



Policy Brief

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The continuous deterioration of the quality of education in the Philippines has prompted the DepEd to push for the implementation of the K to 12 program, which entails the institutionalization of kindergarten and the addition of two more years of high school in the basic education cycle. The proposal has spurred a heated debate on whether it could lead to improvements or just exacerbate the present state of education in the country.

K to 12: The Key to Quality Education?

Overview

The 1987 Philippine Constitution puts special premium on education and accords it with the highest budgetary priority. Article XIV, Section 1, in particular, explicitly provides: “The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels.” Article XIV, Section 5. (5) clearly mandates the State to “assign the highest budgetary priority for education.” However, despite these constitutional guarantees, current performance indicators showed a dismal picture of the quality of education in the country. Participation rates have worsened, dropout rates remain high and the Philippines continues to perform poorly in both national and international assessment tests.

According to the Department of Education (DepEd), the congested curriculum is partly to blame for this bleak situation. The DepEd claimed that forcing in 10 years a curriculum that is learned by the rest of the world in 12 years has been quite a challenge for both Filipino teachers and students. The Philippines is now the only country in Asia that has a 10-year basic education cycle and one of the three remaining countries in the world,¹ together with Djibouti and Angola of Africa, that retains a 10-year pre-university education system.

As a response to this issue, the DepEd is pushing for the passage of a law that will implement the so-called K to 12 program, which will institutionalize pre-school and add two more years of high school in the country’s basic education cycle. However, in light of the tight fiscal situation and the mounting demands coming from all other sectors, the increasing cost of living and the additional burden that this measure will entail particularly for households, it is important to determine whether K to 12 is a viable and critical program that needs to be pursued.

The State of Philippine Education

Despite efforts by the government to make basic education accessible to all, lack of access to quality education remains a major policy concern. The Philippines, a signatory to the Millennium Declaration, has committed to achieve the goal of 100 percent net enrollment rate by 2015. However, there is a low probability that this target will be met given the current trend.

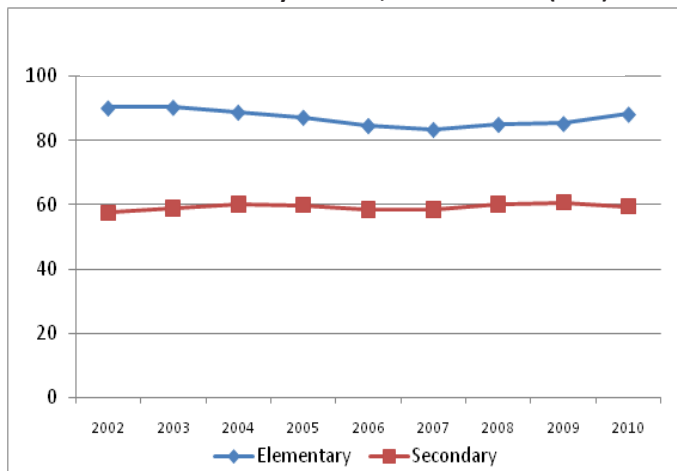
¹ Refers to the 155 member countries of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).



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Net elementary participation rates² have even declined from 90.1 percent in 2002 to 88.1 percent in 2010. Fewer children of school age proceed to high school and an even smaller number pursue college education.

Figure 1. Net Participation Rate in Public and Private Elementary Schools, SY 2002-2010 (in %)



Source: DepEd

Access to education is also unequal, with the poor having significantly lower participation rates than the non-poor. In 2007, the non-poor had an elementary participation rate of 91.8 percent, while for the poor, it was only 85.9 percent. The disparity worsened in the secondary level when the participation rate of the poor dived to 51.4 percent as against the non-poor's 76.5 percent. Looking at the gender dimension, boys have lower participation rates than girls in all year levels.

Table 1. Net Participation Rates, by Level, by Gender and by Poverty Status, 2007 (in %)

	Male			Female			Both Sexes		
	Poor	Non-Poor	All	Poor	Non-Poor	All	Poor	Non-Poor	All
Elementary	84.7	91.3	88.2	87.2	92.3	89.8	85.9	91.8	89
Secondary	44.7	71.9	59.4	58.3	81.1	70.9	51.4	76.5	65.1
Tertiary	6.7	25.3	18.8	11.1	30.1	24.5	8.7	27.7	21.6

Source: Manasan (2011)

Efficiency is likewise a problem as manifested in the still high, albeit declining dropout or school leaver rates. Majority of school leavers also come from the poor and male groups.

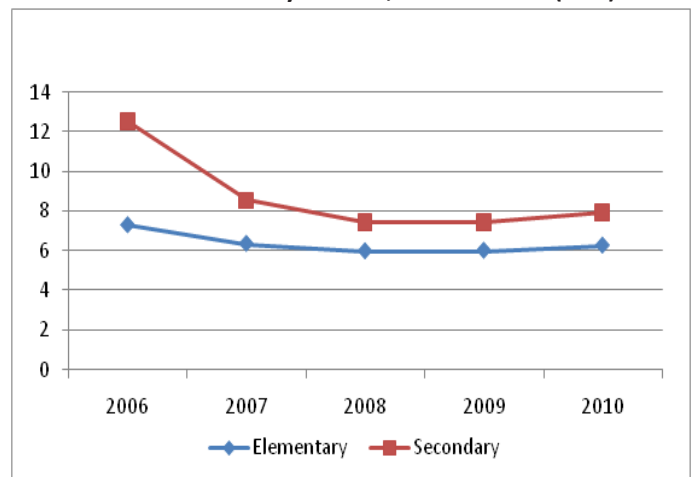
Table 2. School Leavers as a Percentage of All Children in a Given Age Cohort, 2007 (in %)

	Male			Female			Both Sexes		
	Poor	Non-Poor	All	Poor	Non-Poor	All	Poor	Non-Poor	All
Aged 6-11	9.9	2.8	6.2	7.8	2.2	4.9	8.9	2.5	5.6
Aged 12-15	21.9	8.0	14.4	14.1	4.2	8.7	18.0	6.1	11.5
Aged 16-24	76.3	63.0	67.6	72.2	60.4	63.9	74.4	61.7	65.8

Source: Manasan (2011)

² Net elementary participation rate is defined as the portion of the number of enrollees 7-12/6-11 years old to population 7-12/6-11 years old.

Figure 2. Dropout Rates in Public and Private Elementary Schools, SY 2006-2010 (in %)



Source: DepEd

Results of the 2008 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) showed that out-of-school youth with ages 6 to 15 years old do not attend school mainly because: (1) they lack personal interest (35.0%), (2) they find the cost of education high (18.7%), and (3) they consider themselves too young to go to school (16.2%). It should be noted that as the age cohort gets older (16 to 24 years old), the need to look for work and the high cost of education become the major factors for not going to school.

Table 3. Reasons for Not Attending School

	6-15 years old	16-24 years old
Philippines (in '000)	2,281	10,064
Total (in%)	100	100.0
Schools are very far	5.0	0.7
No school within the <i>barangay</i>	1.1	0.2
No regular transportation	0.4	0.2
High cost of education	18.7	24.5
Illness/ disability	7.2	1.9
Housekeeping	0.8	4.4
Marriage	0.6	11.9
Employment/ looking for work	4.0	26.1
Lack of personal interest	35.0	17.1
Cannot cope with school work	2.9	1.1
Finished schooling	0.0	8.1
Problem with school record	1.2	0.3
Problem with birth certificate	1.3	0.1
Too young to go to school	16.2	0.1
Others	5.8	3.2

Source: 2008 FLEMMS

The poor quality of education is also reflected in the country's low scores in national assessment tests. Although mean percentage scores (MPS)³ in the National Achievement Test (NAT)⁴ have generally improved in

³ MPS indicates the percentage or the ratio between the number of correctly answered items and the total number of test questions.

⁴ The NAT is an annual examination administered to public and private school students throughout the country to determine their achievement level, strengths and weaknesses in key subject areas.

the elementary level, they have remained low, with students answering only 68 percent of the test items correctly in SY 2009-2010. Secondary level students performed worse as they only answered 46 percent of the test items correctly during the same period. An MPS of 75 percent is considered the passing mark.

Table 4. NAT, SY 2006-2010, Achievement Rate in MPS

	Elementary					Secondary				
	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
	Grade 6					4th Yr		2nd Year		
Achievement Rate	54.7	59.4	64.8	65.6	68.0	44.3	46.6	49.3	46.7	45.6
Mathematics	53.7	60.3	63.9	67.4	63.3	47.8	39.1	42.9	38.0	39.6
Science	46.8	51.6	57.9	58.9	63.1	38.0	42.0	46.7	42.1	43.8
English	54.1	60.8	61.6	61.8	67.8	47.7	51.8	53.5	52.9	47.0

Source: DepEd

Note: NAT for elementary level was given in Grade 4 in SY 2003-2004 and in Grade 6 in SY 2004-2005 onwards. For the secondary level, NAT was given to fourth year in SY 2003-2004 to SY 2005-2006. In SY 2006-2007 onwards, NAT was administered to second year.

In international tests such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS), the Philippines is among the worst participating countries. Out of 25 participating countries, the Philippines ranked 23rd in TIMMS' Math and Science in 2003. In 2008 TIMMS, even the science high schools that are recognized to be the best and the brightest in the country fared badly in Advanced Mathematics.

Table 5. Average TIMMS Scores, Philippines

	Scores	International Average	Rank	Participating Countries
2003 Results				
Grade 4				
Science	332	489	23	25
Mathematics	358	495	23	25
2 nd year high school				
Science	377	473	43	46
Mathematics	378	466	34	38
2008 Results				
Advanced Mathematics	355	500*	10	10

Sources: 2003 and 2008 TIMMS

*Refers to 2008 TIMMS advanced scale average

The DepEd pointed out that the deterioration in the quality of education can be partly attributed to the current 10-year basic education cycle.

The K to 12 Program

The Philippine educational system is patterned after the American model, which includes seven years of elementary school. In an attempt to control the costs due to a rapid increase in school enrollment during that time, the Education Act of 1940 did away with Grade 7. It

was intended to be a temporary measure. However, to this date, the six-year elementary school cycle remains in effect (International Qualifications Assessment Service, 2007).

Numerous studies have proposed restoring Grade 7 or adding an extra school year to the basic education cycle. The UNESCO Mission Survey of 1949, the Education Act of 1953 and the Swanson Survey of 1960 all recommended the restoration of Grade 7. In 1970, the Presidential Commission to Survey Philippine Education called for the implementation of an 11-year program while the Congressional Commission on Education in 1991 proposed to have either seven years of elementary education or five years of secondary education. A study by the Presidential Commission on Education Reforms in 2000 proposed the establishing of a one-year pre-baccalaureate system while the Presidential Task Force on Education in 2008 had discussions on a 12-year pre-university program (DepEd Discussion Paper, 2010).

The recommendations, however, were not heeded and as such, the Philippines now has the shortest basic education cycle in Asia. The country joins Djibouti and Angola of Africa, as the only three remaining countries with a 10-year pre-university education system. Other countries even have 13- or 14-year cycles.

Table 6. Duration of Elementary, Secondary and Pre-University Education in Southeast Asian Countries

Country	Years of Elementary Education	Years of Secondary Education			Total Basic and Pre-University Education
		Lower	Upper	Post-Secondary/Pre-University Education	
Brunei	6	2	3	2/3	13/14
Cambodia	6	3	3		12
Indonesia	6	3	3	-	12
Laos	5	4	3	-	12
Malaysia	6	3	2	2/3	13/14
Myanmar	5	4	2	-	11
Philippines	6	4	-	-	10
Singapore	6	4	-	2/3	12/13
Thailand	6	3	3	-	12
Timor-Leste	6	3	3	-	12
Vietnam	5	4	3	-	12

Source: Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO INNOTECH)

In 2004, in another attempt to extend the basic education cycle, the High School Bridge Program, a one-year remedial program for underperforming first-year high school students, was proposed.⁵ However, it met strong opposition from students who will have to stay longer in school and their parents who will have to shoulder the extra expenses of another school year.

⁵ The High School Bridge Program is intended for students who do not meet the cut-off score in the High School Readiness Test administered by the DepEd. It focuses on three subjects: English, Mathematics and Science.

Bowing to public pressure, the DepEd offered it then as an optional program.⁶

K to 12 program is the latest effort of the government to elevate the educational system to the global 12-year standard. K to 12 means one year of kindergarten and 12 years of elementary and secondary education. It was one of President Noynoy Aquino's campaign promises and as such, was included in the priority list of bills of the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC).

Why is K to 12 needed?

1. To decongest the curriculum. According to the DepEd, while the K to 12 is not the solution to all the ills of the Philippine educational system, it will address one of its main weaknesses—the congested curriculum.

The DepEd explained that the students are hard-pressed to learn in 10 years a curriculum that is actually designed for 12 years in other countries. Hence, Filipino students are not able to achieve comprehension and mastery, particularly of core subjects. Perhaps the most damning proof of this is the result of the 2008 FLEMMS, which revealed that 19 percent of elementary graduates are not functionally literate (Action for Economic Reforms and E-NET, 2008). Functional literacy means a person can read, write, compute and comprehend.

The DepEd claimed that with K to 12, students will not have to rush through the lessons anymore. It will also do away with unnecessary topics in the curriculum so that students will develop competencies and acquire life skills that will make them productive members of the society.

2. To prepare the students for higher education. From the DepEd's assessment, secondary graduates of the current system are not adequately prepared for college. They pointed out that this is why most of the courses, the so-called General Education subjects, taken by first year college students are actually remedial as they should have already been mastered in high school. With K to 12, students will be better prepared as introductory courses that are currently taught at the tertiary level will be included in the high school curriculum.

3. To prepare the students for the labor market. According to the DepEd, with the 10-year basic education cycle, students usually graduate from high school below 18 years old, too young to legally join the labor force or put

up a business that will entail them to enter into contracts. In addition, because they have not mastered the necessary competencies, graduates of the current system often lack skills and hence, are vulnerable to exploitative labor practices. The DepEd claimed that K to 12 will empower them to confidently join the labor market as by the time they graduate they are already of legal age and equipped with sufficient skills.

4. To comply with the global standards. At present, graduates who wish to work abroad are at a disadvantage because they are not automatically recognized as professionals while students who apply for post-graduate studies often have to enrol in or take remedial courses to meet the entrance requirements of the foreign country. For instance, the Washington Accord signed in 1989 prescribes 12 years of basic education as a requirement for the recognition of engineering professionals. Likewise, the Bologna Accord of 1999 requires 12 years of education for university admission and practice of profession in European countries.

How will K to 12 be implemented?

The K to 12 model proposed by the DepEd is the K-6-4-2 model. This includes one year of kindergarten, six years of elementary education (Grades 1 to 6), four years of junior high (Grades 7 to 10) and two years of senior high (Grades 11 to 12).

Under K to 12, the official school age for kindergarten is five years old, 6 to 11 years old for elementary (Grades 1 to 6), 12 to 15 years old for junior high (Grades 7 to 10), and 16 to 17 years old for senior high (Grades 11 to 12).

K to 12 shall cover both public and private schools. It will be provided by the government for free in public schools and its implementation will be phased over a period of six years. According to the DepEd, kindergarten will be made mandatory starting this SY 2011-2012. A new curriculum for Grade 1 and first-year students beginning SY 2012-2013 will be devised. Senior high, on the other hand, will be offered starting SY 2016-2017. By SY 2018-2019, all students would have already finished 12 years of basic education before they enter college.

Specialization tracks

The DepEd explained that those who are not inclined to go to college and want to pursue technical-vocational courses or entrepreneurial fields stand to benefit from K to 12 as well.

⁶ The High School Bridge Program is still open for schools who think that it is still necessary but at present no school implements the said program.

Figure 3. K-6-4-2 Model

Year 0: SY 2011-12	Year 1: SY 2012-13	Year 2: SY 2013-14	Year 3: SY 2013-15	Year 4: SY 2015-16	Year 5: SY 2016-17	Year 6: SY 2017-18	Target/Ideal
						Grade 12	2 Years Senior High School
						Grade 11	
HS IV (15 yo)						Grade 10	4 Years Junior High School
HS III (14 yo)						Grade 9	
HS II (13 yo)	Old Curriculum					Grade 8	
HS I (12 yo)	New Curriculum					Grade 7	
GR 6 (11 yo)						Grade 6	6 Years Elementary
GR 5 (10 yo)						Grade 5	
GR 4 (9 yo)						Grade 4	
GR 3 (8 yo)						Grade 3	
GR 2 (7 yo)	Old Curriculum					Grade 2	
GR 1 (6 yo)	New Curriculum					Grade 1	
Kinder (5 yo)							Kindergarten

Source: DepEd

At the start of third year high school or Grade 9, an aptitude test will be given to students to determine their possible areas of specialization. They will be provided with specialized tracks that will cater to their diverse preferences. The new curriculum would include special programs in Arts, Sports, Journalism, Engineering Science Education Program (ESEP), Mother Tongue and Foreign Languages, Technical-Vocational Education, Agriculture/Fisheries, and Arts and Trades. In senior high (Grades 11 and 12), the core learning areas would be English, Science, Mathematics, Filipino and Contemporary Issues which includes work ethics, business ethics, etc. It is envisioned that after senior high, students are already prepared for employment, entrepreneurship, or middle-level skills development and can thus lead successful lives even if they do not pursue higher studies.

The DepEd made it clear though that the program plan is still evolving and that consultations with stakeholders will still be carried out to solicit new ideas, suggestions and criticisms.

How much will K to 12 cost?

According to the DepEd, an estimated PhP150 billion will be needed to procure all resources and close the gaps in basic education. This amount would cover the building of 152,569 new classrooms, hiring of 103,599 more teachers, procurement of 95.6 million more books and 13.2 million seats (DepEd Briefer, 2010).

In a document entitled *Financial Forecast for the K+12 Model* provided by the DepEd's Office of Administration and Finance, the preliminary estimated capital cost of the additional two years (senior high) in public schools

is PhP43.7 billion, while recurring costs are estimated at PhP17.2 billion.⁷ Capital costs include the provision of classrooms, chairs, textbooks, and water and sanitation facilities. Recurring costs are for the employment of teachers, for textbooks, and maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE). For the mandatory kindergarten, the DepEd will have to spend PhP27.1 billion, from SY 2011 to 2015.⁸

The DepEd clarified that this costing is still preliminary and that a financial study is currently underway to determine the final costs and sources of financing for the program.

Table 7. Cost Estimate for Senior High School in Public Schools

	Amount in PhP	Number in Units
Capital Cost	43,671,366,606.08	
Classrooms	37,777,998,794.19	55,150
Chairs	2,567,800,910.74	2,647,217
Water & Sanitation	3,325,566,901.15	49,635
Recurring Costs	17,160,922,257.68	
Teachers	15,100,169,445.04	138,532
Textbooks	218,752,812.64	19,854,131
MOOE	1,842,000,000.00	

Source: DepEd

Note: This does not include the cost of kindergarten.

⁷ This is assuming that by SY 2016 onwards, 100 % of Fourth Year High School or Grade 10 graduates will be required to take Senior High and 100 percent of the cost would be assumed by the DepEd in an 80-20 percent public and private school enrollment population.

⁸ This is assuming that starting SY 2011, 43.71% of 5-year olds are enrolled in kindergarten with a 20% target increase for 5 years for the remaining 57%.

Table 8. Estimated Cost for Kindergarten

	Number in Units
Classrooms	27,019
Chairs	675,483
Textbooks	5,403,860
Teachers	81,058
Water and Sanitation	27,019
	Amount in PHP
SY 2011	4,643,363,974
SY 2012	5,032,441,894
SY 2013	5,421,519,814
SY 2014	5,810,597,734
SY 2015	6,199,675,654
Total Budget	27,107,599,070
Annual Average	5,421,519,814

Source: DepEd

Table 9. Duration of Basic and University Education in 4 Countries

Country	Entry Age	Years of Basic and Pre-University Education	Years of University Education				Total No. of Education	
			Eng'g	Nursing	Commerce and Business Education	Teacher Education		
Brunei	6	13/14	4	4	4	2/2	4	17/18
Malaysia	7	13/14	4	4	3	4	3	17/18
Philippines	6	10	5/6	4	4	4	4	14/15-16 (Eng'g)
Singapore	7	12/13	4	3	3	3 1/2	3	15/16/17

Source: SEAMEO INNOTECH (presentation dated April 5, 2011)

lengthening the elementary and high school subcycles did not result in higher scores although lengthening pre-school led to higher scores.

Issues and Concerns: The K to 12 Debate

The announcement of the K to 12 program has sparked myriad reactions not only from those within the education sector but from the public as well. Supporters of the program have claimed that the K to 12 program will be the answer to the basic education woes while critics argued that it merely glosses over the more fundamental problems of the educational system.

1. On the relationship between the length of school cycle and quality of education

The DepEd claimed that with the additional two years, students will have more time to master the essential competencies and skills, with the objective of achieving high academic standards especially in Mathematics, Science and English. However, the Felipe and Porio study (2010), which used the TIMMS datasets showed that longer education cycles do not necessarily result in better TIMMS scores. Some countries that have short cycles have high scores while other countries that have long education cycles have low scores. In the case of elementary cycle data, for instance, test scores of the Philippines in Grades 4 and 8 (or second-year high school) are lower than all 13 countries having shorter elementary cycles, with the exception of Palestine for eighth grade tests.⁹ The same is true for South Korea and Singapore whose pre-college education cycles are 13 years but have significantly higher test scores than the United States whose pre-college education cycle is 15 years. This finding is also interesting given that American students who are native English speakers have the advantage as the language of testing used is English. Using regression, the authors also found out that

In addition, preliminary findings of a SEAMEO INNOTECH study, which looked at the curriculum, structure and duration of education in Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore and the Philippines, revealed that although the duration of education is longer for the other countries, the amount of instructional time per subject is significantly longer in the Philippines. The said countries also placed more emphasis on the mastery of process and skills rather than on content. They also had a stronger emphasis on examinations which could explain their higher test scores.

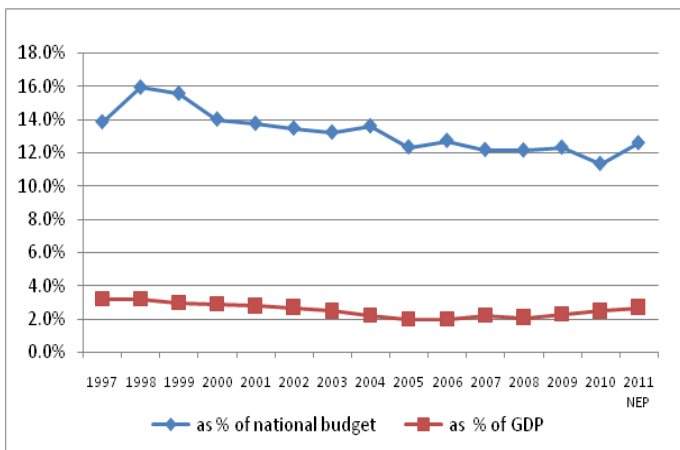
Furthermore, the 2005 Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (GMR) pointed out that lengthening the learning time did not necessarily lead to better performance. The report instead emphasized that what is more important is how effectively learning time is spent. In addition, a World Bank (2007) study said that among the developing countries, returns to increased years of schooling go hand in hand with increases in the quality of education. If the school system is of low quality then it does not pay to keep children in school longer.

2. On the funding constraint and shortage of inputs

Critics pointed out that educational outcomes are largely dependent on resources made available to support teaching and learning. While DepEd received the biggest slice of the national budget in 2011 (12.6%) and that it significantly increased both in nominal terms and as percentage of gross domestic product (2.7%) compared to previous years, the amount allocated is still well below international standards. The UNESCO prescribes the spending of at least 6 percent of GDP for education while according to the World Bank, the average share of education in the national budget in developing countries is 20 percent.

⁹ Countries with shorter elementary cycles than the Philippines are Russia, Armenia, Latvia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, Moldova, Italy, Egypt and Iran. However, they have longer secondary or pre-university education cycles.

Figure 4. Department of Education Budget, 1997-2011



Source: DepEd

As a result of the perennial underinvestment in the sector, the educational system is plagued by long standing shortages in important enabling inputs like classrooms, teachers, chairs, textbooks and sanitation facilities. For SY 2011-2012, for instance, the school system lacks 152,569 classrooms which amount to PhP104 billion. The situation is worsened by Republic Act No. 7880, otherwise known as the “Fair and Equitable Access to Education Act,” which allocates the budget for capital outlay on education among legislative districts in favor of its population rather than on actual shortages.

Table 10. Projected Gross Shortages for Critical School Inputs, SY 2011-2012

Item	Level	SY 2009-2010		SY 2011-2012		Assumptions
		Inventory	Estimated Gross Shortage	Funding Requirements (PhP)		
				Unit Costs	Total Amount	
1. Classrooms	Total	421,496	152,569		104,509,765,000	
	Elementary	328,406	108,977	685,000	74,649,245,000	A
	Secondary	93,090	43,592	685,000	29,860,520,000	A
2. School Seats	Total	15,280,942	13,225,572		12,828,804,840	
	Elementary	11,271,350	10,279,007	970	9,970,636,790	B
	Secondary	4,009,592	2,946,565	970	2,858,168,050	B
3. Teachers	Total	487,969	103,599		17,018,949,000	
	Elementary	356,397	37,460	164,280	10,865,127,000	C
	Secondary	131,572	66,139	164,280	6,031,206,000	D
4. Textbooks	Total	85,975,925	95,557,887		5,264,557,000	
	Elementary	356,397	37,460	164,280	10,865,127,000	
5. Sanitation Facilities	Total	313,085	151,084		10,122,628,000	E
	Elementary	259,855	90,018	67,000	6,031,206,000	
	Secondary	53,230	61,066	67,000	4,091,422,000	

Source: DepEd

Legend:

A - 1 classroom per 45 learners at single shift

B - 48 seats per classroom needs

C - 1 teacher per 45 learners in Grades 1, 4 and 5 teachers in every 3 classes of 45 learners per class in Grades 5 to 6

D - 5 teachers in every 3 classes of 45 learners per class

E - Based on international architectural design ratio of 1:50

Pupil-input ratios reflect the extent of shortages, especially when disaggregated on regional levels. While the national average is 38.9 for pupil-classroom ratio, it could go to as high as 77 students in one classroom in the National Capital Region. Thirty five to 40 students in a classroom is considered to be the manageable class size (UNESCO, 2009).

Table 11. Pupil Input Ratios, SY 2009-2010

Region	Elementary			Secondary		
	Pupil-Room Ratio	Pupil-Seating Ratio	Pupil-Teacher Ratio	Student Room Ratio	Student Seating Ratio	Student Teacher Ratio
I	28.69	0.95	28.68	44.63	1.11	34.13
II	27.33	0.95	28.99	39.61	1.13	34.03
III	36.39	0.99	36.73	54.19	1.18	40.55
IV-A	43.95	1.06	40.53	62.41	1.25	41.97
IV-B	36.59	1.22	35.82	48.46	1.38	38.88
V	37.04	1.23	35.46	49.56	1.31	36.87
VI	30.33	1	30.49	44.84	1.1	34.56
VII	40.13	1.05	37.06	55.89	1.19	41.67
VIII	33.04	1.07	31.71	49.76	1.19	39.14
IX	35.68	1.07	33.85	47.46	1.17	37.33
X	38.07	1.19	35.23	52.62	1.31	37.78
XI	40.43	1.14	37	54.88	1.18	36.95
XII	43.25	1.21	39.32	53.36	1.26	38.83
CARAGA	36.01	0.97	33.1	47.75	1.08	36.95
ARMM	61.1	2.28	49.77	82.25	2.26	54.28
CAR	28.45	0.89	27.57	38.68	1.1	29.12
NCR	77.64	1.65	39.57	76.29	1.54	35.62
Total	38.92	1.13	35.69	53.62	1.25	38

Source: DepEd

For example, in Amparo Elementary School in Caloocan City¹⁰ the pupil-teacher ratio is 49 is to one while the pupil-classroom ratio is 148 is to one. Granted that there are two shifts in this school, it still translates to 74 pupils packed in one classroom. The condition is as bad, if not worse, in the secondary level where on the average, 82 students share a classroom in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Critics of the K to 12 program pointed out that as it is, the government has yet to fully fund the existing 10-year basic education cycle. Introducing K to 12 into the picture would only magnify the lack of resources and further strain the already insufficient education budget. Input shortages in the existing system should hence be dealt with first before thinking of additional school years.

Although the DepEd admitted that funding K to 12 is one of its biggest challenges, its initial computations of the cost show that government can fund the program. DepEd Secretary Armin Luistro, in particular, is confident that money will come in as K to 12 is a good idea. Moreover, the DepEd is not banking solely on budgetary allocations from the national government but will also do its share in securing partnerships to help fund the program. For instance, the DepEd plans to partner with local governments for the possibility of counterpart

¹⁰ Randomly chosen from the DepEd's Basic Education Information System.

funding for classrooms (Educator Magazine, 2011). DepEd Undersecretary Francisco Varela also added that the program is not asking too much in terms of budgetary allocation and that raising the DepEd's budget to 3 percent of GDP would suffice.

3. On the additional expenses incurred by parents

One of the top reasons for dropping out of school is the high cost of education. The 2009 Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) revealed that education is not a priority among poor households as bulk of their spending goes to food (60%). During the said year, only 1.2 percent of the family budget is spent for education.

Table 12. Percentage Distribution of Total Family Expenditures (in %)

Expenditure Items	All Income Groups	Bottom 30%	Upper 70%
Food	42.6	59.9	40.5
Fuel, Light and Water	7.1	6.8	7.1
Transportation and Communication	7.7	3.9	8.2
Education	4.3	1.2	4.6
House Rent	13	9.4	13.2

Source: 2009 FIES

Critics argued that while K to 12 will be provided free by the government in public schools where most of the poor enroll in, parents will still have out-of-pocket expenses to cover their schoolchildren's food, transportation and allowance. Adding two more years of high school would therefore entail additional burden on the households and this could inadvertently increase dropouts and worsen completion rates.

The DepEd reasoned out that in the process of providing various tracks of specialization that cater to students' preferences, K to 12 could actually lower dropout rates since it is partly the highly academic nature of formal schooling that alienates students and causes them to lose interest (Educator Magazine, 2011).

Proponents also averred that K to 12 should be seen not as additional two years of schooling but a reduction of two years in college as high school graduates will already be employable as if they are college graduates.¹¹ The additional two years could also increase their wage potential¹² and as such should be seen as an opportunity by poor families to raise their economic well-being.

¹¹ Undersecretary Varela clarified that this does not mean that college is no longer necessary. For those who want to pursue higher studies and are financially capable, they should still go to college to get more specialization and further increase their earning potential.

¹² A study that looks at the effects of the quantity of education on earnings by Brunello, Fort and Weber (2008) showed that additional years in school increase the wage potential of a student.

4. On increasing the school leaving age

Supporters argued that increasing the school leaving age to 18 years old is advantageous as senior high graduates are no longer minors and therefore could be lawfully employed, legally able to start their own business and enter into contracts. Critics contended though that increasing the school leaving age would be particularly unfavorable to the poor who, in general, want to finish high school in the shortest time possible so that they can help their families right away. Adding two more years of senior high would further delay their entry into the labor market and result in foregone earnings from work. They also added that increasing the school leaving age would not also be an outright advantage even if students graduate at 18 because businesses still prefer college graduates over fresh graduates from high school.

The DepEd explained that the public perception that high school is inferior compared to college is exactly what K to 12 wants to change. The education sector would work with the business sector in developing the curriculum of senior high so that the skills that students learn are exactly what the labor market needs. Industry hiring practices must be changed to take into account the enhanced skills and competencies of the K to 12 graduates. The DepEd consultations with the business sector showed that firms are generally supportive of K to 12.

5. On complying with the global standards

The DepEd said that a 12-year basic education cycle will enable every graduate to be compliant with international standards such as the Washington and Bologna Accords. Critics maintained though that while it is important to comply with standards, actual experience as cited by Tan (2010) showed that foreign employers look primarily at competencies and not at the number of years of schooling when hiring workers. Filipino engineers, nurses, teachers, accountants, etc. get hired as professionals despite the difference in the required years of schooling overseas.

Non-supporters also pointed out that not all graduates will study or work abroad and as such, only those who will be affected by the non-standardized cycles should be the ones to bear the costs. The rest should be spared from undergoing a system of education that will not really benefit them. Instead of altering the entire basic education cycle, an appropriate system of assessment and training could be put in place for those who want to study or work out of the country (Felipe and Porio, 2010).

6. On the effect of K to 12 on higher education institutions

Oppositors to the K to 12 plan claimed that if two years will be added to basic education, higher education institutions (HEIs) will not have incoming college freshmen for two years because students will have to undergo senior high. This could have disastrous effects on the HEIs' financial standing. The DepEd countered that implementing K to 12 would require the cooperation of state universities and colleges (SUCs) and local universities and colleges (LUCs) to fill up the lack of classrooms and teachers. Senior high students could be put up in the already existing classrooms in SUCs and LUCs and college teachers could be tapped to teach senior high. However, for private HEIs that do not offer high school, this could be a valid concern and could lead to displacement of teachers or worse, outright closure.

Legislative Proposals

Two Senate bills, which seek the lengthening of the basic education cycle, are currently filed in the 15th Congress. Senate Bill No. (SBN) 2713, filed by Sen. Ralph Recto, prescribes a 13-year basic education program. However, his proposal is for the addition of two years of kindergarten starting 2012 and the addition of Grade 7 in elementary in 2015. The explanatory note of SBN 2713 states that dropouts are more prevalent in Grades 1 to 3 and that many of those entering public school for the first time are not ready for formal schooling. Hence, rather than prolonging high school as what the DepEd wants, the proposed additional years are centered on pre-school to ensure that students are better prepared to begin their formal education. If passed into law, this measure will repeal the pertinent provisions of *Batas Pambansa* 232, which fixes basic education in the country to 11 years at the most. The bill also prescribes the mother tongue as the primary medium of instruction from the kindergarten level to Grade 3 following findings from international and local researches that learners acquire reading skills more easily when taught in their first language. The bill further proposes that the initial funding for kindergarten be charged against the savings from the current appropriations of the DepEd and proceeds from the value-added tax (VAT) collections amounting to PHP40 billion every year for three years. Subsequent funding for continued implementation will be included in the General Appropriations Act (GAA). Funding for Grade 7 when due for implementation will also be charged to the proceeds from the VAT and included in the GAA.

SBN 775 filed by Sen. Jinggoy Ejercito Estrada is a package of reforms aimed to improve access to and the quality of education. It also includes extending the number of years for basic education to 12 years. It does

not specifically provide where the two years will be added but gives the DepEd the authority to assign the additional two years to the elementary and high school levels. The bill also provides for a compulsory year of pre-school education. Other reform areas tackled are the usage of mother tongue for the medium of instruction, an in-school feeding program, revision of the curriculum, teacher training and independent diagnostic testing. The bill proposes an initial funding of PHP19 billion to be allocated for implementation while subsequent funding is to be included in the GAA.

The Senate has also recently come up with Committee Report No. 24, taking into consideration House Bill No. (HBN) 3826 by Rep. Salvador Escudero III, *et al.* and SBN 2700 by Senator Recto, which called for the institutionalization of kindergarten into the basic education system. As of writing, the said measure is pending on Second Reading under the period of interpellation per the sponsorship of Senator Edgardo Angara who chairs the Committee on Education, Arts and Culture. The proposed measure will complement the Early Years Act also sponsored by Senator Angara, which was passed by the Senate on Third Reading on May 30, 2011.¹³

In the House of Representatives, HBNs 4199 and 4219 by Rep. Escudero III, *et al.* and Speaker Feliciano Belmonte Jr., *et al.* respectively acknowledge that the congested curriculum is partly to blame for the poor quality of education. The bills cite the unpreparedness of high school graduates for college or for the labor force and thus prescribe 1 year of kindergarten and 12 years of basic education. Both measures also authorize the DepEd to formulate the curriculum and determine the actual number of years for elementary and secondary education programs. Similarly, HBN 2182 by Rep. Eulogio Magsaysay acknowledges that the Philippines' basic education cycle is one of the shortest in Asia and proposes for it to be increased to 12 years to be at par with global norms. Funding as proposed by all three House bills will come from the annual GAA.

¹³ The proposed Early Years Act recognizes early years from 0 to 6 as the first cycle of educational development. Existing daycare centers are transformed into child development centers focusing not just on daycare and play but on the children's total development according to their individual needs. The proposed budget for this Act amounts to PHP1.5 billion.

Conclusion

Inarguably, the system of basic education in the country is in dire need of resuscitation. The main question though is whether increasing the number of years of schooling as proposed by the K to 12 program could lead to improvements in quality or just exacerbate the present situation.

The proposal to make kindergarten mandatory and institutionalize it as part of the basic education cycle is not as contentious as the additional two years in high school as there is a universal acceptance of the importance of pre-school in improving the quality and efficiency of education. Various studies have indicated that quality Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) is associated with better cognitive and social skills development. Students who have undergone ECCD tend to stay in school longer and learn more. In fact, informal pre-school programs that operate with inadequate resources and facilities, and are saddled with unfavorable class sizes still manage to produce positive results in students (EFA GMR, 2005). A formal and institutionalized pre-school program with trained pre-school teachers is thus expected to produce more gains. In contrast, researches have mixed findings on lengthening the basic education cycle.

Critics have raised a real and valid concern that adding two more years of senior high would not only strain the government's resources but also contribute additional burden to households. With the increasing cost of living, and the budget, particularly of the poor, already stretched to the limit, K to 12 is a rather ambitious and expensive program, especially when it does not

guarantee favorable results. On the other hand, there is also merit in the argument that the current curriculum needs decongesting and that the country needs to catch up with the rest of the world in terms of the length of basic education cycle. Nearly all countries have complied with the 12-year global standard and the Philippines is one of the last holdouts. If less-developed and poorer countries can commit to providing a longer basic education cycle, why can't the Philippines?

What is clear is that lengthening the basic education cycle alone could be useless on its own without corresponding improvements on other educational inputs. According to the 2005 EFA GMR, aside from the presence of ECCD programs, enabling inputs are critical determinants of quality. Teachers who are considered to be the most important enabling inputs need to have better pre-service and regular in-service teacher trainings. This can also mean increasing the qualifications for teachers and instituting a merit-based system along with increasing salaries to attract the best and the brightest. Likewise, other inputs like classrooms, textbooks, libraries and other school infrastructure need to be sufficiently provided. A better system of testing that focuses on skills and competencies to properly gauge outcomes is also essential.

Ultimately, the government's ability to secure resources to implement the K to 12 program and at the same time address the unresolved shortages in educational inputs will determine the country's quality of education in the future. As wisely stated in the Philippine EFA plan, "Good education is expensive but lack of education costs many times more."

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