

## BEHIND THE EMPTY SEAT

by:  
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An empty chair in any classroom represents more than just a vacant seat, it represents an unwritten story, an unseen struggle, and an unrealized potential. As educators in public schools, we frequently come with these learner absences, which motivates us to investigate the causes more thoroughly and look for solutions that guarantee every student's right to an education is fulfilled.

One of the most urgent issues facing the Philippine educational system is student absenteeism. Research that was published in the International Journal of Research Publications estimates that 10% of students miss school on a regular basis. This figure highlights a major challenge that teachers deal with daily basis. Furthermore, according to data from the Department of Education (DepEd), the Philippines total student absenteeism rate is 4.5%, meaning that almost one out of ten students is categorized as "persistently absent."

DepEd has put in place several policies to address this problem. According to DepEd Order No. 08, s. 2015, a student will receive a failing mark and will not be eligible for credit in the topic or learning area if they miss more than 20% of the allotted number of class or lab times throughout the academic year or semester. The school head may, however, choose to exempt a student who over the 20% cap for legitimate and school-acceptable reasons. Additionally, DepEd Order No. 36, s. 2016, emphasizes the importance of attendance by recognizing learners with perfect attendance each quarter. This initiative aims to encourage learners to attend and actively participate in class.

Even with policies in place, it's important to know the various factors that contribute to student absences. Students frequently miss school due to a variety of reasons, including lack of motivation, family obligations, poverty, and health problems. In certain situations, students might not have access to transportation or may need to work to support their family. Chronic diseases and malnutrition are two health conditions that might make regular attendance difficult.

Our duty as teachers goes beyond simply teaching classes. In order to meet each student's unique requirements, we must work to establish a welcoming and encouraging environment. To provide the required support, this entails identifying pupils who are at risk, interacting with their families, and working with community stakeholders.

Monitoring attendance trends and taking immediate action can be facilitated by the implementation of early warning systems. Additionally, students who struggle to attend regular classrooms might be accommodated by including flexible learning choices like online or modular learning.

Our classrooms' empty chairs are an alarming symbol of the difficulties that many learners encounter. Every learner can succeed if we comprehend the root causes of absence and take proactive steps to solve them. We can turn these empty chairs into places of learning and development by working together, enacting wise policies, and teaching with compassion.

#### *References:*

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