

TWENTIETH CONGRESS OF THE)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
First Regular Session)



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

House Bill No. 8356

Introduced by Hon. Antonio B. Legarda Jr.

AN ACT
STRENGTHENING FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING AND NURTURING CARE BY
ESTABLISHING A "NATIONAL K-3 PROGRAM" WITH AN EARLY LANGUAGE,
LITERACY, AND NUMERACY (ELLN) CORE, INTEGRATING SOCIAL AND
EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND VALUES FORMATION, ALIGNING HEALTH,
NUTRITION, AND RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING SUPPORTS, PROVIDING
PROTECTED INSTRUCTIONAL TIME, BUDGET TAGGING AND PROGRESSIVE
PRIORITIZATION, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In recent months, serious concerns have been raised about the state of basic education in the Philippines, particularly in the early years of schooling. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has warned of a "real and widespread learning crisis," noting that many Filipino children are already falling behind in reading and mathematics at a very young age.¹ The problem is most evident from Kindergarten to Grade 3 – the stage where foundational skills should be firmly established.

Recent data confirms the severity of this issue, showing that nearly 4.5 million learners in Grades 1 to 3 are unable to meet basic literacy standards.² Around one in three early-grade pupils are classified as "low-emerging readers", meaning they struggle to read simple words and understand basic texts.³ By Grade 3, only 30.52% are considered proficient in early language, literacy, and numeracy. As a result, many move to higher grades without mastering essential skills, leading to a drastic decline

¹ DepEd targets K-3 learners to fix crisis, The Philippine Star, June 22, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/06/22/2452381/dep-ed-targets-k-3-learners-fix-crisis>

² One out of three pupils in Grade 1 to 3 are 'low-emerging readers,' study shows, GMA integrated News, September 3, 2025, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/57822/edcom-2-low-emerging-readers-comprehensive-rapid-literacy-assessment-low/story/>

³ *Ibid*, note 2.

in proficiency rates by Grade 12.⁴ These figures point to one clear conclusion: the learning crisis begins early, and it must be addressed early.

The challenge, however, goes beyond classroom instruction alone. Foundational learning, which includes basic literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills is the foundation for a life of learning.⁵ It is linked to children's health, nutrition, school attendance, and the quality of teaching they receive in their formative years. Without a coherent national framework that integrates these elements, efforts to improve literacy and numeracy remain fragmented, uneven, and ultimately ineffective.

This bill responds to these concerns by establishing a "National K-3 Foundational Learning and Nurturing Care Program" that places early language, literacy, and numeracy at the core of basic education. It likewise integrates social and emotional learning and values formation, strengthens coordination with health and nutrition services, supports early identification and intervention for struggling learners.

By promoting whole-of-government collaboration, the measure ensures that children receive comprehensive support during their most vulnerable years. Furthermore, the bill strengthens teacher preparation and specialization in the early grades and protects instructional time for foundational skills.

Thus, focusing on Kindergarten to Grade 3 is not merely a curriculum adjustment; it is a long-term investment in human capital and national development. Strengthening the early years is the most practical and effective way to improve outcomes for Filipino learners and restore confidence in our education system.

In view of the foregoing, the passage of this bill is earnestly sought. This bill also serves as the counterpart measure to that filed in the Senate by Senator Loren Legarda.


HON. ANTONIO B. LEGARDA, JR.

⁴ Student proficiency rates plunge from 30% in Grade 3 to 0.47% in Grade 12, EDCOM2 Communications, January 16, 2026, <https://edcom2.gov.ph/student-proficiency-rates-plunge-from-30-in-grade-3-to-0-47-in-grade-12/>

⁵ Foundational Learning, World Bank, May 16, 2025, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/foundational-learning>

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

1 Section 1. **Short Title.** – This Act shall be known as the "K-3 Foundational
2 Learning and Nurturing Care Act".

3 Section 2. **Declaration of Policy.** – It is the policy of the State to give priority
4 to education and promote total human development. In pursuit of this mandate, the
5 State shall ensure that all children from Kindergarten to Grade 3 develop strong
6 foundations in early language, literacy, numeracy, social and emotional learning, and
7 values, consistent with developmental science and the country's goals for equity and
8 lifelong learning.

9 The State recognizes that foundational learning is profoundly influenced by children's
10 health, nutrition, attendance, responsive caregiving, safety, and well-being, and shall
11 therefore promote whole-child, whole-of-government, and whole-of-community

1 approaches aligned with Republic Act No. 12199, otherwise known as the *Early*
2 *Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) System Act*.

3 The State further declares that investments in early-grade foundational learning yield
4 the highest social and economic returns and shall therefore prioritize preventive and
5 early interventions to avoid widening learning gaps in later years.

6 The State shall provide clear standards, protected instructional time, appropriate
7 teacher support, coherent program governance, transparency in resource allocation,
8 and strong collaboration among national agencies, Local Government Units (LGUs),
9 families, and schools.

10 Section 3. ***Scope and Coverage.*** – This Act shall apply to all public and private
11 elementary schools offering Kindergarten to Grade 3 nationwide, subject to the
12 standards and guidelines prescribed by the Department of Education (DepEd).

13 Section 4. ***Objectives.*** – This Act aims to establish a National K-3 Foundational
14 Learning and Nurturing Care Program (“National K-3 Program”) to ensure that
15 foundational learning becomes the primary focus of the early grades of basic
16 education. The National K-3 Program shall:

- 17 a) Guarantee strong instruction in Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy
18 (ELLN) as its core;
- 19 b) Integrate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), and Values Formation into
20 curriculum and teaching practice;
- 21 c) Strengthen linkages among health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, child
22 protection, and early learning;
- 23 d) Support and professionalize K-3 teachers including pathways for
24 specialization;
- 25 e) Secure protected instructional time for foundational competencies;
- 26 f) Establish a National K-3 Foundational Learning and Nurturing Care Dashboard
27 for accountability;
- 28 g) Ensure budget tagging and progressive prioritization for K-3 investments; and
- 29 h) Promote developmental alignment and coherence from 0-4 ECCD framework
30 to Kindergarten to Grade 3.

1 Section 5. ***Definition of Terms.*** – For the purposes of this Act:

- 2 a) *Early Intervention* refers to the timely identification and support for learners
3 who exhibit delays in foundational competencies;
- 4 b) *Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy (ELLN)* refer to the competencies in
5 oral language, vocabulary, decoding, fluency, comprehension, writing, and
6 early mathematics expected in Kindergarten to Grade 3. ELLN constitutes the
7 core instructional component of the National K-3 Program;
- 8 c) *Foundational Learning* refers to the competencies in early language, literacy,
9 numeracy, social and emotional learning, and values needed for future
10 academic performance and holistic development;
- 11 d) *National K-3 Program* refers to the unified program established under this Act,
12 formally known as the National K-3 Foundational Learning and Nurturing Care
13 Program, encompassing standards, instructional time, teacher development,
14 materials, assessments, interventions, and whole-child support for K–3;
- 15 e) *Nurturing Care* refers to the enabling environment for child development,
16 including health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, early learning, safety, and
17 security, consistent with Republic Act No. 12199;
- 18 f) *Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)* refers to the skills in attention, emotion
19 regulation, cooperation, empathy, perseverance, and responsible decision-
20 making that support learning and wellbeing; and
- 21 g) *Values Formation* refers to the competencies and behaviors related to respect,
22 responsibility, cooperation, fairness, empathy, and bayanihan, embedded in
23 daily routines and school culture.

24 Section 6. ***Establishment of the National K-3 Program.*** – There is hereby
25 established a National K-3 Foundational Learning and Nurturing Care Program which
26 shall serve as the primary national framework governing foundational learning and
27 nurturing care in Kindergarten to Grade 3. The Program shall provide a strong ELLN
28 instructional core covering oral language, decoding, comprehension, writing, and early
29 numeracy. It shall:

- 30 a) Integrate SEL and values formation across curriculum, pedagogy, routines,
31 and school climate;

- b) Ensure nurturing care linkages for health, nutrition, attendance, responsive caregiving, and child protection;
- c) Institute protected instructional time for foundational learning;
- d) Provide localized, culturally relevant, accessible (including offline) learning materials;
- e) Implement early identification and intervention;
- f) Strengthen teacher preparation, assignment, coaching, and mentoring, especially for early grades; and
- g) Promote partnerships with LGUs, parents, and communities.

Section 7. ***Standards and Curriculum Alignment.*** – The Department of Education (DepEd) shall issue standards for ELLN, SEL, and values formation in K-3 and align curriculum, teaching guides, assessments, and learning materials accordingly. The DepEd shall ensure protected instructional time for foundational competencies and align the K-3 Program with Republic Act No. 12199 and the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council’s 0–4 developmental framework to guarantee continuity and coherence in child development from early childhood to the early grades.

Section 8. ***Teacher Specialization and Professional Development.*** – The Department of Education (DepEd), in coordination with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) shall:

- a) Develop specialization pathways for early learning / early-grade teachers;
- b) Strengthen in-service professional development, including coaching and mentoring systems;
- c) Ensure merit-based assignment of teachers to early grades based on competencies; and
- d) Provide comprehensive training in early language, literacy, and numeracy, social and emotional learning, values formation, early numeracy instruction, and early intervention strategies.

All current K-3 teachers shall be deemed qualified during the transition period and shall receive appropriate support to meet emerging specialization standards.

Section 9. ***Integration of Nurturing Care Supports.*** – The DepEd shall coordinate with the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Social Welfare

1 and Development (DSWD), the Department of the Interior and Local Government
2 (DILG), the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council, and the Local
3 Government Units (LGUs) to ensure:

- 4 a) Effective delivery of school-based health and nutrition services, including
5 coordination with the School-Based Feeding Program;
- 6 b) Attendance monitoring, follow-up support for chronically absent learners;
- 7 c) Parenting and responsive caregiving sessions aligned with school learning
8 goals;
- 9 d) Screening and referral systems for health, nutrition, disability, and
10 developmental concerns; and
- 11 e) The promotion of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), and values-enabling
12 environments, including positive discipline and child protection measures.

13 All data collection and reporting under this Act shall comply with the Data
14 Privacy Act of 2012 and applicable child protection laws.

15 Section 10. ***K-3 Foundational Learning and Nurturing Care Dashboard.***

16 – The DepEd shall establish a National K-3 Foundational Learning and Nurturing Care
17 Dashboard containing indicators on language, literacy, and numeracy proficiency,
18 attendance and chronic absenteeism, selected health and nutrition indicators where
19 available, school climate measures; and implementation of early intervention systems.
20 The Dashboard shall guide planning, budgeting, coaching, and reporting at the
21 national, regional, schools division, and school levels.

22 Section 11. ***Financing, Budget Tagging, and Progressive Prioritization.***

23 – The DepEd, in coordination with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM),
24 shall identify and tag budget lines supporting the National K-3 Program. Within three
25 (3) fiscal years from the effectivity of this Act, tagged allocations shall constitute no
26 less than ten percent (10%) of the annual DepEd basic education appropriations. The
27 DepEd shall develop a medium-term plan to progressively increase K-3 investments
28 consistent with enrollment share, learning needs, and evidence on returns to early-
29 grade investment. *Provided, That* such prioritization shall be implemented through
30 efficiency measures and shall not diminish constitutionally mandated funding for other
31 levels of basic education.

1 The LGUs and Local School Boards shall allocate a meaningful share of the Special
2 Education Fund to support K-3 initiatives.

3 Section 12. ***Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** – The DepEd, in
4 coordination with the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Social Welfare
5 and Development (DSWD), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the
6 Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), Department of Budget and Management
7 (DBM), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), the Early
8 Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council, shall promulgate the Implementing
9 Rules and Regulations within one hundred twenty (120) days from the effectivity of
10 this Act.

11 Section 13. ***Transitory Provisions.*** – All existing programs related to early-
12 grade learning, health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, and social and emotional
13 learning shall be aligned with this Act through the Implementing Rules and
14 Regulations.

15 All current K-3 teachers shall remain in their posts and shall receive transition support
16 to meet specialization standards over time. Budget tagging, teacher pathways, and
17 dashboard rollout shall be phased in consideration of system readiness. No existing
18 services shall be disrupted during transition, and improvements shall be gradual,
19 supportive, and consultative.

20 Section 14. ***Separability Clause.*** - If any provision or part hereof is held
21 invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder of the law or the provision not otherwise
22 affected shall remain valid and subsisting.

23 Section 15. ***Repealing Clause.*** – All laws, executive orders, issuances,
24 decrees, rules and regulations or any part thereof which are inconsistent with or
25 contrary to the provisions of this Act are deemed amended, modified, or repealed
26 accordingly.

27 Section 16. ***Effectivity Clause.*** – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days
28 after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

29 *Approved,*