

A POSITIVE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS

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Schools are regarded to be transformative spaces which help in shaping young minds and fostering a love of learning. However, this can only be fully realized when schools cultivate a positive and inclusive environment specifically to students. In such environment, students should feel safe, respected, and valued for their unique contributions to the different activities and programs in school. It is a place where diversity is celebrated and where everyone feels empowered to reach their full potential.

Building a truly positive and inclusive school environment takes more than one strategy. One of the things that schools can do is to embrace diversity and inclusion. One of the countries in the world that practice inclusivity is Finland which is known for its emphasis on equity. Its standardized curriculum is the same for all students, promoting fairness and opportunity. (Sahlberg, 2011). Another is Singapore where schools integrate Mother Tongue Languages into the curriculum, valuing its students' cultural heritage (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2023). Another country known for inclusivity is Canada. Schools in this country incorporate the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives into their curriculum. This means that their perspectives often emphasize living in harmony with nature, respecting elders and traditions, and storytelling as a way of teaching knowledge. Including these perspectives in schools helps students understand Canada's history and present from a more inclusive viewpoint fostering understanding and respect for indigenous cultures (Government of Canada, 2023).

Respect is another basis of a positive and inclusive school environment. In Norway, their approach in schools emphasize student participation and democratic

values. Class meetings are done regularly, allowing their students to voice their opinions and contribute to classroom rules and regulations (Hopfenbeck, 2017). Schools in Japan similarly does the same thing. They promote a strong sense of community through activities like cleaning classrooms which foster a sense of shared responsibility and respect for the learning environment (Morris, 1992).

Building strong and trusting relationships is another key ingredient. In New Zealand, teachers practice "Whānau Ako," a Maori concept meaning "learning family." This philosophy emphasizes collaboration between teachers, students, and families, creating a strong support network for each student (Education Council of New Zealand, 2020). Schools in Germany often have designated "classroom guidance teachers" who provide students with social and emotional support which bring about a sense of trust and well-being (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany, 2023).

Positive reinforcement and celebration play vital roles in motivating students and fostering a growth mindset. Schools in Bhutan, guided by the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), incorporate social-emotional learning into the curriculum alongside academics (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2008). This holistic approach celebrates not just academic success, but also emotional well-being and good character. Schools in Israel often have student-led conferences, where students present their work and receive feedback from peers and teachers. This fosters a sense of ownership over learning and celebrates student achievement (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2022).

Building a positive and inclusive school environment is a continuous endeavor. Schools in Estonia is known for their strong digital infrastructure, utilize online surveys and feedback platforms to gather student input (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2023). This allows for continuous improvement and ensures student voices are heard. Schools in many parts of Africa are also increasingly incorporating traditional knowledge systems and teaching methods alongside Western curriculum, demonstrating

a commitment to cultural responsiveness and valuing diverse learning styles (Akyeampong, 2009).

The Department of Education (DepEd) also advocates positive and inclusive school environments for students through a series of initiatives. First, DepEd develops clear policies and resources that promote equity and inclusion. These resources and training programs equip schools and teachers with the knowledge and skills to implement such policies effectively. The curriculum itself is transformed to integrate diverse perspectives and experiences. This involves showcasing local cultures and histories, celebrating the contributions of indigenous groups, and promoting social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. Furthermore, DepEd empowers school leaders by providing them with resources and leadership training on topics like cultural competency and conflict resolution. DepEd also fosters open communication with families and students which is very crucial in promoting equity and inclusion. This is achieved by encouraging their participation in school decision-making processes, establishing student councils, and creating opportunities for parent-teacher conferences focused on building a positive learning environment. By collecting data on student performance, school climate, and disciplinary records, DepEd can identify areas for improvement and track progress towards a more inclusive environment for all Filipino students.

Fostering a positive and inclusive school environment requires a concerted effort from educators, administrators, families, and the community at large. Schools can take the lead by providing professional development opportunities for staff on topics like cultural competency and inclusive teaching practices. Teachers can actively seek student feedback and involve them in decision-making processes in classroom activities. Families can become active partners in their child's education and collaborate with schools to create a supportive learning environment. Finally, communities can advocate for policies and resources that promote equity and inclusion in schools. By working together, we can create schools where all students can thrive and reach their full potential.

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