

Building Trusting Relationships Among Teachers, Learners, and Families: Towards Harmonious Collaboration Among School Stakeholders

Kelly June G. Manuel

Western Colleges, Inc., Naic, Cavite; Department of Education, Schools Division Office of Antipolo City, Juan Sumulong Elementary School
kellyjune.manuel@deped.gov.ph

Date Submitted:
March 26, 2026

Date Accepted:
May 12, 2026

Date Published:
July 25, 2026

DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.21543848

ABSTRACT

This study examined trusting relationships among teachers, learners, families, and fellow teachers as a basis for harmonious collaboration among school stakeholders. A quantitative descriptive-comparative-correlational design was employed among 66 public elementary and secondary school teachers from the Schools Division Office of Antipolo City who were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire with an overall Cronbach's alpha of .943. Frequency, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, independent-samples t-test, one-way analysis of variance, Scheffé post hoc analysis, and Pearson product-moment correlation were used. Trusting relationships were rated Highly Built for teachers to families ($M = 3.69$, $SD = .33$), teachers to teachers ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .37$), and teachers to learners ($M = 3.60$, $SD = .31$). Strong practices included

establishing relationships with learners, maintaining open communication with families, and welcoming students by name. Lower-rated practices involved deliberate ignoring as a behavior-management strategy, collaboration on individualized plans, and connecting every learner with a supportive adult. Teacher-learner trust differed significantly by educational attainment ($F = 3.142$, $p = .031$), while seminar participation produced significant differences in all three relational domains ($p \leq .009$). Age, sex, length of service, and position or rank generally showed no significant differences. The three trust domains were strongly and positively correlated ($r = .796-.863$, $p < .001$). The findings indicate that relational trust functions as an interconnected school capacity and support continuous professional development, structured family collaboration, collegial mentoring, and school-wide communication systems.

Keywords: *teacher-learner trust, family engagement, collegial trust, school collaboration, inclusive education, stakeholder relationships*

INTRODUCTION

Trust is a central condition for effective teaching, learning, and school collaboration. In classrooms, learners are more willing to communicate their needs, accept guidance, and participate when teachers are perceived as respectful, reliable, honest, and competent. Conversely, distrust redirects attention toward self-protection rather than learning (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Russell et al., 2016). These relational conditions are especially important in inclusive and special education settings, where teachers must understand varied strengths, needs, behaviors, cultures, and family circumstances.

Teacher-learner trust develops through consistent, predictable, and caring interactions. Positive greetings, clear routines, active supervision, supportive feedback, and well-organized learning environments can improve engagement and reduce disruptive behavior (Bennett, 2020; Cook et al., 2018; Shields-Lysiak et al., 2020). Such

practices help establish safety and belonging, which are necessary for learners to take academic and social risks (Australian Education Research Organisation [AERO], 2023; Healey & Stroman, 2021).

Trust must also extend beyond the classroom. Families need open communication, timely progress information, transparent practices, and meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions affecting their children. School personnel likewise depend on collegial trust to coordinate learner support, exchange professional knowledge, and sustain consistent practices. Faculty trust and supportive leadership are associated with stronger organizational functioning, while role, identity, and experience may shape how trust is perceived (Brezicha & Fuller, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

A culturally responsive and inclusive school culture strengthens these relationships by treating learners and families with dignity, recognizing diverse identities, and maintaining high expectations with appropriate support (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Moodie et al., 2019). Classroom management and stakeholder collaboration should therefore be viewed not as separate technical tasks but as relational processes grounded in respect, communication, reliability, and shared responsibility (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2021; De Nobile et al., 2021).

Despite the acknowledged importance of trust, schools need local evidence on the relational practices that teachers consistently enact, the areas that remain less developed, and the personal or professional factors associated with differences in practice. In the Schools Division Office of Antipolo City, receiving and special education teachers work with learners and families who require coordinated, responsive, and sustained support. Examining teacher–learner, teacher–family, and teacher–teacher trust together provides a more complete view of the relational environment surrounding learners.

This study assessed the profile of teacher respondents; determined the level of trusting relationships between teachers and learners, teachers and families, and teachers and fellow teachers; tested differences according to demographic and professional variables; examined the relationships among the three trust domains; and developed a program for strengthening harmonious collaboration among school stakeholders. The results were intended to guide professional development, family engagement, collegial support, and school-wide relational practices.

Literature Review

Trusting relationships between teachers and learners

Teacher–learner trust is built through respect, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence. Tschannen-Moran (2014) explained that learners who trust their teachers can direct more energy toward learning, while Russell et al. (2016) found that care, predictability, personal connection, rule consistency, and honesty support trust development. Hammond (2015) further described familiarity, concern, competence, similarity, and appropriate vulnerability as relational “trust generators” that can reduce social threat and make rigorous learning more accessible.

Daily classroom routines translate these principles into observable practice. Greeting learners, using clear expectations, organizing lessons, providing behavior-specific praise, and maintaining active supervision can strengthen connection and reduce disruption (Cook et al., 2018; Shields-Lysiak et al., 2020). Predictable structures and dependable responses help learners understand that the classroom is safe, fair, and supportive (Bennett, 2020; McDonald, 2019).

Relational support also influences learner motivation. Perceived autonomy and social support are associated with self-regulated learning and achievement (Schuitema et al., 2016), while positive feedback supports confidence and task engagement (Zhang et al., 2012). Teachers’ interests, mastery goals, and self-efficacy can shape instructional practice and learner motivation (Schiefele & Schaffner, 2015), and purposeful motivational strategies can improve participation in language-learning contexts (Sugita McEown & Takeuchi, 2012).

Trusting relationships between teachers and families

Family trust develops when teachers communicate clearly, provide regular progress information, listen to family perspectives, and involve parents or guardians in decisions. Consistent communication reduces uncertainty and helps families understand classroom expectations, learner strengths, and areas requiring support. Engagement is strongest when schools create accessible structures rather than relying only on families to initiate contact (Goss et al., 2017; Ulmanen et al., 2016).

For learners with disabilities, family participation is particularly important because educational planning often requires information across home and school contexts. Collaborative planning can align instructional goals, behavior supports, routines, and accommodations. A sense of belonging is strengthened when families experience the school as respectful, responsive, and attentive to individual circumstances (AERO, 2023; Healey & Stroman, 2021).

Family engagement should also be culturally safe. Culturally responsive practice recognizes that communication preferences, expectations, and experiences differ across communities. Teachers need to maintain high expectations while using language and processes that affirm family dignity and identity (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Moodie et al., 2019). These principles support open communication and shared decision-making as core elements of trust.

Collegial trust and collaborative school practice

Collegial trust allows teachers to seek assistance, share concerns, exchange strategies, and coordinate support without fear of judgment. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) identified faculty trust as an important ingredient in effective schools, while Brezicha and Fuller (2019) showed that personal and professional identities can influence perceptions of trust. These findings suggest that collegial relationships must be intentionally cultivated and cannot be assumed to develop automatically.

Collaborative routines create structures through which trust becomes productive. Professional learning communities, mentoring, co-planning, and reflective dialogue allow teachers to align expectations and respond to learner needs. Supportive administration can protect time and conditions for community-building while maintaining academic rigor (Kasun, 2013). Positive learning environments also require coordination among teachers, school leaders, and support personnel (De Nobile et al., 2021).

Collegial trust contributes to consistency. When teachers share behavior expectations, communication practices, and learner-support strategies, students and families experience a more predictable school environment. Conversely, fragmented practices can weaken confidence and create unequal experiences. School-wide relational systems should therefore connect classroom practice, family engagement, and professional collaboration.

Inclusive classroom culture and harmonious stakeholder collaboration

A positive classroom culture combines clear behavior expectations, proactive management, supportive relationships, and a sense of belonging. Evidence-based guidance emphasizes teaching expected behaviors, establishing predictable routines, reinforcing positive conduct, and responding consistently to concerns (AITSL, 2021; Education Endowment Foundation, 2021). Lemov (2021) and Hepburn and Beamish (2020) similarly emphasized that proactive management depends on deliberate routines and teacher capacity rather than reactive control alone.

Belonging and dignity are especially relevant for diverse and inclusive classrooms. Cobb and Krownapple (2019) argued that a culture of dignity is essential for equitable implementation, while Miller and Steele (2021) stressed that effective teaching requires practices responsive to learners and contexts. Culturally safe environments protect psychological, social, emotional, and physical well-being and support participation among learners, families, and communities (Moodie et al., 2019).

The literature indicates that harmonious stakeholder collaboration emerges when relational practices are aligned across three interconnected domains: teachers and learners, teachers and families, and teachers and fellow teachers. The present study used this integrated perspective to examine the strength of each domain, determine the influence of professional characteristics, and identify program priorities for the Antipolo City context.

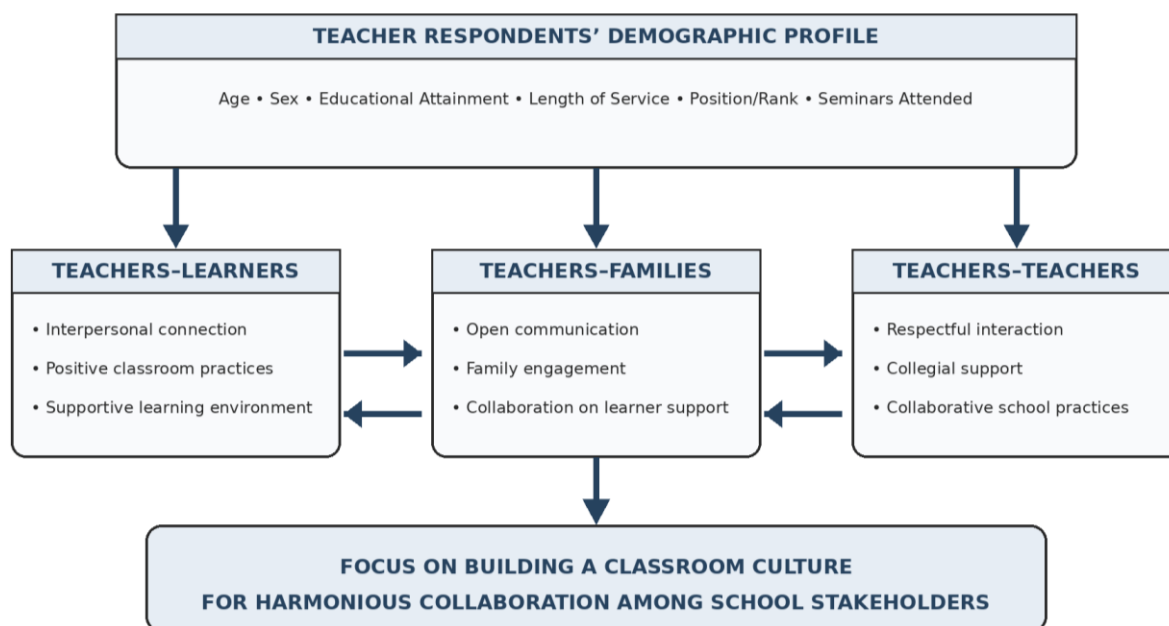


Figure 1. *Research paradigm of the study*

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-comparative-correlational design. The descriptive component measured the levels of trusting relationships across the three domains. The comparative component examined differences in assessments according to age, sex, educational attainment, length of service, position or rank, and seminars attended. The correlational component determined the direction and strength of the relationships among teacher–learner, teacher–family, and teacher–teacher trust.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in public elementary and secondary schools under the Schools Division Office of Antipolo City, Rizal, Philippines. The source manuscript described the participating setting as serving approximately 600 to 900 learners with disabilities and employing about 240 receiving and special education teachers across the division context.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The respondents were 66 public school teachers selected through purposive sampling. Eligible respondents were elementary or secondary teachers, had at least three years of teaching experience, and voluntarily agreed to participate. The sample included receiving teachers and teachers involved in supporting learners with disabilities.

Research Instrument

A researcher-developed questionnaire was used. Part I gathered demographic and professional information. Part II measured trusting relationships between teachers and learners, teachers and families, and teachers and fellow teachers using a four-point response scale. Mean scores of 3.51–4.00 were interpreted as Very

True of Me/Highly Built, 2.51–3.50 as True of Me/Built, 1.51–2.50 as Somewhat True of Me/Somewhat Built, and 1.00–1.50 as Not True of Me/Not Built at All.

The instrument underwent content and face validation by at least three experts. It was pilot-tested, and reliability was calculated through SPSS. The overall Cronbach's alpha was .943 for 31 items, indicating high internal consistency.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission was secured from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent and the participating school heads. Consent forms were distributed to the respondents. After the study purpose and instructions were explained, the researcher administered the questionnaire face-to-face, allowed sufficient time for completion, retrieved the instruments, and prepared the responses for statistical processing.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage described the respondent profile. Weighted mean and standard deviation summarized the three trust domains. An independent-samples test was used for sex, while one-way analysis of variance and Scheffé post hoc analysis were used for profile variables with more than two groups. Pearson product-moment correlation examined relationships among the trust domains. Statistical decisions were made at the .05 significance level.

Ethical Consideration

The study addressed conflict of interest, privacy, confidentiality, informed consent, voluntary recruitment, and potential risk. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the research, assured that their identities would remain anonymous, and allowed to refuse or discontinue participation. Data were used only for the stated academic purpose. The source manuscript included an ethics certification among its appendices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Teacher Respondents

Table 1. *Dominant demographic and professional characteristics of the respondents*

Profile Variable	Largest Category	n	%
Age	36–45 years old	21	31.8%
Sex	Female	59	89.4%
Educational attainment	Master's degree	27	40.9%
Length of service	5–10 years	17	25.8%
Position or rank	Teacher III	27	40.9%
Seminars attended	Fewer than five	24	36.4%

The sample was predominantly female and was composed largely of teachers in middle adulthood, with advanced academic preparation and established teaching experience. Teacher III was the most common rank, while fewer than five seminars was the largest professional-development category. This profile indicates a workforce with substantial classroom experience but uneven exposure to continuing training.

The later inferential results show why seminar participation is important: unlike age, sex, service, and rank, seminar attendance was associated with significant differences across all relational domains. This supports the view that trust-building practices can be strengthened through purposeful professional learning rather than being determined primarily by fixed demographic characteristics.

Trusting Relationships between Teachers and Learners

Table 2. *Assessment of trusting relationships between teachers and learners*

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Rank
Establish relationships with students	3.84	.36	Highly Built	1
Positive learning environment	3.77	.42	Highly Built	2
Set expectations	3.57	.49	Highly Built	8
Organize lessons	3.72	.44	Highly Built	4.5
Focus on strengths	3.45	.72	Built	11
Behavior-specific praise	3.63	.54	Highly Built	7
Greet students at the door	3.51	.63	Highly Built	10
Reminders and cues	3.72	.44	Highly Built	4.5
Active supervision	3.75	.46	Highly Built	3
Deliberate ignoring	2.96	1.08	Built	12
Optimize seating plan	3.69	.52	Highly Built	6
Research-based behavior management	3.56	.55	Highly Built	9
Composite mean	3.60	.31	Highly Built	

Teacher–learner trust was Highly Built ($M = 3.60$, $SD = .31$). Establishing relationships with students was the highest-rated practice ($M = 3.84$), followed by maintaining a positive learning environment ($M = 3.77$) and active supervision ($M = 3.75$). The pattern shows that respondents consistently valued connection, structure, and visible support. These practices align with evidence that predictable, caring interactions and positive greetings contribute to engagement and fewer disruptions (Cook et al., 2018; Shields-Lysiak et al., 2020).

Deliberate ignoring received the lowest mean ($M = 2.96$), followed by focusing on strengths ($M = 3.45$). Both remained Built but were less consistently applied. Deliberate ignoring is a selective strategy that requires careful judgment and should not replace direct support when behavior signals distress or unmet need. The result supports targeted training in proactive, research-based classroom management and strength-oriented approaches (AITSL, 2021; Education Endowment Foundation, 2021).

Trusting Relationships between Teachers and Families

Table 3. *Assessment of trusting relationships between teachers and families*

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Rank
Establish open communication channels	3.83	.37	Highly Built	1
Cultivate trust	3.75	.43	Highly Built	3
Collaborate on individualized plans	3.50	.61	Built	6
Provide progress updates	3.68	.55	Highly Built	4
Foster a welcoming environment	3.77	.42	Highly Built	2
Seek professional development opportunities	3.62	.57	Highly Built	5
Composite mean	3.69	.33	Highly Built	

Teacher–family trust obtained the highest domain mean ($M = 3.69$, $SD = .33$). Open communication ranked first ($M = 3.83$), followed by fostering a welcoming environment ($M = 3.77$) and cultivating trust ($M = 3.75$). These findings indicate that respondents generally maintained accessible and respectful contact with families and recognized family engagement as a continuing part of learner support.

Collaboration on individualized plans was the lowest-rated practice ($M = 3.50$). Although still Built, it indicates an area for strengthening, particularly for learners with disabilities whose educational support benefits from shared information and aligned home–school strategies. Structured consultation, progress monitoring, and family participation can deepen belonging and improve consistency across contexts (AERO, 2023; Healey & Stroman, 2021).

Trusting Relationships among Teachers

Table 4. *Assessment of trusting relationships among teachers*

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Rank
Welcome each student by name	3.84	.40	Highly Built	2
Predictable, structured dialogue between students and adults	3.68	.53	Highly Built	3
Help all students feel heard by educators and peers	3.59	.52	Highly Built	8
Connect one adult to every student	3.50	.66	Built	9
Build relationships with hard-to-reach students	3.65	.51	Highly Built	4
Reflect on culturally responsive teaching for equity	3.60	.60	Highly Built	7
Convene students to advise on school policies	3.63	.59	Highly Built	5.5
Gather useful information about students and families	3.63	.54	Highly Built	5.5
Welcome each student by name in person	3.86	.34	Highly Built	1
Composite mean	3.66	.37	Highly Built	

Trusting relationships among teachers were Highly Built ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .37$). The highest-rated item focused on welcoming each learner by name ($M = 3.86$), reflecting the school-wide relational practices included in the original instrument. Predictable dialogue, relationship-building with difficult-to-reach learners, culturally responsive reflection, and gathering information about students and families were also highly rated.

Connecting one adult to every learner received the lowest mean ($M = 3.50$). The result suggests that collegial collaboration could be strengthened through formal advisory, mentoring, referral, and case-coordination systems that ensure no learner is without a trusted adult. Faculty trust supports the exchange of information and shared responsibility required for such structures (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Differences in Trust-Building Assessments

Table 5. *Differences in trust-building assessments according to respondent profile*

Profile Variable	Teachers–Learners	Teachers–Families	Teachers–Teachers
Age	$F = .396$, $p = .811$, NS	$F = 1.139$, $p = .347$, NS	$F = .712$, $p = .587$, NS
Sex	$F = .311$, $p = .579$, NS	$F = .943$, $p = .335$, NS	$F = .327$, $p = .569$, NS
Educational attainment	$F = 3.142$, $p = .031$, S	$F = 2.732$, $p = .051$, NS	$F = 2.650$, $p = .057$, NS
Length of service	$F = .668$, $p = .650$, NS	$F = .717$, $p = .613$, NS	$F = 1.323$, $p = .267$, NS
Position or rank	$F = .274$, $p = .894$, NS	$F = .403$, $p = .806$, NS	$F = .632$, $p = .641$, NS
Seminars attended	$F = 9.673$, $p < .001$, S	$F = 5.019$, $p = .009$, S	$F = 5.965$, $p = .004$, S

Age, sex, length of service, and position or rank did not produce significant differences in any trust domain. These findings indicate that strong relational practices were broadly shared across demographic and career groups. Educational attainment produced a significant difference only in teacher–learner trust ($F = 3.142$, $p = .031$), with higher group means among respondents with a master’s degree or doctoral units than among those with master’s units.

Seminars attended produced significant differences in teacher–learner ($F = 9.673$, $p < .001$), teacher–family ($F = 5.019$, $p = .009$), and teacher–teacher trust ($F = 5.965$, $p = .004$). Respondents who had attended more than 10 seminars reported the highest mean in each domain. The result identifies continuing professional development as the most consistent differentiating factor and supports systematic training focused on communication, collaboration, culturally responsive practice, and behavior support.

Relationships among the Three Trust Domains

Table 6. *Correlations among teacher–learner, teacher–family, and teacher–teacher trust*

Paired Domains	r	p	Interpretation	Decision
Teachers–Learners and Teachers–Families	.796	< .001	Strong positive	Significant
Teachers–Learners and Teachers–Teachers	.842	< .001	Strong positive	Significant
Teachers–Families and Teachers–Teachers	.863	< .001	Strong positive	Significant

All three domains were strongly and positively correlated. Teacher–family and teacher–teacher trust showed the strongest relationship ($r = .863$), followed by teacher–learner and teacher–teacher trust ($r = .842$) and teacher–learner and teacher–family trust ($r = .796$). The null hypotheses of no relationship were rejected in all cases.

The results show that relational trust functions as an interconnected school capacity. Teachers who report stronger relationships with learners also tend to report stronger collaboration with families and colleagues. Improvement efforts should therefore avoid isolated interventions. Professional learning, family engagement, mentoring, classroom management, and stakeholder communication are more likely to reinforce one another when implemented as a coordinated school-wide system.

CONCLUSION

The teachers demonstrated highly built trusting relationships with learners, families, and fellow teachers. Open communication with families was the strongest domain-level pattern, while teacher–learner and collegial practices were also consistently positive. The findings confirm that trust was expressed through interpersonal connection, welcoming and supportive environments, predictable practices, progress communication, and collaborative engagement.

The results also identified specific areas that require attention: deliberate ignoring and strength-focused behavior support, collaboration on individualized plans, and systems that connect every learner with a trusted adult. Trust-building practices were generally consistent across age, sex, service, and rank. Educational attainment influenced teacher–learner trust, while seminar participation differentiated all three domains, demonstrating the importance of sustained professional development.

The strong positive correlations among the relational domains indicate that teacher–learner, teacher–family, and teacher–teacher trust develop as mutually reinforcing dimensions of school culture. Harmonious collaboration is therefore best strengthened through integrated policies and programs that connect classroom relationships, family partnership, collegial support, and stakeholder participation.

Recommendation

Schools should strengthen continuous professional development on trust-building, inclusive classroom management, culturally responsive practice, family communication, and collaborative learner support. Training should include coaching, follow-up observation, reflective sessions, and opportunities to apply strategies in actual school settings.

Structured family collaboration should be expanded through scheduled consultations, individualized planning, progress updates, and accessible communication channels. Schools should also institutionalize mentoring, peer support, professional learning communities, and adult–learner connection systems to ensure coordinated assistance for learners who are difficult to reach or require additional support.

The proposed program should be implemented in phases, monitored through participation records, climate surveys, classroom observations, family feedback, and collaborative outputs, and revised according to results. Future studies may include learners and families as respondents, compare inclusive and special education settings,

and use longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to examine how trust-building programs influence engagement and school outcomes over time.

Table 7. *Proposed Program for Strengthening Harmonious Collaboration among School Stakeholders*

Key Result Area	Activities	Persons Involved	Performance Indicators	Budget
Learner Relationships	Seminars and workshops on positive classroom climate, inclusive practice, empathy, and learner engagement	Teachers, master teachers, school heads	Improved participation; positive observations; fewer behavioral concerns	₱30,000
Learner Relationships	Peer mentoring, learner-support activities, and collaborative classroom routines	Teachers, learners, guidance counselors	Improved interaction, cooperation, and learner satisfaction	₱35,000
Family Relationships	Parent-engagement seminars and orientations on effective school-home partnerships	Teachers, parents/guardians, school heads	Increased parent participation and improved communication records	₱30,000
Family Relationships	Collaborative family-school activities and regular consultation meetings	Teachers, parents, PTA officers, school heads	Stronger family involvement and meeting attendance	₱40,000
Collegial Relationships	Professional Learning Community sessions on trust, collaboration, and shared instructional practice	Teachers, master teachers, school heads	Documented collaborative outputs and sharing of best practices	₱50,000
Collegial Relationships	Team-building, wellness programs, and reflective-practice sessions	Teachers, school heads	Improved school-climate results and professional cooperation	₱40,000
Stakeholder Collaboration	Stakeholder forums, community partnerships, and school-improvement planning workshops	Teachers, parents, community leaders, school heads	Increased stakeholder participation in school initiatives	₱45,000

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