

Towards Defining the Necessary Complementarity Between Public and Private Schools

by Fr. Joel E. Tabora, S.J.

In the current landscape of multi-layered challenges related with the implementation of the K-12, in the context of gnawing uncertainties concerning the status of our Higher Education Institutions generated by issuances of the Commission on Higher Education, and on the threshold of the implementation on the ASEAN Economic Community, I have been asked to stimulate among ourselves, as Catholic private school educators in the Philippines, and as esteemed educational leaders in the executive and legislative branches of government, thought, discussion and dialogue towards defining the necessary complementarity between public and private schools in the Philippines. In this framework we thought we could address some of the key challenges facing PH education today from a perspective that is long-term and crucial for our continued work as Catholics missioned to Philippine education.

“Complementarity” and the Philippine Educational System

Complementarity may be understood as “combining different things in such a way as to enhance or emphasize each other’s qualities. It could more simply be defined as supplying mutual needs or offsetting mutual lacks.” The definition implies a collaborative or cooperative, if not even a symbiotic relationship between two entities, each one possessing something that may be of value to the other. Through a mutual sharing of resources, both achieve their goals in a better way than were the complementarity not existing. In complementarity the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In the educational system, this is portrayed by the State-funded public schools and the private educational institutions, regarded as partners in providing educational service. In an ideal setting, both parties welcome each other as co-equals that share resources and capabilities on mutually acceptable terms in attainment of the shared goal of promoting education as a fundamental human right and delivering education optimally within the Philippines. So sacred is this right that our Constitution obligates the State to “protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and should take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all” (Article XIV, Section 1).

A. The predicament: “Complementarity” undefined in law.

In our Constitution, the complementarity of public and private schools has been articulated in the following manner: “The State recognizes the complementary roles of public and private institutions in the educational system and shall exercise reasonable supervision and regulation of all educational institutions.” (Article XIV, Section 4 (1)).

While the fundamental law of the land expresses “complementarity” between the public and private educational institutions, the provision does not define the roles nor provide guidance on how complementarity can best be achieved towards Philippine education ultimately for all.

Insofar as complementarity between the public and the private schools is not constitutionally determined, the current practice of complementarity seems determined by how the private entity, that is publicly regulated, can best serve the public entity that is publicly funded. Corollarily, any benefit or sharing of resources extended by the public entity to the private entity is justified as necessary because it will also be beneficial to the public entity. But is this the complementarity that optimizes educational delivery based on the universal right to quality education?

Absent any legislation that clearly defines complementarity between the public and private educational institutions, it would appear that the State today effectively adopts an attitude of “tolerance” towards private schools largely to the extent that they can best complement the politically prior public provision of education. It is only “complementary” insofar as it plugs the holes that the State cannot as yet fill.

The danger in this predicament lies in the fact that with its considerable resources, the State can aggressively introduce measures to further improve the state of public education until such time that it can accommodate everyone in its one system. This would of course be to the detriment of private school providers whose resources culled from tuition payments cannot compete with Government resources culled from the People’s taxes. With increasing aggressive spending by Government in public education, both on the basic and tertiary levels, irrespective of this spending’s effect on private education, the trajectory of development seems in effect to be a takeover by government of all schools, possibly in the direction of an all-public German educational system. A key strategic question that must be asked is whether we really want to do this in the Philippines – and whether this is the best path to travel toward providing education for all in the Philippines.

We have seen how on the level of basic (i.e., elementary and secondary) education, the Aquino Government has appropriated massive funding for the implementation of the K to 12 law in the public schools. In the 2014 national budget of around Php 2.3T, 13.66% of it went to public basic education, exclusive of local government taxes. [15.93%, if you include the budget of the CHED, SUCs and the TESDA.] On the level of tertiary education, we have also seen how government used its resources for more capital investments in facilities, equipment, state scholarships laudably towards making education accessible. This year alone, CHED received an additional P 4.1B funds for the “Tulong Dunong” grants-in-aid program under Special Provision 3 of the General Appropriation Act, where a majority of said funds still went to state HEIs .

Case in point. In Bangued, Abra, out of the 1,155 college students listed as qualified beneficiaries of the educational assistance program in one congressional district,

most of the grantees come from the Abra State Institute of Sciences and Technology – Bangued Campus with 584 scholars and the Lagangilang Campus with 385 scholars, leaving only 186 slots (out of the 1,155) for scholars that went to private HEIs.

In terms of policy, the State also heavily leans in favor of the public school system. For example, in furtherance of its policy of providing adequate remuneration to teachers, the State implemented the Salary Standardization Law III, raising the entry level salaries of public school teachers to Php 18,549 (on the average). By itself, this is a laudable effort of Government in recognizing the significant role played by teachers within the public education system. However, this boon for public schools forced the private schools to contend with issues of the public schools effectively pirating their faculty members and the outmigration of their often painstakingly-cultivated faculty members to the public schools, considering that the government compensation package is significantly more than what the private schools can offer. While admittedly there is an existing government program that provides assistance to teachers in the private sector, the assistance is minimal and now effectively picayune when set against the new compensation rates of public school teachers.

What fate lies in store for the private schools given such a predicament? When compared to the public schools, private schools have to adopt difficult measures to survive, rooted in their inherent dependence on tuition income conditioned, on the one hand, by the free market, but on the other hand, by the income limitation of the students who either opt for private schools for private reasons or cannot be accommodated by public schools because they have not yet been adequately developed.

With State funding easily accessed by public schools coupled with current policies that lean aggressively in favor of the public school system, the message is sent that the public schools are the norm and the private schools are the practical exception, merely tolerated by the State for as long as public schools are not available. As public schools increase, private schools decrease. With the creeping universalization of the public school, comes the consequent, centrally-determined “homogenization” of education. But is this what is most beneficial for the Filipino people? What then becomes of the “complementarity” of the public and the private schools as envisioned by the Constitution?

If the road map of our government is towards complete homogeneity of educational services, is private education then simply a “stop gap” measure, one whose existence becomes expendable when the State can finally afford to provide quality education for all? Is this what is meant by “complementarity” in the Constitution – i.e. we will tolerate you until such time that you are no longer of use to us?

While complementarity is not clearly articulated, clear from the constitutional provision is the apparent “dual” role that the State fulfills, on the one hand, as a “guarantor” of education as a right for all, regardless of whether this is provided by

the private or the public sector, and on the other hand, as an actual “provider” of education.

However, how can the State promote authentic complementarity between the private and the public schools when (1) it is capable of regulating the private entity and creating an advantage through this regulation for its public service? [Setting minimum standards in academic degrees for qualified teachers may be easier for public schools to comply with through budgetary income than for private schools through tuition income.] And (2) in its issuances of policies, it need not consider the adverse effects these policies may have on private schools. [More than doubling the compensation rate in public basic-education schools did not have to consider its impact on private schools whose teachers were raided while most raided schools were unable to raise tuition to replace them.]

How can the State best perform this function as “guarantor” when, in its capacity as an actual “provider” of public education and in the advancement of aggressive programs aimed at improving the state of public education, it may stifle or threaten the very existence of private schools, its supposed partner in delivering educational service to the public? How can it ensure that in discharging its duties both as the “guarantor” and at the same time a “provider”, it does not guarantee the demise of its private partners in the education industry by enhancing its role as provider?

It is the contention of our Catholic private schools, and possibly of all private schools in the Philippines, that an authentic, complementary, and integrated educational system must rest on a healthy tension between, on the one hand, the homogeneity and broad accessibility that the public school system necessarily offers and, on the other hand, by the creativity, flexibility, innovativeness, cultural specialization, remote accessibility, and mission- or religiously-motivated personnel provided by the private schools. The relative “otherness” of these two systems are essentially complementary because in their parallel operation in the Philippines under conditions of genuine academic freedom, they challenge each other to greater heights of educational service in delivering learning outcomes and professional competencies that are in themselves public goods and promotive of the public welfare regardless of whether they are engendered in a public or in a private school. It may also be appreciated that in the delivery of socially-competent educated persons and professionals each of the systems “check” the other in their historical weaknesses: that is, on the one hand, a vulnerability to tampering with the integrity of the public educational system through unscrupulous politicians, and on the other hand, a vulnerability to inaccessibility through pricing or utter inadequacy of public funding for the public good produced by private schools.

If Complementarity Wholesome, How Can We Insure the Sustainability of Our Private Schools?

If history tells us anything, it is the fact that the private educational institutions have played a significant role in education in our country. And because of the significant

role it continues to play, its existence ought not to be merely tolerated but duly recognized. While we laud the government's efforts in improving the state of public education, we must not overlook the role that private educational institutions play in the delivery of educational services to the public.

The big question then: How can we insure the sustainability of our private schools which have over the centuries contributed greatly to the delivery of quality and creative education – without stopping the improvement of the public schools?

With the enactment of the Educational Decree of 1863, and subsequent state enactments granting free secular public primary and secondary education to every Filipino and appropriating public funds for the same, private schools had lesser access to State support and relied primarily on tuition income in order to sustain their operations.

But if one were to look at the provisions of the Constitution which obligates the State to “protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels”, taking “appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all” , that it shall “establish, maintain, and support a complete, adequate and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and society”, this makes no distinction between whether the source of education is the public or the private sector.

In promoting and protecting the right of all citizens to quality education, the State relies on public funding (collected from taxes paid by citizens, regardless of whether these citizens send their children to public schools or not) to carry out its obligations. If the Constitution makes no distinction whether the source of education comes from the public or the private sector, we then have to ask these questions: What is the goal of the State funding of education? Is it not to support education as whole and not just the public schools? Is it not to support and ensure the quality outcome of education as a public good, regardless of whether this is generated by a public or private entity? Is it not to protect and support Philippine education as “a complete, adequate and integrated system” (Art. XIV, Sec. 2 (1)), including “the complementary roles of public and private schools” in this “educational system” (Art. XIV, Sec. 4 (1))?

If these are all answered in the affirmative, then it must follow that the State distribute these public funds equitably to both the public and private educational institutions. This way, it appropriately supports the complementarity of public and private educational institutions. It funds not only public schools and the ongoing improvement of public school delivery but also private schools through student and faculty scholarships, salary subsidies for teachers, research grants, and other incentives without compromising the government's efforts in trying to improve the state of public education. One particular program that exemplifies how public funding can support a public educational good coming from private schools is the salary subsidy provided by the DepEd for teachers of DepEd content courses in

Madaris because of the public need for extraordinary educational interventions primarily in the ARMM. In pursuit of quality education for all, however, can we not also advance similar government-funded programs in support of other private schools providing education as a public good for all?

Without equitable government funding for public and private schools, government issuances regulating performance both of private and public schools beyond the operational minimum are unjust unfunded mandates. For the same public burden, the public school is funded by public money, the private school is not. To carry the public burden, the public school need only win a budgetary increase of taxpayers money. For the private school, fulfilling the government mandate requires private resources which the school in academic freedom may have used otherwise. E.g. when government requires accreditation of engineering from special entities charging substantial fees, when the schools have long been teaching these programs and have their own methods in academic freedom of Quality Assurance, this is an unfunded mandate.

For state-funded HEIs, it is reasonable for the government to be prescriptive insofar as government allocates funds for these HEIs, even though this may never vitiate the academic freedom of SUCs and LCUs. Where private HEIs are concerned, however, government (through CHED) ought to confine itself to minimum standards as prescribed by law. Academic freedom is guaranteed both by the constitution and by the law that creates CHED (RA 7722). The reality however is quite the opposite.

On the issue of quality assurance, for example, the CMO issuance/s on QA effectively targets the private HEIs that are compelled to comply with the various deadlines set by the CMO, while the public HEIs can safely assert the non-applicability of these issuances by virtue of their charters. This undue regulation militates against the development of a culture of a responsible use of academic freedom and dampens the creativity of private HEIs, which ought to be also free to pursue their specific aims and objectives. The penchant of CHED to regulate and to prescribe beyond minimum standards militates against a salutary culture of academic freedom in this country.

If the goal of the government is to move towards or to be an all-state-funded educational system, this ought to seriously be discussed openly and dispassionately. Some countries have been able to do it, and have been able to do it well. But is this something that can feasibly and practicably be done in our country? Or is the alternative – having both public and private educational systems, complementing each other – the better way?

While our public school system's greatest strength lies in the fact that it is funded by Government, it also has its setbacks. If the present administration of "the Educational President" has given utmost priority to education, the same cannot be said for the past administration nor for the next. The unpredictability of politicians mindsets and the fickleness of government policy pertinent to education leads to an instability in educational policies and an effective arbitrariness in fund allocations

for the public schools. Not only that, where government funding is concerned, the greatest vulnerability that any publicly funded entity would have is its susceptibility to political ineptness or corruption. The same cannot be said for private schools whose continued survival is hinged on its continued acceptability to its market.

B. Key issues impacting on Complementarity

At present, there are government policies and interventions that recognize the role and importance of private educational institutions, articulating to a certain extent, how “complementarity” exists in the private educational system vis-à-vis the public system. It would do well for us to briefly re-visit these policies and ask ourselves whether the present and proposed interventions truly articulate an authentic complementarity of the private educational institutions with that of the public.

1. Academic freedom

For institutions of higher learning, academic freedom is guaranteed in section 5 par. 2, article XIV of the 1987 Constitution. While this guarantee applies both to public and private HEIs, this finds greater significance in the private education setting, owing to the fact that public HEIs are primarily funded by the Government leading to greater determination by the latter of the operation of public HEIs for which it pays. The private HEIs however rely mainly on the tuition income they receive for their operation which they determine in academic freedom. Beyond minimum requirements, the private HEIs are free to determine and pay for the areas in which they may distinguish themselves. Government does not pay for these quality improvements.

As established in various Supreme Court landmark cases, institutional academic freedom allows HEIs to determine their aims and objectives and how best to attain them without threat of coercion or interference, except, possibly, when the overriding public interest calls for some restraint. It includes the liberty to determine, based on academic grounds, who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study.

Government ought respect all higher education’s academic freedom, especially since it can only exercise reasonable supervision over them, and not exercise the power of control. Because private HEIs are not primarily funded by the Government, Government ought all the more to provide the space for the private HEIs to creatively exercise what it can teach, how it shall be taught, who can teach, and who it may admit to study — giving due respect for the latter’s academic freedom.

Academic freedom is reiterated in section 2 in relation to section 13 of RA 7722 which provides:

“Declaration of Policy – xxx The State shall likewise ensure and protect academic freedom and shall promote its exercise and observance for the continuing

intellectual growth, the advancement of learning and research, the development of responsible and effective leadership, the education of high level and middle-level professionals, and the enrichment of our historical and cultural heritage.”

“Section 13. Guarantee of Academic Freedom. – Nothing in this Act shall be construed as limiting the academic freedom of universities and colleges. In particular, no abridgment of curricular freedom of the individual educational institutions by the Commission shall be made except for: (a) minimum requirements for specific academic programs, (b) general education distribution requirements as may be determined by the Commission, and (c) specific professional subjects as may be stipulated by the various licensing entities. No academic or curricular restriction shall be made upon private educational institutions which are not required for chartered state colleges and universities.” (emphasis supplied.)

Thus, any government regulation or issuance that grates against academic freedom enjoyed by our HEIs ought to be opposed as it stifles the capability of our schools to determine for themselves, how best to pursue their objectives as defined by their respective vision and mission statements, and indeed how to distinguish themselves vis-à-vis the public schools in desired complementarity. I cite here, in particular, the issuance by the CHED of CMO 46 s. 2012.

2. CMO 46 s. 2012

On December 11, 2012, the CHED issued CMO 46 s. 2012 that establishes an outcomes and typology-based Quality Assurance System. Despite repeated requests to delay its implementation until such time that: (1) the HEIs had adjusted to various challenges that needed to come with the implementation of the K to 12 law, (2) the Policies, Standards and Guidelines (PSGs) crucial to the implementation of a QA system are finalized and (3) the Philippine Qualifications Framework was in place – it is a CMO that is regrettably still in full force. CHED orientations are taking place nationwide despite the assurances we have received from CHED officials that it would be re-linguaged to better reflect its supposed voluntary character or, at the very least, temporarily suspend its implementation pending the deliberation of the much more appropriate QA bill already filed in Congress (HB 3993).

The CMO 46 s. 2012 as it is presently worded, runs contrary to academic freedom as it mandates HEIs to “contribute to the building of a quality nation” without even defining what a quality nation is. Not only that, CMO 46 adopts a skewed definition of quality that constrains HEIs to align their respective vision and missions to the indicators of quality as “defined” by the CHED, going beyond what CHED is allowed to do under RA 7722, i.e. confine itself to prescribing “minimum standards.” In fact, in its definition of “quality”, it incredibly does not recognize the role of articulated “minimum standards.” It misleadingly prescribes an outcomes-based quality assurance system, when meaningful quality-assurance must be inputs-based; its insistence on an outcomes-based quality assurance system threatens the very learning outcomes it wishes to assure.

In the context of its illegitimate mandate to a quality nation, CMO 46 willy nilly prescribes content for learning outcomes that are unspecified, unarticulated, and vulnerable to autocratic, irrational or ideological manipulation against which higher education must militate in its commitment to a nation based on principles of humanity, justice, freedom, rationality and compassion and the common good. That the CMO does not even address the need to have a “level playing field” between public and private HEIs first before any quality assurance system can be set in place even makes the CMO more problematic, as this may just be another case of an “unfunded mandate.” To that end, the CEAP vigorously questions the validity of CMO 46 s. 2012 and opposes its implementation. However, recognizing the importance of establishing quality assurance in the higher education community, the CEAP strongly supports the alternative, the more rational version of a quality assurance system sponsored by Rep. Roman Romulo (filed as HB 3993).

3. Tax Exemption

This is articulated in section 4 paragraph 3 of Article XIV of the 1987 Constitution which provides:

“all revenues and assets of non-stock, non-profit educational institutions used actually, directly and exclusively for educational purposes shall be exempt from taxes and duties. Upon the dissolution or cessation of the corporate existence of such institutions, their assets shall be disposed of in the manner provided by law.”

“Proprietary educational institutions, including those cooperatively owned, may likewise be entitled to such exemptions subject to the limitations provided by law including restrictions on dividends and provisions for reinvestment.”

The ratio legis for the grant of tax exemption lies in the fact that these private educational institutions are already doing what the State is expected to do. Considering that private educational institutions do not primarily rely on public funding for the conduct of its operations, this is the Government’s way of recognizing and supporting the invaluable contribution of the private sector to the education system, by according them a tax exempt status. Recently, our tax exempt status was challenged by Revenue Memorandum Order No. 20-2013, Prescribing Guidelines in the Issuance of Tax Exemption Rulings to Qualified Non Stock, Non-Profit Corporations and Associations under Section 30 of the National Internal Revenue Code, as amended.

The controversial provision lies in Section 11 of the RMO which states that if a corporation or association which has been issued a tax exemption ruling fails to file its annual information return, it shall automatically lose its income tax-exempt status beginning the taxable year for which it failed to file an annual information return, in addition to the sanctions imposed under section 250 of the NIRC, as amended.

However, no less than the Constitution guarantees our tax exempt status:

“All revenues and assets of non-stock non-profit educational institutions used actually, directly and exclusively for educational purposes shall be exempt from taxes and duties. xxx”

The CEAP contends that where a constitutional provision granting the exemption is itself self-executing, the legislature or any administrative agency for that matter can neither add nor detract from it. At present, we have one CEAP member school that filed a case against the BIR questioning the implementation of this RMO and successfully received a favorable judgment by way of a permanent injunction against the BIR from implementing the RMO. This case is considered a victory in our shared struggle to assert our tax exempt status based on the Constitution, and may be used as a template for our other member schools faced with the same predicament. The BIR, however, is challenging this ruling.

Meanwhile, in a meeting of the CEAP Execom with Secretary of Finance Cesar Purissima and BIR Commissioner Kim Henares, it was explained that the historical context for the issuance of RMO 20 s. 2013 was because of the Supreme Court ruling in Commissioner of Internal Revenue vs. St. Luke’s Medical Center, Inc. G.R. NO. 195909 and St. Luke’s Medical Center, Inc. vs. CIR, G.R. No. 195960 September 26, 2012.

Yesterday we received word of a new BIR RMO 34-2014 clarifying certain provisions of RMO No. 20-2013, as amended by RMO No. 28-2013, on the issuance of Tax Exemption Rulings (TERs) for qualified non-stock, non-profit (NSNP) corporations and associations under Section 30, Tax Code.

This RMO clarifies that TERs do not confer tax exemptions which are not provided by law nor can the TERs abrogate those exemptions which are granted by law. Thus, the absence of a valid, current, and subsisting TER will not operate to divest qualified entities of the tax exemption provided under the Constitution or Section 30, Tax Code. Nonetheless, NSNP entities which fail to secure a TER for a given taxable year are duty bound to prove compliance with the conditions laid down by the law and other pertinent administrative issuances in the even of a tax investigation. Furthermore, pursuant to Revenue Memorandum Circular No. 8-2014, the failure of the NSNP entity to present a valid, current, and subsisting TER to the appropriate withholding agents shall subject such entity to the payment of withholding tax on their transactions. Failure of the withholding agent to withhold taxes notwithstanding the lack of TER shall cause the imposition of penalties under Section 251 and other pertinent sections of the Tax Code.

Part III of RMO 34-2014 states that applications for TERs may be filed by umbrella organizations on behalf of its members. However, RMO 34-2014 did not provide any

mechanics on how the umbrella organization, such as CEAP, will go about applying on behalf of its members.

The CEAP Board of Trustees will deliberate soonest on how it can best help its members in the light of these developments for as long as the Supreme Court has not finally declared RMO 20-2013 and related issuances unconstitutional.

4. Scholarship grants, Subsidies, Grants, and other incentives

In relation to the Constitutional guarantee of the State taking appropriate steps to make education accessible to all, Article XIV section 2 par. 2 also provides that the State shall: “establish and maintain a system of scholarship grants, student loan programs, subsidies and other incentives which shall be available to deserving students in both public and private schools, especially to the underprivileged.”

To that end, Congress passed several enabling statutes that concretize the system of awarding scholarship grants and other forms of assistance to deserving students. Private schools, once they meet the qualifications prescribed by law, also benefit from this State support.

The latest developments regarding State assistance to private education involve the bills seeking to further expand the E-GASTPE Law (RA 8545).

The proposed bills seek to further expand the current coverage of the E-GASTPE by including: (a) transportation allowance on top of the book allowance and tuition subsidy provided to a qualified student, (b) expansion of the scholarship grants to include those graduating with academic honors (not limiting them to valedictorians and salutatorians alone) (c) expansion of assistance to teachers and faculty by providing a teacher’s salary subsidy (d) also expanded the college development fund to cover “trainer” development for basic ed, post secondary technical vocational education and training institutions, tertiary ed and alternative learning systems and (e) scholarships for qualified elementary and secondary teachers enrolled in quality graduate programs.

Pending consideration of Congress, is also the bill providing for the Unified Student Financial Assistance for Tertiary Education that seeks to address problems related to access, equity and distribution of student financial assistance slots, targeting of beneficiaries, allocation and utilization of government resources, tracking of the whereabouts of beneficiaries, the payment recovery rate on student loans and compliance system on scholarships and management, as well as program administration and oversight concerns.

UniFAST shall have integral components of all existing financial assistance programs for higher and technical education students in both public and private institutions, including national scholarships, grants-in-aid, special purpose or sector educational assistance, student loans, and government programs in partnership with other

stakeholders, among others, and which are nationally funded and/or implemented by national government agencies, branches and instrumentalities. The bill also provides for the creation of a body that will be the centralized agency administering and providing policies on student assistance programs. The UNIFAST bill (Student Loan Program) has been identified by the 16th Congress as a priority bill, however, while the substitute bill of the Lower House has already been referred to the Appropriations Committee, its counterpart version remains pending with the appropriate committee in the Senate.

Pursuant to the Constitution mandating the State to promote quality education and the recognition of the complementary roles of public and private institutions in the educational system, CEAP expresses support for the passage of these two proposed measures. However, it asks Congress to review the existing E-GASTPE programs alongside these bills in order to avoid any redundancies in the provisions of the bill and promote an equitable utilization of public funds in the identified assistance programs.

Finally, relative to the implementation of the K-12 Law, the State (through the DepED) proposes the use of a Universal Voucher System for SHS to enable 30-40% of its students to enroll in non-DepEd schools which include private JHSs, private HEIs, state and local colleges and universities and technical-vocational institutions (TVIs).

CEAP expresses support for this program in principle. It, however, emphasizes that: (1) this PPP should be a permanent mechanism in the implementation of SHS and not a stopgap measure while government builds its public SHS facilities; (2) private providers should be prioritized more than the SUCs and LUCS as the spirit of RA 10533 in encouraging PPPs with the private education sector, especially the HEIs, was to mitigate the loss of enrollment especially during the transition years; (3) all ESC grantees should be automatically eligible to redeem vouchers in their chosen SHS providers and the initial provision regarding the tiered voucher values be studied during the implementation to ensure that ESC grantees who are economically marginalized receive the full voucher value as well; (4) the universal access to vouchers of for all public school students and ESC grantees should be retained in order to ensure that the vouchers are shielded from political patronage and corruption; and (5) the building of SHS facilities should be rationalized by government, both the DepEd and the local government units, vis-à-vis the private SHS providers in the region/province/division participating in the voucher program.

Conclusion

There are many other issues that we face together that I have not mentioned but concern us all. These are listed in the handouts for your consideration.

Let me end the presentation however in the spirit in which it has been presented.

As Catholic educators we do not involve ourselves in education to compete with public schools and public school governance. We do not involve ourselves in education to compete with those who through education would like to gain profit.

As Catholic educators we are missioned to running non-stock, non-profit schools, to deliver education meant to lead our students to the socially just, common good, “the fullness of life” that Jesus came in Truth to bring – a fullness of life that introduces them to the truth of God, nature and of themselves in human society – in a manner that is actually transformative of ourselves, our society and our diverse cultures into this fullness.

We wish to do so in a manner that is genuinely complementary to the State provision of public education in this country, not in a manner that apes it, reproduces it, or replaces it. We do so in creative expression of the academic freedom that the Constitution and positive law afford us.

As valuable as public education is for this country, we believe that genuine Catholic education is one of its complementary treasures. For this reason, we must be proud of it, we must protect it, we must perfect it, and work to keep it alive. We must shield it from public policy that will coopt it, smother its spirit, or turn it into a relic of the past. We must promote it with private and public energy and treasure, and parlay it as one of our most powerful assets for the future.

We invite all of you here present to join us.