# Beyond four walls of a classroom

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As access to higher education remains a privilege in this country, the passage of Republic Act No. 12124 offers less fortunate Filipinos a more inclusive pathway toward a college degree.

In a nutshell, the new law allows individuals to earn academic credits based on their learned skills, acknowledging that knowledge is acquired not only within the four walls of a classroom but the world at large. Years of hard work, hands-on training, and lived experience can be just as invaluable as reading textbooks or listening to lectures.

By formalizing this alternative route, the government is not just opening doors for skilled workers, but also addressing deep-rooted inequities that have limited opportunities for those unable to afford traditional schooling.

On March 3, President Marcos signed the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) into a law, which would allow Filipinos to earn a college degree through “nontraditional” means.

Under the law, the ETEEAP will evaluate a person’s past learning and work experience—whether from school, training, or real-life jobs to determine whether these can be credited toward a college degree or special graduate program.

## Academic standards

The law requires that applicants be Filipino citizens, whether residing in the Philippines or abroad, to qualify. They must also be at least 23 years old and have completed a secondary school program to be able to apply for equivalency and accreditation.

At the helm of the program is the Commission on Higher Education (CHEd), which shall be responsible for authorizing colleges and universities to offer degrees under the program, and setting the standards for evaluating a person’s skills, knowledge, and experience. It can also decide whether to approve or cancel a school’s permission to implement the program.

The commission shall also exercise oversight of how schools are implementing the ETEEAP, gather input from different groups through meetings, and set fair fees for accreditation that will help fund the program.

According to the commission, the CHEd will have to conduct “rigorous evaluations” to assess the applicants’ professional knowledge and skills, ensuring they meet the academic standards required for degree equivalency.

## ‘Alternative pathways’

The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EdCom II), a bicameral body tasked with the periodic review of the country’s education system, praised the government for recognizing the “alternative pathways” in education. “We understand how important a college diploma is for our fellow Filipinos,” said Sen. Joel Villanueva, a co-chairperson of EdCom II and author of RA 12124. He added: “We want to ensure that [Filipinos] can take advantage of their work experiences, achievements, and skills to earn a bachelor’s degree without going through traditional schooling methods.”

Baguio City Rep. Mark Go, another EdCom II co-chairperson, said the law would address “long-standing educational disparities” by providing working individuals with opportunities to “uplift their lives as well as their families.”

“This innovative approach bridges the gap between professional experience and academic achievement, enabling candidates to complete their degrees more efficiently than through traditional educational routes,” the EdCom said.

## Crucial mechanism

The Philippines has long struggled with underemployment and job mismatch, where highly capable workers remain stuck in low-paying positions for lack of formal educational credentials. RA 12124 provides a crucial mechanism for addressing this disconnect, giving Filipinos with sufficient work experience and technical know-how the chance to get a diploma that puts them on a level playing field with those who received their degrees in the traditional way.

However, for this program to be truly effective, proper implementation and oversight will be essential.

The CHEd, for one, must ensure that equivalency assessments are transparent, fair, and free from abuse. For another, applicant assessments must be designed to ensure that degree holders under ETEEAP can meet the academic and professional standards expected in their respective disciplines.

Equally important is raising public awareness about the program. Many Filipinos who stand to benefit from this initiative should be made fully aware of its existence as well as the processes involved in applying. The success of RA 12124 is also hinged on shifting public perception—on recognizing that learning happens in many different ways.

Passing the law is only the first step. Ultimately, its execution will determine whether it can truly deliver on its promise of a more egalitarian and opportunity-rich educational landscape. If implemented well, this measure has the potential to change the lives of many, proving that long-held view that education—no matter where or how it was obtained—is a gateway to a better future.