



August 2022

CNMI Public School System

# STUDENTS FIRST

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## How He Inspire Confidence in Students to Love Numbers

Meet the 2023 PSS State Teacher of the Year  
**Donovan Manibusan Tudela**  
and the  
Four Finalists for the  
2023 PSS State Teacher of the Year





**'30 Years from Now, How Do We Envision the Future of Education in the CNMI? With Artificial Intelligence, How will Lessons be Delivered? What Will be the Role of Teachers?**

*— Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada*





CNMI Public School System Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada, Northern Marianas Chief Executive Officer Jodina Attao, and NMC President Galvin Deleon Guerrero, EdD recently delivered their first State of Education Addresses on Thursday, September 22, 2022 at World Resort Saipan Taga Hall. The State of Education Address is an annual platform for NMC, NMTECH, and PSS to come together and present plans for student success and workforce development to students, parents, guardians, elected leaders, government officials, and community partners. Together in the photo with the three leaders are the NMC Board of Regents, CNMI PSS Board of Education, and the NMTECH Board of Trustees. (NMC/PSS/NMTECH)

'...I want us all to think of a teacher who has made an impact in your life. We give agredesimantu for them...whether they have passed away, currently alive or retired. Let's give them a big round of applause.'

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the educational scenario has changed unpredictably. To remain and adapt to the crisis, new educational trends came about. While some global trends keep their value, the CNMI Public School System is embracing new/developmental and future trends.

The first trend we saw with CNMI Public Education is:

1) Modern/Contemporary learning platform in Public Education and in moving forward with future trends for the CNMI students to remain productive citizens in a global society.

The second trend we saw with Public Education is the devotion of 2) Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Mental Health

Our teachers provide more than textbook instruction. They give emotional support and structure. Social Emotional and Mental Health awareness will help guide our children through their most difficult and formative years.

PSS Mental Health Team - HALIGI AWARE grant (Healthy, Affirming Locally-Inclusive Grant Initiative). We must also recognize that a mental health crisis exists in the CNMI Public School system, especially among our young people who have weathered two years of disruptions, virtual instruction, isolation and constant changes to normal routines.

This crisis is here, right now. Students must have access to professional mental health counseling and services."

The State Logitudinal Data System is also one of the major initiatives that the CNMI Public School System has launched this year. Statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDS) contain individual record-level data on public school students that can be used to assess their progress and outcomes in and across education levels. Our SLDS now links to EdFi that are used to report education data to the US Department of Education. Under the SLDS, the Early Warning System was developed and utilized to flag at risk students.

The third trend I want to share with the CNMI community is the:

3) Educational programs that PSS is currently Achieving along side this pandemic.

With our State Infrastructure Technology, we increased the bandwidth so connectivity within the classrooms schools are reliable and dependable. The 1 laptop/iPad per student with 1 MiFi per family made distance education a reality. CNMI PSS, now has a World Wide Web Based, State of the Art that is accessible to all. You can find it at CNMIPSS.org

Besides the Infrastructure Technology, our Instructional Technology Distance Education program, made student learning come to fruition. We trained ALL teachers for one month to teach in the BBU teaching platform.

Project-Based Learning (PBL). When discussing trends in education, there will be a gap if we don't refer to PBL. This is also known as experiential learning. "Knowledge is a consequence of experience". People cannot grow up if they just follow the grasp in textbooks, indeed. Global citizens have to experience the real things in real life. Thanks to that process, they sharpen their skills better in integrating with society.

Immersion program implementation of Indigenous Based Education through the Chamorro and Carolinian Language and Heritage Studies

In our effort to sustain our Chamorro and Carolinian language and culture, we now have an Immersion Language Program in the elementary where students are being taught in the language. All 9 elementary schools are offering the Immersion Language courses. Beginning this school year, 2 of our High Schools are offering Chamorro and Carolinian classes.

If we create and implement a plan for college and career pathways, then there will be more opportunities for students to participate in CTE programs, and students will meet or exceed their academic, social-emotional, and well-being

Key Points of Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada's State of Education Address on September 22, 2022 with his counterparts from the Northern Marianas College and the Northern Marianas Technical Institute

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$$\begin{bmatrix} 0 & 3 & -2 & -1 \\ 2 & 1 & 5 & -2 \end{bmatrix} \quad -2R_1 + R_3 \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 3 & -2 & -1 \\ 0 & -3 & 13 & -8 \end{bmatrix}$$

d. Add 6 times the first row to the second row.

*Original Matrix*

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 2 & 2 & -4 \\ - & 3 & 18 & \\ & 4 & 7 & \end{bmatrix}$$

*New Row-Equivalent Matrix*

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 2 & 2 & -4 \\ 0 & 1 & 6 & \\ 0 & & & 7 \end{bmatrix}$$



# SSHS' Donovan M. Tudela is 2023 PSS Teacher of the Year



**F**OR Donovan Manibusan Tudela, it is a tremendous honor and a life-changing moment to serve the children of this small island community.

He wanted to be there for students, to share what he loves most: mathematics.

"Everything that I do and I live for is because of the passion that I have to share and to let my students understand that mathematics is not a difficult subject to learn".

"It really hurts me when I see or hear students fearful about learning mathematics. I have to tell them— I will never get tired to be there for them, and will continue to tell them that 'we are in this together; we can do this together,'" Tudela said.

"I want to be there for them. I want to be there for my students, and I want to be there for my school community," Tudela added.

The 29-year-old educator was hailed on September 26 as the 2023 Public School System's State Teacher of the Year.

The mathematics teacher will officially represent the school district in the 2023 National Teacher of the Year, the most prestigious teacher recognition program in the country and is



initiated by the non-profit Council of Chief State School Officers.

The announcement was made by Teacher of the Year Program Coordinator Frankie Camacho and joined by Human Resources Director Lucretia B. Deleon Guerrero, Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada and BOE Chairman Gregory Pat. Borja.

Asked why he pursued mathematics as his field of specialization, he said: "to change the mindset and perspective of students about the subject. There are students that come to class, scared or hates math. It is my goal and hope to be there for them, and help them understand and appreciate more about the subject—and to say, 'I can try' as oppose to 'I can't do it'."

Tudela has been classroom teacher for 6 years.

## 'Great honor'

Tudela acknowledged that the title of overall PSS teacher of the year is a herculean task that he is honored and humbly accepts.

"This was a journey for me and it sure is a herculean task: This means a whole much to myself, my family most especially my colleagues, my school and at the very core of everything, my students," Tudela said yesterday.

"Being named 2023 PSS State Teacher of the Year is a great honor and a great opportunity to represent our islands and also show to the whole world that what we do here as a small island community can make a huge difference—even if it means something small," he added.

Tudela received a special plaque of recognition and a perpetual trophy that will be displayed yearlong at his school.

This is the sixth time for SSHS to take home the overall teacher of the year award. Opened in 2002. SSHS' previous state-level winners were: William DeWitt, Andrew Golden, Jonathan Cabrera, Dr. Dora B. Miura, and Paul Miura, who went on to serve years later as the teacher representative to the CNMI Board of Education.

"I want to take this opportunity to be a voice for my students, to be a voice for the teachers, as well as to be a voice for the island community that education is going to evolve and that we are all going to be the best versions of ourselves so long as we try, we persevere, and that we have faith, and trust in each other that things will going to be okay because we are a resilient community," Tudela said.

Asked if he has a secret to his success, he said: "There's really no secret to my success. It's just pouring my heart and mind into what I do; it's my drive and my passion for what I do."

"I also want to attribute a lot of my success to my family, my administrators at SSHS as well as my colleagues, and my students for giving me a reason and a purpose," he shares. He said his bond with his mother, Tona, is where he learned to be patient. "She always reminds us to be kind to others, to have the understanding and compassion with others because we don't know what others feels".

## 'Thank You'

Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada congratulated Tudela and all 20 teachers of the year of all public schools in Saipan, Tinian and Rota.

"We are very fortunate to have some very exceptionally committed, smart, talented and dedicated classroom teachers. Each year for more than two decades now, twenty classroom heroes are recognized annually by our respective schools," Commissioner Ada said yesterday.

"Honoring our educators is an opportunity for our PSS family and our community to celebrate the hard work, commitment and sacrifices of our educators," education chief Dr. Ada added.

The 2023 PSS Teacher of the Year Committee also expressed its appreciation to the members of the selection committee.

The selection committee were comprised by: Dr. Beylul Solomon, associate professor of Northern Marianas College School of Education; Shirley Sablan, president/chief executive officer Pacific Insurance Underwriter, Inc.; Charles Cepeda, chairperson, NMC Board of Regents; Kathleen Keiko Yamagata, classroom teacher at Mount Carmel School, and Kaelani Demapan, member, board of directors for Saipan High Education Financial Assistance (SHEFA).

## Rigorous process

It's a rigorous four-part selection process that took nearly five months.

It begins at the school-level, when the nomination and deliberation process starts in April this year. This is done jointly with the school and respective Parents, Teachers and Students Association (PTSA).

The selected school-level teacher of the year will be the official representative to the state-level competition. All 20 school-level representatives are screened and judged using the National Teacher of the Year selection packet. PSS has been using this criterion for decades now.

The third process is an unannounced on-site visit and classroom observation by the panel of judges.

Following the unannounced classroom observation, the selection committee chooses the top five finalists. The final stage is the interview process of the top 5 finalists.

Yesterday's announcement will allow for Tudela to submit timely his entry/application to the 2023 National Teacher of the Year, which formally opens this week and ends on October 30, according to PSS Teacher of the Year Coordinator Camacho.

Announcement of the Top 4 finalist to the National Teacher of the Year is slated for December of this year.

The overall 2023 National Teacher of the Year will be announced by CCSSO in the White House in April next year.



# The Teacher of the Year Finalists

**F**OUR classroom teachers coming from various academic fields of discipline have been named finalists to the 2023 Public School System Teacher of the Year.

On September 26, the four educators: Jolene Aguon, science teacher of Kagman High School; Francis Mendiola, fifth grade all-content teacher of Koblerville Elementary School, Daniel Wollak, physical education teacher of Marianas High School, and Dr. Patrick Castillon, fifth grade all-content teacher of San Vicente Elementary School were honored by Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada and the Board of Education led by Chairman Gregory Pat Borja, during a special BOE meeting. (See related story).

Along with 2023 CNMI PSS State of the Year Donovan Tudela, the four finalists were chosen from the twenty teachers of the year coming from all of Saipan, Tinian and Rota's public elementary, middle and high schools on Saipan, Tinian and Rota.

This year's marks the 34th year of the inception of the Public School System when it was constitutionally created in 1988 as independent entity responsible for providing free and quality elementary and secondary education in the CNMI.

"Our finalists come from a group of very dedicated, passionate and driven educators who all have went above and beyond what were expected of them. They never stopped providing optimum learning opportunities to our children. Like their immediate predecessors (last year's batch), this group is particularly special, too: they have to navigate the challenges of teaching and learning at time when we are all faced with the COVID-19 pandemic," Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada said.

"Today, it gives me great pride to announce the top finalists and congratulate all of the 15 other teachers of the year from all of our Saipan, Tinian and Rota public schools for their exceptional display of commitment and level of educational professionalism," Dr. Ada said during the announcement.





## ‘With this honor, I can give back’

**Jolene Aguon**  
Kagman High School

Kagman High School’s Jolene Aguon dedicates the honor to her colleagues, her school and her student.

“It is the beginning of a journey and the completion of all the work to give public school students the opportunity to have hands-on experience of a working STEM/Science laboratory in her school,” she said.

Aguon is credited for the increased in student enrollment and participation in science-laboratory class and the expansion of the science-lab of KHS. It was only recently that KHS lab received support from the National Institute of Health, as a result of the growth in student interests in science-lab classes under Aguon’s class.

KHS is the only public school today that has a NIH-recognized laboratory room.

“This is something I can hold with pride not only for myself but for my students and my school,” Aguon said. “This is both the beginning of my journey to bring more student appreciation about science-laboratory class, and the completion of sacrifices and hard work of my students and my school”.

Being chosen as a finalist validated what Aguon has done through her school’s science laboratory, which “created more learning opportunities”.

“Now, with this honor, I can give back what I received...” she added.

This month marks her seventh year as KHS teacher. From 2015 to 2018, she was KHS school counselor and transitioned as a classroom science teacher. She graduated college with a degree in nursing, and, began working as a nurse in a clinic before joining PSS.

“After working in a clinic, I feel like the need to serve and work with our children and I switched and go back to school,” she said.

“If chosen as 2023 Teacher of the Year, I will use this as a platform to share my voice, to advocate for students, supporting and promoting the importance of being there for them not only academically but emotionally and socially,” she said.

“I will also use this as my platform to support inclusion



## ‘My Teachers Were My Inspiration’

**Francis Mendiola**  
Koblerville Elementary School

For 18 years, Francis Mendiola, 2023 Koblerville Elementary School teacher of the year, has dedicated his time to guide and support his “hugging umangs” students.

Another product of public school, Mendiola belongs to Marianas High School’s Class of 1999.

He said that while at MHS, it was his high school teachers who inspired him to pursue the education profession.

“I was inspired to become an educator from my previous teachers who have made a positive impact on me growing up in Saipan,” said Mendiola. “I am proud graduate of (the Public School System).”

Mendiola said his high school teachers supported him in his studies. “The support and guidance they provided for me inspired me to do the same for others.”

As one of the five finalists, Mendiola said he dedicates the honor to his peers.

“It means a great deal to me to be recognized among my fellow colleagues for the work and service we provide for our students,” Mendiola said.

He added, “I will do my best to be a spokesperson that promotes public education in the CNMI not only because I am a product of it but because real changes and efforts are being made to provide better quality education for all our students. I would be that advocate that would help build stronger partnerships amongst our students, parents, and communities as well as strengthen collaborative efforts with our private and government entities to open up more opportunities for our students.”

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and diversity,” Aguon said, adding that in her school she has established a “Brave Space” to celebrate diversity, enjoy and respect differences.”





## 'An Advocate For Social-Emotional Learning'

**Dr. Patrick Castillon**  
San Vicente Elementary School

San Vicente Elementary School teacher of the year Dr. Castillon is humbled by the honor.

"It's an honor and a privilege to have been selected as San Vicente Elementary School's Teacher of the Year this year. The feeling of being nominated is overwhelming because you feel appreciated for all of the time and effort you have put in not only for the school but also for the students," Dr. Castillon said.

He added, "Being selected into the top finalist means a lot not just for me but for my school community. The reason for that is because whenever a teacher from our school is nominated into the top five, it not only increases our school pride but it also validates the hard work and sacrifices we educators do for what's best for the school and our students."

Dr. Castillon has been an educator for more than 20 years now. In March this year, Dr. Castillon was named as the CNMI state finalist for the prestigious Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science and Technology. He was selected for his outstanding contributions in the field of math and science teaching.

He admits that classroom teaching was not his first work preference. "Becoming a teacher was not the first preference of my career choice. However, after noticing that the tourism economy was not doing well, I knew I had to broaden my options. So I decided to get into the field of education, I first started as a teacher's aide and worked my way up. Ultimately, it was my wife and kids that inspired me to keep moving forward."

In 1996 he graduated from PSS.

He added, "Now that we are slowly coming out of the pandemic, I just want to let the public know that teachers are still considered front liners. We are the front line of the educational system, and when we encounter emotional and behavioral challenges not just in our children but amongst ourselves, it is crucial for all stakeholders to not only foster social-emotional learning with the students but should also advocate self-care for both our children and teachers. That way both the teacher and students thrive during the educational journey."



## 'The Classroom is Where... at My Best'

**Daniel Wollak**  
Marianas High School

With a large faculty, Marianas High School physical education teacher Daniel Wollak felt honored that he was chosen to be this year's outstanding teacher among his colleagues.

"(W)e have so many amazing teachers in each and every department. So, when I found out that my colleagues had chosen me to represent MHS as their teacher of the year, I was extremely honored. I was asked to give a little speech but struggled to articulate what I wanted to say because I was so overwhelmed by emotion. The PE department can sometimes be overlooked for what they do so I was very honored that my colleagues value what myself and our department does for our students and our school. It is something I will cherish for the rest of my life," Wollak said.

He added, "You don't go into the field of education for accolades or personal recognition. I teach because I have a passion for my subject area and want to pass on that passion to future generations of students. However, being recognized by not just MHS, but all of PSS, helped reaffirm the fact that I am making the impact on my students and my school that I set out to make. Some teachers move on from teaching to other roles such as administration or move to central but this just confirms the fact that the classroom is where I belong and where I am at my best."

This is the 14th year for Wollak to be an educator for PSS. He moved from Minnesota to Saipan out of graduate school for an adventure and gain valuable teaching experience. He didn't expect to fall in love with Saipan and its people. He now call Saipan his home.

Wollak knew that he wanted to pursue a profession that he doesn't have to sit at a desk all day. "Movement and fitness have always been a big part of my life. I grew up playing a large variety of sports and being involved in other physical activities...I was already coaching sports at this point and knew I wanted to continue to work with youth and be around sports so I decided physical education would be a great career path for me."

Wollak has a major in kinesiology and a K-12 Physical Education teaching degree and Developmentally Adapted Physical Education certificate.





# PSS Finance and Budget Team Completes APIPA Courses

**T**HE Public School System's Finance and Budget Team successfully completed the required 13 finance and audit courses offered by the 33rd Annual Conference of the Association of Pacific Islands Public Auditors (APIPA).

The school district's finance and budget team now joins their counterparts in the Pacific to receive Continuing Professional Education (CPE) credits.

The successful participants-cohorts are Merci Alejandre; Marie Montano; Jazmin Camacho; Ronna Eriich, Remy Matagolai, Jojo Tagabuel; Francis Reyes; Cathy Regalado; Eli Santos; Michael Babauta, and Director Arlene Lizama.

The APIPA Conference was held virtually from August 29 to September 2, 2022.

The PSS Finance and Budget team heard from experts in and around the Pacific, and engage in both general and technical training from nine world-class instructors. The opening plenary featured the U.S. Department of Interior's Office of the Inspector General, as well as the U.S. State of Hawaii's State Auditor.

The President of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), David W. Panuelo, provided opening remarks

First held in June 1989, the annual APIPA conference provides members with the opportunity to act as one voice in support of the goal of promoting efficiency and accountability in the use of public resources of emerging nations of the Pacific; to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, experience, problems, and the identification of solutions which are often unique to Public Auditors in the Pacific; to sponsor auditing and accounting training workshops; to identify scholarship sources for Pacific Islanders in need of financial assistance to study auditing and accounting at the post-secondary level; and to promote public awareness for the purposes of conducting audits and public resources.



# Successful Test Show Schools Progress in Tsunami Readiness

**T**HE Public School System successfully tested on September 15 its tsunami readiness and response plan on all coastline schools with the support of government emergency management agencies.

The drill is the biggest to be staged since 2013.

About 5,000 students, teachers and staff, and community members participated in the full-scale tsunami drill, testing various evacuation routes and evacuation sites or safe zones.

The Department of Fire and Emergency Management Services, Department of Public Safety and the Homeland Security and Emergency Management assisted in the execution of the PSS tsunami readiness plan

This was done in partnership with the private schools.

The schools that participated are William S. Reyes Elementary School, Chalan Kanoa Head Start/Early Head Start Center, Oleai Elementary School, Oleai Head Start, Marianas High School, Susupe Early Head Start, Garapan Elementary School, Tanapag Middle School, Tanapag Head Start/Early Head Start, Mount Carmel School and Saipan Seventh-day Adventist School.

Saipan Community School is slated to conduct their own tsunami preparedness drill with the lead support of PSS and in partnership with the three government agencies.

## Communication is key

A "well-developed communication plan for all stakeholders involved was key", according to Anthony Frank, project director for PSS Grants for School Emergency Management (GSEM), which oversaw the planning and execution of the drill.

"Under the leadership of and with the support from our Commissioner of Education (Dr. Alfred B. Ada), our tsunami drill was a success for the most part. PSS was able to identify safe zones and evacuation routes to conduct our exercise drill," Frank told Students First.

"The results are far above my expectations: seeing toddlers walking up the hill with a smile brought tears to my eyes. The success of this drill was because of supportive leadership, collaboration between PSS school leaders and staff, private school representatives, DFEMS, DPS, and HSEM support and community volunteers. Our next challenge now as part of our emergency preparedness initiative is to work on family reunification."

Due to different locations and distance of the safe zones, schools' response time varies.

Frank said, "Everybody was surprised that it went well. Why? Because the effect of communication played a big part that we were all able to coordinate".







### Private Schools Not Left Out

In a separate interview with Students First Mount Carmel School President Frances T. Taimanao credited PSS for continually supporting the private school community in the CNMI.

"It's about time that we have an actual drill because being located by the shorelines, we need to have some kind of plan in the event of a natural disaster, especially a tsunami. Having that drill gave us the experience and to learn what we needed to do and what to improve with our (current) plan," Principal Taimanao said in an interview.

The school leader said that the drill gave MCS students and staffs the "hands-on, real-life experience" using evacuation procedures and protocols

Over 400 MCS students participated in the drill. They reached their designated evacuation safe zone – the former Ladera International School of Saipan – with a time of around 28 minutes.

When the tsunami bell rang at 9 am, it took only 3 minutes for MCS students and staff to exit the campus.

"Overall we did pretty well," MCS President Taimanao said. "(MCS) truly appreciates PSS for continuously involving us and all of the private schools of its plans, not only (helping

us with) federal funds to improve student learning, but also for safety, disaster and emergency readiness (for our private school stakeholders)".

"Now, I see more involvement of private schools."

In a separate interview, SCS Principal Dunn said her school is now working with PSS for their tsunami drill.

"We are very appreciative of Mr. Frank and his eagerness in assisting us to improve our emergency procedures for the safety of our children," Dunn told Students First separately.

With the preparation now underway for SCS' drill in two weeks, Principal Dunn said "students have lots of questions which show eagerness to participate."

"We really appreciate the partnership we have with PSS and we are very happy that we are working with them in improving our emergency and disaster, security/active shooter and earthquake plans," Principal Dunn said.

She added, "I was really happy to see (Dr. Alfred) Ada personally coming to see us in our school, making a point to talk to us personally on the importance of this joint PSS-private school drill. He really made sure that this is not just a courtesy email but a genuine collaboration."

SCS has over 200-student population.





## Public schools

Tanapag Middle School managed to safely evacuate its 308 students including Head Start/ Early Head Start students in “under 10 minutes”, according to Principal Hilda Rios in an interview.

“What was wonderful is we have community support. We saw community members (residents) by the roadside helping each other making sure we reached our evacuation zone timely,” said Principal Rios.

TMS’ evacuation site was the Camacho residence compound. “Overall there was great collaboration with all different agencies and our community.”

Oleai Elementary School Principal Jasylene Parico said students, staff and parents “did the best judgment on the day of the tsunami (drill)”.

“We did the best we could to prepare our students and staff. Of course, our parents gave us the needed support and we are just thankful that everyone was on board,” Principal Parico told Students First yesterday.

It took OES around 40 minutes to reach their evacuation site, which was YCO Do It Hardware in As Terlaje.

“The safety of everybody is always important, and even during drills, we have to make sure that we provide all forms of assistance,” she said. “It also shows that our families take it seriously that they want their children prepared and we are thankful for that”.







# USDA Officials Meet with PSS leaders



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.

**R**ANKING officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture met Public School System officials on August 16, as part of their annual visit to the CNMI.

The USDA through its FNS program is a partner of PSS. Over the years, the federal nutrition program funds the free meal program (breakfast and lunch) of over 10,000 public elementary, middle and high school students of Saipan, Tinian and Rota. It continues to work with PSS through its Child Nutrition Program in improving and supporting a healthy lifestyle and wellbeing of all public school students.

The visiting federal officials are from USDA's Western Regional Office in California. They were WRO Administrator Jesus Mendoza, Jr., Special Nutrition Program Director Marisa Cheung, and Public Affairs Director Mary Kay Grominger.

"Their visit was an annual informal visit to meet with key staff administering the federal-funded nutrition program, including (Nutrition Assistance Program, Women, Infants and Children Program, and PSS CNP)," said Dale Roberts, PSS-CNP director.

Along with PSS, the federal department also supports the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs-NAP Program, and the Commonwealth HealthCare Corporation's Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (CNMI WIC Program). These programs are federally funded through various grants designed to support and improve nutrition, lifestyle and wellbeing of NMI residents.

PSS-CNP Director Roberts added that the USDA-WRO conducts state agency visits on a regular basis to discuss challenges and successes and to offer support.

For the past two years, however, the global COVID-19 pandemic prevented the USDA's WRO visit.

On Capital Hill, Board of Education Chairman Gregory Pat Borja, Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada, Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services Eric Magofna, interim Federal Program's Officer Jacqueline Che, and CNP Director Roberts, among others, received the visiting federal officials.

"Their visit is very important to us in validating what we, at PSS, have been working for many years, in ensuring that we continue to promote healthy nutrition, wellbeing and practices for our children, which are all integrated in the federal USDA guidelines," Commissioner of Education Dr. Ada separately said.

Dr. Ada said PSS, with the support of the Board of Education, has already put in place effective policies that promote healthy lifestyle in the classroom.

The meeting also included discussion on the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) benefit for school children, the fiscal 2023 CNP budget, and proposal to build a new cafeteria for Garapan Elementary School.

Following the meeting, the USDA officials toured the recently constructed and USDA-funded Koblerville Elementary School cafeteria.



# Largest Professional Development For Educators, Stakeholders Held

**T**HE Public School System held a two-day professional development, attracting close to one thousand three hundred educators and stakeholders of public education coming from Saipan, Tinian and Rota.

This is the largest by far in recent years for the school district to host a professional development. This was held from August 19 to 20 at the Marianas High School. The opening ceremony was held in MHS gym, which was filled to capacity.

The last time PSS held a CNMI-wide professional development and training was prior to super typhoon Yutu in 2018. The COVID-19 pandemic further halted similar activities.

Board of Education Chairman Gregory Pat Borja likened yesterday's jam-packed MHS gymnasium to the opening of classes: "It feels like school is starting just from the amount of traffic I encountered heading here today".

The two-day intensive professional development is tailored to address preparation needs for the 20 public elementary, middle and high school campuses, PSS central offices, and programs and departments for the new school year.

PSS resumed in-person instruction on August 22 for its estimated 10,000 student population.

Chairman Borja added, "Thank you all for your hard work, and dedication in supporting our students' education success."

All BOE members attended the event. They included Vice Chairman Antonio Borja of Tinian, Secretary/Treasurer Maisie B. Tenorio of Saipan, and Board Members Andrew L. Orsini of Saipan, and Herman Atalig of Rota, and Teacher Rep. Phyllis Ain.

## Accomplishing together

Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada expressed

excitement that schools will finally resume face-to-face learning successfully.

The theme of the professional development is "A Basket of Success is Woven with Leaves of Knowledge".

"You remember that we embarked on a partial return to campus last academic year (2021-2022) and managed to support a hybrid approach to learning without interruption...(and) this school year, we are happy to open classes in-person and we will be successful," Commissioner of Education Dr. Ada said in his remarks.

"We have accomplished together because we did our part in complying with health and safety measures we've put in place together with our partners—CHCC and CDC," Dr. Ada said. "Thank you for helping us reach our 80 percent vaccination goal, even going above and beyond that by taking us over 90 percent. I ask for your continued compliance with all of these practices and protocol to keep our community safe and healthy," the education chief said.

## NMTech, NMC support

Also, for the first time, the other two public education chiefs in the CNMI showed up to support their PSS counterpart: Northern Marianas Technical Institute Chief Executive Officer Jodina Attao and Northern Marianas College President Dr. Galvin Deleon Guerrero.

"Children are blessings. As a teacher, I learned from my students just as much as they learned from me. I grew because of them. I thought I had it hard, but I've seen kids in my classroom who have dealt with way harder circumstances than I ever have," Attao said in her remarks."

She added, "Kids made me realize so much about who I was and how I could impact others, so I started to count my blessings... often, and shared them my blessings too."

CEO Attao credited the partnership between NMTech and PSS through the career-readiness program called "Trading Up".

It was long-time coming for all three primary education institution in the CNMI to forge a strong partnership, according to NMC President Deleon Guerrero.

"(This is no longer) about where will we go... because we are going to different direction (in the past). I am heartened today to see that the (chiefs) of all primary education in our islands PSS, NMTech and NMC are finally working together," NMC President Dr. Deleon Guerrero said.

"I am heartened to tell you that we are now working in our strategic plans to align our goals and direction together," he said, adding that "today (I am proud to inform everyone here) that the three of us will meet together as (heads of the CNMI's primary education) once a month to ensure that we are working together, so that we are rowing together, and sailing together towards a shared vision."

Dr. Deleon Guerrero paid tribute to PSS employees: "I have nothing but respect for our public education. As a former MHS teacher, I'd be honest it was hard. But you do it everyday, even on Sundays, grading papers, lesson plans, you do that everyday."





# School District, CHCC partnership for stakeholders outreach

THE Public School System met in late August with its the Commonwealth HealthCare Corporation, as part of its expanded effort aimed at strengthening its collaboration with all of community partners.

PSS' Family and Community Engagement Program is spearheading is taking the lead with this partnership work.

The meeting with its healthcare partner is part of the Family and Community Engagement Program's outreach awareness initiative our stakeholders during the new school year.

"Some topics of discussion were focused on possible health-related trainings/presentations for students, parents, and educators, potential Mobile Clinic services to include comprehensive services for students, as well as health-related resources for our stakeholders," PSS Family and Community Engagement Program, which is spearheaded by its Program Manager Liela Yumul

"As we commence SY 2022-2023, we want to remind our stakeholders that health and safety remain our top priority," it added.



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growth targets- Each high school will be ready to implement at least one career pathway by the end of the 2021-22 school year. (2021 - 2022) The draft graduation recommendation policy to change from 28n to 224 credits was presented and will be submitted to BOE at their next BOE meeting.

Our Career and Technical Education (CTE) is on its way to more options and choices for all our students by providing rigorous academic classes with industry-related, work-based learning focusing on career awareness, exploration, preparation, and application. Continued partnership with the Northern Marianas Technical Institute (NMTI) and the Northern Marianas College (NMC) with dual enrollment and career pathways are ongoing. Teacher Academy and Auto Tech are among the highlights of the pathway.

The CNMI Public School System's (PSS) Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program has adopted the Career Pathways model to provide high school students with college and career pathways that are seamless and progressive that lead to a certification or credential upon successful completion of coursework and workplace hands on learning in these programs:

Construction, Entrepreneurship, Nurse Assistant, and Teaching.

Our collaboration and open communication, developing rapport with the community agencies our school principals, the key management team, our parents, and stakeholders of PSS make PSS successful .maintaining a healthy relationship with our students...can benefit their overall success of the whole child, —academically, socially, emotionally, physically, mentally —and eventually the whole adult.

Lastly, 30 years ago, our leaders envisioned quality education for the future of the CNMI. We believe they would be proud of the progress we have made together.

Today, is an opportunity for all of us to continue our partnership in championing education as we Reimagine, ReEngage and ReOpen the best quality education to our students, our future, our youth, our children.

30 years from now, it will be 2052. How do you envision future education will look like in th CNMI? With Artificial Intelligence (AI), robots take the place in our lives such as ALEXA, SIRI,....

How will lessons be delivered? What will be the role of teachers, Where will education take place? at home? In Cafe's? Or in school campus? Or while on vacationing.





# Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Jr. Sr. High School's Journalism, Entrepreneurship Classes

**D**R. RITA Hocog Inos Junior Senior High School's pioneering Career Technical and Education Program is proud of its successful journalism and entrepreneurship classes.

Joycelyn Atalig teaches the journalism class. The journalism was launched prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is taught in 9th to 12th grade students.

Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Junior Senior High School has dance/arts and culinary classes.

On the other hand, for Tinian Junior Senior High School have video production, art classes, agriculture and culinary classes.







# Tinian Jr. Sr. High School's Ryan Michael Nuera is New BOE Student Representative

**A** SENIOR high school student from Tinian, Ryan Michael Nuera, took his oath) as the new student representative to the Board of Education.

On September 26, Board of Education Chairman Gregory Pat Borja administered the oath of office for Nuera, a twelfth grade student of Tinian Junior Senior High School.

The Board of Education held a special session to formally welcome the new student representative.

"At first I was really nervous because I know that I am not only going to represent my students at my school, but all of our students within the Public School System. But I am actually really excited because I get to know all of the student councils, the Youth Advisory Panels and other organizations that I can really work with and be their voice," Nuera said.

Nuera succeeded Jed Sta. Theresa, Rota's Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Junior Senior High School.

On August 22, BOE Chairman Borja nominated Nuera to the governor. On August 24 Governor Ralph DLG. Torres appointed Nuera to serve for one full school year as BOE student representative.

Nuera will represent the 10,000 public elementary, middle and high school students to the governing and policymaking body of PSS.

Nuera is involved in various school and community-based organizations, among others, as TJSHS student council vice president and Youth Advisory Panel member.

He is the 4-HTinian island council president and 4-H Marianas vice president.

"What my fellow students can expect from me is my sincere dedication to do my best to be their voice. I want them to be comfortable and come to really know me...and that I will always be there for them," Nuera said.

He added, "I want them to voice their concerns so I can bring it up to the (BOE) because the board basically plans for and works with our Public School System. There won't be a Public School System without the students."

"It is very important that they (students) understand that I am here and I am willing to voice out their concerns," the Tinian public school student leaders added.



# Supporting PROGRESS in the CNMI

ON May 27th, the end of the school year professional learning was held with close to 200 Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System (CNMI PSS) special education personnel at the Kensington Hotel in Saipan, CNMI. Co-facilitated by the CNMI PSS, PROGRESS Center, and Guam CEDDERS, this full day in-person professional development incorporated the individualized education program (IEP) process into how school teams can be strengthened to support students with disabilities. This culminating event extended the April and May virtual training sessions facilitated by Dr. Tessie Bailey from the PROGRESS Center on promoting progress in students with disabilities through the development of high-quality present levels of academic achievement and functional performance statements (PLAAFPs) and aligned IEP goals.

Funded by the USDOE Office of Special Education Programs, PROGRESS Center (which stands for Promoting Rigorous Outcomes and Growth by Redesigning Educational Services for Students With Disabilities Center) provides information, resources, tools, and technical assistance services to support local educators and leaders (kindergarten through transition age) in developing and implementing high-quality educational programs that ensure students with disabilities have access to free appropriate public education (FAPE) which allows them to make progress and meet challenging goals, consistent with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017). (<https://promotingprogress.org/about>)

The May 27th event focused on how school teams can apply the IEP development process to better understand their current team strengths and to set a team goal for how they can improve their collaboration in support of students with disabilities. From the bus drivers and bus conductors to related service personnel, teachers, and teacher aides, each team member reflected on how individually and collectively they can promote a proactive school culture for nurturing an environment where students, staff, and parents feel welcomed and are committed to making their community a better place to live, play, and learn.

The full day activities started with Dr. Bobby Cruz, CNMI PSS Director of the Instructional Technology and Distance Education (IT&DE) Program, facilitating reflection activities that emphasized how beliefs impact outcomes – *I Hinenggen-mu*. Team members completed a self-assessment and engaged in reflection activities on how we can change our beliefs for improving individually and collectively. June De Leon, Guam CEDDERS Interim Director, continued individual reflections by having each member identify and share their character strengths with their team members. This activity allowed members



CNMI PSS Special Education Director Donna Flores (pictured left) welcomes PROGRESS Center Director Dr. Tessie Bailey to Saipan, CNMI, her first visit to the region.







PROGRESS Center Director Dr. Tessie Bailey (standing) facilitates how school teams can apply the IEP development process to strengthen their school team collaboration.



Rita Inos Jr./High School Team proudly displays their team's name – SPED Bumps, while Guam CEDDERS Interim Director June De Leon (standing) looks on and listens to their explanation of why they chose their team's name.



Antonette Castro, aka "Netty Cee," Special Education Teacher, Kagman High School, shares her team's reflections.



Team sharing included a cheer from the WSR Elementary Team!

to further understand how each member can contribute to their teamwork.

Dr. Tessie Bailey, Center Director for the PROGRESS Center, facilitated the afternoon activities that resulted in each school team crafting their team goal for the next school year. The activities followed the steps of the IEP process from identifying present levels as a team and identifying at least one team need to crafting their team goal statement. Through a gallery walk "voting" activity to identify the completeness of the goal statements, the bus drivers/conductors team received the most points, which garnered each member a special prize!

Guam CEDDERS Keith Villaluna and CNMI PSS Special Education Director Donna Flores closed the full day event with a video presentation of the day's engagement and a summary of the day's outcomes and the possibilities for the new school year. Celebrating our successes from school year 2021-2022 and strengthening our team supports for the new 2022-2023 school year!



Anna Yamada (sitting in blue), Special Education Teacher, Tanapag Middle School, supports the Bus Drivers/Conductors Team to develop their team goal statement which received the most points from the gallery walk activity for completeness! Congratulations Team!





# 'An Invaluable Experience' — Pladevega-Sablan

# Public School System's Annette Paladevega Sablan Graduates from Harvard University's Fellowship

**T**HE school district takes pride with one of its employee for its achievement.

Annette Pladevega Sablan, the project director of the State Longitudinal Data System of the CNMI Public School System has graduated from Harvard University's Strategic Data Project on August.

Pladevega-Sablan is the only resident from the Pacific region that made into the fellowship program. She belongs to the cohort 12 of Harvard's SDP Program.

In June 2020, the school district announced Pladevega-Sablan's successful acceptance to the SDP Fellowship Program at the premier university in the world, following a rigorous and competitive selection process.

Pladevega-Sablan was only one of the 25 select professionals who made it into cohort 12 of Harvard University's SDP Program.

It was a two-year fellowship, from June 2020 to August 2022.

She graduated on September 2.

"As a data strategist, my experience in the SDP fellowship was invaluable, and I have been able to bring back critical knowledge about leveraging data in the CNMI PSS. "Disruption" is synonymous with today's society, and joining a fellowship during the pandemic has tested my personal and professional resiliency, adaptability, and commitment to service. SDP helped me to shift my perspective of data from a "hammer" to a "flashlight" to uncover the stories of our youngest learners, find avenues to improve outcomes, and be fearless in the pursuit of the truth because information, insight, and inspiration can come in unexpected places," Pladevega-Sablan told Students First.

Upon her graduation, Pladevega-Sablan is working towards pioneering an Early Warning System for Reading for the Public School System. This is to put into motion her capstone project that centered on reading.

"My capstone project focused on working with the Research Education Laboratory (REL) Pacific and PSS to develop, build and implement an Early Warning System for Reading," she said.

Pladevega-Sablan added, "This system captures students in K-2 that are off-track to reading proficiently by grade 3, and, more importantly, supports school teams in discussing a student's background and history and how that affects their academic achievement. This system provides a targeted intervention strategy that supports our hardest and most dedicated workers in PSS - our educators.

Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada recognized Pladevega-Sablan for her commitment towards improving student learning within the school district.

"On behalf of our Public School System family and our State Board of Education, I am very proud of this extraordinary achievement of Project Director Annette Pladevega-Sablan. She has been a hardworking member of our highly-trained PSS family," said Commissioner of Education Dr. Ada, adding "her achievements will ensure that our stakeholders of public education, especially our students, will continue to receive maximum learning support in their desire to succeed in life."

