

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session



HOUSE BILL NO. 7961

Introduced by Representatives MANUEL ANTONIO F. ZUBIRI and
MARIA LOURDES ACOSTA-ALBA

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This pandemic brought about by COVID-19 disrupted the lives and way of life of all human beings on earth. The Philippines is not an exception. In fact, a survey conducted for the period September 17-20, 2020 by the Social Weather Station (SWS) showed that the number of jobless Filipinos remains high at 39.5% although it is a decline from the record-high 45.5% in July 2020. It also means that 2 out of 5 Filipinos were laid off this pandemic.¹

While people residing in developed countries experience various signs of mental health decline, the same can be said in the Philippines. The lack of jobs and shrinking of the economy brought about by the virus has pushed the mental health of Filipinos against the wall. Brought about by various stresses and numerous factors, the mental health of the Filipinos is tested. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, over three million Filipinos have been experiencing depression, making it the highest rate in Southeast Asia. It likewise published a study that says mental health-related issues in the Philippines have exponentially increased since the beginning of the pandemic. The growing number of suicide cases among the youth with mental health issues is the sad manifestation of the negative effects of the pandemic brought about by a mix of social and biological factors.²

The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) spokesperson Jacqueline de Guia noted NCMH's data, which shows that the average number of calls on its hotlines swelled to 400 during the lockdown from 80 during the pre-pandemic period. Also, the commission noted that many people without mental health issues before the pandemic may have developed some conditions due to the environment and situation brought by the COVID-19 crisis.³

Given the foregoing, it is important to note that not only adults are experiencing mental health issues. Children also are victims of the various effects of this pandemic. From a formerly socially active lifestyle, children have now been forced to study at home to protect their health. Distance learning or home schooling coupled with modules, online courses and a combination of various medium has become the new normal or way of going to school. However, Save the Children International stated that at least 40 percent of children from poor households said they needed help with their schoolwork, but there is no one who can help them.⁴

This difficulty in learning and the absence of help for children have resulted in reported cases of suicide committed by children. Not knowing how to adjust to the new current home schooling

¹ https://www.google.com.ph/amp/s/mb.com.ph/2020/10/06/number-of-jobless-filipinos-remains-high-2-out-of-5-laid-off-during-pandemic-sws/amp/%3futm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=number-of-jobless-filipinos-remains-high-2-out-of-5-laid-off-during-pandemic-sws

² <https://www.google.com.ph/amp/s/www.sunstar.com.ph/ampArticle/1868515>

³ <https://www.google.com.ph/amp/s/newsinfo.inquirer.net/1344408/chr-wants-greater-attention-budget-for-mental-health-amid-pandemic/amp>

⁴ <https://www.onenews.ph/as-classes-open-learning-crisis-highlighted-with-millions-of-students-left-behind>

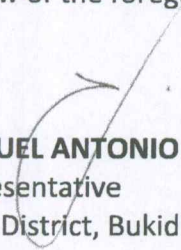
set up, most students struggle to deliver and perform well in their home study. Along with that, these students also get a lot of pressure from their parents and guardians, who themselves are also burdened. Certain expectations set by adults are just not realistic for some of these struggling students to meet. Indeed, the pandemic is not only a health crisis but is also a learning crisis as pointed out by UNICEF.

Only a few are able to cope with this new kind of learning. In the extreme, even children are committing suicide due to difficulties in answering their self-learning modules⁵. There has already been claims of three suicide incidents in Cebu. While the difficulties mentioned cannot be directly and absolutely claimed to be the cause of such suicides, a case in the Third District of Bukidnon depicts otherwise. A child committed suicide because, as per accounts of friends and family, the child was struggling learning.

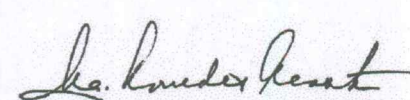
To curb this further mental health decline which pose a great risk on our children, this humble representation seeks to give our children—and to a certain extent, their respective families—leniency from the pressures brought about by the pandemic and the new method of learning by proposing a less stringent way of ascertaining whether a student passes or fails for school year 2020-2021.

In this bill, it is proposed that students enrolled in the K-12 program would automatically get a passing mark as long as they have complied with all the activities and exercises in their modules, have attended all lessons and sessions and have participated in quizzes and exams. The grading system is likewise proposed to be suspended to lessen the pressure and stress to our children—and to a certain extent, their family—to promote their mental health. In lieu thereof, a mere mark of “passed” or “failed” shall be the basis of whether or not a student will be qualified to advance in his or her studies. Furthermore and in order to help ease a family’s financial burden in having to assume tuition and other educational costs associated with a failed student having to repeat an academic year, the school shall afford a deserving student reasonable opportunity to allow him or her to satisfactorily resolve whatever deficiencies may have resulted in the failed final mark and pass the academic year. It is hoped that through this leniency, children and their respective families will bear less burden brought about by the pandemic for the above-mentioned period which will better enable them to adjust and get accustomed in this new normal method of learning for the following academic term.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



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Representative
First District, Bukidnon

⁵ <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1118800>

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**Introduced by Representatives MANUEL ANTONIO F. ZUBIRI and
MARIA LOURDES ACOSTA-ALBA**

AN ACT
**PROTECTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF K-12 STUDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
THROUGH SCHOLASTIC LENIENCY FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR 2020-2021**

Section 1. Title. – This measure shall be known as the COVID-19 Scholastic Leniency Act.

Section 2. Declaration of State Policy. – It is the declared policy of the State to protect the young from early mental health decline. The pressures brought by the current COVID-19 pandemic has affected all facets of life leading to a rise in mental health related problems which has led to the inability to learn and worse, to the taking of one's own life.

Article II, Section 15 of the 1987 Constitution provides that the State shall protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them. In order to protect and promote the mental health of the young people, the State recognizes that abrupt changes in learning methods must be given a familiarization phase to maximize its intended positive results among young students.

Section 3. Scholastic Leniency. – Scholastic leniency is hereby permitted for school year 2020-2021 for all students of the K-12 program. Students of the K-12 program shall be given an automatic passing mark which will enable them to advance in their studies for the next school year. Provided, That the student has complied with the following requirements:

1. Attended all lessons and sessions conducted by their teachers and the school;
2. Submitted all the required papers, projects, and other academic requirements that the school or the Department of Education shall impose;
3. Has taken all the quizzes, recitations and exams conducted by the teachers or the school; and
4. Satisfactorily met the minimum standards for personal behavior and conduct prescribed by the school or the Department of Education.

Provided further, That absence in any lesson or session shall only be excused when the student falls ill or has attended to a family emergency upon submission of proof to the school authorities. Provided finally, That the student did not get a zero (0) mark in any of the quizzes or exams conducted by the teachers of the school.

Section 4. Final Marks. – For the duration of the application of this Act, the school shall plainly indicate if the student “passed” upon compliance of the student with the preceding section. A passing mark shall make the student eligible to advance in his or her studies for the next academic year. Should a student come short of the requirements spelled out in the preceding section, the school shall plainly indicate that the student “failed” which will render him or her ineligible to advance in his or her studies.

Section 5. Remedial Action. - Should a student receive a “failed” final mark for an academic year and provided such student has met the minimum prescribed standards for personal behavior and conduct, the school may administer such remedial actions as are reasonable and proper to allow a student to satisfactorily resolve whatever deficiencies may have resulted in the student’s failed rating and advance in his or her studies.

Section 6. Role of the Department of Education. – The Department of Education shall issue the necessary department orders to carry out the provisions of this Act.

Section 7. Separability Clause. - If any provision or part hereof is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder of the law or the provision not otherwise affected shall remain valid and subsisting.

Section 8. Repealing Clause. - Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive order, letter of instruction, administrative order, rule or regulation contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act is hereby repealed, modified or amended accordingly.

Section 9. Effectivity Clause. - This Act shall take effect beginning fifteen (15) days after its complete publication in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,