

Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS

First Regular Session

House Bill No. **2266**



INTRODUCED BY REPRESENTATIVE PM VARGAS

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING PUBLIC BASIC EDUCATION SCHOOLS IN
GEOGRAPHICALLY ISOLATED AND DISADVANTAGED AND CONFLICT-
AFFECTED AREAS, PROVIDING ACCESS ROADS LEADING TO LAST MILE
SCHOOLS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Section 1, Article XIV of the 1987 Constitution mandates the State to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and to take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all. Yet despite significant strides in education reform and infrastructure development, many Filipino learners—especially those in geographically isolated, disadvantaged, and conflict-affected areas (GIDCA)—continue to be left behind.

In 2023, the Department of Education (DepEd) identified about 2,000 “Last Mile Schools” across the country. These schools, often located in far-flung barangays, cater to learners in areas with poor access to roads, electricity, internet connectivity, and adequate classrooms. Many operate with less than four teachers, use makeshift learning spaces and serve communities with predominantly Indigenous Peoples (IP) populations. In some cases, students must walk more than two hours just to reach school—conditions that discourage attendance and compromise learning outcomes.

The gaps are reflected in national learning assessments. The 2023 Southeast Asian Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) revealed that only 1 in every 10

grade 5 students in the country achieved proficiency in reading, while barely 17% met minimum expectations in mathematics. Meanwhile, EDCOM II (Second Congressional Commission on Education) reported in the same year that the Philippine education system is deep crisis, particularly in terms of equity. The report emphasizes the urgency of investing in rural and marginalized areas to ensure inclusive learning and break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that more than 4 million Filipinos aged 5 and older have not completed any grade level—underscoring how physical inaccessibility and lack of resources continue to hinder educational attainment in remote areas.

This proposed measure seeks to address these structural inequities by institutionalizing the establishment of Last Mile Schools, defined as public education institutions located in underserved and remote areas, especially those with large Indigenous Peoples population. In addition to constructing schools, this bill mandates the creation of access roads, electrification, and digital infrastructure, ensuring that education is not only available but also accessible and relevant.

The bill also ensures full recognition of the Indigenous Cultural Communities, as stipulated in the Indigenous People’s Rights Act of 1997 (RA 8371), by embedding cultural sensitivity in the establishment and operation of these schools.

It is worth noting that this version of the measure was already passed on Third Reading during the 9th Congress and was duly submitted to the Senate. The re-filing reaffirms the State’s commitment to realizing equitable, inclusive and accessible education for every Filipino, particularly the most underserved.

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



REP. PM VARGAS

Fifth District, Quezon City

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Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress Assembled:

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “*Last Mile Schools Act.*”

SECTION 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels, and take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all.

The State recognizes and promotes the rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities within the framework of national unity and development. To this end, the State shall recognize the right of indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education, and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child.

SECTION 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act:

- a. *Basic education* refers to the intended basic learning needs that provide the foundation on which subsequent learning can be based. It includes kindergarten, elementary, and secondary education as well as alternative learning systems for out-of-school learners and those with special needs;
- b. Basic Education School refers to learning institutions accredited by the Department of Education (DepEd) to deliver services addressing the intended basic learning needs of students;
- c. *Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICC)/ Indigenous Peoples (IPs)* refer to the same definition stated in Section 3h, Chapter 2 of Republic Act No. 8371, or ‘The Indigenous People’s Rights Act of 1997’, which describes it as “a group of people or homogenous societies identified by self-ascription by others, who have continuously lived as organized community or communally bounded and defined territory, and who have, under claims of ownership since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilized such territories, sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, or who have, through resistance to political, social and cultural inroad of colonization, non-indigenous religions and cultures, became historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos. ICC/IPs shall likewise include peoples who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, at the time of conquest or colonization, or at the time of inroads of non-indigenous religions and cultures, or the establishment of present state boundaries, who retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, but who may have been displaced from their traditional domains or who may have resettled outside their ancestral domains”, and
- d. *Last Mile Schools* refer to public basic education schools with gaps in resources and facilities which are located in geographically isolated and disadvantages and conflict-affected areas (GIDCA).

SECTION 4. *Establishment of Last Mile Schools.* – The Last Mile Schools are hereby established, under the administration of the DepEd, to cater to the basic education of learners throughout the country’s GIDCA.

The establishment of Last Mile Schools in locations situated by the ICC’s shall be undertaken in consideration of the rights of the IPs, in accordance with Republic Act No. 8371.

SECTION 5. Access to Education. – The DepEd shall collaborate with the concerned government agencies for the delivery of the infrastructures necessary to ensure access to education in the Last Mile Schools, namely:

- a. Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), for the construction of access roads leading to the location of Last Mile Schools;
- b. Department of Energy (DOE) and National Electrification Administration (NEA), for the installation of electricity; and
- c. Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), for the installation of information and communications technology.

SECTION 6. Criteria. – The indicators used in identifying a public school to be included in the Last Mile Schools are the following:

- a. Having fewer than four (4) classrooms;
- b. With makeshift or nonstandard rooms;
- c. Absence of or irregular electricity;
- d. Have not been allocated funds for repairs or new construction projects in the last four (4) years unless destroyed;
- e. With travel distance of more than one hour from the center of a city or municipality, or with difficulty of terrain or of such nature as to be considered difficulty of access to existing educational institutions;
- f. Having multigrade classes or rooms;
- g. With less than five (5) teachers;
- h. Having a student population of less than one hundred (100) learners;
- i. With at least seventy-five percent (75%) IP learners; and
- j. Having such other circumstances that make it difficult for learners to access school facilities.

SECTION 7. Implementation. – The school building program for the Last Mile Schools shall be established and completed within a period of five (5) years after the effective date of this Act.

To facilitate synchronicity, harmony, and complementarity of plans, resources, and efforts of both the national government and the local government units (LGUs) towards the attainment of the objectives of this Act, the DepEd shall plan and implement the programs, projects, and activities that address the needs of the Last Mile Schools, in coordination and collaboration with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), DPWH, DICT, DOE, NEA,

Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), and concerned LGUs.

SECTION 8. *Appropriations.* – The funds needed for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the budgets of the concerned Departments, agencies and Government-owned Controlled Corporations in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SECTION 9. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* Within ninety (90) days from the approval of this Act, the Secretary of Education shall, in consultation with the NCIP, DPWH, DOE, NEA, DSWD, DENR, NDRRMS, and Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines, formulate the rules and regulations implementing the provisions of this Act.

SECTION 7. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act is held invalid or unconstitutional, the same shall not affect the validity and effectivity of the other provisions hereof.

SECTION 8. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, and other issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SECTION 9. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,