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PGMA : The sooner deficiencies of RP education system are fixed, the better

THE MANSION, Baguio City, Dec 31 (PGON) – President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo said today that the sooner the deficiencies of the country’s educational system are fixed, the better. In a meeting with the Presidential Task Force for Education (PTFE) at the presidential residence here, the President directed the group to advance the date of the proposed National Education Congress to next month (January) instead of May 2008 as earlier planned.

The President’s directive underscored her concern over the continuing deterioration of the country’s educational system, especially English efficiency. The Chief Executive has been meeting over the past several weeks with various academic groups and education stakeholders from both the public and private sectors to discuss reform measures intended to upgrade the quality of Philippine education.

This morning’s consultations with officials and officers of public and private educational institutions of higher learning in Northern Luzon lasted for almost two hours. Responding to the President’s directive, the PTFE said it would convene the education congress in the later part of January. She said the task force should present its first draft of proposed educational reforms to the entire educational sector for it to improve on and as part of a consensus-building move.

She told Presidential Assistant for Education Mona Valisno that it would be better to submit the task force’s draft to her and education leaders in Northern Luzon for further suggestions and improvements. These improvements, she said, could be incorporated in the final draft. “The draft does not need to be final. Present the draft to stakeholders so there will be no objections later on,” the President added.

Among those present during the PTFE consultative meeting were the heads of 12 state universities, including University of the Philippines (UP) Baguio chancellor Priscilla

Macansantos; the head of a local government university; and the heads of 12 private universities in Northern Luzon – Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley Region, and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR). Also present were Maj. Gen. Leopoldo Maligalig, Philippine Military Academy (PMA) superintendent; members of the PTFE, the staff and secretariat of the Office of the Presidential Assistant for Education, Education Undersecretary Ramon Bacani and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Executive Director William Medrano.

The President also ordered the Department of Education (DepEd) to submit to her the list of schools belonging to the “30 percent lowest performing” institutions all over the country. The move is intended to give teachers of these schools the first crack at DepEd’s teacher training program, especially in the English language.

The President stressed that English proficiency should be “universal” among Filipino teachers. She said that “in-service training” in English should be held on weekends in order that teachers will continue to hold classes during regular school days. Malacanang had earlier earmarked P500 million for English training. The President made no bones about her concern over the current state of the state of English teaching, as she recalled a comment by Sen. Richard Gordon that many of the semi-finalists in an English competition could not “verbalize” their answers to the interview questions.

“We have to make sure their (the teachers’) English is good. Really, English is not proceeding anywhere as fast as Math or Science... It is deteriorating. Something must be wrong with the educational system,” she said. The task force reported that it had initiated the use of the local “lingua franca,” particularly Ilocano, Cebuano and Tagalog, in 16 public schools in the North and South in Grade I and II. But English is the medium of instruction from Grade III up, the task force said. #

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