

## No Child Left Behind and the Pacific Region

By Jackie Burniske

**T**he *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a law first passed in 1965, was signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. NCLB is now in its fifth year of implementation in the K–12 public education system in the United States. NCLB is built upon four main principles that are believed to lead to increased student achievement: (1) accountability through high state academic standards and annual assessments, (2) choice for parents and students, (3) flexibility for states and school districts, and (4) the use of research-based instructional methods.

In the U.S.-affiliated Pacific region, the state education agencies (SEAs) are subject to differing degrees of compliance with NCLB. Hawai'i is the only SEA that is responsible for all NCLB requirements. The territories of American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and Guam use the consolidated application approach for federal NCLB assistance under Title V, and are subject to some, but not all, NCLB requirements. The three sovereign nations in the Pacific region, known as the Freely Associated States (FAS), are the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the Republic of Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). They are each linked to the U.S. through Compacts of Free Association and are subject to NCLB requirements only in the requirements that the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) places on their funding.

Under NCLB, each SEA is required to submit to the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. ED) a state educational accountability plan. The plans address the state timeline to achieving full proficiency toward state academic



content standards and closing the achievement gap. In the Pacific region, that requirement holds for Hawai'i. American Samoa, the CNMI, and Guam are voluntarily developing (or have already developed) accountability plans for U.S. ED review and approval. The FAS SEAs are required to submit similar accountability/implementation plans to the Department of the Interior (DOI), which administers their education funds. Pacific Resources for Education and Learning's (PREL's) work in the region links directly to needs identified in these accountability plans.

### State of Hawai'i

By virtue of being the only state, Hawai'i is also the only SEA in the Pacific region subject to all the provisions of NCLB. Hawai'i must abide by the timetables and all the compliance and reporting requirements of NCLB

and faces the same NCLB challenges and opportunities as states in the continental U.S. The Hawai'i Department of Education (DOE) is required to submit an accountability plan to the U.S. ED for review and approval.

### Territories

American Samoa, the CNMI, and Guam are subject to some of the provisions of NCLB, but not all. They submit a consolidated plan to the U.S. ED each year under Title V of NCLB and are not required to meet Title I accountability standards. At a meeting facilitated by PREL in Honolulu June 6–7, 2005, representatives of all three territorial SEAs met with U.S. ED personnel to review priority NCLB areas and develop strategic plans for targeted areas of focus. American Samoa has opted to participate in the Adequate

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Yearly Progress (AYP) requirement. The other two territories have not yet done so, but will, as they develop their accountability plans.

### Freely Associated States (FAS)

The RMI, the Republic of Palau, and the FSM are not directly subject to NCLB, but their educational plans are heavily influenced by its requirements. The three FAS each have a Compact of Free Association with the United States. The Compacts with the FSM and RMI were first approved in 1985 and then again in 2003. The new Compact provides for continued economic assistance on an annual basis during fiscal years 2004–2023. Grant assistance under the new Compact is limited to six sectors: health, education, infrastructure, private sector development, public sector capacity building, and environment, with a priority given to the education and health sectors. In addition to sector funding under the Compact, the discretionary, consolidated Supplemental Education Grant (SEG) is provided to the FSM and RMI through funding from three federal departments: the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Education. Two joint committees are responsible for reviewing and approving the government submissions and implementing U.S. grant funding under the amended Compacts: the Joint Economic Management and Finance Accountability Committee (JEMFAC) for the FSM and the Joint Economic Management Committee (JEMCO) for the RMI.

The SEAs for the RMI and FAS are required to annually submit to the DOI an education implementation plan. The DOI works closely with the

U.S. ED in recommending and assuring that these plans are closely linked to the requirements of NCLB. In 2004–2005, the DOI required the FAS SEAs to prepare several status reports, including: National Inventory of Education Facilities, Effectiveness of the National Student Testing System, Analysis of Staffing Patterns, Textbook Inventory, and Indicators of Educational Progress. In particular, the Indicators of Educational Progress mirror the basic requirements of NCLB.

The original Compact of Free Association with Palau was not completed until 1994 and, although it will be in effect for 50 years, certain fiscal provisions will be renegotiated in 15 years, with discussions to begin as early as 2006. There are currently no joint committees created under this Compact, and the relationship between the U.S. and Palau consists of those that have been developed between individual departments, such as between the U.S. ED and the Palau Ministry of Education (MOE). This makes the influence of NCLB most indirect and difficult to determine in Palau. However, the current Compact does require plans for educational systems improvement that will raise student achievement and improve teacher quality and the Palau MOE is committed to the goals of increasing accountability and raising student achievement.

### Student Achievement

Only three SEAs (American Samoa, Guam, and Hawai'i) have participated in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The results of the most recent NAEP (the specific year varies depending upon the content area tested) and other assessments show that significant improvement is occurring in the region, but results are still below the national average and often at the very bottom. Many of these students come

from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Research shows a strong relationship between poverty and low student achievement.

### Teacher Preparedness

One of the most important challenges faced by many Pacific jurisdictions is the preparedness of teachers. While over 90% of the teachers in Hawai'i hold a bachelor's or higher degree, in the FSM, according to the FSM Department of Health, Education, and Social Affairs, 622 teachers hold only high school diplomas. Of FAS teachers with any collegiate preparation, a vast majority hold only a 2-year degree. For instance, only 9% of the teachers in the RMI hold a bachelor's degree. The improvement of both teacher content and pedagogical knowledge is the region's priority need.

### Conclusion

All 11 SEAs in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific region are committed to improving schools and raising student performance. NCLB, and the corresponding DOI requirements in the FSM and RMI, are providing focus, support, and motivation to ensure that improvement efforts continue. PREL is working to provide SEAs with technical assistance in using research-based knowledge to address needs identified in their approved plans to raise student achievement, close achievement gaps, and meet the requirements of NCLB. The following is a list of areas in which PREL is working with SEAs: improving teacher quality; closing achievement gaps for English language learners, students with disabilities, and others with special needs; standards review and refinement; assessment review and alignment; and accountability and reporting systems.

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