

EDUCATION IN OUR SCHOOLS

PART I

Because of a recurring concern about the educational needs of Saipan's schools and an interest in school programs presently being offered, the Marianas Variety decided to interview the majority of the principals of the Saipan schools.

All information gathered for this investigative series is to focus the attention of the general public and responsible authorities on the views, opinions and ideas of those most familiar with the education presently being offered in the schools.

To obtain our information, we talked to the following school principals: Vic Cepeda of MHS, Justin Manglona at Hopwood, Sam Duval and Felix Cepeda at Chalan Kanoa, Danny Quitugua at Oleai, Moses Fejeran at San Vicente, Andrea C. Tenorio at Tanapag and David P. Babauta at San Roque.

The first part of this four-part series will discuss what is actually happening right now in the Saipan Elementary and secondary schools.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN OUR SCHOOLS?

The first question which we asked the principals dealt with how their schools are running at the present time.

MHS is experiencing many problems ranging from inadequate clerical assistance for maintaining smooth office functioning, overcrowding of classes and a poor selection of courses for the students to choose from, according to Mr. Cepeda.

Hopwood is operating in an average manner and meeting general expectations. They do have some drop out students and some disciplinary problems involving marijuana and smoking. Mr. Manglona stated that his vice principal and counselor were of great assistance in keeping the school functioning well.

Mr. Babauta at San Roque reports that generally school conditions are improving because of good community support.

Conditions at Tanapag are generally good, however, school is crowded because of a classroom shortage. In addition, there is no PE equipment available. Another problem facing Mrs. Tenorio, as principal at Tanapag, is an extreme shortage of water which forces school closures when adequate sanitary conditions cannot be maintained.

Mr. Fejeran at San Vicente feels that his school needs to be reorganized to meet its problems. A classroom shortage there requires seven grades to meet in four classrooms which creates hardships for teachers and students alike.

Oleai is running smoothly and substantial progress has been made since the implementation of the open classroom concept, according to its principal, Mr. D. Quitugua. Although the majority of students are adapting well to accepting the responsibility for learning on their own without constant supervision, some teacher attitudes need to be changed to provide the necessary supportive atmosphere required in an open classroom situation. Mr. Quitugua stressed that Oleai is an experimental school and several years are needed before its effectiveness can be fully determined.

Mr. Duval and Mr. Cepeda at Chalan Kanoa feel their school is running fairly well considering the existing staff, materials and funds available. Although they have been able to maintain the school this year, they are deeply worried about next year with high in-

flationary and shipping rates eating up their supply budget and if they loose more teachers.

The CK administration expressed a deep concern for the health and safety of their students and hope that positive steps will be taken in the areas of supervised crosswalks for their students and regulated vehicle speed in the vicinity of their school to prevent tragic accidents involving school children. Mr. Cepeda also mentioned that the CK sewage system backed up in their restrooms causing bad sanitary conditions.

Secondly, the principals were asked how well staffed their schools are.

Mrs. Tenorio reports that Tanapag is fortunate to have a complete and active staff. She does regret that there are some staff morale problems relating to the salary pay schedule.

San Roque is adequately staffed although they are short one teacher. The staff seems satisfied and Mr. Babauta does not anticipate any resignations.

Modular scheduling is a new concept being tried at Oleai. Mr. Quitugua explained that the school operates year round on a 75%-25% student occupancy rotated on a quarterly basis. This system minimizes the student-teacher ratio and keeps school facilities from becoming over crowded.

San Vicente is also fortunate to have a full staff of experienced teachers who are willing and capable of gathering materials and working independently, according to Mr. Fejeran. There is good staff morale and an excellent attendance rate at San Vicente.

A student-teacher ratio of 30-1 has been established for Chalan Kanoa. However, high teacher absenteeism and no replacements for teachers who resign wrecks havoc with the 30-1 figure. Lack of substitute teachers causes daily disruptions to shift students and furniture to cover for absent teachers. Both CK administrators feel Saipan needs much stricter attendance requirements for teachers and a pool of substitute teachers for the principals to draw on when they need them. They stated that three to five teachers are absent daily at CK. Mr. Cepeda stated that if their substitute problem is not solved, CK will have to return to double shifting even though they have adequate classroom space to operate on a full-day basis.

Teacher absenteeism is also a problem for Hopwood, according to Mr. Manglona. He does not know how to resolve the conflict between culturally necessary teacher absences with the school's need to have the teachers present and responsible for their students. He too feels that available substitutes are necessary to keep his school operating smoothly. Basically, teacher morale is good at Hopwood and most of the staff likes to teach there.

MHS is short nine teachers which is causing many difficulties for the existing staff and students. According to Mr. Cepeda, the staff is trying their best to keep the school running but overcrowded classes and few courses to choose from keep it from being a "good" situation. A full time counselor is also needed. MHS staff problems may be even worse next year if teacher resignations cause further vacancies. Mr. Cepeda admires his staff for volunteering to provide some PE instruction for the students.

Next week Part II of this series will deal with the relationship between the schools and District Education.

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