

FSM Comprehensive Vocational Strategy Plan To Improve Vocational Education and Skill Trainings

I. Summary

Pursuant to Part 2 (d) of the Special Terms and Conditions of the Education Sector Grant-FY 2008 (CSG-FSM-2008-EDU) Notification of Grant Award (NOGA) as awarded to the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia and the provisions of the Chief Executive Council's (CEC) Resolution #2008-02, the Department of Education was tasked to step up and improve the Vocational Education Programs in the nation to provide skilled manpower for the Infrastructure Projects in the nation and provide employment opportunities toward the Guam Military Build-up.

The said council, comprised of the President of the nation and the four respective governors of the FSM States, further approved in their communiqué the establishment of separate learning tracks for vocational education programs in the ECE-12 levels public schools. Essentially, the said department was directed to develop a comprehensive vocational education development plan to address the workforce development needs of the nation and aligning the high school vocational education curriculums with those at the nation's single college, COM-FSM.

Presently, there are vocational education elective courses at the (29) high schools throughout the nation at various levels of existence and some have been closed down temporarily due to lack of financial and/or human resources. Vocational Education Programs at the high schools provide both theoretical and practical applications of vocational skills in basic carpentry, mechanic, agriculture, home arts/economics, seamstress and a handful of traditional life-skills like handicrafts, navigation, weavings and canoe-buildings. They are usually funded through the Vocational Education Improvement Program (VEIP) under the Supplemental Educational Grant (SEG) provisions of the Compact, as amended.

High school students are normally required to select a vocational course at entry level in freshmen and pursue that course to the senior level primarily for vocational credits required for graduation, but not necessarily toward building a

life career to be pursued at higher levels at any institute of higher education (IHE). Under the direction of the former Department of Health, Education & Social Affairs, the former Office of Vocational and Manpower Development was tasked to develop a curriculum standard to formalize Vocational Education at the high schools under the SEG toward improving and providing skilled workforce in the nation. Part 2 (d) of the FY 2008 Compact Sector grant and CEC Resolution #2008-02 takes this vocation education improvement endeavors to the next level by linking vocational trainings (both formal and informal) in the nation to the Guam Military Build-up and endorsing a separate learning tracts for the Vocational Education Programs, allowing high schools to graduate seniors in vocational fields and which, in retrospect, would appropriately complement the Build-Up and the implementation of the aforesaid vocational curriculum standard targeting ECE-12 grade levels. A Career & Technology Education (CTE) curriculum standard was introduced and distributed during the 2009 Micronesian Teachers & Education Conference (MTEC), however its implementation at the ECE-12 schools was delayed due to the retirement of the Chief of Division of Career and Technology Education and consequently the transferring of the Trades, Training and Testing (T-3) Programs to the States' DOEs.

II. Background

The FSM is made up of 607 islands that extend 2,900 kilometers over approximately 2.5 million square kilometers of ocean but with a total land mass of only 702 square kilometers. A growth rate of 3% was recorded in the 70s to the 80s and is believed to have declined gradually in the 90s at less than 1% rate annually. According to a 2006 census, the FSM has a population of 108,004. Declining fertility and step-up emigration are believed to be contributive factors to the declining growth rate in the FSM. The FSM has one of the youngest populations in the Pacific regions, with more than fifty percent (50%) is within the ages of 0 year to 21 years. The unemployment rate in the FSM was record high in the 2000s at 31 % according to one FSM economist source, with many people still live on subsistent living sub-standards. They live off the land and the ocean surrounding their islands.

English is the language of instruction in both classrooms and in public places. It is considered as a second or even a third language for nearly all ECE-12 students and 90% of the general public. There are about nine (9) different distinct major languages in Micronesia with various dialects. Each language and/or dialect is

corresponds with a different traditional culture, although there is evidence of mixtures of both languages and cultures across borders and family ties. Micronesians still practice their languages and traditional cultures; however there are concerns toward the erosions of both in this modern time.

For decades Vocational Education in the secondary schools was treated as an elective course for freshmen to senior levels and exceptionally skillful graduates are awarded only with special certificates. The students, parents and their communities considered vocational education as secondary to academic based education. Clearly, the public had stereo-typed vocational education for less proficient and less competent students, hence discouraging young students to pursue vocational careers. In the past, vocational trainings were limited to general mechanics, carpentry, electricity, and welding for the male students and home economics, seamstress and weavings for the females.

The close-down of the only private vocational base school in the FSM, Pohnpei Agriculture & Trades School (PATS), inevitably affected the levels of graduating high school students ready for employment right after graduation. Generally, PATS had been providing skilled young people who immediately were streamlined into many vocational jobs throughout the Micronesian regions which include Palau, Northern Marianas, FSM states (Chuuk, Pohnpei, Yap and Kosrae), the Marshall Islands, Kiribati and Nauru. A handful of graduates proceeded to institutes of higher education on Guam, Hawaii and even to the US mainland. It is evident today that many skilled graduates that headed many prestigious positions in the private and public sectors were trained at PATS. Shortly before it closed down, PATS enrolled female students, while its sister vocational school, the OLMS Village Girls School, provided lessons on sewing, cooking, home gardening and basic skill training in general math and basic ESL English language for 'dropout' girls.

It is a sad reality today that many of FSM young adults and older between the ages of 16 yrs –to- 25 yrs are considered as functionally illiterate by the universal standards. Large segment of this populace is school “dropouts” or forced out students who failed exit examinations at 8th grade levels and those not passing to go on to college or dropped out of high schools. For each group of freshmen entering high schools, only an average of 30% ever reached graduation years. There are no meaningful intervention programs or “second chances” programs to keep these young students in school or to offer them alternative options in job

placements or meaningful self-employment opportunities. Whatever programs that may have existed, according to ADB report in the 90s, are usually sporadic in number and often too insignificant to create an impact among these students turned unemployed and unproductive members of society.

In the 80s, as a response to this socio-economic issue, the FSM adopted the ILO's principle on providing trades, training and testing services to the less fortunate youths who were dropped out of school, offering reliable/practical vocational skills in basic mechanic, carpentry, electricity, welding and general repairs of household appliances and fixtures. The program, popularly known as T3 Program (tee-three), has been training dropout students ever since the 80s, and in about two decades has turned out over 4,039 skillful youths in the aforementioned fields. In mid-90's, T3 became involved in servicing high schools, offering vocational related courses, until the present time. The T3 has worked cooperatively and collaboratively with the high schools and the COM-FSM Vocational Education Programs, especially in the areas of vocational certification. As an initiative measure, the T3 expanded their training services to include what they called the Community Outreach Program that offered training to the general public in small engine repair and maintenance, sewing machine repair and maintenance, solar-power energy and general repair of small appliances. The program also offers night classes on electrical, mechanical and construction to private and government employees who wish to upgrade their skills in the technical fields. Many of the T-3 Program graduates are working at the Pohnpei Transportation Authority (PTA), Pohnpei Utility Corp, Kosrae Public Works, private repair shops and contractors and at various utility agencies throughout the FSM, and even migrated to Guam, Hawaii and US mainland in search of jobs.

In light of the advancements of technology, innovative engineering and the global market drives in general, the FSM's public's perceptions have changed significantly toward vocational careers. Two strong indications are the stated CEC Resolution #2008-02 and the JEMCO's grant condition, Part 2(d) of Compact grant, CSG-FSM-2008-EDU, both of which urged the National Department of Education to immediately formalize and step up the Vocational training in the nation in response to the needed skilled workforce internally at the anticipated Infrastructure Projects and externally at the Guam military buildup. This FSM Comprehensive Vocational Development Plan lays out the general strategies and the implementation measures based on the nation's Strategic Development Plan

goals, with the approximate cost activities and breakdowns to be executed to improve vocational training and provide the manpower needs of the nation.

III. Proposed Strategies

The National Department of Education proposes the following program development and implementation strategies to ensure accesses to Vocational Education Improvement Programs in the nation and further fulfill its Compact grant conditions in accordance with the Resolution JEMCO # 2010-6:

Strategy No. 1

The National Department of Education shall develop and adopt a national policy on vocational education, mandating the improvement of the States' Vocational Education Improvement Programs.

Action Steps:

- 1) Adopts a national policy on Vocational Education pursuant to provisions of Title 40 of the FSM Code and Resolution JEMCO # 2010-6.
- 2) Distributes copies of adopted national policy to the four (4) FSM States and to the College of Micronesia-FSM.

Strategy No. 2

The National Department of Education shall publish a publication on Vocational Education and distributes (500 copies) to the (29) high schools in the nation.

Action Steps:

- 1) Develop a publication on Vocational Education.
- 2) Distributes 500 copies to the (29) high schools.

Strategy No. 3

The National Department of Education shall develop a database system and incorporates it into its FSM Education Information Management System.

Action Steps:

- 1) Develops a database system for the Vocational Education Programs;
- 2) Develops a quarterly progress report format and distributes to the (29) high schools for their reporting uses.

Strategy No. 4

The National Department of Education shall develop a monitoring and evaluation system for the Vocational Education Programs and distributes (25) copies to the (4) States' DOEs and the (29) high schools.

Action Steps:

- 1) Develop a monitoring and evaluation system for the Vocational Education Programs.
- 2) Distributes (25) copies to the four (4) States' DOEs and the (29) high schools.

Strategy No. 5

The National Department of Education shall require the States' DOE to improve their T-3 Programs to provide vocational skill trainings for "push-out" and "dropout" high-school age youths in the nation to increase the skilled workforce.

Action Steps:

- 1) Provide technical supports to the States' DOE in developing and implementing their T-3 Programs.
- 2) Monitor and evaluate the progresses of the States' DOEs T-3 Programs.

IV. Strategic Implementation

The National Department of Education (NDOE) shall publish and distribute copies of its FSM Comprehensive Vocational Strategy Plan to the four (4) States' DOEs and the College of Micronesia-FSM to be used as strategic framework to guide the development and improvements of their Vocational Education Improvement Program (VEIP) and their T-3 Programs to provide skilled workforce for the nation and toward the Guam Military Build-up. The NDOE shall further enforce the application of its Career & Technology Education curriculum standards at the ECE-12 schools and monitor the States' VEIP and T-3 Programs. The NDOE shall develop a series of vocational aptitude tests to measure the performance levels of students at the 4th, 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th grades.