



Oto and Mori, grade schoolers under the Basic Education Assistance in Mindanao as well as Pedro Baracullo, a high school freshman, and the rest of the students in the public elementary and high schools can now expect better learning conditions in the coming school years.

As part of the 10-point agenda, the government has called attention to the physical, mental, financial and digital infrastructures of education. Specifically, it is slated to build 3,000 school buildings or 6,000 classrooms every year, provide desks and chairs and books for students, grant scholarship to qualified poor families and put a computer in every school.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has emphasized the importance of education, during her inaugural speech, saying: “Everyone of school age will be in school in an uncrowded classroom, in surroundings conducive to learning. *Hangad kong makapasok sa eskwela ang bawat bata. Mayroong sapat na lugar sa silid-aralan at may computer sa bawat paaralan.*”

The construction of school buildings is part of the reforms under education and youth opportunity, the fifth of the five reform packages cited in her State of the Nation Address. The other four are: (a) job creation through economic growth; (b) anti-corruption through good government; (c) social justice and basic needs; and (d) energy independence and savings.

To eliminate classroom backlog and reduce class size to a ratio of 1:45 by end of school year 2009-2010, 3,000 school buildings will be built this year according to the Office of the Press Secretary (OPS). These will be constructed where they are needed most, including those where classrooms are overcrowded, the OPS said. Two thousand five hundred buildings will come from funds of the Department of Education (DepEd) and another 500 from the Overseas Development Aid.

The national government is also tapping local government units (LGUs) to help the DepEd address the shortage of classrooms. The OPS said LGUs could avail of loans through the National Development Company, which they can re-



pay from the education fund open to them and from their Internal Revenue Allotments.

At present, a typical class, which may be held on single double, triple and even quadruple shifts depending on the location, is composed of 55 students.

Other funding for the school buildings will come from foreign assistance, build-operate-transfer/build-lease-transfer financing schemes, local government funds, priority development assistance fund, Classrooms *Galing sa Mamamayang Pilipino* Abroad program and private sector-initiative like the Adopt-a-School Program.

### The Fifth Package

The government regards education as a right of every Filipino, a key investment to break the vicious cycle of poverty and a passport to more opportunities. President Arroyo calls the education and youth opportunity reform as the fifth package, sketching the agenda of action that will improve educational services and open new opportunities for the youth.

The plan to construct 3,000 buildings or 6,000 classrooms, provide desks and chairs and books for students, grant scholarship to qualified poor families and put a computer in every school – are just parts of the package.

Other parts of the package are intended to standardize day care instruction to provide appropriate early childhood education by amending the Maceda Law; install distance learning in conflict-afflicted areas; upgrade mathematics, science, English and values formation in basic education; implement optional bridge program; provide emergency employment for Metro Manila out-of-school youth; and equip an educational ladder between vocational-technological and college education.

Several bills are in tow as prerequisites in completing the education and youth opportunity package. These are: (a) amendments to Magna Carta for Public School Teachers (Republic Act or RA 4670), (b) amendments to RA 7880 or Roxas Law, which provides fair and equitable allocation of the DepEd's Budget for Capital Outlay; (c) removal of Election Duties from Teachers; and (d) amendments of education provisions in Local Government Code of 1991.

### The Three Rs of Education

The DepEd identified three Rs - reduce resource gaps, reengineer systems and procedures and raise learning outcomes, as components of the road map to better education and youth opportunity. The first R - reducing resource gaps - deals with the issue of classrooms, computers and early childhood education.

The second R involves reengineering of systems and procedures. This includes basic education information system, decentralization of teachers' payrolls, and the recent textbook policy and its textbook exchange program and universal procurement.

The third R aims to raise learning outcomes intended to: (a) continuously refine/enhance the basic education curriculum – English, Filipino, science, mathematics and Makabayan integrating values education; (b) enforce performance-based grading system; (c) fully implement "Every Child A Reader by Grade 3" Program; (d) implement the English Upgrading Program, a mentoring program for teachers and administrators to improve English language skills; (e) build Strong Republic schools; and (f) upgrade Madrasah Education Program.

To ensure that the expectations of Oto and Mori, Pedro Baracullo and the rest of public school students for better learning structures are met, the National Economic and Development Authority has adopted Agenda Two as part of the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) 2004-2010. The MTPDP is currently being drafted.

The basic task of the MTPDP is to fight poverty and build prosperity for the greatest number of the Filipino people. To realize this task, it fleshes out the 10-point legacy of the Macapagal-Arroyo administration. Education (building 3,000 schools) is one. The others include: (a) create six to 10 million jobs in six years; (b) balance the budget; (c) decentralize progress through the transportation networks and the digital infrastructure; (d) provide electricity and water supply to all barangays; (e) decongest Metro Manila by forming new government and housing centers in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao; (f) develop Clark and Subic as the best international service and logistic centers in the region; (g) automate the electoral process; (h) end the peace process in a just way; and (i) put to a fair closure the divisiveness among the EDSA 1, 2 and 3 forces. ■



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