



BASIC EDUCATION

SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN THE PHILIPPINES REPORT



SITUATION
OF
CHILDREN
IN THE PHILIPPINES

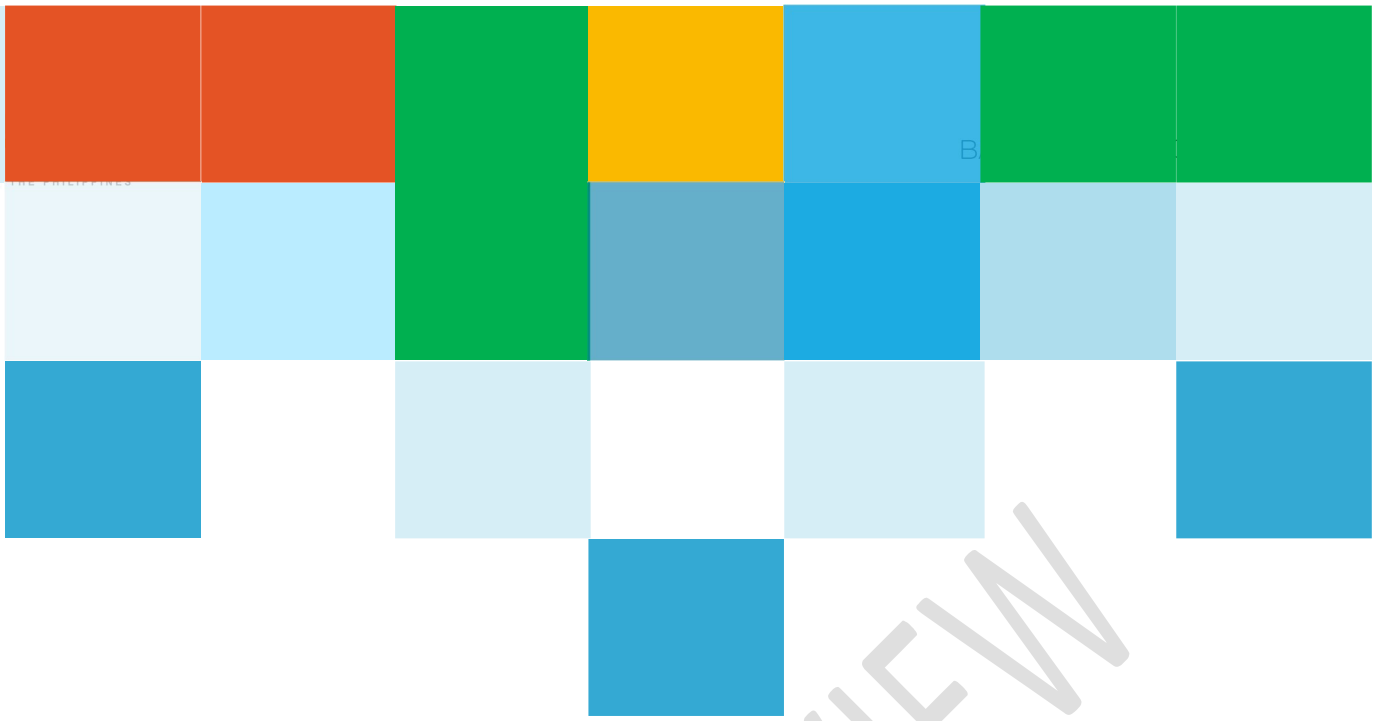


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Basic education in the Philippines primarily refers to the compulsory K to 12 Program, wherein every child is required to attend school from kindergarten level at around age 5 years to grade 12 or senior high school at around age 16 -17 years.

Launched and started in the school year 2012-2013, the K-12 Program is a comprehensive reform of the previous basic education system aims to among others catch up with global standards and strengthen preparation for higher education as well as immediate employability. The education system also includes an Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) Program which is an important parallel learning opportunity for learners who are unable to attend or finish basic education through the formal system.

The Philippines faces significant challenges in its education system: declining enrollment in elementary levels, exacerbated by the pandemic's prolonged school closures, and alarming rates of 'learning poverty'.

The government through the DepEd manages the basic education system and provides access to free basic education in public schools and state and local universities and colleges (SLUCs) throughout the country. The private sector also offers paid basic education through private academic institutions, including universities and colleges.

School attendance is fairly high at all education levels based on the latest national household survey (2019 Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey, PSA). However, net enrolment rates in the basic education system are generally lower and drop from elementary (primary) through junior and senior high school levels.

Net enrolment in elementary level has been on the decline in the last decade, since 2012, but has been increasing at the junior and senior high school levels.

The pandemic may have contributed to the decline in elementary level participation as well as learning outcomes. Notably, the Philippines was among a few countries with the longest period of schools closure during the pandemic and was also among the last to reopen which may have long-term impacts on

children's development and overall education outcomes.

In 2022, a brief by the World Bank and UNESCO Institute of Statistics informed of 'learning poverty' in the Philippines citing that 91 per cent of children in the country at late primary age are not proficient in reading. The indicator is a composite of the share of pupils below a minimum proficiency in reading from the 2019 Southeast Asia-Primary Learning Metrics and share of primary-aged children out-of-school.

As early as 2019, indications of a 'learning crisis' in the country has already emerged with the release of key findings of the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) by the OECD. The PISA exercise indicated that on average only 1 out of 5 Filipino high school students has achieved at least the minimum proficiency level in overall reading and mathematical literacy.

The study placed the Philippines well below the average performance among all participating countries, including those in the ASEAN region. The same assessment conducted post-pandemic, in 2022, found that the same challenges persist.

Child Rights Situation Analysis

The key indicators in this subdimension pertain to learners' access, participation, and progression in the education system (e.g., enrolment in formal and alternative educational systems, school attendance, gender parity index education, and completion, cohort survival, dropout rates, etc.); and quality of education services (e.g., basic and functional literacy, teachers, special needs education, infrastructure, facilities, and budget).

A more recent emerging quality indicator is learning poverty, which, combining both schooling and learning indicators, measures the share of children who have failed to reach minimum reading proficiency adjusted for the proportion of children who are out of school and therefore assumed not to have reached minimum reading proficiency.

Access to basic education

A total of 25.5 million learners are enrolled in basic education for SY 2022-2023, just one per cent higher than the previous school year. For every ten learners, five are in elementary level, three in junior high school and two in senior high school; and nine are in public schools, including state/local universities and colleges (SLUCs), and one in private schools, including Philippine schools overseas. Total enrolment has recovered from a 3.3 per cent drop at the start of the pandemic in 2020 and has since increased by 6 per cent by 2022.

Net enrolment at the elementary level has been decreasing steadily since 2012 — from a high 97.2 per cent in 2012 to 89.8 per cent in 2021. In 2021, the Philippines has the lowest primary net enrolment rate among 8 ASEAN countries (including Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam) and 125th of 135 countries (UNESCO Institute of Statistics).

On a positive note, net enrolment at junior and senior high school levels, while not very high compared to that in primary level, has been increasing since 2015/2016 — rising from 73.6 per cent in 2015 to 86 per cent in 2021 for junior high and increasing from 37.4 per cent at its introduction in 2016 to 58 per cent in 2021 for senior high. Net enrolment reduces markedly between each educational level with average net enrolment rate over the comparable period 2016-2021 at 92.9 per cent at the elementary level then dropping to 79.4 per cent and 48.3 per cent in junior and senior high school levels, respectively.

School attendance rates in age groups corresponding to primary and junior and senior high school, based on responses to the 2019 FLEMMS, are considerably higher than net enrolment rates and are not markedly different across levels. Almost 98 per cent of children aged 6-11 years (~primary), 95.1 per cent of children aged 12-15 years (~junior high school), and 88.2 per cent of children aged 16-17 years (~senior high school) were reported to be currently attending school in 2019. BARMM registered the lowest proportion of children currently attending school across all age groups — 90.7 per cent of children aged 6-11 years, 87.5 per cent of those aged 12-15 years, and 73.9 per cent of 16-17-year olds.

The primary reasons given for not attending school are that parents believe children aged

5-11 years are too young to go to school (presumably in reference to 5-year-olds going to kindergarten) and lack of personal interest among children aged 12-15 years and 16-17 years, as well as employment and looking for work for the last cohort.

Gender parity in net enrolment rate reverses from primary level to senior high school. While there are more boys enrolled at the primary level and almost the same enrolment of girls and boys in junior high school, girls predominates senior high school, indicating higher dropouts among boys. Historically, there are more dropouts (or school leavers) recorded among boys. Dropout rates, for both boys and girls, have been reduced until 2018 but started to rise rapidly in 2019 and through the pandemic. The primary level dropout rate was almost zero in 2018 coming from 6.3 per cent in 2010 but bounced to 3.8 per cent in 2020. In junior high school, the dropout rate was 7.8 per cent in 2010 dipping to 3.8 per cent in 2018 before climbing to 6.2 per cent by 2020. School leavers in senior high school constitute 6.6 per cent in 2020, a quick rise from 3.9 per cent in 2018.

Survival rates in school are higher for girls than for boys at every level of education, and for every year between 2015–2020. Cohort survival rates, which measure the percentage of those enrolled in the first grade who reach the last grade of an education level, began to drop in 2019 and through 2020, during the same period increased dropout rates were recorded, at all school levels. Remarkably, survival rates immediately bounced up to almost 100 per cent in 2021.

Girls are more likely to complete elementary and junior and senior high school education than boys. Average completion rates for girls in 2015-2020 were 92.8 per cent at elementary level, 86.8 per cent in junior high school, and 80 per cent in senior high school, compared to 88.9 per cent, 79.7 per cent, and 71.5 percent, respectively, for boys. Completion rates started to decline in all education levels prior to the

pandemic but quickly recovered, reaching close to 100 per cent by 2021.

Nearly 4 million learners have availed of the ALS programme from 2017 until 2022 with average annual enrolment of over 656 thousand students. However, a sharp 42 per cent decline is noted from 823,123 in 2018 to 472,869 in 2021 before rising to 640,448 in 2022, just below the annual average. COVID-19 and attendant lockdown measures could account for this decline. The DepEd's Bureau of Alternative Education has since partnered with UNICEF to launch the ALS 2.0 ICT Strategic Plan 2022–2026 which, in part, seeks to address access issues. On any given year, three out of four ALS enrollees follow the Accreditation & Equivalency Secondary level. In 2022, close to 60 per cent of ALS learners are males, most of whom taking the Accreditation & Equivalency for elementary and secondary levels. There are almost equal numbers of female and male enrollees in the Basic Literacy Programme.

In 2019, one out of 20 children of school-age for basic education, 6-17 years, is out of school. Out-of-school children comprise 2.1 per cent of children aged 6-11 year, 4.9 per cent of 12-15-year-olds and 11.8 per cent of those aged 16-17 years in the Philippines. The BARM region had the highest prevalence of 12.6 per cent of school-age children not attending school in 2019 as well as in every age group corresponding to basic education.

Quality of basic education

Functional literacy has improved proportionally between 2013 and 2019 for all age groups 10-14 years, 15-19 years, and 20-24 years, and among both males and females.

Functional literacy rates were higher among girls than among boys, which could be because boys often enter the labour-force at an earlier age than girls. Conversely, higher functional literacy rates among girls reportedly do not translate into proportional adequate

employment and labour-force participation for women in the Philippines.

The National Capital Region registered the highest functional literacy rate of 96.5 per cent, while the BARMM registered the lowest at 71.6 per cent, significantly below the national average of 91.6 per cent.

The average number of learners per teacher (or the learner—teacher ratio) in the public basic education system is still way below the standard pupil/student-teacher ratio of 45 at all education levels (per DepEd Department Order No. 77, S. 2010) but generally increasing. The ratio is higher in senior high schools than in elementary and junior high schools. The ratio varies significantly across regions in 2022. CAR and Region VIII have the lowest ratios at the elementary level, at 20:1 and 22:1; CAR and Region VIII and Caraga Region with 21:1 and 22:1 ratios, respectively, at junior high school; and Regions I, II, and V and Caraga Region each with 31:1 in senior high school.

Conversely, the BARMM has the highest ratios at all education levels and is joined by Region XI with a learner-teacher ratio higher than the standard — BARMM has 67:1 while Region XI has 46:1. The disparities would likely result in worse educational outcomes for those regions with higher learner-to-teacher ratios.

There are just over a million basic education teachers in the country in 2021. However, the number has decreased from 2018 due mainly to the decline in teachers in private schools and exacerbated by the pandemic. While the total number of public school teachers continue to rise, those in elementary level are getting fewer since 2020 and the number in junior high school is lower in 2021.

The number of Special Needs Education (SNeD; formerly SPED) teachers in public

schools has increased twofold since 2012 but may not be fast enough to serve the increasing number of SNeD/SPED learners.

From SY 2021-2022 to SY 2022-2023, the number of SNeD learners grew by 42 per cent — from 138,000 to just short of 200,000 learners, outpacing the number of SNeD teachers, which increased by only 3 per cent — from only 5,001 to 5,147 teachers. The current ratio of 38 SNeD learners per SNeD teacher in 2022 is well above the ideal pupil/student-teacher ratio (for all exceptionalities and grade levels, ranging from 2:1 to 30:1) (per DepEd Department Order No. 93, S. 2010 dated July 26, 2010).

Nationally, 59.2 per cent of schools at elementary level, 56.3 per cent of schools at junior high level, and 29.0 per cent of schools at senior high level do not offer access for persons with disabilities. The quality of the education children and youth with a form of disability depends on the extent to which their school's infrastructure can accommodate their needs.

Overall, nine of every ten of public schools have water supply — 93.5 per cent of elementary schools, 95.5 per cent of junior high schools, and 98.3 per cent of senior high schools. BARMM lags the majority of regions and the national average with a proportion of only 77.5 per cent at elementary level. WASH services can impact learning, health and dignity, particularly for girls and those of menstruation age.

In 2022, the Department of Education received PHP 631.77 billion, or around 12.58 per cent of the total national budget. This falls below the 15 per cent-20 per cent target set by UNESCO Member States in 2015.

Equity & Risk

EQUITY

Gender

There is a higher ratio of girls to boys in the higher levels of education; this ratio also increases between educational levels. This suggests that dropout rates are higher among boys than girls, a key reason for which is cited to be “lack of interest” among boys and another key reason being boys are more often encouraged to find paid work in adolescence. This is concerning for boys, as dropping out of education is shown to limit future opportunities for children and young people. Also of concern are findings pertaining to quality of education, which indicate higher attainment rates across indicators like functional literacy among girls than boys. However, this does not translate into proportional employment rates for girls, suggesting that other barriers - like domestic labour, childcare and gendered social norms - create inequities for girls and women with regard to employability in later life.

A 2021 World Bank report titled ‘Overcoming barriers to Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Philippines’ shows that the gender gap in labour-force participation in the Philippines currently stands at 27 per cent. The report posits a number of possible reasons which include: the amount of time women spend on domestic activities; childcare responsibilities; gendered social norms; a lack of flexible work arrangements; lack of support for female entrepreneurs; lack of professional networking opportunities for women; limited reskilling and upskilling opportunities; limited support from firms for women to re-enter the labour-force following childbirth; gender wage gaps; and more recently the impact of the COVID pandemic.

Disability

Some children with disabilities are not able to attend school because the system is not fully inclusive of their needs. This is likely due to there being a limited number of SNeD/SPED schools, or those with facilities to accommodate those with disabilities. There are also relatively few SNeD/SPED teachers and - even though this number is increasing - this is likely to be an inequity regarding education attainment for children with disabilities, as traditional teaching methods and mechanisms are often not suited to those with additional or different educational needs.

Subnational

Quality indicators suggest that educational attainment is more limited in some regions than others. The BARMM region in particular registers a functional literacy rate among those aged 10-64 of 71.6 per cent, compared to a national average of 91.6 per cent. High rates of poverty in this region, which can mean education is deprioritized among poorer families, is one explanation for this. Another is the low teacher to student ratio in BARMM - at 1:67 for junior high school - resulting in

worse education outcomes, which could be explained by insufficient budget for teachers' salaries at the regional level in BARMM.

Others

Age is a factor creating inequity in access to schooling, with older adolescents at senior high school level registering markedly lower attendance rates (49.5 per cent in 2020) than those at elementary (89.1 per cent) and junior high school (JHS) level (81.5 per cent). Kindergarten enrolment rates are also lower at 66.1 per cent, for which one reason may be a perception among parents and caregivers that children of these age groups are too young to attend school: this was the reason provided by 97.8 per cent of respondents to the 2019 FLEMMS survey when asked why those aged 3-4 years did not attend school.

RISKS

Natural hazards

- **Climate change and changing weather patterns pose a significant risk to education.** For example, rising temperatures mean classrooms often become too hot as they are not built to withstand substantial heat with few electric fans, limited WASH facilities and some even lacking roofs and effective shading. This risk is so severe that there are reportedly discussions under way about the possibility of moving the school calendar to run from June to March (which was the schedule prior to the pandemic) so that the hottest months are avoided. Schools and other educational institutions are also at risk of stronger typhoons, which many are not built to withstand. While digital systems are being introduced and developed to counter the impacts of resulting learning loss, these are not so effective as in-person learning.
- **To respond to risks posed by severe weather, the DepEd has a Matatag Agenda which includes plans to build climate-resilient schools.** DepEd is also seeking to ensure learning continuity through the Centre-Based Program, which aims to identify alternative venues for learning.

Conflict

- **Over a three-year period (2017-2019), the education of at least 20,000 children was disrupted following an increase in verified attacks on schools and protected personnel, particularly impacting the Mindanao region.** While the risk of this continuing to occur is reduced by the 2019 peace agreement and establishment of BARMM as an autonomous region, it nonetheless highlights conflict-related risks to education and educational disruption which are still in play despite protection measures in place.
- More generally, global evidence highlights the risks that violent conflict can post to individual educational outcomes, including higher rates of school dropout and lower return to school among girls.

- Children affected by conflict of all ages are at risk of disruption to education services and access. To seek to mitigate this risk, the DepEd Learner Rights and Protection Office has created a protocol for Children in Situations of Armed Conflict.

Health
Crisis/Pandemic

- **The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant loss of learning and learning opportunities in the Philippines, in which some of the world's most stringent COVID-19 containment measures were implemented preventing many from attending school or engaging in learning for up to a year.** As such, it is clear that any such future health crisis would pose a significant risk to learning outcomes and opportunities. The extent to which the negative impact of the pandemic had on educational access and opportunities for learning is yet to be determined for this rate since 2019.
- **Malnutrition risks can be higher among those not attending schools, if they are unable to benefit from school feeding programmes.** In turn, malnutrition and hunger can risk the extent to which children are able to learn effectively, as hunger affects children's ability to concentrate and malnutrition affects their cognitive development.
- **Teachers face mental health challenges due to workloads. This was noted to be a particular challenge during COVID-19.** This indicates the risk future pandemics could pose to teachers' mental health, and potentially their service provision. DepEd is seeking to support teachers experiencing depression and other mental health challenges. This support extends to learners, including those enrolled in ALS.

Other risks

Changes to personnel and leadership within the DepEd affect the delivery of education services in the Philippines. Each new senior official or representative appointed or elected may introduce new structures and priorities, which can make it challenging for INGOs and other partners to work effectively as they need to rebuild connections, networks and relationships, particularly for advocacy work.

This risk is less severe at the local level, as personnel changes within local government generally have less of an impact on educational priorities. Changes to personnel and leadership or gaps in leadership through posts not being filled within the DepEd or other government bodies affect the delivery of education services in the Philippines.

Legislation & Policy Analysis

In the country, the Department of Education is “mandated to protect and promote the fundamental right of every Filipino to quality basic education to facilitate the realization of his or her full potential and later on, meaningfully take part in nation-building.”

The Department of Education’s work in the Philippines, and that of the country’s education system is currently guided by the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP 2030), which is the first long-term plan for basic education covering both formal education (5 to 18 years) and non-formal education for youth and adults. Basic education covers one year of kindergarten, six years of elementary education, four years of JHS, and two years of senior high school (SHS).

In 2013, Republic Act No. 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act, was passed. This built upon the provisions set out in Republic Act No. 9155 which came into force in 2001 and the Education Act of 1982. The goal of the Enhanced Basic Education Act is that “the state shall establish, maintain and support a complete, adequate and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people, the country and society-at-large.” Key to the Enhanced Basic Education Act was the formation of an Enhanced Basic Education Program. The primary objectives of the Enhanced Basic Education Program are to:

- Provide every student with the opportunity to receive a globally competitive quality education;
- Allow high school education to adequately prepare learners for either university, technical and vocational opportunities, creative arts, sports, or entrepreneurial employment in a rapidly globalizing world;
- Make the educational environment responsive to the needs, diversity and capacity of learners.

The programme states that all learners must receive “at least one (1) year of kindergarten education, six (6) years of elementary education, and six (6) years of secondary education” which will encompass four years of JHS and two years of senior school. In addition, the programme also sets out guidelines for the standards for the hiring of teachers to ensure a quality education is being delivered. At the time the bill was passed by President Aquino basic education only lasted 10 years, the shortest pre-University cycle in Asia and one of only three countries worldwide to be 10 years or less along with Angola and Djibouti. The passing of the bill puts the Philippines on a par with globally recognized pre-university education systems and standards.

In addition to the basic education provisions within the Philippines, the ALS is a parallel learning system that “provides opportunities for out-of-school youth and adult learners to develop basic and functional literacy skills, and to access equivalent pathways to complete basic education.” The ALS was institutionalized with the passage of Republic Act No. 11510 in December 2020.

Also of relevance is Republic Act No. 11908, also known as the Parent Effectiveness Law. This mandates parents to assume a major educational role in their child’s growth and development, and to support them in their education progress.

Bottleneck Analysis

Demand

- **Boys are often encouraged to augment family income at the expense of school attendance. In the transition between JHS and SHS, higher rates of boys are lost than girls.** This is reportedly because many boys - particularly from poorer households - are encouraged to find work to augment their family income instead.
- **Non-attendance in ECE and perceptions that older siblings should provide for their younger siblings can affect their access to education.** Where younger siblings are not enrolled in ECE, this is a bottleneck for old siblings' access to education, as older siblings - particularly girls - are often tasked with taking care of younger children.

In general, there is also a prevalent perception that the role of older children is to provide for the family, so they usually do not complete education but support younger siblings instead. This demonstrates the interconnectivity of access to education across age groups.

- **High school dropout rates among boys are also due to 'lack of interest'. This is the reason most often cited for boys dropping out of school.** However, this situation analysis could determine little evidence as to why this may be the case, and why lack of interest is cited by boys so much more frequently than girls. This potential lack of understanding around why this key reason for boys' school dropout is cited is a potential bottleneck to resolving the challenge.
- **Poverty is a key reason for many children not being able to pursue an education.** Either they cannot afford school fees - particularly at higher education levels - or children are required to engage in income-generating activities to support their households. Some schools are beginning to teach livelihood skills, but not all can afford, or have the technical capacities, to do so and the

DepEd does not have sufficient resources to support this work yet. Additionally, in the transition to high school many children must begin paying for transportation which is beyond the material means of some, contributing to drop out rates in the transition from elementary to high school (there is roughly one elementary school per barangay, and one high school per municipality).

- **Children with disabilities are often 'hidden'.** Some families of children with disabilities choose to keep those children at home, as there is reportedly sometimes shame attached to disabilities. This is a bottleneck to their access to education.

- **Absentee parents impact children's learning.** Where parents are often not at home - either due to work at home or abroad, or for any other reason - this is a bottleneck to children's access to education as well as their educational attainment as they are often less supported to learn, or to continue their learning at home.

Supply

- **Few elementary schools have access requirements for children with disabilities.** At the community level, this means that children with disabilities and special needs may be referred to SPED schools which may be very far away from home. Additionally, in such cases financial support to help these children attend those schools is often not offered, which means children with disabilities from poorer backgrounds are the worst affected by this bottleneck to the provision of basic education to those with disabilities.

Furthermore, infrastructure surrounding schools - like roads and public transport - is often inadequate for those with disabilities, which is a bottleneck to their ability to travel to schools. This bottleneck is worsened because of the limited data available on the education needs of those with disabilities; this makes it hard for schools to respond to their needs inclusively.

- **The Philippines is a supplier of teachers globally, which means there are fewer Filipino teachers to teach Filipino children.** Quality teachers are often tempted to work abroad - particularly in countries like the US - where salaries are higher. This results in fewer quality teachers remaining in the Philippines.
- **Pupils who do not speak English or Tagalog face educational barriers.** This is a bottleneck particularly affecting indigenous peoples who may not speak these two languages, which are the typical languages of instruction in Filipino schools.
- **Some localities suffer from a lack of SHS.** This is a bottleneck that particularly affects rural areas, a lack of an SHS offering close by could impede efforts to increase enrolment.
- **Teachers have heavy workloads.** The heavy teacher workload (including administrative work alongside their teaching) reportedly affects teachers' motivation and efficiency, thereby impacting their teaching and the quality of learning. However, DepEd is seeking to support teachers and improve teacher quality and career progression opportunities through the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers, which may help to address this bottleneck.
- **Learning standards may differ between ECE and Kindergarten.** It is noted that the transition from ECE to Kindergarten is not always seamless, with learning standards differing between the two education levels in some cases which means some children are less prepared for Kindergarten than others. The

Philippines Professional Standards for Schools are available seeking to address this bottleneck to some degree.

Enabling environment

- **Nationwide, there is a shortage of teachers and budget shortages at the national level create challenges in efforts to resolve this issue.** High student to teacher ratios are recorded across the Philippines, which can affect educational quality as teachers are able to spend less time responding to the individual needs of their pupils. The DepEd is reportedly working hard to try to address this gap, but reportedly has insufficient budget to fund the salaries and pensions or enough teachers. The problem is particularly acute with regard to SNeD/SPED teachers.
- **Inequities between funds for LGUs and challenging in teacher retention, particularly affecting geographically isolated areas.** Inequity between rich and poor LGUs affects the extent to which poorer LGUs can provide quality education. This particularly impacts geographically isolated LGUs, and it is noted that the DepEd's budget formula - which includes variables on enrolment rate and the number of teachers - does not yet consider this inequity adequately. In remote LGUs, teacher retention is also a challenge as competent teachers often stay in remote areas just for a year or two before moving elsewhere.
- **Limited budget for ALS.** While many schools implement ALS, there is reportedly limited funding for ALS in SHS which impacts the quality of ALS provision.

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