FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING: WHAT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS MAY EXPECT

by:

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Authorities are considering allowing a limited number of face-to-face classes in low-risk zones. In the midst of the health crisis, education groups hailed the pilot's acceptance as a “major step toward enhancing the delivery of education”.

In a trial program approved by President Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines will reopen up to 120 schools for restricted face-to-face sessions after more than a year of fighting the coronavirus pandemic. The operational rules were developed in collaboration with the Department of Health (DOH) and with the cooperation of the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, and other organizations specialized in children's health, according to the Department of Education (DepEd).

The rules take into account "available personal protective equipment, sanitation, detection and referral, ventilation, contact tracing, and quarantine, coordination, and contingency measures," according to the department. Before the school reopened, the instructions included protocol for preparing school personnel, students, and the community.

The test run came as pleasant news to parents and supporters who had been advocating for the safe reopening of schools, believing that pupils were not learning much in the remote learning environment.

What to expect
The pilot will consist of a mix of face-to-face classes in the classroom and previous distant learning methods. Students in kindergarten through third grade will spend no more than three hours in the classroom. Senior high school pupils, on the other hand, will be in class for a maximum of four hours. In collaboration with local health professionals and pediatric groups, the DepEd developed the initial grade levels that will be included in the test run. Experts say further research is needed into the effect of the Delta variant on children because the symptoms of most Filipino children infected with COVID-19 are still minor.

The experimental run of limited face-to-face sessions, is a "joint obligation of the DepEd, DOH, with the consent of IATF, and the local government units themselves and the parents." Teachers aged 65 and under, as well as those without comorbidities, can enroll in the limited face-to-face classes, regardless of their immunization status.

Better late than never

Prior to this, the Philippines was one of only two nations in the world that had yet to reopen schools since the pandemic was proclaimed by the World Health Organization in March 2020. But according to UNICEF, children are less likely to return to school if they are absent for an extended period of time. Children who are not in school are more prone to early marriage, teen pregnancy, and child labor. The organization has been very vocal about the importance of children’s education around the world and the importance of in-school learning.

More children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable and underprivileged, will drop out of school if schools continue to close. Children from the most marginalized communities pay the highest price for a lack of quality remote
learning, damaging their future and perpetuating inequity. Whereas, children's emotional and cognitive development are severely harmed by a lack of in-person engagement with peers. The missed chance for immediate teacher-learner connection during lessons hinders the learner's competency development and has a negative influence on learning quality.

This decision of the president and the education bureau met different views among different sectors. Some supported the idea while some had some unfavorable opinions. But the decision pointed out the importance of school and its environment in learning.

All available procedures to limit virus transmission in school must be adopted to safeguard the safety of children who will be attending in-person sessions. Personal protective equipment, sanitation, detection and referral, ventilation, contact tracking, and quarantine, coordination, and contingency measures are all covered by the pilot implementation of face-to-face learning. It also outlines actions to prepare school officials, students, and the community prior to the reopening of the school.

The pilot test’s findings will enable the government to complete its roadmap toward the ultimate safe reopening of schools across the country while improving its medical and socioeconomic responses to the pandemic.

Reference: