributed as follows:

Science	12 units
Mathematics	12 units
English	12 units
Filipino	6 units
Social Studies	6 units
Music, Arts, and Physical Education	3 units
Home Economics and Livelihood Education	3 units
Values Education	3 units

For the BEEd program, students may choose 57 units of content courses in two areas of specialization: Special Education and Pre-school Education

TABLE 5
**Policies, Standards, and Guidelines for Bachelor of Elementary Education
(BEEd) (CMO 74, s. 2017)**

	C. Major / Specialization Courses	
SCI	Teaching Science in the Elementary Grades (Biology and Chemistry)	3
SCI	Teaching Science in the Elementary Grades (Physics, Earth and Space Science)	3
SSC	Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary Grades (Philippine History and Government)	3
SSC	Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary Grades (Culture and Geography)	3
FIL	Pagtuturo ng Filipino sa Elementarya (I) - Estruktura at Gamit ng Wikang Filipino	3
FIL	Pagtuturo ng Filipino sa Elementarya (II) - Panitikan ng Pilipinas	3
MATH	Teaching Math in the Primary Grades	3
MATH	Teaching Math in the Intermediate Grades	3
TLE	Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan	3
TLE	Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan with Entrepreneurship	3
MUSIC	Teaching Music in the Elementary Grades	3
ARTS	Teaching Arts in the Elementary Grades	3
PEH	Teaching PE and Health in the Elementary Grades	3
ENG	Teaching English in the Elementary Grades (Language Arts)	3
ENG	Teaching English in the Elementary Grades Through Literature	3
MTB-MLE	Content and Pedagogy for the Mother Tongue	3
VED	Good Manners and Right Conduct (Edukasyong Pagpapakatao)	3
RES	Research in Education	3
TTL	Technology for Teaching in the Elementary Grades	3

FIGURE 7
Comparison of 2004 and 2017 Teacher Education PSGs

Policies & Standards for Undergraduate Teacher Education Curriculum (CMO No. 30, s.2004)
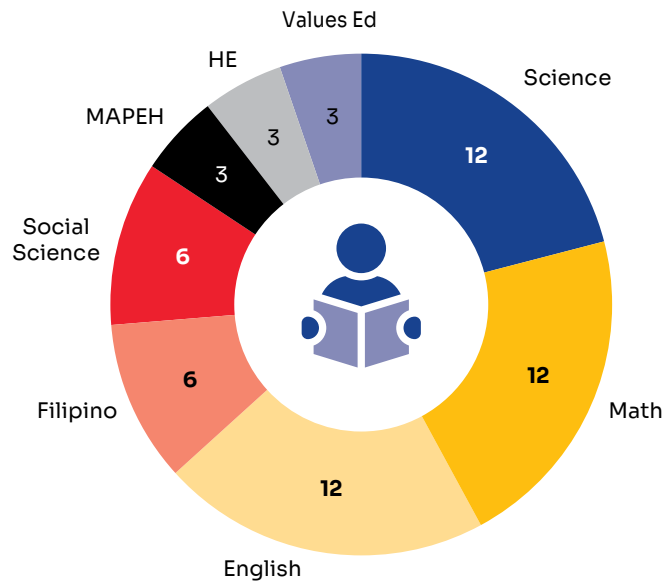
Policies, Standards, & Guidelines for Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) (CMO No. 64, s.2017)

Units were reduced in these learning areas.
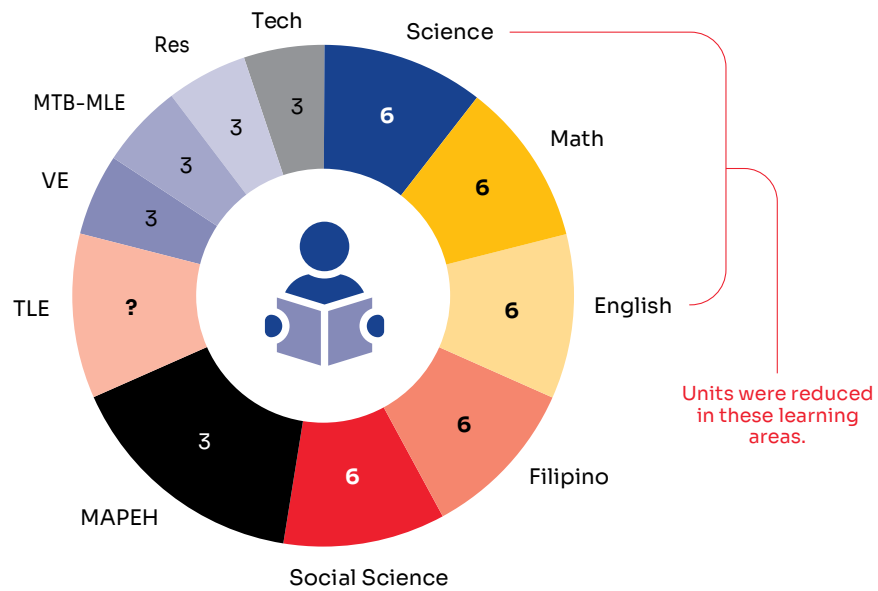
HE = Home Economics; MTB-MLE = Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education; Res = Research;
Tech = Technology; VE = Values Ed

Phasing out nonperforming TEIs or noncompliant preservice teacher education programs is consistent with the implementation of the Excellence in Teacher Education Act (Republic Act No. 11713), which we passed to improve the quality of teacher education and training in our country. Our teachers are the most important factor in education. We have to make sure that our TEIs are producing competent and qualified teachers who have the most crucial role in reversing our country's education crisis.
(Sen. Win Gatchalian, 2024)

DepEd's lack of comprehensive data on teacher supply and demand, particularly regarding specialization and distribution across the regions, hampers effective teacher allocation and deployment (EDCOM II, 2024, January 18). Schools often post generic Teacher I vacancies without specifying the specialization required, leading to mismatches in assignment. It has been observed that only a few applicants would apply if job postings required specialization in elementary education, as most teachers are trained as generalists due to the structure of the BEEd program (see Tables 4 & 5). The Magna Carta for Public School Teachers also does not mandate specialization when hiring elementary school teachers, so schools hire based on board examination rankings rather than specialization needs. However, DepEd has clarified that the CSC Omnibus Rules on Appointments and Other Human Resource Actions do not preclude the agency from indicating the specific key stage and other specialization requirements on vacancy announcements (EDCOM II, 2024, March 11b). DepEd has also reiterated its commitment to revise its teacher qualification criteria. For instance, while mother tongue may be indicated for proper notation to indicate an applicant's proficiency at the language deemed most appropriate for teaching, it nevertheless would only serve as a guide in the selection of applicants deemed most fit to the needs of the school (DepEd, 2024, February 2).

Teacher Vacancies
The shift toward specialization in Key Stage 2 has emerged as a critical recommendation to improve teaching effectiveness, as teachers who currently receive generalist training often lack the deep subject knowledge and discipline-specific pedagogies needed to address the unique learning needs of students in Grades 4–6 (EDCOM II, 2024, September 26). Key Stage 2 represents a critical juncture where students require more focused instruction in specific subject areas such as Math, Science, and English to prepare them for the increasingly complex curriculum in higher grades. While specialization is already happening to some degree in schools, such as with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses or in interventions for students with difficulty in specific subjects, consultations with teachers, school leaders, and other stakeholders point out the need for improvements to maximize its effectiveness. This may include having more options for differentiated instruction, providing more access to subject-specific resources, and exposing students to workshops, field trips, or mentorship programs related to their specialization.

FIGURE 8
Educational Background vs Subject Taught

Kinder to Grade 3 (Key Stage 1) Teachers

SUBJECT TAUGHT

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Subject	General Education	Subject UNRELATED	Subject MATCHES
Agriculture & Fishery Arts	-	-	-
Araling Panlipunan	87.88%	11.42%	0.7%
Biological Sciences	-	-	-
English	87.85%	10.31%	1.84%
Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao	87.82%	12.13%	0.04%
Filipino	87.9%	11.48%	0.62%
Music, Arts, PE & Health	87.88%	11.97%	0.16%
Mathematics	87.89%	11.2%	0.9%
Physical Sciences	88.92%	11.07%	0.01%
Science	86.41%	12.81%	0.79%
Technology & Livelihood Educ	86.94%	11.41%	1.65%
Early Childhood Educ	86.94%	10.01%	0.47%

Grades 4-6 (Key Stage 2) Teachers

SUBJECT TAUGHT

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Subject	General Education	Subject UNRELATED	Subject MATCHES
Agriculture & Fishery Arts	-	-	-
Araling Panlipunan	83.79%	15.08%	1.13%
Biological Sciences	-	-	-
English	83.27%	12.54%	4.19%
ESP	82.94%	17.01%	0.06%
Filipino	84.57%	14.42%	1%
MAPEH	83.83%	15.75%	0.42%
Mathematics	83.45%	12.89%	3.66%
Physical Sciences	79.37%	20.61%	0.02%
Science	82.55%	15.51%	1.94%
Technology & Livelihood Educ	81.25%	16.26%	2.49%

- 🟨 General Education
- 🟥 Subject UNRELATED to teacher's educational background
- 🟦 Subject MATCHES teacher's educational background

Grades 7–10 (Key Stage 3) Teachers (Junior High)

SUBJECT TAUGHT

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Subject	General Education	Subject UNRELATED	Subject MATCHES
Agriculture & Fishery	0%	50%	50%
Araling Panlipunan	0.97%	51.01%	48.02%
Biological Sciences	-	-	-
English	0.82%	18.2%	80.98%
ESP	0.9%	93.64%	5.45%
Filipino	0.99%	42.72%	56.29%
MAPEH	0.96%	67.29%	31.75%
Mathematics	0.79%	17.42%	81.8%
Physical Sciences	0.77%	98.54%	0.69%
Science	0.82%	46.22%	52.96%
Technology & Livelihood Education	0.77%	61.79%	37.43%

Grades 11–12 (Key Stage 4) Teachers (Senior High)
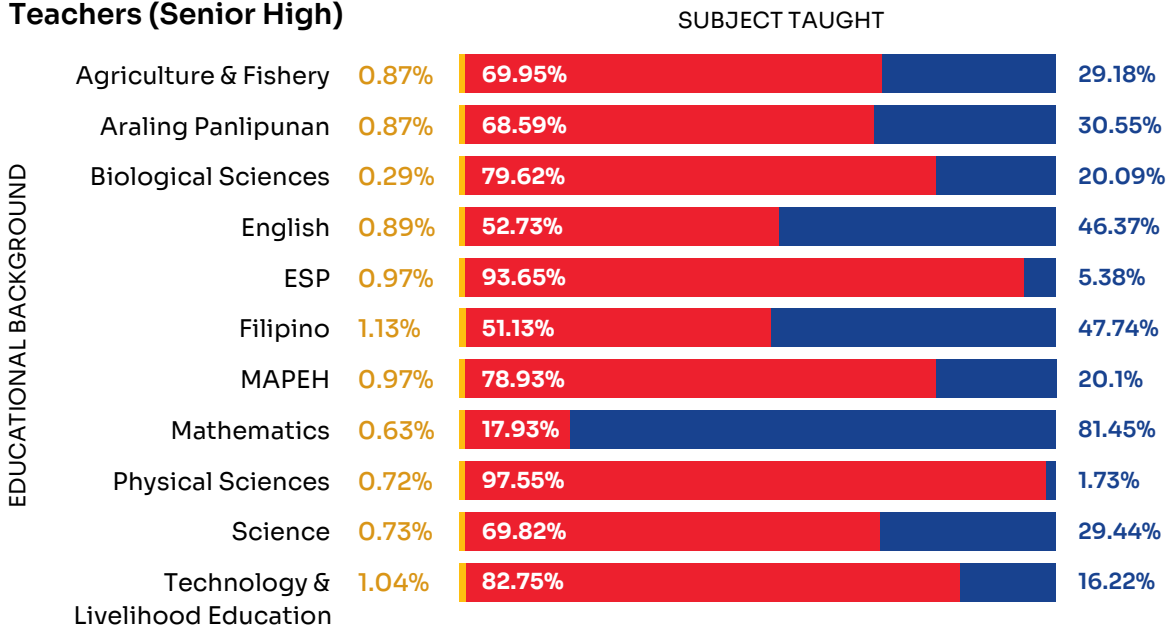
SUBJECT TAUGHT

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Subject	General Education	Subject UNRELATED	Subject MATCHES
Agriculture & Fishery	0.87%	69.95%	29.18%
Araling Panlipunan	0.87%	68.59%	30.55%
Biological Sciences	0.29%	79.62%	20.09%
English	0.89%	52.73%	46.37%
ESP	0.97%	93.65%	5.38%
Filipino	1.13%	51.13%	47.74%
MAPEH	0.97%	78.93%	20.1%
Mathematics	0.63%	17.93%	81.45%
Physical Sciences	0.72%	97.55%	1.73%
Science	0.73%	69.82%	29.44%
Technology & Livelihood Education	1.04%	82.75%	16.22%

Legend:
- General Education
- Subject UNRELATED to teacher's educational background
- Subject MATCHES teacher's educational background

Key Stage 2 represents a critical juncture where students require more focused instruction in specific subject areas such as Math, Science, and English to prepare them for the increasingly complex curriculum in higher grades. While specialization is already happening to some degree in schools, such as with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses or in interventions for students with difficulty in specific subjects, consultations with teachers, school leaders, and other stakeholders point out the need for improvements to maximize its effectiveness.

Many elementary school teachers start their careers as generalists owing to their BEEd degree (see Figures 7 & 8) but gradually develop specialized knowledge through years of teaching experience. As such, some argue that specialization need not be introduced during preservice education but should rather be considered during career progression. According to this view, specialization develops naturally over time, therefore including it in the licensure examination may be unnecessary.

Meanwhile, other advocates suggest that specialization should begin as early as preservice education, as certain subjects, especially the Arts, Sciences, and Technology, demand deep content knowledge and discipline-specific methodologies. Some TEIs, such as the University of the Philippines and the Philippine Normal University, have already revised their programs to incorporate specialization, emphasizing that adequately preparing teachers to handle the rigorous academic demands of these subjects ultimately improve educational outcomes.

The Philippine teacher education system has traditionally trained elementary teachers to be generalists, with limited opportunities for specialization. **Specialization at Key Stage 2 is now being proposed as a means to improve teaching effectiveness and deepen teachers' subject matter expertise. Assigning teachers to subjects based on their comparative advantage has been shown to improve student learning outcomes** (Cohen et al., 2018, as cited in EDCOM II, 2024, September 26b). Moreover, teaching the same subject repeatedly can accelerate the development of expertise and boost teachers' confidence in the subject matter (Brobst & Markworth, 2019, as cited in EDCOM II, 2024, September 26b).

However, the TEC needs to study and issue clear guidelines, including concentration specializations for Key Stage 2 (EDCOM II, 2024, September 26). This addresses the current oversupply of generalist teachers, making it difficult to fulfill the demand for Key Stage 2 specialized teachers. Additionally, achieving a balanced distribution of specialization within schools can be challenging, as this depends on each school's focus, mission, and capacity. For instance, specialization may be more difficult to implement in smaller schools due to limited resources.

There is a need for more than supply-side discussions about specialization. They must be matched with on-the-ground practices in teacher hiring and loading subjects for them to work. This requires the TEC, the Bureau of Human Resources and Organizational Development (BHROD), and NEAP to work closely, have access to reliable data, monitor the implementation of programs, and do interventions as needed.

Recommendations

Extend and structure practicum duration. Practicum periods should be lengthened to provide teacher trainees with meaningful teaching experiences. These experiences must go beyond mere observation and include active classroom management and lesson implementation. Additionally, it is important to distinguish between introductory field experiences and extended teaching practice. Introductory experiences should focus on familiarizing trainees with the school environment, while extended teaching practice should emphasize progressively increasing responsibilities to prepare trainees for real-world classroom challenges (IBRD-World Bank, 2019; World Bank, 2024).

Embed practicum in curriculum and materials. Ensure that practicum experiences align closely with the curriculum by incorporating teaching aids and instructional resources directly into classroom activities, bridging theory with practice, and ensuring coherence between coursework and teaching contexts already happens in the beginning of initial teacher education (IBRD-World Bank, 2019; World Bank, 2024).

Mitigate supervision gaps in resource-constrained schools by developing scalable models of support, such as peer mentoring among trainees, the grouping of trainees in varied school settings, and digital tools for remote supervision and feedback. To ensure the effectiveness of Joint CHED-DepEd Memorandum Order No. 1, s. 2021, which outlines the policies and guidelines on the deployment of preservice teachers for field study and teaching internship under RA 7722 and RA 9155, the implementation of field study courses and teaching internships must be monitored and evaluated. To facilitate this, DepEd regional memoranda provide a monitoring tool to gather necessary data in developing evidence-based and research-based policies and strengthening teaching internships at the regional level. DepEd, CHED Regional Offices, and SDOs share their monitoring and evaluation results.

Recommendations for TEI Educators
Continue a closer and more rigorous monitoring of nonperforming TEIs, considering the recommendation in the Higher Education chapter on harmonizing approaches among QA stakeholders to enhance the credibility and impact of accreditation processes (see the Higher Education discussion on page 122).

Conduct a comprehensive teacher supply and demand study, with a focus on current teacher distribution, areas of specialization, skills gaps, and professional development needs. This study should account for projected demand based on enrollment trends, expected retirements, and other educational requirements across all regions and levels. By informing curriculum improvement and resource allocation, this study would help align preservice education with the specific needs of various grade levels and subjects, particularly in critical areas such as STEM, early childhood, and special education.

> *It's hard to learn theoretical ideas in isolation, try to remember them for two years until you get to student teaching, and then all of sudden be put in a situation where you're supposed to implement something you've never seen in practice. That doesn't work. That's the old model of teacher education.*
> *(Darling-Hammond, 2001)*

Accurate and timely data, which may be provided by a well-functioning information system, would support DepEd and CHED in effectively managing teacher placements, identifying oversupply or scarcity in specific areas, and refine TEI programs to match future workforce demands.

High-performing TEIs with established expertise in specialization should mentor other TEIs that lack the capacity to adequately prepare preservice teachers for specialized roles. This would leverage the strengths of true COEs to ensure that preservice teachers across all institutions gain the subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills essential for specialized teaching roles.

Address critical supply-side constraints among teachers specializing in STEM, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, and Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health. There is a need to review the current preservice teacher education program and issues on alignment with DepEd priorities and needs. Developing alternative pathways to the BLEPT and career progression framework, including certification and professional development, is a must (Teacher Ed, 2024) .

High-performing TEIs with specialization expertise should mentor other TEIs to raise training standards, fulfilling the role of true COEs (see recommendations under Priority Area 16 on page 184). This collaboration would help ensure that preservice teachers gain stronger subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills, preparing them for specialized teaching roles. Based on studies, there is a need to be proactive in ensuring quality provision in specific regions.

For instance, the BLEPT elementary and secondary passing rates are lowest in Mindanao, with an average of 20%–22% point difference from NCR passing rates (PBEd, 2023). BARMM maintains the lowest overall passing rates among Mindanao regions, with an overall passing rate of 15.8% for elementary and 12.6% for secondary passers. A negative relationship exists between the BLEPT passing rate and poverty incidence rate (Yambot & Cambel, 2020), as evidenced by Mindanao's high poverty incidence percentage and low passing rates.

Increased funding, stronger TEI monitoring and supervision, and investment in teacher education can bridge this gap, ensuring that all regions will have access to quality education programs, thereby improving the overall performance of teachers nationwide.

Priority Area 18: In-Service Training and Development, Including Teacher Welfare

The Magna Carta for Public School Teachers or RA 4670, enacted in 1966, sought to protect the welfare of teachers by establishing fair working conditions, including limitations on their teaching hours. RA 4670 states that public school teachers are required to render a maximum of 6 hours of actual classroom teaching per day, allowing them sufficient time for lesson plan preparation and other incidental duties without exceeding their regular work hours. However, when necessary, teachers may be asked to teach for up to eight hours, with compensation for any teaching overload.

Despite protective measures, the workload of public school teachers has significantly expanded beyond classroom duties. The DepEd's 2018 Teacher Workload Balance Study indicates that, in addition to teaching, teachers handle about 50 administrative and ancillary tasks, which are often more suited for administrative staff (DepEd, 2024a; EDCOM II, 2024).

These numerous tasks, compounded by inadequate nonteaching staff in schools, have placed significant strain on teachers, severely affecting their focus and performance and reducing the time they can devote to lesson planning, student engagement, and, most importantly, classroom instruction. Many teachers report frequently exceeding the required eight-hour workday just to complete their responsibilities (EDCOM II, 2024). The burden of these overwhelming tasks has led to widespread dissatisfaction and has become a major point of concern for educators and stakeholders.

Issue 1: Policies that are not implementable because of realities on the ground and lack of funding

The chronic shortage of nonteaching personnel in many public schools remains a major obstacle to effectively reducing the administrative burden on teachers (EDCOM II, 2024, February 8). Teachers have welcomed the relief promised by the directive of DO 2, s. 2024, which mandates the immediate removal of administrative tasks for public school teachers, but they also have expressed concerns about their schools' capacity to implement this change without sufficient suport staff. Currently, there is an uneven distribution of nonteaching personnel across schools; some large city schools have more administrative staff while many small provincial schools are severely understaffed or have none at all. This imbalance makes it difficult for many schools to comply with the new directive to transfer administrative tasks away from teachers.

TABLE 6
Inventory of AO II and Project Development Officer I Positions

Inventory of Non–Teaching Personnel		
Fiscal Year	AO II	PDO I
2020	4,973	0
2021	4,840	0
2022	5,000	0
2023	3,500	1,500
2024	5,000	0
SHS	1,196	0
Prior FY 2020 Creation	10	0
Total	24,519	1,500

Note. A total of 24,519 AO II items have been created for schools. DepEd requires 20,680 items to ensure at least one AO II per school.
Source: DepEd, January 11, 2025

Since 2020, DepEd has allocated AO II personnel in tranches, totaling 24,519 as of 2024. This means that enough items have been created for a 1:1 ratio of AOs to schools. Research by IDinsight has shown, however, that this remains generally insufficient, especially for large schools with more than 500 students (2024). Findings from IDinsight reveal that while administrative officers (AOs) have provided some relief, two out of three teachers still report working more than 40 hours per week, mostly due to ancillary tasks (2024). The same study also surfaced how teachers have also expressed the need for project development officers for program coordination responsibilities.

Administrative personnel are responsible for a wide range of essential tasks at schools, including managing records and performing clerical functions. However, one of the most burdensome issues teachers continue to face is the repetitive submission of paperwork, particularly for systems such as the Learner Information System and the Enhanced Basic Education Information System (EDCOM II, 2024, February 8). Teachers are often required to provide the same data multiple times to various DepEd offices, even though the information has already been submitted. This duplication not only disrupts instructional time but also adds unnecessary stress to teachers, as they are frequently pulled away from their classrooms to complete these redundant tasks.

Concerns were also raised about how the current shortage of administrative personnel would just shift the increased workload onto school principals or onto a single administrative personnel already struggling to manage tasks for one school (EDCOM II, 2024, February 8). Under DO 2, s.2004, this burden may simply grow with the instruction to form a cluster of three schools for those with limited personnel (EDCOM II, 2024, February 8; DepEd, 2024a). Like teachers, many administrative staff are dissatisfied with their expanding workload, with some even considering resignation as they are now expected to handle the administrative load of multiple schools (EDCOM II, 2024, February 8). Moreover, results of Career Progression TWG consultations revealed that nonteaching personnel need higher qualifications and capacity building to be able to prepare the more technical reports that are currently being done by teachers.

The DBM has committed to funding 5,000 new AO positions annually, starting in 2020, under the Miscellaneous Personnel Benefit Fund (EDCOM II, 2024, February 8). Although the DBM has confirmed the availability of Php 300 million for initial funding, this was deemed insufficient, with estimates suggesting the need for an additional PHP 817 million to cover the budget shortfall (EDCOM II, 2024, March 11b). After a comprehensive review, DepEd adjusted its request to Php 6.8 billion for the 2025–2026 school year to fund 20,000 AO positions, as the previous allocation was inadequate to address the actual backlog in public schools (EDCOM II, 2024, April 30a).

Commitments may have been made for new AO positions, but there have been no allocations made for project development officer (PDO) positions. While AOs handle day-to-day operational tasks, PDOs are needed to manage projects and initiatives that extend beyond regular administrative duties, such as development programs, community engagement, and external partnerships. Without these roles, the administrative burden of overseeing both internal operations and external projects, which is anticipated to continue over the next five years, falls on a small number of staff (EDCOM II, 2024, April 30a). Moreover, some schools under the clustering model would need to share administrative personnel across three schools, further straining the existing workforce. There are also outlier schools that may not be clustered due to distance and other geographic factors (EDCOM II, 2024, February 8; 2024, April 30a).

The IDinsight study likewise highlights how. many tasks currently handled by teachers. Many tasks currently handled by teachers fall outside the job description of AO IIs, indicating that deploying more AO IIs alone will have minimal impact on reducing school-related workload. Despite the DBM's allocation of new AO positions under the Miscellaneous Personnel Benefit Fund, unfilled positions remain a significant concern (EDCOM II, 2024, February 8; 2024, April 30). Historically, many positions were left unfilled due to the suspension of hiring under a previous Rationalization Plan, which left roles tagged as coterminous-to-the-incumbent unaddressed. As of June 2024, 2,559 out of 5,821 coterminous-to-the-incumbent positions remained unfilled (EDCOM II, 2024, June 18a). Some of these positions, including janitorial, maintenance, and security services, were recommended for fulfillment through job order contracts if elimination was not feasible (EDCOM II, 2024, April 30a). In some cases, school divisions received these positions, but recruitment stalled due to local-level delays in notification and processing (EDCOM II, 2024, February 8). These delays underscore the need to streamline and digitize hiring systems to address staffing gaps more efficiently.

At present, DepEd lacks a centralized system to manage the hiring process, resulting in fragmented and incomplete data on school staffing, vacancies, and budget allocations. This lack of comprehensive and timely information makes it difficult to accurately assess the full scope of staffing issues.

The lack of coordination among DepEd, the DBM, and the CSC complicates the hiring process, resulting in a fragmented system with multiple steps and agencies, creating bottlenecks at various stages. For instance, schools must obtain a Notice of Organization, Staffing, and Compensation Action from regional DBM offices before recruitment can begin, adding an extra step to filling positions (EDCOM II, 2024, February 8). Inefficiencies in paperwork and approvals further slow the process. Notifications from the Human Resource Management Office, which oversees job postings, applicant assessments, and final appointments requiring CSC attestation, involve redundant steps that frequently delay the onboarding of new nonteaching staff.

DBM representatives suggest the hiring process could take about a week, but delays at DepEd and CSC often extend it to 6 months or more for a single position (EDCOM II, 2024, February 8). The slow hiring pace has drawn criticism, calling the 60-day deadline for transferring administrative tasks unrealistic.

Findings from TWG consultations underscore the need to clean and rationalize DepEd's database of plantilla positions, some of which have not been updated since the pre-EDCOM I era. DepEd's efforts to address these findings have resulted in savings of Php 590,489,538.00, demonstrating the value of continued housekeeping practices.

A Teacher Forms Survey conducted in August 2024 revealed that 42 out of 124 respondents spent 4–8 hours per week just to fill in or create forms.

There is also a need to reduce and improve the efficiency of school forms required from teachers. A Teacher Forms Survey conducted in August 2024 revealed that 42 out of 124 respondents spent 4–8 hours per week just to fill in or create forms. Respondents identified various forms, such as school records and daily lesson logs, but had different opinions on which were particularly tedious and time-consuming. These findings highlight the need for DepEd to review and rationalize these requirements and leverage technology to reduce teachers' administrative workload, allowing them to focus more on lesson preparation (Rodrigo & Talandron-Felipe, 2024).

Recommendations

Fast–track the implementation of a system to centralize data collection and minimize the need for repetitive paperwork submissions. Expanding the use of electronic forms such as eSF7, which automates tasks such as teaching load calculations, will further streamline processes, as demonstrated by the successful implementation in Tarlac's Learning Management System (EDCOM II, 2024, February 8).

Update and modernize the 1997 DBM Organization and Staffing Standards and DepEd DO 52, s. 2015. These updates should relieve teachers of nonteaching responsibilities, enabling them to focus fully on teaching, while addressing the growing complexity of school operations. The updated framework should emphasize the need for key nonteaching roles, such as counselors, librarians, ICT coordinators, and registrars, which are crucial for students' holistic development. A thorough review of support programs should identify funds that can be redirected toward hiring essential support staff.

Issue 2: Limited opportunities for career advancement force teachers into administrative roles.

A major question for governments is how to transform teaching into an attractive career choice. Countries worldwide are grappling with poor working conditions and dwindling retention rates, significantly impacting the teaching profession (Tournier et al., 2019). In this context, teacher career reforms have been identified as a potentially powerful lever. Many governments actively seek ways to diversify teacher career structures and widen career advancement opportunities to attract and retain high-performing teachers.

In the Philippines, teacher promotions occur at an alarmingly slow rate, with data indicating that it takes an average of 15 years to progress from Teacher I to Teacher III (EDCOM II, 2024, April 6) (see Tables 7 & 8). This sluggish advancement is exacerbated by the fact that most new hires are assigned as Teacher I despite their potential to begin their careers at more advanced levels based on their competencies or experience. **Before the release of DO 20, s. 2024, hiring policies in DepEd allowed original appointments for Teacher II and Master Teacher positions only in senior high school (SHS). In elementary and junior high schools, where most new hires were assigned, teachers began at Teacher I, slowing career progression.** DO 20, s. 2024 introduced changes permitting original appointments for Teacher II and Master Teacher at these levels, aiming to accelerate career growth.

TABLE 7
Teachers' Position by Years of Service

Position	Less than 1 Year	1–5 Years	5–10 Years	11–20 Years	21–30 Years	31 Years and Above
T I	0.03% 197	13.99% 97033	15.17% 105230	7.34% 50908	1.61% 1179	0.35% 2399
T II	0.01% 38	2.52% 17472	5.85% 40581	5.10% 35359	2.46% 17035	0.90% 6237
T III	0.001% 7	0.85% 5877	8.71% 60437	14.20% 98476	7.44% 51582	2.60% 18019
MT I	0.0007% 5	0.0558% 387	0.3111% 2158	1.9259% 13358	1.9328% 13406	0.98% 6771
MT II		0.0169% 117	0.0918% 637	0.4787% 3320	0.8054% 5586	0.58% 4039
MT III		0.0016% 11	0.0014% 10	0.0102% 71	0.0254% 176	0.0189% 131
MT IV				0.0003% 8		0.0001% 1

Source: DepEd, June 5, 2024

TABLE 8
Teachers' Position by Age

Position	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60 and above
T I	9.226% 66896	16.9% 122887	2.83% 20517	8.56% 62095	0.504% 3654
T II	1.490% 10806	5.846% 42386	3.247% 23543	5.071% 36766	0.865% 6272
T III	1.133% 8215	9.489% 72138	8.540% 61923	12.087% 87641	2.014% 14604
MT I	0.026% 185	0.679% 4926	2.225% 16130	1.818% 13181	0.532% 3860
MT II	0.005% 7	0.135% 981	1.044% 7570	0.554% 4016	0.283% 2049
MT III	0.0041% 3	0.003% 2	0.034% 246	0.015% 108	0.007% 51
MT IV			0.00014% 1	0.00028% 2	

Source: DepEd, June 5, 2024

Career progression in teaching should encompass both positional advancements (e.g., from Teacher I to Teacher III) and development through career stages (e.g., from beginner to proficient levels). Professional development, led by NEAP, supports this growth. However, teachers at higher proficiency levels face a dilemma: remain in teaching or move into administrative roles. Limited career advancement opportunities push many teachers toward administrative roles for better pay, as classroom-based promotions are scarce. Master Teacher roles are few, and becoming a school head is the only significant promotion path, requiring extensive training and added responsibilities. Consequently, few teachers achieve distinguished statuses or principal roles, leaving many stuck at lower levels unless they leave teaching. This hinders the development of instructional expertise and contributes to a shortage of experienced classroom educators.

Significant progress has been made through DO No. 20, s. 2024, and the Career Progression System IRR under EO No. 174, s. 2022, which established the Expanded Career Progression System for Public School Teachers signed in July 2024. By creating new teaching positions and career pathways (see Table 9), EO 174 allows educators to grow within the classroom without being forced into administrative roles, thus retaining talented teachers where they are most needed (EDCOM II, 2024). Furthermore, under Senate Bill No. 2827, there is a proposal that enables teachers to pursue career progression and professional growth through one of three designated strands or career lines: Teaching, School Administration, and Supervision. The HB and SB share the Teaching and School Admin career lines, while the SB is the only one proposing for the Supervisory career line.

In addition to the IRR, DepEd submitted revised Qualification Standards for Teaching and School Administration Positions to the CSC (Public Hearing of the Senate Subcommittee on Career Progression System for Public School Teachers last October 22, 2024). These competency-based standards replace position-based requirements, enabling external applicants to qualify for higher teaching positions if they meet the necessary qualifications.

TABLE 9
Positions for Classroom Teaching and School Administration Career Lines

CT Career Line	SA Career Line	SG Level
Master Teacher V	School Principal IV	22
Master Teacher IV	School Principal III	21
Master Teacher III	School Principal II	20
Master Teacher II	School Principal I	19
Master Teacher I		18
Teacher VII		17
Teacher VI		16
Teacher V		15
Teacher IV		14
Teacher III		13
Teacher II		12
Teacher I		11

Source: DBM et al., 2022a

Finally, the House of Representatives approved the Career Progression for Public School Teachers Act on the Third Reading on September 5, 2024. At the Senate, the TWG concluded its meetings on November 28, 2024, advancing the legislative process.

Recommendations

Releasing the IRR of EO 174 is a significant step toward establishing a supportive and rewarding career framework for public school teachers. However, this initiative must be institutionalized through legislation to fully achieve its goals of expanding career progression, promoting professional growth, and recognizing excellence in teaching, leadership, and administration.

All the legislative initiatives of the EDCOM II commissioners include the following key recommendations:

- **Institutionalize career progression for public school teachers**.
  - Expand career opportunities by creating new teaching positions (Teacher IV–VII and Master Teacher V), ensuring alignment in salaries, benefits, and privileges across different career lines.
  - Establish clear and rationalized career paths, enabling teachers to pursue alternative career trajectories after reaching Master Teacher I.
- **Harmonize qualification standards and assessments.**
  - Integrate standards-based assessments to ensure quality in career progression.
  - Emphasize continuous professional development and support, including targeted programs for teachers who do not meet performance standards, fostering their growth and retention.

- **Promote merit–based and flexible career progression.**
  - ▫ Implement promotion and reclassification systems based on merit and competency, allowing teachers to advance at their own pace through faster reclassification processes.
  - ▫ Ensure that no teacher retires at the entry-level position by creating robust pathways for advancement in teaching and administrative roles.

These measures aim to attract, retain, and reward highly competent educators by institutionalizing career progression and aligning it with quality teaching standards. Thus, they aim to strengthen the quality of education in the Philippines.

With limited opportunities for career advancement, many teachers feel compelled to move into administrative roles to secure higher pay rather than progressing through classroom-based positions

Issue 3: NEAP's lack of strategic framework and top–down approaches for continuing professional development programs impede continuous professional development of teachers.

The new career progression system emphasizes teachers' professional development and continuous learning through standards of competencies and performance aligned with the PQF and other international standards (EO 174, s. 2022). EO 174 also harmonizes the roles of DepEd, the CSC, the DBM, and the PRC in implementing this new system, including the establishment of a comprehensive information system that collects and tracks data on teacher qualifications.

RA 11713 institutionalized NEAP to provide high–quality in–service training programs for teachers and school leaders. First established in 1985 as the National Education Learning Center, NEAP has undergone several reforms aimed at strengthening the delivery of teacher education (DepEd, 2024). In 2019, DepEd issued DO 11, s. 2019, to create a more responsive system that caters to teachers' diverse needs and establish clear linkages between teacher education and career progression (Prudente et al., 2024). The order also sought to improve the quality and effectiveness of school–based learning action cells (LACs), which were introduced under DO 35, s. 2016, following the implementation of the K–12 curriculum (Prudente et al., 2024). LACs are an important vehicle for improving teachers' competence through communities of collaborative learning and reflective practice, as the majority of teacher training occurs at the school level (Prudente et al., 2024; World Bank, 2016, as cited in Year One Report).

Another key framework guiding the professional development system is the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), which outlines seven domains of teacher practice, further defined through 37 strands and proficiency indicators. The PPST serves as the foundation for evaluating teacher performance through the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS), originally established in 2015 by DepEd and later amended by DO 8, s. 2023, to integrate

professional development into performance evaluations. By aligning teacher performance with all 37 strands of the PPST, RPMS data can help identify individual learning needs and guide the creation of targeted training interventions (DepEd, 2023, as cited in EDCOM II, 2024, July 11).

While these reforms laid a strong foundation for enhancing teachers' continuous professional development, the Year One Report highlighted the need for an urgent review of the weaknesses that continue to impact teacher education. Access to high-quality training remained uneven across regions, with many teachers raising concerns about redundancy and relevance, as most training programs did not fully address their specific needs or subject specializations (EDCOM II, 2024).

NEAP's transformation into an effective professional development institution has been stalled by a lack of strategic framework, clear priorities, and monitoring and evaluation (EDCOM II, 2024, August 2). Although the transformation was mandated in 2019 under DO 11, s. 2019, and an interim organizational structure was adopted in 2020, change management at NEAP only began in 2023. This effort includes the adoption of a three-year roadmap, the rationalization of office and job functions, and the upskilling of existing workforce.

The review of preservice programs for Key Stages 1 and 2 has clearly illustrated the need for in-service training tailored to the unique requirements of educating younger children, which differ significantly from the specialized needs of teaching in higher grade levels (EDCOM II, 2024, January 18) (see Figure 9). In-service training is also more costly than preservice education, and there are not enough training providers due to the lengthy PRC process of accrediting continuing professional development (CPD) programs . According to RA 10912, or the CPD Act of 2016, teachers must complete 15 CPD credit units annually to renew their teaching license. As the primary agency responsible for CPD, NEAP is tasked with resolving these challenges. While NEAP has reached out to the PRC to streamline the process and reduce bureaucratic delays in CPD accreditation, no final outcome has been reported (EDCOM II, 2024, January 18).

FIGURE 9
Percentage Distribution of Grade 5 Students by Their Teacher's Training
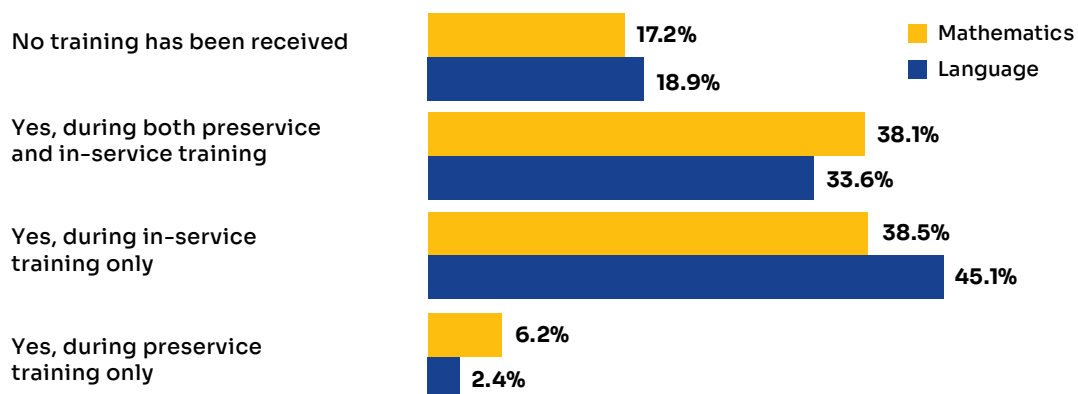
Source: UNICEF and SEAMEO. (2021).Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics 2019 National Report of the Philippines. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

EDCOM II recommended the establishment of a Professional Development Information System (PDIS) to profile and track the continuing education of teachers and to determine specific needs at every stage of their career (EDCOM II, 2024). The PDIS will serve as a powerful instrument to identify, design, and plan relevant and targeted in-service trainings that align with career progression, make these training sessions accessible to all, and rapidly assess the impact of these interventions on a national scale. EDCOM II also proposed a review of Human Resource Development Fund allocation and utilization to assist NEAP in developing a functional PDIS. However, based on several meetings between EDCOM II and NEAP in 2024, there has been little progress in developing the PDIS and an unclear timeline for its completion and implementation. NEAP also has yet to properly utilize new eSF7 data for addressing issues in teacher development, such as subject-level mismatch among graduates.

Top-down approaches still predominate many aspects of CPD, even as bottom-up approaches such as LACs have proven effective in enhancing both subject-specific knowledge and instructional practices (Prudente et al., 2024). Teachers are motivated to participate in in-service training and CPD programs when activities provide content and methodologies that address the practical needs of classrooms (Prudente et al., 2024). Among these, the communal aspect of CPD programs, as demonstrated by LACs, plays a uniquely vital role by offering teachers a support system and collaborative space to share challenges, co-construct knowledge, and gain inspiration from peers. Despite their essential role, LACs face logistical challenges, such as scheduling variations, resource limitations, and a lack of standardized evaluation tools, which contribute to the uneven adoption of LACs across schools (Vega, 2020, as cited in Prudente et al., 2024). In addition, the consistent participation of teachers in LACs is also hindered by teachers' heavy academic workload (Verbo, 2020, as cited in Prudente et al., 2024).

Recommendations

Accelerate a centralized human resource information system (HRIS) platform that includes eSF7 data, enabling the real-time monitoring of teacher profiles and professional development needs. A centralized HRIS and PDIS platform should consolidate demographic and professional data for a comprehensive view of the teaching workforce, enabling targeted CPD interventions based on regional and individual needs. It would identify CPD disparities across regions, address barriers in underserved areas, and guide resource allocation and program planning. The platform can also assist in projecting plantilla positions under the Career Progression System. Transitioning eSF7 to an online, integrated system would improve data accessibility, automate collection, and streamline reporting for DepEd, NEAP, and division offices.

As NEAP's transformation is long overdue, it must begin implementing in-service programs that genuinely support and nurture teachers. NEAP should develop more mandatory professional development programs that emphasize collaborative learning (through LAC sessions), mentoring, and blended learning approaches. It also needs to align these professional development programs with career progression and ensure that professional development is integral to the promotion process.

Since the approval of NEAP's structure as an attached agency remains pending with the DBM, NEAP should explore alternative strategies to move forward with its transformation. Clear communication with the DBM on expected timelines for structure approval should be built.

NEAP should also focus on finalizing its professional development framework and setting clear timelines for its implementation. This framework should spell out training priorities for teaching and teaching-related personnel. In parallel, progress on the PDIS must continue, and interim solutions should be in place to prioritize professional development needs until the system is fully operational. NEAP must plan to integrate eSF7 data into its decision-making process, leveraging insights from the data to tailor teacher development programs, such as addressing subject or level mismatches. Moreover, NEAP should monitor and evaluate training outcomes and see whether the strategy on LACs in the MATATAG curriculum has worked.

Issue 4: Despite its criticality in bringing about school-level reforms, little attention is placed in recruiting, appointing, and fully supporting competent school heads and principals.

FIGURE 10
SCHOOL HEADS IN THE DEPED SYSTEMS, SY 2023–2024
Source: Source: Basic Education Information System End Of School Year Data for SY 2023 - 2024

45,199 DepEd Schools

WITH Principal
20,381 schools
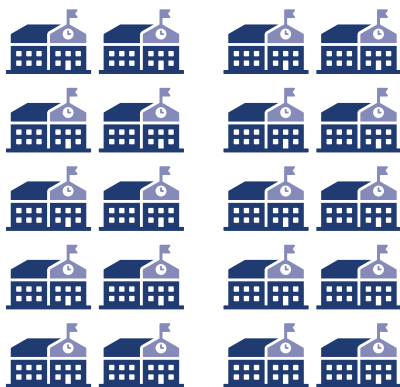
WITHOUT Principal
24,916 schools

Head Teacher only
13,332

TIC only
8,916

OIC only
2,337

Undefined
193

(Retrieved in July 2024)

School Head Position and Allocation
DO 77, s. 2010, defines school heads as individuals occupying the plantilla positions of School Principal (I–IV) and Head Teacher (I–VI). The policy states that a school principal plantilla item is to be assigned to every complete school with at least nine teachers and every cluster of three schools with at least nine teachers. Additionally, Head Teacher plantilla positions are to be provided to schools with at least six teachers and every cluster of three schools with at least six teachers. Despite these guidelines, DepEd's Basic Education Information System End Of School Year Data for SY 2023–2024 shows that only 20,283 out of 45,199 public schools (45%) have a school principal as school head (see Figure 10).

EDCOM II and IDinsight collaborated to analyze DepEd databases containing information on school head plantilla positions and teacher data to assess policy compliance within the DepEd system. Despite data inconsistencies due to varying collection times, our analysis revealed significant strategic deployment issues. Notably, there was low alignment and compliance with the policy on principal and head teacher allocations. Of the 20,381 public schools with school principals, only 18,744 had the corresponding plantilla item (see Table 10). Approximately 1,381 schools with principal plantilla positions were instead led by head teachers, teachers in charge (TICs), or officers in charge (OICs), underscoring challenges in adhering to policy guidelines.

There were also widespread inconsistencies in the allocation of school heads, with about 12,057 schools with incorrect school head items. This issue was especially prevalent among elementary schools, with 8,533 pure elementary schools and 639 schools offering both elementary and junior high levels failing to comply with DepEd policies.

Furthermore, only 16,437 of the 24,481 schools eligible for a principal had one assigned (see Table 11), a problem highlighted during an EDCOM II site visit to Naic, Cavite.

At Ciudad Nuevo de Naic National High School, which had 34 teachers and 3,324 students, a significant misalignment in leadership roles was observed. The school was managed by an assistant school principal whose plantilla item was officially allocated to a nearby integrated high school.

Although eligible for a school principal position, Ciudad Nuevo de Naic only had a head teacher position allocated to it. According to DO 19, s. 2016, assistant school principals are designated for large SHSs (those with 841–1,240 students) with an existing school principal plantilla position. This policy, along with DO 77, s. 2010, was not adhered to in Ciudad Nuevo de Naic, highlighting the flaws in the current school head allocation and deployment system.

TABLE 10
Listed Plantilla Position vs. School Head Designation, All Schools

PLANTILLA POSITION	SCHOOL HEAD DESIGNATION					TOTAL
	Principal	Head Teacher	Teacher in Charge	Officer in Charge	Undefined	
None	1,169	1,279	8,153	1,235	161	11,997
Head Teacher	468	11,560	417	600	15	13,060
Principal	15,873	300	313	411	10	16,907
Both Head Teacher and Principal	2,871	193	33	131	7	3,235
Total	20,381	13,332	8,916	2,377	193	45,199

* Highlighted in red are incorrectly deployed school heads based on policy.

* Data for this analysis were sourced from three different datasets (Notice to Proceed, Basic Education Information System, and Government Manpower Information System) because there is no centralized data system that encompasses all school head plantilla items, such as school principals, school heads, TICs, and OICs, along with their respective school IDs. Additionally, plantilla items for elementary school and SHS in the Notice to Proceed dataset have been allocated to the SDOs to provide flexibility. This means that the SDOs have the discretion to deploy the principal plantilla items.

Sa 45,198 DepEd schools...ang meron lang principal, is only 20,718...kulang na kulang tayo sa principals...are you not panicking?
-Rep. Roman Romulo, 2024

TABLE 11
Listed Plantilla Position vs. School Head Designation,
Schools with Nine or More Teachers

PLANTILLA POSITION	SCHOOL HEAD DESIGNATION					TOTAL
	Principal	Head Teacher	Teacher in Charge	Officer in Charge	Undefined	
None	485	357	1,414	441	103	2,800
Head Teacher	346	4,157	147	286	6	4,942
Principal	12,750	222	209	341	7	13,529
Both Head Teacher and Principal	2,856	185	33	129	7	3,210
Total	16,437	4,921	1,803	1,197	123	24,481

* Highlighted in red are incorrectly deployed School Heads based on policy.

* Locally funded teachers are excluded from the policy governing the allocation of school head plantilla positions. In accordance with the law, locally funded teachers were not included in this count.

Compounding these issues are gaps in data; notably, 193 schools lack recorded school head data, with 65% (126 schools) of these being purely elementary (see Table 12). This absence of data poses significant challenges, as it may indicate that there are no allocated school heads in those schools.

TABLE 12
Undefined School and Type of School

School Head Type	Count	Percentage
All Offering	5	2.60
Elementary School and Junior High School	6	3.13
Junior High School with Senior High School	42	21.88
Purely Elementary School	126	65.53
Purely Junior High School	9	4.69
Purely Senior High School	4	2.08

Analysis revealed multiple entries for school head positions per school in the database, suggesting potential issues with DepEd's data collection system. These may stem from outdated systems or errors made by those entering data at local schools and divisional levels. Additionally, compiling the number of TICs, OICs, principals, and head teachers across public schools involved merging several DepEd databases, which led to inconsistencies across the datasets. Therefore, establishing a centralized data entry system is critical to accurately capturing the true distribution of school head positions and developing an effective deployment system for school heads within DepEd.

Overall, existing DepEd policies governing school head allocation are not being adequately enforced. The observed inconsistencies in the deployment and designation of school heads across various schools highlight a critical need for DepEd to reevaluate and refine its strategies for assigning school leaders.

This reassessment should aim to establish more robust mechanisms that ensure policies are consistently applied and effectively address the unique needs of each school. Implementing such improvements could significantly enhance the effectiveness of school leadership, ultimately benefiting the entire educational ecosystem.

Teachers in Charge and Officers in Charge as Fillers
To address these vacancies, division offices have interim school heads designated as TICs to fill principal roles temporarily in schools without an appointed head.

According to DO 42, s. 2007, TICs are solely designated by the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) to assume school head responsibilities. Thus, this policy relies on individual SDSs to select and delegate personnel to run a school without a school head. Currently, due to the lack of policies outlining their distinction, OICs are used

synonymously to TICs, with the sole difference of whether their plantilla positions are teaching-related or non-teaching-related. In school year 2023–2024, about 8,924 TICs and 2,423 OICs held school head positions (see Figure 10).

A PBed Decentralization Roundtable Discussion conducted on September 24, 2024, in Bacolod City, highlighted the plight of many TICs. It was noted that many TICs had held their roles for over a year, with some serving for more than three years. Additionally, despite their contributions, TICs often do not receive compensation commensurate with their responsibilities and lack a structured professional development track to build their administrative skills, aside from occasional training in their respective divisions. This reliance on TICs highlights a need for more sustainable staffing solutions to support school leadership and track potential leaders to become school principals and school heads.

Alignment of Standards in the Workforce Pipeline
Sections VI and VII of DO 24, s. 2020 state that DepEd-BHROD is responsible for the implementation and integration of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Head (PPSSH) throughout the human resources system, including policies, guidelines, and processes relating to the selection, hiring, performance, appraisal, and promotion and talent management of school heads. Additionally, NEAP is tasked with ensuring that the PPSSH aligns with the development and implementation of professional development interventions and programs for school heads.

However, it is unclear whether this has been implemented throughout the current system. **EDCOM II has found that there are no explicit guidelines stating that the performance evaluation for schools heads must be aligned with the PPSSH.** Currently, the performance review for school heads is governed by DO 2, s. 2015, which outlines the Guidelines on the Establishment and Implementation of the Results-Based Performance Management System. This policy predates the PPSSH and creates a disconnect between the competencies for evaluating school heads as outlined in the PPSSH and those used under the previous system.

Some regional offices have done this step on their own, deviating from the norm by aligning their performance evaluations based on the PPSSH. As an example of a positive deviant, Region V has created a contextualized RPMS system based on the competencies illustrated by the PPSSH. Through a regional memorandum (DepEd Memorandum No. 277, s. 2023, known as the Results-Based Performance Management System for School Heads), they took the initiative to combine both policies of the RPMS and PPSSH in their evaluation cycle. Understanding their process and sharing their practices can be a great starting point for the development of regional alignment in performance reviews.

Burdens and Barriers for Aspiring Principals
One of the main barriers and burdens for aspiring principals is the NQESH, or Principals' Test. One of the main issues is its low passing rate, which restricts the pool of qualified candidates. In 2021, only 36.93% of examinees moved forward in the Principal I selection process, and in 2018, the passing rate was only 0.64%, with just 148 out of 23,000 candidates passing nationwide (see Table 13). These low passing rates suggest that the exam may be excessively challenging, potentially deterring capable candidates from advancing in their careers.

TABLE 13
Historical NQESH Results

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021*	2022	2023**
Passing Rate	2.22%	24.75%	0.68%			36%		26%
Number of Passers	388	5,111	148	No exam administered	No exam administered	2,203	No exam administered	5,753
Assessment Standards		NCBSSH				PPSSH		PPSSH

*Administered in FY 2022 due to procurement delay; online remote modality

*Administered in FY 2024 due to procurement delay

Abbreviations: NCBSSH = National Competency-Based Standards for School Heads, NQESH = National Qualifying Examination for School Heads, PPSSH = Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads

The fluctuating passing rates of the NQESH raise concerns about its effectiveness as a measure of the competencies desired in school principals. Since the 2021 assessment developed by the Research Center for Teacher Quality and the University of New England's SiMERR, the NQESH has been aligned with various indicators in the PPSSH. However, the low passing rates in the most recent exams (2021 and 2023) reflect a gap in training for aspiring candidates that aligns with the PPSSH.

An RTD held by PBEd with school heads revealed that the irregular administration of the NQESH disrupts the leadership pipeline, causing delays in filling key positions. This particularly affects TICs seeking school principal roles. The NQESH was not administered in 2019, 2020, and 2022, as shown in Table 15. These delays, combined with historically low passing rates, create bottlenecks that hinder career progression and the timely filling of essential leadership roles in schools. Consequently, many schools face extended periods without formal leadership, impacting continuity in school management and undermining the support necessary for schools to thrive. This situation may contribute to the current unfulfilled principal plantilla positions.

The absence of a formalized succession planning system for school leaders exacerbates existing challenges. Currently, DepEd lacks a structured succession plan to ensure a consistent pipeline of qualified principals ready to assume leadership roles as they become available. This gap in school leadership continuity is problematic, as there is no established system to identify and prepare future leaders in advance, complicating the process of addressing immediate leadership needs in schools. The newly proposed Expanded Career Progression System, established by EO 174, s. 2022, offers a potential solution to this gap. This restructured pathway enables teachers to transition into administrative and leadership roles, preparing both aspiring and acting school heads for to enter the pool of required school principals through targeted development programs and resources.

Nevertheless, the NQESH is just one of the many requirements for aspiring principals, adding to the overall burden of the qualification process. Combined with the lack of succession planning, these barriers create a substantial gap in the principal pipeline, potentially discouraging capable individuals from pursuing school leadership roles.

**Lack of Support and Development Opportunities
for Current School Heads and Principals**
School heads and principals face significant gaps in support and development opportunities, hindering effective leadership development and career progression.
Current training programs are often one-size-fits-all, lacking customization for leaders at various career stages. This standardized approach limits the impact of professional development, as new principals, experienced principals, and TICs each require different types of support to succeed in their roles.

There is also a noticeable absence of a coaching and mentoring culture within DepEd, particularly at the SDO and school levels. Without a strong mentorship system, school leaders miss out on the valuable guidance and feedback essential for navigating challenges and improving their leadership skills. Additionally, limited access to professional development mechanisms, such as scholarships and fellowships, further restricts principals' opportunities to engage in advanced learning, which would help them grow as educational leaders.

Another issue is the absence of a formal induction program for new principals since 2018, when NEAP last implemented the SHDP. Created through DepEd Memorandum No. 192, s. 2016, the SHDP was to support and train newly qualified school heads with the competencies established by the National Competency Based Standards For School Heads. However, without a standardized induction process, newly appointed school heads were often left to adjust to their roles without the structured support they needed. Addressing these gaps through a targeted, flexible approach to professional development and reintroducing an induction program would better equip school heads to focus on instructional leadership, ultimately strengthening the quality of education across the country.

Some regions have taken matters into their own hands and developed programs to train school leaders. DepEd-Region X of Northern Mindanao has initiated Project CELLS (Comprehensive Education and Leadership Learning System) to strengthen the competencies of school principals and school heads, distinguishing itself as a positive deviant among regions in the Philippines. While many other regions struggle to provide tailored, practical training for school leaders, Region X has proactively developed this project to fill critical gaps in leadership development. Project CELLS offers a structured professional development program that focuses on building the PPSSH outline competencies for school heads. This initiative serves as a model for other regions, demonstrating the transformative potential of targeted competency-based development for school heads.

Lastly, **DepEd DO 7, s. 1999, states that the appointment of district supervisors and principals for both elementary and secondary levels shall be division-specific and not school-specific.** The policy also states that the reassignment and transfer of SDSs and principals are to be done every five years. This means that SDSs and principals may be transferred to any school district within the division when the need arises. A recent study shows that the continuous change of principals and school heads has been a barrier for some schools in terms of continuity in sustaining and scaling up effective school innovations (Hechanova & Yusay, 2024). Consultations with principals show that this policy has not been strictly followed, with some principals having stayed in their schools for more than five years.
However, it would be advisable to distinguish the difference between systematic rotation and rotation itself, where the latter is a mandatory rotation of principals at predetermined intervals instead of an optional rotation (Aquila, 1988). Conversely, the rotation of principals can still be valuable at times. In Singapore, experienced principals are rotated every 5–7 years so that senior principals can gain experience in different school cultures and contexts (Dimmock & Tan, 2012). Thus, an evaluation of our policy on rotation needs to be reassessed and studied to identify a proper formula to determine the adequate duration a principal should be in their respective schools.

Recommendations

To address the significant gaps for school heads in the Philippine public school system, it is recommended that a principal plantilla position be allocated to every school, ensuring that each institution has a dedicated leader to oversee academic performance, teacher support, and community engagement. In its ongoing review of the 1997 School Organizational Standards and Structure Study, DepEd must prioritize updating and finding resources for the allocation of school principals given their critical role in school-level reform. Additionally, recruitment, selection, and appointment processes must be streamlined, ensuring the rapid and transparent filling of these positions.

Interim leaders, such as **TICs and OICs**, play a critical role in maintaining school operations and leadership continuity during transitions. **To support their effectiveness and career growth, it is essential to provide them with fair compensation that recognizes their expanded responsibilities. Additionally, a structured succession plan** should be implemented to prepare these interim leaders for permanent roles as school principals, ensuring a seamless transition and sustained school leadership. The PPSSH should serve as the foundation for designing targeted professional development programs for aspiring school heads, equipping them with the necessary skills, competencies, and confidence to excel in their leadership roles.

The revision of DO 42, s. 2007, can help create a clear distinction between TICs and OICs and establish specific qualifications for their respective designations. Currently, the roles and responsibilities of TICs and OICs are often conflated, leading to inconsistencies in their appointment and expectations. By clearly defining these roles, the revised policy can ensure that TICs are designated as interim school heads with specific academic and administrative qualifications, while OICs serve in a temporary capacity during unforeseen vacancies. This distinction will promote better accountability, streamline school management, and ensure that both roles are appropriately aligned with the needs of the schools they serve.

An induction program aligned with the PPSSH should be established to support new school heads in navigating their roles effectively. This program should be reinforced through clear regulations and policies to ensure consistent implementation nationwide. Beyond instructional leadership, the induction program must emphasize the development of critical management skills, equipping school heads to address both academic and operational challenges. Research highlights the importance of incorporating mentorship and opportunities for collaboration into training programs, fostering a supportive environment where new principals can learn from experienced leaders and build networks that enhance their professional growth (GSL, n.d.).

The creation of a school head tool kit and resource center is essential to streamline administrative processes and allow school leaders to focus more on teaching and leading. This tool kit would guide schools in reviewing and redesigning their practices to reduce time spent on nonteaching and nonleading tasks. Developed in consultation with educators, it would ensure practicality, adaptability, and relevance across different jurisdictions and sectors. Additionally, the resource center would simplify access to policies related to reporting, funding, school improvement plans, and other key responsibilities, reducing the learning curve for school heads. Drawing inspiration from the United Kingdom's Department for Education's *Reducing School Workload Toolkit*, the initiative could provide a model for cutting red tape in Philippine schools, enhancing efficiency, and empowering school leaders to focus on improving educational outcomes.

Appropriate policies and the management of teacher careers are critical to achieving quality teaching and learning and to addressing teacher scarcity.
(Tournier et al., 2019)

Amend the existing policy to introduce a more flexible and strategic approach to the rotation of school heads. DepEd should amend the existing rotation policy to introduce an optional rotation system. This new approach would not solely rely on the discretion of SDSs but be governed by clear systematic criteria that take into account factors such as tenure, school performance, leadership needs, and the professional growth goals of principals. Furthermore, the policy should include a standardized mechanism for assessing the effectiveness of rotations, similar to practices in Singapore where principals are rotated every 5–7 years to gain diverse experiences in different school contexts. Additionally, a framework should be established to limit the discretion of SDSs in the rotation process, ensuring that decisions are based on transparent criteria and involve stakeholder input. Regular reviews and updates to the policy should be mandated to ensure that it adapts to the evolving needs of the education sector and remains grounded in empirical evidence and educational best practices. This comprehensive approach will enhance leadership continuity across schools, support principal development, and ultimately lead to improved educational outcomes.

To address the database of school head allocation and designations, **it is recommended that DepEd develop a centralized data system for school personnel.** This system would serve as a comprehensive repository of accurate and up-to-date information on school leadership positions. The implementation of a centralized system should be accompanied by the establishment of robust assurance and accountability measures. These measures would include regular audits, clear guidelines for data entry, and rigorous training programs for division or regional personnel responsible for updating and maintaining the data. Such a system would not only streamline the process of assigning school leaders but guarantee that deployments are made transparently and aligned with policy guidelines.

A Higher Calling: From Teaching Children to Teaching Teachers

Harold Naputo taught English and campus journalism for seven years in public elementary and ten years in private school before being appointed as school head in 2019 at Old Kawayan Elementary, a last-mile school set in an idyllic seaside barangay in northern Tacloban City. This transition to a leadership role marked a significant milestone in his career, as he moved from directly teaching students to guiding fellow educators.

At Old Kawayan, Harold led a close-knit team of eight teachers serving close to a hundred students. Today, however, as the school head of North Hill Arbours Integrated, Harold leads a diverse team of 42 educators responsible for over 1,300 students from resettlement communities affected by Typhoon Yolanda.

Managing such a large school demands a uniquely careful balance between the needs of students and teachers. Drawing from his five years of leadership and nearly two decades worth of teaching experience, Harold rises to this challenge, nurturing the academic progress of a sprawling student body while supporting the professional growth and well-being of his teachers.

Balancing Teacher Workload and Welfare
In early 2024, DepEd issued two directives to lighten teachers' workloads by removing all administrative duties and capping ancillary tasks at two hours daily, ensuring teachers devote six full hours to classroom instruction. Harold welcomed the change, pleased that his teachers would now be relieved of nonteaching tasks like preparing presentations for division reports. Unlike smaller schools,

North Hill is fortunate to have a dedicated administrative officer, along with a clerk and bookkeeper.

However, average class sizes at a huge school like North Hill remain high. Harold estimates that he needs at least three additional elementary teachers to adhere to the new DepEd guidelines without overburdening his current teaching staff. In some grades, teachers juggle up to eight classes each day. "Even if we squeeze lessons into shorter periods to fit within the mandated hours, this will still leave them feeling stretched and strained," Harold declares.

Harold has taken steps to ease their workloads by requesting extra teachers from the division office. In the meantime, he has arranged for teachers from other grade levels to temporarily cover classes with high student numbers. Working with his master teachers, he has also introduced the clustering of subjects, assigning teachers specialized in one subject, such as Araling Panlipunan, to cover related classes in MAPEH or Filipino.

Learning Action Cells as Lifeline
When Harold received his new teachers at the start of the school year, he put them to work right away, knowing how every teacher in North Hill is essential from day one. Yet, he also recognized the importance of familiarizing them with the school's culture, expectations, and routines for a smoother transition.

Central to this process is the weekly Learning Action Cell (LAC), which Harold utilized to ease new teachers into the school environment and support their

adjustment. Introduced by DepEd as part of a lifelong professional development initiative, LACs offer a collaborative space for teachers to discuss classroom challenges and share teaching strategies. Simply put, LACs enable teachers to learn from one another.

At North Hill, these LAC sessions create opportunities for teachers to pool their expertise, as demonstrated when Harold's new Filipino teacher shared methods for teaching the language with other colleagues, especially in junior high where skilled Filipino teachers are much needed.

Held every Friday after classes, each LAC session is tailored to address specific needs. For instance, sessions on using free Google apps for reporting or conducting effective parent engagements involve the entire staff. Others target specific groups, such as newly hired teachers learning protocols on periodical exams or Grade VI teachers discussing document submission. Occasionally, sessions respond to urgent concerns that arise within the week, such as the appropriate handling of students who choose to leave school due to sensitive circumstances.

LACs are an invaluable resource for finding solutions, harmonizing processes, refining teaching tools, and exchanging best practices. But for Harold, they are also an opportunity to connect and mutually inspire one another.

"LACs could just be a simple *kumustahan*," he shares. "North Hill is a big school, and we rarely get to see each other. It's just nice to see everyone smile at the end of a work week."

A Legacy Beyond Teaching

Harold's dedication to supporting the development of his teachers extends beyond the LAC sessions. This year, North Hill hosted an English literacy program twice for Key Stage 1 teachers, focusing on essentials like oral reading, fluency, and vocabulary. Recognizing its broader value, Harold invited Key Stage 2 and junior high teachers to join, knowing they also encounter students needing help with reading comprehension.

"When students are confident in reading early on, it becomes easier to teach at higher grade levels," he explains.

One of Harold's most successful initiatives is the peer-led Reading Warriors program, where older students mentor younger ones who struggle with reading. These weekly peer tutoring have boosted literacy and fostered a sense of pride and community among students, building confidence, social skills, and camaraderie.

To tackle the issue of student retention, Harold and his team have turned the school into a vibrant hub of activity. Monthly singing contests, quiz bees, and writing competitions fill the air with excitement. These activities showcase the students' talents and strengthen their connection to the school, in fun, meaningful ways.

Reflecting on his role, Harold says, "North Hill is a school where students come from displaced communities. We do our best to create a space where students and teachers alike feel valued and motivated."

TESDA

Technical Education and
Skills Development Authority

CAMERA 1

CAMERA 4

CAMERA 2

CAMERA 3

TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING & LIFELONG LEARNING

Bridging Gaps: Enhancing Industry Involvement in TVET to Build Tomorrow's Workforce

Introduction

Technical-vocational education and training (TVET) programs tailored to industry and labor market needs significantly improve outcomes for trainees, businesses, and the economy. Republic Act (RA) No. 7796 (Technical Education and Skills Development Act of 1994) established TESDA to develop a skilled middle-level workforce. Complementary laws, such as RA 7686 (Dual Training System [DTS] Act of 1994) and RA 10647 (Ladderized Education Act of 2014), fostered enterprise-based learning and strengthened the integration of TVET with higher education. Additional measures, including RA 10931 (Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act of 2016) and RA 11230 (Tulong-Trabaho Act of 2018), expanded access to free training and enhanced workforce qualifications. Scholarship programs like the Training for Work Scholarship Program (TWSP), Special Training for Employment Program (STEP), and the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education further supported marginalized learners, ensuring broader participation in TVET.

From 1991 to 2018, TVET enrollment grew substantially, peaking at 2.3 million. However, enterprise-based training (EBT) accounted for only 4.5% of total enrollment between 2014 and 2022, falling far short of reskilling and upskilling the estimated 35 million Filipinos in need (National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan [NTESDP] 2023–2028).

In 2015, the Philippines had 4,687 technical-vocational education and training (TVET) providers, comprising 4,251 (91%) privately owned and 436 public or government-run technical-vocational institutions (TVIs). However, from 2016 onward, the number of TVIs saw a noticeable decline, reflecting challenges in sustaining and expanding the sector. By 2022, the number of TVIs rebounded to near-2015 levels, with 4,631 institutions reported, of which private institutions accounted for 4,197 (90%) (TESDA Annual Reports, 2017–2023).

Despite this recovery, significant challenges persist in aligning TVI programs with industry standards and labor market demands. As of 2022, only 16% of TVI programs were aligned with training regulations that award National Certificates (NC), vital credentials for skills recognition and employability. Moreover, 64% of these certifications were concentrated at lower skill levels (NC I and NC II), which typically lead to entry-level roles with limited opportunities for income growth. In contrast, certifications at higher levels (NC III and NC IV), which are increasingly in demand due to advancements in technology and industry practices, remained underrepresented. These advanced certifications offer greater potential for career advancement and improved earnings, underscoring the need for targeted reforms to enhance the quality, relevance, and accessibility of technical-vocational education in the Philippines.

The urgency to align TVET with evolving industry needs is growing as businesses adapt to economic and environmental changes. Reskilling and upskilling are critical for Filipino workers to remain competitive in both national and global labor markets. To achieve this, challenges such as fragmented implementation, delayed regulatory updates, misaligned policies, and uncoordinated labor market data must be addressed. Strengthening partnerships between TVIs and enterprises is essential to enable practical, workplace-oriented training that meets the demands of the modern economy.

The shifting dynamics of the labor market further emphasize the need to enhance EBT. Despite its potential to address workforce demands, EBT continues to lag behind other TVET programs due to fragmented implementation, regulatory delays, and policy misalignment. These issues hinder the adoption of timely training innovations, limit scholarships for disadvantaged learners, and exacerbate difficulties in addressing skills gaps caused by uncoordinated labor market data. Additionally, weak partnerships between training institutions and enterprises restrict opportunities for reskilling and upskilling through practical, workplace-based learning, further impeding the full realization of EBT's benefits.

Year One Updates

EDCOM II zeroed in on EBT during its first year, particularly on streamlining its numerous definitions and creating incentives to boost industry participation. These efforts culminated in the enactment of the new Enterprise-Based Education and Training (EBET) Framework Act (RA 12063), which was signed on November 7, 2024, and took effect 15 days after its publication.

The TESDA, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, has been diligently working on the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) for the new law. The IRR is scheduled for release on February 21, 2025, marking a critical milestone in operationalizing the provisions of this landmark legislation.

EBET Framework Act (RA 12063)

Key Objectives
RA 12063 aims to enhance Filipino workers' skills and competencies to advance their careers and meet the demands of a rapidly evolving labor market. The law promotes public-private partnerships to develop and implement training modules and competency standards, ensuring alignment with industry needs. It also seeks to rationalize apprenticeship, learnership, and dual training systems under the EBET framework, prioritizing trainees' safety, rights, and equitable treatment.

Overview
The EBET framework institutionalizes enterprise-led TVET programs guided by Industry TVET Boards (ITBs). These programs include theoretical instruction and are categorized into three main modalities:

- General Training, which lasts up to 6 months, focuses on low- to mid-level skills (NC I/II);
- Apprenticeships covering advanced skills (NC III and above) and emphasizing on-the-job training, enabling seamless transitions from trainee to employee; and
- Upskilling programs catering to employees seeking to enhance their skills regardless of their NC level.

Administration and Governance
TESDA, in collaboration with ITBs, is responsible for registering EBET programs, developing competency standards, and facilitating stakeholder engagement. To support micro and small enterprises, TESDA organizes a regional network of EBET support integrators who assist with program development, technical requirements, and labor market analysis. In sectors with critical labor shortages, the President may mandate compulsory EBET programs.

Trainee Rights and Obligations
EBET trainees are not considered employees unless explicitly specified. However, if hired during the program, their training agreement is automatically terminated. All trainees undergo competency assessments, earning an NCor Certificate of Competency upon successful completion. Programs must adhere to the Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313) and the Occupational Safety and Health Standards (RA 11058), ensuring trainees' rights and welfare are upheld.

Incentives for Enterprises
Enterprises implementing registered EBET programs are eligible for tax incentives, including deductions of 50%–75% of training costs, subject to certain caps. TESDA's EBET Incentives One-Stop Shop provides online assistance for enterprises seeking to access these benefits. Companies registered with investment promotion agencies can choose between EBET incentives and other fiscal benefits but cannot avail of both simultaneously.

Training Allowances and Scholarships
Trainees in general EBET programs receive allowances covering transportation, meals, and other expenses; while apprentices earn at least 75% of the minimum wage, with annual increases for programs lasting over a year. Upskilling programs ensure employees retain their full wages and benefits. Scholarships, such as those under the Tulong-Trabaho Act (RA 11230), are available to eligible trainees to encourage participation in EBET programs.

Program Duration and Agreements
EBET programs are limited to a maximum of three (3) years. Enterprises and trainees must enter into formal agreements outlining the training plan, duration, allowances, and other terms. Enterprises exceeding the 20% trainee cap relative to their regular workforce must obtain TESDA approval. Repeated consecutive training of the same individual without employment converts their status to a regular employee.

Repeals and Integration
RA 12063 repeals the Dual Training System (DTS) Act of 1994 (RA 7686) and sections of the Labor Code and other laws inconsistent with its provisions. It incorporates the salient features of these repealed laws, streamlining and updating training policies to align with current industry and labor needs.

RA 12063 bridges the gap between education and industry by institutionalizing the EBET framework. It empowers Filipino workers to thrive in a competitive labor market while providing enterprises with incentives to support workforce development. Through this framework, the Philippines strengthens its commitment to an adaptable and highly skilled workforce.

Year Two Overview

Year Two examined policies, mechanisms, resources, and other requirements for ensuring the delivery of high-quality EBT programs that lead to improved job outcomes, with the goal of fostering a more favorable ecosystem for increased engagement and investment in TVET.

EDCOM II also looked into the fragmented labor market data from TESDA, DOLE, PSA, DepEd, CHED, and other agencies, pushing for the development of a more integrated Labor Market Information System (LMIS) to improve skill matching and forecasts of the labor market.

To address challenges related to TVET employment and wage outcomes, PIDS recommended greater involvement of the private sector in training provision, curriculum development, certification processes, and regular review and revisions of training programs to align them with industry standards. (Generalao, et al. 2024) EDCOM II discussed key issues that EBT faces because of overlapping and unclear policies, including unimplemented policies of the DTS Law. It also recommended TESDA, the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), and other relevant agencies to streamline their processes for availing tax benefits and incentives.

Limited Industry TVET Boards (ITBs) across sectors hinder the effective implementation of EBT programs. EDCOM II highlighted that ITBs are still not fully functional, and operationalizing them remains challenging. To address this, it proposed expanding the coverage of national ITBs across priority industries, establishing clear and measurable performance indicators, and differentiating the roles of ITBs to better meet the specific needs of local contexts.

TESDA has previously proposed creating and Office of Apprenticeship to consolidate all EBT-related activities and streamline the administration of EBT programs. However this remains for consideration. In the meantime, EDCOM II recommends that TESDA assess its capacity to assign EBT personnel at the regional and provincial levels and consider devolving direct training functions to industries and local government units (LGUs).

Lastly, EDCOM II studied the operationalization of the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) within the context of lifelong learning in TVET, highlighting the need to establish a permanent secretariat, revise level descriptors to match industry standards, and integrate the PQF with the Philippine Skills Framework (PSF).

Priority Area 19: Needs-Based System Projecting the Demands in Workers' Upskilling

Issue 1: Labor Market Information (LMI) remains fragmented across various government agencies, making it difficult to align training programs with the evolving industry needs.

The issue of job-skills mismatch was raised as a top concern in TVET during an EDCOM II meeting, citing a 2021 Asian Development Bank (ADB) study that found nearly two-thirds of TVET graduates were employed in occupations unrelated to the expected outcomes of their training programs (EDCOM II website, 2023).

Mismatch occurs when the skills available in the workforce do not align with the skills demanded by employers (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020, as cited in Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024). The prevalence of hard-to-fill jobs in DOLE and PSA annual labor force surveys suggests a skills shortage in the job market (ADB, 2021). Meanwhile, around one-third of college graduates are employed in jobs designed specifically for those with noncollege education (Epetia, 2018, as cited in ADB, 2021). These mismatches result in lower wages and job dissatisfaction for workers, diminished productivity and higher business turnover rates, and increased unemployment and decreased economic competitiveness (Rihova, 2016).

> "**The labor force and also the market demand is very dynamic.** In fact, it changes very rapidly with the onset of technology, with the onset of new skills, and it is important that we devise a mechanism in which we minimize the mismatch. Of course, there will never be parity on both sides because of the continuous evolution. But at least we minimize it so that we also don't waste government funds in upskilling and reskilling our workforce."
>
> —Sen. Win Gatchalian, Hearing on the Labor Market Information processes in the Philippines, June 25, 2024

In 2021, ADB reviewed the effectiveness of TVET implementation in the Philippines. The review showed that while training-job matching rates increased from 2013 to 2017, only about one-third of employed TVET graduates were matched with the expected occupation of the training program they completed. TVET programs focusing on low-paying, nonroutine manual skills had the highest matching rates between graduates and their expected post-training occupations. Most TVET graduates are considered employed in occupations requiring higher skills than what they are trained for. However, the study noted that some of the underskilled students included highly educated college graduates who took TVET to acquire practical skills or to earn credentials for in-demand overseas work.

FIGURE 1
Share of Trainees Matched, Overskilled, or Underskilled, 2013, 2014, 2017
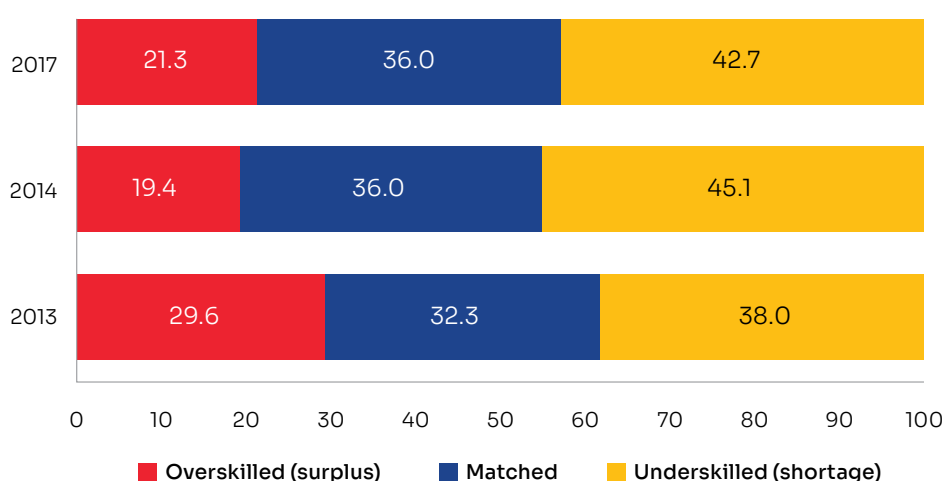
Source: ADB, 2021

The informal sector has higher participation and employment rates than those with degrees, except for those in the postgraduate level. However, they also have high underemployment rates: 69.1% for those with no formal education and 41.2% for those with high school units but have not graduated from senior high school (SHS) (Bersales, 2024).

In October 2022, TVET graduates in the Philippines demonstrated labor force participation and employment rates comparable to college graduates, underscoring the effectiveness of technical-vocational education in equipping individuals with workforce-ready skills. Despite this, TVET graduates experienced the highest underemployment rate among all educational groups, suggesting that many are employed in roles that underutilize their skills or fail to meet their income expectations.

Senior high school graduates, in contrast, faced significant challenges, with the lowest labor force participation rate—less than half that of TVET and college graduates—and the highest unemployment rate, including a double-digit figure. This disparity highlights the critical role of TVET in bridging the skills gap and providing better employment opportunities compared to senior high school education.

The data reinforces the need for targeted reforms to enhance the alignment of TVET programs with industry demands, reduce underemployment, and improve job quality, thereby maximizing the economic and professional potential of TVET graduates.

TABLE 1
Labor Force Indicators by Educational Attainment, Philippines, October 2022 (in Percentage)

Indicator	Total	No Formal Schooling	Elem and HS	Senior HS Graduate	TVET Graduate	College Units	College Graduate	Post-college
Labor Force Participation	70.3	72.9	71.1	41.9	85.8	53.0	85.8	96.2
Employed	95.5	98.6	96.8	84.1	93.0	94.8	93.0	96.7
Unemployed	4.5	1.4	3.2	15.9	7.0	5.2	7.0	3.3
Underemployed	15.2	19.0	17.6	13.4	20.5	12.1	8.6	7.9

Abbreviations: Elem = Elementary, HS = High School, TVET = Technical-Vocational Education and Training
Source: Bersales, 2024

TABLE 2
Percentage Employed by Educational Attainment and Class of Worker, 2021–2022

Educational Attainment	Wage and Salary Workers	Employer in Own Family-Operated Farm or Business	Informal Sector	Remarks
Total	62.3	2.3	35.4	
No Formal Education	28.5	2.4	69.1	54.2% Self-employed without any paid employee and 15.9% unpaid family worker paid employee
Elementary and High School Units	56.7	2.1	41.2	32.9% Self-employed without any paid employee
Senior High School	71.5	0.3	28.2	20.3% Unpaid family worker
TVET Graduate	66.8	2.9	30.3	26.9% Self-employed without any paid employee
College Units	62.9	2.5	34.6	25.4% Self-employed without any paid employee
College Graduate	80.2	3.0	16.7	
Postgraduate Underemployed	90.5	2.8	6.7	

Source: Bersales, 2024

TVET graduates demonstrate a relatively strong presence in the workforce, with 66.8% employed as wage and salary workers. This figure is close to the performance of college graduates and significantly higher than individuals with no formal education or those who only completed elementary and high school units. This suggests that TVET programs effectively equip graduates with skills relevant for wage employment opportunities.

However, TVET graduates also exhibit a notable presence in the informal sector, with 30.3% engaged in informal employment. Additionally, 26.9% of TVET graduates are self-employed without any paid employees, highlighting a reliance on entrepreneurial

or freelance activities, likely due to limited opportunities in the formal sector or challenges in securing jobs aligned with their training.

These trends highlight a longstanding disconnect between skills supply and demand, a challenge that has persisted since the 1970s (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024). Addressing these mismatches will not only enhance employability, but also improve job quality, promote social mobility, and foster inclusion. This indicates the need for a well-functioning LMIS built through collaboration among stakeholders from industry, government, academia, and civil society.

The Year One Report recommended that TESDA establish a centralized management information system to track training programs' creation, delivery, and outcomes, including enrollment, completion rates, and overall effectiveness. Expanding labor force surveys to include TVET-related information will further support this effort (ADB, 2021). A high-quality LMIS will significantly improve TVET's capacity to align with industry needs and evaluate the effectiveness of current programs. It will also help anticipate emerging industry needs, equipping graduates with future-proof skills that match upcoming jobs or remain relevant amid rapid technological changes. Since LMIS data comes from different government agencies, they should all work together to develop this system.
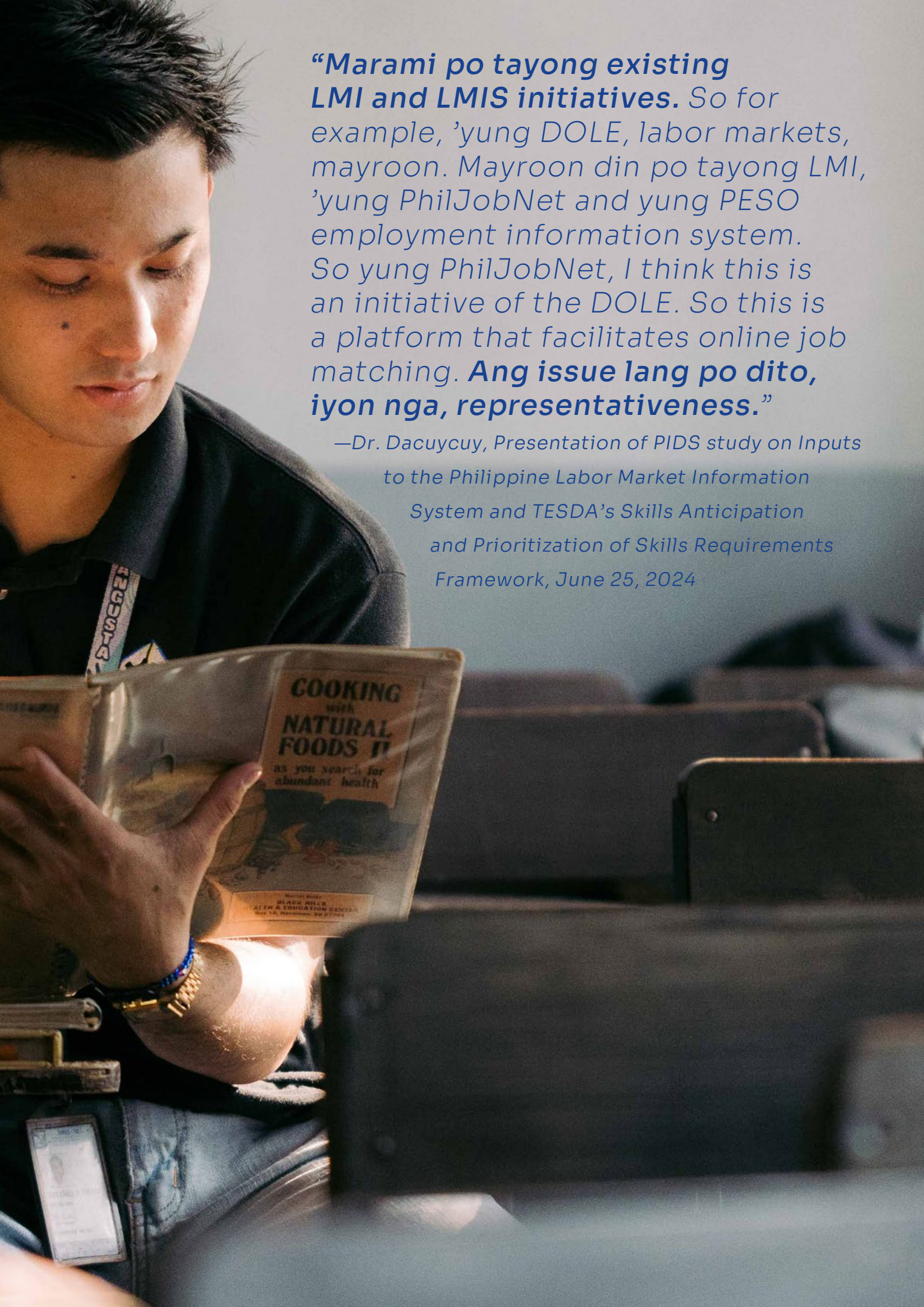
Skills needs anticipation is a key component of an LMIS (ILO, 2015, as cited in Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024). It identifies how labor markets, skills, and learning needs are changing and helps policymakers and training providers align them accordingly. Better matching can be promoted with an LMIS that equips stakeholders with the information necessary to address gaps proactively (Rihova, 2016).

An LMIS is a network of institutions, people, and information, each with distinct roles in producing, storing, disseminating, and using LMI and outcomes (ILO, 2023). LMI refers to any quantitative or qualitative data on the labor market that can assist in formulating and implementing decisions, policies, and programs (Schmillen, 2019).

A high-quality LMIS is critical for aligning TVET with industry needs, evaluating program effectiveness, and anticipating future labor market demands. By integrating data from various sources, an LMIS enables policymakers and training providers to design programs that prepare graduates for high-impact changes like automation and emerging industries. Such a system ensures workers develop future-proof skills that are increasingly valued over traditional technical skills.

An LMIS serves as a network of institutions, data sources, and stakeholders, producing, storing, and analyzing LMI for decision-making. Current Philippine LMIS efforts involve multiple government agencies, including the PSA, DOLE, and TESDA, which collect and disseminate data through initiatives like the LFS, PhilJobNet, and TESDA's Labor Market Intelligence Reports. However, these data sources remain fragmented and lack interoperability, reducing their utility for designing targeted training programs. Effective use of LMI requires harmonization, granularity, and future-oriented projections to address skills mismatches and labor market disruptions.

To align labor supply and demand, EDCOM I recommended enhancing the country's education statistics by establishing a National Education Statistics Office under what is now the PSA and drafting a national employment plan through an Employment Planning Board (EPB) under DOLE (EDCOM I, 1993). The EPB was intended to generate LMI as well as inform the education and training plans of CHED and TESDA. However, despite EDCOM I's recommendation, the EPB was never formed.

"*Marami po tayong existing* *LMI and LMIS initiatives.* *So for example, 'yung DOLE, labor markets, mayroon. Mayroon din po tayong LMI, 'yung PhilJobNet and yung PESO employment information system. So yung PhilJobNet, I think this is an initiative of the DOLE. So this is a platform that facilitates online job matching.* **Ang issue lang po dito, iyon nga, representativeness.**"

—Dr. Dacuycuy, Presentation of PIDS study on Inputs to the Philippine Labor Market Information System and TESDA's Skills Anticipation and Prioritization of Skills Requirements Framework, June 25, 2024

FIGURE 2

Proposed Organizational Structure and Institutional System for Philippine Education
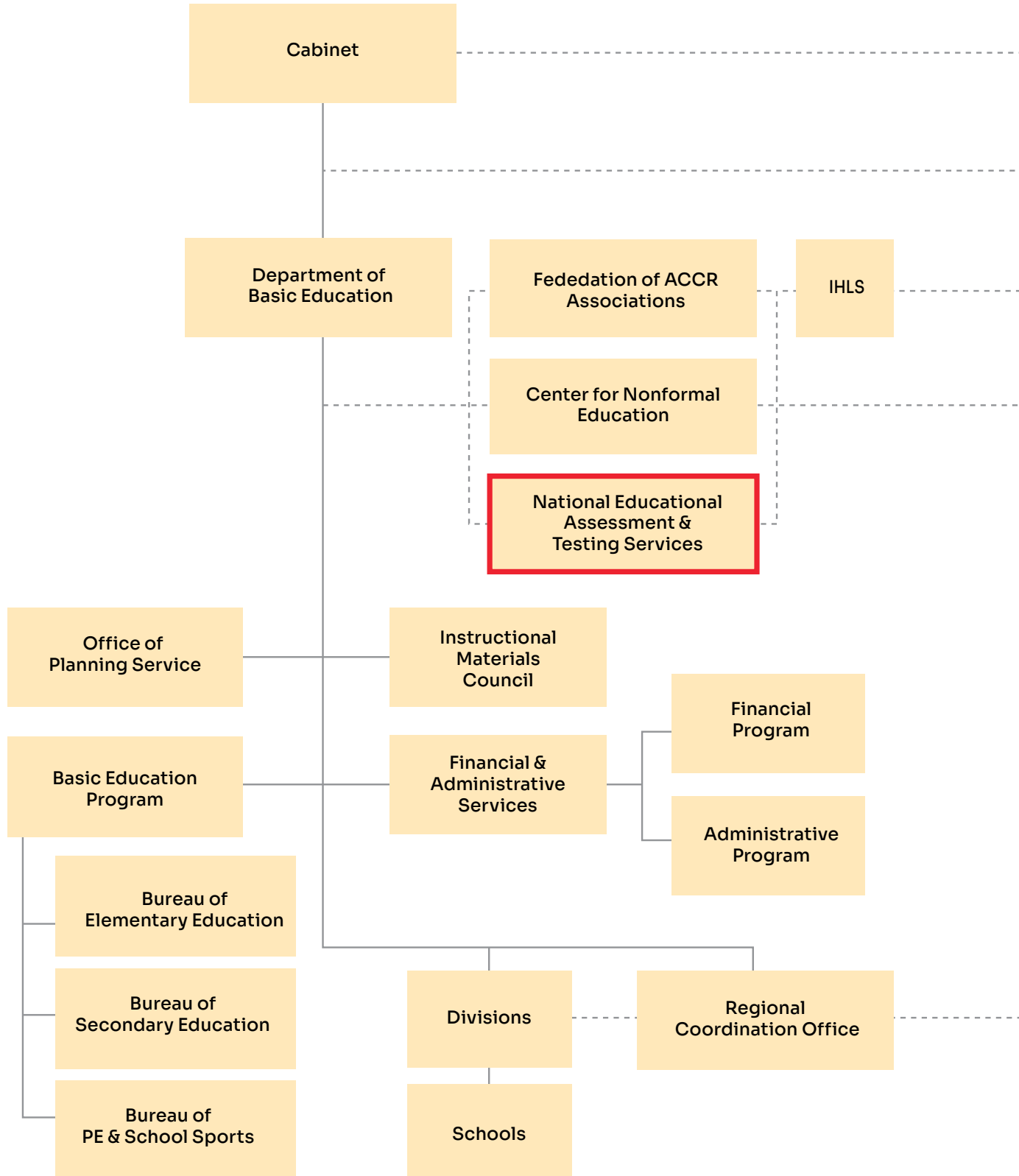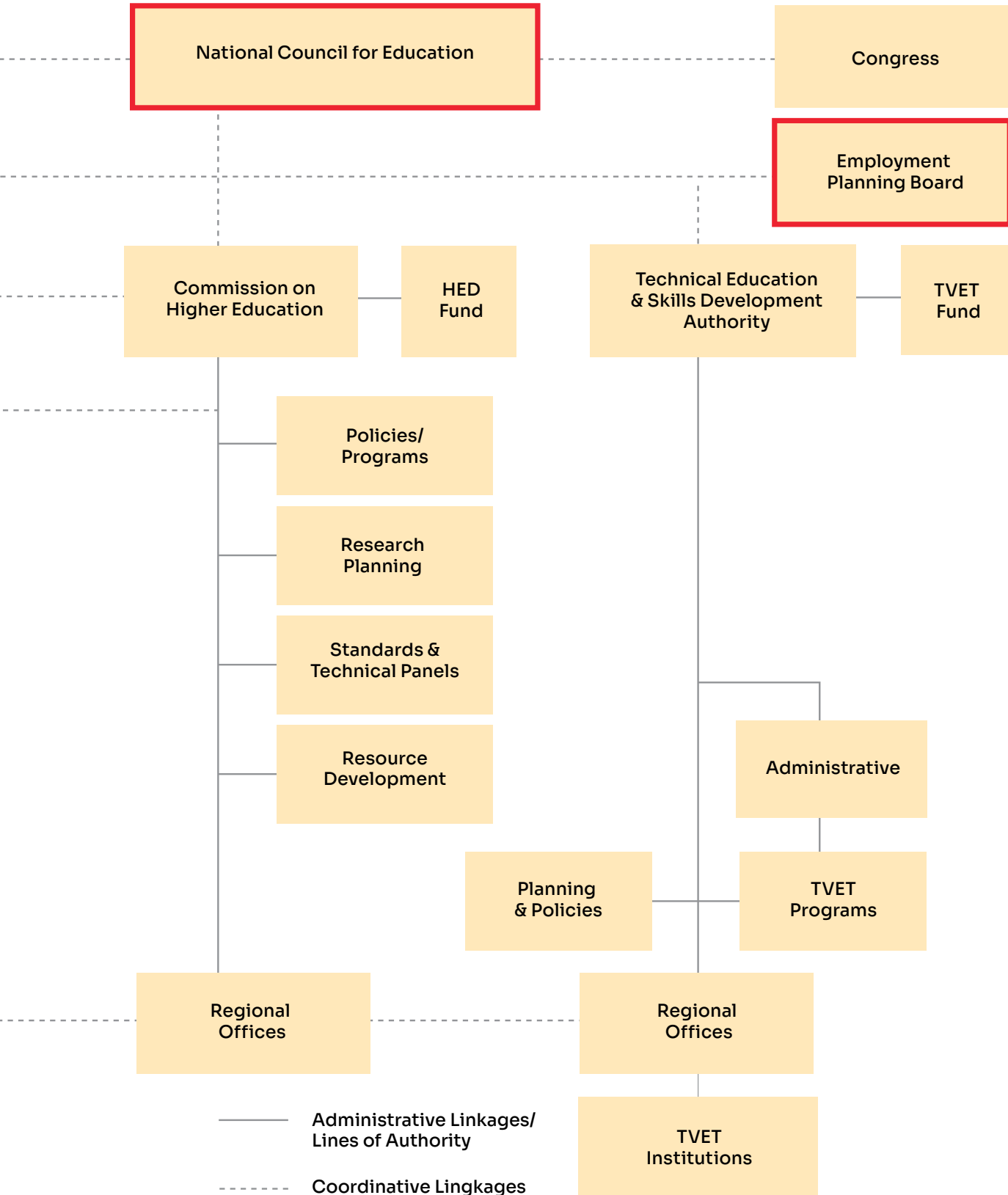
Abbreviations: ACCR: Accrediting, HEd: Higher Education Fund, IHLS: Institutions of Higher Learning

Source: EDCOM I Report, 1993

Data is fragmented across multiple government agencies, which significantly impedes the programming of trainings that align with industry needs. A recent PIDS study showed that LMIS-relevant data is widely available and utilized by various government agencies through their respective LMI systems and initiatives (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024). PSA's monthly Labor Force Survey (LFS) releases national and regional employment estimates based on demographics such as age, sex, marital status, and education. DOLE's annual Labor Market Profile provides a national overview of labor supply and demand conditions. Labor Market Trends offers an in-depth analysis of special topics relevant to the labor market during the year. The Jobs and Labor Market Forecast projects the state of the labor market for the next few years and identifies emerging industries, key employment-generating sectors, and in-demand occupations (Bureau of Local Employment [BLE], web, 2024). The PEIS is an enhanced skills registry that provides locality-specific data on job vacancies and job seeker profiles. PhilJobNet, an online job-matching platform, holds information on the workforce needs of employers (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024).

FIGURE 3
System Interaction Map for the Labor Market Information System
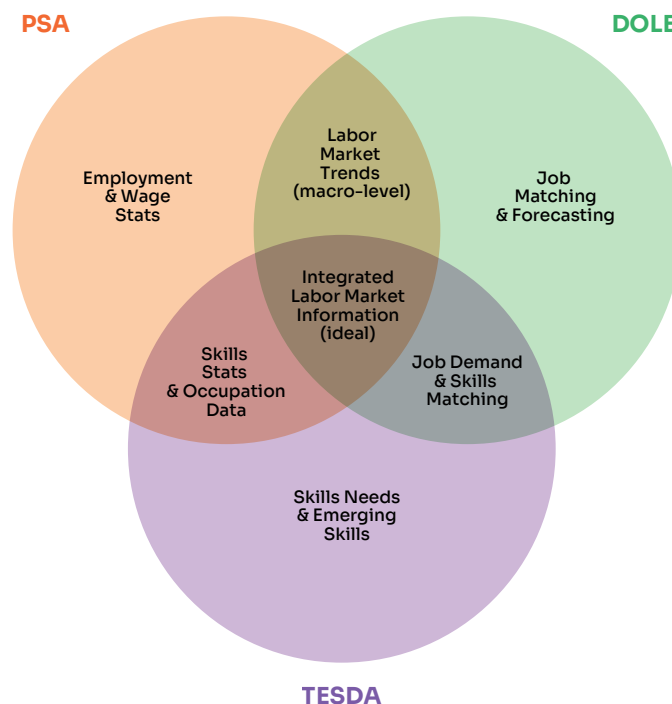
Notes:

- **PSA (left orange circle)** provides employment and wage statistics through sources like the Labor Force Survey and the Occupational Wages Survey.
- **DOLE (right green circle)** focuses on job matching, labor market profiling, and forecasting using platforms like PhilJobNet and the Jobs & Labor Market Forecast.
- **TESDA (bottom purple circle)** centers on skills needs, prioritization, and emerging skills through the Skills Anticipation and Prioritization of Skills Requirements (SAPSR) framework and the National Skills Map.

Overlapping Areas:

- **PSA + DOLE:** Macro-level labor market trends.
- **DOLE + TESDA:** Job demand and skills matching.
- **PSA + TESDA:** Skills statistics integrated with occupational classifications.
- **All three agencies (center):** Ideal integration where labor, skills, and employment data converge to provide comprehensive labor market insights.

Source: Data taken from Bayudan-Dacuycuy, C. B., Epetia, M. C. F., Vargas, A. R. P., & Ocbina, J. J. S. (2024). Inputs to the Philippine Labor Market Information System and TESDA's Skills Anticipation and Prioritization of Skills Requirements Framework (Discussion Paper Series No. 2024-06). Philippine Institute for Development Studies.

TESDA's Labor Market Intelligence Report analyzes trends and issues in the local and international labor markets, informing the agency's training regulations and program development. Since 2014, the yearly Study on the Employment of TVET Graduates (SETG) contains data on the profile of graduates, competency assessment and certification rates, employment rates, and monthly income. TESDA's Workplace Skills and Satisfaction Survey provides data on emerging sector-specific skills and their future workforce requirements (TESDA website, 2024). By consolidating information from development plans and reports of key national government offices, TESDA created a Skills Map identifying emerging skills and soft skills per sector and their respective training regulations (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024).

FIGURE 4
Results from TESDA's Workplace Skills and Satisfaction Survey

Skills Need Anticipation – Workforce Skills Survey		
	In Demand Hard-to-Fill Skills; Critical Occupations	**Emergency Skills**
IT–BPM	• Game Development/Artist • 2D Cutout Animation • 3D Animation • Medical Claims & Medical Coding & Bidding • Software Development	• Digital Fluency (including Data Analytics and Digital Solutions) • Business and Data Storytelling/ Data Visualization • Cybersecurity • Machine Learning • Managing Remotely
Construction	• Heavy Equipment Operator • Heavy Equipment Mechanic 　– BIM Manager 　– Foreman 　– Quantity Surveying	• Robotic Installation • Digital Skills • Digital Cost • Management (5D BIM) • Project Management • Green Construction
Logistics	• Truck Driver • Welder • Mechanic • Forklift Operator/Driver • Heavy Equipment Operator	• Robotics • Artificial Intelligence • Internet of Things • Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality • Analytics
Agriculture	• Agricultural Machinist/Technician 　– Agricultural Resource Specialist/Natural Resource Technician GPS/GIS Modeling Specialists 　– Cacao Grower/Farmer • Nursery Operator	• Sensing Technologies Communication Systems • Robotics, Automated Facilities/Equipment • Agricultural Drones • Geo Mapping and Geo Tagging
Health	• Graphic Artist 　– Staff Nurse • Nursing Attendant/Assistant 　□ Medical Technologist 　□ Emergency Medical Specialist - Advanced	• Telehealth/Telemedicine/ Teleconsultation • Psychological First Aid • Electronic Medical Records Management • Health Information System Navigation • Robotics

Source: The use of LMI for skills matching and anticipation: The Philippine TVET experience, *a slide presentation by TESDA*

Abbreviations: BIM = building information modeling, GIS = geographic information system, GPS = global positioning system, IT–BPM = Information Technology and Business Process Management

The sector-specific PSF of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) focuses on emerging competencies to guide skills development based on 21st-century skills (Lopez, 2021). DTI has released PSFs in five priority sectors: supply chain and logistics, human capital development, digital art and animation, game development, and Business development (TESDA, 2022).

Meanwhile, the Department of Information and Communications Technology completed five more PSFs in the fields of data analytics and AI, software development and security, contact center and business process management, and health information management (ICT Industry Development Bureau, 2024). More skills frameworks are forthcoming in priority sectors in agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing as the PSF initiative also involves several more agencies like the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Tourism (DTI website, 2021).

TABLE 3
Potential Data Sources for Skills Needs Anticipation in the Philippines

Source: Categories Are from Rihova (2016), Augmented by the Authors	Standard Statistics					
	LFS	Education Statistics	Occupational Wages Survey	Integrated Survey on Labor and Employment	Labor Turnover Statistics	Study on the Employment of TVET Graduates
Demand						
Structure of employment by sector	■		■	■	■	
Structure of employment by occupation	■					
Structure of sectors/occupations by age	■					
Vacancies						
Labor turnover by subsector					■	
Supply						
Age structure of population or labor force	■					
Structure of population/ labor force by education	■			■		
Structure of graduates		■				■
Participation of adults in education and training		■				■
Mismatch						
Unemployment rate by education level	■					
Proportions of unemployed vs. employed at each education level	■					
Wage dynamics by occupation	■		■			
Hard-to-fill/skills-shortage vacancies						
Skill gaps reported by employers						
Subjective mismatch reported by workers/ graduates						
Emerging Skills						
Emerging skills						

Abbreviation: LFS = Labor Force Survey
Source: EDCOM II, based on Bayudan-Dacuycuy, et al., 2024

	Skills–Specific Data Sources						
TVET Statistics	Enterprise Survey	Workplace skills and satisfaction survey	Tracer Survey	Development Plans, Roadmaps, Policies, Laws	Qualitative Data Sources	PhilJobNet and PEIS**	Online job vacancies, jobseekers' credentials**
	■	■				■	■
	■	■				■	■
		■				■	■
		By sector			By occupation	■	■
		■					
■			■				
■							
			■				
		■			■	■	■
					■	■	■
			■				
		■			■	■	■

While these numerous sources show that data exists to develop TVET programs aligned with industry needs, these data sources are fragmented and not systematically shared.

Administrative data on students and graduates, when collected in a comprehensive register that tracks individuals throughout their education, provide the most valuable information on skills supply flows. DepEd provides the number of SHS students who enroll and graduate in the technical-vocational-livelihood track and other tracks per school year. CHED maintains information on enrolled and graduating tertiary students by discipline and discipline group. The Professional Regulation Commission has been collecting data on the number of takers and passers of licensure examinations since 2011. Every year, TESDA releases statistics on the number of enrollees and graduates of training programs per sector and region (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024).

While these numerous sources show that data exist to develop TVET programs aligned with industry needs, these data sources are fragmented and not systematically shared.

This, despite TESDA and DOLE belonging to the PSA's Interagency Committee on Labor and Productivity Statistics, the PQF, the PSF, and the Interagency Council for Development and Competitiveness of the Philippine Digital Workforce (EDCOM II, 25 Jun 2024).

To address this, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) signed a Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) in November 2024. This initiative aims to establish an integrated approach to employment facilitation, skills development, and labor market intelligence (LMI), enhancing coordination in data collection, analysis, and program delivery.

FIGURE 5
How DepEd Identifies Priority Technical-Vocational-Livelihood Specializations
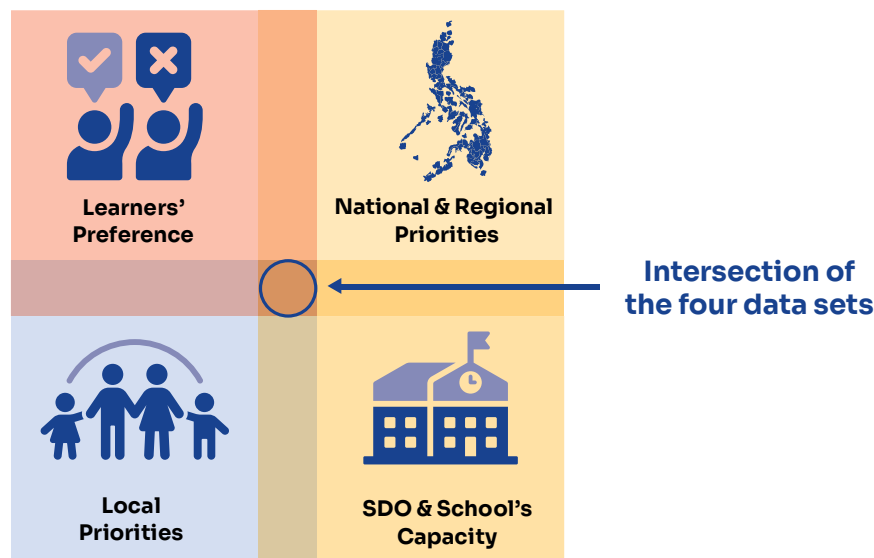
Abbreviation: SDO = schools division office
Source: DepEd Order No. 54, s. 2022

Establishing a strong institutional framework based on a common skills standard and classification is crucial for building a reliable, effective, and sustainable LMIS. This can help unify labor market data sources and ensure consistent data standards throughout. It is a vital precondition in planning an LMIS, facilitating coordination and collaboration conducive to data sharing, analysis, and decision-making among different stakeholders.

FIGURE 6
Skills Anticipation and Prioritization of Skills Requirements Framework

INPUT	PROCESS	OUTPUT
National Skills Map	**Sectoral Consultation**	**Prioritized Qualification for TR Development**
Secondary Data • Philippine Dev't Plan • Industry Roadmaps • Philippine Skills Framework • JobsFit • Studies/LMIR • Overseas Requirements	**Prioritization of the TESDA Board**	**Recommended Programs for CS Development**
Area-Based, Demand-Driven TVET (Results of the Provincial/Regional Skills Mapping)		**Recommended Programs for TR Review**
SNA: Workspace Skills & Satisfaction Survey		**Existing TR Identified as Industry Priority**
Work/ASEAN Skills Competition		
National Policy/Laws		
Emerging Skills Requirements (not included in the National Skills Map)		

Source: The use of LMI for skills matching and anticipation: The Philippine TVET experience, *a slide presentation by TESDA*

Labor market information must be presented in a clear, standardized way to ensure it is relevant and accessible to all users (Rihova, 2016). A unified skills taxonomy, aligning skills with occupational and industry classifications like the Philippine Standard Occupational Classification (PSOC), improves job-skills matching and promotes fairer hiring practices, focusing on skills over formal education (World Economic Forum, 2021).

A national skills taxonomy is essential for initiatives like the LMIS. It provides a structured framework for data collection, enhances labor surveys, ensures reliable data, and aids in workforce forecasting (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024).

TESDA's Skills Map, built on strategic plans and industry needs, serves as a cornerstone of this taxonomy, encompassing skills, job categories, knowledge areas, and descriptors. Similarly, the DTI's Skills Frameworks offer detailed job descriptions and competencies but are limited to priority sectors. Aligning TESDA's Skills Map and DTI's frameworks with the PSOC and the PQF is vital for a cohesive national taxonomy.

Currently, the PSOC is outdated and misaligned with modern labor demands and the PQF. It is based on the 2008 International Standard Classification of Occupations and has not been revised since 2012, despite efforts by DOLE and the BLE to update it (EDCOM II, 2024; PSA Resolution 12, 2022).

A unified skills taxonomy, aligning skills with occupational and industry classifications like the PSOC improves job-skills matching and promotes fairer hiring practices, focusing on skills over formal education (World Economic Forum, 2021).

In contrast, the Philippine Standard Classification of Education (PSCED) aligns with the PQF, which ensures that TVET graduates' qualifications meet employment or higher education standards. CHED is piloting credit transfer guidelines for TESDA qualifications in fields like agricultural engineering, dentistry, and tourism to support this alignment (EDCOM II, June 25, 2024).

Recommendations

The Philippine government must consolidate fragmented labor market data from different government agencies into a unified, interoperable LMIS. A central system should enable real-time data sharing and analysis. Integration will allow for more robust skills forecasting, reduce duplicative efforts, and streamline training program design. This harmonized data can be further enhanced by incorporating real-time big data from job platforms like LinkedIn and Jobstreet (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024), enriching insights into job-skills mismatches, projecting future labor market demands, and identifying critical skills shortages.

By leveraging data science and AI methodologies, the system will empower TESDA's capacity to identify and prioritize skills needs. Predictive analytics should inform training program design, ensuring alignment with high-growth sectors like information technology (IT), health care, and green technologies. These tools can also track the effectiveness of TVET programs in improving graduate employability. DepEd's Learner Reference Number may also be used to monitor a student's progress from basic education through to employment (EDCOM II, 2024, Jun 25).

Harmonize and standardize data-sharing protocols across government agencies by developing a standardized skills taxonomy aligned with PSOC and PQF to improve skills mapping and matching. This taxonomy should classify skills into categories relevant to current and emerging industries, enabling precise identification of skills shortages and surpluses (EDCOM II, 2024, Jun 25). Regular updates, incorporating input from industry stakeholders, will ensure the taxonomy remains relevant in the face of technological advancements and changing labor demands.

DOLE should take the lead in overseeing the LMIS, given its mandate to address labor issues and its involvement in interagency bodies like the PSA's Interagency Committee on Labor and Productivity Statistics (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024). DOLE should facilitate institutional arrangements, establish data-sharing protocols, and standardize methodologies for collecting and analyzing labor market data. Close collaboration with other stakeholders is vital for creating a cohesive system.

Stronger partnerships with industry stakeholders are needed to refine skills forecasting and program alignment. Initiatives like TESDA's Skills Anticipation and Prioritization of Skills Requirements Framework should be expanded to include regular industry consultations and updated skills maps based on market trends (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024).

LMI should have an enhanced data granularity to be more useful to stakeholders. Labor market data must provide detailed insights, including disaggregation by geographic location, specific occupations, and industries, to guide decisions by policymakers, employers, and students. The LMIS should also offer future-oriented projections to help students choose relevant courses and guide employers' workforce planning.

The LMIS must be user-friendly and accessible to all stakeholders, including students, job seekers, employers, and policymakers. A centralized online platform should serve as a one-stop resource for labor market data, offering tools for skills assessment, job matching, and training program selection.

Issue 2: TVET graduates face persistent challenges in securing quality employment and competitive wages.

Labor Force Participation and Employment Rates

In terms of employment effects, TVET positively influences labor force participation, particularly among women and youth. However, it does not significantly enhance the probability of securing employment or quality jobs, especially for males and young people. Generalao et al. (2024) emphasize that although TVET graduates often secure employment, they face higher rates of underemployment, indicating a mismatch between their skills and the labor market demands. In addition, in the study of Generalao et al. (2024), it shows that TVET graduates are less likely to be employed in precarious jobs compared to non-TVET workers. This was also confirmed by Bersales (2024).

FIGURE 7

Quality of Employment of TVET Vis-a-Vis Non-TVET Graduates, April 2023
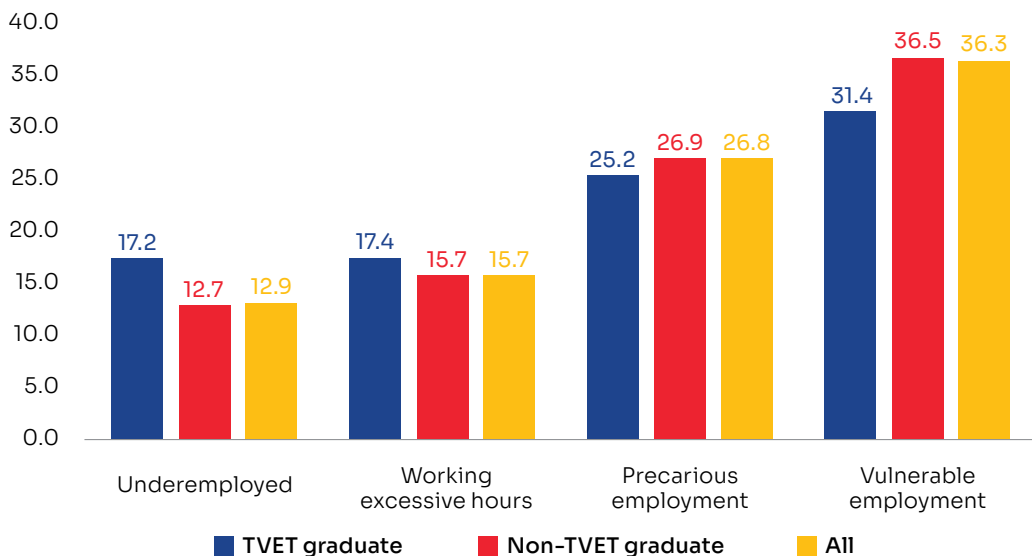
Source: Generalao, 2024 Dec 10

Data from the Labor Force Surveys (2021–2022) highlights this disparity. The figure below from Bersales (2024) illustrates that while TVET graduates have a labor force participation rate of 79.0%, their employment rate is only 91.0%, with an underemployment rate of 22.6%. This underemployment rate is significantly higher than that of college graduates, reflecting the persistent challenges faced by TVET graduates in finding quality jobs.

TABLE 4

Labor Force Indicators of Graduates of Senior High School, Postsecondary Programs, College Programs, With TVET, Without TVET, in Percentage, 2021–2022

Labor Force Indicator	Total	Senior High School Graduate	Post Secondary Graduate	College Graduate	With Post-Graduate Degree	With TVET	Without TVET
Labor Force Participation	62.4	38.6	75.8	78.1	79.6	79.0	61.7
Employment Rate	93.2	78.5	91.3	91.2	98.0	91.0	93.4
Unemployment Rate	6.6	21.5	8.7	8.8	2.0	9.0	6.6
Underemployment Rate	16.8	16.1	16.4	9.7	8.5	22.6	16.5

Note: Computations done by Bersales (2024)

Source: Labor Force Surveys, 2021–2022

TVET and the Informal Economy

TVET also plays a role in reducing participation in the informal economy, particularly among young men without formal schooling. Bersales (2024) found that the likelihood of being employed in the informal sector decreases for those with TVET qualifications, although this effect varies by gender and age. Women, for instance, remain highly vulnerable to informal employment regardless of TVET training, often due to socioeconomic constraints and traditional gender roles.

This finding aligns with Generalao et al. (2024), who note that women often prioritize family responsibilities over employment, limiting their ability to leverage TVET training effectively. Addressing these gender-specific barriers through tailored interventions could improve the employability of women in formal sectors.

FIGURE 8

Labor Force Status of TVET Vis-a-Vis Non-TVET Graduates by Sex, April 2023
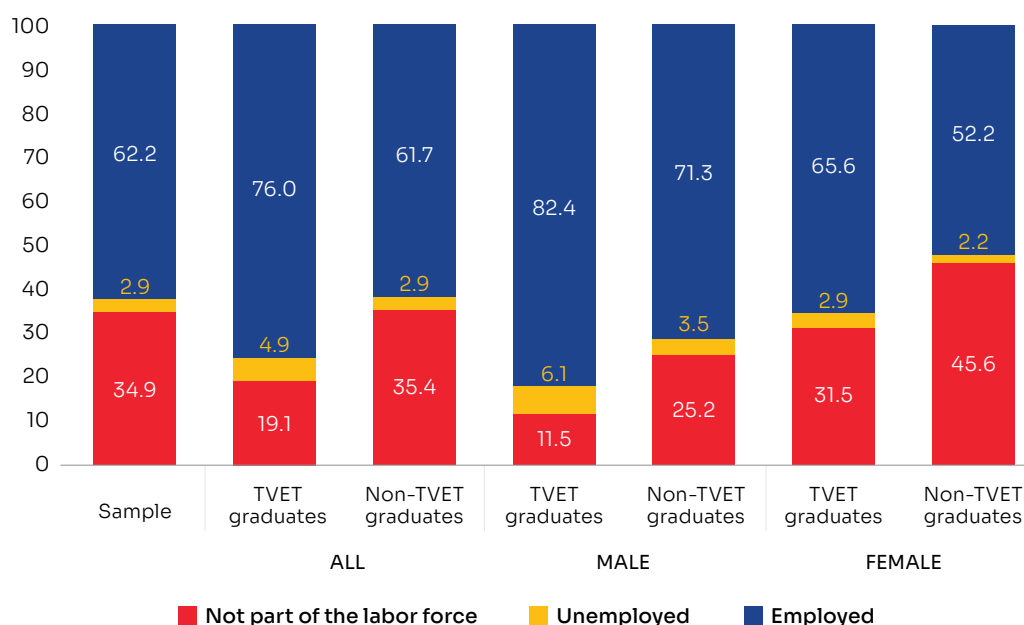
Source: Source: Labor Force Surveys, 2021–2022

Wage Outcomes

Contrary to expectations, TVET graduates do not consistently earn higher wages than their non-TVET counterparts. A PDIS study on wage outcomes compared wages and the likelihood of low-paid employment between TVET and non-TVET graduates. Preliminary results indicate no significant wage differences between the two groups, though factors such as training modality and program registration significantly influence wages for TVET graduates (Generalao, 2024 Dec 10). Bersales (2024) also notes that TVET graduates' earnings often do not reflect the skills and effort invested in their training.

FIGURE 9

Wage Levels (Average Daily Basic Pay) of Workers in Private Establishments by TVET Completion Status Across Various Demographic Characteristics, April
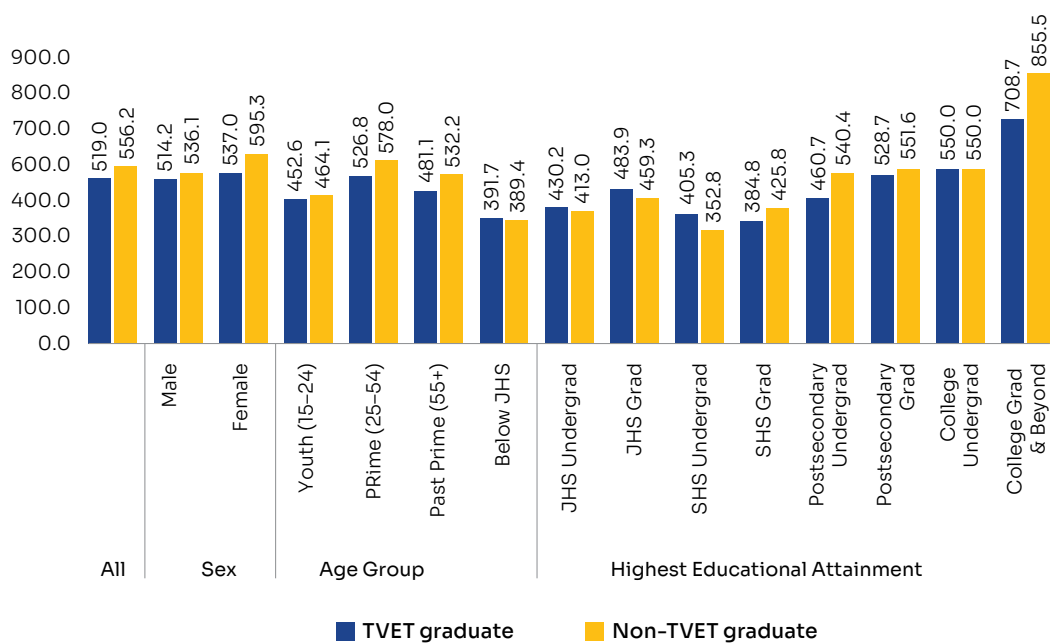
Source: Generalao, 2024 Dec 10

Recommendations

Increase private sector involvement in the design, provision, and certification processes of training programs to ensure alignment with industry needs. Decentralizing the development of training programs and certification systems to the private sector will foster innovation and responsiveness to labor market demands. Regularly revisiting program designs with industry stakeholders will ensure a focus on better-paying occupations and future workforce requirements.

Regularly monitor the employability of TVET graduates and the effectiveness of training programs to ensure they meet labor market expectations. Utilizing advanced analysis methods, including innovative techniques to estimate outcomes and address hidden influences, will improve the accuracy and usefulness of findings. These insights will support continuous improvement in program delivery and outcomes.

Standardize definitions across datasets to improve data consistency, and to ease comparability of TVET and non–TVET graduate outcomes. TESDA should integrate labor market data from sources like the LFS, the TESDA Training Management

Information System, the Special Training for Employment Program, and skills surveys to provide a holistic view of TVET outcomes. This effort will ensure reliable and actionable insights for policy and program adjustments.

Focus on specific groups, such as high school graduates, to provide targeted insights and clearer comparisons of TVET's impact on different populations. This can be done by gathering data on program costs, certification expenses, and wage outcomes that will allow TESDA to assess the returns to TVET using rate of return methodologies. This approach will help refine programs to maximize their effectiveness for key demographics.

Identify and expand programs that demonstrate positive employment outcomes to ensure they benefit a wider range of participants. Adapting these programs based on robust data insights will enable TESDA to replicate success in various contexts while addressing local labor market needs. This ensures the scalability and relevance of effective training initiatives.

Address biases against TVET graduates through strategic marketing campaigns and system enhancements that highlight their value. Showcasing the employability, earning potential, and career success of TVET graduates will improve public perceptions and attract more participants. These efforts are vital for building confidence in TVET as a career pathway.

Priority Area 20: Industry Involvement and Investment in Upskilling

Issue 1: Despite TVET's contributions to workforce development, challenges persist in aligning with labor market shifts, declining sector participation, and improving job quality amid post-pandemic recovery.

TVET has long been recognized as a cornerstone of the Philippine economy, driving growth and enhancing competitiveness by producing skilled workers vital to various industries, including overseas employment. In 2021, eight out of 10 TVET graduates secured employment within a year, with most qualifications concentrated in the agriculture, forestry, fishery, tourism, and automotive sectors (NTESDP 2023–2028; TESDA, 2023). In 2023, over 970,000 graduates were certified as skilled workers, a 15% increase from the previous year. Region VIII, the National Capital Region, and Region VII recorded the highest number of certifications. The numbers of TVET learners enrolling, graduating, and obtaining certification have been steadily rising, after dropping in 2020 due to COVID-19 (TESDA statistics, 2019–2023).

This recovery in TVET participation is evident in sectors such as agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. Since 2015, the number of graduates in these fields has been gradually increasing, nearly doubling between 2020 and 2021, and now accounting for around 20% of all graduates. This significant growth can be attributed to the resilience of the agriculture sector during the pandemic, which maintained employment levels due to its essential and low-contact nature (Debuque-Gonzales et al., 2023, as cited in Epetia

& Villena, 2023). Many city workers also returned to the provinces and relied on farming as a source of income, further increasing the demand for agricultural training (Lucero, 2021, as cited in Epetia & Villena, 2023). In contrast, tourism, which was previously the top sector for TVET graduates, saw a steep decline in graduate numbers, dropping from over 500,000 in 2019 to just over 100,000 in 2020. ICT, which once ranked second to tourism, experienced a steady decrease and now ranks 10th among TVET sectors (TESDA statistics, 2015–2023). These shifts illustrate how TVET both responds to and reflects changes in the labor market.

FIGURE 10
Number of TVET Graduates by Sector, 2015–2023
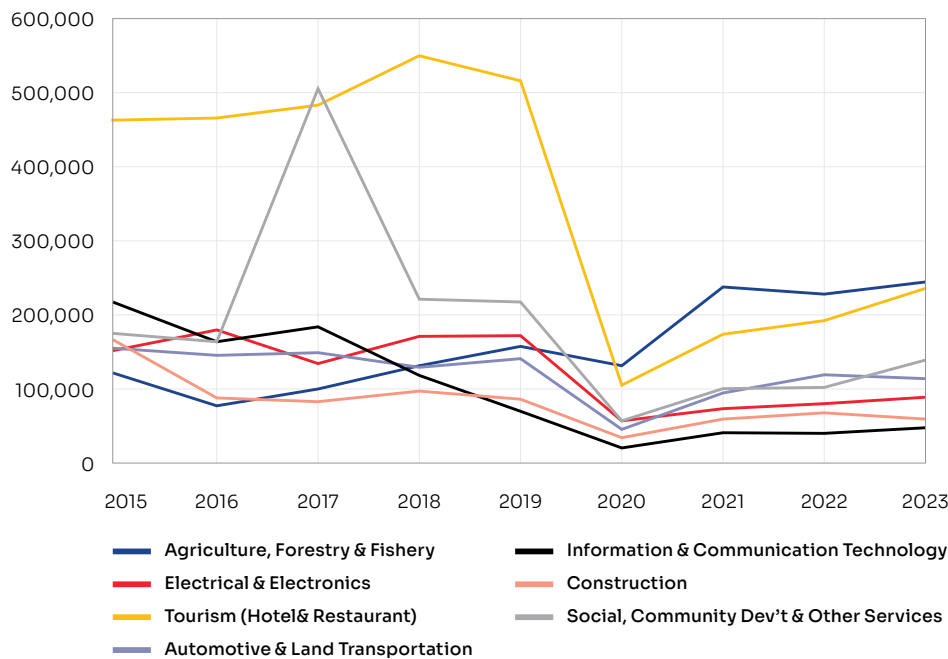
Source: TESDA Statistics, 2015–2023

A comparative analysis of enrollment trends in TVET programs between 2020 and 2023 reveals that in 2020, Driving NC II and Bread and Pastry Production NC II emerged as the leading qualifications, capturing 15.01% and 14.00% of total enrollments, respectively. By 2023, Bread and Pastry Production NC II experienced a marked increase, securing 20.33% of enrollments, while Driving NC II retained its relevance with 17.76%. This upward trend highlights the sustained demand for qualifications tied to workforce-ready industries such as food preparation and transportation. Notably, programs such as Electrical Installation and Maintenance, Shielded Metal Arc Welding, and Caregiving exhibited significant growth, signaling an expansion in occupational diversity within TVET offerings. The total enrollment nearly doubled from 134,453 in 2020 to 283,727 in 2023, reflecting a growing recognition of TVET as a viable pathway for skill acquisition.

A comparative analysis of enrollment trends in TVET programs between 2020 and 2023 reveals that in 2020, Driving NC II and Bread and Pastry Production NC II emerged as the leading qualifications, capturing 15.01% and 14.00% of total enrollments, respectively.

TABLE 5
Top TVET Programs, 2020 and 2023

2020		
Qualification	**Enrollees**	**%**
Driving II	20,188	15.01%
Bread and Pastry Production II	18,829	14.00%
Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW) II	17,121	12.73%
Organic Agriculture Production II	16,855	12.54%
Electrical Installation & Maintenance II	15,388	11.44%
Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW) I	13,058	9.71%
Computer Systems Servicing II	9,602	7.14%
Cookery II	9,461	7.04%
Contact Center Services II	7,654	5.69%
Dressmaking II	6,297	4.68%
TOTAL	134,453	100.00%

2023		
Qualification	**Enrollees**	**%**
Bread and Pastry Production II	57,690	20.33%
Driving II	50,403	17,76%
Electrical Installation & Maintenance II	27,406	9.66%
Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW) II	25,922	9.14%
Caregiving II	24,877	8.77%
Cookery II	23,340	8.23%
Computer Systems Servicing II	20,956	7.39%
Organic Agriculture Production II	20,273	7.15%
Contact Center Services II	18,256	6.43%
Food & Beverage Services II	14,604	5.15%
TOTAL	283,727	100.00%

Although the pandemic slowed growth and introduced new challenges to the labor market, annual gross domestic product (GDP) has shown positive growth over the last 3 years. In the second quarter of 2024, GDP per capita increased to 5.4%, surpassing pre-pandemic levels (Balisacan, 2024). Year-on-year growth in the industry and services sectors were strong, at 7.7% and 6.8%, respectively; while the agriculture sector declined to 2.3%. The GDP growth was primarily driven by significant investments in construction (16%); wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (5.8%); and financial and insurance activities (8.2%) (PSA, 2024).

According to PSA, employment growth mirrored the trends in these industries, with construction contributing 938,000 new jobs; wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles adding 527,000; and accommodation and food services adding 396,000 more positions. However, agriculture and forestry jobs declined by 916,000; public administration and defense, compulsory social security dropped by

340,000; and fishing and aquaculture saw a decrease of 81,000 jobs. As of June 2024, the services sector still held the largest share of the 50.28 million total employed, at 58.7%; while agriculture and industry accounted for 21.1% and 20.2%, respectively (PSA, 2024).

Overall, unemployment fell significantly to 3.1% in June 2024, the lowest rate in nearly 2 decades. Underemployment increased slightly to 12.1%, suggesting more workers are seeking additional hours or jobs. The labor force, defined as the number of individuals aged 15 and above who are either employed or unemployed, grew by 730,000 from June 2023, reaching 51.9 million, with a labor force participation rate of 66% (PSA, 2024). While these figures suggest improvements in the labor market since the pandemic, other indicators highlight the need for continued efforts to improve job quality (BLE, 2024).

Issue 2: EBET policies and programs are unclear and overlapping leading to challenges in implementation

Despite increasing enrollment in EBT since the pandemic, participation rates remain low compared to other TVET modalities. The number of EBT graduates has jumped by 12% in 2023 from the previous year, surpassing the 5% target in the NTESDP 2023–2028. EBT enrollment is steadily increasing and has exceeded pre-pandemic levels. However, it remains significantly lower compared to institution-based and community-based training programs.

EBT is primarily conducted within the workplace but may also be delivered by external training providers. Institution-based training, on the other hand, is delivered through TESDA regional and provincial training centers, private TVIs, higher education institutions, and training centers established by LGUs. Community-based training focuses on serving poor and marginalized groups who are often excluded from formal training programs, and is given directly in informal or formal settings by LGUs, ongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and other TVET providers. Monitored training includes skills programs conducted by national government agencies other than TESDA (TESDA, 2022).

While TESDA serves as the main regulatory authority overseeing all forms of TVET in the Philippines, the agency engages in direct training in all modalities through its technology institutions, which is composed of training centers and administered schools. TESDA operates 178 technology institutions, including 17 regional training centers, 99 provincial training centers, 57 administered schools, and five specialized training centers such as the TESDA Women's Center, the Language Skills Institute, and the Korea-Philippines IT Training Centers (EDCOM II, 2023, May 11). In EBT the participation of TESDA training institutions is mainly in provision of theoretical and soft skills in a DTS partnership with a private enterprise that has registered its training program with TESDA.

As the labor market evolves and industries demand more specialized skills, EBT has emerged as a valuable component of TVET. Unlike community-based and classroom-based training, EBT places trainees directly in real-world work environments, where they gain practical, hands-on experience guided by industry professionals. This approach ensures that graduates are not only equipped with theoretical knowledge but also possess practical skills that align closely with the requirements of employers, improving employability, work readiness, and job security. For example, EBT accounted for the highest employment rate, at 85.22%, among all TVET graduates in 2021 (SETG, 2022).

EBT also enables learners to gain expertise in the latest technologies and develop specific work attitudes, making them more prepared for real-world challenges (Hansson, 2009, as cited in Generalao, 2024). For businesses, EBT offers long-term benefits such as access to a skilled labor pool, opportunities to screen potential employees during training, and alignment of training with company-specific competencies (Flake, 2017, as cited in Generalao et al., 2024).These advantages have been shown to increase productivity, provide seasonal benefits, and reduce costs associated with hiring and onboarding new employees (Mapa et al., 2016, as cited in Generalao et al., 2024).

Despite its potential, Year One findings reveal that industry participation in EBT programs remains relatively low, due in part to perceived costs and administrative burdens on companies, along with other challenges such as unclear policies, inaccessible incentives, and coordination issues. Enterprises have expressed concerns about the added responsibilities placed on supervisors, who are often tasked with designing training modules and overseeing trainee progress. The lack of sufficient personnel to manage these tasks further discourages companies from participating in EBT programs. Moreover, the complex and fragmented policies surrounding EBT, which include multiple training forms, have made it difficult for businesses to navigate the system efficiently (Year One Report, 2023).

In response to the Year One recommendation to rationalize policies on EBT, EDCOM II led several meetings, focus groups, and site consultations with relevant stakeholders and industry partners to clarify EBT and its several variations at present. These dialogues and consultations have resulted in the changes proposed by EDCOM II in the EBET Law.

Many policies to implement the DTS law were unimplemented, and unchecked 3 decades later. Despite available tax deductions, exemptions, and financial aid, enterprises have struggled to access these benefits since 1996 due to unclear, cumbersome processes and the lack of digitalization, as noted in the Year One Report. The one-size-fits-all incentive framework further fails to address the diverse needs of industries.

According to the BIR, no company has filed an application for tax deduction or exemption since BIR Revenue Regulation No. 10-96, series (s.) 1996, was issued to implement provisions of the DTS Act of 1994. TESDA confirmed that it has not recommended any applications for exemption under this regulation (EDCOM II, 2024, Feb 21). However, a list provided by the Department of Finance (DOF) showed that 12 applications for import tax and duty exemptions by six TVIs were filed between 2012 and 2017 (EDCOM II, 2024, Apr 25). No further exemption applications have been received by the DOF after 2017. Notably, this list includes the Porsche sports cars donation to Don Bosco Technical Institute, which took several months to process, demonstrating the lengthy approval process that stakeholders have criticized (EDCOM II, 2024, Feb 21).

"There's not just a lack of incentives but also a lot of disincentives. The process that the institutions must go through is disincentivizing already. Perhaps a refinement that could be considered is whether the incentives cut across all enterprises."
—Mr. Montero (APAC), Consultation on EBT Incentives, February 21, 2024
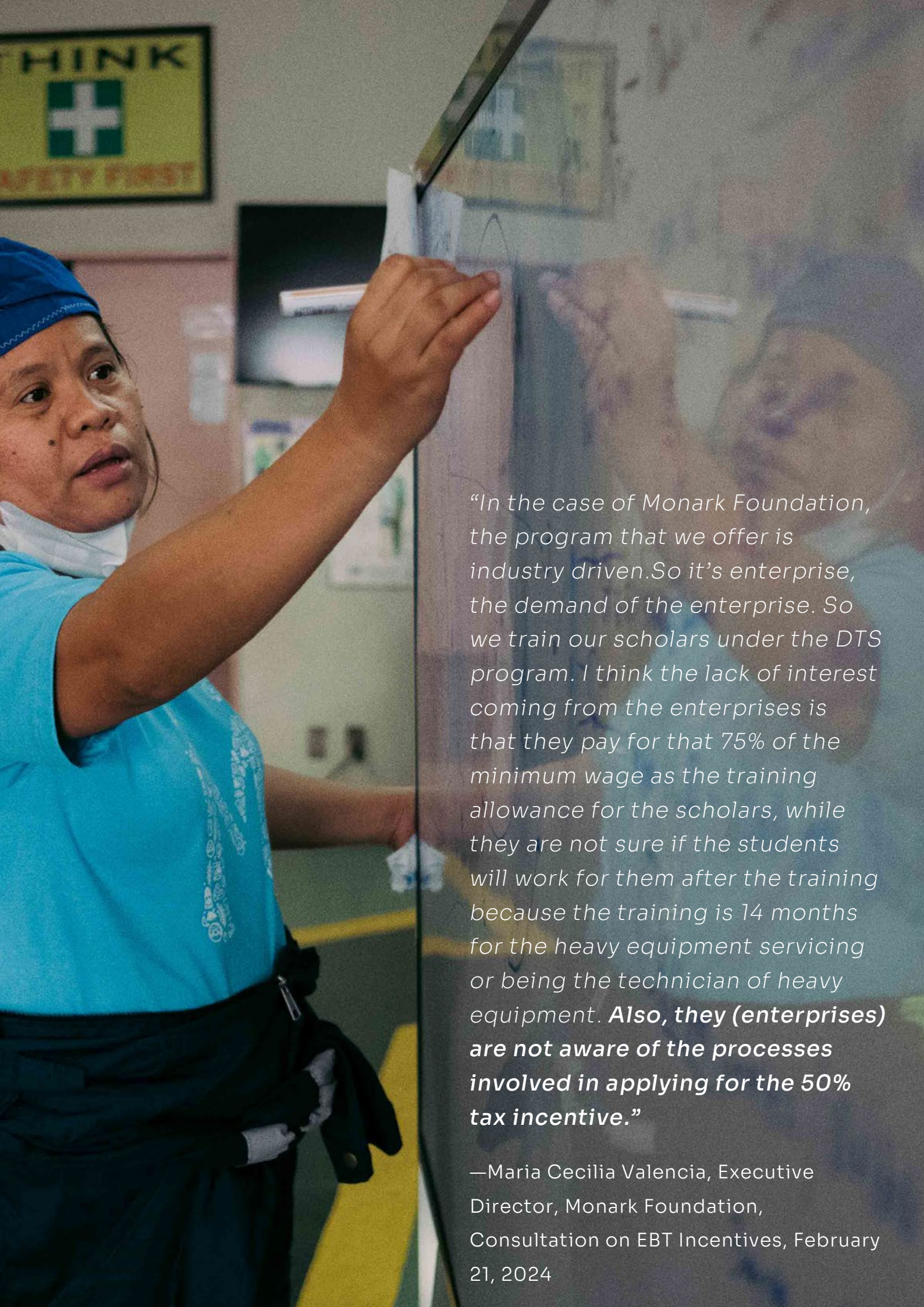
"In the case of Monark Foundation, the program that we offer is industry driven. So it's enterprise, the demand of the enterprise. So we train our scholars under the DTS program. I think the lack of interest coming from the enterprises is that they pay for that 75% of the minimum wage as the training allowance for the scholars, while they are not sure if the students will work for them after the training because the training is 14 months for the heavy equipment servicing or being the technician of heavy equipment. **Also, they (enterprises) are not aware of the processes involved in applying for the 50% tax incentive."**

—Maria Cecilia Valencia, Executive Director, Monark Foundation, Consultation on EBT Incentives, February 21, 2024

FIGURE 11

Process for Obtaining a Certificate for Tax Exemption

Certificate of Tax Exemption to nonstock, nonprofit corporations and associations under Section 30 of the National Internal Revenue Code of 1997, as amended: nonstock, nonprofit educational institutions

EXEMPTION FROM TAXES, DUTIES FOR IMPORTATION

Requirements for tax exemption incentives

Applicant Submission

File an application for exemption with the Revenue Office, Department of Finance, Manila.

The application must be duly signed by the head of the accredited dual training educational institution or an authorized representative.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

☐ Bill of lading, airway bill, parcel post/notice, and other shipping documents

☐ Commercial invoice and packing list

☐ Other relevant documents concerning the shipment

Obtain TESDA Certification

Verify that the importer is an accredited dual training educational institution.

Include a recommendation that the importation is necessary for the dual training system.

⚠ No accrediation is given foreign companies. In the Hearing last February 21, BIR said that the bureau is currently drafting a revenue regulation to streamline the documentary requirements. But to date, no new such regulation has been issued.

Submit Affidavit/ Statement

State that the imported items are essential and will be used exclusively for the dual training system.

⚠ NO list has been submitted by TESDA to the BIR. TESDA said that the list is in every training regulation, but the BIR said that there should be one list that should be submitted.

Provide Charter/ Registration Proof

Provide a copy of the charter or certificate of registration of the educational institution with the Securities and Exchange Commission or equivalent evidence of its character.

Secure Certification of Availability from DTI*

*or appropriate agency, stating that the items are not locally available in sufficient quantity or comparable quality at reasonable prices.

⚠ The BIR was asked why DTI is the one who will issue this list, when it is TESDA who is the authority. According to TESDA, no application has been made through them for this one—zero since the implementation of the law.

Submit Affidavit on Usage and Marking

Submit a sworn statement ensuring the items will not be sold, transferred, or disposed of without prior approval from the Department of Finance.

Mark the items as "TAX AND DUTY FREE UNDER RA 7686."

EXEMPTION FROM TAXES, DUTIES FOR IMPORTATION

Availment of incentives and allowable deduction

Applicant Submission

To avail of the incentives related to donation and allowable deduction, the concerned enterprise must submit the following documents to the Revenue District Office (RDO) of their principal place of business:

1. **Letter of Application**
   Duly signed by the appropriate authority of the agricultural, industrial, or business establishment participating in the Dual Training System (DTS)

2. **Memorandum of Agreement**
   Signed by the accredited DTS establishment, the educational/training institution, and the trainee

3. **Accreditation Proof**
   Certification of the dual training educational institution's accreditation by the appropriate authority

4. **Affidavit from the Educational Institution**
   Statement under oath regarding the actual amount received for the trainee(s) and official receipts for contributions/donations

5. **Affidavit from the Participating Establishment**
   Statement under oath regarding the actual amount donated/contributed to the accredited educational institution for DTS operations and official receipts

6. **Financial Statement**
   For the year when the tax exemption/incentive is being claimed

7. **Securities and Exchange Commission / Department of Trade and Industry Registration Certificate**
   of the participating establishment

8. **Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws**
   or other documents showing the nature of the business of the concerned establishment.

People in the RDO do not inform the enterprises how to avail of these incentives.

The Bureau of Customs (BOC) claims that it typically takes 1.2 hours to process the release of donations or imports, provided all documentary requirements are complete. However, it can take up to 6 days if certain requirements need certifications from other offices. According to the BOC, the DOF is the main agency responsible for approving all applications for duty and tax exemptions on donations and imports. Under BIR Revenue Regulation No. 10-96, the DOF may also conduct inspections before or after approval of any tax and duty exemptions to ensure compliance. The DOF, in turn, requires endorsements from other government agencies to process approvals, including a certification from TESDA that the donated equipment and materials are essential to training (EDCOM II, 2024, Apr 25).

> *According to the BIR, no company has filed an application for tax deduction or exemption since BIR Revenue Regulation No. 10-96, s. 1996, was issued to implement provisions of the DTS Act of 1994.*

FIGURE 12
Process Flow and Procedure: Regular Lane
(Customs and Tariff Division & Internal Revenue Division)
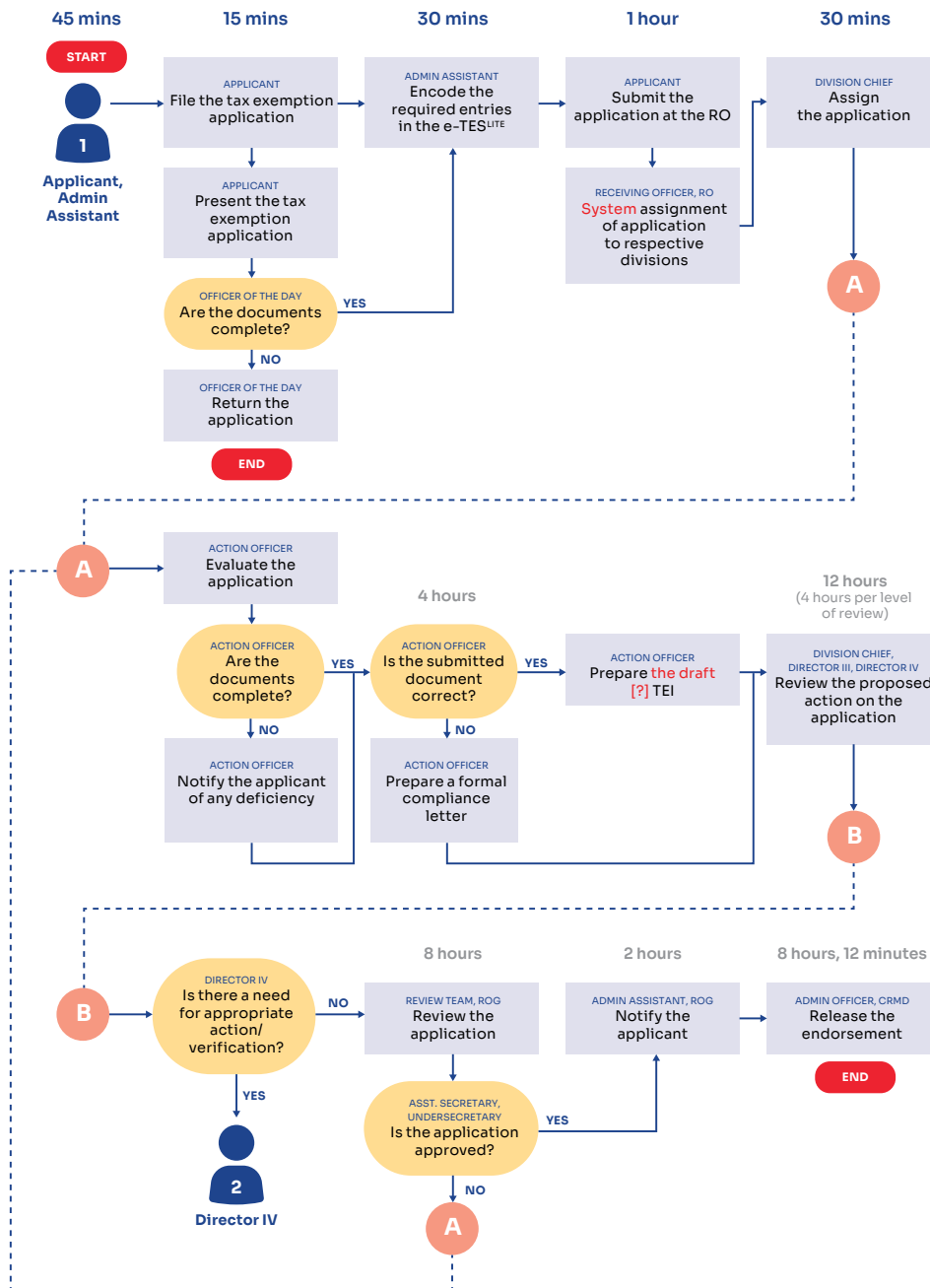
Abbreviations: CRMD: Central Records Management Division, e-TES: Enhanced Tax Exemption System, TEI: Tax Exemption Indorsement, RO: Revenue Office, ROG: Revenue Operations Group

> *The DTS Act mandates TESDA, the DTI, and the BIR to jointly create a list of essential training equipment and materials, but no such list exists. The BIR questioned its role, suggesting TESDA, as the training authority, should lead the effort. TESDA stated that relevant materials are included in its training regulations but have not been consolidated or submitted to the BIR or the BOC (EDCOM II, 2024, Feb 21).*

The DTS Act mandates TESDA, the DTI, and the BIR to jointly create a list of essential training equipment and materials, but no such list exists. During the hearing conducted by EDCOM, the BIR questioned its role, suggesting TESDA, as the training authority, should lead the effort. TESDA stated that relevant materials are included in its training regulations but have not been consolidated or submitted to the BIR or the BOC (EDCOM II, 2024, Feb 21).

Under the DTS Act, private enterprises can deduct 50% of trainee expenses from their taxes and up to 3% of income tax for donations or financial aid to DTS programs. Full deductions apply to contributions supporting National Priority Programs of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), such as dairy cattle production and food animal welfare initiatives in 2024 (EDCOM II, 2024, Apr 25). However, many enterprises are unaware of these incentives or find the process too complex due to extensive documentation and administrative hurdles. Additionally, the incentive structure exposes businesses to financial risks, as they bear training and wage costs without assurance that trainees will join their workforce (EDCOM II, 2024, Feb 21).

The DTS Act and the Adopt-A-School Act of 1998 (RA 8525) provide exemptions from donor taxes, value-added tax, excise tax, and import duties for training donations. However, enterprises and TVIs rarely utilize these exemptions due to excessive paperwork and bureaucratic red tape, which donors also find frustrating. Smaller TVIs feel particularly disadvantaged, perceiving the process as favoring larger institutions. Although the Adopt-A-School Act designates TESDA's budget to cover value-added and excise taxes, this provision has not been included in TESDA's general appropriations (EDCOM II, 2024, Feb 21).

*"The incentives become so restrictive. **It seems that we need a shift in mindset that assumes good faith.** These additional requirements were required to protect the interest of the government, but **now, no one is interested in availing because of the sheer magnitude of the requirements**."*

—Cong. P. J. Garcia, Consultations on EBT Incentives, February 21, 2024

Concerns have been raised about the lack of competition and transparency in the accreditation process managed by the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC), the sole accreditor for TVIs and organizations seeking DTS Act incentives. The BIR, which oversees tax incentives, relies on PCNC accreditation, adding complexity (EDCOM II, 2024, Feb 21). The process, which can take up to 3 months, requires 19 documents and includes organizational and operational tests to ensure compliance with governance and management standards. The lengthy process discourages some nonprofit organizations from accessing the benefits provided by the DTS Act.

FIGURE 13
Accreditation Process

| 1 Application | → | 2 Evaluation | → | 3 PCNC Board Deliberation |

🕐 ~ 3 months

| 6 Issuance by BIR of COR | ← | 5 Endorsement to BIR | ← | 4 Issuance of PCNC COA |
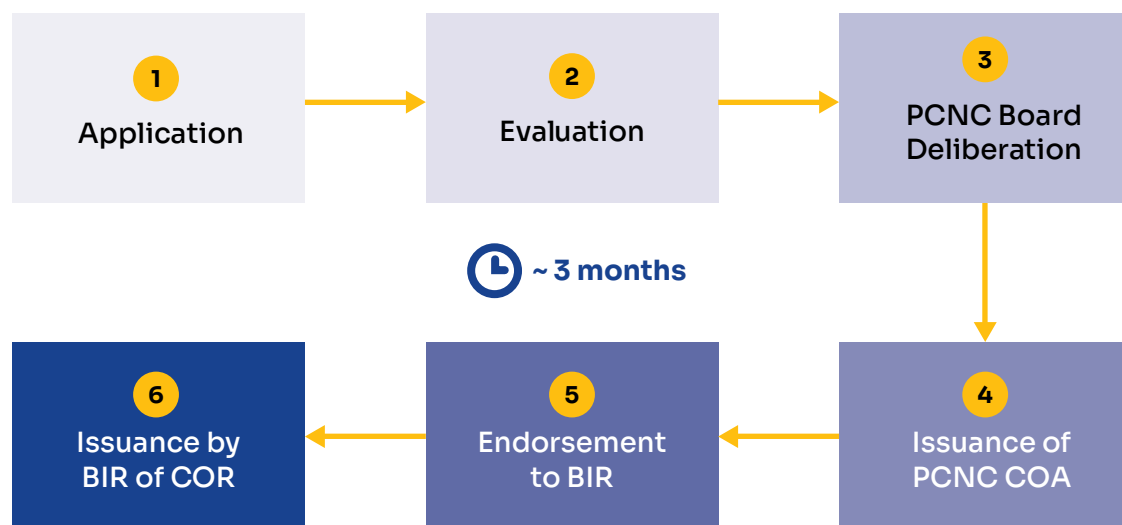
Abbreviations: COA = Certificate of Accreditation, COR = Certificate of Registration

TABLE 6
Table of EBT–Related Incentives by Agency

Law	Applicable to	Incentive	Relevant Agency / Policy	Terms and Conditions
Dual Training System (DTS) Act (RA 7686)	Enterprise	50% deduction for actual expenses incurred on DTS trainee	BIR RR 10-96, RMC 15-2020	■ Deduction limited to 5% of direct labor expenses, not exceeding Php 25 million a year ■ Requires submission of (1) letter of application, (2) MOA, (3) accreditation of DTS institution, (4) affidavit of actual amounts received for training, (5) affidavit of actual amounts donated, (6) financial statements, (7) business registration, and (8) articles of incorporation
Dual Training System (DTS) Act (RA 7686)	Enterprise	3% deduction for donations made to DTS programs	BIR, NEDA RR 10-96, RMC 15-2020 NEDA Circular 01-1991	■ Donations are deductible from business income ■ If DTS program is listed under NEDA's National Priority Programs, deduction is 100% from taxable income
Dual Training System (DTS) Act (RA 7686)	Private entity	Exemption from donor's tax	BIR, TESDA RR 10-96, RMC 15-2020 RA 7686 Sec. 9 and 18	■ Donor tax exemption for DTS contributions, provided that no more than 30% is used for administrative purposes ■ Certification of accreditation from TESDA is required
Dual Training System (DTS) Act (RA 7686)	Public TVI Private TVI	Exemption from VAT and excise tax and duty on imported training equipment and materials	BIR, DOF, TESDA RR 10-96, RMC 15-2020	■ Requires submission of (1) application for exemption with DOF, (2) bill of lading, (3) commercial invoice, (4) packing list, (5) TESDA certification, (6) affidavit that imported articles are essential, (7) Charter or SEC registration certificate, (8) BOI certification of nonavailability of items in the local market, and (9) affidavit that items will not be sold or transferred without DOF approval ■ If NGO, a PCNC accreditation is required ■ List of training essentials for exemption jointly formed by BIR, DTI, and TESDA
Adopt-A-School Act (RA 8525)	Public TVI	Exemption from VAT for local donations	BIR, TESDA RR 10-2003	■ No input VAT so long as donee is final consumer/end-user and donation is considered as a sales transaction ■ VAT exempt if transfer of goods is not considered as a sales transaction

Law	Applicable to	Incentive	Relavant Agency / Policy	Terms and Conditions
Adopt-a-School Act (RA 8525)	Private entity	Deduction of local donations from taxable income Exemption from donor's tax	BIR, TESDA RR 10-2003	■ Donation is directly and exclusively incurred for the program ■ Additional amount equivalent to 50% of contribution provided there is evidence, endorsement from national secretariat, and application filed with RDO ■ Deduction availed within taxable year when paid/incurred
Adopt-a-School Act (RA 8525)	Private entity	Exemption from VAT for foreign donations	BIR, TESDA RR 10-2003	■ Exemption assumed by TESDA except when importation is exempt from Tax Code ■ Import VAT automatically considered as government expenditure under the General Appropriations Act (GAA)
Adopt-a-School Act (RA 8525)	Private entity	Exemption from VAT for local donations	BIR, TESDA RR 10-2003	■ Subject to VAT ■ Input VAT may be claimed but subject to allocation rules on taxable sales, zero-rated sales, and exempt sales
Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises (CREATE) Act (RA 11534)	Public TVI	50% deduction on labor training expenses	BIR, TESDA	■ Available for training expenses incurred in public TVIs, capped at 10% of direct labor wages ■ Requires certifications from TESDA
National Internal Revenue Code (RA 8424)	Private entity	Limited deductibility for donations to accredited NGOs (10% for individuals, 5% for corporations)	BIR, PCNC RR No. 13-98	■ Donations must be made within taxable year to an accredited nonstock, nonprofit, with limit on the percentage of donations allowable as deductions from taxable income ■ Evidence or receipt detailing donation is required
National Internal Revenue Code (RA 8424 as amended)	Private entity	Full deductibility for donations to accredited NGOs	BIR, PCNC RR No. 13-98	■ Donations made within taxable year to an accredited nonstock, nonprofit ■ Donation used by the 15th day of the third month after close of taxable year ■ Administrative expenses must not exceed 30% annually
National Internal Revenue Code (RA 8424 as amended)	Private entity	Exemption from donor's tax	BIR, PCNC RR No. 13-98	■ Donations made to an accredited non-stock, non-profit organization ■ Not more than 30% of donations and gifts to be used for administrative purposes ■ Evidence or receipt detailing donation is required

Adopt–Adapt Framework

Consultations reveal that the development, implementation, and certification of training regulations (TRs) could take from 6 months to 2 years, limiting the capability of training programs to respond to the rapidly changing needs of industry (Year One Report, 2024). In an effort to expedite the development of TRs, **TESDA released Circular No. 009, s. 2024, in February 2024, on Implementing Guidelines on Adopt–Adapt Strategies for Competency/Training Regulations Review and Development.**

The Adopt-Adapt framework allows industries to acquire local or international competency standards and TRs through the integration of existing industry best practices and the application of various adopt-adapt strategies. This not only shortens the time needed to develop new TRs but also reduces the risk of implementing ineffective or inefficient ones.

Strategies of benchmarking (comparing an organization's regulations with leaders in the industry) and referencing (incorporating established industry standards and practices) ensure that industries stay competitive. Meanwhile, industry exposure and partnership agreements encourage industries to support each other and check if adapted regulations are relevant and practical. However, since its implementation in February 2024, only 1 Adopt-Adapt TR has been fully implemented (TESDA Plenary Budget Hearing, 2024).

FIGURE 14
Adopt–Adapt Framework

Abbreviations: NC - National Certificate

COC - Certificate of Competencies

CS - Competency Standards

RPL - Recognition of Prior Learning

TR - Training Regulations

Source: TESDA Circular 009, s. 2024
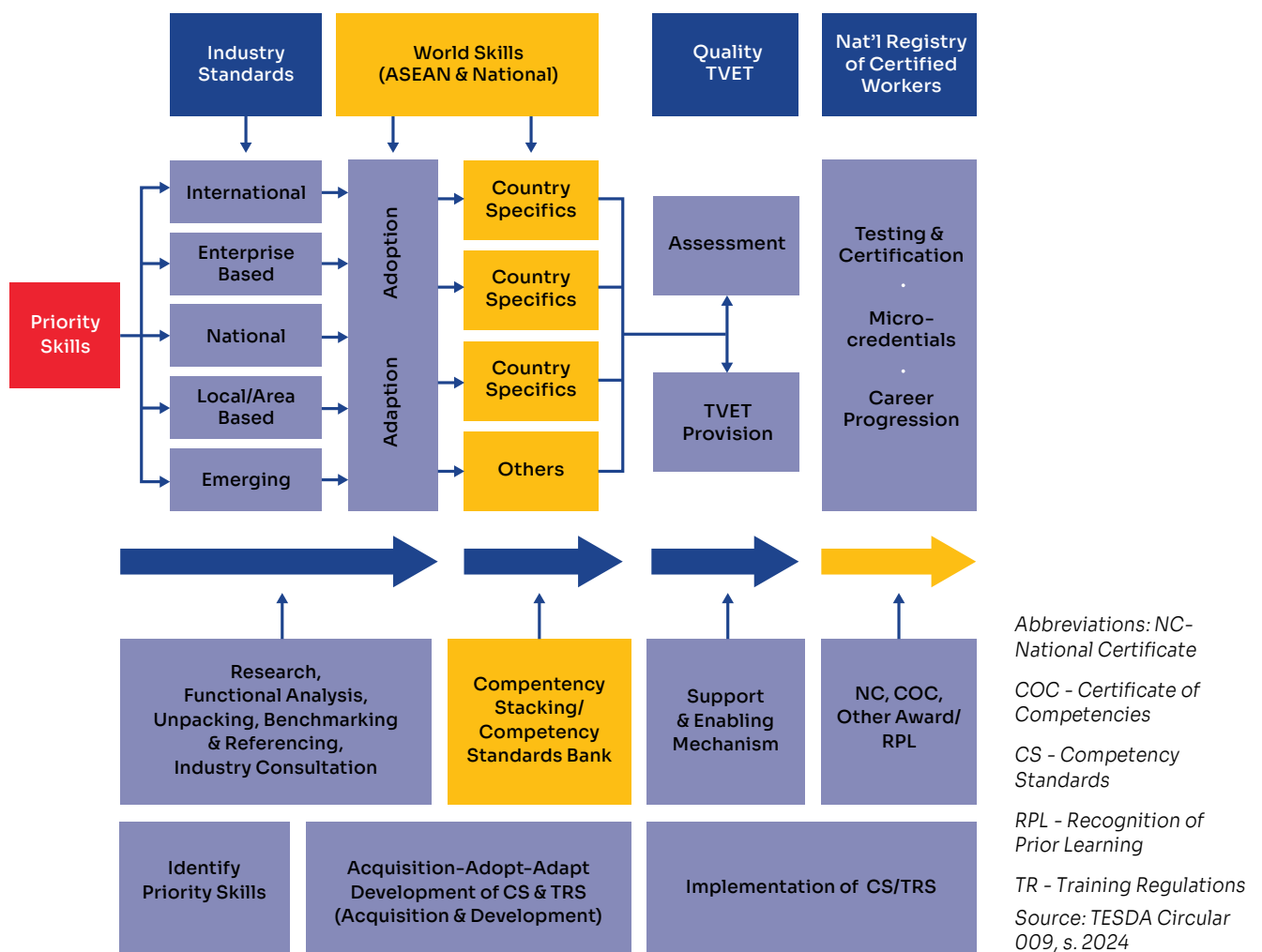
Recommendations

TESDA, the BIR, and other relevant agencies should simplify and streamline the lengthy processes associated with tax benefits and EBT-related incentives. The current bureaucratic hurdles deter companies and training institutions from utilizing these incentives effectively. Implementing a digital platform to consolidate documentary requirements and enable real-time application tracking would enhance efficiency, transparency, and accessibility, minimizing delays and encouraging broader industry participation in EBT programs. This initiative can be pursued under the EBET Framework Act (RA 12063).

TESDA should ramp up implementation of its Adopt-Adapt Strategies following the steps outlined in TESDA released Circular No. 009, s.2024. Capability-building programs funded through scholarship programs can also be conducted to train target clientele in the application of adopt-adapt strategies in developing competency standards for TRs.

Additionally, to enhance industry acceptance of certifications and strengthen industry participation in TESD governance (as emphasized in TESDA Circular No. 041, s. 2024), it is recommended that **TESDA proactively promote and implement the updated Guidelines on the Adoption of the Industry-Based Assessment and Certification System (IBACS),** released on June 28, 2024. This will foster greater alignment between training outcomes and industry requirements.

Priority Area 21: Ensuring Quality in the Provision of TVET

Issue 1: Most TVIs and TRs are concentrated on lower skill programs (NC 1 and 2)

According to RA 7796, TESDA is the lead authority responsible for technical education and skills development in the country. To uphold quality in all TVET programs, TESDA operates based on a framework anchored on competency standards developed by industry experts. This framework is informed by various government plans, policies, and priorities, aligning national economic and labor market needs while providing opportunities for employment, social inclusion, and personal advancement. Quality TVET is delivered through a system that adheres to the principles of lifelong learning and the recognition of prior learning achieved through formal and nonformal means (PQF website, 2024). This system adapts to technological changes and emerging risks that may impact the growth and quality of TVET. TESDA's commitment to high-quality TVET is guided by the Quality Assured Technical Education and Skills Development Framework, which provides standards and measures for competency, training delivery, and learning outcomes (NTESDP 2023–2028).

TVET programs are delivered through a network of 4,536 TVIs, which include TESDA Technology Institutions (TTIs) at national, regional, and provincial levels, as well as local and state universities and colleges, other government agencies with skills development programs, and private institutions. Approximately 90% of TVIs are privately operated, while TTIs represent 4% of TVET providers. However, in 2023, TTIs accounted for nearly 30% of total enrollment.

> *"The growth [in the programs that TESDA offers] will be attuned to the requirements of industries both local and national, and even global.* **The goal is not in numbers, the goal is to grow it with quality.** *That way we will also be targeted in offering our programs and scholarships."*
> —Sen. Win Gatchalian, EDCOM II Co-Chairperson

FIGURE 15
Distribution of TVET Enrollment and TVI Types, 2017–2023
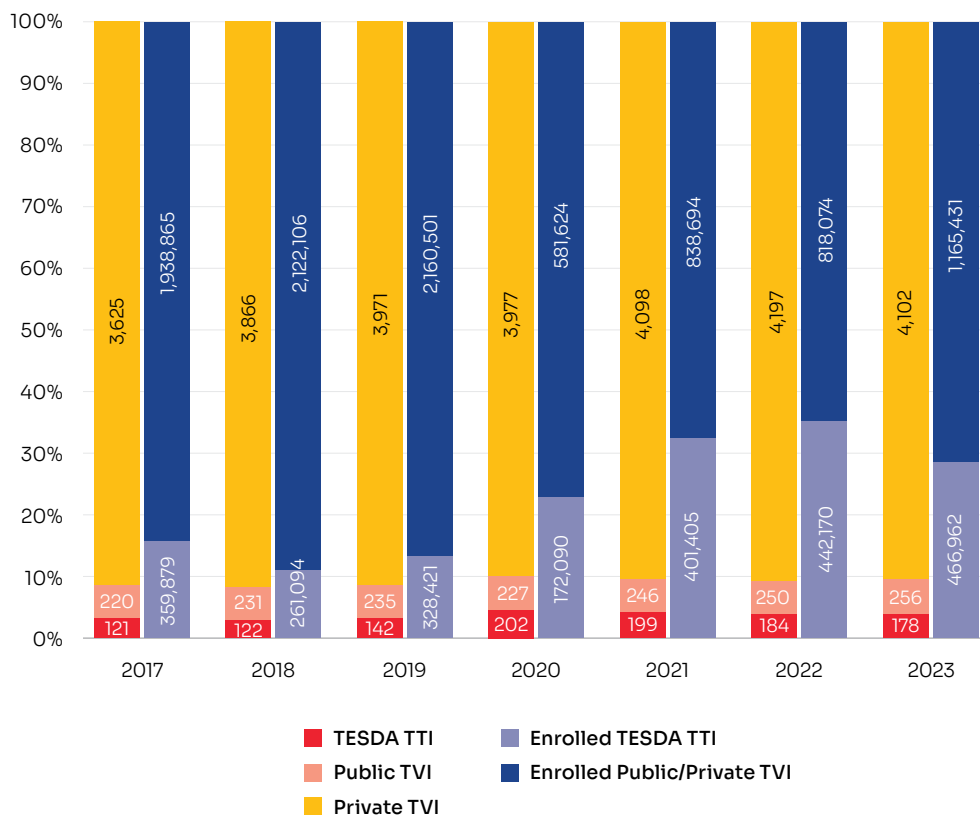
Source: TESDA Annual Reports, 2017 - 2023

Training programs are developed based on TESDA's TRs,which outline qualifications, competency standards, training guidelines, assessment processes, and certification arrangements for specific sectors. These TRs form the foundation for the development of curricula, instructional materials, registration, and the delivery of training programs. Approved by the TESDA Board, these regulations are promulgated for nationwide implementation (TESDA, 2022). Competency standards, organized into units of basic, common, and core competencies, define the specific performance criteria, knowledge, and skills required for each qualification corresponding to various occupations. These qualifications range from NC I to NC IV, reflecting increasing levels of ability and competence.

Under the Philippine TVET Competency Assessment and Certification System, an NC is given after a learner passes an assessment that demonstrates adequate knowledge and expertise in the chosen field. In addition to NC I to NC IV, there is an NC V, which is equivalent to a diploma and represents qualifications at the interface between TVET

and higher education. NC V is comparable to a diploma or an associate degree in higher education (NTESDP 2023–2028). However, according to the Year One Report, which thoroughly discussed the process of developing and registering TRs, no regulations have yet been established for NC V. All of these NCs are aligned with specific levels in

FIGURE 16
Quality Assured Technical Education and Skills Development Framework
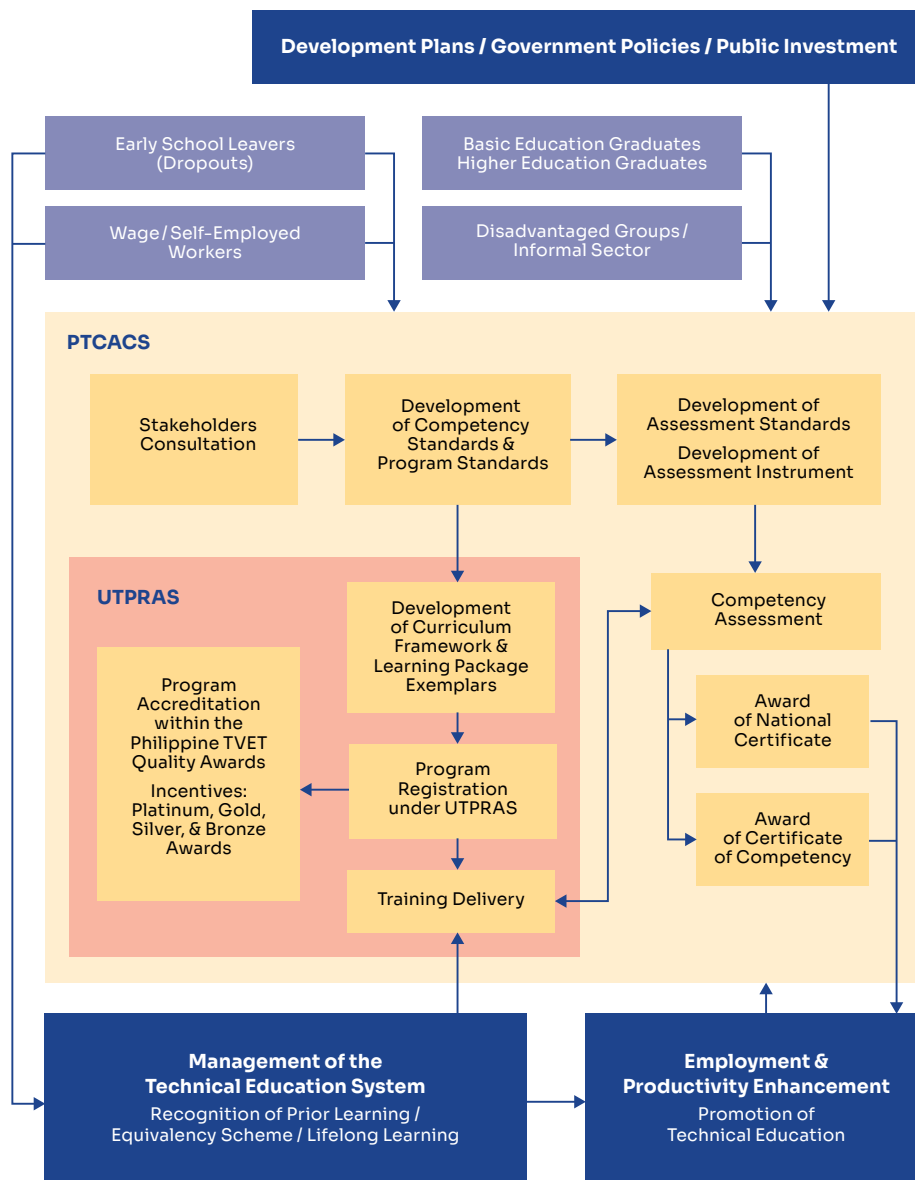
Abbreviations: PTCACS = Philippine TVET Competency Assessment and Certification System, UTPRAS = Unified TVET Program Registration and Accreditation System

Source: NTESDP 2023–2028

The Year One Report also highlighted that less than 15% of TESDA's training programs result in an NC, as only 315 out of 1,888 training programs have corresponding TRs. Most of these programs focus on lower-level skills, such as NC I and NC II, which have shown minimal impact on increasing graduates' incomes. In fact, graduates with college-level education experienced income declines after obtaining lower-level certifications. However, NC III and NC IV have demonstrated significant income improvements, particularly for learners with limited or basic education. Unfortunately,

only a third of TESDA's TRs target these higher-skill levels, highlighting a mismatch between training offerings and potential socioeconomic benefits. Furthermore, the TR development process is incredibly slow, taking between 6 months and 2 years, which limits the TVET system's ability to adapt to the fast-changing demands of industry.

Issue 2: There is a severe lack of industry boards in key sectors.

As of June 2024, the total number of ITBs has risen to 63, with the addition of a national industry board in the creative sector, four regional boards, and 13 provincial boards. New ITBs have been established at the regional and provincial levels for sectors such as health, wholesale and retail trade, and metalworks. However, critical sectors like energy and transportation have few or no industry boards. In some sectors with an existing PSF, ITBs are still lacking (EDCOM II, 2024, Jul 25). The Year One Report identified 40 ITBs across all levels that are concentrated in only eight sectors. However, these sectors represent industries with the most TRs (Year One Report, 2023). Previously, EDCOM allocated P22.8 million for the establishment and operationalization of industry boards to support EBET but it was removed from the 2025 GAA.

TABLE 7
Number of Industry Boards, 2024

Sector	National	Regional	Provincial	Total
Agriculture	1	7	11	19
Tourism	1	0	8	9
Construction	1	1	3	5
Information and Communications Technology	2	5	5	12
Manufacturing	1	3	5	9
Transport and Logistics	0	2	0	2
Creatives and Design	1	1	1	3
Health and Wellness	0	1	0	1
Wholesale and Retail Trade	0	1	0	1
Metalworks Sector	0	0	1	1
Weaving	0	0	1	1

Source: TESDA, September 2024

Industry associations nominate experts to assist in the formulation of competency standards and qualifications, enabling industry involvement in developing TRs. However, the Year One Report did not clearly indicate whether these TESDA-formed industry bodies directly contributed to formulating TRs. Some national industry associations that have been certified to act as industry boards have been instrumental in developing regulations for their respective sectors during the implementation of the Training for Work Scholarship Program. For instance, the IT and Business Process Association of the Philippines developed 19 TRs for the ICT sector, the Semiconductors and Electronics Industry in the Philippines formulated five TRs for manufacturing, and the Philippine Society of Plumbing Engineers created three TRs for plumbing (ILO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD].

This highlights the critical role of ITBs in bridging the gap between industry needs and workforce upskilling. Composed of key industry players and experts, these boards act as a voice for industries in the design and development of training programs, ensuring that they remain relevant to current market needs and overall sector growth. By identifying functional and enabling skills required for various occupations, ITBs help ensure that the workforce is both employable and equipped with the right skills to meet specific sector demands.

TESDA is mandated by law to create industry boards (RA 7796), and in 2019, it launched the Recognition of Industry Bodies program to encourage private sector involvement in TVET. This program was discontinued in 2021, with the release of TESDA Circular No. 17, s.2021, due to concerns about inadequate representation from the labor sector and academe, leading to challenges in translating labor market information into training programs. The new circular called for an ITB that is quadripartite, requiring representation not just from employers or their associations, but also from labor, learning institutions, and government. This circular also identified five priority sectors (agri-fishery, construction, IT, health, and logistics), while outlining the boards' roles in labor market intelligence, area-based skills mapping, skills needs forecasting, and inputs to training regulations and learning content. However, many of these boards, despite signing memorandums of agreement with TESDA, are still not fully functional (EDCOM II, 2024, Jul 25). There remains a challenge to operationalize ITBs, as most do not have set goals and mandates.

The ITBs are also central to the implementation of TESDA's Industry-Based Assessment and Certification System (IBACS), introduced in TESDA Circular No. 041, s. 2024, as addendum to the original 2021 guidelines. IBACS is designed to enhance the alignment of TVET with industry standards by allowing industries to manage their own certification processes. This ensures that assessments are attuned to sector-specific needs, offering alternative certification pathways beyond traditional training regulations. For example, in industries like the business process outsourcing sector, employers often prioritize industry-based microcredentials from providers such as Microsoft, Google, or Coursera over TESDA's NCs. Certifications from Agile or Python training programs, which are globally recognized, are also increasingly adopted by industry (EDCOM II, 2024, Feb 21).

Under the IBACS framework, ITBs are responsible for setting accreditation criteria, developing industry-based assessments, and promoting the recognition of industry-specific certifications. By ensuring that these certifications are aligned with employer expectations, ITBs help boost the employability and productivity of TVET graduates. These boards also play a role in continuously evaluating and refining the system to ensure that certification processes remain responsive to the labor market.

The PSF, on the other hand, complements the work of ITBs by providing a common skills language and taxonomy that serve as structured pathways to upskilling and career progression (EDCOM II, 2024, Aug 19). This alignment ensures workers acquire the necessary qualifications at various levels, while also offering greater transferability of skills across sectors. By integrating the competencies identified in PSFs into existing national certification systems, ITBs can guarantee that training initiatives are not only industry driven but also recognized across multiple industries, further strengthening the overall TVET landscape (EDCOM II, 2024, Jul 25).

Recommendations

Expand the coverage of national ITBs across priority industries identified as key employment and economic generators. ITBs play a central role in the success of upskilling initiatives (Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028). Expanding the formation of additional ITBs at various levels, and making sure they are operationalized, allows industry associations and groups to actively participate in setting standards and shaping technical education and skills development programs. These industry organizations would become TESDA's key partners in the design and delivery of EBT, effectively ensuring that training programs are both area based and demand driven.

TESDA should establish clear, measurable indicators of ITB performance, promote accountability, and facilitate effective monitoring of ITB roles and responsibilities (Generalao, 2024). This could start by reviewing the performance of existing ITBs in areas such as promoting EBT, establishing standards, and updating labor market information. Empowering ITBs to take on more responsibilities, such as assessments and certifications, would allow TESDA to concentrate its resources on enhancing its regulatory capabilities (ADB, 2021). This also involves TESDA supporting the growth of ITBs into matured organized bodies for TVET and providing direction to local technical education and skills development committees to ensure program coherence at the local level. The indicators should be accessible on the website and updated dynamically to reflect the effectiveness of the training programs. This will enable innovation and gamification opportunities for both stakeholders and regulators.

Ensure the quadripartite composition of ITBs as mandated by law to ensure representation and include relevant TVET stakeholder groups. The inclusion of government, industry, academia, and labor in ITBs fosters collaboration that enables programs responsive to industry needs and the broader workforce. The government sets the national agenda for education, labor, and economic development. Academe brings expertise in curriculum development, teaching methods, and assessment practices, ensuring that training programs meet educational standards. Industry, with its real-time knowledge of trends, skills gap, and market demands, serves as the primary employers of TVET graduates. Labor is crucial for upholding workers' rights, ensuring fair treatment, wages, and opportunities for advancement. Labor participation is particularly important in light of concerns about employers abusing training programs by extending training periods unnecessarily (EDCOM II, 2024, Jul 25).

Establish a clear and sustainable framework for ITBs by addressing their organizational functions, financial sustainability, and inclusivity. TESDA should define the roles, functions, and relationships of national, regional, and provincial ITBs, tailoring them to local contexts to address specific conditions and demands effectively. A structured funding mechanism must be created to ensure long-term vitality, reducing reliance on supporting associations through dedicated government funding or alternative financing strategies. TESDA's oversight role should be clarified, detailing responsibilities such as capacity building, partnership formation, and scholarship administration, while ensuring sufficient personnel are allocated to manage the growing number of ITBs efficiently. ITBs must inclusively represent their sectors, with provisions to include smaller and less-represented business groups (EDCOM II, 2024, Jul 25). Empowering industry boards with a clear mandate and strategic guidance will enable them to lead sectoral human capital development, ensuring diverse needs are met and fostering sustainable growth across industries.

## Issue 3: Lack of resources to effectively implement EBET.

Organizational Capacity for EBET
TESDA currently lacks dedicated personnel in its regional and provincial offices to focus exclusively on the implementation of EBET. Staff members assigned as focal persons for EBET are also tasked with multiple other responsibilities, including program registration, scholarship management, industry board coordination, and special projects (EDCOM II, 2024, Apr 12). This multitasking severely hinders the effective implementation, sustainability, and scaling up of EBET programs.

Despite efforts to prioritize EBET, TESDA's workforce has struggled to keep up with the evolving demands of the labor market. Provincial offices, in particular, operate with only 7 to 12 personnel, a lean staffing structure that limits their ability to fully support training outcomes and adapt to industry needs. This issue is compounded at the regional level, where there is a notable mismatch between the number of TESDA personnel and the number of TVIs they are tasked with overseeing. High-demand regions such as the National Capital Region and Region IV-A, which have significantly more TVIs, are disproportionately understaffed, further exacerbating the strain on TESDA's workforce. These staffing challenges underscore the urgent need for additional resources to ensure the successful implementation and expansion of EBET programs.

FIGURE 17
Distribution of TESDA Personnel vs. Number of TVIs, 2024
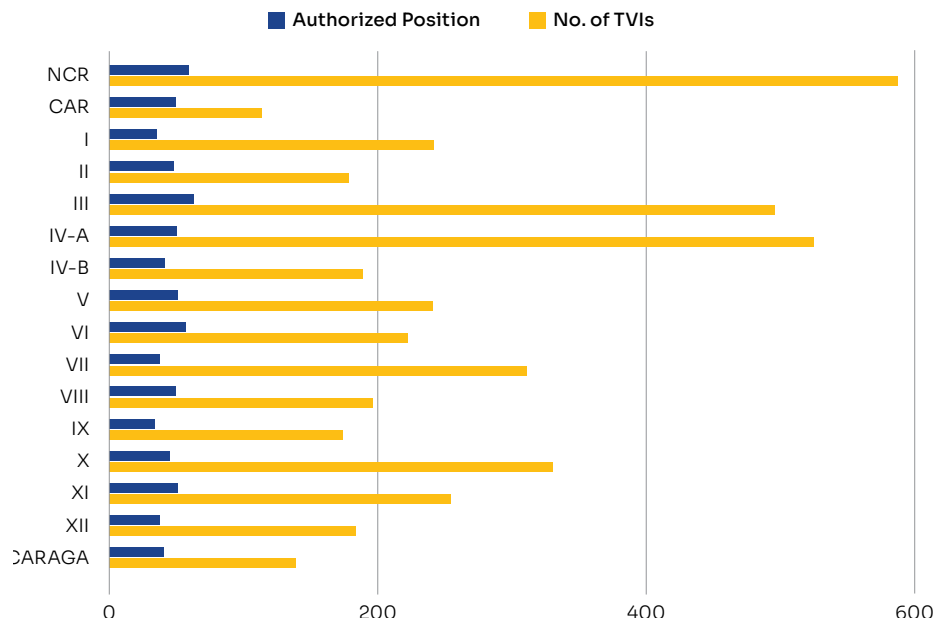
Source: TESDA data as of Aug 31, 2023

At the national level, the Partnerships and Linkages Office has one focal person for DTS and two for both Apprenticeship and Learnership programs, overseeing EBT from registration to monitoring (EDCOM II, 2024, Apr 12). Moreover, there are only one or two staff members assigned to connect with employers and establish ITBs at all levels (EDCOM II, 2024, Jul 25). This lack of dedicated staff further dilutes TESDA's ability to build strong industry partnerships and grow the EBT system.

TESDA's plantilla positions increased by 13.2% between 2019 and 2022. As of April 2024, TESDA has a total of 5,058 authorized personnel, with 15.2% allocated to provincial and district offices. However, 18% of these total positions remain unfilled (EDCOM II,

2024, Apr 12). The shortage of personnel, combined with the multiple roles assigned to those available, has created bottlenecks that slow down EBT program registration and development, limiting engagement with industry partners. Despite requests for more plantilla positions since 2019, little progress has been made in addressing these gaps. Many provincial offices still rely on job order personnel to handle various roles, including EBT administration, which further undermines the quality and focus of EBT programs.

To address these challenges, TESDA has proposed creating an Office of Apprenticeship, an organizational unit mandated by the TESDA Act. This office would consolidate all EBT-related activities under one unit, not just apprenticeship programs, streamlining the administration of these programs and allowing more dedicated personnel to focus on EBT complexities. Since 2023, TESDA has been proposing the creation of this office; however, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) has indicated that TESDA's request for 28 new positions for the Office of Apprenticeship is not included in the 2023 or 2024 General Appropriations Act (EDCOM II, 2024, Apr 12). It was also not included in the GAA for 2025.

TESDA's workforce is also strained by the slow progress in decentralizing responsibilities for EBT program registration to provincial offices. While decentralization could improve efficiency by bringing decision-making closer to the ground, there are concerns that this may create redundancies between regional and provincial offices (EDCOM II, 2024, Apr 12).

Year Two Recommendations

TESDA should conduct an organizational review or rightsizing study to assess its capacity to allocate dedicated personnel for EBT at both regional and provincial levels. Assigning additional staff to EBT will help alleviate the current strain on overburdened personnelwith multiple roles, ensuring that EBT programs receive focused attention and resources. While filling existing unfilled positions and establishing the Office of Apprenticeship may provide a foundation for scaling up EBT programs, it is equally important to implement capacity-building initiatives for personnel, particularly in provincial offices. This could involve training staff to manage the complexities of EBT and industry engagements, building capacity for adaptive change in response to new ways of doing business, specialized training on industry-based assessments, and utilizing digital platforms for monitoring program outcomes.

TESDA should continue to explore ways to devolve direct training functions to industry and local government units. This approach aligns with industry's long-held recommendation to develop their own competency standards and training programs, while TESDA focuses on regulation, financing, and monitoring (EDCOM II, 2024, Feb 21). Under the TESDA Act, the agency is mandated to develop the capacity of LGUs to eventually take on the responsibility for technical education and skills development programs (RA 7796). In 2004, TESDA introduced a policy for the progressive devolution of TVET over a 25-year period, targeting completion by 2030, to LGUs, industry associations, and NGOs (Board Resolution 2004-07). However, a 2018 study revealed that many devolved TTIs and pilot decentralization models proved unsustainable. In response, TESDA revised its policy and, in 2022, approved three new pathways for devolving TVET to LGUs (BR 2022-02). These pathways include: (1) empowering LGUs through the community training and employment coordinators (CTECs) as TVET champions in the localities; (2) engaging LGUs and other stakeholders to strengthen the TVET ecosystem; and (3) scaling up TTIs to be model institutions of higher-level TVET, capable of addressing 4IR challenges and future disruptions. Detailed instructions for each pathway, including preparatory steps and the roles of various TESDA units, have been provided to all regional and provincial directors, as well as TTI administrators (Memo 186, 2002).

"Nasa Puso ang Pagtuturo"

Glenn Maenard Faustino, Joel John dela Merced, and Stella Muyco may have started their careers in vastly different industries—hospitality, health care, and technology—but their shared passion for teaching and TVET has led them to make a lasting impact on their communities.

From Housekeeper to Teacher
Glenn's journey began in 2018 when he enrolled in Housekeeping NC II while completing his technical teacher education degree at the Bulacan State University. What began as a course requirement soon evolved into a lifelong pursuit of learning.

After graduation, Glenn quickly found work at a resort in his province. He breezed through the job application, thanks to the skills he had acquired from his TVET course. But Glenn didn't stop there. Over the years, he earned 10 more NC II and NC III certifications, from food and beverage to events management.

Each training program prepared him for future roles. Starting as a housekeeper, Glenn was eventually promoted to bartending to managing events at the resort. Yet, his ultimate dream was to teach. So when the opportunity came,

he transitioned to full-time teaching and supervisory work at a private training center.

In his new role, Glenn applied his hands-on knowledge and personal experiences from several TVET courses to mentor the next generation of TVET students.

From Nurse to Health Care Trailblazer
Like Glenn, Joel also found his true calling in education. He initially studied nursing and became a rural health practitioner in Tarlac. While completing his nursing graduate studies at the Concordia College, Joel stumbled upon TESDA's trainers methodology program.

Soon after, he began teaching Caregiving NC II, a course whose training regulations he would later help refine and develop. Joel's teaching is deeply informed by his own experiences as a nurse caring for others. He instructs aspiring caregivers not just to master technical skills, but also to nurture compassion and professionalism needed to care for patients.

Joel's leadership in the health care sector led him to cofound his own technical-vocational school, where he continues to mentor future care

providers and trainers. From one batch of 25 trainers, his school now manages three to four batches at any given time with five trainers, including Joel himself.

**Tech Specialist
to Community Educator**

Stella started her career in the bustling information technology (IT) industry in Makati. A graduate of computer engineering with advanced degrees in IT, she could have pursued a successful career in the tech.

Yet her heart lay elsewhere, and she soon found herself back in Kidapawan, her hometown. It was here that Stella first felt the calling to teach, after seeing firsthand the gap in access to quality IT education in certain parts of Mindanao.

Motivated to address this disparity, she chose a more fulfilling career path: bringing her knowledge back to her community and giving young people the skills to thrive in today's tech-driven world. Over the next 26 years, Stella taught Computer Systems Servicing NC II, as well as other tech and multimedia art courses in Cotabato, Maguindanao, and Sultan Kudarat.

A Shared Commitment

As TVET teachers, Glenn, Joel, and Stella share a common philosophy: Education should be practical, hands on, and transformative.

Glenn's frustration with traditional, spoon-fed lessons inspired him to create dynamic environments where students can experiment and find creative solutions. Joel's holistic approach to caregiving education emphasized empathy and accountability, essential in work that deals with people's lives. Stella's teaching instilled both technical skills and confidence in her students, emphasizing that TVET is about giving students the tools to transform their lives.

Their approach to TVET has earned Glenn, Joel, and Stella recognition as TESDA Idols and Tagsanay awardees. But beyond the accolades, for all three educators, TVET is a lifelong vocation that uplifts lives and communities.

"Nasa puso ang pagtuturo," as Stella puts it. This shared commitment to teaching is far more rewarding than any other career path they could have taken.

Priority Area 22: Framework for Equivalency and Recognition of Nonformal and Informal Learning

Issue 1: The lack of a clear national framework for lifelong learning has impeded the development of pathways to support learners.

As the demand for diverse skills continues to rise, there is an increasing need for frameworks that can assess, validate, and certify competencies gained outside formal education, ensuring they are equally recognized and valued. Lifelong learning, a concept that continues to evolve since its introduction as a policy discourse in the 1970s, has been subject to multiple interpretations, ranging from holistic to economistic perspectives, depending on its significance to particular users.

For the purposes of TVET, lifelong learning emphasizes jobs and skills, focusing on how learners are prepared to meet the evolving requirements of the labor market (Delors Report, 1996, as cited in Medel-Añonuevo, 2024). Under the current national development plan, the government aims to increase industry involvement in TVET and promote EBT as the dominant mode of TVET delivery to enhance workforce employability. In addition, it seeks a master plan to institutionalize lifelong learning beyond formal education, with LGUs responsible for developing learning communities in their respective jurisdictions (PDP 2023–2028).

Studies on workforce development and lifelong learning in the Philippines, funded through the University of the Philippines President Edgardo J. Angara Fellowship, was completed in July 2024, setting the stage for future conversations. For instance, a study by Krista Danielle Yu highlights the importance of aligning academic programs with industry needs, addressing industry gaps, and creating more employment opportunities for Filipinos (Yu, 2024). Likewise, Michael Cabalfin's study explored the effect of human capital on the economic complexity of Philippine exports, pointing at the growth of service output in the manufacturing sector and emphasizing how skills upgrading through TVET could boost employees' productivity and welfare (Cabalfin, 2024).

Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo's study on lifelong learning in the Philippines highlights the need for a shared broader perspective on lifelong learning among education and training stakeholders to guide future policies and government programs, like contributions to AmBisyon Natin 2040, a long-term vision for the Philippines where Filipinos could look forward to a "matatag, maginhawa, at panatag na buhay." It also notes how the focus of lifelong learning discourse has shifted from the teacher to the learner, making facilitating learning, learning environments, and learning outcomes more popular in recent years (Medel-Añonuevo, 2024).

Meanwhile, the study by Dr. Dina Ocampo et al. has two parts: The first part points to the steps the Philippines need to take to develop policies, plans, programs, and projects for formal and nonformal education, to provide a cohesive basic education system that contributes to national development. The second part analyzes the organization for education of four countries (Vietnam, Thailand, Pakistan, and,

Finland), and compares them to the Philippines's own education programs. The study concludes with recommendations on how programs on lifelong learning in the Philippines can be ensured across the lifespan and in local governments (Ocampo et al., 2024).

Formal education is only one of several pathways to learning. Nonformal and informal learning have been identified as strong mechanisms for lifelong learning (OECD, 2007). Informal learning, often referred to as learning by experience, is learning that results from daily activities.

On the other hand, nonformal learning is learning that is integrated into planned activities that are not directly designated as learning. While informal learning is often learned unintentionally, nonformal learning is intentional (Cedefop, 2008, as cited in OECD, 2010). Recognition of nonformal and informal learning outcomes generates not only economic benefits but educational, social, and psychological ones as well. In terms of educational benefits, recognition supports lifelong learning by helping individuals learn about themselves and develop their career within a lifelong learning framework (OECD, 2010).

As individuals increasingly acquire skills outside traditional classroom settings, and as industries shift to prioritize competencies over credentials (ABS-CBN News, 2024, Sep 10), it is vital to have mechanisms in place to recognize learning gained through work experiences, self-directed online education, community activities, and other channels of prior learning.

For example, between 2021 and 2022, approximately 35% of the labor force consists of workers in the informal sector, many of whom are self-employed. These workers are often trapped in the informal economy due to limited opportunities in the formal sector or the absence of other means of livelihood (Bersales, 2024). The informal economy is typically characterized by inadequate social protection and arrangements denying worker rights (ILO, 2015), as formal agreements do not fully cover these economic activities (ILO and OECD, 2019). However, in recent years, some workers have voluntarily chosen the informal sector, particularly the gig economy, where digital platforms provide opportunities for more independence and control (Moraga-Galvez, 2018, as cited in Bersales, 2024).

"Lifelong Learning is essential for developing a skilled, adaptable workforce that can meet the demands of emerging technologies, global competition, and societal challenges. It is not just the responsibility of the education sector; it requires collective collaboration across industries, government, communities, and other key stakeholders. By working together, we can create a system that fosters inclusive prosperity and provides opportunities for all."
—Ronald U. Mendoza, PhD, Undersecretary for Policy and Planning, DepEd, Status of Lifelong Learning in the Philippines, TESDA, October 16, 2024

TABLE 8
Class of Workers by Selected Levels of Educational Attainment, 2021–2022

Highest Educational Attainment	Wage and salary workers	Employer in own family-operated farm or business	Informal Sector	Type of informality
All in labor force	1	7	11	
No formal schooling	1	0	8	54.2% are self-employed without any paid employee and 15.9% unpaid family workers
Senior high school graduate	1	1	3	20.3% are unpaid family workers
With TVET	2	5	5	26.9% are self-employed without any paid employee
College units	1	3	5	25.4% are self-employed without any paid employee
College graduate	0	2	0	
With postgraduate degree	1	1	1	

Source: Bersales, 2024, based on PSA Labor Force Surveys, 2021–2022

The informal economy also offers employment opportunities for those with no formal schooling. Recent surveys showed that 69.1% of individuals without formal education are employed in the informal sector (Bersales, 2024). Many SHS graduates do not immediately join the labor force, opting instead to pursue higher education, as evidenced by the 75% of Filipino youth who aspire to earn a college degree (Arguelles & Mendoza, 2024). Among those who enter the informal economy, most SHS graduates become unpaid family workers (20.3%), while those with some college units (25.4%) or those who took TVET (26.9%) are more likely to become self-employed (Bersales, 2024).

There is no shared understanding in the Philippines of what lifelong learning is, what it requires of education providers, and what it offers learners as they navigate the education system (Australian Education Research Organisation [AERO], 2024). For instance, while the PDP 2023–2028 aims to enable thriving families and communities with its expansive view of lifelong learning, its strategies almost exclusively focus on strengthening formal education and its interrelationships. Only one strategy extends beyond formal education, for the government to encourage LGUs to "plan and integrate lifelong learning programs to transform their jurisdiction into learning communities," but even this is focused on learning for professional reasons (AERO, 2024). A shared understanding among stakeholders is needed to achieve a seamless and integrated lifelong learning system, allowing learners to have the knowledge and opportunities to use this system to improve their educational outcomes (AERO, 2024).

Issue 2: PQF has made little progress since its inception in 2012, and the passage of the law in 2018.

No significant progress has been made on the PQF since its inception in 2012, but its slow rollout and limited outcomes are consistent with the experiences of over 150 national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) worldwide (Medel-Añonuevo, 2024). Qualification frameworks like the PQF are complex mechanisms that require a wide range of local expertise, dedicated funding, careful governance, and continuous review to become fully operational.

First established in 2012 through Executive Order No. 83, the PQF was later strengthened by the PQF Act of 2017 (RA 10968), which provided a legal framework for its full implementation. The PQF Act describes the framework as a quality-assured national system that defines various levels of educational qualifications and sets the standards for qualification outcomes. It serves as the foundation for developing, recognizing, and awarding qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skills, and values acquired by learners and workers through diverse methods and pathways. By providing clear routes for learners to transition between formal, nonformal, and informal systems, the PQF ensures that competencies gained through various learning experiences, including those outside formal institutions, are recognized and validated. Furthermore, its alignment with international qualifications frameworks like the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework facilitates the mobility of Filipino workers and students by enhancing the comparability of qualifications across countries (Medel-Añonuevo, 2024). The Ladderized Education Act of 2014 (RA 10647) further mandates DepEd, CHED, and TESDA to work together to implement a unified PQF, harmonizing guidelines, curriculum standards, and equivalency competency courses to improve TVET and higher education delivery.

The Year One Report described the PQF as the backbone of TVET and called for its urgent review, citing that the National Coordinating Committee (NCC) has been nonfunctional since 2017 due to staffing and funding issues. It was also noted that the PQF still lacks a permanent secretariat, a coordinated financing plan, appropriate budget allocation, and a comprehensive strategic plan, all of which are necessary for full implementation.

In Year Two, an EDCOM II study analyzed the operationalization of the PQF within the context of lifelong learning, using policy documents, case studies, and firsthand accounts from implementers and participants. This builds on an earlier World Bank review commissioned by TESDA in 2021, which focused on the PQF's relevance to industry needs, scope and coverage, design and methodology, and usage feasibility. When compared to the global development of similar NQFs, as documented in the 2017 and 2019 global inventories of regional and national qualifications made by Cedefop, ETF, and UNESCO, the slow rollout of the PQF was found to be a common challenge (Medel-Añonuevo, 2024). One key reason for the slow development of many NQFs is the limited availability of in-country expertise to manage the multilayered requirements of frameworks like PQF. A wide range of technical expertise is necessary, not only for implementing the PQF but also for its governance (Medel-Añonuevo, 2024).

The global inventories highlight that learning outcomes are increasingly becoming a central element in NQFs and regional frameworks worldwide. In TVET, learning outcomes become more visible and valued through the validation of nonformal and informal learning. Although the measuring of learning outcomes is a technical approach that may be more suited for TVET than for general education, the shift toward outcomes-based learning becomes more systematic and consistent through frameworks like the PQF (Medel-Añonuevo, 2024).

The development of the PQF should also be understood in the context of the evolution of other NQFs globally. For example, NQF developments in countries like France and the UK during the 1990s were linked to reforms that emphasize outcomes-based TVET systems. These reforms involved transferring control of training programs and qualifications from providers to users, such as employers and individuals, based on the notion that learning occurs more effectively at work and in social life (Cole, 2017, as cited in Medel-Añonuevo, 2024).

The PQF NCC's recent advancements reflect key reforms advocated for by EDCOM II. During its 12th meeting on January 9, 2025, the council finally approved the creation of a permanent secretariat under the Development Academy of the Philippines, and made progress in appointing industry sector representation in the council. Both have been long overdue actions since the passage of the law in 2018, finally acted on by its current leadership.

Recommendations

Provide PQF-NCC with time-limited funding to develop a strategy for lifelong learning and a road map for articulation, implementation, and monitoring (AERO, 2024). The strategy should focus on establishing an integrated lifelong learning system that allows different pathways to attain academic qualifications aligned to the PQF. Education pathways not well served in the existing system should be described in a set of learner profiles, with employers and education providers (early childhood care and development, elementary, secondary, higher education, TVET) listing how they can integrate these pathways into the learner profiles. Furthermore, it should include policies and programs that DepEd, TESDA, and CHED need to implement to enable and incentivize such actions. The road map should then have targets for the development, and/or refinements of the policies and programs listed in the strategy, and a description of available data systems or proposals to develop new data collections that allow real-time monitoring and refinement of these policies and programs.

Establish the PQF permanent secretariat and strengthen the PQF-NCC to accelerate the full implementation of the PQF's critical features. The formation of a PQF authority is essential to making the framework fully operational (Medel-Añonuevo, 2024.) In the short term, multistakeholder discussions should be organized to reflect on 50 years of global NQF practices, focusing on identifying the most suitable contextual model for deploying the PQF, including forming a governing body that can effectively manage and oversee it. These discussions should also aim to develop a shared and consistent definition of lifelong learning appropriate for the Philippines, ensuring that it centers the learner in its programs and activities. Lifelong learning is a wider educational concept. As such, it should not be reduced to just the PQF (Medel-Añonuevo, 2024), and any draft bills or proposed legislation should ensure that its implementation retains this broader perspective.

Conduct an urgent review of the PQF level descriptors to ensure alignment with the rapidly changing demands of industries and the broader labor market, enhance global recognition of Filipino workforce qualifications, and strengthen workforce development. As technological advancements and shifting economic conditions transform the skills needed in key sectors such as IT, health care, and renewable energy, the current descriptors risk becoming outdated.

Conduct multistakeholder discussions to reflect on global NQF practices and develop a model for managing and overseeing the PQF effectively. These discussions should reassess current barriers to implementation based on actual experiences and identify practical ways to advance the PQF's progress.

Integrate the PSF within the PQF by aligning the skills framework within the PQF levels and descriptors, thereby creating a unified system that aligns industry-specific skills with educational qualifications. This unified system will help smoothen transition between different forms of learning, leveraging mechanisms such as credit transfers, certifications, and other pathways. This integration will also create clear pathways to equivalencies that support lifelong learning and provide workers with opportunities to gain recognition for skills acquired through nonformal and informal learning. Employers, through the ITBs, should regularly update the integrated system to reflect the latest developments and trends transforming industries, ensuring the frameworks remain relevant to workforce needs.

Navigating Challenges and Solutions: A Review of Governance and Finance in Philippine Education

Introduction

The First Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM I) in 1993 attributed that the two principal causes of deteriorating education quality are underinvestment in education and poor management of the education bureaucracy.

EDCOM II found, as stated in the Year One Report, that the conclusion was the same: The education sector has evidently and persistently suffered from a lack of a coherent plan, road map, or vision, hindering its ability to strategically navigate and address the challenges posed by extensive reforms, increased responsibilities, and the dynamic demands of the sector's rapidly changing external environment. Gaps in operationalizing complementarity between public and private education have diminished private education's share of enrollment despite evidence of its cost-effectiveness and strong student outcomes. Flaws in the performance management and accountability system have also hindered progress toward achieving desired learning outcomes.

Furthermore, in basic education, multiple issues are related to the challenges of a highly centralized bureaucracy, impacting core competencies at the level of schools and thus the delivery of learning outcomes.

Year One Updates

Strengthening the governance and financing of the Philippine education system is essential yet often overlooked in addressing the learning crisis affecting millions of Filipinos. This requires evidence-based research to guide the design and implementation of comprehensive reforms and to minimize the risks of unintended consequences from poorly planned interventions. Improving governance and financing for education involves cross-cutting challenges. EDCOM II has identified the following:

- Lack of coordination and strategic orchestration of the sector between and among education agencies and other relevant government agencies;
- An unharmonized and unevenly implemented quality assurance system that requires being more mindful of the typology and mandates of institutions and the value of a coordinated system of performance measures—especially in the formulation of performance standards;
- An undefined principle of complementarity between public and private education institutions has fueled the private education crisis, highlighting the need for a clear and authoritative framework to guide its application.
- Inadequate resource investments in education despite considerable increases in government spending;
- Inefficiency in the utilization of resources;
- Constrained school autonomy alongside the need to improve school leadership capacity;
- Limited participation of relevant stakeholders in governance; and
- Undefined role of local government units (LGUs) in the governance of the education system.

Strengthening governance and financing is crucial to improving learning outcomes for learners, teachers, and schools. EDCOM II highlights the importance of clear roles, responsibilities, and accountability among key system actors, guided by a long-term, integrated national education and workforce development plan.

Year Two Overview

In its Year Two research, the Commission finds that education governance remains overly focused on bureaucratic compliance, hindering progress and limiting aspirations for reform. In 2024, EDCOM II pushed for the cabinet cluster on education, engaged with stakeholders in formulating an operationalization of complementarity between public and private education, and continued its collaboration with DepEd in streamlining performance management through the adoption of headline targets with a focus on learner outcomes. One of the key themes that emerged was the need to further decentralize education governance, especially in basic education, to enhance responsiveness. Studies recommend increasing school autonomy to foster innovation and adapt education delivery to local contexts. This requires strengthening support through technical assistance, adequate resources, community engagement, and results-based financial support systems. Providing timely, actionable data and building schools' capacity to take ownership of their deliverables cannot be underscored enough.

Priority Area 23: Ensuring Seamless and Integrated Delivery of Education

Education agencies must act in synergy to pursue a shared vision for the education sector. Mechanisms and/or alternate governance structures must be put in place to ensure coherent planning and coordination between the Early Childhood Care and Development Council (ECCDC), the Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), as well as to enable the participation of other critical actors in the delivery of education and training services across the lifelong learning (LLL) continuum.

- Trifocalization has been successful in improving subsectoral attention, as intended by the first EDCOM. However, this has not resulted in improved learning outcomes (Paqueo et al. 2024) .
- The lack of a formal sectoral coordination mechanism has impeded strategic transsubsector action. However, a move back to a unitary body is seen to be counterproductive.
- Despite the establishment of over a hundred interagency bodies, sectoral coordination has not improved.
- There is a need to review, rationalize, and update policies on School Division Offices (SDOs) to ensure its responsiveness to the needs of students and schools.

Issue 1: Trifocalization has been successful in improving subsectoral attention, as intended by the first EDCOM. However, this has not resulted in improved learning outcomes.

Three decades have passed since the trifocalization of the Philippine education system in line with EDCOM I recommendations on education governance. Among the Commission's key recommendations was reorganizing the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports (DECS), now the DepEd, in order to establish "autonomous, policy-making, planning, programming and administrative bodies to implement the various level programs of the entire educational system" (EDCOM, 1993). This would enable DepEd to focus on basic education, CHED on higher education, and TESDA on technical education and skills development. As part of this reorganization, EDCOM I also recommended to detach agencies and institutes that were not directly related to the primary responsibility of DepEd. The intention was to foster overall simplification of administrative operations and greater accountability for agency performance. This resulted in the rationalization of functions involving competitive sports and athletics, Philippine languages, and teacher professional development under the supervision of other agencies.

Trifocalization succeeded in fostering focused attention on each subsector, especially in ensuring the constitutional prioritization of basic education. Quantitative analysis by Paqueo et al. (2024) also reveals that **government expenditure per student**

significantly increased post–trifocalization, but this has not translated to significant improvements in completion rates and learning outcomes.

As noted in the Year One Report, trifocalization created challenges in sector management and coordination, exacerbated by the absence of a permanent and well-functioning coordinating body aligned with the goals of EDCOM I. Specifically, EDCOM I proposed the establishment of a National Coordinating Council for Education (NCCE) to ensure effective coordination, planning, and allocation of resources among the three agencies. However, despite several attempts, including EO 273, s. 2000, and EO 652, s. 2007, the NCCE has yet to be successfully institutionalized since the 1990s.

Issue 2: The lack of a formal sectoral coordination mechanism has impeded strategic transsubsector action. However, a move back to a unitary body is seen to be counterproductive.

Transsubsector orchestration is needed to ensure continuity of education reforms across administrations, so that these can take root and eventually scale. Research findings suggest that many interventions have failed over the years due to a lack of continuity. Implementation delays hamper the observation of a policy's impact, and policy directions are affected by administrative transitions or changes in leadership. (Paqueo et al., 2024). However, weaknesses in policy design, which include the rotating leadership structure of the NCCE, the lack of a functional secretariat, inconsistent representation of the agencies, and absence of limits that could temper the vagaries of politics hindered the establishment of a mechanism for sectoral coordination (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2021). This is further aggravated by the failure to institutionalize effective accountability mechanisms, such as the biennial education congress envisioned by EDCOM I, that could drive performance toward outcomes (Paqueo et al., 2024).

Most expert informants view the return to a unitary body to be counterproductive (Paqueo et al., 2024), citing concerns about the drawbacks of excessive centralization, further marginalization of subsector-specific issues, and nonnegligible adjustment costs of reorganizing, whether through a unitary or binary governance structure. These costs include compensation packages for job separation and staff reassignment, as well as disruptions from system reconfiguration that would impede the timely delivery of other more fundamental reforms. Reforming the governance structure without a clear framework and well-defined pathways for LLL could hinder the creation of a seamless and integrated learning delivery system (Ocampo et al., 2024).

Issue 3: Despite the establishment of over a hundred interagency bodies, sectoral coordination has not improved.

A considerable number of interagency bodies have been organized to address the need for coordination not only in education, but also in the public sector as a whole. However, these bodies have neither the mandate nor the fiscal and technical capacity needed to enable sectoral cohesion and orchestration urgently needed to address the country's learning crisis. The Commission highlighted at least 68 interagency bodies in its Year One Report, but further desk research has surfaced the count to be, in fact, over a hundred. Reviewing the involvement of the education agencies with these interagency bodies shows that most involve health and social services (37%), followed by education and culture (18%), international and private sector linkages (12%), workforce development (11%), peace and law enforcement (11%), as well as a miscellaneous mix of other functions (11%).

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that the laws creating TESDA and CHED actually aimed to ensure coordination by including education counterpart agencies in their respective boards.

TABLE 1
TESDA and CHED Board Composition

RA 7796 TESDA Board Composition expanded through AO 180, s. 1995, AO 384, s. 1998, AO 87, s. 2003 **DOLE, DepEd, and CHED are members**	*Ex-Officio Members (8)* ■ **Secretary of Labor and Employment (Chair)** ■ **Secretary of Education (Co–chair)** ■ Secretary of Trade and Industry (Co-chair) ■ Secretary of Agriculture ■ Secretary of Interior and Local Government ■ Director-General of the TESDA Secretariat ■ Secretary of Science and Technology ■ **Chair of Commission on Higher Education** *Private Sector Representatives (14)* ■ Six from labor sector ■ Four from employer/industry organizations ■ Two from national associations of private TVET institutions ■ Two from business and investment sectors
RA 7722 **CHED Board of Advisers** Composition expanded through EO 730, s. 2008 **DepEd and DOLE are members; TESDA is not included**	■ **Secretary of Education (Chair)** ■ Director-General of the National Economic and Development Authority (Co-chair) ■ Secretary of Science and Technology ■ Secretary of Trade and Industry ■ **Secretary of Labor and Employment** ■ President of the Federation of Accrediting Associations of the Philippines (FAAP) ■ President of the Fund for Assistance to Private Education (FAPE) ■ Two additional members by presidential appointment ■ Two private representatives

Abbreviations: AO = Administrative Order, CHED = Commission on Higher Education, DepEd = Department of Education, DOLE = Department of Labor and Employment, EO = Executive Order, RA = Republic Act, TESDA = Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, TVET = Technical-Vocational Education and Training

However, the lack of focus, irregularity of meetings, lack of continuity, and weak institutional capacity have prevented these bodies from providing a robust platform to develop a common education agenda. Instead, the education agencies have been saddled with multiple "interagency" responsibilities but none specific to the strategic orchestration of the education sector.

Issue 4: There is a need to review, rationalize, and update policies on Schools Division Offices (SDOs) to ensure its responsiveness to the needs of students and schools.

A study commissioned by EDCOM II finds that out of 228 SDOs in the country, 84 are at the provincial level, 142 are at the city level, and 2 are distinctly at the municipal level namely Lingayen and Binalonan in Pangasinan (Bundoc, 2024). These SDOs have a wide range in terms of number of schools supervised, as well as number of students catered to: from as few as 27 schools in Batanes, to as many as 1,275 schools in Misamis Oriental. Notably, despite the categorization of DepEd of SDOs in terms of size, there are evidently wide differences even within division types, relative to its manpower complement. For instance, despite being in the same DepEd size class (particularly,

categorized as a large provincial SDO), Bulacan and Negros Oriental vary greatly in the number of Teachers, Nurse IIs, Guidance Counselors, underscoring the need to recalibrate the current system. In terms of nurse to student ratios for instance, Bulacan has a 1:10,651 ratio, compared to the 1:5,004 of Negros Oriental. This highlights the need to review the assumptions on the distribution of personnel, and to revise current policies and resource allocations to one that conforms with the DepEd's aims and assumptions in relation to student requirements.

FIGURE 1
SDO Analysis on Schools Covered
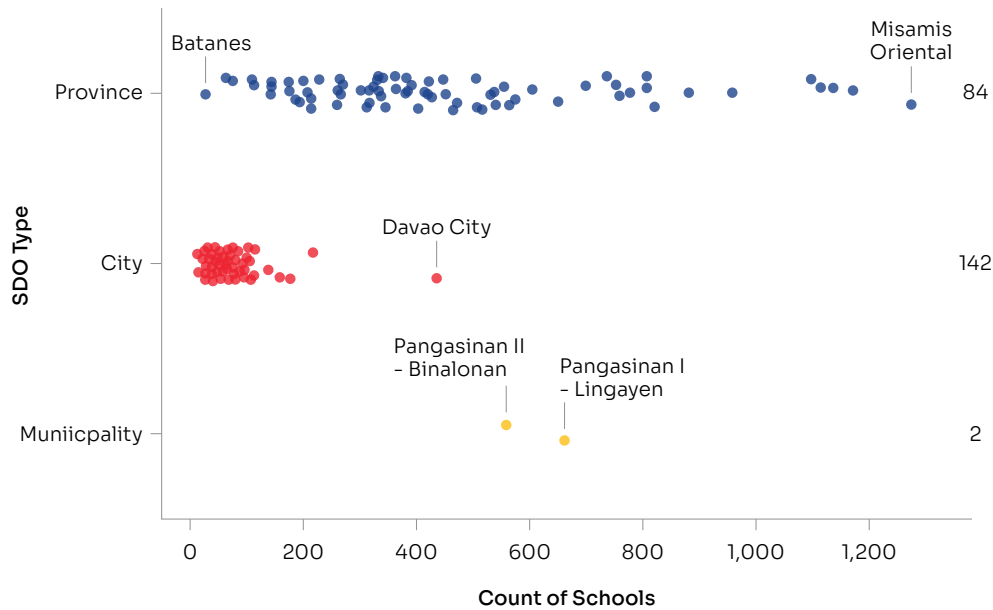
Source: Bundoc, 2024

FIGURE 2
Comparison of SDO Manpower Complement (Bulacan and Negros Oriental)
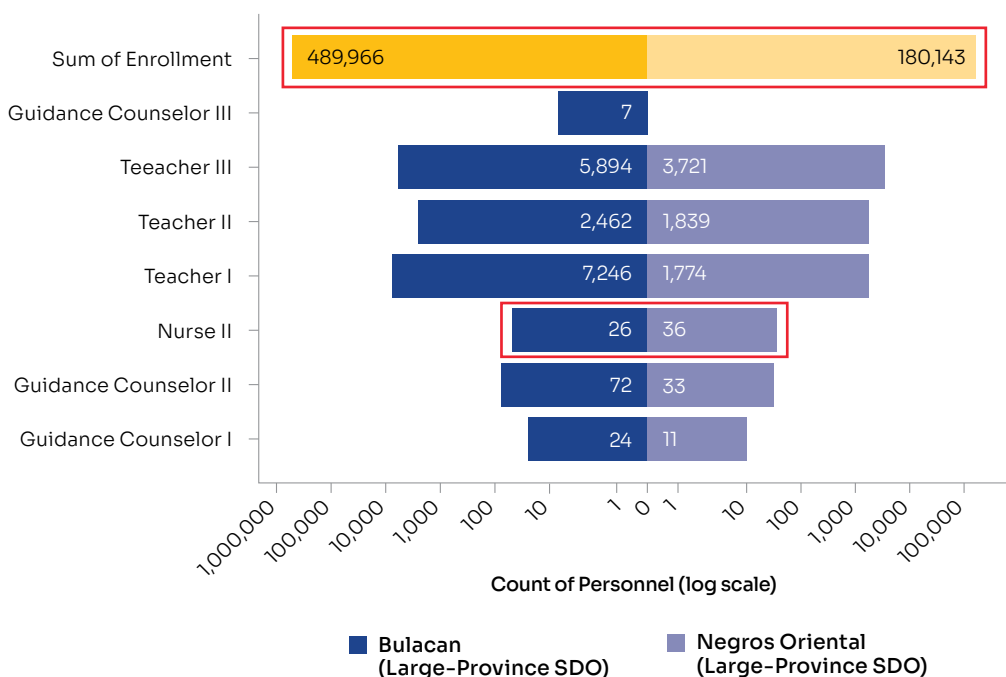
Source: Bundoc, 2024

Recommendations

Ensuring Education Sector Coordination

The findings from the Year 1 report of the First Education Commission led to the establishment of a higher-level coordinating body. Similarly, Paqueo et al. (2024) suggested the creation of such a body to manage interagency dynamics and drive strategic reforms, drawing on the experiences of Thailand and Indonesia. Thailand's Office of the Permanent Secretary, an administrative unit under the Ministry of Education, ensures compliance with national standards across various education sectors; while Indonesia's coordinating body, the Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Culture, operates under the Office of the President. The researchers also suggest a 12-year term limit for such a body to preserve institutional memory and allow sufficient time for policy reforms to take effect.

Prompted by findings documented in the EDCOM II Year One Report, the Commission submitted a letter to the Office of the President in July 2024 requesting the creation of a Cabinet Cluster for Education that could provide strong oversight on all education agencies under the Executive Department. The Commission proposed the following top three objectives of the Cabinet Cluster:

1. Urgently address the learning crisis.
2. Work toward a coherent and system-wide national integrated education and workforce development strategy and implementation plan.
3. Set agency-level targets and budgets, and establish monitoring and evaluation systems.

To underscore the need to address the poor outcomes besetting the education sector, EDCOM II Commissioners from the two houses of Congress—Representatives Romulo, Go, Benitez, Dimaporo, and Garcia, as well as Senators Gatchalian, Cayetano, Pimentel III, and Villanueva—concurrently filed House Resolution No. 28 and Senate Resolution No. 21. The proposal was approved in principle by President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. in August 2024, marking a significant stride for education governance during Year Two.

FIGURE 3
Proposed Structure of the Cabinet Cluster for Education
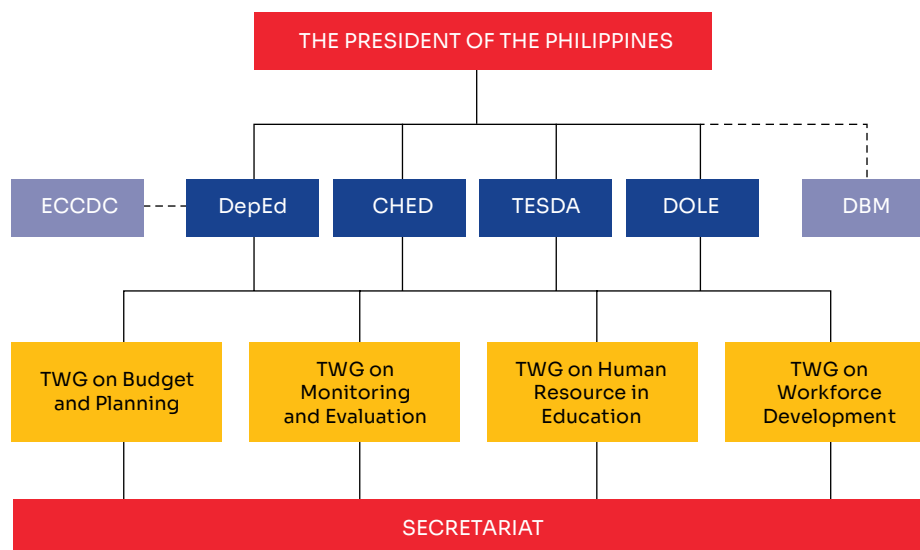
Note: During the discussions in the House of Representatives, the deliberations also surfaced the need to inlcude the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) in the proposed Cluster.

Abbreviations: DBM = Department of Budget and Management, ECCDC = Early Childhood Care and Development Council, TWG = technical working group

In contrast to the Human Development and Poverty Reduction Cluster, where education is only one among the myriad issues that could be taken up, a dedicated Cabinet Cluster for Education would provide a more focused platform to address both urgent and longer-term challenges specific to education. The Cabinet Cluster can facilitate coordinated action to realize the education sector's critical role in workforce development, fostering inclusive growth "that provides equal opportunities to all Filipinos, and equipping them with skills to participate fully in an innovative and globally competitive economy," as outlined in the Philippine Development Plan(PDP) 2023–2028 (National Economic and Development Authority [NEDA], 2023). Toward this end, the Commission has proposed that the Cabinet Cluster be composed of DepEd, CHED, TESDA, DOLE, with support from the DBM to ensure operational funding, likewise including relevant attached agencies such as the ECCD Council. These agencies shall jointly

- Formulate a 10-year National Education and Workforce Development Plan for approval of the President, ensuring integrated planning, projection, and target setting for the education system as a whole;
- Based on this Plan, identify priority programs, activities, and projects to be considered by each agency (specifically on learning recovery, education human resource, and workforce development);
- Review, align, and recommend the overall budget for education annually to the President, ensuring alignment with the Plan; and
- Coordinate, monitor, review, and evaluate the progress of priority initiatives, with a focus on improving learning outcomes and transitions across the education system.

The functions enumerated above shall be undertaken by technical working groups (TWGs) on budget and planning, monitoring and evaluation, human resource in education, and workforce development.

These TWGs shall be supported by a full-time high-level technical secretariat under the Office of the President. The proposed Cabinet Cluster for Education will address the learning crisis by fostering closer coordination and providing strong oversight across education agencies. It will ensure education issues are addressed with a view of the whole system rather than in silos. The cluster will align agency policy directions and optimize resource allocation while respecting existing structures and avoiding interference in daily operations.

The Cluster could also contribute to streamlining public-sector coordination by subsuming and/or rationalizing some of the interagency bodies under the proposed TWGs. Based on a cursory review, at least four interagency bodies could be subsumed under the Workforce Development TWG. These interagency bodies are the Philippine Qualifications Framework–National Coordinating Council, the Career Guidance Advocacy Program Working Group, the First Time Jobseekers Assistance Act Interagency Monitoring Committee, and the Interagency Council for Development and Competitiveness of Philippine Digital Workforce.

There is optimism that the new governance structure will spur synergistic action and combat the nation's learning crisis.

National agencies and various education organizations have backed the creation of the Cabinet Cluster for Education. This was made evident during a joint deliberation of the House of Representatives Committee on Basic Education and Culture and Committee on Higher and Technical Education on House Concurrent Resolution No. 28 in August 2024. The joint deliberation involved DepEd, CHED, DBM, DOLE, DOST, the Coordinating Council of Private Educational Associations (COCOPEA), the Technical Vocational School Associations of the Philippines (TVSAP), and other private education groups. Securing the President's support for the Cluster's creation in Year Two is a significant achievement, one that is hoped to pave the way for greater alignment, better coordination, and effective implementation of education programs.

"This initiative is not merely a matter of governance; It is about ensuring that every agency involved in education works in coordination, follows a clear policy direction, and understands the critical urgency of the tasks at hand. By doing so, we will optimize the use of resources, eliminate redundancy, and ensure that every effort contributes to the greater goal of providing quality education for all."
—Rep. Roman Romulo, 2024

Priority Area 24: Complementarity Between Public and Private Education

We must formulate a clear strategy for complementarity across all levels of education, from ECCD to higher education, in a way that expands access to quality education for all learners.

Issue: Gaps in operationalizing complementarity have led to a decrease over time in private education's share of enrollment, in spite of research suggesting strong student outcomes and cost-effectiveness of private education.

The issue of complementarity between public and private education is particularly pronounced in the Philippines compared to education systems in other countries due to the historical developments and policy legacies that have shaped the emergence and role of both public and private institutions. Historically, the private sector played a leading role in financing and delivering education, primarily through religious institutions established during the Spanish colonial period and secular counterparts introduced during the American colonial era (Jimenez & Sawada, 2001; Yee, 2022). Public education emerged in the early 20th century, with the government prioritizing its limited resources on universal primary education. This focus left private education with a relatively small role at the primary level but a more significant presence in higher education (Jimenez & Sawada, 2001).

Over time, increased provision of public secondary education led to a decline in private education's share of enrollment, particularly after the promulgation of RA 6655, or the Public Free Secondary Education Act of 1988 (World Bank, 2011). Regression analysis by Jimenez and Sawada (2001) indicates a significant crowding-out effect: For every 10 additional students enrolled in public secondary schools, private school enrollment decreased by more than two students. This explains the decreasing share of private secondary enrollment from 46% in 1982 to 31% by 1997. The Commission's own computations using school year (SY) 2022-2023 enrollment data show that this share has further declined to 20.1%.

As for higher education, economic developments and policy changes since the 1990s have led to significant shifts in both public and private provision. A review of the changing higher education landscape by Yee (2022) points to a rise in for-profit higher education institutions (HEIs), motivated by increasing demand for specific skill areas and enabled by the promulgation of RA 7798 in 1994, which permitted the incorporation of schools as stock educational corporations. This surge was accompanied by a corresponding decline in nonprofits such as mission-oriented and foundation-owned entities. At the same time, improvements in the government's fiscal position enabled the intensification of public provision through state and local universities and colleges. Saguin (2023) also points to CHED's adoption of a bifurcated approach in regulating public and private HEIs in the 2000s—deregulation of private HEIs through accreditation and marketization of state universities and colleges (SUCs) through rewards for outcomes and greater autonomy—in enabling the establishment of more private and public HEIs. These changes have led the Philippines to buck the global trend of deepening private sector dominance in higher education. Instead, the Philippines has undergone a process of deprivatization, defined as "the decline in private shares of higher education even while private numbers grow" (Saguin, 2023).

TABLE 2
Changes in Establishment and Enrollment Share of Private Education

Level	Schools Established			Enrollment Share		
	1990–1991	2022–2023	Change	1990–1991	2022–2023	Change
Elementary Ed	1,674	8,396	↑ 502%	6.4%	7.3%	0.9%
Secondary Ed	1,674	4,622	↑ 214%	36.4%	20.1%	↓ -16.3%
TVET	926	3,220	↑ 348%	86.0%	46.4%	↓ -39.6%
Higher Ed	635	1,085	↑ 171%	85.2%	50.3	↓ -34.9%

Notes: The comparative years were chosen to show changes in public and private education in the intervening period between EDCOM I and II. Data consolidated from EDCOM I tables and figures, DepEd Learner Information System as of January 10, 2023, TESDA Training Management Information System dashboard, CHED fiscal year 2024 budget presentation, and TVET enrollment data obtained through correspondence on Jan. 29, 2024. Tertiary enrollment for school year 1988–1989 is shown due to lack of disaggregated data for school year 1990–1991.

Consistent with the research literature, the Commission's own computations (see Table 2) show a decline in private education's share of enrollment in both secondary and tertiary education alongside continued private sector investment in establishing new schools across subsectors.

Mixed Stances on Complementarity Through the Years
Though the complementary roles of public and private institutions in enabling access to education for all Filipinos is enshrined no less than in the 1987 Constitution, the question of how to effectively balance between public and private education has persisted. The issue is further complicated by the absence of a coherent framework guiding the differentiation of roles, as well as the rationalization of program offerings and their geographic distribution, especially in higher education. To this day, gaps in policy with clear guidelines and mechanisms to operationalize complementarity remain a challenge (Generalao & David, 2022).

The government's stance on private education has always vacillated, often influenced by differing perspectives between the executive and legislative branches. This is pointed out in a forthcoming study by Yee and Bautista that noted that in the 1920s, the Legislature resisted calls for stricter regulation following the Monroe Survey's finding that most private schools were of substandard quality. At the same time, the Legislature opposed subsidies for private education, prioritizing provision of free public elementary education. In contrast, by 1989, the Legislature strongly supported assistance to private schools, recognizing their role in performing "an important public function that properly belongs to the State" (Explanatory Note to Senate Bill No. 1105, as cited in Yee, 2022).

TESDA officials and technical personnel surfaced key differences in how education agencies implement complementarity. Among the three, DepEd has made the most progress, identifying complementarity as one of six governance strategies in Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030, its long-term strategic plan. DepEd's provision of vouchers allows learners to enroll in private SHS programs unavailable in public schools, reflecting an enabling approach to complementarity. Meanwhile, TESDA officials noted that the agency avoids competing with private Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET) providers as a policy but acknowledged occasional overlap when public institutions respond to clamor for specific training programs. They emphasized the need for clearer policies, measures, and outcomes on complementarity.

CHED officials observed that SUCs often compete with private HEIs, citing studies and internal reviews of charters that show that SUCs have expanded beyond their original focus on regional needs and specializations over time to offer comprehensive programs.

Providing Access to Quality Education
Given the significant growth of of private education globally, the World Bank emphasizes that "improved interaction between government and private schools is essential for increasing equity and quality" (Baum et al., 2014). This aligns with the State's duty to ensure all children have equitable access to quality education, whether in public or private schools. Moreover, a recent systematic review found that **private school students outperform public school students on test scores by an average of 0.26 standard deviations** (Crawfurd et al., 2023). This indicates that private education can play a crucial role in expanding access to quality education, a resource that the government could strategically leverage to support its national and social development aspirations.

Analysis of test scores from international large-scale assessments shows that, similar to global trends, private schools in the Philippines also perform better than their public school counterparts. Comparing the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2003 test scores of public and private schools, the World Bank (2011) found private school attendance in the Philippines to be associated with significantly higher academic scores in math and science. More recent analysis of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 and TIMSS 2019 test scores by Orbeta and Paqueo (2022) similarly reveals that private schools attained higher test scores than public schools.

FIGURE 4
Results Framework from the Basic Education Plan 2030
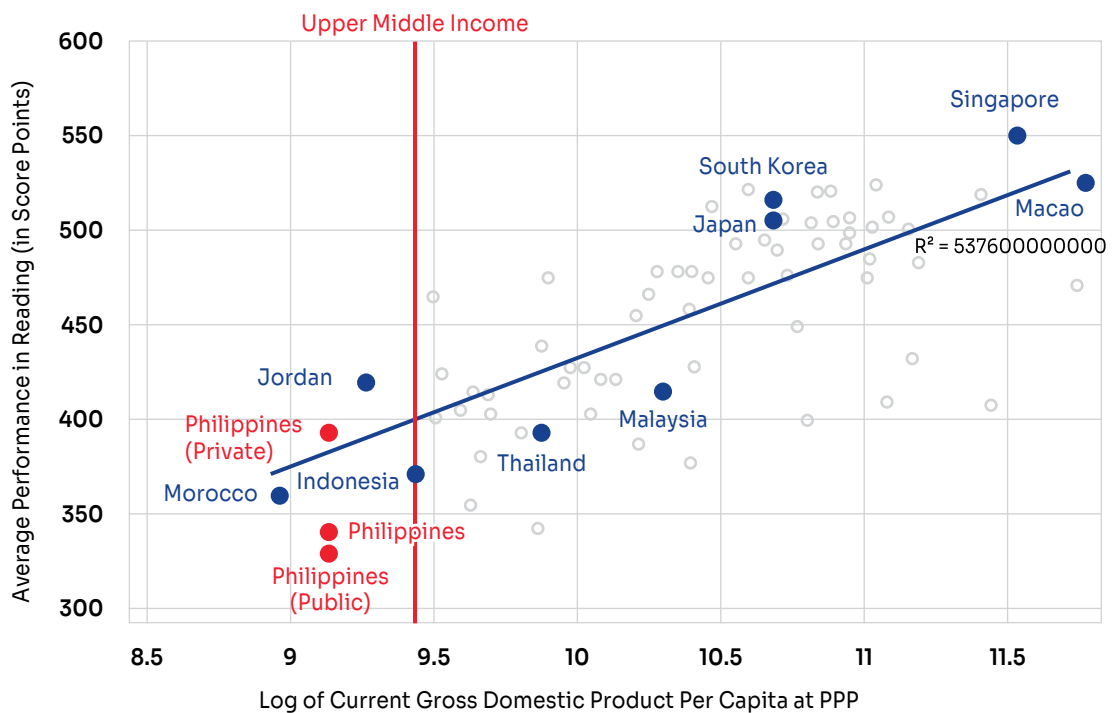
Source: DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2022 or The Basic Education Plan 2030
Abbreviations: GDP = gross domestic product, PPP = purchasing power parity

FIGURE 5
PISA 2018 Average Score in Mathematics by GDP Per Capita
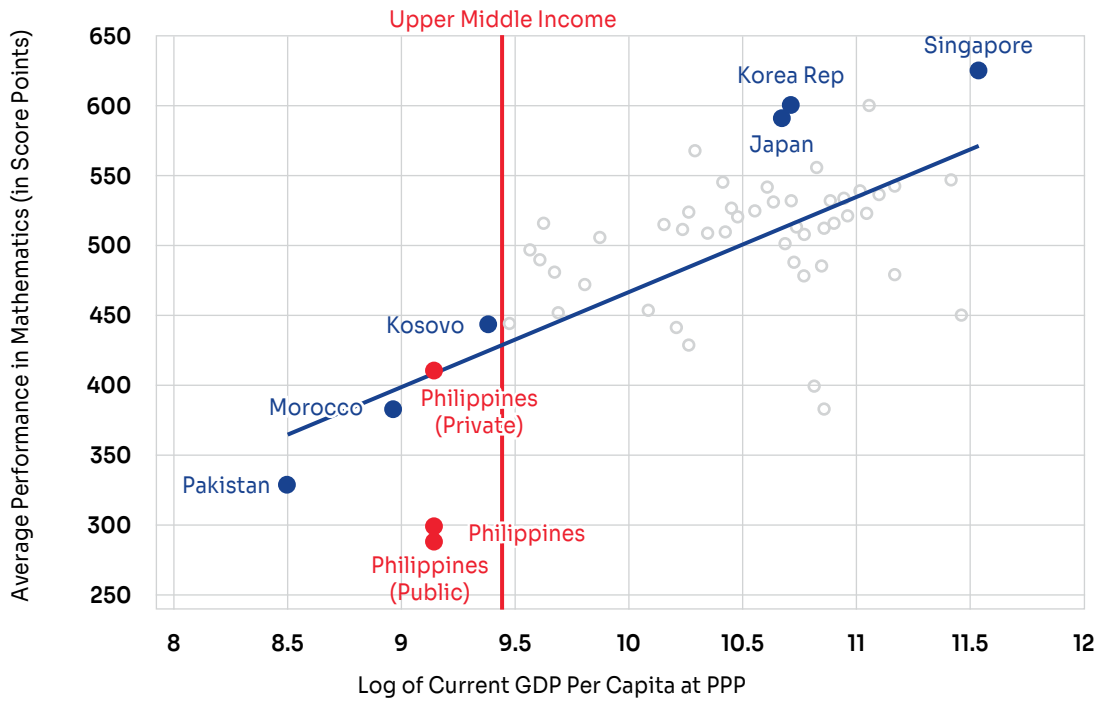
Source: Philippine Education: Situationer, Challenges, and Ways Forward (Orbeta & Paqueo, 2022)

FIGURE 6
PISA 2022 Average Score in Mathematics by GDP Per Capita
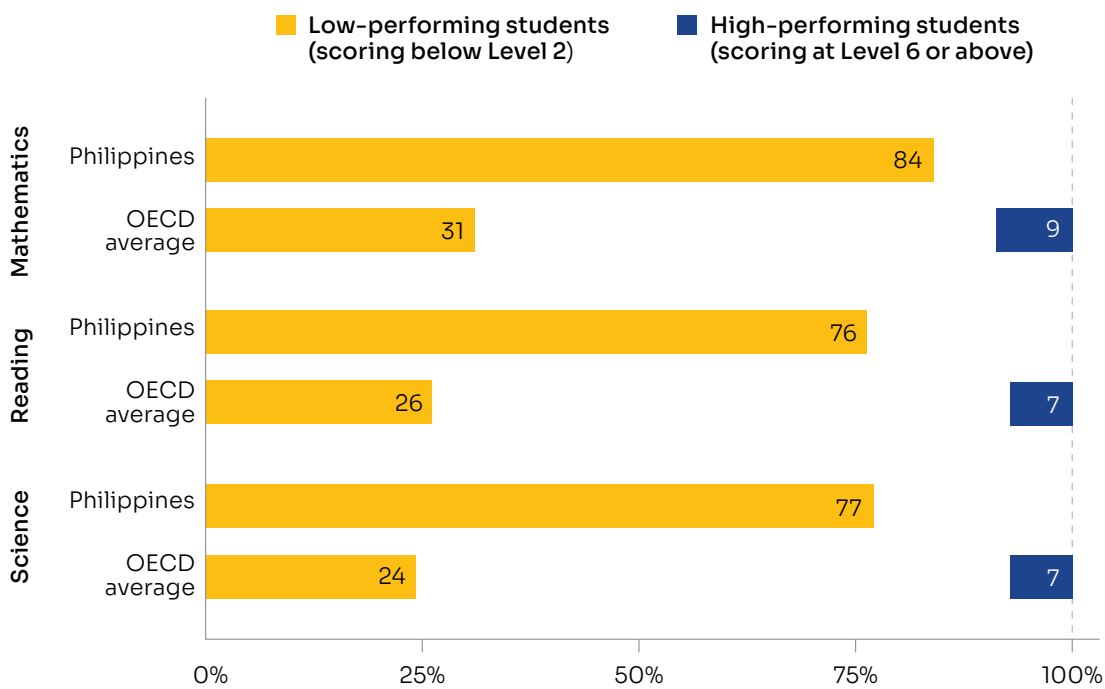
Across the domains of reading, math, and science in the PISA 2018 test of the country's 15-year-old students, Orbeta and Paqueo (2022) found that "private schools are performing better than expected given our level of income and better than public schools." They also had a similar observation in their analysis of TIMSS 2019, which tests Grade 4 students.

Furthermore, comparative analysis of the marginal productivity of education inputs (namely, teacher qualifications, educational materials, class size, and student–teacher ratio) on student scores in math, reading, and science also suggests that public schools in the Philippines are not as efficient and effective as their private school counterparts in utilizing limited resources (Paqueo, et al., 2023). One reason for the efficiency and effectiveness of private schools over public schools could be better management practices, as suggested in the literature review and analysis of PISA survey data by Crawfurd, et al. (2023). Taken together, these findings emphasize the continuing relevance of private education in enabling access to quality and cost-effective education in the Philippines.

Lessons from Public–Private Partnerships in Education

Educational public-private partnerships (PPPs) are one mechanism through which complementarity could be operationalized. Research shows that the Philippine education sector has good experience in educational PPPs, though these are mainly implemented in basic education. Often cited examples are the Education Service Contracting (ESC) scheme and the Senior High School Voucher Program. A lesser known example is the PPP for School Infrastructure Project, which supplemented DepEd's efforts to reduce its classroom backlog through a Build-Lease-and-Transfer scheme. The construction of 9,296 classrooms in Regions I, III, and IV-A was completed on December 4, 2015, with a project cost of Php 9.89 billion approved by the NEDA Board.

FIGURE 7
Public–Private Partnership Continuum
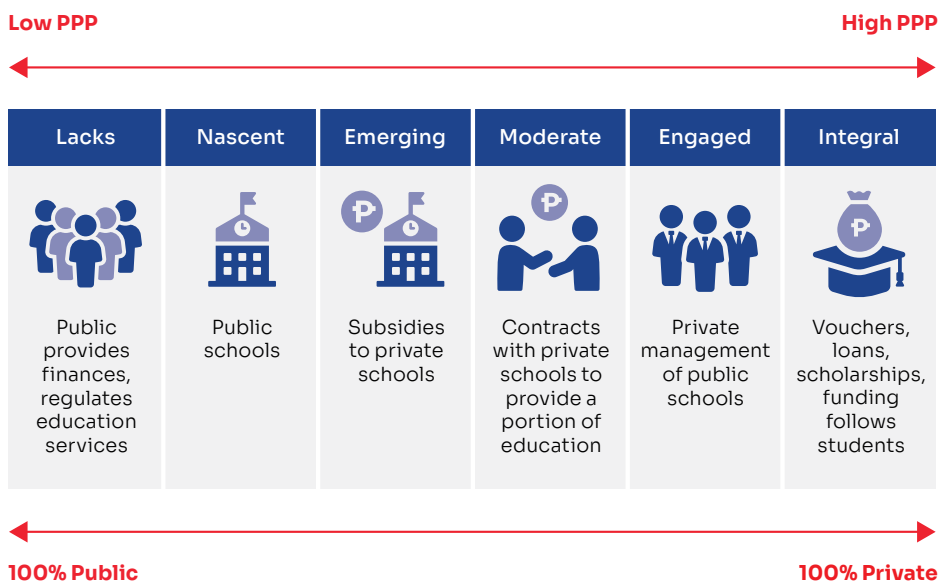
Source: Philippines Private Provision, Public Purpose: A Review of the Government's Education Service Contracting Program, World Bank, 2011

Various assessments of global experience show that, generally, educational PPPs have a positive impact on expanding access to education (Patrinos & Sakellariou, 2011). However, evidence has been mixed with regard to the impact of PPPs on learning (Ansari, 2020; Crawfurd & Alam, 2023; Hsieh & Urquiola, 2006; Patrinos et al., 2009), which suggests that design matters (Crawfurd et al., 2023).

The discussions below surface lessons from both local and international experiences with educational PPPs. The first discussion zeroes in on the Philippines's ESC program, which is one of the world's largest and longest-running educational PPPs (Termes et al., 2020). The second discussion highlights the experience of Punjab, Pakistan, where experimentation with educational PPPs has been ongoing for over 3 decades.

Lessons from Local Experience: ESC in the Philippines

As of SY 2022–2023, the ESC program served over 859,900 students, or 4% of the country's total junior high school population. This number accounts for 76% of total private junior high school enrollment, from 36% in SY 2008–2009. The enactment of RA 6728, or the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education (GASTPE) Act, institutionalized and mainstreamed ESC in 1989. This was later amended by RA 8545. In 2013, the coverage of GASTPE was further expanded to include senior high school through RA 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act, facilitating rapid expansion of access to senior high school via vouchers.

The ESC extends financial assistance in the form of tuition subsidies to qualified elementary school graduates who wish to pursue junior high school in private schools. The program was designed to address congestion in public high schools, improve access to quality education in a more cost-effective way, and ensure the viability of private high schools in view of the significant decline in private education's share of enrollment (World Bank, 2011). The World Bank also put forward the following recommendations to address observed areas for improvement:

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of both the managing agency and the implementing agency.
- Introduce a results-oriented approach in the contractual agreement.
- Establish performance measures for private schools receiving public funds to encourage quality improvements.
- Improve budgeting and slot allocation process to stay within budgetary constraints.
- Gradually adjust the distribution of ESC grants to align with public school congestion across regions and address varying needs among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Collect empirical data on schools, students, family background, and learning outcomes to enable policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders to assess the program's effectiveness.

In a study by Termes et al. (2020) on school choice and competition dynamics in Manila, the researchers found that test scores and school marketing had little impact on families' school choices. Instead, decisions were mainly influenced by factors such as distance (including geographic proximity and transportation costs), financial considerations, and the school's composition and social environment. Families that opted to attend public schools also frequently mentioned teacher quality and ability grouping, particularly the practice of placing "bright" students in "cream sections," as part of their choice criteria. On the other hand, the perceived association to quality education of a longer school day, reduced pupil-to-teacher ratio, and language of instruction prompted families that chose to attend private schools to give more weight to these factors.

Learnings from Global Experience: Punjab, Pakistan

In Pakistan, public schools represent around half of primary schools, with private schools and PPP schools accounting for about 33% and 18%, respectively. Recognizing that the government of Pakistan cannot single-handedly shoulder the immense responsibility of providing quality education to its citizens, policymakers view PPPs as a key strategy in improving equity, particularly for populations with limited access to education, as well as in raising the quality of their education system.

Educational PPPs are managed by the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF), an autonomous body established in 1991 and given full autonomy in 2004, with a mandate to promote quality education through noncommercial partnerships. Since its inception, the PEF has developed PPPs involving vouchers, subsidies, and management contracts. Studies by Crawfurd and Alam (2023); Ansari (2020), and Malik (2010) document the following positive impacts of PPPs in Punjab:

- Improved access to education for poor households across the board, especially for those in rural and slum areas;
- Improved student achievement, in particular students from disadvantaged backgrounds often achieving comparable or superior test results to their peers from more privileged backgrounds;
- Reduction of dropout rate, which in turn reduced child labor; and
- Improved teacher attendance.

PEF's primary mechanism for improving outcomes is a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework, including Quality Assurance Tests for students and regular monitoring of school facilities and infrastructure. The test is conducted at the start and end of the school year. It is a separate test from the standard exams administered to public and private school students by the Punjab Examinations Commission. M&E reports are closely examined and analyzed to inform policy reforms and guide program adjustments. Below are recommendations put forward by the ADB to improve the PEF's M&E and accountability system, which we could also glean lessons from:

- Define in advance a set of specific quantifiable goals and targets.
- Collect, on a quarterly basis, information on a small set of key monitoring indicators that are time-bound and transparent, e.g. physical learning environment and teacher information.
- Conduct structured comprehensive evaluations periodically in addition to internal evaluations.
- Increase involvement of parents and community in the accountability system to foster social and institutional sustainability.
- Institutionalize an M&E department to enable regular scrutiny of program impact and implementation, as well as to support budgetary decision-making, performance gap analysis, and program fine-tuning.

> *Choice is a key aspect of complementarity. When designing complementarity models, it is essential to ensure that end users (students, parents, and households) have a wide range of educational options to choose from.*

It is also important to note that **the success of implementing PPPs for education requires strengthened public sector capability in procurement, monitoring and evaluation, and overall governance.** PPPs necessitate "a range of conditions that must be in place to ensure that these theoretical relationships actually work as expected"; thus, as reviewed in the policy literature, "for a PPP to succeed, the public side of the PPP needs to be strong" (Crawfurd et al., 2023).

**Developing a Harmonized Complementarity Framework for the Sector**
During Year Two, EDCOM II explored potential models and directions in developing a harmonized complementarity framework for the education sector. This was enabled through technical assistance from the World Bank, which kicked off with a workshop on complementarity on January 29–30, 2024. Participating experts remarked that the relatively unique evolution of public and private education in the Philippines may require a more customized approach that combines PPPs, education regulation, and governance. The activity generated the following key insights:

- **Choice is a key aspect of complementarity**. When designing complementarity models, it is essential to ensure that end users (students, parents, and households) have a wide range of educational options to choose from. This means that they are not restricted by financial contributions, particularly in schools receiving government funding. By expanding educational choices to a more diverse range of providers, the government increases client power and makes providers more directly accountable to students and parents for results. **Transparency in school performance** is a key aspect of school choice.
- **Information asymmetry issues must be addressed to strengthen the link between school choice and improved learning outcomes.** Transparency in school performance is crucial so that households are able to make well-informed decisions. Patrinos et al. (2009) have outlined the following concrete steps that can be undertaken by governments to improve information flows and quality assurance in private education markets:
  - Requiring schools to disclose information to regulators and the general public as a condition of registration;
  - Collecting and disseminating information by education authorities on schools according to a number of indicators, including the quality of their infrastructure, facilities, and curriculum, the qualifications that they offer, and their class sizes, fee levels, teacher qualifications, and exam scores;
  - Introducing independent school review systems to provide information on school performance; and
  - Introducing independent accrediting agencies that focus on school performance.
- **Enable flexibility in the delivery of services, while holding providers accountable for learning outcomes.** Private providers need to determine the most effective methods for delivering the contracted services, as long as they meet the government's specified output and performance standards. In particular, providers will require considerable autonomy in staff employment and management, curriculum delivery, and budget allocation and utilization.

Minimizing government restrictions will enable the contracted provider to innovate and effectively manage resources.

■ **Targeting is an important component of PPP design.** Targeted interventions are more able to meet specific student needs. It is crucial to identify services that are needed by the underserved or marginalized groups and communities.

■ Care should be taken to **nuance the choice of complementarity mode**, including what outcomes to prioritize, and what modality fits with the outcome.

■ **Encourage collaboration between private and public schools** by sharing best practices, resources, and strategies to address gaps and enhance the quality of education in both sectors.

■ **Contract design is crucial to ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of PPPs**. To guarantee that educational PPPs serve the public interest, contracts must explicitly define how the private sector contributes to the government's objectives of expanding access, promoting equity, and enhancing the quality of education. In particular, the following details should be clearly articulated:

  ▫ The roles, responsibilities, and liabilities of both the public and private sectors must be clearly defined. This includes the appropriate sharing of risks between public and private sectors.

  ▫ Performance metrics and standards, monitoring mechanisms, and reporting requirements must also be articulated to promote accountability of both parties, as well as to enhance transparency in the use of public funds. Attainment of performance targets could be included in the contract as prerequisites to the provider's receipt of compensation. Relatedly, there should be open, competitive, and transparent procedures for bidding and awarding of contracts.

FIGURE 8
Establishing an Effective Regulatory Environment for PPPs
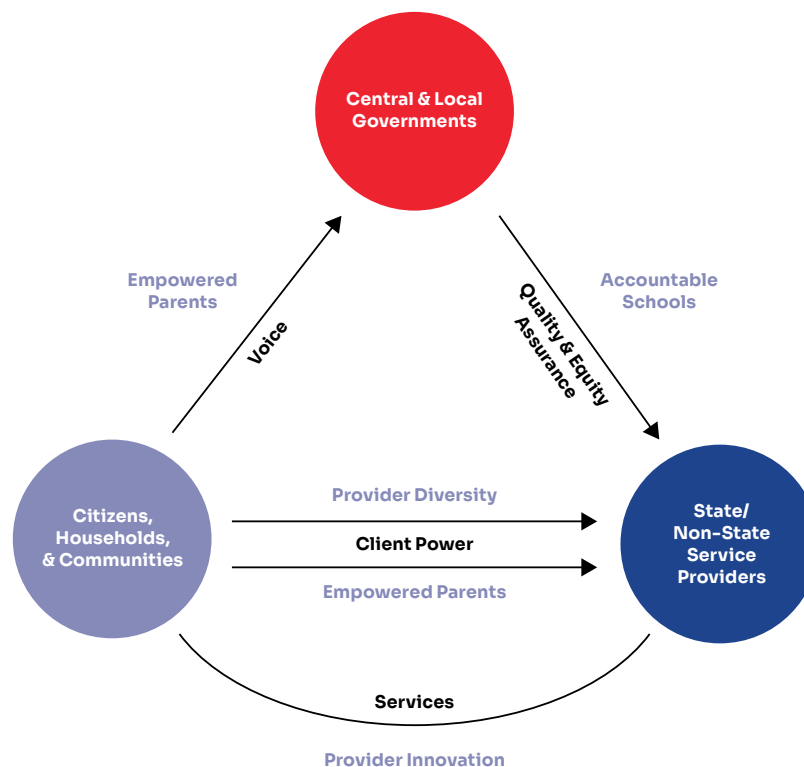
Note: Data taken from EDCOM II Workshop on Complementarity, January 29–30, 2024.
Source: Harry Anthony Patrinos, World Bank

- **The contracting agency must have the capacity to implement a well-designed M&E system**. M&E is a means to ensure that the service provider meets its contractual obligations. More importantly, it enables continuous improvement and safeguards the public interest.
- There is a need to find a **strategic balance** between the private and public sector to avoid tension. Including private providers in the national policy discussion is crucial, particularly in difficult but necessary discussions on competitive neutrality and regulation.

TABLE 3
Components of the STEER Model

Strategically Diversified Systems	• Variety of institutions from universities, polytechnics, and postsecondary colleges to TVET institutions and short-term skills training providers • Diverse delivery modes (online, in person, and blended) • Clear pathways for student movement within the system
Technology	• Adoption of technology in teaching and learning, including the use of virtual and augmented reality as well as artificial intelligence for simulated environments • Building capacity to adapt to rapid technological advancements
Equity	• Sustained commitment to address issues in access, completion/persistence through tertiary education, and learning gaps
Efficiency	• Strategic fiscal and human resource allocation • Agile systems that can adapt to disruptions and shocks • Robust quality assurance mechanisms
Resilience	• Collaboration between government, private institutions, employers, students, and civil society • Clear roles and responsibilities in quality assurance • Responsive review of legal and regulatory frameworks

Note: Data taken from EDCOM II Workshop on Complementarity, January 29–30, 2024.
Source: World Bank

Recommendations

In 2024, DepEd launched a complementarity framework for public and private basic education through DO 6, s. 2024. The issuance acknowledges that PPPs can further help in improving access to quality education, enabling the effective and efficient use of resources. DepEd's framework for complementarity defines the following key principles that basic education policy, programs, and governance must adhere to:

- Optimizing the roles of the public and private sectors in basic education;
- Mutual understanding by the public and private sectors of their complementary roles;.
- Recognition of the inherent value of private education institutions in the education system;
- Reasonable supervision and regulation of private institutions;
- Participatory governance to nurture the complementary relationship between public and private institutions;
- Equal regard to the impact of education policies and resource allocation decisions on both the public and private sectors; and
- Partnership and collaboration in achieving national education goals.

DepEd's adoption of a complementary framework is a step in the right direction in view of the advantages that complementarity brings about to the education system:

- **Addressing market failures:** correcting externalities, reducing equity gaps, improving access to finance, and enhancing information transparency
- **Increased investment:** fostering greater contributions from government, industry, and households
- **Improved outcomes:** enhancing student learning, research, and development through competition and accountability

However, CHED and TESDA must also undertake similar measures to fully realize the complementary roles of public and private education in the Philippine education system.

With the understanding that legislative intervention is another recourse to establish an enabling policy environment, **the Commission is drafting a bill that seeks to create a more dynamic education system where both public and private sectors play crucial roles in providing quality education to all Filipinos, particularly through expanding choices for students and strengthening their ability to access those choices.**

The Taguig Experience: Taguig Learner's Certificate (TLC)
The City of Taguig has implemented a unique voucher system that emphasizes student choice and extends scholarships to both public and private teachers. Public elementary graduates wishing to attend a partner private high school can receive a Php 10,000 educational allowance, along with a tuition subsidy of up to Php 18,000. With over 60 partner schools in the city, the TLC Scholarship Program not only provides opportunities for elementary graduates to enroll in private schools but also helps reduce overcrowding in public classrooms, alleviates the issue of school overpopulation, and supports private institutions by increasing their enrollment.

To date, 10,887 high school students have benefited from the TLC Scholarship's financial assistance. In addition to the TLC, the city has launched the Lifeline Assistance for Neighbors In-need Scholarship program. This initiative offers grants ranging from Php 15,000 to Php 110,000 per year to a wide range of beneficiaries, including high school graduates, students pursuing education at top colleges and universities, technical and vocational courses, board and bar exam reviewees, and both public and private school teachers in Taguig.

Priority Area 25: Integrated Performance Management and Accountability System

Major gaps in the performance and accountability system must be urgently addressed in order to rapidly improve the performance of schools and the agency as a whole toward the achievement of minimum learner outcomes.

Issue: Significant flaws in the existing performance management and accountability system have severely limited its effectiveness in driving performance toward desired student learning outcomes.

Through the technical assistance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Improving Learning Outcomes for the Philippines (ILO-PH) project in Year Two, researchers observed that DepEd officials across governance levels expressed "deep commitment for improving the state of the education system" (USAID, 2024) and were actively seeking opportunities to refine existing processes, practices, and tools. The following are already in place:

- Detailed process for developing plans, as well as roles and responsibilities at each organizational level, appear to be clearly understood.
- Quarterly progress checks are conducted through monitoring, evaluation, and adjustment meetings at the division and regional levels.
- Performance is measured against indicators and budget targets.
- The agency's overall progress is monitored through quarterly performance reports submitted to the NEDA Social Development Committee.

TABLE 4
Performance and Accountability System Gaps and Recommendations

Gaps		Recommendations
There are **too many objectives, indicators, and targets**, which means that "everything" is important, with limited direction or focus.	▶	1. Prioritize a **small number of headline targets** to focus on **learner outcomes** and the system.
Targets are inconsistent, lack ambition, and have a limited focus on learning outcomes.	▶	2. Design targets to be **ambitious yet realistic**. Care must also be taken to reflect community aspirations. 3. Tailor targets at each level of governance, but **ensure that they roll up to system-wide targets**. 4. **Communicate the targets** clearly and regularly across the system.
There is too much "clutter" in the system, leading to a **focus on bureaucratic compliance**.	▶	5. **Simplify and align targets** with performance management policies, tools, and funding processes.
There is **limited alignment** between the Basic Education Development Plan 2030 and the DepEd Budget Framework.		
The system is **not held to account** for improvement.		
Existing data systems are **neither effective at tracking progress against targets** nor are they used to improve teaching practice in a targeted way.	▶	6. Implement **"fit for purpose" standardized assessments** to track progress and to inform where support is needed most. 7. Use data to better understand progress and **drivers of performance**. 8. Align the targets to **focus technical assistance to schools**.
Regions, divisions, and schools **lack agency**.	▶	9. **Give greater agency** to regions, divisions, and schools.

Note: Summary adapted from the USAID ILO-PH report Strengthening Performance and Accountability in the Philippine Education System.

Despite the high number of targets, only 8 out of the 88 targets in the BEDP are about learning outcomes, which is indicative that learning outcomes are not given sufficient attention in the system.

Finally, the overarching recommendation put forward by the ILO-PH researchers is to **establish a delivery function to oversee implementation** of the nine action points.

**A Closer Look at the Gaps in DepEd's Performance and Accountability System**
Case reviews of Indonesia; Punjab, Pakistan; and New South Wales, Australia, conducted by USAID ILO-PH in Year One surfaced the key insight that strong performance and accountability systems are characterized by the following key components:

- **Plans, targets, and budgets are aligned**.
- **Outcome-focused targets** and their supporting indicators are well aligned, understood, and communicated.
- **Quantitative data is available** and regularly shared to understand system performance.
- System leadership prioritizes a **culture of high performance**.
- **System actors receive targeted and tailored support**, and there is a focus on support for underperformers. As a result, **system actors have the capacity to take action**, flexibly deploying plans and resources at all levels of governance.

In contrast to global best practice, ILO-PH researchers observed that the BEDP 2030, the country's first comprehensive and long-term strategic plan for formal and nonformal basic education, is **overburdened with an excessive number of indicators and targets**, adding up to 88 in all. One regional plan had an even more staggering number, at 514 in total. Despite the high number of targets, **only 8 out of the 88 targets in the BEDP are about learning outcomes**, which are indicative that **learning outcomes are not given sufficient attention in the system**.

Furthermore, there is **limited alignment between the BEDP 2030 and the agency's budget framework.** Developed through an intensive consultation process and technical assistance from UNICEF as grant agent of the Global Partnership for Education, the BEDP 2030 establishes a results framework anchored on the key pillars of access, equity, quality, and resiliency and well-being to address immediate and long-term challenges in basic education. DepEd articulated intermediate outcomes for each of these pillars, shown in Figure 9.

FIGURE 9
BEDP 2030 Results Framework
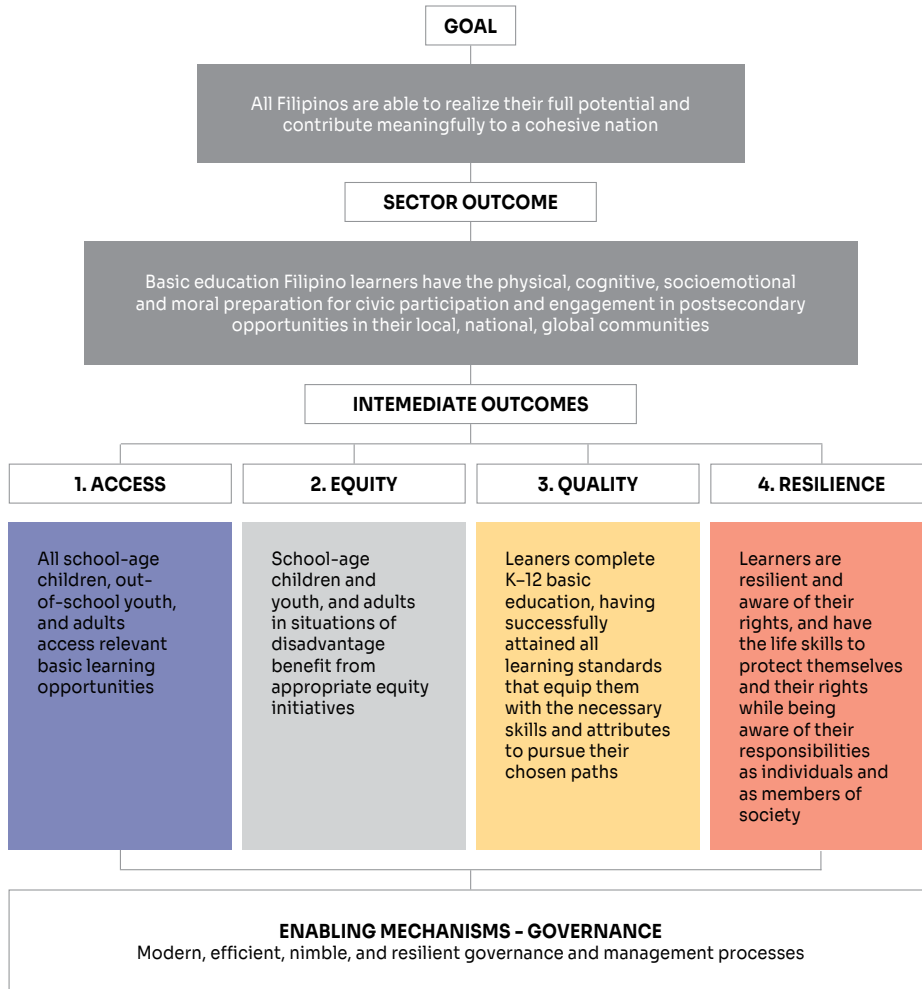
Source: *Basic Education Development Plan 2030 (DO 24, s.2022)*

Meanwhile, the DepEd budget framework articulates the following organizational outcome toward which the agency's programs contribute:

> "*Access of every Filipino to an enhanced basic education program, enabling them to prepare for further education, entrepreneurship, and the world of work achieved.*"

Following the program expenditure classification approach implemented as part of a broader package of public financial management reforms, DepEd activities and projects are organized into five overarching programs: Education Policy Development, Basic Education Inputs, Inclusive Education, Support to Schools and Learners, and Education Human Resource Development.

FIGURE 10
DepEd Budget Structure
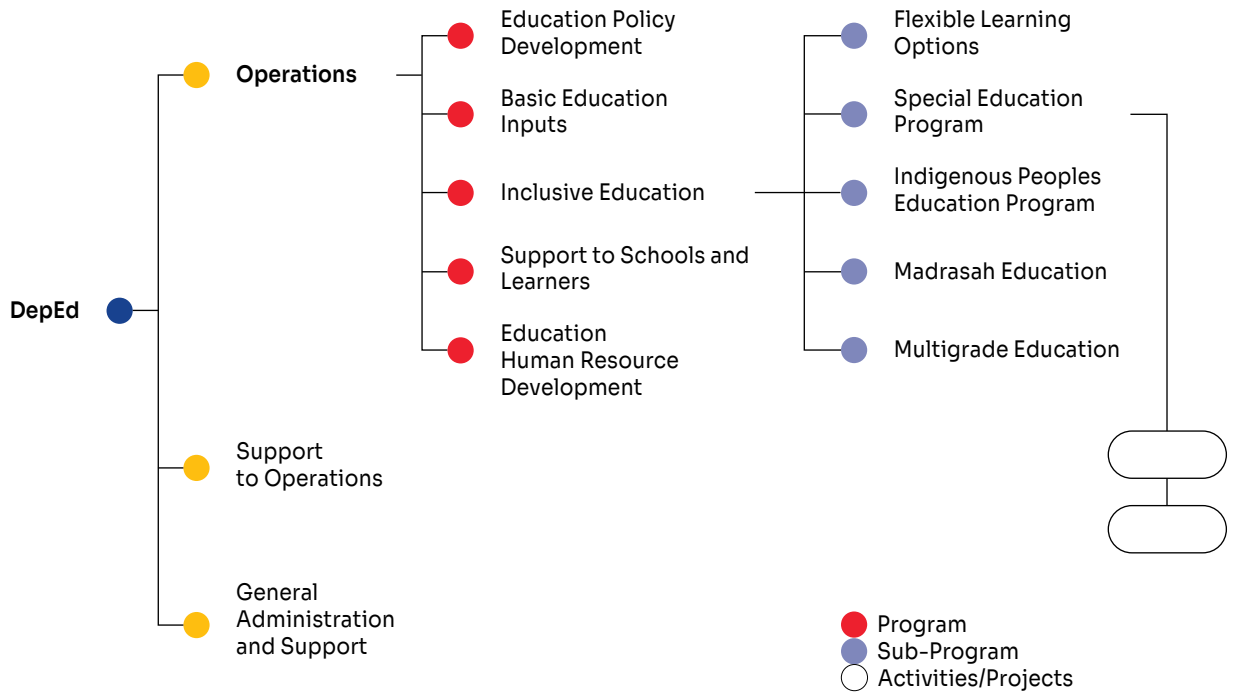
Note: For brevity, only the subprograms under inclusive education are shown to illustrate the hierarchical structure of DepEd's budget in accordance with the program expenditure classification approach implemented by the DBM. Illustration is based on the DBM's PREXC approach.

Source: Program Expenditure Classification (PREXC) briefer published by the DBM, 2016

The agency's budget performance and contribution to promoting human and social development is measured through performance indicators in the National Expenditure Plan (NEP) or the General Appropriations Act (GAA), and the Philippine Development Plan. Examining these documents revealed disparity in the articulated outcomes and metrics used by DepEd, the DBM, and NEDA. This implies that even though DepEd's attainment of budget utilization and nonfinancial targets are tracked, the metrics used by oversight bodies do not have a clear connection to the desired outcomes specified in the BEDP. For instance, while National Achievement Test (NAT) scores are consistently used as measures of quality in the three documents, the actual metrics differ in terms of the degree of proficiency desired, the grade levels tracked, and skill areas specified (see Table 5).

TABLE 5
Comparison of Performance Indicators for Quality of Learning

BEDP 2030 Pillar 3: Quality	PDP 2023–2028 Results Matrix	FY 2025 NEP
Percentage of learners who proceeded to college, employment, entrepreneurship, and middle-level skills training	None	None
Completion rates for elementary and secondary	None	Aligned
Percentage of learners achieving **nearly proficient or better** in English, mother tongue, and numeracy (NAT Grade 3)	Percentage of learners achieving nearly proficient or better in English, mother tongue, and numeracy (NAT Grade 3) ■ Tracks performance in reading and mathematics. These are similar to literacy and numeracy, but not quite the same. ■ The specific metric used is proportion of learners achieving **at least proficient** in the NAT	Also adopts NAT scores as measures but only for Grades 6, 10, and 12. This leaves out foundational learning in the early grades. While it uses the proportion of learners achieving at **least nearly proficient** like the BEDP, it does not specify which skill areas.
Percentage of learners attaining **proficient level or better** in Stage 2 literacy and numeracy standards (NAT Grade 6)		
Percentage of learners attaining **nearly proficient level or better** in Stage 3 literacy and numeracy standards (NAT Grade 10)		
Percentage of learners attaining **nearly proficient level or better** in Stage 4 core SHS areas (NAT Grade 12)		
None	Learning poverty rate	Aligned

Abbreviations: BEDP = Basic Education Development Plan, FY = fiscal year, NAT = National Achievement Test, NEP = National Expenditure Plan, SHS = senior high school

There are also **misalignments in the targets set by DepEd's central office and its field units**. In some instances, even when the measures are consistent, targets at the lower levels of governance do not roll up and aggregate into the targets set at the national level. For example, the BEDP target for percentage of learners achieving nearly proficient or better in NAT Grade 3 English (SY 2022–2026) is 68.9%. However, in one of the regional plans sampled by researchers, the target was 17 out of 21 division offices with at least 61.8% of learners achieving nearly proficient or better in English in 2026. Furthermore, these targets are determined by forecasting performance based on past trends, instead of ascertaining whether or not strategic pivots or additional effort and resources could be invested to hasten the pace of performance improvements. Determined in this manner, these targets do not engender a sense of drive and urgency toward meaningful improvement.

In some instances, even when the measures are consistent, targets at the lower levels of governance do not roll up and aggregate into the targets set at the national level.

Another critical gap is that **existing data systems are neither effective at tracking progress against targets nor are they used to improve teaching practice in a targeted way**. In the case of learning outcomes, the NAT continues to be the primary means of measuring attainment of learner proficiency levels. However, there are **"limited routines and structures . . . that facilitate the sharing of available data** leading to data-informed policy design and system improvement" (USAID, 2024) at the national level. More importantly, results are not made available quickly to the field units, where data could make the most impact in improving student performance. Since test administration is sample based and participating schools change from year to year, using the test as a performance measure of the field units would raise issues of inequity.

Consistent with ILO-PH findings, EDCOM II consultations with DepEd officials also reveal weaknesses in data-informed policy and program design. This hinders DepEd from leveraging data to support rapid improvements in the attainment of desired outcomes, as well as to inform agile pivots when necessary. Reflecting on the agency's fairly recent adoption of the Basic Education Monitoring and Evaluation Framework in 2022, a high-ranking official shared the following assessment:

*"Most existing programs and policies have **unclear theory of change or logframe leading to challenges in evaluation and attribution to organizational outcomes.** With the assumed relevance of the basic education policies and programs, the same have been **implemented for years without assessment or evaluation** to check if the original objectives have already been addressed. **Unclear program design and success measures at the onset leads to programs continually being implemented without clear measure of its contribution to learner and organizational outcomes**."*

Examined as a whole, it is evident that the system is cluttered with detailed policies, processes, and tools for planning, performance-based budgeting, and individual performance mandated at a central level. These involve intensive processes that require significant time and resources for bureaucratic compliance. Mapping out all these policies, processes, and tools together (see Figure 10) reveals that **DepEd has a performance and accountability system that has become "a complex and overengineered tapestry of requirements . . . [that] drives a culture centered around compliance,** where organizations and individuals are more concerned about meeting requirements, than the meaningful improvement of outcomes" (USAID, 2024).

It is important to acknowledge that the design of DepEd's performance management system is not solely determined by the agency's internal dynamics and priorities. Primarily shaping the process, incentives, and tools implemented by DepEd are the following detailed systems developed by oversight agencies that built up over time:

- Development planning and results framework of the NEDA;
- Strategic performance management system of the Civil Service Commission;
- Performance-informed budgeting framework and tools of the DBM; and
- Results-based performance management system and performance-based incentive system introduced through EO 80, s. 2012, and AO 25, s. 2011.

FIGURE 11

Planning, Budgeting, and Performance Management Systems Underpinning DepEd's RBPMS
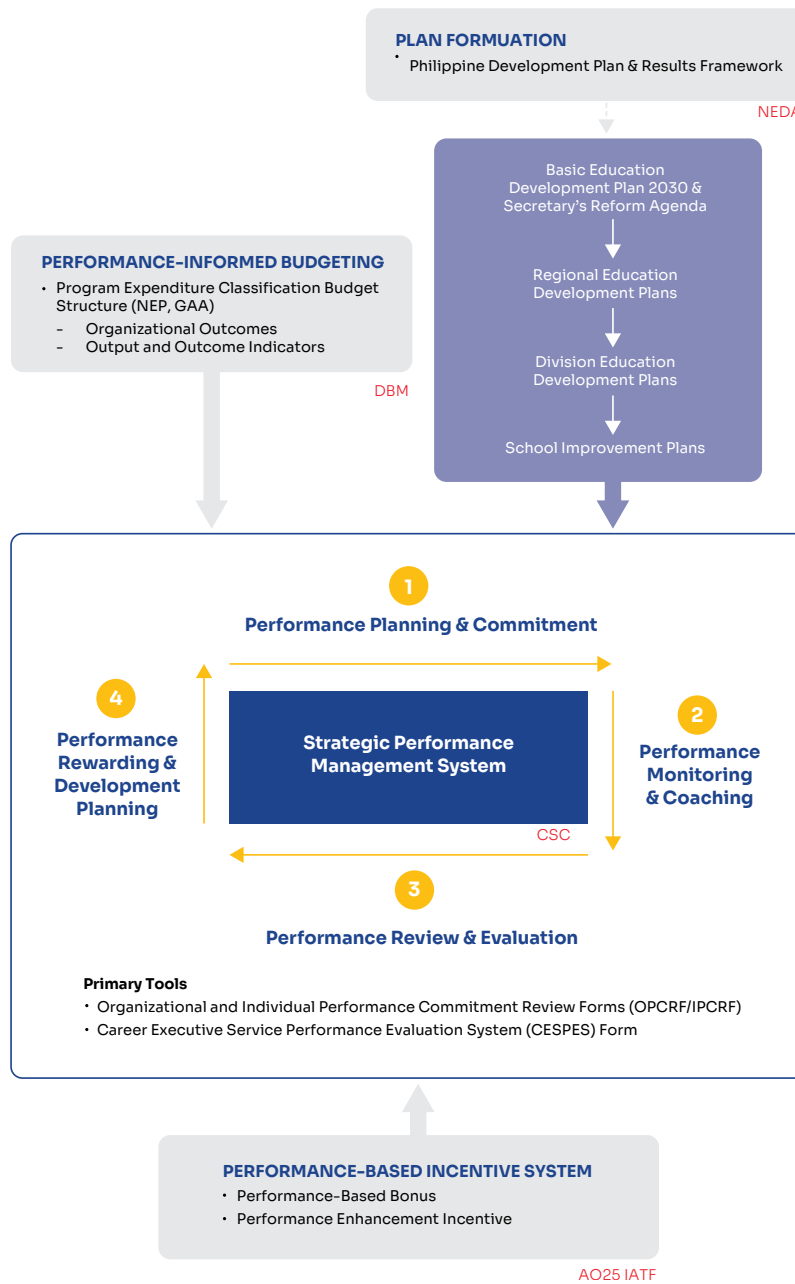
Abbreviations: AO = Administrative Order, CSC = Civil Service Commission, DBM = Department of Budget and Management, GAA = General Appropriations Act, IATF = Interagency Task Force, NEDA = National Economic and Development Authority, NEP = National Expenditure Program, RBPMS = results-based performance management system

At the local level, the sheer weight of plans, processes, and tools from higher governance levels constrains the capacity of regions, divisions, and schools to take action. **The cluttered system limits discretion to direct resources in line with local needs and drives a top-down compliance culture that disincentivizes local actors from adopting more proactive and innovative approaches.**[1] On the whole, these issues in the performance and accountability practices of DepEd lead to misalignment between inputs and outcomes, which in turn limit the capacity of schools and divisions to take full ownership of outcomes.

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1   A related and more in-depth discussion of the agency's compliance culture is discussed under Priority Area 27.

To address inefficiencies arising from these overlapping systems and processes, the Office of the President issued EO 60 on June 3, 2024, to effect the immediate suspension of the results-based performance management system and the performance-based incentive system, as well as create a TWG tasked to overhaul, streamline, and improve the government's performance management and incentive systems.

To communicate findings and recommendations surfaced through the USAID ILO-PH technical assistance and workshops conducted by EDCOM II, the Standing Committee on Governance and Finance organized a series of briefings and brainstorming sessions with members of the DepEd executive committee in the third quarter of Year Two. In these meetings, Secretary Angara outlined the key deliverables of DepEd under his leadership:

- Focus on learning outcomes, specifically the attainment of quality of learning standards as measured through credible assessments, and employability of basic education graduates.
- Improve access to learning resources, particularly textbooks and technology.
- Improve student experience in schools and learning centers to safeguard their well-being.
- Improve teacher quality and teacher experience.

To implement the Secretary's priorities, DepEd has committed to organize and focus its delivery of desired improvements through the following initial steps:

1. **Carefully identify a select number of outcome-focused targets and supporting headline indicators.**
2. **Establish a lean, cross-functional, and high-performing internal delivery unit** to coordinate implementation across and within agencies to achieve targets.

Key DepEd deliverable: Focus on learning outcomes, specifically the attainment of quality of learning standards as measured through credible assessments, and employability of basic education graduates.

Priority Area 26:
Efficiency and Equity in Financing, Resource Mobilization, and Delivery of Education

How do we ensure that government use of resources (i.e., budgeting) in relation to the improvement of learning outcomes is effective? We must formulate financing strategies, policies, and instruments (e.g., GAA, SEF, loans, vouchers, and grants) that could improve resourcing for education and lead to better outcomes in both the short term and long term.

Given the dynamic and evolving global context, ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners requires a multifaceted approach that extends beyond traditional reliance on government expenditure. The Philippine education system must strategically mobilize a diverse range of resources and maximize both public and private capacities to effectively deliver quality educational services (see Figure 11). Given the limitations of relying solely on government funding and the urgent need to significantly improve student learning, adopting innovative "leapfrog" strategies is imperative.

FIGURE 12
Finance–Provision Matrix

Note: Data taken from EDCOM II Workshop on Complementarity, January 29–30, 2024.

Source: Baum et al. (2014), World Bank

Issue 1: Despite significant growth in the education budget in recent years, the Philippines continues to underinvest in education.

Three decades ago, EDCOM I identified government underinvestment as a principal reason for the continuous decline in Philippine education quality. At the time, the government's budget for education was only 2.7% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). In line with global trends, the budget for education has risen to an average of 3.2% of the GDP in the last 10 years. However, the Philippines has failed

to meet the recommended education spending benchmark of 4% to 6% of GDP laid out in the UNESCO 2030 Incheon Declaration (see Figure 12). Although recent budget allocations indicate some progress and growth, there remains a considerable gap between current funding and what is needed to develop a high-performing educational system.

FIGURE 13
Government Allocation for Education as a Percentage of National Budget and GDP

EDUCATION BUDGET
National budget allocated to education

GDP allocated to education
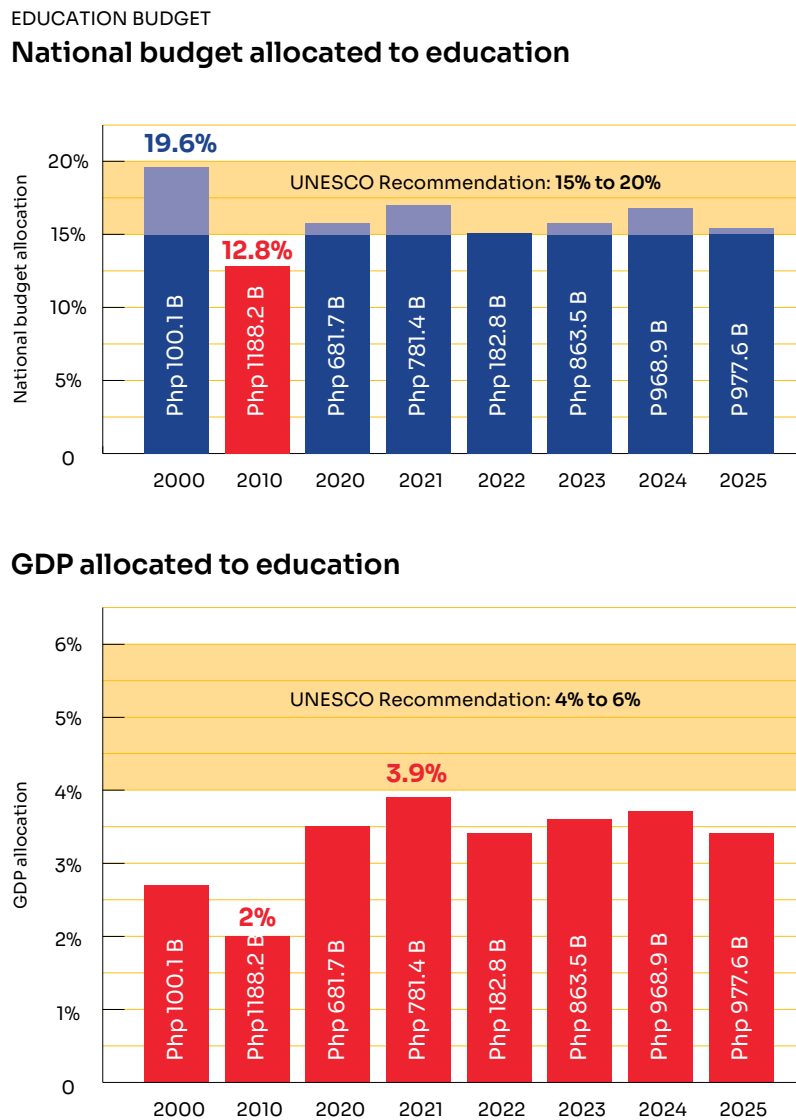
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

However, when budget figures are adjusted for inflation, it becomes apparent that national government allocation for education has in fact flattened in recent years. From 2013 to 2017, increases in the education sector budget averaged at 21.1% annually; but since then, the average annual increase has slowed to 1.33%.

Between 2013 and 2024, the government's education budget more than doubled in real terms. However, the education sector's share of the GDP rose by only about 1% over the past 2 decades, peaking at 4.0% of the GDP in 2017 before declining to an average of 3.7% between 2018 and the present. Notably, spending surged with the implementation of RA 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013) and RA 10931 (Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act). These expanded the student population and increased expenditures for free tertiary tuition (see Figure 13).

FIGURE 14
Total National Government Allocation and Enrollment for Basic and Higher Education

Total National Government Allocation for Basic and Higher Education
Public Basic and Higher Education Enrollment
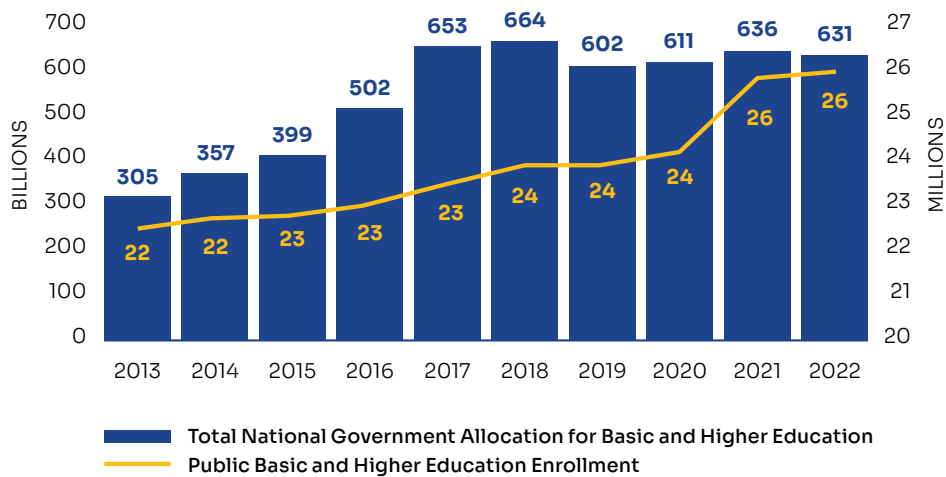
Note: Computed from the GAA figures and enrollment data submitted to EDCOM II

Once Adjusted for Inflation, Recent Budget Increases Have Been Modest
However, when budget figures are adjusted for inflation, it becomes apparent that national government allocation for education has in fact flattened in recent years (see Figure 14). From 2013 to 2017, increases in the education sector budget averaged at 21.1% annually; but since then, the average annual increase has slowed to 1.33%.

FIGURE 15
**Total National Government Allocation for Education
(Nominal vs. Real Values in Constant 2018 Prices)**
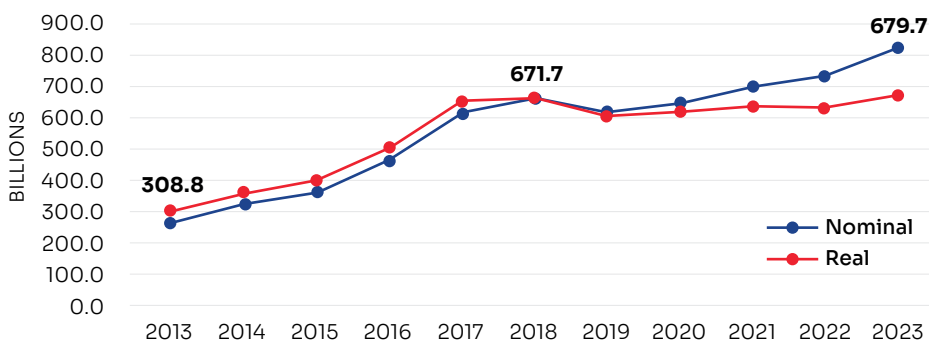
Note: National government spending combines the GAA budgets of the ECCDC, DepEd, TESDA, CHED, and state universities and colleges. Real values computed from the consumer price index.

Issue 2: There is a need to adjust education spending to increase investments in early childhood and primary education.

Investing in education builds human capital, fostering skill development, knowledge, and lifelong growth. Research shows that a 10% increase in school funding can boost individual wages by 7.25% annually, supporting financial stability and stimulating economic growth (Jackson et al., 2015). Primary education in low-income countries, in particular, offers the highest social returns (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). A recent study in the Philippines on recent policy reforms for early education provides strong evidence that early schooling impacts academic achievement and educational attainment in later years (Lloyd & Yang, 2024).

Beyond individual benefits, education creates a productive workforce, fuels innovation, and reduces dependency on social programs. Studies link public education spending to sustained economic growth but warn that inefficient allocations can weaken its impact (Judson, 1998). For the Philippines, increasing the education budget is essential, but improvements must also be strategic and targeted.

Increasing government allocations have mostly been toward upper secondary and tertiary education in recent years
While total spending shows general trends, per capita spending more accurately indicates whether each student receives adequate support. Per capita allocations in basic education have doubled over the past decade, primarily due to senior high school expansion in 2016. Tertiary education saw a rise as well in the subsequent year with the implementation of RA 10931 and the provision of free tuition. However, despite the critical importance of the foundational years for LLL and development, the Philippines allocates the highest per capita funding to secondary and tertiary education, while funding for primary students has seen the least growth and remains the lowest in real terms (see Figure 16).

FIGURE 16
National Government Budget per Student, Adjusted for Inflation
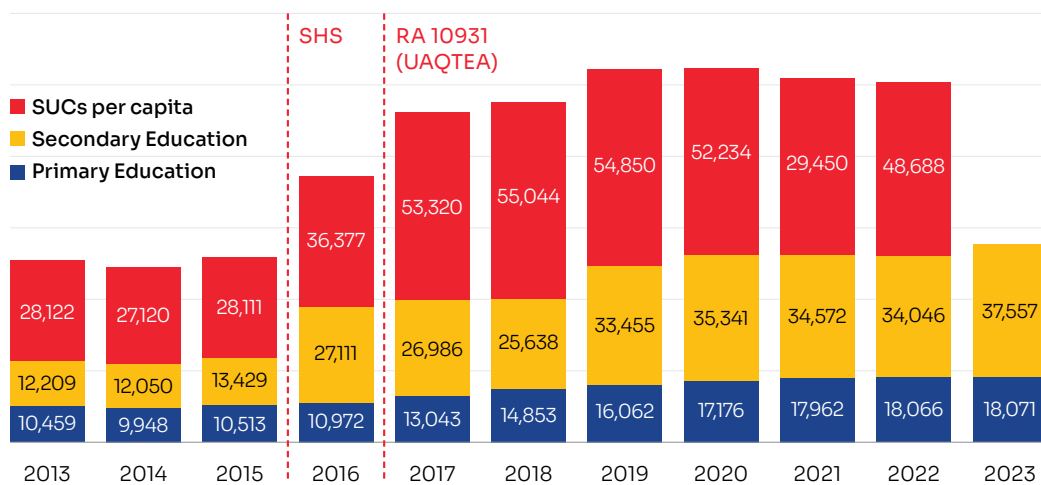
Note: Computed from Operation of Schools Line item, FY 2013–2023, 2018=100.

Abbreviations: SHS = senior high school, SUCs = state universities and colleges, RA = Republic Act, UAQTEA = Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act

Nonetheless, despite recent budget increases, the country's spending of USD 11,000 per student still falls short of this benchmark and remains inadequate, particularly in primary education.

The analysis of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) of the PISA 2018 data shows that cumulative expenditure per student of approximately USD 50,000 over a child's schooling up to age 15 correlates with average reading performance (Schleicher, 2019). It is important to note, however, that there is no causal effect of spending on student achievement, and the necessary "minimum" spending level can vary significantly by country due to differences in demographic and geographic factors, availability of educational resources, and management capacity to efficiently deliver educational services. Nonetheless, despite recent budget increases, the country's spending of USD 11,000 per student still falls short of this benchmark and remains inadequate, particularly in primary education.

TABLE 6

PISA Scores and Cumulative Education Spending per Student of Selected Countries

Country	Cumulative Spending (USD PPP)	Math	Reading	Science
Singapore	166,100	575	543	561
Malaysia	50,700	409	388	416
International Benchmark / OECD Average PISA scores	**50,000**	**487**	**489**	**489**
Vietnam	13,800	469	462	472
Philippines	11,000	355	347	356

Abbreviations: OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, USD PPP = purchasing power parity based on the US dollar

Source: Data from PISA 2018 Results

Issue 3:Inefficient utilization needs to be addressed to maximize the impact of increasing investments.

International research highlights that increasing resources alone does not guarantee better educational outcomes; effective allocation and spending are equally crucial.

In the case of DepEd, analysis of end-of-year financial accountability reports reveals that over the past decade, the agency's unobligated fund allocation by end of year have ranged from a low of 1.1% to a high of 13.5%. While these percentages are relatively low compared to other public sector agencies, these translate to billions of public funds due to the agency's large budget allocation. In terms of actual figures, DepEd has averaged around Php 27.2 billion in unobligated funds annually. Reports from the last 3 years show that unobligated amounts ranging from Php 1.1 billion to Php 10.3 billion include expenditures on basic resource inputs for public schools such as computerization, learning tools and equipment, and school desks and furniture. In the same period, the DepEd Central Office also incurred unobligated amounts for general management and supervision ranging from Php 1.2 billion to Php 3.1 billion.

These unutilized funds represent significant opportunity costs given the magnitude of funding needed to address deficits in basic resources faced by our public schools.

FIGURE 17
DepEd Unobligated Allotment per Expenditure Category
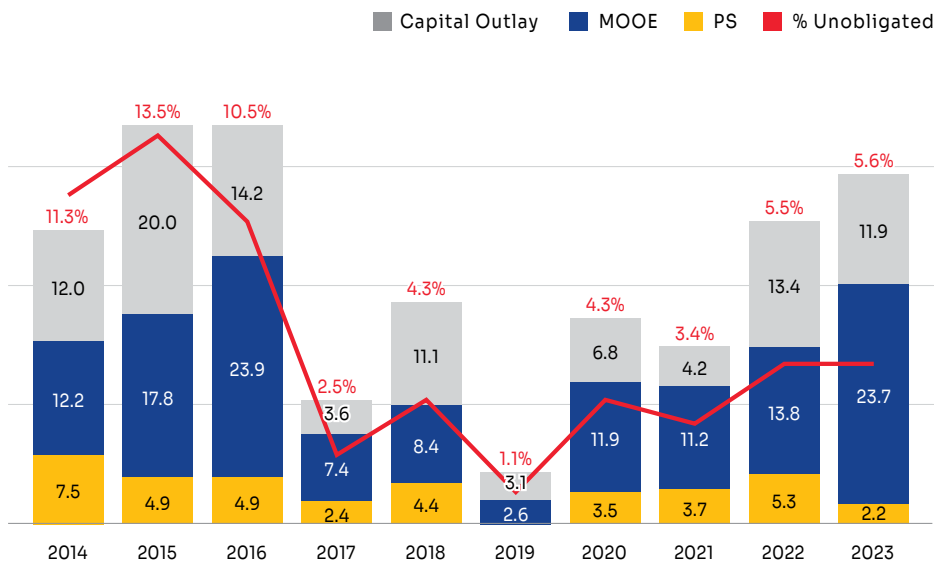
Note: Computed from FY 2014 to FY 2023 statements of appropriations, allotments, obligations, disbursements, and balances data.

Abbreviations: MOOE = maintenance and other operating expenses, PS = personal services

When examined by expenditure category, the highest proportion of unutilized allocation by end of year is incurred for maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), followed by capital outlay, which is indicative of absorptive capacity issues.

> *In terms of actual figures, DepEd has averaged around Php 27.2 billion in unobligated funds annually.*

Issue 4: Resourcing has been done in silos, without equity considerations addressed.

To ensure strategic use of the education sector's limited resources, national and local spending for each education subsector must be evaluated as interlocking parts of a whole, considering variations by geography and the income class of localities. However, the absence of a systems approach at the education sector level also persists within the agencies. DepEd, for example, needs to rationalize resourcing mechanisms to properly monitor and account for what is received at the school level. However, the following data practices hinder the agency:

- Lack of relevant detail and disaggregation in statutory reports on SEF spending submitted by LGUs to the Bureau of Local Government Finance (BLGF) of the Department of Finance (DOF) ;
- Duplicative collection of SEF spending reports required under the DepEd-DBM-Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Joint Circular No. 1, s. 2020, and Joint Circular No. 1, s. 2017, which would involve manual consolidation unlike the more systematic aggregation enabled by the BLGF's LGU Integrated Financial Tools system;
- Common practice of downloading "program support funds" that trickle down to field unit, without systematic assessment of how these additional funds impact overall efficiency and equity of allocation to differently resourced regions, divisions, and schools; and
- Absence of a comprehensive mechanism to track the amount of support received by schools through alternative funding streams, such as SEF allocation to schools; donations from parent-teacher associations (PTAs), alumni, and civil society; and other support initiatives by LGUs or the private sector.

Preliminary findings on local financing and learning outcomes presented by UNICEF Philippines during the Commission's October 29, 2024, field visit to Gapan City show that analysis of the whole resource envelope available to schools could yield useful insights for policy. Specifically, UNICEF Philippines observed weak detection of effects for school MOOE and SEF spending on learning outcomes. This could be indicative of ineffective spending, though further study is needed. In particular, examining learning outcomes in relation to detailed LGU spending is crucial to determine whether current expenditures translate into improved results and to ensure future budgets, whether from national or local sources, are effectively aligned with achieving better learning outcomes.

LESSONS FROM THE FINANCING OF SCHOOL MOOE

Reforms to the School MOOE Formula

For fiscal year (FY) 2024, the total budget for school MOOE is Php 38.9 billion, or 5.07% of DepEd's total adjusted allotment. While small relative to the agency's total budget, the school MOOE allocation is significant because it provides schools some autonomy to decide and fund their spending priorities. However, desk research and consultations reveal two challenges: insufficiency of allocation and delays in the release of these funds.

Insufficient School MOOE Allocation

A budget of over Php 30 billion seems huge, but when we account for the millions of Filipino learners served by the nation's public schools, this budget is actually quite miniscule. To illustrate the point, we computed the annual and monthly allotment per learner using FY 2022 school MOOE adjusted allotment and enrollment data (see Table 7). Assuming equal allocation per learner,[2] a school head in a public elementary school has a mere Php 93.92 to spend on each pupil per month. The monthly budget in junior and senior high school is higher though not by much, at Php 125 per student.

TABLE 7
FY 2022 Per Capita School MOOE

Level	SY 2022–2023 Enrollment	FY 2022 School MOOE Budget	Annual Per Capita	Monthly Per Capita
ES	14,072,129	Php 15,864,088,773	Php 1,127	Php 93.92
JHS	7,243,005	Php 10,886,063,569	Php 1,503	Php 125.25
SHS	2,721,117	Php 4,095,818,275	Php 1,505	Php 125.42

Note: SY 2022–2023 enrollment data from DepEd Learner Information System and school MOOE budget from FY 2022 statements of appropriations, allotments, obligations, disbursements, and balances. Abbreviations: ES = elementary school, JHS = junior high school, MOOE = maintenance and other operating expenses

The Commission's engagement with DepEd on this concern revealed that the agency is fully aware of the problem and has proactively engaged the DBM in increasing the school MOOE budget through the adoption of normative financing formulas. Developed through technical assistance from the ADB, the formulas are informed by cost estimates obtained from a survey of over 10,000 schools. Securing the DBM's approval of the new normative financing formulas is critical in replacing the Boncodin formula, which predates the K–12 reform program and is based on service standards and cost estimates that have since become outdated.

The Boncodin formula computes school MOOE as a function of total enrollment, the number of teachers, the number of classrooms, and the number of graduating students:

School MOOE = Fixed + β1 Enrollment + β2 Teachers + β3 Classroom + β4 Graduating

Over the years, DepEd increased the value of the fixed cost and variable cost coefficients (denoted by β), but the justification for setting these levels was not documented.

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2   In practice, there is variation in actual allocation per learner because of the way the Boncodin formula computes the MOOE budget for each school.

TABLE 8
Boncodin Formula Coefficients for Fixed and Variable Cost

Coefficients	ES	JHS	SHS (Stand–Alone)	Regional Science High School
Fixed Cost	117,600	172,800	172,800	1,150,00
β1	300	480	2,076	2,000
β2	6,000	9,600		
β3	4,500	7,200		

In its review, the ADB observed a lack of clarity in the logic of increases adopted over time, remarking that the proper adjustment due to inflation should be to increase all the coefficients by the same factor instead of the different increases adopted by DepEd. More importantly, the ADB also found that **the Boncodin formula has a built-in bias against congested schools.** Data show that the median MOOE per student decreases as the number of students per classroom increases (see Figure 18). The ADB also observed the same trend for teacher-to-student ratio. This is true across levels from elementary to senior high school.

FIGURE 18
Mean School MOOE per Student by Student : Classroom Ratio
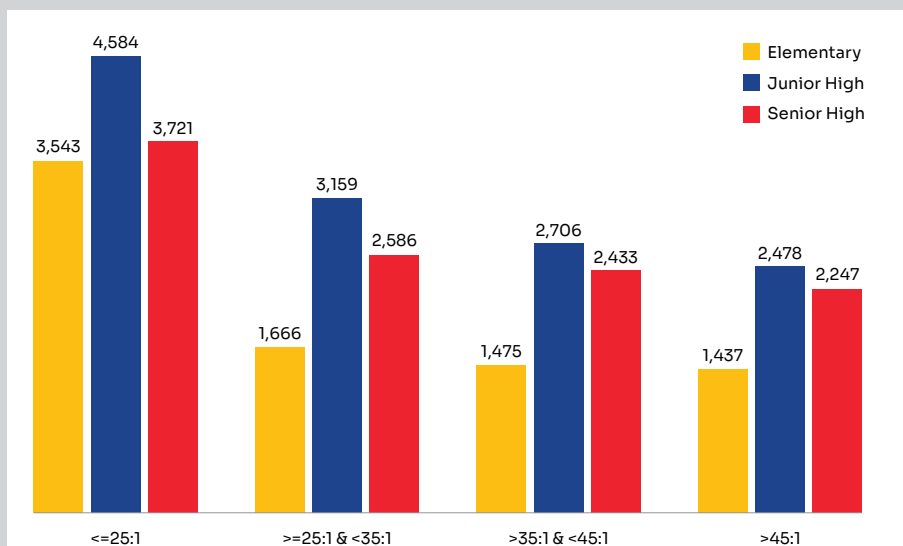
Source: Data from Review of Current School MOOE Formula (ADB, 2024)

To develop a new formula that resolves these issues, the ADB team led by Dr. Geoffrey Ducanes first developed a formula for a normative school MOOE, which is computed based on the current minimum service standards of DepEd. The normative formula incorporates 27 variables influencing the cost of school operations. Regression analyses, relating normative MOOE to curricular offering and number of students, was then used to simplify the normative MOOE formula into seven simple equations with a fixed cost coefficient and a variable cost coefficient. One formula combines all the curricular offerings, while the other six are specific for each type of curricular offering (i.e., purely elementary school, purely junior high school, purely senior high school, or a combination of these).

Adoption of the new formulas as a basis for the agency's school MOOE budget has been approved by the DBM, beginning with a partial implementation in FY 2025. This resulted in a 32.1% increase of the school MOOE budget in the NEP, which amounts to an increase of Php 12.1 billion from Php 37.6 billion in FY 2024.

Delays in the Release of School MOOE
Compared to other DepEd programs managed directly from the Central Office, the school MOOE records low percentages of unobligated funds, at only 2.37% for elementary, 4.3% for junior high, and 7.35% for senior high by the end of FY 2023. In actual amounts, however, the total unobligated allotment for school MOOE adds up to Php 1.2 billion, which is not a negligible amount. Thus, addressing issues delaying the utilization of these funds by schools would be in the public interest.

One reason for this is the delayed **release of the School MOOE budget** to non-implementing units (IUs), which are the majority of the country's public schools. A non-IU school cannot receive its school MOOE budget directly. Instead, school heads have to regularly submit monthly cash advance requests and liquidation reports to access portions of the school's MOOE allotment from their division office. Potential delays are compounded for schools in remote and isolated locations. Unfortunately, 94% of the country's 45,225 public schools are non-IUs. Data submitted by DepEd's Finance Service indicates only 2,661 public schools are IUs. These schools have finance staff, maintain separate books of accounts, and receive their school MOOE budget as a direct release to the school's bank account.

Alternative Funding Streams at the Local Level
Consistent with consultation findings from Year One, the ADB survey confirmed that schools augment their MOOE allocation from the national government by tapping PTA contributions and the SEF. Specifically, ADB found that most schools receive fund support from the PTA, while close to half receive fund support from the SEF. The median amount, as well as range of amounts received, are indicated below:

TABLE 9
Support Through PTA Contributions and SEF Allocation: Alternative Funding Positive Deviants in Low-Resourced Settings

Level	Fund Support	% of Schools	Median	Range
Elementary	SEF	46%	50,000	17,500–461,268
	PTA	70%	40,000	20,000–311,529
Secondary	SEF	44%	70,000	15,000–577,342
	PTA	69%	74,836	30,000–159,093

Abbreviations: PTA = Parents-Teachers Association, SEF = Special Education Fund

However, comparison of the support generated Despite resource limitations, a recent analysis by UNICEF (2024) linking NAT results with school MOOE and SEF budgets reveals potential positive deviants—public schools whose local conditions and practices enable them to perform higher than the prevailing trend of low literacy and numeracy outcomes despite relatively low-resourced contexts characterized by low per capita school MOOE and the SEF. These schools obtained higher than average scores in the problem-solving, information literacy, and critical thinking components of the Grade 10 NAT. The national average for these skill areas ranged from 42 to 45 points.

TABLE 10
Above Average Performance from Schools in Low-Resourced Contexts

School	Division	Problem Solving	Information Literacy	Critical Thinking
Daantabogon NHS	Tabogon	69.4	71.7	69.4
Biliran Science HS	Biliran	69.4	65.3	65.0
Gapan East Integrated School	Gapan North	64.2	62.0	59.7
Doña Liling Neis Negapatan NHS	Tabogon	62.3	63.0	56.2
City of Bogo Science and Arts Academy	Bogo I	61.5	63.1	62.9
Bagacay Integrated School	Calbayog	60.8	51.5	43.1
Kapalangan NHS	Gapan North	60.6	60.1	59.4

Abbreviation: HS = High School, NHS = National High School

Two of these schools are located in the Division of Gapan City, a fourth-income-class city in Region III. In FY 2022, Gapan accrued an SEF income of Php 9.7 million, which is less than half (40.03%) the average SEF income of other fourth-income-class cities in the country. In comparison to other cities in the province of Nueva Ecija, Gapan also has second to the lowest SEF income. Comparing the scores of Gapan East Integrated School and Kapalangan National High School against the more highly resourced schools in the National Capital Region shows that the two Central Luzon schools outperformed over 90% of the 342 public and private schools that had participated in the SY 2022–2023 NAT. This remarkable case from Gapan exemplifies that **quality of education is not solely determined by the amount of funding.** These schools, despite having lower budgets than many others, achieved higher scores in key skills, emphasizing the importance of effective resource utilization, strong leadership, and a conducive learning environment.

Recommendations

- Integrate an equity component for low-income municipalities, given studies that show significant variances in access to resources based on geography and income class.
- Consider adjusting budget amounts based on context-dependent expenditures (for instance, the differing cost of electricity nationwide).
- Improve monitoring and reporting of SEF expenditures and explore how differences in allocations could be better accounted for in the school MOOE formula.
- Review policies on special curricular programs and its assumptions on resourcing requirements.
- Amend DepEd Order No. 8, s. 2019:
  - Embed mechanisms to ensure responsiveness of budget year on year to prevent one-time-big-time adjustments that are typically too late (e.g., ensuring that proposed budget adjusts for inflation).

◻ Review Program Support Funds across the department to ensure nonduplication of resourcing.
◻ Conduct M&E to continuously refine the formula and adjust for realities in implementation.

Furthermore, **mechanisms to overcome inequities in the system are weak**. Cases from low-resourced settings indicate limited additional tailored support. For instance, while the responsibility of delivering ECCD services now largely rests on the shoulders of local governments, support for fourth- and fifth-income-class LGUs remains limited. The following discussion on increasing resources for early childhood education and nutrition showcases how local actors make the most out of resources at their disposal.

LESSONS FROM LOCAL EFFORTS TO MEET EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND NUTRITION NEEDS

The Priority Area 26 subgroup conducted desk research and participated in consultations to identify alternatives to the SEF that could provide further support to a more decentralized delivery of education services. This was prompted by Year One findings that found (a) considerable disparity in SEF income across different types of LGUs and (b) insufficiency of the SEF to finance ECCD requirements on top of the needs in basic education. This workstream supports the work of the ECCD Subcommittee as well as the Priority Area 27 subgroup.

Deploying Local Strategies

Local chief executives from smaller municipalities have cited in consultations with EDCOM II that **limited funds will significantly constrain their ability to implement ECCD and other education programs more broadly**, even if they fully tap the SEF and other sources. One mayor observed that since many health governance functions have been devolved, access to additional funds enabled by the Mandanas ruling would still be insufficient. To overcome these limitations, it has become common practice from innovative local leaders to tap a diverse array of funds to support day care centers and other ECCD needs. A case study on LGUs commissioned by USAID for the ABC+: Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines Project has found that resourceful LGUs deploy both insourcing and outsourcing strategies to generate much needed resources. Insourcing involves maximizing the LGU's ability to generate its own revenues, such as earmarking a percentage of fees collected by the LGU (e.g., burial fees and rents from public market booths) for ECCD. On the other hand, outsourcing strategies require local leaders to tap both institutional linkages and social support networks.

Potential Avenues for National Government Support

The national government has an existing mechanism of providing fund support to LGUs through several types of Local Government Support Fund (LGSF) under the portfolio of the DBM Local Government and Regional Coordination Bureau. Of particular interest is the Local Government Support Fund–Financial Assistance (LGSF-FA) to LGUs and the Support for Capital Outlays and Social Programs. Existing LGSF-FA guidelines already include some ECCD and basic education requirements in the menu of expenditures such as acquisition of school sites and provision of educational assistance to indigent individuals. However, the long-term availability of such funds is not assured as the only legal basis for the LGSF-FA is a special provision in the GAA, which may change from year to year. Another limitation of the LGSF-FA is that it cannot be used to cover the Personnel Services requirements of hiring child development workers and teachers through regular plantilla positions. This is due to the general limitation provided under Section 325(e) of RA 7160, which states that

"Positions in the official plantilla for career positions which are occupied by incumbents holding permanent appointments shall be covered by adequate appropriations."

This suggests that **legislation is needed to establish a support fund for low-resourced LGUs** whose funding shall be covered through regular appropriations. The fund may be lodged with the DBM, similar to how the LGSF is currently implemented; or this could be lodged with the education agencies themselves, provided that implementation guidelines remain consistent with the operative principles of decentralization articulated in Section 2(k) of RA 7160:

"The realization of local autonomy shall be facilitated through improved coordination of national government policies and programs and extension of adequate technical and material assistance to less developed and deserving local government units."

Recommendations

- **Prioritize ECCD budgetary requirements in the allocation of SEF in view of its strategic importance.** The early years exert an outsized influence on future life outcomes, such as in reducing school dropout rates, enhancing learner achievement, boosting labor market participation, and diminishing the likelihood of poverty.
- **Institutionalize equity mechanisms to ensure sufficient resources for lower-income class municipalities** addressing the significant disparities in fiscal resources available to LGUs, particularly for functions funded primarily or exclusively through the SEF. The following interventions are proposed:
  - **Mandate provincial LSBs to support municipal LSBs and to provide a framework for prioritization**. Provincial LSB responsibilities could include
    - Organizing consultations with municipal LSBs;
    - Augmenting the budgetary requirements of proposals that could not be funded through the municipal SEF budget; and
    - Prioritizing the needs of fourth- and fifth-income-class municipalities.
  - **Mandate the DILG to develop incentives through the Seal of Good Local Governance or other mechanisms that would encourage LGUs to improve the efficiency of SEF spending**. In particular, there may be interest among LGUs with large unexpended SEF balances to share their resources.
  - **Mandate national government agencies to provide program support funds and technical assistance for low-resourced LGUs**. In particular, the resources of fourth- and fifth-income-class municipalities need to be augmented to enable strategic investments in ECCD. This is consistent with the Operative Principles of Decentralization articulated in Sec. 3(k) of the Local Government Code, to wit:

    *"The realization of local autonomy shall be facilitated through improved coordination of national government policies and programs and **extension of adequate technical and material assistance to less developed and deserving local government units."***

- **Strengthen national reporting and oversight to foster data-informed policymaking and interventions.** This could include the following:

□   Reinforce the oversight functions of the BLGF enumerated in Sec. 43 of EO 127, s. 1987, as well as the mandate of the Council of Good Local Governance established through RA 11292.

□   Further specify and standardize, if necessary, the data elements in statutory reports on SEF spending, so that data collected and maintained in the LGU Integrated Financial Tools system reliably provides policymakers with actionable insights.

□   Harmonize reporting tools and processes between the DOF, DepEd, and the DILG.

Alternative Funding Streams for Education and Training

Tax incentives are also potent means to increase resources, but these have largely been underutilized in supporting the country's education and training goals.

Research by Lee et al. (2023) highlights that "Asian philanthropists view collaboration with government as a necessary and desirable path to achieving social and environmental change at scale," underscoring the potential for further expanding private contributions and partnerships for education. However, education agencies must, first of all, clearly identify and communicate priority gaps and areas needing intervention, and where possible provide platforms for collaboration with the private sector at both national and local levels. Education agencies also need to expand their thinking as to the kinds of support that private entities can provide. Across Asia, the following levers are deployed by philanthropists in support of social change efforts of governments:

TABLE 11
Range of Private Sector Support for Public Change Initiatives

Levers	Definition
Resources	Give financial or in-kind materials for support
Research	Conduct research or analysis to surface key issues and new insights
Policy development	Prepare policy recommendations to inform or influence public sector decision-making
Technical advisory	Advise government on targeted issues or implementation of policies and programs by providing expertise, inputs, or recommendations
Capacity building	Train public sector leaders and technical personnel to strengthen government capacity and capability
Demonstration programs	Pilot solutions to prove the potential for impact and scale (often in partnership with local governments)
Narrative change	Design and deploy campaigns to inform stakeholders' priorities or points of view on issues
Coalition building	Convene stakeholders to support and work toward a common position or outcome while learning from each other

Note: Adapted from How Asian Philanthropists Work with Governments: A View From the Field (Lee et al., 2023)

To provide more concrete examples of steps that could be undertaken by the education agencies to leverage private sector support, insights from a series of consultations on the Adopt-A-School Program (ASP) implementation are discussed in the next section.

LESSONS FROM THE ADOPT–A–SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION

Although legislation such as the Dual Training System (DTS) Act of 1994 (RA 7686) and the Adopt–A–School Act of 1998 (RA 8525) established tax incentives to encourage private sector support for education, desk research and consultations revealed uneven implementation. For example, under the DTS Act, few claims have been made, with the most recent transaction recorded by the DOF Revenue Operations Group in 2017. Consultations surfaced two key challenges in its implementation:

- Exclusion of the DTS in the National Priority Plan, a list of government programs, projects, and activities issued by NEDA in line with Section 34(H)(2)(a) of the National Internal Revenue Code of 1997, as amended; and
- Need for strengthened advocacy by both TESDA and the DOF, especially the dissemination of critical information to key stakeholders.

In contrast, the ASP appears to be better implemented, at least in securing support for basic education, as evidenced by a total of 476 tax endorsement claims in the period 2018 to 2023 recorded by the ASP National Secretariat. This is equivalent to an estimated cumulative amount of Php 1.8 billion (see Table 12).

TABLE 12

Tax Claims Under the Adopt–a–School Program, FY 2018–2023

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No. of Tax Endorsements	145	120	54	35	56	66
Total Tax Claims	242.2 M	370.2 M	282.2 M	273.6 M	218.4 M	413.4 M

Source: ASP National Secretariat submissions to EDCOM II in April 2024

However, comparison of the support generated through the ASP versus that of Brigada Eskwela reveals there is still much that can be improved. In contrast to the ASP, Brigada Eskwela has a very narrow focus. First launched in 2003 through DepEd Memorandum No. 79, s. 2003, the program mobilizes volunteers to help the country's public schools prepare for the annual opening of classes. Records from the ASP National Secretariat show that a total of Php 4.8 billion[3] worth of financial and in-kind resources were generated in 2023. This is 11.5 times more than the value of resources generated through the ASP.

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3   Consultation participants noted that figures for Brigada Eskwela could be a generous estimate as the pressures of competition may incentivize inflated reporting from schools. However, it is worth noting that the adoption of DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2023, halted the implementation of Brigada Eskwela as a competition between schools in FY 2024.

TABLE 13
Financial and In-Kind Resources Generated Through Brigada Eskwela

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Volunteer Man Hours	1.783 B	1.997 B		1.626 B	1.708 B	
Resources Generated	4.665 B	7.331 B	7.135 B	5.149 B	5.595 B	4.772 B

Source: August 2024 submission of the ASP Secretariat to EDCOM II, generated from the DepEd Partnerships Database System

To make better sense of the data, the Commission conducted consultations and discovered through a semistructured discussion with corporate foundations that **private entities voluntarily provide assistance to public schools, even in the absence of tax incentives,** as indicated by the large difference in investment levels between the tax claims under the ASP and the total resources generated through Brigada Eskwela. This difference may be due to

- Private entities being unaware that tax claims can also be filed for assistance provided to schools during Brigada Eskwela;
- A prevailing notion that assistance provided during Brigada Eskwela is borne out of volunteerism and bayanihan; and
- The sense that assistance provided under the ASP has to be of a certain scale to merit the effort of filing tax claims.

In addition to basic education, the ASP was also supposed to encourage private support for TVET and higher education. However, the absence of tax claim records that could be provided for both subsectors (despite repeated requests from the Technical Secretariat) is indicative of implementation challenges or policy design flaws that need to be addressed. The Commission's consultations yielded insights that shed further light on the relevant issues:

- RA 8525 and its implementing rules and regulations **do not adequately specify the forms of assistance for technical-vocational institutions and HEIs**.
- **Generic statements on tax incentives result in gray areas** that leave their implementation open to the interpretation of tax administrators, who often take a conservative approach in applying them.
- **The policy design construes the private sector as a generic whole** with the availment process primarily framed from the perspective of a large private entity. Short-staffed small to medium enterprises may not have the bandwidth to process the required paperwork, and entering into a memorandum of agreement might be superfluous for individual donors.
- **Bureaucratic delays** in the processing of tax claims disincentivizes private entities from participating. ASP would be more appealing if the process was streamlined with a shortened processing time.
- **Lack of permanent staffing** of the ASP National Secretariat contributes to delays and limits the scale of program implementation. At present only two personnel are handling the review and evaluation of tax claim applications. For these personnel, their ASP tasks are assignments on top of their regular functions in the DepEd External Partnerships Service.

To more effectively encourage the different segments of the private sector (ranging from individual donors and small enterprises to large corporations with their own corporate foundations), consultation participants raised the following suggestions:

- **Segment the private sector into different profiles** based on a sound understanding of their behavior to enable a more effective approach to private stakeholder engagement. In the absence of such study, identify private stakeholders who could help the government in meeting priority outcomes.
- **Guarantee the ease of program participation**. Ease on its own is a strong incentive. A regular company would not have the bandwidth to comply with the requirements of a complicated process.
- **Provide assurance that private sector assistance is directed toward the actual needs of schools.**
- **Explore innovative approaches** such as the establishment of integrator mechanisms, joint adoption by private entities, and consumerization of initiatives.

Recommendations

- A more **detailed enumeration of support areas** with specific articulations relevant to TVET and higher education;
- The **periodic identification and communication of priorities and targets** by education agencies to guide private initiatives toward more strategic interventions and engender more synergistic public–private investments;
- **Involvement of the DILG and LGUs** to facilitate the adoption of ECCD programs;
- **Ease-of-doing business provisions** such as online one-stop-shop processing and expediting the availment of tax exemptions and customs clearances;
- **Establishment of ASP units** in DepEd, CHED, TESDA, and the ECCDC Secretariat, including the creation of plantilla positions;
- **Additional income tax deduction** equivalent to 50% of incurred ASP expenses for support such as
  - Scholarships for teachers and child development workers;
  - Scholarships provided at the tertiary level in both public and private educational institutions if the funding and support involved is for technical training and graduate studies of underprivileged students and those who are products of public institutions; and
  - labor training expenses incurred for the skills development of enterprise-based trainees enrolled in public SHS, HEIs, or technical-vocational institutions; and
- **Additional deduction for hiring of public SHS graduates**, equivalent to 20% of the salaries, wages, and benefits paid to the employed SHS graduate during the entire first year of employment.

Priority Area 27: Decentralization and Participatory Governance

We must decentralize the governance structure in education to make the system more agile, participatory, innovative, and responsive. At the same time, it is essential that we establish mechanisms to expand the role of local government units and increase the participation of the private sector, the civil society, and other stakeholders.

Issue 1: Highly centralized governance structure resulted in a deepening culture of compliance.

The need for improved delivery of public goods and services has motivated jurisdictions across the globe to adopt decentralization reform, with the expectation that empowering local actors who are closer to the issues would result in a more responsive system. Similar views are held in the Philippines, as evidenced by the promulgation of the Local Government Code in 1991, as well as the adoption of policies on shared governance and school-based management in basic education. In a conversation with EDCOM II, the following statement from chief executive officer of Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc., Amaya Aboitiz-Fansler best exemplifies the desired outcome of decentralization:

> "*When you are viewing things from a higher level, the conversations can be theoretical and intellectual, but the decisions that you make and the risks you're willing to take are very different if you are making them for students you know and a community that you're a part of. Learning happens in schools and classrooms, with students and families that have their own needs and priorities. There's something to be said for strengthening school-based management, giving schools some autonomy and preparing their leaders to make decisions responsive to these needs. This is especially true for schools working with children at the younger years, where parents and family should play a big role. To ensure that decisions made in a school are fit for the learners in that community is really important.*"

Decentralization is a process whereby the "central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political–administrative and territorial hierarchy" (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999). The literature describes varying degrees of power transfer to local actors: devolution, deconcentration, delegation, and privatization (King, 2024). In basic education governance, decentralization involves "the distribution of powers and functions from the national government, particularly the DepEd Central Office, to local bodies and units" (Laguda et al., 2024). For our purposes, the distinction introduced by Agrawal and Ribot (1999) between lower-level actors who are upwardly accountable to their superiors in a hierarchy, and local actors who are downwardly accountable to stakeholders in the local context is quite useful in differentiating between devolution and deconcentration (also known as administrative decentralization). This is also consistent with the distinction made by Laguda et al. in their review of existing decentralization policies as applied to basic education governance:

> *"Decentralization reforms have taken different paths; there is apparently no one optimal decentralization design that fits the needs of every country. Countries have struggled to find the design that effectively addresses their most important education goals and challenges, frequently resulting in advances and reversals."*
> *—Dr. Elizabeth King, 2024*

- **Deconcentration** is the transfer of powers and delegation of authority from the DepEd Central Office to the regional and division offices, as well as the schools and learning centers. Note that the officials and personnel in these field units are upwardly accountable to higher governance levels within DepEd.
- **Devolution** is the transfer of power, authority, functions, or resources from the national government to LGUs. In line with the principle of local autonomy, local chief executives and other LGU officials and personnel are primarily accountable to their constituents.

Observing the varied global experiences in decentralization documented in the research literature, King (2024) remarks that "**there is no one optimal decentralization design** that fits the needs of every country," given that strategies must be tailored to the country's specific political, social, and economic contexts. King (2024) cautions against a "big-bang reform," in light of issues and struggles that have stymied similar reforms, noting that **the key challenge often lies not in determining which level of government should deliver a specific service, but rather in establishing mechanisms that support the effective coordination of service delivery across levels of government.**

While haphazard preparation could lead to quick advances, it is also likely to result in costly reversals. Common issues flagged in the research literature concern policy gaps in the allocation of authority and responsibilities, methods of conflict prevention and coordination, intergovernmental fiscal transfer mechanisms, incentives for efficient use of resources, and strengthening technical and administrative capacity of local actors. **Care must also be taken to ensure that equity and accountability mechanisms are in place to avoid intensifying regional disparities and corruption.**

Decentralization holds great potential in improving the coverage and quality of Philippine education, but careful planning is crucial. Successful decentralization will require careful consideration of organizational restructuring, institutional arrangements needed to facilitate change, and personnel management as adjustments are made to roles and responsibilities. Interagency coordination will be essential throughout this process as the reform will involve the Civil Service Commission, the DBM, and various other government agencies beyond the education sector. King (2024) also underscores that involving all relevant stakeholders will be vital to foster a sense of ownership of the process, and thereby guarantee the success and sustainability of decentralization reform.

Recognizing the limitations of a highly centralized bureaucracy in managing a complex system such as education, EDCOM I recommended drastic changes to the governance of education in the 1990s to enable both horizontal and vertical decentralization (Paqueo et al., 2024), as well as rectify the unclear lines of authority and responsibility within the governance structure of DECS (Laguda et al., 2024). These recommendations gave rise to the trifocalized governance of the education system extant today,

distributing powers and responsibilities over each subsector through the creation of CHED and TESDA, and the reorganization of DECS into the present-day DepEd structure. EDCOM I also sought to deconcentrate the governance of basic education by transferring powers from the central office to the agency's field units.
However, as observed by Laguda et al. (2024), departures from these critical recommendations in subsequent policy resulted in the persistence of systemic inefficiencies and overlaps.

Culture of Compliance

Year Two studies by the Commission's research partners all similarly observe a highly centralized and hierarchical DepEd structure that manifests in the agency's day-to-day operations (Comia et al., 2024; Cuyegkeng, 2024; King, 2024; Laguda et al., 2024). Noting parallels in the legislated functions of lower governance levels stated in the Education Act of 1982 (Batas Pambansa Blg. 232, s. 1982) and the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 (RA 9155), Laguda et al. (2024) remarked that "the concentration of policymaking and decision-making at the highest level of the bureaucracy has remained relatively the same." **The mere replication of higher level functions onto lower levels, albeit at a smaller scale, in effect confines the agency's field offices to implementation, while the central office ultimately retains the authority to design programs and allocate resources** (Laguda et al., 2024). Relatedly, Cuyegkeng (2024) has also mapped out a prevailing top-down workflow in DepEd based on roles and functions of offices laid out in policy documents (see Figure 19) This hierarchical process is further reinforced by rigid reporting requirements. In consultations conducted by Hechanova and Yusay (2024), school leaders shared, "our monitoring and evaluation standards do not allow contextualization. It is one-size-fits-all." Taken together, these factors contribute to a culture of compliance.

FIGURE 19
Prevailing Top-Down Workflow in DepEd

Abbreviation: LGU = local government unit

Source: Adapted from Systems Analysis of the Philippine Basic Education System: The Role of School Leadership (Cuyegkeng, 2024)
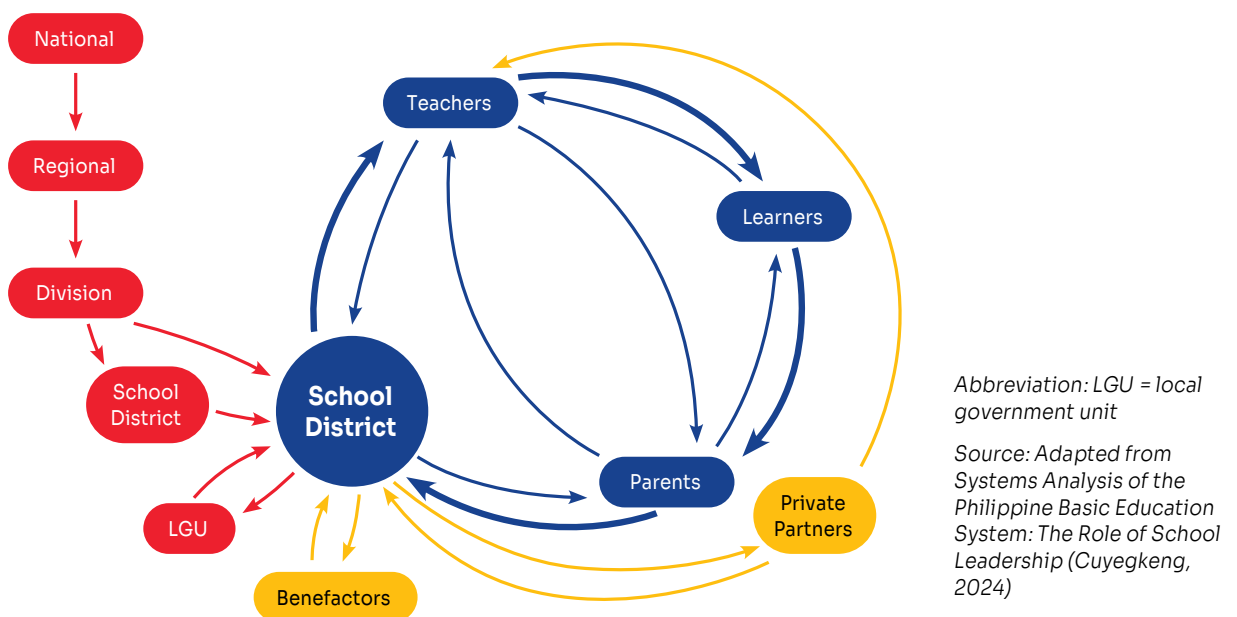
In consultations, teachers repeatedly underscored the agency's compliance culture. This is indicative that adherence has been internalized by field personnel. School leaders also share that while DepEd memorandums may encourage contextualization (as provided under RA 10533), leaders that deviate from rigid reporting requirements may be penalized or publicly criticized when their reports are not fully compliant (Hechanova & Yusay, 2024).Similarly, teachers also share that it is commonplace for

individuals to be labeled *pabibo* (attention seekers) for performing tasks beyond what a memorandum has explicitly required (Comia et al., 2024).

"Our school is more policy compliant. Kung anong binaba from DepEd, 'yun ang ginagawa. [Whatever instructions are handed down from the higher-up DepEd offices, that is what we do.]"

These examples from the lived experiences of teachers and school leaders illustrate how the overemphasis on compliance encourages risk-averse behaviors and stifles innovation and collaboration. Thus, it is hardly surprising that even after 2 decades of implementation, RA 9155 has failed to transform the agency's hierarchical and centralized configuration.

As Laguda et al. (2024) rightly point out, centralized control hinders DepEd's ability to provide tailored and responsive services crucial for improving learning outcomes. Decentralization was urgently needed for the country's basic education system in 2001 when RA 9155 was enacted. Despite the setbacks, this need remains paramount today. Thus, decentralization must still be pursued.

Recommendations

A highly centralized top-down process persists in DepEd despite well-intentioned efforts to decentralize the agency's structure through RA 9155. This outcome underscores the importance of careful and thoughtful design of decentralization reform. More importantly, Laguda et al. (2024) argue that "the Department of Education should spearhead efforts to fully realize the vision of shared governance and decentralization outlined in RA 9155, in view of the agency's primary authority in basic education.

Drawing from the review of global experience on decentralization by King (2024), the Commission puts forward the following recommendations to guide the challenging but necessary work of decentralizing the governance of basic education:

Adopt a phased, selective, and iterative decentralization process based on a clear framework of reform readiness.
King (2024) explains that a phased, selective, and iterative reform involves "organizing the reform process into discrete, sequenced steps, with any decision being contingent on empirical evidence about what design features are working, what is not working, and where the reform is producing good outcomes." The researcher provides four ways of implementing decentralization in phases:

1. **By education cycle:** Start with higher education levels (secondary and tertiary) before moving to the much larger scope and scale of elementary education.
2. **By level of government:** Begin with decentralization to DepEd regions, divisions, then schools, or to the local governments of provinces and chartered cities, followed by municipalities.
3. **By geography:** Implement in selected areas or regions before expanding to others.
4. **By function:** Start with a limited set of functions with clearly defined roles and authorities for each level of government.

Furthermore, King (2024) underscores that the phases and sequence of reform should be **based on a clear framework for reform readiness**, to avoid the pitfalls of a one-size-fits-all approach. This will involve conducting an assessment of the capabilities and resources of lower governance levels, such as administrative capacity, technical expertise, fiscal resources, political commitment, and past experience with decentralization. Recognizing that decentralization is an ongoing process, the possibility of adjustments and improvements based on evidence and experience should be anticipated and already embedded in the policy design to enable a truly iterative approach.

After the decision to undertake decentralization has been made, King (2024) specifies that a preparation phase of at least 2 years must be undertaken to develop coherent and realistic policy design and implementation plans (see Figure 20). The major activities are analysis, design, and planning; consultation and communication; and training.

FIGURE 20
Simplified Cycle of Steps to Decentralization

PREPARATION PHASE
Analysis, Design, Planning
- Prepare a comprehensive and coherent decentralization design and implementation plan
- Include developing the framework for a **readiness index**

Monitor, Evaluate, and Retrofit

Implement the Decentralization Program

PREPARATION PHASE
Consultation and Communication
Obtain and reflect the views of stakeholders in the design and plan of the reform

PREPARATION PHASE
Training
- Fill gaps in administrtive and technical capacities at all levels
- Involves stakeholders from planners to administrators, as well as service providers

The development of institutional capacity at lower levels of governance is just as important as the provision of resources. However, adequate training is often overlooked, despite its crucial role in ensuring the success of decentralization. King (2024) cautions that decentralization can fail if lower levels lack the necessary technical expertise and administrative capacity to effectively carry out their new responsibilities. Comia et al. (2024) also emphasize that adequate staffing at lower governance levels is critical in building institutional capacity, in view of findings on short staffed schools and lean staffing in field units.

In particular, developing the leadership and management capacity of school heads is crucial to any decentralization reform in basic education governance. Analysis of management practices in schools show that improved management practices are linked to substantial gains in student performance, with a 1 standard deviation increase in management quality associated with a 0.2 to 0.4 standard deviation

improvement in student performance (Bloom et al., 2015, as cited by King, 2024). Though learner performance is a multifaceted interplay of factors, international research literature and local cases of good practice show that effective school leadership and management can positively impact the performance of both students and teachers.

Lessons from School-Based Management in the Philippines

School-based management (SBM) empowers schools with greater decision-making authority, aiming to improve accountability, efficiency, and responsiveness to local needs. When implemented properly, SBM significantly impacts school management practices and teacher behavior, which in turn contributes substantially to improved student learning outcomes. However, studies assessing the impact of SBM on student outcomes have shown mixed results (King, 2024). Laguda, et al., (2024) document the following challenges in their review of SBM implementation in the Philippines:

- **Lack of capacity:** Over half of the country's public schools are led by teachers-in-charge (TICs) who lack the necessary training and support to effectively fulfill the role of a school head. While regional and division offices are responsible for providing support to schools, they themselves might not have the technical capacity and resources to do so.
- **Lack of funding:** With limited school MOOE budgets, schools focus on compliance rather than pursue innovative school improvement projects. The discontinuation of SBM grants in 2016 further limited available sources of funding for innovation. While alternative funding sources like LGU support or private partnerships could be tapped by schools, this disadvantages schools in low-resourced communities.

To ensure effective implementation, SBM should be reevaluated within the broader context of decentralization reforms. Laguda et al. (2024) assert that it would be more fruitful to view SBM as a key management principle rather than a program. The researchers propose the following concrete actions:

- Revise prescriptive policies that limit principals from managing schools effectively. These often stifle innovation and initiative at the school level. In particular, provide flexibility to enable tailored strategies for underserved or disadvantaged schools.
- Revive SBM grants to ensure equitable resource distribution, but expand beyond promoting innovation to also include increasing accountability for learning outcomes.
- Reorient regional and division personnel on management and supervision methods that support rather than stifle school head leadership. This will require self-awareness sessions, modeling, and mentoring in the field.

Specify clear functions, responsibilities, and authority for all concerned.

Clear and consistent assignment of roles and responsibilities among different levels of government is crucial for successful decentralization to avoid overlapping and duplicating functions, which can lead to confusion, inefficiency, and inaction. King (2024) reiterates that the assignment of functions must ensure alignment between responsibility and authority; fiscal resources; and administrative, technical, and political capacities. It is crucial to ensure that individuals and institutions at the local level possess the necessary authority, skills, and knowledge to effectively carry out their assigned responsibilities. When capacity gaps exist, training programs can be implemented to enhance their capabilities. Doing otherwise is likely to result in more restrictive, partial decentralization than what was originally intended. Finally,

King (2024) reminds that reform efforts should always be accompanied by a clear, consistent, and widespread information program so that affected stakeholders are aware of their roles and what is expected of them.

While discussions on decentralization often center on which functions should be transferred to lower levels, it is equally crucial to **clearly define and strengthen the strategic role of the central government**. However, this is easier said than done. Selecting the appropriate locus of decision-making is a significant policy design challenge. To illustrate the point, we examine the OECD indicator "Who makes key decisions in education systems," which tracks a set of 23 key decisions, organized across four domains: organization of instruction, personnel management, planning and structures, and resource management. Data from the *Education At A Glance* report reveal a variegated array of possibilities observed across the 36 OECD countries and economies with available data (see Figure 21).

FIGURE 21
Percentage of Decisions Taken at Each Level of Government, OECD Countries and Economies, by Domain of Decisions (2017)
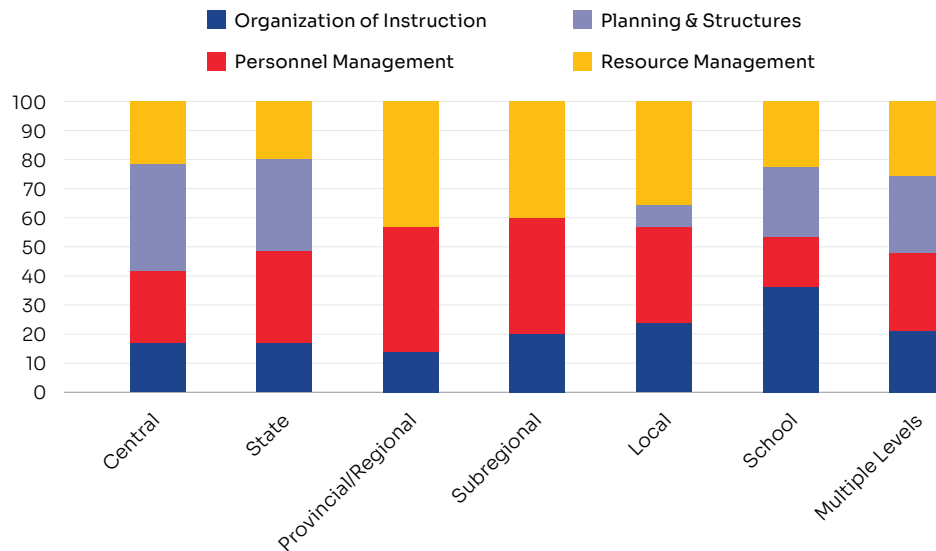
Note: These data pertain to lower public secondary schools in 36 OECD countries and economies. Local refers to the governance level right above the school.

Source: OECD Education at a Glance Report, 2018

The key findings are the following:

- The largest share of decisions is taken at the school level. Nearly a third of decisions at the school or local level are taken in full autonomy, and two-thirds are within a framework set by a higher authority.
- The organization of instruction and use of resources are mostly decided at the school level. For example, in Korea, the central government stipulates a minimum instruction time per group of grades, but schools make decisions on allocation of the instruction time in each grade and can also decide to increase or decrease instruction time within a certain extent (set at the central level).
- Planning and structures, as well as personnel management are more likely to be made at higher levels of authority, although countries vary widely. For instance, In Lithuania, the hiring of school principals results from a competition process between applicants. The committee in charge of the final decision is composed of representatives from the central government, local authorities, and the school board.

Drawing on their review of shared governance under RA 9155, Laguda et al. (2024) recommend that DepEd should "reassess its roles at each level of governance" and conduct a comprehensive review of its programs, projects, and activities to identify which of these could be redesigned for deconcentration. Functions such as beneficiary selection, procurement, delivery, and acceptance can be delegated to regions and divisions, while the central office retains its primary role in policy development and standard setting. This will free up bandwidth so that the central office can focus on monitoring the performance of field units. In particular, the review could begin with programs that repeatedly face utilization and delivery issues, such as those involving computerization, internet connectivity, provision of science equipment and tools, and last-mile schools. The researchers point out that the agency's existing policy on the school-based feeding program is a viable starting reference for delegating responsibilities to lower levels of governance.

**Address vertical and horizontal fiscal imbalances
to reduce inequity and improve implementation.**
Vertical fiscal imbalance arises when lower levels of government lack the necessary resources to effectively deliver services due to insufficient funding from higher levels of government. On the other hand, horizontal fiscal imbalance refers to the widening gap in fiscal resources and spending capacity between different regions within a country. To address imbalances, fiscal transfers and resource sharing must be aligned with assigned roles and responsibilities, as well as the particular needs of subnational levels to reduce regional disparities. To address these imbalances, the central government can implement measures such as the following:

- **Intergovernmental fiscal transfers:** including revenue sharing, general purpose grants, and conditional grants
- **Enhanced fiscal autonomy:** granting subnational levels greater control over resources and expenditures

These measures aim to ensure equitable resource distribution and empower lower governance levels to make more efficient decisions regarding resource allocation and service delivery.

**Integrate M&E mechanisms into the reform
process to strengthen analysis and use of evidence.**
King (2024) notes that a robust M&E system is needed to track the progress and impact of decentralization reform. M&E is especially important in an iterative implementation, as regular assessments enable identification of issues and guide adjustments of the reform process as needed. Evidence from monitoring activities enables the change agents to advocate for necessary resources, and strengthens broader political support of the reform itself.

Issue 2: Participatory governance mechanisms remain limited and often lead to dead ends when pursued.

Year Two findings paint a concerning picture: Significant barriers effectively hinder ordinary citizens from meaningful participation in education governance. A study conducted by Comia et al. (2024) mapped at least 30 mechanisms for people's participation mentioned in various DepEd issuances. While there are many entry points, the researchers found that these often lead to dead ends (see Table 15), especially with scant information available to ordinary citizens on how and where they can engage or contribute to improving the education system.

TABLE 14
Participatory Mechanisms in Basic Education Governance

Level	Mechanism	Potential Barriers
Mechanisms with high potential for effective participation		
School	Parent-Teacher Associations	Lack of resources; limited engagement of marginalized groups
	Teacher-parent collaboration	Overburdened teachers; parents' lack of awareness or interest
	Collaborative development of curricula	Teachers seen as "complying officers"; lack of autonomy in decision-making
	Workshops by student councils	Lack of resources; limited autonomy of student leaders
	Learner-first referral networks	Lack of funding; overburdened teachers; social service responsibilities pushed onto schools
Stakeholder	Public consultations on education policy	Tokenistic participation; limited awareness among community members
LGU	Barangay partnerships for school projects	Political interference; variability in engagement across barangays
Mechanisms with moderate challenges that can be overcome with improvements		
School	School governance councils	Overburdened school staff; limited capacity for community engagement
	Disaster preparedness in schools	Lack of funding and capacity for proper implementation
	Student government	Centralized decision-making; students seen as "complying officers"
	School-based decision-making committees	Overburdened school staff; lack of teacher autonomy due to centralized governance
Stakeholder	Capacity-building programs for stakeholders	Lack of resources; limited awareness; political interference
	Engagement of faith-based organizations	Cultural resistance; elite capture
	Community-based school monitoring	Lack of transparency; limited access to data; centralized decision-making
	Cross-sectoral partnerships	Lack of coordination between private sector, schools, and LGUs; funding constraints
LGU	Public-private partnerships for infrastructure	Political interference; elite capture; inequitable distribution of resources
	Youth involvement in educational planning	Lack of meaningful roles for youth; seen as tokenistic participants
	Civil society organization engagement in local school governance	Procedural or tokenistic participation; lack of funding and capacity for civil society organizations
	Town hall meetings for education issues	Low community turnout; political capture; lack of follow-through on issues raised
	Open forums with LGUs	Political interference; elite capture
	Participatory budgeting	Limited financial resources; political capture; limited community engagement
	Role of local leaders in education	Political interference; elite capture

Level	Mechanism	Potential Barriers
Mechanisms with significant challenges or dead ends due to structural issues, political interference, or other barriers		
School	School-based health and feeding programs	Lack of funding; overburdened school staff with nonacademic tasks
Stakeholder	Collaboration with nongovernmental organizations	Lack of coordination; nongovernmental organizations sometimes offering irrelevant services; elite capture
	Civil society's involvement in curriculum assessment	Tokenistic participation; lack of transparency; centralized decision-making
	Social media platforms for feedback	Limited reach; unstructured feedback collection; lack of responsiveness from authorities
	Inclusion of marginalized groups	Cultural or social resistance; political capture; lack of inclusivity in decision-making forums
LGU	Community involvement in dropout prevention	Lack of resources; political interference
	Local school boards	Political interference; elite capture; lack of awareness
	Multisectoral task forces	Lack of coordination; political interference; resource constraints

Note: Data taken from Comia, R. S. B., Abante, K. I. I., Villasis, J. C., & De Leon, H. C. G. (2024). Kakayanin natin: Empowering citizens to participate in improving education governance in the Philippines. Second Congressional Commission on Education.

The researchers assert that opening up education data is a crucial step "to enable and facilitate more targeted, effective interventions in response to education problems on the ground." By making education data publicly available, governments can empower communities to actively participate in improving learning outcomes and ensure that interventions are targeted and effective.

Comia et al. (2024) highlight the critical role of people's participation in solving complex social problems such as education. However, **focus group discussion and interviews with over a hundred stakeholders revealed a prevailing belief that "only the DepEd Offices can shape policies, curriculum, and mandates within schools"** (Comia et al., 2024). Student council officers shared receiving little guidance and

being mobilized only for administration-initiated events, while parent officers pointed to a prevailing perception of parent engagement in schools that is largely centered around the provision of financial support "beautification" projects, relief operations, and procurement of educational technology devices. These responses are indicative of tokenistic and procedural engagement, which discourages sustained participation and limits the potential of local actors on the ground to engage in meaningful collaboration.

However, without crucial information—publicly available, timely, and usable education data—ordinary citizens, civil society organizations, and nongovernmental organizations are left in the dark about how and where they can contribute to improving education outcomes. The researchers assert that opening up education data is a crucial step "to enable and facilitate more targeted, effective interventions in response to education problems on the ground." **By making education data publicly available, governments can empower communities to actively participate in improving learning outcomes and ensure that interventions are targeted and effective.**

Valenzuela City's Education 360: A Holistic Approach to Ensuring No Student Is Left Behind

Valenzuela City's Education 360 Degrees Investment Program has written a playbook of how local governments can champion education. Beyond the usual "gravel and sand" solutions—building schools and distributing supplies, this project embraces a comprehensive strategy that not only secures the physical infrastructure of education but also nurtures the human components that truly drive learning.

Launched in 2014, the program was the brainchild of then-mayor, now secretary of Social Welfare and Development, Rex Gatchalian, legislated through a city ordinance to ensure continuity. The initiative goes beyond the typical blueprint in governance and management of education. Education 360 adapts a holistic approach by investing in every vital aspect of basic education: infrastructure, school supplies, curriculum enhancement, teacher competency, parental involvement, and nutrition. For Gatchalian and his team, quality education is not just about building classrooms. It's about building a community that empowers every learner to grow and thrive.

"We're not a fan of just constructing buildings," explains Councilor Rovin Andrew Feliciano, one of the program's advocates. "While it is essential to build up the facilities and assets, even more critical is the human component."

Project Education 360 recognizes that education is not just the responsibility of schools; it's a collective effort. It organizes parenting camps that help empower parents and caretakers to take an active role in child education.

These activities bring together parents, teachers, and community members, creating a shared culture of support and accountability.

Teachers, too, are supported through teaching camps where they can develop their skills and adapt to new technologies.

Meanwhile, Education 360 provides support to young learners to excel academically through a series of interventions, including remediation programs on numeracy and literacy. It also provides opportunities for them to cultivate other talents and engage in sports, like baseball and football, while developing values such as discipline, perseverance, and teamwork. These activities are drawn up in partnership with organizations such as the Synergia Foundation and the Laos Football Club.

A standout feature of the program is its bottom-up budgeting approach. Governing councils of local schools actively participate, proposing programs during the budgeting and planning process. The involvement of key stakeholders fosters a sense of ownership within the local community and makes sure that activities are responsive to their specific needs.

Education 360 has continuously improved and adapted over 20 years. It continues to evolve in its third decade, demonstrating how well-designed local education programs can build a lasting ecosystem that truly nurtures the youngest of its citizens.

Conclusion

As the Commission completes its diagnosis of the 28 priorities identified in our mandate, the picture that emerges is stark yet clarifying. The challenges are vast, spanning decades of neglect and systemic dysfunction, but they are not insurmountable. This report represents not an endpoint, but rather a turning point in our collective journey to rebuild Philippine education from its very foundations.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the issues that confront us: chronic underfunding, fragmented policies, inequities in access, and declining student outcomes. But we stress that EDCOM was not assembled to conduct self-flagellation or punitive finger-pointing. Rather, ours is an exercise in deliberate self-awareness, undertaken so that we may fully grasp the depths of the crisis and begin from there, with stronger resolve and a sharper ability to craft solutions that work.

From Bohol to Nueva Ecija, from Makati and even to Vietnam, we sought out solutions and best practices. The insights we gathered consistently pointed us back to the basics: comprehensive teacher support, readily available learning resources, adequate school infrastructure, and a relentless tenacity in ensuring that students are learning. These elements are the bedrock of quality education, the necessary preconditions for creativity and innovation to thrive. Without them, aspirations will remain aspirations—inspiring and good for rhetoric, but yielding little in terms of meaningful change.

> *To move forward, we must first and foremost address the basics. We must focus on what is most urgent and foundational. Early childhood education, nutritional support during the first 1,000 days of life, and literacy by the end of Grade 3 are not just benchmarks—they are lifelines. If we fail to establish these cornerstones, the rest of the structure cannot stand.*

It is also worth emphasizing that the narrative of failure we alluded to in the Year One Report does not tell the entire story. In our visits to schools and conversations with educators, we witnessed profound examples of grit, resolve, and ingenuity. We met principals who traverse great distances to supervise bilocated schools, and teachers who dig into their own often shallow pockets to fill gaps in school resources. Their sacrifices are acts of heroism, not failure—and it is our duty to ensure that they become the exception, not the rule. The goal is a system that empowers—one that allows educators to channel their efforts fully toward improving learning outcomes, rather than merely coping with systemic inadequacies.

To move forward, we must first and foremost address the basics. We must focus on what is most urgent and foundational. Early childhood education, nutritional support during the first 1,000 days of life, and literacy by the end of Grade 3 are not just benchmarks—they are lifelines. If we fail to establish these cornerstones, the rest of the structure cannot stand.

And we must act with the recognition that time is a resource we cannot afford to waste. The demographic window of opportunity will not remain open indefinitely, and every year lost compounds the gaps we need to bridge. If our findings induce strong sentiments, then we must find ways to transform sentiment into inspiration, inspiration into strategy, and strategy into concrete action. All these things we point out that should have happened long ago must begin to happen now and accelerate by the moment, without delay.

While the research conducted by EDCOM II is comprehensive, it is by no means exhaustive. There is more to learn and more to understand. This is why continued dialogue with local stakeholders, teachers, and parents is essential. Their voices must inform the policies that will shape the future of our education system.

As we enter our third and final year, our task becomes both clearer and more urgent. We shall integrate the findings of the past years, identify the most critical interventions, and develop a road map that ensures sustainable improvements. This road map must not only address the current crises but also build an education system resilient and agile enough to adapt to future challenges.

In this light, we acknowledge that there may be context-specific issues we have not yet uncovered. By no means do we imply that the challenges outlined apply across all schools and communities. We examine foundational elements even as we recognize the unique challenges faced by different communities: The problems faced by a village public school in coastal Leyte might differ from those faced by a school in the concrete recesses of Metro Manila. The diversity of our nation—its languages, cultures, and geographies—requires solutions that are not only evidence based but also deeply contextual. We recognize this, even as we recognize that the principles of quality, equity, and inclusion remain universal.

As we enter our third and final year, our task becomes both clearer and more urgent. We shall integrate the findings of the past years, identify the most critical interventions, and develop a road map that ensures sustainable improvements. This road map must not only address the current crises but also build an education system resilient and agile enough to adapt to future challenges.

We close this report with an invitation to all stakeholders to provide us with further nuance on the issues covered by the Year One and Year Two reports, especially those critical impediments that remain unaddressed. We also welcome any suggestions that can help build a system that truly works—one that is inclusive, equitable, and capable of meeting the demands of a rapidly changing world.

Education is about cultivating the full potential of every individual; it is about nurturing citizens who are informed, compassionate, and capable of contributing meaningfully to society. It is about building a nation. Together, we can turn this crisis into an opportunity—to rebuild, to innovate, and to create an education system that is worthy of the Filipino people and their boundless potential.

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About EDCOM II

The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) is a national Commission established through Republic Act No. 11899, tasked to undertake a comprehensive national assessment and evaluation of the performance of the Philippine education sector, and to propose transformative solutions, from 2023 to 2025. It is composed of lawmakers from both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and is guided by an Advisory Council, and assisted by the Technical Secretariat.

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