

Archived Information

Interim Evaluation of the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning

Introduction

A five-member panel responsible for evaluating the Regional Educational Laboratory Program at the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) visited the Lab during the week of May 17-21, 1999. As a member of this panel, I reviewed advance material in preparation for the visit to the Laboratory, which is located in Honolulu, Hawaii. During the visit, panel members listened to presentations by and/or interviewed Laboratory staff, governing board members, Lab partners, and clients. We also toured the Laboratory facilities and met with the program officer responsible for monitoring the Lab on behalf of its funding agency, the US Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI).

I. Brief Overview of Laboratory

PREL was originally a division of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) which is located in Portland, Oregon. Through this division, NWREL provided educational services to the Pacific region. PREL became an independent regional Laboratory in 1990. The region served by PREL is a vast area, consisting of three sovereign nations (Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau); two territories (American Samoa and Guam); one commonwealth (the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) and one state (Hawaii).

PREL serves a region vastly different from those served by the other nine regional educational Laboratories. The region is characterized by its huge geographic area, which covers

4.9 million square miles of ocean, islands, and atolls. Page 10 of the PREL proposal describes the region as follows:

Distance and accessibility are elements that affect every aspect of PREL's work. Honolulu is approximately five hours by air from the West Coast. Guam is seven and one-half hours beyond Honolulu. American Samoa is a five-hour flight from Honolulu. Travel from American Samoa to all other parts of the region is only possible via Honolulu. PREL's current board chair is from Palau. He spent 40 hours of flying time to attend a one-day, OERI board chairs' meeting in Washington, DC. For frequent and regular PREL staff work in Washington, the travel time is eleven hours in each direction with an overnight in transit. The distance variable is a very important one to how PREL will carry out its work.

Regionally, island communities are served by one airline. Travel options and choices are very limited. Flights to and from many entities are every other day. The points of embarking and debarking are Honolulu and Guam. The next day it does the opposite. Within the various entities, the average interval between visits is 30-45 days. Accessibility is a very big consideration in PREL's approach to work.

Within the region, there are six time zones that result in four common workdays between entities east and west of the International Dateline. Time differences range from one to 22 hours. Between Washington and Pacific entities, there is a range of six (daylight savings time) to 28 hours in time difference. The time variable is also an important consideration in the planning and delivering of work.

A further, and perhaps more challenging aspect of the designated Lab region is the cultural and linguistic differences that prevail in the area. The Lab reports that there are at least nine different prominent cultures in the region. While English is the language of instruction, it is not the language of the home for most students outside of Hawaii. Within the ten Pacific jurisdictions served by the Lab, there are at least 30 ethnic groups.

This lengthy overview of the region served by PREL is necessary because it provides a sense of the complexities that must be considered when assessing the extent to which this Lab has fulfilled its obligations during the first three years of its current OERI contract. In my view, one must first acknowledge that this Lab, by virtue of the region it serves, must address seemingly intractable problems in providing education services that meet the myriad needs of its client groups. Secondly, one must seek to understand that the simplest solution to a problem in most other Lab regions may not be so simple in the PREL region.

II. Implementation and Management

A. To what extent is the REL doing what it was contracted to do during the first three contract years?

1. Strengths

PREL appears to be accomplishing what it was contracted to do. The Lab's work is guided by its mission to "assist government, community agencies, business, and labor groups to maintain cultural literacy and improve the quality of life by helping to strengthen educational programs and processes for children, youth, and adults." The specific goals which the Lab has identified to address the needs of the region are to reshape teaching and learning, transform school structures and environments, foster partnerships and connections, and address important issues of language and cultural diversity.

The Lab is governed by a board of directors, which is comprised of 20 members. Nine of the ten chief state school officers (CSSO) are active members on the board, while one CSSO is represented by a designee. Other board members include parents, teachers, representatives of higher and private education, business/industry, and government. The board meets for two days,

three times a year.

A review of Lab documents including the quarterly reports indicates the board is active in addressing Laboratory governance issues. A major board action was to change PREL's corporate name in efforts to differentiate PREL, the regional educational Laboratory contract from PREL, the nonprofit corporation. The new name, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) is designed to reflect PREL's diversity while at the same time retaining the acronym which is known throughout the region.

The board's activities have included revising bylaws and policies, electing new members as necessary, reviewing and refining the Lab organizational structure, and reviewing and revising staff job descriptions. Given the limited number of meetings held during the year, this board appears to be functioning in an effective and exemplary manner.

The board chair and other board members who discussed their roles and the Lab's program stated that the Lab effectively provides education services to the region. They indicated the Lab is responsive to the needs of the region as a whole but it also addresses the specific needs of each entity. Staff members appear to be sensitive to the characteristics of each entity and have developed effective strategies for addressing regional issues and concerns without "imposing the western way of doing things."

The members indicated they are kept apprised of Lab activities through newsletters, phone calls and e-mail. One board member stated that the Lab might be described as a convener, facilitator, bridge to the federal government, communicator and translator for the region. The Lab has garnered a lot of respect in the region primarily as a result of the trust and sensitivity staff have gained over the years of providing services that address the needs of the region. Regard for the chief executive officer and other staff members is very positive. This sentiment seems to be

shared by all of those with whom we spoke and can perhaps be summed up in a statement by a Lab partner/client: “If you would pull PREL out, there would be a void.”

The board and key Lab staff recognize the importance of having a highly qualified staff to perform the duties required to meet the needs of the region’s diverse clients. While staff members are selected for their knowledge, skills, and experience, they are required to engage in staff development activities based on individual professional development plans which all employees are required to complete. It appears, however, that the Lab did not provide regularly scheduled in-house professional development for staff. The 1997 External/Internal Evaluation Report indicates that staff members expressed the need for more in-house professional development opportunities. In addressing concerns about this issue, key Lab personnel indicated that the majority of staff development is now provided internally. However, plans to improve this component are still under development.

In efforts to determine to what extent the Lab is doing what it was approved to do, I attempted to track one of the seven OERI tasks the Lab is required to address under its scope of work. Given the demographics of the region, it is likely that the most difficult task this Lab has to address is Task 3 which provides for direct services to the field. The Lab proposal stated that to carry out Task 3, it “will function as: (a) a resource and facilitator and (b) provider of direct assistance.” As a resource and facilitator, the Lab provides services to the field that include the collection and dissemination of information, convening groups, training, identifying promising practices and exemplary programs, and providing referral information. As a provider of direct services, the Lab proposed to “focus direct services to ensure an adequate breadth and depth of assistance.” To accomplish this, the Lab proposed to work in a selected number of sites, which would be identified through extensive needs assessment and assistance from the board.

A review of the quarterly reports for 1996 shows that the Lab conducted a number of activities in the role of resource and facilitator of educational services in the region including developing a policy database, a newsletter, and publications. The Lab also convened gatherings such as its Pacific Educational Conference, a CNMI Youth Conference, Assessment and Leadership institutes, and a Teacher Pre-service and In-service meeting. Lab staff developed plans to assist each entity in meeting identified high priority training needs and conducted a number of training and staff development activities. In efforts to maintain communication and provide technical assistance in the region, staff stated that they attempt to conduct monthly meetings via PEACESAT. However, since this satellite is often inoperable other distance technology measures are being considered.

One of the most interesting staff development programs offered by PREL is the Pacific Educator in Residence (PEIR) which was initiated by the board several years ago. PEIR is a twelve-month residency program designed to bring educators from the entities to spend a year at PREL to enhance and develop personal and professional skills. The goal is to enable the educators to develop goals and plans for improving education in their respective regions. The PEIR Program is also listed as one the Lab's signature programs.

In its role as a provider of direct assistance, the Lab has assisted a number of schools in the region. Direct assistance was provided to enable schools to develop improvement programs under the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. Direct assistance has also included such activities as leadership training in Chuuk, and the development of an exit assessment instrument for Yap State elementary students in math and language arts.

In further efforts to determine the extent to which the Lab is doing what it was approved to do, I looked at a single activity--the development of the Reading Aloud to Children audio tape

series from its inception to its completion as reported in the quarterly reports (1996-1998) submitted for review. The first and second of these reports (12/95-2/96 and 3/96-5/96), describe the intent to develop an audio series on literacy which would illustrate a “growing attempt at PREL to develop electronic products in addition to print products.” It is the Lab’s judgment that this is an “efficient way of supporting teachers and parent groups and reaching a larger audience, particularly in outlying communities with minimal access to technology.” In the second of these two reports, the Lab stated: “Because the development of audio tapes and CD-ROMs is a new venture for PREL staff, the infrastructure and resources available and resources needed must be identified. The staff’s lack of experience in this area has been a significant barrier so far. Training is now being provided and a teaming approach to product development is being implemented.”

The third quarterly report for 1996 states that the audio tape series was in process. It features Hawaiian/English, Marshallese/English, Samoan/English and Pohnpeian/English. The fourth quarterly report indicates that these tapes were completed. The Hawaiian/English tape was disseminated to Hawaiian-speaking students on Kauai, Niihau, PTAs and schools with Hawaiian Immersion classes on all the islands. The tapes were also broadcast over local radio.

The first quarterly report for 1997 contains information regarding the further development of the audio tape series with a focus on a variety of other languages spoken in the region including Palauan, Chuukese, Carolinian and Chamorro, Yapese and Woleaian. In the second quarterly report, audiotapes were developed in Kosraean and Yapese. The third quarterly report indicates that the tapes are in various stages of development. The Lab was responsive to a request from Yap that two additional languages be taped; and consideration also was given to providing tapes in two additional languages for Hawaiian clients. The Marshallese/English tape was introduced at the PREL 14th Annual Pacific Educational Conference and was broadcast over the local radio and

educational television stations in Majuro. The fourth quarterly report for 1997 states that work is continuing on the tapes. Four tapes were completed and submitted to OERI. The project team responsible for developing the tapes described the need to develop and implement plans for training and dissemination to ensure the most effective use of the tapes in the region.

The quarterly reports for 1998 describe continuing work on the tapes. In the first quarterly report, tapes in eight Pacific languages had been produced and disseminated. A training package was developed to accompany each tape. During the second quarter, the tapes were provided to parents during PREL's Pacific Islands Bilingual Bicultural Association annual conference in Majuro, RMI. The third quarterly report provides the first evidence of problems in the production of the audio tapes. The Kosraean and Carolinian language tapes was delayed because of difficulty in finding children who can read and speak these languages. The fourth quarterly report describes the Lab's efforts to disseminate the tapes through the service center coordinators and parent information resource centers. These entities will be the primary contacts for training and distribution of the tapes in their respective regions. The Lab also reported that the tapes in Chamorro, Carolinian, Ilocano, and Kosraean languages would be completed in the first quarter of 1999.

Information in these reports about this single activity seem to show that the Lab follows through on a planned activity and is able to address the needs of each entity in developing and providing educational services. Generally, this appears to be true for all activities conducted by the Lab for its constituents.

The Lab, in all of its efforts toward providing education services in the region, has

developed a focus for its work that is designed to build the capacity of local educators to plan, develop, and implement effective school practices consistent with their respective needs. The approach for this work is what the Lab describes as “with and through,” rather than “to and for,” which has been typical of past practices in the region.

2. Areas of Concern/Recommendations

The composition of the Board of Directors, as described in the proposal, suggests that there is only one teacher on the board. However, in the 1997 External/Internal Evaluation Report, three teachers are listed as members of the board. According to this report, it appears that the CSSOs are regularly included as members of the board. Ten additional members are selected to balance the board representation. This apparently means that from time to time PREL’s major constituents may or may not be represented on the board since seats have not been designated or earmarked to represent any specific group. An explanation or clarification is needed regarding the makeup of the board. Given the focus on the provision of educational services in this diverse region, it would seem that teacher representatives would be a “given” on the board as are CSSOs.

One of the board members stated that the board needs to address the fact that PREL may not be moving as fast as it should in placing Pacific Islanders in key positions. However, the member also stated that there is a problem in rectifying this situation because there are not enough qualified people from this group in the region who can fill available positions. Additionally when people are qualified, the entities are reluctant to let them go because they are needed to support local educational programs. To the extent possible, the Lab should aggressively address this concern.

While the Lab appears to be providing extensive direct services to the field, it is not clear

how and who is involved in the provision of such services. Given the focus on “with and through,” it would be helpful if information was provided that describes how and by whom the work in the field is carried out.

As stated above, the Lab has provided for staff to engage in professional development activities based on individual professional development plans. It was noted in one of the quarterly reports (9/96) that staff developing the audio tapes and CD-ROMs would need training. Reference was made to the training of staff to develop the CD-ROMs but there was no reference to the training of staff to develop the audio tapes. It is not clear to what extent the Lab addressed this need to enable staff to perform the duties required to accomplish this particular task. Issues regarding staff development were also noted in one of the technical questions. Specifically, the Lab was asked: “Please tell us what additional training and/or staff development will be available for upgrading of staff evaluation skills?” While the response to this question was acceptable, it is not clear to what extent the Lab has addressed the question and developed specific strategies for providing staff development/training to assure that effective and exemplary services are provided in the region.

Comment: During discussions with the OERI program officer, it was noted that reports of site visits are not sent to the Board of Directors and key staff. The program officer stated that regular contact with the Lab is maintained through weekly phone calls. However, written feedback should be provided to the Lab’s hierarchy regarding its work in the region. Such reports should provide information indicating whether the Lab is accomplishing its goals and objectives under the approved scope of work. (This recommendation is directed to OERI, the Lab’s funding agent.)

B. To what extent is the REL using a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs?

1. Strengths

The Lab appears to provide for quality assurance of its products and publications through an internal design team comprised of appropriate regional experts. Research and development products require an external review and the program and contract-based products or informational-based products are reviewed internally.

PREL's quality assurance plan is designed to account for three categories of products and deliverables. Level 1 products are content heavy and require extensive planning and careful content review. Level 2 products contain general content and information and require content review. Level 3 products are basically short informational pieces and require mainly copy editing.

A review of the quarterly reports reveals that Lab staff give careful attention to the development of high quality products. During the 1997 performance period, staff apparently determined that there was a need to revise the quality assurance process (QAP). During the 1998 performance period, the QAP was refined and implemented in the 4th quarter of 1998.

The Lab conducted several self-assessment studies during this contract period. One such study was conducted in 1997. The findings of this study were published in a report dated October 1997. The purpose of the study was to "provide staff with interim, formative feedback on PREL's progress, identify improvements that are needed, and simulate the anticipated third-year evaluation of regional educational Laboratories using peer review teams and the accreditation process." This appears to be a comprehensive self-study that addresses critical issues relevant to the total Laboratory operation.

Following this study, the Lab commissioned an external review panel to examine the 1997 self-study. The two-member panel also visited the Lab to validate the findings of the study. Lab staff reviewed the recommendations from this external review and published a report describing progress made in implementing these recommendations.

All indications are that Lab staff carefully reviewed the findings from its self-study and the external evaluation. A comprehensive response to these studies was prepared. For each recommendation, staff indicated whether or not progress was made in addressing each item. If a recommendation was not feasible, it was so noted. Overall, Lab staff provided candid information about the status of Lab operations.

I reviewed two additional evaluation reports prepared in 1997 and 1999 titled “Annual Formative Evaluation Survey: PREL Materials and Workshop/Presentation.” These annual evaluation surveys are designed to assess the effectiveness of PREL materials and presentations/workshops. They provide information and descriptions about the quality and usefulness of the products and services provided in the region. A review of the first of three recommendations in the 1997 and 1999 reports seem to indicate a need to continue to explore ways to increase awareness of publications as well as consider ways to improve dissemination of products. The second recommendation in each of these reports addresses the issue of impact of services provided in the region.

2. Areas of Concern/Recommendations

Generally, the Lab appears to have met the expectations to engage in self-monitoring and to adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs and issues in the region. It is not clear however, to what extent progress has been made in addressing the areas of needed improvement noted in the evaluation reports. For instance, the recommendations in the 1997 and

the 1999 reports appear to be the same. This seems to indicate that little progress has been made between November 1997 and January 1999 in improving the awareness and dissemination of products and materials to the region. Another concern noted in these two reports is the issue of impact of services to the region. There appears to be a need to “have a long-term plan and strategy for its workshops and presentations tied to regional and entity needs assessment.” Lab staff should give more attention to strategies for implementing the recommendations in the evaluation reports.

III. Quality

To what extent is the REL developing high quality products and services?

1. Strengths

Products and services developed by the Lab seem to be beneficial to the region and beyond. The various evaluation reports indicate that products and services are based on identified needs in the region with a particular emphasis on the myriad languages spoken by the target groups. The products developed include print material, videos, audio tapes and CD ROMS. The print items range from publications that are two pages in length to those that are 100 or more pages. As noted in B. above, the Lab has developed what appears to be a rigorous quality assurance process for the development and production of its products.

During the first three quarters of this contract period, the Lab’s Research and Development Cadre was re-established. The purpose of the cadre, which was identified as one of the Lab’s signature works, is to develop and apply research that is appropriate to the needs of the constituents. The R&D Cadre is comprised of representatives from each of the ten Pacific Departments of Education/Ministries, representatives of private education, and institutions of

higher education (IHE). It is likely that the composition of the cadre enables the Lab to obtain information and ideas for research studies that are representative of each of the entities served by the Lab.

During a discussion with staff members responsible for the R&D Cadre, it was clear that one of the primary goals is to develop the capacity of local school personnel to conduct research activities within their respective regions. Thus, the strategy is to work with and through the local educators to conduct needs-based research. Currently, the cadre is conducting site-based and applied regional research studies on “The Retention and Attrition of Pacific School Teachers and Administrators” (RAPSTA).

The panel was able to talk by phone with some of the members of the Research Advisory Council (RAC). Information shared included the fact that all the entities chose to focus on the RAPSTA study. It is more cost effective to work on a single topic that is consistent with the needs of the region as a whole. Of the entities involved, it was noted that Hawaii has had the least involvement in research activities conducted by the cadre. The RAC members are able to provide advice to the cadre about plans and strategies for conducting research studies; and those with whom we spoke stated that the work of the cadre appears to be of high quality and responsive to the needs of the region.

The R&D Cadre is conducting another needs-based study designed to answer the question: “Do classroom language use and instructional practices influence student’s literacy development?” In preparation for this study, “Pacific Language Use in Schools” (PLUS), the cadre invited a number of experts in research methodology, languages, testing, instructional practices and others to serve on the PLUS Research Advisory Council. Staff expect that the results of this study will lead to the development of curriculum materials and training modules

focused on improving student literacy achievement in the diverse language settings of the Pacific.

Another strategy for developing high quality products and services is the Lab's signature works, "Language and Literacy." This work is designed to address the need to improve the skills of teachers in teaching reading to students in their native languages in efforts to preserve the language. Materials have been developed in native languages as well as in English. In addition to a product and curriculum development strand, staff have made plans to provide staff development through such activities as the Pacific Writers' Institutes. This appears to be a comprehensive effort to address the needs of each entity with regard to language and literacy issues.

During discussions about the "Language and Literacy" signature work, staff provided a number of products for review. In addition to the products and services that emanate from the signature works, the Lab appears to have developed other products that are of value to the region and beyond including the "PREL Briefing Papers," and the "Pacific Education Updates." A number of the products the panel reviewed were attributed to programs other than the Laboratory program. When questioned about this, Lab staff stated that a lot of their work is implemented across programs. For instance, Lab work may in fact be a part of the work that is conducted under the Pacific Center or PREL Star or some other program.

2. Areas of Concern/Recommendations

There is evidence the Lab is developing products and services based on regional needs. Appropriate personnel in the field are identified and asked to assist in the Lab's research and development efforts. However, it is not clear to what extent the products and services are based on sound research methodology. The Lab's QAP states that level 1 products "require extensive and careful content review." Step two of the process indicates the products will be reviewed for research design and questions. The Lab has also provided for the review of products by experts

in research methodology and content areas to verify that products reflect the best knowledge available. Yet, the QAP form does not appear to adequately address issues related to research methodology. It seems that at some point in step two of the review process, the form would have some reference to the appropriateness of the research methodology used in the development of a study.

While there is evidence that the Lab seeks to develop high quality products and services particularly through its R&D Cadre, it is not clear what strategies the Lab uses to determine the extent to which the products or services can result in effective school change. For instance, in areas where the RAPSTA study has been implemented, what and how will evidence be collected to show change, if any, in school practices regarding teacher and administrator retention?

There is little or no evidence that the same careful attention given to the development of products is given to the development of workshops and presentations. For example, the QAP form focuses primarily on product development. There is little information on this form that provides for the quality assurance of services such as strategies for implementing workshops, (technology-based, interactive, “hands-on,” etc.); whether presentations are designed to be language appropriate; and in-house or external staff requirements. When discussing this concern with staff, they indicated awareness of the issue and stated that they are addressing strategies to assure that the development and delivery of education services will undergo the same quality assurance process as that used for product development.

IV. Utility

A. To what extent are the products and services provided by the Laboratory useful to, and used by customers?

1. Strengths

There is credible evidence that the Lab's products and services are useful to and used by customers. The formative evaluation surveys indicate that constituents appear to be satisfied with the Lab's work in the region. They report that the materials are culturally relevant and provide up-to-date information. Additionally, the workshops and presentations provided new ideas and knowledge.

Apparently the Lab seeks to provide as much on-site service as possible. The 1997 formative evaluation survey shows that the sites for presentations and workshops range from three in the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas to 56 in Hawaii State. Participants in these services range from 30 from IHEs to 957 teachers. Other attendees included school principals and assistants, other administrators, curriculum specialists, and parents.

The Lab has provided workshops and presentations on such topics as assessment, at-risk youth, language and cultural diversity, and other needs-based topics. The 1997 survey shows that nearly 100 workshops and presentations were provided in the region, however only 49 were provided in 1998. Additionally, in 1997 over 1,622 persons participated in the services provided by the Lab while in 1998, approximately 453 participated in Lab services. It is not clear why there was such a marked difference in the attendance and the number of services offered in 1997 and 1998.

One of the most successful and long-standing activities conducted by the Lab is its Annual Pacific Educational Conference. This conference is one of the primary services provided by the

Lab to enable target groups to not only serve as presenters in workshops, but to share ideas on issues of mutual concern throughout the region. Without a doubt, the conference is one of the most useful activities provided for the region.

2. Areas of Concern/Recommendations

The Pacific Educational Conference format includes pre conference institutes, which provide opportunities for participants to more fully delve into a topic. Conference topics appear to be relevant to the educational needs in the region. As with all conferences of this magnitude, it is difficult to measure impact with regard to changes in school practices. However, since this conference is a major strategy for providing educational services to the region, staff may wish to examine methods to effectively assess its impact with regard to educational practices in the region.

The evaluation reports seem to indicate that the response rate to the surveys requesting information about the Lab's products and services is rather low with only 13.6 percent responding in 1997 and ten percent responding in 1998. Even though, the response rate is low, the procedures for collecting the surveys seems to be as effective as they can be in this region. Staff may wish to give this issue further consideration.

The Lab is clearly interacting with its target group in the region. However, it is not clear how this interaction occurs. It appears that services are provided primarily through dissemination of products, and conducting workshops and presentations. For instance, the quarterly reports merely state that: "PREL initiated a meeting," or "PREL continues to collaborate with Parents and Children Together (PACT) on cultural issues," or "services were provided to Kosrae" (workshops/training sessions). There is little substantive information about who performs the activities or how the activities are carried out. The who and how is an overriding issue throughout

this report as far as trying to understand how the Lab performs its work. Staff should consider ways to more effectively communicate/describe activities conducted in the region.

B. To what extent is the REL focused on customer needs?

1. Strengths

According to the External/Internal Evaluation Self-Study Reports for 1997, the Lab is widely used by its constituents. Contacts with constituents are very high and every effort is made to maintain visibility in the region by providing services that are needed by individuals, a school, or school district.

One of the strategies used by the Lab to determine its focus with regard to customer needs is continuous and sustained needs assessment activities. The Lab proposes to conduct such assessment activities through educational leadership surveys, practitioner and professional surveys, focus groups, strategic planning groups and on-site dialogs, and data collection with school and community groups. The assessment provides needs data for each of the entities served by the Lab. In addition to the assessment used to develop the initial proposal for funding, other measures have been utilized to keep abreast of needs and trends in the region including the 1997 educational planning meetings that were conducted in each of the entities. The purpose of the meetings was to review educational plans and priorities, current status, identify and prioritize what is needed to meet goals, and identify and prioritize existing resources and programs.

As a result of the surveys, the Lab was able to determine regional priorities on which its work would be based: (1) assessment, evaluating and reporting (2) curriculum and instruction and (3) professional development. The report included a statement that indicates the Lab would align its scope of work with identified priorities.

The Lab appears to have set priorities for its work in accordance with customer needs.

There is evidence that the Lab is addressing the three regional priority areas in an exemplary manner. The quarterly reports, other material, and discussions with staff and clients show that technical assistance and other services and products are provided in the region to improve the knowledge and skills of teachers. The Lab has developed and implemented a number of signature programs designed to support professional development activities. These programs, including “Pacific Educator in Residence Program,” and the “Pacific Educational Conference,” were discussed in items above. Under one of the key initiatives, “Leadership and Systemic Development,” the Lab is conducting research synthesis on “At-Risk Teachers,” and research studies on the “Retention and Attrition of Pacific School Teachers and Administrators,” and “Teaching and Learning Styles.”

During discussions with staff, board members, constituents, and partners, it was revealed that the Lab pays careful attention to the needs of the region and is readily available to provide services. However, requests for services are always responded to within the context of the Lab’s overall mission and scope of work. Such services range from simple referrals to providing long term support and assistance. Worthy of note is the fact that staff have made a conscious decision not to work for constituents but rather with them in addressing their educational concerns and problems. The focus on customer needs is undergirded by the goal to build the capacity of others to solve their own needs in an effective and exemplary manner.

2. Areas of Concern/Recommendations

None noted

V. Outcomes and Impact

A. To what extent is the REL’s work contributing to improved student success, particularly in intensive implementation sites?

1. Strengths

Determining the extent to which the Lab’s work contributes to improved student success is probably the most difficult criterion in this evaluation. The Lab’s intervention in the teaching/learning process is primarily through the development and dissemination of products (both print and technology based) and services such as workshops and presentations, seminars, etc., for school staff.

A review of Laboratory material shows that for FY 98, the quality of the Lab’s work at school development sites was rated as highly effective. Eight-eight percent of partners stated that Lab efforts do contribute to comprehensive school reform. With regard to student impact, the Lab indicates that: “After three years of onsite development, sites will show increases in student achievement.” Indicators of success will occur in assessment of achievement in the year 2000. At this point, it is too early to tell how successfully the Lab’s work contributes to student success for this contract period.

One of the Lab’s efforts toward school improvement is “Project Al Maron,” a comprehensive school improvement program at the Ebeye Public School in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. This is a collaborative effort among four entities—the school district, local government, the Pacific Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center (a federally funded program within PREL’s organization) and the Laboratory. Through this collaborative effort, a variety of school improvement activities are being provided for principals, teachers, and others involved in education in the region. The ultimate goal of this project is improved student success.

The Lab appears to be at a point where the research and development studies initiated under Task 2 will be tested at school sites in efforts to improve student achievement through changes in teacher behavior. To emphasize this thrust, the title for Task 3 was changed from “Services to the Field” to “Application of Research and Development and Scaling Up.” Under Task 3, the Lab proposes to continue to “provide training and technical assistance to apply research-based products, new educational methods, and information-finding methods to the field.” The Lab effort is focused on comprehensive school reform in the region.

It is likely that work under the Lab’s specialty area contributes to student success. PREL, along with two other regional Laboratories collaborate in the development of a comprehensive program on “Language and Cultural Diversity.” PREL contributes to this effort through its focus on home and school language use. As far as services to its target area under this specialty area, the Lab provides training and teaching strategies that promote language acquisition.

2. Areas of Concern/Recommendations

While, I believe the Lab’s activities contribute to improved student success in the region, it is not clear that adequate attention has been given to tracking that success which can be attributed to the Lab. I am ambivalent as to whether it is possible to adequately track success to a specific Lab intervention. There are simply far too many intervening variables over which the Lab would have no control in efforts to improve student success.

However, having said this, the Lab may wish to consider ways to determine how its activities impact school change that results in student success. For instance, in the “Al Maron Program,” direct services are provided to a school site. Yet there appears to be little information that suggests this it is a sound model that could be replicated in, or disseminated to other schools. Nor does the Lab provide adequate information that describes how, or even whether, the impact

of this education intervention will be monitored over time. In this intervention and where possible in others, the Lab should use every opportunity available to monitor and document activities designed to effect school change. Information generated by such efforts will be useful to other schools in the area as well as in other remote or rural areas around the country.

B. To what extent does the Laboratory assist states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies?

1. Strengths

As noted earlier, the Lab's mission, in part, is to strengthen educational programs for children, youth, and adults. All of the Lab programs and activities appear to focus on comprehensive school improvement strategies. The updated annual plan for year 4 describes the Lab's intent to "refocus on applying research to the field and scaling up activities." Activities for scaling up include the Lab's support to the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRSD) Program. Under this program, the Lab is providing assistance and support to area Departments of Education in developing and implementing plans for comprehensive school reform.

In discussions with staff regarding the assistance provided in support of school improvement, we were given more information on how programs are leveraged to maximize school improvement efforts in Ebeye, RMI (see V.A. above). Laboratory funds account for approximately five percent of the multi-program contributions to this school improvement effort. It is expected that Lab staff will be involved in this effort for at least five years. There is no adequate way to describe in this report the conditions that staff must deal with in addressing systemic school change in this community. For instance, staff and community members had to address problems in the school environment such as substandard facilities before issues of

instruction could be addressed. It is not likely that the desired change will occur in five years but the Lab's efforts should result in improvement that probably would not occur without the dedication and hard work of staff and others in the region involved in this effort.

The Lab has developed a credible relationship with a variety of partners, including one of the most important—the Departments and Ministries of Education. Additionally, PREL has a number of other federally funded programs including a Star Schools Program and a Math & Science Consortium. The Lab appears to effectively leverage its resources in these programs and thus maximizes its efforts in contributing to school reform in the region.

2. Areas of Concern/Recommendations

While there is some evidence the PREL organization seeks to maximize its impact in the region by working collaboratively across some of its programs, there is little descriptive information about the approach used to support/enhance educational reform through these programs. The Lab may wish to provide more information about how collaboration occurs across programs and the methods used to plan, implement, and evaluate school improvement strategies.

C. To what extent has the REL made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its specialty area?

1. Strengths

In the proposal submitted for funding under this contract, the Lab proposed to develop a specialty area in "Language and Cultural Diversity." In OERI's technical question to the Lab in response to this proposed plan, the Lab was told that: "The specialty area as proposed centers more around the Pacific region rather than from a National approach. It is recommended that PREL reduce this area by approximately 75 percent and increase tasks 2, 3, 4, and 5, in order to provide more direct services to the region." Even though proposed activities and funds were

reduced under this Task, the Lab agreed to use its remaining funds to collaborate with two other Laboratories that are addressing this specialty area.

There is evidence that the Lab is beginning to develop a national reputation and has taken a leadership role in its specialty area. There is no doubt that the Lab has already developed an excellent reputation in the Pacific region not only in its specialty area but as a whole. Staff members have developed a variety of publications that have been published and disseminated for use in the region and beyond. For example, publications were contributed to the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education for dissemination on its web site. Staff have also delivered presentations in and beyond region on the subject of language and cultural diversity.

2. Areas of Concern/Recommendations

None noted

VI. Overall Evaluation and Summary of Laboratory Program

Generally, the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning is meeting and, in some cases, exceeding expectations in accomplishing goals and objectives in the Regional Educational Laboratory Program. The Lab has tenaciously sought to define a mission which is designed to address the needs of a region that is extremely unique and diverse. Under the direction of a highly qualified and diligent chief executive officer, an extremely capable staff is implementing a program of work that likely will result in improved educational practices throughout the Pacific region. The Lab sees its primary mission as developing the capacity of local educators to plan and implement effective educational practices throughout the region. The stated approach to accomplishing this mission is to work “with and through” its target group.

Given time and adequate resources, this Lab will continue to be a viable and credible presence in a region that clearly needs the kind of support it provides. The concerns noted as a result of this review are designed to prod Lab staff to consider ways to enhance its already dynamic presence in the region.