

**WORKING TOGETHER: BEST PRACTICES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION OF PANGASINAN DIVISION II, PHILIPPINES**

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Abstract: *Inclusive Education is a worldwide program in special education which aims for Education For All (EFA). The Philippines' Department of Education continuously supports inclusive education and promotes inclusion of children with special needs in all public and private schools across the country. Moreover, the Philippines' DepEd's Pangasinan Division II implements inclusive education but faces many challenges in the implementation in all schools over the years. To strengthen and to bring inclusion in action, Pangasinan Division II gears towards the implementation of several activities for students, both in typical, mainstream and special education class, professional upgrading and developments for regular and special education teachers, involvement activities for parents, stakeholders and the entire community to fully embrace and implement inclusive education. As a result, inclusive education, through working together, provides a great positive impact to the learners, strong support from parents and awareness to the whole community. This paper presentation aims to provide the participants with practical, evidenced-based and best practices towards inclusive education.*

Keywords : *Inclusive Education, Best Practices*

INTRODUCTION

What is Inclusive Education?

The definition of inclusive school impinges on human rights, dignity and equalization of opportunities. Inclusion describes the process by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering its curricular organization and provision. Through this process, the school builds capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend and, in so doing, reduces the need to exclude pupils (Handbook on Inclusive Education, DepEd, 1999). Inclusion is a right, not a privilege for a select few (Oberti vs. Board of Education in Clementon School District). Usually families, professionals and advocacy groups would initiate the move for inclusion.

Inclusion also means providing all students within the mainstream appropriate educational programs that are challenging yet geared to their capabilities and needs as well as any support and assistance they and/or their teachers may need to be successful in the mainstream. But an inclusive school is a place where everyone belongs, is accepted and is supported by his peers and other

members of the community in the course of having his or her educational needs met (Stainback and Stainback, 1990). Inclusive education is a flexible and individualized support system for children and young people with special educational needs. It forms an integral component of the overall education system and it is provided in regular schools committed to an appropriate education for all. Inclusive education recognizes and responds to the diversity of children's needs and abilities, including differences in their ways and paces of learning. Thus, paper presentation aims to provide the participants with practical, evidenced-based and best practices towards inclusive education.

Public Policy Support for Inclusive Education:

The **Philippine Constitution of 1987** reflects the educational effectiveness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that it signed in 1990. In Article XIV, Sec. 2, it is provided that

"The State shall ... establish and maintain a system of free public education in the elementary and high school levels" with elementary education being compulsory for children. The Constitution also

mandates that State to “*encourage non-formal, informal and indigenous learning systems, as well as self-learning, independent and out-of-school study programs, and to provide adult citizens, the disabled and out-of-school youths with training on civics, vocational efficiency and other skills.*”

The Philippines adopted the policy on inclusion education after the **World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain in June 1994**. This conference gave rise to the Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education that subscribes to the fundamental principle that “*all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have.*” The integration and mainstreaming of children with special needs into the regular school system in the country actually commenced in the 1970s. A mainstreaming model for children with disabilities was implemented in one of the schools in Manila in 1974. Prior to 1994, the Philippine government had already undertaken a number of legislative, policy and program initiatives related to special needs education. These include, among others, adoption of the Philippine Plan of Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons: 1993-2002, the preparation of a Handbook on Policies and Guidelines on Special Education in 1987, and the **Child and Youth Welfare Code (PD 603)** which is replete with specific provisions intended for the welfare of exceptional children, As cited in Article 3, Rights of the Child, *the emotionally disturbed or socially maladjusted child shall be treated with sympathy and understanding, and shall be entitled to treatment and competent care; and the physically or mentally handicapped child shall be given the education and care required by his particular condition*. Equally important is Article 74, which provides for the creation of special classes. The Article reads: *Where needs warrant, there shall be at least one special class in every province, and if possible, special schools for the physically handicapped, the mentally retarded, the emotionally disturbed and the specially gifted. The private sector shall be given all the necessary inducement and encouragement.*

Other important laws in support of inclusion education are the **Education Act of 1982** and the **Magna Carta for Disabled Persons of 1992 (Republic Act 7277)** as mentioned above. The Education Act provides for a multi-sectoral thrust in the implementation of inclusion education by mandating the schools to provide for the establishment of appropriate bodies that would discuss issues and promote their interest. The Magna Carta for Disabled Persons on the other hand, likewise provides that the State shall (i) ensure that disabled persons are provided with adequate access to quality education and ample opportunities to

develop their skills, (ii) take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all disabled persons, and (iii) take into consideration the special requirements of disabled persons in the formulation of education policies and programs. It also mandates the State to encourage learning institutions to take into account the special needs of disabled persons with respect to the use of school facilities, class schedules, physical education requirements and other pertinent considerations.

The adoption of inclusion education, in effect, provided a synthesizing force for past and current efforts as well as a common platform for new initiatives directed at children with disability and those requiring special education. Moreover, in response to the Dakar Framework of Action inked during the World Education Forum in April 2000 in Dakar, Senegal, and adapted by various countries including the Philippines, the National Action Plan for Education for All (EFA) was approved on February 16, 2006 by the National Economic Development Authority issued as resolution No. 2, series of 2006. The central goal of the Philippine EFA 2015 is ensuring that all Filipinos acquire basic competencies that will enable them to be functionally literate. As a matter of policy, the Philippines through the Department of Education has enunciated a number of implementing orders thereby expanding access to education.

- a) **Department Order No. 126, s. 1990**, which calls for the national implementation of the *Parent Learning Support System (PLSS)*.
- b) **Department Order No. 1, s. 1997** entitled *Organization of a Regional SPED Unit and Designation of a Regional Supervisor In-charge of Special Education* which enjoins the Regional Directors to designate a full-time Regional Supervisor In-charge of Special Education and to organize a SPED unit. The SPED Unit includes representatives from the elementary education, secondary education and alternative learning system. The SPED Unit is tasked with assisting the regional director in the formulation and implementation of policies, programs and projects on special education.
- c) **Department Order No. 26, s. 1997** entitled *Institutionalization of SPED Programs in all Schools* which institutionalizes the provision of equal educational opportunities to children with disabilities through special needs education. The institutionalization is aimed at the following children with special needs: the gifted/talented, the mentally retarded, the visually impaired, the hearing impaired, the orthopedically handicapped, the learning disabled, the speech defectives, children with behavior problems, autistic children, and children with health problems. Educational opportunities are to be provided through the formal system and through other alternative delivery services in education.

The Order also requires all divisions to organize at least one SPED center and SPED programs in each area. Furthermore, it provides training at the regional, division and district levels, and incentives for supervisors, administrators and teachers involved in SPED programs. This issuance started the adoption of inclusive education as a policy.

- d) **Department Order No. 14, s. 1993** entitled *Regional Special Education Council* which authorizes the regional directors to organize a Regional Special Education Council (RSEC). RSEC is tasked with the following: To formulate and coordinate the implementation of policies, plans and programs in special education in the region; To organize regional SPED training team which shall conduct in-service training at the regional and sub-regional levels; and To establish linkages with GOs and NGOs for either financial or human resources support.

e) **Enhancing Special Education Centers**

To improve the special education program, the school-within-a-school concept was introduced in 1974. In a school that is strategically located within the community a Special Education Center is organized. This Center, manned by trained special education teachers for different types of disabilities and administered by the principal of the regular school, offered an array of educational services appropriate to the needs and capabilities of children with mental retardation and other disabilities. The services included special classes, resource room plans, partial or full integration, and mainstreaming. The rationale for the organization of the centers was to maximize the utilization of expert human resources and consolidation of support for the program, to facilitate supervision and administrative functions, and to provide research opportunities.

Salient Features of Inclusive Education in Pangasinan Division II:

- i. Inclusion means implementing and maintaining warm and accepting classroom communities that embraces diversity and honor differences.
- ii. Inclusion means implementing a multi-level, multi-modality curriculum.
- iii. Inclusion means preparing and supporting teachers to teach interactively.
- iv. Inclusion means providing ongoing support for teachers in the classroom and breaking down barriers of professional isolations.
- v. Inclusion means involving parents in the planning process in meaningful ways.

Recognized Special Education Centers in Pangasinan Division II:

Pangasinan Division II is an active government educational institution in the implementation of special education program. As part of its mission on

“no children left behind”, it strongly advocates and implements inclusive education in all schools. Pangasinan Division II has a total of 2,882 enrolments of children with special needs in public schools. 2,310 belong to gifted and talented class while 572 are children with disabilities. With this fast growing number of learners and schools offering program for the children with special needs, the following schools are recognized special education centers that offers education and services for all exceptionalities:

- i. Binalonan North Central School SPED Center.
- ii. Bautista Central School SPED Center
- iii. Narciso R. Ramos Elementary School SPED Center
- iv. Manaoag Central School SPED Center
- v. Mangaldan Integrated School SPED Center
- vi. Juan C. Laya Elementary School SPED Center
- vii. Nantangalan Elementary School SPED Center
- viii. San Fabian Integrated School SPED Center
- ix. Villasis Central School SPED Center
- x. West Central School SPED Center
- xi. Tomana Elementary School SPED Center

Likewise, non-special education center schools are also admitting and educating children with special needs. All elementary and secondary schools offer inclusive education as part of the division’s program.

Special Education Program in Pangasinan

Division II: The ultimate goal of special education shall be the integration or mainstreaming of learners with special needs into the regular school system and eventually in the community (Policies and Guidelines for Special Education, 1997). However, Pangasinan Division II also acknowledges the fact that the provision of least restrictive environment for children with special needs is hinged on the degree of severity of each learner. Educational services for children with special needs (CSNs) in the Philippines come in several forms. These include:

- i. **Resource room plan.** Under this scheme, the child is enrolled in the regular school program but goes to a resource room to use the specialized equipment either in a tutorial situation or in a small group. The resource room teacher functions both as an instructor and as a consultant. The usual procedure is for the trained resource room teacher to serve the area of exceptionality. However, occasionally, in small communities, necessity may dictate that the resource room teacher serves children with a variety of learning disabilities.
- ii. **Itinerant teacher plan.** Under this plan, an itinerant or traveling teacher serves one or more regular schools depending on how many pupils need special help. The teacher gives direct and

- consultative services to children and in addition observes diagnoses, makes referrals and evaluates performance.
- iii. **Special class plan (Self-contained and primed for mainstreaming).** This plan is aimed at children with more severe problems which make it difficult for them to learn in a regular classroom setting. At times, they may be with their normal peers, but are usually not in an academic situation.
 - iv. **Special education center.** This adopts the “school-within-a-school” concept. The Center is administered by a principal and operated according to the rules and regulations that govern a regular school. The Center functions as a Resource Center to support children with special needs in regular schools, assists in the conduct of school-based INSET, produces appropriate teaching materials, and conducts continuous assessment of CSNs.
 - v. **Community-based delivery system.** CBDS is for children with special needs who reside in distant communities and cannot avail themselves of existing special education programs. They are reached by teachers, para-teachers or volunteers who were trained to teach the basic 3Rs and self-help activities to prepare them for useful and independent living.
- ii. **Intellectual Disability Week.** This weeklong activity provides opportunities for people with intellectual disability to showcase their innate talents and skills in the mainstream society. The highlight of this event is featuring people with intellectual disabilities and their success stories through advocacy and campaign in radio and television shows. Also, the division conducts the annual “Camp Pag-ibig (Love Camp)”. In this event, all children with disabilities were gathered together in one venue in school to have two-day camp. Regular pupils serve as audience, assistants and encouragers to the pupils with disabilities. The two-day camp activities are:
 - a) Card Making Contests for children with autism assisted by regular pupils;
 - b) Recycled Bottle Designs for children with hearing impairment;
 - c) Braille Reading Contest for children with visual impairment;
 - d) Poster-Making Contests for children with CP/ID assisted by regular pupils;
 - e) Cook Fest Contest for Transition Program Students with regular pupils;
 - f) Mr. and Ms. Camp Pag-ibig for children with Down syndrome.

CONTENT

Pangasinan Division II’s schools have been active part of inclusive education. Most schools join the monthly activities and celebrations through school-based activities that promote awareness and strengthen inclusive education. Presently, the following are the different activities and best practices that this division has been implementing for the last three years.

A. Working Together: Learners Level

Monthly Activities that promotes inclusive education and special education awareness:

- i. **Autism Awareness Week.** This activity aims to generate awareness, acceptance and understanding, inclusion and employment of people with autism in the society and promote action by public and private sectors towards enabling people with autism to live with dignity, enjoy equal rights and access to education, services and facilities enjoyed by the typical people for them to function independently and contribute productively to the society. The following are the sub-activities conducted:
 - a) Art Workshop conducted in every school;
 - b) Health and Wellness Awareness for all parents of school children;
 - c) Consultation with possible employers of people with autism; and
 - d) Disaster preparedness and response activities for people with autism.
- ii. **Deaf Awareness Week.** This observance aims to enhance significant public awareness on the prevention, early detection, intervention, rehabilitation and education of people with hearing impairment. The following activities are undertaken:
 - a) Sports competition with regular and deaf pupils
 - b) Career Guidance for the Deaf
 - c) Personality Development for the Deaf
 - d) Parents’ symposia on early detection, intervention and education of the deaf.
- iii. **White Cane Safety Day.** This activity aims to stimulate public awareness on the rights and welfare of people who are blind and with low vision, promote recognition and acceptance of the white cane as a symbol of mobility and safety for people who are blind, strengthen and protect the physical, moral and social well-being of people who are blind and low vision, and serve as vehicle of information on the continuing development of programs being implemented through partnerships between public and private sectors to realize the rights and fundamental freedom of people who are blind and with low vision. The following activities are conducted:
 - a) Inviting ophthalmologists or optometrists to conduct free eye examination and screening to all children suspected of visual impairment;
 - b) Showcasing of talents of blinds and low vision learners and success stories of people with visual impairment to parents and school children.

- v. **National Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation Week.** This weeklong national celebration aims to stimulate public awareness on disability issues and concerns, and strengthen the involvement of the government agencies and non-government organizations and develop and strengthen cooperation and partnership between and among the various sectors in the society for better understanding of disability issues and concerns. The following activities are conducted:
- Simple Ceremony including all school learners
 - Showcasing of Skills and Talents of CSNs and selected typical learners
 - Family Support Group Training of Coping Skills Teaching Program for Parents
- vi. **Special Education (SPED) Fun Day** provides opportunities for the gifted and talented students to showcase their giftedness and talents in the community through different activities. Also, children with disabilities are involved in this endeavour.
- Mr. and Ms. SPED Fun Day for Children with Giftedness and Talents
 - Poem Recitation for Headstart
 - Spelling BEE for Children with Giftedness and Talents
 - Sabayang Pagbigkas for Children with Giftedness and Talents
 - Modern Dance Contest for Children with intellectual disabilities
 - Singing Contest for Children with visual impairment
 - Poster Making Contest for Children with autism
- vii. **Week for the Gifted and Talented.** This activity will deepen public awareness on the education of the gifted and talented in the country. Specifically, it aims to strengthen social awareness and responsibilities of the gifted and talented in nation building. The activities are:
- Academic competitions;
 - Leadership Training;
 - Tree planting;
 - Fun games and sports activities
- Implementation of:**
- Mainstreaming
 - Resource Room Program
 - Integration
 - Transition Program
 - Involvement of all learners in all school-based activities.
- Inclusion in:**
- Division SPORTS Competitions
 - Regional SPED Olympics
- B. Working Together: Teachers Level**
- Capability Building for SPED Teachers and Teachers handling children with special needs.** This activity provides opportunities for both SPED and regular teachers to share their experiences, expertise, and skills in handling and educating children with special needs. Moreover, this activity enhances and upgrades both teachers in the field of special education and inclusive education through various activities like demonstration teaching, instructional materials making, and current trends and techniques on handling special learners.
 - Scholarship Grant for SPED Teachers by the Department of Education.** Pangasinan Division II has constantly sends regular teachers who will receive and teach children with special needs in the scholarship program offered by the Philippines' Department of Education to be trained on a specific area of disability. After which, these trained teachers will be assigned to teach and receive children with special needs in their classrooms. Also, they are given an opportunity to share their learning through seminars and trainings conducted by the division and schools.
 - In-service Trainings on Special Education and Inclusive Education.** This is a school-based activity where all teachers in typical and special classes gather together in one venue to be trained in the research-based and current effective strategies on teaching children with disabilities in the mainstream class. This activity is conducted monthly in order to continually promote effectiveness and efficiency in the field of inclusive education.
 - Division Training-Workshop on Inclusive Education for School Administrators.** This training-workshop (three days consecutive training) provides basic knowledge and skills on the policies and guidelines of special education and inclusive education in the Department of Education. School administrators are the participant in order for them to know the different how's and why's in special education. After the training-workshop, they will make an action plan that includes inclusive education to be implemented in their respective schools.
 - Seminars and Trainings on Inclusive Education for Receiving and Regular Teachers.** These seminars and trainings are conducted quarterly (three days consecutive training) for all receiving and regular teachers to give and to train them on the different types of disability, educational programs and effective strategies on teaching children with special needs under inclusive setting. These teachers also receive crash course on special education.

- vi. **Division Search for Outstanding SPED Teachers.** This project aims to recognize excellent teachers of children with special needs.
- vii. **Division Search for Outstanding SPED Schools/Centers.**
- viii. **Benchmarking of SPED Schools.** School administrators and teachers from regular schools benchmark special education centers and inclusive schools to learn about their best practices and how to fully implement inclusive education in their respective schools.

C. Working Together: Parents Level

- i. **Parents-Pupils Collaborative Hydrotherapy.** This is a school and community-based activity which provides a great collaboration between teacher and parents in providing hydrotherapy of the children with disabilities with the help of therapy professionals.
- ii. **Integrated Family Day.** Parents-Teachers Association of the whole school conducts yearly Integrated Family Day. The whole school celebrates the importance of working together both in typical and special education classes. This also establishes a good rapport and camaraderie between parents, students and teachers.
- iii. **School-based Orientation of Inclusive Education for all Stakeholders and Parents.** INSETs are conducted monthly in every school. Every INSET, inclusive education is tackled and discussed to provide fundamental skills and knowledge to all teachers in school.
- iv. **Involvement of all parents in all school-based activities.** In every school activity, all parents are involved through the Parents-Teachers Association. Parents are very supportive in all school programs, activities and endeavours. This creates a positive atmosphere, unity and oneness of parents, teachers and pupils.

D. Working Together: Stakeholders And Community Level

- i. **Invitation of Super Malls in Movie Watching Related to Inclusive Education.** This activity is conducted monthly by a giant and well-known super mall in Pangasinan. Movies being shown are related to children with exceptionality and their great stories with life lessons. All parents of the CSNs in Pangasinan Division II with their children gather and watch together. This inspires and encourages parents to continually support their children in every aspect of their lives.
- ii. **Distance Education for Special Education Learners.** Learners with special needs who are far from the school are given distance education program. SPED Teachers go homebound instruction for these learners. Also, modules are given to parents and pupils for the homebound

instruction and follow-ups. Assessments are conducted after every learning session.

- iii. **Home-based Education for Special Learners.**
- iv. **Community-Based Livelihood Training Program.** School and local government unit in barangay level tie up for the livelihood training program. Out of the school youths, adults and persons with disabilities join together in this program. They are taught different livelihood skills in order for them to live independently and productively.
- v. **Private-Partnership Sponsorship Program for Special Learners.** Private sectors and individuals provide scholarship and sponsorship for special learners especially those who are indigent. Allowances, transportation and school fees are provided as a full support for the learners' education.
- vi. **Local Government Unit Funding for Special Education.** Special Education Fund is provided both barangay and municipal level. This SEF is used to purchase instructional and manipulative materials, teachers and pupils' attendance to different activities and classroom improvements.
- vii. **Information Dissemination Campaign on Inclusive Education.** This is conducted yearly in all barangays of every school. Barangay officials are pro-active and supportive in schools' inclusive education campaign. Also, they inform every household about this program.
- viii. **Deployment of PWDs in the Community Works.** Community businesses and local government units provide opportunities by employing PWDs in their business establishments. The school also provides follow-ups and continues training of skills and work ethics and conducts.
- ix. **Orientation on the Rights and Privileges of PWDs.** In cooperation with the Department of Social Welfare and Development, LGU and NGOs, training and orientation on the rights and privileges of PWDs are discussed and implemented. One of these is the provision of PWD card in which PWDs are able to afford discounts in basic commodities like food, medicines and transportation. Also, they are given discounts in hospitals, clinics, and some leisure places.
- x. **Training on Disaster Risk Reduction Management.** One of the important components of LGU programs in cooperation with schools is the conduct of training on disaster risk reduction management. PWDs are all included and given attention so that they are knowledgeable on the how's in before, during and after of every disaster.

CONCLUSIONS

With the strong advocacy and effort, different strategies and activities being conducted by the school's in Pangasinan Division II, the following are the positive outcomes and implications:

- i. **Reduced fear of human differences accompanied by increased comfort and awareness.** Students in inclusive setting attributed their reduced fear of people who looked or behaved differently to having had interactions with individuals with disability. In addition to feeling more accepting of others, children also learn to value the contributions that individuals make.
- ii. **Growth in social cognition.** Nondisabled students learned to be more tolerant of others as they became more aware of the needs of peers with disabilities. Students demonstrated more positive feelings about themselves after spending time helping classmates with disabilities. They also learned skills to enable them not only to communicate more effectively but also to be more supportive of disabled persons in their daily interactions.
- iii. **Improvement of self-concept.** Many nondisabled students have experienced an increased in self-esteem as a result of their relationship with individuals with disabilities. Teachers reported that students who act as buddy/peer tutor give them sense of belonging.
- iv. **Warm and caring friendship.** Students who act as buddies/peer tutors to disabled children develop friendship with their buddies or tutees. They are friends not only in school but in the community as well.
- v. **Full support and acceptance of the program.** Parents of the children with special needs become proactive in their child's educational needs through follow ups, active participation in their children's education and school activities. Also, parents of the typical students fully support and became aware of the existence and needs of the CSNs in the school. Therefore, they become active part in the full development, making a child-friendly school and dynamic part in inclusive education.
- vi. **Families are more integrated into community and increased parent participation**
- vii. **Increased school staff collaboration and professional and personal growth.**
- viii. **Increased inclusion in community environment and greater opportunities for interactions.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Inclusive Education is a vital part of Pangasinan Division II's educational program for all learners that promote belongingness and unity from pupils, teachers, parents, and the whole community. Thus, the

following were recommended to strengthen and continue the lead of inclusive education:

- i. Teachers must regularly contact the parents that will keep communication lines open and provides opportunities to give positive feedback about the learners.
- ii. Communication and information sharing within the school and community can create advocacy for learners with disabilities and their families.
- iii. Inclusive Schools and special education schools shall canvas for volunteers to support in the school, train volunteers to work with learners with a disability, invite disability organizations to work with the school, develop, circulate community awareness brochures, fact sheets, and continuous involvement in the community in a disability awareness event and start a community disability action group.
- iv. Continuous strong support on inclusive curriculum including teaching methodologies and strategies.
- v. Continuous professional upgrading and development for teachers handling children with special needs and receiving teachers.
- vi. Train parents on how to educate their own children at home.

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