



Statement on PHSA Culture of Sexual Abuse and Violence

National Education Coalition Condemns the Alleged “Normalization” of Bullying, Abuse and Violence in the Philippine High School for the Arts and Calls for Concrete Action to Protect Learners and Make the Elimination of Sexual Violence a Top Priority.

The Civil Society Network for Education Reforms or E-Net Philippines is concerned and strongly condemns the alleged culture of bullying, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and violence happening at the Philippine High School for the Arts, the country’s premier art school, that has traumatized generations of children. These alleged acts which were made public through a news article in VICE World News are based on interviews with abuse survivors and a letter to the PHSA administrators, signed by 89 current students and 79 alumni in January 2022, demanding the school leadership to investigate alleged abuses and ensure “safe spaces” when they resume physical classes post-lockdown in August.

Sexual violence perpetuated against children is a gross violation of fundamental human rights and bears long-term devastating impact on the victims. E-Net is seriously concerned on the impact of these sexual abuse experiences on our children’s well-being. They are at a heightened risk for adverse physical and mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicide. When our learners feel unsafe in school, they have the tendency to avoid certain classroom or school activities. They show lower educational performance, and higher dropout rates. Interrupted or incomplete education, among other impact, sets them to an economic disadvantage in life. Trauma from sexual abuse and violence creates a lingering sense of powerlessness, shame, fear, all of which can affect a victim’s quality of life long term.

There have been significant gains in protecting children and youth from violence in schools through enactment of enabling laws such as R.A. No. 11313 or The Safe Spaces Act which covers all forms of gender-based sexual harassment (GBSH) committed in public spaces, educational or training institutions, workplace and online space and the Department of Education has issued policies on Child Protection such as D.O. No. 40, s. 2012 which constitutes the policy and guidelines on protecting children in school from abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of abuse. The full implementation of these laws and policies is fundamental to guarantee that all children and youth are protected against all forms of abuse and exploitation in schools and other educational institutions and that they feel safe in the spaces where they learn, live and play.



Making everyone aware of these policies and procedures communicates to the entire school community that sexual harassment, abuse and violence will not be tolerated and anyone who engages in these behaviors will be held accountable. The more that appropriate strategies for supporting and protecting students are embedded in everyday policies, procedures, and practices, the more sustainable a safe and positive school climate becomes.

This also reminds us of the urgent need for the implementation of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education in our education system. CSE plays a crucial role in addressing the health and well-being of children and young people by increasing awareness on children's rights to access health, education and protection from all forms of abuse and violence.

E-Net supports the PHSA students' and alumni's demands for investigations of alleged abuses, new policies to prevent new abuse, consultations on the forming of such policies, disciplinary action against abusers, and for the faculty to be more receptive to students' complaints of abuse.

E-Net urges the PHSA administration and the Department of Education to act on the mounting complaints of sexual harassment, abuse and violence reportedly committed by faculty and school personnel against their students. Sexual abuse and violence must be confronted and stopped in haste.

The PHSA experience has reminded us once again how vulnerable children and youth are to sexual abuse and violence in the school setting and if school systems do not act on its responsibility to ensure that each student can attend school in a safe environment, sexual abuse and violence in schools will persist.

**Make every school a safe place to learn!
Make the elimination of bullying, sexual abuse and violence in schools a top priority!**

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