



Educational Needs in the Pacific Region: The REL Client Interview Report

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Abstract

In January 2006, 42 semistructured telephone interviews were conducted with educators (teachers, administrators, and state education agency [SEA] staff) in the Pacific region (American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands [CNMI], Chuuk, Guam, Hawai'i, Kosrae, Republic of Palau, Pohnpei, Republic of the Marshall Islands [RMI], and Yap). Trained interviewers asked them about the two most critical needs, the root causes behind those needs, solutions to meeting those needs, and Pacific Resources for Education and Learning's (PREL's) role in the solutions. A content analysis of the needs resulted in six themes: improving student achievement and learning; opportunities to learn; improving teaching and learning through improving teacher quality; improving teacher quality through increasing professional development opportunities; alignment and coherence of standards, assessment, and accountability; quality leadership; and greater parental and community involvement and support. Analyses of the root causes, potential solutions, and the role PREL could play in the suggested solutions yielded the following: lack of financial resources, issues of language and culture, and poor leadership as root causes; professional development, policy and program revisions, and increased parent and community involvement as potential solutions; and professional development workshops, funding and materials, and advocacy/support as ways PREL can address needs and root causes.

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I. Introduction

Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) serves the U.S.-affiliated Pacific, a large region where people live in mostly rural and remote areas. The region spans a vast area—4.9 million square miles of ocean and six time zones. It is diverse politically, culturally, and linguistically; educationally uneven; and at a developing level technologically. Economic conditions in the region (outside of Hawai'i) are below U.S. poverty levels and disproportionate percentages of the popula-

tion are undereducated, unemployed, and use English as a second language.

This context impacts needs and their assessment both directly and indirectly. Relative poverty, multicultural and linguistic diversity, and underdeveloped infrastructures and resources for education impact the quality of education, access to education, and opportunities to learn. They also impact what students bring to the classroom and how best to build on what they know.

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As part of our ongoing needs sensing across the region, we have talked with educators, parents, national and local leaders, and researchers to better understand local cultures, languages, and contexts (social, economic, and political), and to examine closely the state and conditions of education, schools, and classrooms in the Pacific. In addition, we have systematically scanned the state of education across the region looking for patterns and trends in schooling, teacher supply and quality, and student performance. Finally, we have analyzed the data we enter and store in our information management system to track our work and our responses to requests from the field. The data we have gathered and analyzed have been used to strategically drive and focus our work.

In January 2006, we decided to look further into the needs of the region. To do this, we conducted interviews with administrators, teachers, and state education agency (SEA) staff. In this report, we discuss our approach to and findings of a set of in-depth, semistructured interviews with PREL clients about the critical and enduring educational needs of the region, possible underlying reasons for these needs, some potential solutions, and in what ways PREL could be of assistance to address expressed needs.

II. Needs Assessment, 2000–2005

Throughout its Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) contract (2000–2005), PREL has conducted continuous and systematic needs assessment activities. We used a needs assessment design that incorporated multiple methods and sources for gathering data on needs across the region. Assessments have been conducted through a combination of: (a) systematic environmental scans of the state and changes in education and contexts; (b) analyses of our work (requests and responses) through our information management system (IMS); and (c) through targeted inquiries using focus groups, interviews, and surveys.

Close relationships with our partners in the Pacific region have enabled PREL to track macro aspects of trends in educational conditions across the region through our review of entity educational plans, policies, and legislation, and the analyses of available educational, as well as socioeconomic, data. In addition, our Board of Directors, including leaders of the SEAs and Ministries of Education, regularly provide us with updates on the state of education in each of the entities served by PREL. Another source of information comes from PREL's IMS. Our regional partners submit data into the IMS. The available information enables PREL to assess regional needs and to identify areas where more time or development efforts are required. Finally, information on regional needs has been obtained through meetings, surveys, and forums. For example, regional needs have been discussed at PREL Board of Directors Meetings and have also been revealed through Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) reports, the Pacific Curriculum and Instruction Council (comprised of the curriculum and instruction chiefs of each jurisdiction), the Pacific Higher Education Council, the Pacific School Level Advisory Council, and at the annual Pacific Educational Conferences.

Surveys have also constituted an important method for PREL to conduct needs assessment across the region. The

2005 REL Client Satisfaction survey was distributed to 554 PREL clients and 225 surveys (41%) were returned. The survey contained two sections: the first asked respondents to rate support services provided by PREL, and the second asked respondents to review and rate three areas affecting student achievement that were previously identified by various groups throughout the Pacific region, such as RACs convened by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. ED). PREL clients rated the following three areas as very important to improving student achievement: improving teacher quality (73.9%), strengthening capacity of education systems (standards, assessments, accountability) (72.3%), and addressing learning needs of students with special needs (62.1%). Findings were clear that more work was needed in the region to improve educational opportunities and achievement. Also in the second section of our client survey, PREL clients were asked to identify any educational needs that were of high importance and that should be addressed in the future. Respondents identified 22 areas that needed addressing. Responses were brief and, for the most part, very general in nature. Most critical were the needs for more professional development (27.9%); opportunities to learn and the need for instructional materials (19.1%); and standards, assessments, and accountability (17.6%). Lower percentages were indicated in the areas of help in general (8.8%), counseling (2.9%), leadership (2.9%), research (2.9%), and teacher certification (2.9%).

Although we have continuously gathered needs data using mixed methods and multiple sources data over the 5 years, three enduring issues have consistently emerged across time: (1) teacher quality; (2) student achievement in early reading; and (3) standards, assessment, and accountability.

Teacher Quality. The issue of teacher quality has been gaining attention, as there is evidence that better qualified teachers make positive differences in student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Furthermore, the *American School Board Journal* in its March 2005 issue suggested that high-quality teachers have a substantial effect on student achievement, especially with disadvantaged students. Teacher quality, however, has been recognized as a complex phenomenon and, while there appears to be little consensus on what it is or how to measure it, there has been some agreement that two broad elements characterize quality teachers: teacher preparation and teacher classroom practices (Lewis, Parsad, Carey, Bartfai, Farris, & Smerdon, 1999; Torff, 2005). Teacher preparation, or teacher qualifications, are often referred to as the competencies teachers bring to the job—for example, degrees, certifications. Some researchers have also included professional development they continue to receive in this category. Teaching quality refers to teachers' classroom performance (Ingersoll, 1996). High-quality teachers need to understand instructional sequences and processes and the fundamentals of how students learn, and possess a working knowledge of what constitutes quality instruction (Gersten, Baker, Haager, and Graves, 2005). This enables them to analyze the needs of their students, assess the resources available, and then devise an appropriate, culturally diverse curriculum (Ingersoll, 1996; Cross, 2003). The importance of these elements has been corroborated by the Center for Teaching Quality, suggesting that high-quality

teachers must have content knowledge and classroom skills specifically to understand how to organize and teach in ways that enhance student learning. Finally, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) defines quality teachers as those possessing a bachelor's degree, full state certification as defined by the state, and demonstrated competency in each core academic subject they teach.

The difficulty of achieving the necessary criteria used to describe a quality teacher makes it extremely hard to place these teachers in classrooms in the Pacific region. Within the region, approximately 286,442 students attend K–12 public schools and they are taught by 16,944 teachers. Moreover, most teachers in the region (with the exception of those in Hawai'i and Guam) do not have bachelor's degrees. For example, in grades 5–8, the number of teachers with an associate's degree (AA) or less ranged from 4% in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) to 94% in Pohnpei. High percentages of teachers with no more than an AA degree are found in Kosrae (93%), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) (91%), Yap (89%), Chuuk (85%), Palau (78%), and Samoa (67%). Thus, while NCLB characterizes high-quality teachers as having a bachelor's degree, less than 50% of teachers in American Samoa; about one in four teachers in Palau; 15% of teachers in Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap; and about 4% of the teachers in the RMI in the 2002–2003 school year had bachelor's degrees. Furthermore, teacher certification issues are also problematic at particular sites as some have less than 1% of their teachers with full state certification.

Student achievement in early reading. The academic achievement of children whose first language is not English has long been a major educational concern in the region. Those who come from cultural and linguistic minority backgrounds fall short in school achievement. Measured through grading, retention in grade level, teachers' judgments of student ability, and standardized tests, the academic performance of students with limited English proficiency generally lags behind other elementary school students (Moss & Puma, 1995).

In 2002, 51 states and other jurisdictions participated in the NAEP reading assessment. Nationally, 30% of the 4th graders and 8th graders scored at or above the proficient level. Just 21% of Hawai'i 4th graders scored at or above the proficient level. In Guam, this percentage was 8%. Reading performance for 8th graders indicates an even greater gap. Comparatively, the largest entities score significantly lower (NCES, 2003).

In Hawai'i, just 20% of 8th graders read at or above the proficient level; in Guam, it was 11%, and in American Samoa, less than 1%. In 2002, American Samoa and Guam both ranked at the bottom of all participating states and jurisdictions. Longitudinal comparisons of entity performance over the years indicate no significant differences in reading. Thus, the reading gap between Pacific students and their peers in the continental U.S. is large and persistent (NCES, 2003).

In the Pacific region, this is a major concern. Many students are not learning to read in part because their teachers lack adequate content knowledge and pedagogical skills to effectively teach them. Poor teacher preparation is a general education problem, but it is particularly relevant to those who teach reading. Many English language learner (ELL) students

at the elementary school level need extensive development in the areas of basic reading skills (decoding and fluency), as well as vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing, to enable them to reach high academic standards. The difficulty in teaching students in the Pacific region is further complicated by the fact that the transition from 3rd to 4th grade brings a change in the language spoken by the teacher in the classroom—from the students' native language to English. Depending on the teacher and the teacher's language proficiency skills, some classroom lessons use more English than others. So as students are learning new content in their classes, they increasingly have to learn to understand and speak about the new subject matter in English. However, the transition from native language instruction to English is not systematic and varies by teacher. To furthermore compound this problem, teachers are faced with limited classroom resources, minimal assessments in the local language, and staff development that is infrequent (Low, Clarence, and William, 2002).

Standards, assessment, and accountability. Standards, assessment, and accountability are tools that are being used by the federal government to close the achievement gaps between the rich and the poor and between students of different ethnic groups, and to make sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency (NCLB). Specifically, standards provide the opportunity for school communities to reach consensus on what students should know and be able to do (Burger, 2000) and indicate what content teachers should teach and students should learn (Dougherty and Young, 1998). Researchers also point out that standards (Dougherty and Young, 1998), curriculum, and classroom instruction need to be aligned with assessments (Burger, 2000) because assessments should be evaluating the important ideas that students should be learning (Dougherty and Young, 1998). It is important for teachers to understand that assessments can improve the teaching and learning process (Low, Clarence, and William, 2002). Tied to standards and assessment is accountability, which has been described as multifaceted, involving responsibility, authority, evaluation, and control. While educational accountability can be directed toward a process (how things are done) or outcomes (results), the single best use of accountability within a culture of standards-based assessments is for improving education (Heim, 1996).

Based on the findings of our needs assessments from 2000–2005, we decided to explore more deeply the critical and enduring needs across the region, the reasons behind the needs, how they could be met, and the role PREL could play in meeting these important needs. Basically, we needed to find out more about these needs from our clients, in their own settings and in their own words. An opportunity to expand on the client survey arose when the U.S. ED extended the 2000–2005 REL contract another month to March 15, 2006. With this extension in place, PREL would be able to delve more deeply into educational issues that were identified by respondents in the 2005 REL Client Survey. PREL decided to conduct a more in-depth examination of the educational issues across the region through semistructured interviews. We believed that the responses would be richer and more meaningful if a framework was developed and used that would permit PREL clients

to describe educational needs from their own personal experiences, knowledge, and expectations.

We now turn to the client needs assessment interviews designed to deepen our understanding of needs across the region, their origins, and possible ways to address needs clients identify.

III. Client Needs Assessment Interviews, 2006

As part of its second REL contract extension, PREL designed and conducted a set of semistructured interviews with PREL clients in all 10 jurisdictions during the period of February 15–28, 2006. In this section, we provide a rationale for our approach, describe how we conducted the interviews and with whom, and close with a discussion of how we analyzed the data.

A. Needs Assessment Approach

We decided to augment our more recent needs assessment activities with semistructured interviews that allowed a purposive sample of PREL’s clients to provide more in-depth descriptions and interpretations of the educational needs in their local settings and in their own words. We were particularly interested in the meanings and interpretations our clients brought to identified needs in their own settings. We chose to use semistructured interviews because they add rigor, breadth, and depth to our study.

- To increase rigor in our study, we drew on what we know about how qualitative studies meet tests of rigor in order that readers have trust in the findings and conclusions (Guba and Lincoln, 1983). Based on the research literature and specific discussions in Patton (2002), the following activities were completed in order to improve the rigor of this qualitative study:
 - Key open-ended questions were carefully worded to minimize variations in the answers provided by respondents. Wording the key questions ahead of time does not prevent collected data from being open-ended in that respondents supply their own words, thoughts, and insight (Patton, p. 346), however, the questions will lend focus to the semistructured interviews.
 - Interviewers were selected who were able to write descriptively and knew how to separate detail from trivia.
 - Respondents were selected who were knowledgeable and well-informed about local educational needs.
 - Interviewers were trained in the interview protocol, how to probe for elaboration and clarification, and how to summarize answers into bullet points immediately after the conclusion of the interview.
 - A study audit trail was established to permit confirmation of collected data in order to maximize accuracy and report impartiality.
 - Data analysis was thorough and complete. In addition, triangulation of multiple sources was conducted to determine whether data convergence occurred.

- To ensure validity and reliability of the study, we used multiple sources to obtain data (Mason, 1996). As Denizen (cited in Patton, 2002) has suggested, no single method of data collection is ever adequate, as each method will reveal different aspects of empirical reality. Thus, this study, which is built upon PREL’s previous needs assessment efforts, used semistructured interviews of multiple sources (i.e., administrators, principals, teachers, and SEA staff) to identify a rich, high-quality variety of important educational needs in their schools and jurisdictions, with root causes and potential solutions to resolve these needs. Using this variety of data sources provides the required multiple perspectives and voices to ensure validity and reliability of our study.
- To add more breadth to our needs sensing, our approach used data findings collected through mixed methodological and data sources, since they provide for an opportunity to examine converging “lines of inquiry” (Yin, 2003). In our study, we collected and analyzed data collected from different key informant sources, including teachers, principals, SEA staff, and other educational staff from across the Pacific. The data collected from this sample provided ample opportunities for hearing about educational needs, root causes, potential solutions, and ways that PREL could assist with the solutions from different contexts and perspectives,
- To increase depth in our needs assessment, we designed our study to deepen our understanding of issues that have emerged from PREL’s educational assessments during the past 5 years by gathering different perspectives, meanings, and interpretations of the four key questions from respondents chosen because of their knowledge of the educational situation in their jurisdictions or classrooms. Our qualitative study design enabled us to delve more deeply into the world of each respondent, where the richness of context and perspective can be elicited and analyzed. It was our goal to lead respondents to answer the four questions in their own voice, from their own perspective, and in response to their local setting. As a result, PREL interviewers were permitted to enter the respondent’s world, to collect high-quality information by speaking with individuals to obtain their “feelings, thoughts, and intentions” (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

B. Interview Protocol

After an analysis and review of the short qualitative written responses offered by REL clients in the January 2006 survey (and revisiting the results from committee meetings of groups such as the RAC), a meeting of the REL research and evaluation unit took place to develop the questions to be included in the phone interviews. We decided on four basic questions to be explored with educators across the Pacific region. These included: (1) what are the two most critical educational needs in your school or jurisdiction, (2) why do these two needs

exist, (3) what are the solutions that might best address these two needs, and (4) how could PREL play a role in those solutions? The key questions were developed to be truly open-ended, without presupposing possible responses, thus permitting respondents to determine what “dimensions, themes, and images, or words people use among themselves to describe their feelings, thoughts, and experiences” (Patton, 2002, p. 354). This permitted the individuals being interviewed to open the door to their world and enabled PREL interviewers to view answers from the respondents’ culture and perspective. Clients were given the opportunity to answer the questions in their own words and about their own settings. The interviews were structured to proceed from the general to the specific. First staff asked respondents to identify an important educational issue and then delved more deeply into the root causes affecting the issue and the identification of possible solutions.

Interviewers conducted the interviews over the phone and recorded answers using summarized (i.e., bulleted) responses. These responses would be entered into a database for analysis and write-up. It was estimated that each interview would last approximately 30 minutes. In the end, the average length of all the interviews conducted was 35 minutes (ranging from 12 minutes to 45 minutes). (See interview protocol, interviewer training agenda, and interviewer instructions in Appendixes A, B, and C, respectively.)

C. Interviewer Training

A total of 10 PREL Honolulu staff volunteered to conduct the interviews. They all attended an orientation to discuss the interview protocol, the interview process, and data recording. In this mini-training we went over the introduction to the interview (see Appendix A), stressing the importance of informing the interviewees of the confidential nature of their responses and how the data were to be used. We also reviewed and practiced how interviewers were to probe to arrive at performance needs rather than treatment needs and to seek deeper descriptions and explanations. Moreover, interviewers were informed to complete all of the questions associated with the first educational need (questions 1–4) before beginning the questioning on the second need. For clarity of the information, it was important to complete all discussions and probing on the first need before moving on to discussions on the second need. Finally, at the orientation, the method of writing up the information collected was discussed; interviewers were to submit responses to each question in summarized bullet points for data entry.

D. Sample Selection

For the needs assessment client interview study, we selected a purposive sample of teachers, principals, and administrators from across the Pacific region. We wanted to obtain perspectives from local settings, as well as jurisdiction-wide. PREL staff members from across the region were asked to nominate

potential respondents from each jurisdiction for the telephone interviews. A call to local staff for nominations was sent out with the request for them to identify at least three people from their jurisdictions who were knowledgeable and well-informed about local educational needs and who would be willing to talk about those needs in more detail in a telephone interview. We also asked local staff to consider including at least one person from each of three professional roles: teacher, principal, and SEA administrator. We felt that using a variety of data collection sources would strengthen the identification of any regional educational needs, and the diverse sources would reveal different aspects of empirical reality (Denzin, 1978 cited in Patton, 2002, p. 247). Thus, from each entity we planned to obtain at least one nominated respondent representing the classroom, school, and entity perspectives.

We received a total of 45 nominations from 10 jurisdictions across the Pacific region. Of these, 42 were contacted and interviewed. On average, we conducted four interviews in each site, with some sites having as many as six interviews and others only two interviews. The mix of respondents was 21 administrators from the state level, 10 teachers/school counselors, 8 principals/vice principals, and 3 categorized as “others.”

E. Analysis of Data

With 42 open-ended phone interviews lasting approximately 35 minutes each, an efficient and concise strategy for analysis was necessary to analyze and develop a summary of all the responses. Once the data were collected and entered into the database, four research and evaluation team members reviewed the responses and suggested themes for each of the needs and subsequent questions. The initial review consisted of an independent examination by each of the four research and evaluation team members. All four members individually developed themes and matched interview comments to those themes. Then the team compared notes and, through discussions (consisting of both agreements and disagreements), came up with one set of overarching themes and the corresponding interview comments associated with each theme. This set of six themes was used to sort and analyze responses.

We now turn to the findings from our client needs assessment interviews.

IV. Needs Assessment Findings

In this section, we present the findings from the needs assessment interviews. Our analysis of the findings yielded six overarching themes emerging from needs statements provided by interviewees. These include: (1) student achievement and learning; (2) opportunities to learn (curriculum and instruction for English learners and instructional resources and materials); (3) teacher quality; (4) standards, assessment, and accountability; (5) quality leadership; and (6) parent and community involvement.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Needs Assessment Findings

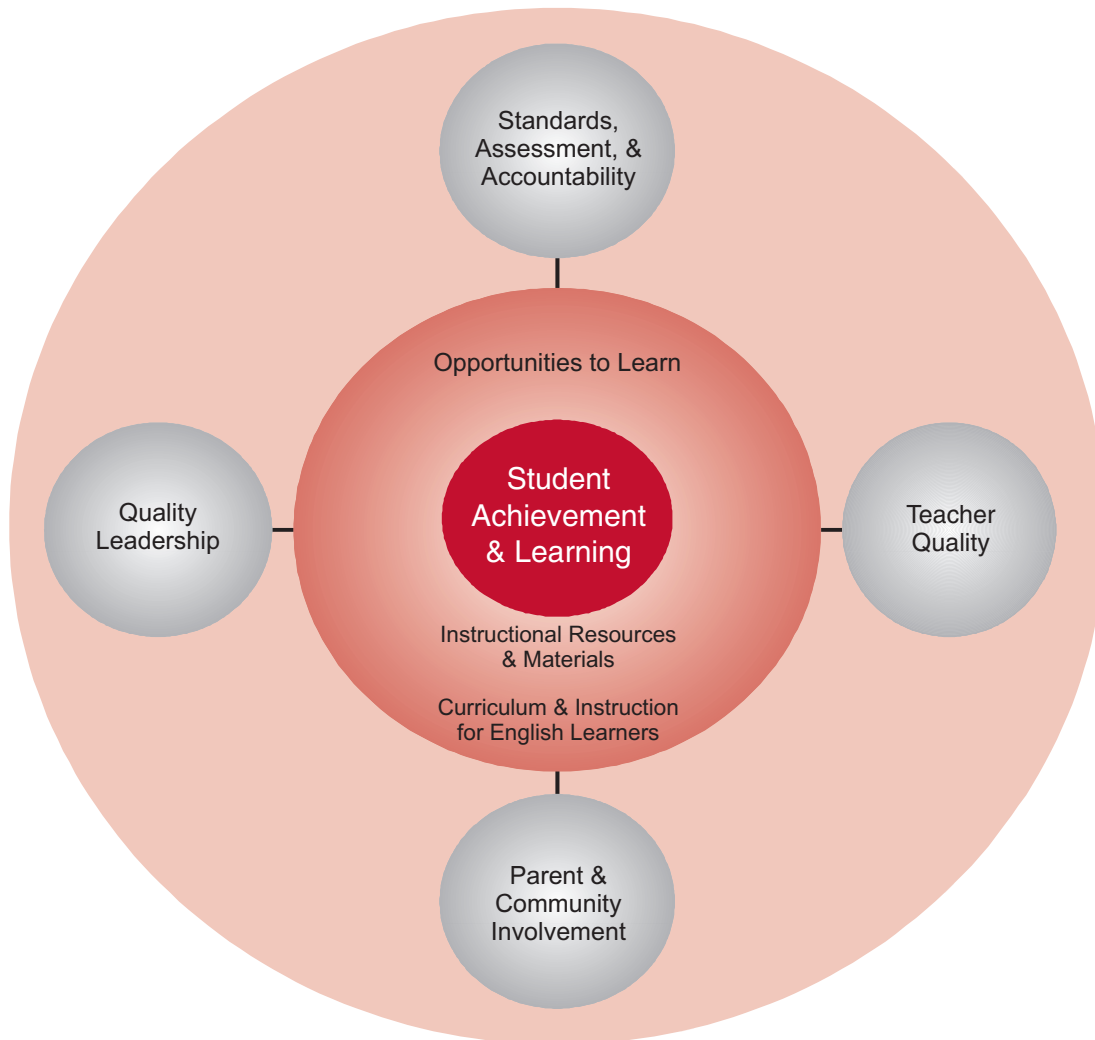


Figure 1 shows a conceptual framework that we developed to understand how these categories of needs can be organized and linked.

In presenting the findings and our analysis, we chose to organize this section based on the linkages or relationships between the six themes. At the center of our discussion is student achievement. In our interviews with Pacific educators, improving student achievement and learning was the primary focus of the discussion on all educational needs they identified. Student learning is then supported by opportunities to learn—in this case the provision of instruction and a core curriculum appropriate to English learners and of appropriate instructional resources and materials. Student learning is further affected by teacher quality and the quality of leaders and instruction. Furthermore, the strength of the standards, assessment, and accountability systems in place in each community also affects student learning. In addition, student learning is affected by what parents do in school and at home, as well as the degree of community support for education. This schema suggests that student achievement and learning is affected directly by the five other needs that respondents identified.

We now turn to our key findings for each major area of need. We first provide data on how respondents defined and

described the need. This is followed by a discussion of what respondents thought were the underlying causes for the existence of the need, the possible solutions to address the need, and, finally, how PREL could assist in addressing the need. (See Table of “General Themes and Sub-Issues” in Appendix D.)

A. Improving Student Achievement and Learning

Improving student achievement and learning was one of the more critical and enduring needs that was identified during the 2000–2005 needs assessment work that occurred through the REL contract. With the majority of students in the Pacific scoring below national proficiency levels, addressing the need to improve student learning and achievement has been one of the Pacific’s most critical needs. For example, in 2002, 51 states and other jurisdictions participated in the NAEP reading assessment. Nationally, 30% of the 4th graders and 8th graders scored at or above the proficient level. Just 21% of Hawai‘i 4th graders reached the proficient level. In Guam, it was 8%. Reading performance for Pacific 8th graders indicates an even bigger gap. Just 20% of Hawai‘i 8th graders scored at the proficient level. In Guam, the percentage was 11%, and in America Samoa, it was less than 1% (NCES, 2003).

Math scores among the three largest jurisdictions (America Samoa, Guam, and Hawai'i) also indicate unacceptably low performance. In the 2000 NAEP mathematics assessment, 27% of 4th graders and 31% of 8th graders scored at or above the proficient level. Just 14% of Hawai'i 4th graders, 2% of Guam 4th graders, and less than 1% of America Samoa 4th graders reached the proficient level. The situation is similar among 8th graders. Just 16% in Hawai'i, 4% in Guam, and less than 1% in America Samoa reached the proficient level. (NCES, 2000).

In this 2006 qualitative needs assessment study, improving student achievement and learning also emerged as a central focus for educators we interviewed. In describing the need or state of student achievement and learning in the Pacific, achievement gaps, low scores, and inconsistent achievement across grades in core content areas emerged as critical issues; some educators also identified a need for student learning in areas outside of content (e.g., character development).

The following presents how respondents characterized the state of student achievement and learning, the root causes behind the state of student achievement, possible solutions, and how PREL could assist in improving student achievement and learning.

One of the critical and enduring needs identified by several respondents was improving student achievement. As expressed by one respondent there is a need to address the achievement gap between students with low socioeconomic status and others.

“Over 42% of our students qualify for free lunch. We need to reduce the achievement gap” [between these students and others].

For others, their student achievement needs are described as “extremely” low scores in reading, writing, or math.

“Our writing scores are extremely low. We need teachers to use writing in everyday learning.”

“We need our student outcomes in reading to improve.”

“Literacy scores over the past 3 years are lower than expected.”

Another respondent stated their needs were not in improving scores, but in keeping them consistently growing across the grades

“Our reading and writing scores are not very low but are inconsistent across grades. There are high scores in kindergarten, but in grades 1 and 2 scores decline, pick up at grade 4, then decline in grade 5. This pattern repeats in the middle grades . . . we want to see a steady flow of progress.”

The root causes for poor student achievement identified by respondents fell into three categories. First, as described by one respondent, a lack of appropriate diagnostic testing (formative assessment) instruments:

“We lack the diagnostic testing to identify needs at each grade level.”

Second, a lack of trained teachers who know how to use formative assessments:

“Teachers do not know how to assess what the problem is with an individual student. Is it the teacher’s teaching? A second language problem? A real reading problem?”

In addition, a lack of trained teachers who know enough teaching strategies to teach diverse student populations with many different reading needs was identified by some respondents as a cause for the state of student achievement and learning.

“Teachers are not fully trained to incorporate best practices in working with a diverse student population.”

“Teachers do not have enough strategies to teach to our many reading problems.”

When discussing solutions for the student achievement needs and the underlying causes for low scores, some respondents suggested involving the use of data to guide instruction (formative and summative assessment) and professional development for teachers to learn how to use assessment and to incorporate such data into instruction.

“Use data-driven evidence—formative and summative assessment—to guide instruction.”

“We need professional development for our teachers: reading content strategies, including critical thinking and comprehensions, and diagnostic assessment.”

Some also suggested professional development for teachers to learn more strategies—including strategies to teach core content areas and skills across the curriculum and across grades.

“We need informal consistent professional development in the content of reading and strategies for teaching reading.”

“More focused training on math and science.”

“Training in overall skills to work across grade levels.”

One respondent suggested that professional development efforts could be monitored and followed up to ensure that teachers are doing what they should be doing.

“More follow-up to professional development by provide some survey format for administrators to use to see if professional development is helping teachers, students, and the school. Make professional development more results-oriented.”

In terms of how can PREL address these needs, respondents often indicated continuing to provide PREL’s current level of technical assistance and professional development in the areas of assessment and teaching reading and math. In addition, one respondent suggested that continued work with PREL should involve their reading specialists.

“We need PREL to continue to support us in consistent informal coaching at [each school]. PREL should continue to work along side our reading specialists to improve both reading content knowledge and reading strategies.”

Another stated that PREL is an important source of professional development.

“Continue to provide professional development. For us, any good professional development program is out of the way. Any type of professional development is costly. PREL is important.”

Several also suggested expanding the content of PREL’s professional development to include effective learning styles, use of time management, classroom management, and reading comprehension.

“Provide staff development in effective learning styles, the effective use of assessments to guide instruction, the development of strategies for classroom management, and use of time management.”

“Supply technical assistance in how to improve comprehension in reading. The outside islands need more service from PREL.”

In addition to student achievement needs in core content areas, a few educators expressed a need for more than just reading and math. Specifically, these educators are concerned that the emphasis on academics alone (driven by NCLB and high-stakes testing) results in less emphasis on social development and higher order cognitive thinking. The following statements describe this need:

“We need to expand student learning to include both cognitive and social abilities in spite of the heavy emphasis on reading and math skills. We should be improving both cognitive and social abilities.”

“Improve cognitive, affective, and student development skills.”

These respondents specifically indicated that this need exists due to high-stakes testing and the resulting focus on reading and math.

“Teachers are focused on improving student reading and math skills because of high-stakes testing in these areas.”

“Teachers are focusing on ensuring that students pass the tests instead of improving cognitive, affective, and development skills.”

One respondent—in an effort to incorporate character into instruction—suggested professional development specific to how to incorporate general learner outcomes as a solution.

“Provide staff development that trains teachers on how to develop strategies to incorporate general learner outcomes into the curriculum.”

Another felt that the alignment between the state test and the curriculum needed to be evaluated.

“There needs to be an assessment of the questions on the test to the curriculum being taught to ensure there is consistency with what is being taught to what they are being evaluated on.”

Respondents felt that PREL could be of direct assistance with this need area. One suggested that PREL assist with incorporating general learner outcomes.

“Assist the department with procedures for implementing general learner outcomes and provide staff development for teachers and presentations to principals and administrators.”

Another felt that PREL could develop better assessments that would account for the realities of student development and the existing curriculum.

“Develop new assessments that are developmentally consistent with student development and are congruent with what is being required in the curriculum.”

Summary

In general, Pacific educators described the need to improve student achievement and learning as issues concerning achievement gaps, low scores, and inconsistent achievement across grades in core content subjects. Some also described a need for students to also learn character development, cognitive skills, and social skills. Root causes behind these issues involve a lack of data-driven assessment and instruction, a lack of effective teaching to meet the diverse learning needs of students, and a lack of skills among teachers on how to incorporate social and character building skills into daily instruction. Solutions to improve student achievement and learning center on having teachers use data to target and modify instruction and building a broader repertoire of teaching and learning skills. PREL was identified as a resource to develop better assessment instruments than currently exist and to serve as a provider of professional development so that teachers can acquire these skills needed to improve student achievement and learning.

B. Opportunities to Learn

The Pacific region is comprised of many distinct cultures that represent indigenous Pacific Islanders, as well as ethnic groups from Asia. Migration from Asia, as well as between the Pacific islands, has created a highly diverse multicultural and multilingual student and teacher population. Contemporary Pacific educators face the daily challenge of instructing in the English language, while for many students, and even teachers, the home language is not English. The region is also well described as being island states geographically spread across a vast mass of water. In each island state, there is a central island where the seat of services is located, and there are also remote islands where transportation of goods and human resources, as well as access to modern advances such as telecommunications, are limited, creating a unique context in which to provide education. Each of the U.S.-affiliated Pacific region’s 10 island entities varies in the degree to which educational resources are available and managed.

In listening to educators identify critical educational issues, two separate yet related issues emerged. First is the provision of appropriate instruction and curriculum to English learners. Second is the provision of instructional materials in the form

of textbooks, supplies, and equipment to students, teachers, and classrooms. Together, these issues make possible valuable opportunities to learn for Pacific students. Without appropriate curriculum and instruction, without adequate supply of essential instructional materials, learning is severely affected.

The following section presents our findings and educator descriptions of the issues related to opportunities to learn—the need for improving teaching and learning for English learners and the need for instructional resources and materials—their root causes, solutions, and how PREL can assist in addressing these issues.

Opportunities to Learn—The Need for Improving Teaching and Learning for English Learners

As part of the discussion on student achievement, one finding was the need to improve teaching and learning for English learners. Many of PREL’s clients identified as their most pressing need the issues they are facing in effectively teaching students whose first or native language is not English. While nearly all entities have in common large proportions of students who are considered by U.S. standards ELLs, the use of the native language as the primary/only language is far more common for some entities than others. For example, for some communities, the use of English is only common at school. For other communities, language in the classroom is best described as diverse—with many different languages and cultures represented. For some communities, many of the teachers are also teaching in English, while their native language is not English. Given this, one of the larger or more consistent expressions by respondents of using dual language or bi-literacy approaches as a need has to do with the challenge or conflict of using an English-only approach to instruction in what many are saying is an inappropriate denial of students’ language and culture. This limits the access of English learners to core content.

This need is well described by the following respondents:

“Students aren’t learning because they don’t understand English—the language of instruction is officially English but it is really mostly the native language that is used, even in school.”

“[The local language] is spoken in the home—English is the language of instruction but not the language spoken at home.”

As stated by one respondent, the need is further exaggerated in that many teachers are also English learners themselves.

“Teachers are native speakers themselves with 90% being English language learners. They do not have the skills to teacher students to transition from the native language to English.”

Another respondent indicated that learning difficulties that exist for elementary students are due to inconsistencies in speaking the native language and having all their textbook materials in English. Furthermore, as one respondent suggests:

“The learning difficulties that exist for elementary students are due to inconsistencies in speaking the native language and having all their textbook materials in English.”

These educators are in need of effective instruction that deals with the reality of dual languages. As these respondents suggest:

“A language program [is needed] that integrates the students’ own language and background.”

“The most critical need is the dual language issue. We have tried for the past 20 years to make an English-only model work for our kids. It HAS NOT WORKED.”

Respondents discussed two primary reasons for why this issue exists: teachers are not prepared in addressing dual languages and educational systems themselves have not established clear language policy.

As described by some, teachers are not equipped to deal with two languages.

“Teachers lack strategies of instruction to teach ESL students in all subjects.”

“We have little or no professional development in ESL strategies for our teachers.”

Others indicated that this issue has broader root causes, saying that the broader community and the department have not yet set clear policy on how to deal with the reality of two languages.

“There is plenty of talk about these issues, but nothing ever gets done.”

“For a long time, this need has not been a priority.”

Solutions described by respondents involved the provision of professional development for teachers in how to teach English as a second language, how to develop local language materials, and policy change.

“Training teachers in ESL and students with special needs. We need more consistency in how kids are taught language.”

“Develop trainings for local specialists on how to create materials for the local language community. We need translated materials into the local language.”

Additionally, one respondent suggested that a solution is to change educational policy.

“A new language policy and professional development for teachers so that they can transition students from the local language to English.”

One respondent recommended conducting a needs assessment, saying that this issue should include the community.

“An educational needs assessment—the last needs assessment was done in the 1970s. We don’t know what the community wants.”

When asked how PREL can address this issue, there were three types of assistance identified. First, there were immediate or practical resources such as providing or training local staff to create materials. Second, PREL could provide expertise in the

areas of research, program development, and guidance in setting policy. Third, PREL was seen as an outside entity that could facilitate or assist in simply moving forward on the issue of dual language instruction.

Practical requests involving the provision of materials in the local language, training local teachers and staff to develop their own materials, and providing focused professional development in teaching English learners are described by some as follows:

“Continue to create materials in the first language. Train teachers on how to integrate culture and language into the regular curriculum.”

“PREL is already providing technical assistance on ELL assessment. We will continue to need PREL support and technical assistance in developing local capacity.”

“Help build leadership and capacity in the area of developing local materials.”

Some described PREL as a resource for research, program development, and guidance. Here, there is a sense that the issue of language involves policy makers and educational leaders and a perception that PREL can help bring about large systemic changes.

“Real research on dual language programs—what works for English language learners? We need a policy on ELL.”

“Help us build a strong bilingual education program.”

“Help us identify and solve language issues.”

Some also described PREL’s role as a facilitator.

“PREL and other higher ed. could help tackle these issues head on at PEC [the Pacific Educational Conference].”

“Assist us in moving initiatives that stall.”

Summary

In describing the need to improve teaching and learning for English learners, respondents characterized the issue as one that needs to be addressed because the realities are that while English is the language of instruction at school, it is not the home language. Furthermore, many teachers are teaching in English, while their native language is not the language of instruction. The result is that student learning is affected by the lack of appropriate curriculum and instruction addressing dual languages. Some of the root causes identified were a lack of clear policy among SEAs about this issue and teachers who are not prepared to teach students using two languages. The solutions offered by respondents include provision of professional development to teachers, development of local language materials, changes to policy, and a comprehensive needs assessment to address the issue of two languages. Respondents stated that PREL could assist with the direct provision of professional development and provision of local language resources, while building capacity within each entity to enable local educators to develop their own materials. PREL could also assist in

working with the SEAs to shape policy, provide research into the issue, and assist in developing programs. Finally, some also saw PREL as a partner that could facilitate addressing language issues at large.

Opportunities to Learn—The Need for Instructional Resources and Materials

The REL Client Survey conducted in December 2005 yielded a large request for materials and resources throughout the region. In this qualitative study of needs in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific, the lack of an adequate supply of tools and materials emerged again as a major theme. However the need for instructional materials was connected to lost opportunities to learn. As expressed by teachers—they simply do not have the tools and materials they need to teach. As expressed by administrators and principals—the shortage of instructional materials is a real barrier to student learning and teaching.

Some expressed this need for essential resources—such as textbooks—in simple everyday terms.

“I don’t have enough supplies, materials, and textbooks.

We have one reader for each class. I have 15 students, [so when I teach reading], I have to read out loud to them [from that reader].”

“Students don’t have the supplies they need to learn properly—books, chalkboards, paper tablets, pencils, erasers, outdated or unusable computers.”

Some specifically connected the lack of instructional resources as barriers to learning.

“The lack of materials prevents delivery of instruction.”

“The lack of financial assistance for classroom materials results in insufficient textbooks for language arts. This impacts the ability of students to do home-to-school connections and learning activities at home. This reduces their learning at home and diminishes learning in the classroom. Literacy scores over the past 3 years are lower than expected.”

One respondent spoke of the physical conditions of the school, saying that poor conditions serve as a barrier to student learning.

“The classrooms are in need of repair. Our classrooms are leaking and falling apart. We have too many students in one classroom. Students have trouble concentrating on learning. We have many behavioral problems. We need repairs and more classrooms. Our island has a fast growing population.”

Some felt that the reason for lack of instructional resources had to do with lack of funding.

“There’s no budget for books.”

However, some expressed problems with obtaining existing resources from the central or state offices of education. For example:

“The department has a lengthy process which takes too long to get things ordered and delivered in an efficient

way. This results in having to wait until the need is very great. Money is there for the purchases, but the materials are not delivered in a timely manner.”

“There’s one computer technician for the entire district to service all computers. He’s backlogged.”

[It’s the] “bureaucracy—federal and state. It needs to be overhauled.”

“Central office controls school budgets and they don’t share information about procurement criteria and decision making with the principals.”

As expressed by one respondent, the lack of instructional resources at the schools is due to education not being a priority for policy makers.

“Education is not a priority on the part of politicians and policy makers.”

Respondents identified solutions that involve setting education as a high priority among decision makers (e.g., administrators and policy makers). Getting resources and funding for them so that these needed materials get to the classroom is viewed as an issue that can only be resolved if those controlling such decisions choose to do so.

“Funding needs to be a high priority.”

“Priority funding for textbooks for public schools. Convince school administrators to spend money on textbooks—the money we don’t have.”

“Our community needs to make education and schools a priority. We need more financial support.”

Ways that PREL can help in the need area of instructional materials are: funding and provision of materials, professional development on procurement processes, assisting with policy and making education a priority, and continuation of all current services.

First, highly practical solutions such as direct funding, as expressed by one respondent:

“Send money fast!”

Or, as a direct provider of materials:

“PREL helped last year—we made readers but there aren’t enough. Can PREL make more?”

“Help us develop curricular materials for our island. PREL could help develop books and stories about all of the island nations.”

In addition, another way PREL can help is to provide professional development to improve the procurement process.

“Train administrators on procurement procedures and financial management.”

PREL can help further by assisting the departments of education to make funding instructional resources a priority. Overall,

PREL is seen as an advocate for the schools with a demonstrated commitment to directly assisting classrooms.

“The PREL board meetings can address policies on textbook purchases and make it a priority.”

“Help decision makers to decide righteously in the interests of the entity’s future.”

Although not specifically linked to instructional resources as a need, the request for PREL to continue its work in the Pacific emerged as a specific response to how PREL can address this need. As one respondent stated simply:

“Continue all the training services PREL has been doing in the past until today.”

Other respondents specifically referenced three program areas PREL has addressed in the past, requesting and emphasizing the need for continuation.

“Continue to provide the level and kind of professional development PREL has over the past 3 years to achieve literacy schoolwide. It has helped because PREL was able to fund three teachers in reading and writing workshops who then return and share information to implement and supplement the materials we don’t have.”

“PREL has been an advocate and have provided instrumental technical support. We have the infrastructure at the schools now—connectivity. But we need hardware and software and we need to train the teachers on educational technology as a curriculum.”

“[We] cannot change bureaucracy, but we do need to maximize getting resources and assistance to the schools. Through the Pacific Comprehensive Center—we need PREL at the state-level. That’s where change needs to start.”

Summary

The need for an adequate supply of instructional materials, as well as enough classrooms, was identified as a real barrier to teaching and student learning. From a teacher with one reader for an entire classroom with overcrowded conditions, Pacific educators perceived the causes for this condition as a lack of monetary resources, inefficiencies in procurement of needed materials and services, as well as a lack of commitment from school officials and politicians. Resolution of this issue is viewed as possible when officials make funding education a priority. PREL is seen as an agency that can help in numerous ways—from funding and provision of materials, professional development on procurement processes, assistance with policy and making education a priority, to continuation of all current services.

C. Improving Teaching and Learning through Improving Teacher Quality

As identified in the work of the REL during 2000–2005 and the Pacific RAC in 2005, improving teacher quality was a top priority need identified as a means to improving student

achievement and learning in the Pacific region. Similarly, improving teacher quality emerged as the single largest need area identified across all jurisdictions and across all respondents in this 2006 study. Having a highly qualified teacher in every classroom is seen as the most important change that will directly improve student achievement. As simply stated by one respondent, *“We need quality teachers to deliver quality instruction to our students.”*

In our interviews with educators in 2006, they shared with us their vision of a high-quality teacher. The highly qualified teacher is one that is skilled with many strategies that can meet the unique learning needs of a diverse student body. Respondents spoke of teachers who can skillfully engage an entire classroom, but are also able to provide individualized instruction. They spoke of teachers skilled and confident in the use of assessment instruments and able to make instructional decisions based on data.

In listening to educators across the region, the path toward improving teacher quality is expressed in two interrelated yet distinct need areas under the broader need of having a highly qualified teacher in each classroom. These are: increasing access to teacher education and preparation and increasing professional development opportunities for all teachers.

These two need areas—increasing access to teacher education and preparation and increasing professional development opportunities for all teachers—have also been identified as specific issues that need to be addressed in order to meet the broader goal of improving teacher quality (PREL, 2006).

The issue of access to teacher education and preparation is a long-standing issue in the Pacific. While the majority of teachers in Hawai‘i, Guam, and the CNMI hold bachelor’s or higher degrees, a large percentage of the teachers in the remaining seven entities possess as their highest level of education an associate’s degree. This situation exists in the more remote island jurisdictions of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the RMI, and Palau, with 78% to 94% of the teachers possessing an associate’s degree or less (PREL, 2006).

Access to high-quality professional development opportunities is also problematic in the region. This is in part due to the remoteness of some islands and the lack of availability of high-quality professional development providers. This is particularly true for island states where access to teacher preparation, or 4-year institutes, is problematic. For example, in six of the region’s SEAs, of the 256 schools, almost three-quarters (73%) are located in remote or outer islands. Often, teachers on remote islands are those who are more likely to only hold a high school diploma. (PREL, 2006).

The following sections present the need, causes, solutions, and specific ways in which PREL can assist in improving teacher quality by improving access to teacher education and preparation and by increasing access to professional development opportunities for teachers, as told by Pacific educators.

Improving Teacher Quality through Increasing Access to Teacher Education and Preparation

Teachers who are not prepared to teach emerged as a prevalent issue among respondents across the region. Some educators expressed the intensity of the need within their jurisdiction through the following examples. One respondent indicated the lack of basic postsecondary education, telling us that 6 out of 10 teachers do not have a bachelor’s degree. Of those with a bachelor’s degree, many do not have a degree in education. There is also high attrition, making them lose ground on qualified teachers. Another respondent supports this situation by explaining that nearly half of teachers in the entity are not qualified to teach, and many who have never taught before are in classrooms. The following responses illustrate the need for teacher preparation as described by respondents:

“There’s just not enough teachers with a bachelor’s degree—these untrained teachers quit because of a lack of classroom management skills.”

“Our teachers lack the general content knowledge they need to be able to teach the many subjects that an elementary teacher must teach. They are not able to pass the content part of the PRAXIS test and will not be able to teach.”

“I need quality teachers to deliver quality instruction. Student test scores indicate that students are grouped in three categories: high, mid, and low. The analysis seemed to match with teachers with high, mid, and low levels of content knowledge. We need to improve the teachers.”

In discussing the need for adequate teacher education and preparation, respondents provided a long list of problems or reasons why the need is so great. For some, access to 4-year degree programs in education simply does not exist. For others, access to even 2-year degree programs in education is problematic. One respondent described the situation as lacking a degree-granting program. According to the respondent, the university has a 2-year program to bring teachers with an AA to a BA-level that might produce 40 teachers a year, but this it is insufficient.

“There is nothing for high school teachers. It is very difficult for the current high school teacher to qualify for degree-granting programs for high school teachers.”

“The shortage in the budget does not allow for off-island teachers to receive the proper credentialing, nor does it allow for the proper support and follow-up for new teachers.”

In addition to lack of preparation, lack of opportunities is also part of the realities of teaching. Teachers are underprepared without sufficient support, knowledge, or teaching strategies. This, compounded with low salaries, is an issue preventing the SEAs from meeting their needs for qualified teachers.

“They get low salaries, poor incentives, poor working conditions with overcrowded classrooms—40 students, it’s hard to recruit off-island. Help us figure out how to hold on to the qualified teachers we have.”

Solutions for this involve increasing professional development for teachers in essential skills and content needed to teach and implementing better policies that reflect the realities of each jurisdiction.

“Teacher training on basic teaching methods (e.g., classroom management) and effective instructional strategies. Train teachers on the content of the curriculum.”

“We need a realistic teacher quality policy—the policy that no teachers can be hired without a BA is impossible.”

PREL is specifically mentioned as being able to play an important role in addressing the need for teacher education. Here, the training needs are specific to essential skills, core content knowledge, and teaching to diverse learners, as described by the following statements:

“Help us with survival skills for teachers with professional development in classroom management skills—this will help us retain qualified teachers.”

“Provide professional development in the content of the various subjects, not just strategies of teaching.”

“Train teachers to modify curriculum and teaching methods to accommodate students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, different abilities and different departure points.”

As expressed by two respondents, PREL is also seen as a vehicle to build capacity among local reading specialists and trainers so that each jurisdiction can continue to provide teachers with the support and training they need.

“Work closely with [state-level] staff to help build capacity of our teacher trainers.”

“Provide training for state professional development teams to prepare them to work with teachers.”

Another respondent requested from PREL assistance in developing long-term policies and plans to assist each entity in addressing the shortage of qualified teachers.

“Help us to design a professional development service plan for the education staff here.”

Improving Teacher Quality through Increasing Professional Development Opportunities

The reality is that there is a long path to meeting the Pacific region’s need for highly qualified teachers. Beyond increasing teacher preparation and education, many of the educators we interviewed spoke of the need to increase professional development opportunities for the existing teacher force. In speaking about root causes, respondents listed a range of barriers. For some, providing sufficient access to any professional development is a challenge. Finding time and resources to provide the level (frequency and intensity) of professional development today’s teachers need is another barrier. Another described a lack of a systematic approach to the provision of current professional development to teachers.

As one respondent described, access to high-quality and ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers (particularly among educators in remote islands) is a very real barrier.

“[The need is for] access to professional development opportunities among the 14–15 schools located outside of the central island—teachers are not exposed to current skills and training in the same manner as central island faculty. The remote islands are served by one boat a month. It means that trainers—if they want to go—need to either spend 1 day only or the entire month.”

Another described a lack of time and resources to provide quality professional development.

“Our teachers are bombarded. What works best is for teachers to work with a committed group or program but for that to happen, it means that they have to give up something and that’s not feasible. There is just no time for teachers to be excused to learn. We just don’t have the support system for this—they cannot take 3 days out for an intensive training or even scattered throughout the week. We have no substitutes much less high-quality substitutes.”

Another described a lack of a “systematic” or more deliberate approach to providing professional development.

“We just don’t have a systematic approach to staff development. There is so much coming at teachers and we’re not doing enough of a good job in embedding the PD [professional development] and supporting implementation.”

Respondents identified some solutions to increasing professional development opportunities for teachers. These involve delivering opportunities through technology, providing incentives for teachers to access professional development during the summer, and provision of adequate support to extend professional development into the classroom.

“Trying to work with the local telecommunications agency to build infrastructure so that teachers can receive training via the Web and have access to the World Wide Web [Internet].”

“During the summer, institutes are possible with incentives for teachers. Incentives do not need to be monetary, but perhaps to help them become certified.”

“Having enough support to follow up PD sessions with coaching in the classrooms.”

When asked how PREL could assist, respondents identified PREL as an immediate source of help as a provider of high-quality professional development.

“PREL can help in the classroom . . . modeling, instructional strategies, helping with coaching.”

“PREL is the only entity to bring about quality professional development for people in the region. If PREL could provide personnel (substitutes) or materials for each teacher (not by entity) to help make the summer institute possible.”

Summary

The issue of improving teacher quality is viewed as a critical need that is addressed by improving teacher preparation and quality and improving professional development opportunities. The root causes of lack of access to 4-year, and in many cases even 2-year, educational institutions to prepare teachers to enter the classroom, as well as the provision of high-quality ongoing professional development for the existing teacher force, have to do with geographic remoteness, existence of quality providers, lack of time and resources to provide ongoing professional development, and a lack of a systematic or deliberate approach to current professional development efforts. There were many suggestions on the content of the type of professional development teachers need (e.g., essential teaching strategies, core content, teaching to diverse students), as well as building technological and human infrastructure within the entities, with summer as a better time to provide professional development, and use of substitutes to allow teachers to learn during the school year. PREL is seen as an agency that can assist by being a direct provider of high-quality professional development to teachers and by helping build capacity in the SEAs, and as a source of expertise to assist with designing good professional development plans.

D. Alignment and Coherence of Standards, Assessment, and Accountability

This section involves educator perspectives on the need for a system of standards, assessment, and accountability. The need for such a system that is aligned and coherent—characterized by high-quality standards, appropriate and rigorous assessment, and transparent accountability processes—was identified by the Pacific RAC as one of the top three priority areas in the Pacific (Pacific Regional Advisory Committee, 2005). In the final report covering the REL's 2000–2005 ongoing needs assessment work, this need is described as follows: *“Low-performing schools in the region have difficulty improving student learning in part because they lack adequate or appropriate assessment systems and accountability processes.”*

The link between student learning and teacher quality is firmly rooted in the research. An aligned, coherent educational system with high-quality standards, appropriate and rigorous assessment, and transparent accountability processes is important to allow educators to make informed decisions about student learning and teacher quality and to ensure that all schools provide all students with the opportunity to attain high standards of excellence and make continuous progress in improving student achievement.

With so many languages other than English spoken across the U.S.-affiliated Pacific region, a major challenge for each of the entities is the alignment of standards-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment within culturally and linguistically diverse populations. For example, Hawai'i lacks appropriate content assessment instruments to determine annual yearly progress (AYP) for students enrolled in Hawaiian immersion schools. In the U.S. affiliates, both English and the indigenous languages are taught. Lack of rigorous assessment instruments in both the local language and English is a challenge, as either

valid instruments do not exist or are not yet not being implemented across all classrooms.

Many of the SEAs do not have adequate data management systems that would enable either accountability or decision making. Building the infrastructure—both technologically and in human capacity—are priority need areas for the SEAs. There is an overwhelming demand for services in developing or identifying assessment instruments in all content areas, developing data management systems, and training teachers, principals, and central support staff on how to use data about student learning in order to improve student learning and teacher quality (PREL, 2006).

In this 2006 needs assessment, the challenges previously identified reemerged. Not surprisingly, the content of the responses we received under the need area of standards, assessment, and accountability reflect these challenges: lack of alignment in standards-based curriculum, lack of assessment instruments in both English and the local language, lack of data management systems, and lack of professional development for staff in the use of such systems. Because of the reality of these challenges, or the lack of infrastructure needed for accountability to occur, we found that in discussing root causes and solutions, respondents generally were unable to provide detailed or in-depth descriptions.

The following section illustrates how respondents described that state of standards, assessment, and accountability in the Pacific region.

Standards

In discussing the need for standards, the need is for both the consistent application of standards across the curriculum and for the alignment between standards, assessment, and accountability. As one respondent suggests, there is no standardized curriculum, so the teachers are not teaching consistently. In addition, core subjects are insufficiently developed and do not fit the standards. Furthermore, there are no consistent standards.

“There is no standardized curriculum, so the teachers are not teaching consistently. Core subjects are not developed enough and don't fit the standards. There are no consistent standards.”

Another respondent describes how the curriculum framework is not clear and aligned. It is aligned from grades 1–6 only; grades 7–12 follow old curriculum. This suggests a need for clear and aligned standards, assessment, and accountability systems.

“The curriculum framework is not clear and aligned. It is aligned from grades 1–6 only; grades 7–12 are following old curriculum. We need clear and aligned standards, assessment, and accountability systems.”

Some of the causes for the lack of consistency and alignment have to do with changes in administration. Respondents cited changes in administration as resulting in changes to curriculum and instruction.

“With each new administration, curriculum objectives and initiatives change. The lack of consistency confuses staff and principals are left to decide for themselves what cur-

riculum and instructional approaches to use. The schools are implementing different curriculum with no consistency.”

“Different administrations come and go. They come in and want to do it their way but it’s not consistent with the last administration so there is no consistency or follow-through. It’s like always starting from the beginning.”

Respondents identified solutions that include creating programs that meet clear statewide goals and board of education policies that are enforced to prevent such inconsistencies from occurring when administrations change.

“Develop programs that contribute to state goals so that everyone has the same plan. When we create plans we need to stick to them.”

“Have state Board of Education create and enforce clear policies for curriculum implementation so there is consistency between administrations.”

PREL can directly assist in this need for consistent standards and curriculum through the development of assessment systems, alignment of curriculum and standards, and alignment of assessment systems to the curriculum.

“PREL can help us to align curriculum to standards to assist with developing content of assessment systems and aligning curriculum.”

Assessment

Many educators identified the lack of assessment systems as a need. Without an assessment system, the basis for changing instruction does not exist. Specifically, without formative assessments, teachers only have year-end summative assessment data that prevent the targeting of instructional interventions and opportunities to improve teaching and learning on an ongoing and timely basis. Additionally, as reported by one respondent, data management systems do not exist to provide analysis even if assessment data were collected. Respondent descriptions of this need area are reported below.

As described by respondents, the lack of ongoing formative assessment prevents collection of knowledge on whether or not standards are being met and on school, teacher, or student performance. Both respondents emphasize the need as critical to influence instruction before “it’s too late.”

“We need ongoing assessment of whether or not we are reaching our standards. We need to have a system for assessment that leads toward the ability to analyze student data that is then translated to impacting instruction. We cannot wait for standardized end of the year data to know where a child is. It’s too late for instruction then.”

“If students, teachers, and schools are performing poorly, we don’t know until the end of the school year and then it’s too late to do anything about it.”

One respondent described the lack of a data management system, as well.

“Ideally, we should be able to tell each month where our students in fourth grade are on expected learning outcomes. Even if we have results to inform decision making, there is no data management system that allows central office to analyze such data.”

When asked about root causes, the reasons offered had to do with perceptions that schools are not aware that they need to do anything and a lack of performance reports throughout the educational system.

“Nothing is expected of the schools and they are not equipped to provide this kind of information.”

“People—central offices, schools, principals, teachers—aren’t used to submitting performance reports on a regular basis that are meant to communicate progress and challenges.”

Solutions provided are directed at the development of an assessment system with the appropriate level of support from the local education boards. For example, as described by two respondents, formative assessment instruments and data management systems need to be developed.

“Have assessment systems in place to monitor progress and identify student needs and strengths throughout the school year instead of just at then end.”

“Develop information management system that would allow us to track progress at [the] school, teacher, and student levels.”

As described by one respondent, greater support is needed to ensure that assessment systems are developed.

“Policy needs to be developed via the Board of Education that emphasizes assessment and funding that is targeted to assessment needs to be increased.”

PREL can directly assist in the development of assessment instruments, data management systems, and also in providing professional development to state and school-level personnel in how to use an assessment system. As described by one respondent, PREL can assist with assessment instruments for all grade levels, as well as with the development of an information management system.

“Assist with developing assessment tools for various grade levels throughout the school year to gauge student progress and provide information to teachers that informs instruction. Assist with developing information management systems that inform decision making.”

Another respondent suggested that PREL could provide the necessary professional development so that teachers and state-level staff could use the assessment system.

“Professional development in analyzing and assisting in using data and training on collecting appropriate and useful data for teachers and the state-level staff.”

Accountability

In speaking about needs relating to accountability, respondents generally described a system in which specific policies are not being enforced, and, therefore, teachers (and students) are not held accountable. Interestingly, those who spoke of accountability specifically spoke about a lack of consequences for teachers and schools in enforcing student and teacher attendance policies—not student performance. We believe the lack of specific mention in this study of accountability for student performance makes sense, as prior findings, including findings presented in the standards and assessment sections above, strongly indicate that much of the region lacks the infrastructure to have transparent accountability systems that would allow educators in the Pacific to speak about accountability for student performance.

Yet the degree of the problem described as “chronic absenteeism” among teachers, as well as students, in more than one area of the Pacific was communicated in our interviews. Several respondents identified this as a critical need; clearly, if teachers are not present to teach and students are not present to learn then it is important to address this as a need. The following responses show how respondents described the problem, its root causes, solutions, and how PREL can help with this.

Respondents from some entities described a system marked by “chronic absenteeism” among teachers and students. As described by respondents:

“[The most critical need is] adherence to 180 instructional day mandate. Many schools do not adhere to this policy and it is being ignored by central office.”

“There are no consequences for absenteeism of students and teachers.”

As described below, respondents identified as root causes a lack of management skills among school principals, a lack of awareness among teachers and students on the relationship between attendance and academics, and the fact that, because of low salaries, teachers often take on additional jobs.

“Principals have no skills in working collaboratively with teachers on campus. There is no common understanding regarding school responsibilities and investing in human resources.”

“Teachers and students lack awareness of absenteeism and academic relations. [There is] a lack of commitment for learning responsibilities. Students as well as teachers do not really know the primary purposes and responsibilities for schooling and learning.”

“Often, teachers are not satisfied with the salary and would look for other economic resources, which causes absenteeism.”

Respondents named several potential solutions to address the issue of absenteeism. Among them were offering incentives for teachers and students to encourage attendance and providing training for principals and teachers on management and interpersonal skills.

Some suggestions for incentives for students and teachers are as follows:

“Provide encouragement for students—a playground.” [student absenteeism]

“Provide incentives for teachers—awards and pay raises for those who deserve a raise. An honor list for students.” [Teacher and student absenteeism]

In offering solutions to this issue, respondents felt that targeted professional development or better communication skills for principals might resolve the issue of teacher absenteeism.

“School principals will need to be trained in [school] management.”

“Provide interpersonal training for teachers and principals [to improve communication].”

Respondents also felt that PREL could assist by providing opportunities for educators to share and learn from each other.

“Provide trainings such as the principals institute, so that they can come together to learn skills, and share experiences in their field.”

“Provide opportunities to share ideas learned—support teachers to attend conferences abroad.”

One respondent identified the work PREL had done at one local school—in which absenteeism and morale was a problem—as a specific example of how PREL can help improve conditions in a school.

“All the schools need to become aware of the process for how this school became united in an effort to excel and to see that school work is valuable. They need to see [this school] in the past and what made it improve.”

Summary

In line with the findings of the Pacific RAC and the work of the REL contract from 2000–2005, the region faces many challenges in building an aligned and coherent standards, assessment, and accountability system. As described by respondents in this 2006 qualitative study, they do not have the necessary components: standards-based curriculum, formative assessment instruments, and data management systems. Without these tools, educators at all levels lack the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about student, teacher, and school performance or as a basis of instruction for students. This lack of knowledge also impacts the existence of an accountability system for students, teachers, and schools. In describing root causes, educators we spoke to generally only named the lack of assessment instruments and data management systems. A few indicated that schools, as well as their boards of education, are not aware of the need or importance of such a system. One of the larger findings came from what was not discussed—notably that under the theme of accountability, the only mention was lack of consequences for teachers and students relating to absenteeism. Solutions identified to address this need were practical—development of standards-based curriculum,

appropriate assessment instruments, data management systems, and accountability systems. PREL's role is seen as a direct provider in this area, specifically with assessment instruments and data management systems. In terms of solutions and even PREL's role in addressing absenteeism, concerns over educator absenteeism have been prevalent in the Pacific for some time now. It is a critical need area in which the REL in its 1994–1999 work conducted a region-wide study (Brown, 1999) to identify factors causing absenteeism and made recommendations to the state school systems. More follow-up in this area may be warranted.

E. Quality Leadership

The role of the principal continues to be key to improving our schools. Research has identified instructional leadership as principals' most significant leadership dimension. As instructional leaders, principals provide direction, resources, and support to teachers and students. Furthermore, as instructional leaders, principals focus on helping teachers improve their classroom performance and make academic instruction their schools' top priority (NSDC, 2000). In 2000, the Office of the Secretary of Education convened a National Principals' Leadership Summit to discuss the role of principals as instructional leaders. As a follow-up to the national summit, PREL's REL also convened a Principals' Leadership Summit to dialogue with principals representing Pacific schools. At this summit, barriers to instructional leadership were identified by the participating principals. Among them were lack of knowledge and skills, geographic isolation, and limited access to quality professional development (Chang, 2001). In this 2006 needs assessment study, the importance of quality leadership with principals as instructional leaders emerged as a critical need. The following presents how respondents described the need for quality leaders, root causes, solutions, and how PREL can assist.

In describing the need for quality leaders, respondents indicated that principals need to be instructional leaders, as well as leaders who can engage key stakeholders within the school and from the community to support student learning. The following response describe the need and profile of a quality leader:

“Principals need training on being instructional leaders and working with parents. They aren't familiar with the standards and cannot tell if teachers are providing appropriate instruction. They don't know that they are responsible for monitoring classroom instruction and coordinating parent involvement.”

“We need quality school administrators. Our principals need to be instructional leaders—at the school, with teachers, students, and the community. They need to improve their skills in school administration, be able to work with teachers to review lesson plans to ensure alignment with curriculum and standards, be able to report clearly, and conduct school administrative protocol properly. We need quality training for our principals.”

However, as described below by respondents, current principals and administrators do not possess the necessary back-

ground or skills needed to accomplish the important and challenging task of being an effective school leader. In general, the root cause of the need is a lack of knowledge and skills, as well as lack of professional development in this area.

“We expect a lot from them but they don't have the skills to do this.”

“Too many lack skills in school management, communication skills that create good human relationships.”

“There's no training provided in school management areas.”

Respondents provided several suggestions to address the need for quality leaders. Specifically, respondents identified training in core content areas, well-planned professional development in school administration and management, and training in communication and social and human relationships.

Said one respondent, principals need training in core content areas:

“Train principals on the content of the curriculum in the major content areas (math, science, language arts, and social studies) so they are aware of what should be happening in the classroom at certain times of the year.”

Some respondents identified solutions involving well-planned, quality professional development:

“Need to plan professional development sessions—a series of focused training in school administrative strategies and management to support principals and education managers in school management.”

“We need a capacity building plan and quality training for our principals.”

Another identified the need for social and communication skills:

“Training opportunities for the development of communication skills, social skills, and human relations activities.”

Responses to the question of how PREL can help fell into two types of assistance. First, PREL can provide technical assistance in needs assessment and planning. Second, PREL can serve as a provider of professional development to principals.

As described by some respondents, PREL can help meet the need for quality leaders through needs assessment, planning training programs, review of current capacity building plans, and assisting those in the region by connecting them to resources to provide training. For example, one respondent suggested that PREL provide needs assessment, planning, and the continuation of support to all staff:

“PREL can help guide us by identifying and prioritizing the important educational needs in our region. Develop plans to train staff in proper school management. Continue to provide all the support services they are currently providing to the education staff here.”

Another suggested that PREL assist by reviewing existing capacity building plans and making recommendations for improvement, as well as helping to connect educators with other resources.

“Review capacity plans and suggest strategies for improvement . . . help with degree requirements—connect the region with training institutions as well as educational services available on the Internet.”

Another group of respondents identified specific areas in which PREL could provide training. Some felt that PREL could provide professional development in management, communication skills, and reporting skills.

“PREL can help conduct training for principals to develop their abilities in management, creating good rapport within schools and the community, improving their communication skills and reporting skills. Continue to provide research and program services that our school managers will continue to benefit from.”

Others suggested that PREL provide professional development with standards and curriculum mapping, and provide a means in which principals in the Pacific region can come together to learn from one another. This is well expressed by the following respondent:

“Assist with curriculum mapping . . . conduct leadership training for principals on specific content standards . . . have principals visit Hawai‘i to learn and exchange ideas.”

Summary

The need for quality leaders in Pacific schools—specifically described here as instructional leaders—emerged as a critical need area among respondents we interviewed. Respondents told us that principals do not possess the necessary knowledge or skills to be effective instructional leaders. Furthermore, professional development opportunities appear to be limited. As solutions, respondents recommended well-planned, ongoing, quality professional development in core content area subjects, as well as in the administrative and social skills principals need to be quality leaders. PREL was identified as a resource for providing these solutions. Specifically, PREL was seen as a source of technical assistance in conducting entity-specific needs assessment, as a resource to review and make recommendations on entity capacity building plans, and as a professional development provider to assist in improving quality leadership in the Pacific.

F. Greater Parental and Community Involvement and Support

Schools, families, and communities are major institutions that socialize and educate children. When goals such as student achievement and learning are of interest to each of these institutions, the goal is best achieved through cooperation and support (Epstein, 1987, 1995). In the Pacific, for many reasons, educators we interviewed identified as a critical issue a lack of parental (and community) involvement with their students’ schoolwork and the school in general. This lack of involve-

ment, described by some as a lack of ownership by parents and the community at large, negatively affects student learning.

Educators we interviewed identified the need for greater parental involvement and community support. According to one respondent, parents are unaware of what is happening at the school.

“Parents do not know what’s going on in school.”

Some respondents identified a need for greater involvement and linked the lack of parental and community support to poor student performance. The following responses illustrate how two educators described this:

“The lack of parental involvement in the schools leads to poor student performance.”

“There’s a lack of community and parental support at the school. The lack of communication between parents and teachers leads to poor performance for students.”

In discussing the reasons for a lack of involvement, respondents provided a range of possible explanations: lack of time for children and school due to economic realities, not being aware of the importance of their involvement, and a lack of ownership by parents and the community in general.

For one, lack of parental involvement has to do with the realities of economic survival and thus the lack of time for families to be more involved.

“Economic survival—it’s expensive here. Families need two incomes and some have two to three jobs. There’s no more ‘Mom’ [as we used to know it].”

Another explained that parents are simply not aware of the importance of parental involvement.

“Parents don’t think it’s important to be involved.”

One respondent connected a lack of ownership among parents and the community at large to explain the reasons for lack of involvement.

“The community and parents do not have ownership of the school, so they tend to stay away and leave it to the educators. Parents take a ‘hands-off’ attitude when it comes to their child’s education.”

When asked to identify solutions to address the lack of parental and community involvement, educators we interviewed listed a range of ideas. As illustrated below, two suggested that schools should create opportunities for involvement.

“Schools should create opportunities for parents to become involved, like volunteering, making lunch so students don’t have to leave school to eat. Form committees that include parents.”

“Provide parents workshops to show them the school, talk about their children’s report cards. Offer food to come meet with teachers.”

Another indicated that a bridge between the school and community must be made.

“Someone needs to address this, push and follow-through, and make a bridge between the school and community.”

One respondent suggested that instead of getting parents to the school, educators needed to go to the families, whether physically or through newsletters.

“I don’t blame them—they have to make ends meet. I need to go to them. Our teachers do extra to assist—we do a lot of sharing and giving information to parents. The teachers do a lot of newsletters, planners, home visits to the families whose kids need their parent’s help the most.”

When asked about how PREL could assist with this need, some respondents suggested that PREL could provide professional development for educators in how to encourage parental involvement.

“PREL can bring us education on how teachers can work with parents.”

“Offer training in this area—perhaps components of social work and counseling.”

“Provide workshops.”

One respondent suggested that PREL could conduct a research study on improving parental involvement.

“PREL can do some research on how to get better parent involvement results in the schools.”

One respondent specifically mentioned PREL’s work in offering opportunities (e.g., conferences, regional events) for educators from the entire Pacific region to meet as one group with the common goal of creating better relationships between schools and communities. This educator also saw added value in the fact that such conferences and events allow for many diverse island groups to forge a common vision of education for the Pacific at large.

“We need to come together to understand the educational system and its processes and what it entails. We are one large Pacific group. We must learn [first] [about each other], then improve. I love what I’m doing—we need to get together to build our world. I go to every conference PREL puts together so I can experience the different backgrounds of all these islands. Here, we collaborate and share practices. We can understand where folks are coming from especially because we are separated by water. I grew up here on an island surrounded by water. As a teacher, the learning and experiences I got through PREL—it built me and gave me a wider perspective as my people as a whole—Pacific Islanders. We need to get together to share and learn to build a better world—and that’s by building a better foundation for every [and] each learner.”

Summary

In the Pacific, for many reasons, educators we interviewed identified a lack of parental (and community) involvement with their students’ schoolwork and the school in general as a critical issue. This lack of involvement, described by some as a

lack of ownership by parents and the community at large, negatively affects student learning. The root causes involve parents busy making a living with little or no time for their students and school work, a lack of awareness among parents that their involvement is important, and a lack of ownership by parents and the community as a key reason for this lack of involvement. The solutions offered included ideas such as educating parents, forming committees that include parents, somehow making connections between the school and the community, and working with the realities of busy parents through home visits and written communication. These educators saw PREL as a source of expertise in the area of engaging parents (knowledge and professional development) and a key vehicle in helping to bring educators across the Pacific together.

We now turn to summarize our findings as a set of conclusions.

V. Conclusions

1. Respondents corroborated but also added to the themes we found as part of our ongoing needs sensing as critical and enduring issues. They identified the needs of student achievement, teacher quality and standards, assessment, and accountability as important needs in the region, but also identified three additional, yet connected, needs of improving the quality of leadership, increasing opportunities to learn, and developing important parent-school connections.
2. The underlying reasons (“root causes”) for the needs identified included issues such as lack of financial resources, issues of language and culture, and poor leadership.
3. The potential solutions to meet the stated needs fell into three major areas: more professional development, policy and program revisions, and increased parent and community involvement.
4. Suggestions about the role that PREL could play in meeting regional needs fell into four major categories: providing professional development workshops and conferences, providing direct funding and educational materials, advocacy and support for the schools, and offering expertise to assist in improving educational processes and jurisdiction capacity building.

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Appendix A

REL Client Telephone Interview Protocol

Respondent:

Title: Jurisdiction:

Interviewer: Date:

Start Time: End Time:

Need #1

1. What is one of the two most critical educational needs in your school (if teacher/principal) or jurisdiction (if other role)?
2. Why does this need exist (root cause)?
3. What are the solutions that might best address this need?
4. In what way can PREL best address this need?

Need #2

1. What is another very critical educational need in your school (if teacher/principal) or jurisdiction (if other role)?
2. Why does this need exist (root cause)?
3. What are the solutions that might best address this need?
4. In what way can PREL best address this need?

Would you like a copy of the final report on the survey when it is completed? Yes No

Address _____

Appendix B

Training Meeting for REL Client Telephone Survey

February 14, 2006, 10:00 am

Lwen Wo Conference Room

Agenda

- Goals/expectations of the survey Scott/Roger
 - Project summary
 - How the data will be used
- Findings from recent REL Client Survey Eunice/Scott
 - Summarize results of report
 - Needs identified by recent study
- Role of interviewer Roger
 - Inform client of confidentiality and purpose of survey
 - Possible probes to get the data needed
- Recording of interview Scott
 - Important points to listen for and record
- Timelines Scott

Appendix C

Key Issues to Discuss with Interviewee before the Interview

Sample “Script”

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us regarding the educational needs in _____ (school or jurisdiction). We really value your ideas and opinions on education and really appreciate your sharing your perspective with us.

I. Confidentiality—Before we start, I want you to know that we are extremely sensitive to the confidential nature of the information shared in these interviews. We are *not audio-recording* this conversation, but we will be taking notes of our discussion. No information will be shared with anyone outside the PREL Research & Evaluation Unit that would enable anyone to be able to determine how you responded to any of the questions. The responses will be summarized together with everyone else’s responses so the results can be reported across the Pacific region only. We will not be reporting results for any specific jurisdiction.

II. Purpose—The purpose of these interviews is to get the feedback of experts in the field of education regarding the educational needs in _____ (name of school/jurisdiction). After all the interviews are completed across all the jurisdictions, we will report the results of our conversations on this topic to the rest of PREL as a way to assist PREL in developing strategies for addressing the needs discussed.

III. Results—The results of the interviews will be summarized and prepared in a report that will be shared with the U.S. Department of Education so it will have more detailed information on the needs in the Pacific region. We will also send you a copy of the final report, if you would like one. Just leave me a forwarding address at the end of the interview and we’ll make sure to send you a copy.

Do you have any other questions before we start the interview?

Appendix D

General Themes	Sub-Issues
Student Achievement and Learning	Achievement gap
	Course work on economy
	Improve both cognitive and social abilities
	Improving cognitive, affective, and student development skills
	Reading & writing proficiency
	Reading proficiency
	Science & math
	Vocational Education
	Writing proficiency
Curriculum & Instruction for English Learners	Bilingual Education
	Develop local materials
	Integrate student first language
	Teachers need ESL strategies
Instructional Resources and Materials	Classrooms in need of repair
	Educational infrastructure
	Educational technology
	Lack of specialists
	Land issues
	Maximize resources
	Purchase of materials
Teacher Quality	Teacher education/preparation
	Teacher training/PD needed
Standards, Assessment, and Accountability	Consistent standards
	Lack of data management tools
	Lack of diagnostic tools
	No accountability system in place
	No communication between schools and DOE
	No consequences for teachers/students (absenteeism)
	Ongoing assessment of students
	Standardize curriculum
Quality Leadership	Principals do not communicate with teachers
	Principals lack skills needed
Parent & Community Involvement	Parents need to understand school goals
	Students need help at home

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