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Naga City's Class Act



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BICOL'S model city is trying its best to address its 'weakest link' in achieving the Millennium Development Goals: keeping schoolchildren in class to complete elementary education.

New Classrooms Rise Ahead of June Classes

BY JONAS CABILES SOLTES

IF ONE WERE TO PUT LOCAL GOVERNMENTS in a classroom setting, the executive body of this thriving city southwest of Metro Manila would be the overachieving nerd, the one guaranteed to garner the most medals at the end of each term. So when Naga City received a failing grade in one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - achieving universal primary education - local officials characteristically lost no time in dreaming up a program aimed at improving its score. It's a situation made even more challenging by the city's demographics: one out of every three Nagueño is of school age. But as Naga City Mayor Jesse Robredo put it, "We need to address the continuing inability of our school system to ensure that no child is left behind."

Launched in May last year, the Quality Universal Elementary Education in Naga (QUEEN) initiative is said to be a "more focused and decisive intervention" of the city government to ensure that every Nagueño child gets all the opportunities to complete primary school. Although it is a multisectoral effort, a key participant in the initiative is the school board, which helps assure funding support for the miscellaneous school fees that have to be paid by all students attending public schools.

Naga City Planning Coordinator Wilfredo Prilles Jr. says that one main reason why school-age children are not showing up in class is because public education, despite a constitutional provision that guarantees free schooling up to high school, is not really free. He points out, "Parents need to pay PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) fees and other charges meant to defray the school's operating expenses, which the national government cannot fully support." SEE > CLASS ACT, 5

BY THE START OF NEXT SCHOOL year, nine additional school buildings in five schools in Naga City should have been completed and ready for use.

These nine new classrooms are being constructed in Teodora Moscoso Elementary School in Barangay Carolina, Calauag Elementary School in Barangay Calauag, Leon Mercado High School in Barangay Pacol, Balatas Elementary School in Barangay Balatas, and San Rafael Elementary School in Barangay Cararayan.

The City School Board through Administrator Huberto I. Ursua said that all existing school buildings in the city should be ready for use in time with the formal opening of classes this coming month, adding that all typhoon-damaged buildings in the city had been restored. SEE > NEW, 9