FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IN SCHOOLS

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Executive Order No. 2 or the Freedom of Information Order was signed by President Rodrigo R. Duterte on July 23, 2016 in Davao City. It is the law that established Freedom of Information in the Philippines, specifically the offices under the Executive Branch. The order requires all government offices, government owned companies and state university and colleges to make public records, transactions, and any other information to be available to Filipino citizens. Information that may jeopardize privacy and national security are restricted. FOI balances continuing practical information disclosure efforts where agencies are duty-bound to publish information in the spirit of transparency.

On November 25, 2016, the Department of Education (DepEd) has released DepEd Order No. 72 s. 2016 also known as Department of Education’s Freedom of Information Manual and Details. This is in pursuant to the abovementioned executive order. This will enable DepEd to craft mechanisms and policies that will improve efficiency in promoting transparency for the improvement of the country. The department should be able to play its role in educating every Filipino citizen about the Freedom of Information which is one of the basic rights.

Education Secretary Leonor M. Briones stimulated all stakeholders to make use of all accessible data of the department to battle any form of dishonesty in the education sector. This was highlighted during the International Policy Forum on Using Open School Data which anchored to the policy to improve transparency and accountability in the system of education which was held from January 24 to 26 at the SEAMEO INNOTECH
in Quezon City, Philippines. Secretary Briones stated that they want to encourage the media, research groups, and all stakeholders to step on of our seriousness in sharing information so that we can enrich our public discussion of issues of education.

In addition, Secretary Briones stressed that the Department is a very strong promoter of freedom of information, and is devoted and active in promoting transparency and accountability. The department has a communications group, and that any entity or individual who asks for information may access the data, if these are available. The Department of Education ordered all its offices to create their own transparency board and submit annually a school report card. This will allow more stakeholders to be aware and informed on school funding, number of enrolments, number of classrooms, teacher qualifications and others. This will enable to close gaps and further improve the delivery of efficient and quality education.

Another way of promoting Freedom of Information in schools is through campus journalism. Campus journalism competitions start from school level up to the national level. Every school that will participate in press conference is required to provide their school newspaper. The publication of school newspaper was based on DepEd Order n. 60 s. 1987 or the Guidelines Governing the Publication of High School Newspapers and the Campus Journalism Act of 1991.

The 2017 National School Press Conference (NSPC) was held on Pagadian City on January 22 to 25, 2017. NSPC is the largest journalism contest in the Philippines planned annually by the DepEd. Assistant Secretary Umali had words of encouragement to the aspiring journalists to use their talents and skills to help bring about change.

Freedom of information has a positive influence on journalism practice. The Freedom of Information Act portends good for journalism practice in schools. Freedom to access information is an essential part of freedom of expression.
References:


DepEd, UNESCO-IIEP: Effective use of open school data addresses education concerns, battles corruption. Philippine Information Agency. January 31, 2018

DepEd Order No. 72 s. 2016

DepEd Order no. 60 s. 1987

Executive Order No. 2, July 2016

1987 Philippines Constitution