

HEALTHY MINDS BUILDS BRIGHTER FUTURE

by:

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Concern for the mental well-being of students in public high schools in the Philippines is more important than ever. As students face pressures at school, at home, and even on social media, it is clear that their mental health needs attention and support. While academics will always be a priority, it's time we focus on helping students feel emotionally and mentally strong as well.

Many high school students at various public schools across the country are dealing with a lot of stress (Bernabe-Advincula et al., 2023). They worry about their grades, family problems, peer pressure, and sometimes even financial problems. Some students travel long distances just to go to school, which makes them tired and unable to concentrate. Others are subjected to bullying or have difficulty fitting in with their class.

In addition, most students at public high schools come from socio-economically disadvantaged families. They bring with them high expectations to do well in school and plan for their families' futures. The feeling of "having their backs against the wall" and the constant pressure to perform well in school can be overwhelming. It's no surprise that many students feel anxious or stressed. Unfortunately, not all of them know how to deal with it.

A major problem is the lack of resources for mental health in public schools (Gonzalo & Alibudbud, 2024). Most schools do not have enough guidance counselors or trained professionals to help students with their emotional needs. Even if there is a guidance counselor, in some cases students do not know who to talk to when they have

problems. Sometimes the school management and even the teachers fail to provide information about other services at the school.

Also, teachers do their best to support their students, but they are already busy taking care of lessons, grades and other tasks. Even though the current curriculum includes a homework hour where classroom counselors can dip into their respective counseling sessions, a few hours a week is not enough to adequately support students' emotional well-being. This is because without proper training or sufficient time, it is difficult for them to focus on students' mental health.

In addition, many students are afraid to talk about their feelings for fear of being judged or misunderstood. In Filipino culture, mental health problems are often seen as a sign of weakness, making it even harder for young people to ask for help. Although the teacher in the classroom is seen as a "second parent", most students prefer to keep their mental health problems to themselves or share them with their peers.

As outlined earlier, there are many issues that the public education system needs to address in order to promote the mental well-being of students. Schools can start by creating a more open and supportive environment. Teachers and staff should be trained to recognize signs of stress, anxiety or depression in their students. Even small changes, such as regular visits to students or a listening ear, can make a big difference.

In addition, schools can also organize activities such as group discussions, mindfulness exercises or stress management workshops. These activities not only teach students how to deal with challenges, but also give them the opportunity to interact with their peers.

The government and education leaders also need to invest more in mental health programs in public schools. This includes hiring more counselors, improving access to mental health services and developing policies that prioritize student well-being.

When students feel emotionally supported, they can focus better in class, build stronger relationships and grow into confident and resilient individuals. When we take mental health seriously, we not only help students succeed in school – we help them succeed in life.

References:

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