

PRESS RELEASE**Briones calls for greater vigilance towards protection of children**

DUMAGUETE CITY, March 3, 2019 – Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones called on civil society organizations, local government units, national government institutions, and the rest of the community to be more vigilant in protecting children because they are the first victims of accidents and abuse.

She made the appeal after visiting the wake of five students (one Grade 7 and four Grade 11) of Basay National High School who died in a vehicular accident morning of March 1 in Zamboanguita, Negros Oriental. The Education chief personally paid her respects and expressed her condolences to the bereaved families the following day.

“It’s really such a great loss. We did not lose only the lives of children; we lost so much promise, so much ambition, and so much hope,” Briones stated during a press conference held at the DepEd Regional Sub-Office in Dumaguete City. “And this is a result, perhaps, of lack of vigilance on the part of us—us who are grown-ups, us who are responsible for these children’s safety,” she added.

Moving forward

Briones, together with Undersecretary for Finance Service and Education Programs Delivery Unit Annalyn Sevilla and Undersecretary for Field Operations and the Bureau of Human Resource and Organizational Development Revsee Escobedo, shared the Department’s plans in the aftermath of the terrible accident.

First is the provision of insurance for all schoolchildren—all 27 million of them—year round. “Each time groups of children go out of the periphery of our campus, participate in competitions, and travel to other places, they have to be covered by insurance so that if there is a need for benefits and for assistance, these can be available,” Briones mentioned.

She also made a call to regulatory agencies to “keep a sharper eye” and to conduct more robust assessment and monitoring of vehicles, especially the public utility vehicles like the one carrying the victims of the March 1 accident. She further cited how they have to look into the state of mind of the drivers and the vehicles, as well as the legality of the franchises.

Further, Briones and Sevilla mentioned the need for a quick response fund, especially because the provision of financial assistance for these types of incidents is not included in the DepEd budget. This shall be brought up, they said, in the next budget proposal.

Pride of Bayawan

The group of students from Basay National High School were on their way home to Bayawan following a Mathematics competition in Cebu where they won in the elimination round. Dubbed as “Math Sayaw,” the contest is both academic and co-curricular, as the participants use music and arts to make the subject more interesting.

“They have been a source of pride among the locals of Bayawan,” DepEd Region VII Assistant Director Salustiano Jimenez also shared during the press conference. “This incident is so much more intense because it involves children, innocent children. And these children were special and different in many ways. One, they come from one of the poorest municipalities in this province,” Briones relayed.

She also shared that they have chosen technical-vocational courses which means that they plan to work immediately after graduation. Finally, she opined that these are not ordinary children because they won in competitions.

Call for donations

The Education chief likewise thanked those who immediately responded to the Department’s call for assistance through voluntary contributions including the members of the existing organizations and cooperatives in DepEd.

Finally, she called for donations to help address the needs not only of the families of those who have passed on, but also the families of the six other patients (five Grade 11 learners and their coach), three of whom are in the intensive care unit. Briones also visited them personally at the Silliman University Medical Center and Negros Oriental Provincial Hospital.

The victims shall need continued medication, physical rehabilitation, surgery or replacement of body parts, and psycho-social intervention, among many others, which all entail exorbitant amount.

Donations may be coursed through the Office of the Secretary, and may be coordinated with Bayawan City Assistant Schools Division Superintendent Adolf Aguilar.

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