

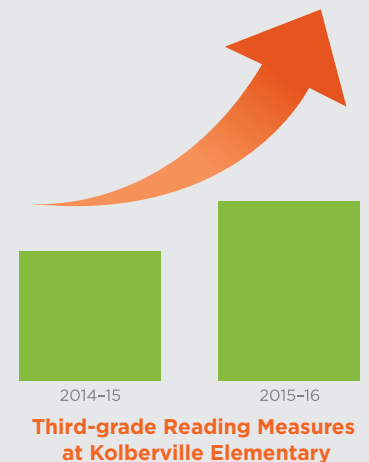
Pacific school system becomes a leader in implementing instructional leadership success strategies

Services McREL provided to the CNMI:

- ✓ Academic standards
- ✓ Literacy in ELL classrooms
- ✓ Technology evaluation
- ✓ School improvement
- ✓ Principal leadership
- ✓ Leadership program implementation
- ✓ Literacy coach training

Results: ACT Aspire Writing

Third-grade reading measures on the ACT Aspire Writing Test *increased from 29% to 41%* at Kolberville Elementary from 2014-15 to 2015-16.



Results: Leadership and Student Success

- At Kolberville Elementary, in the 2015-16 school year, students increased average Lexile® scores by +90L
- Principal pipeline serving 19 schools on 15 islands
- Newfound focus on accountability impacting entire system

“We don’t just talk about McREL’s Balanced Leadership, we are living it. We have made principals accountable to the learning of their students and the performance of their teachers, and the district accountable to the principals and the support they need.”

— Rita Sablan, former commissioner of education, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands



Customized consulting improves education leadership capacity in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands



The Challenge

When your school district is located thousands of miles from pretty much everywhere on Earth, recruiting principals from the district next door is not an option. That's why the public school system of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) recently expanded its longstanding relationship with McREL, from addressing student outcomes to creating a leadership pipeline for the system's 19 schools on 15 islands.

What's emerging is a constellation of sustainable practices that have the potential to transform a remote school district into an international model of self-reliance. Research-based best practices now guide the learning journey of everybody in the system, from kindergartener to commissioner.

Strategic Solution

McREL and the CNMI have collaborated on student success for years. One example: In 2012–13, McREL consultants helped teachers of English language learners adopt teaching styles that shifted the classroom experience from teacher-directed to student-directed, found more opportunities for students to speak and move—even reduced paperwork.

Foreshadowing the leadership-pipeline work, in 2010 McREL provided introductory leadership sessions on topics including literacy, mathematics, collaboration, and parental involvement. School leaders also attended sessions on McREL's Balanced Leadership® framework and began using the Power Walkthrough® classroom observation and coaching tool.

Next, schools targeted specific areas for more guidance. For the following three years, leadership development at the school level drew upon McREL's Classroom Instruction That Works® and school improvement research.

Then, another breakthrough: The educators said they valued the new tools and knowledge, but wondered if greater implementation support could be offered. Thus was born the Balanced Leadership Implementation Support program, in which McREL consultants have, since 2013, been working with CNMI principals to put Balanced Leadership into action. The program has now reached leaders at all 19 schools, enhancing their knowledge of the 21 key responsibilities linked to student achievement, as well as the processes needed to fulfill those responsibilities.

Results

Many CNMI educators call their experience with Balanced Leadership Implementation Support life-changing, said Mel Sussman, a McREL consultant who works closely with the islands.

"It's been amazing to watch their confidence and competence skyrocket," Sussman said. "When it comes to schools, the CNMI is not an isolated place. They are now deeply connected to global best practices, in tune with one another's needs for professional growth, and acutely focused on student success. The Balanced Leadership Technical Assistance program played a huge role in the principals moving forward in their quest to increase student achievement."

Added Rita Sablan, the CNMI's former commissioner of education: "We don't just talk about Balanced Leadership, we are living it. We have made principals accountable to the learning of their students and the performance of their teachers, and the district accountable to the principals and the support they need."

To signal this emphasis on accountability, the system even embedded Balanced Leadership into principal evaluations. Sussman works with principals on regular progress reports that describe their successes and challenges and help them set and accomplish goals.

The journey has been beneficial for students, Sussman said. Some early examples: At Kolberville Elementary, in 2015–16, average Lexile scores jumped +90L, third-grade ACT Aspire Writing Assessment scores increased from 29% to 41%, and reading scores jumped 24% year-on-year.

Next Steps

The CNMI's long-term goal is to build a sustainable pipeline of effective school leaders. The work they've done with McREL has pushed the system closer to that goal by preparing current and aspiring leaders to put into practice what they've learned, and embed it in their school culture.

School leaders across the CNMI continue to implement effective leadership practices and improvement initiatives with quality, fidelity, intensity, and consistency. And the system's relationship with McREL continues to deepen; in August 2017, we launched yet another initiative together, to help literacy coaches acquire effective coaching techniques and strategies.



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