

PRESS RELEASE**Briones reports spending rate, highlights urgent need for guidance counselors as DepEd pivots from access to quality**

PASAY CITY, December 2, 2019 – During the Economic Development Cluster meeting at the Department of Finance (DoF) on November 28, 2019, DepEd Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones presented DepEd's budget utilization for FY 2019-2020 citing 74% obligation rate and 91% disbursement rate as of October 2019, emphasizing support on the implementation of infrastructure and social programs, and the Department's effort to shift its focus from access to quality.

The Education Chief highlighted that the implementation of these programs has brought significant successes in access.

"We have achieved significant successes in making education accessible in terms of enrollment, [in terms of] reduction in drop-out rates, [in terms of] cohort survival and we are now shifting towards quality," Briones said in her opening statement.

Undersecretary for Finance Annalyn Sevilla explained that the current low spending rate of DepEd is affected by interagency [DPWH] funds transfers and delayed procurement for the construction and repairs of facilities; dependence of the Department on the issuance of IRR of some laws like Universal Health Care Law; election ban; and the delayed passage of 2019 General Appropriations Act among other hindering circumstances.

However, the Secretary expressed optimism that DepEd would reach its historical average utilization rate of 95% at the end of the fiscal year despite roadblocks pending the disbursement of vouchers for Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education (GASTPE), and continuing appropriations.

Need for guidance counselors

Briones aired the urgent need to hire guidance counselors "in the light of the emergence of what we describe as Generation Z and the prevalence of adjustment problems especially at the junior and senior high school levels; hence, the need to guide our learners and prepare them for the real world outside."

However, the Department is challenged in filling in positions for guidance counselor citing reasons of disparity in the qualification standards and the salary grade for entry level as provided by law.

"There's also a problem in the filling in positions for our guidance counselor which form[ed] part of our recent Senate hearing when they asked us why we are not hiring guidance counselors. It's not that [because] we're not hiring. There's [a] high qualification standards, like passing of the Masteral degree and the licensure exams for guidance counselor, and yet we're giving them salary grade 11 as entry level. So no one is applying in DepEd," Briones explained.

Meanwhile, Sevilla mentioned that there is pending request lodged at the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) for the increase of salary grade of guidance counselors.

“There is now a pending request in the DBM. So if DBM can issue also guidelines on the overhead cost it will be very beneficial to us. If they can approve the increase in the salary grade, vacant positions for our guidance counselor will be filled [up] in,” Sevilla said.

Briones recognized the full support of the Office of the President, DBM, and the Economic Development Cluster for all the efforts of DepEd in catching up with all the challenges that DepEd is experiencing.

“This is the experience of the difficulty in adapting, in automating our recording, our accounting, financial system, and also the employment of the [peoples] additional personnel and accountants, in addition of course to our teachers,” Briones concluded.

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