Streamlining Administrative Processes in DepEd Division Offices: A Review of Best Practices and Existing Policies

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Abstract

Aim: This review examines existing policies, frameworks, and best practices in streamlining administrative processes in DepEd Division Offices and evaluates their effectiveness in enhancing efficiency and service delivery.

Methodology: A qualitative document-based review was conducted through thematic analysis of official DepEd Orders, evaluation reports, and legislative acts using a structured coding protocol to identify reforms and recurring challenges.

Results: The review highlights notable progress, including the institutionalization of Quality Management Systems (ISO 9001:2015), wider use of digital platforms, and policies aimed at reducing teachers' non-instructional workload. However, persistent gaps remain due to uneven infrastructure, limited digital capacity, and inconsistencies in implementation across divisions.

Conclusion: DepEd's reform initiatives show promise, but their sustainability depends on strengthened capacity building, equitable digital infrastructure, and consistent performance monitoring. Addressing these disparities is essential to achieving a resilient and decentralized governance model.

Keywords: *DepEd administrative processes, division office guidelines, school-based management, education governance, DepEd QMS ISO*

INTRODUCTION

Basic education in the Philippines is governed by a multi-layered bureaucracy, with the Department of Education (DepEd) at the top issuing national policies that are implemented through regional and division offices. Many reforms over the last two decades have sought to reduce the power and centralization of the topmost layers of bureaucracy and improve operations in DepEd, as a slow and heavily centralized bureaucracy inhibits effective basic education service delivery. Schools Division Offices (SDOs) oversee schools at the city and provincial levels, serving as a bridge between national policies and local school needs. Therefore, it is imperative that SDOs operate efficiently and provide timely administrative services to school communities, thereby contributing to the overall performance of the basic education system (Carvajal & Sanchez, 2024).

The sheer size and historically centralized structure of DepEd have long been cited as factors behind slow or erratic policy implementation. DepEd is thought to be the largest bureaucracy in the Philippine government, with over 20 million students and around half a million personnel. In a 2014 interview, Dr. Vicente Reyes described DepEd's bureaucracy as "dysfunctional," noting that one-size-fits-all, top-down decision-making and overworked central management left local needs unmet. Earlier, Luz (2010) observed that structural rigidities and an entrenched "central office-driven" culture prevented authentic school-based management and local empowerment. For many years, some division and school officials felt they had to wait for higher offices to dictate what they could do and how to do it. These traits led to delays, duplicated efforts, and underuse of local opportunities, all of which reduced frontline services for schools (Amihan et al., 2023).

To correct chronic systemic problems, government policymakers and DepEd leaders prioritized governance reforms and public sector efficiency. A key turning point was the passage of Republic Act No. 9155, also known as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, which shifted education management from centralized control to a

more decentralized structure. This law clarified roles and accountability at the central, regional, division, and school levels and provided SDOs with more flexibility in running schools. In conjunction with RA 9155, DepEd created the Rationalization Plan in 2013 to reduce duplication and improve operations. Next came DepEd Order No. 52, s. 2015, which introduced a formal organizational structure to all DepEd offices. As part of this reform, DepEd established a Curriculum Implementation Division in addition to the Schools Governance and Operations Division to give schools organized, dedicated, professional support. The Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) was made responsible for running division-level programs, managing personnel and resources, and maximizing accountability to accommodate responsive decision-making. DepEd also initiated policies to simplify administrative functions such as procurement, record management, performance monitoring, and technical assistance. These efforts were supported by legislation such as the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007 and RA 11032 or the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018, which mandated streamlined processes, shortened turnaround time, and public-facing Citizens' Charters. DepEd has since updated its charter and set up Anti-Red Tape (ART) Committees at central and regional offices to encourage better compliance and clarity in public service (Sanchez, 2025).

Given the wide coverage of DepEd policies, this review is specifically limited to administrative and governance policies and practices at the division level, rather than curricular or instructional policies. Such a scope allows for greater manageability and focuses on processes most likely affecting SDO efficiency and service delivery. The purpose of this study is to systematically review the policies and best practices that currently guide administrative processes in DepEd division offices and examine how well these policies and practices sufficiently address long-term inefficiencies. This research involves documentary and secondary sources, such as official DepEd issuances (orders, memoranda, and manuals), national laws and regulations, and relevant evaluation studies of DepEd's administrative processes.

This review has significance for two reasons. First, it offers an academic and policy-focused synthesis for practitioners engaged in education governance and public administration in developing country contexts. The DepEd case provides insight into how a large, centralized bureaucracy decentralizes functions in education while working within systemic constraints, which is important for comparative education administration (Carvajal et al., 2025). Second, the findings provide policymakers and DepEd leaders with practical lessons and evidence-based recommendations that can be operationalized to strengthen administrative processes. As the Philippine government continues pushing for public sector modernization through management quality systems and performance accountability, reviewing how this agenda is implemented in education at the division level—and identifying which "best practices" can be adapted or scaled—remains both timely and necessary.

Objectives

This review is guided by the following research questions:
1. What existing policies, guidelines, and mandates guide the administrative processes in DepEd Schools Division Offices?
2. What administrative challenges or inefficiencies have been identified from previous studies or reports regarding the administrative process in DepEd Division Offices?
3. What initiatives and best practices have been implemented to improve administrative processes in SDOs, and how effective are they in the context of decentralized governance?

Review of Related Literature

The literature on administrative streamlining within education discusses necessary reforms with some recent examples of action. For example, Alva and Jalos (2023) identified that when SDOs had ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System certification, improvements were found in process clarity, internal communication, and stakeholder satisfaction. Additionally, Dacer et al. (2025) recorded the barriers and interventions when implementing digital governance in a provincial SDO. They found that while digital tools are effective and encourage efficiency and transparency in organizational processes, the effectiveness was limited due to the functionalities of the applications, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient training to build staff capacity (e.g., teachers and administrative staff). Some studies also include efforts around administrative reduction for teachers. For example, Bete and Collera (2025) disclosed that the deployment of the Learners' Information System (LIS) offered more accurate data and allowed for more efficient record-keeping, noting some challenges for schools with limited connectivity. However, the overall ability of the LIS to improve practice was welcomed by teachers. These studies present context-specific evidence as a primary source for assisting in this review. Similar findings also appear in research that emphasizes the alignment of

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governance reforms with teacher workload management, leadership support, and institutional accountability (Carvajal et al., 2025).

International studies highlight that effective administrative reform in education encompasses not just policy approaches but also local capacity and accountability mechanisms (World Bank, 2021). The lack of adequate information about resources and institutional capacities in the Philippines makes implementing reforms difficult in a uniform manner. A policy review by the Philippine Business for Education (PBEd, 2024) similarly emphasizes the importance of continuous support to realize the full benefits of decentralizing governance in education. This broader perspective informs the current study and reinforces the consideration of DepEd's initiatives in both empirical conditions and conceptual frameworks. The integration of policy-driven initiatives and reflective leadership practices can further strengthen reform sustainability (Carvajal et al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws on two complementary theories of public-sector reform: Decentralization Theory and New Public Management (NPM). Decentralization theory suggests that transferring authority or decision-making capabilities for services from central offices to local units can lead to greater responsiveness and accountability (Rondinelli & Cheema, 1983). The decentralization-based governance of the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines is evident in laws such as Republic Act (RA) 9155, which focused on decentralizing authority to schools and division offices, thereby improving autonomy and accountability for results. At the same time, the influence of New Public Management (NPM) is visible in the administrative reforms of the DepEd that focus on efficiency, performance, and customer service. NPM principles advocate the adoption of private sector management processes in the public sector (e.g., quality assurance systems and results-based management) (Hood, 1991). For example, by adopting a Quality Management System (aligned with ISO standards) and implementing the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS), the DepEd institutionalized standards, continuous improvement, and evidence-based decision-making. This theoretical framework was used to examine the significance of the findings, particularly in interpreting reforms such as digital governance, rationalization of workloads, and quality management, all of which align with the goals of decentralization and modernization of public administration. These approaches reflect how leadership frameworks rooted in reflective practices and accountability are essential in sustaining reform (Carvajal et al., 2023).
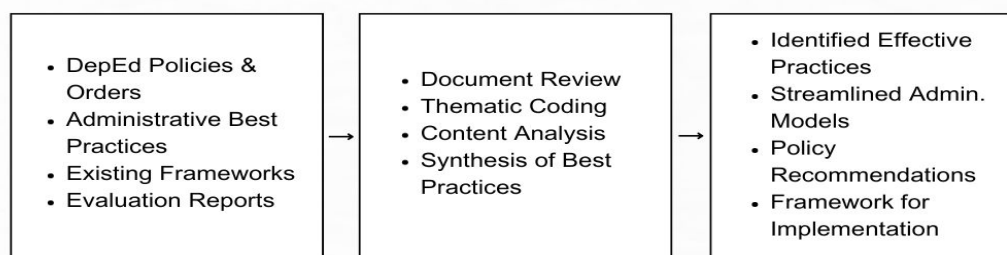
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Paradigm of the Study

This research is based on an Input-Process-Output (IPO) conceptual framework, which proposes a systematic approach to analyzing the policies, administrative processes, and organizational systems in SDOs of the DepEd. The IPO model is considered relevant as it demonstrates how appropriate administrative inputs undergo evaluative and analytical processes, leading to outputs that enhance operational efficiency.

The **Input** component consists of the essential features that govern the boundaries and context of the study. These include policies and orders from DepEd (such as DepEd Order No. 29, s. 2022) and ISO 9001:2015, as well as best practices, decentralization models, performance-based accountability measures, and evaluation reports with empirical evidence of both successes and challenges.

The **Process** component represents the analytical procedures applied to the inputs. The study utilizes qualitative document analysis, beginning with a systematic review of laws, memoranda, reports, and policy

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issuances. This was followed by thematic coding using inductive and deductive methods to classify information and identify patterns. Through content analysis, the study interprets themes to determine reform strategies and institutional responses. The process concludes with an integration of best practices across contexts, generating evidence related to improving policy.

Finally, the **Output** component demonstrates the intended contributions of the study, including identifying best practices to enhance administrative responsiveness and efficiency, reducing duplication and workload, developing research-informed policy implications, and establishing an implementation framework to facilitate reform across SDOs. Although the outputs provide interventionist solutions for operational gaps, they also contribute to broader discussions on decentralized governance in education and public sector innovation. The IPO framework highlights the continuum from policy to implementation and underscores the role of evidence-informed policy analysis in creating a responsive, accountable, and efficient educational bureaucracy. This aligns with the call for institutional reforms supported by reflective leadership and sustainable governance frameworks (Carvajal et al., 2024).

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative descriptive design based on documentary analysis of pertinent documents. Essentially, it was a narrative policy review that relied on existing documentation rather than generating new field data. This approach is well-suited to research focused on policy evaluation, as it allows for the systematic review of official issuances, guidelines, and reports (Carvajal & Sanchez, 2023).

Sources of Data

This research had no human respondents or interviewees. Instead of collecting new data from individuals in the field, it relied on previously documented evidence. By avoiding fieldwork, the study concentrated on reviewing historical and contemporary written records of policy and practice. This approach enabled broader coverage of relevant materials and was appropriate given the "review" nature of the inquiry. A similar method has been recognized as effective in examining organizational practices through existing written sources (Amihan et al., 2023).

Document Analysis Protocol

Since this research was document-based, no physical research instrument such as a questionnaire or interview guide was used. Instead, a document analysis protocol was designed to consistently examine abstract data from the sources. First, a checklist of topics and keywords was developed to guide the document search. The checklist helped ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant themes, from organizational structures to specific administrative processes. Second, a data extraction template was employed for each reviewed document. This template captured essential details such as the title, year, issuing body or agency, key provisions or findings, and notes on the document's relevance to streamlining efforts. Third, a simple thematic coding framework was adopted to organize and synthesize findings. By applying these structured steps, the study ensured consistency in data collection and interpretation, which is a critical element of methodological rigor (Sanchez, 2023).

Data Collection

The data collection process was carefully structured to enhance the credibility of the review of administrative reforms in DepEd Division Offices. It began with the retrieval of official documents from DepEd's online archive and related government sources. These included DepEd Orders, Division Orders, DepEd memoranda, audit reports, evaluation reports, and other official documents. Each document was screened for relevance using explicit criteria (i.e., alignment with administrative processes, timeframe of 2016–2025, and applicability across regions). Once identified, documents were classified into themed folders (e.g., policies, implementation guidelines, performance reports) to support organized analysis and meaningful comparison. A coding sheet was also developed to record key attributes of each document, including scope, objectives, and administrative focus. This coding sheet functioned as the baseline dataset for subsequent thematic analysis, similar to practices applied in policy-focused education research (Carvajal et al., 2025).

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. These phases included: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of documents, (2) generating initial codes

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using both deductive (aligned with the research questions) and inductive (emerging from the data) approaches, (3) identifying themes by grouping related codes, (4) reviewing themes against the dataset for coherence and distinction, (5) defining and naming themes in relation to their analytical contributions, and (6) producing the final report with an evidence-based interpretation of themes. This approach provided both rigor and thematic integrity aligned with the objectives of the study (Carvajal et al., 2024).

Ethical Considerations

Although this study did not involve human participants or personal data collection, ethical considerations were integrated into the research design. No ethical clearance was required since only publicly available documents were analyzed. Nevertheless, the researchers ensured accurate interpretation and representation of all materials, avoiding misrepresentation or overstating of findings. Proper citations were employed to acknowledge original issuances, institutions, and authors, thereby upholding intellectual property rights. Furthermore, the study maintained awareness of potential biases within official documents and exercised caution in drawing conclusions, ensuring that interpretations remained within the scope of the data reviewed (Sanchez, 2025).

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This report's results are structured by the study's research questions, and the main themes were found. First, for RQ1, it identified the current policies and rules that govern SDO administrative roles and processes. Second, for RQ2, it looks at the administrative problems and operational inefficiencies that have been reported in SDOs, which promoted various reforms. Finally, in relation to RQ3, it describes several important initiatives and good practices that have been put in place to improve SDO operations, including the introduction of ISO-aligned Quality Management Systems, initiatives to reduce workload for school personnel, a push for e-governance to improve workflow, and enhancements in technical assistance and performance management. We provide details on each of the themes in the sections below.

Legally Required Roles and Standard Activities for Division Offices

The definition of SDO roles and administrative responsibilities is primarily based on Republic Act No. 9155 (Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001) and expanded upon in several DepEd policies. RA 9155 has provided decentralization in education governance. It has empowered the SDS to manage personnel and operations of schools and hold them accountable for outcomes in their respective division. Therefore, SDOs operate at the most localized level of the education system and are expected to do the following: conduct monitoring visits to schools, provide technical assistance. and contextualize national policy in accordance with local need.

DepEd Order No. 52, s. 2015 specifies the functional structure of SDOs, which includes responsibility for offices like the Office of the SDS, Curriculum Implementation Division (CID), and School Governance and Operations Division (SGOD), and administrative units: the finance unit, human resources unit, records unit, and logistics unit. A macro level of critical responsibilities is subdivided into personnel management, financial transactions, record management, procurement, and maintaining facilities, and the SDO may have an Education Management Information System (EMIS) unit to support data collection and utilization to support planning and policy formulation, or enactment. DepEd Order No. 52's Enclosure 4 provides the respective responsibilities of SDOs, which include local education planning, local budget and revenue resource management, recruitment and evaluation of teachers, and liaison with local stakeholders. As a policy, it reiterates the premise that schools are the primary system's locus, and SDOs are not command centers, but rather supportive conduits. The Undersecretary for Governance and Operations is responsible for overseeing the division's field operations, which support this shift to reinforcing administrative support structures.

Concerning School-Based Management (SBM), the responsibility of the SDO to institutionalize SBM practices is framed in DepEd Order No. 007, s. 2024. These responsibilities include capacity building for school heads, developing local guidelines, establishing school information data systems, and providing technical assistance. Alongside administrative responsibilities, SDOs perform supportive functions, allowing their divisions to focus on teaching and learning while managing systemic and operational issues.

The standard operating procedures across SDOs are articulated through respective Citizens' Charters as required by the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act (RA 11032). The charters specify how to engage each service, the processing time frames, the accountable units/entities, and the service delivery processes and timelines for services, including teacher appointment processing, payroll, procurement, and

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certifications. The Citizen's Charter presents an opportunity for divisions to simplify or improve processes, and to appropriately establish Public Assistance and Complaints Desks to enhance service responsiveness and accountability.

In general, SDOs act as decentralized administrative centers with the role of implementing policies, managing resources, and providing support for schools. They are supposed to use the authority given to them by RA 9155 and other DepEd orders to gain some autonomy in the decision-making process regarding school personnel, finances, and to provide the schools' necessary future time and relevant operational capacity, thus limiting delays associated with numerous bureaucratic functions.

Problems and Inefficiencies Before Reforms

SDOs have historically faced many management problems that have limited their capacity to perform their intended function as support units, despite the presence of many clear mandates to do so. One common problem has been the bureaucracy in terms of work and paperwork that has resulted in requiring schools to go to higher offices. One example is that, before reform, schools were expected to submit copious documentation to evidence their SBM level of practice by Memorandum Order No. 83, s. 2012. Staff at both the school and SDO levels stated that completing and submitting the documentation, amounting to exhaustive reports, took an immense amount of time, energy, and paperwork. Staff also said that the emphasis on compliance paperwork removed or limited the time for support work, or time for real "problem" solving. There was also reported inefficiency related to the duplication of reporting (directly related to the complaints from a variety of offices, which was identified in previous administrations, as a school submitting similar data to a number of offices), as well as the lengthy, bureaucratic approval processes for a routine transaction (e.g., procurement or application for leave). The duplicative steps often resulted in delays, and some steps at the SDO or regional level were redundant.

The other challenge was the lack of non-teaching staff, both at the school and division levels. Because so many schools did not have administrative staff, teachers and principals were assumed to be clerical staff. Then SDOs received incomplete information or were performing basic duties that could have been done at the school if capacity existed. This ineffectiveness not only puts a strain on the educators but also on the processing of data and services.

Limitations in infrastructure and technology exacerbated inefficiencies. Before the IT upgrades, record keeping, communications, and monitoring were largely manual processes, with no technically integrated information systems. The manual nature and fragmented technology meant that even straightforward tasks (e.g., tracking the status of a request or consolidating enrollment data) took longer and were susceptible to errors. In some cases, SDOs in better positions began to integrate their own stop-gap digital tools for their own use, but again, there was no standard system-wide.

Lastly, the lack of even capacity and performance across SDOs has been a fundamental challenge. The readiness and resources of division offices for reform implementation differed, leading to variations in outcomes. Some SDOs adopted new processes the slowest, likely due to ineffective leadership or limited training. Some SDOs adopted and transitioned faster due to better preparation and resourcing. Informal assessments indicated the divisions advancing in the reform process had more proactive leaders and greater access to resources. SDOs with limited resources did not engage in innovations and reform efforts, which revealed a difference between divisions that was to be addressed by reforms. Inherent systemic inefficiencies and variation in experiences in SDOs were also the driving force behind the efforts to streamline programming discussed in this paper.

Key Initiatives and Best Practices for Administrative Improvement

Over the last decade, DepEd and various SDOs have implemented several experiments aimed at improving administrative processes. Most recently, these reforms can be categorized under a few themes: establishing quality management systems; reducing the administrative burden on school personnel; introducing digital technologies and innovations; and enhancing governance and accountability.

Quality Management Systems (QMS) and ISO Certification

Management Systems in accordance with ISO 9001:2015 standards. In line with DepEd Order No. 009, s. 2021, a QMS was established throughout the Department, including SDOs. As part of the QMS initiative, division offices provided documentation and standardization for core processes (e.g., established a process for processing requests, timelines for issuing documents), established performance indicators and timelines, and normalized internal audits and management reviews. Some newer empirical studies (e.g., Alva & Jalos, 2023) indicated that ISO-certified SDOs experienced improved clarity of processes and communications, and stakeholder satisfaction. SDO Laguna (ISO-certified since 2018) established turnaround times to provide clarity on the timeliness of services related to the

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issuance of school permits and processing teacher appointments, which has reduced waiting times considerably. The adoption of QMS also engendered a shifting culture toward continuous improvement, permitting periodic reviews by SDO staff to discover and correct bottlenecks in processes. Another benefit of QMS is improved client alignment with the DepEd Citizens' Charter (the public service standards each office is to post), which assists conformity with anti-red tape legislation. However, without any formal evaluation data, it is hard to know if improvements linked to ISO result in long-term performance improvements, or if some offices used the certification merely as an exercise in compliance. This raises the question of whether QMS is truly transforming organizational culture or simply satisfying its requirements. Overall, the ISO compliant QMS can be considered a best practice that is replicable for streamlining administration: it enhances transparency, consistency, and efficiency for division office operations, ultimately serving schools, teachers, and the public.

Alleviating Administrative Burdens on School Personnel

Another priority has been to mitigate the non-instructional workload of teachers and principals. DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024 directly aimed to remove administrative functions from teachers, reiterating that teachers ought to be teaching, with administrative functions fulfilled by their staff or school heads. This policy was implemented post a series of long-standing complaints that teachers were being burdened with excessive clerical work (data reporting, filling out forms, etc.), which ultimately compromised their teaching quality. Under DO 002 s. 2024, SDOs were directed to provide available administrative officers or hire an official or staff to undertake other duties, and travel and do work such as the preparation of reports, reviewing school records, and data encoding. SDOs and districts have devised various ways to solve this problem, for example, creating mobile administrative support teams to solve management issues across small clusters of schools, making multiple administrative aides available at a district or division level, and deploying them wherever needed. Initial feedback is promising, teachers are seeing more time to prepare lessons and connect with students, and some SDOs are seeing more accuracy and timelier reporting from trained staff instead of untrained personnel. For example, Bete and Collera (2025) found that by implementing the Learners' Information System (LIS), redundancy of resubmitting data was lessened, and data accuracy benefited in a rural high school, though in some areas, the connectivity issues presented difficulty in the implementation processes. The biggest challenge now is sustainability, as SDOs need to retain enough non-teaching staff and possibly institutionalize school administrative assistants. It is also important that the reduction of teacher workload does not require a shifted burden onto the principals or SDO staff without sufficient support. In terms of value, this initiative has at least indicated that with sufficient staff and process reengineering, we can break even and be much more efficient while maintaining higher morale for teachers.

Digital Innovations and E-Governance

The adoption of information and communications technology has had a remarkable impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the SDO administrative functions. DepEd has still promoting a number of digital platforms over the past few years. Churned out and persuaded, DepEd put out a LIS for enrollment and student information, a BEIS (Basic Education Information System) that gives school data statistics, an HRIS (Human Resource Information System), electronic document tracking, and several online portals related to budgets, procurement, etc. Basically, these promises or platforms would automate many mundane tasks and provide opportunities for real-time or cloud-based sharing with SDOs. There are already visible effects of the process of digitalization on the administrative efficiency of the SDOs. For example, an electronic document tracking platform in one region allows school-initiated requests, such as teacher salary adjustments or approval of school repair requests, to be logged online instead of going through the hierarchy of each level of school documents. Dacer et al. (2025), in the SDO Camarines Norte, point out that with the implementation of digital governance projects (e.g., a management system for income transparency), they saw that the speed of transactions increased, as well as the speed of information passage. For example, after the implementation of an e-procurement and tracking system, SDO Camarines Norte reported that when a procurement was processed, it took fewer weeks than before, and school heads of the procurement were able to monitor their requests without ever having to visit the SDO office.

Enhancing Governance and Accountability Mechanisms

Streamlining service delivery processes is not just about making them fast and efficient, but it is also about improving governance arrangements and accountability for results. Streamlining initiatives in this area also involves the strengthening of the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS) and the use of performance indicators in SDO operations. Many SDOs are beginning to develop more consistent monitoring and evaluation

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practices. Many of the SDO divisions now conduct School Monitoring, Evaluation and Adjustment (SMEA) sessions quarterly, in which they analyze and plan with data about school performance and SDO service delivery. In these SMEA and the RPMS more generally, SDOs incorporate administrative indicators such as processing durations, outcomes from client satisfaction surveys, and the total number of support visits from SDOs to schools to generate a feedback loop to improve service delivery. Another practice has been the establishment of service pledge and feedback mechanisms through the Citizens' Charter: SDOs post the specific service standards and contact points, and some have also tried out suggestion boxes or online feedback forms to receive client (teachers, principals, public) feedback on the quality of service. All of this, assisted by ARTA, helps foster accountability and a client-responsive service approach. Furthermore, capacity-building was also designed for accountability to resolve the cases of some divisions that were lagging mainly due to weaker capacity: DepED organized coaching sessions, inter-division sessions, and resource-sharing capabilities to lift the divisions that were the lowest performing. For example, one SDO that was a great example of the ISO QMS process has considered coaching and development with a nearby lower-performing SDO that is starting this process. The peer-learning and targeted assistance are emergent best practices in ensuring the institutionalization of reforms across all divisions. Moving forward, it will be important for DepED to create and provide formal governance support mechanisms (perhaps in the form of policy or funding) so that best practices can remain established and less reliant on the motivations of individual leaders.

Table 1. Summary of Key Administrative Reform Initiatives in DepEd Division Offices

Reform Initiative (Policy Basis)	Objective	Observed Effects
Governance Decentralization (RA 9155; DO 52, s.2015)	Give local offices clear responsibilities and move decision-making closer to the schools.	With more autonomy and responsibility, SDOs were able to provide schools with more responsive support. Impact differs by SDO, though, based on capacity and leadership (some use autonomy to its fullest, others don't).
Quality Management System (QMS) Implementation (DepEd Order 009, s.2021 & ISO 9001:2015 alignment)	Standardize and record SDO procedures; foster accountability and ongoing development.	Speedier service delivery in SDOs with ISO certification; increased client satisfaction; and improved process clarity and consistency. Early indications of improved performance tracking. It still takes a culture shift to get beyond compliance.
Teacher Workload Rationalization (DepEd Order 002, s.2024; DO 005, s.2024)	Remove or reduce non-instructional tasks from teachers to refocus on teaching.	Teachers' morale and concentration improved when they were freed from administrative responsibilities. SDOs send administrative personnel (such as cluster-based) to schools to manage paperwork. Hiring and supporting enough administrative staff is essential for success; if not handled, there is a risk that the responsibility will shift to the principals.
Digital Governance Initiatives (LIS, HRIS, e-Document Systems, etc.)	Automate and optimize administrative and data management processes.	Improved transparency, better tracking of requests, and more effective data management (e.g., quicker report preparation). Online tracking, for instance, shortened processing times. While divisions with strong ICT infrastructure see limited benefits, well-connected

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		divisions experience tremendous impact, underscoring the need for connectivity investment.
Accountability & Performance Monitoring (Citizens' Charter enforcement; RPMS integration)	Boost openness and make SDOs answerable for service quality and outcomes.	Expectations are made public by Citizens' Charters; there will be some processing time reductions and more transparent service procedures. Improvements have started to flow from the connection of RPMS to performance indicators (such as turnaround time and client feedback). To effectively reap the benefits, it needs constant data tracking and management attention.
Capacity-Building and Equity Measures (SDO mentoring programs; targeted TA plans)	Strengthen SDOs' weaknesses and make sure every division can successfully execute reforms.	Stronger SDOs are increasingly mentoring weaker ones; resource sharing and specialized training have aided lagging SDOs in implementing best practices. Although the policy is not yet established, it will lessen the difference between SDOs who do well and those who don't. These efforts continue to require funding and institutional support.

Ensuring Alignment with Decentralized Governance

A review of these developments shows they are mostly consistent with decentralization rationale: empowering local offices (via RA 9155); developing local decision capacity (via trainings and clear processes); and holding local offices accountable for resultant service delivery outcomes (via RPMS and charters). SDOs are increasingly functioning as support hubs responding to their school's needs, rather than simply conduits of top-down commands. As seen in instances where initiatives such as teacher workload reduction reform and digital services effectively support and improve the functioning of conditions in schools, this illustrates the decentralization ideal of viewing the central office as "steering" and regional offices as "rowing." However, because of varying conditions across divisions, we can say decentralization in education reform is still a journey. In some SDOs where reform initiatives are happening, they are getting closer to an effective, responsive local education authority, while some remain responsive but require additional support. The following section recommendations will provide insight as to how to bridge the gaps and pull all SDOs closer to effective decentralized governance.

Conclusions

1. Over the past two decades, the reforms within DepEd (for example, RA9155 and DepEd Order 52, s.2015) embody a decentralized framework for governance that puts Schools Division Offices in a position of power. This has opened the door for SDOs to develop into more responsive support units for schools, but they would need to be accompanied by reforms in processes and capacity building to be effective.

2. Many SDOs have installed Quality Management Systems (aligned with ISO 9001:2015), which have standardized a few key administrative processes and developed a culture of continuous improvement. The result has provided clearer procedures, normalizing errors, and quicker turnaround in those division offices, which clearly illustrates the positive impact formalized quality assurance mechanisms can have on bureaucratic efficiency.

3. Recent advances in digital channels and e-governance systems (e.g., LIS, HRIS, and electronic document tracking systems) have created an improved e-government administrative transaction regime that increases the speed and transparency of administrative transactions. Moreover, these developments have created real-time data sharing and monitoring of workflows. Nevertheless, the ultimate effect of these developments will also depend on the consistency of ICT infrastructure and connected skills across SDOs.

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4. In recent years, policies formulated to lessen administrative burdens for teachers and principals through, for instance, reassigning or hiring non-teaching staff to handle clerical work, have started to yield effects on the ground. In many instances, teachers now find themselves spending much less time doing administrative work, and initial feedback suggests that teachers are more efficient, and teacher morale is improved. To sustain this outcome, additional ongoing support in staffing, but also possibly exploring the creation of new positions of responsibility (for example, administration at the schools- and/or clusters-levels) will be critical.

5. Notwithstanding the above advances, it is evident that SDOs vary significantly in implementation and results of these reforms, as some office divisions have not implemented any of these initiatives due to differences in local leadership, availability of resources, and other contextual factors at the regional level. This reinforces the importance of continuing to build local capacity and providing targeted support to those SDOs that are similarly disadvantaged to ensure that those SDOs equitable road to improved administration processes.

Essentially, DepEd is a bureaucracy in transition. The operational processes of its division offices will increasingly be more efficient, transparent, and decentralized; these trends are strengthening the prospects for more responsive education governance. This cannot mean, however, that the positive trajectory of transition should simply be allowed to continue on its own, since the problems that demonstrate the persistent gaps and challenges, especially the inconsistencies in implementation and financing, must still be actively addressed, to promote a truly improved and equitable environment of division office administration.

Recommendations

▪ **Standardize Quality Management Systems across all SDOs:**
DepEd should make sure that every Schools Division Office develops and implements an ISO-aligned Quality Management System (QMS). This may require intense coordination and capacity building from the Central Office for SDOs still at early stages. By institutionalizing QMS nationwide (and not just the 15 regional offices already ISO certified), all SDOs will systematically improve process inefficiencies in divisions lagging.

▪ **Enhance performance monitoring and accountability:**
Establish real-time monitoring tools and performance indicators for administering services (e.g., turnaround time for transactions, ratings of client satisfaction, error rates). These indicators should be formally analyzed, embedded into existing dashboards, and linked to the RPMS to promote accountability. This will mean electronically establishing dashboards that will be available to the DepEd management of each SDO's performance using key metrics, then using that data to evaluate SDO heads and staff.

▪ **Invest in digital infrastructure and promote equity in e-governance:**
Make concentrated investments in ICT infrastructure and training, particularly for under-resourced or rural SDOs. There should also be active engagement with the DICT to enhance internet connectivity in GIDAs. The end goal is for all SDOs to be able to fully use DepEd's digital platforms (LIS, HRIS, finance systems, etc.) so that no division office is left behind on the digital transformation journey. Investments in digital protocols need to standardize the above and ensure data security and privacy across systems.

▪ **Fully implement teacher workload reduction policies:**
Engage the strategic hiring or reallocation of non-teaching personnel for school-level administrative responsibilities required in DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024. SDOs can engage alternative arrangements, for example, campus administrative aides clustered together; compact mobile administrative support teams, or even paraprofessionals in a pool who can be shared amongst various small schools. You will want to adjust monitoring to make sure teachers do have a reduced slate of work and the new schemata are managing the administrative responsibilities.

▪ **Strengthen continuous capacity-building for SDO staff and leaders:**
Make the regular training programs (for example, quality management, data management, client-oriented service delivery) for division office staff a routine part of the SDO's functions. Leadership development programs should continue to be offered to superintendents, assistant superintendents, and division chiefs to

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build and promote a reform-oriented leadership. Mentorship or twinning programs can be implemented to connect high-performing SDOs with struggling SDOs. Instead of thinking about ways to motivate individuals or teams, the ways your office considers motivating individuals or teams will include socializing and the transfer of best practices, and will serve to build out a reform network within DepEd.

- **Ensure inclusive and sustainable reforms across all divisions:**
    Policymakers should incorporate equity into every administrative reform process. This could come about by providing additional support (funding, technical assistance) to divisions with historically fewer resources on new mandates. The Anti-Red Tape and Citizens' Charter initiatives should be more vigorously enforced in all SDOs to provide the same level of basic services, such that even the least resourced offices are still meeting the baseline service requirements. In addition to that, if there are any new policy shifts, all new policy shifts should have an "equity package", clarification or funding scaffold solely based on supporting lower-capacity SDOs to meet the requirements. This approach will not only prevent divisions with well-resourced offices from getting ahead, while others fall further behind, but will also ensure that improvement in administrative governance will accrue directly to and equally across all regions.

Policymakers, by taking these steps, the Department of Education will emphasize improving the capacity of its administrative machinery, providing opportunities for improved outcomes in service delivery, and enhancing the support provided by SDOs to agencies. Many strategies for educational change require political will, ongoing commitment from all levels of the organization, and inevitably stakeholder participation in some governance. The anticipated improvements in efficiency in service delivery will warrant such efforts undertaken by the organization.

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