



Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session



House Bill No. 8988

Introduced by CIBAC Party-List Representative
EDUARDO “BRO. EDDIE” C. VILLANUEVA

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Education remains one of the most powerful tools for breaking the cycle of poverty and empowering communities. Yet for many Filipino children living in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA)—including remote upland communities, island barangays, and conflict-affected regions—access to quality basic education remains a persistent challenge. Long travel distances, lack of transportation, difficult terrain, inadequate school infrastructure, limited electricity and connectivity, and shortages of teachers often prevent learners from fully exercising their constitutional right to education.

Despite the efforts of the Department of Education (DepEd) and local government units, existing education planning frameworks do not sufficiently address the unique geographic and socio-economic realities of GIDA communities. Many schools operate with inadequate facilities, multigrade classrooms, and minimal teaching personnel, while some communities remain without reasonable access to a school within a safe and practical distance.

This proposed “GIDA Schools Act” seeks to institutionalize a comprehensive and targeted framework for improving access to basic education in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. The measure formally recognizes GIDA Schools within the public education system and establishes clear indicators for their identification based on conditions such as remoteness, limited infrastructure, small student populations, multigrade classes, and the presence of Indigenous Peoples communities.

The bill further mandates the development of a National GIDA Schools Mapping System to guide evidence-based education planning and resource allocation. Through this system, the government can more effectively identify underserved areas, prioritize infrastructure investments, and ensure that learners have reasonable geographic access to basic education facilities.

Recognizing that education access challenges extend beyond school buildings alone, the measure promotes inter-agency collaboration involving key institutions such as the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) for access roads, the

Department of Energy (DOE) and National Electrification Administration (NEA) for electrification, and the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) for connectivity. Such coordinated efforts are essential to addressing the broader structural barriers faced by learners in remote communities.

The bill also provides targeted support for teachers and non-teaching personnel assigned to GIDA Schools, including hardship allowances, mobility support, housing assistance, professional development opportunities, and localized recruitment strategies that prioritize community-based educators and Indigenous Knowledge holders.

Importantly, the measure affirms the rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities and Indigenous Peoples, ensuring that educational initiatives within ancestral domains comply with the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) and incorporate Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) into the learning process where appropriate.

By institutionalizing sustained government support for GIDA Schools, this measure seeks to ensure that no child is deprived of the opportunity to learn simply because of where they were born or where their community is located.

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


EDUARDO "BRO. EDDIE" C. VILLANUEVA



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HOUSE BILL NO. 8988

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EDUARDO "BRO. EDDIE" C. VILLANUEVA

AN ACT
INSTITUTIONALIZING SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC BASIC EDUCATION SCHOOLS IN
GEOGRAPHICALLY ISOLATED AND DISADVANTAGED AREAS (GIDA) AND
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

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 "*GIDA Schools Act.*"

2
3 **SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy.** -The State shall protect and promote the right of
4 all citizens to quality education at all levels, and take appropriate steps to make
5 education accessible to all.
6

7 The State also recognizes that accessibility to school sites is an essential
8 component of the right to basic education. Education planning, school mapping, and
9 school infrastructure development shall be guided by the principle that learners must
10 have reasonable geographic access to a basic education school that is compliant with
11 national education standards.
12

13 Towards this end, the State shall improve the quality and access to basic
14 education for children in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas, by
15 investing in school infrastructures, access roads, and programs responsive to their
16 unique contexts.
17

18 In implementing these measures, the State recognizes and promotes the rights
19 of Indigenous Cultural Communities within the framework of national unity and
20 development. To this end, the State shall recognize the right of indigenous families
21 and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education,
22 and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child.
23

24 **SEC. 3. Definition of Terms.** - As used in this Act:
25

- a) Basic Education refers to the intended basic learning needs which provide the foundation for subsequent learning. 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) Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA) refer to remote or marginalized areas or communities, with limited access to essential services and infrastructure, and may include areas impacted by conflict or insecurity; and
- d) Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs)/Indigenous Peoples (IPs) refer to people or homogenous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as organized community on 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 inroads of colonization, non-indigenous religions and cultures, become historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos. ICCS/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.

SEC. 4. Establishment of GIDA Schools. - Public basic education schools located in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas are hereby established as GIDA Schools, under the administration of the DepEd, to cater to learners who face significant geographic, infrastructural, or access-related barriers to basic education.

For purposes of this Act, a school may be identified as a GIDA School if it has any or a combination of the following indicators:

- a) Less than four (4) classrooms;
- b) Makeshift or nonstandard rooms;
- c) Irregular or no electricity;
- d) No allocation of funds for repairs or new construction projects in the last four (4) years;
- e) Access travel time of more than one (1) hour from the center of a city or municipality, or with difficulty of terrain or of such nature as to be considered having difficulty of access to existing educational institutions;
- f) Multigrade classes or rooms;
- g) Less than five (5) teachers;
- h) A student population of less than one hundred (100) learners;
- i) More than seventy-five percent (75%) IP learners;
- j) Location in communities affected by conflict, insecurity, disaster vulnerability, or other conditions that significantly impede safe access to education; and

- 1 k) Such other analogous circumstances identified by the DepEd, which make it
2 demonstrably difficult for learners to access school facilities.
3

4 The DepEd, is hereby vested with the authority, through appropriate guidelines,
5 to supplement, refine, operationalize, and update these indicators affecting
6 geographic isolation, resource deprivation, or community vulnerability based on
7 evidence and measurable criteria, and consistent with the policy and objectives of this
8 Act.

9 The establishment of GIDA Schools within ancestral domains shall be
10 undertaken in accordance with Republic Act No. 8371, otherwise known as the
11 "Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997," including compliance with Free Prior and
12 Informed Consent (FPIC) requirements.
13

14 **SEC. 5. Accessibility of Basic Education School Sites.** - The DepEd shall
15 adopt and implement a national school accessibility standard to guide school siting,
16 school mapping, and infrastructure programming for public basic education schools,
17 including GIDA Schools.
18

19 The accessibility standard for these school sites must ensure that:

- 20 a) Students shall have access to a basic education school within a walkable
21 distance of three (3) kilometers from their place of residence; or
22 b) Where walkable access is not feasible due to terrain, geography, or safety
23 considerations, no reasonable access and safe transportation arrangements.
24

25 This standard shall be periodically reviewed and integrated into school planning
26 systems and inter-agency coordination, subject to considerations of safety and
27 feasibility.
28

29 **SEC. 6. Establishment of the National GIDA Schools Mapping System.** –
30 Within one (1) year from effectivity of this Act, DepEd shall develop and publish a
31 National GIDA Schools Map which shall serve as basis for planning, resource
32 allocation, and program implementation under this Act. The DepEd shall review and
33 update the GIDA Schools Map at least once every three (3) years to ensure
34 responsiveness to changing conditions and educational needs.
35

36 **SEC. 7. Access to Education and Inter-Agency Support.** - The DepEd shall
37 collaborate with concerned national government agencies (NGAs), local government
38 units (LGUs), civil society organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders to ensure
39 access to education in GIDA, including through the following:
40

- 41 a) LGUs and CSOs, for the construction, upgrading, and community-based
42 support of GIDA Schools;
43 b) Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), for the construction of
44 access roads leading to GIDA schools;
45 c) Department of Energy (DOE) and National Electrification Administration
46 (NEA), for the provision of electricity;
47 d) Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), for the
48 installation of information and communications technology and connectivity;
49 and

- 1 e) National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), for compliance with the
2 process of obtaining the Free Prior and Informed Consent of concerned
3 ICCs/IPs in cases where a GIDA School or access road is to be established
4 within ancestral domains.
5

6 The establishment of GIDA Schools and its access roads within ancestral
7 domains shall be undertaken in consideration of the rights of the concerned ICCs/IPs
8 to their ancestral domain and their right to Free Prior and Informed Consent, in
9 accordance with Republic Act No. 8371.
10

11 For purposes of implementing partnerships under Section 7(a), the DepEd shall
12 establish guidelines for the engagement of CSOs through Memoranda of Agreement
13 (MOA) and other community-based partnership modalities, adopting context-
14 responsive and streamlined procedures to facilitate timely delivery of school
15 infrastructure in GIDA areas. The DepEd may likewise engage the Armed Forces of
16 the Philippines (AFP) in the construction of GIDA School infrastructure in priority,
17 conflict-affected, disaster-prone, or hard-to-reach areas.
18

19 **SEC. 8. Construction Standards for GIDA Schools.** - School buildings and
20 related facilities under this Act shall comply with the minimum standards and
21 specifications prescribed by the DepEd for public school infrastructure; Provided, That,
22 where full compliance with these minimum standards and specifications is not feasible,
23 the DepEd shall prescribe appropriate and context-responsive standards specifically
24 for GIDA Schools. Such standards shall ensure that all school facilities remain safe,
25 durable, accessible, climate- and disaster-resilient, and suitable to the geographic,
26 cultural, and environmental conditions of the communities they serve.
27

28 The DepEd shall, when practicable, integrate the use of bamboo, engineered
29 bamboo, and other sustainable, locally sourced materials in the design, construction,
30 repair, and rehabilitation of public school buildings and facilities: Provided, That the
31 use of such materials shall strictly comply with the building codes, safety metrics,
32 structural standards and guidelines set forth by relevant regulatory bodies to ensure
33 the structural integrity and disaster-resilience of the school infrastructure.
34

35 The construction of GIDA Schools shall be subject to applicable environmental
36 laws, including Republic Act No. 11038, or the "Expanded National Integrated
37 Protected Areas System (E-NIPAS) Act of 2018", and Presidential Decree No. 705, or
38 the "Revised Forestry Code of the Philippines," in coordination with the Department of
39 Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).
40

41 **SEC. 9. Programs for GIDA Schools.** - The DepEd shall formulate and
42 implement programs responsive to the unique context of GIDA Schools, teachers, and
43 learners, including, but not limited to:
44

- 45 a) Learning delivery and intervention mechanisms, including alternative
46 learning modalities suited for GIDA Schools;
47 b) School staffing standards and teacher deployment, given the unique needs
48 of learners in GIDA schools;
49 c) Formula for school maintenance and other operating expenses, in
50 consultation with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM);

- d) Learning tools and equipment appropriate for the context of GIDA Schools;
- e) Learner support services, including psychological and socio-emotional support, feeding programs and other health and nutrition interventions, tutoring, mentoring, and other individualized interventions;
- f) Relevant undergraduate and graduate teacher training curriculum; and
- g) Teacher, school head, and school performance evaluations in accordance with the Teacher Education Council's (TEC) affirmation system of career stages, and in coordination with the Civil Service Commission (CSC).

For GIDA Schools in ancestral domains, the curriculum shall integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP), indigenous languages, and community-validated cultural narratives, in coordination with the NCIP and consistent with Republic Act No. 8371.

SEC. 10. Targeted Support for Teachers and Non-Teaching Staff in GIDA Schools. - The DepEd, in coordination with the DBM, concerned LGUs, and other relevant agencies, shall provide a comprehensive support package for teachers and non-teaching staff assigned to GIDA Schools, which shall include:

- a) Additional Compensation and Allowances - Personnel assigned to GIDA Schools shall be entitled to additional compensation, separate from existing benefits, including hardship allowance, hazard pay, per diem, food allowance, teaching and learning materials allowance, and relocation or mobility assistance, determined based on distance or difficulty, including transportation support for deployment and periodic travel, when applicable;
- b) Housing and Accommodation Support - DepEd, in coordination with concerned LGUs, shall provide accommodation support, which may include the construction of teacher quarters where feasible, rental or housing subsidies, or partnerships with LGUs and communities for safe local housing;
- c) Professional Development and Teacher Pipeline - DepEd shall strengthen teacher preparation and retention through:
 - (1) Relevant in-service training and bridging programs through the National Educators' Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) in coordination with TEC;
 - (2) Scholarships and teacher education support programs for aspiring teachers from GIDA and ICC/IP communities, linked to return-to-service obligations in GIDA Schools; and
 - (3) Additional Credit Points in the evaluation and ranking of teachers in GIDA Schools for purposes of promotion, reclassification, scholarship grants, leadership designation, and other career advancement opportunities.
- d) Localized Recruitment and Engagement Mechanisms - DepEd shall promote community-based and context-responsive staffing:
 - (1) Prioritizing the hiring of qualified teachers and essential non-teaching personnel who are residents of, willing to reside in, or culturally connected to the local community, and who demonstrate proficiency in the local language;

- (2) Adopting provisional or alternative deployment pathways for qualified individuals, including deployment as Learning Support Aides (LSAS), subject to appropriate safeguards; and
- (3) Engage respected community elders as Indigenous Knowledge Educators for the teaching of IKSP, consistent with the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act and local cultural protocols.

SEC. 11. Role of Local School Boards. -The Local School Boards shall perform the following:

- a) Assist the DepEd in identifying, establishing, and prioritizing GIDA Schools;
- b) Recommend and allocate funds, including the Special Education Fund and other local resources, for the establishment of, and support to, GIDA Schools;
- c) Ensure GIDA School needs are included in local education and development plans; and
- d) Promote community participation, including parents, ICCS/IPs, and other stakeholders, in school planning and monitoring.

SEC. 12. Implementation. - The DepEd shall plan and implement programs under this Act in coordination with relevant national government agencies (NGAs), local government units (LGUs), and partner CSOs.

SEC. 13. Monitoring and Reporting on Learner Outcomes. - The DepEd shall regularly assess and report on learner participation, retention, and learning outcomes in GIDA Schools, which shall be the basis for the allocation of national funds and guide the participation of LGUs in supporting these schools. Learner outcomes shall be assessed and reported separately for students enrolled in GIDA Schools, to ensure that progress and gaps are systematically monitored and addressed. The DepEd shall submit an annual report to Congress on the status and implementation of this Act.

SEC. 14. Policy Review. -The DepEd shall review and revise existing relevant policies, standards, and guidelines to directly address the specific conditions and contexts of GIDA Schools.

SEC. 15. Appropriations. -The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the budgets of the concerned departments, agencies, and government-owned and controlled corporations in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 16. Implementing Rules and Regulations. – The rules and regulations necessary for the effective and efficient enforcement of the Act shall be formulated by the DepEd, in consultation with the NCIP, DPWH, DICT, DOE, NEA, Department of Social Welfare and Development, DENR, National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, DBM, CSC, TEC, and Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP), and shall be implemented within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act.

SEC. 17. Separability Clause. – If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remainder hereof not otherwise affected shall remain in full force and effect.

1
2 **SEC. 18. Repealing Clause.** – All other laws, presidential decrees, executive
3 orders, letters of instructions, proclamations, administrative orders, rules, or
4 regulations that are inconsistent with the Act are hereby repealed, amended, or
5 modified accordingly.

6
7 **SEC. 19. Effectivity.** – Notwithstanding the non-issuance of the implementing
8 rules and regulations, this Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days following its publication
9 in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

10
11 *Approved,*