

**PRESS RELEASE****Secretary Briones eyes more classrooms, facilities for IP learners in Talaingod, Davao del Norte**

PASIG CITY, September 16, 2019 – True to her commitment to ensure that all Filipino learners are able to access quality basic education, Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones visited Nasilaban Integrated School in Talaingod, Davao del Norte last August to assess the needs of indigenous people (IP) learners and teachers.

*“Ako ay pumunta rito para makita ko nang personal ang mga paaralan at makita ko ang mukha ng mga bata at mga guro. I want to personally hear from them what still needs to be done and to be provided to ensure that education is not disrupted and deprived,”* the Education chief stated.

The Secretary lauded the teachers, who regularly brave the terrain just to make education possible for the IP learners. Understanding their plight, she vowed that the Department will provide a three-story building with nine classrooms, a dormitory for teachers and learners who live far, solar panels and computers, and a rainwater collection system that will help address the scarcity of water in the area.

Talaingod Mayor Jonnie Libayao expressed his gratitude to the Secretary for taking time to visit their town despite its distance and regardless of her age: “I’m thankful to Secretary Briones, it’s the first time that a Secretary of Education visited this village.”

According to the Education chief, she agreed with the mayor about the need to establish a school that will serve learners from Kindergarten to Senior High School. She also vowed to coordinate with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to establish a community college in the area.

Datu Gibang Apoga, chieftain of the Ata-Manobo tribe, thanked the Secretary for visiting and for DepEd's efforts to improve the IP learners' access to quality basic education. According to him, it has always been his dream that all children and youth in Talaingod, including those who have long been in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) Haran compound, will achieve their life goals through quality basic education.

School head Yuri Jiovanni Colita reported that the integrated school already accommodated the learners from the neighboring Salugpongan learning centers, where one has been closed and torn down by the community. He added that the teachers are working to ensure that the learners will be able to advance to the next grade level with the appropriate documents.

"Talaingod was the IP area I failed to visit many years ago due to [reported] security concerns. But now I have proven that this town is peaceful. No less than the Constitution guarantees the right to quality education for all. What we want is for the law to be applied in Talaingod, for every learner in the entire Philippines," Briones stated.

In appreciation of their rich and vibrant culture, the Secretary reminded the learners and members of the IP community: "*Kailangan dalhin pa rin natin ang ating identity. Hindi ninyo dapat ikahiya ang inyong tribo, ang inyong pinanggalingan, ang inyong kwento, ang inyong awit. Ang ating kultura, ang ating dialect ay ating alagaan at patuloy na gamitin.*"

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