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Priority Area #23
Ensuring seamless and integrated delivery of education

Putting Foundational Learning at the Core of Philippine Educational Systems Reforms

Dr. Alec Ian Gershberg, Rameen Iftikhar & Ramsha Fatima

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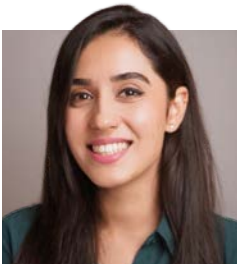
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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABC+	Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ALS	Alternative Learning System
ANA	Amplified Numeracy Assessment
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
BEA	Bureau of Education Assessment
CDC	Child Development Center
CDT	Child Development Teacher
CDW	Child Development Worker
CHED	Commission on Higher Education
CRLA	Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment
DEPDev	Department of Economy, Planning, and Development
DepEd	Department of Education
DILG	Department of the Interior and Local Government
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EDCOM II	The Second Congressional Commission on Education
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
ELLNA	Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Assessment
EO	Executive Order
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FLN	Foundational Learning and Numeracy
GEEAP	Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel
IPeD	Indigenous Peoples Education
KII	Key Informant Interview
LAYS	Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling

LCC	Literacy Coordinating Council
LGU	Local Government Unit
LSB	Local School Board
MELC	Most Essential Learning Competency
MOOE	Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses
MTB-MLE	Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
NAT	National Achievement Test
NEAP	National Educators Academy of the Philippines
NNC	National Nutrition Council
PAPS	Programs, Activities, and Projects
PIDS	Philippine Institute for Development Studies
PRC	Professional Regulation Commission
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RBEC	Revised Basic Education Curriculum
RISE	Research on Improving Systems of Education
RMA	Rapid Mathematics Assessment
SBM	School-Based Management
SDO	Schools Division Office
SDS	Schools Division Superintendent
SEF	Special Education Fund
SNPP	Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Pamilya ng Pantawid
SRC	School Report Card
TaRL	Teaching at the Right Level
TEC	Teacher Education Council
TEI	Teacher Education Institution
TES	Tertiary Education Subsidy

TESDA	Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UP-NISMED	University of the Philippines National Institute for Science and Mathematics Education Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Putting Foundational Learning at the Core of Philippine Educational Systems Reforms

“To move forward, we must first and foremost address the basics. We must focus on what is most urgent and foundational. Early childhood education, nutritional support during the first 1,000 days of life, and literacy by the end of Grade 3 are not just benchmarks—they are lifelines. If we fail to establish these cornerstones, the rest of the structure cannot stand.”

EDCOM II, *FIXING THE FOUNDATIONS* YEAR TWO REPORT (P. 380)

The Bottom Line

-
- A. Foundational learning and core instructional support for learners younger than age 9 should be at the center of systems reform efforts.
 - B. It is impossible to try to conceptualize all the “systems” under the remit of EDCOM II as a single system under a single coherent framework.
 - C. Foundational learning can itself be thought of as a system in a complex but coherent manner.
 - D. This study articulates a systems thinking approach to foundational learning in the Philippines and places it within a policy reform framework.
 - E. We then situate the system for foundational learning within the larger administrative and policymaking context of the Philippine educational sector—including but not limited to DepEd, CHED, TESDA, ECCD Council, the legislative and executive branches of the national government, sub-national governments and administrative units, the private sector and ultimately schools and other local service providers—to build the argument for making foundational learning the central aim of educational reform efforts.
 - F. We emphasize that foundational learning is developed integrally across all the early years, ages 0-8—and therefore is not only a function of primary school.
 - G. This will not be easy politically or bureaucratically, but it is imperative to maximize EDCOM II’s long-term impact.
 - H. We begin to generate guideposts for policy reform process placing foundational learning at the center.
 - I. We call for EDCOM II to create a companion report in the next 6 months focused exclusively on fixing foundational learning for children under 8 years of age, where they could situate all the excellent insights and recommendations on foundational learning coherently in one place. (See Annex A for excerpts from *Fixing the Foundations* report related to foundational learning.) Such an effort could overcome the inevitable diffusion that occurs when foundational learning issues and analysis are scattered (as they are in the Year Two Report) throughout a 400-page report that must cover all ages and all levels of schooling including lifelong learning. This would also allow an opportunity to better highlight the relevant issues in the Government and Finance and Teacher Education Sections of the report and integrate them explicitly into the discussion of foundational learning for these children.
 - J. We examine, in turn, I) The Challenges to Focusing on Foundational Learning, III) Assessment, Data and Information Needed for Foundational Learning, IV) Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and Foundational Learning, V) Foundational Learning: Lessons from Global Cases and Initiatives in the Philippines, VI) Teachers, Curriculum and Pedagogy: Support for Foundational Learning, VII) Governance and Decentralization, VIII) Inter-agency Coordination: Cabinet Cluster and Beyond, and IX) Focusing the EDCOM II Priority Areas on Foundational Learning.

K. We conclude with a summary of our recommendations, and an overarching message: to flourish, the Philippine educational system must achieve a focus on foundational learning:

...to accelerate progress in learning, reformers must “Focus to flourish.”¹

The five key actions to drive system transformation that Pritchett distilled from myriad country cases and decades of research apply equally well to the Philippine educational and policymaking context:

- **Commit** to universal, early foundational learning.
- **Measure** learning regularly, reliably, and relevantly.
- **Align** systems around learning commitments.
- **Support** teaching.
- **Adapt** what you adopt as you implement.

Note: This report does not have an executive summary but reading only the sentences presented in **bold** throughout serves this purpose.

¹ Pritchett, L., Newman, K., and Silberstein, J. 2022. Focus to Flourish: Five Actions to Accelerate Progress in Learning. Research on Improving Systems of Education. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-Misc_2022/07

I. The Challenges to Focusing on Foundational Learning

The Philippine education sector is large, diverse, over centralized and complex. The range of issues and challenges is evident in the EDCOM II *Miseducation* report and in the many policy and legislative initiatives the commission has either sponsored or supported in the past year. This admirable coverage of all aspects of the education sector, however, makes centering foundational learning more difficult, even if that is not the intent.

To pivot from educational access to learning will require a near relentless focus on foundational learning in an institutional context that eschews such focus. Yet, prioritizing foundational learning in children under 10 years of age could pay high dividends across the education sector and Philippine society. It will not be easy, and will require:

- **focus on a few achievable indicators or targets that are ambitious but not overly-ambitious, and that are directly related to learning outcomes.** While DepEd and EDCOM II have embraced similar goals, there is not yet a strong indication that the direction is focused on foundational learning—e.g., Key Stage 1 and perhaps Key Stage 2. (Specific ideas for assessments and indicators are discussed below in Section III.)
- This in turn will require prioritizing programs and practices with a track record of positive impacts on Foundational Learning.

The concern is not that foundational learning is missing as a priority—either in the *Miseducation* or *Fixing the Foundations* reports or in the myriad initiatives and activities EDCOM II has pursued. Here is one example from the *Miseducation* report (p. LV):

“Addressing multiple issues simultaneously requires prioritization.... we identified 28 priorities that will promote equitable access while focusing heavily on factors that relate to quality of *education*. Within these 28 priorities, the Commission has also agreed to first of all tackle issues in building foundational skills, specifically literacy and numeracy, in Key Stage 1 (K to 3).”

The new *Fixing the Foundations* report makes the priority even more prominent, highlighting the President’s “stressing the need for greater focus on the first 1,000 days,” (p. 17) and “to realign priorities towards foundational stages of learning: on early childhood education and nutrition, and on primary education during which critical competencies are built.” (p. 20). Furthermore, the report picks up on the language of the “relentless focus” required to move the needle on foundational learning outcomes (p. 44):

“While the many competing priorities remain, the central revelation is that attempting to address all addresses none. The task before us precludes a relentless and razorsharp focus on path-dependent, long-horizoned interventions; Resources must flow toward the early years—addressing stunting in the first 1,000 days, improving access to early childhood education, and ensuring that every learner achieves foundational literacy by the end of Grade 3.”

The concern, rather, is that the crucial laser focus on foundational learning is elusive, and less likely to be achieved in a diffuse policy making and legislative environment, especially given the very tight timelines under which EDCOM II operates. For example, the *Fixing the Foundations* report

contains excellent discussions of how to improve teacher training to better support foundational learning in your learners, but they are often buried among the broader, albeit important, discussions of the sector in general, specialized secondary schools, gifted and talented programs, and Alternative Learning Systems (ALS). (See Annex A for excerpts from *Fixing the Foundations* report related to foundational learning). **We recommend that EDCOM II put all their knowledge, analysis, and advocacy related to foundational learning in a single supplementary report entirely focused on foundational learning for children up to age 8.**

From a “systems thinking” perspective there is not one education system in the Philippines (or any country for that matter), but rather many overlapping systems. It is impossible to try to conceptualize all the “systems” under the remit of EDCOM II as a single system within a single coherent framework. **Foundational learning can itself be thought of as a system in a complex but coherent manner.**

One way to rapidly improve learning outcomes at a system level is to prioritize the low-performing students in early grades. This is because improving the learning of the students who are learning the least can have a greater impact on average learning than focusing on improving the performance of high-performing students.² Many of the most successful of these efforts in practice are part of a category known as Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL). India through the Pratham organization is perhaps the best known, but there are many others. In the Philippines for example there is the experience of the Learning Recovery Curriculum with a set of promising interventions linked to the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) and the Amplified Numeracy Assessment (ANA). Much of the *Fixing the Foundations* report’s discussion on the need to improve regional equity is highly relevant to improving foundational learning, and it could be better framed in this respect.

2 DepEd could still develop protocols such as those in Vietnam that identify, support and encourage high-performers in disadvantaged populations.

II. Methods and Approach

- In order to gain an understanding of the Philippine education sector, we began with a deep reading of EDCOM II's *Miseducation* report. We then reviewed a range of reports from the Philippine government, international development partners, academic studies, and others.
- We used the international literature on educational reform and systems thinking to begin to develop a framework for thinking about potential strategies for educational reform processes in the Philippines, with a particular focus on the priority areas articulated by EDCOM II.
- Most importantly, we engaged in 30+ key informant interviews with a range of experts: former DepEd officials (including three previous DepEd Secretaries), current government officials in Manila and other regions of the country, EDCOM II members, development partners currently working directly on education programs, executive directors of relevant non-government organizations, policy-oriented researchers and analysts, a parents interest group, and school-level administrators. These interviews lasted an average of 75 minutes, and were generally done in a confidential manner to encourage frank conversation.³
- We conducted a half-day workshop with representatives from EDCOM II, DepEd, The Asia Foundation, and ABC+⁴ to conceptualize and develop Messy Maps (sometimes called Mind Maps) of the system of Philippine foundational learning. These maps are in Annex B.

Focusing on foundational learning as a system has allowed us to work with EDCOM II to identify the elements, the relationships, and the feedback loops that produce the outcomes and that are so often effective in resistance to change—and yielded insights on which policy efforts to emphasize. Many of these efforts are underway, though we identify some policy gaps, especially as they relate to the early childhood sector.

⁴ ABC+: Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines was a United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded project to improve early reading, math, and social and emotional skills for children in the early grades (Kindergarten through Grade 3 [K–3]) in the Philippines

³ We follow a qualitative interview methodology called “Interviews as Guided Conversations” Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing (2nd ed.)*: The art of hearing data. SAGE Publications, Inc., <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226651> Some interviews were by Zoom and most were in-person. There were no recordings or transcriptions to encourage frank conversations. The interviews were led by Dr. Alec Gershberg who took notes by hand, and were generally attended by another note taker who was part of the research team.

III. Assessment, Data, and Information Needed for Foundational Learning

The lack of good, properly-measured, and usable assessment data is a common mantra in Philippine educational policy circles. The problem is well known and DepEd is currently working hard to improve through a wide range of efforts such as reorganizing the Bureau of Education Assessment (BEA) and giving it more autonomy, improving monitoring and evaluation, and considering ways to make more data and results public. It is beyond the scope of this study to even summarize let alone assess all these efforts, but there are some **crucial elements for improving foundational learning** that we must emphasize:

- **By the time most students finish Grade 3, many problems in their foundational learning have already taken root.** *Fixing the Foundations* shows this clearly in Figure 2: Literacy Performance of Students in Key Stage 1 (p. 44). The most regular and organized assessments conducted annually are the Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Assessment (ELLNA) for Grade 3 and the National Achievement Test (NAT) for Grades 6, 10, and 12. These are understandably receiving much of the attention within DepEd (see for example p. 107 of *Fixing the Foundations*). But the data and assessment needs start much earlier in the students' educational trajectories. The system must know which children are "grade ready" (or not) at each individual Grade K through 3, the point being that the system must know not only that they are not "grade ready" after Grade 3 but also as precisely as possible at which point in their educational trajectories they fell behind being grade ready. So, for instance, in addressing the "pressing need for clearly defined minimum competencies and a consistent scale for measuring progress" (p. 113)—why not start with Preschool and

Key Stage 1? Similarly, with the recent efforts "urging DepEd to suspend the regular academic program for K-12 learners" (p. 126)—why not start with Preschool and Key Stage 1?

- There is an array of early learning assessments⁵, but most if not all have been implemented in projects with development partners. **There is, thus, enough proof of concept and some or all of these early learning assessments must be taken to scale nationally in ways that are as comparable as possible across jurisdictions, and useful for tracking progress towards subsequent national assessments.**
 - The ELLNA, if improved, could provide the basis for governance and accountability mechanisms in the monitoring and evaluation of school efforts, but without more and better assessment of foundational learning in real time, teachers and schools will not have the means to improve. **Several Key informants indicated that the CRLA, in particular, is ready to be mainstreamed, implemented nationally.**
 - According to DepEd,⁶ the CRLA has been administered nationwide starting School Year 2024-2025 together with the Rapid Mathematics Assessment (RMA). If successful, this is an important step forward. However, in addition to the need to evaluate this first national effort, the CRLA, as designed, is for teacher planning not performance evaluation.
 - In addition, for a coherent assessment system for Foundational Learning, DepEd must work to ensure that

⁵ For example: EGRA, EGMA, ANA, and CRLA.

⁶ DepEd memo [DM-CT-2024-284](#) August 22, 2024, accessed April 18, 2025

the CRLA dovetails effectively with the ELLNA, that it effectively tracks progress towards the ELLNA in ways that explicitly allow both teachers and the system as a whole to adjust in ways that improve performance on the ELLNA.

- If the CRLA is to remain a teacher-led assessment for planning, then at least one more formal assessment should be administered before Grade 3. Following the Puebla, Mexico case in Section V below, **we advocate the consideration of an assessment administered mid-year in Grade 2.**
- **In terms of specific indicators or targets,** we suggest a single measure (one each) for literacy and math above the minimum acceptable level in the national assessment, which in this case would be the ELLNA. **Thus, four targets could be the focus of each Key Stage 1 grade level: attendance, completion, and learning (measured as literacy and numeracy).** Myriad other indicators could be collected for various uses, but these four indicators should provide the focus on the evaluation of system progress as each Grade and Stage.
- There is also the possibility of using early childhood Pre-K assessments to better foster foundational learning, which is discussed in more detail in a later section on ECCD.
- Finally, the recent ECCD legislation, the “Early Childhood Care and Development Act”, does lay the groundwork for clearer monitoring and evaluation of ECCD.
- **DepEd must publish learning outcomes for each and every school** in the country—as well as at each level of political and administrative jurisdiction. This may be politically precarious especially at first but without it, efforts to improve learning outcomes will fall short.
 - **As a first step, we recommend that the four indicators mentioned above (attendance, completion, and learning (measured by single literacy and numeracy targets taken from a redesigned ELLNA) be published nationally and then all the way at each level of the system to the school.** This would be the measures of success at each level and would promote accountability for results.
 - The details of what is published, and how, are important. **International experience generally shows there is a trade-off between accuracy and understandability, especially with parents.** Publishing raw scores without contextualizing them or adjusting for the characteristics of the student body or more simply the *gains* over time in those scores will fail to capture the quality of a school and thus not provide good accountability through parental decision making or useful information for teachers and school staff to improve.
 - Although DepEd officially has a School Report Card (SRC) that is “prepared by schools twice a year which aims to strengthen shared governance and increase participation among local stakeholders,” it does not include the kind of published learning outcomes needed to understand and motivate corrective actions (by school staff, parents, DepEd officials or others).

- **There is misalignment between what the national assessments capture and the competencies and skills that should be measured from the curriculum.** Our Foundational Learning Workshop participants corroborated what we heard in Key Informant Interviews in this regard. As one key informant stated, “a Grade 2 teacher is simply not aware of the skills a student did or did not accomplish in Grade 1.” In addition, even assessment data that are gathered, are not made available in ways that would support foundational learning.

Forexample, the ELLNA results are not published and provided to teachers in a timely manner to assess student proficiency levels. Even earlier in the student learning trajectory, early childhood centers officially have a detailed assessment of learning and social development they should perform on every child, but these assessments are often not done, not collected, and nearly never made available to Kindergarten or Grade 1 teachers to help them understand what ECCD workers already know from having worked with each child. (See Annex B for more details).

IV. Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and Foundational Learning

- **Policymakers in the Philippines have consistently either underestimated or undervalued the early childhood sector. This was the single strongest agreement that arose in the Foundational Learning Workshop.** These conclusions dovetail with the finding of the World Bank's (2024) *PHILIPPINES HUMAN CAPITAL REVIEW: "Investing in the Early Years to Boost Human Potential,"* and were echoed in nearly all Key Informant Interviews and many EDCOM II publications and communications. This is institutionally understandable given that ECCD is not fully under the control of DepEd and has a diffuse organizational and governance structure. Similarly, several current DepEd officials seem hesitant to prioritize ECCD reform and integration given the complexity of everything on their plate coupled with the lack of direct control they feel they wield. Nevertheless, DepEd Secretary Angara recently signaled his support for ECCD publicly in a presentation at the World Bank Philippines Economic Update Development Dialogue.
- **Recent congressional acts have increased funding to the ECCD sector, an important statement of support. Yet in the absence of an overarching national plan to increase access, improve quality, and encourage the private sector, the funding will fall well short of the levels required to properly support foundational learning.** Although formal rate of return analysis generally fails to capture the true value of effective investments in early childhood care and preschool, the strong international consensus supports the existence of very high rates of return. There is little doubt that significantly increasing investment in high-quality ECCD would bring very high return on investment.⁷
- **The *Fixing the Foundations* report clearly articulates the need to increase attendance, increase funding, address the shortage of accredited child development workers, and better integrate preschool and Key Stage 1 primary school grades.⁸**
- ***Fixing the Foundations* also identifies important strategies for nurturing shared accountability between families, schools, and communities,** specifically developing "a comprehensive ECCD framework that harnesses the untapped potential of diverse home-based caregivers to strengthen early childhood development outcomes." (p. 90)
- **Where the *Fixing the Foundations* is weaker is in the details of what actually goes on inside the early childhood centers and preschools.** The report details the need to better train child development workers but is nearly silent on the pedagogical and other approaches, curricula and teaching and learning materials, that would improve outcomes for children and increase their school readiness as they enter

7 The Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) is well positioned to tease out the rate of return to early childhood investment, which could be useful politically as well as analytically. See for instance: 1) Valerie Gilbert T. Ulep, Lyle Daryll D. Casas, Aaron Carlos G. Manuel, John Paulo D. Mendoza, Joy Bagas, and Kim Leonard G. Dela Luna. "Behind the Slow Start: An Assessment of Early Childhood Care and Development in the Philippines." PIDS DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES NO. 2024-04 MAY 2024. <https://doi.org/10.62986/dp2024.04>. 2) Jose Ramon G. Albert, Jan Carlo B. Punongbayan, and Mika S. Muñoz. "Returns to education in the Philippines (2005-2022): Declining benefits, increased inequities." PIDS Policy Note No. 2024-09 (July 2024) <https://doi.org/10.62986/pn2024.09>

8 Notably, the Governance and Finance Chapter gives significant details on recommended funding strategies for ECCD (p. 361)

Kindergarten and Grade 1.⁹ That is, the *how* of fostering foundational learning in preschools and child development centers. Furthermore, doing so will require integration across Pre-K and Key Stage 1 curricula and, ideally, teachers from both working in teams. (See Section V)¹⁰

- **Attaching the ECCD Council to the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) is a good idea, but creates new challenges that must be addressed.** Most Key Informants seemed to agree with the judiciousness of officially delegating the ECCD to DILG as an attached agency in order to encourage all LGUs to integrate ECCD initiatives into local governance and support other decentralization efforts, in part as a result of the Mandanas-Garcia ruling¹¹ (See the Governance & Decentralization section). Based on recent developments and the latest bill this change

9 There are a few references, such as on p. 81: “In the context of Philippine early childhood learning centers, these insights highlight the critical need to assess and enhance the accessibility and quality of educational materials and resources in early learning centers.” Later (p. 88) the report asserts the “need to reevaluate how we design our ECCD programs, not only in addressing access, but also in rethinking how services are structured to better support Filipino families in order to drive the demand for ECCD service.” EDCOM II should “put the meat on the bone,” so to speak, and articulate more detail in this regard in the coming months. Perhaps the LGU cases presented on p. 97 could also be integrated into this effort?

10 *Fixing the Foundations* (p. 109) does provide such details on Vietnam, with the implication that similar strategies should be pursued in the Philippines, but future efforts could make this much more explicit: “The Vietnamese education system also emphasizes early school readiness. Various nursery level programs designed for children aged three months to three years are widely available and typically accessed by the public. These programs focus on holistic development encompassing physical, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social, and aesthetic skills. In 2010, the government established a development framework for 5-year-old children, comprising 120 indicators. Moreover, the Vietnamese government ensures equitable distribution of resources by prioritizing students in remote and disadvantaged areas through affirmative action programs and teacher incentives.”

11 It seems likely that this change in the role of DILG and its augmented set of responsibilities provides additional impetus to review, update and amend the 1991 Local Government Code along the lines advocated in Maria Ela L. Atienza and Jan Robert R. Go (2023). “Assessing Local Governance and Autonomy in the Philippines: Three Decades of the 1991 Local Government Code,” CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES PROGRAM ON SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES, Discussion Paper Series 2023-05.

appears likely.¹² And *Fixing the Foundations* clearly recognizes the need to support both low-income LGUs and those in need of capacity building. (p. 96)

- **DepEd will thus cede some control, but must not cede responsibility for overseeing the educational components of ECCD.** The DepEd Secretary will still be part of the ECCD Governing Board, co-chairing together with the head of DILG, and including the heads of CHED, DSWD, DOH, DA, TESDA, and the National Nutrition Council (NNC). There will also be an Advisory Committee for ECCD that will provide independent advice to the ECCD Council. In addition, it will be very important for the Department of Economy, Planning, and Development (DEPDev) (formerly NEDA) to facilitate increased funding given both the role that such investment can play in fostering economic growth and the institutional connection between DEPDev and PIDS, who can provide detailed analysis of such returns.
- **In practice, there will be coordination challenges, and the Council has been bounced between different agencies several times in the last few decades. Perhaps some of these challenges could be mitigated by an improved national coordinating body, such as a Cabinet Cluster or other arrangement, but the parts of DILG related to ECCD would have to be incorporated somehow.** Ultimately, the Cabinet Cluster’s oversight of the ECCD council under its new structure is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for solving the coordination challenges. Rather specific areas of engagement will be needed amongst and between the various actors, and particularly between the DepEd and DILG secretariats.
- **Foundational learning must be conceptualized to include both ECCD and Key Stage 1 together**

12 As per Senate Bill 2575, which was in the third and final reading as of Dec 16, 2024 and is sent to the House of Representatives for concurrence. https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/lis/bill_res.aspx?congress=19&q=SBN-2575

in an integrated manner. But to date there has been poor curricular alignment between DepEd and other ECCD services. For example, there exists an extensive ECCD checklist and assessment that child development teachers should fill out on each child; this data could be useful to K and Grade 1 teachers, but the data is not tracked or available.

- **Funding is an issue for ECCD. Funding constraints may not be as much an issue for other parts of the education system, but the evidence suggests it is for ECCD.** The expansion of services will require additional funds (UNICEF and others have advocated for 10% of the education budget).¹³

- **A clear conclusion of our Foundational Learning Workshop and many Key Informant Interviews is that there exists a shortage of Child Development Centers (CDC), which in turn lack Child Development Teachers (CDTs) and Child Development Workers (CDWs).** This shortage can be attributed to a lack of certification for these personnel and poor wages, leading to low motivation levels to join these centers.

¹³ See UNICEF (2022) *Add Today Multiply Tomorrow* Building an Investment Case for Early Childhood Education.

- **The certification issues can be traced up to TESDA and CHED. For example, there is an incomplete quality assurance mechanism in TESDA,** a lack of national certifications, and inadequate trainers and assessors across all sectors. Recently, TESDA has publicly committed to rectifying some of these shortcomings, which is a good sign, but they must be held to account. Particularly encouraging are the new TESDA competency standards for ECCD and their commitment to implement a new certification course for child development workers who are high school graduates in 2025. This could be considered a solid example of inter-agency coordination.
- ***Fixing the Foundations* also identifies the “mismatch between the general design of ECE degree programs and the competencies needed to teach in the early years, specifically for children below the age of 5.”** (p. 83) This suggests a role for CHED and TESDA to work together to support ECCD. Later, the report presents data on the average cost per unit of degrees in higher education, and shows the degrees in Early Childhood Education are nearly 30% higher than degrees in Elementary and Secondary Education (Table 7 p. 189). **One idea would be to have Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) grants specifically for students pursuing the early childhood degree.**
- To be sure, there are demand-side issues with parents resisting the use of CDCs, but without adequate high-quality supply, it will not be possible to address the demand issues.

V. Focus on Foundational Learning: Lessons from Global Cases and Initiatives in the Philippines

Students who do not build foundational literacy and numeracy skills in primary schools are unlikely to catch up later (World Bank, 2024).¹⁴ This impacts their lifelong learning trajectories (Banerji et al., 2021)¹⁵. However, the evidence shows that **the current education system is not delivering results in foundational literacy and numeracy for the vast majority of learners. The system does not prioritize foundational literacy and numeracy skills as prerequisites for cumulative and progressive learning. Even the EDCOM II Year Two report, “Fixing the Foundations,” presents too broad a view of foundational learning** rather than focusing it on children under 8 years of age. Here, the structured and targeted pedagogy supported by approaches such as Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) can help efficiently and effectively overcome obstacles to pursue Foundational Learning and Numeracy (FLN) at scale (World Bank, 2023)¹⁶.

It may be tempting to use economic rate of return analysis to prioritize education policy efforts; however, typical rate of return analysis is deceptive for policymakers justifying such prioritization because it fails to account for the fundamental role foundational learning plays in the achievement of returns from higher levels of education. As Belafi et al state, “It is often tempting for policy makers to focus attention to secondary and tertiary education, where the highest economic benefits may be expected (Darvas et al., 2017).

However, without a focus on foundational learning for all, only a small minority of students are able to reap the full benefit from secondary and tertiary education.”¹⁷ Global expert Harry Patrinos cautions that the “increase in demand for tertiary education [will] put pressure on policymakers to expand university education. This should not, however, come at the detriment of basic education, since primary education is a fundamental human service, and access to primary (and secondary) education is a prerequisite for entry into university.”¹⁸ And Karol Mark Yee has noted that “attainment of lower levels of schooling remains the stepping stone to access better returns provided by ‘secondary’ and ‘some college’.”¹⁹ Ideally, analysis should use Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS), and not simply economic rates of return. **This is as much a challenge for messaging and politics as it is analytically.**

An evaluation of the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of education interventions by Angrist et al. (2020)²⁰ found that those interventions that yielded the most significant returns (measured in Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling) for the least cost per child mainly were associated with improving targeted instruction, with four out of the top ten ranked, focusing explicitly on foundational

¹⁴ World Bank. (May 16, 2024). Foundational Learning. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/foundational-learning>

¹⁵ Banerji, R., Floretta, J., Donnelly, K., & Jenkins, R. (2021, July 13). Foundations for student success: Focusing on functional literacy and numeracy. J-PAL. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/blog/7-13-21/foundations-student-success-focusing-functional-literacy-and-numeracy>

¹⁶ World Bank. (2023). Cost-effective approaches to improve global learning: What does recent evidence tell us are “smart buys” for improving learning in low- and middle-income countries? World Bank Group.

¹⁷ Belafi, C., Hwa, Y., and Kaffenberger, M. 2020. Building on Solid Foundations: Prioritising Universal, Early, Conceptual and Procedural Mastery of Foundational Skills. RISE Insight Series. 2020/021. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-RI_2020/021

¹⁸ Patrinos, H. Estimating the return to schooling using the Mincer equation. IZA World of Labor 2024: 278 doi: 10.15185/izawol.278.v2

¹⁹ Yee, K.M.R. “Raising the floor while lowering the ceiling: Reduced inequities in education returns in the Philippines,” *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol 101, 2023,

²⁰ Angrist, N., Evans, D. K., Filmer, D., Glennerster, R., Rogers, F. H., & Sabarwal, S. (2020). *How to Improve Education Outcomes Most Efficiently? A Comparison of 150 Interventions Using the New Learning-adjusted Years of Schooling Metric*. Policy Research Working Paper; No. 9450. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/2a873f3a-1bd1-577f-aef0-bc7c386d0fb5>.

learning, while an additional 4 out of the top ten (or a total of 8 out of the top ten) would very likely improve Foundational Learning (e.g., preschool attendance, community- or village-based schools, and ability grouping with extra teachers in primary schools). In other words, **investment in improving foundational learning can be among the most cost-effective resulting in high returns.**

Foundational Learning Initiatives in the Philippines

Characterized by rapid assessments, continuous feedback, targeted instruction, and remedial support²¹, iterations of the TaRL method can be found across different initiatives undertaken in the Philippines' education system. DepEd is leading some of these efforts at the regional level in collaboration with local municipalities and civil society organizations, while others are being implemented nationwide in collaboration with various agencies and donors.

The Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines (ABC+) program is an example of a large-scale effort towards improving foundational learning²².

Led by DepEd, it was a collaboration between USAID, RTI, and partners, including The Asia Foundation, SIL Lead, Florida State University, and the University of the Philippines National Institute for Science and Mathematics Education Development (UP-NISMED). The project contributed to reducing the learning gap in foundational learning across K-3 by developing dedicated material for struggling students, for example the Beginners Reading Program, Classroom Reading Packages, Early Numeracy Initiative for Remote Learning, providing instructional support to teachers for effective use of supplementary materials for literacy development, and the development of the Comprehensive

Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) and Rapid Mathematics Assessment (RMA) to assess and enhance foundational learning. However, the project emphasized support for literacy across its different components, specifically for leveled reading, while it planned to expand its focus on numeracy. This program possessed key characteristics of the TaRL methodology by emphasizing rapid assessment and information sharing, a clear and directed focus on foundational learning, and instruction according to proficiency instead of grade level.²³

Similarly, the Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Program (ELLN) initiative led by DepEd focused on equipping teachers with the necessary competencies for assessing and enhancing foundational learning for K-3 students²⁴.

It provided teachers with training for evidence-based teaching practices, including differentiated instruction, and support through learning partnerships with other teachers in school-based Learning Action Cells, where teachers collaborate with experienced mentors for guidance, knowledge transfer, and feedback. This incorporates an integral tenet of TaRL by creating sources for consistent teacher development and support, usually done through resource personnel or “leaders of practice” who frequently visit participating institutes.

Another initiative implemented by DepEd, in collaboration with IPA and Youth Impact, mEducation or ConnectEd, focused on developing foundational learning through

23 While there are certainly legitimate questions about the cost per student of the ABC+ as well as the capacity of the DepEd to scale such an effort within its administrative structure, these are key questions worth answering.

24 Andaya, J. R. (2019, August 1). Scaling education programs in the Philippines: A policymaker's perspective. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/scaling-education-programs-in-the-philippines-a-policymakers-perspective/>

21 Foundational Learning Resources. <https://www.flnhub.org/focus-area/teaching-at-the-right-level>

22 RTI International. (July 19, 2021). Rising to the challenge: Improving basic education in the Philippines. <https://www.rti.org/impact/rising-challenge-improving-basic-education-philippines>

at-home instructional support (Angrist et al., 2023)²⁵. Using rapid assessments to monitor learning based on the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) model from Pratham in India, they provided 20-minute personalized phone tutor sessions for math weekly and shared practice problems via text to students in Grades 3 and 4. The initiative concluded a 40% increase in numeracy scores for participating students, highlighting the potential to yield 3.4 learning-adjusted years of schooling (LAYS) per \$100 spent on the intervention. While it is unclear if these efforts are scalable in the Philippine context, there are important characteristics to consider. **In fact, one medium term goal should be to foster some kind of community-led assessment similar to ASER (see Annex D for more detail). While these are generally spearheaded by non-governmental organizations (such as AHA Learning Center), the Philippine Government could play an important supportive role.**

Similar initiatives have been taken by other external partners and civil society organizations. To train and facilitate community teachers to provide remedial support to struggling students, World Vision has led programs such as the Brigada Pagbasa and functional literacy support in Zamboanga del Norte²⁶. To provide supplementary instruction for foundational learning, **the Knowledge Channel Foundation implemented the Basa Bilang²⁷ program with DepEd**, where they developed curriculum-based video lessons for K-3 students, conducted teacher training, and enabled at-home reinforcement with a 24-hour broadcast channel.

25 Angrist, N., Ainomugisha, M., Bathena, S. P., Bergman, P., Crossley, C., Cullen, C., ... & Sullivan, T. (2023). *Building resilient education systems: Evidence from large-scale randomized trials in five countries* (No. w31208). National Bureau of Economic Research.

26 Maluyo, F. J. (2019, January 24). Improving functional literacy in the Philippines. World Vision. <https://www.worldvision.org.ph/improving-functional-literacy-in-the-philippines/>

27 Knowledge Channel Foundation Inc. (n.d.). Basa Bilang. <https://www.knowledgechannel.org/basa-bilang>

Currently, a coalition of AHA Learning Center and Yellow Boat of Hope, local civil society organizations, is piloting a TaRL-based initiative called Learn Anywhere in Bicol and Zamboanga Peninsula²⁸. Their partners in Bicol include DepEd Sorsogon and Bicol University. In the Zamboanga Peninsula, they are partnering with DepEd Zamboanga Sibugay and DepEd Zamboanga City with Ateneo de Zamboanga University. The schools division partners assist with administration, while university partners contribute to research and development. So far, they have trained over 250 teachers and identified school partners in Bicol.

Overall, there are enough reform and program experiences in the Philippines to date to show that foundational learning can be improved significantly, yet none have gone to scale, even while learning outcomes demonstrate that the Philippines have major deficits in foundational learning skills nationally. One idea would be for the current DepEd administration to examine all the different efforts that have been aimed at improving foundational learning in children from early childhood through Grade 3. They could then pick one or a few of them and determine what it would take to scale them nationally.

Doing so at scale will require making foundational learning the single most important priority area for educational reform, which will necessarily mean the political challenge of lessening emphasis on many of the other priority areas that came out of EDCOM II's first two reports, "Miseducation" and "Fixing the Foundations". While not necessarily a strictly zero-sum situation, no one has argued that there is significant excess capacity at DepEd to take on more. Prioritizing among priorities is required.

28 Lim, D.V.(n.d.). ADZU hosts BASA Pilipinas project launching. <https://host.adzu.edu.ph/revamp/?p=25091>

Crouch's case studies of Foundational Learning in Brazil, Mexico, and Kenya²⁹

According to Luis Crouch (2020: 4), cases showing “impressive gains” in learning through successful systems reforms exhibit a “sharp focus on the classroom and on teaching and learning reforms. For example, reading as a foundational skill in the early grades, and measured very specifically.” Crouch further explicates:

“There were conscious choices [in the successful case studies] to not do some things that are ‘good’ because too many small aspects to the intervention meant that fewer schools would implement. Focusing the attention of key change agents on a smaller number of things by dropping the possibilities that would only have a small impact was key. **Many primary school reforms or investment programmes do not realise just how relentless and militant the focus needs to be.** [emphasis added]”

Annex C provides considerable detail on Crouch's three case studies—Sobral (Brazil), Puebla (Mexico), and Kenya—and on both the need and the challenge to find this focus on foundational literacy and numeracy. The specific nature of conditions undergirding these achievements is detailed in Table 1 in Annex C. Here we briefly summarize the key lessons and observations across the 3 cases vis-à-vis the Philippines:

1. **Clear articulation of the focus on foundational learning at every level of the system**, from top-level management, supervisors and coordinators at the school level, to teachers.
2. **An emphasis on achievable targets focused on pedagogy and instruction with clear indicators measuring progress.**

3. **Most likely, the development of a more structured pedagogical approach and curriculum.**
4. **Measuring and tracking indicators to give timely feedback to teachers and managers (perhaps the single most crucial need in the Philippines).** Puebla, for example, produced “a customized report identifying by name every at-risk student in each school of the state, and critical areas in the last assessment results in mathematics and Spanish, [which were sent] every two months through the existing systems.” This amounted to a “massive provision of information in many cases down to the child level” which was then “tied to action items and [with] rapid feedback loops.” (p. 15)
5. **Supporting all actors in translating their motivation to results through short, consistent feedback loops (with easy and regular access to monitoring indicators), allowing teachers to adjust their teaching according to the current learning levels of the children.**
6. **Consistent support from supervisors/coaches, lower teacher-pupil ratios, basic infrastructure, and teaching and learning material closely aligned with foundational learning goals.**

The Puebla case is particularly relevant, so we provide some additional details on the interventions we believe relate well to the Philippines (adapted from Crouch, p.14)³⁰:

- **A new assessment was developed and administered in the middle of Grade 2** thus giving schools time to adjust and target particular topics for particular students.
- **The reform approach was integrated across pre-school and early grades of primary school.** For example, preschool workbooks

29 Crouch, L. 2020. Systems Implications for Core Instructional Support Lessons from Sobral (Brazil), Puebla (Mexico), and Kenya. RISE Insight Series. 2020/020. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-RI_2020/020

30 In addition, Puebla showed impressive learning gains; see Annex C page 40.

were designed to cover “prewriting and math skills... by the same experts designing primary school workbooks.”

- **Pre-school and early primary grade teachers were required to work in teams.**
- **The government implemented a successful media campaign** credited as having significant impact increasing preschool attendance—which was five times the national average. The *Fixing the Foundations* report indicates that they are committed to developing such media campaigns and indicates forthcoming work that could provide more detail (p. 91).
- **Teacher “training groups were limited to 25 teachers or less.”** Thus, capacity building emphasized on “quality, not quantity”.

Lessons in Achieving Foundational Learning from India’s Teaching at the Right Level

Annex D provides considerable detail on the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) program in India to derive lessons for educational reforms strategies that might help achieve the pedagogical shift needed to foster improved foundational learning in the Philippines.

The TaRL approach has achieved national and global success in bolstering learning, because of a “persistence and serious commitment to the issue of children’s learning.”³¹ This focus was achieved with a simple yet innovative design that aligned different levels of government and civil society:

- a. **Creating the demand for quality education through gathering, publishing and disseminating excellent assessment data at the school level.**
- b. **Responding to the demand for quality education through TaRL’s targeted**

instructions, resulting in drastic improvements in students’ foundational skills in as little as 8 to 12 weeks.

- c. **Contextualizing the approach to the local conditions** and varied educational governance systems and stakeholder demands across different states in India.
- d. **Consistent, deep engagement from government throughout the process of implementing and adjusting TaRL to best support foundational learning.** For example: In the case of Karnataka, the reform faced resistance from key actors, specifically the Cluster Resource Persons (CRPs)—who had been designated to monitor and support teachers across the districts—and teachers. In response, senior-level government officials engaged and personally reaffirmed their trust by visiting teachers and CRP training sessions, reaffirming a system-wide focus. Such efforts are both time consuming and time-sensitive.
- e. **Creating clear communication channels across all levels of state bureaucrats and technocrats** using a common vocabulary, delineating clear short- and long-term learning benchmarks, and creating transparency through qualitative and quantitative data on student assessment and program evaluations.

Taken together, the lessons imply that similar success in the Philippine context would likely require the effective deconcentration of DepEd functions to sub-national units.

31 Banerji, R, & Venkatachalam, B. (2023). Using evidence to scale up India’s most promising education intervention: The case of Pratham. In Anu Rangarajan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Program Design and Implementation Evaluation*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190059668.013.29>

VI. Teachers, Curriculum, and Pedagogy: Support for Foundational Learning

Most of the principal ideas that emerged from our workshop and interviews regarding teachers, curriculum and pedagogy are well known but we summarize them briefly here:

- 1. Curriculum and instruction issues include a lack of quality teaching and learning materials** and significant delays in procurement and development of material
- 2. DepEd remedial programs such as catch-up Fridays and learning camps are neglected and suffer poor implementation.**
- 3. Teacher development and pre-service education do not effectively prepare them to teach reading and basic numeracy,** because they do not focus on these skill areas. Concomitantly, the early grade curriculum itself lacks a focus on competencies related to foundational learning.
- 4. Teachers lack clarity on the language of instruction** due to an unclear policy, in the wake of the repeal of the MTB-MLE program.
- 5. School leaders are challenged to serve as instructional supervisors and mentors as they are overwhelmed by administrative tasks while also lacking authority to make decisions at the school level.**
- 6. The level of technical assistance available from the Schools Division Offices (SDO) is also inadequate.**

VII. Governance, Accountability, and Decentralization

There is much attention being paid in Philippine education policy circles to decentralization of the education sector in various ways—from deconcentration of DepEd, to devolution to local governments, to school-based management and decision-making. While not a focus of this study, there are a few key issues that connect foundational learning to various forms of decentralization and we briefly summarize them here.

- **Regarding the need for strong, central assessment of learning outcomes for foundational learning, these are even more crucial under any form of decentralization** as they become one of the only ways for the central government to hold decentralized units accountable while giving them great flexibility and control.
- **Regarding ECCD, the proposed transfer of authority to DILG is essentially a means to foster decentralization under the assumption that local governments are closer to the needs of local constituents and better able to expand supply and increase demand.** But as mentioned governance and accountability relationships will need to be set up to encourage the necessary coordination between DILG and DepEd to articulate coherent connections between ECCD and Key Stage 1 in basic education. As but one example, the more play-based approaches in early childhood must be carefully coordinated with the more competency-based approaches in the early grades under DepEd, and vice versa.
- **Regarding choices about which teachers should receive training to support foundational learning strategies, principals should be empowered to decide.**
- **Regarding School-Based Management, there is generally support for the concept but also agreement that it has not been well-implemented. The “Fixing the Foundations”** report (pp. 366 & 371) discusses this explicitly and puts forth some ideas for improving it, which we support.
- **Regarding the benefits of shared governance and accountability, there is certainly proof of concept in the many individual development projects and programs supporting parental and community engagement;³² however, shared governance is still a struggle for many parents who perceive a monolithic and unsupportive education system. Focus group discussions with parents from SNPP** (see Annex E for highlights) shows that DepEd still has much work to do in nurturing such shared governance and accountability, especially in more isolated and marginalized communities.
- **The Mandanas-Garcia ruling reinterpreted the allocation of national revenue, giving LGUs a larger share. However, some LGUs have pushed back because they believe the incremental resources they would receive is not enough to cover the existing mandates, let alone new ones.**
- **Following Laguda et al (2024), and a range of our Key Informant Interviews, we recognize the genuine energy and support for deconcentration of DepEd and the more circumspect approach to devolution; however, we echo Laguda et al’s (2024, p. 50) recommendations** regarding DepEd working with Local School Boards to align plans and priorities and, in particular strengthening partnerships for local planning with civil society organizations to improve budgeting process. This could include “Expanding and diversifying Local School Board (LSB) membership to adequately cover local needs and representation and broadening the utilization of the Special Education Fund.”

32 See for example, The Asia Foundation, “Learning Report,” April 2024 and Myn Garcia, “Mothers know best: Women in a Masbate barangay champion education,” Business Mirror, March 9, 2024

VIII. Inter-agency Coordination: Cabinet Cluster and Beyond

Of late much time and energy has been spent on a Cabinet Cluster or other kind of national coordinating body to make the sum of the several bureaucracies greater than the parts—to enhance complementarity. In particular, the Cabinet Cluster idea has made procedural advances and gets strong support in Fixing the Foundations. Such an effort, if done well, could indeed prove helpful, and inter-agency cooperation is nearly always important and difficult.³³ But if what is needed is an overall shift to a focus on foundational learning, then such arrangements face the same challenges to achieving the needed reforms, because, similar to EDCOM II, the aims of all the different systems within the Cabinet Cluster are too diffuse and extend well beyond foundational learning. **In addition, as Paqueo et al (2024)³⁴ have recently argued, a Cabinet Cluster is considered a short-term solution to get the ball rolling.**

- **What is really needed is “the establishment of an independent agency invested with oversight responsibilities and powers to hold DepEd, CHED, and TESDA and other related agencies accountable for their performance.”** Although Paqueo does not mention early childhood at all, we argue that the ECCD Council whether it is housed in DILG or elsewhere must be included in such an independent oversight agency.

How else might one consider national coordination across the education sector in a way that might shift the focus of the overall systems to foundational learning?

- One idea would be to have an inter-agency body with the sole aim of improving foundational learning, especially in the early years—perhaps attached to a “development plan,” something like the **“Philippine Development Plan for Foundational Learning and Basic Education.”** This would not require CHED and TESDA to coordinate with DepEd on all aspects of the education system (although that might be helpful), but rather require them to coordinate deeply on their role in supporting foundational learning. For instance, for **TESDA, this might mean paying particular attention to qualifications and competencies for early childhood teachers and caregivers, who need training and credentialing but do not need a university degree.** In fact, TESDA recently addressed this issue and committed publicly to its role in the task.³⁵ For CHED this might mean coordinating university teacher training programs with the specific components of curriculum and pedagogy aimed at foundational learning, or encouraging and fostering research to develop such curriculum and pedagogy. It would also provide a prominent seat at the table for those involved in early childhood development.³⁶

Of course, we are well aware of the hesitancy to add to the “68 interagency bodies created through legislation, agency issuances, and agreements” documented in *Miseducation* (pp. 263-265). Effective national coordination has proven elusive, and the specific details of how to best achieve

33 See World Bank (2018), *Improving Public Sector Performance: Through Innovation and Inter-Agency Coordination*

34 Paqueo et al (2024) *The Impact of Trifocalization on Philippine Education Outcomes and the Coordination Issue*, PIDS.

35 See TESDA (2024) *Understanding Philippine Child Development Workers' Labor Market and Education*.

36 This idea emerged from my key informant interviews. All interviews included some discussion of inter-agency coordination, including the history of “trifocalization”, the possibility of a Cabinet Cluster or even a “super-minister.”

it are better known to EDCOM II, but **we argue that whatever coordinating mechanisms are developed must be charged explicitly to focus substantively on foundational learning for younger students.**

There is one other controversial policy proposal that we have come to support, at least conditionally: a potential merger of TESDA and CHED into a single agency. We cannot assess such a major reconfiguration holistically and the complexity and implications are beyond our overall understanding of the political and institutional contexts; however, specifically with respect to the issues highlighted in this report it seems such a merger would be helpful. Namely, it would

potentially improve inter-agency coordination and could make sense on efficiency grounds.

This support is speculative, but it had some support among our key informant interviews. The merger would take up a lot of time and effort at CHED and TESDA and would consume much of the policy dialogue around them, thus, in turn, potentially freeing up DepEd, the ECCD Council, EDCOM II and others to focus on foundational learning. It might also provide synergy between the CHED and TESDA sectors to coordinate how to prepare teachers and child development workers for an appropriate set of skills to deliver a core focus on foundational learning.

IX. Focusing the EDCOM II Priority Areas on Foundational Learning

Critically reviewing the 28 priority areas EDCOM II has put forward with an eye for those that are likely crucial for foundational learning would concentrate efforts on a smaller subset of priority areas, many of which would be narrowed further, including:

I. All those relating to early childhood:

1. Nutrition and feeding
2. Supply-side factors
3. Demand-side factors
4. Governance and financing of ECCD

A focus on FLN is dependent upon providing adequate support to ECCD. Primarily as the first 1000 days prepare students for their learning journey throughout primary education and beyond. Greater focus on the governance of ECCD would also entail creating communication between educators in ECCD and primary levels to ensure that learning is responsive to students' proficiency levels, as detailed previously.

II. A narrower subset of those relating to Basic Education:

6. Measurement of learning outcomes—but with purposeful emphasis on early years
7. Curriculum and instruction—but with purposeful emphasis on early years and specific programs aimed at struggling learners, such as TaRL in India or CRLA in the Philippines³⁷
10. Home and School Environment: In particular those efforts aimed at supporting “Improved mechanisms for partnerships

and shared accountability between families, schools, and communities”—but focused on ECCD and Key Stage 1.

A focus on FLN aligns with priority areas focusing on learning resource development (to ensure that learning material builds foundational skills according to proficiency levels), measurement of outcomes (to create rapid and frequent assessments with short feedback loops to inform correct action), curriculum and instruction is designed towards fewer, but clearer objectives related to proficiency levels, and the home and school environment is leveraged by providing information on FLN and advocating for greater involvement to support FLN.

III. None relating to Higher Education or Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) (though both have roles to play in foundational learning, particularly through training teachers and ECCD workers)

IV. All those relating to Teacher Education and Development—but with purposeful emphasis initially on those related to early years and specific programs:

16. Alignment of CHED, the PRC, DepEd (including the TEC) on teacher education and development
17. Pre-service education, especially CHED's new guidelines and sanctions for Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) “that consistently fail to meet standards.” (p.28) and the need to match teachers specialization with their teaching jobs, particularly in Key Stages 1 & 2.
18. In-service training and development, especially the improvement in teacher career trajectories and producing more principals—but

37 See discussion of CRLA below.

EDCOM II could more prominently articulate these specific issues for how they impact Key Stage 1 and 2 staffing, (as they do on p. 255).³⁸

A clearer articulation of FLN as the most important goal of Teacher Education and Development would also entail creating direct pathways between what teachers learn and receive training for, on the one hand, and what is needed in the classroom. One area to start could build upon poor teacher subject knowledge and the dearth of teachers qualified for ECCD and as CDWs?

V. A narrower subset of those relating to Governance & Finance:

23. Ensuring seamless and integrated delivery of education—but with focus on foundational learning

25. Integrated performance management and accountability system—clearly this is important overall, but there are more specialized needs for measurement and accountability integrated across Preschool and early-grade primary, as we have detailed.

38 “The review of preservice programs for Key Stages 1 and 2 has clearly illustrated the need for in-service training tailored to the unique requirements of educating younger children, which differ significantly from the specialized needs of teaching in higher grade levels.” (p. 255)

27. Decentralization and participatory governance—potentially, but this is complicated

A clearer focus on a small number of indicators and achievable targets (such as the four FLN-oriented indicators advocated previously) could create cohesion between the different levels of education (specifically ECCD and Basic Education), and the different agencies and different levels of government. The nature of the assessment and policy reforms we have recommended, and a laser focus on FLN, will support the development of a more integrated performance management and accountability system, where information is relayed accurately, with clarity, and frequently to those who need it most, and published for use by actors at all levels of the system. Publishing openly, and at all levels of the system, the four indicators (attendance, completion, foundational literacy, and foundational numeracy) would be the single most important catalyst for more effective accountability and performance management within a decentralizing system build in part on participatory governance.

Fixing the Foundations openly recognizes the challenge declaring “We have spread ourselves too thinly.” (p. 42)

More difficult will be the recognition of the need to allow some very important efforts and initiatives to be “demoted” below the level of “priority areas.” As discussed, the Philippines has many education systems which cannot effectively be conceptualized as a “whole.” Put another way: “the popular idea that thinking systemically is about ‘wholes’ has a major snag. We cannot think about everything; setting boundaries around our thinking is not optional. We make situations manageable by setting boundaries.”³⁹

39 Bob Williams & Richard Hummelbrunner. *Systems Concepts in Action : A Practitioner's Toolkit*. Stanford University Press, 2010: p. 22

Or as Pritchett *et al* advise, **to accelerate progress in learning, reformers must “Focus to flourish.”**⁴⁰

The five key actions to drive system transformation that Pritchett distilled from myriad country cases and decades of research apply equally well to the Philippine educational and policymaking context:

- **Commit** to universal, early foundational learning.
- **Measure** learning regularly, reliably, and relevantly.
- **Align** systems around learning commitments.
- **Support** teaching.
- **Adapt** what you adopt as you implement.

40 Pritchett, L., Newman, K., and Silberstein, J. 2022. Focus to Flourish: Five Actions to Accelerate Progress in Learning. Research on Improving Systems of Education. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-Misc_2022/07

X. Summary of Key Recommendations

Assessment & Data for Foundational Learning

1. DepEd must publish learning outcomes for each and every school in the country, nationally and then all the way down to each level of the system.
2. This data needs to be captured **in ways that are as comparable as possible across jurisdictions, and useful for tracking progress towards subsequent national assessments.**
3. The gathering, publishing and disseminating of this assessment data should happen at the school level to create demand for quality education and coordinate inter-agency efforts.
4. Create a clearer focus on a small number of indicators and achievable targets (such as attendance, completion, foundational literacy, and foundational numeracy), four measures which could create cohesion between the different levels of education (specifically ECCD and Basic Education), and the different agencies and different levels of government.
5. DepEd must work to ensure that the CRLA dovetails effectively with the ELLNA, that it effectively tracks progress towards the ELLNA in ways that explicitly allow both teachers and the system as a whole to adjust in ways that improve performance on the ELLNA.
6. Data assessment needs to start earlier, prior to the ELLNA (Grade 3) and NAT (Grade 6, 10, and 12).
7. Administer at least one more formal assessment before Grade 3 if the CRLA is to remain a teacher-led assessment for planning.
8. Consider designing an assessment to be administered mid-year in Grade 2, a year and a half earlier than the current NAT in Grade 3 (see Puebla Case Study).
9. Consider a single measure (one each) for literacy and math, such as performance above the minimum acceptable level in the national assessment, which in this case would be the ELLNA.
10. Providing “good” data: publishing contextualized data by adjusting for the characteristics of the student body or the gains over time in those scores to capture school equality and facilitate good accountability through parental decision-making and adapting pedagogical practice by providing useful information for teachers and school staff.
11. Foster some kind of community-led assessment similar to ASER (organized either by civil society organizations such as AHA Learning Center or supported by the Philippines’ government) to provide contextualized learning data that engages both the home and larger community alongside the school and administration.
12. Taking early learning assessments to scale nationally to improve data transfer and transparency, particularly through early childhood Pre-K assessments to better foster foundational learning (or using CRLA to foster this).
13. Evaluate how end of Pre-K Early Childhood assessments performed by CDWs could be used to inform K and Grade 1 teachers regarding grade-readiness.
14. Improvements to the School Report Card (SRC) need to be made such that it publishes the kind of learning outcomes that are necessary for understanding and motivating corrective actions (by school staff, parents, DepEd officials or others).

15. EDCOM II should publish a “Foundational Learning Strategy Paper” as a supplemental document to follow up on Year Two report and/or as a companion to the Year 3 report—consolidate in one place all relevant foundational learning research and strategies for children up to age 8, rather than leave them as currently embedded throughout the year-end reports.

ECCD

16. Efforts need to be made to increase attendance, increase funding, address the shortage of accredited child development workers, and better integrated preschool and Key Stage 1 primary school grades.
17. Through these efforts and greater coordination, ECCD must be better curricularly aligned with DepEd’s curricula in Key Stage 1.
18. Create governance and accountability relationships to encourage the necessary coordination between agencies, particularly between DILG and DepEd, to articulate coherent connections between ECCD and Key Stage 1 in basic education.
 - a. For example, the more play-based approaches in early childhood must be carefully coordinated with the more competency-based approaches in the early grades under DepEd, and vice versa.
 - b. As decentralization efforts for ECCD are realized, it is important to provide support to both low-income LGUs and those that require capacity building to strengthen local governance.
19. The Cabinet Cluster’s oversight of the ECCD council under its new structure needs to be augmented. Specific areas of engagement will be needed amongst and between the various actors, and particularly between the DepEd and DILG secretariats.
20. TESDA and CHED should work together to support ECCD, particularly through aligning ECE degree programs with the competencies required.
21. A clearer articulation of FLN as the most important goal of Teacher Education and Development would facilitate this alignment by developing teachers’ competency according to what is most needed in the classroom.
22. Consider Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) grants specifically for students pursuing the early childhood degree to cover higher degree costs.
23. The recent congressional increase in funding to the ECCD sector needs to be supported with an overarching national plan to increase access, improve quality, and encourage the private sector.

Foundational Learning

24. A clearer (and narrower) conceptualization and focus on foundational learning—as related to children under 8 years of age needs to be more clearly articulated.
25. Measuring and tracking indicators that allow timely feedback to teachers and managers (perhaps the single most crucial need in the Philippines). Supporting all actors in translating their motivation to results through short, consistent feedback loops (with easy and regular access to monitoring indicators), allowing teachers to adjust their teaching according to the current learning levels of the children.
26. Focus on a few achievable indicators or targets that are ambitious but not overly-ambitious, and directly relate to learning outcomes. These should indicate grade readiness and be communicated with teachers timely so they are aware of the proficiency levels and competencies of incoming students.

27. The system must know which children are “grade ready” (or not) at each individual grade K through 3 so that they can pinpoint where in their educational trajectories they fell behind being grade ready.
28. Prioritizing programs and practices with a track record in the Philippines of positive impacts on foundational learning and take them to scale. One idea would be for the current DepEd administration to examine all the different efforts that have been aimed at improving foundational learning in children from early childhood through Grade 3. They could then pick one or a few of them and determine what it would take to scale them nationally.
29. To support foundational learning, ensure the development of more structured pedagogical approaches and curricula aligned with building foundational competencies.
30. Strengthen ongoing efforts.
31. Some examples from the Puebla case that can be integrated into efforts in the Philippines include:
 - a. A new assessment was developed and administered in the middle of Grade 2 allowing schools to adjust topics and target at-risk students.
 - b. Integrating reform across pre-school and early grades in primary schools e.g. preschool workbooks designed by same experts who designed primary school learning material.
 - c. Teams of teachers from preschools and early grades in primary schools working together.
 - d. Supplementary media programming to advocate for preschool attendance.
 - e. Smaller teacher training groups to emphasize quality.
 - f. Articulation of the focus on foundational learning at every level of the system, from top-level management, supervisors and coordinators, the school level, and teachers.

Inter-agency Coordination

32. The establishment of an independent agency invested with oversight responsibilities and powers to hold DepEd, CHED, TESDA and other related agencies accountable for their performance.
33. An inter-agency body with the sole aim of improving foundational learning, especially in the early years—perhaps attached to a “development plan,” something like the “Philippine Development Plan for Foundational Learning and Basic Education.”
34. The ECCD Council, whether it is housed in DILG or elsewhere, must be included in such an independent oversight agency. Governance and accountability relationships will need to be set up to encourage the necessary coordination between DILG and DepEd to articulate coherent connections between ECCD and Key Stage 1 in basic education.
35. A potential merger of TESDA and CHED into a single agency may improve inter-agency coordination and could make sense on efficiency grounds. It could also provide synergy between the CHED and TESDA sectors to coordinate on how to prepare teachers and child development workers for an appropriate set of skills to deliver a core focus on foundational learning.

Overall Prioritization

36. To adequately and relentlessly focus on foundational learning will require some very important efforts and initiatives be “demoted” below the level of “priority areas.” To accelerate progress in learning, reformers must “Focus to flourish.” **Broadly, these recommendations can be summarized down to:**

- **Commit** to universal, early foundational learning.
- **Measure** learning regularly, reliably, and relevantly.
- **Align** systems around learning commitments.
- **Support** teaching.
- **Adapt** what you adopt as you implement.

Annex A: Foundational Learning Excerpts from *Fixing the Foundations*

We present here excerpts from the *Fixing the Foundations* report that are directly related to foundational learning for children in ECCD programs and Key Stage 1 of Basic Education (though Grade 3). The intent is to give an initial idea of how the concept of foundational learning is included in the report, though not always in a way that is coherent for fostering foundational learning itself. This could provide a starting point should EDCOM II take up our recommendation to create a companion report in the next 6 months focused exclusively on fixing foundational learning.

The excerpts are presented in the order in which they appear in the report and page numbers correspond to that report.⁴¹ In the cases in which several pages of the report are relevant, we provide only the page numbers rather than the actual excerpt. If a discussion in the report is potentially relevant to foundational learning but not explicitly framed as such, it is not included. For example, most of the discussions of textbooks and learning loss relate to all schooling levels and do not highlight specific issues for foundational learning. Much insight could be gained from combing through the report and framing many of the broader discussions specifically by how they relate to foundational learning years and how broader recommendations could be tailored to emphasize children in their first 8 years.

Introduction

PP. 43-44. *In actuality, accounting for inflation, allocations have stagnated. The contrast with countries that have decisively turned around poor education performance—such as Vietnam and Peru—is stark: **They prioritized foundational learning in the***

early years, addressed learning gaps at the onset of education, and refused to allow the system's base to erode. Compare this with the situation in many barangays where child development centers remain a promise unfulfilled since 1978. Participation in early childhood education is abysmal at 18%, and stunting rates have hovered stubbornly at 20% since 2000. Backlogs in classrooms have forced schools to implement multiple shifts; public schools remain understaffed, with teachers bearing the brunt of nonteaching responsibilities; half of all our public schools do not have principals; and promotions for teachers have come at a glacial pace, with most having to wait 12 years to move from Teacher 1 to Teacher 3.

*We Need to Focus on the Foundational Years: While the many competing priorities remain, the central revelation is that **attempting to address all addresses none**. The task before us precludes a relentless and razorsharp focus on path-dependent, long-horizoned interventions; Resources must flow toward the early years—addressing stunting in the first 1,000 days, improving access to early childhood education, and ensuring that every learner achieves foundational literacy by the end of Grade 3. Emerging data only underscores this imperative. A forthcoming UNICEF study (see Figure 2) finds that prior to the pandemic, Filipino students exiting Grade 3 lagged a full year behind curriculum expectations in terms of literacy. The pandemic widened the gap to up to three years. Unchecked, these deficits compound into lifelong handicaps. Includes Figure 2*

Early Childhood Care and Development, entire chapter is relevant. **(PP. 57-97)**

⁴¹ Second Congressional Commission on Education (2025). *Fixing the Foundations: A matter of national survival*, EDCOM II year two report. Congress of the Philippines.

Basic Education Chapter

P. 102. *FIGURE 1* Status of Procurement: Grade 1 Textbooks and Teacher's Manuals.

P. 107. *For rationalization, the key stage assessments should not only inform system enhancement and accountability, but also be used to improve learners' mastery of essential topics. These assessments should focus on literacy and numeracy in Grade.*

P. 107. *Meanwhile, the learning progression assessment refers to a formative evaluation of key competencies in literacy and numeracy over time, distinct from curriculum-based assessments. It should be developed and standardized at the national level but administered by the teachers in their classrooms thrice a year—i.e., at the start, middle, and end of the school year for Grades 1 to 3 and potentially extending to Grade 6. Individual progress reports should be shared with students, parents, teachers, and schools to inform targeted interventions and critical skills development.*

P. 109. *Prioritizing primary education.* Vietnam allocates significant resources to primary education to ensure that students receive adequate support during the foundational years. In 2022, Vietnam spent USD 745.8 per student in Grades 1–3—more than double the regional average (USD 328). The Vietnamese education system also emphasizes early school readiness. Various nursery level programs designed for children aged three months to three years are widely available and typically accessed by the public. These programs focus on holistic development encompassing physical, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social, and aesthetic skills. In 2010, the government established a development framework for 5-year-old children, comprising 120 indicators. Moreover, the Vietnamese government ensures equitable distribution of resources by prioritizing students in remote and disadvantaged areas through affirmative action programs and teacher incentives.

P. 110. *Parents also play an active role in supporting education and ensuring accountability. They contribute financially to nursery and preschool improvement initiatives.*

P. 140. *Last Mile Schools, which cater to 1.6 million learners, lack all these basic amenities.* Out of 9,000 schools, 1,500 do not have electricity and 1,000 do not have toilets (Data from DepEd submission as of October 10, 2024). Fifty percent of these schools are located in BARMM. The increasing trend for unobligated allotments in the Quick Response Fund, which should be used to provide relief and rehabilitation to disaster affected communities, further complicates the situation.

Teacher Education

P. 226. *Introduce a separate examination for Early Childhood Education due to its unique competency requirements.*

P. 233. *The generalist nature of preservice education has contributed to low-level content mastery among teachers in Key Stages 1 and 2, as it fails to equip them with the specialized subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills necessary to address the distinct developmental needs of younger learners.*

P. 234. *Key Stage 1 (Kindergarten–Grade 3) and Key Stage 2 (Grades 4–6) represent critical developmental phases in the K–12 program (DepEd, 2024c).* Assessments at the end of each stage ensure that students meet the developmental and learning outcomes specific to that stage (DepEd, 2024c). However, consultations regarding the teaching pipeline for these key stages revealed that teachers are frequently assigned to grade levels that do not align with their specialization or competency.

P. 239. *DepEd's lack of comprehensive data on teacher supply and demand, particularly regarding specialization and distribution across*

the regions, hampers effective teacher allocation and deployment.... DepEd has clarified that the CSC Omnibus Rules on Appointments and Other Human Resource Actions do not preclude the agency from indicating the specific key stage and other specialization requirements on vacancy announcements.

P. 240. *FIGURE 8 Educational Background vs Subject Taught, Kinder to Grade 3 (Key Stage 1) Teachers.*

P. 255. *The review of preservice programs for Key Stages 1 and 2 has clearly illustrated the need for in-service training tailored to the unique requirements of educating younger children, which differ significantly from the specialized needs of teaching in higher grade levels.*

Governance and Finance

P. 345. *Table 5. Also adopts NAT scores as measures but only for Grades 6, 10, and 12. This leaves out foundational learning in the early grades.*

P. 352-353. *(all of both these pages in the section). Issue 2: There is a need to adjust education spending to increase investments in early childhood and primary education.*

P. 361. *Prioritize ECCD budgetary requirements in the allocation of SEF in view of its strategic importance. The early years exert an outsized influence on future life outcomes, such as in reducing school dropout rates, enhancing learner achievement, boosting labor market participation, and diminishing the likelihood of poverty.*

- *Institutionalize equity mechanisms to ensure sufficient resources for lower-income class municipalities addressing the significant disparities in fiscal resources available to LGUs, particularly for functions funded primarily or exclusively through the SEF. The following interventions are proposed:*

- *Mandate provincial LSBs to support municipal LSBs and to provide a framework for prioritization. Provincial LSB responsibilities could include: Organizing consultations with municipal LSBs; Augmenting the budgetary requirements of proposals that could not be funded through the municipal SEF budget; and prioritizing the needs of fourth- and fifth-income-class municipalities.*
- *Mandate the DILG to develop incentives through the Seal of Good Local Governance or other mechanisms that would encourage LGUs to improve the efficiency of SEF spending. In particular, there may be interest among LGUs with large unexpended SEF balances to share their resources.*
- *Mandate national government agencies to provide program support funds and technical assistance for low-resourced LGUs. In particular, the resources of fourth- and fifth-income-class municipalities need to be augmented to enable strategic investments in ECCD.*

P. 365. *Involvement of the DILG and LGUs to facilitate the adoption of ECCD programs.*

P. 377. *Meanwhile, Education 360 provides support to young learners [K to 6] to excel academically through a series of interventions, including remediation programs on numeracy and literacy. It also provides opportunities for them to cultivate other talents and engage in sports, like baseball and football, while developing values such as discipline, perseverance, and teamwork.*

Conclusion

P. 380. *To move forward, we must first and foremost address the basics. We must focus on what is most urgent and foundational. Early childhood education, nutritional support during the first 1,000 days of life, and literacy by the end of Grade 3 are not just benchmarks—they are lifelines. If we fail to establish these cornerstones, the rest of the structure cannot stand.*

Annex B: Foundational Learning System Messy Map Workshops

(Instructions to groups & Workshop description are provided at the end of this Annex)

Group 1:

This group was composed of:

- Kay Anonuevo, Chief Technical Specialist, EDCOM II
- Tashie Melero, Technical Specialist – TVET, EDCOM II
- Michael Cabautan, Director III, Office of the Secretary, DepEd
- Vernice Quintana, Director III, Office of the Secretary, DepEd

The first group defined foundational learning as basic literacy, numeracy, and 21st-century skills. They identified two parts to this: ECCD and Basic Education.

ECCD

In the map describing the ECCD system and its relationship with foundational learning, they identified the following issues:

1. **Fragmented governance and finance of ECCD** at the local and national level.
2. **Supply-side issues: Lack of child development centers (CDC), lack of Child Development Teachers (CDTs) and Child Development Workers (CDWs).** This shortage can be attributed to a lack of certification for these personnel and a lack of incentives as their honorarium is PhP5,000 a month on average, leading to low motivation levels to join these centers.
 - a. **The certification issues can be traced up to TESDA and CHED. For example, there is an incomplete quality assurance mechanism in TESDA,** a lack of national certifications, and inadequate trainers and assessors across all sectors.

3. Nutrition funding is not prioritized, leading to high stunting rates.
4. Demand side: Parents do not want to send their young children to CDCs, and they lack good maternal health practices.
5. Lack of pre-base and development of appropriate pedagogies in the CDCs. The group reported that there was an interesting contrast between a center they visited in Muntinlupa and a positive deviance case they identified, the UP Child Development Center, where they did see development among appropriate classes.
6. **Little alignment between ECCD and DepEd in terms of the curriculum and governance.**

Basic Education

Defining foundational learning as learning from 0-8 comprises Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2. At this level, the group identified the following issues:

7. **Curriculum and instruction issues include a lack of quality teaching and learning materials** and significant delays in procurement and development of materials.
8. DepEd **remedial programs such as catch-up Fridays and learning camps are neglected and suffer poor implementation.** Not addressing inadequate foundational learning at the right level will extend this issue beyond 0-8 as children in K-6, or even up to high school, will not have the necessary proficiency to study ahead.
9. Learning is often not fun or enjoyable in schools, and there is little reinforcement at home as parents are not readers, leading to overall low levels of support all around.
10. There may be a **misalignment between what the national assessment captures and what is intended to be measured. There is**

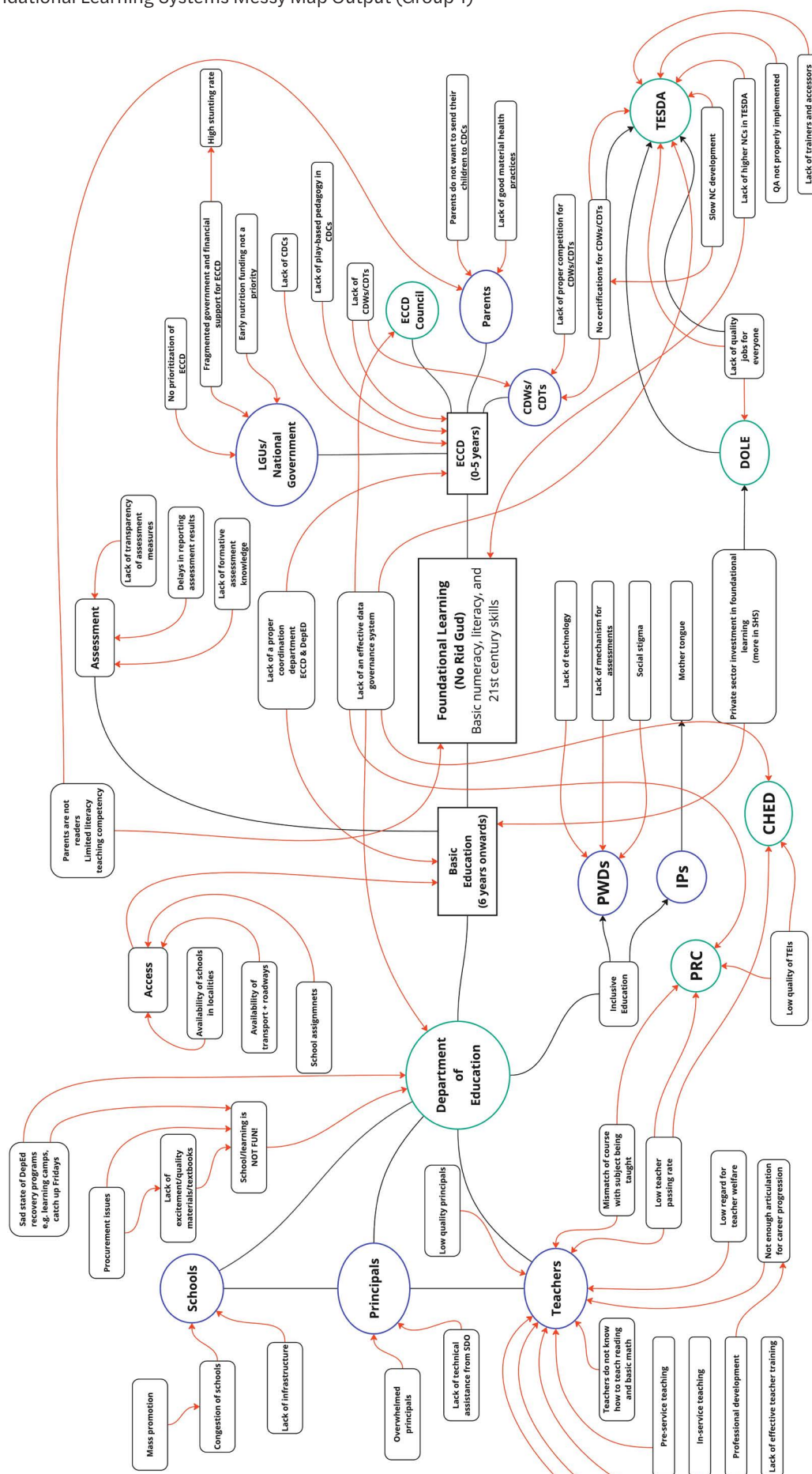
also a lack of transparency in assessment measures and a delay in assessment results.

For instance, the group reported not receiving **the results for the ELLNA (Early Language Literacy and Numeracy Assessment) on time, so key stakeholders, including the teachers, do not know the actual proficiency level of students.** Coupled with the lack of formative assessments, there is little understanding of how much children are learning.

11. This connects with the issues of teacher development and pre-service education. In the PSGs of 2017, reading has been removed as a focal area, making it difficult to expect teachers to know how to teach reading and basic numeracy without an explicit and targeted focus on this during professional development.
12. **Lack of mechanisms to assess and support learners with disability.** There is also a lack of accessibility for learners with disability in terms of the equipment, technology, and resources that they can use to learn. Similarly, there are limited resources dedicated to other special education programs such as the IPED (Indigenous Peoples Education) and Madrasas. Some other learners are also disadvantaged because of their memberships in these groups, but there are no mechanisms to support their learning.

13. There is also a **mismatch in terms of language.** Teachers sometimes do not know the language that they are supposed to be using to teach learners due to an unclear policy. With the repeal of the MTB-MLE program, there is little clarity on how to support multilingual learners.
14. In terms of governance, school leaders are overwhelmed by administrative tasks that are not conducive to their roles as instructional supervisors and mentors. The level of technical assistance available from the Schools Division Offices (SDO) is also inadequate, which ultimately affects the quality of instruction.
15. Teacher welfare is another issue. Teachers are burdened with too many administrative, ancillary tasks, disrupting their focus on teaching and limiting their time with learners.
16. There are also issues of access due to roads, transport systems, school assignments, and localities. This may affect certain regions and groups disproportionately, further hampering their acquisition of foundational skills.
17. **In terms of the private sector, there is greater investment in senior high school instead of foundational learning.**
18. **Data governance does not adequately capture the ground reality.** Despite a law mandating all 5-year-old children in school, the group was not sure if children were actually in school due to poor data collection and sharing.

FIGURE 1: Foundational Learning Systems Messy Map Output (Group 1)



Group 2:

This group was composed of:

- Ina Aquino, Chief of Party of ABC+, RTI International
- Rita Dalisay, Education Systems Strengthening Specialist, RTI International
- Teenie Enrile, Technical Specialist – ECCD, EDCOM II
- Kim Garcia, Program Manager of Let's Read, The Asia Foundation

The second group described their approach to and perspectives on foundational literacy and numeracy as the following. They envisioned foundational learning as the learning of reading skills and holistic child development comprising values, personality, and discipline. This is influenced by various actors at different levels, including parents, households, the larger community, and the institutions in society. In terms of formal institutions, they identified the DOH (Department of Health), the DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development), the Department of Education (DepEd) for K-10, CHED (Commission on Higher Education), and more broadly, schools, local government, and the private sector.

They identified that society as a whole has a certain value for education. Parents and families want their children to finish school and receive a college diploma. However, this often means that they prioritize having access to education over quality – so they are not involved with what happens when their child gets to school, depending entirely on the teachers for their children's learning. They identified livelihood and economic factors as significant factors affecting children's education.

In terms of quality of education, they found that **foundational learning comprises early literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills. This is most affected by low quality of instruction**, which itself is a result of many other factors.

1. **Teacher training is not targeting their needs.** There is no effective training needs assessment. For example, **for reading, when children come to kindergarten, they are learning about logical awareness and the sounds of the words, but the teachers do not receive any relevant training to build these skills.**
2. **The mass training modalities are not effective.** Thousands of teachers are trained in one venue, and teacher trainers receive mass training. Similarly, in the development of ELLN, the Early Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program, trainers and teachers are both mass-trained, and teachers receive very limited support to implement the program. School heads are not included in this training either.
3. **This training is envisioned in a top-down manner by the DepEd Central office.** It does not reflect the needs of the schools and teachers who have a better understanding of the needs of their **classrooms.**
4. **Pre-service training** is developed and delivered by CHED. However, they have found that **teachers are not adequately prepared for formal Foundational Learning instructional needs.**
5. There is also an issue of **teacher mismatch.** Even when the teachers graduate from Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), they are not teaching the subjects that they have specialized or majored in. EDCOM found that 63% of teachers are teaching subjects that they did not major in during college.
6. **Weak school leadership also contributes to low-quality instruction.** Often, principals and school heads only focus on administration, the day-to-day operations of the school, the canteen, maintenance, and other operation expenses (MOOE), the barangays, and other local government projects. There are too many non-curricular requirements and no formal training for principals to support quality instruction in their classrooms.

7. Another contributing factor is the **lack of teaching and learning resources**. There is a shortage of books at the basic education level. The materials that are provided are often not appropriate in terms of children's proficiency level. **There is weak alignment between the curriculum and the material due to frequent curricular changes from RBEC** (Revised Basic Education Curriculum) to MELCS (Most Essential Learning Competencies) in 2020, and now MATATAG. The standard for material development is not clearly set, which is further obstructed by multiple developers, writers, and publishers producing inconsistent material.

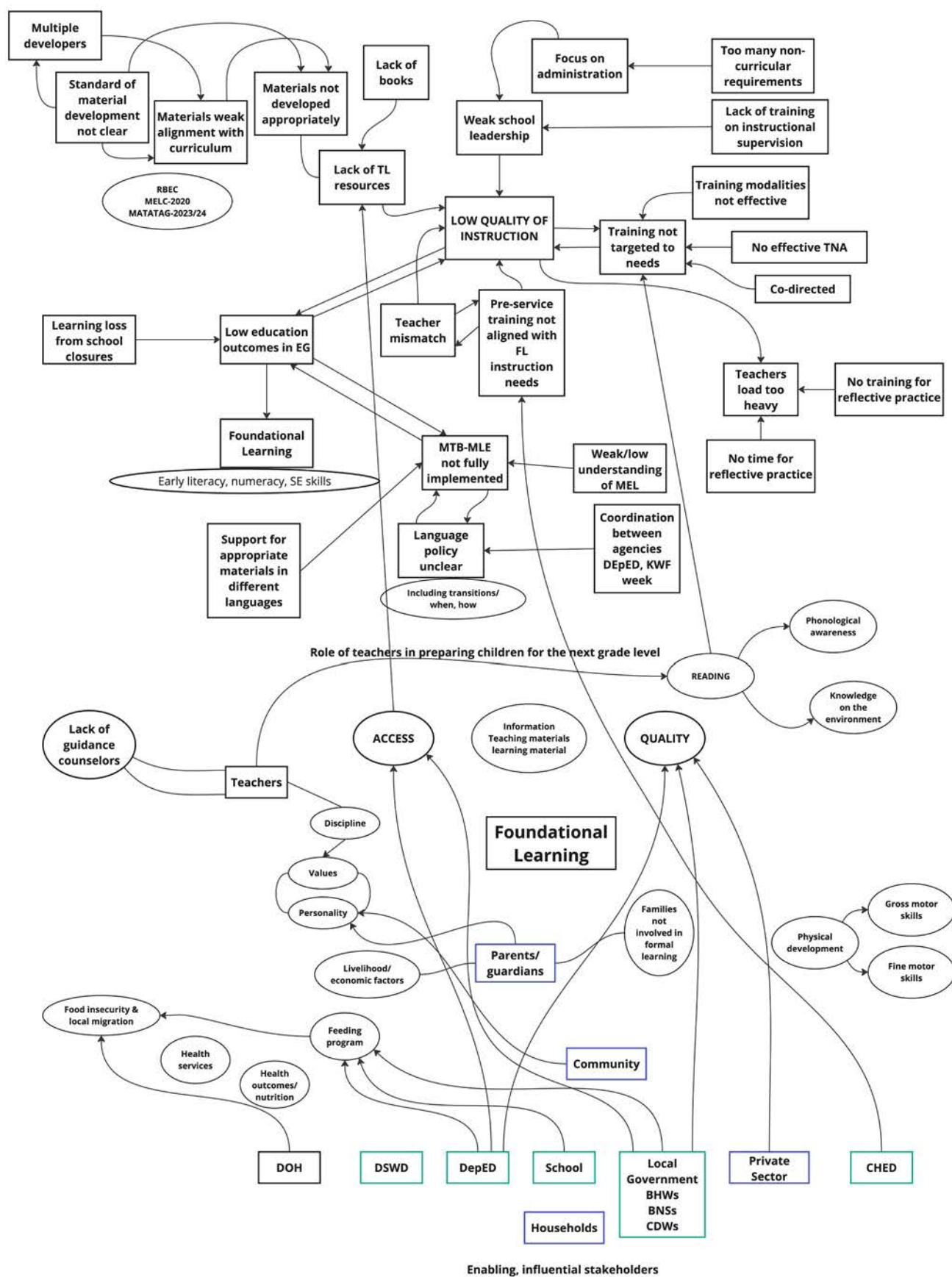
This is further complicated by learning losses due to the school closures as a result of not only just the COVID-19 pandemic, where the Philippines closed their schools the longest, but also due to natural disasters, including typhoons, earthquakes, heat waves, and volcanic eruptions, and schools being used as evacuation centers.

Low levels of foundational learning are also impacted by the MTB-MLE (**Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education**) curriculum. **This was not fully implemented, and it has now been rescinded entirely. As a result, the language policy is still unclear:**

1. Is it bilingual now, or do schools focus on hundreds of regional languages?
2. When should the transition from language 1 to language 2 happen? How should this transition be made?

This is further complicated by the political leaning for some languages over others.

FIGURE 2: Foundational Learning Systems Messy Map Output (Group 2)





Foundational Learning Systems Workshop

October 23, 2024 | 8:30 AM – 11:30 AM

Kanlaon Meeting Room, The Asia Foundation, Greenfield Tower

Pursuant to its mandate, the **Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II)** is conducting research on System-level Reform in collaboration with **The Asia Foundation (TAF)** to understand education issues and reforms in the Philippines and develop a Systemic Reform Framework that aligns and enhances the 28 priority areas of EDCOM II.

Leading this research initiative is **Dr. Alec Gershberg**, a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Urban Studies at the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) and a Senior Fellow in the International Educational Development Program of the Penn Graduate School of Education. He specializes in social and education policy, public finance, and economic analysis in both developing and OECD countries, with expertise in policy reform processes, political economy, systems thinking, education finance, school governance and accountability, and community participation and decentralization.

As part of this research, we are hosting a **Foundational Learning System Workshop on October 23, Wed, from 8:30 to 11:30 AM** to be held in The Asia Foundation's office. The goal of the workshop is to:

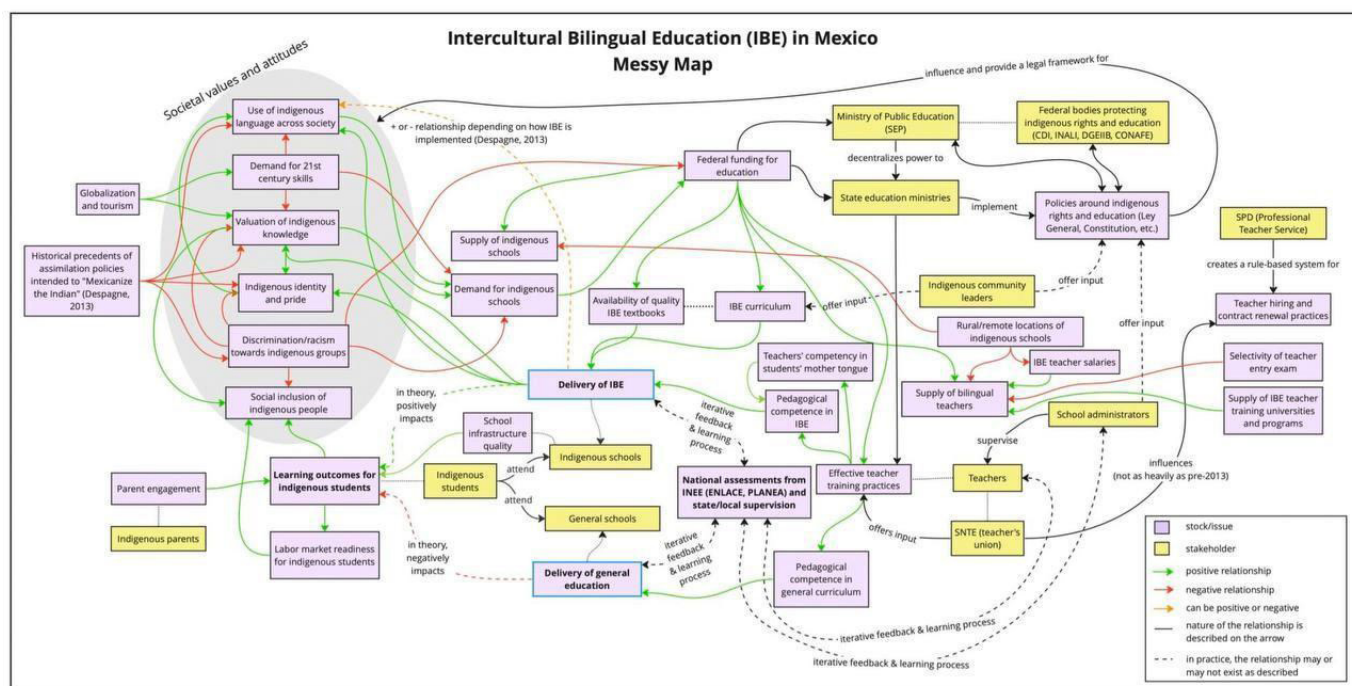
1. Map the system that impacts foundational learning in the Philippines (or in various contexts in the Philippines), and;
2. Understand the complex dynamics of this system.

What do we mean by system? At its most basic, a system is a set of elements and relationships between those elements that produce something. In this case, the focus is on understanding the system that produces foundational learning outcomes (noting that these outcomes can be good or bad).

What are we mapping? This is not a stakeholder analysis, although stakeholders can be elements in the system. We are mostly looking to map the relationships between issues.

- For example, “poor or irregular school attendance” may be one issue, and “roads inaccessible after heavy rains” might be another issue that impacts school attendance. We want to capture this relationship in the system map.
- Poor reading skills may be one issue, while issues that impact reading could include teacher subject content and pedagogical knowledge, inadequate teaching materials, and poor pre-service or in-service teacher training. Several of these issues may impact each other.
- We also want to capture the relationships between elements that are not formally in the education sector—families, local elected officials, the private sector, etc.
- Finally, while DepEd is clearly a key institution, other institutions also impact foundational learning even if it is not central to their function (e.g. CHED, TESDA, DILG, DSWD, etc.).
- Once we map the relationships between central issues, we can incorporate people (stakeholders) such as parents, teachers, and students—as well as others outside the formal sector.
- The goal is to capture as much of the complexity in the system as we can.

Figure 5. Messy map of IBE in Mexico



What is an example of an issues/system map in education? To give you a sense of the goal, we are sharing a sample Messy Map depicting the system of bilingual education in Mexico.

What to prepare? Please note that you don't need to prepare anything for the workshop. An open mind and readiness to share your expertise and ideas is more than enough.

How to get to The Asia Foundation?

- The Asia Foundation's address: 20th Floor, Greenfield Tower, Mayflower corner Williams St, Greenfield District, Mandaluyong City, Philippines. <https://maps.app.goo.gl/sGuoHX8QANFZzMqC9>
- Nearest parking from Greenfield Tower is along Williams Street.
- Before going to the TAF office, please leave your ID at the lobby to get an elevator pass.
- Please proceed to the elevator and enter the 20th floor.
- On the 20th floor, you'll see signages pointing to The Asia Foundation's office.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Ria Tagle at ria.tagle@asiafoundation.org.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration!

Annex C: Militant Focus on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: Case Studies of Sobral (Brazil), Puebla (Mexico), and Kenya

To build the case that significant improvements in system-level foundational learning requires a relentless and almost militant focus on those aspects of the system, we draw on work by Luis Crouch for the RISE Programme.⁴²

Almost 90% of primary-school-aged children are enrolled in schools globally – signaling the success of policies and programs aimed at increasing access to education. Among these children, 6 out of 10 children do not have the minimum level of proficiency in literacy and numeracy. This is a clear indicator that while education systems worldwide have been able to get children into schools, their enrollment does not necessarily translate to learning. Making an education system coherent, aligned, and conducive to learning is contingent upon integrating the different components of the system in a clear, targeted, and relentless focus on foundational literacy and numeracy – only then are we able to see schooling realize its function of learning.

The cases of Sobral (a municipality in the state of Ceará, Brazil), Puebla (a province in Mexico), and Kenya showcase how **learning can be realized through a militant focus on learning that brings together actors across all levels of the system, from top-level management and politicians to front-line providers, to meet a unified goal.**

These three cases present vastly different contexts, but they share core features that were able to empower the system and its actors to improve foundational literacy and learning. In the case of the municipality of Sobral, despite five years

of drought and high levels of poverty, the region has been able to improve reading levels to 285 on a 350-point scale, compared to the national average of 210 for the rest of Brazil. Similarly, the State of Puebla ranks the fifth highest in poverty and population levels in Mexico. However, in 2015, it ranked first in the country in the national Plan Nacional para la Evaluación de los Aprendizajes (PLANEA) assessment. Since then, it has ranked between 2nd and 3rd in Spanish literacy. Lastly, Kenya ranks 25th out of 54 African countries in GDP per capita. The Tusome program has been able to realize significant improvements in learning levels in Kiswahili, garnering international recognition for its impact at mid-line alone.⁴³

These results highlight the potential for systems to transform sustainably to improve learning despite constraints and challenges. Across these three contexts, the policies and interventions designed emphasized key elements, certain salient features, and crucial perspectives all facilitated by a long-term, unwavering, militant focus by education policy and system leadership on foundational literacy and numeracy in the early years.

This relentless focus was built and maintained through the following aspects common to the three cases:

1. **Clear articulation of the focus at every level of the system.**
 - a. The three cases showcase a focus on a limited number of objectives and indicators. There was an **emphasis on**

42 Crouch, L. 2020. Systems Implications for Core Instructional Support Lessons from Sobral (Brazil), Puebla (Mexico), and Kenya. RISE Insight Series. 2020/020. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-RI_2020/020

43 Overall, Kenya is a strong educational performer given its GDP per capita and other factors. As Levy (2018) shows, for instance, Kenya outperformed 9 out of 11 African nations, even though half of them were predicted to have better performance. Brian Levy et al (2018) “‘All for Education’—Meeting the Governance Challenge,” Chapter 10 in *The Politics and Governance of Basic Education: A Tale of Two South African Provinces* (Oxford University Press)

achievable targets focused on pedagogy and instruction with clear indicators measuring progress.

- b. This focus was articulated at every level of the system, from top-level management, supervisors and coordinators at the school level, to teachers.
- c. Their focus was **directed at fewer system components and targets than typical reforms**, with the most significant impact i.e. instruction, curriculum, and adequate monitoring.

2. Generating and aligning motivation.

- d. Using “wake-up value” of initial assessments to highlight the need for intervention and the extent of the learning crisis for key stakeholders, including actors within the government, administrators, teachers, and community. This helps generate buy-in to motivate actors to align themselves with the focus on foundational literacy and numeracy.
- e. **Measuring and tracking indicators to give feedback to teachers and managers (perhaps the single most crucial need in the Philippines).** This helped these actors adjust their instruction and management towards learning as they were able to act upon feedback quickly. By using evidence-based pedagogical approaches and adapting them to continuous feedback, they were able to realize desired results, which builds motivation better than extrinsic incentives and punitive accountability.

3. Supporting all actors in translating their motivation to results.

- f. **Through short, consistent feedback loops (with easy and regular access to monitoring indicators), teachers were able to adjust their teaching according to the current learning levels of the children.** This allowed them to meet the children where they were – according to their existing, not expected proficiency levels.
- g. In addition to giving them the information needed to adjust, they were also **given the basic conditions to meet their goals, including but not limited to constant support from supervisors/coaches, low teacher-pupil ratios, basic infrastructure, and teaching and learning material that was aligned with Foundational Learning goals.**

The specific nature of these pre-requisites and how these were met is detailed in Table 1 below. While most of these factors are worth considering to derive lessons for the Philippine context, we have highlighted in bold those that we deem particularly apt.

TABLE 1: Key Factors in Education System Reforms in Three Contexts

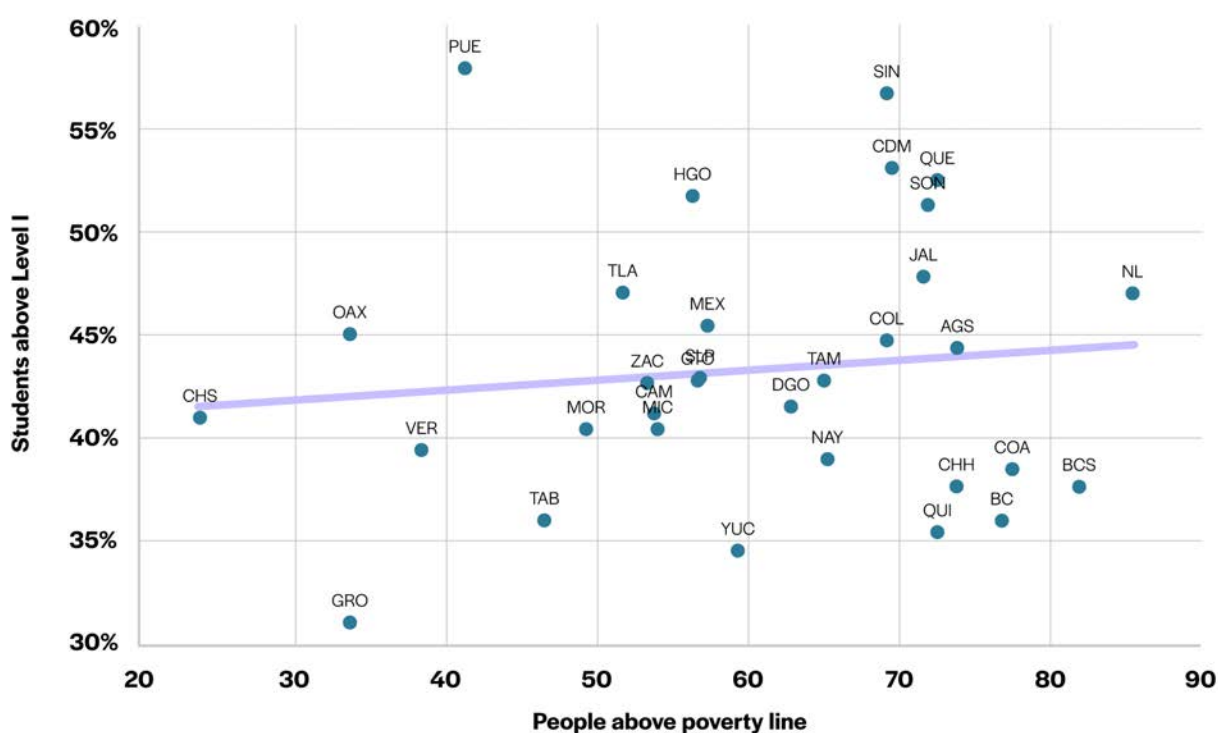
	Sobral (Municipality), Brazil	Kenya	Puebla (State) Mexico
Focus	Prescriptive lesson plans and learning materials defined at the central level Clear definition of and focus on foundational literacy (moving beyond limited ideas of grammar and language) Evidence-based pedagogy: Focus on fluency, accuracy, prosody, then comprehension Consistent data collection and communication of results to teachers and school administration	Year-long lesson plans and corresponding textbooks Well-defined and articulated definition of literacy i.e. reading, listening, speaking, and writing (moving beyond limited ideas of grammar and language) Focus on a few clearly identified indicators, e.g. fluency Clear and consistent pedagogy, i.e. phonics, “big-five” Consistent data collection and communication of results to teachers and school administration	APA model (Asistencia, Permanencia, y Aprendizaje; Attendance, Completion, and Learning) formed as a result of a surprising initial assessment Locally-generated approach Focused on a few clearly articulated numerical indicators Well-defined reading method (“palabra generadora” or generating word) adopted Supplementary teaching resources were developed in alignment with revised pedagogical approach when existing material was found to be out of learners’ reach Management and assessment were stronger than pedagogy in this case (compared to Sobral and Kenya). Academic councils were formed to make sure alignment between different institutions, departments, and actors
Motivation	Clear communication, adequate and timely distribution of learning materials, monetary bonuses coupled with recognition through public award events and honors for both teachers and schools Pioneered by influential political actors (Gomes family) and mid-level management motivated by results of literacy level improvement	Uwezo and EGRA results sparked initial buy-in due to disappointing results, necessitating intervention through PRIMR Teachers motivated by pride and esteem in their profession Bureaucrats motivated by Uwezo and EGRA results that inspired urgent action Kenya “owns” concern over learning performance, across all levels of the system. There is a sense of “all for education.” – And it is worth noting here that raising the political consciousness about the importance of education compared to other issues in the Philippines remains a challenge County officials and Curriculum Support Officers legitimized efforts by showcasing improvement to top-level management President of Kenya endorsed program, generating confidence	Data sharing from national assessments with all schools, emphasizing learners who needed most help Main motivator was the opportunity to improve instead of a “crisis” championed by new administration and state Education Secretary (“Minister”) Teachers were involved in design; identity and pride as teachers was emphasized to garner motivation Highly reputed advisory panel Teachers welcomed professional development Teachers were not held accountable for results, instead schools were answerable for the performance Mid-level managers were motivated with results Supervisors played a key role in communicating results with top management

Support	Support from pedagogical coordinators Extensive lesson plans 1/3 time spent on teacher development that happened within schools to minimize the time burden	The materials were integrated in the sense that everything was included in one teachers' guide for teachers and a student book for learners. Extensive coaching from Curriculum Support Officers Consistent teacher training (4 days pre-service, 3-day before subsequent terms started) Head teachers were trained to provide support to teachers	Training for teachers, principals Face-to-face focus in training Teachers were given workbooks to finish without a time limit, focus was on completion Federal effort to improve teacher training Remedial course support during the summer New assessment specifically designed for Grade 2 to evaluate foundational learning External service provider (Proyecto Educativo) helped make actions continuous despite government changes
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Because we emphasize key aspects of the Puebla experience as relevant for the Philippines, we also present here two excerpts from the Crouch paper showing that Puebla achieved strong improvement in learning:

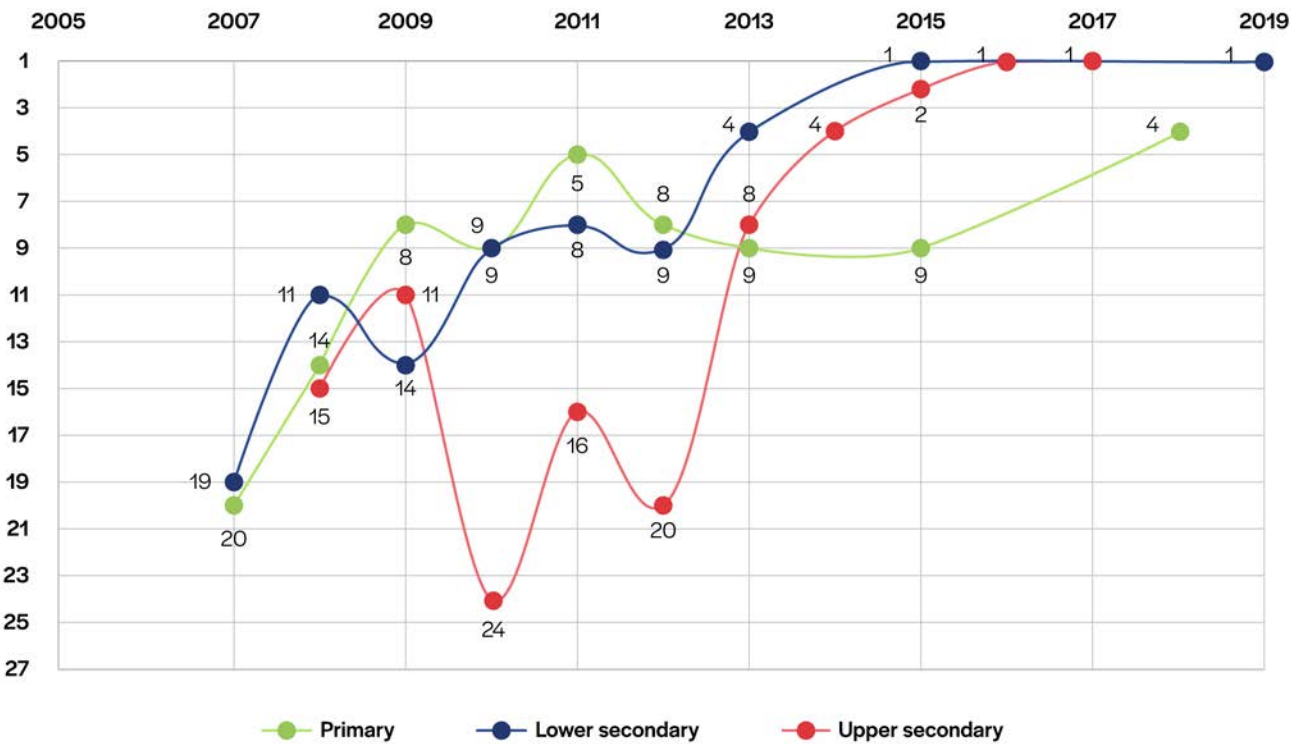
Two graphics explain why the Puebla case is so compelling, and what was achieved in such a short time. The first one shows Puebla to be a major outlier in terms of expected achievement conditional on income. The fact that the regression line is not very strong is immaterial. The point is that Puebla is very much on the edge of the scatter.

FIGURE 3: Basic Knowledge in Mathematics by GDP per Capita, Mexican States (2019)



SOURCE: Socioeconomic data from Coneval (2018) and academic data from PLANEA (SEP, 2019).

FIGURE 4: Academic Results: Puebla’s Ranking Relative to Both Rich and Poor States



(It should be noted that results up to 2013 may be less reliable, for primary, than after.)

Annex D: Pratham's Teaching at the Right Level in India (TaRL): From Policymakers to Policies – Aligning the System and Stakeholders to Support Foundational Learning

While the experience of TaRL in India is a well-known pedagogical strategy among Philippine educational policymakers and analysts, it also holds important lessons for educational reforms strategies that might help achieve the pedagogical shift needed to foster improved foundational learning.

Despite achieving near-universal access to education, India experienced staggeringly low levels of foundational learning, as demonstrated by the citizen-led ASER reports. Experts attributed these poor learning outcomes to multiple factors, including insufficient teacher training, inadequate parental education, lack of regular learning assessments, and an over-ambitious curriculum that did not match students' learning pace and pressurized teachers to complete the prescribed curriculum at all costs.⁴⁴ All of these factors are present in the Philippine context.

Pratham's inquiry into the extent, magnitude, and trajectories of learning losses suggested a need for immediate remedial support for at least half of all primary-level students who were unlikely to pick up foundation skills later (Pratham, 2024)⁴⁵. In an era that defined a successful education system through enrolment and persistence, they created an awareness of the urgency and need for foundational learning, creating and maintaining a sustained focus to the exclusion of other popular reforms – working only with state and local governments that shared and supported a convincing dedication to being in it and focused for the long haul.

To understand how to best meet this need and maintain this focus, they conducted rigorous trials across 15 years and several states in India, exploring various pedagogical designs to provide remedial support according to the proficiency level of the students. Based on this experimentation, TaRL in India focus on a few important facets in its pedagogical and implementation design: regular and low-cost student assessment, grouping students according to proficiency level instead of grade, and simple and engaging teaching activities using multi-purpose and low-cost teaching materials. These activities could be conducted through volunteer-led intensive learning camps in addition to regular classes, or in one-to-two hour remedial sessions held after school by teachers supported year-round by designated mentors. Refer to Box X for a more detailed understanding of the pedagogical design underlying the TaRL approach.

For TaRL to effectively ensure positive impacts at scale, the approach needs to be embedded in a larger ecosystem where different elements of the program are aligned with one another to support and ensure learning for all children (World Bank, 2023)⁴⁶.

44 Pritchett, L., & Beatty, A. (2012). The negative consequences of overambitious curricula in developing countries (Working Paper 293). Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/negative-consequences-overambitious-curricula-developing-countries-working-paper-293>

45 Pratham. (2024). Teaching at the Right Level. <https://www.pratham.org/about/tarl/>

46 World Bank. (2023). Cost-effective approaches to improve global learning: What does recent evidence tell us are "Smart Buys" for improving learning in low- and middle-income countries? Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, World Bank, UNICEF, and USAID. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/231d98251cf326922518be0cbe306fdc-0200022023/related/GEEAP-Report-Smart-Buys-2023-final.pdf>

According to Rukmini Banerji, the CEO of Pratham, the TaRL approach has achieved national and global success in bolstering learning, because of a “persistence and serious commitment to the issue of children’s learning.”⁴⁷ This focus was achieved with a simple yet innovative design that aligned different levels of government and civic society:

1. Responding to the demand for quality education:

The ASER reports made the extent of learning gap and quality concerns visible to the public, which led the government to pursue rapid improvement in learning outcomes, while also committing to more sustained reform processes. Through TaRL’s targeted instructions, students’ foundational skills drastically improved in as little as 8 to 12 weeks. “We were doing the right thing at the right time. People responded and we grew” (Datla & Garcia Rios, 2020)⁴⁸; however, doing so was made possible by a persistent government commitment to foundational learning.

2. Evidence-informed and information sharing:

Pratham heavily relied on evidence and data. TaRL was designed iteratively through student-level assessment data to inform program improvement (Fahsbender et al., 2023)⁴⁹. The data gathered was easy to understand and communicate to local governing bodies, teachers, and parents who were able to track student progress, improving accountability. **This learning data was also reviewed frequently at sub-district levels to**

inform wider program delivery and course correction (Fahsbender et al., 2023), a major need in the Philippine system.

3. Context-informed: Pratham prioritized contextualizing the TaRL approach to adapt to the particular educational governance systems and stakeholder demands across different states in India. The flexibility that TaRL affords allows for the approach to be replicable at scale by being adaptive across different contexts (Datla & Garcia Rios, 2020).

a. In developing the TaRL pedagogy, Pratham emphasized only a few core elements that tested consistently across different contexts, while leaving the rest of the design adaptable: group children by proficiency, teach at that level, and ensure continuous monitoring and motivation for the teachers. **Thus, success in the Philippine context would likely require that the deconcentration of DepEd functions to sub-national units is accomplished.**⁵⁰

b. Government leaders had to remain consistently engaged with the process of implementing and adjusting TaRL to best support foundational learning. In the case of Karnataka, the reform faced resistance from key actors, specifically the Cluster Resource Persons (CRPs)—who had been designated to monitor and support teachers across the districts—and teachers. In response, senior-level government officials engaged and personally reaffirmed their trust by visiting teachers and CRP training sessions, reaffirming a system-wide focus.

47 Banerji, R, & Venkatachalam, B. (2023). Using evidence to scale up India’s most promising education intervention: The case of Pratham. In Anu Rangarajan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Program Design and Implementation Evaluation*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190059668.013.29>

48 Datla, A., & Garcia Rios, P. (2020). Pratham: The challenge of converting schooling to learning in India. Harvard Kennedy School Case Program.

49 Fahsbender, J., Gokhale, S., & Walton, M. (2023). How Pratham learns while scaling: A case study of adaptive design and evaluation (CID Faculty Working Paper No. 438). Center for International Development at Harvard University. https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/cid/files/publications/faculty-working-papers/438_Pratham_Case_Study.pdf

50 **Pratham adapted their design based on the sociopolitical context of its intervention.** In Karnataka, they focused on teaching Grade 4 and 5 students due to the existing prevalence and acceptance of another program at this level. This stems from designing their interventions by first mapping and identifying the governance structures of a particular area, negotiating stakeholder interests and needs, and adjusting to ensure effectiveness and scalability

4. Sustained engagement by government actors to foster and maintain stakeholder buy-in:

TaRL was effective and scalable because it was simple, replicable, result-oriented and continuously improved through monitoring and evaluation feedback, which was achieved through institutional vigilance:

- a. **Creating clear communication channels across all levels of state bureaucrats and technocrats** using a common vocabulary, delineating clear short- and long-term learning benchmarks, and creating transparency through qualitative and quantitative data on student assessment and program evaluations (Fahsbender et al., 2023). This insured that different regions were learning from their experiences.
- b. *Teachers, trainers, and front-line bureaucrats*: Quick positive results, consistent mentorship and support, and encouragement from top management generated and maintained their buy-into the program and focus on student learning (Fahsbender et al., 2023).

Pratham's success hinged upon the collaboration between different stakeholders and was particularly dependent on prolonged support from bureaucratic actors and high-level government officials. Challenges that arose – the CRP's resistance to engaging in further training and teachers' hesitance towards adopting TaRL, printing press delays in obtaining teaching and learning materials, and fluctuating institutional support from some government officials—might have derailed the reform without key champions continued motivation and engagement. It is an example of a well-focused solution that engages students using interactive learning, data, and stakeholder engagement to significantly improve foundational literacy and numeracy skills—and an approach that is largely replicable in the Philippines, if given a similar level of unrelenting focus and commitment.⁵¹

51 There is a larger strategic question for the Philippines in the TaRL case from India: Could the Philippines foster an organization similar to Pratham? This is beyond the scope of the current paper, but worth considering as it could substantively improve accountability. And we had some relevant conversations in our key informant interviews.

BOX 1: Teaching at the Right Level in India: Pedagogy and Program

To effectively support children who are unable to cope with grade-level curriculum, the TaRL approach focuses on accelerated remedial child-level targeted instruction (World Bank, 2023)⁵². The program was developed in the early 2000s as a response to staggeringly low learning outcomes in India. Despite almost reaching universal education, nearly half of all 5th-grade students had the reading competency of 2nd graders. Similarly, only a quarter of all 5th-graders were able to do simple divisions (ASER, 2022)⁵³.

In response, Pratham conducted rigorous experimentation to design a pedagogical approach that helps students “catch up” quickly and effectively. In the TaRL program, grade-level curriculum is replaced with teaching adapted to the proficiency level of the students. It begins with teachers conducting a simple individual oral assessments with every student to determine basic numeracy and literacy skills. Then, children are grouped based on their current learning levels across or within the same class, depending on the class size. With these models, Pratham targeted children aged 7 or above, usually enrolled in grades 3, 4, and 5, but the approach could be adapted to the earlier years as well.

This approach was based on insights from rigorous and reiterative trials, qualitative data collection, and deep institutional knowledge. Pratham conducted six randomized controlled trials in seven states in India across fifteen years, testing various approaches to remedial support, including computer assisted learning, volunteer-run teaching camps, and training government teachers. Based on the results of these trials, they decided to focus on two implementation models that were implemented based on the context and available funding:

- a) Volunteer-run intensive ten-day learning camps that were held in addition to regular classes three to five times a year.
- b) Government partnership models where teachers conduct one to two hour remedial sessions at the end of the school day to support children based on their proficiency level. These teachers are supported year-round by mentors who provide ongoing and on-site guidance.

TaRL instructions consist of simple and engaging activities that are appropriate for each learning level. Multi-purpose, low-cost teaching materials are used, such as story or word cards and letter charts, for individual and group learning activities. The teaching materials are made to be adaptive so that children across different learning levels can use them in different ways (Fahsbender et al., 2023)⁵⁴.

Periodic assessments are aligned with instructional practices to track students' progress and adapt teaching accordingly. These assessments are easy to implement, interpret, and facilitate regrouping children as they progress. Pratham primarily used the ASER assessment tools to gauge and track student learning. The students' progress data gathered by teachers and monitors is easy to aggregate, display, and understand for teachers and parents.

This pedagogical design is combined with consistent engagement across all levels of the program. To drive a demand for learning, Pratham engages parents and communities by leveraging ASER's data to highlight the drastic learning crisis faced by students. They continue to share assessment data with parents and communities to engage them with the students' learning trajectories as they participated in TaRL. In the volunteer-led model, these community members are also trained as teachers. Similarly, the program also motivates students to participate and meaningfully engage with the pedagogy as they realize rapid gains in their learning outcomes through teaching that is tailored to their learning levels and pace.

With this design, Pratham was able to realize substantial gains in learning. In Uttar Pradesh, for example, the Learning Camps doubled the number of students who could read a paragraph or a story, with 0.7 SD increase in learning. With its low-cost and highly adaptable model, The Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (GEEAP) has categorized the TaRL approach as a “Great Buy” – a highly effective education intervention that is based on evidence.

52 World Bank. (2023). Cost-effective approaches to improve global learning: What does recent evidence tell us are “Smart Buys” for improving learning in low- and middle-income countries? Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, World Bank, UNICEF, and USAID. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/231d98251cf326922518be0cbe306fdc-0200022023/related/GEEAP-Report-Smart-Buys-2023-final.pdf>

53 ASER. (2022). Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2022. <https://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202022%20report%20pdfs/All%20India%20documents/asr2022nationalfindings.pdf>

54 Fahsbender, J., Gokhale, S., & Walton, M. (2023). How Pratham learns while scaling: A case study of adaptive design and evaluation (CID Faculty Working Paper No. 438). Center for International Development at Harvard University. https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/cid/files/publications/faculty-working-papers/438_Pratham_Case_Study.pdf

Annex E: Excerpts on Shared Accountability from Focus Group with SNPP (Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Pamilya ng Pantawid)

President, Vice President, and member of the Board of Trustees (rough translations)

On voicing concerns to schools:

- I use my homeroom to really talk one-one with the teacher. During the pandemic, I really raised that students have varying levels of comprehension.
- It was difficult what we went through, what helped was having a group chat (GC). We have many group chats now. When we have problems, we're able to talk about it and set face-to-face appointments. The GC is between parents and teachers. There are GCs for active students and students with problems.
- There are schools that are really not good. If you don't use your voice, if the teacher did not make a group chat, you won't be able to talk to them. There is also a Parent-Teachers Association (PTA).
- There are "late bloomers" and teachers have to extend their patience. Because some students feel discouraged to go to school. It's our problem as parents, especially if that's how our kids feel. I really tell the teacher who my kid is so they'll be able to adjust. There should be open communication between parent and teacher.

During the pandemic, a Grade 1 student under the 4Ps program wasn't able to attend online classes because they didn't have enough money for gadgets and an internet connection. The student's parent was a tricycle driver who didn't have any passengers during the pandemic. The teacher didn't accept the reason for missing classes and didn't want to pass the Grade 1 student. If the student doesn't pass, they will completely drop out of school. One of the SNPP parents went directly to the principal to explain the situation. In the end, the principal decided to transfer the student to another section.

- What if there weren't people like us (SNPP) who were taught to be empowered? And willing to help out neighbors and people we know? How many students or parents would have just accepted the situation?
- What if we weren't that vocal? What if we didn't care about other parents' problems? Children will really drop out of school. You would really feel if you didn't know anything, if you weren't brave, you'd be stuck. Nothing.
- Even some parents who have some money don't know how to use their voice.

Annex F: Key Informant Interviews

(average length: 75 minutes)

TABLE 2: List of Key Informants

	DATE	NAME	MODALITY	DESIGNATION & ORGANIZATION
1	3 Sep 2024	Cynthia Banzon-Bautista, PhD	Zoom	Former Commissioner of the Commission on Higher Education; and former Vice President for Academic Affairs of the University of the Philippines
2	4 Sep 2024	Br. Armin Luistro, FSC	Zoom	Former Secretary of the Department of Education; and former President of De La Salle University-Manila
3	4 Sep 2024	Cielito Habito, PhD	Zoom	EDCOM II Standing Committee Member for Governance and Finance; and former Director General of the National Economic Development Authority (recently changed to the Department of Economy, Planning, and Development)
4	5 Sep 2024	Atty. Butch Abad	Zoom	Former Secretary of the Department of Education and Department of Budget and Management
5	6 Sep 2024	Irene Isaac	Zoom	Former Director General of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
6	9 Sep 2024	Excelsa Tongson, PhD	Zoom	Chairperson of the Philippine Social Science Council; Faculty Member of the Department of Family Life and Child Development at the College of Home Economics, University of the Philippines
7	9 Sep 2024	Vince Fabella, PhD	Zoom	President of Jose Rizal University; and EDCOM II Standing Committee Member for Governance and Finance
8	10 Sep 2024	Ramon Bacani, PhD	Zoom	Former Director of Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO-INOTECH); and former Undersecretary of the Department of Education
9	12 Sep 2024	Gilbert Sadsad	Zoom	Regional Director of the Department of Education in Region V (Bicol)
10	13 Sep 2024	Cristina Robles, PhD	Zoom	Former School Head of Navotas Elementary School
11	14 Sep 2024	Patricia Licuanan, PhD	Zoom	Former Chairperson of the Commission on Higher Education
12	15 Oct 2024	Jaime Faustino	In-person	Strategic Advisor for Coalitions for Change project of the The Asia Foundation
13	16 Oct 2024	Rina Lopez	In-person	Founder and President of the Knowledge Channel Foundation, Inc.
14	16 Oct 2024	Kiko Benitez, PhD	In-person	Director General/Secretary of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority; and former EDCOM II Commissioner
15	16 Oct 2024	Karol Mark Yee, PhD	In-person	Executive Director of The Second Congressional Commission on Education
16	17 Oct 2024	Ina Aquino	In-person	Chief of Party of ABC+ or Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines, RTI International
17	17 Oct 2024	Elyzur “X” Ramos, PhD	In-person	President of University of Makati; and EDCOM II Standing Committee Member for Higher Education
18	18 Oct 2024	Carleen Sedilla, CESO V	In-person	Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) of Schools Division Office (SDO) of Quezon City; and former SDS of SDO Muntinlupa City and Makati City
19	18 Oct 2024	Atty. Alberto Muyot	In-person	Chief Executive Officer of Save the Children Philippines; and former Undersecretary for Legal Affairs of the Department of Education

	DATE	NAME	MODALITY	DESIGNATION & ORGANIZATION
20	18 Oct 2024	Jennie Jocson, PhD	In-person	Executive Director of Teacher Education Council; Director of the Philippine National Research Center for Teacher Quality; and former Vice President for Academics of the Philippine Normal University
21	21 Oct 2024	Fr. Ben Nebres	In-person	Former President of the Ateneo de Manila University (longest serving)
22	21 Oct 2024	Karthika Radhakrishnan-Nair	In-person	Senior Education Policy Specialists of the World Bank
		Janssen Teixiera		
23	21 Oct 2024	Carlo Medina	In-person	Executive Director of Synergeia Foundation
		Monch Aldana		Program Officer
		Rene Pizarro		Communications Officer
24	21 Oct 2024	Rose Urdaneta	In-person	Deputy Director General for Policies and Planning of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
25	22 Oct 2024	Elvin Uy	In-person	Executive Director of Philippine Business for Social Progress; EDCOM II Standing Committee Member on Early Childhood Care and Development and Basic Education; and former Assistant Secretary and K-12 Program Coordinator of the Department of Education
26	22 Oct 2024	Psyche Vetta “Cheche” Olayvar	In-person	Early Childhood Education Specialist of the United Nations Children’s Funds-Philippines
		Nicholas “Nicki” Tenazas		Basic Education Specialist
27	22 Oct 2024	Andoni Santos	In-person	Policy and Advocacy Manager of the Philippine Business for Education
28	23 Oct 2024	Angela Tubello	In-person	President of the Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Pamilya ng Pantawid
		Annabelle Luna		Vice President
		Analiza Natalio		Member of the Board of Trustees
29	23 Oct 2024	Edilberto de Jesus, PhD	In-person	Former Secretary of the Department of Education; former President of Far Eastern University; and former Secretariat Director of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization
30	25 Oct 2024	Jaton Zulueta	In-person	Executive Director of AHA Learning Center (Commodore S. Francisco Foundation, Inc.)
		Hams de Leon		Program Manager/Teacher
31	25 Oct 2024	Ron Mendoza, PhD	In-person	Undersecretary for Strategic Management of the Department of Education; and Senior Economist and Senior Research Fellow at the Ateneo Policy Center
32	12 Nov 2024	Malcolm Garma, PhD	Zoom	Assistant Secretary for Operations of the Department of Education

About EDCOM 2

The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) is a national Commission established through Republic Act No. 11899, tasked to undertake a comprehensive national assessment and evaluation of the performance of the Philippine education sector, and to propose transformative solutions, from 2023 to 2025. It is composed of lawmakers from both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and is guided by an Advisory Council, and assisted by the Technical Secretariat.



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