

## **A SEAT AT THE TABLE: THE NEED FOR NON-TEACHING REPRESENTATION IN SCHOOL-BASED DECISION-MAKING**

*by:*  
**Christian Paul C. Dimayuga, LPT**  
*Dinalupihan West District*

In every public school in the Philippines, while teachers take center stage in educating learners, another set of individuals quietly ensures that the stage is set, the systems run smoothly, and the needs of the school community are met without fanfare. These are our non-teaching personnel - the clerks, administrative assistants, utility workers, security guards, and aides – who perform the essential yet often invisible tasks that keep our schools running. Despite their critical roles, they remain largely absent from school decision-making bodies, a gap that must be addressed if we are to promote truly inclusive and effective school governance.

The Department of Education (DepEd) has long advocated for School-Based Management (SBM) as a decentralization strategy aimed at empowering schools to respond more effectively to the needs of learners and communities. SBM encourages participation from various stakeholders including parents, teachers, and local government units. However, in practice, the participation of non-teaching staff in these discussions is rarely institutionalized. They are usually informed of decisions rather than consulted during the process. This perpetuates a culture where their insights and experiences are underutilized.

This exclusion is not due to lack of value in their perspectives. In fact, non-teaching personnel are often the first to observe pressing issues in the school environment. The school utility worker may be the first to notice safety hazards within the premises. The clerk at the registrar's office deals directly with students and parents, and often becomes the initial point of contact for addressing concerns related to school services. These

employees have institutional memory, operational knowledge, and firsthand insights that could significantly enrich school improvement plans and policy decisions.

Representation matters, not just symbolically, but substantively. Including non-teaching staff in school governing councils, planning committees, and SBM monitoring groups can lead to more grounded and effective policies. For instance, decisions about budget allocations, facility improvements, or student services can benefit from the input of those who manage resources and operations daily. Their presence in these discussions also fosters accountability and builds a stronger sense of shared responsibility in achieving the school's mission.

Moreover, empowering non-teaching personnel through involvement in decision-making can have a positive effect on morale and professional growth. When they are recognized not just as doers but as thinkers and collaborators, they are more likely to feel respected and motivated. Inclusion also provides them with leadership opportunities that are otherwise scarce in the existing career path structures. It opens doors for skills development, capacity-building, and greater investment in school initiatives.

In many regions, particularly in rural and underserved areas, non-teaching personnel go beyond their job descriptions. There are school guards who mentor troubled youth, clerks who help learners with reading difficulties, and janitors who organize clean-up drives and lead disaster preparedness efforts. These actions reflect not just dedication, but a deep sense of belonging to the school community. Their commitment warrants not only our gratitude but also our trust in including them as decision-makers.

Ultimately, inclusive school governance is not just a matter of fairness—it's a strategy for better outcomes. When all voices in the school are heard, decisions become more representative, solutions become more practical, and implementation becomes more effective. The school becomes a true learning community, not just for students but for everyone who serves within its walls.

It's time to give our non-teaching personnel what they've long deserved: a seat at the table, and a voice in shaping the future of Philippine education.

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