

## Portrait of the Best Practices of Public School Heads in Establishing School-Community Partnerships

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### Abstract

*Case analyses were conducted to identify the best practices of public elementary and secondary school heads of the Division of Tarlac City and Province regarding school-community partnerships. This study was focused on the best practices of the school heads in establishing and sustaining school-community partnerships as well as the challenges encountered. Data were gathered using interview and documentary analysis. All participants were awarded for having strong school-community partnerships and were evaluated with Level III (Advanced) Practice for School-Based Management during the school year 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. Results showed that school heads established successful strong school-community partnerships by constantly involving the stakeholders in decision-making and planning of all the activities of the school, soliciting feedbacks from them, assessing the needs of the school and the community, having shared vision, delegating tasks with the stakeholders, having constant communication, showcasing the school's achievements, adhering to No Collection Policy, establishing clear organizational structure, signing of Memorandum of Agreement, and being transparent at all times. Data also revealed the challenges encountered by the school heads in establishing school-community partnerships which include low socioeconomic status of the members of the community, gaining the trust of the community and other stakeholders, negative notions about school-community partnerships, adjusting to the changes brought about by the pandemic, having individual differences, and being situated in a far-flung area. Inconsistent communication with stakeholders, difficulty with time management due to overlapping tasks, responding to changes, and the notion that an award-winning school no longer needs support were also challenges for school heads in sustaining partnerships. Despite these challenges, the cases maintained the motivation of their stakeholders by keeping constant communication with them, tapping all the stakeholders not just for financial support, but also for their skills, keeping all the partners updated on the school's programs, activities, and projects, recognizing and awarding dedicated partners, and practicing shared leadership and governance. An Action Plan was proposed to address these concerns. Based on the findings and conclusions, schools should promote increased collaboration and cooperation among partners. School's dedication plus community commitment equals successful learning.*

*Keywords: School-Community Partnerships, Best Practices, Case Study, Department of Education-Tarlac, Philippines*

### Introduction

In achieving tremendous heights in the realm of education, many hurdles and challenges are unavoidably confronted. However, these do not dissuade educators from pursuing their predetermined

objectives. One critical factor in overcoming these obstacles is the presence of partnerships between schools and their communities. This collaboration provides support and resources to meet the requirements of school employees, families, and students that extend beyond the common availability provided by schools.

Partnerships are defined as mutually beneficial arrangements developed within a community. This type of relationship is developed by engagement between community members for the purpose of meeting needs. Partnerships in the realm of education have been established to boost student learning, empower schools, and patronize underserved communities (Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2016).

The true partnership entails more than just cooperating. They encompass a greater range of disciplines and organizations. A partnership's quality is defined by a formal or informal written agreement between partners to build a process and framework for accomplishing goals that no single member can accomplish alone. Partnerships are frequently focused on the delivery of services and programs, more efficient resource utilization, and structural methods.

Overlapping Spheres of Influence, the fundamental notion of family-school-community partnerships in child education emphasizes the fundamental principle that a child's academic accomplishment will be effective only with the collaboration and support of his school, home, and community (Epstein, 2018).

Partnerships among schools and the community can benefit schools by providing extra sources that support the success of students, the school, and the community as a whole.

According to May and Aslan (2016), this form of relationship is pivotal in attaining effective school management. They also recognize this collaboration as a response to the current educational demands. Additionally, complex educational issues have accelerated the development of new standards, educational policies, techniques, and designs in the modern era. For that purpose, a collaboration between communities and other organizations is crucial for overcoming socioeconomic hurdles that have persisted daily (Pozil & Hacker, 2017).

In addition, school-community partnerships are regarded to have an impact on student's achievement and accomplishments outside the school, as well as positively influence and benefit the community in return (Gross et al., 2015).

Due to the significant contributions of school-community partnerships to school development, educational leaders continue to seek strategies to foster partnerships, particularly during current pandemic despite all the uncertainties this new normal brings. Additionally, it is critical especially at this time to assist students in adjusting to living on the same bridge as everyone else and succeeding in a distant learning system where teamwork, resiliency, communication, and interdependence are more important than ever. The emerging educational needs compel school leaders to leverage the social and human capital inherent in their communities in order to ensure that school personnel, students, and families have their needs met by fostering effective school-community partnerships.

According to Khalifa (2012), principals who foster effective school-community relations that result in student academic and social success engage in practices such as promoting community rapport and trust, bringing the community into the school, maintaining a consistent presence, promoting school-community overlap, and creating a strong commitment to student and community advocacy.

To this end, it is pivotal to have a school leader who possesses excellent leadership abilities and interpersonal skills. Frequently, it is the school head that initiates and maintains positive relationships with community members and other stakeholders. Therefore, his or her willingness to engage the community in the school's management is vital. The school head must devote time and effort to prepare for and support

community involvement in school. Additionally, s/he must communicate the school's vision and goals to community members, listen to their diverse perspectives, and invite them to engage in school activities.

In the Philippines, school heads together with the teachers and staff are given responsibilities to encourage local communities to become effective and active partners in achieving the Department of Education's objectives through the adoption of School-Based Management (SBM), which focuses on decentralizing school governance. SBM was formally established as the DepEd's governance structure in 2001 with the enactment of RA 9155. Thus, SBM is a feasible structural reform strategy for enhancing the quality of public school education to generate functionally literate Filipinos.

The Department of Education greatly encourages and challenges the schools to commit in creating a culture of collaboration. Many public schools in the Tarlac City Schools Division and Division of Tarlac Province face unprecedented challenges such as lack of learning materials, facilities, and provision of training for teachers and parents. These issues have been a big challenge even before the pandemic and these need the attention of the community since schools cannot surpass these challenges alone. To solve these current and future hurdles, community effort is key.

This study was undertaken at this context. The researcher presented and analyzed the best practices in forging and sustaining successful school-community partnerships of the elementary and secondary public school heads in the Division of Tarlac City and Province that were recognized and awarded for their successful partnerships with the community and other stakeholders and were assessed and evaluated Level III (Advanced) of Practice for School-Based Management during the school year 2019 to 2020, and 2020 to 2021. This examined how the school heads established and sustained the motivation of their external partners in giving their continuous support like financial, physical resources, expertise or skills, and labor for the attainment of quality education.

## **Objectives of the Study**

This study presented and analyzed the best practices of public elementary and secondary school heads of the Department of Education – Tarlac in establishing successful school-community partnerships.

Specifically, this study aimed to describe and analyze the following:

1. The school head's profile in terms of the
  - 1.1. Awards received with regard to partnerships
  - 1.2. Length of service as a school head
  - 1.3. Current designation
  - 1.4. Established partnerships
2. The best practices of the school heads as regards in forging and sustaining partnerships
3. The best practices of the school heads as regards in sustaining partnerships
4. The challenges being encountered in school-community partnerships

## **Methodology**

The study used qualitative research. This kind of research enables the incorporation of a variety of sources, including interviews, published data, observations, and documents. It is the gathering, analysis, and interpretation of non-numerical data.

The case study was utilized in analyzing and describing the best practices of the school heads in forging and sustaining school-community partnerships.

The research was also intended to present the profile of the schools outstanding in fostering school-community partnerships and the challenges encountered in sustaining the partnerships. From the findings of this study, a plan of action to address those challenges was developed and implications for educational management were identified.

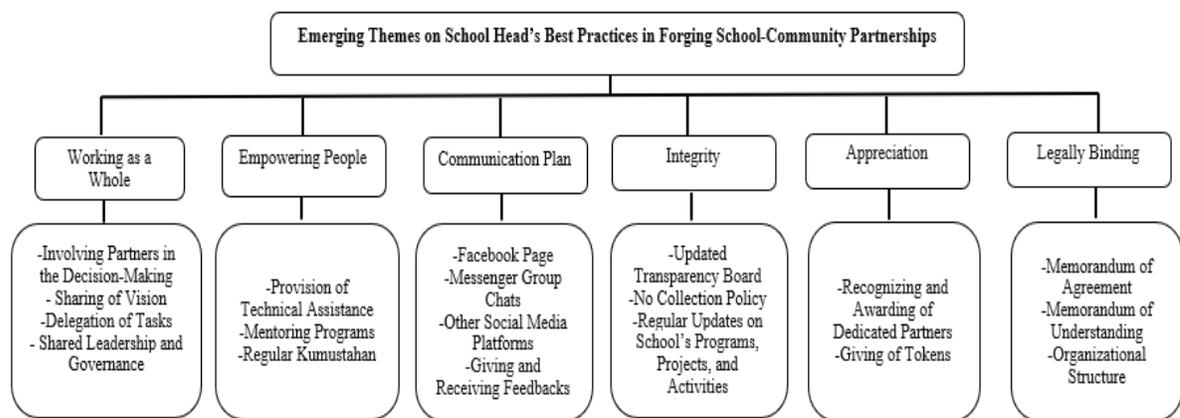
The participants of this study were ten (10) elementary and secondary school heads of Tarlac City Schools Division and Division of Tarlac Province who received recognition and awards for having established strong school-community partnerships and were evaluated with Level III (Advanced) practice of School-Based Management during the school year 2019 to 2020, and 2020 – 2021. The participants were interviewed in their workplaces to achieve a deeper understanding of their work lives.

Purposive sampling was utilized in identifying the cases. The design dictates a minimal number of samples. Hence, the researcher easily identified the respondents, and a completed enumeration of the sampling frame may be too minimal. Purposive sampling was employed to intentionally select only those who have experienced the phenomenon under study.

## Results and Discussions

In order to have successful school-community partnerships, this study summarized the variable that made the subjects successful in the field. Also, emerging themes per variable were presented.

### 1. Case Analysis on the School Heads’ Best Practices in Forging School-Community Partnership



*Figure 1: Emerging Themes on School Head's Best Practices in Forging School-Community Partnerships*

School leaders formed successful school-community relationships by including partners in all school endeavors. All cases witnessed higher partner engagement by giving them a voice in the school's decisions, projects, and activities.

Cases 1 and 8 suggested using client feedback forms to seek feedback from stakeholders. Asking for input makes people feel appreciated, they say. They used it to interact with partners, promoting cooperation. Cases 1 and 8 built their community partnerships by listening.

Case 1, Case 7, and Case 9 are assessing the needs of the school and community since this is essential for developing projects, activities, and programs and establishing priorities to address what the school and community actually need. An assessment of needs offers the initial data upon which planning is based.

Meanwhile, Case 1, Case 4, Case 7 and Case 9 put great value on having shared vision. They stressed that the first stage in creating a strong shared vision is to be crystal clear about the school's desired results. Individuals and teams will be able to collaborate more effectively if their goals are crystal clear. When individuals have the same interests, they develop a strong sense of commitment.

On the other hand, Case 1 and Case 3 established strong partnerships with their stakeholders by delegating tasks to them. Spreading the butter evenly is Case 3's principle in assigning tasks to the internal and external partners. They both felt that the capacity to delegate not only empowers their partner, but also builds a sense of trust and confidence in them, resulting in greater school involvement.

Communication is important to successful collaborations, according to all cases. With the pandemic causing changes in communication, they all used social media and technology, such as a school Facebook page, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, group chats for parents and other stakeholders, e-mail, text messages, and phone calls. With these, they maintained communication despite the new norm.

Cases 1, 3, and 8 promoted the school by showing its achievements. Case 8 compares school-community ties to advertising. Potential buyers will be interested in products with attractive attributes. Partnerships are similar. Present the school, teachers, and students' accomplishments to the community. For a collaboration to be long-lasting, community partners must recognize their efforts benefit the whole school.

Offering a cup of coffee while having informal meetings and kumustahan is Case 1's way of initiating conversations. This is supported by Case 6, and Case 7 who believe that having deep and sincere dialogue with the members of the community without having an agenda to ask something from them builds trust and camaraderie which are important in establishing partnerships.

Adhering to the No Collection Policy is what makes Case 3 distinct. She strictly follows this policy because for her this can encourage more people to take part on the school's programs because they know that they are being invited not because the school plans to ask for donations or monetary support from them, but because the school values their presence. This is also her way of changing the notion that partnerships are just about donating money, but partnerships are about being committed to work as one for the betterment of the school community.

All cases stressed that transparency must be applied always, in all situations. Transparency increases trust. On their transparency board, they offer current liquidation reports on financial programs such MOOE, School-Based Feeding Funds, and donations. Stakeholders and external partners must know how school resources are allocated. Case 2 emphasizes honesty by saying, "Give credit where credit is due."

Cases 7 and 9 recognize and award committed stakeholders. Quarterly awards were given to partners as a symbol of gratitude for their cooperation in achieving the school's goals. Recognition inspires others to achieve better, which improves the school community.

Five out of ten cases provide community leadership power. Sharing leadership tasks helps schools become more open and self-reflective as more people exchange information, discuss difficulties, and make decisions together. Case 8 emphasizes self-improvement and selflessness. As a result of shared leadership, it became obvious that people may be empowered by reflecting on the relevance of their work. These activities assist bridge gaps, solve common concerns, and develop listening and communication skills.

An organization's structure explains how its actions achieve its goals. Case 1, Case 7, Case 9, and Case 10 have clear structures and work arrangements with well-defined roles and duties. Case 7 said that when people recognize their roles, they will be guided toward the school's goals. School staff and community partners should learn each other's roles and duties to effectively communicate about services. The community partner should help the school address the needs of students, families, and the community (Rossen, 2016).

Case 6 advised that the school should always have the stakeholders sign a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to formalize their agreement. MOA provides cooperative terms and conditions. Case 6 showed that a MOA allows members to detail their goals. This eliminates ambiguity and future confrontations. By stating what each member expects from the other, MOA functions as a contract template.

Case 4's commitment as a school leader to promote collaboration is to educate the entire staff. Cases 1, 2, 6, and 8 believed that routinely assessing the performance of teachers, students, and stakeholders is crucial in designing training plans and giving teachers the option to reskill and upskill. If teachers feel empowered, they will develop self-affirmation and be effective and efficient learning facilitators for their students. If parents see their children developing holistically, they will have faith in the school's potential and take initiative to help achieve the school's goals. Case 1 believes a strong leader develops more leaders.

Cases 1, 3, and 8 advised sharing relevant and accurate performance results with parents and other stakeholders. Case 1 requires teachers to produce accurate and reliable findings even if most pupils did not accomplish the target. Parents and other partners were informed of the learners' needs so they could collaborate on intervention strategies. Cases 8 and 10 encouraged their partners to teach. Case 10 developed a PLC to involve everyone in curriculum and instruction development, not just teachers.

## 2. Case Analysis on the Challenges Encountered by the School Heads in Forging School-Community Partnerships

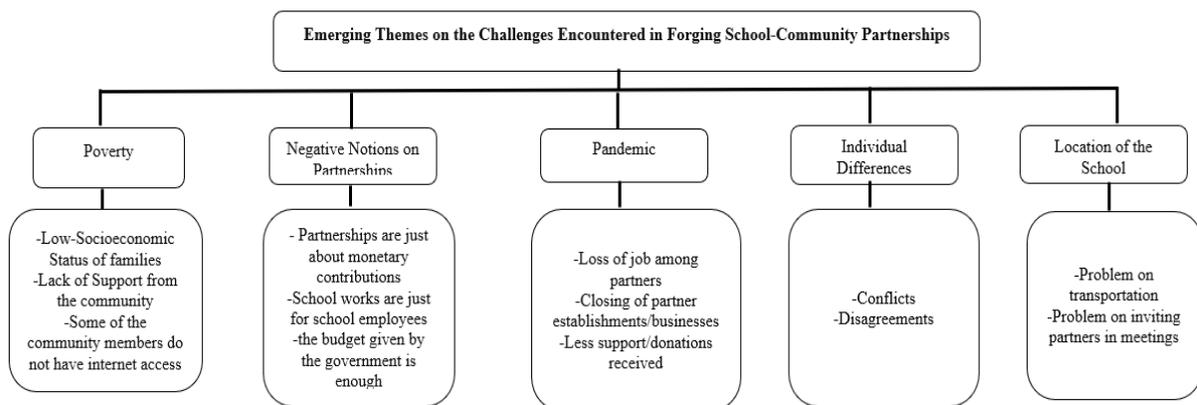


Figure 2: Emerging Themes on the Challenges Encountered in Forging School-Community Partnerships

School leaders face obstacles and issues while establishing school-community partnerships. Poverty is a major barrier to community participation. Four (4) out of ten (10) cases claimed that because their schools are located a barangay where most families have low socioeconomic level, many people of the community do not want to participate in school programs.

Cases 1, 3, and 5 had trouble building school-community connections because the community mistrust their abilities and intentions. Case 3 was compared to the preceding principal. According to Cases 1, 7, and 8, this issue stems from bad perceptions about partnerships. Case 1 showed that inviting community members to meetings left a bad impression. They assumed the school was using them to get contributions. Case 8 indicated many parents thought schoolwork was for teachers and the principal. Community people were hesitant to contribute support because they believed the government's budget was enough to build classrooms, teaching materials, and other facilities.

Cases 2 and 4 show how the pandemic's unprecedented changes complicated linkages. Case 2 had trouble modifying the school's improvement plan to match current demands due to a rapid shift in plans. Case 4 indicated that many community members lost their jobs and some businesses closed due to less external funding.

Case 6 and 7 experienced having conflicts with the members of the community and other partners because of their individual differences. As case 7 said, having different visions and purpose for establishing linkages can cause disagreements and conflicts. Case 6 experienced having disagreements with some of their partners for having agenda that were not for the school's improvement, but for their own benefits.

For Case 9, the location of the school can affect the process of establishing school-community partnerships. He had difficulty reaching out to their external partners outside the school barangay. Also, because his school is located far from the city, some of their partners cannot attend meetings regularly, while some did not even know where the school is located.

### 3. Challenges Encountered by the School Heads in Sustaining School-Community Partnerships

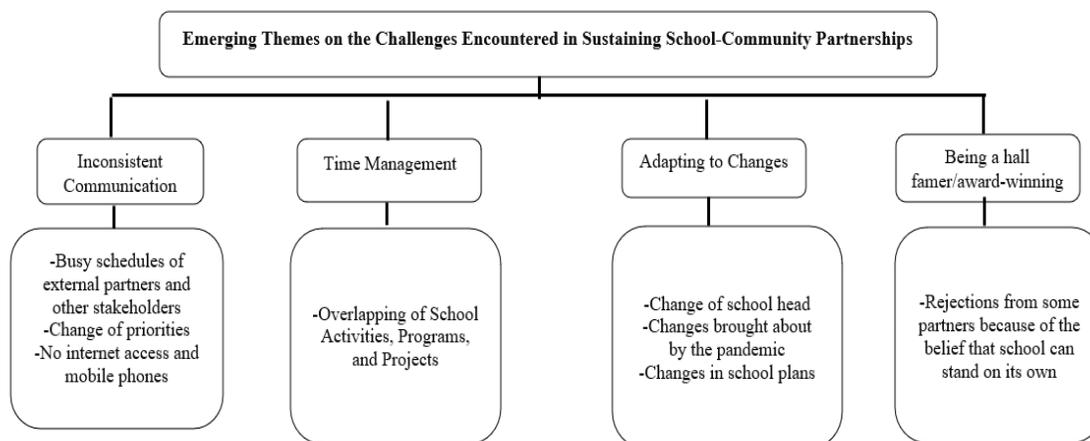


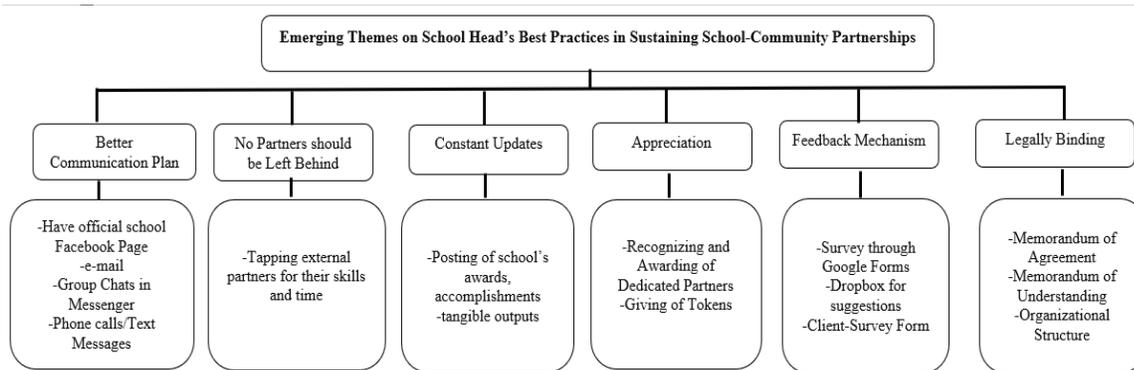
Figure 3: Emerging Themes on the Challenges Encountered in Sustaining School-Community Partnerships

Many school heads believed that if partnerships were well-established, the community would create dedication and initiative. Inconsistent communication from their partners due to busy schedules, other commitments, and changing priorities prevented them from attending school meetings and convergence. Case 4 had trouble communicating with their barangay partners since some lacked internet connection and mobile phones. Moreover, Case 5, Case 8, and Case 10 confronted challenges in time management because of the overlapping of activities to be accomplished urgently. As a result, meeting with their stakeholders were being set aside.

Adapting to changes made it hard for Case 6 and Case 7 to sustain their linkages with their external partners. Based on the experience of Case 6, after assessing a plan and they found out that changes must be made, some partners disagreed and lost their interest because they wanted to stick to the traditional ways of doing things while some did not want their suggestions and proposals to be modified in any way.

Lastly, for Case 9, the notion that their school no longer needs assistance or support because they have been recognized as the school that has done the greatest job of implementing Brigada Eskwela for the past three years in a row. Some of their partners believed that they had all of the needed resources and the school could function properly without their assistance.

#### 4. Case Analysis on School Head’s Best Practices in Sustaining School-Community Partnerships



*Figure 4: Emerging Themes on the School Head’s Best Practices in Sustaining School-Community Partnerships*

As leaders, the school heads were committed to involving the community in the school's progress, especially for the student’s education. All the cases improved communication with their partners via Facebook, Messenger, e-mail, Google Meet, and phone conversations. Case 1 also shares meeting minutes with partners to keep them informed.

In sustaining good relationships with stakeholders from low socioeconomic status, Case 1 and Case 6 tap them not for monetary assistance, but for their time and skills. They were invited in the school to share their expertise in different areas like making of handicrafts and planting vegetables. *“We establish partnerships not only for people with rich families or organization, but with everyone who has love for education. No partner should be left behind,”* as quoted from one of the cases.

Cases routinely shared information on school projects, programs, and events to keep partners interested and motivated. Case 1 publishes the school, teachers, and students' accomplishments on Facebook to show the community the fruit of their labor. These awards would not be achievable without the community's support. Case 5 uses social media to update partners on the school's efforts by publishing pictures and videos. According to her, partners want to see real results of their support, which will keep them engaged.

All cases believe an appreciated individual will go above and beyond. This study's cases rewarded partners for their dedication. Certificates, plaques, and tokens were given to persons who exhibited dedication and commitment.

Case 4 and Case 7 gave importance on feedback mechanism. *“We can always improve if there are feedbacks,”* are the words of Case 4. Also, both admitted that as school heads, they do not always see the

school's progress clearly because there were times that they fail to reflect. But through feedbacks, they can see their flaws and areas that need improvement. Though the truth hurts for them, these feedbacks can help them grow because *the "best way to improve is to recognize that something is lacking, and the best way to identify that is by having access to feedbacks to improve the school services,"* as stated by Case 4.

Out of ten (10), Case 2's strategy in sustaining school-community partnerships is by securing Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). A MOA among all partners should be in place to assist in outlining the roles of each partner and how the activities will be coordinated. Regardless of who supplies the services, MOA with well-defined partner responsibilities and expectations should be adopted.

Case 3 sustains connections distinctively. She values their teacher-partners. She makes them feel valued. Motivated teachers can improve student achievement. If the community sees that the school provides outstanding instruction, they will be more encouraged to contribute.

On the other hand, Case 6 gives the stakeholders the chance to lead by allowing them to facilitate activities such as Parents' Night, Alumni Homecoming, Family Day, and more. Moreover, Case 5 sets meetings regularly and provides invitation and memorandum to inform the stakeholders on the matters to be discussed so they can prepare for suggestions and proposals.

Sustaining the commitment of partner institutions was challenging for school heads, but sustainability was achieved through engaging the community with the school's goal of providing quality education.

## **Conclusions**

The following conclusions were derived from the findings of the study:

1. School heads established successful school-community partnerships by involving the stakeholders in decision-making and planning of all the activities of the school; soliciting feedbacks; assessing the needs of the school and the community; having shared vision; delegating tasks with the stakeholders; having constant communication; showcasing the school's achievements; adhering to No Collection Policy; establishing clear organizational structure; signing of Memorandum of Agreement; and being transparent at all times.
2. The challenges encountered by the school heads in establishing school-community partnerships include: socioeconomic status of the members of the community; gaining the trust of the community and other stakeholders; negative notions about school-community partnerships; adjusting to the changes brought about by the pandemic; having individual differences; and being situated in a far-flung area.
3. In sustaining school-community partnerships, school heads were confronted by challenges such as inconsistent communication with the stakeholders; problems in time management due to overlapping of activities; adapting to changes; and having impression that award winning school does not need support anymore.
4. The school heads were able to sustain the commitment of their partners by keeping constant communication with them; tapping all the stakeholders not just for financial support, but also for their skills; keeping all the partners updated on the progress of the school's programs, activities, and projects; recognizing and awarding dedicated partners; securing Memorandum of Agreement; and practicing shared leadership and governance.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following are recommended:

1. In order to enhance and improve the quality and relevance of education, school heads may encourage greater collaboration and linkages among partners involved in the delivery of services and resources by providing developmental trainings for teachers and learners, development of contextualized and localized learning materials, and other similar activities.
2. Schools and community are encouraged to embrace a feeling of shared ownership, accountability, and responsibility for education in order to increase the commitment of all stakeholders to fulfilling their responsibilities in school.
3. School heads are advised to increase the participation of all stakeholders in the development of plans, implementation of the school's programs, initiatives, and activities, and assessment of the school's accomplishments. This would improve shared leadership and governance between the school and community, favorably improving the services provided to students.
4. School heads are encouraged to continually update the community on their needs, progress, and accomplishments, as it is through communication that excellent relationships and shared commitment are fostered.
5. All schools are recommended to establish a Memorandum of Agreement with their partners in order to have a clear understanding of how activities will be coordinated.
6. Schools and their partners are suggested to also have partnership contracts signed by both parties to specify their rights, duties, and the allocation of budget. In addition, the contract should establish the general partnership regulations, such as withdrawals and financial reporting.
7. Other regions may also perform similar research. Given the significance of effective school-community collaborations, the results will serve as a springboard for the development of programs aimed at enhancing the quality of education.

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