

CARE for a Standards-Based School System in Guam

By Juan Flores

The Guam Public School System (GPSS) is using the principles of Collaboration, Accountability, Results, and Excellence (CARE) to work toward being more of a standards-based school system aimed at meeting student-centered goals. The two main student-centered goals focus on ensuring that students graduating from high school are prepared to pursue post-secondary education or gainful employment in the community, and that there are effective transitions from one grade level to the next or from one school level to the next (elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school).

COLLABORATION comes in many forms and pairs the GPSS with different institutions and organizations. One of the most recent and exciting collaborative efforts has been with the University of Guam Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Services (CEDDERS) in applying for and securing more than \$9 million for the next 3 years for a Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant. The grant will fund efforts to revamp the certification and recertification requirements, develop a mentor program for new teachers, and enhance teachers' content knowledge and skills. The grant will also fund school-based activities for professional development for teachers and the enhancement of technology in the schools.

The Pacific Comprehensive Center (PCC) at PREL is supporting the efforts of the GPSS to develop and review standards for English language proficiency; work with the education departments in Hawai'i, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) to develop better English language learner assessments; and support standards-based activities in all schools. These activities follow discussions with U.S. Department of Education officials who are supporting systemic changes in various Pacific entities that will benefit and enhance effective teaching and learning. The changes and the collaborative efforts are all in support of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) initiative nationwide.

ACCOUNTABILITY is one significant area in which systemic change will bring about greater responsibility for effective teaching and learning and the support needed by classroom teachers, for whom professional development will be key in ensuring long-term effectiveness.

Certification and recertification standards are being reviewed, and the school principals are held accountable for teachers' effectiveness in the classroom. For the very first time, GPSS teachers will be applying and preparing evaluation materials for National Board certification. The

teachers will receive financial and logistical support to complete the various steps that compare lead to national certification.

The standards for principals, established by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), are guiding efforts to prepare principals to assume or keep school leadership positions. The leadership academies for school leaders focus on the ISLLC standards. They have already been critical in allowing principals to conduct midyear self-assessments, develop short-term goals, and articulate evidence demonstrating competence in each of the six standards.

Teachers in designated high-needs areas, allied health professionals, and teachers and administrators who have demonstrated that they have had significant impact on student learning will soon begin receiving monetary recognition as part of the Bonus, Rewards, and Incentives Programs developed by the GPSS. Evidence of qualifications in high-needs areas and appropriate documentation will lead to the distribution of thousands of dollars that will support the recruitment and retention of teachers who have and who will continue to make a difference in student achievement.

RESULTS in student achievement at each grade level and successful completion of requirements for high school graduation are uppermost on the list of priorities for all involved in the GPSS. Two major initiatives continue to be the reasons for increased student achievement, especially at the elementary school level. Participation in Success for All (1 school) and in Direct Instruction (24 elementary and 7 middle schools) provides the framework for effective teaching and learning and is leading efforts toward student proficiency in reading, language arts, and mathematics. For the first time in over 15 years, Guam's elementary school students have shown improvements in SAT 10 percentile



Photo by Ray Wong

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scores and in the percentage of students performing at the highest levels at each grade level.

As part of an overall effort to redesign high schools, teachers and administrators are reviewing and working toward developing programs that will target high school literacy efforts. Various scientifically research-based programs will be implemented in all four Guam high schools in the 2006–2007 school year.

The drive for EXCELLENCE is fueled by support for classroom teachers in the form of professional development, materials and supplies, ongoing assessments, and an accountability system. Those critical factors are visible in the Success for All and Direct Instruction programs, but have also been provided in preparing teachers to use the newly adopted mathematics textbooks in the 4th and 5th grades. Teachers, administrators, and families are finalizing School Improvement Plans that will target student achieve-

ment and will focus on best practices that will lead to progress in student achievement.

Beginning this spring, Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) consultants and coordinators will be spending time in all elementary schools observing classes, collecting curriculum materials, and organizing and analyzing assessment instruments and evidence of student achievement. At the end of the collection, organization, and analysis activities, the C&I staff will make recommendations for professional development activities that will enhance teachers' abilities to make sure all students learn; leave no child behind; provide a free and appropriate education; and, on Guam, ensure that every child is entitled to and receives an adequate public education.

There is no doubt the GPSS needs to continue to proceed with CARE when working toward being a standards-based school system. CARE has brought us along in the last 2.5 years and will continue to help us move ahead in the next 5 to 10 years.

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