

NO LEARNER LEFT BEHIND: HELPING AT-RISK STUDENTS SUCCEED IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

by:

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The sudden pivot to distance learning in the Philippine educational system, necessitated by global crises, revealed and amplified deep-seated inequalities, threatening to leave "at-risk" students further behind. For the Department of Education (DepEd), an "at-risk" learner may be a Student At Risk of Dropping Out or one struggling with the shift due to socio-economic or geographic barriers. Current issues highlighted in various studies and reports include the glaring digital divide, where many students in remote areas lack stable internet or adequate learning devices, which makes compliance with online classes or timely submission of modular activities exceedingly difficult. This reality is compounded by family financial constraints and the need for some students to take on work, which compete directly with the demands of their school tasks and contribute to low retention rates. As educators, our moral imperative is to bridge these gaps and ensure that the promise of accessible education is not broken for the most vulnerable.

In response to these systemic challenges, the DepEd has implemented various mechanisms to mitigate dropouts and provide targeted support. A key intervention during the height of the distance learning setup was the deployment of Learning Support Aides (LSAs), as outlined in DepEd Order No. 032, s. 2020. LSAs were engaged to assist teachers, particularly in providing instructional support to learners who could not manage independent learning or lacked household members to guide them. Furthermore, the perennial issue of students who have already left the formal system is addressed by the Alternative Learning System (ALS), a parallel learning system institutionalized by

Republic Act No. 11510. ALS offers out-of-school youth and adults flexible pathways to complete basic education, recognizing that their circumstances – like economic factors or being geographically isolated – require a non-traditional approach. These policies underscore the commitment to flexibility and resource-based interventions, but their effective and consistent implementation remains a daily challenge for schools, especially in geographically deprived or underserved areas.

Moving forward, sustaining the success of at-risk learners demands an even more localized and compassionate approach, moving beyond a one-size-fits-all distance education model. Schools must conduct thorough and regular profiling of their students to identify those facing multiple challenges – be it a lack of emotional support, poor learning environment, or lack of materials – and deploy a multi-modal strategy that prioritizes their unique needs. This means strengthening school-based remediation programs like the "Catch-up Fridays" initiative, mentioned in DepEd Memorandum DM_s2024_001, to focus on reading intervention and general academic enhancement, especially for those falling behind. Ultimately, ensuring "No Learner Left Behind" requires teachers, school heads, and community stakeholders to work hand-in-hand, treating every student not as a statistic, but as a unique individual whose right to education must be tirelessly protected, regardless of the learning modality.

References:

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Department of Education (DepEd). (2024). DM No. 001, s. 2024: Implementation of Catch-up Fridays.