



▷ The Pacific Curriculum & Instruction Council implements education reform and helps align PREL program activities with entity initiatives.

# PCIC

## Fostering Pacific School Improvement

By Joan Perkins

One major instrument of school improvement in Hawai'i and the U.S.-affiliated Pacific is the Pacific Curriculum & Instruction Council (PCIC). Composed of the curriculum and instruction (C&I) directors from each school system, the members of PCIC are responsible for the day-to-day implementation of education reform. In addition, PCIC serves PREL in an advisory capacity, ensuring that PREL program activities are aligned with entity priorities and initiatives.

The current PCIC developed out of leadership teams that met through the Pacific Summer Institutes and Curriculum & Instruction Leadership Seminars beginning in 1988. Reconstituted in 1995 as a PREL Leadership Team for the Pacific Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center, PCIC served in that capacity until 1998. At the suggestion of Dr. Tom Barlow, now the company's Chief Executive Officer, the group's role was then redefined as an advisory council for all PREL programs.

Ms. Eloise Sanchez, C&I director for the Guam Department of Education and former PCIC chair, explains PCIC's role as helping to coordinate PREL's work in the

entities. By bringing together C&I directors from each entity, PCIC meetings provide an opportunity for them to brainstorm and discuss how best to integrate curricular research, federally funded initiatives, and island priorities. She explains, "The Council acts as a catalyst to bring all these elements together in a way that promotes educational excellence."

### Cultural Literacy

One of PCIC's earliest priorities was to establish a core curriculum for cultural literacy. The initiative grew in part out of the need to maintain island heritage. PREL Senior Associate Kathy Busick remembers that at one meeting the late governor of American Samoa, Mr. Tauese Sunia, expressed a concern shared by educators throughout the Pacific. "Our children," he said, "know more about the U.S. than they know about their own cultures." By reinforcing cultural values and knowledge within school systems, PCIC aimed to create greater understanding of connections across Pacific cultures. Amongst Islanders, the project has helped strengthen awareness of shared history and common goals.

Another objective, says former Palauan C&I director and long-term PCIC member Masa-Aki Emesiochl, is to support Micronesian students making the transition from their communities of ori-

gin to schools in Guam and Hawai'i. At one point, he explains, there was concern in these school systems about the influx of Micronesian students and how best to serve them. Cultural profiles developed by the different island communities provide helpful information to teachers and administrators in host countries. These are now available on the Teaching Educators About Micronesian Students (TEAMS) website at [www.prel.org/teams](http://www.prel.org/teams). The project has served as a springboard for local initiatives as well. For example, under the direction of Mr. Emesiochl, the Palau Ministry of Education partnered with PREL in the development of a CD-ROM entitled "Learning About Palau."

### PEC

More recently, the PCIC chair has taken responsibility for planning and directing the annual Pacific Educational Conference (PEC). A major source of professional development, the PEC also provides a vital opportunity for networking, collaboration, and cultural preservation for educators most often separated by thousands of miles of ocean. Greater control of the conference makes it possible for PCIC to determine the depth and focus of its activities, ensuring that the entity's most urgent professional development needs are being met. As Dr. Barlow explains, organizing and managing the PEC "places another instrument in the hands of PCIC to direct school improvement in the Pacific."

### Looking Forward

What will PCIC take on in the future? Mr. Emesiochl hopes to see the group turn its attention to an important and ongoing challenge: maintaining the implementation of professional development programs beyond their federal funding cycles. Changing priorities as federal administrations come and go has long been a detriment to continuity in school improvement programs. Mr. Emesiochl believes that by requiring accountability at the local level and allotting time to share knowledge and skills, school systems can continue to reap the benefits of teacher training beyond the life of federal programs.

*Joan Perkins is the Managing Editor of Pacific Educator magazine.* ★