

# Adjustments on the Awards and Recognition of Learners' Performance this School Year Under the COVID-19 Global Pandemic

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the adjustments being taken by the Department of Education regarding the awards and recognitions of learners' performance during its school year under the COVID-19 global pandemic. The underlying policy guidelines and perspectives on the education continuity plan were discussed along with the premises of operant conditioning (positive reinforcement), learning assessment, and school-home partnerships to enlighten the discussion that producing learners worthy of recognition especially at this period of the pandemic is a collaborative product of the education system, teachers, and parents.

**Keywords** — adjustments; awards and recognition; learners' performance; COVID-19 global pandemic

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the situation that the world is under the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Education (DepEd) of the Philippines believes in the importance of continuity of the basic education services. Thus, the education department collaborated with various internal and external stakeholders in crafting strategic directions and guidelines for the protection of all the people in the organization against the deadly virus, from its officials down to the learners throughout the school year. The policy guidelines were released before the opening of classes as the *Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP)*. [1]

As stated on the third paragraph of the said issuance, DepEd's BE-LCP is anchored on the five principles, which include (a) protect the health, safety, and well-being of learners, teachers, and personnel, and prevent the further transmission of COVID-19, (b) ensure learning continuity through the K to 12 curriculum adjustments, alignment of learning materials, deployment of multiple learning delivery modalities, provision of corresponding training for teachers and school leaders, and proper orientation of parents or guardians of learners, (c) facilitate the safe return of teaching and non-teaching personnel and learners to workplaces and schools or community learning centers, taking into consideration the scenarios projected by the Department of Health (DOH) and the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases in the Philippines (IATF), complemented by other credible sources, and balanced with DepEd's own risk assessments; (d) be sensitive to equity considerations and concerns, and endeavor to address them the best we can, and (e) link and bridge the BE-LCP to DepEd's pivot to quality and into the future of education, under the framework of *Sulong EduKalidad* and *Futures Thinking in Education*.

Since the opening of classes on October 5, 2020, school officials, teachers, parents, and learners have experienced a new way of schooling, far beyond their previous experiences and expectations [2]. Adjustment became the key factor in surviving the challenges of education during the pandemic period. Furthermore, Tria (2020) noted that collaboration is the most important at these difficult times, which would be of great essence in addressing the schools' concerns and in careful evaluation of plans and procedures on the implementation of the new normal [3].

As we end the school year on July 10, 2021, per the amended school calendar, the department ensures that learners' efforts and perseverance will receive due recognition [4]. This award and recognition of learners in this current school was adjusted to the context of the global pandemic through DepEd Order No. 018, s. 2021 entitled *Interim Guidelines on Giving of Awards and Recognition in Light of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for School Year 2020–2021* [5].

According to the mentioned issuance exclusive for the current school, this year's policy is based on the premise that: "awards and recognition have been embedded in the Philippine basic education curriculum because of their profound effect on learners' morale, motivation, self-efficacy, and commitment of learners to consistently perform and strive to do better. These meaningful moments of recognition inspire others and reinforce behavior that leads to improvement."

## 2. AWARDS TO BE GIVEN

With the implementation of the K to 12 Curriculum, the basis of the awards and recognition program of DepEd is DepEd Order No. 36, s. 2016 entitled *Policy Guidelines on Awards and Recognition for the K to 12 Basic Education Program*. This order emphasized that the awards enumerated in the guidelines are designed to formally recognize the outstanding performance and achievement of learners in academics, leadership, and social responsibility, among other

aspects of learner progress and development. Moreover, those awards are given to encourage learners to strive for excellence and to become proactive members of the school and community. [6]

However, due to the changes of teaching-learning modalities, DepEd suspends the majority of the awards, as stated in the DepEd Order No. 018, s. 2021: “The Department suspends a majority of the awards and recognition provided in DepEd Order 36, s. 2016. These awards require face-to-face interaction and in-person observation of learner’s classroom demeanor and performance; however, the current learning setup limits the basis for authentically identifying recipients of these awards. These awards include the following: Classroom Awards (Performance Awards for Kindergarten, Conduct Awards, Recognition for Perfect Attendance); Grade-level Awards (leadership Award, Award for Outstanding Performance in Specific Disciplines, Award for Work Immersion, Award for Research or Innovation, Award for Club or Organization Achievement); and, Special Recognition. These awards are results of largely observable behavior in the classroom and are demonstrations of exemplary performance in in-person academic and non-academic competitions, which are possible only in a face-to-face learning set-up.”

The Academic Excellence Award will be the only award to be given this end-of-school-year rite but with some limitations. Academic Excellence Award, as defined by DepEd, is a grade-level award that is given to learners from grades 6, 10, and 12 who have attained a general average of at least 90 and a passing final grade in all learning areas. This award includes the following categories: with Highest Honors (Mag Pinakamataas na Karangalan), with High Honors (May Mataas na Karangalan), and with Honors (May Karangalan). According to the interim guidelines: “Academic Excellence Awards, however, shall not be suspended for graduating/moving up learners from Grades 6, 10, and 12. Academic excellence awards are highly valued by learners and their families, teachers, and the community owing to their profound effect on motivation, self-efficacy, and determination of learners to consistently perform and strive to do better especially in these trying times. These awards are also indispensable in applying for scholarships and admissions as learners transition to Junior High School, Senior High School, and College, respectively. Conversely, Academic Excellence Awards shall be suspended for learners from Grades 1 to 5, Grades 7 to 9, and Grade 11 this School Year 2020-2021.”

Procedures and specific guidelines were properly enumerated on DepEd Order No. 018, s. 2021 to guide education officials and teachers on choosing the right and deserving learners to be recognized, and to avoid confusion among parents, learners, and other concerned stakeholders.

### 3. THRUSTS OF AWARDS AND RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Recognizing the exemplary performance of learners has been a global practice since time immemorial. At every end of each quarter and term, and every end of each academic or school year, a formal program is called for the distribution of awards medals, certificates, and other similar tokens to learners who successfully met the highest standards set by the institution. This practice is anchored on the theory of Positive Reinforcement, a sub-concept of *Operant Conditioning* which was first described by behaviorist B.F. Skinner, which is occasionally hearing it referred to as Skinnerian Conditioning. [7]

As part of Skinner’s *Operant Conditioning*, Cherry stated that: “the *positive reinforcement* involves the addition of a reinforcing stimulus following a behavior that makes it more likely that the behavior will occur again in the future. When a favorable outcome, event, or reward occurs after an action, that particular response or behavior will be strengthened.” She likewise pointed out examples of positive reinforcements, as shown in Table 1. As Cherry added, “in each of these situations, the reinforcement is an additional stimulus occurring after the behavior that increases the likelihood that the behavior will occur again in the future.” [8]

**Table 1.** *Examples of Positive Reinforcement by K. Cherry (2021)*

Kind	Description/ Situation
Praise	<i>After you execute a turn during a skiing lesson, your instructor shouts out, "Great job!"</i>
Monetary Rewards	<i>At work, you exceed this month's sales quota, so your boss gives you a bonus.</i>
Other Rewards	<i>For your psychology class, you watch a video about the human brain and write a paper about what you learned. Your instructor gives you 20 extra credit points for your work.</i>

Morin explained how positive reinforcement works in a practical context. According to the author, when a child misbehaves, rewards might be the last thing on our mind. But for her, positive reinforcement can be one of the most effective behavior modification techniques. The author stated that we can use positive reinforcement to encourage prosocial behaviors, like sharing or following directions, likewise, we can use it to prevent misbehavior, like hitting and rule violations. As the author said, “positive reinforcement can also be an effective way to encourage and motivate your child to be responsible, do their chores, get along with their siblings, or complete their homework assignments without arguing.” [9]

With these ideas on positive reinforcement, we can utilize the awards and recognition program of our school in motivating our learners to bring out the best in them and solicit parents' support for the utmost development of their children. We should never use the recognition program to build walls between the performing and the not-so-performing learners, but rather take it as an opportunity to encourage the rest of the class to strive for everyone's growth and development no matter how gradual it is.

#### 4. INSIGHTS ON SELECTING AWARDEES

The awards and recognition program of the school is such an essential part of the education system; hence a careful selection of awardees should always be adhered to in ensuring fairness and equality throughout the process. As teachers start their teaching duties, the assessment process follows. The assessment results serve as concrete evidence of teachers in gauging learners' performance and who among them exemplify excellence in various learning tasks.

Adjustments to the assessment of learning performance are indeed important in this COVID-19 global pandemic. A locally developed Assessment Paradigm was developed by Cabigao in a triadic representation, employing the various foundations of assessments in DepEd, which include (a) the DepEd's Vision, Mission, and Core Values as foundations, (b) the equal contribution of school, home, and community in the education of our learners, and (c) the role of assessment as the heart of teaching-learning engagement for the growth and development of learners which comes into three dimensions, the assessment *for* learning, *as* learning, and *of* learning. All these factors contributed to making the school assessment program effective in honing the skills of every learners, which will surely be of great help in identifying the learners who belong to the cream of the crop of each class. [10]

Parents' support likewise plays a significant contribution for our learners to bring out the best in them and become achievers of the school. Delgado (2019) stated that parental involvement is essential for student development and offers many benefits not just in improving learners' success, but teachers' work as well. The author likewise noted an important point, that is: "parental involvement is associated with various benefits for students of all ages. There does not even need to be a high level of commitment; simply by asking the child how he or she did in school and attending school meetings, parents can positively influence the student's future. According to experts on the subject, the best indicator of a student's success is the extent to which families are involved in their education. Feeling their parents' support, students become more motivated and develop a love of learning." [11]

An earlier study of Cabigao (2014) posed similar ideas from the work of Delgado but focused more on the contributions of the teachers in building a strong rapport between home and school. Cabigao's paper concluded that (a) teachers' frequent home visitations encourage parents to maximize their effort in monitoring their children in

accomplishing home works, (b) learners need constant encouragement and/or assistance from parents and/or elders in completion of their school requirements; (c) home visitation is an important method of encouraging the parents to cooperate closely with teachers in monitoring their children's studies; and (4) parents' active involvement in monitoring the progress of the studies of their children is very essential. These conclusions lead to a recommendation of strengthening the connection between parents and teachers to produce achievers, thus having a bigger opportunity for our learners to develop within the standards of the depart.

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