INSTITUTIONALIZING COMPLEMENTARITY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EDUCATION: A CEAP POSITION PAPER ON COMPLEMENTARITY

Fr Karel San Juan SJ

The State's recognition of the "complementarity roles of public and private institutions in the educational system" is enshrined in the 1987 Constitution. This Constitutional mandate has taken center stage in many advocacies to improve Philippine education, especially after the dissemination of wide ranging reform proposals of EDCOM1 and EDCOM2. Private school associations, led by the Coordinating Council of Private Educational Associations (COCOPEA), are committed to advancing the possibility and realization of complementarity, as it will address many issues and concerns of private education in the country.

The Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP), the largest member association of COCOPEA, contributes to this discourse and discernment on complementarity. This presentation focuses on **the challenge of institutionalizing complementarity**, and the **need to formulate a strategic and operational framework** for doing so. The following eight points present this framework.

1. **We need a paradigm shift and change in strategic mindset, toward at least three directions.**

1.a. **We need to reaffirm that education is a public good**, which means it is the right of all citizens to be educated. The public is entitled to it. Being a public good, **government is responsible for its delivery as a basic service to its people.** In the Philippines, the delivery of education as a basic social service is done by **both public schools and universities, and private educational institutions,** from basic to higher education, including technical and vocational education. Government is thus responsible for **both public and private education**. Since government runs or operates public schools, it tends to give more attention to public schools than private schools.

1.b. It follows that **both public and private schools should be strengthened**, since both serve the public good that is education of our people. This entails the recognition of the strengths of public education and private education, as well as their weaknesses and challenges. It also means that government shall work on **harnessing strengths, addressing weaknesses, and maximizing the potentials of *both* public and private schools**. Both sectors, strengthened, mean a stronger educational system in the Philippines. Government, therefore, should not be seen as preferring one or the other, or neglecting one while focusing on the other.

1.c. These two points lead to **freedom of student choice**, a basic principle in the complementarity mandate. Citizens, especially the parents of students, and the learners themselves, are thus empowered and given the freedom to choose their schools unencumbered by their capacity to afford or not the tuition fee rates of their chosen schools. Since the State gives equal value and attention to both public and private schools, the State can **facilitate the choice and enrolment of a student to either public or private school**. Through the current government provision of vouchers, grants, subsidies, and scholarships, this is ensured to some extent. The right amounts or realistic levels of financial support vis-à-vis the real cost of education are subjects of current research and deliberation.

1.d. **Education stakeholders should thus be reoriented toward the three strategic perspectives above**. It is hard to assume that government can easily understand and accept the goal of complementarity without a process of reorienting paradigms and mindsets toward those three directions. Our key agencies in education, DepEd, CHED, and TESDA, as well as other agencies contributing to the whole-of-government approach to education (e.g. DOLE, DOH, DSWD, DTI, local government units) should enable their people, at all levels (e.g. central to field offices) to truly understand the private sector, the issues and concerns of private education, and the synergy that can be achieved through private and public complementarity. The private sector, too, should understand the nature of operations of public education. Public-private dialogues or a national complementarity program for DepEd, CHED, TESDA, DOLE, and LGUs can be structured, including immersion exchanges where public and private school leaders learn from each other's systems. These processes will build trust, openness to collaborate, and readiness to change systems and processes toward the goal of genuine complementarity.

2. **We need to operationalize this new strategic paradigm of complementarity through at least three operational directions.**

2.a. Complementarity can be realized in decisions that lead to the establishment of schools. **The feasibility of establishing new schools, whether public or private, can be more strategically based on context and complementarity**: the needs of the locality, the presence of other educational institutions, the demand of the market, the existence of congested schools, the gaps in skills needed for local development, the existing niches of established schools, the risk and value of competition, the possibility of coordination and cooperation. A Joint Education Mapping System where public and private education providers share enrollment, location, and facilities data to guide rational school expansion and prevent duplication or neglect in underserved areas.

These decisions can thus be more data-driven, with public and private stakeholders sharing data, and united by a common vision of better educational outcomes in the place (barangay, city, town, province, country as a whole).

2.b. **Government funds for education can be strengthened** in terms of their capacity for: facilitating freedom of student choice (e.g. the current voucher system, scholarship grants), ensuring teacher welfare (e.g. rationalization and standardization of salary scales across public and private, subsidies to address the gap of public and private

salaries), assuring and upgrading quality of education for both public and private, applying principles like equity (e.g. socialized schemes) and subsidiarity. The PEAC model of delivery of government funds based on quality assurance, independent of patronage systems, should be preserved and expanded to cover higher education and all levels of basic education.

2.c. The Constitution also mandates the State to pursue complementarity through "reasonable supervision and regulation of all educational institutions." **The kind of regulation and supervision should flow from the strategic perspectives of complementarity** (1.a to 1.d) above. It should thus be centered on quality assurance, respectful of public and private difference and similarity, should be applied fairly, should be independent from operations, and should consider a host of factors that support the goals of greater access, higher quality, innovation, and international competitiveness of Philippine education. It should be fundamentally respectful of academic freedom, also enshrined in the Constitution. Student performance assessment should be done by an independent agency, and not by agencies who are operating schools.

2.d. The three operational imperatives above would necessitate that both public and private sectors of education will be involved in **collaborative planning and governance, at all levels: national central office, regional offices, local bodies.** Complementarity may be easily forged as a governing concept and principle at the national level, but its concretization may be realized at the local level, embracing local contexts and needs for greater synergy of public and private to make local education more vibrant and effective. Specific context-specific goals can be set, like the following: local workforce development, addressing gaps in skills and demand of labor and industry, support for increasing the level of literacy and improving performance assessments, addressing malnutrition in early childhood care and development. Joint curriculum development, teacher training, research, and community engagement can be planned for and implemented collaboratively and effectively.

3. **Our next steps should consider the following**

3.a. Build some **level of consensus among education stakeholders** from government (especially Executive, Legislative, local government units), private sector, and civil society on **a framework of complementarity in both its strategic and operational dimensions**. This presentation offers an example of such a framework.

3.b. **Acknowledge and support current proposed legislation** (e.g. SB 167) aimed at institutionalizing funding, regulation, and governance frameworks beyond temporary orders or budgets **and initiatives in the Executive branch** (e.g. DepEd DO 6, 2024, planned memoranda on complementarity of CHED and TESDA) on complementarity and align their strategic and operational dimensions according to the framework (3.a).

3.c. **Work for the application and integration of complementarity in its strategic and operational dimension in policies, structures, systems, and processes of DepEd, CHED, and TESDA**, e.g. through the Memoranda issuances, Manual of Regulations for Private Schools in Basic Education, Manual of Regulations for Private Higher Education. These and other government agencies that work touch on education should evolve in institutional development attuned to complementarity.

3.d. **Identify gaps in both strategic and operational levels**, and **work toward comprehensiveness in frameworks** for legislation and executive action. A complementarity audit at both national and local levels to identify what policies and budgets already support it, what gaps remain and what reforms are needed is worth pursuing in this connection.

3.e. **Acknowledge existing initiatives and proposals on at the local levels that already apply the complementarity principle and mandate**, in specific forms and dimensions (e.g. collaboration of schools with their LGUs and DepEd divisions on literacy, teacher training, remediation, addressing malnutrition and early childhood care, etc.).

3.f. **Ensure participation of private school associations in governance structures** of CHED, DepEd, TESDA, LGUs, and other agencies, through permanent membership and regular consultations. For example, among the CHED Commissioners should be representatives from the private schools and universities.

3.g. **Form a national level public-private partnership on complementarity** to facilitate, plan for, implement, supervise, and monitor this whole long process of making complementarity a reality in Philippine education.