

PRESS RELEASE**DepEd spearheads first Nat'l School Mental Health Forum**

PASIG CITY, October 30, 2018 – To provide a venue to discuss recent researches, updates, initiatives, issues, and concerns related to mental health, especially in the school context, the Department of Education (DepEd), through its Bureau of Learner Support Services-School Health Division (BLSS-SHD), spearheaded the first National School Mental Health Forum from October 23 to 24 at the Millenia Suites in Pasig City.

The forum gathered health personnel, teachers, guidance counselors, and other non-teaching personnel from the Central, Regional, and Division Offices, and public schools, as well as external partners, to showcase programs and research studies related to school mental health.

DepEd Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Service and Alternative Learning System G.H. Ambat shared the significant efforts of the Department in ensuring the health and well-being of both the personnel and learners, in partnership with various agencies and organizations.

“For the past years, the Department of Education has implemented programs, passed policies, and conducted activities related to the promotion of mental health. These include the conduct of trainings on mental health and psychosocial support, and the issuance of policies as complex as child protection and addressing bullying, and even as simple as unloading children of homework during weekends,” Ambat shared.

“Moreover, concepts on mental health have always been incorporated in basic education curricula, especially in health and values education subjects,” she added.

The forum is directed to be the first step to harmonizing and strengthening these efforts to ensure their impact to the overall health of the learners.

“One cannot overemphasize how our learners’ health is key to helping us realize our vision for them. As emphasized in this forum: There is no health when there is no mental health,” BLSS Director Rizalino Jose Rosales said.

The BLSS-SHD, in coordination with the BLSS-Youth Formation Division, and in partnership with the Youth for Mental Health, Inc., also conducted a workshop on October 9 to engage children and youth on matters connected to school mental health. In line with the theme, “Young People and Mental Health in a Changing World,” of the World Mental Health Day celebrated on October 10, the workshop was participated by learners and their respective teachers or guidance counselors from Oranbo Elementary School, Pineda Elementary School, Rizal High School, and Kapitolyo High School.

Mental health in basic education

The two-day forum also served as a strategic platform for education stakeholders to provide inputs to the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of the recently enacted Republic Act (RA) No. 11036 or the Mental Health Act, as it included a

consultation facilitated by the Secretariat of the IRR Task Force created by the Department of Health. In consonance with the said law and its IRR, the Department shall issue a comprehensive school mental health policy.

As stated in the said RA, the duties and responsibilities of DepEd are the following: integrate age-appropriate content pertaining to mental health into the curriculum at all educational levels both in public and private institutions; develop guidelines and standards on age-appropriate and evidence-based mental health programs both in public and private institutions; pursue strategies that promote the realization of mental health and well-being in educational institutions; and ensure that mental health promotions in public and private educational institutions shall be adequately complemented with qualified mental health professionals.

“I am glad to announce that ahead of the issuance of the IRR of the mental health law soon, DepEd has already commenced its process of crafting its comprehensive policy through this forum,” Ambat enthused.

Early this year, the Department also launched the *Oplan Kalusugan (OK) sa DepEd*, which is a convergence of its health and nutrition initiatives to ensure their impact, especially at the school level. As soon as the RA 11036 was passed, DepEd made sure that mental health would be one of the flagship programs under *OK sa DepEd*.

Additionally, Ambat iterated DepEd's call for more guidance counselors in schools. DepEd, under the direction and instruction of Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones, has improved the qualification standards for guidance counselors and is continuously pushing to increase their salary.

“This forum is just the beginning. Year after year, we shall look forward to a forum where we will sit down and discuss our efforts, our learning, and our successes in promoting school mental health,” Ambat concluded.

The Department observes the National Mental Health Week every second week of October, as stipulated in the Presidential Proclamation No. 452, s. 1994. Through the DepEd Memorandum No. 148, s. 2018, all offices and schools were enjoined to administer activities for employees, learners, parents, and other concerned stakeholders to promote mental health and raise awareness on related issues.

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