

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Batasan Hills, Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL No. 6832



Introduced by
ACT Teachers Party-List Rep. FRANCE L. CASTRO,
BAYAN MUNA Party-List Rep. CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE,
Rep. FERDINAND GAITE and Rep. EUFEMIA C. CULLAMAT,
GABRIELA Women's Party Rep. ARLENE D. BROSAS,
and KABATAAN Party-List Rep. SARAH JANE I. ELAGO

AN ACT
MANDATING MASS TESTING, CONTACT TRACING, AND INFECTION PREVENTION
PROTOCOLS AND DISEASE SURVEILLANCE MEASURES FOR THE SAFE REOPENING OF
SCHOOLS

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill proposes for several mandatory actions prior to the reopening of classes in public and private schools in the basic and tertiary levels of education, namely, the conduct of free and regular mass testing of teachers, school personnel, field personnel, and students who are suspect cases; contact tracing of individuals testing positive for COVID-19; referral of appropriate actions for individuals who test positive and become probable cases such as treatment and isolation; COVID-safe classrooms and learning spaces; and education information about COVID-19, its transmission, and prevention.

The framework for mass testing follows the relevant guidance documents of the World Health Organization and the Department of Health, including the case definitions of suspect and probable cases who should be tested.

These actions aim to ensure that schools are logistically prepared to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among teachers, non-teaching personnel, and students, while these institutions continue providing education. These will address the immediate and long-term concerns aired by teachers, employees in schools, students, and parents: How do we ensure that reopening of schools and the conduct of face-to-face classes will not subject them to infection from individuals who may either be with symptoms, undiagnosed


sufferers of COVID-19, or asymptomatic carriers? How can we know of the true scope of the spread of COVID-19, with mass testing still not implemented?

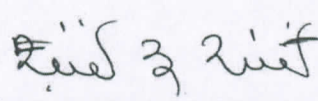
Schools ought to be places where children can access basic health services—just as the World Health Organization has urged the Philippines and other member-states in 1995 through its Global School Health Initiative to make every school an “entry point for health promotion and a location for health intervention.” A health-based response against COVID-19 means that schools are recognized as crucial institutions in this long-term health crisis, where education personnel and children are empowered with the knowledge, capacity, and facilities to prevent themselves and their families from being infected with the novel coronavirus and to inhibit the spread in their communities.


The essence of this bill also corresponds to several mandates under existing laws on the working conditions of and health measures for teachers and school personnel, such as the *Magna Carta for Public School Teachers* (Republic Act 4670), the *Labor Code* (Presidential Decree 442), and rules and regulations issued by the Department of Education, Commission on Higher Education, and Department of Labor.


Lastly, approval of this bill will answer the demand of the people for mass testing, contact tracing, isolation, and treatment—that is, the urgent medical solutions which will ensure that we are aware of the true scope of the virus, that we can stop its transmission, and that the suffering of the people under the prolonged general lockdown will not be wasted.


Approved,



Rep. FRANZE L. CASTRO
ACT Teachers Party-List

Rep. CARLOS ISAGANI T. ZARATE
BAYAN MUNA Party-List

Rep. FERDINAND GAITE
BAYAN MUNA Party-List

Rep. EUFEMIA C. CULLAMAT
BAYAN MUNA Party-List

Rep. ARLENE D. BROSAS
GABRIELA Women's Party

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SCHOOLS

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* This Act shall be known as the *Safe Reopening of Schools Act*.

SECTION 2. *Definitions.* For purposes of this Act:

- a. **Safe reopening and safe operations of schools** shall mean schools and learning establishments that are logistically prepared (1) to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among teachers, non-teaching personnel, and students and (2) to continue providing education at the same time, with the maximum protection for all individuals. Measures for safe reopening and safe operations of schools will ensure conditions that reduce the transmission of the coronavirus; safeguard essential services and supplies; and promote healthy behavior among teachers, non-teaching personnel, and students. This includes the provision of access to clean water and soap for safe handwashing, sanitation facilities, procedures on when staff or students feel unwell, protocols on physical distancing, and good hygiene practices.
- b. **Mass testing for COVID-19** is the testing of teachers, school personnel, field personnel, and students who are at risk of contracting COVID-19 infection.

Testing shall be free of charge or covered by PhilHealth, as the case may be. No part of the test or procedure towards the same shall be charged from school personnel or students.

c. **Suspect cases** are, pursuant to the case definitions published and implemented by the World Health Organization and the Department of Health:

- i. individuals with acute respiratory illness (fever and at least one sign or symptom of respiratory disease, e.g., cough, shortness of breath), AND a history of travel to or residence in a location reporting community transmission of COVID-19 disease during the 14 days prior to symptom onset;
- ii. individuals with any acute respiratory illness AND having been in contact with a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case (see definition of contact) in the last 14 days prior to symptom onset; or
- iii. individuals with severe acute respiratory illness (fever and at least one sign/symptom of respiratory disease, e.g., cough, shortness of breath; AND requiring hospitalization) AND in the absence of an alternative diagnosis that fully explains the clinical presentation.

d. **Probable cases** are:

- i. suspect cases for whom testing for the COVID-19 virus is inconclusive or
- ii. suspect cases for whom testing could not be performed for any reason.

SECTION 3. Coverage. This Act shall apply to public and private schools in the basic and tertiary levels.

SECTION 4. Safe Reopening of Schools. The following shall be the minimum measures, programs, and activities to be undertaken by all public and private schools in the basic and tertiary levels:

- a. **Mass testing of teachers, school personnel, field personnel, and students considered as suspect cases.** This shall be both free and regular, that is, must be done to the individual as the need arises.
- b. **Contact tracing of individuals who test positive for COVID-19.** The DOH shall ensure that all individuals who have tested positive shall be interviewed for as many contacts as possible, with priority to close contacts. It shall also ensure that all traced contacts are monitored for symptoms and, where necessary, tested and treated.
- c. **Referral of appropriate actions for individuals who test positive and become probable cases, as the case may be.** This shall include but not be limited to treatment and isolation at home or at the public nearest to the individual's residence. Referral shall be, as much as possible, to public hospitals, institutions, and facilities so as to encourage maximum compliance and to ensure the least financial burden to the individual concerned and her or his family.

In no case may a teacher, non-teaching personnel, or student be discriminated against in any manner in instances, where her or his absence from school occurs due to treatment or isolation.

- d. **COVID-safe classrooms and learning spaces.** The Department of Education Commission on Higher Education, and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, state and local universities and colleges, and private elementary and high schools and higher educational institutions shall ensure that physical distancing is practiced in all classrooms and premises within schools. Face-to-face learning, therefore, shall be done only where one-meter-distancing between all individuals is possible. Where face-to-face learning is impossible considering the current infrastructure or where holding classes in alternative spaces would be extremely difficult for students and teachers, other modes of instruction shall be applied.
- e. **Education information about COVID-19, its transmission, and prevention for teaching personnel and school staff and students.** The above agencies shall ensure the conduct of activities such as a "COVID Hour" where information about the novel coronavirus, how it is transmitted, and how it can be prevented will be taught. This mandate shall also include the delivery of such information through accessible learning modes for teachers and learners with disabilities.

SECTION 5. *Safe operations under better conditions.* All agencies shall endeavor to achieve improved learning and the provision of more comprehensive support for children at the school including health, nutrition, psychosocial support, and water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. They shall also develop the capacities of teachers and school personnel towards making schools resilient from COVID-19.

SECTION 6. *Assessment at Least One Month Prior to School Reopening; Report to Congress.* Within one month before the target reopening of schools, the DOH, DepEd, CHED, and TESDA shall assess the readiness of all schools under their jurisdiction for safe reopening. They shall submit to the Senate and the House of Representatives their respective reports under this Act, including but not limited to statistics on mass testing, contact tracing, availability of COVID-safe classrooms or lack thereof, and the budgetary and personnel requirements of public schools and higher education institutions for the safe reopening of schools.

SECTION 7. *Participatory and Transparent Mechanisms for the Safe Reopening of Schools.* In the fulfilment of their respective mandates under this Act, the DOH, DepEd, CHED, and TESDA shall be in strict consultation with organizations and unions of teaching and non-teaching staff in schools, field personnel, parents, and students. All dialogues and documents, especially those which are made the bases of policy, shall furthermore be open to the public.

SECTION 8. *Separability Clause.* Should any provision of this Act or any part thereof be declared invalid, the other provisions, insofar as they are separable from the invalid ones, shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 9. *Repealing Clause.* All laws, orders, issuances, rules and regulations or parts thereof inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.1âwphi1

SECTION 10. *Effectivity.* This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its complete publication in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,