

Real Changes, What Schools Truly Need

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If there is to be genuine reform in the Philippine education system, it must start with the voices of those who experience it daily, students in elementary and high school classrooms in the provinces who share battered books, and teachers who often spend their own money to buy chalk and markers. In rural areas, too many public schools are forced to focus on getting by, not getting better. Reform must begin with meeting these urgent, on-the-ground needs.

Large class sizes are among the most pressing problems, particularly in provincial schools. In some classrooms, fifty or more children squeeze together on broken benches. With only one teacher managing the entire class, many students who struggle with reading or math are left behind, their questions and worries buried in the crowd. Reducing class sizes is not just about comfort; it is about fairness. About giving every learner, especially those in far barangays, the chance to be seen, understood, and supported. While such issues are specific to schooling, students in rural locations can also be affected by challenges outside of school, including fewer cultural resources such as libraries and museums (Miller et al., 2019)

School facilities in the provinces also tell a story of neglect. In many elementary and high schools, battered books are passed from hand to hand, pages held together with tape and hope stated by Ikhrom et al. (2023). Leaky roofs turn classrooms into puddles when it rains, while broken chairs and cracked walls (Navarro, 2024) send a clear message, education is not truly valued. Reform must recognize that every child deserves to learn in a safe, clean, and welcoming environment, no matter where they live. Even the journey to school can be a hardship. In some mountain communities, children cross rivers or hike for hours just to attend class. These daily struggles are often overlooked, yet they reflect how determined many students are to learn.

Reform means giving students the chance to think deeply, to question, to connect what they learn to the world they see every day (Kim et al., 2019). Schools must teach skills that go beyond rote memorization—like problem-solving, creativity,

and resilience—so that even those in the poorest provinces can imagine and build a better future. Magallanes (2022) highlighted that Teachers, too, must be at the heart of this change. In many rural schools, they are the only hope for their students, juggling overcrowded classrooms and limited resources. They need fair pay, practical training, and respect for their insights into what their students truly need. Reform will only work if teachers are seen as partners, not just workers following orders.

Real reform demands more than promises and empty slogans. It requires facing the truths that underpaid teachers cannot give their best, that broken classrooms crush children's dreams, and that empty policies rob them of the skills they need to thrive. If the country is serious about the future of its children, especially those in the most neglected provinces, it must stop talking about reform and start doing it, investing where it matters, listening to those in the classrooms, and refusing to accept anything less than a system that truly works for every Filipino learner.

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