

AS SPECIAL AS YOU ARE

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Education is not one size fits all.

The Philippines' inclusive education aims to break the stigma for children with special needs or learning exceptionalities. Republic Act 11650 s. 2022 mandates a policy of inclusion and services for learners with disabilities to support inclusive education, establishing inclusive learning resource centers for learners with disabilities. In a recent study by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2022) enclosed in the report of the Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department (2023), 1.6 million Filipino children were identified with disabilities. However, based on the report presented by the Department of Education (DepEd), 232,975 students with learning exceptionalities were mainstreamed in regular classes in the school year 2016-2017.

The progression of special education in the Philippines has been reinforced throughout the years by the government, non-government organizations, and other stakeholders to respond to the persistent demands and challenges. Though DepEd has an established SPED program, the identified SPED classes as of January 2023 only account for 893, including private and public schools from Kinder to G12 for the entire country. Compared to the millions of students with learning exceptionalities, this number is just a speck among the vast student population in need of specialized educational support.

Consequently, to alleviate the lack of access to special education, particularly in underprivileged rural areas, special education (SPED) facilities must be expanded. Building new SPED institutions requires more government money. Public schools should implement special education programs to address the unique learning needs of students

with learning exceptionalities and incorporate them into mainstream education. Expanding the number of SPED centers guarantees that more learners may get interventions and education that are suitable and customized for them.

But buildings alone don't make an excellent education. The proportion of formally trained special education teachers is dwindling relative to the growing number of students with exceptional learning needs. DepEd needs to prepare teachers to handle special education classes since it does not adhere to mainstream education and requires unique strategies for classroom management.

As of 2020, the SPED program supported around 439,000 learners with disabilities in the Philippines (Pascua, 2022), but millions more may be outside its assistance. The right to education for children is a fundamental human right and should not be limited to those with learning exceptionalities.

References:

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