



# POLICY BRIEF

No. 2020-22 (August 26, 2020)

## Urgent Need to Address Massive Drop-off in K-12 Enrolment

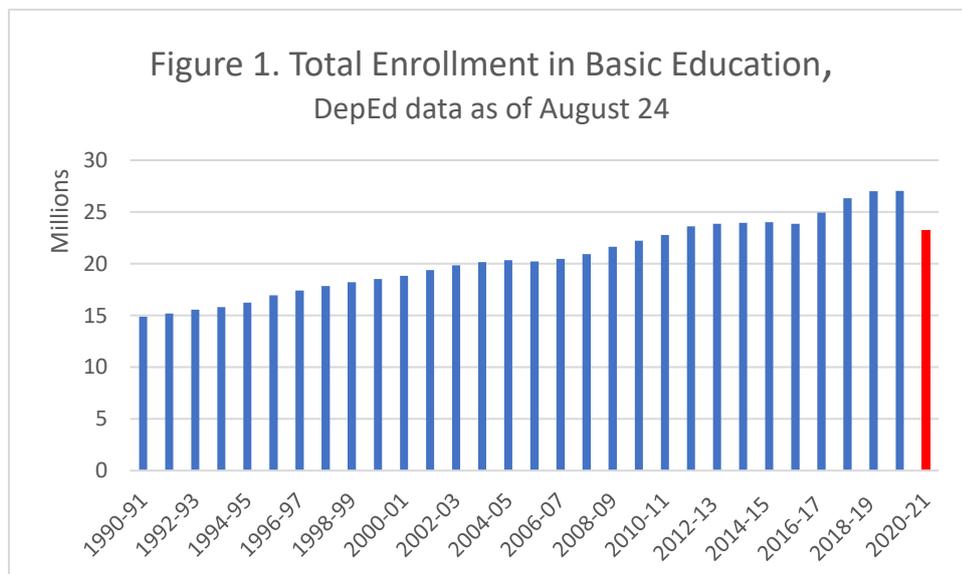
Geoffrey M. Ducanes<sup>1</sup> and Edita A. Tan<sup>2</sup>

The postponement of school opening for public basic education schools to October 5 from August 24, apart from providing the Department of Education (DepEd) more time to prepare for distance learning, also gives the agency time and opportunity to abate the massive decline in enrolment across all levels of basic education.

According to DepEd data as of August 24, total enrolment in K-12 declined by 3.8 million (14 percent) to 23.2 million in school-year (SY) 2020-21 from 27 million in SY 2019-20. This sets back enrolment level in basic education by a decade, or to less than what it was in SY 2011-12, and increases the number of out-of-school children in the K-12 age-range about five-fold to around five million.

The drop-off cuts across all levels of basic education: kinder enrolment fell 19 percent to 1.7 million from 2 million; elementary enrolment by 14 percent to 11.5 million from 13.3 million; junior high school enrolment by 12 percent to 7.5 million from 8.5 million; and senior high school enrolment by 18 percent to 2.6 million from 3.2 million.

Private schools suffered disproportionately, with a total enrolment decline of close to 60%, reflecting both the drop-off in overall enrolment and a shift to public school enrolment, and likely putting the financial viability of many private schools in jeopardy.



<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Ateneo de Manila University Department of Economics. Email: [gducanes@ateneo.edu](mailto:gducanes@ateneo.edu)

<sup>2</sup> Professor Emeritus, University of the Philippines Diliman, Email: [edita.tan@upd.edu.ph](mailto:edita.tan@upd.edu.ph)

## Why enrolment has dropped

There are at least three ways by which the COVID-19 crisis could have negatively affected enrolment.

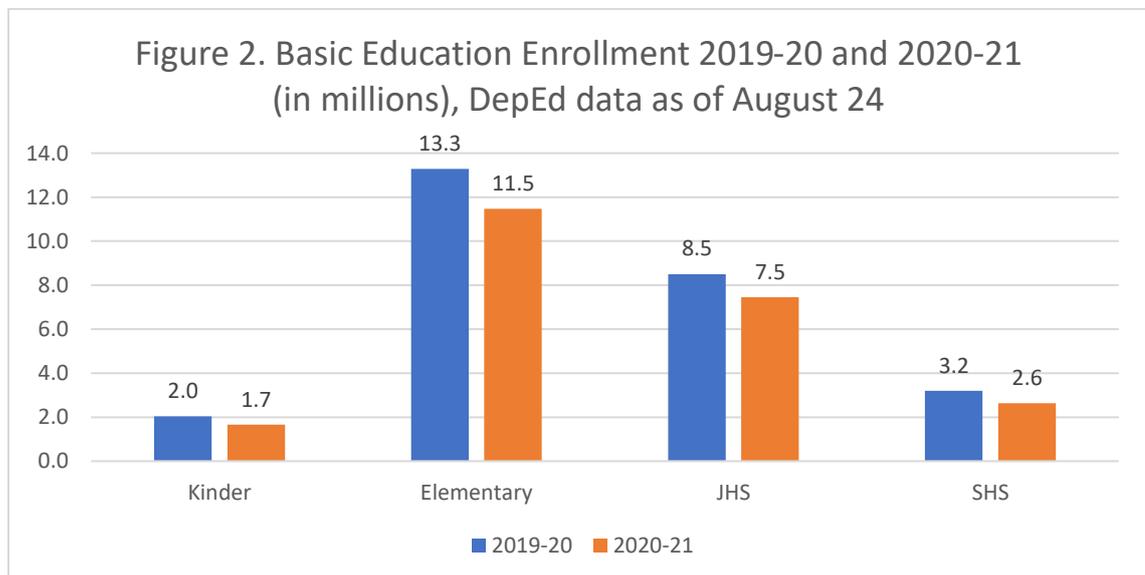
One way is through the physical distancing-induced need for remote learning combined with the massively unequal access to digital technology. In families which do not own learning gadgets, such as personal computers, tablets or even smart phones, or who have no fast and reliable internet access, whether via broadband or mobile data, parents might be daunted and see little point in enrolling their children this school year.<sup>i</sup>

A second way is through parents' fear of infection for the children and the rest of the family once face-to-face classes resume, possibly within the school year. Although classes are planned to be done remotely until the end of 2020, there is some uncertainty as to whether regular face-to-face classes will resume next year. Fear of infection together with uncertainty as to when the pandemic will end, likely contributes to the lower enrolment turnout.

A third way is through the reduced incomes suffered by many households in the second quarter – when the economy contracted by more than 16 percent – and the beginning of third quarter of the year, largely coinciding with the enrollment period. At the height of the lockdown, 8 million workers lost their jobs according to the April 2020 Labor Force Survey, and several more million workers likely earned no income even if they had jobs.<sup>ii</sup>

There are actual costs to sending children to school even if tuition is free, in the form of food and transportation allowance, and uniform and other costs. There is also the opportunity cost – given the current hardships, parents could have decided they could increase the chance of getting employment and income for the family with more members available for work, including children.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority's 2017 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey, pre-COVID-19, 38 percent of out-of-school children in the K-12 age range (5-17 years of age) were not in school either because of financial concerns or because of employment or the need to find employment. These reasons are now likely to dominate among the estimated 5 million out-of-school children.



## Effect on learning outcomes

The large dropout in K-12 enrolment this school-year could have a large and lasting impact on completion rates and learning outcomes. Those who drop out this school-year are likely to have a reduced chance of returning to school even after the pandemic has ended. And even if they do return, are likely to significantly lag behind their peers, especially in mathematics.<sup>iii</sup> These will have long-term consequences on their future earnings potential.

As it is, the abrupt shift to distance learning, though necessary, will likely impact the quality of education delivery and exacerbate the disparities in learning outcomes even among those who are going to enroll, given the short time the education system and teachers have had to prepare, and the inequality in access to technology.

## Previous policies that have significantly raised enrolment

In the post-Marcos period, there were three policy actions that have had a clear impact on basic education enrolment. The first is the provision of free public secondary education through The Free Secondary Education Act of 1988, which, upon implementation, immediately and significantly raised overall secondary enrolment, particularly in public schools.<sup>iv</sup> The second is the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program or 4Ps, which has increased enrolment in elementary to near universal among recipient (poor) households.<sup>v</sup> The third is the Senior High School Program, which has substantially raised enrolment among those in the 16 to 17 year age group, especially among the poor.<sup>vi</sup>

## Recommendations

The effect of COVID-19 on schooling is very complex and difficult to address. The impact is both on quality and access. On the issue of access at least, the postponement of school opening gives the government additional time to try to raise K-12 enrolment. But this may require bold actions, similar to previous policies which have successfully raised enrolment.

To address non-enrolment due to household income decline, the government should consider an expanded and/or enhanced 4Ps program. Expansion means the coverage of more households, particularly those that have recently fallen into poverty. Enhancement means an increase in the amount of cash transfer provided to poor households conditional on the enrolment of their child members. Such a policy accomplishes two things at once: it increases K-12 enrolment; and it provides necessary cash support to households in danger of hunger and poverty.

Alternatively, or perhaps in addition, the continuation of DepEd's school-based feeding program for undernourished students in kindergarten and elementary schools (and public day care) to address under-nutrition and hunger, but with the food rations provided to students in their homes via some delivery system (for example, through the barangay or via pick-up by parents from the school), could motivate parents worried about sufficient nutrition for their children to enroll them in school. Something similar is already being undertaken in Colombia and Congo.<sup>vii</sup>

Finally, speedy action to bridge the digital divide could reduce non-enrolment due to lack of access to remote learning technology. This could be done by building internet hubs in barangays, especially in poor communities (as has been suggested by Vice President Robredo), or providing free learning gadgets and mobile data or internet allowance (in collaboration with telecommunication companies) for education purposes to low-income students, as is being done in some localities, like Manila and Quezon City.

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<sup>i</sup> See, for example, Lubangco, C.K. 2020. Education in the Time of COVID-19: Assessing the Accessibility of Online Learning for Filipino Learners. Ateneo de Manila University Department of Economics Policy Brief No. 2020-18.

<sup>ii</sup> See, for example, Ducanes, G. 2020. A Closer Look at the Impact of COVID-19 and the Lockdown on Employment and Poverty. Ateneo de Manila University Department of Economics Policy Brief No. 2020-20.

<sup>iii</sup> Soland, J., Kuhfeld, M., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E., and Liu, J. 2020. The Impact of COVID-19 on student achievement and what it means for educators. Brown Center Chalkboard Blog dated 27 May 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/05/27/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-student-achievement-and-what-it-may-mean-for-educators/>

<sup>iv</sup> Ducanes, G. and Balisacan, A. 2019. 'Reducing Inequality in the Philippines'. Chapter in *Getting Even: Public Policies to Tackle Inequality in Asia* edited by M. Talpur. Bloomsbury India.

<sup>v</sup> Chaudhury, N. and Okamura, Y. 2012. Conditional Cash Transfers and School Enrolment: Impact of the Conditional Cash Transfer Program in the Philippines. Philippine Social Protection Note No. 6. The World Bank Group. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/479681468093580402/pdf/719040BRIOP1180m0in0the0Philippines.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Ducanes, G. and Ocampo, D.J.. 2020. "The Impact of Basic Education Reform on the Education Participation of 16 to 17-year old Youth in the Philippines". *The Philippine Statistician*, 68 (2019), 111-130.

<sup>vii</sup> Er, M. (2020, April 30). School feeding at home. World Food Programme Insight. <https://insight.wfp.org/school-feeding-at-home-95ff24a2c78>