BRIGADA ESKWELA PROGRAM IN THE NEW NORMAL ERA
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The school calendar for the year 2021 to 2022 shall be opening soon. At this time, the educational community headed by the Department of Education, through the regional and division heads, school superintendents and other officials are very busy preparing public school facilities for the influx of students eager to start the new season.

During this period, the Filipino sense of “being one for a common goal”, the Bayanihan spirit of the Filipino is most felt. Teachers, parents, students, alumni, socio-economic groups and other non-government organizations converge together to the school grounds and share their skills, talents, resources, time and brut strength for the repair, maintenance and cleanup of elementary and secondary public school classroom and facilities. This event is known as “Brigada Eskwela” or the National School Maintenance Week. This event dates back since year 2003 when the Department of Education (DepEd) implemented the program to address the limited resources of the department against the rising need for classrooms and facilities for the student. It is aimed to encourage awareness and importance of education specially in the rural and far flung areas. This act of volunteerism became so successful that the DepEd made it a permanent part of the school year calendar and mandated school officials nationwide to conduct the “Brigada Eskwela” weeks before each school year opens.

Brigada Eskwela objectives

Teachers, parents, students, civic society, business community and people working for the government gets the opportunity collaborate and actively participate in the “Bayanihan” and prepare the future leaders of the land, the students, for quality education. It may seem the greatest beneficiaries of this endeavor are the students, paving the way for conducive and
unhampered paths to learning. Typical school opening day jitter and problem of teachers and school officials such as over-crowded classrooms, dilapidated chair and armrest, dirty classrooms and unhealthy toilet are addressed thus allowing the teachers to do its rightful task i.e. teach on the first day. However, looking deeper, the program became so successful not only because students get better quality education. More than that, the “Brigada Eskwela” gives all the stakeholder the opportunity to feel and practice that sense of patriotism; that innate Bayanihan spirit amongst Filipino; together as one, no task is too big to achieve. Through these activities, values and competencies of learners are developed and enhanced within the school is fortified.

**Brigada Eskwela during the pre pandemic**

As directed by the officials of DepEd, the implementation of the “Brigada Eskwela” program for each district varies based on site conditions. A yearly theme is set to achieve a common goal.

The event normally kick start with a bang and in festive mood by parading within the school vicinity as if to invite more volunteers to join the task.
 Volunteers pick their own spots to contribute to the common goal. Some may showcase their artsy side by painting the classroom walls while others help repair broken chairs and desks. Techie people mend the electrical wirings while others assume Super Mario role by fixing the plumbing. Overhanging tree branches are cut while plants are organized to provide beautiful landscape and conducive environment for learning. Though tasks may be hard, everybody is having fun.

_Brigada Eskwela during the new normal_
Even with the covid-19 scare, the Bayanihan spirit will never die. People will still find ways to help and continue a tradition specially if its for a noble cause. The Brigada Eskwela’s face had changed. Nowadays, with the blended learning scheme enforced, school grounds are populated not by students, but by new set of heroes willing to sacrifice their lives to provide proper education to our learners. The task is not only confined within the school premises, but rather, the battlefield gone wider.

In the absence of face-to-face classes, the Department of Education adopted the blended education system. Technology now play a vital role. Educators conduct virtual classes via the internet to convey the lesson using mobile devices such as cellular phones, tablet and personal computers.
However, not everybody has access to these devices or has the infrastructure to receive internet signal. With the use of video and audio recording devices, the teacher conducts her lesson in a virtual classroom for students to interact with. The pre-recorded learning modules are aired to designated television and radio channels for the student’s consumption.
And finally, to cater to those students who doesn’t have access to mobiles devices, the government through the initiative of DepEd, lessons and activity sheets are prepared in printed format and distributed to each students falling under these category. This is where the emerging Brigada Eskwela 2.0 warriors contributes most.

The activities we saw in the previous Brigada Eskwela events were diverted to new task to address the blended learning scheme. School ground still continue to be the central operation.
hub so keeping it clean and disinfected remains top priority. Funds and other resources donated that previously used mainly for the physical maintenance are diverted in buying paper, inks and other peripherals to mass produce the learning modules for students. Volunteers who had shared their precious time now help in organizing the preparation and distribution of these materials. Some provide free transportation while others in the physical delivery and collection of these modules.

**Conclusion**

As we continue to believe what Dr. Jose P. Rizal said “Nasa kabataan and pag-asa ng bayan”, providing the best possible education to the Filipino youth remains a top priority.

Whatever the situation we faced, no matter the odds are, the resiliency of Filipino and the spirit of Bayanihan will forever be alive as proven by the Brigada Eskwela program.

References:
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