The results of the implementation of the CNMI Public School System’s ACT Aspire revealed how this new assessment system – which measures academic achievement in four critical content areas – is actually tailor-made for the school district.

These materials will be used to give our public school students multiple means to further explore learning, to be engaged in learning the concepts.

“Thank You
CNMI Public School System
STUDENTS FIRST

Landmark Primary Instructional Materials Initiative Approved

IT can now be told that public education learning will be far richer than ever before.

The approval of the Public School System’s Primary Instructional Materials initiative by the State Board of Education is perhaps will allow the public schools to have the opportunity to match learning styles or diverse needs of the growing public school student population.

This will provide classrooms the needed instruction and teaching flexibility and will provide accessibility for all students.

Regulation Being Drafted for Teacher Rep to BOE

THE long wait is over.

After several attempts to provide for public school teachers a platform within to the State Board of Education, the school district is now preparing the groundwork for the first elected Teacher Representative to the governing/policymaking body of the CNMI Public School System.

Students First has learned that the school district’s legal team are now drafting the regulation that would set in motion the election of a Nonvoting Teacher Representative to the BOE.

Capturing 2015, the Year of Many Firsts for Public Education in the CNMI

Commissioner of Education File by Rita A. Sablan, Ed.D.

State PAC: Parents Are Our Children’s Advocates

NEVER before has there been so much interest in public education policy and input sought from parents and the community, and never before have there been so many opportunities and possibilities that parent engagement brings to education.

RWDC, a unique groundbreaking platform, creates STEM champions

THE Real World Design Challenge has become a unique ground-breaking stage in training the Public School System’s high school students to work with the real tools of engineering professionals.

Networking: Upgrading School Networks at the Speed of Change

WHEN the school district recognized that there is a need for better network coverage for all of public elementary, middle/junior and high schools on Saipan, Tinian and Rota that triggered a transformation.

New Education Law: The Every Student Succeeds Act

ON December 10 the Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA was signed by President Obama, both landmark and pivotal legislation that will have direct benefit to school districts in the nation including the CNMI Public School System and other outlying areas.

The ESSA will re-authorize the nation’s 50-year-old omnibus education law – Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This reaffirms the longstanding commitment to quality educational opportunities for all students.

The new law builds on key areas of progress in recent years, made possible by the efforts of educators, communities, parents, and students across the country.

“There is, for the outry,
The year 2015 inevitably defined our goal of creating a classroom culture based on our enduring commitment to **Students First**.

We will cherish the year 2015 with many successes—and of many of firsts. They were results of partnership with our parents and community and the unequivocal support the Public School System has received from our State Board of Education and supporters of public education.

The year 2015 defined our commitment to hard work, accountability and the great regard for community and for learning. And as we bid adieu to the year that was to look back on one more time to the year that defined public education in the CNMI—a reflection of how we have evolved and grown into a strong and united organization.

While it is inevitable that there will always be questions about the quality of public education in the CNMI, one thing is certain: PSS will never lose sight of what we can do, as one family, to continuously improve the quality of education we provide to the thousands that depend on us, year after year.

**ACT Aspire Testing: All Systems Go**

All 19 public elementary, middle/junior and high schools on Saipan, Tinian and Rota are gearing up for the first implementation of the ACT Aspire, which will assess public school students’ knowledge and skills in English, math, science, reading and writing of the ACT Aspire, which will assess public school students’ knowledge and skills in English, math, science, reading and writing.

ACT Aspire is designed for the school district’s focus in connecting student outcomes in the context of college and career readiness. It replaced the Stanford Achievement Test 10th Edition after nearly 10 years of implementation.

**Alternative Education Focus Towards Career Preparation**

Career preparation has been a priority for the school district’s Alternative Education Program for the past year, through an expanded partnership with other institutions that include tourism/hospitality sector.

The learning experience within Alternative Education is designed to create and encourage not only college but career preparation for students. In 2015 additional career-patterned courses have been offered to at-risk public school students.

Four years since its inception, the program continues to assist these students to look at their future positively.

Alternative Education provides opportunities and experiences that engages, encourages, and empowers at-risk students to successfully transition after high school.

**Investing in 6+1 Trait Writing**

A research-based model of teaching and assessing writing that was initially tested in 2013 was fully implemented in 2015, giving both teachers and students of the school district the framework to help achieve the high quality writing called in the Common Core State Standards.

Called 6+1 Writing Model, this research-based classroom instruction-designed framework was pioneered by PSS in the region.

This calls for training and further developing the writing skills of both teachers and students, using the 6+1 Trait Model of Instruction Key Qualities: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions and presentation.

**USDA-FNS Visit Validates Investment in Health, Wellness**

The promotion of a healthy lifestyle within PSS through access to nutrition programs is a success achieved by the school district, this was according to the federal Food and Nutrition Service-USDA-FNS visit validates the district’s strong management and stewardship of the program, through grants funneled toward the PSS-FNS Program.

**District Begins Work To Address Accreditation Recommendations**

My office and our district leadership has created a team of experts, called the Executive Committee for Accreditation Program with the primary role of creating and implementing plans to address the six required actions identified by AdvancED. These include teaching assessing, instructional process, resource and support systems, safety plans, and establishing policy or procedure on continuous improvements, among others.

**New Parents Advisory Council, Head Start Policy Council Formed**

Close to 200 parents-officers representing Saipan’s public elementary, middle/junior and high schools gathered at this year’s largest PTSA Summit to elect their new officers.

During the summit, parents committed to build strong partnership with stakeholders by underscoring the urgency of maximizing their roles in meeting the needs of student success.

At the same time, the Head Start Policy Council introduced its new set of leaders. The HPC has been the bridge in building and expanding the opportunity of partnership with the community.

**Visiting Federal Official Applauds District Begins Work To Address Accreditation Recommendations**

At the same time, the Head Start Policy Council introduced its new set of leaders. The HPC has been the bridge in building and expanding the opportunity of partnership with the community.

**Capturing 2015, the Year of Many Firsts for Public Education in the CNMI**

STUDENTS FIRST is a non-profit publication established by the Commonwealth of the Marianas Island Public School System on 2008 with the main objective of bringing the islands’ educational system—its leaders, staff and personnel, and students—closer to the community as part of its mission to offer equal educational opportunity for all students by providing curriculum, instruction, community service, and work experience in academic and career—technical education so that they become productive and contributing members of the Commonwealth and the global world; to provide certified, qualified, and effective personnel; to plan, build, and maintain school facilities conducive to learning, safe, orderly, and accessible to all; to establish effective communication and collaboration of all stakeholders for meaningful and productive partnership; and to allocate financial and technical resources to meet the educational needs for all students.
Clean Audit: External Auditors Lauds PSS’
NGA’s Center for Best Practice Applaud
PSS Sweep 2015 Tumon Music Festival
won the silver award.

coveted Sweepstakes Championship Trophy, and its Pep Band
educational opportunities of our public school students.
Festival, validating our aggressive promotion and support to
providers/centers in the CNMI.

For nearly a year, the school district leadership and the State
BOE had looked at expanding public education opportunities in the CNMI. And last August, we have implemented the Early
Head Start Program in partnership with private childcare providers/centers in the CNMI.

This is about building the foundation for our youngest learn-
ers.

PSS Sweep 2015 Tumon Music Festival
PSS swept the top three honors at the 2015 Tumon Music Festival, validating our aggressive promotion and support to educational opportunities of our public school students.

Marianas High School’s Rhythm ‘N Harmony took home the coveted Sweepstakes Championship Trophy, and its Pep Band won the silver award.

NGA’s Center for Best Practice Applaud
PSS’ Principal Pipeline Initiative
According to the National Governor Association’s Center for
Best Practices’ Project Director Sarah Silverman the Principal Pipeline Initiative provides enormous opportunities for participation and transformation that is absent in other states and territories.

This, as we increased our efforts to expand and strengthen this initiative with focus towards training, selection and sup-
porting our public school teachers, counselors and school dis-
trict personnel in pursuit for professional growth.

Strong, Positive Financial Management.
The results of the fiscal 2014 audited financial statement re-
vealed the strength and quality of our accountability systems—a product of top-notch financial management.

Audit firm Burger, Commer and Magliari, a full service CPA
firm in the Western Pacific, has found that PSS financial state-
m ents are accurate, citing positive financial management.

It was in 2012 when our leadership and the State Board of
Education took massive steps to strengthen our financial man-
agement. This, among others, was aimed at clearing prior year or pre-2009 audit citations and questioned costs.

Clean Audit: External Auditors Lauds PSS’

BOE Approved State Systemic Improvement Plan
The State Board of Education approved the plan for submit-
tion to the federal office of Special Education or OSEP. SSIP, a new requirement from OSEP, is a six-year framework that al-

dows for monitoring, support and the use of data on perfor-

mance and other information about students with disabilities, to be able to implement a focused learning approach.

Exploring Project Lead the Way
We have begun exploring at the idea of investing in a high-
end curriculum that its success has been effectively replicated in school district in the nation, primarily with high emphasis in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics dis-
ciplines.

Project Lead the Way is a pre-collegiate program that was developed under a STEM curricula for the use by elementary, middle/junior and high schools.

We see this as another opportunity for our public school students to be exposed and immersed to problem-based cur-
riculum.

Near-Sweep of AG’s Cup
Marianas High School took the coveted Attorney General’s
Speech Competition top prize, twenty-three years after it was last won by a public school.

The AG’s Cup was also won by two other public schools: Saipan Southern High School took the third place spot, and Dr. Rita H. Inos Junior/Senior High School was fourth.

PSS is Now Future Ready School!
Our school district has committed to be a member of the Future Ready School, a bolder new effort that maximizes digi-
tal learning opportunities. PSS has become one of the 17,000
school districts in the nation that has pledged to the goal of Future Ready School.

Project Third Grade Implemented
Our school district has started the groundwork in imple-
menting the nationwide initiative, Project Third Grade Read-
ing, which is recognized by the National Governor’s Associa-
tion’s Center for Best Practices, as an opportunity to close the achievement gap of student.

Biggest Anti-Meth Education Campaign Launched!
In what would be a tough stand against the spread of il-
legal drugs – methamphetamine, marijuana and other illicit substance – the school district is spearheading the fight.

We have launched the PSS Meth Project.

The launching is to raise awareness and help prevent occur-
rances of drug related crimes, which this year, we saw the rise in drug-related crimes – in staggering numbers. This is a multi-
sector cooperation. PSS is seeking partnership with faith-based organizations and government agencies.

PSS Begins Campaign to Host 40th Pacific
Circle Consortium Conference
The PSS, in partnership with the Northern Marianas College, has approved its official proposal to host the 2016 Pacific Circle Consortium, the largest international education conference.

If successful with its bid, the joint PSS-NMC hosting will bring honors to the CNMI as 2016 marks the 4th year of the PCC.

Project TEAMS Implemented
Twice Exceptional students Achievement and Matriculation in STEM or Project Teams is another initiative that PSS has pio-
nereed in 2015. This is a five-year research project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program through the Center on Disability Study of the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

PSS is only one of the four jurisdictions throughout the coun-
try that implemented this leading edge and research-based ini-
tiative which emphasizes the development of students with dis-
abilities who “have the potential in science to grow scientifically promising.”

$40 Million Budget Proposal
The proposed $40 million public education funding will ad-
dress burgeoning classroom population, aging facilities and en-
suring safe, clean health learning environment.

The proposal is the 25 percent of the $383.5 million gross budgetary resources that was indicated by the governor in his budget submission to the legislature.

US Dept. of Defense-ESGR Honors PSS
Interior Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Esther Ka‘aina
commended our school district for establishing the Connecting Youth-to-Jobs initiative, which is done in partnership with the chambers of commerce of Saipan and Tinian and the Rota Department of Commerce.

The initiative is designed to prepare and train 500 junior
and senior high schools every year in local career-related opportu-
nities.

US Dept. of Defense-ESGR Honors PSS
PSS became the 2015 recipient for the Employer Above and
Beyond Award. We were recognized for having gone above and beyond the legal requirements of the Uniformed Service Em-
ployment and Reemployment Right Act, by providing Guard and Reserve employees additional, non-mandated benefits while employed within PSS.

Please See COE FILE
23) Completes New and Aspiring Leaders Program

A year after we launched this pioneering program, 23 principals, vice principals and classroom teachers have completed the New and Aspiring Leaders Program. This program is designed as an educational program that promotes career growth for our school district personnel.

Planning Begins for Implementation of Future Ready Schools Initiative

This year we began planning for the Future Ready School Initiative, with the primary focus on self-assessment using seven key categories or “gears.”

ABC Initiative Approved

The Board of Education approved the assessment of Buildings and Classrooms Initiative (ABC) of PSS. The initiative will serve as the school district’s guideline of its pursuit to support its improvement initiatives for all of classrooms and buildings. This is a tri-agency partnership that involves the school district, the Office of Insular Affairs and the CNMI government is based on a partnership agreement that ensures that the Public School System has “functional and safe schools.”

Gov. Eloy S. Inos Signs Senate Bill 19-3 as Public Law 19-7: Teacher Rep. to BOE

On Sept. 25 and after years of work between the State BOE, the Legislature and the Executive Branch, Gov. Eloy S. Inos signed legislation that gives public school classroom teachers a seat to the policy and governing board of the Public School System.

The statute, which was shepherded by Sen. Jason Quitugua will give the new Teacher Representative a two-year non-voting seat to the BOE.

From LANDMARK | P 1

cet, and expression for our students to demonstrate what they have learned,” Board of Education Chairman Herman T. Guerrero told his colleagues after the BOE unanimous approval to the recommendation of the Instructional Services and Assessment Committee.

The primary reason why the BOE has fully endorsed the passage of the initiative is it responds to the diverse interest, abilities, background and culture of PSS students.

“arached-needed tools and resources that gives our learners access,” BOE member King pointed out.

She added, “We are now following the path by looking at the future of our public school students.”

What are Primary Instructional Materials?

According to Associate Commissioner for Curriculum and Instruction Jackie A. Quitugua these instructional materials are tools and resources used to teach PSS’s research-based and standards-based curriculum.

They are the main instructional materials used within a course. They are comprehensive and contain an extensive scope and sequence of skills and concepts, utilize variety of instructional strategies and identify primary instructional tool for a grade level.

These Primary Instructional Materials will directly impact student learning in five core content: English Language Arts, math, science, social studies and Chamarro Carolinian Language and Heritage Studies.

“When these materials, we are effectively connecting our impressions and observations as educators with ‘what is going on with our students’ learning,’” Quitugua separately said.

She further explained that the Primary Instructional Materials are the main instructional materials used within a course. They are comprehensive and contain an extensive scope and sequence of skills and concepts, utilize variety of instructional strategies and identify instructional tool for a grade level.

With the implementation, the BOE is expecting the school district to make progress on improving student achievement.

“We are expecting the BOE will be implemented with fidelity at all relevant grades, compared with researched based best practices.”
Governor Eloy Songao Inos Remembered for his Passion for Public Education

‘I Will Be There Whenever You Need Me’

The CNMI Board of Education and the Public School System mourns the untimely passing of Governor Eloy Songao Inos, a true ally with a strong interest to improve the state of public education in the commonwealth.

The late Gov. Inos had a strong insight on education issues, a quality he drew from his belief that the economic success of the islands is through quality public education. He was an enthusiastic supporter of forging stronger partnership and collaboration for all public education stakeholders.

“He was our strong ally and a friend to our PSS family,” Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan, who remembers the late chief executive of his commitment.

“My greatest memory of the late Governor Eloy S. Inos is that he was certainly an ally to public education. He honored our school district as an autonomous agency and opened lines of communication between the Executive Branch and PSS in his capacity as Lt. Governor and then, when he was elected into office as Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands,” Dr. Sablan told the school district’s staff and personnel upon learning the untimely passing of the chief executive on December 28, 2015.

The education chief vividly remembers how the late chief executive promised that he “would always be there in all activities and events of our public schools.”

Throughout the years, Gov. Inos’ strong connection to PSS has grown with his enthusiasm of not missing out any of the school district’s events and activities.

“Commissioner how is our school district? Let me know how else I can be of help,” Dr. Sablan remembers the late Gov. Inos’ once telling her. “I will be there whenever you need me.”

Board of Education Chairman Herman T. Guerrero said public education was privileged to be able to count him as one of its ardent supporters.

“Gov. Inos was a ready source of support. He was there to help our education leaders find a way to advance the needs of our public school students, our classroom teachers and school district personnel,” Chairman Guerrero shares his thoughts.
School Year 2014-2015 was the initial roll out of the test as a trial to allow the school district to fully prepare for its full implementation. This was to establish the baseline data of ACT Aspire. The ACT Aspire replaces the Stanford Achievement Test 10th edition or SAT10. It immerses Saipan, Tinian and Rota public schools’ students with the use of multi-digital tools in connecting their academic outcomes in the context of college and career readiness.

The school district's accountability plan calls for multiple use of assessments to identify student academic growth throughout the school year. These multiple assessments include all students, meaning that assessment tools are also available for students with special needs.

ACT Aspire is electronically-delivered, Common Core State Standards aligned, and as a summative assessment informs the school district on three areas such as student outcomes following a full school year of teaching and learning, instruction and assessment.

Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan explained that ACT Aspire is linked to the ACT College and Career Readiness Standards and is research-based information. This makes test results “meaningful” by connecting a student’s score to specific skills and knowledge important for college and work success.

ACT Aspire measures the academic achievement of students in English, math, reading, science, and writing from Grades 3 through 10.

“This is a technology-based classroom assessment, utilizing technology in assessing our public school students,” further explains Dr. Sablan. Last March, the State Board of Education approved ACT Aspire.

Using this new online testing, the results of the first implementation of the ACT Aspire revealed the public school students that were tested are “ready” for high school and college-level coursework or for participation in workplace training, “Ready” means that public school students tested met the ACT Readiness Benchmark and are on target for College Readiness in Grade 11.

ACT Aspire Readiness Levels

(Grade and Career Readiness)

The results are based or compared to four ACT Aspire Readiness Levels: In Need of Support, which is substantially below the ACT Readiness Benchmark, Close, which is substantially above the ACT Readiness Benchmark.

Participation Rate

There were close to 6,000 students that were tested across all five critical content areas: English, math, reading science, and writing. The chart shows the participation rate which meets or exceeds the accountability plan of 90 percent based in the combined “exceeding” and “ready” levels while 20 percent are Close.

Overall Results

The overall test results indicated that students in Grades 3 through 10 ranked highest in English. The English test consists of test items in conventions of Standard English, knowledge of language, and production of writing. The test results further ranked Grade 7 as the highest grade level with 66 percent of the student that participated in the English test to be at ready and exceedingly ACT Readiness Benchmarks. Students with IEP test results in English showed that Grades 3, 4 and 5 ranked highest with 16 percent of the students performing at the “Exceeding and Ready” levels of the ACT Readiness Benchmarks followed by Grade 7 at a close 15 percent.

The overall result for English for Grade 3 had a total 60 percent based in the combined “exceeding” and “ready” ACT Readiness Benchmarks.

This is 20 percent higher if compared to combined ACT Readiness Benchmarks of “Close” and “Need Support”, which has a combined percentage of 40.

Grade 4 has a combined 60 percentage overall ACT Aspire result (Exceeding and Ready), while for Grade 5 it yielded 64 percent in combined “Exceeding” and “Ready” ACT Readiness Benchmarks. English ACT results for Grade 6 was at 59 percent (Exceeding and Ready) and for Grade 7 it had 66 percent (combined Exceeding and Ready)—the highest.

Grade 8 had 57 percent for combined Exceeding and Ready ACT Benchmarks, while Grade 9 has 35 percent overall Exceeding and Ready benchmarks results.

Grade 10 had 33 percent combined Exceeding and Ready ACT benchmark results.

For math, across all eight grade level tested the results varied between “Close” and “Exceeding/Ready.” Students in Grade 3 ranked highest with 31 percent of the students are at Reading and Exceeding ACT benchmarks.

Grade 3 math results showed 46 percent “Close” and 31 percent combined Exceeding and Ready, while for Grade 4 it was 88 percent “Close” and 27 percent “Exceeding” and “Ready.”

Grade 5 had 62 percent “Close” and 26 percent “Exceeding/Ready.”

Grade 6 had 57 percent “Close” while 26 percent “Exceeding/Ready.”

For Grade 7, 21 percent showed “Exceeding/Ready” levels and 41 percent were at “Close” levels.

Grade 8 results showed 28 percent at the “Close” level and 12 on the “Exceeding/Ready” level.

Ninth grade showed 16 percent “Close” level and 13 percent at the “Exceeding/Ready” Level.

And Grade 10 showed 12 percent “Close” level and 5 percent “Exceeding/Ready” levels.

For the ACT Aspire testing for reading, the results indicated that 28 percent of the students in Grade 8 are at “Exceeding and Ready”, ranking highest amongst all grade levels that participated in the test.

Grade 3 had the same levels—17 percent for Exceeding/Ready and Close levels.

Grade four: 23 percent Exceeding/Ready while 27 percent are Close.

For 5th grade, the result was at 20 percent Exceeding/Ready and 31 percent at the Ready level.

6th grade showed 21 percent at Exceeding/Ready level and 22 percent at the Close level.

For Grade 7, there was 20 percent who showed they are Exceeding/Ready and another 25 percent at the Close benchmark.

Eight grade has 28 percent indicated they were Exceeding/Ready and a close 31 percent showing they are Close.

Grade 9 had 18 percent showing they are Exceeding/Ready for reading and 24 percent at the level indicating they were at the Close benchmark.

10th grade showed 14 percent at Exceeding/Ready levels while 20 percent are Close to the benchmark.

In Science, the result were almost evenly divided in student performance, in meeting between Exceeding/Ready and Close levels ACT Aspire Benchmarks. Students in Grade 6 ranked highest in Science with 30 percent of the students at the “Exceeding/Ready” levels of the ACT Aspire Benchmarks.

While for writing, the close to 6,000 public school students showed similar performance. Except that students in Grades 9 and 10 ranked highest with over 40 percent of the students participating in the test performed at “Exceeding/Ready” at the ACT Aspire Benchmarks. And students with IEPs in Grade 10 ranked highest with 9 percent of the students performing at “Exceeding/Ready” levels at the ACT Aspire Benchmarks.
NEVER before has there been so much interest in public education policy and input sought from parents and the community, and never before have there been so many opportunities and possibilities that parent engagement brings to education.

This, in essence, captures the role of the school district’s Parent Advisory Council.

“We obviously need to reorganize—meaning, to fully organize because we as parents and stakeholders (of public education) we have a role, both as our children’s advocates and the (PSS) advisory council, to assist our Commissioner of Education in putting together and implementing the school district’s policy, vision, and direction,” said John Oliver Gonzales.

Gonzales in the newly-elected president of PAC. He is the current president of the joint Kagman High School and Kagman Elementary Schools’ PTSA. On December 15, Gonzales was overwhelmingly elected to lead the PAC, which serves as the advisory council of parents for the Office of the Commissioner of Education.

Saipan Southern High School PTSA President Glenna SP Reyes was elected vice president.

Arlene Long PTSA officer at Tinian Jr. Sr. High School was elected as Secretary.

Audrey Manglona of Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Jr. Sr. High School was elected treasurer.

As the “best educational advocates for our children”, the parents’ mission is to assist the school district navigate through its ongoing educational reform and programs—a worthy feat that continues to be presented with challenges resulting from the changing education landscape.

“We should be there to continue to respond and help our children and the (school district) with its work in continuously providing a conducive learning environment and successful (student graduates),” explains the PAC president.

“Another important role for us as advisory to the commissioner, is to assist and support her with the implementation of the Strategic Priorities PLUS,” he added.

The PSS-PAC, Gonzales added, could be influential in ensuring that its mission and public education is at the forefront of everything that it does.

“It falls to all of us to continue to build on our collective strength, knowledge and experience to keep PSS mission moving forward and to make all of our public schools, and children, as successful as they can be.”

I hope that we embody and personify the leadership that will empower our parents, by participating as direct stakeholders that will help chart the course of our children’s future.
THE Real World Design Challenge has become a unique ground-breaking stage in training Public School System’s high school students to work with the real tools of engineering professionals.

When Marianas High School’s Aeronautical Dolphins won last November’s National Real World Design Challenge Competition, it validated the school district’s investment in STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, which is a rapidly developing theme in public education in the CNMI.

Three years ago, Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan and the State Board of Education has embraced the STEM Program through investment in resources and time to develop public school students interests in engineering design, computer programing, emerging technologies and robotics.

It was in 2012 when the STEM Program was pioneered, and on the same year the school district sent its first competing team to the National RWDC: MHS’ Aeronautical Dolphins. During the 2012 national finals, PSS delegation won Against All Odd Award at the nationals in Washington, D.C.

In 2013, PSS continue to produce state RWDC champions and went on to compete nationally. It took the national title by winning first place. The competition was also held in the nation’s capital.

This year’s national champion, the CNMI Aeronautical Dolphins of MHS, represented the Pacific territories of CNMI, Guam, and American Samoa when they won the State Real World Design Challenge earlier this April 2015.

The 2015 winning team members consist of Ann Margaret Norcio, Edna Nisola, Masrur Alam, Jun Young Kim, Matthew Cao, Scarlet Chen, and Robert Malate.

“Our students continue to excel in competition and have become the best among their peers because of opportunities and exposure afforded to them like RWDC,” Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan said.

She added, “This has been made possible through our STEM program which gives our public school students opportunities to learn new things while pursuing their interests.”

The Board of Education, during a special awards presentation, hailed the commitment of public schools in pursuing the STEM field.

Board of Education Chairman Herman T. Guerrero said, “this program continues to give our students greater opportunities to learn, covering many aspects such as design, entrepreneurship and community outreach.

“We are essentially helping our students demonstrate the value of developing solutions of real-world challenges,” the chairman of the school district’s policymaking body further said.

The Aeronautical Dolphins of Marianas High School is coached by John Raulerson, a mathematics teacher and aviation club coach at MHS. He has dedicated many hours to coaching and mentoring the team.

This is the 2nd time the CNMI’s Aeronautical Dolphins of MHS have won the National Competition. The Aeronautical Dolphins of MHS have consistently won the State Real World Design Challenge since its 1st participation in 2012. In 2012, the CNMI won the Against All Odds Award in the national competition in Washington DC. In 2013, they won 1st place on the National Real World Design Competition. 2013 National Competition winners consist of members: Arada, Jill Ann; Magjat, Clariza; Xiao, Stephanie; Xu, Cecilia
The goal that drives the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to work across a broad spectrum of efforts to boost student achievement continues to complement the initiatives of the Public School System in ensuring that access and opportunities are availed by the commonwealth’s over 10,000 public education stakeholders.

For the last last five years that Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan has been a member of CCSSO, the school district has received tremendous technical assistance and professional development training that, among others, raised the level of classroom learning. From increasing access to a strong early childhood education to paving higher quality career readiness pathways, to building better educator preparation program, CCSSO remains committed to reforming the public education system throughout the nation in four strategic areas: educator workforce, information systems and research next generation learners; standards, assessment, and accountability.

In late November, Dr. Sablan joined the nation’s top education leaders for its Annual Policy Forum that was held in Charlotte, North Carolina. The forum focused on three principles—equity, quality and accountability in public education.

During this forum, no less interim U.S. Secretary of Education John King spoke of the urgency of ensuring that these three strategies will be the priority over the next 14 months for all of the nation’s school districts.

“There is a sustained desire to collaborate to ensure equity. What this means is it is our responsibility as education leaders and policymakers to ensure that all students are making significant gains in college and career readiness,” Dr. Sablan explained.

With equity, Dr. Sablan explained, “achievement gaps between student populations are significantly narrowed.” CCSSO agreed and recommended that accountability systems should incentivized improved academic achievement for all students, including — and especially — students at risk. This focus on equity is not in conflict with efforts to promote gains for high performing students. This is moving toward more student-centered, personalized learning environment that suggests the consideration for the design and evaluation of accountability systems that meets the goal.

During his presentation, interim U.S. Education Secretary King highlighted the “high school re-design” plan, which is about improving public education of secondary schools, soft skills and academic skills.

It was in 2011 when CCSSO released a set of principles that were endorsed by 44 states, the District of Columbia and the CNMI-PSS, to guide school leadership in raising the bar toward college-and career-ready systems of accountability and supports. It called on the U.S. Congress the U.S. Department of Education to support state leadership through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or ESEA.

Articulated in CCSSO’s Roadmap for Next-Generation State Accountability Principles, the principles emphasized, among other elements, a focus on college and career readiness and a call for inclusion of differentiated performance indicators to inform support.

It also committed all states and school districts to processes of innovation, evaluation, and continuous improvement in college and career ready-accountability and support.

PSS, for the last five years, had invested and engaged heavily in college and career-ready program.
ing areas, a big impact,” Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan told Students First in an interview.

Dr. Sablan particularly underscored that the ESSA will provide “added value” to the many programs and initiatives of the school district. In essence, supplementing and expanding leading-edge innovative that have been put in place to improve academic/student success and classroom learning.

“I am very hopeful now to continue to pursue all our initiatives to help our public school students be college and career ready,” explains Dr. Sablan.

During the December 12 end-of-year Principals and Program Manager Meeting, the school district’s Federal Programs Officer, Tim Thornburgh, disclosed how much impact and effect the new federal statute would have to the CNMI public education system.

“What does the reauthorization offer to PSS? There will be about $2.6 million increase in our Consolidated Grants,” Thornburgh said in breaking the news, just two days after President Obama affixed his signature on ESSA after securing bipartisan support from both chambers of the US Congress.

“It is going to be good news for us and this will be felt in (school year 2016),” he added.

Highlights

Although the new law will continue to require annual tests in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school, it takes several important steps to reduce testing and decouple high stakes decisions from these assessments.

Six reasons how:

This will eliminate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the rigid-test based standard NCLB used to measure student proficiency.

ESSA will allow school districts to apply to use another nationally recognized assessment in high school instead of the state standardized tests.

The new federal education statute will allow states to set a cap limiting time students spend taking tests.

This will also provide funding for states to audit and streamline assessments systems, eliminate unnecessary and duplicative assessments, and improve the use of assessments.

Another important provision in the statute is it will create a pilot program from state-designed assessment systems that allow for local district assessments driven by teaching and learning, not accountability alone. And this will maintain the right of parents and guardians to opt their children out of statewide assessments where state and local policies allow them to do so.

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“When does the reauthorization offer to PSS? There will be about $2.6 million increase in our Consolidated Grants,” Thornburgh said, "in breaking the news, just two days after President Obama affixed his signature on ESSA after securing bipartisan support from both chambers of the US Congress.

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June 30, 2015

From REGULATIONS | P1

On September 23, Governor Eloy S. Inos signed Senate Bill 19-03 into Public Law 19-7.

The bill was authored by Senator Justo S. Quitugua.

Under Section 2 of the statute, the selection of the CNMI State Board of Education Teacher Representative within the Public School System “shall be selected by the teachers in the Public School System.”

The selection will be through a “general election” among public school teachers on Saipan, Tinian and Rota.

The said act mandates the Commissioner of Education to conduct an election of the teacher representative during the first week of October of each year.

“Only a teacher is eligible to be a candidate and only teachers are eligible to vote one candidate on the ballot,” a portion of Section 2 of PL. 19-7 reads.

There shall be no write-ins on the ballot.

Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan, in an interview, explained that the draft regulations have been sent to all public school teachers for their review.

“This is a very transparent process and the intent why our public school teachers will be given the opportunity to comment on the regulations that the school district is currently working on (as required by PL. 19-7),” Dr. Sablan said.

“Hopefully,” she said, “we will soon have our teacher representative to the State BOE,” the education chief added.

In their letter to the late then-Gov. Eloy S. Inos, who is credited for his strong support for the swift passage of the legislation, both Dr. Sablan and Board of Education Chairman Herman T. Guerrero said it was a fruition of a long and arduous process.

“We have attempted, letters, an executive order, and other means to accomplish this for about three years,” the chairman and the education chief said, adding, “We are thrilled...and anxious.”

They added, “We look forward to completing the chorus of voices on the Board of Education with the addition of a teacher representative. Thank you very much for your efforts in reviewing and signing this bill.”

Under the Nonvoting Teacher Representative Act, a run-off election will be conducted during the first week of October for the two candidates who received the highest number of votes.

The Commissioner of Education will submit the names of the teacher who obtained the highest vote to the Governor to be appointed as the CNMI State Board of Education Teacher Representative.

The elected teacher representative will serve a term of two years. And no teacher may be elected to the same position more than twice.
Here is no dearth of quality teachers in the Northern Marianas as the Public School System honors three from a pool of hundreds who have shown consistency and exemplary work in the classroom.

PSS this year declared Dora Miura, Rose Sharon Taimanao Jones and Eric Larson as teacher, instructor and teacher aide of the year.

It’s déjà vu for Dr. Dora Miura, whose husband Paul, also of Saipan Southern High School, was previously declared TOY back in 2014. Two years later, Dr. Miura gets to share the same recognition.

“I am honored to have been chosen to represent our teachers of the CNMI. I will be attending some conferences that will bring me together with the other 2016 State Teachers of the Year across the nation and the territories of the United States,” she said.

Miura, who has been teaching for close to two decades now, welcomes this opportunity to meet equally remarkable teachers.

She said, “This opportunity to meet with great teachers will undoubtedly provide me with ideas and experiences that I can bring back to the teachers of the CNMI. Hopefully there can be a forum where the CNMI State Teachers of the Year and the CNMI teachers get together, perhaps a session at Professional Development conference, where these ideas can be shared and other ideas from our teachers here can be brought together to celebrate our strengths and inspire us to do more good for our students.”

Born on Saipan, Dr. Miura said she originally wanted to go into education administration. But what changed, she said, it was her class at the University of Hawai’i in Manoa that changed her perspective.

“I learned from my classes at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa that in order to become a good administrator, I had to understand teachers. I was advised to teach for several years before going into administration. As such, after graduating with my Masters in Education Administration in 1998, I decided to teach for a couple of years before going into administration. However, during my first year of teaching, I fell in love with teaching and have continued to love impacting the lives of my students,” said Mrs. Miura.
We need the support of our parents and the community to help us with awareness by promoting the language and heritage in their homes and out in the community at all public places and establishments. It would be amazing to see everyone participate and come together to revive our roots and language so that it will not become extinct one day. I am very happy that the Public School System has mandated the indigenous program so that we can have a concrete foundation to begin with. Just like all success, we need everyone’s support and need to continue to find advancements to help our program move forward. I envision one day in the near future that where ever I go, I will be able to bear all age groups communicating in the native tongue.

Challenges
As to the roadblocks to teaching and to education in the CNMI, Miura said, “We live in an ever changing world, in large part due to technology, and to the climate issues. This means that our students live in a world where there is a lot unknown. “

For Miura, it is incumbent upon them—teachers—to prepare the students to interact and contribute to a world that may look different when they leave the educational system.

“These students need to be prepared to solve problems that may not exist today,” Miura said.

She said the teachers in the CNMI bring a wide variety of contexts and strengths that aid their students get ready for the challenges that await them.

She added that such diversity of contexts and strengths framed in a curriculum that is designed to inspire our students to be able to think critically and creatively that is the primary asset of our education system in the CNMI.

“The diversity in our teachers provide our students with a variety of opportunities and experiences,” she said.

She expressed her hope that the leaders and parents in the CNMI can appreciate this diversity.

It is this diversity the teachers tap to make the CNMI and the world a better place through the education of the children here in the commonwealth.

Outstanding teachers under one roof
As to how they both inspire each other to be better teachers, Dr. Miura and husband Paul have school issues as staple of their conversation at home.

“Part of our normal conversation includes school issues. We share ideas and sometimes we collaborate when planning lessons. When policy issues are brought to the forefront through an online article or through the news, we often talk about to the implications such a policy. As the 2016 CNMI Teacher of the Year, I feel fortunate to have my husband, 2014 CNMI Teacher of the Year, by my side to provide me with advice as I journey through this year. As the 2014 CNMI STOY, he has provided me with some tips on how to make the most of my conference experience,” she said.

SHE’S destined to teach and to join the ranks of the exemplary ones.

Rose Sharon Taimanao Jones, this year’s instructor of the year, did not even plan to become a teacher yet she wound up taking a teaching assistant job right after graduating from high school.

Jones, who has been teaching for 15 years now, told Students First, “I never planned to become a teacher at first. I took a teaching assistant job right out of high school at the NMC Lab School and really enjoyed working with grades K-8 for three years.”

She said this was the turning point. “That was what first made me consider teaching,” said Jones.

But it is small wonder that she would end up in the same profession that her mother, sisters and sisters in law are in.

“I come from a family of educators. My mom, my sisters and my two sister-in-laws are all teachers. My mother, Carmen S. Taimanao inspired me to teach! She has been in the education system all her life. She has inspired me in so many ways to become an educator and continues to encourage and support me in my journey in education,” adds Jones.

She has been a Chamorro language and heritage studies instructor since 2004. She currently teaches at Chacha Oceanview Middle School in Kagman where she also coaches her students in academic and poetry competitions.

When asked by Students First what she considers as the hurdles to teaching the indigenous language in the CNMI, 1. The biggest challenge we face teaching the indigenous language and heritage is having the students’ master speaking and comprehending the Chamorro language. We do our best to encourage them to practice daily outside of school at home and in the community.”

Jones also could not have emphasized more parent involvement as key.

“We need the support of our parents and the community to help us with awareness by promoting the language and heritage in their homes and out in the community at all public places and establishments. It would be amazing to see everyone participate and come together to revive our roots and language so that it will not become extinct one day. I am very happy that the Public School System has mandated the indigenous program so that we can have a concrete foundation to begin with. Just like all success, we need everyone’s support and need to continue to find advancements to help our program move forward. I envision one day in the near future that where ever I go, I will be able to bear all age groups communicating in the native tongue,” said Jones.

In her winning this year’s instructor of the year, Jones dedicates her award to her husband and her family. “I would like to acknowledge my husband, Ason M. Jones, my mother, Carmen S. Taimanao, my siblings, my family, my friends, my colleagues and the community who continue to encourage and support me and my vision in education.”
When the school district recognized that there is a need for better network coverage for all of public elementary, middle/junior and high schools on Saipan, Tinian and Rota that triggered a transformation.

“In order for (the Public School System) to continuously meet the CNMI Technology Plan we have to get that infrastructure in place,” said Joseph Torres, director of the district’s Technology and Communication Networks Department, in an interview with Students First.

In all of the 19 public campuses including the 10 Head Start Centers, the school district continue to faced with the need to sustain and upgrade its technology infrastructure to support online learning tools and testing and multimedia resources that come with the speed of change in the education landscape.

The CNMI Technology Plan was created and developed by the school district nearly six years ago and this was signed and approved by then the late Gov. Eloy S. Inos.

Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan and the State Board of Education aggressively pushed for this plan to align the school district’s core goals of adapting to a rapidly changing education environment that uses technology and another innovative tools.

The CNMI Technology Plan supports PSS’ numerous services ranging from voice, video teleconference, data network and technology infrastructure development heeded to support all K-12 communications.

In order for (the Public School System) to continuously meet the CNMI Technology Plan is for us to get that infrastructure in place.

Networking: Upgrading School Networks at the Speed of Change

PSS Installs 10 mbps circuit between Saipan-Tinian grid; Rota in the works
This summer, the Public School System-Northern Marianas College will jointly host, and in partnership with Research Triangle Institute International, the 40th Pacific Circle Consortium.

This largest conference is expected to draw over 300 delegates across the globe—and will capture the importance of laying a solid foundation for the region’s economic development.

“The conference will focus on research-based educational practices that will facilitate the overall collective development of the region’s education system and ultimately impact the region’s overall economic development,” Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan explained.

The 40th Annual Pacific Circle Consortium Conference will be held on Saipan this summer. Dr. Sablan said the conference will promote economic development and bring the region’s educational institutions together as they try to improve the lives and education of their children and communities.

Among others, in particular, Dr. Sablan said the focus of the conference will primarily evolve about educational collaborative practices. This will define how partnership among educational institutions can be vehicle towards development.

“This is the first time that the Pacific Circle Consortium Conference will be held in the northern Pacific,” Dr. Sablan said.

“That this will also be the 40th anniversary of the conference highlights the historic significance of the event,” she said, adding that hosting the conference is a great honor not only for PSS and NMC but for the entire Northern Marianas.

The Pacific Circle Consortium was established in 1977 as an initiative in international cooperation between education research and development institutions in the region initially drawn from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development or OECD countries.

The consortium is now independent from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and development.

Conference participants will come from Australia, New Zealand, several Pacific Islands, China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, several state of the U.S. Vietnam, Canada, Latvia and Mexico.

The conference was held in Fiji last year. NMC President Dr. Sharon Hart further said that the conference will be unique opportunity in raising both higher education and K-12 educators together.

“We do share some very common areas of mutual concern and interests, so we really need to collaborate altogether,” Dr. Hart said.

The conference will be held from July 4 to 7.

The theme for the 2016 conference is “Navigating Global Trends in Education within the Pacific Region.”

In the coming weeks, the tri-partnership with PSS, NMC and Research Triangle, will be calling for proposals presentation. Selected proposals will be presented thorough plenary and breakout sessions.

The call for proposals will be a tool for PCC and the host institutions to be able to identify resources that would be applicable and sustainable in fostering the region’s economic growth through education.

Promising education practices from educators and institutions that are members of PCC are expected: From the most progressive to replicable elements and practices for economic development success.

“We are going to vet and collect best tools that will be useful for our region’s growth. These proposals/presentation can be used as models, effective tools and resources that reflect the needs of our current education system,” Dr. Sablan pointed out.

Additionally, during the conference, winner of the Peter Brice Award, which recognizes an individual who best exemplifies the aims of the Pacific Circle Consortium, will be announced.

Peter Brice represented New Zealand in the early days of the consortium when it was under the auspices of the OECD.
There is now greater understanding that the magnitude of change that has taken place within the public education landscape in the CNMI in recent past validates a safe, supportive learning environment that has continually embraced continuous improvement.

This essentially captures the result of the first National School Climate and Culture Survey of the Public School System. This was conducted last year and the result, which was just revealed recently, provides insights from school and school district employees including all employee groups.

PSS employees were respondents to the survey.

This was initially developed in 2002 and has been improved over the past 12 years.

The survey has been designed to measure a range of organizational issues including employee morale, commitment to the organization, school pride, trust in the organization, nature of the existing culture, overall health of the work environment and leadership effectiveness.

Education chief Dr. Sablan explained that the emphasis of the survey is about identifying common factors that will lead to a positive or negative climate culture within the PSS.

The overall survey disclosed that among education leaders themselves, the PSS is a safe and supportive learning environment.

The same survey also acknowledges that change has taken place and is on the right direction in producing high-achieving public school student graduates, through its continuous improvement process.

“What has really kept us going? It is the passion that you have for the school district,” said Commissioner of Education Dr. Rita A. Sablan in encapsulating the overall result of the survey which she disclosed during her end-of-year meeting with the district’s principals and program managers.

Survey Data

The School Climate and Culture Survey generated a total of 528 responses from classroom teachers, school administrators, key management and program managers, counselors, librarians and Board of Education staff.

It was conducted district-wide, covering all 19 elementary, middle/junior and high school campuses, 10 Head Start Centers, and the central office.

They were surveyed based on 10 dimensions or levels: School Pride, Internal Communications, Parent Connections, Works Environment, Organization Dynamics, Accountability, Meeting Student Needs, Readiness for Change, Direction of the Organization, and Leadership Dynamics.

The National Center of School Leadership gives emphasis in the 10 dimensions or characteristic that are directly linked with one another and greatly impacts the development of K-12 educational leaders and successful learning/schools.

It also validates what studies have repeatedly say that school culture is one of the most significant factors influencing student success.

“Through the school climate survey process, educational leaders can better understand the strengths and weaknesses of their schools,” the National Center of School Leadership said.

Surveyed PSS personnel indicated under the “School Pride” dimension, among other criterion, that the “Overall Dimension of School Pride” for PSS and the national level are similar.

When broken down to particular characteristics, there is 81 percent among PSS employees surveyed who would recommend my school/school district to a family seeking a school for their children.” The result is much higher than the national benchmark of 74 percent.

There is a higher percentage – 76 percent – of respondents acknowledging that “my school/school district is well regarded in the community. This is higher than the 73 percent national level.
The State Board of Education has commended the leadership of the Public School System and stakeholders of public education after the school district completed and met its December-2015 deadline for submission of AdvancED’s accreditation required actions.

“Let us commend our staff for their hard work. We are making sure that the rest of the recommended actions are being addressed—and they exactly did it,” BOE Chairman Herman T. Guerrero said.

“The report is about making sure that our children are being connected to their needs and desires to learn, as identified and validated by our accrediting team,” the BOE chairperson added.

BOE member Florine Hofshcneider described the report as “really exciting…that reflect the exciting progress” that the district has made for the past year in meeting the requirement of AdvancED.

On February 20, 2014 Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan AdvancED was officially notified by chief executive officer Dr. Mark Elgart, who disclosed that the school district “has now joined more than 20,300 of the 32,000 schools and 20 million students in the nation that are accredited at the school district level”.

During the visit in 2013, AdvancED’s top officials comprising the accrediting/external review team visited PSS central office and the Board of Education, the various public schools and Head Start Centers on Saipan, Tinian and Rota. In their exit finding, they have “highly recommended” for a five-year system-wide accreditation for PSS.

And in their evaluation and deliberation, the external review team identified six “strengths” that need to be addressed to ensure that PSS’ vision, mission, goals and initiatives are met.

“These progress report contains the six standards that were required of us to be completed,” Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan disclosed.

These required actions include indicators 3.3 and 3.6 of AdvancED’s recommendation. This is about Teaching and Assessing.

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“These progress report contains the six standards that were required of us to be completed,” Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan disclosed.

These required actions include indicators 3.3 and 3.6 of AdvancED’s recommendation. This is about Teaching and Assessing.

There was also the need to address Indicator 4.2, which is Resource and Support Systems.

Indicator 4.3 and 4.6 is also about creating and implementing rigorous safety plan and consistent and integrated use of technology and equipment that enable the effective and equitable utilization of interactive media, information resources, and infrastructure to deliver state-of-the art needed for 21st Century classroom learning.

Required action for Indicator 5.4 is about creating momentum for continuous improvement and organizational effectiveness.

And the last indicator was the need to update diagnostics relating to student performance. This is primarily focused towards updating the district’s demographics.

Last year, the district leadership has created an executive committee for accreditation program to address the recommendation of AdvancED.

In meeting the required action and the PSS’ timely submission to AdvancED, BOE Chairman Guerrero said the school district has now created a “powerful medium that encourages the local government and the federal grantors to support” the direction for growth.

PSS is now officially the only school district in the Pacific to achieve a state-level accreditation feat.

It was in 2011 when Dr. Sablan began looking at the system-wide accreditation process. She noted that the process is a powerful tool that drives effective and best practices. For a year, PSS and BOE has devoted substantial amount of time in investing and preparing for the transition of the accreditation process, from school-level to district-level.
Huixin, Aglubat, John Paul, and Bigueras, Jessica. Due to RWDC funding issues which included losing a major grantor, the 2015 National Competition had to be presented online via Embry-Riddle University’s Eagle Vision meeting software instead of competing in Washington D.C.

Along with the CNMI-MHS Aeronautical Dolphins, Alabama and North Carolina have also been chosen as the two other teams comprising the top three teams nationwide. Alabama was second place and North Carolina taking third place.

Each student on the RWDC National Champion Team gets a $50,000 scholarship to Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

The RWDC State competition is coordinated by the CNMI Public School System whose state coordinator is Jeaniffer Cabangbang.


One of the judges mentioned many times how he was impressed with unmanned aircraft’s design, specifically the airfoil. The students spoke with confidence, well-prepared, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic as they presented and answered the judge’s questions.

Raulerson says its hard work and endurance that allowed them to prevail and come this far.

The 2015 RWDC National challenge focused on unmanned systems and precision agriculture through the design and implementation of an Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) to support precision agriculture, specifically the targeted and efficient application of pesticide to control local crop predation. The teams used concepts from Engineering Technology (i.e., application of science and engineering to support product improvement, industrial processes, and operational functions) to identify, compare, analyze, demonstrate, and defend the most appropriate component combinations, system/subsystem design, operational methods, and business case to support the challenge scenario.

Teams were judged based on the scoring of their (1) Engineering Design Notebooks, a detailed 80 page report of their technical work and results. The Engineering Design Notebooks were judged by a panel of Technical Judges using a detailed Scoring Rubric; and (2) Presentations of their work before panels of Challenge Judges. The Challenge Judges determined the top three teams and the Merit Award Winners. A panel of Blue Ribbon Judges ranked the Top Three Teams and determined the National Champion based on the Top Three Teams’ Presentations.
In addition, the Technology and Communications Network support training and installation of technology that facilitates student academic achievement by working closely with schools and other department units to ensure that the PSS network infrastructure is capable of supportive solutions that are to be integrated into the classrooms.

Capacity

PSS investment in network and technology has federally-funded, and to some extent, locally supported under the CNMI Technology Plan. However, PSS has been innovative in its funding utilization, and over the last five years led the school district to become one of the adequately and technologically-supported CNMI government instrumentality.

At the close of 2015, the school district completed the installation of a 10 Mbps (megabyte per-second) between Saipan-Tinian. This speed is 3 Mbps up from previous 7 Mbps.

Saipan-Rota network is now in the works. “We just completed the installation of 10 Mbps circuit and are almost moving away with old, outdated system,” Torres explained.

There is 80 percent of the surveyed PSS personnel who “would recommend my school/department to a friend seeking employment.” This is higher than the 76 percent national average.

Under the “Internal Communications” dimension, 75 percent of the respondents – higher than the 72 percent national level – acknowledge they are “able to share ideas and opinions with school/department leadership.”

In the same dimension, there is 63 percent admitting that “school-wide/department meetings are a good use of their time.” This is higher than the 47 percent national average.

83 percent also admits that “my peers exhibit a strong belief that all students can excel if we all do our jobs well.” This is higher than the 79 percent national level.

70 percent of them also acknowledge they are “involved in the decisions that affect work,” a figure higher than the 60 percent national level.

In the “Meeting Student Needs” dimension, PSS personnel agrees that their school campuses and the district is a “positive, professional work environment.” 74 percent acknowledged that, which reflects the same level that of the national percentage.

83 percent of those surveyed reveals they are “encouraged to try new ways of doing things.” This is higher than the 77 percent national level.

70 percent of them also acknowledge they are “involved in the decisions that affect work,” a figure higher than the 60 percent national level.

About “Accountability” or if the staff are clear about their performance and if they are given adequate feedback with their task, 76 percent said they are. This is higher than the 75 percent national level.

91 percent of those surveyed acknowledged that they “know what is expected of me at work.” And 68 percent said “my school/department does a good job of holding people accountable for results.” The national level is 63 percent.

In “Parent Connections” level, 63 percent of them say they “communicate frequently with most parents of (their) students.” This is higher by a notch with the 62 percent national level.

However, for educators and PSS personnel surveyed, there is a great number of the respondents acknowledging that “there is more that need to be done” for parents to be engaged in their child’s learning. When surveyed/asked about “parents at my school are very engaged in the learning of their child,” the district result showed 29 percent, which is far lower than the 45 percent national level.

In the “Work Environment” dimension, PSS personnel agrees that their school campuses and the district is a “positive, professional work environment.” 74 percent acknowledged that, which reflects the same level that of the national percentage.

83 percent of those surveyed reveals they are “encouraged to try new ways of doing things.” This is higher than the 77 percent national level.

70 percent of them also acknowledge they are “involved in the decisions that affect work,” a figure higher than the 60 percent national level.

In “Meeting Student Needs,” 70 percent – which is higher than the 67 percent national level – approving that “I am able to immediately access useful student achievement data that is specific to my students.”

PSS also is on the level with that of the nation’s – at 79 percent – in “meeting students needs as its priority.”
Despite going to different public schools across the commonwealth, the students begin to come together, appearing as a monolith fighting against a commonly perceived enemy: drugs.

Their aversion to drugs appear to be the common thread that binds these youths together as could be gleaned from the recently held Youth Advisory Panel seminars.

PSS Personal Responsibility Education Program Coordinator Melisha PB San Nicolas, and Hopwood Junior High School principal Jonas Barcinas were at the helm of these sessions with the youth leaders.

San Nicolas told Students First that Dr. Rita A. Sablan—the commissioner—herself wanted the students to start convening now that repairs at schools are winding down after Typhoon Soudelor hit the island in August.

She said the Youth Advisory Panel Leadership Planning Session was held on Nov. 10 on Saipan, Nov. 13 on Rota, and Nov. 17 on Tinian.

Close to 100 youth leaders got together for these sessions.

“5 student leaders were selected from each school with their advisors to take part in the planning for Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) student led activities to include their peers on various topics such as anti-bullying, alcohol, drugs and tobacco education. Student leaders collaborated by levels as well as by cluster schools. Schools were given the chance in the afternoon after they were provided with current data on the various topics to drive the planning for each school's Action Plan,” said San Nicolas.

She said that students also had a chance to discuss as a school successes and recommendations for improvement.

“They compiled their top 5 successes and recommendations, which will be provided to PSS Central Leaders to review students’ point of view on school success and recommendations. The overall goal for the sessions is to promote Positive Youth Development in the schools and to encourage the Youth Advisory Panel to step up to the plate and be involved and make a difference in the overall success of their school year,” she said.

Following the brainstorming of their goals for the school year, San Nicolas said they offered the students the SMART template.

She said, “We gave them template of SMART goals.”

SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-based goals.

In following the SMART template, San Nicolas said the students will for example be targeting to decrease bullying from 64 percent down to 58 percent at the end of the school year as indicated in the Student Discipline Report.

San Nicolas said the action plan should include two components: what the students need from the administrators and what they will do differently to decrease bullying at school.

San Nicolas, again cited as example, how they would plan to have an after-school workshop on anti-bullying. During the school year, the YAP will work with the principals, vice principals and counselors in developing an anti-bullying campaign.

“These student leaders are utilizing the SMART goal template to create their activities for the school year and thoughtful planning and considerations are done to ensure a successful outcome,” said San Nicolas.

As to bullying, San Nicolas pointed out how the San Antonio Middle School has tapped into service providers and brought in the Division of Youth Services to talk about bullying.

Moreover, referring to leadership training sessions, San Nicolas said the students turn in their action plan which sets the tone for the rest of the school year.

Common plans, goals and challenges

San Nicolas said after the sessions, the common feedback from the youth leaders was their common desire to stamp out drug addiction and alcohol dependence.

She said that the students were given recommendations on available resources that they can tap.

Commissioner Dr. Rita Sablan herself has been looking at having more of these YAP sessions.

“She is recommending that we have another one in January,” San Nicolas said.

But next time, San Nicolas said they are confident that the youth leaders are now ready to step up to the plate and lead the sessions.

“They are going to be stepping up conducting sessions themselves,” she said.
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Breakfast</th>
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<th>Dinner</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Monday, Jan. 4</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Potatoes and Ham Chowder, Breadsticks or Crackers, Fruit</td>
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<td>Lunch: BBQ Chicken and Rice Texas BBQ Beans, Potato Wedges, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Tuesday, Jan. 5</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Scrambled Egg, Grilled Ham, Steamed Rice, Fruit</td>
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<td>Lunch: Italian Lasagna, Wheat Dinner Roll, Garden Salad, Fruit</td>
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<td>Secondary Second Choice: Turkey &amp; Cheese Sub Sandwich, Garden Salad, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday, Jan. 6</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: French Toast, With Syrup, Fruit</td>
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<td>Lunch: Beef Broccoli, Local Vegetable, Steamed Rice, Fruit</td>
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<td>Secondary Second Choice: Chef Salad, Garlic Bread, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Thursday, Jan. 7</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Fried Rice with Scrambled Eggs, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Pepperoni Pizza, Carrots with Hummus, Fruit</td>
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<td>Secondary Second Choice: Build Your Own Burrito (BYO Burrito), Seasoned Carrots, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Friday, Jan. 8</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Grilled Cheese Sandwich, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Seasoned Fish, Steamed Rice, Oriental/Vegetables, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Secondary Second Choice: Chicken Parm with Oriental/Vegetables, Fruit</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MLK Day</strong></td>
<td>No School Today</td>
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<td><strong>Monday, Jan. 11</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Fruit Muffin, Fruit</td>
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<td>Lunch: Bistek with Green Peas, Cabbage Coco, Red Rice, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Secondary Second Choice: BI Sandwich with THE WORKS, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Tuesday, Jan. 12</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Scrambled Egg, Grilled Ham, Steamed Rice, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Italian Lasagna, Wheat Dinner Roll, Garden Salad, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Secondary Second Choice: Turkey &amp; Cheese Sub Sandwich, Garden Salad, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Wed., Jan. 13</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Bread Pudding, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Chicken Penne Bake, Mixed Vegetables, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Secondary Second Choice: Southwest Salad, Garlic Bread, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Thursday, Jan. 14</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Fried Rice with Chicken Nuggets, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Cheese Burger, with Sweet Potato Fries, Fruit</td>
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<td>Secondary Second Choice: Specialty Pizza, Garden Salad, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Friday, Jan. 15</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Ham and Cheese Sandwich, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Chicken Curry with Carrots, Local Greens, Steamed Rice, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Secondary Second Choice: BI Sandwich with Baja Vegetables, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Monday, Jan. 18</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Amazocado Soup, Breadsticks or Crackers, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Pork Loin Chop, Japanese Salad, Steamed Rice, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Secondary Second Choice: Chicken Pizza, Japanese Salad, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Tuesday, Jan. 19</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Ham and Cheese Scramble, Steamed Rice, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Beef Macaroni Bake, Tossed Salad, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Secondary Second Choice: Turkey and Cheese Wrap, Tossed Salad, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Wed., Jan. 20</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: French Toast, With Syrup, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Korean Beef Bulgegi, Local Greens, Cucumber Kimchee, Steamed Rice, Fruit</td>
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<td>Secondary Second Choice: Asian Salad, Garlic Bread, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Thursday, Jan. 21</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Fried Rice with Chicken Nuggets, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Cheese Pizza, Carrots with Ranch, Bean Pasta Salad, Fruit</td>
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<td>Secondary Second Choice: Club Sub Sandwich, Carrots with Ranch, Bean Pasta, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Friday, Jan. 22</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Peanut Butter and Jam Sandwich, Fruit</td>
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<td>Lunch: Chicken Parm with Baja Vegetables, Steamed Corn, Steamed Rice, Fruit</td>
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<td>Secondary Second Choice: BI Sandwich with Baja Vegetables, Steamed Corn, Steamed Rice, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Monday, Jan. 25</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Arrozcaldo Soup, Breadsticks or Crackers, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Pork Loin Chop, Japanese Salad, Steamed Rice, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Secondary Second Choice: Chicken Pizza, Japanese Salad, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Tuesday, Jan. 26</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Meat Lovers Scramble, Steamed Rice, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Spaghetti with Meat Sauce, Broccoli, Sweet Potato Stir Fry, Fruit</td>
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<td>Secondary Second Choice: Tenasya Chicken Sandwich, Broccoli, Sweet Potato Stir Fry, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday, Jan. 27</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Pancakes with Syrup, Sausage, Fruit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Turkey and Gravy, Mashed Potatoes, Steamed Carrots, Whole Wheat Roll, Fruit</td>
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<td>Secondary Second Choice: Chicken Caesar, Garlic Bread, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Thursday, Jan. 28</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Fried Rice with Grilled Ham, Sausage, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lunch: Cheese Burger, Texas BBQ Beans, Fruit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Secondary Second Choice: Turkey and Spicy Mayo Sub Sandwich, Texas BBQ Beans, Fruit</td>
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<td><strong>Friday, Jan. 29</strong></td>
<td>Breakfast: Egg and Cheese Pandesal Sandwich, Fruit</td>
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<td>Lunch: Oven Fried Chicken &amp; Red Rice, Local Greens, Steamed Corn, Fruit</td>
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<td>Secondary Second Choice: Tuna Salad Sub with THE WORKS, Corn Salad, Fruit</td>
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