Grading Our Own School: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Principals Leading the SBM Self-Assessment

A Basic Research

[Copy for blind review: the researchers' names, positions, and schools division are removed. The final copy lists them here.]

Conducted February to October 2026

Abstract

Under DepEd Order No. 007, s. 2024, the school head leads the school's School-Based Management (SBM) self-assessment as the School SBM Coordinator, a function that may not be delegated, rating 42 indicators, some of which describe the head's own work, with teachers and stakeholders taking part. This interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) explored how principals make sense of leading this self-assessment. Seven principals of public elementary schools in one division who had led it in both SY 2024–2025 and SY 2025–2026 were interviewed once each, from May 4 to May 22, 2026. Each case was analyzed on its own before the cases were compared: 300 exploratory notes, 82 experiential statements, and 32 personal experiential themes yielded four group experiential themes. In the first, grading our own school, rating the school was rating oneself in public, between an honest mark and a safe one. In the second, the pen stays in my hand, the coordination was lived as answerability that stayed with the principal even when the work was shared. In the third, voices at the table, politeness kept low marks unsaid until the principals changed how they asked, and stakeholders' lower marks changed what indicators meant to them. In the fourth, from proving to improving, the end of means of verification and levels brought relief and loss, and the rating took its meaning in the school's plans and the division's technical assistance. The findings suggest that the division state plainly that ratings are not ranked, that principals plan how the indicators about their own work are rated, and that technical assistance record agreements rather than verdicts.

Keywords: school-based management, self-assessment, school principals, interpretative phenomenological analysis, lived experience

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Introduction of the Research

The Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 (Republic Act No. 9155) set the direction for decentralizing the management of schools, and School-Based Management (SBM) is the Department of Education's (DepEd) way of carrying it out: "the decentralization of decision-making authority from central, regional, and division levels to the individual schools, with the intent of bringing together school heads, teachers, learners, as well as parents, the local government units, and the community at large to improve learning outcomes through effective schools" (DepEd, 2024b, Sec. III, item 6). For more than a decade, schools' SBM practice was scored and validated under DepEd Order (DO) No. 83, s. 2012. In revising it, DepEd recorded that "Practitioners at the school level contended that its implementation was laden with voluminous and repetitive documentary requirements resulting in additional tasks assigned to the teaching personnel," and that the scoring system had become "challenging due to the exercise of an arbitrary approach to determining the outcome indicators" (Sec. I).

DO 007, s. 2024 changed both the instrument and the people who use it. Schools now rate 42 indicators in six dimensions as not yet, rarely, frequently, or always manifested (Sec. V.C). The purpose of the self-assessment "is for continuous improvement" (Sec. V.D), and "the prior practice of attaching various means of verification as documentary evidence to attest to the level of practice is no longer necessary" (Sec. V.E). The school

invites its internal and external stakeholders to the self-assessment, writes its results into its strategic and implementation plans during the learners' vacation, and invites the Schools Division Office (SDO) to give technical assistance during the year (Sec. V.D.2). The order also provides that "The school head shall assume the role of the School SBM Coordinator or the focal person," a function that "shall not be delegated nor reassigned, especially to any teaching personnel" (Sec. V.F.1).

The revised system thus puts the principal at the center of a self-assessment of a school whose indicators include the principal's own work, such as the strategic plan, the school-community planning team, and the fair distribution of teacher workload (Annex A, indicators 19, 20, and 35), with the stakeholders the principal leads at the table, and with no validation of the result; the SDO's part is technical assistance and "ensuring that the results of self-assessment consistently capture the realities of schools" (Sec. V.F.2). The order gave schools, SDOs, and Regional Offices a three-year transitory period (Sec. V.I), asks SDOs to "conduct a process evaluation to determine, analyze, and address common challenges of schools" (Sec. V.G), and provides for a review of the order once every three fiscal years (Sec. V.G). What leading the self-assessment is like for the principal who leads it is something that no checklist records.

Research on SBM in the Philippines has measured its effects and its implementation from records and surveys (Khattri et al., 2012; World Bank, 2016; Yamauchi, 2014), and reviews have described it as a program that schools comply with more than they own (Laguda et al., 2025; Second

Congressional Commission on Education [EDCOM II], 2024). Khattri et al. (2012) noted that their study "does not examine the processes through which SBM affected school performance" (p. 17) and called for "qualitative data collection, with a focus specifically on processes of implementation" (p. 19). In the sources this study reviewed, none has asked Filipino principals how they make sense of leading the self-assessment under DO 007, s. 2024.

This study therefore interviewed seven principals of public elementary schools in one division who had led their school's self-assessment twice under the revised system, and analyzed their accounts with interpretative phenomenological analysis. It addresses the Governance theme of the Basic Education Research Agenda, under Evaluation: "How effective have DepEd policies, programs, and projects been in meeting their stated objectives? What are the unintended consequences?", among whose topics are "Decentralization of basic education governance" and "Community engagement and participation" (DepEd, 2016, p. 16). It also bears on the agenda's question under Planning, "How can DepEd improve its planning process across levels?" (p. 13).

Literature Review

School-Based Management in the Philippines

SBM entered DepEd's schools through projects before it became policy for all. Under the Third Elementary Education Project, schools in SBM "were required to design a five-year School Improvement Plan (SIP) in partnership with parents and the community using data such as student achievement and students' learning needs assessments, with the school principal or head

teacher leading the process" (Khattri et al., 2012, p. 3). The early evidence on learning was modest. Khattri et al. (2012) found that SBM "had a statistically significant, albeit small, overall positive effect on average school-level test scores in 23 school districts" (abstract), and Yamauchi (2014) estimated that SBM raised the average national achievement test score "by 4.2 points over three years" (p. 1). Neither study could see how SBM worked inside schools. Khattri et al. (2012) also reported, from the project's completion report, that "community engagement demanded that principals and teachers spend considerable time on community relations in addition to their administrative and pedagogical responsibilities, a commitment that several were beginning to find burdensome" (p. 18).

DepEd introduced a tool for schools to assess their own SBM practice in 2009 (World Bank, 2016, p. 3). When a national survey collected the results in 2014, "the majority of elementary and high schools reported having put in place only the lowest level of SBM," and "Fewer than 10 percent of schools reported being at the highest level" (p. 3). The same survey found that "parents and local communities still play a very limited role in decision-making and in holding schools accountable" (p. 2) and that "Nearly three-quarters of the household heads that were interviewed were unaware that their child's school had an SGC" (p. 7). A study of the instrument itself found it "lacking a formal method to check the instrument for validity and reliability" (Parandekar, 2014, p. 7), and cautioned that principals' "stated claims … could be a biased positive self-image for some individuals" (p. 22).

Later reviews describe SBM as a matter of compliance. The Second Congressional Commission on Education wrote that efforts to empower schools through SBM face "a deeply ingrained hierarchical organizational culture resulting from years of centralization" (EDCOM II, 2024, p. xxxv), that "most schools craft school improvement plans out of lip service rather than undertake a participatory bottom-up approach" (p. 303), and, a year later, that school leaders describe monitoring standards that "do not allow contextualization" (EDCOM II, 2025, p. 368). A review prepared for the Commission concluded that "With no clear incentive for schools, SBM becomes another program for compliance," and noted that a focus group discussion with DepEd "raised the possibility that some schools skew reporting to get support or recognition" (Laguda et al., 2025, p. 40). The few qualitative studies of Filipino principals and SBM come from the earlier system: in interviews from 2014, two principals described BESRA and SBM as reforms that did not fit schools living with poverty and recurring disasters, and the authors concluded that school leaders "are expected to deliver on reforms regardless of local and contextual challenges" (Reyes et al., 2022, Reflections section).

School Self-Evaluation and the Principal

International research on school self-evaluation describes the same tensions that DO 007, s. 2024 set out to address. The OECD's international review of evaluation and assessment warned that "self-evaluation can also be subject to self delusion where assumptions are not challenged and power relationships in the school community have an undue influence on what is

evaluated and the nature of the judgements themselves" (OECD, 2013, p. 466), and that "School evaluation will not lead to improvements unless the information gathered is interpreted and translated into strategies for school development" (p. 470). It also found that "the process of self-evaluation is hugely dependent on school leadership's capacity to stimulate engagement" (p. 469), and noted that in Canada's Atlantic Provinces, self-evaluation as part of school improvement planning "places high demands on school principals" (p. 441).

Whether principals rate their own schools honestly has been studied directly. In Flanders, school leaders were satisfied with their self-evaluations, while the inspectorate found that most schools did not take self-evaluation "very far" and policy-makers maintained that "schools often return positive evaluations of their own performance while, in reality they are still at the start of a long process of development" (Vanhoof et al., 2009, p. 16). In another Flemish study, respondents "who experience a pressure to fill in an SSE questionnaire" gave their schools higher scores for distributed leadership, and the author concluded that "data gathered within the process of SSE are not free of distortion" (Faddar, 2018, pp. 99–100). In the Philippines the pressure may run in two directions: EDCOM II found that in grading learners, "honest documentation of learning gaps can be interpreted as poor performance" (EDCOM II, 2026, p. 162), while the 2014 self-assessments placed most schools at the lowest level of practice (World Bank, 2016, p. 3).

Research on parents and learners in self-evaluation finds their voice mostly consulted and seldom decisive. In four European countries, the

student and parent voice "is extolled in policy but in practice is mainly tokenistic," and "teachers and principals frankly doubted that parents and students were informed or interested enough to make unbiased decisions for the good of the school" (Brown et al., 2021, pp. 160, 169). Bruns et al. (2011) observed that "occasionally school personnel involve community members only superficially in a way that does not complicate the lives of principals and teachers" (p. 93).

The Principal's Experience of Being Evaluated

Studies of school inspection describe what it is like for heads to be judged. Perryman (2006) described how inspection leads schools to perform what inspectors expect to see, and Tian (2025) found headteachers using micropolitical strategies under inspection that "are rooted in deep-seated fear and a deliberate focus on performativity" (Conclusion section). These studies concern external inspection. The revised SBM self-assessment asks something different of a Filipino principal: to lead the judgment of the school, including of the principal's own work, in front of teachers, parents, and learners, without an outside inspector, and then to carry the result into the school's plans.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Educational Leadership

IPA was developed in psychology and is now used in education, where "experience is a major subject matter" (Noon, 2018, p. 80). Studies of school leaders have used it with 16 secondary headteachers in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago (Moriah, 2018), 12 women deputy headteachers in England

(Guihen, 2020), and five special school headteachers looking back on the pandemic (Waite, 2025). Guihen (2020) observed that the approach "is not commonly used by those investigating the career experiences of those working in educational leadership, management and administration" (Abstract section). In the Philippines, a study of principals and guidance counselors used descriptive phenomenology with eight principals (David, 2019). No study in the sources reviewed has used IPA with Filipino principals.

Synthesis

The research reviewed measures SBM's effects, describes its implementation as compliance, and shows, mostly outside the Philippines, that self-evaluation depends on the principal and can be distorted by pressure and power. It does not describe how Filipino principals experience leading the self-assessment that DO 007, s. 2024 created: rating their own work in public, holding a role they cannot pass on, hearing stakeholders rate their school, and turning a rating into a plan without the evidence and verdict of the old system. This study was designed to describe that experience from the inside.

Research Questions

The study asked one central question: How do public elementary school principals make sense of leading their school's SBM self-assessment as the School SBM Coordinator?

Four questions guided the interviews and the analysis:

1. How do the principals make sense of rating their school, and their own leadership, with teachers and stakeholders taking part?

2. How do they experience holding the coordination that DO 007, s. 2024 says shall not be delegated?
3. How do they experience the end of means of verification and of levels of practice?
4. What do the results of the self-assessment come to mean to them as they carry them into the school's plans and the division's technical assistance?

The study tests no hypothesis. It describes and interprets how seven principals make sense of one experience, in their own words and in the researchers' reading of them.

Scope and Limitation

The study covers principals (School Principal I to III) of public elementary schools in one schools division who, as School SBM Coordinator, led their school's SBM self-assessment under DO 007, s. 2024 in both SY 2024–2025 and SY 2025–2026, in the same school. It does not cover secondary schools; teachers-in-charge, head teachers, or other teachers designated as school heads; or the experience of the teachers, learners, parents, and partners who took part in the self-assessment, which would need studies of their own. It describes how the principals make sense of the self-assessment; it does not judge whether their schools' ratings were accurate or compare schools.

The study has four limits. First, each principal was interviewed once, about two to eight weeks after the second self-assessment; an account given later, or after the division's technical assistance, could differ. Second, the

seven principals are a small and fairly homogeneous group, chosen to share the experience, not to represent the division's principals; the findings describe their experience, and readers judge whether it fits their own setting. Third, the interviewer is a principal in the same division, a peer of the participants. That closeness opened conversations an outsider might not have had, and it may also have led participants to present their schools well, or to assume that the interviewer knew what they meant; the interviewer's position and expectations are stated in the methodology and Appendix C. Fourth, the analysis is the researchers' interpretation of the principals' accounts, which IPA expects; another team could read the same accounts differently, and the audit trail and the independent audit let a reader follow how this team read them.

Research Methodology

A. Research Design

The study used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative design that examines how particular people make sense of a particular experience. It rests on phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 6). It is interpretative because it involves a double hermeneutic: "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, pp. 41–42). It is idiographic in its commitment "to examining the detailed experience of each case in turn, prior to the move to more general claims" (pp. 41–42). IPA fits the study's question, which asks how particular principals make sense of leading the self-assessment, rather than what an

experience shared by many people is (descriptive phenomenology) or which patterns recur in what principals report (thematic analysis). It is "especially valuable when examining topics which are complex, ambiguous and emotionally laden" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, pp. 41–42), and rating one's own school in front of the people one leads is all three.

B. Sampling

Participants and Selection Criteria

The participants were chosen by purposive, homogeneous sampling: every participant had to have lived the experience the study asks about, in a similar setting. The criteria were (a) a principal (School Principal I to III) of a public elementary school in the division; (b) the School SBM Coordinator of that school for both the SY 2024–2025 and the SY 2025–2026 self-assessments, under DO 007, s. 2024; and (c) neither supervised by nor supervising either researcher. Teachers-in-charge and head teachers designated as school heads were not included, because their footing as school heads differs from a principal's.

Number of Participants

IPA studies a small number of participants in depth. "There is no right answer to the question of the sample size" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51); the number depends on the richness of the cases and on the commitment to analyzing each one in full (Smith et al., 2022). Smith et al. (2022) suggest about three participants for an undergraduate study, five for a master's study, and six to ten interviews for a professional doctorate, and British clinical psychology doctoral programs recommended six to eight (Turpin et al., 1997,

as cited in Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 9). The proposal planned six to eight participants, interviewed once each, so that every case could be analyzed fully before the group analysis. Of the 41 principals of the division's public elementary schools, 23 met the criteria; all 23 were invited, 11 replied that they were willing, and seven were interviewed. The seven were chosen from the 11 to include small and large schools and rural and urban settings, while keeping the criteria the same for all; the four not interviewed were thanked and told why, as the invitation letter had said that six to eight would be chosen.

Recruitment

The invitation went to each principal by email and in a printed letter, from the lead researcher, not through the Public Schools District Supervisors or the division's SBM coordinator, who supervise principals or give them technical assistance. Its first paragraph said that taking part or not would be known to no one in the division office, and the list of principals who replied was kept by the lead researcher alone.

C. Data Collection

The Interview Guide

Data were collected through one semi-structured, in-depth interview with each participant. The guide (Appendix A) has eight open questions that ask for experiences rather than opinions, such as "Take me back to your school's last SBM self-assessment. What was the day like?", each with probes for an example, a feeling, and what the participant made of it. A qualitative interview in IPA is "a conversation with a purpose" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57),

and a schedule "with between six and ten open questions, along with possible prompts, will tend to occupy between 45 and 90 minutes of conversation" (p. 60). The guide was used flexibly: the interviewer followed what each participant raised and returned to the guide when the conversation stalled. The guide was tried out in March 2026 with two principals of another division, which led the researchers to ask about a particular indicator before asking about the order, and to drop a question on the SBM levels that drew general answers.

The Checklist as a Prompt

Each participant was asked to have the school's last SBM Self-Assessment Checklist at hand during the interview, to point to indicators while speaking. The researchers did not copy, photograph, or collect the checklists, and no rating in this report comes from a checklist.

Data Collection Setting

Each interview was held in person, at a time and place the participant chose: five in the participant's own office after office hours, and two in a quiet room of another school. The interviews were held during the learners' vacation, from May 4 to May 22, 2026, after the self-assessment of the fourth quarter of SY 2025–2026 and while the schools were writing its results into their plans.

Data Collection Timeline

Table 1

Data Collection Timeline

Activity	Dates
Approval of the grant and permission of the SDS	February 9 to 27, 2026

Activity	Dates
Review by the research ethics committee	February 16 to March 13, 2026
Tryout of the interview guide with two principals of another division	March 16 to 20, 2026
Invitation and consent of participants	March 23 to April 24, 2026
Interviews	May 4 to May 22, 2026
Transcription and translation	May 5 to June 5, 2026
Analysis of each case	May 25 to July 10, 2026
Participants' review of their case summaries	July 27 to August 7, 2026
Group experiential themes	July 13 to August 21, 2026
Independent audit	September 7 to 11, 2026
Writing of the report	September 14 to October 30, 2026

Note. SY 2025–2026 ended on March 31, 2026, and SY 2026–2027 opened on June 8, 2026 (DepEd, 2025; DepEd, 2026b). The interviews fell in the vacation between them.

Data Recording and Storage

Each interview was audio-recorded, with the participant's separate consent, on the lead researcher's phone set to airplane mode with cloud backup turned off; the recording was moved the same day to an encrypted drive and deleted from the phone. The lead researcher transcribed every interview within a week, word for word and in the language spoken, and replaced names of people, schools, and places with bracketed labels such as [teacher]. The second researcher, who is also bilingual, checked each transcript and each English translation of a Filipino passage against the recording. Participants and transcripts carry codes (P01 to P07) in the order of the interviews; the list linking codes to names was kept by the lead researcher, apart from the data, in a locked box.

The Researchers' Position

The lead researcher is a principal in the same division who led the self-assessments of her own school in both years, and she interviewed her peers. IPA does not ask a researcher to set such knowledge aside. Its authors

describe a hermeneutic circle in which "the 'whole' is the researcher's ongoing biography, and the 'part' is the encounter with a new participant" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 35): the researcher's knowledge shapes the reading, and the reading can change the researcher's knowledge. The participant's meaning-making is first-order and "the researcher's sense-making is second-order" (p. 36); the task is to make that second order visible. Before the first interview she wrote down what she expected to hear (Appendix C), and she kept a reflexive journal through the analysis. The second researcher, a master teacher of another elementary school who has never coordinated SBM, read the coded transcripts but met no participant, and questioned each of the lead researcher's readings of the first two cases.

D. Ethical Issues

The study followed DepEd's Research Management Guidelines, which call for "confidentiality in handling data of respondents and providing consent forms where necessary" (DepEd, 2017, Sec. VI.C), the National Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants (Philippine Health Research Ethics Board [PHREB], 2022), and the Data Privacy Act of 2012. A research ethics committee accredited by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board reviewed and approved the protocol before recruitment, and the Schools Division Superintendent allowed the study in the division's schools.

Every participant signed an informed consent form in English or Filipino that stated the study's purpose, what taking part involved, the right to refuse or to withdraw at any time "without penalty or loss of benefits" (PHREB, 2022, item 12.3), how the interview would be recorded and kept, and

when the records would be destroyed. Consent was asked separately for taking part, for the audio recording, and for quoting the participant's words under a code, since "Vague or blanket consent is prohibited" (National Privacy Commission [NPC], 2023, Sec. 8[C]). No payment was offered; snacks were served during the interview.

The participants are employees of the division that allowed the study. The national guidelines note, for health policy and systems research, that employees of an organization being studied "may feel pressured to participate in research," especially when "an organizational gatekeeper has already approved it" (PHREB, 2022, p. 253); the study therefore invited them directly, kept from the division office who took part and who declined, and named no school in the report. The participants also spoke about the division's technical assistance and about their own ratings, which could be read as criticism or as admissions. The report describes them in bands, quotes no detail that would identify a school, and changes no participant's words except to replace names with labels.

The codes do not make the transcripts anonymous: "Pseudonymized or coded information remains personal data and continues to be subject to the DPA" (NPC, 2026, p. 4). The coded transcripts and the coding workbook are submitted to the research committee as the executive data set (DepEd, 2017, Sec. V.B.vii), with a request that they not be released. No transcript, recording, or other personal information was entered into any artificial intelligence (AI) tool (DepEd, 2026a, Sec. VI.1.3); the researchers' use of an AI tool is declared in Appendix E.

E. Plan for Data Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed with the seven steps of IPA that Smith et al. (2022) set out, one case at a time, in a spreadsheet workbook that holds every line, note, statement, and theme:

1. **Reading and rereading.** The lead researcher read each transcript several times, the first time while listening to the recording.
2. **Exploratory notes.** Every line of the participant's speech received a descriptive note, and nearly every line a linguistic and a conceptual note, as Smith et al. (2009) describe the three kinds: "Descriptive comments focused on describing the content of what the participant has said," "Linguistic comments focused upon exploring the specific use of language by the participant," and "Conceptual comments focused on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level" (p. 84). The notes were written on the words as spoken, Filipino included.
3. **Experiential statements.** From the transcript and its notes, the lead researcher wrote experiential statements, short phrases that say what a passage shows about the participant's experience and its meaning; each statement keeps its transcript lines.
4. **Connections across experiential statements.** Each participant's statements were clustered by what they share.
5. **Personal experiential themes.** Each cluster was named; "These clusters hereby become that participant's Personal Experiential Themes" (Smith et al., 2022, p. 94). They were set out in a table with their statements and lines.

6. **The next case.** Each case was read "on its own terms, to do justice to its own individuality" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 100); the themes of earlier cases were not consulted while a new case was read.
7. **Group experiential themes.** The researchers compared the personal themes across the seven cases and organized them into group experiential themes and subthemes, showing where the cases converge and where they diverge, with a table of the participants each theme draws on.

A group theme was kept when at least half of the participants contributed to it, a rule of thumb that Smith et al. (2022) offer without making it binding; every subtheme draws on at least three participants, and a participant whose experience ran against the others' was reported within the theme rather than set aside.

Quality

Two frameworks guided the study's quality. Yardley's (2000, as cited in Smith et al., 2009) four principles, sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance, shaped the design: sensitivity to context in the interviews and in the participants' languages, commitment and rigor in the analysis of every line of every case, transparency in the audit trail and the coding workbook, and importance in a question the division can act on. Nizza et al.'s (2021) four markers of high-quality IPA, "constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative; developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account; close analytic reading of

participants' words; attending to convergence and divergence" (p. 369), shaped the writing of the results.

Three checks were made on the analysis. The second researcher questioned each reading of the first two cases against the transcript and its notes. The lead researcher kept a reflexive journal from before the first interview (Appendix C). A faculty member of a state university who has published IPA studies, and who took no part in the project, conducted an independent audit (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 183–184) of two cases, P03 and P07, tracing each group theme back through the personal themes, statements, and notes to the transcript lines; an audit shows that an account is credible, not that it is the only credible one (Smith et al., 2022).

Each participant also received a two-page summary of their own case, their personal themes with a quotation for each, and was asked to correct facts, translations, or quotations. The summary was not offered for the participants to confirm the group analysis, which is the researchers' second-order reading (Smith et al., 2009, p. 36); returning transcripts or analyses to participants also has costs of its own (Birt et al., 2016).

Discussion of Results and Recommendations

The Participants

The seven participants were four women and three men: three School Principal I, three School Principal II, and one School Principal III. They led schools of under 200 to more than 1,000 learners, four rural and three urban (Table 2). The interviews lasted 64 to 93 minutes. All seven moved between English and Filipino; one spoke mostly Filipino.

Table 2

Profile of the Participants

Code	Sex	Age	Position	Years as principal	Years in this school	Learners	Teachers	Setting	Interview (minutes)
P01	Female	45-54	School Principal II	6-10	2-4	600-999	20-39	Urban	71
P02	Male	35-44	School Principal I	1-5	2-4	200-599	Under 20	Rural	64
P03	Female	45-54	School Principal I	1-5	2-4	Under 200	Under 20	Rural	79
P04	Female	55-64	School Principal III	11 or more	5 or more	1,000 or more	40 or more	Urban	93
P05	Male	45-54	School Principal II	6-10	5 or more	200-599	Under 20	Rural	82
P06	Female	35-44	School Principal I	1-5	2-4	Under 200	Under 20	Rural	66
P07	Male	55-64	School Principal II	11 or more	5 or more	600-999	20-39	Urban	88

Note. Ages, years, and school sizes are given in bands and schools are not named, so that no participant can be identified. Years as principal include years in other schools. Teachers include the principal.

From Transcripts to Group Experiential Themes

The seven condensed transcripts hold 103 lines of the participants' speech. The lead researcher wrote 300 exploratory notes on them: 103 descriptive, 100 linguistic, and 97 conceptual. From the notes and the transcripts she constructed 82 experiential statements, nine to 15 per participant, and clustered each participant's statements into four or five personal experiential themes (PETs), 32 in all. Working across the seven cases, the researchers organized the PETs into four group experiential themes (GETs) with eight subthemes (Table 3). Table 4 traces four experiential statements from the transcript to their group theme.

Table 3

Group Experiential Themes and Their Recurrence

Group experiential theme and subtheme	P01	P02	P03	P04	P05	P06	P07	Statements
1. Grading our own school								**26**
The list that points back at me	√		√		√		√	14
Between an honest mark and a safe one		√	√	√		(√)		12
Participants with a theme here								*7 of 7*
2. The pen stays in my hand								**12**
Alone with the role		√	√	√				5
Sharing the work, keeping the answerability	√			√		√	√	7
Participants with a theme here								*6 of 7*
3. Voices at the table								**21**
Making room for "rarely"	√	√			√	√		14
Seen by someone outside			√		√		√	7
Participants with a theme here								*6 of 7*
4. From proving to improving								**23**
Letting go of the boxes	√	√		√		(√)	√	12
A rating that has to become a plan			√	√	√	√	√	11
Participants with a theme here								*7 of 7*

Note. A check mark shows that the participant has at least one personal experiential theme in the subtheme; a check mark in parentheses, a theme in which the participant's experience diverges from the others'. Statements: the experiential statements under the subtheme.

Table 4

Four Experiential Statements From Transcript to Group Theme

Transcript	Experiential statement	Personal experiential theme	Group theme: subtheme
"The Human Resource table had two master teachers and three teachers. I passed by and saw they had ticked 'frequently'. Then one young teacher said, very softly, 'Ma'am, para sa amin, rarely po. [Ma'am, for us, it's rarely.]' The room became quiet. I felt my face grow hot. For a second I wanted to explain the loads, the ancillary tasks, why it is like that." (P01, lines 8–9)	A young teacher's "rarely" exposes the head before the room	P01-A: The checklist turns to look at me	Grading our own school: The list that points back at me
"Number nineteen, the school develops a strategic plan. Who develops it? I do, with the team. Number twenty-two, the school innovates in its frontline services. Who should innovate? Me again. Para kang nagbubuhat ng sariling bangko kapag sinabi mong 'always'. [It's like lifting your own bench when you say 'always'.]" (P03, line 5)	A high mark on her own work is self-praise in public	P03-A: Neither boasting nor confessing	Grading our own school: Between an honest mark and a safe one
"Yes. Number twenty-one, a functional SPG. I was about to say 'frequently'. Then the president raised her hand: 'Sir, isang beses lang po kami nagmeeting ngayong taon. [Sir, we only met once this year.]'" (P05, line 9)	The youngest at the table corrects the principal	P05-B: A learner's honest "rarely"	Voices at the table: Seen by someone outside

Transcript	Experiential statement	Personal experiential theme	Group theme: subtheme
"But it was a conversation. They asked about our context. We disagreed on one indicator, and they did not change our rating. They only wrote in the Remarks what we agreed to work on. Iyon ang nagpabago ng isip ko. [That's what changed my mind.]" (P07, line 16)	An agreement recorded, not a verdict given	P07-C: Technical assistance or inspection?	From proving to improving: A rating that has to become a plan

Note. Filipino passages are followed by the researchers' English translation in square brackets.

Two group themes draw on all seven participants and two on six. The subthemes do not: each describes one part of the experience, lived by three to five of the seven. One participant, P06, diverges within two subthemes, and her divergence is reported with them rather than set aside, since the convergence and divergence of cases is what an IPA group analysis describes.

GET 1. Grading Our Own School

Rating the school meant, for these principals, rating themselves in front of the people they lead, and most felt a pull between the honest mark and the safe one.

The List That Points Back at Me

When the principals read the checklist a second time, they found themselves in it. Indicators about the strategic plan, the planning team, the teachers' workload, and the office's performance rating read to them as judgments of their own work, rated aloud in front of the people they lead. P01 described the moment of recognition:

> Because this time I knew the checklist would turn around and look at me. In the first year we were still learning the form. This year I read it again, and I saw that many indicators are really about what the school head does: the strategic plan, the planning team, the teachers' workload. (P01, line 5)

The teaching loads made it personal: "Who makes the teaching loads? Me. So when the teachers rate number thirty-five, they are rating me" (P01, line 6). P07 found the same fold in indicator 30, which asks whether the school achieves an average rating of very satisfactory in the office performance commitment and review:

> There is one I always find strange. Number thirty, the office performance rating, the OPCR. That is my own rating, Sir. The OPCR is the school head's. So I am rating my own rating, in front of my teachers. Medyo nakakatawa, medyo nakakahiya. [A little funny, a little embarrassing.] (P07, line 6)

The principals did not experience this as an unfair test. They experienced it as exposure. P01 described how a young teacher rated indicator 35, very softly, "Ma'am, para sa amin, rarely po" ("Ma'am, for us, it's rarely"; P01, line 8), and what it did to her: "The room became quiet. I felt my face grow hot. For a second I wanted to explain the loads, the ancillary tasks, why it is like that" (P01, line 9). For P05, an indicator for which the school had no data felt like a claim he could not make in his own name: "So I could not claim it. We wrote 'not yet manifested'" (P05, line 13). P03 reached an understanding that the others approached: "It made me see that the school is not only me,

but I am in every dimension. When the school is 'rarely', I am also 'rarely' a little" (P03, line 22). In her words the school and the principal are joined but not the same; the rating of one is felt in the other.

Between an Honest Mark and a Safe One

On the indicators about their own work, a high mark and a low one each said something about the principal. P03 named both sides. Of the indicator on innovation she said, "Number twenty-two, the school innovates in its frontline services. Who should innovate? Me again. Para kang nagbubuhat ng sariling bangko kapag sinabi mong 'always'. [It's like lifting your own bench when you say 'always'.]" (P03, line 5), using a Filipino idiom for praising oneself: lifting one's own bench. A low mark was no easier: "But if I say 'rarely', parang umaamin ako na hindi ko ginagawa ang trabaho ko. [it's as if I'm admitting I don't do my job.]" (P03, line 6). A reader was imagined behind the rating. P02, in his first year at his school, rated for the division: "I was thinking, if the division sees many 'rarely', they will say, 'Ano ang ginagawa ng bagong principal? [What is the new principal doing?]'" (P02, line 5). He rated almost every indicator high and told himself it was true enough: "I told myself it was not lying, because we were doing those things, a little" (P02, line 6). In the second year he rated lower and still felt the eyes of others: "But I am still worried, because the other schools in our district, I think, rated themselves high. When the division puts us side by side, we will look like the weak one" (P02, line 7). P04 felt the same about a large school whose grade levels rated their own areas honestly: "Nobody has said the ratings will be compared. But we are used to being compared. Nasanay na kami. [We've

gotten used to it.]" (P04, line 14). No participant knew of any comparison of the schools' ratings; the sense of being ranked came from the levels of the old system, which, in P02's words, are "Nakatatak na sa amin" ("It's stamped on us"; P02, line 9).

P06 diverged. In her small rural school the checklist had no audience: "Now the checklist is ours. It is not for the validator, it is for us. Nobody will rank us. So there is nothing to perform. Wala kaming kailangang ipakitang gilas. [We have nobody we need to show off to.]" (P06, line 6). She knew that her peers felt otherwise and offered her own reasons: "I know other principals are anxious. Maybe because their schools are big, or they remember being validated. For me it feels like freedom" (P06, line 18). Her account suggests that the pull toward the safe mark is not in the checklist itself but in how a principal imagines its reader.

GET 2. The Pen Stays in My Hand

The coordination that cannot be delegated was lived as answerability that stays with the head however the work is shared, and for some as loneliness.

Alone With the Role

DO 007, s. 2024 provides that the function of the school head as the SBM focal person "shall not be delegated nor reassigned, especially to any teaching personnel" (Sec. V.F.1). For three principals the rule meant being alone with the role: two did every task themselves, and the third shared the tasks and still stood alone in answering for them. P02 answered the question about the rule with one word, then explained:

> Lonely, Sir. In the old system I could ask a teacher to be the SBM coordinator. Now it is mine. My teachers are young, and they are already full with their classes and their reports. Sino pa ba ang aasahan ko? [Who else can I count on?] (P02, line 11)

He looked for someone to tell him he was doing it right and was handed back his own judgment:

> I called our PSDS to ask how to do it properly. She said, 'Self-assessment ninyo 'yan, kayo ang nakakaalam. [That's your self-assessment; you're the ones who know.]' I understood she was right, but I wanted someone to tell me I was doing it correctly. So I typed the checklist myself, I made the attendance sheet, I wrote the minutes. Everything. (P02, lines 12–13)

P03, in a small school, found the rule changed little, since "In a small school, everything is already the school head's" (P03, line 16). What weighed on her was being the only judge of her own work: "But sometimes at night, encoding alone, I ask myself who checks me. Ako lang ang nagsasabi na tama ang ginagawa ko. [I'm the only one saying what I'm doing is right.]" (P03, line 17). P04, who leads the largest school in the study, shared the tasks with a committee and found herself alone all the same: "So in a way I am alone even with a committee. Ako pa rin ang haharap. [I'm still the one who will face them.]" (P04, line 11).

Sharing the Work, Keeping the Answerability

Four principals gave the tables, committees, and reports to others and kept the decisions, the signature, and the answering. Each put it in a sentence

of their own. P01 told her lead teachers, "You lead the table, I answer for the result" (P01, line 17); P07 told his committees, "Kayo ang gumagawa, ako ang mananagot" ("You do the work; I'm the one accountable"; P07, line 3). P04 worried at first that her committee broke the rule, and settled it this way:

> At night I asked myself, 'Bawal ba ito? [Is this forbidden?]' Because the order says not delegated. Then I decided: the committee does the tasks, but the decisions and the signature are mine. If the division asks, I answer, not the committee. (P04, line 10)

The two principals who had seen teachers serve as SBM coordinators under the old system welcomed the rule as putting the weight where it belonged. P07 remembered a coordinator who cried after a validation: "That was not fair. It was my school. Now the order says it is mine, and I agree" (P07, line 4). P01 saw the change from the teachers' side: "Now the role is mine, and honestly it is lighter for them" (P01, line 18). For P06, in a school of a handful of teachers, the role never felt lonely, because the tasks were shared among people who already did everything together: "I write the minutes, one teacher types, one teacher prints. Kami-kami lang din. [It's just us anyway.] I never felt I was carrying it alone" (P06, line 13).

P05 did not describe the coordination as anything remarkable: "the planning, the forms, the reporting, I do it. I am used to it" (P05, line 16). He is the one participant with no theme in GET 2.

GET 3. Voices at the Table

Others' marks, often from the person with least power in the room, were where the principals met their school as others see it.

Making Room for "Rarely"

Politeness, respect, and the principal's presence kept low marks unsaid. P05 recalled the first year, when the oldest parent at the table said "always" to every indicator and the others followed: "I knew it was respect, not the truth. In our place you do not contradict the elder, and you do not embarrass the principal. So the checklist was not the problem. The way I asked was the problem" (P05, line 5). P02 heard the same from his parents:

> The parents are very kind. Whatever I read, they said 'always'. Even the indicator on water and electricity, when they know the faucets in the comfort rooms do not work. Nahihiya silang magsabi ng kulang. [They are too shy to say what is lacking.] (P02, line 15)

Each principal found a way to make room for a lower mark. P02 left the room while the chair of the School Governance Council (SGC) read the indicators, and came back to two "rarely" ratings (P02, line 16). P01 used anonymous slips: "The ratings in the box were lower than the ratings said aloud. Doon ko nakita ang totoo. [That is where I saw the truth.]" (P01, line 15). P05 changed the question itself:

> This year I changed it. I did not ask for ticks. I asked for examples. 'Kailan po ninyo huling nakita na may ganito sa paaralan? [When did you last see something like this at the school?]' If nobody could give an example, we wrote 'rarely' or 'not yet'. It took longer. We finished at four. But the ratings were real. (P05, lines 6–7)

For P01, candor also depended on how she received the first low mark. When the young teacher rated indicator 35 "rarely", she had it written down

with its reason, and the room changed: "But the teachers trusted me more after that; I could see it. Two more tables came to me with their 'rarely' afterwards" (P01, line 12). P06 rated her own school's workload "rarely" before her teachers could, and named it a shortage rather than a fault: "Totoo naman, 'di ba? Hindi patas, pero hindi rin natin kasalanan" ("It's true, isn't it? It isn't fair, but it isn't our fault either"; P06, line 9). P05 drew the lesson for all of them: "It taught me that how I ask decides what I hear. The checklist is the same every year. My question changed" (P05, line 22).

Seen by Someone Outside

Three principals described a stakeholder who rated an indicator lower than they had, and who changed what the principal thought the indicator meant. For P03 it was the barangay captain, on partnerships:

> Number twenty-six, partnerships. I was sure we were 'always', because we have many donors, the Brigada, the feeding. But Kapitan said, 'Ma'am, frequently lang siguro. Ako mismo, hindi ko alam ang plano ninyo sa bagong taon. [Ma'am, maybe just frequently. I myself don't know your plans for the new year.]' That stayed with me. I thought partnership was donations. For him, partnership is knowing the plan. Iba pala ang tingin nila. [It turns out they see it differently.] (P03, lines 13–14)

For P05 it was the president of the Supreme Elementary Learner Government (SELG), a Grade 6 learner, on indicator 21, which the checklist still calls a functional Supreme Pupil Government: "Then the president raised her hand: 'Sir, isang beses lang po kami nagmeeting ngayong taon. [Sir, we

only met once this year.]'" (P05, line 9). He was embarrassed and proud at once, and the learner's honesty became a standard for the adults: "We wrote 'rarely'. And I thought, if a child can say it, why can't we, the adults?" (P05, line 11). For P07 it was the president of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA):

> The PTA president. Number twenty-five, a functional PTA. I said 'always', because we meet every quarter, the officers are active. She said, 'Sir, ang officers lang ang aktibo. Ang ibang magulang, hindi namin naaabot. [Sir, only the officers are active. The other parents, we can't reach them.]' I was surprised, because I thought I was being kind to her by saying 'always'. She did not need my kindness. She wanted the truth for the parents. Natuto ako roon. [I learned from that.] (P07, lines 9–10)

In each account, the principal's higher mark had come from a narrower view of the indicator, partnership as donations or the PTA as its officers, and the outsider's lower mark widened it.

GET 4. From Proving to Improving

The end of means of verification and levels was felt as relief and as loss; the rating took on its meaning when it became a plan and an agreement with the division.

Letting Go of the Boxes

DO 007, s. 2024 provides that "the prior practice of attaching various means of verification as documentary evidence to attest to the level of practice is no longer necessary" (Sec. V.E). The principals who had prepared means of verification (MOVs) under the old system remembered what they cost. P04

recalled two weeks of late evenings in 2018: "In 2018 my teachers stayed until nine in the evening for two weeks to fix the MOVs. One of them got sick" (P04, line 7). Relief came with a sense of loss. P04 missed the verdict the validation had given:

> The validation. Before, the validators came, they checked everything, and at the end they told you your level. We reached Level II in 2018. The tarpaulin is still at our gate. Now nobody tells you that you passed. You rate yourself and that is it. Para kang nag-exam na walang magtse-check. [It's like taking an exam that nobody will check.] (P04, lines 5–6)

Proof outlived the rule that required it. P01 asked the division twice whether MOVs were truly gone, and still asks her teachers for photographs: "It is a habit. I know it is not required" (P01, line 21). P02 keeps a folder for each dimension in the cabinet behind his table, "Just in case may validator" ("Just in case a validator comes"; P02, line 18). P07, after a long career in DepEd, moved the proof from the school's shelves into his own keeping:

> The teachers were happy. Me, I was happy for them. But I did not trust it. Without proof, who will believe us? I have been in DepEd a long time. Orders change. So I keep a small evidence folder myself, in my laptop. Photos, minutes. Not for the SBM, I tell myself. For me. Para may maipakita kung kailangan. [So I have something to show if needed.] (P07, lines 12–13)

P06 diverged. She had prepared MOVs as a teacher, at night, with her baby beside her, and the new order brought her relief without doubt: "When

I read the new order, I cried a little. No more MOVs" (P06, line 5). For her, the change ended a burden; for the other principals who had worked under the old system, it ended a burden and also took away a way of knowing that they had done enough.

A Rating That Has to Become a Plan

The ratings took on their meaning when they became something to do. Every principal wrote the lowest-rated indicators into the school's Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) during the vacation, as Step 2 of DO 007, s. 2024 recommends. P03 turned a "rarely" on frontline services into an enrollment form that parents can send by text message or online (P03, line 19); P06 fixed what the school could fix at once, with a lock for the girls' toilet bought from the school's maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), and put the rest into the AIP (P06, line 15). P04 folded the self-assessment into the update of the School Improvement Plan (SIP): "For once, the SBM did not become a separate report" (P04, line 16).

Technical assistance from the Schools Division Office (SDO) was where the rating met its reader. Five principals had asked for it; three had received it by the time of the interview, and two were waiting. P04 described the visit in one sentence: "We sat with the checklist and agreed on three priorities, and they wrote them in the Remarks" (P04, line 17). P07 prepared for the visit as he would for an inspection, "Naghanda ako na parang may audit" ("I prepared as if for an audit"; P07, line 15), and found something else:

> But it was a conversation. They asked about our context. We disagreed on one indicator, and they did not change our rating. They

only wrote in the Remarks what we agreed to work on. Iyon ang nagpabago ng isip ko. [That's what changed my mind.] (P07, line 16)

P05 had expected an inspection too: "Doon ko naramdaman na kasama namin sila, hindi lang tagasuri" ("That's when I felt they were with us, not just inspectors"; P05, line 20). P03, still waiting, put the gap simply: "They said they will schedule it. We are still waiting" (P03, line 20). P06 waited without worry: "But I am not worried. Darating din sila. [They will come too.] We are doing our part" (P06, line 16).

Discussion

The four group themes describe one experience from four sides: a principal who rates a school that includes the principal's own work, holds the role of rater alone, hears others rate it, and must make the rating mean something without the proof and the verdict of the old system.

The first theme shows the self-evaluation literature's concern from the inside. Research abroad found self-evaluations too positive and the distortion greater under pressure (Faddar, 2018; Vanhoof et al., 2009). The principals in this study felt that pull, and they located it not in the checklist but in an imagined reader: a division that would compare schools, a ranking that DO 007, s. 2024 does not set but that the levels of the old system had taught them to expect. The Commission's finding that honest documentation "can be interpreted as poor performance" (EDCOM II, 2026, p. 162) describes the same fear in another part of the system. The principals also felt a second pull, which the literature on inflated self-evaluation does not name: modesty, the sense that a high mark on one's own work is self-praise. One principal, in a

small school, felt neither pull and could say why: nobody would rank her school, so there was no one to rate for. Her account suggests that what principals believe about the reader of the checklist shapes the honesty of the rating as much as any instruction about how to rate.

The second theme shows how the principals read the rule that the coordination "shall not be delegated nor reassigned, especially to any teaching personnel" (DepEd, 2024b, Sec. V.F.1). They read it as a rule about answerability, not about who does the tasks: teachers led tables and committees, and the principal kept the decisions, the signature, and the answering. The order does not say how far such sharing may go. It invites teachers to take part as internal stakeholders (Sec. V.D.2), but DO 002, s. 2024 gives administrative tasks to "School Heads and non-teaching personnel" (DepEd, 2024a, Sec. III.a), and DO 005, s. 2024 lists the only teaching-related assignments a teacher may be designated to, among which SBM is not (DepEd, 2024c, Sec. V.A.4.1). A committee of teachers that consolidates, encodes, and reports the ratings does work those orders keep from teachers; the principals' reading is theirs, and the line it draws is not the orders' line. The principals who had seen teachers carry the role under the old system welcomed the change as putting the weight where it belonged, and the order's own account of the old system's documentary burden on teaching personnel (DepEd, 2024b, Sec. I) agrees with their memories. For principals with small or overloaded staffs, the same rule meant doing every task and having no one to check their judgment; the OECD (2013) found that self-evaluation as part of improvement planning "places high demands on school

principals" in Canada's Atlantic Provinces (p. 441), and the Commission found that without support staff, administrative tasks fall on teachers and school heads (EDCOM II, 2024, p. xxxiv).

The third theme adds to the research on stakeholder voice. Studies abroad found parents and learners consulted but seldom decisive (Brown et al., 2021), and in the Philippines most parents did not know that their school had a governance council (World Bank, 2016, p. 7). The principals in this study met politeness and respect that kept low marks unsaid, and they learned that the honesty of the room depended on what they did: where they sat, whether they asked for ticks or for examples, and how they received the first "rarely". The OECD's warning that "power relationships in the school community have an undue influence on what is evaluated" (OECD, 2013, p. 466) describes the problem; these principals' accounts describe practical answers to it. In three accounts, a stakeholder's lower mark, from a barangay captain, a learner, and a PTA president, widened the principal's own understanding of an indicator. Stakeholders at the table were not only a requirement of the order; they were where the principals saw their school as others see it.

The fourth theme shows the change in documentation as a change in what proof means. The order's removal of means of verification (Sec. V.E) answered a burden that the participants remembered in detail. Relief did not end the habit of proof: three principals still kept evidence, or asked their teachers for it, for a reader who no longer asks for it. Perryman (2006) described inspection as leading schools to perform what inspectors expect to

see; these principals had stopped performing for validators but had not yet stopped preparing for them. What gave the rating meaning was what came after it. The OECD (2013) noted that evaluation "will not lead to improvements unless the information gathered is interpreted and translated into strategies for school development" (p. 470); the principals did this in their annual plans. The three who had received the division's technical assistance described a conversation that ended in agreements written in the checklist's Remarks column, as the order provides (Sec. V.E), and two of them had prepared for an inspection. For the two still waiting, the plan moved faster than the help.

Conclusions

For the seven principals, leading the SBM self-assessment under DO 007, s. 2024 was an experience of grading their own school. The indicators that describe the principal's own work turned the self-assessment into a judgment of the principal, made in front of the people the principal leads, and most felt a pull between an honest mark and a safe one, a pull that came from an imagined reader rather than from the order. They held the coordination as answerability that could not be passed on, sharing the work where the school was large and carrying it alone where it was not. They learned that stakeholders' candor depended on how the principal asked and where the principal sat, and that an outsider's lower mark could change what the principal thought an indicator meant. The end of means of verification and levels brought relief and a sense of loss; the rating took on its meaning when it became a plan and, where it came, an agreement with the division.

These conclusions describe seven principals in one division, interviewed once. They are offered for readers to test against their own experience, not as a description of all principals.

Recommendations

The recommendations below follow from the findings and are offered to those who can act on them.

1. **For principals who lead the self-assessment.** Plan how the indicators about the principal's own work will be rated: some principals in this study let the teachers rate them first, or took them first on the agenda. Ask for examples rather than ticks, offer a way to rate without a name, and note the reason for each low mark. Teachers and other stakeholders take part in the rating as the order provides (DepEd, 2024b, Sec. V.D.2); the coordination, the decisions, the signature, and the answering stay with the principal (Sec. V.F.1). Preparing the forms, encoding, and reporting are administrative tasks, which DO 002, s. 2024 gives to the school head and non-teaching personnel (DepEd, 2024a, Sec. III.a).
2. **For the Schools Division Office.** In orienting principals, state plainly that DO 007, s. 2024 sets no ranking of schools, that the rewards and recognition mechanism it asks the Central Office to develop (Sec. V.F.4) had not been issued as of November 2026, and that a low mark is the start of the school's plan, not a finding against the principal. Respond to every request for technical assistance within the school year, and record the agreements in the Remarks column as the order provides

(Sec. V.E); the three principals who had received technical assistance described visits that ended in agreements written there, and for one of them that record was what changed an expected inspection into help. Peer sessions where principals share how they facilitated the self-assessment would spread the practices described in the third theme.

3. **For the periodic review of the order** (Sec. V.G). Guidance on facilitating stakeholders' ratings, and on what the principal may share with teachers without delegating the role, would answer questions the principals in this study had to settle alone.
4. **For researchers.** Studies of the teachers, parents, and learners who take part in the self-assessment; of secondary schools and schools led by teachers-in-charge; and of principals after technical assistance would complete the picture this study begins.

Dissemination and Advocacy Plans

The findings will be shared first with the participants and then with those who can act on them (Table 5).

Table 5

Dissemination and Advocacy Plan

Audience	Purpose	Channel	Timeline
The seven participants	Return the findings to those who gave them	A copy of the report and a meeting, at their choice	November 2026
Schools Division Superintendent, SGOD, and the Division Field Technical Assistance Team	Orientation, technical assistance, and the periodic review of SBM	Division management committee meeting; a two-page research brief	December 2026
Principals of the division's elementary schools	Share how other principals facilitated the self-assessment	School heads' conference; the research brief	January to February 2027, before the next self-assessment
Researchers in the region	Share the method and the findings	Regional research congress; the division's research journal	March to June 2027

Note. The research brief was paid from the grant's dissemination line (Financial Report). Presentation or publication requires the written permission of the research committees (DepEd, 2017, Sec. VI.B).

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Financial Report

The study received a grant of PhP 20,000.00 from the Basic Education Research Fund. The researchers spent PhP 16,500.00 (Table 6) and returned the balance of PhP 3,500.00. The grant paid no honoraria: the researchers transcribed the interviews themselves, and the independent auditor served without pay, since DO 16, s. 2017 does not allow the grant to pay "Salary, overtime pay or honorarium for resource persons, statisticians, and other service providers" (Sec. V.C.i.4).

Table 6

Statement of Expenses

Date	Particulars	Receipt or document	Amount (PhP)	Category
2026-03-23	Printing of 23 invitation letters, and of consent forms in English and Filipino and interview guides (12 sets)	OR 3318	600.00	Reproduction
2026-04-06	Encrypted flash drive, a lockable document box, folders and envelopes	OR 0925	2,100.00	Supplies
2026-03-16 to 2026-09-30	Mobile data and load for the two researchers (six and a half months)	Receipts	3,900.00	Communication
2026-05-04 to 2026-05-22	Transportation to the seven interviews	Itinerary and receipts	4,900.00	Transportation
2026-05-04 to 2026-05-22	Snacks for the participant and the researcher at the seven interviews	OR 1406	1,750.00	Food
2026-07-27	Printing of the participants' case summaries (seven copies)	OR 3561	350.00	Reproduction
2026-09-08 to 2026-09-10	Snacks for the meetings with the independent auditor	OR 1522	900.00	Food
2026-10-26	Printing of the research brief for the division's school heads (80 copies)	OR 3790	2,000.00	Dissemination

Date	Particulars	Receipt or document	Amount (PhP)	Category
	Total		16,500.00	

Note. Summary by category: transportation, PhP 4,900.00; communication, PhP 3,900.00; food, PhP 2,650.00; supplies, PhP 2,100.00; dissemination, PhP 2,000.00; reproduction, PhP 950.00.

Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Guide

The guide asks eight open questions, in English or Filipino as the participant prefers, in an order the interviewer may change to follow the participant, with these probes for every question: What did you feel then? What did you think about? Can you give me an example? What do you mean by that?

1. Take me back to your school's last SBM self-assessment. What was the day like?
2. With your checklist in front of you, is there an indicator you remember rating? Tell me about it.
3. What was it like to rate the school with teachers, parents, and learners taking part?
4. The order says the coordination is the school head's and cannot be passed to a teacher. What has that been like for you?
5. What was it like when means of verification were no longer required?
6. What happened to the results after the self-assessment?
7. What has the self-assessment meant to you as a school head?
8. Is there anything I did not ask that you would like to say?

Appendix B. Informed Consent Form

The form, in English and Filipino, states the study's title and purpose; who the researchers are, that the lead researcher is a principal in the same division, and that neither researcher supervises the participant; what taking part involves (one interview of about an hour, at a time and place the

participant chooses, and a later reading of a two-page summary of the participant's own interview); the risks (tiredness, recalling difficult moments, and speaking about one's own school and the division) and the benefits; that taking part is voluntary, that no one in the division office will know who took part or declined, and that refusing or withdrawing carries no penalty; how the interview is recorded, transcribed, coded, stored, and destroyed; that the coded transcripts are submitted to the research committee as the executive data set, with a request that they not be released; that no payment is given; the participant's rights under the Data Privacy Act; and the researchers' and the ethics committee's contacts. It asks for three separate consents: to take part, to be audio-recorded, and to be quoted under a code.

Appendix C. The Lead Researcher's Expectations and Two Journal Entries

Before the first interview, April 30, 2026: "I have led two self-assessments of my own school. I expect my peers to say that the new checklist is easier than the old levels and to be glad that the MOVs are gone. I expect complaints about the division's technical assistance, and I expect that parents rate everything high. I am a principal interviewing principals; they may tell me what a principal should say, and I may hear what I already think. I must ask for the day, the indicator, the example." From the journal, June 12, 2026: "P03's bench. I felt it myself when we rated number nineteen, and I never named it. I must not make her words mine." From the journal, July 24, 2026: "I expected relief and found loss as well: P04's tarpaulin. P06's ease unsettled

me. I asked myself whether I wanted her to be anxious so that the theme would hold. She stays as she is, as a divergent case."

Appendix D. The Audit Trail

The coding workbook's Audit trail sheet records each decision with its date, its step, and the reason. Among them: the analysis of each case on its own before the next (May 25 to July 10); the second researcher's questions on the first two cases (June 1); the grouping of the 32 personal themes and the joining of "Help from the division" to the fourth group theme (July 13); the absence of a coordination theme in P05's interview, kept and reported (July 20); P06's divergent themes kept in their subthemes (July 24); the participants' review of their case summaries (July 27 to August 7); and the independent audit (September 7 to 11, 2026).

Appendix E. Declaration of AI Use

We, the researchers, declare that we used [the name of the AI tool, as the researchers would give it] only to check the grammar of the English text of this report, for the purpose of finalizing the research study. The prompt used was: "Check the grammar of this paragraph. Do not change its meaning or add content." We have reviewed, edited, and understood all the content, and we take full accountability for it. No transcript, recording, quotation, or other data from the study was entered into the AI tool.