

AJIRI MOKTA

MEETING LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE



**PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM
REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS
STRATEGIC PLAN: 2017-2020
With a View to 2020-2023**

October 2016

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Adoption	2
Vision	3
Mission	3
National Sustainability Plan	3
National Development Theme	3
Sustainable Development Goal	3
Critical Challenges.....	4
Major new initiatives	4
Major on-going initiatives	5
Key characteristics of the Public School System	5
Goals and Objectives	6
1. Improving student achievement.....	6
2. Improving student persistence, especially at Secondary level.....	7
3. Improving principal and teacher qualifications and performance.....	8
4. Improving school characteristics.....	9
5. Improving accreditation rates and school improvement planning	10
6. Developing community-based governance of schools and parental involvement.....	10
7. Promoting the effective use of technology in education	11
Sector Wide Planning	13
Operational Planning	13
Annex 1 - Nine Characteristics of High-performing Schools.....	14
Annex 2 Improving Quality Basic Education	15
Annex 3 Overview of Education in the Marshall Islands.....	16
Annex 4 Analysis of Critical Challenges Marshall Islands' Education System	21

Adoption

This Strategic Plan was approved by the RMI National Board of Education at its meeting on October 14, 2016.

Vision

Our students are the key to a peaceful and productive Marshall Islands. They will be independent critical thinkers, with bi-cultural skills, knowledge and values that will allow them to thrive in both atoll and global environments.

Mission

We aim to educate and prepare all students to be independent, literate critical thinkers and problem-solvers, and be culturally and globally competent and responsive in order to reach their greatest potential.

We are committed to developing effective partnerships with parents and the community, placing qualified teachers in all schools, creating safe and conducive learning environments and equipping our schools with vital learning resources.

National Sustainability Plan

The Objective of the National Sustainability Plan is that every citizen can expect to enjoy improved quality of life in all areas, including education.

Sustainable, Equitable and Measurable Development Reflecting the Priorities and Culture of the Marshallese People.

National Development Theme

Improving education is one of ten RMI National Development Themes.

Promoting an innovative people by improving health and education access and opportunities.

Sustainable Development Goal

Goal 4 is one of 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by world leaders in September 2015.

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.

Critical Challenges

Analysis of current education indicators¹ and sector-wide progress² shows that the Education Sector continues to face critical challenges to high performance. Critical challenges are high-impact, persistent problem areas that deserve our most vigorous counter-efforts. This Strategic Plan will outline the ways in which the Public School System (PSS) proposes to meet and overcome these challenges.

Critical Challenges

- 1. Improving student achievement*
- 2. Improving student persistence, especially at Secondary level*
- 3. Improving principal and teacher qualifications and performance*
- 4. Improving school characteristics*
- 5. Improving accreditation rates and school improvement planning*
- 6. Developing community-based governance of schools and parental involvement*
- 7. Promoting the effective use of technology in education.*

The plan builds upon the work conducted under the 2012-2016 Strategic Plan, Invest in Children: An Agenda for Change. It addresses key questions about how the system is working, what its vision is and how it plans to achieve that vision.

Major new initiatives

- Specific MISAT growth targets of 10% per year.
- Support for frequent formative evaluation and teaching adjustments.
- Reforms of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Aligned with Standards.
- Specific growth targets for entrance into true 9th grade in high school and credit levels at CMI.
- Support for high-performing schools³ and qualified Principals and Teachers.
- Extended National program to reduce dropouts.
- Deployment of two teachers per classroom for K-3 classes in large urban schools.
- Correction of over and under staffing and consolidation of some very small schools.
- Reassignment of Specialists to work in the schools to improve instruction.
- Professional Development for teachers, including multi-level teaching for outer island teachers.
- Increased community participation through School Improvement Programs.
- Introduction of a permanent school lunch program.
- Expanded use of technology and data collection and analysis.

¹ PSS Portfolio Budget Statements, Fiscal Year 2017

² Annual Report, Public School System, 2014-2015

³ See Annex 1 for research findings on Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools

Major on-going initiatives

- PSS autonomy, strengthening financial management and transitioning to full fiscal control rather than day-to-day control by the Ministry of Finance.
- Gaining maximum benefits from curriculum and teaching technical assistance including
 - Quality Primary Education in the North Pacific pilot (QPNP)
 - Early Grade Learning Assessment (EGLA)
- Tapping technical assistance for PSS and sector planning
- Building capacity for the appropriate, compulsory secondary education

Key characteristics of the Public School System

The challenges of the PSS must be seen in the light of the characteristics of the islands: Two major population centers, Majuro and Kwajalein Atolls with 20 much less populated atolls or islands reachable only by sea or air. This makes instructional support difficult.

The 85 schools of the PSS enrolled 12,237 students in SY 2015-2016. As of July 2016, the PSS employs 852 teachers and supporting personnel.

The budget for Fiscal Year 2016, roughly matching School Year 2015-2016, from all sources is about \$29 million.

In addition, the PSS has chartered and oversees 26 private schools that enroll 3,126 students.

Based on data from the South Pacific Commission and the RMI statistics office in 2016, the population of school-age children will remain constant for the next five years. If we are successful in reducing dropouts, the enrollment, particularly at the secondary level, will go up about five percent.

More details on the PSS are presented in Annex 3.

Goals and Objectives

PSS has set specific, realistic and measurable goals to close the gap in each Critical Challenge area between where the sector is now and where we want it to be in the future. These goals are supported by detailed objectives.

1. Improving student achievement	
Goals	Objectives
1.1. Increase average MISAT scores by 10% at every school in every coming year.	1.1a. Increase student placement from all secondary schools into credit level at CMI or other higher education programs by 10% every year.
	1.1b. 70% of students in grade 3, 6 and 8 will perform at the level of proficient or better by 2020
	1.1c. Enrollment in true Grade 9 (as contrasted with Pre-9) will increase by 10% each year.
	1.1d. Achieve an enrolment rate of 80% at true Grade 9 by 2019.
	1.1e. Get technical assistance and teacher engagement on alignment of curriculum and assessment including the nature and role of the MISAT testing program.
	1.1f. Two teachers will be assigned to large K-3 classrooms in urban areas.
1.2. Technical & vocational education & training (TVET) will be an established curriculum component in all secondary schools by 2020.	1.2. Coordinate with CMI and other government agencies.
1.3. Life Skills instruction will be a rigorous content area in the school curriculum by 2020.	
1.4 Provide opportunities for high achieving students	1.4a. Dual high school & college enrollment
	1.4b. Online opportunities for learning will be pursued.

2. Improving student persistence, especially at Secondary level	
Goals	Objectives
2.1. Increase enrollment by 10% per year.	2.1a. Achieve K enrollment of 90% of 5 year olds by 2019.
	2.1b. Achieve a 100% gross enrollment rate for grade 1 students.
2.2. Reduce the Elementary drop-out rate to 10% by 2020.	2.2a. Reduce the grades 1-8 drop-out rate from 32% in SY 2011-12 to 10% by 2020.
2.3. Reduce the secondary dropout rate to 25% by 2020.	2.3a. Reduce the grades 9-12 drop-out rate from 51% to 25% in 2020 by specific steps including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliable school buses • National government: Reliable sea and air transportation to get student to islands with high schools. • Student Information System (PowerSchool) installations in all schools in Majuro and Ebeye for early detection and attention to at-risk students. • Improved counseling programs. • Strong parental involvement. • Implement national awareness campaign to combat dropout problem. • Dormitories for outer island students
	2.3b. School counselors will identify early-on students who have attendance problems and work with parents, community agencies and teachers to provide a remedial program for them.
2.4 Improve attendance	2.4. Achieve a daily attendance average of 90% in all schools by 2019. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen local boards of education / local government and PTA. • Establish a social work agency in urban areas to help families of chronic truant students.

2. Improving student persistence, especially at Secondary level	
2.5 Implement a permanent school lunch program.	2.5. Secure public & parental contributions so students do not go home for lunch or go hungry. Promote local solutions.
2.6 Understand the root causes of dropping out.	2.6. Commission research on the causes and possible solutions.

3. Improving principal and teacher qualifications and performance	
Goals	Objectives
3.1. By 2020, PSS will attract and hire only fully qualified teachers for all school levels.	3.1a. Request CMI to increase the number of teachers receiving Associate's degrees by 50% by 2020.
	3.1b. All PSS Principals will be comply with PSS Principal Performance Standards by 2020.
	3.1c. By 2020, PSS will have engaged all schools and teachers in Professional Development activities through the Improving Quality Basic Education project. (See Annex 2)
3.2. Increase the status of the teaching profession.	3.2a. Increase teacher salaries in accordance with approved scale.
	3.2b. Place strong instructional leaders, principals, in big schools with exceptional salaries
	3.2c. Provide 401k style benefits to fully qualified teachers and principals.
	3.2d. Teachers will organize learning communities and demonstrate recognition of their responsibilities.
3.3. Increase support for teachers.	3.3a. Assign subject matter specialists to schools rather than basing them in the PSS office.
	3.3b. Support from principals, specialists, supervisors for more frequent formative evaluation of students and teaching adjustments.
	3.3c. Require elementary school supervisors to spend a majority of their time in the schools, in the classrooms.

3. Improving principal and teacher qualifications and performance	
	3.3d. Principals and head teachers will actively involve teachers in school improvement planning and encourage a culture of seeking help.
3.4. Define what it means to be an effective teacher	3.4a. Research the literature on what makes an effective teacher
	3.4b. Tuition assistance for professional development
	3.4c. Create targeted workshops such as multi-grade teaching strategies, phonics, becoming a high-performing school, etc. based on the research
3.5. Attract more Marshallese to secondary level teaching	3.5a. See 3.2 on salaries and the status of teachers.

4. Improving school characteristics	
Goals	Objectives
4.1. By 2019, all primary schools with fewer than 50 students will be converted to Grades 1-6 schools	4.1.a. All Grade 7-8 students in primary schools with fewer than 50 students will be transferred and enrolled in the nearest larger school.
4.2. By 2020, there will be a reduction in the number of very small public primary schools.	4.2. By 2020, three to ten small schools will be closed and their students transferred and enrolled in the nearest larger schools.
4.3 Strengthen K-3 instruction	4.3. Assign two teachers to large K-3 classrooms by transferring teachers from over-staff schools.
4.4 Fully staff schools	4.4a. Recruit, hire and have in place faculty for high schools at the start of the school year.
4.5. Becoming a high-performing school	4.5 Each school will make a plan to develop the nine characteristics of a high-performing school.

5. Improving accreditation rates and school improvement planning	
Goals	Objectives
5.1. All schools will be accredited at Level 2 or above in the RMI School Accreditation System by 2020.	5.1a. All schools in the RMI will conduct and submit an annual School Self Study by 2020.
	5.1b. By 2020, all schools will submit an annual School Improvement Plan that complies with PSS quality guidelines.
	5.1c. Starting September 2016, schools will at least annually, convene, discuss their annual targets and adopt some specific measures to become high-performing schools. See Annex 1.
5.2. Ten schools will be accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges: Accrediting Commission for Schools (WASC).	5.2a. See 5.1. WASC accreditation applies mainly to larger schools.

6. Developing community-based governance of schools and parental involvement	
Goals	Objectives
6.1. By 2020, all PSS schools will demonstrate compliance with the Community-Based Governance System.	6.1a. High community demand for better schools will be evident by 2017.
	6.1b. The PSS will seek legislation allowing flexibility in CBGS for local conditions.
6.2. Use CBGS to increase parental involvement.	6.2. Provide active public recognition for high-performing schools.
6.3. Provide PSS guidance focusing on results.	6.3. Emphasize the nine characteristics of high-performing schools
6.4. Involve community in school improvement plans	6.4. Each principal or head teacher will have a school improvement plan developed with the active participation of teachers and staff. Strengthen procedures for facilitating and supporting school improvement.

7. Promoting the effective use of technology in education

Goals	Objectives
7.1. All schools will have internet access and/or an appropriate package of off-line computer-based learning resources by 2020.	7.1a. Monitor and evaluate the Achieve 3000 system used at Majuro Middle School, Rita Elementary School and MIHS Pre-9.
	7.1b. Evaluate the current use and potential of KA Lite (Khan Academy) at MIHS.
7.2. School information systems will be used where connectivity is practical.	7.2a. Set up all schools on Majuro and Ebeye with PowerSchool
	7.2b. Provide practical guidance to teachers, counselors, parents, students, school personnel to use PS more effectively.
7.3. By 2017, PSS will reevaluate the Standards, Recommendations and Annual Targets specified in the 2010 Comprehensive Technology Plan. ⁴	7.3a. Review, simplify, adapt to current conditions & technology, adopt.
	7.3b. Adopt the recommendations of the CMI-PSS taskforce on EMIS.
	7.4c. Schedule regular, at least annual updates to the basic facts about PSS and post on the PSS website.
7.4. Increase technical support to teachers and the PSS	7.4a. Educate and train more local people
	7.4b. Hire full-time instructional technology specialists to support teachers and students in the use of instructional technology.
	7.4c. Use technology to support Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education
7.5 PPS Division will more actively distribute testing results and other data in ways that help teachers.	7.5 The Policy, Planning, and Standards division of PSS will develop policies and procedures for rapid dissemination of MISAT results so teachers and principals will have the data on each student's strengths and weaknesses by RMI curriculum standard measured on the MISAT. This also applied to the JICA math testing. (Curriculum aligned with standards)

⁴http://pss.edu.mh/files/PSSDocuments/Public%20School%20System%20Plans/RMIMOECCompTechPlan_final_wo_bud.pdf

7. Promoting the effective use of technology in education

7.6 Increase the effectiveness of EMIS	7.6.a. Make the data more available for monitoring the performance of PSS and for planning.
	7.6b. Keep the PSS web site more up to date.
	7.7c. Get more timely, accurate data on dropout and graduation rates

Sector Wide Planning

The PSS is in receipt of grant funding From the Global Partnership for Education to support Phase One of an Education Sector Wide Planning project.

Phase One will consist of capacity development to enable PSS to undertake thorough analytical and diagnostic research training and activity resulting in the development of a sector report that will provide a research base for the development of a new, wider-ranging sector plan that includes post-secondary, non-formal and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

The activity will involve the cooperation and collaboration of PSS with other RMI Government Ministries as well as the College of Marshall Islands (CMI), University of the South Pacific Majuro Campus (USP), National Training Council (NTC), stakeholders, employers, donors and others involved in the education sector.

The capacity development outcomes of this phase will include improved skills in analysis and diagnosis of critical issues affecting education and will lead to more informed planning and decision making, resulting in improved effectiveness and efficiency throughout the education sector.

Following on from this phase, PSS intends to apply to GPE for further funding support to build the local capacity needed to develop and implement a fully inclusive sector plan.

Operational Planning

The detailed strategies, activities and outputs required to implement this Strategic Plan are to be found in the Annual Portfolio Statements. These contain a detailed matrix of Implementing Actions along with management arrangements and associated costs. This allows for flexibility and response to changing circumstances.

Annual Monitoring and Evaluation will occur through the completion of the annual report and education indicators.

Annex 1 - Nine Characteristics of High-performing Schools

These nine characteristics have been adopted as the overall model for the schools of the RMI Public School System. They detail where we are going as to we work to meet the critical challenges and comply with our Vision and Goals.

Clear and Shared Focus. Everybody knows where they are going and why. The focus is on achieving a shared vision, and all understand their role in achieving the vision. The focus and vision are developed from common beliefs and values, creating a consistent direction for all involved.

High Standards and Expectations for All Students. Teachers and staff believe that all students can learn and meet high standards. While recognizing that some students must overcome significant barriers, these obstacles are not seen as insurmountable. Students are offered an ambitious and rigorous course of study.

Effective School Leadership. Effective instructional and administrative leadership is required to implement change processes. Effective leaders proactively seek needed help. They nurture an instructional program and school culture conducive to learning and professional growth. Effective leaders have different styles and roles -teachers and other staff, including those in the district office, often have a leadership role.

High Levels of Collaboration and Communication. There is strong teamwork among teachers across all grades and with other staff. Everybody is involved and connected to each other, including parents and members of the community, to identify problems and work on solutions.

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Aligned with Standards. The planned and actual curriculum are aligned with the essential academic learning requirements (EALRs). Research-based teaching strategies and materials are used. Staff understand the role of classroom and state assessments, what the assessments measure, and how student work is evaluated.

Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching. A steady cycle of different assessments identifies students who need help. More support and instructional time is provided, either during the school day or outside normal school hours. Teaching is adjusted based on frequent monitoring of student progress and needs. Assessment results are used to focus and improve instructional programs.

Focused Professional Development. A strong emphasis is placed on training staff in areas of most need. Feedback from learning and teaching focuses extensive and ongoing professional development. The support is also aligned with the school or district vision and objectives.

Supportive Learning Environment. The school has a safe, civil, healthy and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Students feel respected and connected with the staff and are engaged in learning. Instruction is personalized and small learning environments increase student contact with teachers.

High Levels of Family and Community Involvement. There is a sense that all have a responsibility to educate students, not just teachers and school staff. Families, businesses, social service agencies, and community colleges/ universities all play a vital role in this effort.

Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), State of Washington

Annex 2 Improving Quality Basic Education

The PSS will work in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank to develop and implement the Improving Quality Basic Education Project. The Project will focus on Professional Development for supervisors, Principals and Teachers in bi-lingual literacy and numeracy teaching and learning practices, including student assessment.

In the first instance, the PSS will work with the Project Preparation Technical Advisory Team to align project activities with the Critical Challenges of the education sector.

To the greatest extent possible, during Project implementation, the PSS will implement all its Professional Development activities through the Project, thereby strengthening ownership and avoiding duplication.

Annex 3 Overview of Education in the Marshall Islands.

The Education Act of 1992 (14 MIRC Ch. 3) established a Ministry of Education (MOE) responsible for the “administration and implementation of all elementary and secondary educational programs in the Republic” (§304). In addition to the public schools themselves, the PSS is responsible for issuing charters to private schools authorizing their establishment.

By legislation in 2013 the MOE was restructured to create the Public School System (PSS), that became effective in November 2014. The PSS now has responsibility for personnel decisions.

Financials Transition from MOF to PSS. While personnel transition was fully executed and accomplished in FY 2015, the process of transitioning financial matters from the Ministry of Finance to the PSS is still ongoing. Tasks required of this process are varied and more complex. During the past year, an MOU between MOF and PSS was signed clearly laying out when and how the transition will take place. Since the MOU was signed, the PSS is still working out a Transition Plan for approval by both parties.

A phased-in approach is taken in the area of fund management transfer to the PSS. Eventually, it is envisioned that General Fund and Federal Program funds will be transferred to the PSS for management and operation. Other program funds will be transferred in subsequent years as the PSS Finance and Budget Divisions is readied to manage all program funds.

The transition of financial management is priority reason for external assistance. The RMI Ministry of Finance is overburdened by everything from routine PSS purchase orders for supplies upwards to major acquisitions.

Furthermore, the PSS is annually embarrassed by not spending all the money allocated. However this is largely a result of MOF not drawing down money, MOF not processing purchase requisitions and lack of timely reporting of account balances.

The Ministry is required to submit an *Annual Report* to the Nitijela that describes the condition of education in the RMI and assesses the outlook for the future. This section of the *Strategic Plan* provides an overview of education in the Marshall Islands that is largely based on information contained in the 2016 *Annual Report* to the Nitijela. In addition, data from the 2011 RMI Census and other PSS sources are cited, as appropriate. Many of the topics examined below are discussed in further detail in Annex 4, which considers the critical issues facing Marshall Islands education now and in the immediate future.

Organization of PSS Central Administration

The upper level management of the MOE currently consists of the Minister of Education and a semi-independent Public School System (PSS) overseen by the nine-member Board of Education. The Minister recommends to the Cabinet the members of the Board of Education who serve 4-year terms. The Board appoints the Commissioner (formerly, Secretary) and the

Commissioner appoints the six Associate Commissioners who are in charge of the PSS' six Divisions. These are:

- Personnel, Budget, and Administration;
- Policy, Planning, and Standards;
- Elementary Education;
- Secondary Education
- Kwajalein Schools and Ebeye Special Needs; and
- Property and Maintenance

Although the responsibilities of the PSS Divisions are many and varied, their fundamental purpose is to provide services and support to the schools. These services may be indirect (e.g., proposing new legislation or coordinating preparation of the annual budget), but are usually direct and tangible (e.g., procuring materials and supplies, providing in-service training for teachers, repairing school facilities and buses, etc.).

In FY 2016, the PSS Divisions consisted of 79 staff out of a total PSS workforce of 1,124.

Schools: Number, Size, and Enrollment

Table 1 below presents figures on the number of and enrollment in public and nonpublic primary and secondary schools in the RMI. As the figures indicate, the RMI education system currently serves 11,866 primary school students (9584 public and 2282 private) in 95 schools and nearly 3,493 secondary students (2653 public and 840 private) in 15 schools. After dipping in the early years of the century, student numbers have remained fairly stable over the past decade, with primary school enrollment increasing at a rate of about 100 students per year and annual secondary enrollment hovering slightly above or below 3,000.

Table 1 [Update]					
Number of Schools, Enrollment by Gender, School Year 2015-2016					
Level	Type	No. of Schools	No. of Students	No. Boys	No. Girls
Elementary	Public	79	9584	4939	4645
	Private	16	2282	1149	1139
Total Elementary		95	11866	6088	5778
Secondary	Public	5	2653	1271	1382
	Private	10	840	428	412
Total Secondary		15	3493	1699	1794

Table 2A			
Number of Schools			
SY 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016 (Public and Private Combined)			
	SY 2013-2014	SY 2014-2015	SY 2015-2016
Total Elementary	95	96	95
Total Secondary	17	17	15
Grand Total	112	113	110

Table 2B [Contact EPPSO]			
Future Enrollment Estimates for			
SY 2016-2017, 2018-2019, 2020-2021 (Public and Private Combined)			
	SY 2016-2017	SY 2018-2019 (est.)	SY 2020-2021 (est.)
Public Elementary	9,732	9,864	9,800
Private Elementary	2,283	2,314	2,299
Total Elementary	12,015	12,178	12,099
Public Secondary	2,713	2,723	2,752
Private Secondary	862	860	869
Total Secondary	3,593	3,583	3,621
Total Public	12,463	12,587	12,552
Total Private	3,145	3,174	3,168
Grand Total	15,608	15,761	15,720

A distinctive characteristic of Marshall Islands education is the sheer number of schools that provide primary and secondary education—a result of both geography (i.e., widely dispersed atolls and islands) and the national policy of providing universal access to schooling.

With the exception of Majuro Middle School serving grades 7 and 8 students only, all schools in the RMI are classified as either primary (grades 1-8) or secondary (grades 9-12) schools.

Staffing

In FY 2016, PSS reported a total workforce of 1,124 making it the largest employer in the RMI. Teachers accounted for 852 positions, 194 school-based personnel and 78 central office staff.

With total 2014-2015 public school enrollment of 12,793 and 873 teachers, the National student-teacher ratio was only about 14.7 to 1. However, there are major differences in the student-teacher ratio between urban and rural areas. In the population centers of Majuro and Ebeye, the student-teacher ratio in primary schools is 25:1, versus less than 11:1 on the Outer Islands. These averages disguise overcrowding in some schools and are distorted downward by special ed teachers being included. Similarly, in secondary schools the student-teacher ratio on Majuro and Ebeye is approximately 22:1, versus slightly more than 15:1 on the Outer Islands. These ratios are all well below the PSS's mandated maximum.

The base qualifications for RMI teachers (Professional Certificate I) are an Associate's degree in Education or an Associate's degree in another field plus 16 credits in Education with a 2.5 GPA and successful completion of a teaching practicum. A Provisional Certificate may be granted for up to three years to those who hold a high school diploma and have earned at least 30 college semester credits, provided that they are making progress towards Professional Certification.

The RMI teaching corps is augmented by volunteers from programs and organizations such as World Teach, Japanese Volunteers and the Dartmouth Volunteer Teaching Program. In SY 2015-2016, a total of 29 volunteer teachers were assigned to public primary and secondary schools, often filling teaching posts for which there was no qualified Marshallese candidate.

Curriculum

Schooling is compulsory in the RMI for all children between the ages of 5 and 18. At both the primary and secondary levels, the curriculum focuses on English Language Arts, Marshallese Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies/Marshallese Studies.

PSS Rules and Regulations stipulate that the school year shall consist of at least 185 days with 1,750 [check] minutes of instruction per week in grades 1-3 and 1,800 minutes in grades 4-8. In addition to the five core subjects cited above, school principals are expected to provide time within the weekly calendar for career education, health and population, physical education, art/music and gardening.

The PSS is responsible for establishing educational standards and benchmarks in the core content areas. Student achievement of these standards is measured by the Marshall Islands Standards Assessment Test (MISAT) series, which is currently administered to all grades 3, 6, and 8 students, and 10 and 12 at the secondary level. However, we may drop the testing in the 12th grade in favor of using the CMI entrance test as a measure of system performance.

With the exception of English Language Arts classes, the language of instruction in grades K-12 is Marshallese. A Marshallese Studies course (culture and history), usually integrated with Social Studies, is required in every grade. With the new language policy, the language of instruction is Marshallese except all English Classes and Japanese classes. This is not yet realistic at the secondary level due to the shortage of qualified Marshallese.

Finances

In FY 2016, the PSS's budget was slightly more than \$ 29 million. The table below shows the sources of these funds.

Table 3 FY 2016 PSS Budget, by Source	
RMI General Fund	6,752,632.00
Special Appropriation	800,000.00
Compact Sector	11,176,734.00
Supplemental Educational Grant (SEG)	5,298,590.00
SEG TA	278,876.00
Ebeye Special Needs	2,697,699.00
ROC Fund	500,000.00
IDEA Part B	1,682,139.00
TOTAL	29,186,679.00

As these figures indicate, the PSS is heavily dependent on U.S. assistance, whether in the form of Compact-related funds or other educational grants, for its operations.

The PSS is particularly dependent on U.S.-sourced funds to pay staff, including teachers' salaries and benefits, as Table 4 shows.

Table 4 No. of Staff, by Source	
RMI General Fund	272
Special Appropriation	N/A
Compact Sector	481
Supplemental Educational Grant (SEG)	187
SEG TA	N/A
Ebeye Special Needs	55
IDEA Part B	129
ROC	N/A
TOTAL	1,124

Annex 4 Analysis of Critical Challenges Marshall Islands' Education System

This section of the PSS *Strategic Plan* examines the critical challenges facing the Marshall Islands PSS in the coming years. They were refined and reaffirmed with the Minister and PSS leaders in March-June 2016. The PSS considers these challenges as holding the keys to developing a modern educational system consistent with Marshallese cultural values. The issues are few in number, but profoundly challenging.

Critical Challenges Summary

1. Student achievement
2. Student persistence
3. Principal and teacher qualifications and performance
4. School characteristics
5. Accreditation and school improvement
6. Community-based governance of schools and parental involvement
7. Technology in education

This does not mean that other challenges will be neglected. On the contrary, we believe that they can be fit within the above with increased focus on measureable outcomes.

1. Student Achievement

The primary means of assessing student achievement in RMI schools is the Marshall Islands Standards Assessment Test (MISAT) series. The MISAT is currently administered to all grade 3 and grade 6 students as four separate tests in English reading, Marshallese reading, math, and science. The grade 8 MISAT is a single test consisting of questions in these same four content areas plus social studies and an English writing sample. The grade 8 MISAT also functions as the High School Entrance Test, determining which students will be admitted to the public secondary schools. Recent MISAT results for grades 3, 6, and 8 are summarized in the table below.

Table 5 MISAT Results % of Students Scoring Proficient or Higher					
Grade 3					
	2008-2009	2009-2010	2013-2014	2014 - 2015	2015-2016
English reading	21	22	19	19%	25
Marshallese reading	20	34	33	28%	33
Math	15	23	28	33%	37
Science	23	28	30	34%	27
Grade 6					
English reading	13	20	18	19%	19
Marshallese reading	35	40	32	32%	39
Math	8	19	16	21%	20
Science	9	12	8	15%	15
Grade 8					
High School Entrance Test	26	25	38	37%	41

10 th Grade	English				Math				
	Schools	2013	2014	2015	2016	2013	2014	2015	2016
All		22%	23%	24%	25	10%	11%	12%	13%

12 th Grade	English				Math				
	Schools	2013	2014	2015	2016	2013	2014	2015	2016
All		32%	29%	30%	31%	12%	12%	11%	11%

As these figures vividly illustrate, student achievement is falling far short of expectations across all the content areas and grade levels for which the MISAT provides results. Nonetheless, there are some emerging signs of improvement over the four years summarized in Table 5. Most notably, the percentage of students scoring proficient or higher in math has nearly doubled in grade 3 and more than doubled in grade 6. Further examination of the factors behind this increase may yield lessons and insights applicable to other content areas.

Perhaps the most important finding of the MISAT results is that Marshallese children have already fallen far behind when the first test is administered in grade 3. Particularly in English reading, which has stubbornly defied efforts at improvement, grade 3 children find themselves at a serious disadvantage from which they are never able to recover. Researchers have speculated that the poor results in subjects such as science may have as much to do with weak English reading skills as with failure to master the principles and concepts of science.

In terms of strategic priorities and resource allocations, the MISAT results clearly suggest that increased emphasis on the early elementary years should be a prime consideration. Starting in SY 2016 – 2017 (roughly FY 2017), subject matter specialists -- math, English, science, etc.

are being moved out of offices in the PSS headquarters to work in specific schools with teachers on formative evaluation. Teachers need to know on a weekly basis if their students are not learning the skills specified in the curriculum and take corrective actions.

Measures Other than MISAT

Pilot Project Show Positive Results in Literacy and Numeracy. The Quality Primary Education (QPNP) in the North Pacific pilot project was designed to develop and trial new inputs in learning, assessment, teacher development, and data management to improve the quality of primary education in the northern Pacific Micronesian nations of the RMI, the FSM, and Palau. The project, funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and operated in the RMI in five selected schools on Majuro, and in the FSM, the project worked with all six schools of Kosrae State and two selected schools of Pohnpei State. A control group of two schools in the RMI and two schools in Pohnpei allowed for some comparative assessments to be made.

The Project utilized a formative assessment tool that provides a detailed picture of student performance levels in reading and mathematics. The EGLA was developed for the FSM and the RMI in a collaborative manner alongside education authorities of each project site, with intensive capacity building, piloting, analysis, and extensive trials. In the following tables, literacy and numeracy results, in both English and Marshallese were assessed for the two years of the project, 2014 and 2015. The results show gains in both tested areas.

2. School Persistence Rate

The RMI Education Act of 1991, as amended, required the MOE, now PSS, to provide schooling to all children aged 5-18 and mandates parents or guardians to ensure that children in this age range enroll in and attend primary or secondary school. Despite such progressive legislation, PSS and independent researchers have documented for many years how few students actually persist in school for the full 12-13 year cycle and complete high school. The tables below summarize “persistence” figures provided by PSS in its FY 2017 Portfolio Budget Statements and by the World Bank in its 2006 case study of educational performance in the Marshall Islands. The persistence percentages are then used to calculate the resulting size of a hypothetical cohort of 100 grade 1 students at three junctures on the educational continuum—(i) at the end of grade 8; (ii) at the beginning of grade 9; and (iii) at the end of grade 12. The PSS meets the obligation of secondary education for all 8th graders with the Life Skills Academy for those who do not qualify for high school because of low 8th grade MISAT scores.

**Table 6
Student Persistence Rates in RMI Schools (PSS)**

	% of Total	Cohort Size
Hypothetical cohort of grade 1 students:		100
Students completing grade 8	68	68
Grade 8 completers enrolling in grade 9	69	47
High school students completing grade 12	49	23

**Table 7
Student Persistence Rates in RMI Schools (World Bank)**

	% of Total	Cohort Size
Hypothetical cohort:		100
Students completing grade 8	80	80
Grade 8 completers enrolling in grade 9	67	54
High school students completing grade 12	60	32

Although there are inherent difficulties in accurately calculating student persistence or dropout rates over time, even basic methods (e.g., comparing the number of high school graduates with the number of children enrolled in grade 1 twelve years earlier) indicate that a significant majority of Marshall Islands children are exiting school long before achieving a high school diploma or certificate.

The low persistence/high dropout rate of Marshallese students has been known and documented for many years, if not decades. Yet, to date, it has proved resistant to change or significant improvement.

The PSS believes that the problem must now be moved to the “front burner” and efforts— involving many, diverse segments of society—made to solve it. Among other initiatives, the Strategic *Plan* calls for a high-profile national campaign to raise awareness about the dropout epidemic and encourage broad-based support in combating it. The PSS is concentrating on

high school dropout prevention. We will depend on the communities for work on primary school attendance.

3. Principal and Teacher Qualifications

The heart of a quality education system is people and the PSS has made efforts in recent years to upgrade the qualifications and capabilities of its teaching staff.

The Teacher Standards and Licensing Board (TSLB), established under the Teacher Certification Act of 2007, is responsible for establishing standards for certifying and licensing teachers in the RMI. The “base” qualification (Professional Certificate I) for all new teachers is an AS degree in education or an AS in another subject plus 16 credits in education and completion of a teaching practicum. PSS data summarized in the table below, show the current qualifications status of teachers.

These figures clearly indicate that there has been progress in bringing all teachers up to the Professional Certificate I level. Nearly 21% of the schools’ 853 teachers still possess only a high school diploma and the rate at which these teachers are earning degrees is slow.

Teachers Education Level

<i>Education Level</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>%2014</i>	<i>2015-2016</i>	<i>% 2015-2016</i>
HS	307	283	172	21%	158	19%
CECE	26	55	129	15%	143	17%
AA/AS	368	362	368	43%	354	42%
BA/BS	137	147	160	19%	175	21%
Masters	12	15	14	2%	10	1%
Total	850	862	853	100%	840	100%

A large part of the problem faced by PSS in creating a highly qualified and capable teaching corps has been the low wages that teachers receive in comparison with other public employees of similar educational backgrounds and experience. In addition, K-12 teaching as a whole lacks the professional “standing” of occupations in health care, finance, engineering, and other fields.

PSS has begun to address these problems by introducing legislation to upgrade the salary scale for public school teachers. The new salary scale was approved by the 34th Nitijela and was to be implemented over the next three years. Among other strategies, PSS will be implementing certification requirements and higher pay for principals to ensure that the nation’s school leaders are of high caliber. Effective principals inspire better student achievement.

4. School Characteristics

A unique feature of the RMI education system is the sheer number and geographic dispersal of schools. As summarized in the preceding section, there are 85 public schools in the Marshall Islands (79 primary, 6 secondary) enrolling slightly more than 12,000 students (9,951 primary and 2,316 secondary). By contrast, reportedly the Guam Department of Education serves approximately 30,000 students in 27 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, and 5 high schools.

Of course, the number and geographic dispersal of schools go hand in hand. To achieve the National goal of universal access to primary education, schools have been established on 20 different atolls and islands with multiple schools on many of the larger atolls. As shown in the table below, this has led to a profusion of small schools, particularly on the Outer Atolls and Islands.

Table 8 Geographical Distribution of Schools by Enrollment 2015-2016			
Location	Enrollment	No. of Schools	Total
Majuro Atoll			
	500-1,000+	4	
	150-499	4	
	50-149	1	
	1-49	0	9
Kwajalein Atoll			
	500-1,000+	1	
	150-499	2	
	50-149	0	
	1-49	2	5
Outer Islands/Atolls			
	500-1,000+	0	
	150-499	1	
	50-149	38	
	1-49	26	65

This distribution of schools presents extraordinary administrative, logistical, and pedagogical challenges. The small size of many schools on the Outer Islands/Atolls means that teachers there must often teach subjects with which they are unfamiliar, in multi-grade classrooms, to students with diverse capabilities. Moreover, unreliable, time-consuming, and expensive transportation and communication links means that they are at a severe disadvantage in terms of receiving on-site technical assistance, participating in in-service training programs in the population centers, or simply joining a professional community of learners. The result is that the quality of classroom instruction is compromised and students suffer.

PSS will do evaluation on individual teachers in every outer islands school; the goal is to identify who can monitor, coach and mentor teachers. We will train the Head Teachers or Principal on multi-level instruction.

As summarized in the table below, research conducted by PSS shows that students in these small schools fare poorly on the MISAT in comparison with those in medium or large schools. We will check the qualifications of individual teachers in every school and assign more certified teachers

Table 9 MISAT Results by Size of School % of Students Scoring Proficient			
	Small	Medium	Large
Grade 3			
English reading	10	12	20
Marshallese reading	21	26	38
Math	17	20	31
Science	18	20	27
Grade 6			
English reading	5	9	18
Marshallese reading	29	32	38
Math	15	17	20
Science	6	8	10

The PSS is pursuing strategies to improve the cost effectiveness and educational outcomes of the current system while maintaining its commitment to universal primary education.

A significant PSS initiative for the 2016-2017 SY is to transfer teachers from overstaffed small schools to schools with large class sizes. We will assign no more than three teachers to schools with enrollment below 50. Two certified teachers are a requirement in any small school. Very small schools may be consolidated.

Compulsory Education

In 2003, amendments to the Education Act of 1992 raised the compulsory education age from 14 to 18. In effect, this meant that a full four years of high school were now compulsory for virtually all students in the RMI.

Although the goal of universal secondary education is laudable, it is far from being achieved. As noted above (Tables 6 and 7), the percentage of grade 8 completers enrolling in high school has been in the 67-69% range for many years. To a certain extent, the decline in enrollment during the transition from grade 8 to grade 9 is a *demand* problem (i.e., students drop out of school at the end of grade 8 because they are bored, transportation to high school is unavailable, etc.). However, the decline is also a *supply* problem—students drop out after grade 8 simply because there is insufficient capacity to accommodate them all. Perhaps the best evidence for this is that when new, alternative secondary programs were established, such as

the National Vocational Training Institute or the Life Skills Academy, students are eager to sign up and participate. The NVTI has been eliminated and replaced with Life Skills Academy.

The PSS believes that renewed efforts must be made to realize the Government's stated goal of universal secondary education. First and foremost, this requires the development of a detailed multi-year plan to *construct* and *operate* a secondary-level infrastructure (schools, classrooms, facilities, teachers, etc.) sufficient to offer all grade 8 completers, based on current completion rates, with continuing education opportunities by 2020. However, as the primary school dropout rate declines, this will increase the number of grade 8 completers and attention must also be paid to meeting the needs of this larger cohort of students.

PSS Autonomy

Although the Ministry of Education is committed to a strong Community-Based Governance System for schools (see discussion below), the logic of efficiency means that the PSS will continue to perform critical services for schools in a centralized manner. For instance, decentralizing the purchase of textbooks to 85 separate public schools would result in massive duplication of administrative effort and greatly increased costs to the overall education system.

However, the PSS's ability to carry out its services to schools was often compromised by the fact that the PSS itself previously lacked sufficient autonomy, particularly in relation to its personnel and financial functions. Too often, the state of affairs led to delays in recruiting for and filling vacant teaching positions; delays in processing teachers' salary increments; sluggishness in responding to school needs that arise during the year. Inconsistencies in financial records maintained by PSS and the Ministry of Finance; led ultimately to the permanent loss of funds due to restrictive carryover provisions, as in the case of SEG funds.

To address these problems, the Nitijela passed the Marshall Islands Public School Systems Act, 2013 to provide for independence and autonomy in its personnel, financial, and budgeting functions. The legislation also established National Board of Education that, as of November 2015, has ultimate control and authority over the public school system.

While the PSS now controls its personnel functions, financial control has not yet been received. Strengthening the PSS financial system is a major goal of technical assistance and the consultants funded thereby.

Access and Equity

Both the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) initiative have articulated the goals of achieving universal access to and equity in the provision of schooling. The MDGs and EFA place emphasize on gender parity, but also cite the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children including ethnic minorities and those living in war-torn or disaster-stricken areas.

Available data indicate that the Marshall Islands have substantially met the goal of gender parity, but that more work needs to be done to achieve true gender equality in schooling.

If the RMI school system has achieved gender parity, it appears that more progress is needed to achieve the related goal of gender equality.⁵ In the high schools, the lack of total gender equality primarily manifests itself in the different vocational elective courses that boys and girls

choose. This pattern foreshadows similar differences in the choice of postsecondary training choices and, eventually, in labor force outcomes.

Almost certainly, these differences are due to broad social values, rather than a failing or systematic discrimination on the part of schools or teachers. Nevertheless, they may imply a need for public education to take a more proactive stance in introducing girls to “non-traditional” occupations and providing guidance to assist them in pursuing these alternative career paths.

A significant social and educational issue is brewing because boys are dropping out of high school at a higher rate than girls.

5. Accreditation and School Improvement

The purpose of an accreditation system is not to sanction or close schools, but to ensure that schools engage in an organized, meaningful, and effective process of continuous improvement. In 2012, the PSS began designing a local accreditation program for all public schools in the RMI. Implementation commenced in 2013 with the first site visits to schools scheduled for the spring.

RMI accreditation is not the only path. Marshall Island High School was accredited by WASC starting in 2009.

Delap Elementary School was accredited in 2014 by WASC and Laura High School is awaiting the decision from WASC in mid-2016.

Under the RMI accreditation system, PSS School Evaluation Teams (MSETs) were to conduct visits to all public and chartered non-public elementary and secondary schools and evaluate each school’s performance in relation to six broad standards—leadership; teacher performance; data management; curriculum and student learning outcomes; campus, classrooms, and facilities; and school improvement planning. Each of the standards is comprised of four criteria so that an individual school is rated on a total of 24 different factors. The ratings options for these criteria are Level 4 (exceeds accreditation standards), Level 3 (complies with accreditation standards), Level 2 (substantially complies with accreditation standards and has a plan to correct deficiencies), and Level 1 (does not meet accreditation standards).

Schools that pass Stage 1 of the accreditation process, the on-site MSET evaluation, proceed to Stage 2, which consists of a School Self Study to be completed annually. School that do not pass Stage 1 are placed under “Special Measures” and required to develop an action plan to address the deficiencies identified in the MSET’s assessment. If, after three years, the school has still not passed Stage One of the accreditation process, the PSS shall “recommend the closure of the school and the relocation of the students to an accredited school.”

This expectation applies equally to schools that pass Stage One of the accreditation process and then undertake a Self Study to improve their ratings, and schools that do not pass Stage One and must implement a corrective action plan.

The PSS is acutely conscious of the fact that sustainable “whole school” improvement is not an easy or automatic process. In fact, for many years schools have been required to maintain and regularly update School Improvement Plans—often to little lasting effect. Therefore, a critical component of the new Accreditation Program will be to design and propose a school

improvement model, or models, that are thorough, research-based, and appropriate to the Marshall Islands context.

We propose that school leaders focus on the nine characteristics of high performing schools adopted in this Plan.

6. Community-Based Governance of Schools

Related to the issue of continuous school improvement is that of community-based governance of primary schools, whether formal or informal. The formal part is a local school board. The informal, essential part, is that parents get involved and demand quality schools. They must also stress the importance of education to their children.

No matter how plentiful the resources are at its disposal, the PSS realizes that it cannot effectively manage all schools from the central office. What it can provide is a strong partner with major responsibility for training and technical assistance to communities in management skills and teacher professionalism.

Put simply, the Community-Based Governance System needs serious revitalization if the goals of decentralization and local control are ever to be realized. The PSS has already begun addressing this issue through dialogue with Local Governments at the Mayors' Conference on Majuro. In addition, it will examine the legal provisions, rules, and regulations that underpin CBGS and, if necessary, propose changes to increase the system's workability and effectiveness. Small communities don't need a lot of formal structure. Each atoll has a municipal council that can function as the school board too.

7. Technology in Education

Technology, particularly computer-assisted and Web-based learning, has the potential to profoundly impact the quality of education in the Marshall Islands and improve student achievement. In recent years, substantial progress has been made in increasing school and student access to computers and Internet resources.

- Internet connectivity has been achieved for all public schools on Majuro;
- The One Laptop per Child (OLPC) initiative (1,000 units) is not perceived as having been effective. Formal evaluation is lacking. Teachers did not made effective use.
- Solar laptop learning systems (21 sets) donated by the Republic of China are were distributed to 21 schools on the Outer Islands.
- Thin-client computers provided by NTA are being provided to 13 primary schools and all five high schools in SYs 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16.
- The initiative by Marshall Island High School to install the PowerSchool student information system in 2012 is considered a success by the faculty, administration, students and parents. Initially hosted on Majuro, it has now been migrated to off-island hosting so the technical and teaching staff can concentrate on instruction.
- MIHS, also on its own initiative, installed the Khan Academy learning system, locally hosted version KA Lite, on a server that feeds thin-client computers.

- PowerSchool is being set up for Rita Elementary School and Majuro Middle School for activation at the start of the 2016-2017 school year.
- At both MIHS and RES key factors were technical staff in the school and principals were leading the efforts.

Moving forward, the challenge for PSS is not merely to distribute hardware, but to ensure that the new teaching and learning resources available through technology are productively integrated into classroom instruction. The PSS is acutely aware of the criticism that many educational technology initiatives fail to achieve their aims because teachers and students are inadequately or improperly guided during the rollout process.

Student information systems facilitate principals' oversight of both attendance and instruction.

Conclusion

Promoting An Innovative People by Improving Education Access and Opportunities has been identified as one of the goals in the RMI (National Strategic Plan 2016) or National Strategic Goal Theme 5. It is the goal of both RMI government and Public School System (PSS) to provide and make sure high quality education is available to its citizens. The RMI Government and PSS must collaborate to produce a competitive skilled workforce of the nation.

Therefore, in order to over-arching the Educational goals and Objectives outlined in both RMI NSP and PSS Strategic Plan, the Public School System has developed an implementation plan for 2017 – 2020 and beyond.