

Republic of the Philippines
Congress of the Philippines
Senate
Pasay City

Eighteenth Congress

Second Regular Session



RESOLUTION No. 92

RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE SENATE TO RECOMMEND THE RESUMPTION OF FACE-TO-FACE CLASSES THROUGH THE IMMEDIATE LAUNCH OF THE PILOT TESTING OF LOCALIZED LIMITED FACE-TO-FACE CLASSES IN LOW RISK AREAS AS IDENTIFIED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION UNDER RISK-BASED ASSESSMENT, FOLLOWING STRINGENT MITIGATION MEASURES, STRICT HEALTH PROTOCOLS, AND GUIDELINES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND OF THE INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE ON THE MANAGEMENT OF EMERGING AND INFECTIOUS DISEASES, TO ENABLE THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO GATHER EVIDENCE ON THE GROUND AND DESIGN A FRAMEWORK FOR THE SAFE REOPENING OF SCHOOLS

WHEREAS, on March 11, 2020, World Health Organization (WHO) Director General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak as a pandemic;

WHEREAS, due to the rising number of confirmed local COVID-19 cases, President Rodrigo Duterte on March 16, 2020 also declared a State of Calamity throughout the country for a period of six (6) months, imposed an Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) in Luzon effective midnight of April 12, 2020, and ordered the suspension of classes at all levels, both public and private, in the National Capital Region from March 10, 2020 to March 14, 2020;

WHEREAS, the persistent rise in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and resulting deaths further led to the extension of the suspension of classes at all levels;

WHEREAS, the unexpected and unprecedented pandemic school closures affected a total of 28,451,212 learners from the pre-primary to the tertiary level in the country – 24,861,728 of whom are in basic education – based on the March 31, 2020 data of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in its global monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19;

WHEREAS, eleven months later, the data from UNESCO as of February 28, 2021 yield exactly the same number of affected learners in the Philippines considering that, globally, the number of affected learners has drastically decreased from around 1.47 billion to 208 million within the said eleven-month period;

WHEREAS, the pandemic has drastically affected the education systems around the globe, compelling countries to adopt alternative learning modalities to protect the learners from the virus through distance learning via online instruction, the use of self-learning modules, or television and radio educational programs, among others;

WHEREAS, the prolonged pandemic school closures have adversely affected the learners' education, but impacting more severely the most vulnerable and marginalized learners and

their families and aggravating the already existing disparities within the education system such as gaps in nutrition and childcare;

WHEREAS, while the Department of Education (DepEd) has been implementing its Basic Education-Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) to arrest the adverse effects of the prolonged school closures through alternative learning modalities, the DepEd must be forthright in recognizing the controversial quality of blended learning that was adopted, the limited preparations of educators, parents, and learners alike to engage in alternative delivery modes, and the unreliable and expensive information and communications technology (ICT) services in the country;

WHEREAS, the DepEd had previously mapped out the conduct of the pilot testing of localized limited face-to-face classes for January 2021 in 1,904 public schools nationwide within areas categorized as low-risk, or at least under Modified General Community Quarantine (MGCQ), which was approved during the Cabinet Meeting held on December 14, 2020, subject to the following conditions: (1) that such pilot implementation be a shared responsibility of DepEd, local government units (LGUs), and parents of the school children; (2) that only schools with overall readiness shall be allowed to participate therein; and (3) the health and safety protocols shall be strictly observed at school, at home, and during transport in the schools/areas covered;

WHEREAS, the pilot implementation of localized limited face-to-face classes nationwide was recently postponed by President Duterte, who is given the power under existing laws to make final decisions on education policies, in view of his concern over the new COVID-19 variant and subject to the availability and roll out of vaccines in the country, making it the 3rd approval, and recall, of the conduct of the pilot testing of localized limited face-to-face classes;

WHEREAS, the pilot implementation was suspended by the Secretary of Education with an instruction to all central and field units to further strengthen and improve distance learning delivery, and the conduct of survey on first quarter challenges,

and with a statement issued on February 24, 2021, that the DepEd “shall continue preparing action plans for this activity should the President give his approval in the coming months”;

WHEREAS, the Senate Committee on Basic Education, Arts and Culture, in the exercise of its oversight function, has persistently discussed in four public hearings Proposed Senate Resolution No. 391 to determine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to the country’s basic education sector for the purpose of crafting legislation that would ensure an immediate, effective and efficient government response;

WHEREAS, in the Committee’s most recent public hearing, it was reported by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) that the Philippines is the only country in the East Asia and Pacific region where schools have remained closed since March 2020, and that globally, there are only 13 other countries that have not opened schools since their respective lockdowns last year;

WHEREAS, it was likewise reported during the said hearing that as of February 9, 2021, there are 433 municipalities and 3 cities in the country with zero active cases of COVID-19, and that the identified 1,065 schools that are projected to participate in the pilot study for localized limited face-to-face classes represent only around 2.2% of all the public schools nationwide;

WHEREAS, the Senate plenary discussions on February 24, 2021 and the interpellations on the privilege speech on the “The Perennial Crisis of the Education System” raised issues on the decline in the quality of education in the country, observed by the Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM) thirty years ago and continues on to this day, and how the protracted school closures have further resulted in significant learning loss and reduction in foundational skills, considering that prior to the pandemic our learner outcomes under recent standardized tests like the NAT, PISA, TIMMS, and SEA-PLM were already consistently poor, if not the poorest among the testing population;

WHEREAS, there are deep concerns that while countries whose students had performed well in the past international assessments are already back on track, the Philippines is still lagging behind using the blended learning method which, to many, is not an effective means due to the lack of access to the internet and ICT equipment and gadgets by the majority of our learners;

WHEREAS, since there is no substitute to face-to-face classes and to avert a prolonged learning loss and minimize other potentially profound adverse social, developmental, and health costs that learners will suffer, the DepEd needs to immediately launch its pilot testing of localized limited face-to-face classes in low risk areas;

WHEREAS, according to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is possible for learners to return to schools for in-person instruction as long as mitigation measures are observed, as there has been little evidence that schools have contributed meaningfully to increased community transmission;

WHEREAS, the pilot testing will enable the DepEd, the Department of Health (DOH) and the Inter-Agency Task Force on the Management of Emerging and Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) to gather evidence on the ground to guide the framework for the safe reopening of schools using a risk-based assessment to identify, analyze and reduce the risks affecting each school;

WHEREAS, the pilot testing will also guide the DepEd to set specific standards and health protocols, in coordination with the DOH and the IATF-EID, to reopen schools safely, including the provision of safe learning facilities and public health supplies such as adequate supply of safe water, sanitation areas, hand washing stations, soap, alcohol, and other cleaning materials;

WHEREAS, the pilot testing will also lead to the resumption of the feeding program where the delivery of food packs to the beneficiaries will help mitigate the toll of the pandemic to their families and on their well-being;

WHEREAS, the pilot testing shall be implemented in low risk areas, and the participation by learners shall be voluntary and with express permission by their parents and/or guardians;

WHEREAS, to sustain the pilot testing of localized limited classes and the preparations for the eventual reopening of safe schools, it is important to prioritize the vaccination of teachers to mitigate the risk of adult-to-adult transmission in schools;

WHEREAS, the pilot testing program must be a shared responsibility of the DepEd, the LGUs, the parents or guardians, and the community as a whole, to ensure that our investments in education will not be put to waste, and put the education system back on its tracks in due time, and leaving no one behind;


WHEREAS, to ensure that this endeavor will progress through shared responsibility with the LGUs and will be implemented on a case-to-case basis, the Provincial School Board, the City School Board, and the Municipal School Board shall assume the major task of assessing and recommending whether to reopen, adopt selective school or localized lockdowns, and resume face-to-face classes in their respective localities, taking into consideration local conditions and resources;

WHEREAS, as education is the key to any country's success, we can no longer allow Filipino learners to be left behind, and we must be willing to take the first brave step of immediately launching the pilot testing of localized limited face-to-face classes to achieve the implementation and normalization of face-to-face education in the New Normal: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate of the Philippines, To express, as it hereby expresses, the sense of the Senate to recommend the resumption of face-to-face classes through the immediate launch of the pilot testing of localized limited face-to-face classes in low risk areas as identified by the Department of Education under risk-based assessment, following stringent mitigation measures, strict health protocols, and guidelines of the Department of Health and of the Inter-Agency Task Force on


the Management of Emerging and Infectious Diseases, to enable the Department of Education to gather evidence on the ground and design a framework for the safe reopening of schools.

Adopted,



VICENTE C. SOTTO III
President of the Senate

This Resolution was adopted by the Senate on March 2, 2021.



MYRA MARIE D. VILLARICA
Secretary of the Senate

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