

DepEd thumbs down 'calamity diplomas'

by PHILIP TUBEZA
Inquirer.net

THE Department of Education has rejected the call of Senator Francis Escudero for all students in calamity-hit areas to be given passing marks this grading period or semester.

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus said the Department of Education (DepEd) was not sold on the idea of issuing passing marks across the board because doing so might further hobble a public education system reeling from storm-damaged or -destroyed property worth P930.75 million.

"Maybe [Escudero] was misconstrued? If we follow his suggestion, we compound our losses of lives and property further with a costly penalty to the education of our children," said Lapus, who, like the senator, is a member of the Nationalist People's Coalition.

"The students might pray for supertyphoons every year, and we might end up with calamity diplomas," he added.

Education Undersecretary Vilma Labrador echoed Lapus' position, saying: "We sympathize with the victims of the recent typhoons, including our students and teachers. The country has lost lives and resources. We can't afford to lose further by giving up the needed learning of our youth."

Labrador said school and local officials would resume all regular classes as soon as possible and have been "looking for ways to make up for the missed class days."

"The required minimum number of class days can be met," she said.

On the other hand, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) is leaving it to tertiary schools to decide on the matter.

DepEd-National Capital Region Director Teresita Domalanta said teachers would be willing to "walk the extra mile" and even "bend policies" just

so the students in devastated areas would make the grade.

After all, under normal circumstances, "at most only one or two students" failed in an average class of 50 students in public schools, Domalanta said, adding: "That's because our teachers always try their best to give those students in danger of failure [every chance to pass], like remedial classes and other enrichment studies. Our teachers even visit them at home."

"So now, although many of our teachers are also victims of the [storms], they will do what they can to help students pass. We've already thought about this. Our teachers will walk the extra mile to visit them."

Domalanta admitted that when classes resumed last week, student attendance was noticeably low in the devastated areas of Marikina, Pasig, Taguig, Navotas, Valenzuela and Muntinlupa.

"But this week, we've noticed that the numbers are improving," she said.

According to Domalanta, the children seeking shelter in schools that are serving as evacuation centers may temporarily attend classes there.

"We'll have separate records for that, and they can return to their original schools later," she said.

CHED Executive Director Julito Vitriolo said the issue could be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

He said school officials could assess their students' standing.

"If the grades of these students show that they have a chance of passing even if they fail their final exams, then maybe they can be exempted from their finals," Vitriolo said.

"But if their grades show that there is no hope of passing even if they get a perfect grade in their finals, then that's a different matter," he said. ■

Arroyo signs order for reconstruction commission

by REY M. NASOL
Inquirer.net

LEGAZPI CITY—The proposed reconstruction commission, a so-called "bypass route" that will quicken fund sourcing and hasten the country's coping mechanism against the effects of calamities, has been signed into an executive order by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, said Joey Salceda, economic adviser to Ms. Arroyo and current Albay Governor, last Oct. 12.

Salceda proposed the creation of a special commission for Philippine reconstruction after Tropical Storm "Ondoy" and Typhoon "Pepeng" ravaged the central part of the country and the northern Luzon areas barely two weeks ago.

"Given the impact of the global crisis on our fiscal capacity versus the magnitude of calamity impact, the Philippines should seek fresh aid amounting to \$1 billion to fund reconstruction," he said.

The special public-private reconstruction commission composed of representatives from the government, church, big business and civil society should be constituted by the government to spearhead the effort, he added.

Salceda explained that the special commission will operate like the original Coordinating Council for the Philippine Assistance Plan headed by businessman Roberto Villanueva of Atlantic Gulf Philippines Inc.

The CCPAP has since evolved into the Coordinating Council for Private Sector Participation which operates the BOT Center under DTI.

The Office of Civil Defense and the National Economic and Development Authority will form the secretariat, whose key task is to raise funds especially grants, prioritize programs and oversee implementation, is spelled out in

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