



ASSESSMENT IN KOSRAE

Parents Help at Home with Literacy Needs

By Winton Clarence

Most educators are familiar with the African proverb, “It takes a whole village to educate a child.” Many leaders in Kosrae have repeated these words; however, little has been improve parent involvement in academics. Parent involvement in Kosrae currently includes extracurricular activities and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. With this in mind, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning’s (PREL’s) Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) site-based staff initiated an assessment and parent involvement activity surrounding early literacy in the lower grade levels.

As a result of the formation of the REL Assessment Cadre (AC), new initiatives have been underway. REL site-based staff (AC members), a reading specialist, and the Co-Development Partner (CDP) School principal convened to discuss how teachers could implement assessment. The group discussed the three pillars of assessment: performance, observation, and conversation. Then, they agreed to work on these pillars by conducting informal observations in grades 1 and 2 classrooms.

There are five steps to follow in this process, including: 1) informing the teachers involved about the purpose; 2) asking teachers to identify at least one student to work with closely using the three pillars; 3) explaining the steps to be taken after the classroom observation, including post-conferencing, sharing ideas and insight regarding the three pillars, and sharing assessment data with parents of the chosen kids; 4) arranging to meet with the teachers and parents; and 5) setting the time.

Thus two groups were identified for observation, each consisting of two members. During the observations, the observers focused on activities and conditions created by the teachers that would help them get to know the students better. As a principal in Palau once said, “Knowing the child is the most important thing for the child’s learning.” Afterward, there was a debriefing session in which observations were discussed. Many questions were raised. For example, “I saw you walk around and talk to some students; what were you talking about?” “What are some conditions you create that allow you time to observe other students?” “What do you think about the three pillars in relation to your profession?” Time was then given for the teachers to share what they had learned.

They agreed that knowing the child is critical to the learning process. So, the question was, what else is being done to help this situation? The first teacher of any child is the parent, and that parent can provide helpful information to teachers. Two parents were notified in advance that there would be a sharing meeting held at the school. The parents were transported to the school by the principal to ensure their attendance.

After the principal’s welcoming remarks, the AC member explained the purpose of the meeting. The teacher then shared

the child’s level of performance through a student portfolio and specified the challenges faced by the student. The parents then shared information about their child’s behaviors and activities. Afterward, they expressed their gratitude for being part of the session. One parent said, “Now that I know the needs of my child, I can tell my wife to start helping him at home.”

After one month, the REL site-based staff followed up with the teachers on the students’ progress. Both teachers said, “There is big change. Their behaviors changed. They even outperformed some of the other students.” The teachers were asked about the process and whether they thought it would be helpful to conduct sharing ses-



Photo: Lee Noto

▷ Hanson Sigrah uses word-reading strategies with a student at the Northern Marianas College Lab School in Saipan.

sions with other parents. Both answered affirmatively. One stated, “Oh, yes, it is so important that we continue, especially with students who are not doing well.” As a result, this process will continue, bringing parental involvement to the core of learning.

Because parents were made aware of their children’s learning needs, they were able to help them at home using basic literacy skills that are easy to teach. When asked what actually happened, each teacher said that they followed through with the child in terms of observing, conversing with, and helping them in their work, but in limited amounts of time. When the teachers spoke with the students, the students said their parents helped them at home with their literacy needs.

Winton Clarence, Specialist, Center for Accountability, Research, and Evaluation, can be reached at clarencew@prel.org. ★