

**PRESIDENT FERDINAND ROMUALDEZ MARCOS JR.'s
SPEECH AT THE BASIC EDUCATION REPORT 2024**

Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila, Pasay City
January 25, 2024

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Thank you very much, Vice President and Secretary of Education, Sara Duterte.

Please, take your seats.

And thank you not only for the introduction, but the most eye-opening report that you have given us for the year 2023.

Your excellencies of the diplomatic corps; Cabinet members who are here with us today; Senator Sherwin Gatchalian, Chair of the Senate Committee on Basic Education; Senator Pia Cayetano; Education Undersecretary Gina Gonong; education organizing partners; fellow workers in government; other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Today we are here for the annual ritual that millions of our school children undergo: to read our school report card. That is how education is improved, whether it is for one individual or for an entire race: To take stock of where we are, to find feats worth celebrating, identify flaws that we need to correct.

It's not just learners in classrooms who must be graded; it is also the educational system that we must assess as well. In fact, we should hold ourselves to a higher standard than those that we set for our children.

We should give ourselves assignments harder than what we ask our learners to submit. We must subject ourselves to tougher diagnostic tools so we can use the results to make lesson plans that will help us meet our greatest obligation to our youth, to our people: to mold them into critical thinkers, into problem solvers, brave visionaries and to ensure that they wield the skills that will allow them to succeed in the future.

I am happy to note that this report, the Basic Education Report, is candid, clear, comprehensive, and I think you will agree, quite compelling. [applause] So, certainly the milestones achieved so far deserve our congratulations.

Daghang salamat, Vice President Inday Sara. [applause] Your stewardship of the biggest agency, with the largest constituency, and, I would say, most difficult mandate.

Against this backdrop are tasks that complicate our mission: to recoup losses from the pandemic, retool the curriculum and reform the system.

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It is not easy to reboot a system with millions of moving parts that are all closely interconnected, in which the failure of just a single part leads to the entire ecosystem failing.

But as your report has shown, the building blocks of a modern, responsive educational system have now been laid. It is something we have waited for — for many, many, many years.

At this juncture in our transformational journey, my instruction is simply this: Padayon! Padayon! Padayon! [applause]

We are decongesting the curriculum, with a focus on the development of foundational skills. I am happy that the DepEd is piloting a new K to 10 curriculum in 35 schools across the regions.

As in any government project design, the way forward is to prototype in order to validate what was written in the presentation, in the PowerPoint.

This administration continues to support these remedial initiatives, like learning camps, to ensure that no one is left behind.

Maganda rin ang Catch-Up Friday. And amidst the rising sea of novel education theories, one has stood the test of time: Nasa pagbabasa ang pag-asa. Nasa pagbibilang ang magandang kinabukasan.

Reading and Numeracy. [applause] The classic three arts—reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Not only are they the starting blocks in the journey of knowledge, they also set the velocity and volume of what can be learned later in life. We cannot continue developing learners who can barely read or write.

Hindi ito pasa load na bahala na ang susunod na grado na ayusin ang kakulangan ng pinagmulan.

I am happy that, while we await the congressional rewrite of the Procurement Law, the DepEd has awarded projects worth PhP11.7 billion. We should accelerate the building of more classrooms, laboratories and schools.

Despite institutional bottlenecks not of your making, the DepEd has already built and repaired thousands of classrooms [last] this */sic/* year and I look forward to seeing more of these this year and in the years ahead.

As you build and repair these classrooms, let us be mindful: storms and earthquakes are not getting any less frequent and neither are they getting any weaker. That is why we are putting more emphasis on the quality of the schools that we build.

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Nagbabago na ang panahon, kaya kailangan na natin magbago ang ating pamamaraan ng konstruksyon, hindi lamang sa mga paaralan kung hindi sa lahat ng proyektong imprastraktura.

And for this, I would like to mention and thank, and make a special mention of the World Bank and the ADB for their aid in boosting our schools' resilience to disasters. But it is not only in buildings that must carry the "Do not delay" signs. Books, furniture, other pedagogical tools must be stickered with "Please expedite" reminders.

I am glad that amidst all the current barriers and shortcomings, the DepEd has filled its shopping cart with ICT equipment such as computers, laptops, WiFi services. The road to the future is rendered in digimap. One of the guides there calls for WiFi services to expand beyond the present 7 in 10 schools. We must do this.

Doon sa mga nagdududa, ang babala nila baka madaming classrooms, baka hindi kaya ng budget.

My standard response to those who clip our wings with their fears is: We use the mandate of the people to achieve the grand, not to waste it on the petty. We go big, or we go home.

Apart from the textbooks procured by the DepEd for our learners, I hope books for the blind and other assistive equipment for our children with special needs are also in the pipeline. We cannot mainstream those in the margins if resources for them are miniscule.

Sa usaping ito, gusto ko rin kayong papurihan sa mga non-traditional programs, tulad ng Alternative Learning System classes, targeted for the old because learning, like love, has no "best before" date.

There are other bold but bespoke programs worth commending: for indigenous peoples, for farm schools, for Muslim children, just to name a few. In the end, the reforms that we envision for our educational system should be showcased in our classrooms.

The gist of which is this: A learner with books on the table, a well-trained, highly-motivated, well-paid teacher in front of them, teaching a curriculum carefully curated to their needs.

At sa gitna nito, ang sentro ng ating pagsisikap: Isang batang natututo.

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To those who are hungry, we will provide meals, because one cannot feed the mind if the stomach is grumbling. Our School-Based Feeding Program should have beneficiaries carefully chosen, supplies locally sourced as much as possible, complemented by similar nutrition programs by other agencies in accordance with the National Nutrition Program.

To ensure our students' and teachers' health, we urge the DOH to work with the DepEd by strengthening health centers to support the network of school-based health facilities and dental clinics.

Every school will steadfastly stand as a no-bully zone; a sanctuary for diversity, a resource center for teens, a psychosocial first aid center, a mental health nurturer, a bulwark against the drug menace. A safe space for all. And most importantly, a safe space for our children.

To those who cross these lines, a layer of tripwires catches them: the Learner Rights and Protection Office, Telesafe Hotline and the Children Protection Committees.

But through the ages, there has been one unvarnished truth in education: teachers occupy the core of learning. They should be at the center of our great reform movement.

In fact, when the K to 12 was up for review, the teachers on the ground were the first to be asked for feedback. They willingly gave theirs, not because they are against change, but because they want change to succeed. And when it comes to reforms, they are not mere passive recipients or alienated implementers. They are much more than that.

Teachers are incubators of ideas. Teachers are innovators.

So as we move forward, they will be the lynchpin of a national standard for learning competencies. You will be the tip of the spear as we modernize system assessments under the Project for Learning Upgrade Support or PLUS. Those who teach must continually train, and we will roll out those programs to upskill competencies, drawn from experiences and tested best practices.

We are cognizant that VP Sara and the whole of the DepEd family are pulling out all the stops for the betterment of our basic education by focusing on ensuring teachers' teaching quality, competency and well-being; improving our learners' capacities and nutrition; building better and more facilities to aid both teaching and learning.

These goals will be hard to meet, as are all great endeavors, but I believe that we will get there with all that you have done thus far and with all that you will accomplish moving forward.

We are one in our dream to build a “Bagong Pilipinas,” where we enjoy the opportunities of a modern, vibrant and peaceful country. This can be fully realized if we continue transforming our education system—for the sake of our beloved children.

I thus call on everyone to join us in this daunting but extremely rewarding endeavor under Bagong Pilipinas, marked by a MATATAG educational system that paves the way for a more empowered, secure and progressive future.

Mabuhay ang Kagawaran ng Edukasyon!

Mabuhay ang mga Pilipinong mag-aaral!

Mabuhay ang ating mga guro! Mabuhay ang DepEd!

Mabuhay kayong lahat!

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