

LEADING WITH INTEGRITY: HOW EMPOWERED SCHOOL LEADERS TRANSFORM COMMUNITIES

by:

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This year, the Department of Education received one of its biggest budgets in recent memory – a golden opportunity to make real, lasting change in schools across the Philippines. But more resources also mean more responsibility. The challenge is clear: schools must ensure that every peso reaches its intended purpose and benefits every learner.

Across the country, inefficiency and bureaucracy still slow progress. Delayed reports, backlogs in procurement, and unnecessary red tape prevent programs from reaching students on time. Even worse, corruption – small or large – erodes trust between schools and the communities they serve. In this environment, one truth stands out: empowered, transparent, and transformational school leadership is the key to turning resources into real results and restoring public trust.

Transparency is the cornerstone. Schools that openly share budgets, procurement processes, and program updates build confidence among teachers, parents, and students. The Zero Backlog Program, which ensures timely submission of administrative and financial reports, exemplifies how clear processes strengthen accountability. Studies from the Asian Development Bank confirm that transparency in public institutions reduces mismanagement and increases stakeholder satisfaction.

Equally important is listening to the people schools serve. Client Satisfaction Measurement (CSM) allows communities to give feedback on programs, identify gaps, and track improvements. Schools that regularly gather and act on feedback see a

noticeable rise in trust and participation. When parents and learners know their voices matter, they become partners in education, not just observers. Research shows that systematic feedback mechanisms improve both school performance and community engagement (Bennett, 2018).

Streamlining processes is another game-changer. Anti-red tape measures remove bureaucratic obstacles that slow down services and frustrate teachers and parents alike. Faster document processing, efficient procurement, and simplified approvals mean programs are implemented on time, teaching materials reach classrooms promptly, and administrative work no longer blocks learning. According to the Civil Service Commission (2020), organizations that reduce red tape operate more efficiently and limit opportunities for corruption.

Empowered leaders do more than improve systems—they inspire people. Transformational leadership encourages ethical behavior, teamwork, and shared responsibility. When principals model integrity, teachers follow suit, and students experience a culture of fairness. Studies by Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) show that transformational leadership strengthens school climate, boosts teacher morale, and positively impacts student outcomes. In practice, schools led with integrity become spaces where everyone thrives.

Concrete action makes the difference. Schools must embed transparency, CSM, zero backlog, and anti-red tape measures into daily routines. Leadership programs should train principals and department heads in ethical governance, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement. Reporting progress to the community and encouraging active participation ensures that resources are used efficiently, equitably, and effectively.

Consider the story of a school that inherited years of backlogs and delays. The new principal introduced monthly CSM surveys, published financial statements online, and enforced zero backlog deadlines. Within a year, teacher morale soared, parent

participation doubled, and the community began trusting the school again. This example proves that empowered leadership transforms not just operations, but culture itself.

School leaders have the power to turn resources into results, bureaucracy into efficiency, and distrust into confidence. With clear processes, transparent practices, stakeholder engagement, and transformational leadership, schools can make the most of DepEd's increased budget, improve student outcomes, and strengthen community trust.

Ultimately, the message is simple: empowered school leaders do more than manage—they transform. They build schools where fairness, accountability, and excellence are lived values. They inspire communities, lift learners, and show that integrity is the most powerful tool for change.

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