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Strengthening School and System Responses for CICL Reintegration: Addressing Gaps in Policy, Practice, and Coordination in the Philippines

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Lecture-workshop by registered social workers for public school teachers in Muntinlupa (2023).

This policy brief examines the systemic challenges affecting the mainstreaming and reintegration of children in conflict with the law (CICL) in Philippine schools. Drawing from existing policies, empirical studies, and institutional reports, the analysis identifies seven key issues: insufficient teacher readiness, persistence of stigma, lack of specialized training, weak school-based support systems, gaps between policy and practice, limited inter-agency coordination, and the absence of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. These interconnected challenges highlight a disconnect between policy mandates and actual implementation at the school level.

The findings indicate that while the Philippines has established a strong legal and policy framework for CICL reintegration, schools and educators often lack the capacity, resources, and coordinated support necessary to effectively operationalize these mandates. Teacher preparedness remains limited, stigma continues to influence school environments, and institutional support systems are inconsistent. Moreover, fragmented coordination among agencies and weak monitoring systems further constrains the effectiveness of interventions.

To address these gaps, the brief proposes an integrated set of policy and programmatic recommendations, including strengthening teacher training, promoting inclusive school cultures, enhancing school-based support systems, improving policy implementation mechanisms, institutionalizing inter-agency coordination, and establishing robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Overall, the brief underscores the need for a systems-based approach that aligns policy, practice, and accountability to ensure the effective and sustainable reintegration of CICL in the Philippine education system.

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Introduction

The reintegration of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) into formal education systems is a critical component of the Philippines' commitment to inclusive education, social justice, and child protection. Anchored in the principles of restorative justice, the Republic Act 9344, or the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006, mandates that CICL be provided with opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration, including continued access to education. This legal framework is further strengthened by Republic Act 10630, which emphasizes community-based interventions and the role of institutions such as schools in supporting the developmental needs of at-risk youth. Complementing these national laws, DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2015 outlines guidelines for managing CICL and children at risk within the school system, reinforcing the responsibility of educators as frontline implementers of reintegration efforts.

Within this policy landscape, schools are positioned as key sites for social reintegration, where education serves not only as a means of academic development but also as a mechanism for restoring dignity, promoting social inclusion, and reducing recidivism. From a social development perspective, education expands individual capabilities and opportunities, particularly for vulnerable populations such as CICL (Sen, 1999). However, the success of this reintegration process depends significantly on the readiness of teachers to address the complex behavioral, emotional, and social needs of these learners.

Existing literature suggests that while policies supporting inclusive education are well-established, implementation challenges persist at the classroom level. Teachers often report limited preparation in handling learners with trauma, behavioral difficulties, and histories of social exclusion (UNICEF, 2020). Moreover, stigma associated with CICL can influence teacher perceptions and expectations, potentially affecting the quality of classroom interaction and inclusion (Goffman, 1963). These challenges are compounded by institutional constraints, including insufficient access to guidance counselors, lack of structured reintegration programs, and weak coordination between schools and social welfare agencies (Department of Education, 2015).

Despite these concerns, there remains a limited body of empirical research in the Philippine context that directly examines teacher readiness in handling CICL within mainstream classrooms. Most existing studies focus on juvenile justice systems or broader inclusive education issues, leaving a gap in understanding how teachers experience and respond to CICL reintegration in practice. This gap is significant, as teachers play a pivotal role in translating policy into meaningful educational and social outcomes.

In response, this study aims to: (1) assess the level of teacher readiness in handling CICL; (2) examine the challenges encountered in mainstreaming CICL in classroom settings; (3) identify gaps between policy mandates and actual school

practices; and (4) propose policy recommendations grounded in empirical findings. By situating teacher readiness within a social development framework, this study underscores the importance of strengthening educator capacity as a means of promoting inclusive education, supporting rehabilitation, and advancing equitable development outcomes.

Key Issues

1. Insufficient Teacher Readiness for Handling CICL

Teachers play a key role in reintegrating CICL, yet many lack the specialized skills needed to address their behavioral, emotional, and psychosocial needs. Most rely on general teaching strategies, creating a gap between expectations and actual preparedness. This often leads to ineffective classroom management and limits meaningful reintegration.

2. Persistence of Stigma and Negative Perceptions

Negative perceptions toward CICL continue to persist despite inclusive education policies. These biases can result in unequal treatment, exclusion, and lowered expectations. Stigma not only affects classroom dynamics but also undermines the self-esteem and participation of CICL.

3. Lack of Specialized Training and Professional Development

Teachers receive limited training specific to CICL, particularly in areas such as trauma-informed teaching and behavior management. Existing professional development programs are often too general, leaving teachers unprepared to support at-risk learners effectively.

4. Weak School-Based Support Systems

Many schools lack adequate support structures such as guidance counselors and mental health services. Without these, teachers are left to manage complex learner needs on their own, resulting in inconsistent and insufficient support for CICL.

5. Gaps Between Policy Mandates and Actual School Practice

Although policies supporting CICL reintegration exist, their implementation in schools remains inconsistent. Limited resources, unclear guidelines, and insufficient capacity hinder the effective translation of policy into practice.

6. Limited Inter-Agency Coordination

Coordination among schools, local government units, and social welfare agencies is often fragmented. This results in disjointed interventions and weakens the overall support system needed for CICL reintegration.



7. Absence of Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

There is a lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of CICL programs and teacher readiness. Without clear indicators and data, it is difficult to assess effectiveness and improve interventions.

Key Findings

Table 1: Evidence of Limited Preparedness in Handling CICL (Derived from Laro, 2021)

Indicator of Readiness	Evidence from Laro (2021)	Data Interpretation	Implication for Teachers
Formal training	No structured training mentioned prior to handling CICL	0% evidence of formal preparation in the study context	Suggests absence of systematic preparation
Source of skills	Skills developed through experience and exposure	Readiness is experiential, not pre-acquired	Teachers may also rely on trial-and-error
Approach used	Reliance on observation and situational judgment	Indicates adaptive but informal competence	Lack of standardized intervention strategies
Guiding framework	Use of social work values (acceptance, confidentiality)	No structured pedagogical framework identified	Teachers may lack discipline-specific tools
Complexity of cases	Exposure to behavioural and social challenges of CICL	High level of complexity in handling cases	Requires specialized competencies not commonly taught

The study indicates that there was no structured pre-service training provided to individuals handling CICL, with competencies largely developed through direct exposure and experience. Participants relied primarily on observation, situational judgment, and adaptive strategies, rather than standardized or formally taught intervention approaches. The absence of structured preparation suggests that readiness in handling CICL is informal and experience-based rather than systematically developed.

Table 2: Effects of Stigmatization on Self-Concept Among CICL (Derived from Dominguez, 2020)

Dimension of Self-Concept	Observed Indicators	Evidence from Study (Dominguez, 2020)	Implications
Negative Self-Image	Feelings of shame, inferiority, and social rejection	Participants reported being labeled as “criminals” or “troublemakers,” leading to negative personal identity formation	Weakens confidence and identity development

Low Self-Esteem	Lack of self-worth, self-doubt, withdrawal from social interaction	Youth expressed diminished sense of value due to community and peer discrimination	Reduces motivation for rehabilitation and social participation
Exclusionary Self-Concept	Internalization of being “different” or “unacceptable” in society	CICL begin to see themselves as outsiders or unworthy of reintegration	Reinforces marginalization and social isolation
Psychological Distress	Anxiety, emotional insecurity, identity confusion	Stigma contributes to emotional burden and unstable self-perception	Affects mental health and behavior
Barriers to Reintegration	Fear of judgment, reluctance to re-engage socially	Internalized stigma discourages participation in education or community life	Increases risk of recidivism

Stigmatization significantly shapes the self-concept of children in conflict with the law. As reflected in Table X, experiences of social rejection and labeling contribute to the development of negative self-image, low self-esteem, and an exclusionary self-concept. These youths internalize societal perceptions, leading them to view themselves as unworthy or incapable of reintegration. This internalized stigma not only affects their psychological well-being but also creates barriers to their successful reintegration into society, thereby reinforcing cycles of marginalization.

Table 3: Evidence of Limited Teacher Training and Preparation for Handling Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) in the Philippines

Indicator	Data	Link to CICL
Teachers with relevant training	17.6% only	Shows majority of teachers lack training overall
Teachers without training	Up to 88% no training	Includes lack of training in behavioral/psychosocial needs
Understanding of child protection	Limited awareness reported	CICL are under child protection cases
CICL program implementation	Inconsistent / occasional only	Reflects lack of trained personnel

Note: Data compiled from Philippine Institute for Development Studies. (2025, July 17) ; Sahijuan, R. (2026) and Ferrer, J. (2025).

Existing Philippine studies reveal significant gaps in training related to handling children in conflict with the law (CICL). Teachers report limited understanding of child protection

procedures, indicating insufficient preparation for managing at-risk learners. Moreover, studies on CICL program implementation highlight inconsistent and fragmented training among stakeholders, with programs often only occasionally implemented.

National reports further emphasize the need for capacity-building in diversion and rehabilitation approaches. When combined with broader teacher training data—where only 17.6% of teachers have received relevant training—these findings strongly suggest that educators are not adequately equipped to support CICL reintegration.

Table 4: Evidence of Weak School-Based Support Systems for Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) in the Philippines

Indicator	Data / Evidence	Implication
Limited guidance counsellor availability	Many public schools do not meet the ideal 1:500 counsellor-to-student ratio; some schools have no assigned guidance counsellor	Insufficient psychosocial support for CICL during reintegration
High teacher workload limits support provision	Teachers report heavy administrative and teaching loads, reducing time for individualized support	Teachers cannot provide consistent monitoring and mentoring for CICL
Lack of school-based mental health services	Majority of public schools lack structured mental health programs and trained personnel	CICL needs (trauma, behavioral issues) are not adequately addressed
Weak coordination between schools and external agencies	Studies show fragmented coordination among schools, LGUs, and justice agencies in CICL cases	Leads to inconsistent monitoring and support for CICL
Absence of structured reintegration programs in schools	CICL reintegration is often handled on a case-by-case basis, not through standardized school programs	Lack of continuity and sustainability in support
Limited teacher training in psychosocial support	Teachers report insufficient training in behavior management and mental health support	Weak capacity to address CICL-specific needs

Note. Data compiled from the Department of Education (2022) policy issuances on school mental health and guidance services; Philippine Institute for Development Studies on teacher workload and education system gaps; UNICEF Philippines education and child protection reports; Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council reports on CICL intervention systems; Ferrer (2025) on CICL management programs; and Sahijuan (2026) on teachers' awareness of child protection policies.

Weak school-based support systems significantly affect the successful reintegration of children in conflict with the law

(CICL) in the Philippines. Evidence indicates that many schools lack adequate guidance personnel, mental health services, and structured reintegration programs. In addition, heavy teacher workloads and insufficient training in psychosocial support limit the ability of educators to provide individualized interventions.

Coordination between schools and external agencies such as local government units and juvenile justice bodies also remains fragmented, resulting in inconsistent case management. These systemic gaps demonstrate that schools are not fully equipped to provide sustained and holistic support for CICL.

Table 5: Systemic Gaps in Policy Implementation, Coordination, and Monitoring of CICL Support Systems in the Philippines

Thematic Area	Indicator	Data / Evidence	Implication
Policy Practice Gap	Policy–practice mismatch in teacher training	Only 17.6% of teachers received relevant training	Policies are not effectively translated into practice
	Child protection policies not fully implemented	Teachers report limited awareness and inconsistent implementation	Weak classroom-level application of policies
	Mental health policies with limited implementation	Lack of trained personnel and structured programs in schools	Services are not fully delivered despite policy presence
	Underutilization of diversion programs	Limited understanding of diversion approaches in schools	Schools may rely on punitive measures
Inter-Agency Coordination Gap	Fragmented coordination among agencies	CICL interventions are sector-based and not well integrated	Inconsistent case management
	Weak school–LGU–justice linkage	Programs are inconsistent and uncoordinated at local level	Lack of continuity in support
	Unclear stakeholder roles	Lack of clearly defined roles across agencies	Duplication or service gaps
	Limited information-sharing systems	No unified database for CICL tracking	Weak coordination and follow-up
Monitoring & Evaluation Gap	Lack of standardized M&E systems	CICL programs are not consistently monitored	Difficult to assess effectiveness
	Irregular program evaluation	Programs are only occasionally evaluated	Weak accountability

	Limited data-driven decision-making	Insufficient systems for tracking CICL outcomes	Policies are not evidence-informed
	Absence of reintegration indicators	No clear metrics for CICL success in schools	Outcomes remain unclear

Note. Data compiled from Philippine Institute for Development Studies (2025); Department of Education (2022); UNICEF Philippines (2023); Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council (2024); Ferrer (2025); and Sahijuan (2026).

Table 5 highlights key systemic gaps in the implementation of support systems for children in conflict with the law (CICL) in the Philippines. Despite the presence of policies on child protection, mental health, and juvenile justice, their application in schools remains inconsistent, as reflected in limited teacher training and weak policy awareness.

In addition, coordination among schools, local government units, and justice agencies is fragmented, resulting in uneven and discontinuous support for CICL. The absence of standardized monitoring and evaluation mechanisms further limits the ability of institutions to assess program effectiveness and improve interventions. Overall, the findings indicate a disconnect between policy, practice, and accountability, which hinders the successful reintegration of CICL.

Key Recommendations

Integrated Recommendations for Addressing CICL Mainstreaming Issues

Key Issue	Integrated Recommendations (Strategic + Actionable)
1. Insufficient Teacher Readiness	- Provide mandatory training on CICL handling (behavior management, trauma-informed and restorative practices) through structured 3-day workshops - integrate CICL competencies in pre-service and in-service programs - develop teacher toolkits/manuals - assign mentor teachers or specialists for ongoing support
2. Persistence of Stigma	- Implement anti-stigma and awareness programs for teachers and students by integrating modules in Homeroom Guidance/Values Education; - promote inclusive and restorative school culture through campaigns (e.g., <i>Second Chance</i> initiatives); - establish peer support/buddy systems

3. Lack of Specialized Training	- Develop targeted professional development programs on CICL, including quarterly INSET sessions on behaviour intervention and restorative practices; - partner with psychologists/social workers; - require certification courses; - ensure continuous coaching and mentoring beyond one-time training
4. Weak School-Based Support Systems	- Strengthen guidance and mental health services by designating at least one counselor per school cluster; - establish School CICL Support Teams (teacher, counselor, social worker, school head); - create standard reintegration plan templates for each learner
5. Policy–Practice Gap	- Translate policies into clear school-level guidelines and manuals; - conduct regular policy orientation and compliance monitoring; require annual school CICL action plans; - implement quarterly monitoring by school heads/division offices
6. Limited Inter-Agency Coordination	- Establish formal coordination mechanisms and referral pathways among schools, LGUs, and agencies; - develop standard case management systems; - conduct monthly inter-agency case conferences; - create shared tracking databases/forms
7. Absence of Monitoring and Evaluation	- Develop standard indicators for CICL reintegration; implement tracking tools (attendance, behavior, academic progress); - require quarterly progress reports; conduct annual program evaluations; - use data for evidence-based decision-making

Conclusion

This study examined teacher readiness and school capacity in supporting the mainstreaming of children in conflict with the law (CICL) in the Philippine education system. The findings show that despite the presence of inclusive and rehabilitative policies, implementation remains challenged by insufficient teacher readiness, persistent stigma, limited specialized training, weak school-based support systems, gaps between policy and practice, fragmented coordination, and lack of monitoring mechanisms.

These issues highlight that CICL reintegration is not merely a policy concern but a systemic challenge requiring strengthened

teacher competencies, improved institutional support, and more effective coordination among stakeholders. Without these, inclusion efforts risk becoming inconsistent and superficial.

Overall, the study underscores the need for a more integrated and capacity-driven approach to ensure that policies are translated into meaningful practices. Strengthening these areas is essential to achieving effective and sustainable reintegration of CICL and advancing inclusive education in the Philippine context.

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Declaration

AI was used solely in checking the grammar of the manuscripts

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