

MORE TIME IN THE FORGE: HALF A DECADE OF K-12 IN THE PHILIPPINES

by:

Mary Leyza D. Pinzon

Teacher III, Bonifacio Camacho National High School

Back in S.Y. 2016-2017, the Philippines had its first official batch of senior high schoolers. Before then, the expectation was that students earn their secondary education diploma after 4 years of high school. Afterwards, they were free to pursue a college or university degree or vocational certification. The addition of 2 more full years of high school drew mixed reactions from students who had to go through them, and parents who had to wait longer before sending their children off to college or to work. Newly appointed senior high school teachers, equipped with strand-specific curricula, as always rose to the challenge of guiding their wary pupils through the tapering nature of senior high school. The Philippine educational system would never be the same and 5 years on from that first Grade 11 batch, is there now a consensus among teachers on the effectivity of K-12 learning? Is the program capable of equipping the Filipino student with the skills necessary to thrive in the current career landscape?

One of the facts often pointed out by proponents of the shift to K-12 is that the Philippines had been the last country in Asia to upgrade from a 10-year pre-college educational system. To many, this sounds like an argument for a “more is better” approach with regards to years in school. While to some extent it is true that staying in school longer might help the more important aspect of these 2 additional years is the tapering, which focuses students’ efforts along whichever path they would like to take career-wise. And because these strand-specific fundamentals are covered in senior high school, concepts taught in junior high school can be made less complex and Grade 7 to 10

students aren't dragged through subjects they probably would not need in the career paths they have in mind at that time. The same goes for what students do after senior high school. Colleges and universities can offload general education electives and focus more on the degree major subjects they specialize at.

All this redistribution of work aims to eliminate congestion within the existing curriculum. Achievement examination scores of both primary and secondary Filipino graduates had been flagging since the last decade. This is taken as a sign that a significant proportion of elementary and high schoolers were having trouble juggling the amount of schoolwork crammed into our previous 10-year system. According to (Gotinga, 2020) of Rappler, 2.3 million of students have not enrolled during the 2020-2021 school year. The K-12 system, though not without its own share of criticisms, is a tried and tested one, and both its pluses and minuses are known. It is something the country can adopt relatively quickly by patterning implementation on existing frameworks and adjusting as determinations are made regarding what works for our students and teachers and what doesn't.

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Currently, and with schooling having been thrown a curve ball by a global pandemic, it is too early to tell how we would evolve the K-12 system further according to our needs. Birthing problems, such as lack of senior high school classrooms, books, and qualified teachers, have been brought forward but these issues have existed in our public-school system for quite a long time now, even before K-12 implementation. With today's rapid technological advancement and the profound effect this has on our youth's career prospects, it is imperative that we find the best way to utilize those 2 additional years of basic education to equip our students with the necessary skills and forge them into upstanding and productive members of society.

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