CNMI Public School System

STUDENTS FIRST

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November 2023

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Interim Commissioner of Education Donna M. Flores flashes the award she presented to the 2024 State Teacher of the Year winner, and Board of Education Member Andrew L. Orsini applauds.

Marianas High School Is 2024 PSS

AN EDUCATOR of Marianas High School, Dr. Roque Castro Indalecio, was hailed on Education Day as the 2024-2025 Public School System State Teacher of the Year and will be the Commonwealth's representative to the prestigious National Teacher of the Year competition next year in the nation's capital.

The announcement of the major PSS awards was one of the many highlights of the Public School System's 35 year's establishment.

The two top PSS leaders – Interim Commissioner Donna M. Flores and Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services Eric Magofna – along with Board of Education members led the Education Day Celebration throughout Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.

All 20 public elementary, middle, and high schools on Saipan, Tinian and Rota held their respective Education Day celebrations yesterday. Interim Commissioner Flores and Associate Commissioner Magofna also attended Education Day celebration of Tinian and Rota public schools.

PSS became an autonomous agency in 1988 by virtue of the enactment of Public Law 6-10 which transformed the Department of Education into an independent government entity governed by an elected BOE.

Interim Commissioner Flores and Associate Commissioner Magofna also joined Sinapalo Elementary School staff in celebrating PSS Education Day.

Following Rota's Education Day celebration, the two PSS officials flew to Tinian to join Tinian Elementary School Principal Lou Connie Manglona and Tinian Middle School-Tinian High School Principal Liz Perzinski in celebrating with their schools' staff and personnel.

Who is Dr. Indalecio

Interim Commissioner of Education Flores asked the CNMI PSS Teacher of the Year Coordinator Frankie Camacho to announce the overall winner. Flores also praised Camacho for yet again putting together a successful Teacher of the Year competition.

At the Marianas High School, Public School System Interim Commissioner of Education Donna M. Flores, Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services Eric Magofna, and Board of Education Member Andrew L. Orsini led public education officials and stakeholders in presenting the award to three outstanding PSS professionals, all of MHS: Dr. Roque Castro Indalecio, State Teacher of the Year; Natalie Hill Beyer, State Librarian of the Year, and Michelle Taisacan, Distinguished Online Educator Award.

ol's Dr. Roque Castro Indalecio S Teacher Of The Year

Four other finalists were also recognized. The other four PSS Teacher of the Year finalists this year are Francis Mendiola of Koblerville Elementary School, Maria Pobeda of Sinapalo Elementary School, Maria Victoria Nishida of Hopwood Middle School, and Sonya-Jane Olopai of Da'ok Academy.

Dr. Indalecio is an educator "who imparts his expertise across all high school grade levels (9th-12th), specializing in the subjects of chemistry and environmental science."

He has a degree in with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from the Northern Marianas College. Pursued a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from Concordia University, which expanded his repertoire of effective teaching methodologies.

Dr. Indalecio earned his Doctor of Education in Educational Technology from Walden University.

PSS Teacher of the Year Coordinator Camacho expressed his appreciation to this year's judging panel, which was comprised of Jesse Tudela, Board of Regents – NMC; Mildred Sablan-Camacho, CNMI Scholarship – Administrator; Beth Nunez, Principal of Grace Christian Academy; Vivian Sablan, Division of Youth Services - Administrator , and Monique Sablan, Board of Directors - CNMI Scholarship.

Dr. Roque Indalecio speaks after receiving his award while Interim Commissioner of Education Donna M. Flores looks on.

Natalie Hill Beyer is PSS Librarian of the Year

NATALIE HILL-BEYER'S leadership within the Public School System library community is worth emulating. Over the past 12 years as a school librarian, she has developed relationships within the school district, primarily to raise issues and or ways that impact and improve the school library community.

And her commitment and passion are also immeasurable.

She is the 2024 State Librarian of the Year. This is her third time. She was the state's previous overall awardee for 2019 and 2018.

She has been responsible and is being credited for initiating several leading-edge programs catered to and designed for the promotion of student learning with the direct role of libraries.

She worked with her peers to develop course content for certification and deliver instruction to school librarians. Designed as a professional growth for her fellow librarians, the course content she developed allows for her peers to be certified and deliver instruction within the Blackboard Professional Learning Portal. This pioneering initiative led to 11 of all 16 employees of PSS library staff enrolling in the school librarian courses. Nine are now pursuing certification while two are seeking professional development credit.

With the support of her mentor, Hill-Beyer also took the lead in organizing quarterly professional development workshops for PSS librarians.

At the school-level, as Marianas High School's librarian, she is an instructional partner to MHS teaching staff to ensure the library program and resources are updated, inclusive and aligned with the district's curriculum.

Beyer started her career with the Public School System at Hopwood Middle School as a social studies teacher and rose to become its vice principal for curriculum and instruction before moving to Kagman High School, and, eventually, to her current post, at Marianas High School.

She has a master's degree in library science and American history.

Hill Beyer also donates her time to help build and curate the library collection of other schools.

Vicente "Vince" Cabrera, 5th left, is joined by his Da'Ok Academy family led by Principal Christine Tudela, 4th left.

'I Share the Honor with all Public School System Teacher Aides and my Da'ok Academy Family'

Vicente 'Vince' Cabrera, 2024 State Teacher Aide of the Year

TO this day, Vicente "Vince" Cabrera still cannot believe that he is the Public School System 2024 State Teacher Aide of the Year.

But he believes everyone can achieve their growth and potential when working for the Public School System because there is support for all staff.

Cabrera is a Da'ok Academy's teacher aide under the Special Education Program of the school district.

"In all honesty, I got my job easier because of the team that works with me every day. Working with Da'ok Academy is not a easy task. Any Special Education contact teacher or any staff at PSS would tell you that students with behavioral or special needs would require both skills and support. But because of that staff and colleagues here at Da'ok Academy and the Special Education Program that I am surrounded with, it plays an important role in what I do," Cabrera told ***Students First*** in an interview.

Cabrera has been working for the Public School System for 8 years now. He has been with Da'ok Academy for the last 3 years.

Prior to working for the school district, Cabrera had stints with the private sector, the government sector, and for a non-profit organization.

"I tried giving it a shot working for PSS and I didn't mind working for any position, but it was the Special Education Program that stood out for me. And I am glad that I was assigned here at Da'ok Academy. Working for PSS is a whole different environment for me: I get the support system for me to grow and make my job easier," Cabrera said.

He also praised Special Education Program Director (and current Interim Commissioner of Education) Donna M. Flores for her program's support to teacher aides like him. "She is awesome. I learned a lot from her and from the people that surround me."

"I am very happy (that I am a member of the PSS SpEd Program. I do look forward to working every day," Cabrera said.

"(I) share this honor with all the staff. Working with Da'ok Academy with high school students or with students with special needs is not an easy task. (This is the reason why) I share this award with all the special education teacher aides and my Da'ok Academy family. I am very honored though, but there are people that have worked longer than me in the system," adds the State Teacher Aide of the Year winner.

"To be chosen out of hundreds, I still cannot believe to this day why I deserve this award."

Vicente "Vince" Cabrera is presented with the state-level award in a surprise ceremony on November 21 by PSS central office personnel.

2024 State Counselor of the Year Jove Jenn Taman

'My Success is My Tribute to My Community'

JOVE JENN TAMAN sees her work as a public school counselor as an opportunity to share the experiences – blessings, as she aptly describes it, she has received during her years as a public school student.

Taman is a product of the Public School System. She graduated from Saipan Southern High School in 2011. Upon high school graduation, she never looked back; instead, she valued and paid forward the wisdom of learning she earned in school.

"Signing up for this job was intentional and purposeful for me. SSHS is where I found some of the most influential people in my life and instilled this kind of standard (and discipline)... that's why I have high expectations for myself in serving my students," Taman said in her essay.

Taman was named as the 2024 State Counselor of the Year on November 21, coinciding with the Education Day Celebration of the Public School System's 35th year as an autonomous government entity.

It is her passion and devotion that she puts into the work that she does as SSHS school counselor that made her "extra" and recognized by her school, and, eventually, as the state's best.

Taman has involved herself in activities that allow her students to excel and grow. She is the co-advisor of SSHS student council, youth advisory panel, and sports club.

Like in her student years, she is also directly engaged in extracurricular activities of students. She is a coach for cross-country, girls and boys soccer, and track and field. And when she's not coaching, she supports and cheers other sporting events or outside events of her students.

"I am a big believer in supporting students with their interest and talents. I try to be there for them through their losses, wins, and any events (in moments of) fear to make sure they know they matter and have the strength to get through whatever circumstances comes their way. "The love and commitment I pour into serving students and people is what I find joy in Doing," Taman said.

2024 State Administrative Staff of the Year Josefa D. Mikel

From her Parents' Dream to Working with Everyday Heroes, She's Inspired To Give Her Best

JOSEFA T. MIKEL works with everyday heroes.

Growing up from a family of educators, it is where she drew her desire to serve the community. Her parents were her sources of inspiration, who imbibed her importance of education. Many years later, today, as a Public School System employee, she is living the dream of her parents: to serve and be of service to the community through education.

Last October was her 15th year as an employee of the Public School System, working for William S. Reyes Elementary as its administrative staff.

This year, she was hailed as the 2024 State Administrative Staff of the Year. She was previously the school's administrative staff of the year winner four times.

"I am really happy to join the Kingfisher family and the (PSS) community. I came from a family of educators, who spent their whole lives serving the community," Mikel told ***Students First*** in an interview.

Her mother is a retired schoolteacher, serving both in public and private school in Chuuk.

Her father comes from a "big family" of educators in Chuuk, as she describes it. One of her uncles (father's first cousin) was the first superintendent of education of Chuuk and a very close friend of the CNMI's first education superintendent, who was the late William Sablan Reyes.

For the last 15 years, Mikel has been proud of her "small contributions" to the school community, she humbly said.

"I come to work every day with very supportive coworkers. My school leaders have always been there for me every step of the day. They are my heroes," Josefa T. Mikel said during the interview.

From her parents' guidance when she was growing up to what she has achieved today – one of the best in her field throughout the entire CNMI Public School System – Mikel can only express her profound appreciation for "all the heroes I work with every day at PSS".

And she never ceases to show appreciation for them.

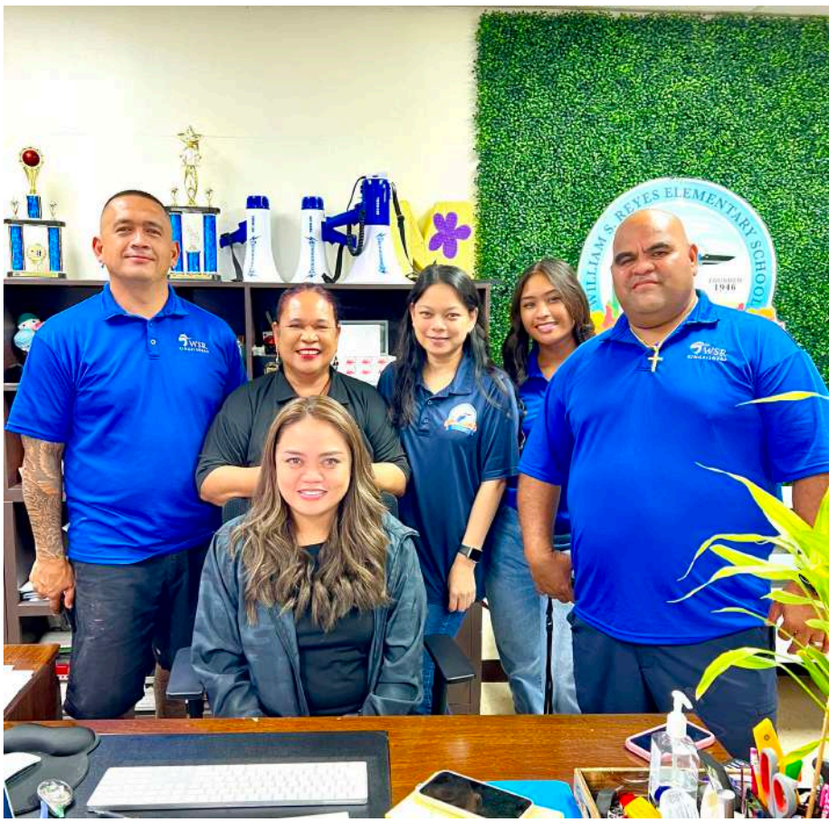
"I am so proud that I worked for the public school in the CNMI because I love what I am doing: helping the students, the teachers, the staff, and the community with whatever they need in our school," she said.

During the interview, she couldn't hide tearing up and being reminded of how surprised and humbled she was about the award, which is annually given by the school district following a rigorous competition and evaluation process.

"I was surprised. I was crying. My daughter was with me (when I was announced winner). I was hoping my husband would be around, but I knew he was watching me," Mikel shares.

Working for PSS for the last 15 years is an honor of a lifetime for her. "This is my parents' desire; they guide me to work for WSR (Elementary School) —and I am just happy that I have been a member of the PSS family for the last 15 years."

"Thank you to all of you for making my 15 years memorable."



Josefa Defang Mikel is proud of her William S. Reyes Elementary School family. Some of her every day heroes join her in this photo, among others, are: Principal Dr. Lynn O. Mendiola,Dr. Jocelyn M. Tudela, and Marlon Cabrera.

PROUD OF HIS GTC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COMMUNITY
Dominador 'Jun' Concepcio is one of the most reliable Public School System trades and maintenance employee. In this photo, he gave ***Students First*** a first-hand look of one of his many tasks.

Dominador 'Jun' Concepcion

A Highly Respected 'All -Around Man' is Honored as the 2024 State Trades and Maintenance of the Year

PUBLIC schools' trades and maintenance personnel are also considered education support professionals.

Their variety of roles helps ensure that school campuses are conducive and safe for student learning. As custodians, aides, groundskeeper, warehouseman, caretakers, craftsman, and technical staff, they are professionals who keep our public school students healthy, safe, engaged, and supported, so they are ready to learn.

One of these professionals is Dominador 'Jun' Concepcion, who was adjudged as the 2024 State Trades and Maintenance Staff of the Year.

Concepcion had been employed by the school district for 8 years, working for Gregorio T. Camacho Elementary School.

Concepcion is respected for his years of experience in the field of trade and maintenance. He embodies real-world skills that are often learned through years of experience. And the CNMI Public School System is fortunate that he is a highly skilled and highly dependable worker that ensures his workplace continues to cater to students' needs seamlessly.

"I really feel good and happy serving my school— (this is) for ***Students First,***" said Concepcion.

A quiet worker, "Jun", works behind-the -scenes on almost every need at GTC Elementary School's building, trades and maintenance upkeep.

"He is very dependable," says Principal Raena B. Camacho.

Concepcion left the private sector (he previously worked as a medical-testing staff member) to pursue a career in the Public School System. Eight years since he joined the school district, all he has is appreciation for GTC Elementary School, which allows him to contribute in whatever small ways he can.

"I am truly happy working for the school and thankful to the Public School System. Working in (a very supportive environment) is motivating," Concepcion said.

He praised his GTC Elementary School colleagues as his motivation for coming to work and doing his best every day. "They are very good and supportive of what I do and that's why I always do my best."

Concepcion said he couldn't believe he won the award. The state-level award, one of the school district's six major awards, is handed out every year.

"Oh my God, that's the one that I am really surprised at and couldn't believe up until today. How it happened is also a surprise to me because I know there are also trades and maintenance workers who are worth the honor," Concepcion said humbly.

Concepcion said it is yet again the best thing that ever happened to him while working for the school. He can only repay the "kindness" of the school by continuing to serve for many more years, he said.

"I will (definitely) continue working for the Public School System," he added.

Diann Tudela Torres is 2024 National History Teacher for the US Territories

MARIANAS High School educator Diann Tudela Torres has been named as this year's 2024 National History Teacher of the Year for all the United States Territories, a feat that only four other CNMI educators have won since the awards' inception in 2004.

The highly acclaimed award is presented by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, which was founded in 1994, by Richard Gilder and Lewis E. Lehrman, visionaries and lifelong supporters of American history education. The Institute is the leading nonprofit organization dedicated to K–12 history education while also serving the public. Its mission is to promote the knowledge and understanding of American history through educational programs and resources.

Since 2004, only 1013 "exemplary American history teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools in all fifty states, Department of Defense schools, Washington DC, and US Territories have been named State History Teacher of the Year," the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History said.

Marianas High School nominated educator Torres to the competition last year, and the results were announced only recently.

"She possesses a great personal character and exerts such passion in ensuring an equitable and accessible education for students. Her professionalism is an asset in supporting the academic and personal growth of her students," the nomination letter read.

She is praised for being an effective communicator and displays many fine personal and professional qualities that "normally define an outstanding and amazing teacher."

MHS, the largest school in the NMI in terms of student population, is proud of Torres' willingness to accept the task of a classroom teacher, "reaching out to students from different walks of life and skills set."

"Her passion to grow professionally indicates her continued desire to be an effective, efficient, collaborative, innovative, and engaging professional," said the nomination letter.

Torres is now in her third year as an MHS history teacher. She previously served as a Career Technical Education teacher for Saipan Southern High School.

For the last 19 years, this is the fourth time that the Public School System, and the Commonwealth, as a whole, have won the award besting all other schools throughout the US territories.

Torres succeeded Rachel Ale-Kersten of Leone High School in American Samoa who was the 2022 the winner for the US Territories

The winner in 2021 was another colleague of Torres: James Glenn of MHS.

In 2019, Dr. Riya Nathrani, then-Hopwood Middle School classroom teacher, was the winner for the US Territories.

The first time the CNMI won was in 2014, with Dr. Charles Algaier, also of MHS.

In 2015, GTC Elementary School's Mei Reedstrom was the winner for the US Territories.

Guam won the overall award for the US Territories in 2010. It was their first and only until today.

There were no winners for 3 competition years for the US territories.

Interim Commissioner of Education Donna M. Flores and Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services Eric Magofna joined Rota's Sinapalo Elementary School community led by Principal Daisy Quitugua on Education Day..

Interim Education Commissioner Flores Praises Teachers and Staff for the Success of PSS

Rota – During the 35th anniversary of the Public School System's establishment as an autonomous government entity, Interim Commissioner of Education Donna M. Flores also visited Rota and Tinian to directly speak to personnel and staff and praise them for the success of the school district.

"I, together with our Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services Eric Magofna, are here with you today to personally recognize you for your heartfelt dedication and commitment to the job that you all do. It is not an easy job, but it is a 'heart' job that we all do," Interim Commissioner Flores told Rota's Sinapalo Elementary School and Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Junior Senior High School's staff and personnel during the school's respective PSS Education Day Celebration on November 21.

"The reason we work for PSS, for our schools, and work together with our parents is because we want them to grow to be independent thinkers and contributing members of our society. It makes a difference to serve and to celebrate each other's hard work and contributions," Interim Commissioner Flores said.

Sinapalo Principal Daisy Quitugua led Sinapalo Elementary School staff and personnel in a celebration that was held at the school's cafeteria.

Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Junior Senior High School's Education Day Teacher and Staff Awardees are honored.

AmeriCorps' students also joined in the celebration.

Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Junior Senior High School Principal Annette Calvo and Board of Education Vice Chairperson Herman T. Atalig celebrated with the school staff with a luncheon in the cafeteria.

"PSS works hard to give our children the education they need in each of our 20 schools, and we know it is possible because we have professionals in various roles and capacities committing themselves to the success of our students," adds the education chief.

Flores also praised BOE Vice Chairperson Atalig for "always sticking it out for our Rota stakeholders."

On Tinian, Interim Commissioner Flores and Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services Magofna joined the staff and personnel of Tinian Elementary School, Tinian Middle School, and Tinian High School in their celebration.

Tinian Elementary School Principal Lou Connie Manglona led in honoring her school's respective "of the years" honorees at the school cafeteria, which was followed by a special luncheon.

Tinian Middle School and Tinian High School Principal Liz Perzinski held a similar activity for the schools' staff and personnel.

"Thank you for caring for our children; thank you for taking time, especially for our children who need extra support and attention. It's not just about classroom instruction but the whole child." Interim Commissioner Flores told Tinian PSS staff and personnel.

Associate Commissioner for Administrative Service Magofna echoed Interim Commissioner Flores' statement.

"We, at PSS central office, are not able to do it alone. We have all of you who make things happen for our schools, for our parents, for our children. That's why we extend our Un Dangkulu na Si Yu'use Ma'ase to all of you," Associate Commissioner for Administrative Service Magofna said.

Sinapalo Elementary School personnel and staff, led by Principal Daisy Quitugua, are joined by BOE Vice Chairperson Herman Atalig during their celebration.

"We are one system even if the ocean separates us. I wish I could tell the whole world that you're all doing a great job—but for now these are the words that I would like to share with our local community, Interim Commissioner Flores said.

Interim Commissioner Flores also thanked Tinian PSS staff and personnel for their support: "I would like to thank you all for your support for my interimship. The job isn't easy but am motivated to go to work every day because I feel respected and well received."

Interim Commissioner Flores said PSS couldn't do it alone and thanked BOE Chairperson Antonio L. Borja for "making it happen" for all of PSS.

Led by Principal Lou Connie Manglona, Tinian Elementary School staff and personnel are joined by Interim Commissioner of Education Donna M. Flores and Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services Eric Magofna in a group photo. The school staff also honored their school staff and personnel awardees.

Tinian Middle School and Tinian High School staff and personnel, led by Principal Liz Perzinski, 4th left front row, are joined by Interim Commissioner of Education Donna M. Flores, third left, front row, and Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services Eric Magofna, second left, front row, during the PSS Education Day Celebration on November 21.

BOE Vice Chairperson Herman T. Atalig, Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Junior Senior High School Principal Annette Calvo, Interim Commissioner of Education Donna M. Flores and Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services Eric Magofna presented the award to Éclair M. Ladao, the 12th grade student who won the 35th Education Day theme competition. Ladao is also joined by her parents.

Joined by his family, Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Junior Senior High School eleventh grade student Mazed Mizan is the state-level logo winner. She was presented with his award by BOE Vice Chairperson Herman Atalig, Interim Commissioner of Education Donna M. Flores, Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services Eric Magofna, and Principal Annette Calvo.

35 Years of Public Education Student Winners

SINCE the Public School System first celebrated Education Day in November 1988, student competitions on theme and essay writing, and logo design highlight public school students' work and has become one of the central activities of the annual celebration.

This year's 35th celebration of Education Day, November 21, 2023, three public school students were honored for winning the theme and essay writing, and logo design competition.

The theme and logo winners were won by one school – Rota's Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Junior Senior High School.

The winning theme, "Education Ignites the Flame to Success," was written by Eclair M. Ladao, a 12th grade student of Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Junior Senior High School.

The logo winner was Mazed Mizan, an 11th grade student of Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Junior Senior High School

The winning essay was written by Koli Tydingco, an 8th grade student of Dandan Middle School.

"Education ignites the flame to success.

Just like igniting a flame, education takes time, effort, and patience in order to reach success. Someone cannot expect to become accomplished without any hard work and effort. Students will have to be patient and determined in order to achieve great things, while putting in the time and effort to continue burning the flame in order to become successful.

Education will help you light the flame to success. The flame that students possess will continue to stay lit if time, effort, and patience are put into it to make it glow brighter. As life goes on, their light will falter with every challenge that they face, but like a flame it will not go out so quickly. Caring for their light will allow it to get brighter and brighter even after facing these challenges. Students will sometimes feel fear and sadness in their successes which may cause their flame to falter, but with constant care their flame can shine brighter. Students, overcome your challenges with everything and make your flame shine brighter than anything!"

PSS Recognizes Outstanding Educators as Online Teacher, Online Instructor, and Online Counselor of the Year

THE Public School System has recognized three educators for their contributions to student learning, and the success of the school district, as a whole, through the Office of Instructional Technology and Distance Education Program.

In particular, these educators are hailed for their exceptional service in the field of instructional technology and distance education.

It was in 2012 when PSS implemented the then-Distance Education Program, which was designed to prepare high school graduates—with PSS' focus on ensuring a high graduation turnout.

Six years ago, it was expanded to the current Instructional Technology and Distance Education Program. And since then, the PSS-ITDE Program has been recognizing educators behind the success of the online program.

"We are truly excited and enormously proud of our educators who continue to make a difference in the everyday lives of our children, of our schools, and the community we all work and serve with," ITDE Program Director Lorraine Catienza told Students First in an interview.

The awardees are:

Darrah Benavente is the 2024 Online Counselor of the Year

Ms. Darrah Benavente has served as an online counselor for the Student Portal Program for over six years. She provides emotional and academic support to students navigating the challenges of distance education. Aside from providing exceptional support services to students, she also takes on a mentor role for new online counselors.

These educators have demonstrated a commitment to fostering an engaging virtual learning environment for student and adult learners in the CNMI PSS," adds ITDE Director Catienza.

"These online educators represent excellence in virtual learning and are recognized for their contributions in the field of instructional technology and distance education," she added.

Michelle Taisacan was named 2024 State Online Teacher of the Year

Taisacan is an online AP Statistics math teacher who has been with the Student Portal Program since its inception in 2012. She continues to offer her online AP course to promote equity and access for students from schools that may not have an AP Statistics teacher available.

Dr. Lynn Mendiola was honored as the 2024 Online Instructor of the Year

Dr. Lynn Mendiola has served as an Educational Technology Instructor for the past ten years. She was a participant in the first Ed Tech cohort and has since made it a goal to share with other professionals the power of instructional technology in impacting student outcomes.

STUDENT LEADERS IN STEM

On November 30, Youth Advisory Panel leaders from Francisco M. Sablan Middle School, Tanapag Middle School, Oleai Elementary School, and Hopwood Middle School gathered to participate in several activities about learning and development that integrate the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Held at Hopwood Middle Schools cafeteria, the STEM activities, which include rover station, catapult station, fun-with-numbers, station, and graphic puzzle station, was facilitated by HMS Science Teacher Shirley Crisostomo. Interim Commissioner of Education Donna Flores joined the YAP leaders in their activities, capping the month-long STEM month celebration of the Public School System.

COGNIA ACCREDITATION EXIT CONFERENCE

Interim Commissioner of Education Donna M. Flores, second left, seated, alongside Senior Director for Accountability, Research and Evaluation Dr. Rizalina Liwag and PSS Accreditation Program Manager Marian Tudela, who both spearheaded the accreditation preparation process, led Public School System officials on Capital on November 9 for the Cognia Accreditation exit conference. The school district underwent a four-day district-wide accreditation from November 6-9. Cognia accreditation will release its findings in the next 30 days. Cognia accreditation is a non-profit organization that is considered as the world's leading accrediting firm that that accredits over 36,000 schools in 85 countries.

BREAKTHROUGH
Key Public School System officials led by Interim Commissioner of Education Donna M. Flores and Carolinian Affairs Office Executive Assistant Felix Nogis on Friday afternoon to discuss the challenges and difficulties in hiring bilingual classroom instructors. Following nearly two hours of meeting, a breakthrough was reached with both government instrumentalities working together. Also in the photo are PSS Human Resource Officer Lucretia B. Deleon Guerrero, and PSS program managers Asapmar Ogumoro, Vinnie Orsini, Jonas Barcinas (in his capacity as former Chamorro Carolinian and Language and Heritage Studies program manager), and Carolinian curriculum writer Monica Pua.

New hires

HRO Officer Deleon Guerrero told Nogis that five new instructors under an independent contract have been hired within the past month and were assigned to various public schools on Saipan.

Deleon Guerrero said they are optimistic PSS will eventually fill the gap with the need for bilingual classroom instructors.

Interim Commissioner of Education Flores said PSS will work with CAO by building on the "recommendations and advocacy" of Executive Assistant Nogis.

"We at PSS truly admire your advocacy and focus on promoting Carolinian language instruction at the schools" adds Interim Commissioner Flores.

The hiring of the 5 new additional bilingual instructors is the result of PSS' decision to provide a third option (alternative) by giving local residents the opportunity to be class instructors.

Under a professional service contract PSS, the Carolinian instructors are afforded every professional growth opportunity given to all classroom teachers in the school district.

"Our newly hired (Carolinian) instructors have been provided with and availed of professional support that PSS provides to all classroom teachers: professional development and training, and invited to participate in the mentee and mentorship program. These opportunities will help build our local workforce," PSS-HRO Director Deleon Guerrero told Nogis.

In hiring classroom teachers, PSS is required by local and federal statutes and guidelines that a person must have a minimum college degree.

The reason for the RFP for bilingual teachers is the "flexibility" that the PSS has implemented to hire locally sourced and trained bilingual instructors. This was implemented with the direction and support of the BOE.

For many years now, despite PSS' aggressive work in recruiting teachers, the mandated minimum requirements have hindered the hiring Carolinian bilingual instructors. The basic requirements for a bilingual teacher include employment application, police clearance, resume, high school diploma, and official transcripts.

In 2017, the BOE approved PSS redesign of its instructional coaching program, which led to the review and assessment of hiring classroom teachers, including Carolinian and Chamorro bilingual instructors, "of how to provide an alternative address the hiring difficulty/challenges.

The RFP is the third alternative to attract both Chamorro and Carolinian to apply for instructors.

Joint effort

CAO Executive Assistant has offered to assist PSS in lobbying for funding for the hiring of additional Chamorro and Carolinian Language and Heritage Studies (CCLHS) instructors under the RFP/contract system implemented by PSS.

While the number of CCLHS bilingual instructors needed in every school depends on the student population, PSS-HRO said it would at least need at least 30 bilingual instructors.

Hiring at least 30 bilingual instructors will cost at additional $1.4 million in local funds.

CAO Executive Assistant Nogis also said his office had been assisting PSS in "recruiting" for bilingual teachers.

"I am glad that there is recruitment. In fact, the (CAO) played a major role. We have been announcing it (as well)," CAO Executive Assistant Nogis said.

He and Interim Commissioner Flores proposed – and agreed – to work together in lobbying with the legislature for the continuous funding of PSS' CCLHS program's hiring of classroom instructors.

PSS, according to Interim Commissioner Flores, will prepare for an updated budget recommendation/proposal that she will share with CAO, and, in turn, Nogis will help lobby with lawmakers for inclusion in the budget earmarking for the new fiscal year.

"We at PSS are being creative and proactive. We welcome all help and support, especially from your office, in ensuring we are able to continually hire bilingual instructors and continue to provide adequate learning opportunities for our students," Flores said.

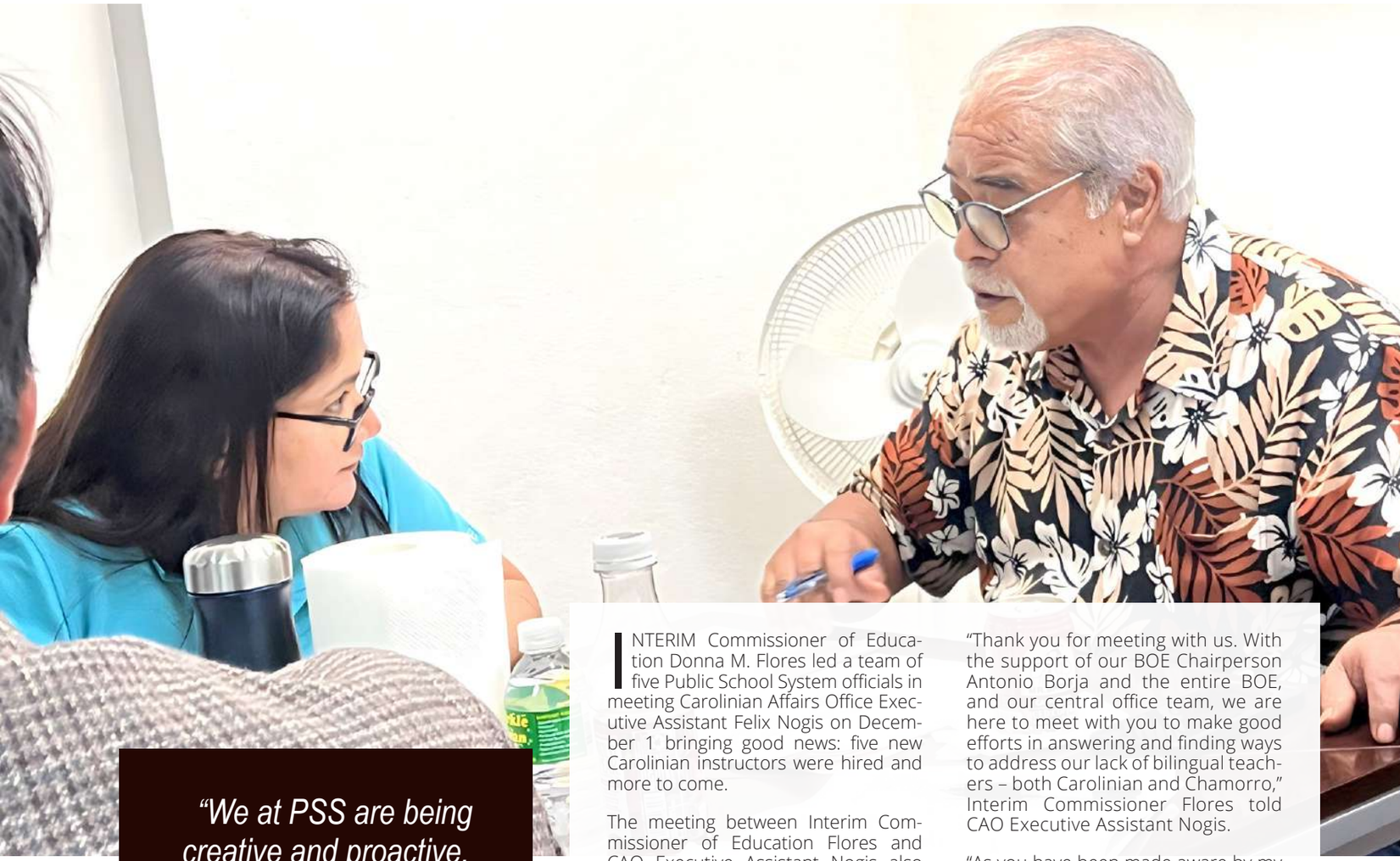
CAO Executive Assistant Nogis acknowledged and expressed appreciation to Interim Commissioner Flores for reaching out.

"At least I have the chance to express our frustration; there's two-way communication now," Nogis said.

As a follow-up to their successful meeting, Interim Commissioner of Education Flores and CAO Executive Assistant Nogis agreed to meet again this month and early next month for to check on the progress of their joint work. "This is big progress, a very big development," CAO Executive Assistant Nogis said.

Interim Commissioner of Education Flores agrees: "We are all advocates for our people. We work as one Public School System. We are one community here – and this is the reason why we want to work with all of our stakeholders including and particularly the (CAO)."

Public School System, Carolinian Affairs Office Agrees to Collaborate in Hiring Bilingual Instructors



"We at PSS are being creative and proactive. We welcome all help and support, especially from your office, in ensuring we are able to continually hire bilingual instructors and continue to provide adequate learning opportunities for our students,"

– Interim Commissioner of Education Flores

INTERIM Commissioner of Education Donna M. Flores led a team of five Public School System officials in meeting Carolinian Affairs Office Executive Assistant Felix Nogis on December 1 bringing good news: five new Carolinian instructors were hired and more to come.

The meeting between Interim Commissioner of Education Flores and CAO Executive Assistant Nogis also led to a breakthrough, after months of back-and-forth between the two government instrumentality, in jointly working together towards the hiring of bilingual teachers. With the direction and support of Board of Education Chairperson Antonio L. Borja, this is the first time for a sitting chief state school superintendent to meet with the Carolinian Affairs Office to address the issue of lack of bilingual teachers.

Interim Commissioner Flores was joined by Human Resource Officer Lucretia B. Deleon Guerrero, and PSS program managers Asapmar Ogumoro, Vinnie Orsini, Jonas Barcinas (in his capacity as former Chamorro Carolinian and Language and Heritage Studies program manager), and Carolinian curriculum writer Monica Pua.

"Thank you for meeting with us. With the support of our BOE Chairperson Antonio Borja and the entire BOE, and our central office team, we are here to meet with you to make good efforts in answering and finding ways to address our lack of bilingual teachers – both Carolinian and Chamorro," Interim Commissioner Flores told CAO Executive Assistant Nogis.

"As you have been made aware by my predecessors, PSS has been earnestly working to ensure that we are able to address the lack of and inadequate bilingual classroom instructors because of various reasons, primarily, among others, due to recruitment difficulties, minimum hiring requirements, and lack of local funding," explains Interim Commissioner Flores.

Both Flores and Nogis agree to cooperate and partner together to address the issue.

CAO Executive Assistant Nogis said, "coming together is a positive sign".

"Getting together and talking about finding a common ground on the issue is a positive sign," Executive Assistant Nogis noted.