

## NURTURING MINDS THAT NURTURE: SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS' MENTAL HEALTH IN PHILIPPINE SCHOOLS

*by:*

**Rose Anne P. Pangilinan**

*Head Teacher III, Luakan National High School - Annex*

It will surely go without saying that educators remain at the very heart and soul of the Philippine education system; they shape and mold minds and futures. Indeed, such a vital position in society is accompanied with tremendous mental challenges because of the heavy workloads associated with handling student demands, bureaucratic tasks, and an interplay of shifting education policies. All these strains lead to high stress and anxiety, even burnouts, hence affecting not just the wellbeing of teachers but even the quality of education which the students acquire. Hence, the psychosocial health of teachers can play a significant role in the more healthy-minded learning environment of the instructor as well as the student.

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Awareness of Concerns of Teachers. There are various reasons why educators in the Philippines have worse mental health status. The biggest one is overwork. Since there are numerous tasks teachers do such as planning, evaluating the performance, the paper works, meeting for discussion, and performing related extracurricular events. For most of them, their usual work entails a new set of reforms introduced into the school system, which includes the current MATATAG Curriculum, thus requiring further training. All these would lead to chronic stress due to the pressure of meeting performance expectations with available resources.

Another very big issue is the large class sizes, even in public schools. A teacher should handle a number of up to 40 students. With the high number, it becomes very hard for the teacher to ensure attention to each student. So much stress arises in the classrooms mainly because of large classes, especially in cases where the teacher is very

young or has not received support from the administration level. This also stretches the teachers to ensure that these students learn as per those standards, and hence make them anxious in terms of the success or failure of their students.

**The Effect on Teacher's Mental Health.** Teachers' mental health challenges are a significant concern. At such high levels, the stress and anxiety will finally bring burnout when one has the feeling of emotional draining, disconnection with others, and no feeling of accomplishment. Burnout will influence not only the private but also the professional life of the teachers, and less motivation and capability to be in relation with the students. Poor learning outcome is associated with less interesting and energetic classes.

Challenges with mental health can result in higher rates of absenteeism and tardiness. Mentally struggling teachers take so many sick leaves or quit to be a teacher, making there not be enough staffs, thus, disrupting the normal flow of learning for their students. The crisis situation about teacher's mental health will cause the school system to undergo effects which influence the level of students' performance, the overall school morale as well.

**Possible Solutions and Support Systems.** There is an urgent need for supportive policies within the education system to deal with these issues. The introduction of mental health programs and counseling especially for teachers can be a step in this direction. Periodic workshops on stress management, coping mechanisms, and mindfulness can be given to teachers to proactively manage their own mental health. Counseling services should be accessible, de-stigmatized, and without fear of being judged.

This would reduce the workload and administrative burden, and therefore, contribute positively to the mental health of teachers. Having delegated the school work that never takes one into the classroom would give administrators tasks of data and paperwork so a teacher has enough time in the classroom with his/her students. An increase of more teachers and even the increased number of reasonable teacher-student

ratio decreases the classroom pressure as one is able to focus much more on individual students.

Lastly, support a school community. The employees can meet from time to time and share how each is coping with some of these challenges, discuss experiences for handling specific issues, or support each other in being able to cope with their difficult situations. When the efforts of teachers and their achievements are recognized and celebrated, the teacher's morale increases, hence their work is valued.

Attention to mental health should be prioritized by the teachers. On considering this, some factors may come in to enable teachers to improve even better in the teaching sector. These include: the program for mental health of the teachers, elimination of administrative burdens, and a friendly school environment. Investing in teachers' mental wellness may well make the teachers even better in this respect but would also serve as a reason to ensure a more optimistic and effective learning experience with students, thus building on a firmer foundation, Philippine education.

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