Economic Issue of the Day

Vol. XII No. 2 (December 2012)

Enhanced K to 12 Basic Education Program: opportunities and challenges

Education equips an individual with the necessary knowledge and skills he/she needs to become a functional member of a society. According to the World Bank, education can also be one of the strongest instruments for reducing poverty, thereupon improving the well-being of the people. However, to establish and maintain a high-quality education system, proper investments must be made.

In the Philippine context, education remains a top priority. Despite the various development plans and projects formulated by the government and different sectors, the quality of Philippine education still leaves much room for improvement.

As part of the efforts of the present administration to respond to the perceived needs of the education sector, the Department of Education (DepEd) had pushed for the implementation of the “Enhanced K to 12 Basic Education Program.”

What is K to 12?

“K to 12” stands for kindergarten plus 12 years of elementary and secondary education. This educational system for basic and secondary education is widely adopted around the world.

DepEd Secretary Armin Luistro presented the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA) last March in the annual membership meeting of the Philippine Business for Education (PBEd). BESRA, as a package of reform initiatives, considers K to 12 as the flagship reform strategy. The objective of the program is to be able to produce more productive and responsible citizens equipped with the essential competencies and skills for both life-long learning and employment.

From among various proposals and studies conducted to come up with an enhanced model that is suitable to the Philippine context, DepEd proposed the K-6-4-2 model or the K to 12 model. This model involves kindergarten, six years of elementary education, four years of junior high school (Grades 7-10), and two years of senior high school (Grades 11-12). The two years of senior high school intend to provide time for students to consolidate acquired academic skills and competencies. The curriculum will allow specializations in science and technology, music and arts, agriculture and fisheries, sports, business and entrepreneurship.

The change is two-fold. It will give focus not only to the curriculum enhancement but also to the transition management as well. The intention of K to 12 is not merely to add two years of schooling but more importantly, to enhance the basic education curriculum.

Opportunities: Why is there a need for K to 12?

In a discussion paper on the “Enhanced K to 12 Basic Education Program” prepared by the DepEd in the last quarter of 2010, it was pointed out that K to 12 is an effective cure to the deteriorating quality of the Philippine education system. The low achievement score of Filipino students in the National Achievement Test (NAT) is one of the indicators of a defective education system.

The DepEd also noted that the present ten-year curriculum is congested wherein students are forced to absorb all the knowledge and skills necessary in a short and limited span of time. As a result, high school graduates are often unprepared for employment, entrepreneurship, or even higher education. They do not yet possess the basic competencies or even emotional maturity essential for the world outside the school. High school graduates who do not pursue higher education are thus unproductive or vulnerable to exploitative labor practices. In the same context, those who may be interested to put up their own business cannot enter into legal contracts yet. This partly explains why the number of unemployed Filipinos is increasing at an alarming rate.

The short duration of the basic education system is also a disadvantage for the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), especially the professionals, and those who intend to study abroad. DepEd further claims that the Filipino graduates are not automatically recognized as professionals abroad because the ten-year curriculum is usually perceived as insufficient.

The DepEd therefore strongly believes that the K to 12 program will give every learner the opportunity to receive quality education based on an enhanced and decongested curriculum that is internationally recognized and competitive.

The implementation plan

As a flagship education program of the Aquino administration, K to 12 has been proposed to be implemented by phases. Stakeholder consultations, policy discourses, and education summits were conducted to solicit inputs and feedback on the proposed model.

Figure 1 shows a summary of the implementation plan of the K to 12 program. Universal kindergarten has already become mandatory beginning school year (SY) 2011-2012. The new curriculum for Grade 1 and first-year Junior High School (Grade 7 JHS) students were already implemented this SY 2012-2013. This scheme gives the administration ample time to prepare and provide the necessary infrastructures, materials, and trainings for the Senior High School
Figure 1. K to 12 Proposed Implementation Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kinder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = Implementation of Grade 7 K to 12 curriculum; b = Year 5 implementation; c = First senior HS graduates; d = Implementation of Grade 1 K to 12 curriculum; e = First batch of K to 12 graduates

Source: Luistro (2012)

(ShS) education which is to be launched by SY 2016-2017. By SY 2018-2019, all students would have already finished 12 years of basic education and would therefore be ready to enter college.

Challenges: issues and concerns

The K to 12 program stirred mixed reactions from different sectors. While supporters strongly believed that this is the key to quality basic education, critics argued that it is merely a superficial solution and does not truly address the more fundamental problems of the educational system.

Critics also questioned the relationship of the education cycle length and education quality. They cited studies by the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) which revealed that longer education cycles do not necessarily result in better performance of students.

But one of the major concerns of the critics is the additional expense to be incurred by the parents. The longer education cycle would be an added burden to households and would later on translate to higher dropout rates. While the government can provide free public education, the allowances, transportation, school supplies, and other schooling expenses are still to be shouldered by the parents.

Meanwhile, some are worried about the rush to implement the K to 12 program. For one, according to a study conducted by a group of researchers from the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), the rush implementation of the program may have unintended effects on social equity if publicly funded. This is because many poor families do not reach beyond the secondary level of educational attainment. In addition, the revised curriculum is not yet fully tested. Finally, the study also raised concerns about the many reforms the DepEd is trying to implement all at the same time, including the implementation of the K to 12 program, which might result in similar reform failures in the past. It also expressed concern on the fact that DepEd might lose administrative concentration by spreading itself too thinly.

Conclusion

Critics presented valid concerns regarding the K to 12 program. The government must therefore continue to address such concerns to further develop the model. Though the program is ready to take off this year, continuous monitoring, evaluation, and program enhancement must be ensured.

And foremost, it must be made clear that a longer education cycle alone could be useless without corresponding improvements in other aspects of the education system. Proper training of teachers, additional classrooms and textbooks, better facilities such as libraries and computer rooms must therefore be deemed as urgent as the implementation of this program.

References


