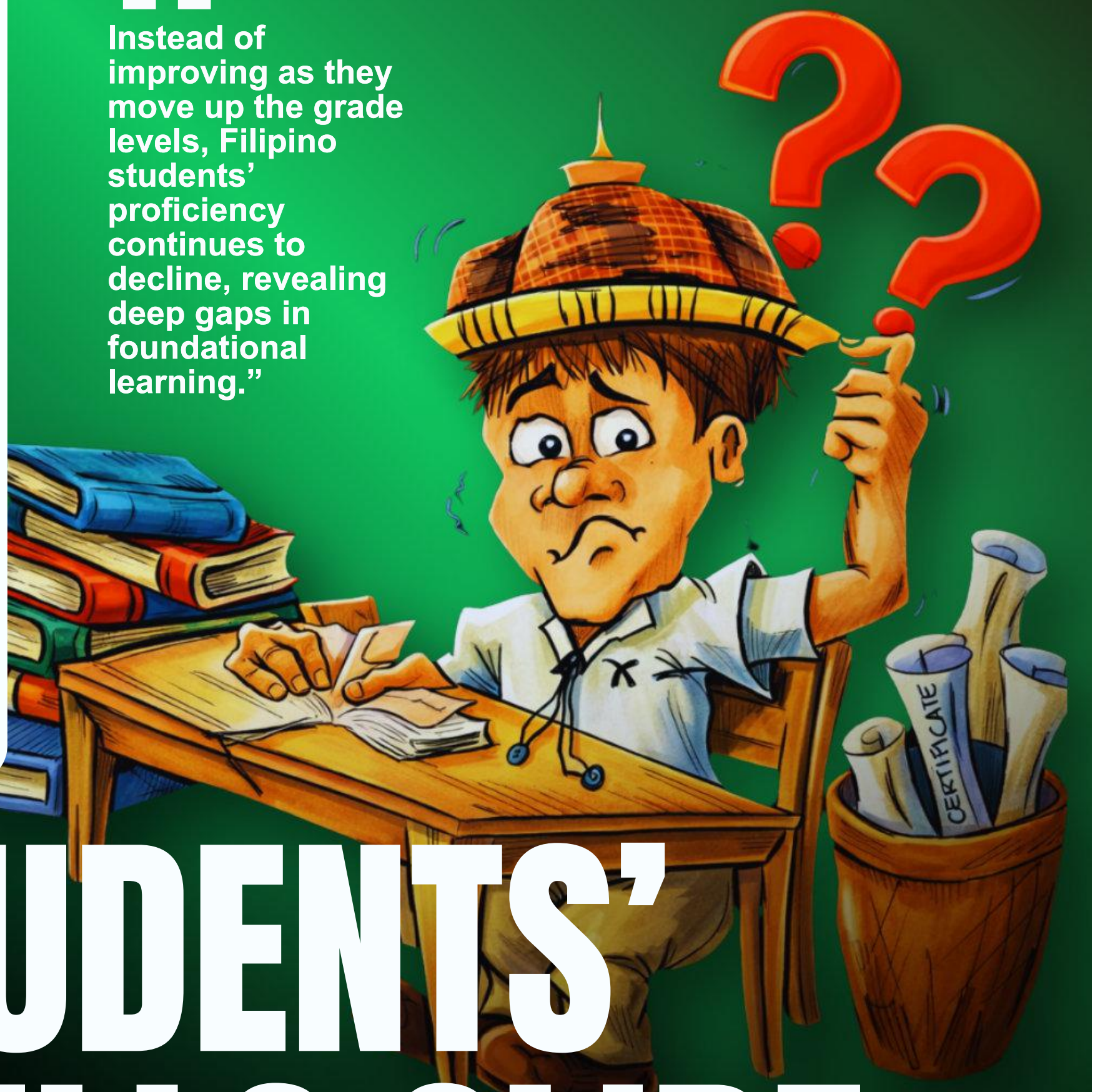
the CONNERSIAN
THE OFFICIAL ENGLISH PUBLICATION OF CONNER CENTRAL NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL
VOLUME II ISSUE NO. 1 | JUNE 2025 - JANUARY 2026

“Instead of improving as they move up the grade levels, Filipino students’ proficiency continues to decline, revealing deep gaps in foundational learning.”



STUDENTS’ SKILLS SLIDE

Filipino students' proficiency drops sharply by SHS-EDCOM 2

Raquel Balauro

Proficiency rates of Filipino students show a continued alarming decline from early grades to senior high school, according to the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2) on Jan. 16, 2026.

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THE OFFICIAL RNGLISH PUBLICATION OF
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the themisian

For the new breed

CCNHS conducts campus journ training;

Next-gen scribes undergo intensive workshop

Hyatt Dawanis

The Themisian and Ang Aguhon launched 2025 Campus Journalism Training Workshop for Student-scribes, Coaches and School Paper Advisers on the 24-25th of November and 1st of December with the theme"Truth, Tech and Responsibility: Empowering New Gen Journalists."

The three-day event featured training sessions led by experienced former and current campus journalists.

The SPAs (School Paper Advisers) played a crucial role in hosting the event, welcoming guests and participants, and ensuring the smooth execution of the program.

Marife Tagudan, a Junior High School Filipino teacher, led a solemn prayer to commence the workshop.

To energize the young journalists, SPA Angela S. Accad conducted a fun and engaging energizer session.

The games, "Guess the Word" and "Color Game," were designed to illustrate how messages, like news, can be distorted and susceptible to alterations or misconceptions.

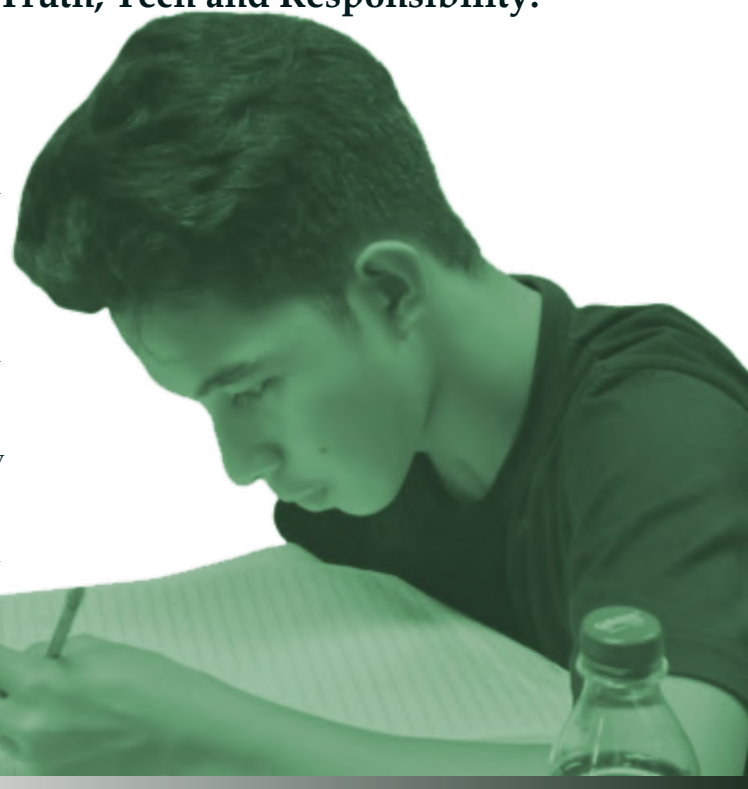
Experienced journalists and adjudicators shared their achievements in various categories, highlighting their successes at the Division, Regional, and even National Schools Press Conferences. Florante Tagudan covered topics such as Sports Writing, Copy Reading and Headline Writing, News Writing, and Editorial Cartooning.

Amir Aquino, a Northern Bulletin columnist, shared his creative process for Editorial, Column, and Feature Writing, offering insights that have earned him accolades in these sections.

Lovely Nieva Asuncion, a former National qualifier and winner, provided valuable insights into Science & Technology Writing.

Mary Kristine V. Dela Cruz, a winning coach and current school paper adviser of Lycean Illuminator, drew upon her experience in journalistic writing to lead sessions on Copy Reading and Headline Writing, and News Writing.

This event marks the conclusion of the three-day sessions for the 2025 Campus Journalism Training Workshop, with additional drills scheduled in the coming weeks.



Ready, Set, Write. The Themisian and Ang Aguhon kick off training to empower the next generation of student journalists, (with the theme "Truth, Tech and Responsibility: Empowering New Gen Journalists"), November, 24-25, December 1 2026.

CCNHS SHS Entrant in Project RISE, wins 1st place

Rexlyn Boawey

Conner Central National High School (CCNHS) takes pride as Girlie P. Sibal, grade 12 STEM student bags 1st runner up in the Division SCI-MATH Fair held at Flora National High School last October 7, 2025.

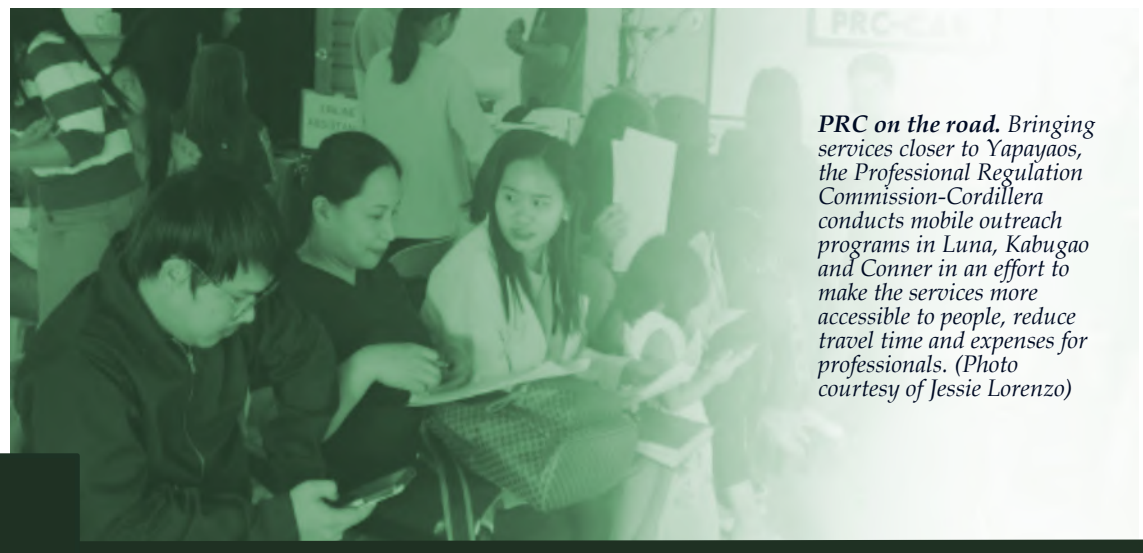
Sibal, as one of the strong contenders representing Northern Conner Apayao competed on the said Division SCI-MATH Fair along with seven contingents coming from other municipalities in the province of Apayao.

The official theme for the Division SCI-MATH Fair 2025 was "Towards A Shared Vision: Exploring The Future For A Better Tomorrow". Sibal was coached by Nedie Coloma, science teacher and master teacher II.

"I didn't expect myself to win because I was full of doubt, and I had lots of ups and downs, late night breakdowns and lack of sleep but by the grace of God and with the help of my coach and adviser, nairaos ko naman. I know I did my best."

Sibal also gave thanks to her biggest inspi - her family, for their love and support, and to her research adviser, Clyde Ramos, for her guidance and support throughout her preparation for the competition.

Though the preparation wasn't easy, Sibal had faith and determination that led her through victory.



PRC on the road. *Bringing services closer to Yapayaos, the Professional Regulation Commission-Cordillera conducts mobile outreach programs in Luna, Kabugao and Conner in an effort to make the services more accessible to people, reduce travel time and expenses for professionals. (Photo courtesy of Jessie Lorenzo)*

Next stop

PRC-CAR brings services to Apayao

Khaiza Claire Pudoc

The Professional Regulation Commission-Cordillera Administrative Region (PRC-CAR) recently brought its services directly to the people of Apayao through a mobile outreach program held from January 21 to 23, 2026.

The event was a collaboration with the Provincial Government of Apayao and the municipalities of Luna, Kabugao, and Conner.

The outreach kicked off in Luna on January 21 at Aliwa Gym, followed by Kabugao at the Escudero Building on January 22, and wrapped up in Conner at the PAD Gymnasium on January 23.

Services offered included licensure exam applications, Professional ID renewals, exam registration, document certification, and more.

Teachers from Conner Central National High School and other professionals in the opportunity.

The event aimed to make PRC services more accessible to Apayao's professionals.

The initiative highlighted the strong partnership between local government units and the PRC in bringing essential services closer to professionals in remote communities.

By conducting the outreach across multiple municipalities, the program reduced travel burdens and ensured more inclusive access to government services for Apayao's workforce.

Mayor Bayaua takes a stand: LGU-Conner enforces new Local Ordinances

Raquel Balauro

The Local Government Unit of Conner under the leadership of Mayor Jorico F. Bayaua approved and signed new municipal ordinances focusing on education assistance, public safety, and good governance.

Under Municipal Ordinance No. 159, series of 2025, authored by Hon. Martina W. Dangoy and approved by Mayor Bayaua on January 8, 2026, the Conner Educational Assistance Program (CEAP) was enhanced to provide more support to students at different levels of education.

Senior High School students will now receive ₱5,000 per academic year or ₱2,500 per semester, an increase from the previous ₱4,000 annually. College students will receive ₱5,000 per semester, with a total of ₱10,000 per academic year. Postgraduate students, specifically those enrolled in Juris Doctor and Veterinary Medicine, will receive ₱15,000 per semester.

Since the cash assistance has increased, the program will now operate on a first-come, first-served basis.

In line with improving local services, Municipal Ordinance No. 165, series of 2025, authored by Hon. Lloyd S. Gannaban and approved by Vice Mayor Alexander Aswigue on January 16, 2026, addresses the fare matrix, ensuring fair and regulated transport fees for the community.

Furthermore, individuals who bring pride to Conner, such as graduates with Latin Honors will also receive recognition and rewards under Municipal Order No. 143, series of 2024, authored by Hon. Montes Moyaen and approved by Mayor Bayaua on January 19, 2024.

With proper implementation of these ordinances, Conner can support its people and move closer to a better Conner.



STEPS UP. Mayor Jorico F. Bayaua signs new local ordinances for LGU-Conner, expanding education assistance, regulating transport fares, and recognizing outstanding graduates to boost community welfare and good governance. (Photo credits to LGU-Conner Public Information Office)

Breaking barriers

CCNHS Pioneers Digital Shift with SIAS Training

Janzen Perez

To capacitate faculty digital skills, Conner Central National High School (CCNHS) took a significant leap forward in modernizing its academic operations with a two-day faculty training on the Student Information and Accounting System (SIAS) on September 11-12, 2025.

Organized in collaboration with the Schools Division of Apayao (SDO-Apayao), the training aimed to equip faculty members with the necessary digital skills to navigate the newly adopted SIAS.

The system promises to streamline grade submission, attendance tracking, and student record management, freeing up educators to focus on what matters most - student instruction and mentoring.

"The introduced system will revolutionize how faculty interact with student data and administrative tasks," said Roselyn F. Alumit, resource person and Senior High School teacher.

CCNHS is the first school in both Southern and Northern Conner Districts to adopt SIAS, showcasing its commitment to technological advancement in education.

The school's initiative is expected to set a precedent for other schools in the region to follow suit.

from page 1

EDCOM 2 reported that as students progress to higher grade levels, their proficiency rates do not improve but instead decline further.

According to EDCOM 2's analysis using DepEd data from 2023 to 2025, 70% of Grade 3 pupils struggle with foundational skills like reading, understanding short texts, and simple math.

In the 2024 Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Assessment, only 30.52% of Grade 3 learners were "proficient" or "highly proficient".

By Grade 6, this percentage dropped to 19.56% based on the National Achievement Test, meaning only one in five students is considered "proficient".

In high school, the results worsened: only 1.36% of Grade 10 students were "at least proficient" (14 out of 1,000 students), and only 0.4% of Grade 12 students were "at least proficient" (4 out of 1,000 students).

EDCOM 2 attributes this decline to students not mastering foundational competencies early on.

About half couldn't read at grade level by Grade 3, causing a 5.5-year learning gap by age 15.

"This is a big challenge we are facing. Many students graduate without acquiring the competencies they should have," said EDCOM II Executive Director Karol Mark Yee.

Meanwhile, The DepEd uses a 75% passing mark for "proficiency". But a study suggests this might be too high, as more students would be classified as not meeting standards using standard-setting methods.



REMINDER. MARIO E. TAWAC, school head of CCNHS reminds every parent and the students to give importance to reading and learning so that problems on low comprehension in the country will be lessen, at least in Conner.

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the themisian

Apayao honors 18 new lawyers;
8 YConnerians nail 2025 Bar Exams

Hyatt Dawanis

The municipality of Conner extends its warmest congratulations to its personnel and people who successfully passed the 2025 Bar Examinations, the results of which were officially released by the Supreme Court on January 7, 2026.

This year's Bar Examinations, widely regarded as one of the most difficult exams in the country, saw a total of 5,594 examinees pass out of 11,420 who completed all three exam days, resulting in a 48.98% national passing rate.

18 Yapayaos are among the 5,594 nationwide who have successfully passed the 2025 Bar Examinations, and are set to take their oath as new lawyers on February 6, 2026 at the Philippine Arena.

Of the 18 passers, 1 is from Sta. Marcela, 1 from Calanasan, 2 from Luna, 3 from Kabugao, and 4 from Flora. While a total of 8 individuals from across the municipality of Conner joined this year's list of Bar passers are; Atty. Maika Jereza Lacuesta, Atty. Jade Mark Aoen, Atty. Shiela Mae Baguec, Atty. Marjorie Longid, Atty. Lara Faith Gannaban, Atty. Sheldon Baddongon, Atty. Roderick Tamacay, and Atty. Joshuarus Favor.

Atty. Jade Mark Aoen, Conner Central National High School alumus, said his decision to take the Bar was inspired by his firsthand experience in public service and his aspiration to protect people's rights and welfare.

Atty. Mayor Jorico Bayaua expressed pride in the accomplishment of the Yconnerians Bar passers, noting the difficulty of the exams and the challenges of balancing duty with academic pursuit.

"This is a proud moment for the entire Conner. Passing the Bar is no small feat—it demands years of sacrifice, focus, and determination. That our people were able to do this while serving the public makes their achievement even more meaningful," Mayor Bayaua said.

He underscored how the achievement of the new lawyers reflects well on the municipality's ongoing reform and professionalization efforts, especially in upholding due process, human rights, and justice.

Atty. Mayor Bayaua also encouraged learners and other professionals to pursue continuous education and self-improvement.

The LGU of Conner said the success of its people reflects the municipality's culture of excellence and commitment to building a competent, ethical, and responsive bureaucracy.

Sandex Gavin, Apayao's 1st Mainstream TV series actor

Janzen Perez

Sandex Gavin has etched his name in history as the first Apayao native to secure a regular role in a mainstream television series as Phoenix Strife in the live-action adaptation of the bestselling Wattpad novel "My Husband Is a Mafia Boss," a story that has amassed over 218 million reads since its 2012 debut by the late author Diana Marie Serrato Maranan.

Before stepping onto the small screen, Gavin built a reputation as a vocalist and broke new ground as the first yApayao contestant on "It's Showtime's" Tawag ng Tanghalan.

He later appeared on GMA Network's variety show "TiktoClock," sharpening his on-camera presence. His career pivot accelerated after joining a Baguio-based talent agency that mentors Cordilleran artists, leading to his scouting and subsequent signing with Viva Artists Agency in 2024.

In September 2025, Gavin added another feather to his cap by composing and performing the official Miss Baguio theme song. Now, he takes on the role of Phoenix Strife in the highly anticipated series, marking his first full-length television appearance.

While the original novel sees Phoenix die early, hints of a plot twist emerged when Gavin commented on the series' official page on January 9, 2026, writing, "Phoenix Strife is alive," sparking speculation among fans.

"Abangan niyo po ako bilang si Phoenix Strife. Be part of the gang in My Husband Is a Mafia Boss, written by Yanalovesyouu and directed by Fifth Solomon," Gavin posted on social media, inviting viewers to follow his journey.

His breakthrough has been celebrated across the Cordillera, with fellow Apayao residents hailing him as a source of regional pride. The achievement underscores the growing visibility of provincial talent in Philippine mainstream entertainment and highlights the untapped creative potential from the country's remote areas.

From humble beginnings far from cameras and city lights, Sandex Gavin's rise signals a new chapter for Apayao, proving that talent from the periphery can shine on the national stage.

11 Teachers at CCNHS earn new posts thru ECP; Cordilleran educator-promotees take oath

Khaiza Claire Pudoc



CHALKED UP. 11 CCNHS teachers secure promotions under the ECP, taking their region-wide virtual mass oathtaking ceremony on January 5, 2026 along with the other newly promoted educators from Schools Division Office of Mountain Province and Benguet.

Under the leadership of Regional Director Estela P. Leon-Cariño, a virtual and face-to-face Mass Oath-Taking Ceremony for newly promoted Cordilleran teachers took place at the Benguet Sports Complex Gym, La Trinidad, Benguet, on January 5, 2026.

The event was attended by 1,933 promoted teachers from Schools Division Office (SDO) Benguet in person, while 1,263 teachers from the Schools Division Office of Mountain Province and 679 teachers from SDO Apayao participated virtually, underscoring the region-wide impact of the Expanded Career Progression (ECP) initiative.

Through the ECP, teachers were promoted to higher positions, including Teacher 4 to 7, Master Teacher 1 to 4, and Principal 1 to 4.

These promotions recognize the hard work and dedication of teachers in teaching and supporting their schools' missions, goals, and objectives to better serve the Filipino people.

The ECP also demonstrates a commitment to strengthening the teaching workforce through merit- and competency-based career advancement, aligning with President Marcos's message that no teacher should retire as Teacher I.

Notably, eleven teachers from Conner Central National High School (CCNHS) have also benefited from the ECP, with these 11 educators representing a significant portion of the 679 teachers from SDO Apayao who took the oath.

Guided by a call to accountability and service, the newly promoted teachers are now stepping forward with renewed purpose – to serve, to lead, and to continue shaping the future of every learner.

CCNHS Rallies Community Support for ARAL Program Launch



ARAL for ALL. CCNHS mobilizes educators, parents, and stakeholders for the ARAL Program launch, October 20, 2025, to support learners' academic recovery.

Britz Dela Cruz

Conner Central National High School (CCNHS) ignited a community-wide commitment to academic recovery with the launch of its Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program on October 20, 2025.

The initiative, designed to bolster struggling learners, was unveiled at a conference held at the Teen Center, uniting educators from both the Northern and Southern Conner Districts.

The launch event drew a diverse audience, including parents, dedicated teacher-tutors, and key stakeholders, all of whom voiced enthusiastic support for the learning-intervention program.

The program's objectives and scope were thoroughly presented, followed by introductions of the teacher-tutors and the students poised to benefit.

The participating districts reaffirmed their commitment, underscoring the collaborative spirit essential for the program's success.

"The ARAL program is a lifeline for learners facing academic hurdles, particularly in reading," emphasized School Principal Mario E. Tawac in his opening remarks.

"Our goal is to ensure every student achieves grade-level expectations."

Assistant Schools Division Superintendent Jerry B. Sario Jr. provided a comprehensive program overview, while CCNHS ARAL Coordinator Roxan B. Follo detailed the program's implementation strategy within CCNHS and partner schools.

The approach combines structured tutorial sessions, active parent-guardian engagement at home, and continuous monitoring of student progress.

Parents and guardians were urged to actively participate in their children's learning journey by monitoring tutorial sessions, maintaining open communication with tutors, and fostering a supportive home environment.

Tutors left the event with a strengthened dedication to providing personalized, student-centered instruction.

Key stakeholders, including Municipal Administrator Dahlia Casuple, LNB Chair Roger Canipas, GPTA President Albert Bacuyag, and Barangay Captain of Ripang, Richard Sibal, pledged their unwavering support.

They emphasized that the ARAL program's success hinges on a strong partnership between the school, families, and the broader community.

Public Schools District Supervisors (PSDS) from both NCD and SCD were also present, signaling the districts' unified commitment to the initiative.

The ARAL program is grounded in Republic Act No. 12028, which mandates the Department of Education (DepEd) to ensure accessible, quality education for all and to provide targeted support for struggling learners.

The law establishes a free national learning-intervention program to help students below minimum proficiency levels in reading achieve the competencies set by the DepEd.

As CCNHS embarks on this vital endeavor, the school leadership, along with ARAL tutors Rhea Wanawan, Marife Sanoy, Gracelyn Besyaken, Annie Agcon, and Roxan Follo, are calling on all stakeholders – parents, tutors, the community, and the learners themselves – to unite and ensure that no student is left behind.

3 NCD SH schools notch performers in Grade 12 NAT; CCNHS ranks 5th

Raquel Balauro

Northern Conner District swept the top spots in the recent National Achievement Test (NAT) for Grade 12, with three of its Senior High Schools emerging as the best performers among 31 schools in the province of Apayao for the school year 2023-2024.

The NAT is a standardized set of examinations taken in the Philippines by students in Grades 3, 6, 10 to 12, designed to determine learners' academic levels, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as their knowledge learned in major subjects throughout the year.

Out of 1,611,809 total examinees in the entire Cordillera Administrative Region, 1,928 were from the Province of Apayao.

Talifugo NHS secured 1st place with 33 examinees, achieving an overall Mean Percentage Score (MPS) of 57.62. Ili NHS bagged 4th place with 67 test-takers, posting an overall MPS of 50.61.

Conner Central National High School, one of the largest and most populous schools, grabbed the 5th spot with 117 examinees, achieving an overall MPS of 50.34.

Meanwhile, Cupis NHS, also from the Northern Conner District, claimed 14th place. Southern Conner District's Senior High Schools belonged to the top 20, particularly Conner NHS, which ranked 8th with 68 examinees, and Governor BLMNHS, which placed 16th.

The Harbinger of Truth, Justice and Freedom



THE MATATAG MYTH

the themisian
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When the Matatag is "di matatag" at all.

The irony is hard to miss. A structure christened Matatag, a word that connotes strength, stability, and resilience—now stands as a symbol of the very opposite. Cracks in its foundation, and the constant chorus of complaints from its occupants reveal a truth that no branding exercise can conceal: the Matatag Building is not matatag at all.

How can a building claim resilience when its walls tremble under the slightest pressure? How can it stand for stability when its tenants live in fear of collapse? This is not just about poor construction; it is about betrayal.

Officials who approved it, contractors who cut corners, inspectors who looked away: all must answer. Public funds were poured into a project that cannot even uphold the dignity of its name. To call it Matatag is to mock the very people who depend on it.

The cost of this failure is measured not only in wasted funds but in the erosion of confidence. We deserve infrastructure that is worthy of our taxes, worthy of our trust, and worthy of the name matatag. What they have been given instead is a cautionary tale of negligence.

Patching the cracks? It is a cosmetic fix, a band aid on a festering wound. It only hides the deeper rot that continues to weaken the foundation, the beams, and the very system that allowed such a flawed structure to rise in the first place. Every patch is a cover up, not a cure. It is a deliberate attempt to mask negligence, to pretend that stability exists where in truth there is only fragility. The cracks are not the problem, they are the symptom. The real disease lies in the culture of shortcuts, the corruption of oversight, and the betrayal of accountability.

Therefore, we cannot allow this to pass as just another failed project. Accountability must be demanded, transparency must be enforced, and consequences must be real.

We must insist on answers, demand reforms in procurement and inspection, and refuse to accept slogans in place of substance.

The Matatag building is not matatag but our resolve must be. Let this failure be the turning point where we stop tolerating weak foundations and start building a culture of accountability that is as strong as the structures we expect to stand. It is time to act—time to demand responsibility, time to rebuild trust, and time to ensure that never again will a name be used to cover up a lie.

If this pattern of denial and cosmetic repair continues, the Matatag Building will remain nothing more than a myth—strong in name, hollow in reality. Its promise of stability will live only in speeches and signboards, not in the concrete meant to protect the people inside.

Until accountability replaces excuses and real solutions take the place of patchwork fixes, Matatag will never cross the line from legend to truth.

It will stand as a reminder that strength cannot be declared; it must be built, proven, and upheld.

And we dare to say, the Matatag is not really matatag at all.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I am writing to bring to your attention a matter that directly affects the well-being and performance of student-athletes and campus scribes participating in academic and sports competitions: the recent lack of snack provisions during these events.

Having witnessed firsthand how this snack shortage impacts our peers, I understand the toll it takes—participants report diminished energy levels, reduced concentration, and noticeable effects on their ability to perform at their best. These students dedicate significant time and effort to representing our school with pride, balancing rigorous training or preparation alongside their academic responsibilities.

This situation prompts a thoughtful inquiry: whether the gap in provisions stems from budget constraints or a need for enhanced prioritization of these extracurricular initiatives. Regardless of the cause, we believe that even modest, nutritious snacks would make a meaningful difference in boosting morale and ensuring our students can thrive in their roles.

We respectfully request a transparent explanation of the current circumstances and prompt action to address this concern. Such support would not only benefit participants but also reflect the institution's commitment to nurturing the holistic development of all its students.

Sincerely,

Ted Juan

Letter from the Editor

Dear Ted Juan,

Thank you for highlighting the lack of merienda for our student-athletes and campus scribes during competitions. We truly appreciate your concern for peers who juggle rigorous training, academic work, and representation of our school—proper nourishment is essential for their energy, focus, and performance.

The recent shortage stemmed from temporary budget reallocations for urgent campus needs and upgrades and from delays in updating procurement procedures to meet new safety and compliance standards. Although funds were already earmarked for snack provisions, administrative transitions created an unintended service gap.

We are pleased to inform you that corrective measures are now in place, and such disruptions will not occur in the future. Your thoughtful advocacy exemplifies the engaged leadership we strive to nurture, and we encourage you and your fellow students to keep sharing ideas that strengthen our community.

Sincerely,

EIC-Fil-Eng



FLOOD FICTION

Charish T. Balingcos

Apayao floods every rainy season, yet some insist it's "flood-free." Rivers swell, homes get submerged, and crops are washed away. Still, official narratives cling to a version of reality that locals know doesn't exist.

Welcome to Apayao, the province where floods don't exist according to Tulfo's Flood Water Warning System.

According to Senator Erwin Tulfo, Apayao is not flood-prone. Yes, you read that right. Forget the swollen rivers, the overflowing banks, the knee-deep water in homes, all of that must have been a collective hallucination.

Tulfo has spoken, and therefore the rivers must obey.

Now, let's unpack this miracle. Tulfo seems to think that because Apayao is mountainous, it's automatically immune to flooding. That's like saying Baguio doesn't get landslides because it's on a mountain, or that Manila doesn't get traffic because it has roads. The logic is so airtight you could use it as a flotation device during the next typhoon.

But here's the inconvenient truth: Apayao is not only mountainous, it's also rainy. Rain here isn't a seasonal visitor, it's practically a permanent resident. Combine that with the fact that Apayao is known as a water reservoir, rich in rivers and tributaries, and you've got a province where water doesn't just flow, it occasionally decides to redecorate your living room.

The Yapayaos, the people who have lived along riverbanks for generations, know this reality all too well. Floods are not a theoretical concept here; we lived experiences. Crops destroyed, homes submerged, families displaced but sure, let's call flood control projects "just a political insertion to budget." Because apparently, the only thing more powerful than nature is Tulfo's microphone.

And let's not ignore the casual accusation of corruption. Flood control projects in Apayao, he says, are just political gimmicks. Ah yes, because nothing screams "vote for me" like a concrete dike. Forget roads, forget schools, the real scam is keeping rivers from swallowing entire barangays.

If Tulfo insists Apayao is flood-free, I propose a field trip. Let him come during the rainy season, preferably without an umbrella, and stand by the riverbanks. When the water rises, he can personally explain to us that we are mistaken, that the flood engulfing our homes is just an illusion. Maybe he'll even livestream it: "Breaking news, this isn't a flood, it's just Apayao's rivers giving free swimming lessons."

So here's the deal: Apayao doesn't need lectures from Manila about whether it floods. We've got muddy shoes, damaged crops, and waterlogged homes as proof. What we don't have is the luxury of pretending that rain plus rivers equals sunshine and rainbows.

Again, if Tulfo insists Apayao is flood-free, maybe he should come visit during the rainy season. I'll even lend him a balsa.



HONORS HIJACKED

Raquel Balauro

Journalism is supposed to celebrate truth and integrity. This year's press conference, however, turned those ideals into a comedy of errors.

The right write stuff.

The Division Schools Press Conference is supposedly a celebration of journalism, integrity, and sportsmanship. Supposedly. In reality, it often feels more like a provincial Hunger Games—municipalities pitted against each other, with victory paraded as the ultimate goal. Unity? That's the slogan. Competition? That's the practice.

This year's awarding ceremony was a masterclass in confusion. Winners were announced, certificates handed out, applause delivered. Then, plotwist!—hours later, the results were "corrected." I couldn't help but think of the Steve Harvey moment at the 2015 Miss Universe pageant, where the wrong winner was announced. However, in our case, the correction took far too long. Harvey must be proud if he learned about this.

Let's be fair: this isn't about losing. I know how to accept defeat. What I don't know is how to accept being crowned winners, celebrated on stage, and then told, "Oops, our bad." That's not sportsmanship—it's organizational comedy.

According to the rules, the decision of the Board of Judges is final and irrevocable. The subsequent changes to the results therefore appear inconsistent with the stated guidelines. Since school papers were submitted a week before the competition, it is reasonable to expect that a definitive list of winners should have been prepared in advance. The existence of a "qualifying round" or other adjustments was not clearly communicated, which added to the uncertainty.

The organizers should have been more careful and addressed the issue promptly. I'm not looking to place blame, but they should have at least considered the consequences. We know exactly how to accept defeat, as long as it's done in the right way – not like what happened.

Despite these concerns, recognition is still due to the winners, as well as to those who participated and submitted their work. The efforts of the adjudicators who remained consistent in their judgments should also be acknowledged.

In the end, the Division Schools Press Conference is supposed to uphold truth, honesty, and integrity. Instead, it gave us a crash course in how not to run a competition. Journalism is about telling the truth. Maybe next year, the organizers can try practicing it.

If you are going to take this negatively, then why bother celebrating the journalism event at all? Journalism is about freedom of expression, after all.

The Harbinger of Truth, Justice and Freedom

Opinion

We Are Not Water-Proof

Why Our Typhoon Class Suspension Rules Need an Overhaul

Ashley Manglugay

Age doesn't make one immune to falling trees, flash floods, and unstable infrastructure.

If you've ever watched rain turn your street into a river or felt wind rattle your windows ahead of a storm, you know the Philippines doesn't just experience typhoons – we live with them year after year. For millions of school children, this means facing dangerous conditions just to get to class. While the Department of Education (DepEd) has policies in place to keep them safe, it's becoming clear that these rules are falling short.

DepEd's current guidelines operate on two separate tracks. When it comes to rainfall warnings, orange or red alerts trigger automatic class cancellations for all students, regardless of age or location. But typhoon signals tell a different story: Signal No. 1 only keeps younger learners home, while high school and college students are expected to press on. The message seems to be that age somehow makes one immune to falling trees, flash floods, and unstable infrastructure. That assumption is dead wrong.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) defines Signal No. 1 as winds of 30 to 60 kilometers per hour – strong enough to damage light structures, uproot small trees, and turn low-lying areas into temporary lakes. Yet, our rules act as if older students can simply "weather the storm."

Some argue that DepEd's tiered system is practical, noting that older students are more capable of assessing risks. There are also worries about the challenge of making up lost instructional days. These are real issues, but they cannot take priority over protecting lives. A missed exam can be retaken, but a child who never makes it home from school is a loss we can never recover from.

Local governments hold the key, exercising their discretionary power. Who better, than them, to know which roads flood first, which bridges are unstable, or which areas lose power? Local officials shouldn't wait for Manila to give the go-ahead; they should look out their windows, check their streets, and act to protect their kids.

We spend countless resources talking about building stronger homes and more resilient infrastructure to withstand typhoons. But the simplest, most effective way to keep our children safe is to ensure they're not in harm's way when danger strikes.

Whether we choose to standardize class suspensions for all students during typhoon events or give local leaders the power to make decisions based on what's happening in their own backyards, one thing is clear: we need to stop pretending that a number on a weather bulletin or a student's birth certificate can guarantee safety. Our streets flood, our trees topple, and our young people are just as vulnerable to storm damage as anyone else. Losing a day of school is never ideal, but losing a child is unthinkable.

It's time to reform these policies and put safety where it belongs: at the very top of our priorities.

As students say in their local dialect, "Haan kami nga kasla bulong aba weno klase ti lamis. (We're not like Taro Leaves or any kind of fish)." Indeed, older students are not water-resistant; they can't weather the storm

Unfair Fare

Charish Balingcos

An ordinary tricycle ride—luxurious priced, fueled by greed.

Who would have thought that corruption could occur in the smallest ride, costing more than what is just?

Nowadays, public transportation, particularly tricycles, plays an essential role in our daily lives—especially to us students. From attending classes, going back home, participating in school projects, and going to other school related activities. This has become a big part of our lives.

But why doesn't this 'smallest ride' seem small at all? Here's the thing; tricycle drivers are not just demanding for higher fare, they are even charging fee that isn't even necessary. Is this even reasonable for a simple student with no work or source of income at all?

Recently, there is an ordinance approving the new Fare Matrix of Motorized Tricycles, featuring a ₱16 fare for the first kilometer and an additional ₱5 charge for an exceeding 500 meters. This shocked everyone, especially us students who only commute on our way to school.

As a concerned student journalist, I asked one of my classmates, Markly Balawag, who's from a very far distance away from school about his recent experience with this. Balawag stated that "I'm not yet capable of paying that much for a ride. My daily allowance is barely enough for my snacks and required class contributions, and now I still have to mind the round-trip transportation fare? It's not fair." This statement makes so much sense.

I am aware of the fact that poverty is the most common issue in our society today, but that doesn't mean that we should do unjustifiable things just to survive in it. Being practical while also being selfless is possible, that's why we shouldn't let ourselves be engulfed by greed. Let's all be fair, because poverty is not an excuse to be selfish.

Remember this: Greed itself is not the problem, it only becomes an issue in the hands of those who choose to act on it.

Rigged Results

Blessy Maguli

In a game where the dice are loaded, defeat is a badge of honor and winning is just a hollow crown.

The loud cheers, the resounding applause, the triumphant raising of a trophy, the swift acceptance of certificates, and the proud moments of receiving prizes—these are the images we associate with competition. But what happens when the celebratory dust settles, and a bitter aftertaste remains? What happens when the proclaimed winners leave many questioning the fairness of the outcome?

In many competitions, Many learn to accept defeat. Some shake hands, offer congratulations, and move on. But there's a critical difference between accepting a loss and accepting an injustice. It's one thing to acknowledge superior skill; it's quite another to swallow the bitter pill of a questionable decision.

This is particularly relevant in competitions with subjective judging. While the intention is to hone students' preparedness and skills in emergency situations, the results should reflect true merit. When the victor isn't demonstrably the best performer – when a contestant takes the top prize – the integrity of the competition is compromised.

This isn't about sour grapes or a refusal to accept the outcome. It's about accountability. It's about demanding transparency and seeking justification when the results defy logic and observable performance. To accept the final judgment without question is to condone a system that prioritizes something other than skill and preparedness.

The questions, "What went wrong? Why was the result this way?" are not signs of poor sportsmanship; they are demands for integrity. They are calls for explanation, for transparency that ensures future competitions are judged fairly. The silence that follows an unjust victory is far more damaging than any protest.

In the case of the recent competition in the municipality, attempts to seek clarification from the organization were met with silence for three days. As usual, unresolved issues leave a lingering sense of unease and raise serious concerns about the fairness and effectiveness of the competition. Three days later, two factions visited Conner CNHS to justify why students from the aforementioned school were or weren't the winners. If it wasn't rigged, then why would they bother coming here and saying something else? Rescue me, please.

Every participant deserves a clear, complete, and valid explanation. This isn't about changing the past; it's about ensuring future competitions are run with integrity and that the true champions are rightfully recognized. The goal is not to rewrite history, but to learn from it and improve the process for future participants. If you think you're the organization we're referring to, remember, I didn't mention anything bad, and I didn't even drop names. Take note, a jab at random shouldn't hit a sore spot. I don't even spread salt on your wounds, so why react?

When Darkness Becomes Routine

Charish Balingcos

Power outages in Conner aren’t exceptions; they’re the rule. Students, families, and businesses endure them as if they’re just part of life.

Weather isn't the only thing that's predictable; it's power outages.

Darkness is Conner's Avid visitor. I don’t mean literally, of course. But if you're from here, you'd have to get used to brownouts, darkness even during daytime. Whether or not it's intentional, these outages have wide-ranging effects on everyone, causing great inconvenience. Worse, power interruptions frequently coincide with critical moments.

How many times a month must people, especially students, go without electricity before it has already become a normal phenomenon? The answer, it seems, is as many times as it takes – but for our community, this status quo is no longer acceptable.

Scheduled power interruptions are due to road widening projects, line clearing, and replacement of rotten crossarms. These are legitimate improvements that promise long-term benefits, and we recognize the effort required to upgrade power systems. But legitimacy doesn't excuse the pattern of unreliable service that has become our almost daily reality.

Other forces beyond our control can be unpredictable, but we should have a plan to remedy the massive power outage that may happen. Right information is critical, especially with a service as important as electricity.

Scheduled blackouts often don't occur, while unscheduled interruptions strike without warning. Most of the time, power goes out with no explanation, or else even drizzle or light rain can cause a power outage. We've just gotten used to it.

We acknowledge that improving infrastructure demands time and resources. We understand that road widening will enhance economic opportunities for local farmers. We recognize that stronger power lines should eventually reduce outages. But “eventually” is not a sufficient response. The community deserves concrete action:

First, maintenance work must be scheduled with respect for the school calendar and important dates.

Second, communication must be honest and timely. When outages run longer than planned, the electric cooperative must provide clear explanations and realistic restoration timelines, allowing schools to adjust their plans accordingly.

Third, a public timeline for improvements must be established. Residents have a right to know how long frequent interruptions will continue and when they can expect to see results from infrastructure upgrades.

Fourth, schools, hospitals and other offices must be designated as critical facilities, receiving priority for power restoration when outages occur. They cannot be treated as an afterthought.

We don't demand perfection. We don't expect round-the-clock electricity. What we demand is reliability. Electric cooperative, has a responsibility to deliver consistent service to the communities they serve. Local leaders have a duty to advocate fiercely for their constituents. And we all have an obligation to ensure that our students and people are not forced to remain resilient when they can do better, when there are ways better.

Enough is enough. The time for change is now. May power interruptions then be like earthquakes – frequent yet unpredictable, a rare occurrence than a daily reality.

> “In a town where the lights never last, resilience has become mandatory — but patience has limits.”

Illusion of Excellence

Calix Sean Ladera

Medals and honor rolls are everywhere, but mastery is nowhere to be seen. Students move on to the next grade without truly learning, and grades are often illusions rather than evidence of skill. The real question isn’t who’s on top—it’s whether anyone is actually ready for the challenges beyond the classroom.

Who among you here is not an honor student? It’s rare, I imagine—so rare that it almost feels like an exception. Certificates, medals, and ribbons crowd classrooms, showcasing academic excellence. But appearances can be deceiving.

In the Philippines, the culture of schooling has created a paradox: classrooms overflowing with honor students on paper, yet behind the accolades lies a troubling reality. When the Education Commission II (EDCOM2) results came out, they told a different story—one of low performance, weak mastery, and systemic gaps that no ribbon could cover.

Students are often promoted to the next grade level even when they haven’t fully mastered the skills and knowledge expected of them. The system prioritizes progression over proficiency, pressuring schools to maintain high pass rates at the expense of actual learning.

Grades are transmuted.

Low raw scores are converted into passing marks, masking failure and creating an illusion of success. The honor roll, once a symbol of excellence, now often reflects compromise rather than mastery.

EDCOM2’s findings are more than numbers; they are a wake-up call. They expose the cracks beneath the glossy certificates, reminding us that education is not about producing honor students for applause or recognition.

The true goal of education is to cultivate learners who can think critically, solve problems, and navigate the world beyond the classroom. Academic titles mean little if the skills behind them are hollow.

The challenge is clear: do we want a culture of honors, or a culture of learning? Until we confront this paradox, medals will continue to mask deficiencies, and titles will carry more weight than true competence.

Because in the end, the measure of education is not how many medals hang on students’ necks, but how prepared they are to face life with knowledge, confidence, and resilience. Anything less is just a title, not an achievement.

> “Classrooms overflow with honor students, medals, and certificates, yet behind the accolades lies a troubling reality where grades are transmuted, competencies go unmastered, and true learning is sacrificed for the illusion of success.”

THE OFFICIAL ENGLISH PUBLICATION OF CONNER CENTRAL NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

From Fields to Footlights

When Purpose Wears No Crown

Charish Balingcos

While others chase crowns for applause, she stepped onto the stage carrying a lifetime of survival no spotlight could ever match. Long before judges scored her walk, life had already tested her courage—and she never failed.

Before she was recognized by the crown, life already knew her by hardship.

She was only a little girl when the world already taught her how to be strong and face reality too early. Poverty was never a chapter of her life—it was the main setting. Her mornings always began with uncertainty, and her nights always ended with prayers—whispering to ceilings that have heard everything but promised nothing.

As she grew older, her struggles also grew bigger. Doors were closed before she could even knock. The rejections were piled up like unanswered calls—too poor, lack of experience, not enough. There were countless days when she questioned her worth, wondering if dreaming was a luxury that's only for those who could afford it.

She is no other than Joyce Manera Batugal, and her story didn't begin on stage, it began in Caglayan, Conner, Apayao, where life was simple but often difficult. She was born on September 1, 2000, and grew up in a farming family—her father, Narciso T. Batugal, worked the land, while her mother, Jona M. Batugal, stayed at home to take care of their family. Joyce is the eldest daughter of the family, and as the eldest, she learned early what responsibility meant. She was not just a simple daughter—she's a dreamer who's carrying more than just her hopes.

Despite all the problems that she faced, she rose. Not loudly. Not suddenly. Education became her weapon. From Caglayan Elementary School, where she graduated as 5th honor in 2012, to Conner Central National High School, where she finished with honors in 2018. She realized that rejection is not a verdict, but a detour. She realized that if the world is outstanding, then be the standard. Poverty didn't define her future—it only sharpened her hope to rise above it.

While many opt for fields promising higher incomes, Joyce chose education—driven by personal knowledge of its power to transform lives and elevate entire communities. She pursued her studies at Apayao State College, graduating in 2022 with a Bachelor of Education degree majoring in English. Though she playfully notes she did not earn academic honors, her journey was defined by unwavering determination. Financial hardship was a persistent obstacle, yet poverty never deterred her: she balanced part-time work with her studies, lived modestly, and diligently sought out every scholarship available from the municipal and provincial governments.

Like all of us, Joyce has faced quiet struggles and late-night doubts that weigh heavily on her mind, with the clamor of the world around her often leaving her heart unsettled. Still, she strives to grow better with each passing day. After graduation, even amid harsh criticism from those around her, she took the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) in 2023—and succeeded, passing the board exam in her first take. She went on to work at Apayao State College as a Contract of Service employee. In 2024, she ventured into a new challenge by joining Binibining Conner, where she placed as first runner-up and Bb. Conner Earth. Despite her placement, instead of congratulatory remarks, hurtful words and disparaging comments circulated, cutting deep with their harshness.

"Sayang la nga mestra, english teacher pakam adi nga nangapput." These are words stated by others to drag her dreams down as she worked to become an empowered individual.

When she first stepped onto that stage at her local municipal competition, fresh out of college with dreams of representing her barangay, she faced a lot of judgement, invalidating her achievements.

"But I quickly learned that pageantry is about so much more – it's about knowing your purpose and being able to articulate it with heart, and having the willingness and magnanimity to accept results and discouragement from others."

Rather than stepping down and abandoning her dreams—not just for herself but for her family—she joined more pageants across different occasions and levels. Each time, she made it to the finals but never took home the top prize. Critics and doubters told her she was too small, too quiet, too "ordinary" to stand out among more polished competitors. There were nights she considered hanging up her heels for good.

In the same year after her first journey in Binibining Conner 2024, she joined the ASCU SN (Association of Colleges and Universities-Solid North) pageant, representing Apayao State College and held at Isabela State University. Though she didn't win the crown in the said pageant, she said her experience of competing is still priceless.

"After having no placement, I internalized for a week," Joyce admits. "I kept asking myself if I was chasing a dream that wasn't meant for me. But then I looked at the journey I'd started – serving as an inspiration to young dreamers like me– and realized that even if I never won, pageants were giving me a platform to make a difference."



MISSION COURAGE

Where the Pavement Sizzles

The People Behind the Plates

Jetmar Damaguen



In a world where poverty stretches thin and every peso counts, many fights daily battles just to put food on their own tables—and on others'. While fancy restaurants and fast-food chains draw crowds with prime locations and polished menus, there is another group of food providers whose work is often overlooked

They stand where the pavement meets the fire—their stalls a patchwork of tarpaulin and wood, their hands moving like clockwork over bubbling vats of oil. You've walked past them a hundred times, maybe tossed a few coins for a kwek-kwek or a warm cup of kalamares. We call them "vendors"—but they're so much more than that. We call them "peddlers" but we've been calling them the wrong name all along.

Inside our school grounds, where concrete hallways meet dusty sidewalks, these women wage a quiet war against poverty—one sizzling pan at a time.

Feel the heat radiating from their stoves. See the blisters that map their palms, the sweat that carves paths through grime on their foreheads. They hold heavy woks as if they're shields, stand for hours as if rooted to the earth, all while the world rushes past them—students with backpacks slung over shoulders, teachers with coffee cups in hand, everyone in a hurry to get somewhere else.

But for them, there is no "somewhere else." Every scoop of rice, every skewer of meat, every drop of sauce carries the weight of a family's hopes. "Kahit mainit hanggang sa magkasunog-sunog ang balat, kahit pagod na pagod hanggang sa hindi makalakad—kailangan," says Tita Janet, who has manned her corner stall near the gymnasium now at the side of the new Matatag Building for three years straight. Her voice is steady, but her eyes tell another story—of late nights, empty pockets, and children waiting for her at home.

Yet even in their struggle, they face judgment. Whispers about cleanliness. Sideways glances at their makeshift setups. We worry about what goes into our food—but how many of us have stopped to ask why they work the way they do? They craft meals with nothing but their hands and hearts, racing against time to serve us before the bell rings, before the rain falls, before their supplies run out.

A vendor is not a machine. They are not a "nuisance" to be moved along. They are Anty Betty, who remembers your favorite affordable halo halo and pancit bihon order even when you can't. They are Tita Lilibeth and Ate Margie who save extra siopao and siomai for the students who come by hungry after practice or school. They are parents, siblings, dreamers—people who wake up before dawn because they believe that hard work can change things. And we hold the power to help that change happen.

A single compliment—"Ate, mas masarap pa 'to kaysa sa restaurant!"—can light up their faces like the morning sun. A gentle word about keeping their space tidy isn't criticism—it's a sign that we care about their work and their safety. "Minsan, isang salita lang ng pagpapahalaga, napapawi na lahat ng pagod ko," Ma'am Clyde shares, wiping down her biscuit and school supplies display at the school canteen with careful hands. "Gusto naming ibigay ang pinaka the best para sa inyo."

They have no corporate backers. No government permits to shield them from the rain or the rules. No air-conditioned kitchens or fancy equipment. All they have is their will—and the knowledge that every meal they make feeds not just our bodies, but our day.

To us students, they are more than just providers of quick bites between classes. They are living lessons in strength. In a world where we often complain about homework or curfews, they show us what it means to fight for something bigger than ourselves.

"Sila anty Betty, ate Janet, tita Lilibeth, ate Margie at ma'am Clyde ay ilan lamang sa mga kantinerang, hindi basta-basta tindera lamang," one of my fellow seniors put it perfectly. "Sila ang tagapawi sa uhaw at gutom na ating nararanasan sa tuwing tayo ay nasa loob ng ating paaralan—at ang kanilang kinikita ay nakasalalay sa ating mga kamay, ang bawat sentimong nalilikom ay para din sa kanilang mga pamilya, anak na nangangailangan ng pambayad sa school at iba pa."

So the next time we see one of them, look them in the eye when you buy from them—say "thank you" like you mean it. Speak up if you hear others putting them down. Pitch in—help keep their areas clean, or suggest ways we can support them as a school.

Next time you smell the familiar sizzle of their make shift stalls, stop. Really stop. Because when you take a bite of their food, you're not just eating—you're tasting the fire, the fight, and the soul of the people who keep our campus alive. After all, they're not just feeding our stomachs—they're teaching us what it means to keep fighting, no matter what.

This is the Heat of the Fight, the tale why Campus Vendors are More Than Just Food Sellers.

Relentless Commitment. The story of these campus vendors manifest their steadfast dedication and commitment not just for the service they provide for Conner Central National High School but the love and sacrifice they give to their families. (Photo courtesy of Airesh Moira Eming)

The Harbinger of Truth, Justice and Freedom

THE 'JADE' In Mark

Jetmar Damaguen

Life shapes family in ways that defy simple definition—sometimes through presence, often through sacrifice, and always through love stretched across distance. For many in rural communities like Conner, Apayao, family is not just who stays, but who leaves so others may rise. This was the world Jade Mark Aoen was born into.

Born on October 21, 1998, Mark grew up in Bubug Nabuangan, Paddaoan, and Caglayan without a father figure. His grandmother became his anchor, raising him with quiet strength and stories of resilience that carried them through hardship.

When he was in Grade 1, his mother, Mariepaz L. Aoen, left to work abroad to secure his future. Though her absence was painful, it taught Mark that family is defined not by proximity, but by sacrifice.

Mark studied at Paddig Elementary School and later at Conner Central National High School, where witnessing his community's struggles sparked his desire to pursue law. He went on to study Political Science at the University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao, but tragedy struck when his grandmother passed away during his college years—leaving him with memories, grief, and renewed resolve.

He continued to law school at the University of Cagayan Valley, determined to serve the community his grandmother loved. In his second year, he lost his biological father to violence, just months after they had finally begun to speak and reconnect—conversations left unfinished.

Amid grief and perseverance, Mark found strength in public service and in love. While working at the Conner LGU Legislative Department, he met Judith Daligdig, whose unwavering support became his constant through late nights, doubt, and loss.

When Mark passed the bar exam, the victory was not his alone—it belonged to his mother's sacrifices, his grandmother's guidance, his father's memory, and the people who believed in him. From a child shaped by absence to a lawyer ready to serve the underserved, his journey came full circle.

Mark now aims to serve as a Public Attorney's Office lawyer, carrying his scars not as weaknesses, but as armor—proof that even from loss and hardship, purpose can rise.



Cape and Gavel. *The inspiring journey of Attorney Jade Mark Aoen is a powerful testament that excellence is built through steadfast commitment and relentless dedication as he earned his place as a respected legal professional serving the community of Conner, Apayao. More than just a license or a title, his achievement stands as a beacon of inspiration for every aspiring advocate in the region who strives to uphold justice and make a meaningful difference in people's lives. (Photo courtesy of Jade Mark Aoen)*

A dream of a Homegrown Stardom

Jeffrey Gamiao

From mis-singing the wrong lyrics as a wide-eyed kid to belting out every note with the force of a rushing mountain stream, music has always been his soul's language. He'd fill the air with song turning the most ordinary chores into mini-concerts for anyone – or anything – that would listen

. Reminiscing about those childhood moments, he remembers standing on a makeshift stage at his barangay fiesta, a microphone in hand and his heart set on a dream that seemed impossible from where he stood.

That dreamer is Sandex Bayaua Nunag, now known to the nation as Sandex Gavin – Apayao's first mainstream television star, who is showing young dreamers across the province that no goal is impossible when paired with unwavering determination.

For most students in Apayao, breaking into showbiz may seem far out of reach, feels like a fantasy reserved for those in the bustling lowlands. But Sandex has turned that distant vision into reality, carrying the pride of his homeland to screens nationwide.

Growing up in the peaceful town of Caglayan, Sandex didn't have access to fancy studios or professional coaches. What he did have was a voice that could fill any room, and a community that cheered him on at every turn. From leading hymns at his local church to belting out OPM hits at school programs, every performance was a step forward – even if the audience was just his family and neighbors. While he loved performing for his family, relatives and schoolmates, he always hoped to share his talent with a wider audience.

"Back then, the biggest stage I knew was our school hall, then the town gymnasium, then the provincial grounds," Sandex recalls with a warm smile. "But every time I sang, I closed my eyes and pictured thousands of faces looking up at me. I told myself: One day, they will."

His love for performance transformed daily life into a stage –while the mountains, trees, and flowing waters served as his most faithful listeners. At every gathering, from barrio fiestas to town meetings, neighbors would call out his name in unison: "Sandex! Sandex! Awitan mo kami!" (Sandex! Sandex! Sing for us!) And he would deliver, pouring his heart into each melody not knowing that one day, those same notes would carry him far from home and would pave his path to stardom.

Sandex's powerful vocals and grounded charm caught the eye of a Baguio-based talent agency dedicated to nurturing artists from the Cordillera region.

He made his national debut as Apayao's first contestant on ABS-CBN's It's Showtime segment Tawag ng Tanghalan. Though he didn't take home the top prize, the experience fueled his drive to push further – leading him to GMA Network's TiktoClock, where he became a two-time defending champion of Tanghalan ng Kampeon.

In 2024, his years of hard work paid off when Viva Artists Agency and Viva Recordings signed him to a five-year contract, offering training in acting, singing, and stage performance. That same year, he took on the role of cultural ambassador, composing and performing the official theme song for the 2025 Miss Baguio pageant – a tribute to Cordillera heritage that revealed his gifts extended far beyond singing.

This year, Sandex blazes new trails as Phoenix Strife in My Husband Is a Mafia Boss, a live-action adaptation of the late Diana Marie Serrato Maranan's (pen name Yanalovesyouu) Wattpad novel that has touched over 218 million readers since 2012.

"Please watch me as Phoenix Strife," he tells his growing legion of young fans. "This show is special, but what makes me proudest is bringing Apayao with me in every scene I film."

"Every time I gaze at the Cordillera peaks, I'm reminded of where I began," Sandex reflects. "They taught me that the higher you climb, the farther you can see – and the more people you can show the way up."

Across Apayao, students and residents hail him as a beacon of hope. At Conner Central National High School, where Sandex completed his high school journey, his story is woven into career guidance sessions – with teachers using his path to show that talent can bloom anywhere, even in the highest mountain valleys.

"Sandex proves that hard work and self-belief can move mountains," says Charish Balingcos and Raquel Balauro, Themisian Publication Editor-in-Chief. "He makes us all proud to be CCNHS'ians, YConnerians, Yapayaos, and Cordillerans."

His journey sends a powerful message to every young dreamer: greatness grows from humble roots. Where you come from doesn't limit where you can go– it anchors you, so you can reach for the sky and carry your home with you wherever you go.

Life-giving, Life-taking

Makabuhay Plant

Blessy Maguli

With a name that can be translated to “can give life” in Filipino language but possess an effect that contradict its name’s meaning as it can take lives of certain living organism such as ectoparasites like ticks and fleas, that’s a humoring truth about makabuhay plant.

Nowadays, innovation, discoveries and scientific advancement are becoming more frequent. And last school year, at Conner Central National High School, discovery and innovation was made contributing to the growing breakthroughs in the field of science. It was about makabuhay, scientifically known as Tinospora rumphii, a tropical plant that loves to grow in places that has a tropical climate like our country – the Philippines.

It has this long vine as a stem that has a bitter taste but is mostly used. Makabuhay plant is traditionally utilized as a remedy, however, recently a discovery about makabuhay’s ability to kill ticks and fleas of dogs have been made. According to some studies, the pesticidal activity of the plant came from its phytochemical contents such as alkaloids, flavonoids, steroid and tannins.

In tropical climate locations, numerous plants and organisms loves to reside and dog’s ticks and fleas are no exception from these. According to research conducted by Marquez et al. back in year 2021, tropical countries like Philippines makes an ideal breeding ground for ticks and fleas – a common ectoparasite found in dogs.

Furthermore, the American Veterinary Medical Association stated that ticks and fleas cause irritation leading to skin conditions, infections and even anemia on dogs or even other animals, and in some cases, it serves as a carrier of disease that can be transmitted to humans like Lyme disease.

On the positive side, there are researchers from STEM 12 students in CCNHS who conducted experimental research back in 2025 featuring makabuhay stem extract alone as a main ingredient in a chemical-free soap for dogs. It is created mainly to eradicate dog’s ticks and fleas and after testing the soaps effectivity against the parasites, results show a positive outcome – it can be used in killing ticks and fleas in dogs.

Supporting the CCNH’S students research, the study conducted by Haque et al., in 2023, where a body wash containing makabuhay and madre de cacao was tested on dogs infested with brown ticks and the results showed mortality rates ranging from 66.67 to 76.67 percent.

Additionally, Daguro et al., also confirmed in a study that is published in 2021 that makabuhay stem extract and madre de cacao leave extract exhibits a strong acaricidal activity against Sarcoptes scabiei var. canis – a species of fleas. These literatures validate and support the development of natural alternatives.

In the study of Pregoner that was conducted in 2020, he proved that the phytochemicals found in makabuhay stem have their own roles and functions in terms of killing pests like ticks and fleas; alkaloid is actually the main killer among the other phytochemicals because it is responsible for interfering with the nervous system and causes paralysis and death on the parasite; as for tannins, it reduces the feeding efficiency, weakening the pests; while flavonoid, it disrupts the metabolism and reproduction of the parasites; and lastly for the steroids, it’s role is to break down cell walls, causing dehydration and death.

The makabuhay soap making process is also not that complex as it only requires 4 ingredients: lye, distilled water, coconut oil, and makabuhay extract. The process starts with extraction where the researchers used maceration method where the makabuhay stem was dried using an oven with moderate heat, grinded until powderized, and soaked in 70% ethanol for 3 days in a tightly closed container.

After extraction, the makabuhay powder was filtered using clean cloth to gather only the ethanol stem extract. The soap base was created by gradually adding 13 g of lye into 24 ml of distilled water in a beaker, stirring it continuously until the lye was completely dissolved.

Then, 75 ml of coconut oil was added the water in the beaker and blended. After thorough mixing add 30 ml of makabuhay stem ethanolic extract in the beaker. The mixtures were continuously blended, placed at room temperature, and left to be solidified.

As for the application process, it is stated in the research paper of the CCNH’s STEM student that the makabuhay soap should be applied and let it stay on the dog’s fur and skin for 5-8 minutes before washing off the soap.

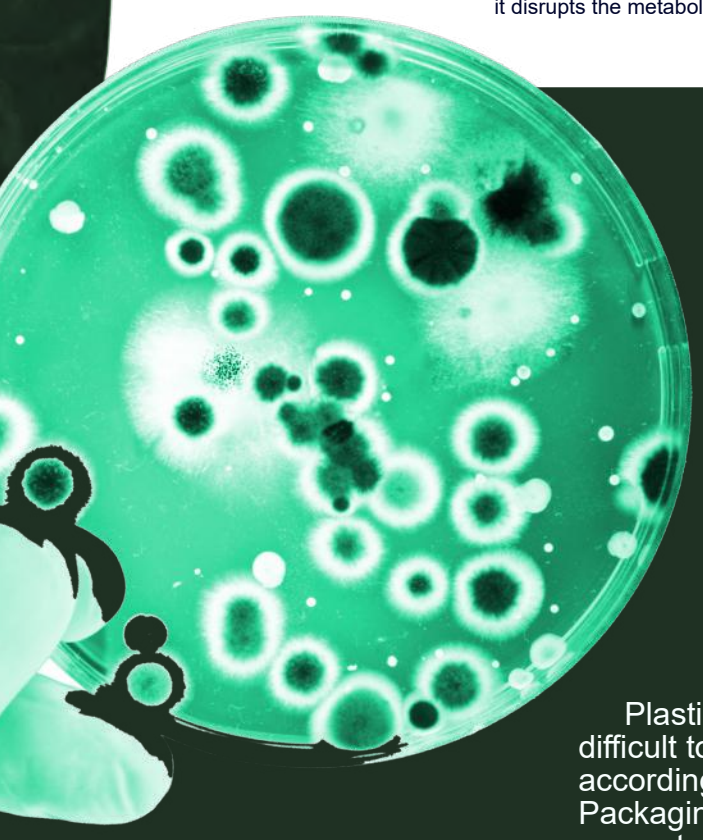
This study made by students that are supported by several literatures shows how natural resources – like makabuhay – can be used in creating solutions to certain problems like biopesticides that is much financial, environmental and health friendly than the man-made ones.

It provides a safer and more accessible alternative for pet owners who is struggling with money or access to veterinary care.

However, this makabuhay soap is an innovation meaning it still need to go through a more thorough study and testing to make sure that it is hundred percent guaranteed to be used in any dogs with varying skin types. For now, it is advisable to first consult a nearest veterinary facility for a checkup if you’re planning to try this makabuhay soap.

This innovation proves that the possible solution to our problems may be just around us, long been provided by nature, it only lacks recognition and attention.

Always keep in mind, everything exists for a reason and it’s our job to find out what it is!



Plastic Bacteria is the Solution

Blessy Maguli

Answer To Plastic Waste Crisis

A microorganism often associated with fear and danger and is incredibly small, yet it can be extremely dangerous. But what if this tiny organism is actually the answer to a problem we have been trying to solve for a long time?

Ideonella sakaiensis, a rod-shaped microorganism, was discovered in Japan back in 2016 by scientist from Kyoto Institute and it is identified to be included in the family of bacteria. In the case of Ideonella sakaiensis, it can be considered as a "good" bacterium because it helps humans dispose specific plastic – a long-standing global problem – by consuming it and using it as a source of energy. This bacterium is recognized as the first discovered plastic-ating bacteria.

Plastics are known to be very difficult to decompose and according to Sustainable Packaging News, by 2025, the amount of global plastic waste have reached a concerning 225 million tons which is equivalent to the weight of around 50 million adult elephants. Because of this, recycling is often adviced; however, recycling alone is not enough to dispose of even half of the world's plastic wastes.

In 2016, there was a major scientific breakthrough that occurred which is about the first discovery of a plastic-eating bacteria called Ideonella sakaiensis. According to ACS Publication, this bacterium was found out to be feasting on a specific plastic known as polyethylene terephthalate (PET), which is a material commonly used in tough plastics, food packages, drink bottles, and fabrics, by breaking it down using enzymes – tiny natural tools produced by living organism to help break down food.

Researchers at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) stated that the bacteria had gone through evolution and by then it developed two special enzymes that can break down PET, these are known as PETase and MHETase.

Furthermore, Yuya Tanaka et.al., explained in an article published in National Library of Medicine how these bacteria use PETase and MHETase to break down these plastics. First, the bacteria uses the enzyme PETase to cut the plastic into smaller pieces. Then, with the help of MHETase, the tiny plastics pieces will be broken into tiny bits that the bacteria can eat, like a food, to gain energy.

In addition to this discovery, other plastic-eating microbes have also been identified. Actually, as of 2025, there are already 50 species uncovered of both fungi and bacteria that eats plastics.

This evolution and emergence of thede microorganisms shows the nature’s way of adaptation to these human-induced pollution. As many problem in this planet arises due to human activities, nature continues to find a ways to survive, adapt, and heal on its own.



QUAKE SAFETY DETECTOR IN THE HOUSE



How safe do you feel when you're at home? Houses are supposed to be a safe place or a zone of comfort and peace, however, truth be told, this is not the case in times of calamities that's why most people evacuates to a safer location, but for the case of sudden disasters like quakes evacuation is just impossible, on the other hand, there's this new innovation where no hard hats required and all you need to do is to download an app, answer several questions, and within minutes, you'll know how safely built your house is in times of earthquakes.

If you live in Philippines, you'll know how frequent calamities occur within a year and you've probably memorized already when to expect some of it, but it's a different case for earthquake that attacks silently. With series of consecutive earthquakes jolting the Philippines, there's this one click technology application developed by Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) called "How Safe Is My House?" that aims to provide a platform for self-assessment of 1-2 storey concrete hollow block (CHB) house and buildings in the country.

This project is created through collaborative efforts between PHIVOLCS, National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Prevention (NIED), Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST), and Association of Structural Engineers Philippines (ASEP) and was launched in 2021. According to PHIVOLCS, the app's main function is to determine an establishment's capability of withstanding strong earthquakes, and it is also designed to provide a framework for proper construction practices and standard design awareness.

Furthermore, in this application it is required for the users to answer 12 questions about the house – when and how it has been built and designed, what materials were used, if there's any history of damages, and the house's current overall condition. In this way, the app can generate a test score result, together with stimulation that lets you see your house's current situation in an earthquake onset, moreover, the app also gives steps and recommendations on how you can strengthen your home to prepare for any sudden events.

"The initial result will show if your house was properly built and followed appropriate construction procedures and recommended measures or if it will require necessary strengthening," PHIVOLCS stated in an article from GMA news.

On September 30, 2025, a 6.9 magnitude earthquake struck Northern Cebu and according to the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) 74, 616 houses were partially and 5, 343 houses were totally damaged. Following this incident, on October 13, 2025, with a magnitude of 7.4, an earthquake struck Bogo, Cebu again and this time an unusual occurrence happened because a twin earthquake with the same magnitude of 7.4 and 6.9 respectively hit Davao Oriental back in October 10.

With the extremely devastating impact that these quakes has left behind, it uncovers the shortcomings of the people when it comes to disaster readiness preliminaries like delays in area check-ups, assessment cost, and lack of experts in isolated rural places where access for help is challenging and takes longer time to reach – such problems are the one's that the app tries to lessen.

The wide-range use of this app all over the country is advisable because it will not only help disaster managers and authorities to be aware of the possible impact of an earthquake in their community but also let people know individually how safe their house is and it encourages a more efficient, time-saving, and easy way of preparing for calamities as unpredictable as earthquakes.

Although the app doesn't stop or lessen the intensity of an earthquake, at least it will reduce the severe impact of such disaster. And instead of waiting and relying on an official inspection, people can now instantly check the state of their houses with the help of a simplified assessment that allows ordinary citizens to actively participate in ensuring their personal safety.

Even though there's no such thing that allows people to easily, individually and automatically detect an earthquake without requiring any expertise at real-time yet, this disaster prevention application wants to convey the importance of being step ahead of the quake. This new creations and advancements in technology changes and develop different approaches of people on varying problems.

"How Safe Is My House" application can be downloaded through Apple's App Store or Google Play Store or through the website.

THE SCIENCE *Behind Onion Tears*

Blessy Maguli

A clever plant defense for onions, a teary moment for us in the kitchen

One peel away, one slice, and you'll get watery eyes — that is how onions can make you cry. Have you ever wondered why onions make you cry? It's definitely not because of emotions; its science.

Onions, scientifically referred to as Allium cepa, belong to the vegetable family and come in variety of colors such as yellow, red, and white. Truth be told, onions are one of the most widely and earliest cultivated vegetable worldwide.

They are commonly used as a flavor enhancer – whether raw, sauteed, roasted or pickled – and are also used as remedies This vegetable is highly utilized since it is rich in calories, macro- and micro- nutrients, vitamins and individual fatty acids, as proven by several literatures.

However, despite the benefits of onion, preparation of it is quite challenging. Just by thinking of slicing it, you can already imagine yourself some when we are tearing up. But why do of us gets teary eyed slicing onions into pieces?

The answer lies in science. According to the information from The Library of Congress, when an onion is cut, its cells are damaged triggering a defense mechanism thst causes thr release of enzymes and sulfur compound that react to forming a gas.

This gas is a chemical irritant known as syn-Propanethial-S-oxide, when this irritant get mixed and rises into the air then reaches the human eye, this is when tears are produced.

As reaction of the eyes to the discomfort caused by the gas, it forms mild sulfuric acid that activates the eyes' nerves that signal's the tear glands in our brain (lacrimal gland) to produce tears, flushing out the irritant. This tear-inducing mechanism of onions originally served as a defense against animals and pests because this discourages creatures from eating it. It's an individual way of onions for survival just like other organisms.

In various studies, such as that of Ariane Lang dated back in 2021, onion's already been used by Romans, the Greeks, and many other cultures as herbal remedy or treatment for several ailments for thousands of years.

Moreover, findings of Amar Jeet Gupta et al., written in their journal published in 2025 confirms that onions are fibre-rich, packed with vitamins and minerals, has calorie, and contains numerous phytochemicals such as: quercetin which reduces oxidative stress, lower blood pressure, and improves cognitive functions; allicin together with quercetin exhibits an anticancer effect; and organosulfur compounds responsible for enhancing immune function and linked to tumor growth reduction colorectal cancer patients.

To make kitchen life easier there is a tips uploaded by Spices Alibaba to prevent your eyes from doing waterworks every time you slice onions.

Considering that onions emit an eye irritant every time it is cut due to damages of its cells, it is more suitable to use a sharp knife to avoid excessive cell damage on the onion. You can also refrigerate the onions before cutting it into pieces as coldness slows the chemical reaction that causes tears. Another trick is that slice onions near a running water to absorbs the irritants that the onions releases. Lastly, cut the onion root lastly, this is because the root end of an onion has the highest concentration of the sulfur compound that mainly irritates the eyes.

In cooking, onions have long been used and are rarely absent as it greatly contributes to the taste, aroma and sometimes even in the appearance of the food.

There are some circumstances where it is also used as a remedy. However, onion has its own way of protecting itself — by making our eyes water but through science we can understand how this happens and how to avoid it.

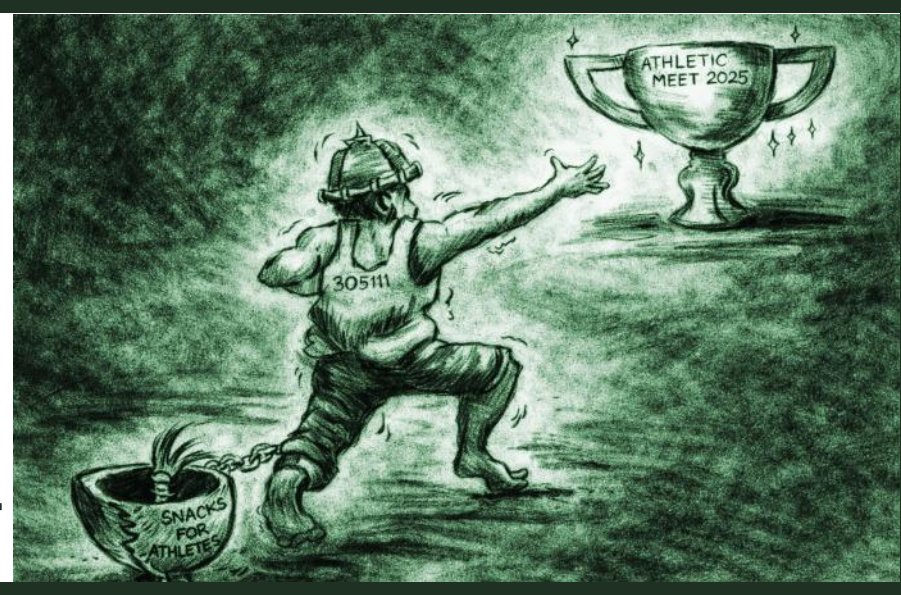
We are surrounded by things that work in fascinating and often unimaginable ways. With the help of science, we can learn how and why these things happen.

Sometimes, science—together with innovation—helps us create solutions to widespread or long-standing problems. The onion reaction is one such example. Always keep in mind, do not just settle for what you know; instead, continue to seek truth and understanding to become more knowledgeable





sports editorial



FUEL BEFORE GLORY

We celebrate our student-athletes when they win, cheer for them when they compete, and proudly claim their victories as our own. Yet too often, we forget the simplest support they need before the whistle even blows.

They train for months, push their bodies past exhaustion, and step onto the court carrying not only their own dreams but the name of their school—yet too often, they do so on empty stomachs, expected to perform at their best without even the most basic support.

When student-athletes compete, they are not merely participants in a game. They are representatives of their institutions, embodying school pride, discipline, and excellence in full public view, where every movement reflects on the community they stand for.

Every sprint, jump, and shot is earned through countless hours of practice, physical strain, and mental conditioning. These students sacrifice time, comfort, and rest, balancing academics and athletics in ways that demand resilience far beyond the classroom.

Despite this, a recurring neglect remains glaringly visible: the inconsistent provision of snacks and refreshments during competitions. This oversight may seem small to some, but to athletes, it speaks volumes about how their efforts are valued.

This is not a trivial concern or a matter of preference. It is a fundamental issue of support and responsibility that affects both performance and morale.

In competitive environments, physical endurance and mental focus are essential. Hunger weakens concentration, slows reaction time, and erodes confidence, turning what should be moments of excellence into unnecessary struggles.

No amount of motivation, pep talks, or school pride can compensate for the absence of proper nourishment. An athlete asked to compete without fuel is an athlete set up to underperform.

Snacks and refreshments are not incentives or rewards reserved for winners. They are basic necessities that enable athletes to perform safely, fairly, and effectively.

These essentials clearly fall within the scope of Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE). If funds are allocated for operational needs, then it is only reasonable to ask why student-athletes are still left to compete hungry.

Students dedicate long hours to training—often after classes, on weekends, and under physical fatigue. Expecting proper nourishment in return is not entitlement; it is a reasonable and just expectation.

Beyond nutrition, snacks carry symbolic weight. They represent care, attentiveness, and respect, reminding athletes that their well-being matters as much as their performance.

Providing refreshments sends a clear message: our student-athletes are valued, supported, and not taken for granted. It reinforces the idea that schools are invested in the whole student, not just in medals and trophies.

When such support is absent, the message is equally clear. It suggests that performance is demanded while care is optional—a contradiction that undermines the values schools claim to uphold.

We cannot continue to rely on applause, slogans, and moral encouragement alone. Support must be practical, visible, and consistent if we truly want our athletes to thrive.

It is time to realign priorities and translate recognition into action. Our student-athletes deserve dignity, fairness, and care—feed them, not as a favor, but as a responsibility owed to those who give their all for their schools.

Espejo's Streak Continues: Conquers Apayao Provincial Athletic Meet, Aims for CARAA Berth

Glysa Alansigan

Apayao's taekwondo player Clarence Espejo has booked his ticket to the Cordillera Administrative Region Athletic Association (CARAA) 2026, after vanquishing representatives from Pudtol and Calanasan in the featherweight 51-55 kg men's category at the Apayao Provincial Athletic Meet 2025 on thursday, December 11.

Espejo's impressive run began with a dominating 21-3, 18-2 victory over Pudtol's Jeremy Rance, showcasing his mastery of head kicks and aggressive body kicks that swiftly ended the match. He followed this up with another commanding win, 15-4 and 25-6, against tough rival Calanasan's Javier Dagon Jr., leaving no doubt about his prowess in the sport.

Espejo credited his coach, Clinton Bardillo, whose guidance and advice fueled his motivation to give his all in the competition. "I applied sir Bardillo's advice, and he trained me well. The reason I won is because I gave everything I had," Espejo said. He also expressed gratitude to his teammates, friends, and God for their unwavering support.

With this victory, top-seeded jin Espejo has secured a four-year winning streak in the provincial meet and is now set to represent Apayao Eagles in Taekwondo at CARAA 2026 in Benguet come February.

Latupan Clinches Gold in High Jump Women's Division, Seals Ticket to CARAA '26

Edgar Follo

She did it again!

Jana Clemen Latupan, a standout in the High Jump women's division, remained unstoppable with a spectacular performance at the 2025 Apayao Provincial Athletic Meet held at the Luna Apayao Sports Complex on December 11.

Latupan secured her two-year placement in high jump during the Provincial Meet, dominating the competition with a dashing height of 1.35m against representatives from different municipalities, with Flora being her strongest opponent.

Using the scissor technique as her tactic, Latupan had a persistent higher leap, with moderate running as she approached the jumping pit, helping her obtain an exalted jump and perfect landing.

Flora's Rep tried to surpass and match Latupan, setting a new higher leap of 1.33m, but Latupan gave everything and remained unbreakable, landing farther than Flora with a dash of 1.35m, leaving her opponents in the dust.

According to Latupan, warm-ups and exercise during training are crucial as they help her gain more strength and knowledge. "My inspiration to bring another gold is my family and friends. I trust myself, and I know that I can do it, and I did! I won, and my win is your win as well," she added.

Latupan won the match in the high jump competition and will represent the whole of Apayao in the next high jump competition at the 2016 Cordillera Administrative Region Athletic Association Meet, happening in Benguet in February.

The Harbinger of Truth, Justice and Freedom

Kings of SEAG hoops

Gilas Pilipinas outlasts host Thailand to defend SEA Games throne

Gilas Pilipinas successfully retained its men's 5-on-5 basketball crown in the 33rd Southeast Asian Games after an inspired 70-64 comeback win over Thailand at the jampacked Nimibutr Stadium in Bangkok on Friday, December 19.

Facing a hostile home crowd and a determined Thai squad, Gilas Pilipinas overcame a slow start to claim their 20th regional championship extending their record as the winningest team in SEA Games men's basketball history.

Gilas men in an early hole, trailing 17-22 after the first quarter and facing a nine-point halftime deficit at 29-38.

Thailand controlled the tempo in the opening frames, capitalizing on Gilas' sluggish offensive execution and solid defensive stops to build their lead.

The host team's pursuit of a historic breakthrough appeared well within reach as they kept the defending champions at bay through the first 20 minutes of play.

The tide turned decisively in the third quarter, fueled by Jamie Malonzo's breakout performance,former Barangay Ginebra forward scored 11 of the Philippines' 23 points in the frame, while Gilas' defense clamped down to hold Thailand to just 10 markers.

The rally flipped the scoreboard, with the Gilas entering the final quarter holding a 52-48 advantage.

Thailand refused to back down, tying the game at 52-all in the early moments of the fourth quarter. But Malonzo joined forces with Matthew Wright, Thirdy Ravena, and Cedrick Manzano to ignite a decisive 15-3 run.

Malonzo capped the surge with a triple and an inside basket, pushing Gilas to a game-high 12-point lead at 67-55 with 4:15 remaining in regulation.

Similar to their semifinal win over Indonesia, Gilas had to withstand a late comeback push from their opponents.

Nakorn Jaisanuk sank three free throws to highlight a 9-1 Thai run, cutting the deficit to just four points at 68-64 with 47.8 seconds left.

However, a crucial offensive rebound by Bobby Ray Parks Jr., combined with missed free throws by Frederick Lish and clutch charity shots from Robert Bolick, sealed the victory for the defending champions.

Malonzo led all scorers with a game-high 17 points on 7-of-12 shooting, adding 12 rebounds, five steals, and three assists to his stat line. Wright contributed 14 points with three three-pointers, while Bolick posted an all-around effort of 10 points, five rebounds, and five assists. Dalph Panopio (nine points) and Poy Erram (eight points, six rebounds) also provided key support.

For Thailand, Chanatip Jakrawan and Emmanuel Ejesu each scored 13 points, with Jakrawan grabbing 10 rebounds in the silver-medal finish – the team's fifth consecutive podium appearance.

The win completes a golden double for Philippine basketball at this year's SEA Games, following the Gilas Women's team's championship victory over Thailand earlier in the tournament. This marks the first time since 2021 that the Philippines has claimed both men's and women's 5-on-5 basketball gold medals at the regional games.

SEAG Region's Best. Gilas Pilipinas recovers from a slow start and erases a double-digit deficit as it beats Thailand in its own turf to capture a 20th gold medal in the Southeast Asian Games. *(Photo credits to ABS-CBN Sports)*