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SNAPSHOT

Students Win When Teachers Help Teachers

Educators transfer skills to colleagues with students as the ultimate beneficiaries



A teacher in southern Philippines teaches her colleagues how to use science instruments.

Rojessa Tiamson-Sacada, Education Development Center

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"Mañana mang jigsaw kami," (Tomorrow we will do jigsaw puzzles), a grade school student from Santa Maria Central School in Zamboanga City, southern Philippines, brags to a fellow student. In this school, students are excited to attend classes and digest new lessons. The excitement stems from a successful teacher training project between USAID and the Philippine Department of Education that has made this school the top central school in this city for the past three years.

The school's principal, Dr. Fely Ascabano, clearly sees the connection: "The program has put us in the top place, with increasing National Achievement Test (NAT) scores since we started implementing the program in 2006. Clearly, it was because of our teachers' improved teaching capacities, which resulted in better student performance." The NAT scores of participating schools increased from 51 percent in 2006 to 65.3 percent in 2010, surpassing the project's target of 55 percent.

The program, active in 741 public elementary schools in the southern Philippines, enhances teachers' core competencies in English, science, and math as well as teaching and learning management practices. Core teacher groups attend USAID-funded professional development training, and then train other teachers through peer learning circles, study groups, and small workshops. Teachers focus on mastering subject areas where students have exhibited low NAT scores, such as fractions; or areas within their own realm, such as classroom management.

"The program can be a formal gathering of several teachers with one taking the lead, or an informal one-on-one session in the guise of an afternoon chat. It's a very flexible practice. And as the principal, I conduct follow-through evaluations," says Dr. Ascabano.

Student interest in learning, class participation, and school attendance has improved dramatically. At the end of the day, Dr. Ascabano enjoys listening to students talk about their lessons, saying, "They are still very excited! It just shows that the teachers have done well, and that makes me a very proud principal." The teacher training project is now part of the Department of Education's strategy to improve teachers' competency in teaching math, science, and English.