

**THE BETTER NORMAL: THE REOPENING OF PROGRESSIVE
EXPANSION LIMITED FACE-TO-FACE OF CLASSES IN THE
PHILIPPINES**

by:

Gio B. Santisima

Teacher I, St. Francis National High School

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has had a particularly negative impact on education. Millions of students have been affected since several governments throughout the world decided to temporarily close schools owing to the pandemic's spread and threat. As a result, the pandemic has caused a learning crisis for students. In this scenario, government education agencies in the country implemented alternative learning modes to cope with the situation.

In the last two years since the outbreak of a highly contagious and deadly disease, the education sector in the Philippines employed distanced and asynchronous learning delivery modality to safeguard student from being infected by the virus and for the welfare of teachers as well. Department of Education (DepEd) came up with plans and guidelines to implement online and modular distance learning delivery of instruction that requires students and teachers to distant learning and at the comfort of their homes which the use of their digital and mobile platforms or the printed modules to be answered with the assistance of the teacher or anyone at home.

In relation, experts pointed out that there are long-term economic effects of long periods of absence from school will be felt years from now, when the workforce, which by that time will be made up of today's students, will lack many knowledge and skill sets that they should have acquired while in school. In this sense it is crucial decision to reopen the schools.

Today, as the situation starts to lighten down a bit and the country is gradually recovering from the negative effects of the Covid-19, schools also started to reopen for learners. November 15, 2021 when the Department of Education started the pilot implementation of limited face-to-face classes. Reopening the school for expansion limited face-to-face classes was carefully planned and managed to ensure the safety of the students, the teachers, as well as all the stakeholders and in a phased manner, especially following the primacy protocol which is the proper wearing of facemask all the time and observing social distancing. Moreover, accurate information provided by various institutions must be used to support the planning and implementation of school health policies during this epidemic.

More importantly, the World Health Organization (WHO) has released a checklist to aid in the reopening of schools and the planning for a potential COVID-19 revival. The checklist is structured around protective measures related to: 1) hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette; 2) physical distancing; 3) use of masks in schools; 4) environmental cleaning and ventilation; and 5) respecting procedures for isolation of all people with symptoms, according to WHO.¹⁰ The checklist aids policymakers and school officials in improving compliance and adherence to public health regulations.

Besides, every school in the country made sure that safety health protocols were observed and followed as the opening of classes launch. DepEd together with the Department Interior and Local Government worked really hard to ensure the safety of each person who will be inside the school. There has been an implementation of “safety seal” which is a DILG initiative activity which sets criteria and standards to be met by each school to formally reopen the schools to the students. Contract tracing sheets, thermal scanners, hand-washing areas, alcohol everywhere, proper wearing of facemask, and social distancing were the utmost concern and priority as the schools prepare for the reopening of progressive expansion of limited face-to-face classes in the country.

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