

PRESS RELEASE**DepEd, partner agencies urge enabling environment for youth's informed choices vs early pregnancy**

PASAY CITY, August 22, 2019 – Stressing on the growing importance of enabling the Filipino youth to make educated decisions in regard to their health, education, and development, Department of Education (DepEd) posed the challenge of creating “an environment of openness, where the youth of Generation Z are able to share their thoughts, views, and experiences without fear of judgment” during the national summit *Kapit-Kamay: Empowering the Youth to Make Informed Choices* on August 22 in the Philippine International Convention Center.

“Communicating with them requires that we grab their attention within eight seconds, mainly with visual ‘snackable content’ [and] they are looking for support systems to help them navigate life,” the Education chief remarked.

According to Briones, this is where the K to 12 Program comes in as it has integrated gender and reproductive health, sexuality and sexual behavior, gender, culture, human rights, self-knowledge and protection, and respect for others into the curriculum, as well as the 21st century skill of critical thinking that equips the youth how to think, analyze problems, and find solutions.

“We are adjusting our curriculum to the Generation Z, because they are the first global generation. Why are we trying to develop new means of teaching, especially on health and early pregnancy? It’s because, as I’ve repeatedly said, by the time our learners graduate, everything we have taught them are already irrelevant. So we are developing in them the ability to accept change,” the Secretary emphasized.

She further shared with the representatives of government agencies, the private sector, development partners, and youth-led organizations the Department’s ongoing development of standards for the efficient and effective instruction and delivery of age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and evidence-based Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) concepts integrated in the curriculum.

The Secretary also highlighted the strengthened Alternative Learning System (ALS) that offers learning opportunities for youth and adults outside the formal education system: “ALS provides non-formal education pathway for out-of-school youth, including young mothers, to have a second chance at completing basic education.”

Time to address teen pregnancy is now

Youth representative Shanille Jane Blase from Davao City called for greater awareness on the risks and underlying problems that comes with teenage pregnancy, especially at the grassroots level, as she shared her story as a sexually active adolescent.

Now of legal age, Blase is an advocate for educating and empowering the youth to delay sexual activity as much as possible, and to use protection when already engaged in the activity: “After giving birth, I felt that I have a bigger responsibility, not only to my son but to a bigger community. I realized in my own little way, I need to educate them. I need to tell them about the hazards of teenage pregnancy [and that] it goes beyond maternal care and childcare. It includes problems on poverty,

separation of couples and broken families, religious beliefs, sexual abuse, drug abuse, alcoholism, lust, peer pressure, and stigma. It must be addressed, and the time is now.”

Teen pregnancy prevention as the President’s directive

Cabinet Secretary Karlo Alexei Nograles remarked that President Rodrigo Roa Duterte himself recognizes that more should be done to respond to the problem of teen pregnancy. With the directive coming for the Chief Executive, DepEd and the Department of Health, in cooperation with the National Economic and Development Authority, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Philippine Statistics Authority, United Nations Population Fund, and the Philippine Educational Theater Association, organized the national summit.

“This issue, for obvious reasons, cannot be overlooked. There are complex issues and problems that accompany unplanned pregnancies, especially when these involve women who are ill-prepared for the responsibilities of parenthood. Teenage pregnancy is also a factor that contributes to the painful cycle of poverty by preventing young mothers from continuing their education,” Nograles noted.

Nograles recognized DepEd’s implementation of CSE and other relevant activities that ensure age-appropriate and culturally relevant approach to teaching sexuality and relationships based on “accurate, realistic, and non-judgmental” information from UNESCO.

Liberating basic education vs teen pregnancy

Emphasizing the need for critical thinking in today’s education, Briones noted that a liberating kind of basic education will help teach the youth that while they have a freedom to choose, such choice must be made with adequate and accurate information.

“How can each of us – as parents, teachers, guidance counselors, friends, leaders, academics, and members of religious community – help in empowering our youth to make informed choices? We need to educate them well, give them facts, science, and socio-emotional or soft skills. This is where guidance helps, where parents come in. To be able to educate our learners, we need to educate ourselves as well. We need to go beyond this conference and have time to digest all the data as well as the implications given to us,” the Secretary pointed out.

Joint declaration of early pregnancy prevention

The event concluded with the presentation of the Manila Declaration on the Prevention of Early Pregnancy. Representatives from the government, the private sector, development partners, and youth-led organizations indicated their support through an interactive call to action.

The one-day summit also featured a question-and-answer segment moderated by broadcast journalist Sandra Aguinaldo and participated by youth organization representatives and advocates, and break-out sessions that tackled the dimensions of early pregnancy such as education, health, child protection, media and technology, and social and community. Lea Espallardo of PETA delivered the synthesis of the summit’s five break-out sessions.

Partner agencies that made the summit possible include the National Youth Commission; Commission on Higher Education; Likhaan Center for Women’s Health; YPEER Pilipinas; Save the Children Philippines; United Nations International Children’s Fund; United States Agency for International Development; Reach Health Philippines; Volunteer Youth Leaders for Health; and Center for Health Solutions and Innovations.

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