

## BUYING RANK, SELLING TRUST: THE PROMOTION-FOR-SALE DILEMMA IN PHILIPPINE EDUCATION

*by:*

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It is at a critical juncture that the Department of Education (DepEd) stands due to mounting concerns about alleged practices of "promotion-for-sale." Among teachers, a great amount of worry has circulated that career progress and employment positions become progressively dependent on financial remuneration or material rewards, and less upon a person's own ability. Such ongoing perception has negatively affected many teachers' morale while questioning the integrity of the institution and dissolving confidence within the body charged with ensuring equal opportunities in education.

The issue escalated following nationwide appeals by teacher organizations to the Department of Education on July 1, 2025, to investigate allegations of a conspiracy involving the purchase and selling of promotions and teaching posts in exchange for items or cash. For Filipino teachers who work tirelessly to improve their craft and upgrade their competence, such schemes hit at what is central to their professional ethics. Promotion in the teaching career is supposed to be a reward for excellence, leadership, and service. When these are instead transformed into patronage or bribery, professionalism suffers and practitioners wonder if work will ever be good enough.

The consequences of such harm extend far beyond the limits of personal careers. A system corrupted by malfeasance creates a climate of demoralization among teachers. By witnessing other people's progress through improper means, teachers can be discouraged and pressured to engage in suspect behaviors to keep up competitively. Such an environment not only stifles professional growth but also puts schools and students at risk. Leaders who achieve power through improper motives might be lacking in ability and leadership capacity to inspire teachers and adequately serve students. Therefore, this results in compromised governance within schools, low morale among teachers, and inferior educational experiences for students overall—most especially those within marginalized groups who already must contend with systemic disparities.



Studies examining corruption in the education system corroborate these findings, showing that nepotism, patronage, bribery, and favoritism always undermine access to opportunity and perpetuate inequity. For teachers, this suggests that career progressions designed to recognize performance and dedication are undermined by corrupt practices. However, countries and institutions that use a system of meritocracy find a higher link between professional integrity and ambition in civil service. Clearly articulated performance-based criteria reduce opportunities for corruption and foster accountability culture. These findings have important application in the Philippines scene, where "padrino system," involving personal influence and patronage-based practice has long hindered equity in public service. Teachers who work tirelessly to mold future generations have their efforts undermined whenever such practice determines career development.

History demonstrates that reform is possible. The tenure of Education Secretary Raul Roco in 2001 serves as an important reminder. His reforms in textbook procurement and his crackdown on unauthorized salary deductions were well received by the public, with DepEd earning high approval ratings under his leadership. Teachers recall such efforts as proof that integrity in leadership can inspire confidence, restore morale, and strengthen institutions. It shows that when the system champions fairness, both educators and learner's benefit.

Resolution of these promotion-for-sale claims today calls for a multidimensional and definitive response. Teacher groups greatly advocate an investigation independent of DepEd but preferably in partnership with anti-corruption units. Openness in the findings will not only penalize perpetrators but will also bring back trust among professionals who have long trusted DepEd. Just as significant is ensuring merit-based promotion structures wherein transparent bases like performance evaluation findings, leadership abilities, and community relations become bases for promotion.

Teachers also know that they need to create better systems of monitoring. An auditable trail at every stage within the process of promotion could help to deter inappropriate activity and provide a level of accountability. Whistleblower protections are another necessity. By and large, teachers will not protest because they will be retaliated against; but a system of protected reporting and anti-retaliation provisions can serve to adequately safeguard reporting unlawful or inappropriate activity without fear of job loss.



Also crucial is integrating ethics training throughout all levels of the school system. When integrity is part of DepEd's culture, enforced via training, rewards, and narrative, administrators and teachers will both know that openness is not a merely regulatory concept but a professional core value. Acknowledgment of ethical leadership can further act as a counter-momentum against such culture of *padrino* wherein professional growth may be achieved via honesty and work.

Argument regarding promotion-for-sale practices transcends administrative issues; it engages ethics and culture. For teachers, this matter is quite personal. It impacts feelings regarding mission, professional integrity, and that effort and excellence will be fairly rewarded. Furthermore, it concerns students, upon whose achievement qualified and honorable teachers' guidance depends. Finally, it involves communities, who require schools to demonstrate fairness and integrity.

The call for reform is not merely about punishing wrongdoing but about rebuilding trust in an institution that shapes the nation's future. Teachers remain steadfast in their belief that the profession must be anchored in fairness and merit. They deserve a system where dedication is recognized, students deserve leaders of integrity, and communities deserve an education system that upholds the highest ethical standards. By implementing bold reforms, conducting transparent investigations, and renewing its commitment to responsibility, DepEd could reassert education as a cornerstone of national integrity and advancement.

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