



SCHOOL & SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT

## Supporting Educators and Students Across the Pacific



CNMI

 25  
Schools

 9,695  
Students

Worked with 16 principals & 500 teachers  
on Classroom Instruction That Works  
With English Language Learners



Republic  
of  
Palau

 24  
Schools

 2,256  
Students

Worked with 24 school leaders  
on Balanced Leadership®



Guam

 41  
Schools

 30,112  
Students

Worked with 40 school leaders and  
40 teachers on Classroom Instruction  
That Works®

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, Palau Ministry of Education, Republic of Palau National Government, & CNMI Public School System, 2018–19.

McREL is a nonprofit organization that provides research and evaluation, technical assistance, and professional learning and consulting services to K-12 schools, state and federal departments of education, and institutes of higher education. The highlights we share in this document are from our direct work with education systems in the Pacific region. Honolulu, Hawai'i is home of McREL's regional headquarters.

Separately, one of the many services we have provided over our 55-year history is operational management of two of the U.S. Department of Education's Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs), which provide research, training, coaching, and technical support to educators in their regions. From the 1960s to the early 2000s, we managed REL Central, and since 2012 we have managed REL Pacific, which serves education systems in American Samoa, Hawai'i, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap).

# An Emphasis on Local Solutions

One of McREL International's core beliefs is that, while many evidence-based best practices are universal, they need to be geared to local needs, strengths, and goals for school improvement to stick. This emphasis on local approaches helps explain why McREL has for years co-created solutions in such areas as professional learning, coaching, consulting, and analysis with many Pacific island jurisdictions.

"McREL has become a trusted partner for many educators throughout the Pacific because relationship-building is so important to us. Some of our consultants have made dozens of visits," said McREL president and CEO Bryan Goodwin.

## Guam: An Instructional 'Game Changer'

Consistency doesn't mean sameness. This key distinction in McREL's Classroom Instruction That Works® (CITW) framework has helped teachers in Guam high schools gain confidence in themselves—a sense of efficacy that rubs off on students. McREL instructional consultant Cheryl Abila has provided onsite professional learning sessions and coaching for teachers at 25 Guam schools over the last several years.



McREL's Cheryl Abila becomes an honorary member of the Astumbo Middle School Dragons during a PD session sponsored by the Guam Department of Education.

Abila says teachers learned new ways to approach classroom interactions—with students and among themselves.

"In addition to sharing content, we always want to model effective teaching techniques in our PD sessions, and in Guam I have been emphasizing checking for understanding," Abila said. "I talk a lot about growth mindset and 'failing forward.' When teachers help students discover what they need to accomplish next, learning really blossoms."

Said Joni Serisola, assistant principal for student life at George Washington High School in the village of Mingilao: "Our teachers became more mindful, intentional, and collaborative, and our students came to be active participants in their own learning. CITW has been the game changer, bringing our school community to speak the same language and move forward in one rhythm. It works!"

The professional learning went so well that the Guam Department of Education asked McREL to add sessions on classroom walkthroughs and working with English learners.

## The Northern Marianas: Helping English Learners Find Their Voice

Teachers of English learners live for that moment when a hesitant student becomes a confident communicator. Of course, before they can feel comfortable speaking English, they must feel comfortable speaking at all, and that's not always the case in a tradition-minded setting.

When Jane Hill, a McREL English learning specialist, began teaching a 90-hour professional learning program co-created with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Public School System nine years ago, she found a classroom culture where teacher talk prevailed. Working with cohorts of teachers for three years each, she demonstrated how a new approach to classroom management can encourage student talk.

By year 3, Hill said, "Everything I've talked about, they're putting into action. They've gone from 'sage on the stage' to 'guide by the side' and even the desks promote student talk—no longer in rows but in groups of two to four."

## Palau: A Systemwide Emphasis on Leadership

Decades after McREL research showed the connections between school leadership and student success, some education leaders still need persuading to focus on developing their principals' capacities. Not the Palau Ministry of Education: Several leaders from the republic attended a Balanced Leadership® seminar in Denver and saw the potential right away, inviting McREL to the country for customized professional learning sessions.

"What's impressive about Palau is that they're really trying to make a systemwide difference," said lead consultant Dr. Kent Davis. "They don't see this as one-and-done training; this is about supporting everything they do for educators and students. They want to build sustainability."

Several principals wrote in their course feedback that the sessions dramatically boosted their self-confidence and helped them see that principals aren't mere office workers, but genuine instructional leaders who can connect with students and motivate them. As one first-year principal put it, "I really want to be that one person that can help students believe in themselves and make it no matter what."

## Next Steps: The Commitment Deepens

While McREL's relationships with Pacific educators have thrived through the online transition, our consultants are looking forward to resuming their visits to the islands to resume in-person PD on teaching, learning, and leading.