

“Radiating positivity, creating connectivity”

CEBU BUSINESS WEEK

August 12, 2020

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THE ACADEME SPECIAL EDITION

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By: **BEBIE HIÑOLA BAQUERO**

WITH online classes now the trend in the ‘new normal,’ the use of electronic gadgets such as smartphones and laptops for the students has become a MUST to be able to join the online education bandwagon.

Suffice it to say, this has compounded the already burgeoning problem of financial inadequacy among the Filipinos brought about by this health crisis.

Education has become burdensome and inaccessible to most students whose family incomes barely meet their needs.

Because of the shift to online or blended mode of learning, devious electronic store owners and entrepreneurs doubled or even tripled the prices of gadgets and laptops.

The cost of brand new laptops before the announcement of online classes were around P17,000 to P30,000 depending on the brand. Now, the prices ballooned to whopping P37,000 to P85,000!

And this does not even include the cost of installing a fast broadband since relying on “data” cannot keep up with online sessions.

What is worse is that private schools either collect the same tuition fees

they charged last school year or increase the already high tuition fees. This does not include the miscellaneous fees!

Senators and even the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) had called on private secondary schools, colleges and universities to be transparent and explain where the tuition fees go and justify why they still charge miscellaneous fees when there is no more physical classes and students no longer use the school facilities, electricity, energy and water, and janitorial services.

Sen. Imee Marcos said she will pass Resolution No.

480 seeking to investigate educational institutions in the country and order them to justify the tuition fees and miscellaneous fees they charge to the students.

“Why are they asking for laboratory fees, medical fees, internet fees when nobody will go to the laboratory, nobody will use computers in schools, there is no face to face? ... Let’s investigate the tuition,” she said.

Even Sen. Pia Cayetano agreed with Marcos and said it is “only fair” that higher education institutions regularly update the parents and students about the recurring costs.

Julian Tarriela, national convener of the Students’ Rights and Welfare Philippines (Straw), noted that some universities still charge students with fees despite class interruptions.

He said that there should be some sort of intervention in addressing transparency concerns in how they compute their tuition.

Adding to the education woes faced by parents is the admission of CHED Chair Prospero de Vera III that at least 89 of the 400 private universities had pursued an application for a tuition increase.

“The problem is the existing tuition being collected. The parents and students do not understand the basis for the tuition. Universities have various structures. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have a unilateral structure when it comes to the fees. But we have identified the cost associated with shifting to flexible learning,” he said.

This has caused a lot of parents to give up hope and decide to not enroll their children this year because food, daily sustenance and medicine come first for the family to survive.

School can wait. Parents cannot just enroll their children this year only to have them stop in the middle of the year because they cannot anymore continue to pay the monthly tuition fees.

They will be devastated to see their children’s disappointment. And this emotional burden is way too much for both parents and children to handle.

So, instead of risking unwanted school stoppage, parents find it best to suspend their children’s schooling for one academic year. Their children can understand. However, parents need to work doubly hard to be able to save more for the next school year.

