



**World Health
Organization**

Western Pacific
Philippines



UN, UNICEF, WHO and UNESCO welcome the start of limited in-person schooling in the Philippines

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The UN, UNICEF, WHO and UNESCO support the Philippine Government in welcoming children back to schools as the country starts its pilot of limited and voluntary in-person schooling in minimal-risk areas. The said initiative highlights that school attendance is critical for children's social development and continued learning.

We commend the Department of Education (DepEd)'s leadership that enabled the start of in-person classes and its coordination with relevant agencies, including the Department of Health (DOH). We acknowledge DepEd's continuous efforts in ensuring learning continuity for children not participating in the pilot as well as efforts of local government units (LGUs), school staff, health workers, and parents to support the delivery of quality education.

We acknowledge that implementing in-person schooling in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic poses many challenges and is not without risk. However, in the context of learning to live with endemic COVID-19, available evidence confirms that starting in-person classes as soon as possible brings greater benefits than risks.

Schools are not only central to children's education and development but are enablers and accelerators for the realization of child rights such as protection, participation, and play. Prolonged school closures have a significant impact on children's physical and mental health. Without the safety net that school often provides, children are more vulnerable to abuse, gender-based violence

including sexual exploitation and child marriage, and child labour that they may experience at home, especially in the stressful context of the pandemic. The most vulnerable children, and those who are unable to access remote learning, are disproportionately impacted and are at risk of never returning to the classroom.

Globally, children account for a small proportion of confirmed COVID-19 cases and evidence has shown that schools are not drivers of transmission within the surrounding community when applying a risk-informed approach that considers safe operations and focuses on learning for the most marginalized.

A national representative survey by UNICEF and the Social Weather Stations (SWS) among Filipino parents of 0-17 year-old children in September 2021 found that 69% of parents agree to conducting voluntary face-to-face classes with health and safety protocols, while 73% of parents support voluntary face-to-face classes in areas where there have been no COVID-19 cases in the last 28 days.

In recognition of the crucial role of educators, they should remain a priority group in the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines. Public health, and safety measures, such as mask-wearing, handwashing, physical distancing, and good ventilation, remain equally important to keep every child and every teacher safe.

The pilot in-person schooling is a positive step which provides an opportunity to learn how to manage and minimize the risk of infections in school settings. This can then be applied as in-person learning expands to other areas and schools.

Together with our partners, the UN will continue to work closely with the Government in support of safe in-person schooling beginning with the joint work in pilot schools and preparation for scale up.

We are committed to continue our support to DepEd and DoH in line with shared accountability for safe school reopening, contributing to our joint efforts to overcome the pandemic and achieve sustained recovery for the Philippines and its people.

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UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. In more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

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Dedicated to the well-being of all people and guided by science, the World Health Organization leads and champions global efforts to give everyone, everywhere an equal chance to live a healthy life.

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