



January 2023

CNMI Public School System

# STUDENTS FIRST

• Accountability • Responsibility • Transparency

INVESTING IN  
WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT

17 Educators are Pioneer Graduates of CHamoru Studies Degrees (P2) Interscholastic Activities All Set (P5) Grateful to Live and Teach in a Supportive Community (P7) Non-violent Crisis Intervention Training for Pupil Transportation Personnel (P10)

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## PIONEERS

# 17 Public School System Educators Receive Bachelor of Arts in CHamoru Studies Degrees from UOG

**S**EVENTEEN Public School System educators received their new Bachelor of Arts degree in CHamoru Studies from the University of Guam on December 28.

These educators, elementary and high school Chamorro and Carolinian Heritage Studies classroom teachers on Saipan, Tinian and Rota, are pioneer cohorts of the program.

The PSS has partnered with UOG last year to build a curriculum and provide learning opportunities for teachers particularly in building capacity for CHamoru teachers

and help them earn a bachelor's degree in CHamoru Studies.

This is a pioneer distance learning program that was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities combined with PSS funding.

These 17 PSS educators received their Bachelor of Arts degree in CHamoru studies on Wednesday in a ceremony held at the Saipan World Resort. Education leaders led by UOG, PSS, Board of Education and Northern Marianas College leaders.

The seventeen cohorts received their diplomas last Wednesday from UOG officials and were witnessed by PSS, NMC and community officials.

They were: Claire Dina Cabrera of Oleai Elementary School, Cynthia A. Cepeda of Kagman Elementary School, Angelina C. Fitia of Tinian Elementary School, Rosalita S. Hosono of Garapan Elementary School, Rose Sharon T. Jones Chacha Oceanview Middle School, Jennie P. Magofna of Gregorio T. Camacho Elementary School, Therese R. Manalang of Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Junior Senior High School, Tricia Marie A. Manglona of Sinapalo Elementary School, Lee Sablan Pangelinan of Kagman Elementary School, Monica D. Pangelinan of Hopwood Middle School, Michelle S. Rasa of Saipan Southern High School, Velma Mae S. Reyes of Tinian Junior/Senior High School, Janerlinse Seman Saimon of Kagman Elementary School, Trisha Adela R. Taitano of Koblerville Elementary School, Joann M. Torres of Gregorio T. Camacho Elementary School, K'nilismer'fifi N. Tuhuweitae of Gregorio T. Camacho Elementary School and Alma Jean Kisa Villagomez of Koblerville Elementary School.

UOG President Dr. Thomas W. Krise said: "It is my honor to recognize the 17 Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands educators who will be receiving their new Bachelor of Arts degree in CHamoru Studies during today's special commencement on the beautiful island of Saipan."

"I also would like to recognize the CNMI Public School System for working with the University of Guam's Global Learning and Engagement and College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. Their team efforts allowed this distance learning program to be offered for the first time," he said.

Dr. Krise added: "In essence, professionalizing the teaching of CHamoru language and culture is a commitment that both the CNMI Public School System and UOG recognize as necessary to perpetuate cultural knowledge, linguistic acumen, and the history of the people of the Marianas."

PSS Commissioner of Education Dr. Ada said: " I am beyond honored and truly proud to witness such a huge accomplishment for all of you remarkable educators and professionals. The journey it took you to get here is not taken lightly.

I recognize your hard work and efforts.

I recognize your commitment and sacrifices.

Most of all, I recognize your scholarship and passion."

"You stuck it out throughout your career and persevered no matter how difficult or tiring it was. Let this serve as a grand milestone in your life, as well as in a system that is able to provide this opportunity for you. As your CNMI Public School System, we hope to continue this program and these types of support and resources for you so that we can build and sustain our local capacity," Dr. Ada said.

He added," Congratulations and a job well done to all of you at the personal and professional level for being excellent pioneers of this program for the CNMI. You have made history today and we will always remember you for that.

From the bottom of all our PSS hearts, we salute you for the progress and strides you are making in our CCLHS department, our school system, and our CNMI. Thank you for putting Students First. Happy Holidays!"





UOG's Senior Vice President and Provost, Dr. Anita B. Enriquez, said: "The 17 graduates who enrolled in the CHamoru Studies program in 2021 worked diligently, even through the COVID-19 pandemic, to complete coursework and program requirements. It was a challenge, but with help of faculty members from UOG and the CNMI, these newly minted bachelor's degree holders exemplified tenacity, motivation, and resilience. Their passion for teaching, learning, and pushing forward the significance of language and culture for and among the CHamoru people ensures that students in the Marianas will have credentialed and qualified teachers for years to come. Their achievements will benefit the people and communities of the Marianas."

Delivering on behalf of her class, Therese Reyes Manalang said they have been waiting for a long time now.

(W)e Chamorro-Carolinian Language Heritage Studies & Immersion Program have been waiting for such a long time now.... (this is) indeed a very special one for us 17 women in black. We did it ladies. We went into this fastrack Chamorro studies head-strong despite having to report to work all week, attending classes all day Saturday, doing so much homework, and not

to mention responding to countless chats and video calls as we engaged in group works on weeknights," Manalang said in her class address.

"We finished and came out strong together. Kudos to us. Though doors of opportunity were closed back then for many of us, it was (God's) great timing and plan for us to take this course together because he knew we would need each other's help on this journey. Like the saying goes "If one door closes, another door opens" and it is with this door, and through this door that we found out how patient and resilient we are. We stood strong for one another through all the challenges that came our way. When one wanted to give up we made sure that our constant encouragement towards one another was the forefront of every motivation. Ti libianu ta karerāyi lao potfin man mattu hit gi dipotsihi na estao ni hagas ha' ta facho'chu'i."

"My colleagues let us be reminded that This dream wasn't only because we pushed and encouraged each other through the years, it's the fact that one of us spoke up from the onset of small table talks that led our very own stakeholders, Auntie Jackie Quitugua and Mr. Jonas Barcinas to one amazing individual who made it all possible and that is none other than Dr. Clare Ann Camacho."



On January 27, the Co-ed Elementary Division of the NMIVA-PSS Interscholastic Volleyball League will begin with three pools. Pool A will have Kagman Elementary School 1, William S. Reyes Elementary School 2, Gregorio T. Camacho Elementary School 1, San Vicente Elementary School 2, Saipan International School 2, Oleai Elementary School 2 and Garapan Elementary School 1. Pool B is filled with Brilliant Star School, Koblerville Elementary School 1, GTC 2, WSR 1, Mount Carmel School, KAG 2, and GES 2. And pool B consists of Saipan Community School, KOB 2, OES 1, SIN, SVS 1, SIS 1, Tinian Elementary School, and Grace Christian Academy.

On January 31, the Boys Middle School Division of the NMIVA-PSS Interscholastic Volleyball League will begin with a total of 10 varsity teams and 9 junior varsity teams. Pool A will have Tanapag Middle School, Dandan Middle School, Mount Carmel School, Saipan Community School, and Hopwood Middle School while Pool B is filled by Chacha Oceanview Middle School, Agape Christian School, Francisco Middle School, Saipan International School, and Grace Christian Academy. For the junior varsity category, pool A will have HOP JV, TMS JV, GCA JV, and SCS JV while pool B consists of COVMS JV, FMS JV, DMS JV, MCS JV, and SIS JV.

By February 4, the Co-Ed Outrigger season will begin with a total of 5 schools, each with boys, girls and co-ed teams including Marinas High School, Kagman High School, Saipan Southern High School, private school teams and Da'ok Academy.





# Kicking Into Gear: PSS Interscholastic Activities All Set

**W**ITH the start of a new year, the Public School System – spearheaded by Athletic Director Nick Gross – has started the year 2023 with a host of activities for the new season.

Following the slowdown brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the school district's interscholastic sports programs came back stronger, starting series of sporting events that included basketball league, volleyball league and outrigger activities.

On January 25, the Boys High School Division of the NMIBA-PSS Interscholastic Basketball League will kick off the month with 9 varsity teams including Grace Christian Academy, Mount Carmel School, Agape Christian School, Saipan International School, Tinian Jr/Sr High School, Marianas High School, Rita Hocog Inos High School, Kagman High School, and Saipan Southern High School while the junior varsity will have 8 teams including MHS JV, MCS JV, SSHS JV, KHS JV, TIN JV, RHI JV, and two MHS JV teams.





## Washington Week

Washington Week was a whirlwind of opportunity, advocacy, and celebration. From the TED talks, to the Smithsonian Institute, to conversations about how to create more equitable classrooms, to the incredible visit to the White House. These opportunities allowed me to grow as an educator and share stories of our islands, celebrate our students and teachers, and create lifelong memories. This experience sparked numerous conversations and ideas on breaking down barriers to ensure our students have meaningful educational experiences and the best opportunities to learn and grow.

On the first day, the Smithsonian Institute invited us to a professional development event where we spent the day exploring museums and participating in collaborative learning and hands-on activities while thinking about how we can connect these concepts to our classrooms. We also visited the Department of Education and met the Secretary of Education, Miguel Cardona. Then, we visited our lawmakers on The Hill. I had conversations with Congressman Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan and his staff about ensuring equal access to education and how we can create more educational opportunities for our students in the Marianas.

We were then invited to the National and State Teachers of


the Year White House Recognition Ceremony by President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden. After our group photo, we were celebrated by the President and First Lady. "What makes your work so special is you: the love and the joy that you bring to it, the empathy and the understanding, the sheer power of your presence," Dr. Biden said. She is a long-time educator who is exceptional in her craft.

Last but not least, the evening gala was a beautiful finale to a week spent listening, learning, advocating, growing, and transforming. I left this week surrounded by the strength of my fellow educators that have become family and the powerful words of so many decision makers in DC. I shared my passion about education and we built upon our mission of ensuring everyone has space in this world to be exactly who they are.

## Space Camp

Held at NASA's Space Camp Headquarters in Huntsville, Alabama, the Space Academy for Educators program includes astronaut training simulators and activities developed to promote learning in a classroom setting. The curriculum includes NASA-inspired lesson plans and is correlated to the National Science Education Standards. The Teachers of the Year came together for a professional



A woman with dark hair, wearing a blue flight suit with patches, stands in front of a large model of a Space Shuttle rocket. The rocket is white with black and red markings, including the letters 'USA' and an American flag. The woman is smiling and has her hands on her hips.

# A Valuable Journey and Grateful to Live and Teach in a Supportive Community

2022 State Teacher of the Year on her Life-Changing Experience

By Dr. Riya Nathrani

**M**Y time as the State Teacher of the Year has been an incredible journey. This past year, I was afforded some amazing opportunities that I never dreamed would be possible.

The Council of Chief State School Officers is the organization that coordinates the events and activities for the teachers of the year. In March 2022, I met my fellow State Teachers of the Year through a series of Zoom meetings. I don't often wish I could spend more time on a Zoom call (especially those that begin at 3am), but this was the exception. We had conversations about storytelling, owning our identities, showcasing our favorite lessons, and hearing from sponsors like Google and Equitable. I met some incredible people who are each uniquely different, yet what brings us together is our joy and dedication to education. I am thankful for these virtual meetings as they empowered us to be changemakers.



learning experience in space exploration. During our days at camp, we worked as a team to encourage each other, learn about space concepts, and lead our teams through numerous activities. It was incredibly fun, overwhelming, anxiety filled, and the space missions pushed us to grow both individually and as a team. These experiences helped stretched my thinking and perspectives about science, engineering, and technology.

Some of the activities include riding a zip line off a five story tower into a lake to simulate a parachute landing over water, spinning all around in a Multi Axis Trainer, riding on a simulation of the moon walk, dropping into the lake in a giant can simulating a crashing helicopter, designing a heat shield to protect our “eggstronaut” to test different shielding materials, completing a shuttle mission to the “International Space Station” and “Mars,” as the Commander, and launching a rocket from the launch pad. We were challenged mentally, physically, and emotionally. We all grew in unexpected ways.

My experiences at space camp as a scientist, a builder, an inventor, a mission specialist, an astronaut, a critical thinker, and team member truly demonstrated my belief that authentic learning happens through experiences where students can see themselves in roles or actually be part of the outcome. This is a wonderful example of the idea that in education, every lesson matters and students find success when they are able to connect and apply their learning to the world around them. Above all, the week was filled with gratitude about what educators do to help grow the next generation of thinkers, creators, speakers, innovators, and explorers. Educators help inspire the future generation to be innovators of space exploration in some way. There are so many career paths that exist within the realm of space and space exploration that I never expected. I shared these experiences with my students, which inspired them to think about career options they had never considered before.

## Impact and Influence Conference

In October, we attended the Impact and Influence conference in Princeton, New Jersey. The event started with storytelling and advocacy work and was a wonderful way to connect, dialogue, and share ideas with amazing educators. The sponsor of the event was ETS, which administers tests like Praxis. I gave feedback on how the assessments could be and should be more relevant to our demographics and experiences in the islands. The topics discussed at this conference helped me continue my professional growth by reflecting on my impact and considering the many pathways for continued influence. I learned how a teacher's impact goes beyond the four walls of a classroom and transcends into the way students view the world and make life decisions. I was reminded of the power of surrounding yourself with people who energize and challenge you.

I hope we can all inspire our students to dream big and realize that with hard work they can do great things. I hope they see the value



of serving others and the rewards that come from helping others. I am so grateful to live and teach in a community that has shown me incredible support, and I look forward to promoting equity and working hard to remove barriers to learning for all students.

## College Football Playoff Championship Game

Our last trip organized by CCSO was to attend the College Football Playoff Championship game in Los Angeles. My colleagues and I were honored on the field in the presence of 72,000 people in the stadium. I was so happy to share this moment with these incredible educators as we stood side by side and were honored for our work in education. Apart from this event, we also ran a 5K in the cold winter morning of Los Angeles to celebrate education.

Looking back on the last year shows me just how much we have to celebrate in the world of education, and also the work that still has to be done. This is just the beginning for me, and I am forever grateful for the people I have met, the places I've been, and the support I've received. Continuing to honor and uplift students through choice and voice is imperative — and it gives me so much hope to have met so many people over the last year (in and outside of education) that want to continue to lead the way in doing just that.

Thank you, my fellow educators, for helping students to discover their dreams and be their best selves, for seeing potential in every single child that walks into your classroom, for extending kindness to those who need it most, for teaching resilience to those who are overcoming challenges, and for always putting the needs of others well before your own.

I have been able to celebrate teachers across the nation through sharing stories and making connections between other educators. I hope to continue to have a voice in important conversations to create educational opportunities for all learners in the Marianas. I will continue supporting all students and uplifting the expertise of the brilliant educators working hard to do just that. I'm not sure where this journey will take me next, but no matter what I'll be here, still teaching, still sharing, still advocating, still learning, and always growing.





# Office of Pupil Transportation Personnel Undergo Non-violent Crisis Intervention Training

**T**HE Public School System's Office of Pupil Transportation Office underwent a two-day training on Non-violent Crisis Intervention (NVCi) designed to arm these essential and critical school district personnel skills and strategies in safely handling daily crisis situations in the workplace.

"The two-day training that teaches participants intervention strategies to recognize and manage crisis behaviors you may encounter in the workplace," explains PSS Transportation Director Shawn San Nicolas.

The successful event was held on January 3-4 at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan. Participants were Saipan, Tinian and Rota public school bus drivers, conductors, mechanics and office staff.

These was facilitated by NVCi-trained trainers: San Vicente Elementary School Principal Paulette Tomokane, PSS Family and Community Engagement Director Liela Yumul, Rota Local Education Agency/





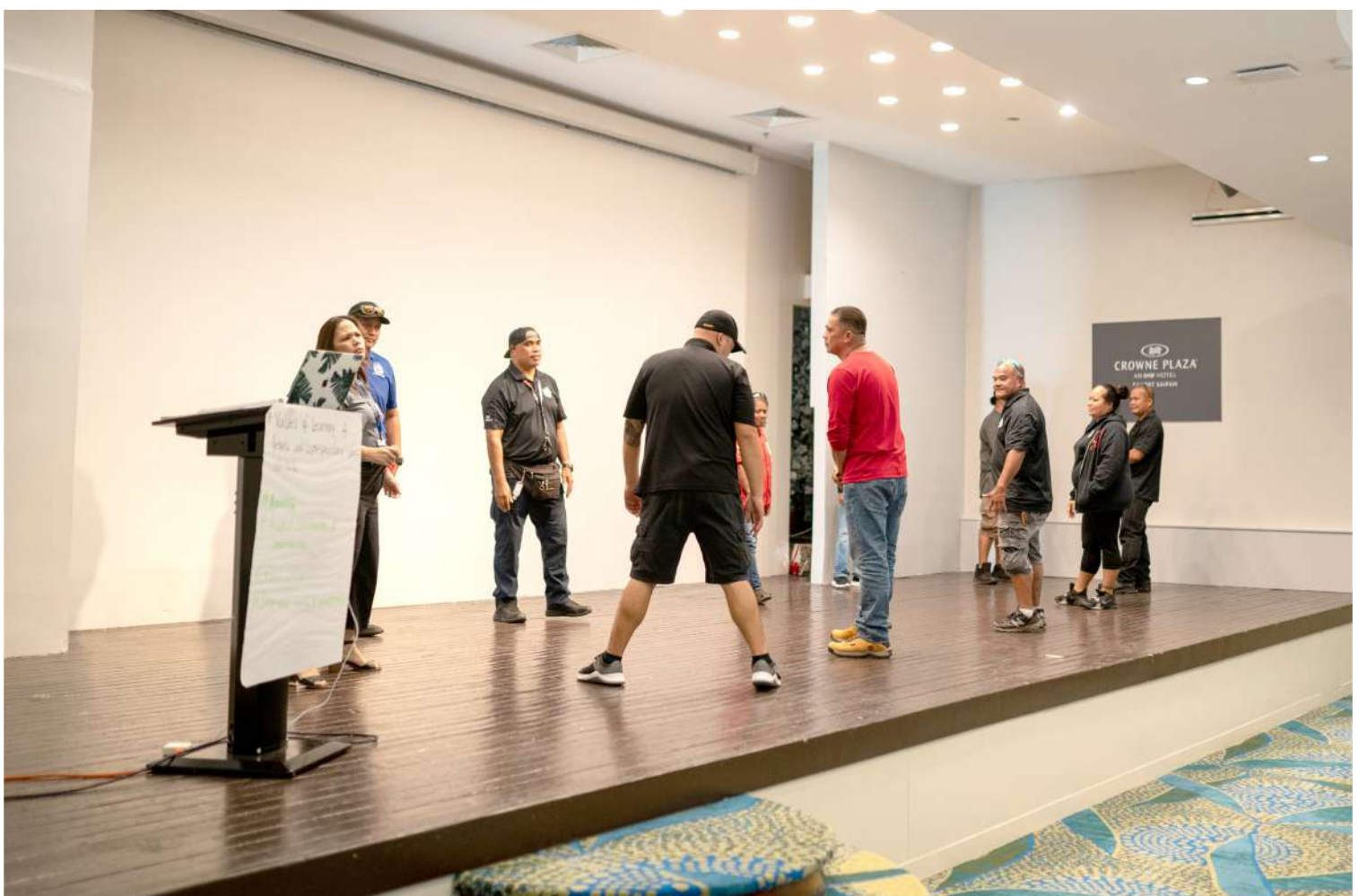
Project HALIGI Community Project Manager Marvin Tamangided, Special Education teacher Jessica Mendez, and OPT Director San Nicolas.

Among the highlights of the two-day training were staging real-life situations designed by the NVCI trainers to provide the school district personnel with appropriate skills that safely identify and handle workplace crisis situations.

PSS' OPT handles the daily transportation needs of the school district's student population throughout Saipan, Tinian and Rota, servicing around 5,000 elementary, middle, high school, and Special Education students.

"These participants in this training, that are all PSS bus drivers and OPT staff, simulated scenarios that taught them on how to keep our public school students safe from any danger and or untoward incidents," Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada said separately.

The NVCI training also taught OPT participants strategies to recognize and manage crisis behaviors. The intervention strategies focus on preventing a crisis from escalating, avoiding overreacting or underreacting, and de-escalating a crisis.







# School District's Administration of Federal Funds 'Highly Monitored'

From external audits to reporting, PSS has consistent performance accountability monitoring

**T**HE Public School System's administration of the federal grants including the American Rescue Plan spending plan, Education Stabilization Fund and Consolidated Grants are "highly monitored" through consistent and systematic performance accountability monitoring that have been in place, the school district said.

These monitoring are in forms of external and independent audits, quarterly reporting and professional development and trainings— all federally mandated and monitored, education officials said.

It was only in March last year when the US Department of Education, during the annual Council of Chief State Officers, praised PSS ARPA spending plan. This is particularly after its plan was one of the first to be received and approved by the federal education department.

"(Yes), we are mandated to undergo an external audit on an annual basis," explains Jacqueline Che, Interim PSS Federal Programs Officer. "All federally funded programs are highly regulated".





She added, "Controls and compliance are in place to effectively manage funding to ensure allowable use."

According to Che "quarterly progress update meetings are conducted to monitor our progress and ensure federal funds are used for their intended purposes and that projects and activities supported by federal funds are meeting the established goals and objectives".

Board of Education Chairman Gregory Pat Borja said that PSS' exit audit report conducted for accountability of both local and federal funds ensures that findings and or recommendations are addressed.

"As a board member I have had the opportunity to sit in on the Exit Audit Report conducted (annually) for the accountability of local and federal funds administered by PSS. Any findings made during the audit are addressed by the Commissioner and his staff, including the director of finance and director of federal programs. The board and the PSS administration pay particular attention to any findings as they may affect our ability to continue to receive funding," said Chairman Borja.

"Additionally, when it comes to the funds received from federal grantors (i.e. U.S. Department of Education and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) there are performance indicators in place to ensure that the federal funds are being spent for the purpose the PSS received them. There are additional reporting requirements from the various federal programs that are conducted annually," the

BOE leader pointed out.

Chairman Borja added: "Furthermore, when it comes to funds received by the PSS from the ARPA, the Commissioner (of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada) and his key management developed a comprehensive spending plan for the duration of the funding cycle. The spending plan was approved by the Board and is monitored by the Board through biweekly expenditure reports and quarterly reporting presented during regular board meetings. The board is dedicated in ensuring that the spending plan is held to, in order to prevent excessive spending during a given School Year, which allows the administration and the board to determine whether there are areas that need to be reallocated to other categories."

"(O)ur federal grants are looking at the PSS' expenditures to ensure the costs are allowable and that they are going toward the projects they are intended for, which may include training for our educators to keep them up to date on issues that affect our students in areas such as mental health. Our Board monitors the expenses through reporting from the Commissioner and his staff. It is my personal belief that PSS is properly budgeting and spending our federal funds as intended, in order to provide the appropriate education for our students and safeguard their education success."

The BOE is the policy and governing body of PSS. All spending plans and earmarkings of PSS are proposed, reviewed and acted by the BOE before they are set in motion.



## ARP Implementation Plan

Just last week, district leaders, directors, managers, coordinators,, project leads and team members, school leaders and other stakeholders of PSS' federally-funded programs underwent a federally-required work session After-Action Review on PSS ARP Implementation Plan". This was held from January 11 to 13 at the Laolao Bay Golf & Resort.

Facilitated by Dr. Allison Layland of the Academic Development Institute and Lynette L. Villagomez, Co-Director, Region 18 Comprehensive Center- Senior Research Specialist of the Pacific Region Education Laboratory, the work session was designed to further enhance performance accountability and sound financial management, among others, of PSS' administration of federal grants.

Assisting Dr. Layland were presenters from within PSS — Federal Programs Officer Jacqueline Che, Senior Director for Accountability, Research and Evaluation Dr. Rizalina Liwag, Social Studies Program Director Vinnie Orsini, Science Curriculum Coordinator Asap Ogumuro, Mathematics Curriculum Coordinator Gus Lose, Title 1 Program Coordinator Joaquina Salas, and the State Longitudinal Data System's Annette Pladevega Sablan and Jeaniffer Cubangbang.

Region 18 Comprehensive Center received a supplementary grant and Dr. Layland facilitated the after action review work session.

The After Action Review were conducted on the ARP-funded projects: High Quality Instructional Materials; High Dosage Tutoring, Summer Schools and Title 1 Tutors; Infinite Campus, State Longitudinal Data System, Learning Environment

(classroom furniture, fire alarm system, UV lights, technology infrastructure, PPE Covid-19 supplies); and Career Pathways under the Career and Technical Education Program of PSS.

There will also be a separate presentation to PSS stakeholders on lessons learned and action steps/ taken following the three-day work session.

"These three days allowed us to engage in very candid discussion through the various work sessions. We did an in-depth discussion and examination whether the projects were impactful, identifying practices to sustain and practices to improve," FPO Interim Program Director Che explained.

In March last year, the US Department of Education, during the annual Council of Chief State Officers, praised PSS ARPA spending plan. This is particularly after its plan was one of the first to be received and approved by the federal education department.

In particular, during the CCSO conference, Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada, among others, met and discussed in person with US DOE funders including Dr. Tiffany Forrester, group leader, Insular areas team. Essentially, the USDOE funders commended PSS for being one of the first grantees to have an approved ARPA spending plan and for the comprehensive nature of its plan.

PSS, during the CCSO meeting, was recommended by US DOE funders on all school districts in all the other territories to "model" PSS' approach.

Of the \$850 million in 2021 American Rescue Plan funds for Outlying Area's State Educational Agencies, PSS received about \$160 million.







# BOE's Antonio L. Borja: 'Let's Continue Serving our Students'

**A**FTER successfully winning the non-partisan election for the lone Tinian seat for the Board of Education unopposed, Antonio L. Borja officially took his oath of office on January 9 before Supreme Court Justice Perry Inos.

His family - wife Star Taitano Borja; daughter Aurora Dawson Taitano Borja; father and former rep. Antonio Sn. Borja and aunt Charlene Manglona - witnessed his swearing in which was held at the CNMI Board of Education conference room in Capital Hill.

The oathtaking of Borja, the current vice chairman of the policy and governing body of the Public School System, took place at 8:47 am.

This is Borja's first full elected term. The current BOE vice chairman was appointed by then-Gov. Ralph DLG. Torres three years ago after former BOE member Philip Mendiola-Long of Tinian resigned on October 20, 2020. Borja ran unopposed for the BOE Tinian seat during the November 2022 general elections.

Borja is the youngest elected member in the BOE history. He will turn 34 in March. He is the current Tinian ports manager under the Commonwealth Ports Authority.

In his remarks, Vice Chairman Borja particularly hailed the management of the Public School System, led by Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada, in working hard towards ensuring that all public education stakeholders are given the support they need.

"To Commissioner (Alfred) Ada, Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services Eric Magofna, and to all of our school administrators: thank you for making sure that our







children are given the maximum support, and that were are always there for our staff -- for all of PSS," Vice Chairman Borja said in his remarks.

He expressed his appreciation to his father, former Rep. Antonio Sn. Borja and his mother, Benedicta for all the support.

To his wife and daughter, the "two very important people in my life thank you for motivating me to (continue to serve)".

To his colleagues in the BOE, Vice Chairman Borja said, "We will continue to work together in ensuring that our children receive the optimum learning opportunities and our staff their continued professional growth. These are the reasons why we serve our children."

"Let's work together, let's push forward for our students, for our teachers. We just have to remember that it's all about students first," Vice Chairman Borja ended his remarks.



## Passion, Ethical

Commissioner of Education Dr. Ada led the school district's key management and various school principals in attending the swearing in ceremony of Borja.

Commissioner Ada agrees with Borja by saying that "students will always be first" in PSS agenda.

"We will continue to work with all stakeholders with the guidance of the BOE in ensuring students first," Dr. Ada said.

Borja's colleagues rallied around him in his commitment to continue working with PSS in ensuring public school students, teachers and staff are served well.



BOE Chairman Gregory Pat Borja, in a statement, said: My congratulations go out to Antonio L. Borja, our newly sworn in member of the CNMI Board of Education from the island of Tinian."

"In my experience working with him during the past two years he served as an appointed member, he has shown his passion and dedication of truly putting our students first. I am looking forward to continuing to work with him and our fellow board members to ensure the educational success of our students and to provide the support needed for our educators to achieve this goal," BOE Chairman Gregory Pat Borja said.

Praising his colleague for his commitment, compassion and ethical work, BOE Secretary/Treasurer Maisie B. Tenorio is excited to continue working with her Tinian colleague.

"It is my honor to congratulate member Toram (Antonio L. Borja) on his swearing in as an elected member of the CNMI State Board of Education. I also extend my congratulations to his wife, Star, their daughter and the community of Tinian," BOE Secretary/Treasurer Tenorio said.



She added, "Having worked with member Borja over the last two years, I have come to know him as a committed, compassionate, and ethical public servant. He is humble in all things and truly cares about our students, their guardians, teachers, and all of our stakeholders at PSS. I look forward to working with him to fulfill our mandate as board members."





# BOE Member Andrew L. Orsini: PSS will Continue to Move Forward

**B**OARD of Education Member Andrew L. Orsini pledged to keep the Public School System afloat as he took his oath of office on January 20 which was administered by Associate Judge Teresa Kim-Tenorio.

Orsini, who is serving his second term, was sworn into office at 10 a.m. on January 20 Friday at Oleai Elementary School where he started his career in the school district as a Parent Teacher Student Association officer for 11 years.

Orsini took his oath of office in the presence of his wife, Bertha Flores Orsini, who was an Oleai kindergarten teacher for 30 years, and his son, Marianas High School Vice Principal Romolor Orsini.







Also present were Board of Education Chairman Gregory Pat Borja, Board Member Herman Atalig, Commissioner of Education Commissioner Alfred B. Ada, other PSS officials, the students and teachers of Oleai Elementary School, its principal, Jasylene Parico, and vice principal, Alisa Pangelinan.

The Oleai students honored BOE member Orsini with a special dance number led by Pangelinan, faculty members and Parico who also served as the mistress of ceremonies.

In his remarks, BOE member Orsini said: "In my days with the Oleai PTSA...there was also an economic recession in our islands."

When there's no money to spend, "that's when leaders like myself step up to lead. When you are short of money, you have to be creative. I remember every other year, we held a Cultural Day celebration in which the diversity and uniqueness of Oleai students shone. But we also used the event to help

raise funds for the school."

He added, "Turtles are strong, they are wise, but known for being slow," referring to the Oleai school mascot.

"As I get older, I can see that I'm starting to become more of a turtle myself." But "in the darkness of the night, that's when turtles lay their eggs." In the darkness to come, he added, "I will have to hatch some ideas to get our system to safety."

He said "the work ahead will be difficult but I will not forget the real reason we're all here — the students. I will do this job to honor the confidence of the thousands of the voters who put their trust in me..."

"Being here inspires me to keep moving forward," he added. "You can call me a turtle because I may be old, I may have wrinkles, I may have scars on my shell that tells you what I've overcome, and just like a turtle, I may move slowly, but I will always move forward."







# PSS, NMC, NMTech Chiefs Meet on Local Workforce Development

**T**HE leaders of all three educational institutions in the CNMI - the Public School System, Northern Marianas College and Northern Marianas Technical Institute - have begun discussing major ways to build, develop, and expand the local workforce with the looming 2029 deadline of the CNMI-Only Transitional Worker (CW-1) visa program.

The CW-1 visa program allows for CNMI employers to apply for permission to employ noncitizens who are otherwise ineligible to work under any other nonimmigrant worker categories.

The CW-1 program is scheduled to end on December 31, 2029 following many extensions since its implementation with the US Congress' passage and eventual enactment of Public Law 110-229 or the "Consolidated Natural Resources Act of 2008".

During their January 30 monthly luncheon meeting, Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada, NMC President Dr. Galvin Deleon Guerrero and NMTech Chief Executive Officer Jodina Attao have identified seven industries that have potential for growth and development for local graduates on Saipan, Tinian and Rota.

PSS, NMC and NMTech have begun meeting last year, with the purpose, specifically, among others, to create newer industries for local graduates, and further expand and grow existing industries that will continue to service the CNMI.

The industries are: construction, food preparation, personal care, technology, agricultural science, and business and finance.

"(All) three leaders from the CNMI's educational institutions had their monthly meeting at the American Pizza Grill to discuss local workforce preparation with the 2029 end of the CW (program) with all foreign



workers existing in the Marianas. One major discussion is to help locals find job or career placement through apprenticeship and or internship," Commissioner of Education Dr. Ada told Students First.

"These industries that our community needs are construction, food preparation, personal care, technology, agricultural science, business and finance," Dr. Ada added.

Commissioner of Education Dr. Ada has disclosed that PSS has already started a construction course as early as middle school at the Tanapag Middle School. The construction course was launched last year, with about 35 students signing up with the pioneer program.

NMC President Dr. Deleon Guerrero shared that the College is already in the process of offering a master's degree in teaching and special education this summer.





Dr. Ada and NMTECH CEO Attao also shared that through the Career Technical Education Program (CTE), a course on cosmetology will be offered for high school students. These high school students signing up for the new cosmetology course will receive a preparatory course/program and NMTECH will offer an additional course which is designed to "advance toward national certification in cosmetology", both Dr. Ada and CEO Attao said.

"This is geared towards locally trained barbers (hair stylists, and cosmetologists). PSS and NMTECH are working with Guam Trades Academy on this particular high-demand career," Dr. Ada said.

In the same luncheon meeting, NMTECH CEO Attao has invited Department of Labor Secretary Leila Staffler to their next monthly meeting, with the aim at "aligning ourselves in ways to support and produce local laborers through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and how to support local laborers", all three education leaders have said.

In September 2022, Dr. Ada, Dr. Deleon Guerrero and CEO Attao announced they have formed a partnership primarily to discuss ways and initiatives to diversify the local workforce industry by tapping graduates from NMC, PSS and NMTECH. These leaders share the same vision of building, producing and sustaining local capacity for the future workforce of the Marianas.