



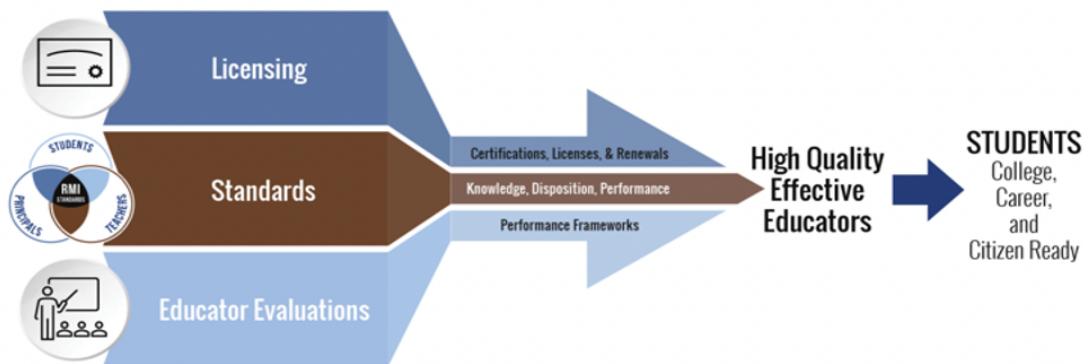
## Impact Story: Strengthening Educator Effectiveness in the RMI

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is an independent country in free association with the United States. Located slightly west of the international date line near the equator, the RMI consists of 5 single islands and 29 atolls. RMI’s population is approx. 79,000. The country’s official language is Marshallese, although English is widely spoken. The RMI public school system is comprised of 80 elementary and 7 secondary schools, many of which are rurally and remotely located.

The Region 19 Comprehensive Center (R19CC) has provided intensive technical assistance to the RMI Ministry of Education (RMI MOE) to help them create an educator evaluation system and then develop staff to use it across the RMI Public School System (RMI PSS). The Strengthening Educator Effectiveness project responds to a pressing need that surfaced when the RMI MOE passed the *2007 RMI Ministry of Education Teacher Certification Act* [14 MIRC Ch.5], requiring the development of teacher and principal performance standards along with matching evaluation policies and procedures. Prior to partnering with R19CC, the RMI PSS had been using insufficient evaluation tools and had been unable to put their own system in place, despite contracting with an external vendor to develop one.

To assist the RMI PSS in meeting the mandate of Act 14 MIRC Ch. 5, R19CC has provided research and examples of performance standards and components, reviewed current evaluation practices, drafted new processes and forms, and offered guidance and feedback on how to pilot the system. These efforts led to a finalized RMI PSS Educator Effectiveness System, which is made up of licensing procedures, standards, and evaluation processes designed to grow and support effective educators throughout the RMI (see Figure 1). As a result of this in-depth technical assistance, RMI MOE leaders and educators shared that they have *renewed knowledge on evaluation strategies* and believe that they have *developed an adaptable evaluation system focused on results* and *evaluation tools better suited to the daily work of teachers and school leaders*.

**Figure 1. The RMI Educator Effectiveness System**



### Developing and Piloting the New Educator Effectiveness System

Work on the project began in Year 2 of the CC program (SY2020-2021) as the R19CC collaborated with the RMI MOE to select a Task Force of representatives from the Central Office and schools. The Task Force became the main recipient of technical assistance as they were responsible for creating and rolling out the new system to schools. R19CC led a series of 34 face-to-face workshops as well as monthly meetings with Task Force members to *strengthen existing teacher performance standards and create new principal and head teacher performance standards for MOE approval*.

Using both formal and informal observations and professional growth plans, the revised teacher evaluation system evaluates performance across 9 standards: philosophy; learning theory and practice; culture and values; learning environment; content and instruction; assessment and accountability; family and community relationships; diversity; and professionalism. The school administrator evaluation system uses self-reflection and review and professional growth plans to evaluate principals and head teacher performance across 7 standards: vision; instructional leadership and school culture; assessment and accountability; school management and operations; leadership and school governance; diversity; and professionalism. Evaluation procedures, tools, and resources were developed based on research, including the Charlotte Danielson framework, and the local context and culture of the RMI.

Next, the RMI Educator Effectiveness Task Force, with guidance from R19CC, created a pilot training plan and accompanying professional development materials. This effort led to a draft communication plan to introduce and collect feedback on the new system. At the end of the planning and design phase, the RMI MOE selected 27 elementary and 7 secondary schools based on location and size in which to pilot the system. ***The Task Force and R19CC completed a joint-training series for school administrators and teachers on evaluation tools*** in the selected schools between July 2021 and February 2022. RMI Task Force members and R19CC staff agreed to this collaborative approach to strengthen RMI Task Force members' knowledge and skills in putting the Educator Effectiveness System to work.

During this time, R19CC staff based outside of RMI participated virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions, while RMI-based R19CC staff travelled with the Task Force throughout the country delivering over 30 customized, on-site trainings. The trainings were conducted at central points throughout the islands, and virtual trainings were offered for those school staff unable to travel. Interestingly, while the travel ban put in place by the RMI in response to the COVID-19 pandemic erected some barriers for the project, for instance redirecting RMI MOE priorities to distance education programming, it also gave the professional development teams with time to focus on training schools.

According to RMI MOE leaders, the work of the project has stayed on track thanks to R19CC's ***responsiveness, flexibility, and persistence in communication and follow-up***. One Task Force Member shared, ***"constantly meeting, like on a twice a month basis, on a schedule, that was very helpful"*** for driving the project forward. This frequent communication also helped the RMI MOE overcome geographic isolation due to COVID lockdowns by ***"being able to talk with [the R19CC team] who was revising and putting it all together"*** (RMI MOE Stakeholder).

*"The CC has been very responsive to the PSS team in finding ways to ensure the work is clear and is within teachers' comprehensive knowledge and will be easy to implement once the roll-out begins".*

***– RMI MOE Task Force Member***

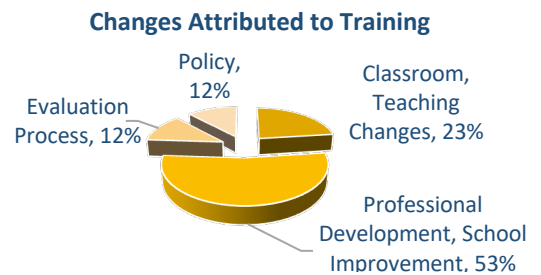
## **Revisions to the Training**

***The RMI Task force, together with R19CC, made several decisions based on participant feedback to improve school learning and use of the evaluation system.*** As they traveled to neighboring islands and remote schools, the joint R19CC-RMI Task Force team ***updated their training methods to better fit the culture and contexts of school communities.*** For example, they found that training teacher and principals in smaller numbers was a much better way to make sure they understood the evaluation process. Additionally, they translated training materials into the Marshallese language, which led to ***"more interactive"*** trainings. ***"They easily understood"*** the training when delivered in Marshallese (RMI MOE Key Stakeholder). Furthermore, the joint R19CC-RMI Task Force postponed the complete rollout of the new evaluation system to Year 4 in favor of offering refresher trainings for the rest of Year 3.

## **Early Signs of School and Classroom-Level Change**

***Principal and teacher feedback collected by R19CC showed the joint trainings were very well-received and that positive changes are already being made.*** For instance, some teachers shared they have developed more interactive lessons,

and improved instruction to meet the needs of all students. They also now keep better records to support the evaluation process. Principals shared they have simplified their teacher evaluations to focus on one goal at a time. They have also observed better classroom management and improved teacher attitudes towards students. Interestingly, some principals also reported increases in teacher attendance and enhanced planning. Principals even credited the RMI MOE’s revision of child protection and student attendance policies to the trainings.



**Figure 2: End-of-Year Key Stakeholder Interview Results, R19CC Evaluation**

The feedback did reveal, however, the need for additional training to deepen teacher and principal understanding of how to carry out the evaluations and identify professional development strategies that make educators effective. This was particularly the case for schools on the outer atolls and islands.

### Strategies for Sustainability

At the heart of R19CC’s strategy for building lasting capacity in the RMI is *on-the-ground staff who understand the local culture and speak both Marshallese and English*. This was even more the case given the border closures that prevented external TA providers from traveling to the RMI. They were described as communication facilitators, team players, and champions of the Educator Effectiveness project work.



The Task Force and R19CC are also working together to make sure the project is sustainable by recruiting additional educators, who are familiar with evaluation, to train school principals as they transition to using the new teacher evaluation system. These new recruits, which include expat educators living in the RMI, are a solution to major staff shortages affecting the RMI MOE’s ability to roll the new evaluation system out to the entire school system. The RMI Task Force also collaborated with R19CC to revise the school improvement guide and develop additional products to support full-scale use of the system in Year 4, including a training checklist and video recordings of trainings for remote, hard-to-reach schools without internet.

### Next Steps

Now in Year 4 (2022-2023), the RMI MOE has started using the teacher and principal evaluation system in all RMI MOE schools. The RMI recently opened its borders, and all R19CC staff are onsite working hand-in-hand with Task Force Members, coaching principals in observing, collecting data, and providing meaningful guidance to teachers. The training and coaching will be expanded to schools in the outer atolls this summer. The Marshallese people are great navigators. And just as the early navigators used traditional stick charts to plot and guide their journeys, the RMI MOE uses the RMI Educator Effectiveness System to guide school administrators and teachers on a journey of reflection and growth so that they may effectively facilitate student learning and success.

*“...we have...the two [R19CC] representatives based here in Majuro, and they’ve been very helpful. We’d like to see that continue because I think that plays a big role in assisting us in working on these objectives”.*

**– RMI MOE Task Force Member**

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