

S TRENGTHENING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



The cultivation of strong family-school-community linkages is increasingly and widely viewed as an essential strategy for improving student educational outcomes. During 2010, PREL continued to conduct research and provide technical assistance through the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs). The PIRCs use strong social networks at the village level to engage parents and community members in school policy decisions and activities. PREL PIRC staff partnered with state education agencies to help implement successful and effective parental involvement policies, programs, and activities that led to improvements in student academic achievement and strengthened partnerships among parents, teachers, principals, administrators, and other school personnel.

Beyond the work of the PIRCs, PREL partnered with the RMI Ministry of Education (MOE) and UNESCO to implement year 1 of the Mejrrok Elementary School Academic Literacy Integrating Values Excellence and Economic Empowerment (MES ALIVE) project. The project objectives—increasing students’ academic literacy, integrating sustainable skills and knowledge in teaching, and empowering and developing community engagement—are based on the idea that the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and values into formal curricula and learning processes is critical to literacy development and academic achievement.

Our central focus on strengthening family and community engagement continues to guide and inform our technical assistance activities. PREL facilitated workshops and seminars in Hawai’i that focused on equity and access for immigrant students as well as cultural competencies for teachers working with Micronesian student populations. On Maui, PREL staff collaborated with the state Immigrant Services Division to disseminate findings and recommendations from the Micronesian Voices conference and raise awareness about Micronesian cultures and the history of Micronesians in Hawai’i.

PREL’s work in family and community engagement, as well as in mental and physical health, expanded in 2010 when the UNICEF- and RMI-funded Child Protection Baseline Research (CPBR) project appointed PREL as its lead national research agency. CPBR uses the child protection conceptual framework for building a protective environment for children: (1) child protection legislative and regulatory compliance review, (2) institutional stocktaking

of child protection social welfare and protection systems and interagency collaboration, and (3) a societal behavior component. PREL staff analyzed baseline data and presented recommendations to UNICEF and the RMI government. These results will serve as the basis of UNICEF support to the RMI in the area of child protective services for the next 5 years.

We understand that what schools do to foster parent involvement is

critical in determining whether, which, and how parents will participate in their children’s schooling, and ultimately how students will benefit. Over the course of 2010, PREL staff presented at regional and national forums, disseminating research on effective school and teacher practices for influencing the level and quality of parental and community involvement in Pacific schools.

Mejrrok Elementary School Academic Literacy Integrating Values Excellence and Economic Empowerment (MES ALIVE)

The MES ALIVE project was organized around the rationale that community-based learning involves reciprocity among students, teachers, and community members, where not only students, but the entire community, develop new capacities.

PREL and the Republic of the Marshall Islands Ministry of Education provided classroom management and instructional support to help align the project’s activities to curricular standards and benchmark outcomes. Examples of the support provided include the following: using local materials to organize classrooms, establishing a reading center for grades 1–3, training teachers to connect community learning activities to literacy learning, and developing Marshallese language arts vocabulary and the learning of Marshallese culture.

The implementation of the MES ALIVE project has resulted in some notable changes in school management and parent involvement:

- Improved student/teacher attendance and participation
- Higher accuracy in data collection



- Clarification of expectations for students, parents, and teachers, as established through daily school routines
- Promotion of a professional school environment through enforcement of the school uniform for students and professional attire for teachers

The project also displayed the following evidence-based results:

- There was 100% family involvement in the school and community garden plots for social science learning.
- There was 100% participation from 7th and 8th grade boys in making sennit ropes, which are used to make thatch houses.
- There was 100% participation from 7th and 8th grade girls in making thatch for the school house.