

PRESS RELEASE**First ALS-EST learning hub opens in Eastern Samar**

Lawaan, Eastern Samar, May 4, 2019 – The country’s pioneer Alternative Learning System–Education and Skills Training (ALS-EST) Learning Center was inaugurated at Lawaan National School of Craftsmanship and Home Industries (LNSCHI) on May 3.

Department of Education (DepEd) Undersecretary and Chief of Staff Nepomuceno Malaluan and Australian Ambassador Steven Robinson led the ceremonies.

“Today is a celebration of *bayanihan* in practice,” Malaluan said, attributing the birth of the learning center through the collaborative efforts of DepEd and Australia’s Basic Education Sector Transformation (BEST) program, in cooperation with the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP).

Major commitment

“ALS is a major commitment of DepEd and is fully supported by the President. To enhance the ALS program, my office initiated the ALS-EST. It will be integrated into the academic curriculum of our regular ALS program,” DepEd Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones expressed in a message read by Undersecretary for Finance Annalyn Sevilla.

The Secretary added that with the inauguration of the first ALS-EST Learning Center and the creation of the ALS-EST handbook, DepEd solidifies its commitment “to intensify and expand the ALS programs in order to reach out and provide better opportunities for the out-of-school youth and adults who failed to finish basic education.”

The learning center was likewise built to improve participation rate among non-formal education learners.

“Students have options—if for any reason they could not be accommodated in the formal education, they now have the chance to be part of this ALS-EST,” DepEd Region VIII Director Ramir Uytico said during his welcome remarks.

The 444 square meter learning hub was designed to be disaster-resilient, with classrooms that may be combined and converted into one big hall. Other design elements of the center include gender-segregated toilets, faculty room for the ALS facilitators, and nursing room for parent-learners. The center will also be a laboratory for best practices and will set the benchmark for other ALS-EST areas.

Partnerships for education

The Australian Ambassador guaranteed that through the BEST program, they will continue to support DepEd with its priority reforms: “DepEd is committed to providing quality education to all Filipinos. This requires adapting standard models to meet the needs of diverse learners. Australia strongly supports this commitment and is proud to work with DepEd to develop initiatives like the ALS-EST to cater to learners outside the formal school system,” Robinson mentioned.

To realize the partners’ vision in providing education and skills training opportunities to more students, Australia, through the PBSP, will construct four additional ALS-EST learning centers across the country. To maximize the employment prospects of the future ALS-EST graduates, they will be working with the University of the Philippines (UP) to undertake a labor-market study.

Australia and the Philippines are long-standing partners in education, sharing a strongly held view that education is the critical foundation for expanding labor-market participation and accelerating inclusive economic growth.

“We will continue to work closely with our stakeholders, consult them, and strengthen partnerships to achieve our goal of delivering quality, accessible, relevant, and liberating education for all,” Briones concluded.

Also present in the event were First Secretary for Education of the Australian Embassy Frankie Lawe-Davies, BEST team leader Allison Atwell, Director Elvin Ivan Uy and Daryl Calvert of PBSP, DepEd Undersecretary for Planning, HROD, and Field Operations Jesus Mateo, Undersecretary for Legislative Affairs, External Partnerships, and Project Management Service Tonisito Umali, OIC Assistant Secretary for Curriculum and Instruction Alma Ruby Torio, Bureau of Learning Delivery Director Marilette Almayda, Region I Director Malcom Garma, Eastern Samar’s Schools Division Superintendent Bernardo Adina, and Lawaan Mayor Florencio Almeda Jr.

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