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## Face-to-face classes during pandemic: Are we ready yet?

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**Abstract**---We are facing an education crisis. This right to go to school and learn is the center of every child's development. Yet, the pandemic has taken away the School-age population a chance to have face-to-face learning due to COVID-19 lockdowns. Since these learners cannot afford any more disruptions to their education, the government plans to reopen the schools as soon as possible and get education back on track. The objective of this study is to assess the readiness of the schools in reopening the classes in Naga City. Specifically, this will identify the status of the Covid active cases of the school-age population and teachers. Analyze the activities of CHED, DepEd, and LGUs to combat the present situation and Perceptions of the different stakeholders in reopening of classes. The study used the triangulation approach to collect qualitative and quantitative data. Social Network Analysis (SNA), interviews, and documentary analysis were used to measure and explore pieces of evidence. Results show that 20% of the school-aged population and 4.5% of teachers of the active cases in covid were reported last September and October 2021 in Naga City. There are a lot of activities related to safety protocols done by the different agencies such as CHED, DepEd, and LGUs to combat the present situation. And yet, there is no clear policy was disseminated on the reopening of classes, and 52% of the parents, teachers, and students are confident that schools are not ready for the reopening of classes next school year. Results suggest that there should be a collaboration with stakeholders to discuss the implementation concretely, not only just proclaimed but how to implement it.

**Keywords**---pandemic, face-to-face classes, education, school, readiness.

### Introduction

Globally, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) firmly shut on all aspects of everyday life. This circumstance has interrupted not only international travel,

devastated the economic growth of the country, and especially disrupted the schooling of the school-age population [1]. This has changed the landscape of all academic institutions. Similarly, as we continue to deal with this global health crisis, there is still a need to examine different instructional approaches (including online, hybrid, and blended learning methods)[2] because the higher education needs to deliver the online modality. For most, the remote teaching was the step for continuity of education[3]during pandemic. However, there is still a need to deliver face-to-face on-campus offerings.

In the Philippines, the pilot implementation of limited face-to-face delivery in low-risk areas of COVID-19 transmission have been taking place last November 15, 2021. Nonetheless, reviews shows that only few and mostly small COVID-19 school outbreaks had been reported, suggesting that the containment measures are sufficient to reduce spillover into the community[4]. But since, schools remain overlooked as sites of risk [5]. Thus, reopening fully in the setting of high community transmission it also provides fertile ground for virus evolution and new variants [6]. And the dilemma of the government in face-to-face learning due to another threat of the new strain of COVID-19. Some large groups and agencies also noted that the gradual reopening of schools is not only possible but necessary. Since the research found that most students had difficulties joining online learning such as signal, internet budget, lack of understanding and focus, and interactions[7]. Subsequently, students' lives matter as education does to them. It is the responsibility of every government to ensure the schools are following health protocols in conducting face-to-face classes. Considering the national and international guidelines to ensure that students will be safe or mitigate the effects of COVID-19[8]. As, it is recently highlighted the need to improve health literacy. Teachers should act as health promoters for their students from a young age, by actively fostering healthy habits (physical activity, good personal hygiene, and balanced diet) and raising awareness of the consequences of risky behaviors [9].

## **Objectives**

The objective of this study is to assess the readiness of the schools in reopening the classes in Naga City. Specifically, this will identify the status of the Covid-19 active cases of the school-age population and teachers. Analyze the activities of CHED, DepEd, and LGUs to combat the present situation and perceptions of the different stakeholders in the reopening of school.

## **Materials and Methods**

The study adopted a descriptive-analytic approach of mixed methods to collect qualitative and quantitative data. In determining the readiness of the schools in reopening the classes in Naga City. The methods were used to confirm, validate, or corroborate findings. Purposive random sampling for 515 respondents composed of parents (42), teachers (44), students (94), and 335 school-age population with Covid in Naga City in which data provided weekly by local LGU through social media like Facebook Page. A Social Network Analysis (SNA) and an online survey were used to assess the perception of respondents on the readiness of the schools in reopening the classes. The unstructured interviews and

documentary analysis were used as a tool to measure and explore pieces of evidence such as the number of Covid-19 cases in Naga City and analyze the activities of CHED, DepEd, and LGUs to combat the present situation. The frequency count and percentage were utilized in analyzing the data.

## **Results and Discussion**

Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-2019) has paralyzed, to a greater or lesser extent, the life in many countries[6] school-aged population. This is the challenge that the global education systems have ever faced. Many governments have ordered institutions to cease face-to-face instruction for most of their students, requiring them to switch, almost overnight, to online teaching and virtual education[11]. But it seems that students can't cope with the virtual learning environment. That is why every country has the responsibility to come up with strategies to reopen schools safely [12]. Subsequently, nine public schools in Bicol Region out of 120 public schools nationwide joined the pilot implementation of the limited face-to-face classes held last November, 2021, these were the first to pass the granular assessment set by the Department of Health (DOH) and the Inter-Agency Task Force to ensure its safety and preparedness for the conduct of in-school classes. They have also secured the consent of the concerned local government units and has already coordinated with parents prior to the said pilot implementation [13].

*Status of the Covid-19 in Naga City.* As to how do they address students' needs with asynchronous or online learning[14] is a big challenge to education systems. In some parts of the world, the government issued a learning process policy amid a pandemic to carried out face-to-face, and online[15] learning. The data shows that COVID-19 cases in all six Bicol provinces especially in Naga City have been alarmingly and the surge in infections was evident in September and October 2021. It is known that most cases now are not linked to those with travel history nor from travelers coming from outside Bicol[16]. Out of 1667 cases in Naga City 335 or 20% of the school-aged population. And the detection of cases of new variants with a high possibility of local transmission, the DOH may again implement granular lockdowns. For this reason, reopening schools potentially increases the risk for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) exposure among teachers, other school employees, students, and their household members. Results highlighted the public health challenge when the risk of school-related exposure is associated with the potential household transmission [17]. Studies show that children and young people can be asymptomatic carriers of SARS-CoV-2 or develop COVID-19[18]. Although COVID-19 tends to be less severe in children and adolescents, and thankfully relatively few students have died of the condition, a key policy concern has been that young people are equally essential as community reservoirs for the transmission of the virus to household members. Pieces of evidence came out that children are not super-spreaders of the virus, the fact that they may not be significantly contributing to spreading the virus [19].

According to an interview, the government should learn from the experiences of the other countries that reopened face-to-face classes is very risky, and later on, retract on their decision due to surge in Covid-19 cases. School reopening for

face-to-face interactions must be carefully planned safely to ensure the safety of the students.

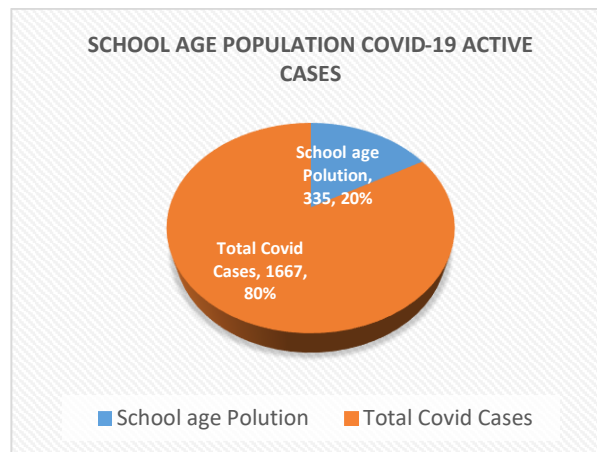


Figure I. Total active cases of School-Age population in Naga City (September-October, 2021)

The activities of agencies. The youth are the future's hope. Yet, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they are restricted not only to their regular routines but also to having face-to-face classes. Although, COVID-19 vaccines can help end the pandemic. They are a "key to end the COVID-19 pandemic" so everybody can get back to doing the things we enjoy. But everyone must have access to covid vaccines. That is why, as seen in the table below, the DOH together with the local government has been implementing innovations and strategies in its intensified Community-Based Campaigns. As shown in Table 1 are some activities of the different agencies to combat the present situation.

Table 1. The activities of the different agencies

Name of Programs and projects	Lead//Partner agencies	Description
BIDA Solusyon sa COVID-19 project RESBAKUNA ((Bayanihan, Bakunahan, PEDIA VAX, WORKERS VAX (Commercial Centers In Naga City)School-Based Vaccination, Child & Adult Vaccination ,	DOH/LGUs/All Agencies	(B-bawal walang mask at fsce shield I-Isanitize ang kamay at bawal sa Kulob na lugar D-dumistancia ng isang metro at limitahan ang pisikal n interaksyon sa iba A-alamín ang tamang impormasyon)
	DOH/LGUs/HEIs/DEPED	An ongoing mass immunization campaign against COVID-19, in response to the ongoing pandemic in the country.

House To House  
Vaccination)

Pilot Implementation of Limited Face-To-Face Classes

Expansion of Limited face-to-face classes to other degree programs

DOH/LGU/DEPED

LGUs/DOH/HEIs

The pilot implementation of limited face-to-face classes in basic education was conducted by schools located in low-risk areas

Expansion of limited face-to-face classes to other degree programs that require hands-on experience in higher education institutions (HEIs) under Modified General Community Quarantine (MGCQ).

Aside from the activities done by the Department of Health as a lead agency, just like the vigorous campaigns of Covid-19 vaccination especially among the school-aged population, the government has come up with guidelines for a gradual reopening of classes from flexible learning delivery of instruction. The Deped had already conducted the pilot implementation for limited face-to-face delivery in low-risk areas of COVID-19 transmission last November 2021. The resistance is felt in the Naga City community, reactions are heard by some stakeholders, and sentiments are raised in social media in its government plan for the gradual opening of classes because of its fear for Covid-19 transmission. In spite of the fact that only two countries in the world have not conducted face-to-face classes and the Philippines is the only country in Asia.

Studies indeed conducted, infected children rarely develop severe forms of the disease[20]. It is a must that face-to-face classes still be carefully planned to safeguard students, teachers, and school staff against Covid-19 transmission. Furthermore, there is a need to strengthen policies to promote education on hygiene and social distancing measures and to advocate for the use of masks when viral transmission in the general population is high[21]. The World Health Organization (WHO) has published a checklist to support school reopening and the preparation for the possible resurgence of COVID-19. WHO cited that "The checklist is aligned with, and builds upon, existing COVID-19-related WHO guidelines and is structured around protective measures related to 1) hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette; 2) physical distancing; 3) use of masks in schools; 4) environmental cleaning and ventilation, and 5) respecting procedures for isolation of all people with symptoms. This checklist helps policymakers and school officials to enhance compliance and adherence to public health protocols at the time of the pandemic[22].

*The readiness of the school.* The organizations should be responsive and adapt and change proactively with "out of the box" thinking about who will thrive in the next normal. In most countries, getting children back into school has been an ongoing issue and a major flashpoint for heated debate. Data shows that 52% of the parents, teachers, and students are confident that schools are not ready for the reopening of classes next school year. Schools that have reopened have faced

the considerable challenges of social distancing, intensive cleaning, and the careful orchestration of all movement around the school[23]. There is a lot to be considered on the part of the school administration. An ample amount of funds is needed so that every room must be retrofitted according to the guidelines set by the DOH/IATF just like the school facilities must be fully equipped with DIY cubicle safety procedures like washbasin and the likes. Future threats must be addressed first before the reopening of the school because the school community as a whole and their lives will be at risk.

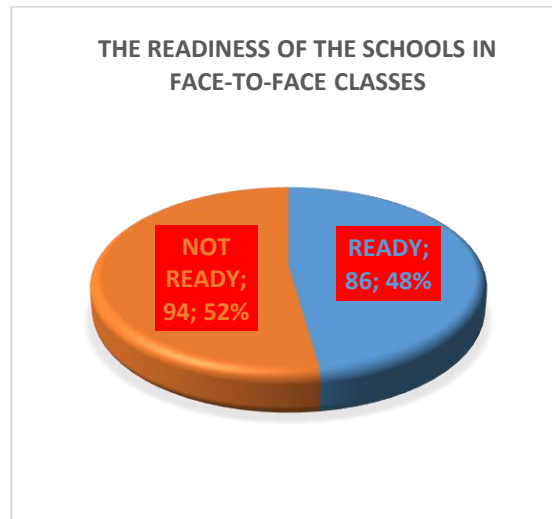


Figure 2. The readiness of the schools in face-to-face classes.

We do not know, long term, what the impact, effects, and consequences of opening schools in the current pandemic might prove to be, but it is clear that the mental health of young people[24] is at risk. In this time of turmoil where quick solutions are required in a fast-changing world, the priority must be the well-being of leaders, teachers, learners, parents, and all stakeholders involved in the reopening of school life[25]. Although research shows that there is a significant percentage of students and teachers feel stressed, isolated, lack confidence, and the curriculum is not effectively delivered through online mode. The majority of them accepted online learning as a better choice for learning during this pandemic period but not an alternative to the traditional approach of learning i.e. face-to-face mode of learning[26].

## Conclusion

In the context of increasing viral transmission in the community, the spread among children and adolescents remained lower than that observed among adults[27]. Yet, face-to-face classes must be planned carefully to ensure the safety of students, teachers, and school staff [28] following the recommendation of the agency in charge. Even the World Health Organization (WHO) has published a checklist to support school reopening. This checklist can help policymakers and school officials to enhance compliance and adherence to public health protocols at the time of the pandemic[29]. Inevitably, schools and other learning

institutions must go back in face-to-face classes from online learning as the world continues the battle to control the spread of the virus and its different variants. However, this migration to face-to-face learning during the Covid-19 pandemic has faced several concerns relating to policy, guidelines, logistics, socioeconomic factors, technology, and psychosocial factors. It needs careful planning as the lives of people are at risk. Results suggest that there should be a collaboration with stakeholders to discuss the implementation concretely, not only just proclaimed but how to implement it.

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