

About the REL Pacific Region



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Regional Educational Laboratory
At Mid-continent Research
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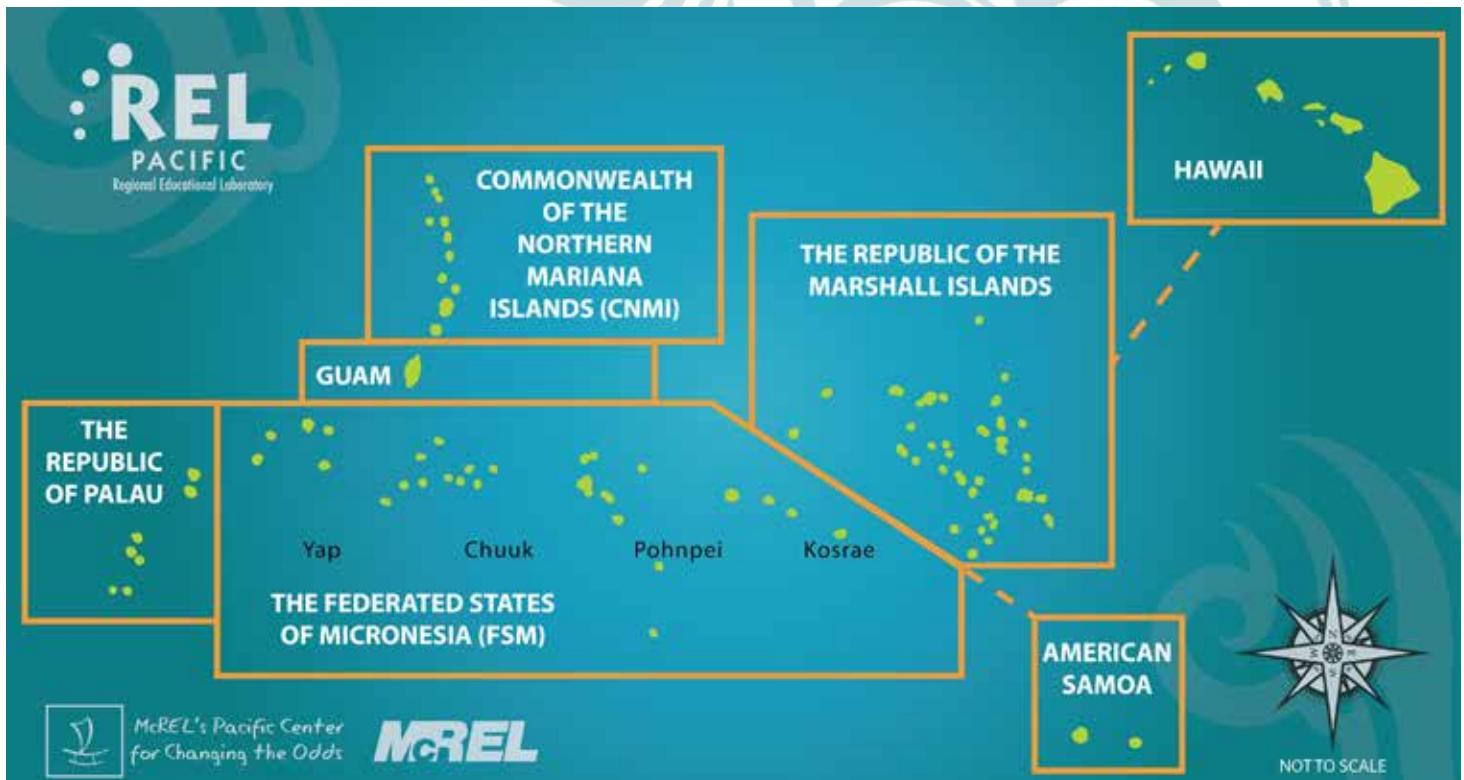
About the REL Pacific Region

REL Pacific is one of ten Regional Educational Laboratories established and funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. Our region encompasses approximately 4.9 million square miles and serves seven Pacific island entities, including American Samoa; the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; the Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap); Guam; Hawai'i; the Republic of the Marshall Islands; and the Republic of Palau. REL Pacific is housed at McREL International's Pacific Center for Changing the Odds (PCCO) in Honolulu, Hawai'i, a private nonprofit corporation that draws upon the best of education research to translate what works into innovations and results.

The REL Pacific region is geographically vast, spanning an area larger than the entirety of the continental United States. The seven entities in the REL Pacific region include one state, three countries in free association with the United States (one of which includes four unique states; see sidebar), and three territories, covering five time zones and more than 1000 islands. All entities use English as the language of instruction, with six of the seven also instructing in an indigenous language, including Chamorro, Chuukese, Kosraean, Marshallese, Palauan, Pohnpeian, Samoan, and Yapese.

Freely Associated States

Colloquially known as the "freely associated states," or FAS, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau have each entered into Compacts of Free Association (COFA) with the United States that affirms their "close and mutually beneficial" relationships. Some of these benefits include, for example, eligibility for economic assistance through U.S. federal programs and the right for FAS citizens to travel and work within the United States. In exchange, the United States receives certain defense and operating rights within the region. The COFA between the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the United States took effect in 1986. A renewed compact took effect in 2003 and expires in 2024. A separate Compact of Free Association was enacted between the Republic of Palau and the United States in 1994. A renewed compact took effect in 2010 and expires in 2024.



Regional Context

At REL Pacific, we support “research alliances” that bring together key stakeholders to work collaboratively to address problems and questions of high priority and relevance to Pacific education, including

1. **Strengthening Teacher Effectiveness:** a focus on increasing teachers’ qualifications, determining characteristics of effective teachers, and identifying the best classroom practices to impact student outcomes;
2. **Engaging Families and Communities in Education:** a focus on connecting schools, families, and communities to work together to support learning;
3. **Ensuring Career and College Readiness:** a focus on preparing students to enter the workforce or to pursue college or technical education upon exiting Pacific high schools; and
4. **Optimizing Data Systems:** a focus on developing, maintaining, and use using data systems effectively and efficiently.

We gather information on the needs in the region from these research alliance members, our Governing Board, the community at large, and through reviews of education research and practice data and reports. Within each entity, REL Pacific has also partnered with a “locally-based consultant,” an on-the-ground education expert who helps coordinate services within the entity.

Unique Strengths and Challenges of the Pacific Region

- A strong focus on family and communities;
- Significant geographic distances, greater than all other nine laboratory regions combined;
- Limited transportation options, with one airline serving most of the region’s population centers, and outer-island communities accessible by boat and periodic supply ships (Chuuk, Marshall Islands, and Palau);
- Susceptibility to environmental hazards that can lead to property damage, school closures, and need for emergency support (Marshall Islands, American Samoa, Hawai’i);
- Limited access to technology and infrastructure to support communication, teaching and learning, and online access to assistance (freely associated states);
- Teacher shortages (freely associated states);
- Significant populations of English language learners (all entities);
- Increasing migrant populations (Guam and Hawai’i);
- Limited curricular materials, particularly contextual learning materials (all entities);
- Limited/declining funding for education (Republic of the Marshall Islands and Federated States of Micronesia [Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap]);
- A need for more robust data systems (all entities); and
- School building infrastructure issues, including electricity, water, restrooms, furniture, and supplies (Republic of the Marshall Islands and Federated States of Micronesia).

The following geographic profiles provide information on the history, demographics, and education statistics of REL Pacific’s unique service region, as well as the focus of the work being conducted in each entity.

American Samoa

American Samoa has been a territory of the United States since 1899. Residents of American Samoa are not U.S. citizens; rather, they are U.S. nationals. This territory has its own constitution with oversight from the U.S. Department of the Interior. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, American Samoa has a population of 55,519, with the majority of the population residing on the island of Tutuila. There are five islands and two coral atolls in the territory. The economy is dependent on tuna fishing and processing, which is responsible for 80% of employment.

American Samoa's Department of Education is led by the director of education, who reports to the territorial governor. The school system has approximately 12,692 students and 811 teachers in grades K–12. American Samoa's compulsory schooling age ranges from 6–18. Both English and Samoan are the official languages and languages of instruction in American Samoa. There is one four-year institution of higher learning, American Samoa Community College.

Work in American Samoa centers around the priority area of college and career readiness. With support from REL Pacific through a study on college readiness and technical support, the American Samoa Alliance for College and Career Readiness is working to use data from the Student Longitudinal Data System to inform policy and practice around college and career readiness, to identify college and career readiness indicators, and to support American Samoa's Five-Year Comprehensive School-Based plan, which focuses on facilitating college and career preparedness, the transition from secondary to post-secondary, training opportunities to help students understand the world of work, adequate resources for all career pathways, and pre-service and in-service training for teachers and counselors to support academic, career, and personal/social skill standards for students.

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)

CNMI is classified as an unincorporated, organized territory of the United States. A covenant to establish a commonwealth with the U.S. was approved in 1975, and the majority of CNMI's 55,883 (as of the 2010 U.S. Census) residents are U.S. citizens. Located in Micronesia, CNMI consists of 14 islands with a total land area of 179.01 square miles. Trade and tourism account for a large percentage of the CNMI's economy.

Only three of the islands are significantly populated—Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. The majority of the population resides on Saipan, the capital. The indigenous populations are Chamorro and Carolinian. English, Chamorro, and Carolinian are the official languages. English is the language of instruction, while Chamorro is also taught in the Public School System (PSS). The PSS is headed by a commissioner of education, who reports to an elected board of education. There are approximately 11,011 students in grades K–12 taught by 464 teachers (not counting teacher aides) across three islands. The compulsory schooling age in CNMI is from 6 to 16. Northern Marianas College, a four-year institution, is CNMI's sole postsecondary institution.

In the CNMI, REL Pacific supports work around the priority area of college and career readiness. The objective of the CNMI Alliance for College and Career Readiness is to identify college and career readiness indicators and make them more actionable through interventions, policy, and practice. The CNMI Public School System is working closely with REL Pacific and representatives from Northern Marianas College on a study to address issues related to readiness, including determining the availability and quality of student-level data for high school and community college students, tracking college success relative to students' placement (or non-placement) in remedial courses, and developing supports to positively impact student success.

Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)

The FSM is an independent, sovereign nation, made up of four island states—Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap. It is comprised of approximately 607 islands covering 702 square kilometers in land, covering a distance of almost 2,700 km across the Pacific Ocean. In 1986, the FSM signed a treaty (Compact of Free Association) with the United States, giving its citizens free and unrestricted entry into the United States and its territories. The capital is Palikir, located on Pohnpei. Subsistence farming and fishing account for a large part of the economy.

English is the official language and a language of instruction across the FSM school systems; however, indigenous languages unique to each state are first languages, commonly spoken, and used as languages of instruction in the primary years of education. The population of the FSM is 102,624, according to the 2010 Census, with more than half of its residents residing in Chuuk State. The FSM National Office of Education is led by a secretary of education, who is appointed by the president of the FSM and confirmed by the Congress. Country-wide, there are approximately 28,845 students in grades K–12, taught by 1,855 teachers. The FSM has a two-year postsecondary institution, the College of Micronesia–FSM, with a main campus located in Palikir, Pohnpei, and branch campuses in each of the four states. Compulsory schooling ages range from 6–17 years old.

The work of each of the four states within the FSM, and their individual state alliances, is concentrated on strengthening teacher effectiveness and optimizing data systems. The national Office of Education of the FSM is developing a school turnaround plan and continues to focus its attention on teacher certification. Although all states within the FSM have unique strengths and needs, a common focus across states is analyzing the strengths and weakness of their education management information systems (EMIS) through individual REL Pacific studies in each state; in addition, all states are examining how data are used and perceived by education stakeholders across the FSM. For more information about individual priorities and work being conducted in Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap, see each state entry below.

Chuuk State

Chuuk State consists of a total of 25 islands and has one of the largest enclosed lagoons in the world, encircled by a 140-mile long barrier reef and covering over 832 square miles. Fourteen island atolls and low islands are located outside the lagoon. Chuuk's population is about 48,651 (according to the 2010 FSM Census), with roughly 80% of its residents residing inside the lagoon. The Chuuk State Department of Education is led by an executive director, who reports to an elected school board. There are approximately 13,304 students in grades K–12 in the Chuuk school system. Chuukese and English are the languages of instruction from first through eighth grade; English is the language of instruction from the ninth grade onward.

In Chuuk, the FSM Research Alliance has identified priorities related to strengthening teacher effectiveness, increasing the use of data for decision-making, addressing both student and teacher absenteeism, and ensuring college and career readiness.

Kosrae State

Kosrae State is comprised of four municipalities on one island with a land area of approximately 42 square miles, the second largest island in the FSM. Kosrae has a population of approximately 6,616 people (according to the 2010 FSM Census) whose official language is Kosraean. The official languages of instruction are Kosraean (grades K–3), Kosraean and English (grades 4–5) and English only (grades 6–12). Kosrae has a K–12 student enrollment of approximately 2,286. The Kosrae Department of Education is led by a director of education, who is chosen by political appointment.

The FSM Kosrae Research Alliance's work is aligned to the Kosrae Department of Education's Strategic Plan: strengthening teacher effectiveness, increasing the use of data in decision making, reducing absenteeism (teacher and student), engaging families and communities in student learning, and increasing college readiness and admission. In addition, the alliance is particularly interested in building members' capacity to conduct research, which is a goal of all research alliances.

Pohnpei State

The State of Pohnpei is made up of several island groups with a population of approximately 35,981 (according to the 2010 FSM Census). The capital of the FSM is Palikir, located in the center of the island of Pohnpei, which is the most populous and largest of all of the single islands of the FSM. Pohnpei state is approximately 133 square miles. Pohnpeian and English are the two official languages. Pohnpeian is the language of instruction from early childhood education through third grade; English and Pohnpeian are taught in grades 4–5; English is the language of instruction in grades 6–12. The Pohnpei Department of Education is led by a director of education, a politically appointed position. The school system enrolls approximately 10,448 students in grades K–12.

Work in Pohnpei is focused on improving student performance on the FSM National Minimum Competency Test, such as improving teacher preparation and access to teaching resources, and improving human resources management in schools to impact teacher effectiveness. Supported by REL Pacific, the FSM Research Alliance in Pohnpei is also working on increasing Pohnpei's capacity to manage, use, and apply data.

Yap State

Yap State is comprised of the Yap Islands and 14 atolls and is the westernmost state in the FSM. The state has five official languages: English, Ulithian, Woleaian, Satawalese, and Yapese. Yapese is the language of instruction for grades K–3; Yapese and English are the languages of instruction grades 4–5; English is the language of instruction for grades 6–12. Yap's total area is 46 square miles and the approximate population is 11,376 (according to the 2010 FSM Census). The Yap Department of Education is led by a politically appointed director. The Yap State school system enrolls approximately 2,807 students in grades K–12.

The FSM Research Alliance in Yap's work focuses on supporting school administrators and practitioners in efforts to use data to positively impact student outcomes.

Guam

Guam is an organized, unincorporated territory of the United States. It has been a U.S. territory since 1898, and Guam natives are U.S. citizens. Guam is the largest island in Micronesia—approximately 30 miles long and four to 12 miles wide—and its population of 159,358 (as of the 2010 U.S. Census) is the largest in Micronesia. The indigenous population is Chamorro. English and Chamorro are the official languages of Guam. The school system is organized as a Department of Education, led by a superintendent who reports to an elected board of education.

The island economy is significantly dependent upon the military, followed by tourism, with more than one million Japanese and other visitors from Asia annually. Guam has approximately 48,486 students and 2,472 public school teachers in grades K–12. Guam's compulsory schooling age ranges from 6–18. The island is home to the University of Guam, a four-year and above institution; Guam Community College, a two-year college; and Pacific Islands University, a four-year university.

Guam is home to a large population of migrants from the freely associated states (FAS), and better supporting the academic and non-academic needs of FAS Micronesian students as well as other students who may be struggling is a priority in the territory. The Guam Alliance for Family and Community Engagement in Education is focused on cross-cultural understanding and learning; fostering partnerships among educators, students, families, community, and researchers; supporting applied research; and building local capacity to conduct research. REL Pacific is supporting these goals through a study on enrollment, demographic, and program participation characteristics of Guam's FAS Micronesian students and other technical assistance.

Hawai'i

Hawai'i became the 50th state in 1959, and is the only U.S. state made up entirely of islands. It is the northernmost island group in Polynesia, comprised of approximately 130 islands with a total area of 6,470 square miles. The eight largest islands are Hawai'i, Maui, O'ahu, Kaua'i, Moloka'i, Lana'i, Ni'ihau, and Kaho'olawe. Hawai'i's population is approximately 1,360,301 residents (as of the 2012 U.S. Census) and about four-fifths live on O'ahu. Hawai'i is the only U.S. state with a minority-dominant population, with 38% Asian and 10% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific islander.

The Hawaii Department of Education was founded by King Kamehameha III in 1840. It is the only statewide, single-school district in the United States, and is led by a superintendent of education, who is appointed by and reports to the state board of education. There are approximately 215,345 students in the public schools, taught by 11,069 teachers. Hawai'i's compulsory schooling age is from 6–18. Hawai'i's student demographics have shifted to include a significant number of Micronesian students from the freely associated states. The official language of instruction is English. There are more than 20 postsecondary institutions throughout the Hawaiian Islands offering a range of programs, from certification programs to doctoral degrees.

REL Pacific's work in Hawai'i is focused on the optimizing data systems priority area by supporting stakeholders in the use of Hawai'i-specific, publicly available data sources in order to build local capacity to conduct education research within the state and foster collaboration among local researchers. Specifically, REL Pacific is working to identify research topics that can be addressed using publicly available data, as well as sources of education data and research used by education stakeholders to guide their practice.

Republic of the Marshall Islands

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is an independent nation that has had a Compact of Free Association with the United States since 1986. The islands have approximately 53,158 people (as of the 2011 RMI Census) and a total land area of just 70 square miles spread out across five islands and 29 coral atolls. The official languages and languages of instruction of the RMI are English and Marshallese. The public school system is led by a minister of education who is appointed by the president, with approval of the congress. The secretary of education oversees the day-to-day operations of the school system. The public school system has approximately 10,100 students in grades K–12, who are taught by 1037 teachers. RMI's compulsory schooling age ranges from 6–14. There are two postsecondary institutions, the College of the Marshall Islands, a two-year institution, and the University of the South Pacific, which offers vocational education, four-year degrees, and graduate degrees.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands, through the Marshall Islands Research Alliance and with the support of REL Pacific, is focused on the strengthening teacher effectiveness and optimizing data systems priority topic areas; specifically, on increasing teacher preparation in classroom management and differentiated instruction; building connections across the college teacher education program in in-service teachers, and monitoring teachers' use of knowledge and skills gained from professional development. In addition, work in the Marshall Islands is focused on addressing the need for a more centralized data system and supporting data quality and reliability.

Republic of Palau

Palau is an independent nation, affiliated with the United States through a Compact of Free Association. The Compact provides economic assistance, military protection, and free and unrestricted access to the United States by Palau's citizens. The population of Palau, approximately 19,907 as of the 2005 Palau Census, is spread out over eight principal islands and 250 smaller islands. The official languages and languages of instruction are Palauan and English; Palauan is the language of instruction for grades K–3, Palauan and English are the languages of instruction for grades 4–5, and English is the language of instruction for grades 6–12. The economy is dependent on government employment as well as tourism, trade, subsistence agriculture, and fishing.

The school system is headed by a minister of education, who reports to an elected board of education. A director of education oversees the day-to-day operations of the schools. Enrollment in the school system is approximately 4,151 students in grades K–12, with a total of 359 teachers. The compulsory schooling age in Palau ranges from 6–17. There is a two-year institution of higher education, Palau Community College.

In Palau, work is focused on strengthening teacher effectiveness and optimizing data systems to help create a new generation of leaders for Palau's future. In coordination with the Palau Research Alliance, REL Pacific is conducting a study on how teachers in Palau perform on the ETS Praxis I PPST tests of reading, writing, and math, and the relationships between teacher demographics and professional characteristics and teacher performance. In addition, optimizing data systems by sharing data that impact specific issues across organizations is a priority in Palau.

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