

PRESS RELEASE**Striking a balance in quality basic education**

PASIG CITY, March 1, 2017 – Coming from a family of teachers, and being a professor herself, the last thing Education Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones aspires for her *kabaro* is that their mission and passion be obscured by the demands and challenges of the profession. There are weaknesses in the system that the Secretary wants to address gradually, but eventually, to achieve quality, accessible, relevant, and liberating basic education for all Filipinos.

The Department's lion's share of the annual national budget, as mandated by the Constitution, is allotting a huge bulk for the learners and DepEd personnel. Intent on delivering a learner-centered education, it is the first time DepEd is investing heavily on providing the requirements of all learners.

Salary

Part of encouraging passionate and competent teachers who work overseas to return to the country, DepEd collaborated with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and other government agencies in the program called "*Sa 'Pinas, Ikaw ang Ma'am at Sir.*" Since its launch in 2014, the program has filled 660 teacher items in schools where the teachers' specific expertise is needed, with salaries more competitive than household service workers (HSWs) wages in a number of countries.

In fact, the basic salary of P19,077 (bonuses/allowances not yet included) for Teacher 1 in public schools attracts more private school teachers to migrate to public schools, given the average basic salary of P8,000 for an entry-level teacher in a regular provincial private school.

The Department, which aims to reach 25 million learners, duly recognizes that it will not be able to accomplish its mission without the teachers whose dedication is completely on nurturing and guiding the Filipino youth. The attitude is not cavalier, but heedful – of the widening salary gap with private schools and other service sectors, of the inflationary impact, of the premium on senior teachers and teachers who specialize in Math and Science, and of the huge Department population.

SEF

Undersecretary for Planning and Field Operations Jesus Mateo reiterated during the February 6 meeting with Teachers' Dignity Coalition (TDC) that while the Joint Circular (JC) No. 1, series of 2017 issued by the DepEd, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) does not include allowances of nationally hired teachers in payments chargeable to the Special Education Fund (SEF), local government units (LGUs) are not prohibited from providing such, which may be sourced from the LGUs' regular budget or General Fund.

With the allotment of P19.4 billion in the 2017 budget for hiring 53,831 teaching and 13,280 non-teaching positions, the Department is gradually addressing the lack in nationally hired personnel remedied temporarily by the LGUs' hiring of teachers. Locally hired teachers who qualify under the DepEd's hiring policy are given premium in filling the national vacancies.

Meanwhile, significant increases in the schools' Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) progressively allows elbow room for schools to conduct training and seminars through learning action cells (LAC) that enable teachers to carry out professional development activities even among themselves.

Amid fears that the JC might spell the removal of welfare assistance and medical compensation sourced from SEF, DepEd teaching and non-teaching personnel are already entitled to medical benefits under the expansion of *Tamang Serbisyong Kalusugang Pampamilya* (TSeKaP), formerly known as the Primary Care Benefit (PCB) 1 of PhilHealth. As mandated under DepEd Memorandum No. 30, series of 2014, DepEd personnel are entitled to basic laboratory tests, health profiling, basic screening for cancer of the cervix and breast, and counseling in PhilHealth-accredited clinics and hospitals. Currently, the Department is gradually working out the possibility of granting PCB 2 that provides for select free medicine and hospitalization services for DepEd employees.

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