

Valenzuela City is One of the Best LGUs in the Country

Synergeia is so proud of the Valenzuela City Government. Its Education 360° Investment Program was awarded as one of the Ten Outstanding Programs in Local Governance by the Galing Pook Foundation.

Valenzuela City's **Education 360° Investment Program** is a holistic, systemic, comprehensive, student-centered, program of the City Government of Valenzuela that revolutionizes its public education system. It does not merely focus on hardware or infrastructure development, but on all the other aspects that affect access of children to education and their learning performance. Its components are:

- Curriculum Build-up
- Parenting Camp
- Teaching Camp
- Educational Supplies, and
- Massive infrastructure spending.
- K to 6 In-school Feeding Program
- Performance Incentive System

This program pairs software (people) with hardware (cement and gravel) in addressing the needs of the students. The program benefits 80,452 Elementary School Students and 41,102 High School Students

Program Brief

Basic education remains to be centrally delivered in the country. Local governments and communities are given perfunctory roles and are mostly involved in fund-raising. Policies and programs are driven from the top and are not demand-driven and needs-based. As result, programs are discrete, disparate, and fragmented. The Special Education Fund is used for diverse purposes, many of which are not related to the improvement of learning performance. The lack of community engagement results to disempowerment of stakeholders, particularly parents. Accountability is blurred because schools are not held accountable to communities and their local governments.

Part of the Curriculum Build-up is the development of the city's own work-texts in Mathematics and English for all elementary students. This lessens the cost for the LGU, ensures the quality of the materials and widens the distribution of copies to students at the ratio of 1:1. Furthermore, in May 2014, a comprehensive *Summer Reading Camp* was held for 15,950 incoming Grades 3 and 6 Non-Reader and Frustrated Level Reader students. After spending 20 days in the classrooms during the summer months reading, most of the students moved on to become Instructional Level reader while some managed to become Independent Readers. This program enlisted 605 college students from the city's public college to serve as teaching aides for the students. Another strong component of the program is the Parenting Camp or *Nanay-Teacher*. This project brings back the nurturing guidance of parents in the educational progress of their children. Some 55,000 parents of students from 39 public elementary schools are continually being re-oriented on the importance of being engaged in the learning life of the children. On the educator's front, teachers' teaching skills and competency is being enhanced and further developed through a Teaching Camp, an intensive training being conducted in partnership with USAID and Synergeia Foundation. The camp aims to sharpen the teachers' teaching strategy skills and mastery of content.

The Valenzuela City K to 6 In-school Feeding Program is the country's largest sustaining in-school feeding program to date. Through its three years of existence, the program has targeted an average of 18,000 underweight children in day care centers and public elementary schools daily. In partnership with Ateneo Center for Educational Development (ACED), this program's heart and soul are the parent volunteers, who day-in and day-out prepare the ingredients to be used, cook the meals to be served, pack them into the lunchboxes, deliver them, feed the children and wash the lunchboxes. This program thrives in the spirit of parent-community volunteerism.

These “improve the software initiatives” are paired with the traditional “hardware initiatives” that address the material needs of the students. Every public elementary school student receives a backpack with complimentary work-texts, notebooks, pens, pencil and a tumbler. As student population grows, there is a constant need for new classrooms. This is being addressed with the three-year plan of building 435 new classrooms to reduce the student to classroom ratio to 1:45. This is apart from the newly built state-of-the-art *Valenzuela City School of Mathematics and Science* which is furnished with world class facilities and equipment that are conducive to learning.

As the human capital theory states, the economic development of a nation is directly correlated with the quality of its education. Higher literacy rate among the people translates to the enhancement of their standard of living and improvement of employment opportunities that hasten economic growth.

In Valenzuela City, with Education 360° Investment Program, good quality education is no longer a badge of privilege but an instrument for social transformation and equality.

Positive Results and Impact

Education 360° has already posted impressive positive results and achievements in several of its components.

Philippine Individual Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) results for Valenzuela City in the School Year 2013-2014 showed that out of the 56,862 Grades 2 to 6 students tested; 2,844 were found to be Non-readers while 41,375 were Frustration Level Readers; comprising 78% of the total student population. Thus the 11th Month Instruction or the 20-day Summer Reading Camp was born.

The incoming Grades 3 and 6 who were Non-Readers and under the Frustration Level Readers were designated as beneficiaries. They totaled 18,299 but only 15,950 were able to attend the sessions.

Results of the program’s post-test administered at the end of the classes showed a very dramatic improvement on the reading ability and comprehension of student participants. Only one remained a Non-Reader out of the 2,165 beneficiaries in incoming Grade 3. Non-Readers were fully eradicated in incoming Grade 6. 5,870 Frustration Level Readers in incoming Grade 3 were reduced to 1,364 while 7,738 in incoming Grade 6 were reduced to 1,120.

Most of the students moved on to become Instructional Level Readers while some managed to successfully become Independent Readers. From students who can barely decipher English words, most of them can now read four English short stories in relatively no time.

One of the most notable accomplishments of the program is the case of Rustom Soriano, Jr., a Grade 6 student of the city’s Malinta Elementary School, who, from being a Non-Reader and poor-performing student, becomes the top of his class.

The program is perceived to lead the city into achieving higher scores in the National Achievement Test (NAT) which is given to Grades 3 and 6 students.

Furthermore, beyond any numerical indicators, the *Nanay-Teacher* program has able to reinforce the immeasurable bond between the parents and their children. Now, most of the parents are hands on to their children’s learning process. An open line of communication was reinforced. Through this, they gain a better understanding of their children’s academic strengths and weaknesses. “Guidance in the formative years of a child is the building block of their mental development,” has become their personal dictum.

For Mrs. Maria Lourdes “Lheng” Lorenzo, mother of Grade 5 and 2 students at the city’s Serrano Elementary School, the Parenting Camp has re-acquainted her to her roles in the education of her children.

Lheng was a working mother prior to her being diagnosed with Stage 3 Breast Cancer in May 2014. She had little time for her children. She has already noticed then that her eldest was not active at school activities, but she only realized its alarming implications when she was forced to resign from work due to her illness. She received comments from teachers that her child was inattentive and was often seen staring off into space. It dawned on her that she should have spent ample quality time with her children to know them better. Now, as a proud *Nanay-Teacher*, she shares her story with fellow-parents and advises them to spend more time with their children while they are still fit.

For the K to 6 Feeding Program, the cycle for the School Year 2013-2014 showed that out of 8,542 kinder to Grade 6 beneficiary students, 78%, or 6,662 students, have improved with their academic performance.

Most of all, with all the developments in the public school system in Valenzuela City through the **Education 360° Investment Program**, being a public school student can never be a symbol of shame but a crowning glory of equal chances in life between the privileged and the marginalized.

Promotion of People's Participation and Empowerment

Volunteers fuel the **Education 360° Investment Program**. The program through numerous townhall meetings gathered the different ideas, views and opinions of education stakeholders – parents, teachers, NGOs, and even future teachers in crafting solutions that became components of the education investment plan. These same stakeholders came together, and harnessed the strength of volunteerism to transform public education into a working learning system. These volunteers strive day-in and day-out to act as support crutches for the numerous component programs of the Education 360°.

Feeding close to 18,000 students daily on time has become lesser of a daunting task because of the partnership forged between the LGU, ACED and the parent volunteers who man the central kitchen operations. Every day, starting at the crack of dawn all the way to the heat-filled afternoons, public school parent volunteers prepare the ingredients, cook the ACED-prescribed menus, repack the numerous lunchboxes and deliver them straight to the doorsteps of the schools, feed the children, and wash the stained lunchboxes.

Likewise, the Summer Reading Camp is powered by the spirit of volunteerism. Through the joint efforts of the LGU, the Synergeia Foundation, hundreds of public school teachers who gave up their summer breaks and some 605 Education students from the local university, the *Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Valenzuela* who acted as teaching aides, the city was able to transform 15,950 Non-Readers and Frustrated Level Readers into either Instructional Level or Independent Readers, helping them cross the illiteracy line.

The *Nanay-Teacher* is another hallmark on people's participation. After hearing the clamor from teachers, principals and parents, the city partnered with USAID and Synergeia Foundation in coming up with the country's first ever Parenting Camp. Some 50,000 public school parents were re-oriented about the values of staying engaged in the learning life of their children. In addition, the *Nanay-Teacher* parent-mentors who were trained by the foundation now also serve as support community for other parents struggling to cope with different parenting challenges.

Innovation

The first and foremost reason for establishing the **Education 360° Investment Program** is to revolutionize the public education system in Valenzuela City. It aims to adopt in public schools the best practices of local and international private schools that give their students the strong education foundation and competitive advantages later on when they seek career opportunities.

Innovation is loosely defined as the application of better solutions that meet new requirements and unarticulated or existing needs. This is accomplished through more effective products, processes, services, technologies, or ideas that are readily available to markets, governments and society.

Education 360° is innovative because it uses tools that are readily available in the private learning setting and directly importing it for public education use. It is trailblazing and bold because it employs learning tools that were once thought to be only suited for the well off few who studies in private learning institutions. The program was able to roll out its initiative by pairing down costs implications through the power of volunteerism. It aims to truly use education as a tool of equal opportunities, wherein the quality of public education is equal or even better than the private education standards.

The K to 6 In-school Feeding Program is innovative because it is the country's only in-school feeding program of its magnitude and sustainability. Running for three consecutive years, the program benefits an average of 18,000 students daily. This component is patterned after the in-school lunch box

program that can only be seen in affluent countries like the US and Canada. This in-school feeding program is unique because despite its size, cost of each meal is trimmed down to P11.00 per lunchbox. The program successfully lowered its expenses by eliminating the largest central cost of such endeavor – labor. Through the support of parent volunteers the city is able to deliver clean, nutritious and standardized meals to public school students. Studies show that one of the main reasons why the grades of public school students are low compared to private schools lie in the fact that they go to school hungry. K to 6 In-school Feeding Program eradicated this deep-seeded problem in the City of Valenzuela. Recent tests show that out of 8,542 kinder to Grade 6 beneficiary students, 78%, or 6,662 students, have improved with their academic performance.

Similarly, the Summer Reading Camp is a cutting edge in education because it is the first after-school intervention program of this size set in public schools. Traditionally, after-school intervention programs were only seen in exclusive learning institutions. After isolating the problems through consultations with teachers and principals, the LGU realized that the only way to strengthen the core learning values of the public school students in the city is to see to it that their reading proficiencies are right for their age and grade level. More than 15,000 incoming Grades 3 and 6 students were brought back to the schools over the summer, spending three hours in the classroom daily to learn how to read properly. After 20 days, these students cross the threshold of illiteracy into instructional or even independent level readers. The application of the after-school intervention in public schools used to be limited because of the high labor costs entails. But in Valenzuela City, model volunteers from the local university were paired up with teachers who came back during the summer to mentor classrooms with an average of 30 students each. The Summer Reading Camp is a targeted, focused and strategic reading program energized by dedicated teachers who did not go on breaks and future teachers who wanted to make a difference.

The *Nanay-Teacher* Parenting Camp is also another innovative component of the program. Some 55,000 parents were re-oriented about the values of being engaged in their children's learning lives. Like the In-school Feeding and Reading Camp, this component is fueled by the passion for volunteerism of Valenzuelanos. PTA officers were trained to serve as parent mentors and facilitators. Likewise, this program is unique because of its magnitude and setting. It has been a known fact that PTAs in public schools had the mindset that their main purpose is to raise funds for school projects. Through this component program, PTAs' mindsets were shifted towards the genuine essence of PTA – to serve as support community for parents to encourage them to be more participative in activities at school beyond the traditional fundraising projects.

The components of the Education 360° Investment Program seek to address inherent handicaps in the public school system. Traditional interventions give heavy emphasis on hardware – classrooms and facilities. Valenzuela City's program, on the other hand, weighed in on more pressing concerns that the eyes cannot see such as, malnutrition among the school children, illiteracy at school and disengaged parents. The program affords the scarcely resourced local public schools with the luxury of exclusive private schools intervention programs. It is achieved by harnessing the strength of the community to lower costs, making it more feasible to implement at a larger public scope. This program clearly addresses the underlying shortcomings of the system beyond the traditional façade or superficial remedies.

Transferability and Sustainability

To be called an innovation, an idea must be replicable at an economical cost and must satisfy a specific need.

It is, likewise, said that a sustainable reform disappears from the reform agenda because it has been absorbed into the system and is part of the governance landscape.

The concepts imparted by the **Education 360° Investment Program** to the constituency are now a way of life. Even a contract or decree written in the most expensive ink is of no use to reinforce what had already been cemented to the psyche of Valenzuelanos. Yet, an ordinance is being presented at the City Council to make the program become institutionally more accessible for the students in the future.

The City Government of Valenzuela has been becoming a choice venue for *Lakbay Aral* by other LGUs. Among their favorite destinations are the premiere high school in Valenzuela City, the *School of Mathematics and Science*, and the K to 6 In-school Feeding Program Central Kitchen.

Some Education 360° program components, like the K to 6 Feeding Program, *Nanay-Teacher* and the Reading Camp have been attractive topics for sharing discussions with the City Mayor REX Gatchalian and other city government leaders and officials.

These three components are economically replicable and are easily adjustable to cater to the environment of other LGUs because of the key component of volunteerism that can be fulfilled by the members of their respective communities.

Valenzuela City's sister LGUs have been requesting *Nanay-Teacher* and K to 6 Feeding Program mentoring sessions to replicate these initiatives to uplift the quality of education system in their localities.