



July 2022

CNMI Public School System

# STUDENTS FIRST

• Accountability • Responsibility • Transparency

## Summer Programs to Prepare for New School Year

Competitions Shine National Spotlight  
on NMI Students

# 'Among America's Best'



**The Chapter Select Showcase Production of the Public School System  
at the International Thespian Festival Main Stage**

Sommer Gomez, Rownel Jody Coloma, Betty Matson, Callia Lucenara,  
Jame Mozunder, Mica Sune, Pricness Rigua, Zhymonne Escobeeer, DeeJay Santomin, Kyle  
Manuel, Christian Troy Rosimo, Joshua Cadudu-an, Juliet Inocencio, Jonathan Wolf,  
Lars Wolf, Vivien Liu, Mylan Goodwin, Jzl Santomin, Andre Arriola, Sara Keaton, Aubrey  
Tabenas, Princess Rigua, Lurelen Odal, Nocola Acaba, and Isabella Mallari

# Among America's Best

## CNMI Students' Outstanding Performances at 2022 National Speech & Debate Tournament, International Thespian Festival

**T**HE Team CNMI – comprised of public and private school students – displayed very strong performances at the recently concluded 2022 National Speech and Debate Tournament (NSDA) and the 2022 International Thespian Festival (ITF), respectively.

The CNMI representatives placed among the nations top students in both competitions.

The CNMI team, represented by winners from various public private schools, has been very competitive in the national level in previous editions of both NSDA and ITF. The CNMI Team has been in the top 10% and top 20% numerous times over the years.

At this year's edition of NSDA and ITF, the CNMI students-representatives displayed particularly strong and competitive finishes.

"It would have been impossible to accomplish all that our CNMI Teams accomplished without the hard work of our NSDA and ITF Coaches.

They were chaperones, coaches, judges, drivers (and) numerous other roles at both these events," Team CNMI overall chair and Marianas High School educator Harold Easton told *Students First*.

The NSDA and ITF are held during the summer months every year. The 2022 editions of NSDA and ITF were held in-person following the pandemic. The NSDA was held in Louisville, Kentucky from June 12 to 17, and the ITF was in Bloomington, Indiana from June 20 to 24.

The 2022 National Speech & Debate Tournament and the International Thespian Festival are funded under the Public School System's Consolidated Grant.

"I am very proud of our students. The experience of travel, competition, performance and interaction with the other students is a priceless experience. I am especially proud of our middle school students who showed they could 'hold their own' when evaluated against highly experienced high schoolers," Easton added.





## NSDA

To qualify for NSDA, students across the country compete in one of 111 District Tournaments, including the CNMI. From 120,000 student-members, less than four percent (4 %) qualify to compete in this prestigious competition.

The top 4 percent proceeds to June national finals, which is a week of intense competition.

In Louisville, Kentucky, the CNMI team competed against an estimated of over 5,000 high school students from 1,194 schools throughout the United States.

The CNMI Team advanced to the “Round 3 Break”, the top level of the national competition.

Student Jonathan Wolf of Marianas High School made it all the way through round 7 – the semi finals round – in both prose and storytelling competitions. These are highest feats ever achieved by a CNMI student. There were a total of twelve rounds.

The NSDA bestowed Wolf the “Premier Distinction”. Premier Distinction is the highest degree in the NSDA Honor Society. Wolf was coached by the CNMI Team’s overall chair Easton and Kristine Wolf. Wolf also made it to the top 30% in the poetry competition.

According to NSDA, only fewer than 3% of NSDA members earn the Premier Distinction prior to high school graduation.

Student Jesus T. Sablan of Saipan International School made it to the quarterfinals in the expository competition. Sablan successfully bested other students-competitors in the 30-round competition. He made it all the way to round six. This is his third year in competing at the national level.

The NSDA considered Sablan as among the “top 7%” in the nation.

Also, Sablan also made it to the top 30% in the storytelling competition category.

Students Juliet Inocencio (MHS), Tee Hee Him (Grace Christian Academy), Mylan Goodwin (MHS), and James Keaton (MHS) all made it to the top 30% in poetry, expository and impromptu category-competitions, respectively.

The NSDA also commended five students “who advanced in the national ranking of the tournament”. They are Hannah Lim (honor commendation), Jesus Sablan (honor commendation), Si Jin Cheng (honor commendation), Tae Hee Kim (distinction commendation), and Anastashiia Shamanaeva (special distinction commendation).

Coaches were Grace Duran (GCA), Ronnie Hodges (SIS), and Criselda Aldan (Mt. Carmel School).

## ITF

The CNMI Team is well respected at the International Thespian Festival in Indiana, considered as the venue of the best in high school theatre with multiple productions performed and staged daily during the duration of the festival.

The CNMI Team, comprised of public and private schools, staged rousing plays, short film and musicals earning them high praises at the ITF.

This is the first time the ITF was held after a two-year hiatus.

The CNMI Team received a special invitation to present at the prestigious "Chapter Select Showcase". The special invitation was a result of the CNMI's "history as a top producer of film" and "performance reputation in Group Musical Theatre and other events such as "monologue, duet acting, solo musical theatre, scenic design, and theatre marketing".

According to ITF, over 3,000 attended this year's festival and the Marianas High School's entry film received the highest honor for film (1st film ever to qualify) when it was selected for the closing ceremony (Main Stage). This was in a category of "short film-animation". It was produced and directed by Lars Wolf and coached by Jojo Alepuyo.

MHS has had films qualify for the closing ceremony for four years in row.

In the ITF individual competition, several public and private school students comprised the CNMI Team, including five who competed in the NSDA.

At the ITF, results of best performances are rated accordingly. They are divided in two categories: senior and junior.



For senior category, four students entered in various categories and were rated "superior": Jonathan Wolf in monologue, Juliet Inocencio in solo musical, Rhythm 'n Harmony in group musical, Patricia Castillon and Christian Rosimo in short film, and Lars Wolf in short film animation.

Wolf's short film animation has received the highest honor for film after being selected to be shown for the main stage.

In the junior category, seven students from CNMI Team won the festival judges' nod: Princess Rigua of Hopwood Middle School rated "superior" in solo musical, Aubrey Tabenas (Francisco M. Sablan Middle School) rated "excellent" in monologue, Lurlene Odall (Hopwood Middle School) "excellent" in monologue, Princess Rigua and Lurlene Odell (Hopwood Middle School) "excellent" in duet musical, and Isabella Mallari and Nicole Acaba (Green Meadows School) excellent in duet acting.

Hopwood Middle School coach Jesse Sablan said, "For the middle schools, it was excellent exposure. Three CNMI middle schools not only got to compete at a more rigorous competition level, they were able to interact and take classes with (their senior peers). These experiences will surely increase the competition floor at the middle school level, which should bleed into the high school as they share tips, lessons, and experiences with their peers here in the CNMI."



# 'I'm Happy That PSS Has This Program'

## 17 High School Students Are Certified Nursing Assistants

“ I AM very happy that PSS has this program to help me my career choice after high school”.

So says Somia, an upcoming senior at Saipan Southern High School. Like her, 16 other high school students have found the Certified Nursing Assistantship (CNA) Program offered by the school district's Career Technical and Education Program as their pathway to early career exposure in the nursing profession while still in high school.

The groundbreaking intensive summer program launched by the Public School System's CTE Program has entered its second year with high expectations from students. Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada and CTE Program Director Dr. Jessica Taylor expanded the program last year, with the goal of building the local workforce pipeline.

The CNA Program directly caters to local graduates of the Public School System.

And for students-cohorts, the value of the CNA Program to is immeasurable.

"I have always been interested in the medical field. I heard about this program since last year and I wanted to join but there was a limited seats available; I just said to myself I have to wait for the next cohort," adds Somia.

She said the certified nursing assistantship program is "a good opportunity" for her to learn before pursuing a degree in the medical field after high school.

A Tinian Jr. Sr. High School incoming junior student, Jocelyn Furton, said even before the CNA Program's application process was opened she already submitted her application letter.



And she described how “lucky” she was to be able to make it into this year’s program.

“I’ve always been wanting to join the nursing program. One of (my friends in) Tinan joined the program last year and I asked her about it, and the result is really encouraging. I’m glad that I was able to join the cohort,” Furton told *Students First*.

“I am really happy that PSS has a program like this because I want to be a pediatric nurse one day,” she added.

There are 17 students who received their CNA certification from the Guam Marianas Training Center. The PSS-CTE Program has an existing partnership with the center to provide CNMI students a highly-rigorous and intensive six-week training with certification.

Upon certification, these students can be hired or work at any clinics or get employed at the local hospital.

Another student, Adiva, an incoming senior at SSHS, acknowledged how her school introduced her of the CNA Program.

“This has always been my dream and my parents has been encouraging me to follow this career path,” she said. “When I heard about this program last year from my school counselor, I told her that I am going to pursue this.”

Marianas High School junior student Grace Ju described the program as “a very good opportunity” after hearing it from her friend who was a previous cohort of the CNA Program.

“My friend completed this program and she told me that this is really good,” Ju told *Students First*. “I have learned a lot of skills that are really needed for me to prepare for my future career”.


“This is worth every penny,” Ju added. “I am really happy that PSS has a program like this.”

Dr. Taylor explained that the CNA Program is a “student-driven and career-focused program”

“The vision of career tech is student-driven. There is only so much that we can do to encourage, convince students to be part of program, and been successful that way. These students have been in communication with me since last summer so they’ve had a lot of time to think about what their expectations are and what their future might be,” said Dr. Taylor in a separate interview.

She added, “I am just glad that they (our students) are excited. This is the reason why PSS has invested so many resources for our students because it is really about their future and their contributions to the CNMI. We are just really excited and we are happy that they’re happy.”





# 11 High School Students represent NMI at the Close-Up Program in Washington D.C.

By: Ismail Hossain and Zenn Tomokane

**R**EPRESENTING the CNMI, eleven students hailing from different schools took part in the Close-Up Insular Program in Washington D.C. throughout the days of May 13th to 28th. The group toured our nation's capital along with other students from different states, territories, and Palau. The group also toured locations in Williamsburg, Arlington, Philadelphia, and New York City.

The Close-Up Program is a program aimed at teaching students about government through seeing new places and meeting different people that makes our government possible. It also gives students a chance to practice being future government leaders and to listen to each other's voices.

Among the eleven students were Sharon Calamaan, Sara Keaton, Zenn Tomokane, and Amira De Guzman of Marianas High School, Jimmina Flamar of Kagman

High School, Tammy Fernandez of Rota's Dr. Rita H. Inos Jr./Sr. High School, Andrew Sunderland and Elyza Pamintuan of Saipan Southern High School, Ismail Hossain of Tinian Jr./Sr. High School, Tiana Cabrera of Saipan International School, and Ryan Quitano of Da'ok Academy. They were accompanied by PSS Close-Up Advisor Vinni Orsini and Patricia Sablan from Marianas High School.

While in Washington, the students got the chance to tour different sites and memorials with significance to U.S. History. They include the U.S. Capitol, Lincoln Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery, and much more. As they visited the areas, they were tasked with gathering information and understanding the significance of the location. Students also got the chance to meet with U.S. Congressman Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan, who asked questions regarding his profession and what he does on behalf of the CNMI.

"The location that I probably loved the most was Capitol Hill. I loved that location the most because I got to meet Representative Kilili Sablan and I also got to see the inside of the Capitol Building" Elyza Pamintuan recounted.

"My favorite and most memorable place I enjoyed going to was the memorial for the Vietnam War because the view was amazing and the drawings explained the war very well and the statutes. Not only did it bring peace, but it reminded me of my grandpa a lot since he was part of the war" Tiana Cabrera recalled.

Once they completed a day out in the city, the students along with their workshops headed back to the hotel to discuss what they learned. Students then engaged in activities that focused on the site they visited, the values of our nation, and our government. One notable activity was the Mock Congress activity where students were given issues about our nation in which they debated. Once a decision was made, the students drafted laws of their own and voted on whether the law should be passed.

Andrew Sunderland pointed out that "one important idea I took away from the workshops is that most decisions are not clear cut at all. In fact, many of them have compromises for upsides and downsides. Everyone knows this, but I think it was important to see this type of idea in action ourselves as students. Our discussion was about climate change, and multiple options were given to us in groups for us to decide how we would enact policies that would affect the whole nation. Everything had pros and cons, forcing us to debate our positions on what policies were more effective than others. It was

surely a learning experience for everyone."

In their final week, the students toured Colonial Williamsburg, Philadelphia's Independence Hall/ Liberty Bell, and multiple locations around New York City such as the Statue of Liberty and the 9/11 Memorial. With all of that traveling, the students got to learn more about our nation's history and government, and how they could become better citizens. Sharon Calamaan commented, "My experiences from the program have pushed me into wanting to assert more action in my island because I feel like my generation has the voice and courage to change many of the issues that Saipan suffers through."

As their trip finally came to a close, the students embraced as they departed home to their parents and revered the trip as memorable and life-changing. We asked what they thought was memorable from the trip and Ryan Quitano said, "The people I was surrounded by, My group and the other island groups made those unfamiliar waters



CNMI Close-Up Students visit the UN Headquarters in New York City





Students from Palau, Guam, and the CNMI pose with their Close-Up Instructors

easier to sail through, We started bare but built a support structure that could lift us all.”

Amira De Guzman stated, “What really made this trip memorable were the friends I made throughout the entirety of it. I was able to meet wonderful and intellectual people from places I’ve never been to, and I was able to have deeper bonds with the CNMI group.”

The students also enjoyed the locations they visited, with Jimmina Flamar saying “the Smithsonian Museum of National History is my favorite!!! I was roaming around when I stumbled upon stone money. Being Yapese, this made me so emotional. I was so happy. happy beyond words. It was such an honor!”

The chaperones too expressed appreciation for being able to come on this trip. Mr. Vinni Orsini who is the Close-Up Advisor for the CNMI noted, “I enjoyed the various personalities the students had. They made discussion and field trip enjoyable because they were so varied and personable.”

Orsini also mentioned, “I want to see the students in this trip give the experience to learn about the CNMI’s government for their peers in the islands. I want to see them lead a forum or a field trip using places on their own islands to teach students about government.”

Ms. Patricia Sablan has lived in D.C. for nearly five years while in University. She noted that she always hoped to see students experience what she did, and being a chaperone allowed her to do so. “Seeing the students’ faces light up with wide-eyed wonder at the new sights, and observing all their experiences (both the good and the bad) are memories that will always

linger in my heart. Having been able to witness some of the CNMI’s brightest youths learn and grow so much in just two weeks was such an honor.”

The Close-Up Program plans on sending new students next year to represent our islands in Washington D.C. as well as hosting an island-wide conference for those that are interested on this opportunity.

Zenn Tomokane expressed some advice to those that go on the trip next year. “To future Close-Up Program students, be yourself no matter what others may have to say about you. And make sure to have fun!”

Tammy Fernandez commented, “I would really encourage upcoming students to join the program because you get so many different opportunities to see things that you wouldn’t really get the chance to see coming from the islands. What I would advise them is to have each other’s backs when you are there you don’t really know who you can and can’t trust so always be careful. But make friends get out of your little bubble and get to know people from different places you never really know how great a person is till you get to know them.”

The students and chaperones are grateful to have been given this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and to be able to learn more about our nation’s government and history. We thank the Close-Up Program for leading us on all of these tours, PSS for making this trip possible, and all the chaperones and staff that helped us throughout our voyage. We also thank Congressman Kilili Sablan for welcoming our group into his office and answering our questions. We look forward to the next group of students next year.



**PSS STRATEGIC PLANNING MANAGEMENT WORK SESSION**  
 Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada, 4th left, seated front row, led over a hundred Public School System education leaders and policymakers in a successful three-day work session which was held at the Koblerville Elementary School cafeteria

# Public School System conducts strategic performance management work session

**O**VER a hundred Public School System education leaders, school administrators and policymakers gathered for three days during the first week of July for an intensive multi-year strategic plan work session that was held at the Koblerville Elementary School cafeteria.

This was by far the largest gathering of public education leaders from all of Saipan, Tinian and Rota public elementary, middle and high schools including the school district’s key management teams, leadership teams, program managers and coordinators and the Board of Education.

Called the “CNMI PSS Strategic Performance Management (SPM) Mandatory Work Session”, it was held from July 6 to 8.

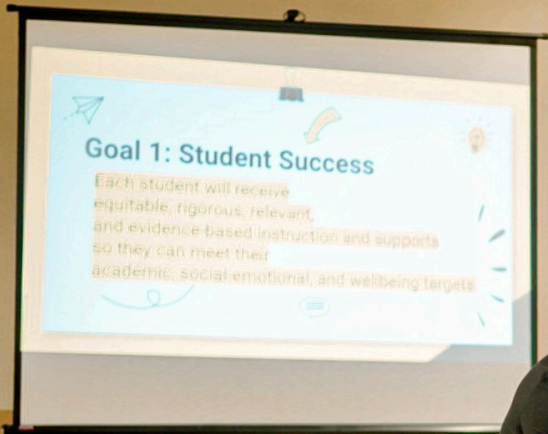
Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada has been working with all public education stakeholders in ensuring the continuous implementation of research-based and-proven ways strategies to support the long-term success and direction of PSS.

According to PSS the objective of the the intensive work session was centered towards ensuring there is “agreed structure and routines to manage implementation of Strategic Direction, and milestones and actions for the next three years”.



PSS leaders, among them, Dr. Rita H. Inos Jr. Sr. High School Principal D. Tanya King, Science Program Manager Asapmar Ogumoro and English Language Arts Coordinator Amy Blanco.

San Vicente Elementary School Vice Principal Anna Guerrero, Dr. Bobby Cruz, director of instructional technology & distance education program, and Dr. Annette Pladevega Sablan, state longitudinal data system program to director.



Social Studies Program Director Vinnie Orsini and Kevin de Torres of PSS ITDE during their presentation.

The expected outcomes of the work session, adds PSS, are: for PSS key management to identify needed structural changes and supports, common language, frameworks, and teaming processes and routines to be a highly effective team; a multi-year strategic plan has been developed that is aligned with the multi-year budget, and clear alignment with Cognia Standards and supports to schools to ensure schools are successfully meeting the standards for accreditation."

Cognia is PSS' accreditation arm and was the former AdvancEd.



Kagman High School Principal Ben Jones and Marianas High School Vice Principal Romolor Orsini.

**P**UBLIC School System's Tim Thornburgh has retired.

On June 29, Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada led the school district in honoring Thornburgh, who served as the school district's Federal Programs Officer until his retirement on June 30.

Dr. Ada, alongside Associate Commissioner Eric Magofna, presented Thornburgh the "Public School System's Distinguished Service Recognition Award" for his "exemplary contributions" during a special ceremony held on June at the PSS Central Office on Capital Hill. Thornburgh's peers, whom he served and worked with for 27 years in various capacities, attended the ceremony.

"On behalf of your Public School System family, we express our most profound appreciation to your immeasurable contributions and commitment to support the children of the CNMI in their desire to learn and be successful," Commissioner of Education Ada said in his tribute.

PSS Federal Program's Director of Internal Controls and Evaluation Jacqueline "Jackie" Che was appointed by Commissioner Ada as interim PSS federal programs officer.

Thornburgh's tenure spanned the administration of six commissioners of education: the late Dr. Rita H. Inos, Dr. David Borja, Dr. Rita A. Sablan, Cynthia I. Deleon Guerrero, Glenn Muna and the current, Dr. Ada.

The PSS Federal Programs Office, among other major tasks, administers over 30 federal grants of the school system.



Thornburgh smiles as he shows the plaque presented to him honoring him of his 27 years of public service.

# Public School System's Tim Thornburgh retires after 27 years



Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada and Associate Commissioner Eric Magofna presented PSS Federal Programs Officer Tim Thornburgh the "Distinguished Service Recognition Award" on June 29, the eve of his retirement.



Thornburgh, seated, center, is flanked by his PSS Federal Programs Office family: Jacqueline Che, Liz Romolor, Bernie Calvo, Maria Quitugua, Armie Catalla, Melisha San Nicolas (not photo) and Richelle Castro, in this photo taken the day before his retirement. Also in photo is former FPO employee Dencio Manglona (PSS photo)

He is known within PSS and in the community to have worked with various education chiefs in navigating the challenges faced by PSS in the past 30 years by successfully helping secure major federal financial grant awards to support public schools and private schools in the CNMI.

These include the multimillion-dollar 2010 American Recovery and Reinvest Act (ARRA), which amounted to \$42 million. This grant was used among others to fund PSS technology program, which led to the investment of the One-Laptop Initiative in 2010. Today, laptops, iPads and computers continue to support PSS students' learning, especially during the pandemic.

PSS was the first in the pacific region to have piloted the said initiative.

"Technology is a big piece in our public education in the CNMI today, making sure that our students has laptops, iPads and connectivity at home," Thornburgh said in an interview with Students First.

In 2021, under Commissioner Ada's leadership and with Thornburgh's guidance, PSS was awarded a \$16 million Career and Technical Education (CTE) Center grant. This will be used for the construction of the first-ever CTE training center for all career technical and education program students in the CNMI, which will be located inside the Marianas High School campus.

On his last two years with PSS, Thornburgh also worked with Commissioner Ada, along with the CNMI Board of Education and other officials in securing the biggest one-time grant PSS has ever received since it's establishment in 1988. This is the \$162 million American Rescue Plan, which will be used to support student learning.

"I am just looking forward to doing some traveling

and seeing my family back in the states," he told *Students First* in an interview.

He is leaving PSS behind in a better financial posture: "Twenty-seven years ago we had a certainly better and diverse local economy (with various local sources of revenue available compared to this pandemic-driven economic state for the past two years). And with federal government supporting public school students learning, PSS is certainly better now than 27 years ago."

PSS has received multiple clean audit reports and was particularly cited for its "strong financial management on federal grants" by external auditors.

"The federal government has helped us in many, many ways. We always need to try our very best to work amicably and prudently with our federal funds, said Thornburgh.

He was federal programs coordinator from December 1990 to May 1999, federal programs officer during the period May 2004 to September 2006, May 2007-May 2009, October 2010-Sept. 2011, and Sept. 2012-June 2022.

Thornburgh also served as acting associate commissioner for administrative services during the following period: Sept. 2006-May 2007, May 2009-October 2010, and interim associate commissioner for administrative services from Sept. 2011 to Sept. 2012.

In 2009, Thornburgh pioneered the Students First newsletter. Today, the newsletter continues to be the main source of information for all public education stakeholders, highlighting students and PSS successes. This was established primarily as a vehicle to promote "accountability, responsibility and transparency" to all stakeholders of public education.

# 4 new Special Education mini buses arrives



The four new mini buses were turned over on June 28.



Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada, Associate Commissioner Eric Magofna, Special Education Program Director Donna Flores and PSS Federal Programs Officer Tim Thornburgh received the four new mini vans turned over on June 28 at PSS Lower Base's transportation hub.

**T**HE Public School System (PSS) Special Education Program recently procured four (4) new mini buses to add to its fleet for transporting students with disabilities to and from various public schools in the CNMI.

These mini vans are designed for sitting passengers, equipped to safely secure up to three (3) wheelchairs, with side or rear door loading.

Funds used to procure the mini vans are from the Special Education Program, according to program director Donna Flores.

The vans were delivered last June 28 to the main transportation hub of PSS, the Office of Pupil Transportation Office in in Lower Base.

Saipan will utilize 2 buses, and Tinian and Rota will utilize 1 bus each.

Special Education Program Director Flores extended her appreciation to Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada, Federal Program's Officer Tim Thornburgh and the PSS Office of Pupil Transportation, for overseeing this purchase for our students.



Special Education Director Donna Flores and PSS Federal Programs Director Tim Thornburgh.

Last March, 16 separate vans were purchased by PSS to further support and expand PSS' current transportation fleet, primarily providing transportation needs of all public elementary, middle and high schools on Saipan, Tinian and Rota.

# Leading Experts Train School District Personnel on 'Infinite Campus'

**T**HE CNMI Public School System through the Office of Accountability, Research, and Evaluation has brought two presenters from off-islands to train school administrators, records custodians, and teacher-coaches on Infinite Campus.

Dr. Anthony Albright and Tony Spengel from Infinite Campus has worked closely with school district personnel for two weeks, to ensure that all public schools are provided with training and to successfully transition Saipan, Tinian and Rota elementary, middle and high schools into the new district-wide student information system.

The intensive training was held from June 27 to July 8 at the Chacha Oceanview Middle School cafeteria.

InfiniteCampus is the latest student information system that the school district will use beginning SchoolYear 2022-2023.

The new district-wide student information system will

allow the schools to store student demographic data, create student schedules, and generate transcript and report cards. The system also allows schools to record and generate student attendance and student discipline. Infinite Campus will also provide the online registration and enrollment for the SY2022-2023.

ARE Senior Director Dr. Rizalina Liwag said, "This training is essential to ensure that schools are ready to accept the students for the SY2022-2023. During the training, the schools will prepare the SY2022-2023 student roster, build courses and sections, and create schedules. Since Infinite Campus is both district and school student information system, it will be easier for the district to track and generate student records."

Dr. Liwag told *Students First* that Infinite Campus has now live data and will be accessible to all school administrators and records custodians during the training from June 27 and onwards.

The online student re-enrollment and new registration has opened on July 5, she added.



THE CNMI PSS Office of Instructional Technology & Distance Education has closed out a successful summer filled with online learning for students and professional development for educators.

Over 250 educators from public and private schools participated in the first 21st Century Educational Technology conference on June 8 and 9, 2022. The summit featured acclaimed educator Matt Miller.

There were eight sessions covered in two days covering topics such as eight techy ways to make class unforgettable and the post-pandemic classroom. Successes & Opportunities for Growth: Participants learned new skills to improve and refine instruction, teaching strategies, and practices with the use of hardware and software. Educators of the CNMI stayed engaged and eager to share their thoughts and experiences with one another throughout the conference. Participants were given three free resources.

Educators' biggest takeaway is the confidence gained to use technology to have a more meaningful teaching experience.

# Successful Summer Online Learning for Students, Professional Development for Educators

In addition to the virtual Ed Tech Conference, the ITDE Office also offered two summer programs: 1) the Student Portal Program for online student advancement and enrichment, and 2) the Online Middle School Credit Recovery Program. A total of 1,225 students were enrolled in the Student Portal Program, which offered 35 courses ranging from Elementary Digital Skills, Middle School Game Design, and High School Core Content and CTE courses.



## CNMI Public School System 21st Century EdTech Summer Conference



**CNMI  
PSS**



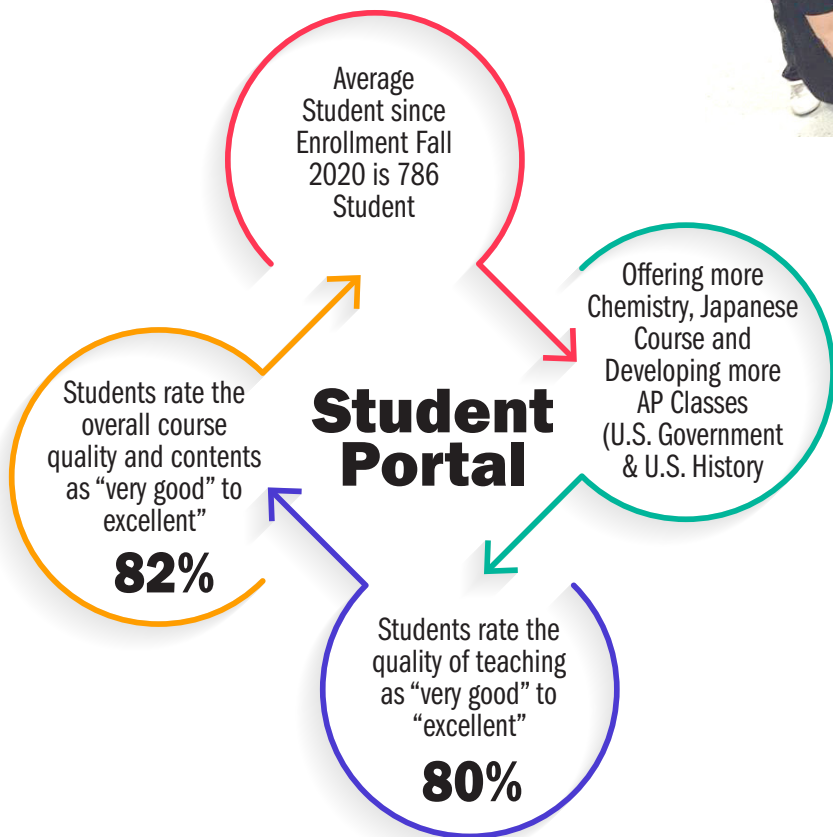
**DITCH THAT  
TEXTBOOK**

Session 1: 8 Techy Ways to Make Learning Memorable





The Online Middle School Credit Recovery Program was designed to support middle school learners in need of additional support and instructional time to meet promotion requirements. The program was designed as an intervention to bridge learning gaps as well as crucial retention at the middle school level. A total of 336 students were enrolled in online credit recovery



courses. A total of 18 courses were run during the summer, including 6th-8th grade CCLHS, Integrated STEM & Science, and Integrated ELA & Social Studies.

The mission of the CNMI PSS Office of Instructional Technology & Distance Education is to provide access to quality online educational experiences to support digital learners across the CNMI.



From left, CNMI Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada, Director of PREL's Region 18 Comprehensive Center Dr. Emerson Odango, and Palau Community College President Dr. Patrick Tellei.

## Region's Education Leaders Gather in Hawaii

**A**LL top education leaders in the Pacific met on July 12 in Hawaii for the annual Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) Advisory Board meeting.

The annual meeting was for all education leaders of seven Pacific entities to update and provide feedback on ongoing initiatives that supports educational needs in the Pacific.

"This meeting is certainly an eye-opener for me and the CNMI PSS. All Pacific school chiefs gather once a year to discuss and share issues *Students First* in an interview.

Dr. Ada said he has shared his observations with Dr. Emerson Odango, Director of PREL's Region 18 Comprehensive Center.

"As leaders of the Pacific school system, we have similar issues but different in some ways," Dr. Ada added.

The chiefs of the Pacific region's school systems gather on July 12 in Honolulu, Hawaii.



The meeting was for the both the Region 18 Comprehensive Center (R18CC) and Region 19 Comprehensive Center (R19CC). The R18CC serves Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Republic of Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia. The R19CC serves American Samoa, Hawaii and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Both centers are led by Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), a not-for-profit, nonpartisan organization based in Honolulu, Hawaii.

### 'Common issues'

There are many common issues that Pacific entities are facing together, education chiefs of the region said.

Dr. Ada particularly pointed out how school districts in the region have initiated programs and initiatives to address needs relating to "social emotional learning, learning losses, distance education, strategic priority management, migration and identities" among other emerging factors impacting learning in the region.

"A key takeaway for me was when (Palau Community College President Dr. Patrick Tellei) stated that 'we are Pacific Islanders with much talents, intelligence... We can solve these challenging issues ourselves. We generate our own teaching and learning data and we should be able to identify root causes'. I agree: As Pacific-Micronesians, we know best on how to survive through turbulent times," said Dr. Ada said.

This was further reinforced by the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) education leader and former President, Dr. Hilda Heine, when she said, "So Much of the western culture influence our students' lifestyle due to migration of students. We need to step back and analyze what's happening: western education and its impact on culture. We graduate students, they leave the islands but they don't comeback'."

### 'Project-based Learning'

Dr. Ada disclosed to PREL researchers at the annual meeting that CNMI PSS has, for nearly two years now, implemented an "Indigenous Based Education" initiative called Project Based Teaching/Learning.

With Project-based learning CNMI public school students are able to promote the Marianas and its strengths, by "arming our students with the root knowledge and island life survival skills."

Dr. Ada also credited how oral history helped preserved the islands' culture and learning— and how the project-based learning can learn from "our Man Amkos" and how "our history was passed on through effective oral (history) story-telling."

Dr. Ada was assured that PREL will continue to assist CNMI PSS with Research Based, Technical Assistance, on Strategic Priorities Management, Career Pathways, Data Accountability and Continuity of Practice with added topic of Indigenous Based Education through PBL direction.



PSS Mental Health welcomes 23 new summer mental health interns for the islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota

# PSS Project HALIGI Aware Welcomes 23 Summer Interns

**P**roject HALIGI AWARE/PSS Mental Health Program welcomed 23 new mental health interns from Saipan, Tinian, and Rota during the week of June 27-July 1.

Held at Cha Cha Ocean View Middle School, a four-day onboarding session was held by the school district to introduce the summer interns to the PSS Mental Health Program. These mental health interns were responsible for supporting summer schools on all three islands.

Throughout the summer months, these interns were to provide mental health support to promote positive social, emotional, and behavioral skills, and the overall wellness for students enrolled in summer school programs.

During the the four-day onboarding session, the 23 interns were introduced to and received knowledge on how to be effective with their internship roles and responsibility working in the mental health field. The interns learned about social-emotional processes, mental health terminology, strategies to support and deal with real-life situations in the classroom, and paths of solutions in the day to day work life. The interns were also guided through their daily routines on the job, including social emotional learning (SEL) lesson plans and presentations.



**Mr. Walt Mendez**  
*Community Project Manager - Saipan*  
Sharing the roles & responsibilities as professionals and ambassadors of mental wellness

Walter Mendez, the Local Education Agency Community Project Manager for Saipan led the Nearpod Walkthrough to introduce an online platform that interns used to promote SEL in the classroom. The interns were taught how to launch presentations and how to properly use their devices to engage student participation.

Vannah Hocog, Behavioral Specialist for Rota, shared a presentation on SEL Competencies, which was broken down into Self Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible Decision-Making, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills. These 5 different types of competencies will allow the interns to properly communicate to their students how they can integrate these skills in real-life situations.

Jericho Tobias, Mental Health Specialist, said: "We are beyond excited to share these opportunities to our student interns. After all that our students in the CNMI have endured throughout the past six years, these conversations are becoming more important for students so that they are aware of the support available to them."

Mendez expressed optimism on the "personal growth each of the interns will (gain through the) experience working with and assisting the students. As educators, we understand that the highest level of learning is teaching. Giving these young adults this experience allows them to learn at the highest level as facilitators and ambassadors of mental wellness."

Throughout the four week program, PSS Mental Health and its new summer interns have presented multiple social-emotional lesson sessions to different



**Mr. Jericho Tobias**  
*Mental Health Specialist*  
- Leading the on-boarding sessions for the Mental Health interns

classrooms within the elementary, middle and high schools. They were also able to integrate multimedia with the use of the presentation tool, Nearpod, into their lessons to engage students with the use of technology.

The students were able to engage, illustrate, and communicate their participation with the use of their devices and learn about mental health.

# New Furniture, New Laptops To Welcome The New School Year





**A**LL of the school district's elementary, middle and high school campuses on Saipan, Tinian and Rota have received upgraded furniture and technology, as part of the school district's ongoing preparation for the new school year.

These new furniture and technology are essential to the needs of all classrooms in ensuring of smooth and exciting reopening of in-person learning.

They have been funded by the Public School System's share of the multimillion-dollars American Rescue Plan (ARP) awarded by the US Department of Education in 2021, according to PSS Federal Programs Interim Officer Jacqueline Che.

"The delivery, including the 'tagging' and the setting up of these furniture and technology are in full swing as we work alongside all of our schools in ensuring that our children and all stakeholders of public education are welcomed back with optimum learning support,"

Che told *Students First* in an interview.

Various furniture have been distributed to all 20 campuses of PSS, replacing aged-old learning tools and equipment. Among those are: flex-space balance ball seats, activity tables, four-legged triangular chairs, stack chairs, student desks, tablet arm chair, bean bag chairs, STEM student desk, mesh back office with tilt control, outdoor board, common area chair with tablet arm, computer workstations, and school desk barriers.

Kagman Elementary School Principal Dr. Ignacia Demapan expressed her appreciation to the district leadership in providing her school the needed furniture replacement.

"Every start of the school year, I always think that it is very important to show your teachers that the rooms are ready and, that, they are inspired to start the new school year. At the same time, for the students to also



be motivated to continue to feel safe in a learning environment that has furniture and equipment that are age-appropriate," Dr. Demapan told *Students First* separately.

Brand new iPads and iPad keyboard have also arrived as replenishments to those that were damaged and to support student learning.

"San Vicente Elementary School received 300 iPads

and iPad keyboard and we are very appreciative of this because it now ensures that all classrooms, from Kindergarten to 5th grade, are equipped with functional iPads and keyboards," says Principal Paulette Tomokane in a separate interview with *Students First*.

"With the damage and loss accrued over the past two school years, this comes at a right," Principal Tomokane added.