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**IMPLEMENTATION OF MAINSTREAM EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN REGION V: BASIS FOR POLICY FORMULATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021, the Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program highlights mainstreaming in regular schools. This study, which used the mixed method design, determined the implementation of mainstream education in the public schools in Region V with mainstream programs included in the School Improvement Plans, including the opportunities it provides to regular and mainstreamed learners, administrators, receiving teachers, parents, community, and stakeholders. The findings revealed that the implementation of mainstream education in the public schools in Region V needs to be improved, having a significantly inadequate number of implementing schools, mainstreamed learners, and receiving teachers. Visual impairment is the disability that registered the highest percentage among mainstreamed learners because the blind can see, hear, and write. These findings mean that mainstreamed learners need more support to succeed in school. If addressed, this can have a positive impact on their academic achievement, as well as their emotional and social well-being. Implementing mainstream education provides extensive opportunities for school heads, teachers, administrators, families, communities, and stakeholders to provide an inclusive learning environment for all learners. By embracing inclusive practices, schools can offer social advantages to learners with special needs, enhance their self-esteem, and teach regular education learners how to work with those different from them. The proposed Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of Mainstream Education by the Department of Education, possible enactment of a Compulsory Free Assessment Among All Children Before Admission to Schools Law and the National Child Find Week Law, and other recommendations aim to improve the implementation of mainstreaming in the country.

**KEYWORDS:-** Mainstream education, child find, assessment, program options, curriculum modification, parental involvement.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

According to the International Bureau on Education - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), mainstreaming includes learners with special needs in general education settings or regular schools. Simply put, it allows learners, regardless of disabilities, to deal, work, and learn with classmates in typical classroom setups. It also allows them to socialize with schoolmates in more prominent communities. UNESCO explains that mainstream education settings should ensure that all learners' needs are addressed and that all impediments obstructing their participation be eliminated. Thus, inclusive mainstream settings should be responsible for inclusive and available school infrastructure, learning processes and methods, as well as teaching and learning resources, among others.

Kto12.com reported that before the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act, US government schools educated only 20 percent of learners with disabilities. Almost 200,000 of the children who were deaf or those with mental retardation lived in government institutions. The state provided either limited or no educational or rehabilitation services. In addition, more than a million children were excluded from school. More than 3 million children went to school but did not receive the appropriate educational services. Some of these learners were segregated into different buildings or programs. These strategies did not even allow disabled learners to associate with regular students. They should have been given basic academic skills.

In the 1980s, the mainstreaming education model became more prevalent due to the provision to place children in the slightest restricting conditions. This model involved integrating students with relatively minor disabilities into regular classrooms while learners with more severe disabilities remained in segregated special classrooms. In contrast, the report claimed that learners with significant disabilities stayed in isolated special classrooms, with the chance to be among regular learners for up to a few hours each day. Parents and teachers approved allowing disabled learners to be in classrooms with their non-disabled peers.

Accordingly, in 1997, IDEA was adjusted to improve conditions for properly combining learners with disabilities. Individual Educational Plans must be more clearly related to the general education program. The act requires government schools to accommodate learners with disabilities. It should mandate that learning institutions include the learners in school assessment activities and provide parents with a regular report of their children's progress.

According to Kto12.com, all public schools in the US are required to provide Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) as mandated by federal law. The preferred placement for all children, including those with disabilities, is mainstreaming or inclusion in a regular classroom setup, with accompanying support and services if needed. Learners with severe disabilities are mostly placed in self-contained classrooms or segregated special education schools.

Over the past two decades, Singapore, according to Lim et.al (2022) has made significant progress in developing inclusion for learners with special educational needs. Some of the key advancements include increased enrollment in mainstream schools. Notably, there has been an increase in the number of mainstreamed learners enrolled in regular schools than in special education centers or

schools. The program, which aims to promote inclusivity between mainstream children and those with special needs, is part of the national educational agenda with government projects setting directions for change and teacher education playing a supportive role.

Saleh and Woodward (2021) conducted a study that found that teachers in Malaysia view inclusive education as a challenging concept to implement. The study identified several factors that influence such views, including miscommunication between departments, sociocultural attitudes to disability, educational systems, inefficient utilization of resources, inadequate amenities, and teachers' deficiency of knowledge and skills about special education and learners with special educational needs. The study highlights the need to address these factors to improve the implementation of inclusive education in Malaysia.

The Education Act of 1982 made mainstream education possible in the Philippines by establishing and maintaining an integrated education system. Regarding Section 2, this law applied to and ruled formal and non-formal methods in public and private schools at all levels of the educational system. Section 3 of the act declared that the state should further the right of every person to relevant quality education. It disregarded gender, age, belief, socio-economic class, physical and intellectual circumstances, cultural, and political or other connections. It should work on the benefits of education for all its citizens.

DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, also known as the Inclusive Education as a Strategy for Increasing the Participation Rate of Children, is a policy that ensures learners' right to education in regular schools. It promotes the philosophy of inclusive education, which aims to include all children regardless of differences or disabilities with the assistance of school staff, learners, parents, and society. The policy defines a fully inclusive program for children with special needs, which includes Child Find, Assessment, Program Options, and Parental Involvement as its components. To implement this policy, the collaboration of division and school-based special education and regular teachers, school heads, and parents is necessary. They should work together to develop and facilitate the most valuable program for learners with disabilities. This program should be included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

Republic Act No. 11650 of 2021, also known as the Inclusive Education Act, has the objective of providing learners with disabilities free, public, and basic education and related services. The act also aims to ensure that learners with disabilities have access to the general education system through formal school systems, including the implementation of alternative delivery modes. Additionally, the act supports learners with disabilities in developing their full potential toward self-sufficiency and becoming fully participative members of society.

In addition, DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021, also known as the Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program, is a policy that provides overall supervision in the implementation of programs for learners with disabilities. It is designed to ensure that all learners with disabilities, regardless of their differences or incapacities, have access to inclusive education. It emphasizes the importance of providing equity and meeting the needs of diverse learners to ensure that all learners benefit and can fully participate in the learning process. It also highlights the need to pay attention to policy implementation and the political economy of reform, rigorously conceptualize key notions and terms involved, mobilize existing knowledge, and fill knowledge gaps. Likewise, it serves as an aide for the stakeholders and partners in providing support to address the needs of learners with disabilities.

While there were insurmountable challenges in implementing mainstream education, the COVID-19 pandemic was another struggle to battle. It brought extreme difficulties, especially for learners with disabilities. Mainstreamed learners all over the country exposed to the same challenging situations must adapt to the new conditions with the aid of institutions, teachers, family members, and friends.

The study by Cruz (2021) titled "Coping Mechanisms of Mainstreamed Learners in the Public Schools of Legazpi City Division in the New Normal" revealed that only three schools had enrolled mainstreamed learners. Among the three respondent schools, one elementary school had five, and another high school had one mainstreamed enrolled in the regular class. One high school registered the highest number, with 27 mainstreamed learners from nearby municipalities like Daraga and Sto. Domingo, Albay. Out of the three schools with enrolled LSENs, only one had a program on mainstreaming that is included in the School Improvement Plan.

The results posed a question to the researcher as to why these learners need help to report to schools far from their respective local communities, where expectedly, have public schools. The issue of why these public schools do not mainstream is another reason for the conduct of the research.

This study is significant to mainstream learners, teachers, parents, the community, stakeholders, and the Department of Education. Understanding the challenges, the teachers, administrators, and schools, in general, are going through can lead to the provision of necessary interventions that are beneficial primarily to the learners. Moreover, schools can enhance the implementation of mainstream education. The administrators and lawmakers can give innovations in mainstreaming learners of the utmost importance.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study evaluated the implementation of Mainstream Education in the public schools in Region V. Specifically, it:

1. Determined the status of Mainstream Education in the public schools in Region V in terms of the:
  - a. Number of implementing schools,
  - b. Number of mainstreamed learners,
  - c. Types of disabilities of mainstreamed learners, and
  - d. Number of teachers handling mainstream classes.
  
2. Evaluated the implementation of Mainstream Education along:
  - a. Child Find,
  - b. Assessment,
  - c. Program Options,
  - d. Curriculum Modification, and
  - e. Parental Involvement
  
3. Assessed the opportunities in the implementation of Mainstream Education among:
  - a. Learners,
  - b. Teachers,
  - c. Administrators,
  - d. Parents,
  - e. Community, and
  - f. Stakeholders

4. Presented proposed guidelines on the implementation of Mainstream Education.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were formulated:

1. The number of implementing schools for Mainstream Education in the public schools in Region V, the number of mainstreamed learners and receiving teachers is low, and hearing impairment is a disability that is common among mainstreamed learners.
2. The level of implementation of Mainstream Education in the public schools in Region V is moderately implemented, particularly in terms of Child Find, Assessment, Program Options, Curriculum Modification, and Parental Involvement.
3. There are varied opportunities for improvement in implementing Mainstream Education among the implementers.
4. The proposed guidelines on the implementation of Mainstream Education will cover detailed policies that will improve mainstream education in the public schools in Region V.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

There have been several studies about including learners with disabilities in regular schools, and these revealed positive findings. Krish (2021) stated that mainstream education provides children with the opportunity to grow and develop to their potential in a stable atmosphere, without the elitism and sense of high self-value that often plagues the general public school contingent. She added that using morals and decency is essential for them to visit far in existence, the education system supplies a better platform later than many private institutions. By permitting them to see the plethora of differing opinions and viewpoints within the mainstream, she explains that learners can create a more rounded picture of existence after school, morality, and problem-solving, as opposed to the stricter exam-centric approach of numerous private facilities. Furthermore, she emphasizes that the mainstream education system enables children to talk about every aspect of society without getting to cover an extremely isolated upbringing that lots of independently educated students are exposed to.

Mainstreaming special education students into regular classrooms has several advantages, as described by Lieberman (n.d.). Mainstreamed learners acquire exposure to a different learning environment. In a regular classroom, they have the opportunity to learn real-world skills that are essential for their future, such as problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. Their interaction with their non-disabled peers can help advance their societal skills and widen significant connections. And being in a mainstream classroom can challenge special education students academically, leading to intellectual growth and a more positive mindset. Mainstreaming can result in being encouraged to interact with normal society and learn people's attitudes. They will be equipped to defend themselves from the "prejudice and mockery" they may encounter.

In England, the Independent Provider of Special Education Advice, or IPSEA, reports that the fundamental principle underpinning the country's Special Educational Disability Needs (SEND) Law is the parent's decision for their children to be mainstreamed. It must never be denied because the mainstream is unsuitable, or their needs or disabilities are too significant or complex. The SEND Law emphasizes Inclusive education where learners with disabilities are included in regular classes. In Portugal, according to Alves et al., there has been a focus on developing inclusive schools since the education reform in 2018. The reform aims to ensure that learners find responses to their potential, expectations, and needs. They should develop a degree of education that builds maximum participation, belongingness, and equity, supporting social inclusion and unity. Additionally, the reform aims to build a degree of education that promotes full involvement, a sense of belonging, and fairness. However, there have been challenges, like the apparent need for more

resources in implementing the program. Such sharing of resource shortage might be disadvantageous, especially to the most vulnerable learners with disabilities. These add to the present challenges in the program's operation in Portugal.

In Switzerland, there has been a shift in the legislature towards including more learners with special needs in mainstream schools. However, health authorities such as occupational therapists still need to be fully integrated into the Swiss education system, as noted by Echsel in 2019. Nevertheless, pediatric occupational therapists are starting to work at schools to enable children's full participation as school learners. This switch in the practice of pediatric occupational therapists is influenced by cultural, political, and social factors that may differ from other countries where most current research on pediatric occupational therapists in mainstream education has been conducted. The specific factors contributing to this difference are not mentioned in the search results. However, the move towards inclusive education and the development of inclusive schools in Portugal, as a part of the education reform in 2018, can be seen as a broader context for this switch.

On the other hand, there is clear evidence in Australia that inclusive education can be justified across these areas (Boyle and Anderson, 2020). Accordingly, there is a lack of proof that inclusive education is less than useful for all learners in mainstream schools. In fact, Boyle and Anderson opined that there is an economic benefit to being fully inclusive, but this should not be perceived as a chance for cost savings. The evidence for the social and educational advantages of mainstreaming in special education is enormous for parents and students.

Bright Education Hub underscores several social advantages of mainstream education, such as learners getting to enjoy their learning with their non-disabled classmates or schoolmates. It details that learners with special needs require opportunities to develop their social skills and connect with their peers. This can be achieved by providing them with access to inclusive education that responds to their individual needs and strengths. Including them in classes with diverse students will help improve skills and develop self-esteem, considering these learners know they are in a typical classroom with their peers. It furthers that mainstreaming special education students into regular classrooms has several benefits for both the students with special needs and their general education peers.

Nevertheless, combining students of different capacities into one resource room not only aids the learners with special needs but also assists the regular learners by teaching them how to deal with others who are different. According to it, another advantage of mainstreaming is that mainstreamed learners receive the same instructional materials as their non-disabled classmates.

Bright Education Hub likewise supports mainstreaming by discussing that if classrooms do not mainstream, learners without disabilities will not be exposed to those with difficulties. The exclusion would not provide them with experiences promoting the tolerance needed when they become adults. It emphasizes that including learners with special needs with the rest of the students gives them exposure to all types of people, with or without disabilities. It likewise highlights that when the other learners learn patience, students with disabilities also understand acceptable behaviors and those that are not.

The study of Islam (2019) revealed that adequate resource allocation needs to be present to continue mainstreaming the education system but gradually improve. The study showed that insufficiently trained teachers, transport problems, and extra expenditure for children with disabilities make parents stop sending their children to school. The study also revealed that classmates, peers, and society sometimes behave rudely toward children with disabilities. However, some people support

much to continue their education. The study further revealed that poor academic improvement in children with intellectual disabilities discourages parents from sending their children to mainstream schools. Besides, the social skills of children with disabilities are improving through this system. The study's major findings showed that the school does not have proper facilities to meet the required needs of children with disabilities, like appropriate infrastructures, teaching aids, assistive devices, and learning materials. Although different government and non-government activities are available to promote the mainstream education system, the opportunity for mainstream education for children with disabilities is yet to develop. School leadership, with the fundamental role of translating policy into practice, is critical for the development of inclusive education and must be aligned with system and country priorities (Chen et al. 2020). The authors highlighted that collaboration across the region has the potential to share best practices and persist in enhancing the educational prospects for learners with disabilities.

### **Common Types of Disabilities among Mainstreamed Learners**

The first common type of disability among mainstreamed learners is **hearing impairment** including those with **difficulty in hearing**. Studies on deaf learners mainstreamed in regular classes conveyed the positive impact of mainstreaming this type of learner. The study by Van der Straaten et al. (2020) found that the quality of life of learners with hearing loss was like that of children with normal hearing at both time points on two of the four quality of life scales, emotional and physical functioning. On the other two measures, social and school functioning, those with hearing loss who attended special education and those who shifted to mainstream education exhibited lower scores than those with hearing loss who were consistently in mainstream education and lower scores than those with normal hearing.

In Finland, most deaf pupils attend regular schools in line with the country's inclusive policy, as related by Sume and Takala. Their study revealed that inclusion was successful according to teachers handling deaf learners in mainstream education at the primary or secondary stage. This was made possible because of the main help provided, which was instructional and technical, despite 48% of teachers needing more support. In Singapore, although teachers may be aware of the need to present information visually to deaf and hard-of-hearing students, teachers may be unaware of information gaps that arise in one modality and language, when multiple overlapping modalities and languages are used simultaneously (Tan, 2022). Presumably, there is a need to assist teachers in using modality and language systems to probe their classroom teaching. In the United States, while the majority of deaf and hard-of-hearing students are currently mainstreamed in regular public school classrooms, there are ongoing concerns about accessibility, social-emotional well-being, and monitoring outcomes of students in the mainstream (Silvestri and Hartman, 2022). With Universal Design for Learning, teachers can design available spaces using auditory, visual, and multisensory methods. With culturally receptive education, schools can monitor all learners to observe the contributions of the deaf and hard of hearing and develop an awareness of their communication requirements.

Alasim's (2028) the study revealed that the teachers' awareness and attitudes toward deafness and inclusion are critical to improving the participation and interaction of the deaf and those with hearing difficulties. For concerns connected to students, the study obtained that the spoken language problems for deaf and those with hearing difficulties are imposing obstacles that constrain the involvement and collaboration of those learners. Also, the deaf and hard-of-hearing learners are always occupied in the classroom because they are working on their tasks and seeing the teacher and interpreter simultaneously. Thus, these learners often receive the information and the questions late. The study also suggested that schools should improve their collaboration to progress effective strategies that make the context of the general education classroom suitable for deaf and hard-of-

hearing s. Alasim concluded that most barriers that deaf and hard-of-hearing learners meet in regular classes can be addressed when the entire school works together and delivers all potential help to those learners. This is supported by Alshutwi et al. (2020) whose findings demonstrated that inclusion setting improves academic performance, social interaction, and self-esteem of the deaf and those with hearing difficulties. They recommended that these learners should gain access to a 'good inclusion setting'. Therefore, policymakers and educators must advocate the need for advancing special approaches for such children.

People who are born deaf experience language differently than those who are born hearing sounds. Without the ability to hear, many deaf people rely on their sight to communicate (Locket, 2020). For them to be able to express themselves and join in conversations, sign language has been developed. Developing effective sign language recognition, generation, and translation systems involves proficiency in a wide variety of fields, including computer visualization, computer visuals, natural language handling, human-computer contact, linguistics, and deaf ethos (Bragg et al. 2019). Hall et al. (2019) refuted claims that there are damaging effects of sign language and that listening and spoken language are required for the optimum growth of deaf children. While practical tests persist for offering a sign language-rich environment, they asserted that such challenges are worth undertaking considering natural sign languages offer benefits for the deaf and hard-of-hearing children – particularly in the prevention and lessening of language deprivation. Moreover, Strenger (2022) identified the five most powerful benefits of sign language which include stronger bond between parents and infants, improved spatial reasoning, enhanced ability to interpret body language, better reaction times and peripheral vision, and long-term cognitive benefits of learning sign language.

Constantino et al. (2018) realized that there was only initial proof of how technology can support the inclusion of deaf learners in mainstream schools. They argued that there is less requirement for research on technologies specialized in incapacity or disability. They underscored that there is a foremost necessity for technology integration and investigation on its real-world usefulness, to the inclusion of all learners in the mainstream classrooms.

The second type of disability is **visual impairment**. The study of Al-Mori et al. (2021) supports the idea of mainstreaming learners with visual impairment. The research study found that teachers had positive attitudes towards the mainstreaming of blind learners in regular classes, across different factors of the study. This result is reinforced by Ravenscroft et al. (2019), whose study demonstrated that elementary school teachers in Turkey commonly hold positive attitudes towards including visually impaired children and that teachers' initial and in-service training about inclusion positively influenced their attitudes. Their findings are a disparity with earlier research which contends that teachers do not embrace positive outlooks to inclusion and highlights that a major obstacle to inclusion starts from elementary school teachers feeling unprepared to teach blind children. They concluded that significant training is necessary to qualify teachers to employ several methods that aid the inclusion of visually impaired learners.

These visually impaired learners in regular classes require special educational provisions. Pandey (2018) discussed the educational implications of the said learners in regular classroom set-up for teachers, school administrators, curriculum writers, and parents. Pandey emphasizes the following responsibilities of parents and teachers to ensure learners' proper adjustment in every sphere: identifying areas where learners lack adjustment and providing better conditions for proper adjustment. making available facilities to visually impaired learners for their better adjustment and all-around improvement, providing proper guidance and counseling services about all three areas of



adjustment to learners, ensuring that the school environment is cordial and congenial, and ensuring the proper provision of co-curricular activities in the school.

The next type of disability among mainstreamed learners is **learning disabilities**. The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada defined learning disabilities as a group of conditions that may impact the achievement, organization, remembering, comprehension, or use of spoken or nonverbal communication. These conditions affect understanding in persons who otherwise display at minimum capacities needed for thinking and/or reasoning.

Peterson (2022) discussed the benefits of including learners with disabilities in regular classrooms. Including learners with disabilities in regular classrooms can lead to numerous positive outcomes that impact all learners, both with and without disabilities. One of the advantages of inclusive classrooms is shift in focus. The concentration becomes less on a learner's incapacity and more on everybody's learning and collaboration. Inclusive classrooms can be an aid for learners whose disability is always prominent. All learners learn empathy, understanding, and acceptance of differences. Learners comprehend that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Learners see the whole person, not just the disability. Learners value varied approaches to thinking. Learners with disabilities see that they can learn.

Peterson's insights highlight the importance of inclusive education and the positive impact it can have on all learners. By embracing diversity and providing appropriate support, regular classrooms can become a place where all learners can thrive and develop new skills.

Burry (2021) identified common learning disabilities including dyslexia which impairs reading and spelling ability, dyscalculia which affects math-related skills, dysgraphia which impacts writing ability and fine motor skills, non-verbal learning disorder that affects the visual-spatial and visual-motor skills, dyspraxia which disturbs muscle control, and auditory and visual processing disorders which affect receiving and responding to information.

In dealing with dyslexic learners, Thwala et al. (2020) found that insufficient time, unwelcoming attitudes, lack of support, and lack of training of teachers of dyslexic learners were factors that affected learning. They claimed that without an effective support system for teachers, the learning of dyslexic learners would remain an illusion. Their finding implies that training on inclusive classroom teaching should form part of the teacher education programs in colleges and universities. Efforts towards including learners with **intellectual disabilities** in schools with all the other students can be seen in many countries' education systems, including that of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Bagadood and Sulaimani (2022) stressed that the 'rights of the child have been the primary contention this program's supporters placed forward to shift from the health to the societal model. Their study argues that, although mainstreaming can be considered a progressive drift to successful education, its implementation remains challenging. It is assumed that further investigative research into professionals' outlooks is needed to advance service provision and inform the administration of mainstreaming practices. In the study, teachers indicated a need for additional training and resources. This finding affects pre-service teachers' training and regular teachers' professional development. A model of teacher preparation, where all teachers are trained in mainstreaming practices, would help alleviate teachers' concerns regarding their lack of preparedness to work with a wide range of student needs. It is recommended that universities train teachers to provide differentiated instruction for learners at all levels and provide professional development opportunities for practicing teachers to develop the strategies and skills needed to work with a wide range of learners. The recommendation has a significant connection to the study of Tometten in 2021, who examined the social involvement and academic progress of children with and without

special educational needs due to emotional and behavioral (EBD) and learning difficulties (LD) and the importance of teachers' knowledge of this SEN. The study revealed the poor performance of these learners with special educational needs. Students with EBD also felt less integrated than their classmates without special needs. Teachers' knowledge of EBD was positively related to every student's social participation and academic achievement. The results emphasize the importance of teacher knowledge for student results in classes with students with special needs.

Children with **autism spectrum disorder** (ASD), on the other hand, are also likely to receive an appropriate education, which may enable them to be successful, according to Josilowski (2019). Success results from the collaboration between the family and the teachers, who gain a complete understanding of their students' different needs. This realization permits them to transform the classroom to address the needs of the children transitioning from a self-contained to a mainstream classroom. As a result, children with ASD are likely to be provided with an appropriate education, which may enable them to be successful. Students with ASD are the focal point and the major beneficiaries of an effective partnership between parents and educators. A fluid shift to an inclusive situation may provide a child with special needs the chance to learn from their peers in the general education setting. Advantages may also include advancing students' social and emotional behaviors and improving their educational aspirations. In addition to being spurred to perform, students can accomplish more when their parents participate. With collaboration, students with ASD take a broad view of what they learn in school to other situations that are less restrictive.

Learners with **emotional-behavioral disorders** have been found to benefit from being mainstreamed in regular classes rather than being secluded. In 2020, Daniel Waldeck et al. explored the experiences of 13 to 14-year-old learners with social, emotional, and mental health issues. These pupils attended alternative provision schooling or APS. Results of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis recommend that shifting from primary to secondary grades is a vital social process where bullying and violence are promoted remarkably. Furthermore, subjects of isolation and anxiety mirrored the learners' non-adaptive coping mechanisms when change happens. The results significantly affect how educational modifications are handled for learners with SEMHD.

The study conducted by Njoroge (2021) aimed to determine the impact of assistive devices on pupils with **physical disabilities** or challenges and their contribution to the retention of physically challenged learners in public primary schools in Kajiado County. The study showed that most teachers expressed that mobility devices were unavailable for physically challenged children. Most head teachers cross-examined stated that the assistive devices did not help retain learners with physical challenges. To help these physically challenged learners, Pennington and Pennington (2020) recommended that each student's physical activities and education be individualized depending upon one's particular set of conditions. For complete and fulfilling exercise and sports experiences, they explained that static and dynamic exercises are encouraged. However, it is important to consider the level of intensity of the exercise or activity. They added that open-circuit activities, like traditional team sports such as basketball or soccer, inherently possess more risks and concerns to safety than closed-circuit activities.

Indeed, physical impairments become critical deterrents to participation in physical education classes and, more importantly, in social activities in which the physically challenged must also be a part. Nevertheless, these constraints can be lessened through other people's support. Sit et al. (2019) conveyed that the presence of mothers is significantly associated with the children's moderate-to-vigorous physical activity before school classes. They narrated that in many Hong Kong special schools, parents (usually mothers) accompany their children to school and are involved with them

before the start of classes. During breaks, other children provide physical activity prompts associated with increased moderate-to-vigorous physical activity. The positive effect of peer support on the physical activity of children with physical challenges has been documented. The study found that dealings with peers impact the activity-related behavior of children with physical disabilities in the environment. Interaction, as one effective strategy in mainstreaming, also influences the performance and behaviors of learners with speech or language disorders.

Mutai (2018) underscored that teachers' knowledge of curriculum adaptation of mainstream education for learners with **communication challenges** (speech/language disorder) was just physically having and accepting learners in their school and their classrooms. The researcher stated that presenting learning experiences and opportunities that expect learners with communication disabilities to participate in their learning appeared minimal in practice. Some teachers knew there was a need to assist learners with communication disabilities by teaching after classes when the other learners without communication disabilities were free.

Learners with **cerebral palsy** must face several challenges, too, when mainstreamed in regular classes. Their participation and performance in school are affected by unstoppable movement, muscle tone, or posture; hence, their learning environment must also respond to their special needs. Inclusive education, according to Hasan and Islam (2020), provides all students with compatible policies, infrastructure, facilities, curriculum, teachers, and attitudes, regardless of their background at the mainstream school. Policies provide guidelines and compel related stakeholders to arrange and implement necessary steps to ensure all students' education. On the other hand, well-matched infrastructure and amenities allow learners with cerebral palsy to access the classroom, playground, other school buildings, toilet, and drinking water fountain, ensuring they can do school-related activities without facing any obstacles. Inclusive education teaches students compassion, acceptance, collaboration, and patience, which are life-long skills that will better prepare them for the future. It fosters understanding and tolerance, better preparing students of all abilities to function beyond school. When all children, regardless of their differences, are educated together, everyone benefits.

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education also play a crucial role in the education of students with disabilities. Various factors, including geopolitical instability, national instability, and complex problems in the education system, contribute to the negative attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education. However, research has shown that training and experience in inclusive education can help teachers develop positive attitudes towards inclusion. Inclusive education has numerous benefits for children with disabilities, including friendship skills, peer models, problem-solving skills, positive self-image, and respect for others. Inclusion also teaches children acceptance of other people, and that each person has unique abilities.

Rachmadani et al. (2021) declare that inclusive education for children with cerebral palsy at the policy level can also be adjusted to the conditions in the environment so that later it becomes the basis for the preparation of an inclusive education curriculum. Correspondingly, efforts should be made for policy adoption for learners with cerebral palsy in inclusive schools that will align policy and practice in education that should focus on the children's abilities.

Parents are the first people to be highly affected by children with **chronic diseases**, even when they go to school for education. This dilemma among parents has been supported by Wilson and Corkett (2019), who sought to understand parents' role in their children's healthcare and professionals and educators as they emphasized the collaboration between health experts and teachers in children's academic success with chronic illnesses.

Wilson and Corkett's study reported that parents could effectively communicate their child's health and educational needs with health and educational professionals; however, the statistical analysis determined moderately increased challenges in presenting information across professions. Accordingly, effectively engaging parents as partners in interprofessional collaboration can promote smoother collaboration and communication of a child's needs and offer a greater likelihood of achieving a child's health and educational goals.

To support parents in educating their children with chronic illnesses, Bernstein (2018) recommends the development of an Individualized Healthcare Plan (IHP) to provide these mainstreamed children with the necessary support. Accordingly, IHPs are administered by a school nurse and normally include an emergency care plan. IHPs support teachers, parents, and peers and foster safety among learners with chronic illnesses. IHPs can lessen barriers affecting the capacity of the children to participate in a class. It also helps teach the teachers the traces of the chronic condition and how they can assist in attending to students' situations when such illnesses arise in schools.

Kis and Sarica (2018) proved that children with **multiple disabilities** could also be mainstreamed in regular classes. Their study investigated the coherence between mainstreaming laws and practices in Turkey through a case study involving an elementary school student with multiple disabilities, her parents, and her teacher. Results illustrated that the laws and actual practice related inconsistencies with practices missing special education services. In contrast, the inadequate services delivered by the researchers exposed significant gains on behalf of the study's participants, allowing the researchers to conclude that mainstreaming and inclusion, in general, are probable within the Turkish educational system even with inadequate resources and provisions.

The Department of Education in the Philippines has made it a priority to mainstream learners with disabilities. The department has issued DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021 presenting policy guidelines for educational programs and services for learners with disabilities in the K to 12 Education Program. It aims to provide overall direction and guidance in the organization recognizing that the inclusion of learners with disabilities in the general education classroom differs depending on their distinctive needs and other constraints. Therefore, the school must provide an appropriate educational placement to serve the learners with disabilities better. The options include full inclusion in regular schools, partial inclusion, and self-contained classes exclusively for those learners with stark to extreme disabilities. To enable mainstreamed learners to participate actively in all teaching and learning activities, the policy guidelines on full inclusion underline the following provisions: making appropriate accommodations to the K to 12 Basic Education curriculum considering the learner's Individualized Education Program (IEP) when necessary, providing appropriate learning resources, applying suitable instructional strategies for learners' specific and additional needs while they are learning with their typically developing peers, ensuring teachers' readiness in the general education classes and their parents in accepting, recognizing, and respecting learners with disabilities, ensuring the collaboration of teachers in general education and Special Education (SPED) classes in preparing plans and lessons for learners based on their needs during regular Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions or other times when teachers get together, registering the learners with disabilities within the general education class and tag them in the Learners Information System (LIS) as learners with disabilities (LWDs), organizing a required class where the receiving teachers can learn Filipino Sign Language (FSL) and Braille Reading and Writing. By implementing these provisions, learners with disabilities can actively participate in all teaching and learning activities and receive the necessary support to achieve their full potential.

Department Order 72, s. 2009, or the Inclusive Education as Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate Policy, has rallied for Inclusive Education to increase the participation rate of children with

disabilities. The policy recognizes every learner's right to an education that is learner-centered, relevant, and appropriate to the learner's identity, culture, and context. The approach also recognizes the importance of providing learners with disabilities with equal opportunities to participate in the educational programs and services offered by the department. The policy has several components, including Child Find, Assessment, Program Options, Curriculum Modifications, and Parental Involvement. The policy calls for the collaboration of teachers, school leaders, and parents to come up with programs for learners with disabilities. These initiatives must be included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Administrators, teachers and other staff shall be provided with training on inclusive education by the DepEd. They shall monitor the program's implementation regularly, deliver the needed technical support, and conduct an assessment to verify its efficacy and advance its implementation.

The policy guidelines on full inclusion aim to support mainstreamed learners to join actively in all instruction and learning activities. These guidelines provide various provisions, including making appropriate accommodations to the K to 12 Basic Education curriculum in consideration of the learner's Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) when necessary. Appropriate assistive devices and technologies, as well as learning resources that support the needs of learners with disabilities (LWDs) should enable them to fully participate in activities. Appropriate instructional strategies for the specific and additional needs of learners with disabilities should be provided. Readiness of regular teachers and parents in accepting, recognizing, and respecting learners with disabilities should be given priority. The collaboration of teachers in general education and Special Education (SPED) classes in the preparation of plans and lessons for learners with disabilities based on their needs during regular Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions should be facilitated where receiving teachers can learn Filipino Sign Language (FSL) and Braille Reading and Writing as a support mechanism for learners with sensory impairments. An accessible physical environment (e.g., ramps, tactile flooring, accessible toilets, hand railings, etc.) for learners, especially those with mobility impairments, should be guaranteed. These provisions are in line with the concept of inclusive education, which involves educating learners with special educational needs in regular education settings, with appropriate support and accommodations.

The Enhanced Basic Education Act, also known as Republic Act 10533, establishes the Enhanced Basic Education Program, which espouses the following objectives: provide every student with a quality education that is globally competitive and based on a pedagogically sound curriculum at par with international standards, broaden the aim of high school education to include college, vocational and technical career opportunities, sports, arts, and entrepreneurial employment in a fast-changing and increasingly globalized environment. make education learner-oriented and responsive to the needs and communities through the appropriate teaching and learning languages, including the mother tongue, as a learning resource, provide every student with a broad range of options for their future, whether it be further education, employment, or entrepreneurship and ensure that every student is equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to succeed in their chosen path. The law aims to connect fundamental education to eventual employment in a globalized society, utilizing a curriculum that is rooted in sound educational principles and geared towards excellence. Studies about mainstreaming and its effects on learners with disabilities have been conducted. Sumayang et al (2022) presented differing views on mainstreaming learners with disabilities. The study highlighted that teachers have positive and negative attitudes toward mainstreaming and experienced various challenges in handling a mainstream classroom. A learner-centered approach to learning is used in the classroom. According to them, mainstreaming LSENs in regular classrooms has pros and cons for teachers, regular students, and the LSENs, thereby giving “daunting responsibility” to the teachers. Nonetheless, the researchers explained that it is necessary

to support teachers, especially those who are not majors in special education, by providing seminars and training.

In 2021, Palanca et al. conducted a study to investigate and relate non-SPED teachers' inclusive education practices for mainstreamed children with special needs. The study revealed five common, inclusive education practices which were: 1. providing extra time to complete the required task, 2. allowing students to take tests in a different setting, 3. structuring classrooms such that students with special needs sit where they learn best, 4. structuring activities and experiences, and 5. giving students alternate projects or assignments. These practices employed by non-SPED teachers are considered practical strategies for handling mainstreamed learners. Accordingly, these practices are not sufficient to accommodate the needs of diverse learners suitably.

Yeves (2022) clarified that curriculum modification includes the changes teachers make to curriculums to make them available for learners with special needs. Teachers categorize curriculum modification as a type of educational approach. She furthered that it is a set of resources designed to allow special needs student's better access to information. Accordingly, teachers must be aware of the learner's qualities when developing methodology, content, and assessment. The goal, according to her, is to make the content more accessible to students who have some learning barriers.

The Internal Bureau of Education Curriculum supported contextualization when it explained that inclusive education considers and caters to all learners' diverse needs, previous experiences, interests, and personal characteristics. It added that it should ensure that all students are part of the shared learning experiences of the classroom and that equal opportunities are provided regardless of learner differences.

The study of Domingo in 2020 aimed to identify the factors affecting the implementation of inclusive education (IE) in the Philippines, particularly the inclusion of children with special needs. Five considerations were theorized to impact performance: policy, resources, beliefs, and attitudes of implementing agencies, community support, and implementation structure. A descriptive survey was conducted among principals and teachers at public elementary schools with special education centers in the National Capital Region (NCR). Participants in the study generally had positive responses concerning implementing inclusive education. Still, they noted areas for improvement regarding knowledge and skills, facilities, learning materials, ancillary services, and parental engagement. Multiple regression analysis revealed that other factors that influence the placement of CSNs in general education classrooms while increasing inclusion levels are associated with beliefs and attitudes and community support.

### **Indicators in Mainstreaming Learners with Disabilities**

For mainstreaming to be successfully implemented, efforts must be made to find children with disabilities in the communities where they live. **Child find** involves public awareness initiatives by schools, teachers, and community members. Grant (2021) highlights the need for all public schools to identify and evaluate students suspected of having disabilities. However, she claims that this requirement has not been treated with the seriousness it deserves, leading to numerous children being left without access to an education that adequately prepares them for higher education, the workforce, and independence after graduation. Grant further explains that the government and its concerned offices left schools in identifying learners who may be needing assessment for special education.

Barzalla (2022) detailed the Child Find Process as informing those who care for children about signs of disability, identifying and reporting possible signs of disability, screening a child to confirm the signs of a potential disability, evaluating a child if the screening recommends it, and servicing a disability.

According to PAVE (Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment), schools have a legal obligation to assess children impacted by disabilities, and anyone can refer a child suspected of disability for an assessment. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) requires schools to seek out, evaluate, and potentially serve infants, toddlers, or school-aged students. The law mandates that the evaluation be conducted for those aged 0-21, regardless of whether they attend private or public school, are housed permanently or are homeless, and adopted or not. The Child Find law protects children in private and home-based schools, so parents can request an evaluation of whether their children attend schools. If the child is qualified, the local office accountable for the services must assist the child unless the family disagrees to avail such services.

Approve. The Child Find law protects children in private and home-based schools, but private schools are responsible for providing equitable services and complying with the law.

Child find during the COVID-19 pandemic was complicated and hard for the schools and teachers considering the worrying restrictions. McGinnis (2022) pointed out that while schools support these bigger needs, they must also be watchful of fulfilling child find, which requires schools to identify, pinpoint, and assess all students who may have disabilities and, because of those incapacities, may need special education accommodations. She stressed that child find mandates schools to refer children suspected of having incapacities for special education assessments performed with parental consent.

Next to child find is **assessment**, which according to the DepEd, is the constant procedure of discovering the strengths and weaknesses of the child out of the use of formal and informal tools for appropriate program grade placement. Prevailing SPED Centers in the Division shall support traditional schools in the evaluation procedure.

According to DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021, assessment plays a crucial role in establishing clear goals for learners with disabilities (LWDs) in their learning and development areas. It also helps monitor their progress in various domains of development, such as cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, motor, and moral-spiritual. It further stated that LWDs should have access to psychological and multi-disciplinary examinations so that specific evaluations of their strengths and weaknesses can be made and/or monitored. Every ILRC must establish a multidisciplinary team. The DepEd will strive to establish collaborations with the Departments of Health (DOH), Social Welfare Development (DSWD), and/or other government agencies so that these students can access professionals as needed.

Assessment, according to DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021, is vital for learners with disabilities to constantly check their progress in all realms of development. It also stresses that psychological and multi-disciplinary evaluations should be made available to the learners.

Furthermore, learners with disabilities (LWDs) shall participate in national assessments following the accommodations discussed in Section 9 of the Policy Guidelines on the National Assessment of Student Learning for the K to 12 Basic Education Program under D.O. No. 55, s. 2016. The progress evaluation of LWDs shall be based on their IEP and ITP goals, and the assessment of a learner with a disability shall be consistent with their curriculum.

The multi-disciplinary team is composed of any combination of specialists such as pediatricians or medical doctors, occupational therapists, speech therapists, physical therapists, behavioral therapists, developmental psychologists, registered guidance counselors, and nurses depending on the needs of the learners. The assessment result will serve as the basis for adjusting the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). Learners with a severe to profound degree of disability will use descriptive ratings to track their progress toward achieving their educational goals as stated in their IEP, whereas learners with special educational needs in the inclusive setting will use the K to 12 BEC grading system. Learners with disabilities should use the accompanying Progress Report Forms for LWDs in addition to the specified K to 12 Forms, such as the Individual Learner's Profile, Progress Report Card, and Behavior Intervention Report, in their progress reports.

Jacova et al. (2018) defined the individual Educational Plan as a functioning document that must be beneficial, accessible, and coherent to all those dealing directly with the learner. It should be deemed in the perspective of home environment, school, and classroom concern. Successful individual education plans, accordingly, should have the following key characteristics: individualized and learner-centered, inclusive, holistic, cooperative, and available.

Ayannoglu and Gur-Erdogan (2019) found that most administrators believed in the necessity of preparation/implementation of the IEP for the mainstreaming students, that their knowledge of the preparation/implementation of the IEP was partially sufficient and that they did not receive any prior education and that they needed training, and that the IEP development unit was established in most of the schools. To assist school officials, including parents, Stefanovic et al. (2018) opined that the role of good and developed collaboration with parents is well known for a long time in the theory of educational sciences, and particularly in special education and rehabilitation science. Education of students with disabilities and gifted students demand additional engagement, knowledge and efforts from their teachers, in order to adjust educational curricula, classroom conditions, methods, and techniques to the abilities and needs of this group of students, and to each of them solely and individually. However, Ilik et al (2019) found that most of the parents do not know anything about IEP. It was also determined that parents are not involved in the IEP process, and they are not invited by the schools. Teachers, accordingly, have some problems about getting the parents to involve in the IEP process. It was seen that teachers lack knowledge regarding how to include parents in the IEP process.

On the other hand, the study by Hurwitz et al. (2019) proved that test scores of students with disabilities improved after being enrolled in special education and that participation in school was associated with sustaining developments over time. Alternatively, Lazarus et al. (2022) introduced a comprehensive assessment system, including data from local evaluations as formative assessment practices and interim assessments that can assist in enlightening instructional decisions for learners with disabilities, including those with important intellectual disabilities. Lazarus et al. stressed that re-assessment to plan instruction could help guide the instructional planning procedure and enhance the learning experience for those with disabilities and other learners. Provisional assessments can back up instructional decision-making but can also negatively impact individual learners and groups of students if not chosen and exercised with care. Also, special education leaders, according to them, need to be familiar with choosing and executing local evaluations to help guarantee that the subsequent data are effective and valid for the anticipated objectives. Maher et al. (2022), who shared similar fear, concluded that there is a need to interrupt even pull to pieces, modes of thinking that cast learners with special educational needs as being of poorer capability vis-à-vis their age peers and thus being deprived by standardized assessment practices. They relayed that the change may be hard. However, teachers must recognize the individual needs and capacities of learners with disabilities through more holistic methods focusing on societal, emotional, and intellectual,



including physical learning and progress. While achieving this cultural change will be difficult, teachers need to recognize the needs and capabilities of learners with disabilities through more holistic approaches that focus on social, affective, cognitive, and physical learning and development.

Graham et al. (2018) reasoned out that while their examination of a typical assessment task sheet emphasized some worries about assessment design, it was not proposed to challenge the significant intellectual effort that teachers do in designing reliable and effective assessments. They agreed that locally constructed assessment tasks allow teachers to respond to the multiplicity of learners in their classroom and think about how assessment design connects to the ongoing development of the learners. They confirmed, too, that teachers draw together data from curriculum documents, school urgencies, pedagogical agendas, and awareness of learners' cultural and social communities, as well as detailed learning capabilities and incapacities as they plan assessment tasks. Villamero and Kamenopoulou (2018), on the other hand, conducted an examination that gathered the opinions of mainstream classroom teachers concerning the approaches they employ in assessing learners with disabilities. Their study found limited methodical research on assessment approaches employed among learners with disabilities in the Philippines. Findings discovered that teachers used various strategies, "such as tests, observations, portfolios, and groupings." Moreover, in providing these approaches, teachers made additional modifications depending on learners' needs. The authors emphasized that when distinguishing assessment, teachers should consider several development factors and underscore some attributes in the Philippine context.

Marcus et al. (2018) realized that little research examined how to improve communication between parents and teachers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and its effect on child outcomes. Such was the reason why they tested an innovative parent-teacher consultation model entitled Partners in School. To improve parent-teacher communication about evidence-based practice and its effects on learners with Autism Syndrome Deficiency or ASD. Results showed that parents and teachers observed child outcomes development after participating in Partners in School. Adjustments in parent-teacher consultation also were linked with changes in some child effects. The research also highlighted the vital role of communication in discussions about aiming family-school collaborations for children with ASD.

Dueker and Day (2020) conducted a study to address the learning gap in learners with disabilities in the context of numeracy and mathematics skills. The study revealed that learners with disabilities often lack the prerequisite numeracy and mathematics skills to perform at the level of their typically developing peers, even in simple addition problems. This is by some means similar to the statement of Saimon and Musa (2022) who expressed that students might end up being judged as failures in such assessments while their failure is attributed to the nature of the assessment rather than their lack of competence in language literacies. They specified that the paper-and-pencil assessment in Tanzania hardly accommodates learners with disabilities such as visually impaired ones because it does not allow adjustment of the font size to suit the reader's needs. To address this, they investigated the impact of mobile applications on helping learners with diverse needs in taking language literacy assessments. Their findings showed that mobile applications make language assessment more accommodating because of their flexibility in terms of presentation, response delivery, and locations and time given. Moreover, their study calls for the National Examination Council in Tanzania to consider the integration of technology in language literacy assessment to maximize learning opportunities for learners with disabilities. Also, they conveyed that teacher education should empower teachers on the use of technology in their classrooms.

The use of assistive technology has been found effective in the education of learners with disabilities. This is supported by Svensson et al. (2021) whose results of the study indicated improvement in reading by both students and parents, in managing the technology, and in listening easily to a text, thus, increasing the ability to absorb the text. The involvement of assistive technology contributed substantially to motivation for both reading and schoolwork in general. Accordingly, some of the students posed the perception that by listening to a text, they comprehended the content better. In 2018, the same authors demonstrated that assistive technology could help users acquire access to text, let learners with reading difficulties get involved in classroom learning, and use the same learning material as their peers. It also displayed some of the requirements for effective use and incorporation of the technology in the classroom, by showing that it was the teachers who made it viable for the learners to use the technology effectively. Similarly, Onyema et al. (2019) discussed the prospects of mobile technologies for the efficiency of inquiry-based learning approaches. It established that mobile technologies have the capabilities to become potent equipment to intensify the success of inquiry-based learning approaches. The study suggested that the inquiry-based learning method can be more accessible, effective, and productive if the potential offered by mobile technologies is maximized. As such, teachers can influence these advantages to limit the gap in students' academic performance. The researchers recommended that teachers should adopt adaptable approaches to make time for students' involvement in the teaching and learning process and equip themselves with up-to-date and mobile skills to improve quick and smooth shifts to emerging learning methods such as inquiry-based teaching and learning approaches. Martiniello et al. (2019) also made use of use of smart phones and tablets among people with visual impairments to gauge learning. Their study found that as students become more competent, they are more likely to prefer mainstream gadgets that are widely used by the general populace. They warned, however, that future designer, teachers, and the government to learn to adapt to accommodate these trends, to make sure that such mainstream devices are harnessed to their extensive potential where suitable.

Similarly, the use of videos in classrooms, as assistive devices, has increased significantly. The use of video lessons has been recommended, too, by Cruz (2021) for all types of SPED learners and these should be available and accessible to the parents and learners to lessen instruction-related issues at home. Anyanwu, et al. (2018) focused on video technology in science subjects to establish the optimum video duration to facilitate learning, foster retention, and aid student motivation. Outcomes indicated that while assessments directly using short videos were slightly greater, the findings were not substantially different from scores using longer videos. Learners testified that they were more connected, had improved concentration, and had higher retention of what they saw in shorter videos. An established research base exists for using video modeling to teach students with severe disabilities. However, the application of this strategy for teaching academic skills to students with a learning disability is less known, particularly in secondary mathematics. Video modeling provides a resource for supplementary instruction using age-appropriate technology to support student learning. To explore the use of this strategy in algebra, this study assessed video modeling paired with a system of prompting to teach three secondary students with a mathematics learning disability how to graph linear equations. Using a single-subject multiple probe design, the researchers found that student performance across multiple measures, including problem-solving accuracy and independence, improved for all three students during treatment phases. These results and their implications for the broader field of mathematics education are discussed. Satsangi et al. (2020) utilized video lessons in secondary mathematics. To investigate the use of this approach in algebra, the study evaluated video modeling paired with a method of prompting to educate three high school students with a mathematics learning incapacity on how to graph linear equations. The researchers realized that student performance across manifold measures, including problem-solving precision and individuality, enhanced for all three students during treatment phases.

With the unstoppable advancement in technology, artificial intelligence (AI) has invaded education as well. Chen et al. (2020) conducted a study that ascertained that AI has greatly been used in education, particularly by education institutions, in different developments. Accordingly, using this platform, teachers have been able to perform different administrative tasks, such as examining and rating students' assignments more effectively, and attain higher quality in their teaching performance. Conversely, because the systems influence machine learning and flexibility, curriculum, and content have been modified according to students' needs, thereby improving learners' practice and total quality of learning. Garg and Shrama (2020) also attested to the advantages of AI as, according to them, AI technologies are touching the lives of every individual and making life easier for children with special needs. Its key impact can be experienced in the area of education where institutions, teachers, and parents promote inclusive education with assistive technologies that can replace human work and advocate schooling without discrimination.

Also, Teachonline.ca (2023) emphasized that AI-enabled learning aids provide help for learners with exceptionalities. It mentioned that partially sighted students can transform text-to-speech and speech-to-text, allowing them to embark on assessments made for sighted persons. Text or audio can be converted into any language. For a student whose primary language is not the same as the language of teaching, an assessment can be decoded immediately from one language to another, and replies transcribed in their language can be evaluated as if written in the language of teaching. Video captioning, generated spontaneously, can let somebody who is deaf or hard of hearing completely recognize a Zoom session or face-to-face contact. For learners with speech barriers, Voiceitt picks up speakers' distinctive speech patterns, identifies any errors in pronunciation, and regulates speech before designing an output of audio or text. Learners who practice sign language can use an AI-supported skill on Amazon Alexa, allowing them to be understood by persons who do not know sign language.

Cotton et al. (2023) likewise examined the opportunities and challenges of utilizing ChatGPT in higher education and discussed the potential dangers and rewards of these tools. The paper considered the difficulties of detecting and preventing academic dishonesty and suggested approaches that academia can implement to guarantee the ethical and accountable use of these tools. These approaches include developing policies, providing training and support, and employing numerous techniques to uncover and stop cheating. While UNESCO believes that Artificial Intelligence can solve some of the alarming challenges in education, transform teaching and learning practices, and speed up advancement towards Sustainable Development Goal 4, which is to eradicate poverty, it also supposes that AI poses numerous risks and challenges.

UNESCO is committed to assisting member countries in utilizing the capacity of AI technologies to realize the Education 2030 Agenda while guaranteeing that the fundamental beliefs of inclusion and equity drive its use in educational contexts.

DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2012, requires regular schools, with or without trained SPED teachers, to provide educational services to children with special needs, with the goal of expansive inclusion. These schools shall seek support from SPED Centers or SPED-trained teachers. The program options that shall be organized for these children include a self-contained class for children with similar disabilities, which can be mono-grade or multi-grade, handled by a trained SPED teacher. Another option is the placement of the child with disabilities in general education or regular class, which is mainstreaming. They learn with their classmates under a regular and SPED-trained teacher who addresses the learner's needs. The third option is a resource room program where the child with disabilities shall be pulled out from the general education or regular class and report to a SPED

teacher who provides small group/one-on-one instruction and appropriate interventions for these children.

According to Llego, at the secondary level, appropriate Special Education programs and services are provided for learners with disabilities. He furthered that schools' referral system to medical and allied medical-service providers is essential to special education services to address the learners' health and medical conditions. This will only be done through a strong partnership with communities and parents, local governments, and other organizations. In addition, Llego expounded by ensuring that learners have access to the K to 12 basic education program, curriculum contextualization, adaptations, and modifications are made depending on the learner's abilities and needs. This, according to him, is possible when time allotment for learning areas and subjects in junior and senior high school are adjusted or extended.

The transition program, added Lego, prepares learners to move from home to school successfully, from class to class, or from school to another school for higher education or middle-level skills development.

Mieghem et al. (2018) conveyed that the inherent contradiction between high demands and special needs is one of the most contentious challenges regarding educational inclusion. They said that numerous regular teachers turn to training programs to offset the special education expertise they lack and to obtain special education teaching skills. The study concluded that special education teachers should have the knowledge and expertise, and all teacher education programs should contain courses to enable inclusive education.

Yeves (2022) defined **curriculum modification** as the changes educators make to curriculums to make them accessible to children with special needs. Curriculum alteration is classified as a form of educational strategy by educators. She went on to say that it is a collection of materials meant to give special needs children easier access to knowledge. Accordingly, teachers must be aware of the learner's qualities when developing methodology, content, and assessment. According to her, the idea is to make the curriculum more accessible to kids who face learning challenges. Furthermore, Sasizo (2021) defined curriculum modification as a change to a classroom activity or materials that allows or increases a student's participation in intended performances, interfaces, and habits. As a result, enhanced access to the curriculum will result in a higher degree of involvement, providing the student with a greater opportunity to learn. As a result, enhanced access to the curriculum will result in a higher degree of involvement, providing the student with a greater opportunity to learn. Study.com also shared that modifications are designed for students who are either far behind their peers or have significant learning difficulties and provide changes to materials or methods that reduce the learning goals for the students who receive them. Moreover, the Internal Bureau of Education Curriculum supported contextualization when it explained that inclusive education considers and caters to all learners' diverse needs, previous experiences, interests, and personal characteristics. It added that it should ensure that all students are part of the shared learning experiences of the classroom and that equal opportunities are provided regardless of learner differences.

While the curriculum can be modified, Special Ed narrates that one of the major errors when teachers modify lessons is removing the lesson's focus. Special Ed suggests keeping the meat of the content in the lesson or text and presenting the material in simpler forms and texts. It likewise recommends that Special Education teachers ask general education teachers to review the modified lesson to determine whether it has gone too far from the curriculum. While teachers successfully modify the curriculum for easy understanding, especially by learners with disabilities, they find

devising inclusive teaching and learning plans for mainstreamed learners reflected in daily lessons challenging. This can be attributed to some teachers' issues with too much workload. Mamabolo (2021) had a different view when he expressed that it is unbelievable that learners, who are dependent on teachers, often endure because teachers and the department cannot get their act together. His study revealed that forces occur in the environment of learning when least expected and that the training of teachers is part of the policy directive of the department for the development of teaching skills of its workforce. However, he asserted, that it is incomprehensible that well-qualified teachers would constantly whine about lack of training and poorly trained specialists when in fact, they can read and, to a greater extent, advance their efficiency for curriculum delivery. Contrary to the mentioned issues, Leite et al. (2018) presented a different finding which, according to teachers' perceptions, the pressure to prepare students for national exams makes it difficult to contextualize the curriculum, not so much due to the exam itself, but because the content of the national curriculum is widespread and demands substantial classroom time. This implies that the teachers feel obliged to plan their lessons in a way that caters to all the content in the exam year.

On the other hand, Obilo and Sangoleye summarized the challenges of the teachers as curriculum implementers as non-involvement of the teachers in curriculum planning and development process, uncondusive school environment, heavy academic load, teacher factor, parent factor and working conditions.

Change is a constant part of the daily existence of human beings. As a human, adjusting to change is challenging. The comfort zone must be altered, and adapting to the new situation is inevitably necessary to survive. The abrupt change in the way of life due to the COVID-19 pandemic is now the new normal (Cornain, 2020).

Toquero (2020) stated that the COVID-19 epidemic has been an ongoing struggle, particularly for individuals and children with special needs and disabilities, whose voices are frequently silenced, and this regrettable condition is exacerbated during this catastrophe. During the pandemic, government measures must include persons with disabilities who also have global rights, because no one should be left behind in this disaster. The article investigates the Philippine government's regulations governing inclusive special education and the rights of learners. It also emphasizes potential educational approaches to complement their learning amid the epidemic. It makes recommendations for disaster preparedness legislation policies and services that are relevant to kids with disabilities' academic, socio-emotional, and mental health needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought enormous challenges, especially to mainstream learners. Despite the efforts extended by the government to help students with special needs, inevitably, they may still encounter many types of challenges. Bowers (2020) cited that due to the new normal, students with special needs struggle with their education, boredom, lack of social activity, and lack of pre-set schedule. Parents also working with childcare and those with children of autism cases felt the weight of the challenges since they and their children find it hard to adapt to the drastic change in routine.

Besides, students with special needs must endure instruction challenges, including accomplishing assignments and using resources to comply with school tasks. Other coping mechanisms can be manifested by dealing with self, socializing with others, trying to mitigate, trying to adapt, and learning to live the new routine with the support of family, friends, and teachers. However, since most of the differently abled students "struggle to find a distraction-free space at home" conducive for learning, some have problems with an internet connection, and many have no internet connection since they are financially struggling. Also, deaf and blind students work due to the

inaccessibility of the sign language interpreter support and difficulty in doing simple tasks like finding resources, resulting in "fatigue, frustration, sadness, anger, grief, and adjustment anxiety." Though most differently abled students find the home-based learning policy mentally draining, some consider it rewarding (aidran.org 2020).

The new normal, according to Dictionary.com, is the current state and a social pattern that is not the same as what has been experienced or done previously but is expected to become usual. According to Tibon (2020), to overcome the issues brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the DepEd created the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) under DepEd Order No. 012, s. 2020. Bibon went on to say that the BE-LCP is in accordance with Section 1, Article XIV of the 1987 Constitution. According to the law, the state must preserve and promote all people's right to quality education at all levels. The government must take appropriate steps to make such education available to all citizens. Section 6 of Chapter

Schools provided differently abled students with differentiated instruction in the previous typical education setup. It is a set of individualized instructions for students who learn and think differently. It may vary in content, process, projects, and learning environment. It can work well through small workgroups, reciprocal learning, and continual assessment (Tucker, n.d.).

In line with homework preparation, students with special needs, according to Fleming (2020), teachers of special education students are faced with many challenges in the new normal to provide appropriate learning materials. Also, students and their families needed help dealing with home-based individualized instruction. So, Fleming recommended establishing the right learning environment at home. He suggested that schools should emphasize having a detailed homework program.

The necessity of technology in special education is crucial. Gundam (n.d.) cited that schools should provide students with special needs with custom-made technology to cater to their instructional needs. Individualized learning can be best offered when technology makes learning more meaningful. Many learning opportunities can suit individual requirements while keeping them busy at home. Also, Angdhiri (2020) cited that in Indonesia, students need access to technology to struggle sustaining learning. Government support, collaborating with the global community, and connecting with other schools and the local community is vital to maintaining and achieving education for all amidst pandemics.

The Internal Bureau of Education Curriculum supported contextualization when it explained that inclusive education considers and caters to all learners' diverse needs, previous experiences, interests, and personal characteristics. It added that it should ensure that all students are part of the shared learning experiences of the classroom and that equal opportunities are provided regardless of learner differences.

Balderas et al. (2018) conducted a study whose results showed that administrators should be fully aware to guarantee alignment with programmed goals. Stakeholders need to collaborate more in school activities. Schools must consider appropriate solutions to eradicate or minimize the challenges. School administrators should see that plans are implemented to provide inclusive, equitable, and gender equality education for learners with disabilities.

Cruz's (2021) study on the coping mechanisms of mainstreamed learners during the pandemic evaluated the coping mechanisms of mainstreamed learners, the recommendations of the parents and learners, and the program that can be implemented to improve the implementation of

mainstreaming learners with disabilities (LWDs). Mainstreamed students have a strong drive to cope with instructional-related challenges. In general, positive coping mechanisms were noted. Specifically, the coping mechanisms on instruction, lesson engagement, homework preparation, technology and isolation involved reconciliation and determination. The constant guidance and support of the parents, teachers, relatives, and the community had helped mainstreamed students to sustain challenges. In the conduct of lessons, contextualized visual, audio, and video lessons were more preferred by students and parents. The recommended program for policy formulation and implementation will significantly improve the coping mechanisms of the mainstreamed learners and their academic performance as well. The school community should institutionalize the contextualization of lessons, especially in Mathematics. Video lessons for all types of SPED learners should be available and accessible to the parents and learners to lessen instruction-related issues at home. The partnership of teachers and parents needs to be strengthened, and the implementation of family support initiatives on instruction for Special Education must be intensified. Critical, too, are the implementation of annual medical assessments and regular monitoring by experts like Psychologists and Physical and Psychotherapists for the learners' well-being. It can also implement the researcher's framework, Rx Education for the Mainstreamed in Time of Pandemic, which involves 1. Medical Assessment (MedAss), 2. Class home Readiness (HomeReady) 3. Creative Instruction (Creation), and 4. Progress Monitoring (ProgMon). Conduct of annual medical assessments and regular monitoring by experts like Psychologists and Physical and Psychotherapists for the learners' well-being should be in place.

Basister et al. (2021) clarified that **parental involvement** and collaboration between stakeholders would be vital in achieving a more inclusive environment, given the existing definitions, policies, and programs for the country's inclusive education. Specifically, they furthered that the journey of learners with special educational needs toward full inclusion will depend on the available professional services, easy access to these services, and the mechanisms to address conflicts that may arise in accessing these services. The study also considered the effect of existing rules, ethos, and practices on the partnerships of professionals and other shareholders of inclusive education. Similarly, Arias (2020) cited that the new typical education in the Philippines amidst the pandemic will only be proper with the collaborative efforts of teachers, parents, and learners. Students being isolated from the school need family members to simplify learning. Parents are expected to "monitor, motivate and guide their children." The class home must be a conducive place for learning.

Interestingly, Marcus et al. (2018) realized that little research examined how to improve communication between parents and teachers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and its effect on child outcomes. Such was the reason why they tested an innovative parent-teacher consultation model entitled Partners in School. To improve parent-teacher communication about evidence-based practice and its effects on learners with Autism Syndrome Deficiency or ASD. Results showed that parents and teachers observed child outcomes development after participating in Partners in School. Adjustments in parent-teacher consultation also were linked with changes in some child effects. The research also highlighted the vital role of communication in discussions about aiming family-school collaborations for children with ASD.

Park and Holloway (2018) discovered that parents' involvement in their children's education was influenced by inclusive school practices and the perception of deficits in student experiences at school. They also found a direct relationship between school factors and parental involvement, as well as an indirect path through parents' insights into their role in promoting their involvement. This research highlights the importance of a strong partnership between schools and parents in supporting students' academic success and well-being.

This study is anchored on Gordon Allport's Contact Theory which suggests that prejudice and conflict between groups can be reduced if members of the groups interact with each other; Finney's Program Theory that creates a plausible and sensible model of how a program is supposed to work; and Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development.

### **Scope and Delimitation**

This mixed-method research aimed to assess the status, level of implementation, and opportunities in mainstream education in public schools in Region V. Additionally, it proposed guidelines to the Department of Education for enhancing the implementation of such a program. The study was conducted in the thirteen school divisions of the Bicol Region, specifically involving Education Supervisors in charge of Special Education, school heads, and teachers in selected schools with Mainstream Programs included in the School Improvement Plan. The research was carried out from March to July 2023.

To ensure the study's focus, schools with enrolled learners with disabilities but without mainstream programs included in the School Improvement Plan were excluded. Furthermore, the school where the researcher acts as Principal was excluded from participating in the interviews to prevent bias. However, the research did not investigate other factors that could restrict the research findings beyond the researcher's control.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This part provides theories on education and a framework related to the study.

First is Gordon Allport's Contact Theory which proposes that partiality and fight between groups can be lessened if members of the groups intermingle with each other. For contact to reduce prejudice, the following four conditions must be met: the members of the two groups have equal status; the members of the groups have shared goals; the members of the groups toil supportively; and there is institutional support for the contact.

Allport's contact hypothesis is relevant to the conditions in the implementation of mainstream education. The contact hypothesis suggests that under appropriate conditions, interpersonal contact can be one of the most effective ways to decrease discrimination between majority and minority group participants. In the context of mainstream education, this would mean that all those involved in the program, including teachers, administrators, parents, and the community, should have a shared vision or goal about why learners with disabilities are included in a regular classroom setup. They must work together to achieve such a vision or goal, and there must be strong institutional support.

Allport outlined four key conditions for successful intergroup contact: equal-group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support. In the context of mainstream education, these conditions would translate to equal status ensuring that learners with disabilities are treated as equals and have the same opportunities for learning and participation as their peers; common goals: Having a shared understanding of the educational goals and objectives for all learners, including those with special needs; intergroup cooperation which encourages collaboration and teamwork among teachers, parents, and students to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment; and institutional support which provides the necessary resources, training, and support for teachers and staff to effectively implement inclusive practices.

The implementation of these conditions can help to create positive contact experiences, which have been shown to reduce self-reported prejudice towards various groups. However, the effectiveness of



intergroup contact to lessen prejudice varies across different types of groups and situations. Therefore, it is important to continuously evaluate and improve the implementation of these conditions in the context of mainstream education. This is the work of the second theory, which is the Program Theory.

Finney et al. (2021), stated that Program Theory is relevant to the implementation of mainstream education in Region V. It is the process of creating a plausible and sensible model of how a program is supposed to work. It clarifies the set of cause-and-effect relationships that connect programming to the expected outcomes. In the context of mainstream education, program theory can help stakeholders understand what programming is implemented and why, making obvious the links between programming and intended outcomes.

According to Finney et al. (2021), weak program theory is often based on limited personal experiences, assumptions, or hunches, while strong program theory is research- or theory-based, providing evidence-based links between program activities and student learning outcomes. Strong program theory uses research or theory to justify each arrow linking programming and outcomes. This approach communicates to stakeholders that faculty and staff intentionally built programming that should be effective given existing evidence, and they can explain why and how. Strong program theory also allows faculty and student affairs professionals to use the outcomes assessment process to test the hypothesis of program effectiveness.

In the context of mainstream education in Region V, strong program theory can help ensure that the programming generated is more likely to improve student learning and development than programming based on tradition, hunches, or guesses. This evidence-informed approach is more cost-effective in time and resources because the programming generated is more likely to obtain the desired outcomes, and fewer iterations of the assessment process are necessary to inform changes to programming.

To implement strong program theory in mainstream education in Region V, it is important to conduct research or use existing theory to justify each arrow linking programming and outcomes; communicate to stakeholders that programming is intentionally built to be effective given existing evidence, and explain why and how; use the outcomes assessment process to test the hypothesis of program effectiveness; continuously evaluate and improve the implementation of programming to ensure that it is effective in achieving the desired outcomes.

By implementing strong program theory in mainstream education in Region V, stakeholders can ensure that programming is evidence-based and effective in improving student learning and development. These are what Lev Vygotsky's theory is aimed at.

Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory has had a significant impact on research and theory in cognitive development over the past several decades. His theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development, and it has several implications for mainstream education. Some of the opportunities in mainstream education that are related to Vygotsky's theory include collaborative and cooperative learning. Vygotsky's theory encourages learning through collaborative and cooperative interactions between children and teachers or peers. In this approach, students and teachers form relationships in the classroom to help the students learn, and the relationships facilitate social interaction and active participation in the learning tasks.

Vygotsky's theory suggests that a more knowledgeable other (MKO), such as a parent or teacher, can guide a child's learning through scaffolding. Scaffolding involves providing support and

assistance to a child as they learn a new task, and then gradually removing the support as the child becomes more competent. This approach helps students to accomplish tasks that are too difficult for them to solve alone, but they can accomplish them with the help of adults or more skilled peers. Reciprocal teaching is an effective educational strategy based on Vygotsky's ideas. In reciprocal teaching, students take turns leading a small group discussion about the content they are learning. The teacher models the process first, and then gradually releases responsibility to the students. This approach helps students to develop higher-order thinking skills and to become more independent learners.

Socio-cultural theory also highlights the importance of language in cognitive development. It believes that inner speech is used for mental reasoning, while external speech is used to converse with others. Therefore, teachers can create opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful conversations and discussions, which can enhance their understanding of the content and promote their cognitive development.

Culture, as the theory advocates, plays an important role in shaping cognitive development. Therefore, teachers can incorporate culturally relevant materials and examples into their instruction, activities, and other initiatives to make learning meaningful and engaging for learners by collaborating with parents, the community and stakeholders. This collaboration will make individuals to be more sensitive to the varied conditions and capabilities of the learners or persons with disabilities and to endeavor to create inclusive and socially receptive learning conditions.

The interplay or interconnection of Contact Theory, Program Theory and Socio-cultural Theory resulted in the formulation of Affective Learning Theory, the researcher's theory.

Based on the three learning theories used in this study, the researcher discovered that the principal approach to the education of the mainstreamed and all types of learners is affection. Affection transcends love and care. It accepts a person's individuality, including the things that he/she can do, learn, or achieve. More significantly, affection recognizes one's weakness at doing or performing because of incapacities, be it physical, mental, or emotional.

These have been the bases for the researcher to introduce his teaching philosophy, The Cruz Affective Learning Theory or Affection Theory.

Affection Theory emphasizes that love and learning should never be separated for learning to occur among all learners of all types. The capacity to learn also varies; hence, some teachers may feel frustrated or even enraged about those who cannot or find lessons difficult to understand. If teachers manifest negative emotions, learners may take them as something they cannot bear. This feeling may bring them to either frustration, hatred, violence, rebellion, or worse, suicidal thoughts and acts.

Affection is compassion that allows teachers to see and feel their learners' struggles, sufferings, and pains. Compassion is understanding the individual stories of learners under their care, accepting them, and proving to the children that their misfortunes are valuable stories to be heard by others so they, too, can learn from them.

Affection will allow teachers to go through personal recollections to think of how they can still be more caring to their learners despite their struggles. Personal recollection will bring them to accept who they are, acknowledge their weaknesses and imperfections, and aim to be improved always.

The process of recollecting makes any educator more accepting, understanding, loving, and providing, hence, any educational placement should require an assessment of the readiness and capacity of learners. Assessment may be in the form of diagnostic tests or medical examinations for those with or suspected of learning disabilities. These form part of the Recognition of Strengths and Weaknesses as rationalized by the researcher's RISE MODEL ON MAINSTREAMING. **Recognition** is about knowing the educability, including the reading and numeracy readiness of the learners. It is also about acknowledging the weaknesses of those with medically assessed disabilities. Such valuation will rightfully place the learners in educational institutions that provide the necessary learning provisions and interventions.

The **Inclusion in the Mainstream Program** phase places the learners with disabilities in regular classes after conducting necessary medical and other forms of evaluation. Inclusion is seeing to it that classes with mainstreamed learners are smaller than that of an average class without learners with disabilities. Curriculum and instruction are contextualized and simplified for those with disabilities to understand, interact and pass school assessments of, on, and for learning activities. Learning resources are within the learners' grasp and are free from dangers and destruction. Also, schools should continuously work for inclusive facilities for all learners' maximum participation and accomplishment.

In the implementation of the Mainstream Program, schools orient both the parents of regular and mainstreamed learners on the advantages and opportunities in organizing the mainstream classes; assign teachers who have background/ training in handling learners with disabilities to teach in mainstream classes; assign teachers who are considered patient and understanding of the special needs of mainstreamed learners; sees to it that mainstream classes have fewer learners compared to those without mainstreamed; considers the location of the classroom/building in assigning classrooms to mainstream classes; and assigns teachers/staff to monitor the performance of the mainstreamed learners regularly. For the curriculum to be responsive to the needs of the learners with disabilities in mainstream classes, the curriculum should be based on the principles of human rights, inclusion, equality, and diversity; it should respond to the needs of both the regular students and the learners with disabilities in a mainstream class; is modified to ensure that the students with disabilities have access to the same educational opportunities as their non-disabled peers; ensures that the key standards for both regular and mainstreamed learners by subject area are emphasized; teachers and administrators unpack the standards to address the needs of the regular and mainstreamed learners; and receiving teachers devise inclusive teaching and learning plans for Mainstreamed Learners that are reflected in daily lesson plans.

For instruction to be appropriate and responsive to the disabilities of the mainstreamed, teachers must employ differentiated instruction to meet the needs of every learner, whether it is those who learn at a slower rate or those gifted students who benefit from enrichment activities in a mainstream class; teaching methods and learning activities that teachers use respond to the diverse needs of learners in a mainstream class; teachers use sign language while teaching deaf learners in mainstream classes; teachers use technology to support teaching and learning among the regular and mainstreamed learners; teachers provide multiple options for personalized learning through the lesson/unit in a mainstream class; and teachers incorporate Accountable Talk or student-led questions which deepen student understanding even among the mainstreamed learners.

For assessment to be suitable to the capabilities and condition of the mainstreamed, teachers should provide varied formative assessments that lead to mastery of competencies by regular and mainstreamed learners; design and use special assessment tools to assess the performance of mainstreamed learners; design authentic tasks for mainstreamed learners; have plans for

mainstreamed learners when they do not learn or find lessons hard to understand; keep narrative reports or incidents of mainstreamed learners and give regular feedback to parents of mainstreamed learners regarding their children's performance in school.

For learning resources to address the individuality of the learners, teachers should use instructional aids that even the mainstreamed learners, such as the deaf and hard of hearing, will use and understand; produce instructional aids for the mainstreamed learners for a clearer understanding of lessons; use television or screen big enough for the deaf to see, if applicable; provide supplementary learning materials that the mainstreamed learners can bring home; the school has a functional learning resource center or library equipped computers and interconnectivity which the mainstreamed learners can readily use, and parents of the mainstreamed learners can work for individual access to the internet for home learning activities.

To ensure inclusive facilities, the school must adopt and practice mechanism/s for the provision and use of inclusive facilities; the design of the buildings/facilities accommodates a range of preferences and abilities; school facilities are responsive to the disabilities of the mainstreamed learners, including the deaf and blind; visibly written signages are posted where mainstreamed learners usually pass by or stay; schools have laboratories/spaces where the mainstreamed can develop their talents in arts, vocational, and other fields and schools continuously work to provide and improve inclusive facilities for all.

For training to be extended, schools should conduct regular training on handling learners with disabilities and sign language to teachers, non-teaching personnel, students, parents, and those outside the school community.

**Support for Empowerment** is all about emotion and tangible assistance. Emotion is the manifestation of the Affection Theory in Learning as introduced by the researcher. More than anything else, it allows any teacher to understand the challenging situations of learners with disabilities in school. More significantly, it permits learners to continually learn despite repeatedly committed errors until they can give the expected answers and show accepted behaviors.

In between all the phases are structured monitoring and assessment activities to monitor the progress of the mainstreamed learners. Progress monitoring means the assessment of a learner's academic and socio-emotional behavior. Besides the teachers' regular follow-up with learners and their parents, psychologists, and physical and psychotherapists will deliver primordial roles in monitoring the learners' well-being.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework illustrates the flow of the conceptual paradigm shown in Figure 2. As presented, the current research was mainly focused on determining the status, level, and opportunities in the implementation of mainstream education in the public schools in Region V and proposed policy guidelines for mainstreaming learners with disabilities in regular classes.

In determining the status and level of implementation of mainstreaming, the CIPP Model, developed by Daniel Stufflebeam in the 1960s was used. According to Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning, the CIPP Model is a decision-oriented model that thoroughly gathers information about a program to recognize strengths and boundaries in content or performance, to advance program efficacy or to design for the future of a program. In the study, the model focused on management-oriented evaluation and combined four stages of evaluation, with the aim of continuous improvement by concentrating on four areas of a program. Context Evaluation focused

on the overall goals or mission of the implementation of mainstream education in the public schools in Region V. Input Evaluation focused on the plans and resources needed for the program. Process Evaluation assessed the activities or components of the program. Product Evaluation measured the outcomes or objectives of the program.

The CIPP model was used to evaluate the implementation of mainstream education in public schools in Region V, providing an analytic and rational basis for program decision-making. The model was used to systematically guide the researcher into looking at the conception, design, implementation, and assessment of the implementation of mainstreaming in the region. The CIPP model allowed the researcher to assess the program at different levels, including the inputs provided, the monitoring systems involved and, more significantly, the effects of the program's implementation. The evaluation process was cyclical and did not have to be performed in a specific order. Additionally, each evaluation stage was performed more than once, depending on the program's needs.

### **Significance of the Study**

The results of this study will be significant for the following:

**Mainstreamed Learners.** This group of learners can receive appropriate and individualized intervention to improve their academic performance and socio-emotional skills in a mainstream class. More than social acceptance, they will benefit from the program. They will also be able to maximize their potential and skills, graduate, and land decent jobs.

**Teachers.** As the primary source of instruction and learning, they can be provided with varied and proper strategies to deal with mainstreamed learners and how learning will occur among the mainstreamed in regular classes.

**Parents.** Their role in their children's education is highly significant; hence, they are expected to collaborate closely with teachers and school authorities regarding their children's performance and behavior in school. They can provide their children with more opportunities to learn and develop in a natural environment alongside their peers, which can lead to better social and academic outcomes.

**School Administrators.** School officials can utilize the results of this study to introduce initiatives for developing programs that will support and improve the overall performance of mainstreamed learners.

**Department of Education.** As the frontrunner of educational programs in the country, the Department of Education may consider the findings and recommendations of the study to review and improve its programs on mainstream education.

**Policymakers.** Lawmakers will be provided with scientific bases for introducing legislation to improve the implementation of the Mainstream Program.

**Local Government Units.** Given the study's results, local government units will be made aware of mainstreaming, and they will be able to support the program's implementation.

**Community.** Community members will be more understanding and eventually supportive of the endeavors of persons with disabilities. Expectedly, they will become partners of the local government units in promoting inclusion.

**Stakeholders.** This group of benefactors will be more enlightened on the kinds of support and assistance that learners with disabilities need.

**Researcher.** His advocacy for inclusion will be made more scientific-based and that the results of this study will be shared with bigger audiences.

**Future Researchers.** Considering the few studies on Mainstream Education, future researchers will be encouraged to conduct similar studies to improve instruction among all learners.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are set technically and operationally for a clearer understanding of the study:

**Mainstream Education.** This term references the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education settings or mainstream schools (IGI Global). It refers to the practice of including learners with disabilities in a regular class setup.

**Mainstream Program.** It refers to the officially planned, organized, and implemented system of services and activities that support learners with disabilities in a regular class for instruction and learning. In this study, it refers to the plan of activities of a school that is included in the School Improvement Plan and Annual Improvement Plan.

**Public Schools.** It refers to schools supported by public funds. In this study, it refers to kindergarten through grade 12 schools run by the Department of Education.

**Status.** It pertains to the condition of implementation of the Mainstream Program in the public schools in Region V. In this study, it considered the number of implementing schools, number of mainstreamed learners, types of disabilities of mainstreamed learners, and number of teachers handling mainstream classes, child find, assessment, program options, curriculum modification, and parental involvement.

**Disabilities.** It refers to physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental conditions that impair, interfere with, or limit a person's capability to participate in certain undertakings or activities or partake in typical daily happenings and exchanges (Meriam-Webster). In this study, it refers to the disabilities categorized in the Learner Information System as provided for by DepEd Order No. 23, s. 2022 or the Child Find Policy for Learners with Disabilities Towards Inclusive Education. These disabilities are visual impairment, hearing impairment, learning disability, intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, emotional-behavioral disorder, orthopedic or physical handicap, speech/language disorder, cerebral palsy, special health problem/chronic disease, and multiple disabilities.

**Mainstreamed Learners.** It refers to learners with disabilities who are in the regular classroom setup.

**Receiving Teachers.** It refers to teachers in regular schools who handle learners with disabilities in regular classes.

**Administrators.** It refers to a person whose function involves facilitating managing and overseeing the way that an organization or institution performs. In this study, it refers to the public school principals or heads of public schools in the region with mainstream programs included in the School Improvement Plans.

**Parents.** It refers to the parents of mainstreamed learners in regular schools.

**Community.** It refers to a communal group of any size whose members dwell in a certain environment, share government, and every so often has a collective social and historical tradition (dictionary.com). In the study, it refers not only to the place where the mainstreamed learners live but also to the bigger communities like schools and cities or municipalities.

**Stakeholders.** It refers to either an individual or group that is impacted by the result of a plan. They have a concern about the realization of the project and can be inside or outside the organization that is helping the project (Landau, 2022). In the study, it refers to individuals or organizations who are directly helping or supporting the programs, projects, and activities of public schools.

**Child Find.** It is locating children through a family mapping study, advocacy activities, and collaboration with local health workers. Special Education (SPED) will list and visit children with special needs who are not in school. Parents should be persuaded to enroll their children in SPED Centers or schools in their neighborhood (Department Order No. 72, s. 2009).

**Assessment.** It refers to the constant process of recognizing a child's strengths and shortcomings using formal and informal instruments for suitable program grade placement. The Division's existing SPED Centers will support ordinary schools with the assessment process (Department Order No. 72, s. 2009, s. 72). In this study, it refers to both the diagnosis conducted by medical experts and practitioners and the formative and summative assessments activities done by receiving teachers among the mainstreamed learners.

**Program Options.** It includes a self-contained class for children with similar disabilities that can be mono-grade or multi-grade and is handled by a trained SPED teacher; inclusion or placement of persons with incapacities in regular schools or regular class where he/she learns with his/her peers under a regular teacher and/or SPED trained teacher who addresses the child's needs; and a resource room program where the child with disabilities shall be pulled out of the general class (Department Order No. 72, s. 2009).

**Curriculum Modification.** It refers to the new ways of thinking and developing teaching-learning practices. This shall be implemented in the form of adaptations and accommodations to ensure optimal learning based on the needs and potential of the individual. It also entails alterations to any of the processes in the teaching-learning process. Curriculum changes must incorporate service delivery choices such as cooperative or team teaching, the consulting teacher program, and others. (Department Order No. 72, s. 2009).

**Parental Involvement.** It is a critical role in preparing children for academic, moral, and spiritual growth. Parents must participate in observing their children's performance, volunteering to act as teacher aides in the classroom, and providing support to other parents (Department Order No. 72, s. 2009). In this study, it refers to the parents of mainstreamed learners in regular classroom setups.

**Opportunities.** It refers to occasions or situations that make it possible for one to do something that he/she wants to do or has to do or the possibility of doing something (Cambridge Dictionary). In this study, it refers to the favorable or positive benefits that the implementation of Mainstream Education can give the learners, administrators, teachers, parents, and the community.

**Curriculum.** It refers to the academic content and lessons taught in a school or a specific course or program. It encompasses everything that is part of the plan for instruction, including a scope and

sequence, instructional units, lesson plans, resources, teaching strategies, and more. Curriculum is what is taught in a given course or subject, and it sets expectations for student learning. (The Glossary of Education Reform).

**Inclusive Education.** Inclusive education entails placing all pupils in the same classrooms and schools. It means meaningful learning chances for traditionally excluded groups (UNICEF).

**Guidelines.** It refers to the information proposed to guide people on how something should be done or what something should be (Cambridge Dictionary). In this study, it refers to the proposed policies in mainstreaming learners with disabilities in regular classroom setups.

**Policy.** It is a deliberate system of guidelines to guide choices and attain rational results and an assertion of intent and is executed as a process or rule (Wikipedia). In this study, it refers to a persuasive proposal that the researcher will forward to the Department of Education for possible consideration in improving the Mainstream Program implementation in the country.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This part presents the research design, validation of an instrument, research instrument, data-gathering procedure, respondent, sampling design, study site, and statistical tool.

#### Research Design

This research utilized a mixed method design. Mixed methods research is a research design that strategically incorporates or links rigorous quantitative and qualitative research methods to draw on the strengths of each (Harvard Catalyst). This approach allowed the researcher to make use of a variety of approaches, combining inductive and deductive thinking, and counterbalancing limitations of exclusively quantitative and qualitative research through a harmonizing approach that maximizes the strengths of each data type. The integration process occurred during data collection, analysis, or in the presentation of results. Mixed methods research was employed to produce a strong description and analysis of the data, make quantitative results more logical, or understand the broader pertinence of small-sample qualitative outcomes. Mixed methods research can help obtain a more complete picture than a standalone quantitative or qualitative study, as it combines the benefits of both methods. However, mixed methods research is labor-intensive and requires interdisciplinary teams of researchers.

To gather quantitative data, a structured questionnaire was utilized to evaluate the implementation of mainstream education in the public schools of Region V. To give additional context and depth to the data collected from the quantitative survey, interviews among the teachers and school heads were conducted. The interviews qualitatively verified the data and gathered first-hand information on the opportunities in the implementation of mainstream education.

#### Validation of Research Instrument

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, the following steps were taken: a copy of the questionnaire was provided to an Education Specialist of the Student Inclusion Division of the DepEd Central Office, a Special Education Supervisor of Davao City, and a Professor VI of Bicol University College of Education; they were furnished with an evaluation tool, validation checklist, and recommendations form; the comments and suggestions or recommendations served as a revision guide; the revised instrument was used for pilot testing among randomly picked secondary school teachers excluded from the study; this process identified points of vagueness not noticed while constructing the instrument; and based on the feedback from the pilot study group, necessary corrections, modifications, and improvements on the final copy of the instrument were applied.



### **Research Instrument**

A structured survey questionnaire was used to determine the status of the implementation of mainstream education in Region V. The research questionnaire consisted of three (2) parts, the status of the implementation, the level of implementation of mainstream education in the public schools in Bicol Region and the opportunities that can be gained from the implementation of mainstream education.

The first part of the questionnaire required data about the status of implementation of mainstream education while Part 2 measured the level of implementation. A 4-point Likert scale was utilized as follows: (4) Highly Implemented; (3) Moderately Implemented; (2) Slightly Implemented; and (1) Not Implemented. The indicators of the questionnaire were based on DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021 or the Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K to 12 Education Program and DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 or the Inclusive Education as Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate of Children Policy. Part 3 gathered information on the opportunities that could be gained from implementing mainstream education.

To add context and depth to the data collected from the quantitative survey, interviews were conducted. Guide questions were utilized during this process.

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

The researcher sought permission from the Regional Director of the Department of Education – Region V for the approval of the conduct of the research. With the letter of endorsement from the head of the office, the researcher also wrote the Schools Division Superintendents for the endorsement of the distribution of the questionnaires to the Education Program Supervisors in charge of Special Education, Principals, and Receiving Teachers of schools with Mainstream Programs that are included in the School Improvement Plan. The Public Schools District Supervisors with mainstream schools under their care were also informed regarding the conduct of the study.

The responses of the 13 Education Supervisors in charge of Special Education as to the number of schools implementing Mainstream Programs were further validated by the researcher through interviews.

After the validation, the researcher distributed the questionnaires intended for the Supervisors in charge of Special Education and Principals and Receiving Teachers of schools with Mainstream Programs that are included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP). To probe considerably and seek answers to the question of what opportunities mainstreaming brings to both regular and mainstreamed learners, teachers, parents, community, and stakeholders, interviews with some Principals and Teachers were conducted.

### **Respondents of the Study**

Table A presents the 108 respondents who participated in the study.

13 Education Supervisors in charge of Special Education from the thirteen regional divisions were involved since they determined the data on the number of mainstream schools and mainstreamed learners from the different schools in their respective divisions. 35 school heads or administrators were considered since there were only 35 schools with mainstream programs included in the SIPs. Only 60 teachers from the 35 mainstream schools were asked to participate in the survey since they already represented the whole receiving teachers on their perceived implementation of mainstream education in the region.

**Table A**  
**Respondents of the Study**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Number</b>
Education Program Supervisors in charge of Special Education	13
School Heads/Administrators	35
Receiving Teachers	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>

### **Sampling Technique**

Total enumeration was applied to the Education Supervisors in charge of Special Education and school principals. Convenience sampling was applied to teacher-respondents who were easily accessible to the researcher and were willing to be a part of the study.

Simkus (2023) defines convenience sampling as a non-probability sampling method where data are collected from an easily accessible and available group of people. The individuals in the sample are selected not because they are most representative of the entire population, but because they are most easily accessible to the researcher.

### **Study Site**

The locale of the study is Region V, Bicol Region, Philippines. The Bicol Region is composed of six (6) Province Divisions and seven (7) City Divisions. The focus of the study included the Education Supervisors in charge of Special Education and the Principals and Receiving Teachers of schools within the region with Mainstream Programs that are included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

The Bicol Region was selected as the locale of the study since the researcher is a school head of the school implementing mainstream education. Upon learning the benefit of mainstream education, further investigation of the mainstream programs included in the School Improvement Plans (SIP), is necessary to further assess the status of mainstream education in the Bicol Region.

The researcher believes that the roles of principals and receiving teachers are paramount in mainstream education. Principals provide the leadership, vision, and strategic direction needed for successful SIP implementation, while receiving teachers translate those strategies into meaningful classroom practices. Together, they form a dynamic partnership that can drive positive change and improvements in the education system within the region.

The commitment and dedication of these educators, along with their ability to collaborate, adapt, and effectively utilize data, are essential for achieving the desired outcomes outlined in the SIPs. As schools continue to focus on improvement efforts, recognizing and supporting the critical roles of principals and receiving teachers is imperative to ensure that all students have access to high-quality education and opportunities for success.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Descriptive statistics was employed in the treatment of data particularly frequency (f), percentage distribution (%) for objective number 1, and Weighted Mean (WM) for objective number 2. The formula of Weighted Mean is presented as  $WM = \frac{\sum fw}{N}$ , where, MW is the weighted mean, f is the frequency (number of responses), W is the weight (numerical rating), and N is the number of respondents.

To guide the researcher in the analysis of data, the numerical value and adjectival description are as follows: 3.51 – 4.00 for Highly Implemented; 2.51 – 3.50 for Moderately Implemented, 1.51 – 2.50 for Slightly Implemented, and 1.00 – 1.50 for Not Implemented. To support the results and provide an in-depth understanding of the status and opportunities (objective number 3), thematic analysis was employed.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study determined the status of the implementation of Mainstream Education in the public high schools in Region V involving the number of schools that implement mainstream programs, the number of enrolled mainstreamed learners, the number of receiving teachers, and the types of disabilities of the mainstreamed learners. It also considered the opportunities that can be gained by both regular and mainstreamed learners, teachers, administrators, community, and stakeholders in the implementation of such a program.

##### 1. Status of Mainstream Education in the Public Schools of Region V

The status of the implementation of Mainstream Education in Region V was determined through the response to the survey questionnaire that involved the number of public schools with mainstream programs included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP), number of mainstreamed learners, types of disabilities, and the number of Receiving Teachers.

##### a. Number of Public Schools in Region V with Mainstream Programs

Table 1a shows that out of the public schools in the region, only 35 have mainstream programs that are designed, organized, and implemented to support the education of learners with disabilities in the regular classroom setup. Out of the thirteen school divisions, only six (6), or 46.15 % have schools that implement mainstreaming programs. This excludes regular schools without enacted mainstream programs included in the SIPs but have learners with disabilities.

As per the report of the Department of Education Regional Office through the Planning, Policy, and Research Division, the number of public schools in the region for the school year 2022 – 2023 registered at 3,852. This was based on the Learner Information System dated January 10, 2023. The enrolment comprised kindergarten, elementary, junior high school, and senior high school.

The number of public schools with implemented mainstream programs for learners with disabilities contrasted with the number of public schools in the region is at a dismal record of 0.91 %. Such a figure provides a serious challenge to the Department of Education in the implementation of its Department Order No. 44, s. 2021 or the Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program, which ensures learners with disabilities are included in mainstream or general education classes.

**Table 1a**  
**Number of Public Schools in Region V with Mainstream Programs**  
**Included in the School Improvement Plan**

Division	Number of Mainstream Schools	Total	Percentage
Province Division 1	3	19	54%
Province Division 2	-		
Province Division 3	-		
Province Division 4	16		
Province Division 5	-		

Province Division 6	-		
City Division 7	1	16	46%
City Division 8	1		
City Division 9	4		
City Division 10	-		
City Division 11	10		
City Division 12	-		
City Division 13	-		
Total Number of Mainstream Schools	<b>35</b>		
Total Number of Public Schools in Region V	<b>3,852</b>		
Percentage of Mainstream Schools Versus Public Schools in Region V	<b>0.91%</b>		

*Legend: PD – Province Division  
 CD – City Division*

The Department's policy establishes the overarching direction for the Special Education (SPED) Program in order to ensure the provision of educational services to learners with disabilities in all primary and secondary schools. Furthermore, the policy demands the DepEd to offer learners with disabilities with equal opportunity to fully engage in the K to 72 Basic Education Program. But, with only 35 schools with mainstream programs included in the SIP's out of 3,852 in the whole region, there is a loud call to investigate why most schools do not fulfill the mandate of the Department on including learners with disabilities in the region. Knowing the difficulties of schools in the implementation of mainstreaming will allow the DepEd to provide scientific-based provision of interventions or solutions to these difficulties in human resources, facilities, and budget. All these define the readiness of schools in mainstreaming learners with disabilities.

The non-readiness of schools in mainstreaming is attributed to the lack of qualified and competent teachers, including administrators who can communicate and interact with learners with disabilities in the language that the latter will understand. Hence, they should be provided with the training necessary to achieve the Department's thrust of inclusion.

Interestingly, there are regular schools in the region that accommodate learners with varied disabilities. Some have assigned coordinators for these learners apart from their receiving teachers. Sadly though, there is the absence of an established program intended for this group of learners that details the curricular and other support activities to provide the appropriate and responsive interventions in a regular class.

Regular schools are in dire need of support from the Department to fully implement mainstreaming. Unless all schools are technically guided and provided with necessary assistance in crafting thoroughly developed Mainstream Programs that should be included in the SIPs, the policy on including learners with disabilities in regular schools will not be fully implemented.

Ambiong (2020) lamented that regular schools often use the excuse that they do not have a SPED Center and that parents should look for a school that has it. He ascertained that some of the schools will open their doors, however, the students are on their own and no support is provided by the school administration.

Another issue at hand is the quality of instruction that the mainstreamed learners acquire in an inclusive classroom. Ambiong expressed that getting a quality education is still an uphill battle for someone who has a disability, and that quality education does not only mean accepting students in schools. He furthered that accommodation, true inclusion, and support must be given to the students for them to thrive.

To increase the number of schools that implement mainstream education in the public schools of Region V, schools should develop a comprehensive Mainstream Program that should be included in the SIPs. The program that will promote true inclusion should detail the curricular and other support activities to provide the appropriate and responsive interventions in a regular class. Hence, the DepEd should provide necessary assistance in crafting thoroughly developed Mainstream Programs that should be included in the SIPs. This can include providing technical guidance, human resources, facilities, and budget.

By implementing these recommendations, the DepEd and schools in Region V can improve the implementation of mainstream education and ensure that learners with disabilities are included in mainstream or general education classes.

#### **b. Number of Mainstreamed Learners in Region V**

Table 1b presents the number of mainstreamed learners in the public schools in Region V with mainstream programs included in the SIPs.

One of the aims of the study was to determine the number of learners with disabilities with diagnoses from licensed medical specialists. The classification of disabilities is categorized in the Learners Information System (LIS) as provided for by DepEd Order No. 023, s. 2022 or the Child Find Policy for Learners with Disabilities Towards Inclusive Education. The disabilities include visual impairment, hearing impairment, learning disability, intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, emotional-behavioral disorder, orthopedic or physical handicap, speech/language disorder, cerebral palsy, special health problem/chronic disease, and multiple disabilities.

The collected data reveal that out of the 1,803,644 learners in the region for the school year 2022 – 2023, as per the report of the Education Management Information System Division, Planning Service Unit of the Department of Education, there were 321 or 0.02% mainstreamed in the regular schools with implemented Mainstream Programs that were included in the SIPs. The six province divisions had 59 or 18.38%, while the city divisions totaled 262 or 81.62%. These figures are consistent with the data regarding the city divisions with a much higher number of regular schools with approved Mainstream Programs included in the SIPs.

The number is indeed alarming as there are children with disabilities who are not in school. Hunt's study (2021) supports this by explaining that UNESCO identified the disability prevalence rate in populations to be between 10 and 16 percent, yet the reported number of children with disabilities in schools is much lower (e.g. 1.79 percent of total school enrolment in Uganda, 1.1 percent in Rwanda and 0.7 percent in Ethiopia). This reveals that numerous children with disabilities are not in school, or if they are, they are unidentified within current school populations.

The gap in enrolment may continue to decline as those previously enrolled cannot sustain the demands given by schools due to contributing factors that need to be addressed.

Asked about the complications in identifying learners with disabilities, Teacher 1 of City Division 8 elaborated by saying:

**Table 1b**  
**Number of Mainstreamed Learners in the Public Schools in Region V with Mainstream Programs Included in the School Improvement Plan**

Division	Number of Mainstreamed Learners	Total	Percentage
Province Division 1	22	59	18%
Province Division 2	-		
Province Division 3	-		
Province Division 4	37		
Province Division 5	-		
Province Division 6	-		
City Division 7	23	262	82%
City Division 8	35		
City Division 9	34		
City Division 10	-		
City Division 11	170		
City Division 12	-		
City Division 13	-		
<b>Total</b>	<b>321</b>		
<b>Total Enrolment in Public Schools in Region V</b>	<b>1,803,644</b>		
<b>Percentage of Mainstreamed Learners Versus Total Enrolment</b>	<b>0.02%</b>		

: PD – Province Division  
 CD – City Division

*I know there are still many students with disability in our school but we cannot identify because parents do not give the result. I have students who cannot read even if we give them remediation. Some are in Grade 8. I guess they have disability.*

Teacher 2 of Division 8 added with:

*In the LIS, we are asked to tag learners with disabilities. It's hard for me to do that because I am not in authority. I should ask the permission of parents first. I don't tag my student who is very naughty in my class. Others say that that student has ADHD, but who am I to know? I am not a doctor.*

Detecting disabilities is a critical function of medical experts. If teachers are asked to do the assessment, results may not be at all credible, hence, there will be misplacements and appropriate interventions will not be provided. Detection must be done before any child is accepted into school. Hunt (2021) supports this contention when he argued that mechanisms associated with Early Identification and Early Intervention (EI/EI) must be supplied with all necessary resources for recognizing and attending to the distinctive assistive technology needs of each individual child.

Questions on whether all learners undergo medical assessment or not remain an unsolved problem. Not all parents can afford to pay costly assessment fees. The government must have a provision for free assessments among all children before any participation in schools takes place.

Critical, too, are the implementation of annual medical assessments and regular monitoring by experts like Psychologists and Physical and Psychotherapists for the learners' well-being. Teachers cannot do these since this need the expertise of medical and other experts. Republic Act 11650 of 2021 or the Inclusive Education Act mentions these experts as part of the Inclusive Resource Centers in the country. Meanwhile, the Department has started establishing these resource centers but must expedite its operation, appropriate budget for, and hire medical experts.

The impact and sustainability of the inclusion program of the Department, with mainstreaming as one of its interventions, will depend primarily on its support to the schools for medical assessments, continued medical monitoring, and evaluation apart from the much-needed facilities and other curricular provisions.

If medical assessments are provided for free, not only the region but the entire country will achieve its thrust to provide education to all regardless of disabilities. Parents will be forced to have their children assessed if medical diagnosis is compulsory for all. Hence, there is a need for national legislation that will address this alarming problem of medical assessment and provide free assessments among all children before any participation in schools takes place.

To further increase the participation of learners with disabilities in mainstream education, schools must provide more detailed information on the specific mainstream programs included in the SIPs and their effectiveness in supporting learners with disabilities. Further research must be conducted to identify the specific contributing factors that prevent children with disabilities from enrolling or sustaining their enrollment in school and develop interventions to address these factors.

### **c. Types of Disabilities among Mainstreamed Learners in Region V**

The classification of disabilities is categorized in the Learners Information System (LIS) as provided for by DepEd Order No. 023, s. 2022 or the Child Find Policy for Learners with Disabilities Towards Inclusive Education. The disabilities include visual impairment, hearing impairment, learning disability, intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, emotional-behavioral disorder, orthopedic or physical handicap, speech/language disorder, cerebral palsy, special health problem/chronic disease, and multiple disabilities.

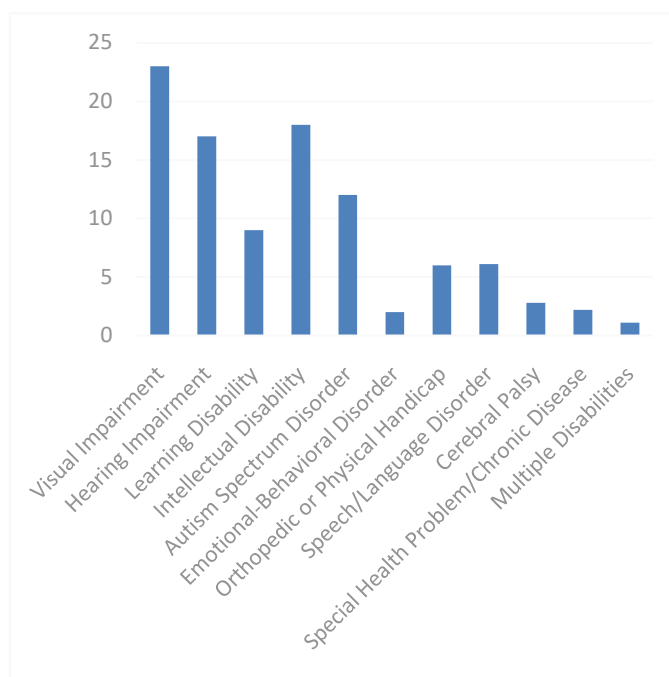
Out of the 11 types of disabilities among the 358 mainstreamed learners in the public schools in Region V, visual impairment registered the highest with 83 or 23.28%, followed by intellectual disability with 65 18.6% and hearing impairment with 62 or 17.32%. The disability that recorded the lowest was multiple disabilities with 4 or 1.1% followed by emotional-behavioral disorder with 8 or 2.2% and special health problem/chronic disease with 8 or 2.2%.

Mainstreaming those with visual impairment is supported by the study of Al-Mori et al. (2021), which concluded that the teachers' attitudes towards the mainstreaming of blind students in ordinary students' classes were positive in all the (cognitive, social, emotional, and academic) dimensions of the study. This result is reinforced by Ravenscroft et al. (2019), whose study demonstrated that elementary school teachers in Turkey commonly hold positive attitudes towards including visually impaired children and that teachers' initial and in-service training about inclusion positively influenced their attitudes. Their findings are a disparity with earlier research, which contends that teachers do not embrace positive outlooks to inclusion and highlights that a major

obstacle to inclusion starts from elementary school teachers feeling unprepared to teach blind children. They concluded that significant training is necessary to qualify teachers to employ several methods that aid the inclusion of visually impaired learners.

Figure 3 presents the graphical presentation of the types of disabilities among the mainstreamed learners in the public schools in Region V with mainstream programs included in the SIP.

Visually challenged students in regular classes require unique educational accommodations. For instructors, school administrators, curriculum developers, and parents, Pandey (2018) highlighted the educational consequences of the stated learners in a typical classroom setting. Pandey emphasizes the first role of parents and teachers, which is to identify areas where learners lack adjustment and work to improve conditions



**Figure 1. Percentage of Disabilities among the Mainstreamed Learners in the Public Schools in Region V with Mainstream Programs Included in the School Improvement Plan**

Pandey emphasizes the first role of parents and teachers, which is to identify areas where learners lack adjustment and work to improve conditions for correct adjustment in all spheres. According to him, the school should provide facilities for visually impaired students to help them acclimate and improve overall. He goes on to say that learners should receive good guidance and counseling services in all three areas of adjustment, that the school environment should be pleasant and congenial, and that there should be adequate availability of co-curricular activities in the school.

Miyauchi (2020) also presented how visually impaired learners can be assisted in regular classes through a holistic support system with external specialist support. She furthered that effective teacher training will allow general education teachers to make varied approaches that advance access for visual-impaired learners; however, teachers should have a holistic support system. Specifically, she emphasized that there should be internal and external backing, with internal aid combining head teachers, teachers, and paraprofessionals. For external support, centers can provide



support from learning and teaching materials to teacher training, consultancy, and direct help for learners.

Opie (2018) emphasized the importance of finding alternative ways to deliver necessary expanded core curriculum components for visually impaired learners due to the limited access to visiting teachers and specialists in vision impairment. She suggested that teachers of these learners could benefit from an online unit that teaches them about vision impairment. This would help them avoid unintentional segregation practices and encourage them to incorporate the mechanisms of the extended fundamental curriculum into their daily teaching methods.

Intellectual disability, having ranked second, is a piece of appealing information that the study found. While intellectual disability, formerly known as mental retardation, causes significant limitations to an individual's intellectual functioning, a significant percentage of learners with such a disability were in the regular classes. These learners must have been assessed to be academically ready, or some were in programs besides the regular curriculum, like vocational interventions in regular schools.

Efforts towards including learners with intellectual disabilities in schools with all the other students can be seen in many countries' education systems, including that of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Bagadood and Sulaimani (2022) stressed that the child's rights have been the primary contention this program's supporters placed forward to shift from the health to the societal model. Their study argues that, although mainstreaming can be considered a progressive drift to successful education, its implementation remains challenging. It is assumed that further investigative research into professionals' outlooks is needed to advance service provision and inform the administration of mainstreaming practices. In the study, teachers indicated a need for additional training and resources. This finding affects preservice teachers' training and regular teachers' professional development. A model of teacher preparation, where all teachers are trained in mainstreaming practices, would help alleviate teachers' concerns regarding their lack of preparedness to work with a wide range of student needs. It is recommended that universities train teachers to provide differentiated instruction for learners at all levels and provide professional development opportunities for practicing teachers to develop the strategies and skills needed to work with a wide range of learners. The recommendation has a significant connection to the study of Tometten in 2021, who examined the social involvement and academic progress of children with and without special educational needs due to emotional and behavioral (EBD) and learning difficulties (LD) and the importance of teachers' knowledge of this SEN. The study revealed the poor performance of these learners with special educational needs. Students with EBD also felt less integrated than their classmates without special needs. Teachers' knowledge of EBD positively affected every student's social participation and academic achievement. The results emphasize the importance of teacher knowledge for student results in classes with students with special needs.

Multiple disabilities ranked at the bottom, having 4 or 1.12%. The figure supports the study of Kis and Sarica (2018) proving that children with multiple disabilities could also be mainstreamed in regular classes. Their study investigated the relationship between mainstreaming laws and practices in Turkey via a case study participated in by an elementary school learner with multiple disabilities, her parents, and her teacher. Results illustrated that the laws and actual practice related inconsistencies with practices missing special education services. In contrast, the inadequate services delivered by the researchers exposed significant gains on behalf of the study's participants, allowing the researchers to conclude that mainstreaming and inclusion, in general, are probable within the Turkish educational system even with inadequate resources and provisions.

Most learners with multiple disabilities do not survive in regular schools because of their extreme health conditions and financial demands. For a learner to survive in school, there must be a multi-disciplinary team consisting of the learner's parents and educational and medical specialists in the areas where the individual has problems. This team works together to plan and coordinate necessary services. With these burdens, it can be theorized that there can be a significant number of children with multiple disabilities whose parents chose to let them stay at home rather than be in school to receive education.

Repeatedly said, the Department's policy on including learners with disabilities, including those with multiple incapacities, provides medical experts who will deliver the much-needed health services to these learners. In addition,

Monitoring the mainstreamed learners' health condition must be a regular activity in schools. It will determine the learners' progress, if any, and most importantly, the needed interventions that the school community will undertake to survive their schooling.

Again, if medical assessments are provided for free, the region and the entire country will achieve its thrust to provide education to all, regardless of disabilities. Parents will be forced to have their children assessed if medical diagnosis is compulsory for all. Hence, there is a need for national legislation that will address this alarming problem of medical assessment.

To support the learners with disabilities mainstreamed in regular schools, it is proposed that there must be more detailed information on the specific interventions needed to address the identified gaps in the inclusion program of the Department. This can be done by developing national legislation that will address the alarming problem on medical assessment and provide free assessments among all children before any participation in schools takes place. Similar studies in other regions or countries be conducted to determine the attitudes of teachers towards mainstreaming learners with disabilities and identify gaps in the inclusion program and identify the specific contributing factors that prevent children with disabilities from enrolling or sustaining their enrollment in school and develop interventions to address these factors. The DepEd must continuously provide teacher training and professional development opportunities for practicing teachers to develop the strategies and skills needed to work with a wide range of learners with disabilities.

#### **d. Number of Receiving Teachers**

Table 1d presents the number of Receiving Teachers versus the number of mainstreamed learners in the public schools in Region V with mainstream programs included in the School Improvement Plan.

The Receiving Teachers in city divisions comprise 54.05% of the total population of teachers handling learners with disabilities in the whole region while those from the province divisions registered 45.95%. Interestingly, the number of Receiving Teachers against mainstreamed learners is higher than that of the city divisions with a remarkably higher percentage of mainstreamed learners. This may provide an ideal figure in the teaching-learning process; however, Receiving Teachers handle other learners with disabilities in a regular class. The number of both mainstreamed and those without disabilities is dependent on the enrolment of a particular school and the number of teachers. Significantly, the number of Receiving Teachers in city and province divisions and the number of students with disabilities receiving services vary by location and enrollment. The most common category of disability among students receiving special education and/or related services is specific learning disabilities.

**Table 1d**  
**Number of Receiving Teachers Versus the Number of Mainstreamed Learners in the Public Schools in Region V with Mainstream Programs Included in the School Improvement Plan**

Division	Number of Receiving Teachers	Total	Percentage	Number of Mainstreamed Learners	Total	Percentage
Province Division 1	60	136	45.95%	22	59	18.38%
Province Division 2	0			0		
Province Division 3	0			0		
Province Division 4	76			37		
Province Division 5	0			0		
Province Division 6	0			0		
City Division 7	10	160	54.05%	23	262	81.00%
City Division 8	48			35		
City Division 9	12			34		
City Division 10	0			0		
City Division 11	90			170		
City Division 12	0			0		
City Division 13	0			0		
<b>Total</b>	<b>296</b>		<b>100%</b>		<b>321</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Legend: PD – Province Division  
 CD – City Division*

The Department has been providing training on inclusive education including handling learners with disabilities, sign language, and creating instructional materials. However, it seems that not all teachers, particularly the Receiving Teachers have not been provided with such training that is supposed to improve instruction among those mainstreamed. With the presence of a deaf in a regular classroom, for instance, a Receiving Teacher will not be able to engage in a conversation with his/her learner with such a disability sans his/her skill in sign language. Learning will never take place in a learner who is not able to talk because his/her teacher does not speak his/her language. And the same problem will be true between and among the deaf and the hearing learners. This alarming dilemma of Receiving Teachers must be given the utmost and speedy attention. If not, mainstreamed learners might just be wasting time, effort, and financial resources only because they need to be in school, but their needs are not addressed.

Presumably, there is a need to assist teachers in using modality and language systems to probe their classroom teaching. In the United States, according to Silvestre and Hartman (2022), while the majority of deaf and hard-of-hearing students are currently mainstreamed in regular public school classrooms, there are ongoing concerns about accessibility, social-emotional well-being, and monitoring outcomes of students in the mainstream. With Universal Design for Learning, teachers can design available spaces using auditory, visual, and multi-sensory methods. With culturally receptive education, schools can monitor all learners to observe the contributions of the deaf and hard of hearing and develop an awareness of their communication requirements.

Alasim (2018) investigated significant issues that concern the participation and interaction of deaf learners in the regular classroom setup. The data collected indicated that assistance of participation

and interaction of deaf learners in the general education classroom necessitates the knowledge and skills of the teachers, staff, and interpreters. Additionally, the study revealed that the teachers' awareness and attitudes toward deafness and inclusion are critical to improving the participation and interaction of deaf learners. For concerns connected to students, the study obtained that the spoken language problems for deaf learners are imposing obstacles that constrain the involvement and collaboration of those learners. Also, the deaf learners are always occupied in the classroom because they are working on their tasks and seeing the teacher and interpreter simultaneously. Thus, these learners often receive the information and the questions late. Alasim's study suggested that schools should improve their collaboration to progress effective strategies that make the context of the general education classroom suitable for deaf learners. Alasim concluded that most barriers that deaf learners meet in regular classes can be addressed when the entire school works together and delivers all potential help to those learners. This is supported by Alshutwi et al. (2020) whose findings demonstrated that inclusion setting improves academic performance, social interaction, and self-esteem of deaf and hard-of-hearing students. They recommended that these learners should gain access to a 'good inclusion setting'. Therefore, policymakers and educators must advocate the need for advancing special approaches for such children.

To provide support to teachers, the Department of Education (DepEd) must provide additional training and support in the following areas: mainstream education, handling learners with disabilities and sign language proficiency; and implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that helps give all students an equal opportunity to succeed. It provides the opportunity for all students to access, participate in, and progress in the general education curriculum by incorporating flexible materials, techniques, and strategies. Teachers can design accessible spaces using auditory, visual, and multi-sensory methods to cater to the diverse needs of learners. To foster a culturally receptive education environment, schools can monitor all learners to observe the contributions of the deaf and hard of hearing and develop an awareness of their communication requirements. Collaboration among teachers, staff, and interpreters can be enhanced to improve the participation and interaction of deaf and hard-of-hearing learners in the general education classroom. Research has shown that inclusion settings can improve academic performance, social interaction, and self-esteem for children with disabilities. Therefore, the DepEd should advocate for the need to advance special approaches for children with disabilities.

## **2. Level of Implementation of Mainstream Education**

The level of implementation of mainstreamed education in Region V as perceived by the school heads and receiving teachers was determined using the indicators of Child Find, Assessment, Program Options, Curriculum Modification, and Parental Involvement.

### **a. Level of Implementation on Child Find**

The data reveal that the level of implementation of mainstream education along Child Find as perceived by secondary school heads and receiving teachers in the region is moderately implemented.

The indicator "*Schools convince parents to enroll their children in schools nearest their homes*" is the only one that received a highly implemented description with a 3.63 weighted mean. This is not surprising to note since generally, parents send their children to schools nearest to their residences practically for economic reasons. However, this is not commonly true among learners with disabilities.

A teacher of City Division 10 sadly expressed her disappointment regarding schools that do not accept learners with disabilities.

*Nakakalungkot lang na may mga schools na hindi tinatanggap ang mga LSEns keso wala raw silang mga SPED teachers. Wala naman kaming SPED teacher sa school pero may mga LSEns kami.*

Teacher 2 of the same division shared similar regret.

*May mga estudyante kami na harayo pa an pighahalean. Makaherak man ta grabe an gastos sa pamasaha uruawdaw. An iba pating parents binabantayan an mga aki sa school.*

The readiness of schools to mainstream learners with disabilities in regular classes primarily depends on the ability of the receiving teachers to handle the learners' distinctive behaviors caused by their disabilities. Equally significant is the teachers' power to communicate with the learners in a language that the latter understand.

While the DepEd has been training some regular teachers and school administrators on inclusive education, it still must include all teachers and school staff in the whole country so they will all be ready and equipped to accept any learner with a disability.

The indicator "The school conducts advocacy campaigns in the community" had a moderately implemented description. This suggests that mainstream schools have not maximized the participation of the community in finding children with disabilities. This validates the indicators slightly implemented description "Administrators and teachers interact with community officials, Day Care teachers, and community health workers for child find and partnership for support."

To address these concerns, it is suggested that schools conduct improved advocacy campaigns that highlight mainstreaming, its implementation, and how the community and other stakeholders can encourage parents of those with disabilities to enrol their children in regular schools. The DepEd can even consider including advocacy campaigns like Child Find Day in its activities.

The indicators "The school conducts a child mapping survey," "Children with special needs who are not in school are visited by SPED teachers" and "The school keeps a list of children with special needs who are not in school," which were all considered not implemented indicators provide an alarming signal to mainstream schools in the region.

Another teacher of City Division 10 conveyed her melancholy with this statement:

*Nagconduct man po kami ki survey sa community pero dai man sinabi na isasabay an may mga kaninan. Dapat po palan isasabay. Sa masunod po gigibuhun mi iyan.*

Clearly, the receiving teachers did not conduct a child mapping survey among those school-age children with disabilities presumably they were not informed or oriented regarding such child find initiative. However, their manifestation to find children with disabilities in the communities the next time provides opportunities for those with disabilities to go to school, be educated, and improve themselves eventually.

The indicator "Children with special needs who are not in school are visited by SPED teachers" was never complied with at all by those schools with mainstreamed learners simply because they

did not have any SPED teachers at all. Yet again, the DepEd's guidelines ensuring that mainstream schools should have SPED teachers who will provide support to receiving teachers and mainstreamed learners must be realized. Otherwise, the inclusion initiative for learners with disabilities will remain to be a burden among their teachers, administrators, and the whole school.

In 2022, PAVE (Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment) communicated that schools have a legal duty to assess children impacted by disabilities and that families, teachers, or anyone can refer a child suspected of disability for an assessment. The local school district offers a thorough assessment, without fee, if there is a suspected disability and reason to suppose that proper early learning or school success requires intervention. It added that the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) requires schools to seek out, evaluate, and potentially serve infants, toddlers, or school-aged students. The law says that the evaluation be conducted for those aged 0-21 regardless of whether they attend private or public school, are housed permanently or are homeless, and adopted or not. The Child Find law protects children in private and home-based schools; hence, parents can request an evaluation of whether their children attend schools. If the child is qualified, the local district is accountable for rendering services unless the family does not want them. In certain instances, families can have their children attend private or home-based schools but get special education services through public schools. The Child Find law protects children in private and home-based schools, but private schools are responsible for providing equitable services and complying with the law.

To fully target its mandate of finding children with disabilities and enroll them in regular schools, the DepEd must conduct a nationwide study on the implementation of mainstream education in the Philippines to provide a more comprehensive evaluation, include information on the specific types of disabilities of the mainstreamed learners to better understand their needs and challenges, provide more detailed recommendations for addressing the challenges faced by receiving teachers in handling learners with disabilities, such as specific training programs and support systems and develop and implement a national child find policy that involves the community and provides free medical assessments for all children to ensure that children with disabilities are identified and enrolled in regular schools.

#### **b. Level of Implementation on Assessment**

The data disclose that assessment in mainstream schools is moderately implemented. While the indicator "*The school conducts formative and summative assessments among the mainstreamed learners that establish their learning and development goals*" received the highest weighted mean of 3.96 which is highly implemented, the indicator "*The school conducts medical assessments to continually monitor the progress of the mainstreamed learners in all domains of development, namely, the cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, motor, and moral-spiritual domains*" was at its lowest rating of 1.24, or an equivalent of a not implemented description.

Unsurprisingly, mainstream schools and receiving teachers conduct formative and summative assessments, considering both are non-negotiable key result areas. In short, they must comply with DepEd's directives on giving assessments to all types of learners. The considerable concern here is the extent of support DepEd provides to receiving teachers on the quality of assessment strategies and resources that respond to the distinct needs of those learners with disabilities, through its officials, including the school administrators. To remove the worry, Lazarus et al. (2022) stressed that re-assessment to plan instruction could help guide the instructional planning procedure and enhance the learning experience for those with disabilities and other learners. Provisional assessments can back up instructional decision-making but can also negatively impact individual learners and groups of students if not chosen and exercised with care. Also, special education

leaders, according to them, need to be familiar with choosing and executing local evaluations to help guarantee that the subsequent data are effective and valid for the anticipated objectives. Maher et al. (2022), who shared similar fear, concluded that there is a need to interrupt even pull to pieces, modes of thinking that cast learners with special educational needs as being of poorer capability vis-à-vis their age peers and thus being deprived by standardized assessment practices. They relayed that the change may be hard. However, teachers must recognize the individual needs and capacities of learners with disabilities through more holistic methods focusing on societal, emotional, and intellectual, including physical learning and progress. While achieving this cultural change will be difficult, teachers need to recognize the needs and capabilities of learners with disabilities through more holistic approaches that focus on social, affective, cognitive, and physical learning and development.

Graham et al. (2018) reasoned out that while their examination of a typical assessment task sheet emphasized some worries about assessment design, it was not proposed to challenge the significant intellectual effort that teachers make in designing reliable and effective assessments. They agreed that locally constructed assessment tasks allow teachers to respond to the multiplicity of learners in their classroom and think about how assessment design connects to the ongoing development of the learners. They confirmed, too, that teachers draw together data from curriculum documents, school urgencies, pedagogical agendas, and awareness of student's cultural and social communities, as well as detailed learning capabilities and incapacities as they plan assessment tasks. Villamero and Kamenopoulou (2018), on the other hand, conducted an examination that gathered the opinions of mainstream classroom teachers concerning the approaches they employ in assessing learners with disabilities. Their study found limited methodical research on assessment approaches employed among learners with disabilities in the Philippines. Findings discovered that teachers used various strategies, "such as tests, observations, portfolios, and groupings." Moreover, in providing these approaches, teachers made additional modifications depending on learners' needs. The authors emphasized that when distinguishing assessment, teachers should consider several development factors and underscore some attributes in the Philippine context.

A highly implemented rating of 3.77 was given to the indicator "*Schools regularly give parents the progress report of learners with disabilities using the Progress Report Forms for LWDs in addition to the prescribed K to 12 Forms (Individual Learner's Profile, Progress Report Card, and Behavior Intervention Report).*" Such high evaluation can be attributed to the attendance of parents during quarterly parent and teacher conferences and other meetings called for by the school or the receiving teachers regarding learners' concerns. Such good practice must be sustained, or schools can work for a one hundred percent (100 %) attendance of parents in gatherings that involve their children for a progress report and other important concerns regarding the education of their children and how they and their school can work together to improve the performance and behavior of their children.

The indicator "*The school conducts medical assessments to continually monitor the progress of the mainstreamed learners in all domains of development, namely, the cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, motor, and moral-spiritual domains*" has become an extremely critical matter that needs to be addressed immediately.

A School Principal of Province Division 1 convincingly shared her sadness over the absence of medical experts by saying:

*How can we assess all our students? I am not a doctor! My teachers are complaining because... ahhh... they do not know how. If they ask me what to do I cannot answer. I just tell them bahala na kayo. Sana matabangan talaga kami na matabanagan man kan mga specialists.*

A teacher 1 of the same Province Division shared the similar struggles when she said:

*Minaabot an punto na nawawara man an pasensya ko ta kun minsan dai ko aram kun ano an gigibuhun ko lalo pag may estudyante na minawala sanang bigla. Pero salamat sa Dyos ta nakakalma man. Agree ako kay Madam na dapat may mga speciliasts talaga na magtabang samo.*

According to DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021, assessment is a crucial process for learners with disabilities. It helps them establish clear goals for their learning and development areas and continually monitor their progress in all domains of development.

Cruz (2021) understands these difficulties when he states that critical in mainstreaming is the implementation of annual medical assessments and regular monitoring by experts like Psychologists and Physical and Psychotherapists for the learners' well-being. To address the problem, he suggested that schools implement his framework, Rx Education for the Mainstreamed in Time of Pandemic. The framework involves 1. Medical Assessment (MedAss), 2. Class home Readiness (HomeReady) 3. Creative Instruction (Creation), and 4. Progress Monitoring (ProgMon). Conduct of annual medical assessments and regular monitoring by experts like Psychologists and Physical and Psychotherapists for the learners' well-being should be in place.

Another critical issue in the implementation of assessment among mainstreamed learners is compliance with the policy on the Individual Educational Plan.

The indicators “*The school sees that all persons involved in the IEP ensure that it is carefully planned, constantly monitored, and reviewed periodically to ensure the learner's progress toward the realization of the agreed goals/performance*” and “*The school sees to it that all persons involved in the IEP ensure that it is carefully planned, constantly monitored, and reviewed periodically to ensure the learner's progress toward the realization of the agreed goals/performance*” both received a slightly implemented rating. It can be argued that most schools are not compliant with DepEd's policy on the implementation of Individual Educational Plans which should be carefully planned, constantly monitored, and reviewed periodically. One factor that hinders the receiving teachers from complying with the IEP policy is that they were not provided training on how to make such a plan and monitoring of the implementation was an additional issue to consider. Another reason is the non-participation of parents in the IEP processes and developments for reasons like non-availability due to work-related concerns. These issues are supported by Ilik et al (2019) when they found that most of the parents do not know anything about IEP. It was also determined that parents are not involved in the IEP process and they are not invited by the schools. Teachers, accordingly, have some problems about getting the parents to involve in the IEP process. It was seen that teachers lack knowledge regarding how to include parents in the IEP process.

To assist school officials, including parents, Stefanovic et al. (2018) opined that the role of good and developed collaboration with parents is well known for a long time in the theory of educational sciences, particularly in special education and rehabilitation science. Education of students with disabilities and gifted students demand additional engagement, knowledge and efforts from their teachers, in order to adjust educational curricula, classroom conditions, methods, and



techniques to the abilities and needs of this group of students, and to each of them solely and individually.

To address the lack of medical assessments, the DepEd and schools should consider implementing the framework proposed by Cruz (2021), which involves 1. Medical Assessment (MedAss), 2. Class home Readiness (HomeReady), 3. Creative Instruction (Creation), and 4. Progress Monitoring (ProgMon). This framework emphasizes the importance of annual medical assessments and regular monitoring by experts like Psychologists and Physical and Psychotherapists for the well-being of learners.

To improve the implementation of Individual Educational Plans, schools should provide training for receiving teachers on how to create and monitor these plans. Additionally, efforts should be made to involve parents in the IEP process, as their participation is crucial for the success of learners with disabilities.

### **c. Level of Implementation on Program Options**

The data disclose that the level of implementation of mainstream education along Program Options as perceived by secondary school heads and receiving teachers is moderately implemented.

The high rating of 3.70 mean or highly implemented description for the indicator "The school ensures that DepEd Order No. 40, s.2012, as amended, and D.O. 55, s. 2013 or the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 is observed in all programs involving learners with disabilities (LWDs), giving consideration that LWDs may be more vulnerable to bullying, child abuse, and other forms of violence against children" suggests that mainstream schools have a strong commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment for learners with disabilities (LWDs). This commitment is reflected in their high level of implementation in ensuring the observance of the IRR of the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 in all programs involving LWDs. The implementation of anti-bullying policies and programs in schools has been shown to be effective in reducing bullying experiences among students and improving their mental health. School-based anti-bullying interventions aim to prevent bullying experiences among students inside and outside of school by providing group education sessions for students, training and consultation to school staff, or both. These interventions may focus on enhancing interpersonal and emotional skills, such as communication, problem-solving, empathy, and emotional awareness and regulation. Efforts to address bullying behavior are not over when the bully is caught and disciplined. Students, who have been bullied, as well as the bullies themselves, may need resources and support to address the underlying issues that contribute to bullying. Therefore, it is essential for schools to have a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying, which includes not only the implementation of anti-bullying policies and programs but also the provision of resources and support for students and families. To sustain or further improve the provision of scholastic and learning opportunities that are suitable for learners, schools can conduct regular assessments to identify the interests, strengths, and needs of learners and use this information to design and implement developmentally appropriate educational opportunities, provide professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their understanding of developmentally appropriate practices and how to tailor educational opportunities to meet the needs of individual learners and collaborate with parents and the community to offer a wide range of educational opportunities that reflect the diversity of learners' interests, strengths, and needs.

The indicator "*The school offers various educational opportunities that are developmentally appropriate for learners and are based on their interests, strengths, and*

*needs*” obtained a moderately implemented rating with a high 3,48 mean. These are positive affirmations that schools recognize the importance of offering various educational opportunities that are developmentally appropriate for learners and are based on their interests, strengths, and needs and are making efforts to provide developmentally appropriate educational opportunities for learners. This is supported by Llego (2021) when he explained that appropriate Special Education programs and services are provided for learners with disabilities. He referred "to academic interventions, curriculum adaptations, learning resource support, career and guidance counseling programs, and transition programs focusing on technical-vocational competencies and special interest skills development." He furthered that schools' referral system to medical and allied medical-service providers is essential to special education services to address the learners' health and medical conditions. This will only be done through a strong partnership with communities and parents, local governments, and other organizations.

In addition, Llego expounded by ensuring that learners have access to the K to 12 basic education program, curriculum contextualization, adaptations, and modifications are made depending on the learner's abilities and needs. This, according to him, is possible when time allotment for learning areas and subjects in junior and senior high school are adjusted or extended.

The indicator "*The school has a teacher with SPED item assigned to provide educational support services to learners and teachers in mainstream classes*" had the lowest weighted mean of 1.16 or a not implemented description. This highlights the importance of having a teacher with SPED item assigned to provide educational support services to learners and teachers in mainstream classes. Special education teachers play a crucial role in promoting an inclusive classroom and ensuring that the needs of students with disabilities are considered. They can help craft lessons for inclusive classrooms, make modifications to lesson plans, provide individual instruction and assistance, and conduct regular assessments to determine whether students are achieving academic goals. To address the weakness in the indicator, schools can take the following steps: advocate for the allocation of resources to hire and train teachers with SPED item to provide educational support services in mainstream classes; collaborate with local government agencies and non-governmental organizations to access funding and support for the hiring and training of teachers with SPED item; develop partnerships with universities and colleges to offer training programs for teachers interested in obtaining a SPED item; and provide incentives for teachers to pursue this additional qualification

It is also important for general education teachers to receive more training focused on inclusion and special education to make them ready for working, dealing with, and handling learners with disabilities. Partnership between regular and special education teachers is crucial for creating an inclusive environment in which all students can thrive. Teachers can also help like making tasks simpler and easier to do.

In summary, having a teacher with SPED item assigned to provide educational support services to learners and teachers in mainstream classes is crucial for promoting an inclusive environment for students with disabilities. Schools can take steps to address the weakness in this indicator by advocating for resources, collaborating with local agencies, developing partnerships with universities, and providing incentives for teachers to pursue a SPED item. General education teachers can also receive more training focused on inclusion and special education and provide scaffolded support to students with special needs.

To improve implementation of program options, mainstream schools should conduct regular assessments to identify the interests, strengths, and needs of learners and use this information to

design and implement developmentally appropriate educational opportunities, provide professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their understanding of developmentally appropriate practices and how to tailor educational opportunities to meet the needs of individual learners, collaborate with parents and the community to offer a wide range of educational opportunities that reflect the diversity of learners' interests, strengths, and needs, advocate for the allocation of resources to hire and train teachers with SPED item to provide educational support services in mainstream classes, develop a clear plan for how to implement the weak program options, with specific actions and timelines for improvement and regularly assess progress towards the implementation of mainstream education on Program Options and adjust strategies as needed to ensure continuous improvement.

#### **d. Level of Implementation Along Curricular Modifications**

Among the six areas that determined the level of implementation of mainstream education in the public schools in Region V with mainstream programs included in their SIP, it is the Curricular Modifications that received the only highly implemented rating with a weighted mean of 3.52. This affirms that schools are making efforts to provide developmentally appropriate educational opportunities for learners. None of the indicators received a slightly implemented or not implemented rating, suggesting that there is a level of implementation across all areas.

Four indicators including “*Teachers employ curricular adaptations and accommodations to promote the best possible learning based on the individual’s needs and abilities,*” “*Teachers involve changes in any of the steps in the teaching-learning process,*” “*Teachers involve changes in any of the steps in the teaching-learning process*” and “*Teachers employ service delivery options like collaborative or team teaching in course adjustments*” all received a highly implemented rating.

The high implementation rating of the indicators related to teachers' curricular adaptations and accommodations, involvement in the teaching-learning process, and service delivery options like collaborative or team teaching in course adjustments is a positive sign. It shows that teachers in public schools in Region V are making efforts to provide a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all learners, including those with disabilities.

By employing curricular adaptations and accommodations, teachers can ensure that the learning materials and activities are tailored to meet the individual needs and abilities of the learners. This can include providing additional support, modifying assignments, or using alternative teaching methods to help students with disabilities access the curriculum and participate in the learning process effectively.

Involving changes in the teaching-learning process allows teachers to create a more flexible and responsive classroom environment. This can include using different instructional strategies, providing additional resources, or adjusting the pace of the lessons to accommodate the diverse learning needs of the students.

Yeves (2022) defined curriculum modification as the changes educators make to curriculums to make them accessible to children with special needs. Curriculum alteration is classified as a form of educational strategy by educators. She went on to say that it is a collection of materials meant to give special needs children easier access to knowledge. Accordingly, teachers must be aware of the learner’s qualities when developing methodology, content, and assessment. According to her, the idea is to make the curriculum more accessible to kids who face learning challenges. Furthermore, Sasizo (2021) defined curriculum modification as a change to a classroom activity or materials that

allows or increases a student's participation in intended performances, interfaces, and habits. As a result, enhanced access to the curriculum will result in a higher degree of involvement, providing the student with a greater opportunity to learn. As a result, enhanced access to the curriculum will result in a higher degree of involvement, providing the student with a greater opportunity to learn. Study.com also shared that modifications are designed for students who are either far behind their peers or have significant learning difficulties and provide changes to materials or methods that reduce the learning goals for the students who receive them. Moreover, the Internal Bureau of Education Curriculum supported contextualization when it explained that inclusive education considers and caters to all learners' diverse needs, previous experiences, interests, and personal characteristics. It added that it should ensure that all students are part of the shared learning experiences of the classroom and that equal opportunities are provided regardless of learner differences.

Employing service delivery options like collaborative or team teaching in course adjustments can be beneficial for both students with disabilities and their peers. By working together, teachers can share their expertise and resources, provide additional support, and create a more inclusive and engaging learning experience for all students. The high implementation rating of these indicators suggests that teachers in public schools in Region V are aware of the importance of providing curricular adaptations and accommodations, involving changes in the teaching-learning process, and employing service delivery options to support the learning needs of students with disabilities. This commitment to inclusive education is a positive step towards creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all learners.

Significantly, the indicators *“The school provides services through professionals and specialists, parents and peers, or buddies to children with special needs”* and *“The school has institutionalized the use of Filipino Sign Language (FSL) and the variety of Filipino sign language with deaf learners in basic education.”* This suggests that schools in Region V with mainstream programs included in their SIP are making efforts to provide services and support for children with special needs, as well as to promote the use of Filipino Sign Language for deaf learners.

Inclusive education programs, such as mainstream programs, play a crucial role in accommodating the needs of learners with disabilities. The use of FSL in delivering academic support services has been proven to be effective in providing equal access and opportunities for deaf students. However, despite these efforts, the accessibility of FSL in the Philippines is still limited, and only a small percentage of the Filipino population knows how to use it. This poses a challenge for deaf individuals in communicating with their immediate families and within society. To address this, there is a need for more widespread adoption and promotion of FSL, as well as increased support for training programs for parents and educators.

Notably, not one indicator got a slightly implemented or not implemented rating. The absence of a slightly implemented or not implemented rating for any of the indicators is a positive sign that schools in Region V with mainstream programs included in their SIP are making efforts to provide developmentally appropriate educational opportunities for learners, including those with disabilities. It also suggests that schools are committed to providing a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all learners and that the implementation of mainstream education is being evaluated and monitored.

To improve the implementation of mainstream education on Curricular Modifications, national legislation for free medical assessments be enacted. Implementing national legislation that requires free medical assessments for all children before their participation in schools would ensure that

parents have their children assessed, leading to better identification of learners with disabilities and appropriate interventions. In addition, there should be increased support for Inclusive Resource Centers. The government should provide appropriate budgets and resources for Inclusive Resource Centers, including the hiring of medical experts, to support the inclusion program and provide necessary medical assessments, monitoring, and evaluation for learners with disabilities.

#### **e. Level of Implementation Along Parental Involvement**

Table 2e examines the level of implementation of mainstream education in Region V along Parental Involvement as perceived by secondary school heads and receiving teachers at public schools with mainstream programs included in the SIP.

The gathered data show that the level of implementation of mainstream education in Region V along Parental Involvement as perceived by secondary school heads and receiving teachers of public schools in Region V with mainstream programs included in the SIPs is moderately implemented although, among the six (6) indicators, five (5) were considered slightly implemented.

The indicator “*Parents examine children’s performance in school*” was the only one that received a highly implemented rating. This is reflective of the presence of the parents during the distribution of report cards and parent-teacher conferences. However, the data disclose that there is a need for schools to allow and encourage parents to involve themselves in developing and implementing an effective program for their children, to act as teacher aides whenever they are available, to be part of making the Individualized Educational Plan and to assist co-parents of mainstreamed children.

The five indicators “*Parents are part of developing an effective program for children with special needs that is included in the School Improvement Plan,*” “*Parents are part of implementing an effective program for children with special needs included in the School Improvement Plan,*” “*Parents offer to assist in the classroom as teacher aides,*” and “*Parents offer to assist other parents*” all received a slightly implemented rating. These data suggest that parental involvement in the education of children with mainstreamed learners is not being fully realized in the public schools of Region V. The indicators that received a slightly implemented rating indicate that parents are not being fully utilized as partners in the education of their children with special needs. This is a significant concern as research has shown that parental involvement leads to positive outcomes for children with special needs, including greater motivation, learning achievement, and generalization of skills.

The involvement of parents in the development and implementation of effective programs for children with special needs is crucial for creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. When parents are actively engaged in the process, they can provide valuable insights and feedback that can help ensure that the programs are tailored to meet the needs of their child and other students with special needs.

Similarly, when parents offer to assist in the classroom as teacher aides or to assist other parents, it can help create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment. This can include providing additional support to students with special needs, helping to create a more welcoming and inclusive classroom environment, and providing support and resources to other parents who may be struggling to navigate the challenges of raising a child with special needs.

To improve the implementation of these indicators, schools can develop strategies to increase parent participation in the development and implementation of effective programs for children with

special needs. This can include regular communication with parents, providing them with resources and information, and creating opportunities for them to share their input and feedback.

Provision of training and support for parents who are interested in helping in the classroom or to other parents should also be a priority. This can help parents feel more confident in their ability to support their child and other students with special needs.

Collaboration with local community organizations and resources to provide additional support and services for parents and students with special needs is a promising undertaking. This can include connecting parents with support groups, workshops, and other resources that can help them navigate the challenges of raising a child with special needs.

By improving parent involvement in the development and implementation of effective programs for children with special needs, as well as offering assistance in the classroom and to other parents, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students.

In addition, schools can prioritize the involvement of parents in the education of their children with special needs. This can be achieved by providing opportunities for parents to participate in the development and implementation of effective programs for their children, offering training and support for parents who wish to assist in the classroom as teacher aides, and creating a supportive network of parents who can assist each other in navigating the challenges of raising a child with special needs.

Overall, parental involvement in education is crucial for student success and has numerous benefits for both students and educators. Parents should be encouraged to get involved in their children's education in any way they can, and schools should provide opportunities for parents to do so.

Basister et al. (2021) clarified that collaboration between stakeholders, including parents would be vital in achieving a more inclusive environment, given the existing definitions, policies, and programs for the country's inclusive education. Specifically, they furthered that the journey of learners with special educational needs toward full inclusion will depend on the available professional services, easy access to these services, and the mechanisms to address conflicts that may arise in accessing these services. Similarly, Arias (2020) cited that the new typical education in the Philippines will only be proper with the collaborative efforts of teachers, parents, and learners. Students being isolated from the school need family members to simplify learning. Parents are expected to "monitor, motivate, and guide their children."

It is therefore imperative that schools conduct surveys or focus group discussions with parents to gather their feedback on how they would like to be involved in their children's education and what barriers they face to involvement, provide training to teachers and school staff on how to effectively engage parents in their children's education, develop a clear plan for how to implement the indicators that were rated as slightly implemented, with specific actions and timelines for improvement, regularly assess progress towards the implementation of mainstream education along parental involvement, and adjust strategies as needed to ensure continuous improvement.

#### **f. Level of Implementation of Mainstream Education Along All Indicators**

The data disclose that the level of implementation of mainstream education in Region V is **moderately implemented** as perceived by the school heads and receiving teachers at public schools with mainstream programs included in the SIPs. Among the five indicators, Curriculum Modification was the only area evaluated to be highly implemented. Program Options and Parental

Involvement ranked second both with a moderately implemented description. Assessment and Child Find were at the critical lowest ranks in a not implemented category.

Curriculum modification's highly implemented evaluation was a confirmation of the indicators *"Receiving teachers employ curricular adaptations and accommodations to promote the best possible learning based on the individual's needs and abilities," "Receiving Teachers involve new ways of thinking and developing teaching-learning practices," "Receiving teachers involve changes in any of the steps in the teaching-learning process,"* and *"Receiving teachers employ service delivery options like collaborative or team teaching in course adjustments."* All these are attestations of receiving teachers' ability to contextualize lessons and learning resources to address the special needs of the mainstreamed learners despite the absence or lack of such.

Sasizo (2021) clarified that curriculum modification is an adjustment to the classroom activity or materials to make possible or increase a student's participation in planned performances, interfaces, and habits. Accordingly, improved access to the curriculum will result in a higher level of involvement, which offers the student a bigger opportunity to learn. Yeves (2022) also highlighted that it comprises curriculum adaptations made by educators to make them accessible to children with special needs. Curriculum alteration is classified as a form of educational strategy by educators. She went on to say that it is a collection of materials meant to give special needs children easier access to knowledge. Accordingly, teachers must be aware of the learner's qualities when developing methodology, content, and assessment. The goal, according to her, is to make the content more accessible to students who have some learning barriers. In addition, Study.com also shared that modifications are designed for students who are either far behind their peers or have significant learning difficulties and provide changes to materials or methods that reduce the learning goals for the students who receive them. Moreover, the Internal Bureau of Education Curriculum supported contextualization when it explained that inclusive education considers and caters to all learners' diverse needs, previous experiences, interests, and personal characteristics. It added that it should ensure that all students are part of the shared learning experiences of the classroom and that equal opportunities are provided regardless of learner differences.

For the DepEd to achieve its goal of inclusion, particularly mainstreaming, it must continually provide needed, appropriate, and timely support to receiving teachers and mainstream schools.

The indicators *"The school provides services through professionals and specialists, parents and peers, or buddies to children with special needs,"* and *"The school has institutionalized the use of Filipino Sign Language (FSL) and the variety of Filipino sign language with deaf learners in basic education"* yet remain to be a challenge for mainstream schools. This is because schools do not have professionals and specialists as part of their workforce and training school staff in Filipino Sign Language requires additional expenditure. Schools' yearly budget is at no time sufficient to fully finance its operations and implementation of its programs that should contribute to the improved academic performance of learners including the mainstreamed.

The slightly implemented description that the indicator Assessment received was a verification that mainstream schools have highly critical problems in conducting regular medical assessments to monitor the progress of the mainstreamed learners in their domains of development like the cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, and motor domains. Teachers cannot conduct medical evaluations as they are not the authorities or experts to do such evaluations. Therefore, the DepEd must provide specialists to do regular monitoring and assessment. This recommendation is supported by Cruz (2021) when he defended that schools must conduct annual medical assessments

and regular monitoring by experts like Psychologists and Physical and Psychotherapists for the learners' well-being to be in place.

The indicator Child Find, being at the bottom, substantiates that mainstream schools do not conduct family mapping surveys, do not interact with community health workers, and do not list children with special needs who are not in school. For mainstreaming to be successfully implemented, efforts must be made to find children with disabilities in the communities where they live. It involves public awareness initiatives by schools, teachers, and community members. Grant (2021) articulated that all public schools find, name, and evaluate all students suspected of having a disability. According to her, however, this mandate has yet to be taken seriously and has left many children without access to an education that will prepare them for higher education, the workforce, and independence after graduation. Such is basically the same with schools in the region and the whole country. This is another serious challenge to the DepEd in the implementation of its mainstreaming or in general, inclusive education thrust.

To fully implement its mandate on child find, the DepEd must conduct further research to identify the specific challenges faced by schools in implementing the different indicators and develop interventions to address these challenges, provide additional support to schools in implementing the different indicators, including the provision of professionals and specialists, training on Filipino Sign Language, and regular medical assessments and monitoring by experts, develop a national legislation that will address the alarming problem on medical assessment and provide free assessments among all children before any participation in schools takes place, advocate for the need to advance special approaches for children with disabilities, as research has shown that inclusion settings can improve academic performance, social interaction, and self-esteem for these learners and foster public awareness initiatives by schools, teachers, and community members to find children with disabilities in the communities where they live and ensure that they have access to education.

### **3. Opportunities in the implementation of Mainstream Education**

The opportunities for implementing mainstream education are extensive for school heads, teachers, administrators, families, and the community.

A School Head of City Division 10 said:

*“Mainstream Program provides social advantages to learners with special needs as they interact with regular peers, which will help enhance their self-esteem. Children with varying abilities are often better motivated when they learn with classmates and schoolmates in a regular school set-up. Learners with disabilities can cope and enjoy the same activities and opportunities experienced by children in regular classes. They are allowed to explore, learn, and grow with their peers.”*

Another School Head from the same Province Division added by saying:

*“Combining learners with disabilities with other students in classrooms help both the learners with disabilities and the other students. Those without disabilities experience how to work with them. They are trained to more caring to everyone.”*

Bright Education Hub backs up the preceding arguments by stating that if schools do not mainstream, learners who do not have disabilities will not be exposed to those who do. It emphasizes various social benefits of mainstream education, such as students receiving their education alongside non-disabled peers their own age. It goes on to say that by doing so, students are able to interact with their peers in ways that a special education classroom would not allow, as many students with special needs have a recognized need to enhance their social skills. Including



them in classes with diverse students will surely help improve skills and develop self-esteem considering that these learners know they are in a regular classroom setup with their peers. It goes on to say that no matter how hard people work to break down barriers and build acceptance, the social stigma of being different persists. However, blending students of different abilities into one classroom benefits not only students with special needs, but also regular education students by teaching them how to work with others who are different from them. It goes on to say that mainstreaming "teaches all students compassion, acceptance, collaboration, and patience, all of which are life-long skills that will better prepare them for the future."

Another advantage of mainstreaming according to it is that mainstreamed learners receive the same instructional materials as their non-disabled classmates. It further claims that, while they may receive accommodations and curriculum modifications, they are still learning what everyone else is learning. It allows these pupils to study something that they might not have had the opportunity to learn in a special education classroom.

A teacher of City Division 9 enthusiastically exclaimed:

*"Nadipisilan ako lalo na nung muna pero di nag uluy nagging parte na ning buway ko kan pagturo sa mga LSEs. Sa pagmati ko, mas naging creative ako sa pagturo lalo na sa mga bungug. Mapagal pawno ta idi ako tataw mag sign language. Kaypwan na isabay ko sinra sa activities para ma enjoy ninra kan pagklase kasabay su mga kaklase ninra sa regular class. Nauda kan pagal ko pag naipaintindi ko sa estudyante ko na maski di niya ako narurungug. Maski uno na sanang sign language kan piga gamit ko."*

Another teacher of the same school was emotional when she related this:

*"Dati, pag piga turuan ko sinra napapabura ako ta naerak ako na arug sinra nikaan. Pawno na sana kung su akus ko kaan? Pawno kung ako kadto? Haaay. Pasensya na ta ka-emotional ko talaga."*

**Teachers** develop their capabilities and creativity in ensuring that both the regular and the students with special needs are given the same opportunities while learning inside the classroom and school premises. They become more understanding, patient, and compassionate, attributes that are essential in handling learners with disabilities. Without these traits, the more that mainstreamed children will feel inferior, unwanted, and unproductive. Some of these teachers say that handling mainstreamed boosts their self-esteem and that there is so much fulfillment in working with those who feel they belong because they are accepted.

Asked what mainstreaming does to him, a School Head of City Division 7 eagerly replied with:

*"Well, mainstreaming makes me a more compassionate Principal. And I guess teachers, too. We need to support the thrust of our department. No one should be left behind. Sige lang maski kun minsan mapagal."*

For **Administrators**, mainstreaming is an answer to DepEd's thrust of including learners in the education system despite disabilities or differences. Administrators of schools with mainstream programs gain and provide academic sustenance that creates a supportive environment for all learners. This environment makes the administrators genuine advocates of the Education for All agenda of the United Nations. Moreover, they have greater access to the advanced level of School-Based Management practice, an attestation of continuously improving schools and their services.

The recommendations of Alborz aimed to provide a framework for school reform to build an education system that is inclusive of all children and specifically establishes its mandate for disabled children as an educational objective and not just an addition to systems of care. In this

respect, the recommendations were aimed not just at disabled people themselves but also at the broader community to foster a fundamental understanding of inclusive education and a deconstruction of the barriers to access, participation, and success. Administrators should be looking into these in implementing inclusive education or mainstreaming.

Asked about the importance of mainstreaming to parents, a teacher of the same City Division seriously replied:

*“Dakulaun na bagay para sa mga magurang kan may mga disability na makasabay an mga aki ninda sa mga normal na mga kaklase ninda. Ay sorry po. Ano po baya an tama? Ah okay. Mga regular palan na students. Pasenya na po Sir ha? Natatawan sinda ki pag-asa asin kusug ki boot na pwede palan magklase sa regular school an mga aki ninda. Dati an mga kaklase parareho nindang SPED. Maray ta igwa na kitang inclusion sa DepEd.”*

For **Parents**, providing their children the chance or opportunity to be included in regular schools is invaluable. This gives them hope for their children to be productive and eventually see them working in companies, establishments, or offices. Parents feel that it is not only their families helping them but also the whole school and community.

Parents' support is critically significant. When parents are involved in their children's education, children are more likely to do well in school and have better social and emotional development. It improves learners' achievement, self-esteem, and behavior, especially for learners with special needs. All these build a strong relationship between parents, their children's teachers, and the school administration.

To involve parents and families in providing support to children with disabilities, Save the Children suggests the practice of Families and Schools Together of FAST Programme. FAST, Save the Children says, builds stronger bonds among parents, schools, and communities to make sure children get the support they need to do their best at school. FAST was also displayed to have a helpful effect on children's societal and behavioral outcomes.

In 2018, Save the Children published the results of Europe's first Randomised Control Trial (RCT) of FAST, which realized that the program can be a useful method for keeping parents in their children's early education. It furthered that there are important lessons from FAST's capability to secure parents' thoughts and keep them participating.

Another teacher at the same school had this to say when asked about the opportunities mainstreaming provides the community:

*“Kaito бага pigaburully an mga SPED. Makaherak man ngani. Pero ngonyan wara na akong naaraman na may nabully o pigkarawan maski sa mga barangay. Accepted na sinda. Igwa. akong pinsan na byade. Dati dai mo ito mapaluwas ki harong ta pigakarawan. Ngonyan o okay na.”*

For the **Community**, what is noteworthy is the acceptance of, respect for, communicating, and working with persons with disabilities. These are what mainstreamed learners and those with disabilities dream about. The stigma and humiliation these different people suffer may be lessened if not eradicated. Community members will be more confident that these mainstreamed learners are also assets who can contribute to the progress of society. They will then be part of the prime partners of the mainstreamed learners in their quest for individuality and empowerment.

Asked regarding the good things that mainstreaming can do for their stakeholders, a teacher of Province Division 4 gladly replied with:

*“Napakalaking tulong ang maibigigay ng mga stakeholders sa mga LSEs. Sana nga dumami pa sila para marami din ang matulungan na mga bata. Marami sa mga estudyante nami mga mahirap. Kaya pasalamat ako sa kanila.”*

**Stakeholders** will be more enlightened that there is a growing number of children with disabilities mainstreamed in regular classes and that these learners still need their support and assistance. While most stakeholders provided help to self-contained classes in the past, they may, at their own choice, continue reaching the same help to the mainstreamed. Schools should share their plans with them so they will know which support they can provide to the mainstreamed learners for improved participation and performance. The country has made considerable development towards inclusive education in recent years. However, there is still work to be done. For inclusive education to be successful, it is vital that everyone involved – including students, families, educators, and community members – work together towards common goals. Llego (2021)

Basister et al. (2021) clarified that collaboration between stakeholders will serve as a vital component in achieving a more inclusive environment given the existing definitions, policies, and programs for the country's inclusive education. Specifically, they furthered that the journey of learners with special educational needs toward full inclusion will depend on the available professional services, easy access to these services, and the mechanisms to address conflicts that may arise in accessing these services. The study also provided a significant consideration on the effect of existing rules, ethos, and practices on the partnerships of professionals and other shareholders of inclusive education.

Similarly, Arias (2020) cited that the new normal education in the Philippines amidst pandemic will not be proper without the collaborative efforts of teachers, parents, and learners. Students being isolated from the school needs family members to simplify learning, parents are expected to "monitor, motivate and guide their children". The class-home must be a conducive place for learning.

Balderas et al. conducted a study that highlighted the significance of principals monitoring the activities being implemented to ensure alignment with set goals. The study also suggested that stakeholders must work collaboratively to intensify the implementation of the activities, and applicable solutions must be thought of to minimize the problems encountered. Therefore, principals, in collaboration with teachers and stakeholders, must implement a plan of action to ensure the achievement of the goals of providing inclusive, equitable, and gender-equality education for learners with special educational needs.

To foster valuable partnerships, schools can adopt the researcher's Partnership Framework that spells out the word PARTNER for Problem identification, Action planning, Resource gathering, Trailblazing leadership, Nurturing relationships, Evaluating activities, Reporting accomplishments, and Rewarding partners.

One of the critical roles of school leaders is ensuring that such partnership will yield improved performance, which they can achieve through the Partnership Framework prepared by the researcher. The framework spells out the word PARTNER for Problem identification, Action planning, Resource gathering, Trailblazing Partnership, Nurturing Relationships, Evaluating activities, and Reporting accomplishments and Rewarding partners.

For interventions to be appropriately made, problems must be fully defined, and identification of causes requires meeting different minds; thus, schools must create a team to do this task. Representatives from the Local Government Unit, Parents and Teachers' association, Faculty Club, Student Government Organization, and other sects can compose the team. The essence of involving people in this critical stage is the ownership of and accountability of perceived problems.

According to McMahon (2018), strategic action competency is a key managerial skill for mid-level management; hence, educational leaders should involve others in formulating plans to address school problems.

Because the number of stakeholders is large, it is important to gather their representatives in a summit where the school will present the identified problems, the financial and material support needed, and the strategies to address such issues. Administrators should be perennially reminded that stakeholders' presence in the gathering is an investment of their time; thus, details of activities where they can partner, and their roles and involvement should be efficiently presented. Stoker clarified the nature of the management style most suited to the emergence of networked governance and that the paradigms of traditional public administration and new public management sit uncomfortably with networked control. McMahon underscored, too, that a managerial competency, in general, is a set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that allows a manager to perform his duties efficiently and effectively. School managers must, therefore, be able to deal with different situations, particularly those that pose barriers to achieving school goals.

One of the critical stages in partnership with stakeholders is the ability of school members to sustain such connections. Poor stakeholder management will hinder the attainment of change or response to the existing problems that need to be solved through the support of educational partners.

Evaluation of programs, projects, and activities provides the avenue for implementation improvement. This works with monitoring activities that consider the processes taken in the implementation and, more significantly, the impact on student performance.

Despite their demanding work schedules, stakeholders would want a report of how their partnership has gone and how their help contributed to the school's educational goals. This also supports the SBM's principle of accountability and transparency. At his level, the researcher introduced the QuarPA (Quarterly Parents' Assembly in Oro Site High School in 2009 and later changed it to QuarPOSA (Quarterly Parents' and Other Stakeholders' Assembly) to include other educational partners. The SOSA (State of the School Address) highlights the regular convocation where the school principal presents the accomplishments and challenges that the school faces.

While some stakeholders would want to remain anonymous donors, school administrators must still recognize and formally report them, particularly by using the deed of donation. Recognition and awards mechanisms may come in certificates, posters, etc. Rewards and recognition have been a global concept that gives positive reinforcement not only to external stakeholders. Work efficiency is also improved when a culture of gratitude is developed in the school community. And no matter how tedious the problems are, the burden of work becomes lighter. As the researcher coined it in Bicol, and has been advocated by many, "*An ano man na magabat, minagian kun pigtuturuwangan.*"

Indeed, principled partnerships will work in the continuous improvement of the implementation of mainstream education, particularly in helping schools, administrators, and teachers develop support programs, projects, and activities.

Additionally, schools should conduct a needs assessment to identify the specific challenges and barriers to implementing mainstream education in a particular context, develop a clear plan for how to implement mainstream education, with specific actions and timelines for improvement, provide training to teachers and school staff on how to effectively implement mainstream education, including strategies for working with learners with special needs and promoting social interaction among diverse learners, involve families and the community in the implementation of mainstream education, and provide resources and support to help them understand and support the program, and regularly assess progress towards the implementation of mainstream education, and adjust strategies as needed to ensure continuous improvement.

All these opportunities that mainstreaming provides are affirmations to the researcher's theory or the Affective Learning Theory which emphasizes that love and learning should never be separated for learning to occur among all learners of all types. Mainstreaming provides opportunities for learners to be included in regular classrooms with their peers, but some teachers and administrators may feel frustrated or even enraged about those who cannot or find lessons difficult to understand. Negative emotions from teachers and administrators may bring learners to either frustration, hatred, violence, rebellion, or worse, suicidal thoughts and acts.

Affection is compassion that allows teachers, administrators, students, parents and family members, community, and stakeholders to see and feel the mainstreamed learners' struggles, sufferings, and pains. Compassion is understanding the individual stories of these learners, accepting them, and proving to the children that their misfortunes are valuable stories to be heard by others so they, too, can learn from them. Affection will allow others to go through personal recollections to think of how they can still be more caring to these individuals despite their struggles. Personal recollection will bring them to accept who they are, acknowledge their weaknesses and imperfections, and aim to be improved always. The pedagogy of love humanizes learning by engaging students in an ongoing process of self-exploration.

#### **4. Proposed Guidelines on the Implementation of Mainstream Education**

The proposed Guidelines on Mainstreaming Learners with Disabilities in Regular Classes aim to provide inclusive education opportunities while considering the individual needs of learners. The policies offer various strategies and actions to improve the implementation of mainstream education, including Child Find, Assessment, Program Options, Curriculum Modification, and Parental Involvement.

On **Child Find**, the guidelines aim to ensure that children with disabilities are identified and enrolled in regular schools and that schools have the necessary resources and support to provide appropriate education for learners with disabilities by requiring schools to conduct improved advocacy campaigns, develop, and implement a national Child Find Policy, ensure the presence of SPED teachers in mainstream schools, and conduct a nationwide study on the implementation of mainstream education. On **Assessment**, the guidelines will be measured to improve assessment in mainstream education, provide training for receiving teachers on assessment strategies, implement regular medical assessments and monitoring by experts, involve parents in the IEP process, comply with DepEd's policy on the implementation of IEPs, regularly give parents progress reports of learners with disabilities, conduct medical assessments to monitor the progress of learners with disabilities, use locally constructed assessment tasks, consider various assessment strategies, and

ensure assessments are comprehensive and valid. On **Program Options**, the guidelines will see schools that improve the implementation of mainstream education along program options by institutionalizing mainstream programs that must be included in the SIPs, regularly assess learners to identify their interests, strengths, and needs, provide professional development opportunities for teachers, collaborate with parents and the community, advocate for the allocation of resources to hire and train teachers with SPED item, develop partnerships with universities and colleges, and provide incentives for teachers to pursue a SPED item. On **Curricular Modifications**, the guidelines will require schools to increase support for Inclusive Resource Centers, identify current strengths and deficits areas, provide professional development opportunities for teachers, encourage parent involvement, collaborate with regional partners on policy and systems change, value students' wellbeing, dignity, autonomy, and contribution to society, employ service delivery options like collaborative or team teaching in course adjustments, institutionalize the use of Filipino Sign Language (FSL), and provide services through professionals and specialists, parents and peers, or buddies to children with special needs. On **Parental Involvement**, the guidelines will mandate schools to conduct surveys or focus groups with parents to gather feedback on how they would like to be involved and what barriers they face, provide training to teachers and staff on how to effectively engage parents, develop a clear plan for implementation, regularly assess progress, and adjust strategies as needed.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, substantial conclusions were drawn:

1. The status of the implementation of mainstream education in the public schools in Region V is inadequate having a significantly low number of implementing schools, mainstreamed learners, and receiving teachers. This means that learners with special education needs may not be receiving the support they need to succeed in school. This can have a negative impact on their academic achievement, as well as their emotional and social well-being. The findings can be utilized to improve the implementation of mainstream education in Region V and ensure that learners with special education needs receive the necessary support to succeed in school.
2. The level of implementation of mainstream education in Region V is moderately implemented, with Curriculum Modification being the only area evaluated to be highly implemented. This indicates an urgent need to improve the implementation of mainstream education in Region V in several areas, particularly in Assessment and Child Find. To address this issue, schools and teachers need to be provided with more resources and support to help them identify learners needing special education services and assess their needs accurately. Additionally, enhancing parental involvement in the mainstreaming process is crucial to ensure that students receive the support they need to succeed in school. The study highlights the importance of implementing mainstream education in schools, which involves collaborative efforts among division and school-based special education and regular teachers, administrators, and parents. The provision of support services from professionals and specialists, parents, volunteers, and peers or buddies to the children with special needs is also an important feature in the mainstream program. The findings of the study can be used to inform policy and practice in Region V to improve the implementation of mainstream education and ensure that learners with special education needs receive the support they need to succeed in school.
3. Implementing mainstream education provides extensive opportunities for school heads, teachers, administrators, families, community, and stakeholders to create a positive learning environment for all learners. By embracing inclusive practices, schools can provide social advantages to learners with special needs, enhance their self-esteem, and teach regular education students how to work with those different from them. This can lead to better academic achievement, emotional and social well-being, and a more accepting and inclusive community. However, the implementation of mainstream education faces several challenges,

including existing structural, educational, and cultural challenges, lack of resources, and inadequate training and support for teachers and school leaders. To successfully implement it, a well-designed implementation strategy that includes a clear plan, evaluation, and school review process is necessary. Providing inclusive education training, sustained support, and resources for all teachers and school leaders is also crucial. These findings can be used to propose policies in ensuring optimum participation of school heads, teachers, administrators, families, community, and stakeholders in the successful implementation of mainstream education.

4. The proposed Policy Guidelines on Mainstreaming Learners with Disabilities in Regular Schools provide a framework for improving the implementation of mainstream education. By providing inclusive education opportunities while considering the individual needs of learners, schools can create a positive learning environment that benefits all learners. The guidelines suggest various strategies and actions to improve the implementation of mainstream education, including providing professional development and training, developing IEPs, providing accommodations and modifications, encouraging parental involvement, and developing policies and guidelines for handling learners with disabilities. The proposed Policy Guidelines on Mainstreaming Learners with Disabilities in Regular Schools can be used to inform policy and practice in implementing mainstream education in schools to ensure that all learners receive the support they need to succeed in school.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the foregoing findings and conclusions derived in the conduct of the study, the following recommendations to improve the implementation of mainstream education are offered:

1. DepEd continuously provides resources and support to schools implementing mainstream programs, expediting the provision of medical experts and specialists who will conduct regular assessments among the mainstreamed learners, training teachers and school staff on how to effectively implement mainstream education, including strategies for working with learners with different types of disabilities and promoting social interaction among diverse learners.
2. Schools can institutionalize mainstream programs that must be included in the SIPs, provide appropriate training for teachers to improve their skills in teaching learners with disabilities and in conducting regular assessments and medical evaluations; involve parents in the education process by conducting surveys or focus groups to gather their feedback on how they would like to be involved and what barriers they face, providing training to teachers and staff on how to effectively engage parents, developing a clear plan for implementation, regularly assessing progress, and adjusting strategies as needed, advocate for the allocation of resources to hire and train teachers with SPED item to provide educational support services in mainstream schools; collaborate with regional partners and develop partnerships with universities and colleges to offer training programs and incentives for teachers; develop a national legislation that will address the alarming problem on medical assessment and conduct compulsory free assessments among all children before any participation in schools takes place; conduct family mapping surveys, interact with community health workers; and list children with special needs who are not in school.
3. School Administrators are highly encouraged to provide strong leadership in implementing inclusive practices, improve administration policy and guidelines in handling learners with disabilities, focus on clear and manageable learning goals to nurture global competence; teachers continuously develop their capabilities and creativity in ensuring that both regular and special needs students are given the same opportunities while learning inside the classroom and school premises welcome students with disabilities into the curriculum, environment, social interaction, and self-concept of the school, provide age-appropriate social skills to students with disabilities by imitating their peers; families should provide their children the chance or opportunity to be included in regular schools, as this is invaluable for their development; the

Community continues to embrace acceptance, respect, communication, and working with persons with disabilities and foster a fundamental understanding of inclusive education and a deconstruction of the barriers to access, participation, and success; stakeholders are more enlightened about the growing number of children with disabilities mainstreamed in regular classes and understand that these learners still need their support and assistance.

4. The researcher can coordinate and work with authorities on how his proposed policy guidelines will reach the Department of Education to consider such a proposal that aims to improve the implementation of mainstream education in schools. He can also present the findings of this study to certain lawmakers in the country for a possible enactment of a Compulsory Free Assessment among All Children before Admission to Schools Law and the National Child Find Week Law.

In the meantime, the researcher will present a proposal to the Schools Division Office of Legazpi City for the conduct of the Division Child Find Week and to the Legazpi City Council for a possible City Ordinance on the Conduct of a Yearly Child Find Week.

These and other initiatives affirm the researcher's titles, Ambassador of Inclusive Education and Champion Advocate of Inclusive Education. Such titles and numerous inclusive programs and practices have made Legazpi City National High School, his present assignment, DepEd's Model School in Inclusive Education.

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## Author's Profile



**Jeremy A. Cruz**, a Doctor of Education and Philosophy, is a multi-awarded educator, researcher, and champion of inclusive education. He received his Global Inclusion Award 2024 at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France, where he also acted as a speaker during the UNESCO -Global Inclusive Schools' Forum attended by more than 500 participants from around the globe. Also, he was a recipient of the 2020 National Dangal ng Bayan Award for his performance of extraordinary act of public service and consistent demonstration of exemplary ethical behavior of an official or employee based on the eight norms of conduct provided under Republic Act No. 6713, SEAMEO SEN Innovation Disability-Inclusive Education Award 2023, SEAMEO Special Education Innovation Country Winner Award 2022, Bicol Region's Gawad KILYAB Award 2022, International Outstanding School Leader in the Field of Research Award 2021, International Outstanding Research Management and Innovation Award 2021, Civil Service Commission Regional Pag-asa Award 2019, 3<sup>rd</sup> Princess Maha Chakri Thailand Regional Award 2019, Outstanding Principal of Albay, and the Most Outstanding Teacher of Legazpi City 2006.

Dr. Cruz's leadership at Legazpi City National High School, where he serves as the School Principal, has been pivotal in its recognition as Asia's Most Inclusive Educational Programme (Silver) 2019 and the Department of Education's Model School in Inclusive Education. His strategic vision and dedication to inclusive education have set a high standard for educational institutions worldwide.

Apart from his excellent leadership and managerial performance as a school administrator, which earned him the title "Principal of the Poor," he has been a sought-after speaker in international, national, and regional assemblies on Inclusive education, leadership, management, and others.