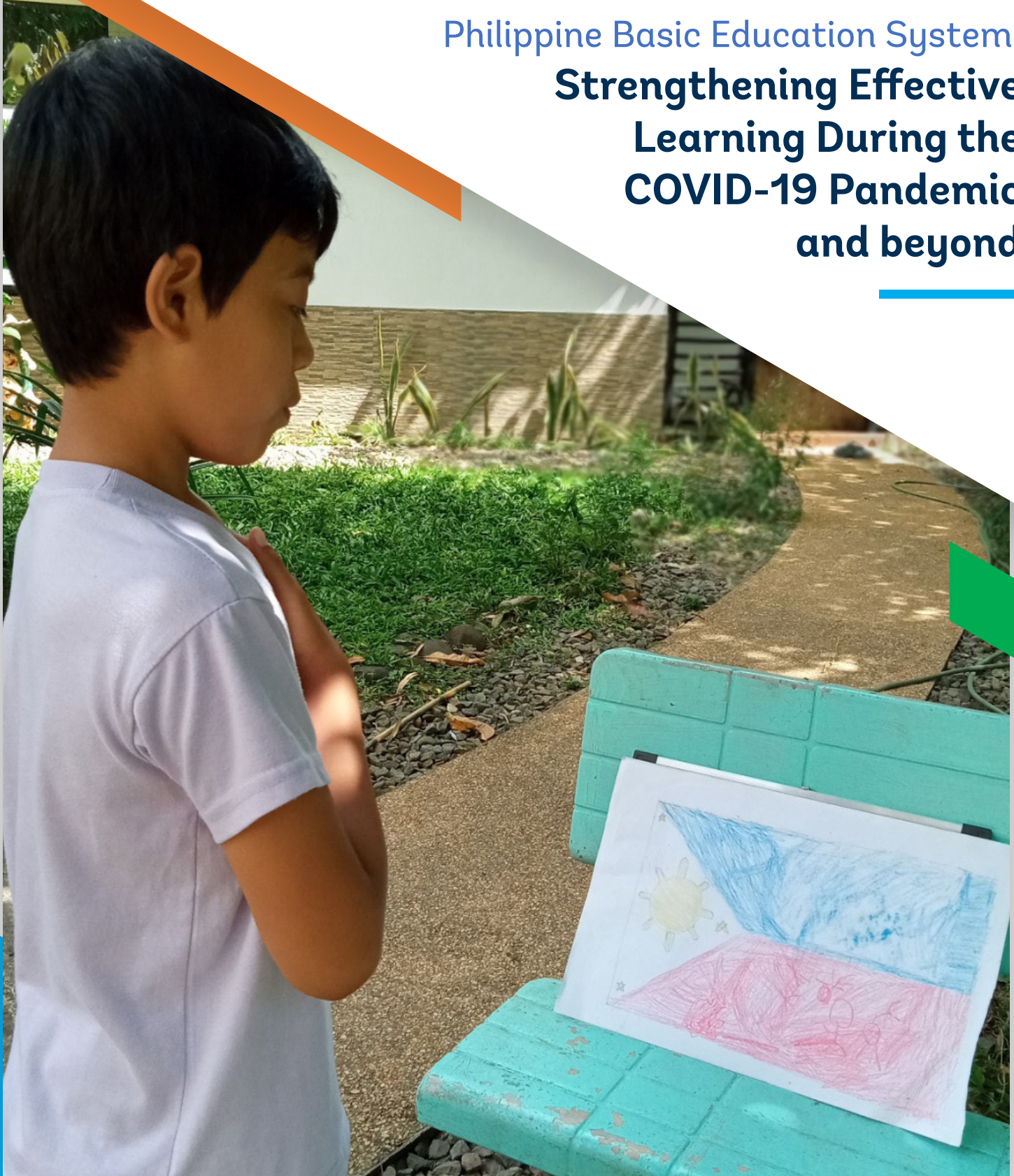




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# Philippine Basic Education System: Strengthening Effective Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic and beyond



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# Executive Summary



**School closures and learning loss during the COVID-19 pandemic can have a long-term negative impact on the current cohort of school children.** Global evidence from past health and disaster-related emergencies show that the impact extends well beyond the period of the disaster or pandemic. Learning poverty—the share of 10-year-old children who cannot read and understand a simple story—for the Philippines was estimated at 69.5 percent in 2019 and is expected to rise further due to the pandemic.



**School closures and long-term learning loss are also likely to affect the children's economic potential and productivity in adulthood, thus undermining the country's competitiveness.** It is estimated that due to learning losses, an average annual earning per student will decrease by \$893-1,137 (in 2017 PPP\$) or a loss of present value of individual lifetime earnings by \$16,287-20,752 (in 2017 PPP\$).<sup>1</sup>



**Key short-term impacts include:**



Overall basic education enrollment was six percent lower this year than last year, placing additional 1.6 million students out of school;



Children who are enrolled face many challenges to effective learning under the current distance learning modality;



Such challenges are greater for lower income households who have limited resources for better access;



There is high demand for returning to in-person classes, and such demand is higher for lower income households and women; and



Fears for viruses are still of concern among some households in the return to school.

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<sup>1</sup> Agevedo and Cloutier, forthcoming, Learning in the time of COVID.



**Based on these findings, the note highlights the following policy options:**



There is an urgent need to offer in-person schooling for children whose parents want it, though this should remain optional for now given the rampant fear of the virus.



Delivery of distance learning must be improved—by strengthening communication between teachers and students, engaging parents/guardians actively in education, improving the quality of paper modules, providing materials for early graders in local languages, and enhancing awareness of the complementary learning platforms.



Re-enrollment campaigns and provision of alternative learning options can be widely carried out to address the concern that dropouts this year might not return to formal education given the extended period of school closure.

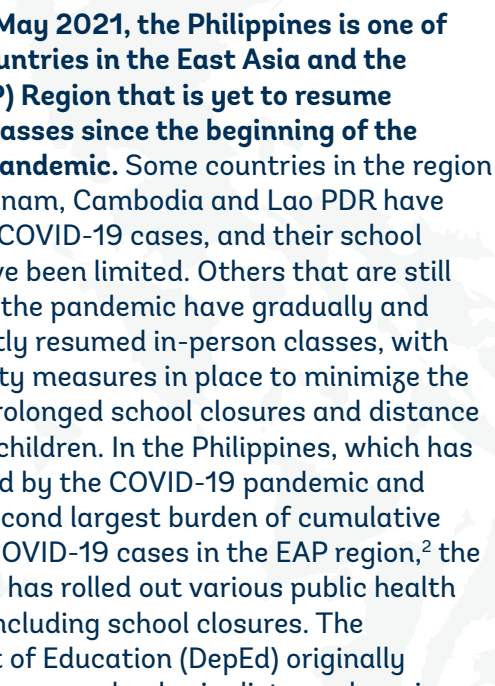


High-impact learning recovery programs are needed. Given the huge learning loss, it is essential to implement learning recovery programs based on assessments of individual students' learning levels. These programs will be needed for virtually all students, whether they are offered in-person schooling or continuing to learn remotely.

**Note:** This policy brief is based primarily on two nationwide surveys that provided a snapshot of the education conditions and their impact on children: the High Frequency Monitoring (HFM) Household Survey carried out in December 2020; and the COVID-19 Low Income Household Panel and Economic (HOPE) Survey targeting poor and near-poor households carried out in October 2020.







**As of early May 2021, the Philippines is one of only two countries in the East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) Region that is yet to resume in-person classes since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.** Some countries in the region such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao PDR have had limited COVID-19 cases, and their school closures have been limited. Others that are still coping with the pandemic have gradually and intermittently resumed in-person classes, with careful safety measures in place to minimize the impact of prolonged school closures and distance learning on children. In the Philippines, which has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and bears the second largest burden of cumulative confirmed COVID-19 cases in the EAP region,<sup>2</sup> the government has rolled out various public health measures, including school closures. The Department of Education (DepEd) originally planned to reopen schools via distance learning on August 24, 2020 but moved the reopening to October 5, 2020. Reasons for the deferment included challenges in the distribution of learning materials, questions regarding the quality of the modules, and strong reservations from practitioners in the education sector. Few education-related activities took place in the country for nearly seven months between March and October 2020. Since early October, children have been receiving education via distance learning. To support distance learning, the DepEd developed multiple learning delivery modalities, including the online platform Commons, TV and radio programs, SMS, and paper-based self-learning modules.

**Global evidence from past health and disaster-related emergencies suggest that the impact of school closures on learning loss extends well beyond the period of the disaster or pandemic.** The longer the school closure gets, the bigger and less reversible learning losses will be. Early evidence shows that COVID-19 will slow down the goal of lowering learning poverty—which is defined as the percentage of 10-year-old children who cannot read and understand a simple story—by at least half the global rate by 2030.<sup>3</sup> Pre-COVID, it was estimated that the global learning poverty would go down from 53 percent in 2015 to 27 percent by 2030; post-COVID, it is 43 percent by 2030.<sup>4</sup> Learning poverty for the Philippines was estimated at 69.5 percent in 2019 based on TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) 2003 outcomes.<sup>5</sup> The rate will be updated soon to reflect more recent cross-national assessment data and is expected to be considerably higher. With the impact of COVID-19, learning poverty could further increase. Furthermore, according to the World Bank’s simulation analysis of learning losses, it is estimated that Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS) will go down from 7.5 years to 5.7-6.1 years (by 1.4-1.7 years), and the Harmonized Test Scores from 362 to 316-325.<sup>6</sup> LAYS adjusts the quantity of schooling (in terms of years) by taking into account its quality (defined as learning)<sup>7</sup>. The Harmonized Test Scores measure how much children learn in school based on the countries’ relative performance on international student assessments.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup>As of April 7, 2021, there have been 819,614 confirmed COVID-19 cases, of which 646,404 have recovered. There have been more than 14,000 confirmed deaths. The country remains vulnerable to new variants and waves of COVID-19 infection, despite the declining trend in newly confirmed cases.

<sup>3</sup>Global Alliance to Monitor Learning. <http://gaml.uis.unesco.org/learning-poverty/>.

<sup>4</sup>World Bank estimates. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/learning-poverty>.

<sup>5</sup>World Bank estimates.

<sup>6</sup>Agevedo and Cloutier, forthcoming. Learning in the time of COVID.

<sup>7</sup>LAYS combines quantity and quality of schooling into a single easy-to-understand metric of progress. It is calculated by multiplying the estimates of expected years of school by the ratio of most recent harmonized test scores to 625. This adjustment is important because recent research shows that students who have completed the same number of years of school often have vastly different learning outcomes across different countries (Filmer et al. 2018. Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS) Defining a New Macro Measure of Education. Policy Research Working Paper 8591. Background Paper to the 2019 World Development Report. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/243261538075151093/Learning-Adjusted-Years-of-Schooling-LAYS-Defining-A-New-Macro-Measure-of-Education>).

<sup>8</sup>The benchmark international student assessments include TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), and other regional assessments. They are measured in TIMSS-equivalent units, where 300 is minimal attainment and 625 is advanced attainment. Harmonized Test Scores is a component of the Human Capital Index. (For the detailed methodology, see Patrinos and Angrist. 2018. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/390321538076747773/Global-Dataset-on-Education-Quality-A-Review-and-Update-2000-2019>).



**The cost of school closures could also result in short-term and long-term economic and social losses.** In the short-run, household members who need to support children in distance learning may face immediate economic losses. Most children, particularly younger ones, need adult supervision during distance learning. Parents report that they are the key assistants in distance learning (40 percent), followed by grandparents (30 percent) and relatives.<sup>9</sup> Among those adults, women are far more likely to assist children than men and thereby bear the brunt of care responsibilities: this may have implications on their participation and productivity in economic activities.<sup>10</sup> In the long run, it is estimated that an average annual earning per student will decrease by \$893-1,137 (in 2017 PPP\$) or a loss of present value of individual lifetime earnings by \$16,287-20,752 (in 2017 PPP\$).



**This policy note analyzes key issues related to the current schooling and learning situation and proposes policy options to prepare for in-person schooling when this is possible.** Two nationwide surveys in the Philippines provide a snapshot of the conditions of education in the country: the High Frequency Monitoring (HFM) Household Survey carried out in December 2020<sup>11</sup> and the COVID-19 Low Income Household Panel and Economic (HOPE) Survey targeting poor and near-poor households carried out in October 2020.<sup>12</sup> The key issues emerging from these data and proposed policy recommendations are summarized as follows:

<sup>9</sup>Joint World Bank-NEDA-DOF High Frequency Monitoring (HFM) Survey round 2 carried out in December 2020.

<sup>10</sup>Low Income Household Panel and Economic (HOPE) Survey in October 2020.

<sup>11</sup>Joint World Bank-NEDA-DOF High Frequency Monitoring (HFM) Survey round 2.

<sup>12</sup>Cho, Y., D. Johnson, J. Avalos, Y. Kawasoe, R. Rodriguez. 2021. "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Low Income Households in the Philippines: Impending Human Capital Crisis," COVID-19 Low Income HOPE Survey Note No.3, World Bank.

Key Issues	Current Situation	Policy Recommendations
<b>1. Children not engaged in any learning activity</b>	Overall enrollment in formal basic education is about five percent lower than in the last year; Need to monitor attendance and engagement in learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct re-enrollment and re-engagement promotions and campaigns</li> <li>• Provide remedial programs for returnees</li> <li>• Provide alternative learning options for non-returnees</li> </ul>
<b>2. Limited effectiveness of distance learning</b>	Challenges of distance learning include low take-up due to limited access to gadgets and internet, poor quality materials, limited availability of materials in local languages; children's inability to focus, and psychological stress; Challenges are greater for poorer income households and younger children, with the conditions having large regional variations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support teachers to prioritize pedagogical interaction with students by reducing administrative workload</li> <li>• Strengthen monitoring of students' engagement in distance learning</li> <li>• Enhance the quality and quantity of paper-based modules and enhance awareness of available learning modalities</li> <li>• Support teachers to provide accelerated catch-up programs for students</li> <li>• Ensure students' overall well-being</li> </ul>
<b>3. Significant, but uneven demand for in-person classes</b>	Majority of students and parents support the resumption of in-person classes, but some fear it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore local solutions together with local government units and communities, with clear set of priorities, criteria, options, health protocols, and options for different needs</li> <li>• Enhance hygiene and safety and define criteria and priority for in-person classes</li> <li>• Prioritize younger children for in-person classes</li> </ul>
<b>4. Long-term learning losses</b>	Pre-COVID structural weaknesses will remain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor learning outcomes</li> <li>• Further streamline the most essential learning competencies (MELC) to focus the curriculum on foundational topics and subjects</li> <li>• Provide learning recovery programs, taking advantage of technology and innovative teaching practices</li> <li>• Continue reform on key structural challenges</li> </ul>



### Issue 1. Children not engaged in any learning activity

**Overall enrollment in formal basic education is about five percent lower than in the last year, and dropouts this year might not return to formal education given the extended period of school closure.** DepEd's data show that as of mid-January 2021, the total enrollment in formal basic education (K-12) in school year (SY) 2020-21 was 94.2 percent of the enrollment level in SY 2019-20.<sup>13</sup> A non-negligible share of households did not enroll their children due to various concerns, including risks associated with the virus, costs of education, and ineffective remote learning. In terms of the enrollment rate, the HFM survey shows 9 in 10 households with school-aged children had at least one child enrolled, with the poorest quintile presenting a higher enrollment rate (94.5 percent) than the national average (91.0 percent). This relatively higher enrollment rate among the poor was also observed in the HOPE Survey where 97.3 percent of school-aged children were enrolled in school, only slightly lower than the rate of the previous academic year (98.8 percent).<sup>14</sup> The enrollment rate among beneficiary households of the country's flagship safety net, Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), marginally lagged behind the overall poor.



### Issue 2. Limited effectiveness of distance learning

**Enrollment does not necessarily guarantee effective learning, and there are significant challenges in distance learning.** The HFM survey asked household members the top three barriers to effective learning. Figure 1 presents the barriers in order of the first ranked barrier. Limited access to gadgets and internet, the child's inability to focus, and stress due to COVID-19 were among the major barriers to effective learning.<sup>15</sup> Despite the availability of various modalities, 8 in 10 households with enrolled children used paper-based modules as a primary modality for distance learning. Paper-based modules can be as effective as other modalities if properly used, but students may find using them more difficult than other modules in the absence of close supervision by teachers and peers and/or support from household members. Limited use of other modalities may also be due to the lack of access to gadgets and internet among teachers.

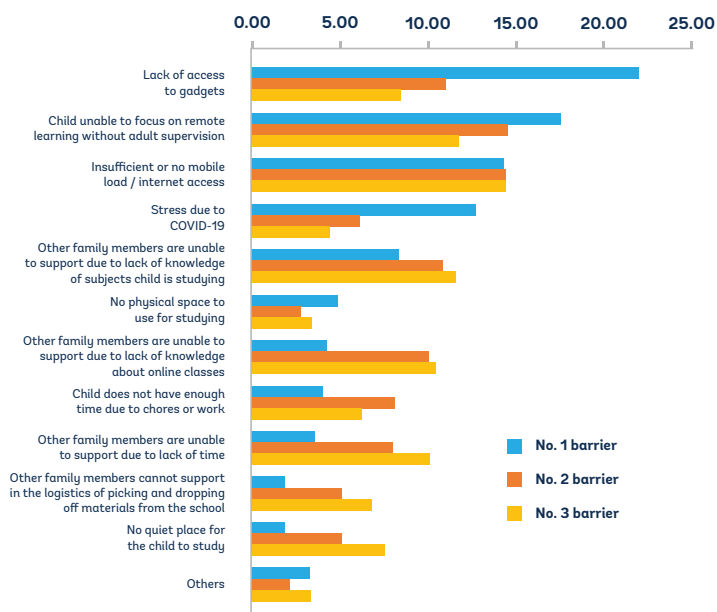
<sup>13</sup>DepEd data presented at the 8th Education Forum on January 29, 2021. They include enrollments in public and private primary and secondary schools, state universities and colleges, but excludes those in Philippines schools overseas and the alternative learning system.

<sup>14</sup>The COVID-19 Low Income Household Panel and Economic (HOPE) Survey, conducted in October 2020. See Cho, Y., D. Johnson, J. Avalos, Y. Kawasoe, R. Rodriguez. 2021. "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Low Income Households in the Philippines: Impending Human Capital Crisis," COVID-19 Low Income HOPE Survey Note No.3, World Bank.

<sup>15</sup>World Bank. 2021. Impacts of COVID-19 on Households in the Philippines: Results from the Philippines COVID-19 Households Survey Round 2 - December 2020.



**Fig 1: Top 3 Barriers to Effective Learning**



Source: World Bank. 2021. The Philippines COVID-19 Households Survey Round 2 – December 2020.



**The challenges in distance learning are more prominent among poorer households.** Only 40 percent of households in the bottom quintile of income distribution have internet access, which is a prerequisite for online learning. Hence, paper-based modules were used more widely among poorer households. Even among the richest quintile households, only 70 percent have internet access and only about 45 percent used online live classes as a primary modality. Also, three quarters of poor and near-poor households in the HOPE survey reported owning at least one smartphone, but students from these households spent only an average of 37 minutes per school day studying online using a phone. Difficulties in internet access, insufficient internet ‘load’ or mobile data allocation, or sharing the gadget with multiple household members were part of the challenges.



**Awareness of DepEd’s TV and radio programming and Commons is low, and even among the households who knew about these platforms, utilization has not been high.** In the HOPE survey, only 35 percent of low-income households reported awareness of DepEd’s TV, 27 percent of radio, and 21 percent of Commons (online platform). The utilization of these platforms was even lower, with 10 percent of households using TV, 8 percent using radio, and 3 percent using Commons. Given that over 70 percent of households reported owning a TV at home, the low utilization may suggest lack of promotions of the programs, low quality and relevance of the programs, conflicting schedules among siblings or with other school activities, among others. Altogether, many enrolled students are not fully engaged in learning. Of particular concern is that relatively little programming and material is in local languages even under the normal circumstances and more so under the current situations, which makes it much harder for parents and other adult members of the household to help their children learn.



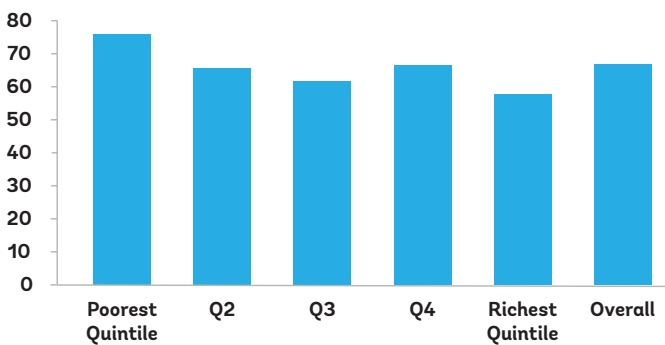
**Younger learners face the biggest challenges under the current distance learning modality due to their inability to engage effectively in self-learning.** The HOPE survey shows that younger children (<11) are unable to use distance





**Most schools across the country distributed self-learning modules, but schools in Luzon tend to reach out to parents to monitor students' learning progress much more than the schools in Visayas and Mindanao.** The HOPE survey shows that nearly all (95.5 percent) surveyed households reported to have received paper-based modules. However, schools' efforts to reach out to parents beyond the distribution of learning materials have significant room to improve especially in Visayas and Mindanao. The share of student guardians who had been contacted by the school varied enormously by island group in the HOPE survey—in Luzon 95.1 percent of parents were contacted, but in Mindanao only 27.8 percent of parents were contacted.

**Fig. 2: Willingness to send children for face-to-face classes**



### Issue 3. Preference for and fears about in-person classes

**The majority of students and households support the resumption of in-person classes, but not all of them do.** The nationwide HFM survey in December shows that 2 in 3 households are willing to send their children back to school. The willingness to do face-to-face learning is most pronounced among poorer households who have less access to online learning than wealthier households. (Fig. 2)

Moreover, female respondents are more likely to report their support than male respondents with statistically significant difference (68 percent vs. 63 percent). DepEd's survey also found that students are the strongest supporters of the resumption of in-person classes, with more than half of them supporting it, followed by a "significant portion" of teachers and undecided parents.<sup>16</sup> However, some parents are unwilling to send their children to school: of those who are unwilling, 97 percent said they were worried of their children contracting the virus. The HFM survey shows that only 3 in 10 respondents felt confident that going out was safe. In particular, there was grave concern about the safety of public transportation.



### Issue 4. Long-term learning losses

**By the time schools reopen for in-person classes, students will have been far behind the learning level of normal years, with some groups experiencing wider learning gaps.** If no remediation education is offered, children who have fallen behind the normal curriculum during the school closure and distance learning are likely to fall further behind as the curriculum progresses.<sup>17</sup> The learning gap will be wider among children who were not enrolled in distance learning at all.

**Now is the time to accelerate the deeper structural reforms in the education system.**

Returning to the pre-COVID system performance would not address the long-standing challenge of low levels of learning outcomes for students. The response to the pandemic is an opportunity to provide education in a new, and more effective, way. Fortunately, most of the investments to help children learn more effectively in response to the pandemic learning losses can be done in a way that makes them contribute to the longer-term improvement of the system.

<sup>16</sup>Atienza, Kyle, and Cortez, Gillian. 2021. "Education department gearing up for trial run of in-person classes." BusinessWorld (Feb 18). <https://www.bworldonline.com/education-department-gearing-up-for-trial-run-of-in-person-classes/>.

<sup>17</sup>Kaffenberger, Michelle. 2020. "How much learning may be lost in the long-run from COVID-19 and how can mitigation strategies help?" Brookings (June 15). <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/06/15/how-much-learning-may-be-lost-in-the-long-run-from-covid-19-and-how-can-mitigation-strategies-help/>.



## Recommendation on supporting children who are not engaged in any learning activity

**Organize re-enrollment and re-engagement campaigns.** Presumably, short-term dropouts this school year could lead to permanent dropouts after long school closures. Provide support to non-enrolled students to return to school next year, including active reach-outs and awareness campaigns, and provide remedial programs for returnees. Such efforts can be concentrated among the poor, particularly 4Ps beneficiaries.

**Provide alternative learning options.** When short-term dropouts are not returning to school the following year, provide them with alternative delivery modality (ADM) programs and pathways and related information to complete the equivalent primary and lower secondary education.



## Recommendation on improving the effectiveness of distance learning

**There is room to improve the delivery of distance learning, which can be addressed by strengthening communication between teachers and students, engaging parents/guardians actively in education, improving the quality of paper modules, providing materials for early graders in local languages, and enhancing awareness of the complementary platforms.** To enhance the effectiveness of distance learning, it is most essential that teachers communicate with students. Cash allowances and means for teachers to reach out to students online, on call, or in-person, can be considered. Where possible, teachers may communicate with students in person on a small group or individual basis. Frequent communication between teachers and parents/guardians is also critical. Given the high share of TV ownership but relatively low awareness and usage for education purposes, strengthening TV programming (e.g., extended hours, multiple languages for key subjects) can be considered.

A number of impact evaluation studies have found improvement in student performance when teachers use TV video programs as a supplementary activity in their lessons in the Philippines.<sup>18</sup>

**Schools need to monitor and ensure students' overall well-being during the COVID pandemic.** Schools provide platforms for children to socialize and develop beyond learning academic subjects; for low-income households, schools also provide a source of nutritional and psychosocial support. It is essential that schools monitor and assess not only the students' learning progress but also their health and mental well-being, as well as their access to nutritious meals which continue to be delivered using different delivery modes and different food products from usual school-based feeding program.<sup>19</sup> This could be done in collaboration with LGUs, DepEd district offices, and communities.

**Teachers need additional support to engage students effectively in distance learning.** Teachers have faced difficult challenges to engage students effectively given the different learning modalities used by their students, the increased burden of interacting with individual students and their families, and the lack of guidance on how to conduct effective distance learning. Moreover, teachers and their families are also affected by the broader pandemic, as other household members might have lost income or suffered health impacts from the virus and / or teachers might be caring for and teaching their own children. All this calls for providing teachers with more examples of good practice in teaching through the new multi-modality approach and psycho-social support to help them deal with the increased levels of stress. Much of the support to teachers will need to be conducted through a distance modality, which will be a challenge, but also an opportunity for teachers to be distance learners just like their students.

<sup>18</sup> Available in the KCFI's website <https://www.knowledgechannel.org/dlsu-impact-study>.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Mateo, Janvic. 2020. "School feeding program continues despite distance learning." <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/12/04/2061379/school-feeding-program-continues-despite-distance-learning>



## **Recommendation on responding to the significant, but uneven demand for in-person classes**

**A gradual and optional transition to in-person schooling is critical.** The risk of exposure to the virus as well as the tolerance to that risk differs among individuals and localities. Therefore, as the national government sets clear criteria for school reopening, it is essential that parents, students, teachers, and schools be given an opportunity to discuss when and how they can shift to in-person schooling to reach a broad agreement among the stakeholders. Even where COVID cases are low, a distance learning option should be offered to those who are not comfortable with in-person classes.

**Priorities could be given to younger children (e.g., kindergarten and lower grades) who face significantly greater challenges in distance learning.**

The results of recent international and regional student assessments, namely, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018, Trend in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2019, and Southeast Asia Primary Learning Matrix (SEA-PLM) 2019, clearly demonstrated the importance of strengthening early literacy and numeracy as the foundation for further learning. The direct interaction should ideally be in-person, and at the minimum, via live online communication, TV and radio programs. Indeed, given the need to help students catch up with lost learning, the multi-modality approach should continue even for children who return to face-to-face schooling to maximize their learning opportunities.

**In planning the transition—given the persisting fears of the virus among a high number of households—strong health protocols as well as opt-out plans should be established to create a safe learning environment.** To date, the nationwide policy of no in-person classes holds across the country.

However, this policy could be adjusted for areas where there are limited COVID cases and in-person classes, and where interactions between teachers and students may be relatively safe with cautionary measures taken. DepEd, together with LGUs and communities, can invest in hygiene facilities and supplies to create a safe learning environment for in-person classes and conduct public awareness campaigns for teachers and parents on safety protocols and evidence on risks. The government's recent decision to prioritize teachers in the COVID-19 vaccination effort is a welcoming key pathway to enable schools to return to in-person learning.



## **Recommendation on minimizing long-term learning losses**

**Monitor and assess students' learning and provide learning recovery programs when students return to school.** It is essential to implement learning recovery programs, including just-in-time assessments of individual students' learning level, intensive tutoring, teacher training in adaptive learning where instruction and pedagogical practices are adapted to students' levels and needs, and prioritization of children's attainment of essential skills. Prepare teachers for lower levels of learning and higher levels of learning inequality in their classroom because learning gaps are expected to vary among students. Students can continue to learn through multiple modalities to maximize learning.

**Even pre-COVID, students' learning outcomes were extremely poor—a challenge that requires systemic reforms.** A fundamental bottleneck includes serious mismatches between the language of instruction and the students' language proficiency, inadequate knowledge and skills among teachers to teach students with limited and different levels of basic literacy and numeracy, and the lack of teaching and learning materials in the language that students understand. Structural challenges such as these will remain, and should be addressed going forward.