

PUBLIC EDUCATION MAKES
EVERYBODY COUNT

HEAD START SUCCESSFULLY
HOSTS KINDERGARTEN SUMMIT

NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY
INDUCTS NEW MEMBERS



February 2022

CNMI Public School System

STUDENTS FIRST

• Accountability • Responsibility • Transparency

Honoring Public School Counselors

In Recognizing Valuable Role of Technology, First Tranche of Laptops Arrives

5K laptops for all public middle, high school students
ready for distribution

Special Feature A Commitment to First-Rate Transportation Service

Either in darkness or daylight, stormy days or calm nights, on the islands' road and highways, the Office of Pupil Transportation of the Public School System safely transport thousands of kindergarten, elementary, middle, high school, special education and early intervention students to and from school each day.

They are the dedicated and committed bus drivers, conductors, mechanics and all other staff who make up the OPT.



SPECIAL FEATURE

A Commitment to First-Rate Transportation Service

THE hardworking men and women of the Office of Pupil Transportation are the dedicated few who start their day even before most timers on automatic coffeemakers turn on.

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from school each day.

They are the dedicated and committed bus drivers, conductors, mechanics and all other staff who make up the OPT.

While it is widely acknowledged that one of the dangers in every bus ride of every student is the loading and unloading procedure, the OPT staff are well-trained professionals that can handle all situations that will ensure maximum safety and protection for every child availing of the school district's transportation services.



Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada, BOE Chairman Gregory Pat Borja and Saipan Senator Vinnie Sablan joins district education leaders in celebrating with the OPT family on February 23, 2022.



OPT has done extensive classroom training and field training exercises on loading and unloading. While the classroom training provides them with useful information, it is the field training exercise providing drivers the opportunity to utilize what they have learned in the classroom.

The training includes simulation about conditions during loading and unloading using pupil transportation staff. Drivers are then evaluated on how well they did during this condition/scenario.

OPT continues to seek out available trainings to better improve services to its customers: public school students — the largest stakeholders.

OPT continue to partner with CNMI government agencies that includes the Department of Public Safety and CNMI Homeland Security, Commonwealth Office of Transit Administration, among others.

In addition to trainings, OPT has procedures to complement the trainings they received.

There are procedures on assigned seating and pre-deployment inspections conducted by mechanics. These procedures add more responsibility and are essential as the department continually strives to improve the overall safety of all passengers.

Assigned seating allows for greater accountability, faster loading times, and most importantly reduces the likelihood of bullying due to seating.

Many times these fine professionals go beyond what is expected of them.

An example is when they had to assess the roads leading to the homes of special needs students because of PSS' investment on OPT's Special Education busses/vans.

After completing the assessments, they immediately knew what to do to ensure transport service is availed by students-that no child is left behind.



Celebrating the Men and Women of the Office of Pupil Transportation

The school district's transportation professionals take their job seriously. To them there nothing that is more important than every child's safety.

On February 23, 2022 Board of Education Chairman Gregory Pat Borja declared the week of February 21 to 25, 2022 as Pupil Transportation Week. The proclamation honors the hardwork and dedication of Saipan, Tinian and Rota's Office of Pupil Transportation (OPT) personnel.

PSS leadership and key management led by Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada witnessed the proclamation which was held at the main transportation hub of OPT in Lower Base.

Paramount is Student Safety

BOE Chairman Borja praised the men and women of OPT for ensuring the continued safety of students.

"We want to thank all of our drivers because you all are professionals that most of our students see every day, making sure they all arrive safe to our schools; we also thank all of our

conductors for helping our students with special needs; our mechanics and dispatchers who ensures our busses runs and keep everyone on schedule, and of course administrative staff for making sure everything is well-coordinated," Chairman Borja said.

He added, "You all play an important role in all of our lives."

Commissioner of Education Dr. Ada the commitment, dedication and sacrifices of all OPT staff have never gone unnoticed.

"I don't think our students will be safe without all of you. I want you to know that we are truly thankful for playing a big part in the lives of our children in the commonwealth," Commissioner Ada said during his remarks.

"Our schools need you, our parents need you, this community needs you—and we are all here to support you."

Associate Commissioner for Administrative Service Eric Magofna hailed the OPT staff who carries "the most precious passengers" in our lives.



Well-trained professionals

While it is widely acknowledged that one of the dangers in every bus ride of every student is the loading and unloading procedure, the OPT staff are well-trained professionals that can handle all eventualities that will ensure maximum safety and protection for every child availing of the school district's transportation services.

PSS-OPT has invested towards the continued training and professional development of its transportation personnel. These include among others, bus-room management, loading and unloading procedures, First Aid and CPR, and Non-violent Crisis Intervention.



Going above and beyond

With the continued support of the Board of Education and our Commissioner of Education, OPT will continue to commit towards providing public school students with the safest, reliable transportation to and from school.

"Thank you drivers, conductors, mechanics and support staff for your hard work, dedication and service to our students," Associate Commisskojer for Adminsitratve Services Magofna said.



Tinian Elementary School and Tinian Junior Senior High School's OPT personnel are honored. They are joined by their school leadership and the school district leadership led by Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada.



The OPT team of Rota was honored by public education leaders, led by Board Member Herman Atalig, Dr. Rita H. Inos Jr. Sr. High School Principal D. Tanya King, Sinapalo Elementary School Principal Daisy Quitugua, Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services Eric Magofna, Head Start Director Lathania Angui and Special Education Director Donna Flores, among others.



At the Lower Base main OPT hub, licensed and highly-trained mechanics are hard at work.



At the onset of the pandemic, the OPT has ensured transporting students are designed to protect their health and wellbeing such as this seating arrangement in Rota.

Models of Responsibility: The Office of Pupil Transportation

THE CNMI Public School System believes in the power of individual efforts and why it is vital and essential to the collective success of the school district. The personnel – all highly-trained and skilled – of the Office of Pupil Transportation are continuously hailed for doing a little extra.

They go above and beyond of what is expected of them. They

took the extra mile to support student learning by ensuring that the most precious passengers they bring everyday to and from school are safe and secure.

Their acts are important ways that moved the school district forward in its quest to create learning opportunities to the over 10,000 public school students in the CNMI.



Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada, right standing, introduces the school district's OPT team.



The Special Education OPT team with Director Donna Flores and BOE Chairman Gregory Pat Borja.



Commissioner of Education Dr. Ada tours the OPT Lower Base facility with Chairman Borja, Board Secretary/Treasurer Maisie B. Tenorio, OPT's Oswald Quitugua and SARC Coordinator Bob Coldeen.



One of the newly acquired OPT service trucks.



The fleet of yellow buses ready to serve.

Honoring Public School Counselors

AS an institution of learning, the CNMI Public School System holds itself to a much higher standard/level of effectiveness for enhancing student learning.

This is reflected with initiatives that have been put in place to support and boost student achievement.

On February 4, the Board of Education through Chairman Gregory Pat Borja signed a proclamation honoring public school counselors by dedicating the week of February 7 to 11 in their honor. With the theme, "No Limits", a special ceremony was held at the Marianas High School cafeteria that brought together all of Saipan, Tinian and Rota's school counselors.

The school counselors were honored and praised by education leaders for their life-changing impact on every public school student.

Education Commissioner Dr. Alfred B. Ada said the PSS have

and will continue to give priority to investing on research-based and proven initiatives that are intervention-designed programs that improve outcome in classroom learning.

He added that the district continue to leverage our resources and investing them on strategies that "we believe that have effects on how our students perform in school and their success after high school."

"The school district continues to maintain a strong level of support to one aspect that help define and support our movement to improve public education in the commonwealth. It is our school counseling program and our school counselors," Commissioner Ada said in an interview with *Students First*.

He added, "They have a lot on their plates and the amount that counselors spend at their jobs. They are, like our teaching staff and school personnel, are responsible for helping to chart the future of our public school students on Saipan, Tinian and Rota."





In Recognizing Valuable Role of Technology, First Tranche of Laptops Arrives

5K laptops for all public middle, high school students ready for distribution

THE Public School System of the CNMI recognizes the key role that technology plays in the learning process and how it acts as a catalyst in the dissemination of information. Over a decade now, PSS continue to invest in technology—a proactive stance of ensuring that the public school students are not left behind when it comes to technology.

For this school year, the first tranche of laptops—five thousand in all – have arrived on February 20. This high-end brand new technology are ready to be distributed to all public middle and high school students on Saipan, Tinian and Rota.

This is funded fully by the federal government through the Education Stabilization Fund and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada told **Students First** in an interview.

“With the federal government supporting our classroom learning initiatives, it supports our focus in minimizing the gap (learning losses) as a result of the pandemic. We are going to make sure that every student gets one laptop and Wi-Fi (connectivity and access) so they can continue doing their work remotely,” Dr. Ada said.

The education chief revealed that on top of laptops, the school district would continue to invest Internet MIFIs for easy access and connectivity to all of the nearly 10,000 public elementary, middle

and high school students.

“When we are thinking about future-focused education (guided by the U.S. Dept. of Education’s direction to all of the nation’s school districts) that means that we, here in the CNMI, are also preparing our students with technology-based learning,” education chief Ada said.

Public middle and high school students are priority recipients of the laptops that are needed for their “research-to-learn” work/ curriculum.

The second batch of laptops and they will be for pre-Kindergarten and the elementary students.

Dr. Ada, along with PSS Federal Programs Officer Tim Thornburgh and Senior Director for Student Support Service Dr. Yvonne Pangelinan inspected the newly purchased brand new laptops last week in Lower Base.

“I would like to express our continued appreciation to the federal government for continuously supporting the learning of our students here in the CNMI,” adds Dr. Ada.

PSS was the first school district in the Pacific that invested in technology, through its One-Laptop Initiative that began in 2010.



NEW PARENT LEADERS

The Parent Advisory Council elected its new set of officers for 2022. Elected were John Oliver Gonzales (President); Dr. Rita H. Inos Jr. Sr. High School Counselor Elvira Mesngon (Vice President); Oleai Elementary School Vice Principal Alisa Pangelinan (Secretary), and Kiki Igitol (Treasurer). Gonzales succeeds Rob Harrell. The election was witnessed and facilitated by Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada, through Liela Yumul, interim family and community engagement program manager. Also in photo, among others, are Special Education Director Donna Flores, Human Resources Director Lucretia Deleon Guerrero, Student and Support Services Senior Director Dr. Yvonne Pangelinan, and Rep. Leila Staffler.

'Parents Empower School Communities'

Parent Advisory Council Elects New Officers

SINCE 2009, the role that parents play in their child's education has increased, reflecting the success of the work that Public School System leaders have put forward in bringing parental engagement and community involvement to the front seat.

In a close-knit community like the CNMI, activities put out by the school district further defines the role of parents on how they work with public schools in providing quality education to the islands' close to 10,000 public school student population.

The school district's interim Family and Community Engagement Program Manager Liela Yumul acknowledged that the role of parents had already grown over the years, and, today, it continues to empower school communities.

The role of parents is further amplified with the state Parent Advisory Council that pushes for increased school engagement with parents. PAC is the main organization of all school PTSAs. It serves as an advisory council to the Office of the Commissioner of Education.

And when the election of officers for the state-level Parent Advisory Council (PAC) took place on February, parent leaders, representing all 20 public elementary, middle and high schools in the CNMI, took time off from their work to participate.

Elected for the year 2022 were John Oliver Gonzales, president. He represents the Kagman public schools; Elvira Mesngon, vice president, representing Dr. Rita H. Inos Jr. Sr. High School; Alisa

Pangelinan, secretary, and the current vice principal of Oleai Elementary School, and Kiki Igitol Benjamin, treasurer, and representing Tanapag Middle School.

"Our CNMI PSS is exceptionally honored to welcome the incoming 2022 PAC officers," said Liela Yumul, interim Family and Community Engagement Program Manager for the school district.

The PAC officers serve as an integral part for the school district in serving as "the voice of our children and families", notes Yumul. Their role as parent leaders will also support the district in educating parents, providing them with a better understanding of the district's endeavors, policies and initiatives, and working towards building a positive relationship aimed at providing equal learning opportunities to all public school students.

At the same time, the school district praised the outgoing PAC officers for their commitment and dedication. The 2021 officers were led by then-President Robert Harrell.

"The CNMI PSS extends it sincere gratitude to the outgoing PAC officers for their invaluable contributions that helped steer our district into the many successes that it has achieved this past year," said Yumul, adding that the advocacy efforts of the past officers empowered families to get much-needed support from their respective schools.

The previous officers were Harrell, president and Benjamin DLG. Kennedy, secretary.

Head Start Successfully Hosts Kindergarten Summit



THE CNMI-PSS Head Start Program, in collaboration with the school district's Office of Curriculum and Instruction, has recently hosted a successful Kindergarten Summit aimed at reducing the gap in student learning.

"We collaborated and worked with our Kindergarten teachers from our receiving schools...with the key purposes of bringing in key stakeholders in early education," explains Lathania Angui, director of the CNMI-PSS Head Start Program.

The summit saw the participation of high school teachers and

staff, and Kindergarten teachers, administrative and support staff.

The training underscored the importance of a strong partnership between Head Start Program and local education agencies (LEAs).

"(We) communicate...together the importance of successful early transition experiences for children and to allow for high school and Kindergarten teachers an opportunity to share current transition practices and to align the high school and Kindergarten standards for better transition to lessen the gap between high school and Kindergarten," Director Angui added.





In Recognizing Academic Excellence & Leadership, National Honor Society Inducts New Members

BY all measure the National Honor Society continues to recognize outstanding students who have excelled in the areas of scholarship, leadership, service and character.

The largest and the most prominent academic-honor organization in the nation, the NHS has become a stepping stone for Saipan, Tinian and Rota Public School System students. Membership to this organization has become a parameter to early student success and after-high school success.

One of the public schools in the commonwealth that continue to embody these traits is Marianas High School, which is home to a large number of NHS members.

Recently some 20 MHS 'Dolphins' students were inducted into the NHS in a ceremony feting them the honor and for demonstrating academic excellence and active school and community involvement.

Throughout the years a big number of public high school graduates in the CNMI continue to reap success, and NHS membership has become an indicator of potential success in a student's life.

Not only that, the National Honor Society is also an active contributor to school and community events and functions.

At the Saipan World Resort induction, the NHS inductees were also

graced by the presence of federal magistrate for the NMI District Court Heather Kennedy, who was the keynote speaker.

Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada and Board of Education Secretary/Treasurer Maisie B. Tenorio joined Principal Jonathan Aguon, Vice Principal Melanie Rdiall and Preston Basa in honoring the NHS inductees.

The inductees portrayed the qualities that mirror NHS' four pillars – scholarship, leadership, service and character.



Sporting Events Promote Positive, Meaningful Opportunity

THE Public School System led by its Athletic Programs continue to promote interscholastic sport culture, affording public school students the opportunity to embrace friendly competitions and promote a healthy wellbeing essential to their learning success.

The support of the school district in the promotion of interscholastic sporting events has been the priority of the Office of the Commissioner of Education of the Public School System, saying that the positive impact of sport goes beyond the physical.

Recently, the Athletic Programs led by Director Nick Gross partnered with the Northern Mariana Islands Volleyball Association, and successfully held the Interscholastic Volleyball League 2021-2022.

"After months of cancellations and delays we're excited to finally get athletic programs back online! I'd like to thank the community and most especially the students, coaches, and officials for believing in the need to return to sports and following the updated safety protocols that have been put in place. With everyone's cooperation and adherence to the protocols I believe we can safely and successfully restart athletic programs for the students of the CNMI," Director Gross was quoted as saying.

The PSS-NMIVA interscholastic tournament attracted over 100 public and private middle school students throughout Saipan, Tinian and Rota. They were held at various locations – at Kobelville gymnasium, Marianas High School gymnasium and in Kagman.





From left, University of Hawaii-Manoa's Dr. George Hui, Dr. Alanna Tseng, and PhD student Annessa Golshan (virtually) provide a five-day hands-on science laboratory training-support at the Kagman High School laboratory to KHS teachers Jolene Aguon, Nicholas Brennfleck, and Tinian Jr. Sr. High School's Dr. Conrad Kiyoshi.

Leading edge Laboratory Training to Expand District's *Science* Laboratory Curriculum

THREE middle school science teachers – from Kagman High School and Tinian Junior Senior High School – have received a five-day intensive training from some of the region's leading figures behind successful research studies.

The science laboratory training was done in collaboration with the Pacific STEP-UP Program and the Public School System, through the district's Science Program, to give public schools' science

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Kagman High School, Tinian Jr. Sr. High School pioneers training
Goal is to encourage more teachers, students' interest in pursuing field

teachers the opportunity to be trained in laboratory techniques, and, eventually, encourage for more students and teachers to pursue the field.

The training was held at Kagman High School's laboratory with three middle school classroom science teachers as pioneer trainees. They are KHS teachers Jolene Aguon, Nicholas Brennfleck, and Tinian Jr. Sr. High School's Dr. Conrad Kiyoshi.

University of Hawaii-Manoa's Dr. George Hui, one of the leading figures in providing research training and mentoring to underrepresented minority and disadvantage high school students in Hawaii and the Pacific, through the Pacific STEP=UP Program, Dr. Alanna Tseng, and PhD student Annessa Golshan (virtually) provided five-day hands-on science laboratory training-support.

The PSS Science Coordinator Asapmar Ogumoro coordinated the teachers training and supported by Annette P. Sablan, because of her training on biomedical research

Need in the Classrooms

In an interview with *Students First*, Kagman High School biology teacher Jolene Aguon told Students first that the training was needed

"I expect to gain more skills to conduct different types of laboratory (techniques). Our students really need these labs to better understand learning in the classroom. Having this opportunity gives us more access... to future careers, to opportunities," Aguon explained.

The field of science deals more on investigative thinking, she said adding "laboratory work plays a big role on that. It gives you that hands-on experience."

"I am very honored and glad to be part of this training. To be able to give experience back to my students."

The 10th and 11th grade biology teacher said she looks forward that the school district will be able to attract more teachers and public schools that will offer science laboratory curriculum to students.

"I am really proud that KHS is helping pioneer this program. Hopefully, in the future we see more and more schools take on this

opportunities...to see more students interested in the STEM field especially science because that is what we really need," she added.

Building the Science-Lab Curriculum

Dr. Hui, in a separate interview with *Students First*, disclosed that they help PSS pioneer the science laboratory training with the long-term goal of assisting the school district build its curriculum in this specific field of discipline.

"What we want basically is to increase the ability of the teachers to enhance their curriculum. Currently, as I understand, the biology science curriculum is very limited in terms of how the students are able to have hands-on laboratory experience," Dr. Hui said.

He added, "What we want is for them to build up the curriculum for additional classroom/laboratory experience."

The University of Hawaii's Pacific STEP-UP Program, he said has brought in laboratory equipment to PSS and the Northern Marianas College, helping both institutions establish their respective laboratories for teacher-student training and learning.

"And now we try collaborate with PSS. Hopefully, this is the kind of pilot experiment that we would like to see our students earn hands-on experience, retain their techniques and eventually will have the interest in pursuing science," Dr. Hui said.

Dr. Hui said through their partnership with PSS, he hopes to see a long-term success of developing the science laboratory program with more science teachers expressing interest.

"At the end of the day, the teachers are going to be driving this—not us. And this only is going to work if their interest is continuing. Hopefully, we will succeed here if the words gets out that more science teachers in other school will want to build up their curriculum and bring it to other schools."

The training is an extension of the Pacific STEP-UP Program, which is a summer program for high school students to be engaged in depth research project.

The school district has been participating with the STEP-UP Program since 2010.



US Education Secretary Thanks Nation's Schools For Ensuring Continuity In Student Learning During Pandemic

US Secretary of Education Cardona Pleased with PSS Work



DURING the School Superintendents Association National Conference on Education in Nashville, Commissioner of Education Dr. Alfred B. Ada spoke with US Education Secretary Miguel Cardona, who praised the CNMI Public School System for its ongoing work in ensuring student learning continues during the pandemic.

Commissioner of Education Dr. Ada and Board of Education Vice Chairman Antonio Borja were among the nation's 200 education leaders that met with US Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona at the School Superintendents Association National Conference on Education in Nashville.

"I had a chance to meet the State Secretary of Education, Dr. Miguel Cardona. I introduced myself as the CNMI PSS Commissioner of Education and he mentioned that he is very pleased with the things we are doing with public education considering the pandemic situation," Commissioner Ada revealed how the nation's top education leader praised Saipan, Tinian and Rota's education leaders, classroom teachers, school leaders and staff, and stakeholders of public education

In the same conference, Commissioner Ada said Secretary Cardona

is very proud that all the schools remain open for all students.

"He believes in Public School Education and thanks everyone for helping out get through this storm," Dr. Ada told *Students First*.

In the CNMI, public elementary, middle and high schools have reopened on January 7, 2022—among the first in the nation to have successfully resumed in person learning.

In the conference, Secretary Cardona also spoke of the need to add learning loss and mental health issues as "priority issues".

The CNMI PSS has put in place initiatives to address learning loss and mental health issues and we are progressing, said Commissioner Ada. PSS, Dr. Sad said is fully equipped to provide support and address the emotional, psychological, academic needs of the nearly 10,000 students.

"We are in the right track and I am confident we will make it with everyone's support," said Dr. Ada