

The Republic of the Marshall Islands

Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment

Prepared by: The Ministry of Education



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This report was produced by Mr. Patrick Lane, Special Assistant to the Ministry of Education in the Marshall Islands, and Mrs. Sally Ann de Brum-Abraham, Director of Research and Planning.

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1. Introduction

The Republic of the Marshall Islands consists of 29 low-lying coral atolls and five individual islands spread over 750,000 square miles of ocean. The country became independent in 1979 and in 1986 entered into a Compact of Free Association with the United States that was renewed in 2003 for an additional 20 years. This agreement provides substantial economic aid to the country, as well as eligibility for some U.S. federal programs.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands has a population of approximately 53,000 with 70% concentrated in the two major urban centers of Majuro and Kwajalein. Although birth rates are quite high, provisions in the Compact that allow Marshall Islands citizens to emigrate to the United States without visas has led to low net population growth.

To date the government continues to be the largest employer in the country and the Ministry of Education is the largest agency of the government. Many in the Marshall Islands, particularly in the rural outer islands continue to rely on subsistence fishing and small-scale agriculture; however staples such as rice and flour are imported. In the urban centers, the economy is mainly based on government employment and a service-based industry reliant on government contracts. New efforts in fish processing and aquaculture may provide new jobs in the near future.

The Ministry of Education oversees the school system in the RMI from Kindergarten through grade 12. The schools are structured similar to the United States system, but recently the government has undertaken a major initiative to “rethink” the education system so that it better reflects Marshallese culture, values and traditions.

Even before the passage of the Education Act of 1991, the Marshall Islands Ministry of Education has worked to provide a quality education for all Marshallese. The growth of the education system over the past 17 years has brought us closer than ever to this goal. Today, more Marshallese children than ever are enrolled in Early Childhood Education programs, while our high school system has expanded to provide free secondary schooling to more young people than ever before.

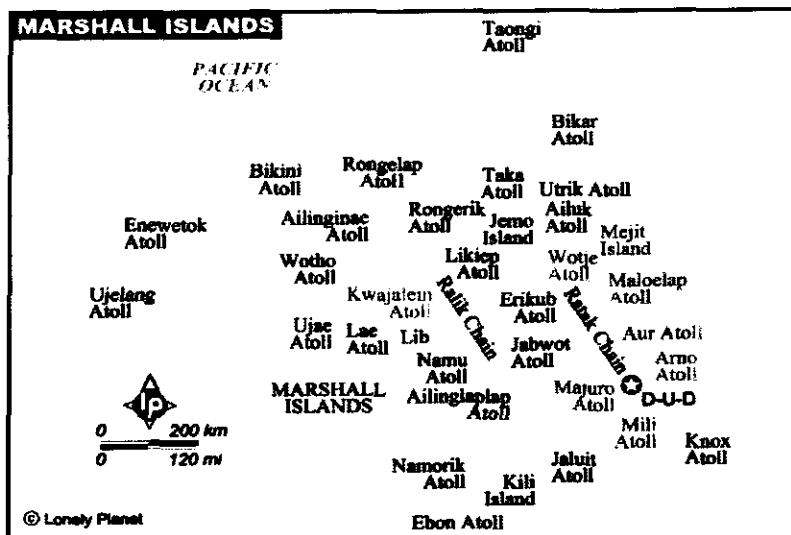
The Education for All initiative draws attention nationally and internationally to the goal of “reaching the unreached,” which is used as the theme of the mid-decade assessment. In general, the Marshall Islands has a relatively equitable education system, without disparities in access to schooling between different groups.

The Marshall Islands does not have a wide range of ethnic groups, castes, or other minorities that require special policy analysis. The country is relatively homogenous and the school system is almost exclusively populated by indigenous Marshallese.

This report disaggregates data by gender and by geographic location. The report provides data for each of these urban centers individually, and groups the remaining islands into a

single category. Although these outer islands are located at varying distances from the urban centers, as can be seen in the map below, they face many similar challenges, due to isolation and problems with transportation and communication.

Figure 1: The Republic of the Marshall Islands



As will be seen in the data analysis that follows, there are specific areas that show a great disparity between Majuro and Kwajalein. The latter atoll is home to Ebeye Island, which is one of the most densely populated pieces of land in the world. MOE will continue to pay special attention to Ebeye to expand educational opportunities to its residents and work to improve the enrollment rates and student performance. This report marks one of the first times that MOE has been able to provide disaggregated data by location and gender that is linked to national population estimates. This will be an important first step in ensuring that the children of Ebeye and the rest of Kwajalein Atoll receive the schooling that they deserve.

In general, there is little or no evidence of gender disparity in school enrollment, retention rates, or other measures of access to education. Additionally, with a strong special education program, the RMI is able to provide education for students with disabilities; however, there does seem to be the need to target some programs and policies geographically to make sure all areas of the country receive equal services.

Certainly more work remains before the RMI can truly say that all children receive a high quality education. However, the recently adopted MOE strategic plan will provide focus and concrete initiatives to meet these challenges and continue the progress that has been made in recent years. This mid-decade assessment is a crucial step in examining the current state of education and charting our course for the years to come.

During the period covered by this report, the strategic mission of MOE has been driven by the 2000-2005 strategic plan, a development mission and vision from the Rethinking

Education in the Marshall Islands conference, and MOE's performance-based budgeting objectives.

"The goal of the educational system in the Republic shall be to provide a thorough and efficient system of education to provide all children in the Republic, regardless of socio-economic status, handicap, or geographical location, the education opportunity that will prepare them to develop into self-reliant individuals and to function socially, politically and economically in society"¹.

This goal is in line with the Millennium Development Goals to achieve universal primary education and consistent with the goals of UNESCO's Education for All initiative.

National Vision

The national vision of the RMI is set forth in the Visions 2018 strategic development plan. The RMI will "become a country within an inter-dependent world, with an enhanced socio-economic self reliance, an educated, healthy, productive, law-abiding and god loving people in which individual freedom and fundamental human rights are protected and culture and traditions are respected and development and environmental sustainability are in harmony."

MOE later developed its own mission statement specific to the education system.

"Our students are the key to a peaceful and productive Marshall islands. They will be independent and critical thinkers, with bi-cultural skills, knowledge and values to thrive in an atoll environment and globally."

Mission Statement

"We aim to prepare ALL students to be literate and successful, reach their greatest potential, be critical thinkers and problem-solvers, and be culturally and globally competent and responsive. Thus, 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 Education Strategies

The RMI Education sector has been governed by a range of strategic planning documents since the adoption of its strategic plan in 2000. This included the 2000-2005 Strategic Plan, the Implementing Guidelines for the 2000 Strategic Education Plan, (produced in January 2001), and the Strategic Plan for Education, 2001, which revised the earlier document. With the adoption of a performance-based budgeting system in 2003, this strategic plan was essentially abandoned as the new budgeting system incorporated new strategic goals and objectives into the budgeting process.

MOE has recently completed a three-year strategic plan for 2008-2010. In this process, MOE has decided to adopt a rolling planning process in which the plan will be updated annually and drive the annual budget process. Every year, MOE policy makers will

¹ Ministry of Education Annual Performance Report FY 2002-03.p.6

evaluate progress on the plan, make adjustments as needed, and add an additional year of planning to the end. It is hoped that this will not only keep the plan current, but also result in better adoption of the plan as a guiding strategic document throughout the Ministry.

THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION IN THE RMI

Early Childhood Education

In its negotiations with the United States to develop a new Compact of Free Association, the RMI worked to “cash out” several U.S. federal grants into one block grant that provided relief from rules and regulations that were not applicable here. The Head Start program, which had provided early childhood education since the 1990s, was one of these grants.

In its place, MOE has established a nationwide kindergarten program. This has greatly expanded the coverage of the early childhood programs as enrollment is open to all children and classes are now available at all public elementary schools. Previously, the Head Start program was limited by grant regulations to only two-thirds of the schools and capped at 1260 students. Although the new Kindergarten program is not open to four-year olds yet, the geographical coverage is greatly improved. Currently, only five schools in the country do not offer a Kindergarten program, but MOE expects that these will open soon.

The University of the South Pacific (USP) is the designated Early Childhood Education teacher training provider on Majuro and offers Early Childhood Education certificate and degree programs for the Kindergarten teachers.

Elementary Education

There are 75 public elementary schools in the RMI. Eight are located in Majuro Atoll, one in Ebeye, and the remainder throughout the outer islands. There are also 27 private elementary schools throughout the country. About 8,000 students are enrolled in the public elementary schools and 2,200 in the private system.

The public schools in Majuro are relatively large with the ones in the urban center enrolling around 500 or more students. Four rural schools in Majuro enroll between 100 and 500 students. Ebeye Elementary School in Kwajalein Atoll is the largest in the country, with more than 1000 students. The outer islands schools generally have between 50 and 100 students, although a few schools enroll up to 200 children.

There are about 850 primary school teachers, with the majority working in the outer islands, where the student-teacher ratios are quite low due to the much smaller populations. The MOE recently completed a revised curriculum for the public elementary schools and has also developed national tests for grades three, six and eight based on the newly revised curriculum.

Secondary Education

The MOE Secondary Education program is responsible for the delivery of education to students in grades nine through twelve. There are six public secondary schools in the RMI: three on Majuro, one on Kwajalein and two in the outer islands. The two outer islands are public boarding schools with student populations serving students from the outer islands elementary schools. The public secondary system enrolls about 2,000 students. There are 14 private secondary schools enrolling about 1,000 students.

The Secondary Education Division has recently begun work on a system-wide curriculum. Development and implementation of a secondary curriculum is crucial since there has not been any curriculum development in this division for over twenty years. Plans are underway for national assessments based on the curriculum to be given at the tenth and twelfth grade levels.

Providing education for all secondary-aged students is a major challenge. The RMI education system has never had enough space in high schools to accommodate all children. However, with the construction of Laura High School, Kwajalein Atoll High School and the National Vocational Training Institute in the past six years, plus the doubling of the capacity at Marshall Islands High School that is expected to be complete soon, the government has made much progress.

Currently, MOE conducts a test for all 8th graders and admits students to public high schools based on their performance on this test and the capacity of the secondary system. Although there has been remarkable progress in the last five years in providing secondary school opportunities to more students, without major new funding to construct, maintain and staff additional new high schools, the RMI will not be able to provide free universal secondary education by 2015.

This also means that MOE is clearly not in compliance with the Education Act, which was amended a few years ago to raise the age of compulsory education from 14 to 18, although it did not provide any additional funds for new high schools. Still, once the construction effort is complete, it is likely that there will be enough capacity for all secondary-aged students. However, approximately half of this capacity is in private schools, which charge tuition that is out of reach for many families.

It is possible that MOE could adjust its policies on aid-to-private schools to help more families afford private secondary school, but no formal discussions have currently taken place, or work out temporary arrangements to utilize unused private school classroom space to accommodate more students.

Technical Vocational Education

The MOE's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs are part of the Division of Secondary and Vocational Education. Although there are some vocational education programs in public high schools, they are scattered and not well defined. Non-formal TVET programs are run through the National Training Council, which makes grants to non-governmental and private sector training providers. MOE is currently

working with NTC and other stakeholders to coordinate a reorganization of the TVET sector.

Post-Secondary and Statutory Bodies

Post-secondary schooling mainly occurs through the College of the Marshall Islands (CMI) and the University of the South Pacific (USP). A small percentage of students are able to access colleges and universities elsewhere through the RMI scholarship program.

CMI provides a 2-year Associates degree in a variety of subjects and is the main training center for RMI teachers. The branch of USP in Majuro provides preparatory courses for students to attend other USP campuses, as well as certificate-level classes (based on the southern system) in subjects such as Early Childhood Education.

MOE has also partnered with off-island institutions such as Brigham Young University-Hawaii and Park University to enroll teachers in Bachelor of Arts in Education programs.

The Marshall Islands Scholarship Grants and Loan Board is also a statutory body that offers scholarships, grants and loans to students attending CMI and various colleges and universities abroad.

Specific Strategic Objectives for 2000-2005

The following strategic objectives are taken from the MOE strategic plan for 2000-2005. Although they theoretically guided MOE operations during that span, major changes, such as the adoption of a new performance-based budgeting system led to the plan generally becoming inoperative by 2004.

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION	
Objective 1. Expand incrementally enrollment in early childhood education centers.	Outcome. Increase pre-school enrollment (including Head Start, kindergartens, and other early childhood education centers) by 5% a year from 2002 through 2005.
Objective 2. Provide funding from the Marshall Islands Government General Grant or Compact-Designated Funds for early childhood on a regular basis.	Outcome. The number of students entering school ready to learn (based upon vocabulary or early language assessments) will increase each year from 2002 – 2005.
Objective 3. Develop teacher training programs so that well-qualified preschool teachers will be available as early childhood opportunities expand.	Outcome. The number of teachers prepared to teach preschool and kindergarten will increase each year from 2002 through 2005.
Objective 4. Establish a support program for newly hired kindergarten teachers.	Outcome. Support system and required staff will be hired by school year 2002.
Objective 5. Create Marshallese curriculum materials for use in kindergarten classes based on standards and benchmarks developed by the Ministry of Education.	Outcome. Marshallese materials for early childhood education, especially in language arts and math, will increase by 2003.
ELEMENTARY EDUCATION	
Objective 1. Develop measures to improve the language development of students.	Outcome. 1) Reading scores will increase at all grade levels assessed between 2002 and 2005; 2) An increasing number of teachers will report that they are adequately prepared to teach reading (as measured by a teacher questionnaire) from

	2001-2005.
Objective 2. Develop standards of performance for selected grade levels, including benchmarks of adequate and superior student performance.	Outcome: An increasing number of students will meet the standards as determined by performance on teacher-administered assessments and the MISAT at grade levels assessed between 2001 and 2005.
Objective 3. Undertake a national public relations campaign targeted at parents to ensure all pupils of school age attend school regularly.	Outcome. Parents will report increased knowledge and skills in way to ensure attendance
Objective 4. Develop a strategy to combat truancy.	Outcome. 1) Attendance records will indicate decreased truancy between 2001 and 2005; 2) The number of students who drop out of school during the school year will decrease between 2001 and 2005.
Objective 5. Foster parental/community participation and involvement in schools and education decision-making.	Outcome. 1) Parents will report an increased awareness of the importance of involvement in their children's education (on a parent questionnaire) by 2002; 2) School records will show increased levels of parent participation in school events by 2002.
Objective 6. Improve the effectiveness of the Community-Based Governance System (CBGS).	Outcome. 1) An increasing number of CBGS personnel will participate in training programs from 2002 to 2005; 2) An increasing number of CBGS personnel will report increased knowledge and skills in post-training evaluation forms.
Objective 7. Increase instructional hours per student per year in crowded urban schools and in two-teacher schools in rural areas.	Outcome. By end of plan period, minimum instruction hours as dedicated by MOE Rules and Regulations will be attained.
Objective 8. Increase efficiency and effectiveness of classroom instruction.	Outcome. Effective use of classroom instruction will increase by 2004 (as measured by a principal and master teacher questionnaire).
Objective 9. Strengthen management and operation of primary schools by establishing clear roles and placing accountability on school principals.	Outcome. Improvements in school management will be exhibited by 2003 (as shown by a parent and teacher questionnaire).
Objective 10. Develop a revised system of financing private schools based on per capita enrollment and performance standards.	Outcome. A revised private school financing plan will be in effect by SY 2002.
Secondary Education	
Objective 1. Revise the secondary education curriculum with special emphasis on students' acquisition of language arts and higher order thinking skills.	Outcome. All secondary-level curricula will be revised by March 2003.
Objective 2. Increase the percentage of grade 8 students who enroll in private or public secondary schools.	Outcome. By SY 2004-5, 85% of 8th grade graduates will enroll in public or private high schools—up from 70% in SY 1999-2000.
Objective 3. Improve the retention rate of students in private and public high schools.	Outcome: By SY 2004-5, 75% of each cohort of students entering the 9th grade will graduate from high school —up from 53% in SY 1999-2000.
Post-Secondary Education	
Objective 1. Review post-secondary technical and academic education and training.	Outcome. By December 31, 2001, arrangements will have been put in place to evaluate (1) articulation between the CMI and RMI high schools; (2) articulation between all post-secondary institutions and agencies in the RMI; (3) teacher education programs in the RMI; and (4) programs, resources, administration, and facilities at the CMI.

Objective 2. <i>Implement the teacher certification requirements set out in the Education Personnel Management System.</i>	Outcome. By SY 2004-5, increase the percentage of teachers who meet current RMI certification requirements to 70% for elementary teachers and 90% for secondary teachers.
Objective 3. Increase the quality and effectiveness of in-service teacher training programs.	Outcome. By SY 2001-2, establish procedures to evaluate and document the impact of in-service training programs on classroom activities and student achievement; by SY 2002-3, begin implementing program improvement measures consistent with the findings and recommendations of these evaluation studies.
Objective 4. Increase the number of Marshallese high school graduates opting to pursue a career in teaching.	Outcome. By SY 2004-5, ensure that the number of Marshallese high school graduates opting for a career in teaching is equal to the annual demand for new teachers due to either expansion or replacement needs.
Objective 5. Improve the quality of pre-service teacher education programs in the RMI	Outcome. By SY 2001-2, establish procedures to evaluate and document the quality of pre-service teacher education programs in the RMI; by SY 2002-3, begin implementing program improvement measures consistent with the findings and recommendations of these evaluation reports.
Objective 6. Allocate tagged scholarships as preparation for a teaching career on an annual basis (these may be taken up at the College of the Marshall Islands).	Outcome. In Year 1, the Scholarship Board has established teacher education as a key priority and has made a policy decision to allocate a designated number of scholarships each year (tenable at the College of the Marshall Islands) for pre-service teacher education. In Years 2-5, these scholarships are taken up annually.
Technical Vocational Education and Training	
Objective 4. Establish a National Vocational Training Institute to provide technical-vocational education instruction for youth who are not admitted to or drop out of high school.	Outcome. The National Vocational Training Institute will begin admitting students in SY 2002-3.
System Effectiveness	
Objective 1. <i>Design and implement a management information system that can assist MOE staff in (1) monitoring progress in achieving the objectives of the Strategic Plan; (2) preparing annual performance reports on U.S. federal education grants; (3) identifying emerging issues in education; and (4) developing or revising education policies at the ministerial level.</i>	Outcome. Implement the new MOE management information system by December 31, 2001.
Objective 2. Improve communication between the MOE and schools, parents, local school boards, employers, and other constituencies that are critical to the operation and improvement of the public education system.	Outcome. By June 30, 2002, schools, parents, employers, local school boards, and other education stakeholders will report substantially improved communication with the Ministry of Education and its senior officers.
Objective 3. Strengthen the Ministry of Education's ability to manage, monitor, and increase the effectiveness of its operating and capital budgets.	Outcome. By the end of the plan period, the MOE will have established an integrated planning and budgeting system to govern and direct its allocation of financial resources.
Objective 4. Implement measures to increase the responsibility and authority of individual communities and schools for strengthening the public education system.	Outcome. By the end of the plan period, at least 50% of all public schools in the RMI will report that they have undertaken community-based projects or activities to improve the academic achievement of their students.

2. MOE Data for the Mid-Decade Assessment

MOE has made great progress in the last five years in developing and implementing a new data management system. With this system, MOE can track individual students as they progress through the schools, giving a much more accurate and detailed picture of the education system.

Before this data system was adopted in 2004, MOE would not have been able to prepare a report with this level of detail. With the new system, MOE finally gained the ability to provide detailed and accurate data on a wide range of education indicators. In many ways, this is proving to be one of the most important developments in the ongoing effort to give the Marshallese young people the schooling they deserve.

With this system, MOE can monitor overall progress and formulate new policies and programs that are based on concrete information. It can reliably track individual students as they progress through the system, and also provide detailed information on teacher qualifications and training.

MOE feels that data available before 2004 is not sufficiently accurate to provide a valid comparison with information available after the adoption of the new system. Thus, this report tracks the indicators from the 2004-2005 school year through 2006-2007. Figures from before 2004 are used sparingly.

Population figures for the RMI are obviously another key component of the MDA. In preparing this report, MOE has developed year-by-year estimates of each age group, disaggregated by gender and geographic location. This process certainly has limitations and the final figures may not be 100% accurate.

The Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office released a major revision of the RMI's estimated population in 2006. This report estimated that the overall national population was significantly smaller than previously thought. This has obvious implications for education policy and planning, and the enrollment figures presented in this report represent one of the first attempts to measure these indicators based on the new population figures.

The population distribution throughout the country may be changing. Anecdotal evidence suggests significant internal migration to Majuro and Kwajalein from the outer islands. Although the population figures used throughout this report are up-to-date estimates, the estimated population for each location is based on the distribution measured in the 1999 census.

Significant urbanization would alter any of the indicators based on population, such as enrollment and intake rates. Larger populations in Majuro and Kwajalein would lower rates for Majuro and Kwajalein, while raising them in the outer islands. MOE eagerly awaits the results of the next national census in 2009, which will provide a much more

accurate picture of the population, its location, and demographics than these estimates can provide.

Additionally, there are reports of increased out-migration to the United States in recent years, but it is not clear how this is affecting the school-aged population.

For now, the population estimates used here represent the best available information. With the data from the next census combined with the new data management system, MOE will be able to present an extremely accurate picture of the education system in the RMI.

In areas outside of MOE's mandate, such as infant and child health, and non-formal education, MOE continues to work with our partners to gather and use the best possible information for the development of new policies and programs.

One major weakness that will be difficult for the RMI to address is the question of economic inequality. The country does not collect the necessary data to analyze how children from different economic backgrounds fare in the education system, although this may be an area for future collection efforts.

3. MDA Report Structure

The RMI Mid-Decade Assessment has one section for each of the EFA goals. In each of these sections, we provide the relevant data where available, along with a discussion of issues, challenges, and policy initiatives relating to MOE efforts to make progress toward achieving the goal by 2015.

Each section begins with a short description of the laws relevant to the goal, followed by a summary of the policy framework affecting this particular area. Charts for many of the EFA indicators follow these introductory sections. Each section concludes with an analysis of the data, and descriptions of relevant plans by MOE and other stakeholders that would affect these indicators.

In most cases MOE has used the indicators set forth by UNESCO, however in some instances, such as Goal 6, which targets improved quality education, we have included our own indicators (in this case, student test scores), which may provide a more accurate appraisal of the current status, and better means to monitor overall progress.

4. Goal 1: Expand Early Childhood Care and Education

The Marshall Islands Education Act of 1991 requires the Ministry of Education to provide schooling for children aged 5-18. The significance of Early Childhood Development generally recognized and has been a key part of MOE's strategic plans in 2000 and 2008.

In its negotiations with the United States to develop a new Compact of Free Association, the RMI worked to "cash out" several U.S. federal grants into one block grant that provided relief from rules and regulations that were not applicable here. The Head Start program, which provided early childhood education to 1260 four- and five-year olds, was one of these grants. In its place, MOE has established a nationwide kindergarten program. This has greatly expanded the coverage of the early childhood programs as enrollment is open to all children and classes are now available at all public elementary schools. Previously, the Head Start program was limited by grant regulations to only two-thirds of the schools and capped at 1260 students.

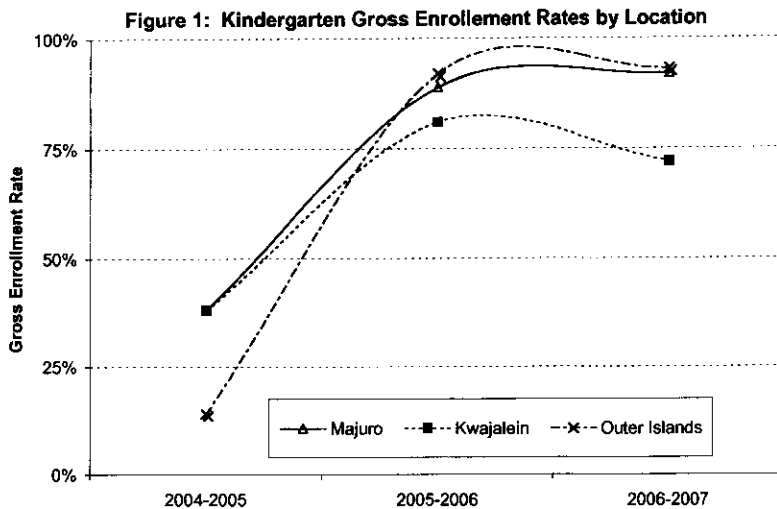
MOE policy states that the Kindergarten program is open to students who are five years old at the beginning of the school year. There are calls to expand the program to include four-year olds, but at this point MOE lacks the resources to make this change. This issue will be revisited once all five-year olds have access to Kindergarten.

Kindergarten classes are integrated into the overall primary school structure in the RMI. Currently, only five schools (all located in the outer islands) are without Kindergarten programs, but these are expected to open during the 2007-2008 school year.

Progress toward goal

With the implementation of the nationwide Kindergarten program, the Marshall Islands has greatly expanded its Early Childhood Education programs. As can be seen below, enrollment had increased dramatically since 2004, when the Kindergarten program first launched.

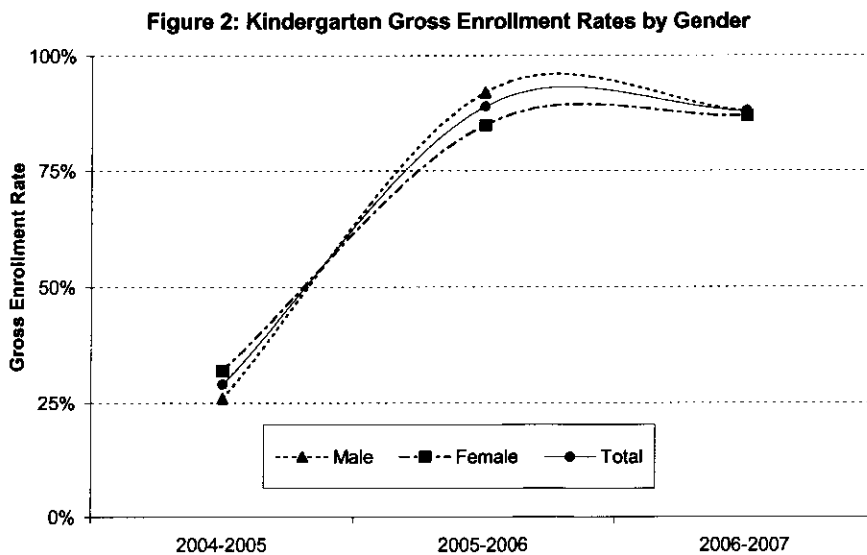
Looking at this data can be misleading because the nationwide Kindergarten program started in 2004 at a limited number of schools. Most outer islands schools did not begin their programs until 2005 and 2006. Still, there is undeniable progress in expanding the program to all schools. As can be seen in the chart below, there was a significant increase in enrollment in the 2005 school year with coverage reaching 88% nationally by 2006.



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

Disaggregating the data by geographic location shows clearly the growth due to the opening of the program at nearly all schools. In coming years, it is likely that the rate for outer islands children will increase by 3%-5% as MOE opens the remaining five Kindergarten centers. The significant drop in the enrollment rate for Kwajalein from the 2005-2006 school year to 2006-2007 is cause for concern, as is the fact that enrollment rates there are lagging far behind those in Majuro.

The data record before 2004 is not as detailed, however, earlier reports demonstrate the significant progress by the RMI toward meeting this goal. In 2000, the Ministry of Education reported a total Gross Enrollment Rate of only 14%, which suggests major progress in the last five years.

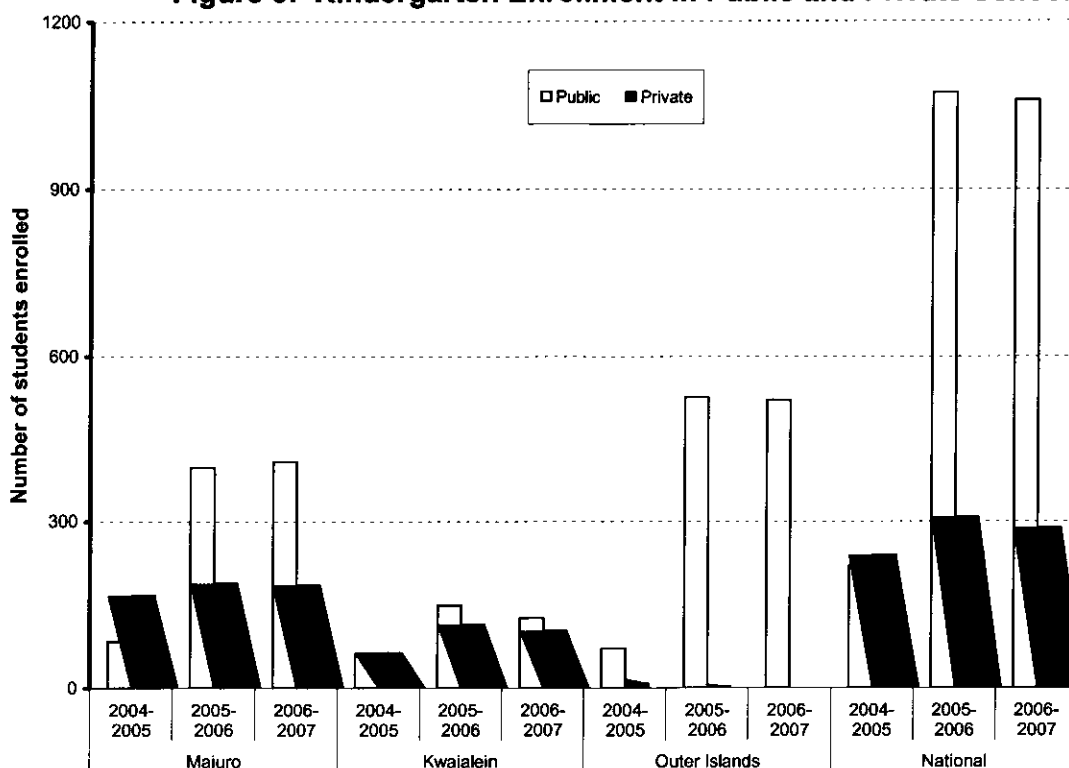


Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

In 2006 the RMI nearly achieved gender parity in Kindergarten enrollment rates. However, there have been significant swings from year to year in the balance between male and female enrollments, so it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions. The male enrollment rate dropped by 4% from the 2005-2006 school year to 2006-2007, but as this is only a two-year trend; MOE must continue to monitor these figures to gather more information before making conclusions. There is some concern that enrollment rates have leveled off, but this must be analyzed with data from future years.

Private schools continue to play an important role in providing schooling opportunities. In addition to enrolling approximately 20% of all Kindergarten students, private schools provide the only pre-Kindergarten opportunities in the country, although there are fewer than 100 students enrolled and these are not included in this analysis.

Figure 3: Kindergarten Enrollment in Public and Private Schools



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

MOE will continue to encourage private schools to offer Kindergarten and other Early Childhood Education programs through its aid-to-private schools incentive program.

Although the Gross Enrollment Rates have shown significant progress, MOE must still work to increase the number of 5-year olds enrolling in the program. Net intake rates for grade 1 (please see section 5) show that a significant number of students are starting Kindergarten when they are six, seven, or even eight years old.

The percentage of trained teachers working in Kindergarten is likely less than 40% based on the MOE definition of having at least an Associate's level post-secondary degree, although MOE does not currently separate Kindergarten teachers in its teacher data system. The data for all primary school teachers are presented in section 5.

The health of students in early childhood programs is also a concern of the EFA initiative. Although MOE does not collect data on health-related indicators, a recent national survey found that 14% of boys and 11.6% of girls were malnourished.¹ As these results are analyzed MOE will work with the Ministry of Health and other relevant stakeholders to take appropriate actions.

Due to the difficulty in disaggregating MOE expenditures by grade level and location, an analysis of the composite spending on the basic education system is presented in Section 9.

¹ Economic Policy, Planning, and Statistics Office (EPPSO) Domestic Health Survey (Forthcoming)

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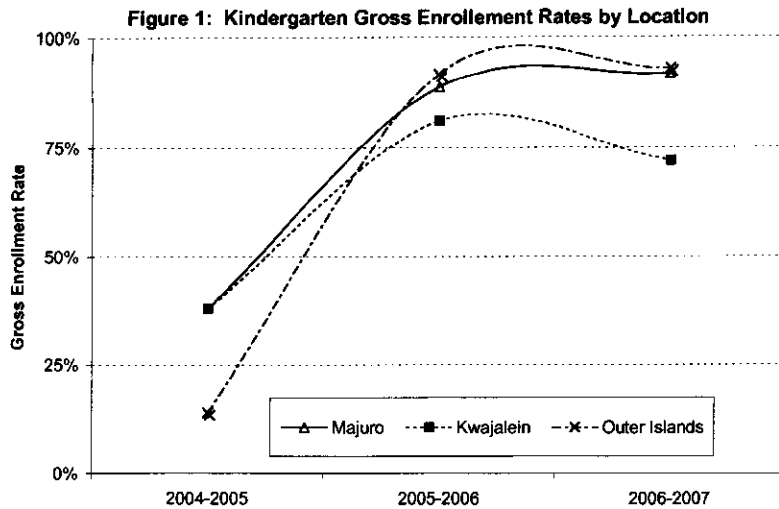
MOE policy states that the Kindergarten program is open to students who are five years old at the beginning of the school year. There are calls to expand the program to include four-year olds, but at this point MOE lacks the resources to make this change. This issue will be revisited once all five-year olds have access to Kindergarten.

Kindergarten classes are integrated into the overall primary school structure in the RMI. Currently, only five schools (all located in the outer islands) are without Kindergarten programs, but these are expected to open during the 2007-2008 school year.

Progress toward goal

With the implementation of the nationwide Kindergarten program, the Marshall Islands has greatly expanded its Early Childhood Education programs. As can be seen below, enrollment had increased dramatically since 2004, when the Kindergarten program first launched.

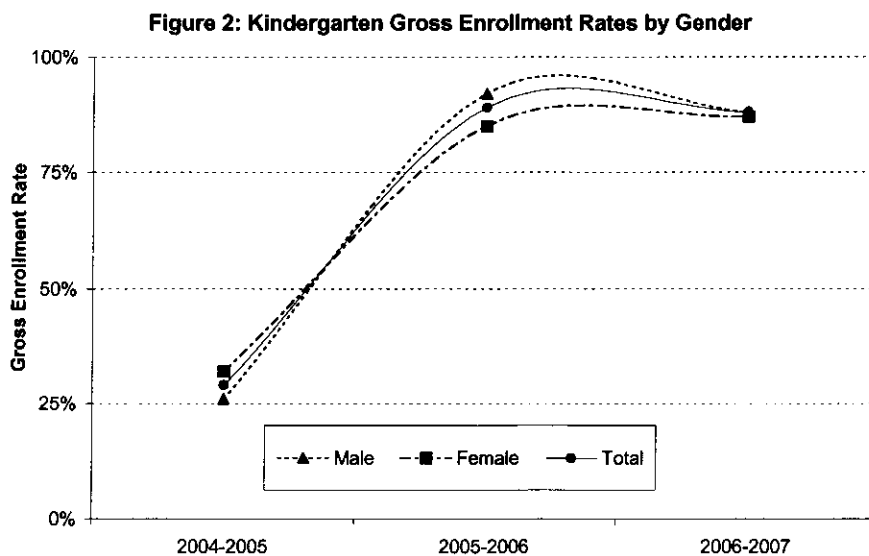
Looking at this data can be misleading because the nationwide Kindergarten program started in 2004 at a limited number of schools. Most outer islands schools did not begin their programs until 2005 and 2006. Still, there is undeniable progress in expanding the program to all schools. As can be seen in the chart below, there was a significant increase in enrollment in the 2005 school year with coverage reaching 88% nationally by 2006.



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

Disaggregating the data by geographic location shows clearly the growth due to the opening of the program at nearly all schools. In coming years, it is likely that the rate for outer islands children will increase by 3%-5% as MOE opens the remaining five Kindergarten centers. The significant drop in the enrollment rate for Kwajalein from the 2005-2006 school year to 2006-2007 is cause for concern, as is the fact that enrollment rates there are lagging far behind those in Majuro.

The data record before 2004 is not as detailed, however, earlier reports demonstrate the significant progress by the RMI toward meeting this goal. In 2000, the Ministry of Education reported a total Gross Enrollment Rate of only 14%, which suggests major progress in the last five years.

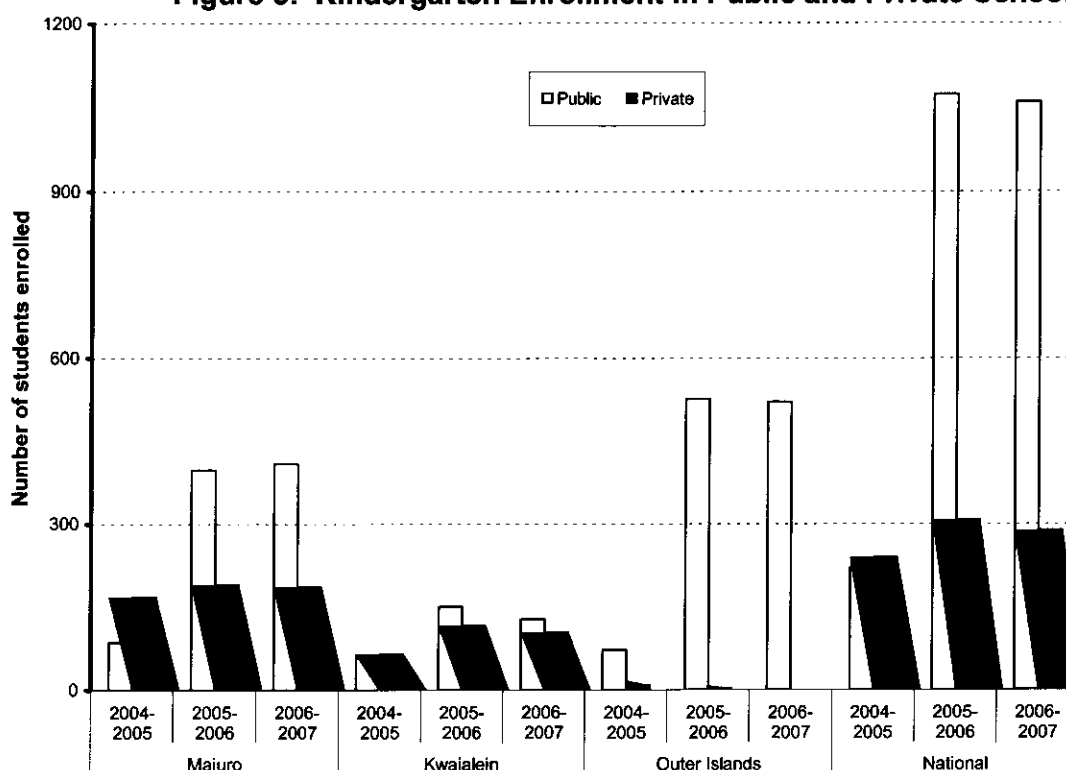


Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

In 2006 the RMI nearly achieved gender parity in Kindergarten enrollment rates. However, there have been significant swings from year to year in the balance between male and female enrollments, so it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions. The male enrollment rate dropped by 4% from the 2005-2006 school year to 2006-2007, but as this is only a two-year trend; MOE must continue to monitor these figures to gather more information before making conclusions. There is some concern that enrollment rates have leveled off, but this must be analyzed with data from future years.

Private schools continue to play an important role in providing schooling opportunities. In addition to enrolling approximately 20% of all Kindergarten students, private schools provide the only pre-Kindergarten opportunities in the country, although there are fewer than 100 students enrolled and these are not included in this analysis.

Figure 3: Kindergarten Enrollment in Public and Private Schools



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

MOE will continue to encourage private schools to offer Kindergarten and other Early Childhood Education programs through its aid-to-private schools incentive program.

Although the Gross Enrollment Rates have shown significant progress, MOE must still work to increase the number of 5-year olds enrolling in the program. Net intake rates for grade 1 (please see section 5) show that a significant number of students are starting Kindergarten when they are six, seven, or even eight years old.

The percentage of trained teachers working in Kindergarten is likely less than 40% based on the MOE definition of having at least an Associate's level post-secondary degree, although MOE does not currently separate Kindergarten teachers in its teacher data system. The data for all primary school teachers are presented in section 5.

The health of students in early childhood programs is also a concern of the EFA initiative. Although MOE does not collect data on health-related indicators, a recent national survey found that 14% of boys and 11.6% of girls were malnourished.¹ As these results are analyzed MOE will work with the Ministry of Health and other relevant stakeholders to take appropriate actions.

Due to the difficulty in disaggregating MOE expenditures by grade level and location, an analysis of the composite spending on the basic education system is presented in Section 9.

¹ Economic Policy, Planning, and Statistics Office (EPPSO) Domestic Health Survey (Forthcoming)

5. Goal 2: Provide free and compulsory primary education for all

The Education Act of 1991 is consistent with the Millennium Development goals relating to universal primary education and the UNESCO Education for All initiative regarding universal primary and secondary education. The law mandates compulsory education for all children aged 5 to 18. The law does not address the question of school fees and most public schools charge registration fees ranging from a few dollars up to \$20.

MOE has established goals in 2000 and again in 2008 for improving enrollment and retention rates at the primary school level. Currently, a Truancy Task Force is examining the causes of non-attendance at the primary school level.

MOE is committed to eliminating the obstacles to school attendance, particularly at the Kindergarten and Elementary School levels, and will work in the near future to refine policies and programs to raise enrollment rates throughout the system. A recent survey of primary school-aged children who are not attending any school will lead to new programs and policies to raise enrollment.

TABLE 2.1: Reasons cited by children for non-enrollment

Reason	% of Respondents
Late Registration	37%
School Full	17%
Difficulty in transferring	11%
Fees	12%

In 2000, MOE established as a goal of making primary education the national priority. Today, primary schooling and the national Kindergarten program are the main priority for MOE, although there has been much work to expand the secondary schooling opportunities.

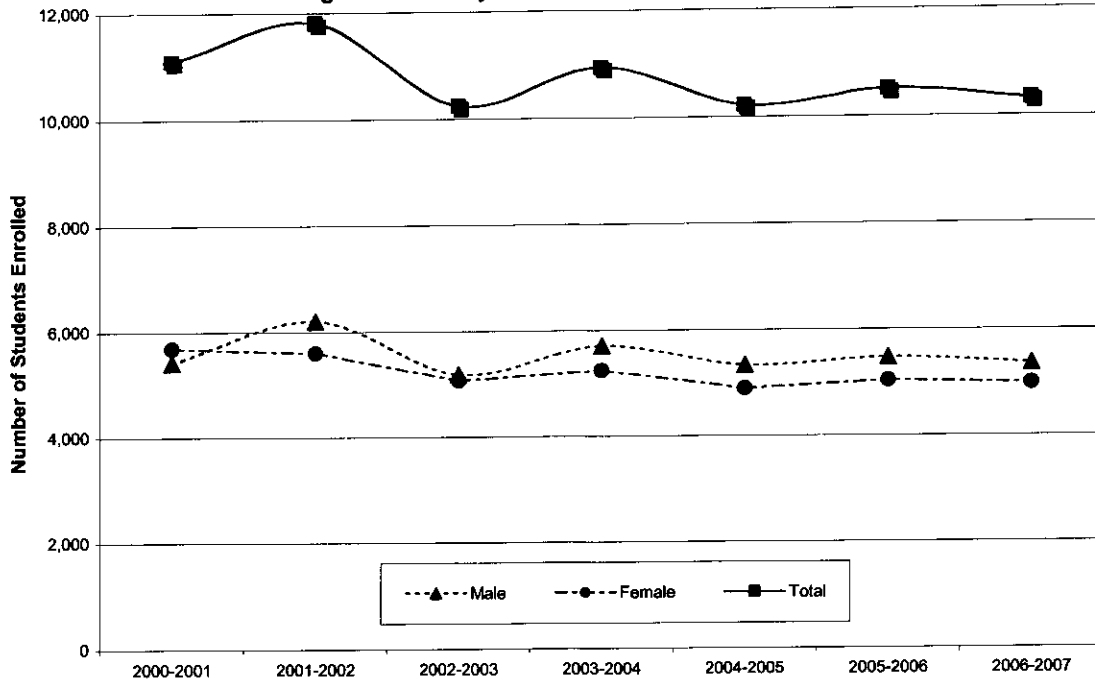
MOE also had plans to accelerate decentralization of school management and oversight and adopt community-based governance systems, but these programs have proven unworkable and ineffective and have largely been abandoned. Instead, MOE has worked to identify specific aspects of school administration that work better at the local or school level and decentralized those.

The RMI government also recognizes the importance of the private schools in providing education and has improved its incentive structure for providing subsidies to these schools. In recent years, there has been a shift to reward higher-performing schools with increased funding.

Primary Schools (Grades 1-8)

The summary statistics for the primary school system are presented below.

Figure 4: Primary School Enrollment 2000-2007*

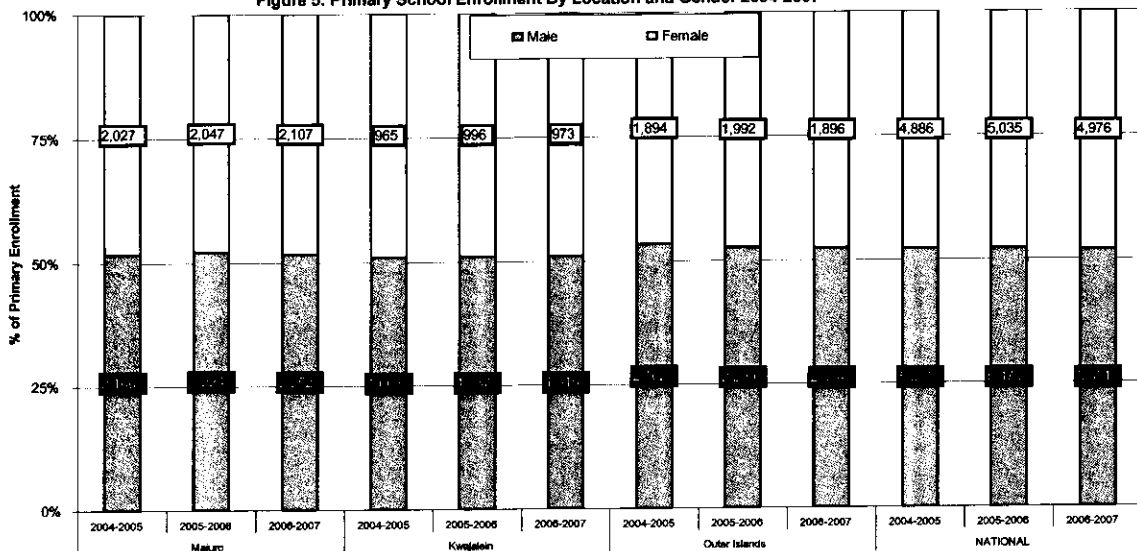


Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

*Note: Data disaggregated by location is only available since 2004.

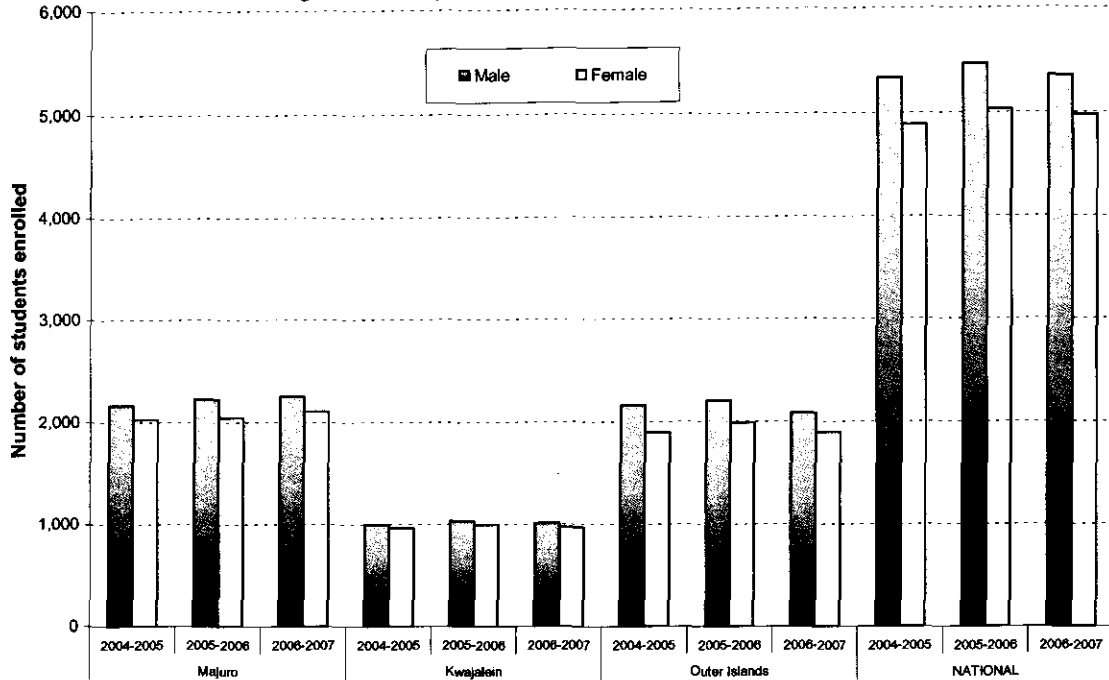
As noted earlier, MOE adopted a new data system in 2004. With the major unexplained fluctuations in enrollment data before this, such as in the 2001-2002 school year, it is likely that some of the earlier figures are unreliable. However, the general trend of primary school enrollment seems to be declining.

Figure 5: Primary School Enrollment By Location and Gender 2004-2007



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

Figure 6: Primary School Enrollment by Location 2004-2007



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

The numbers in this chart may reinforce the anecdotal evidence that outer islands residents are increasingly moving to Majuro as enrollments have risen since 2004-2005. MOE is looking forward to the results of the 2009 Census, which should provide definitive information about the population distribution and growth rates.

TABLE 2.2: Primary system summary

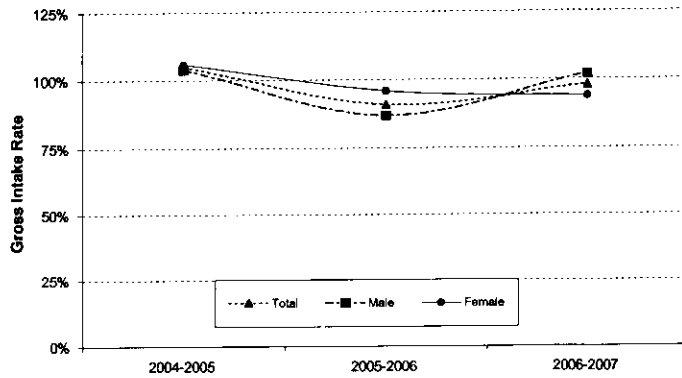
Year	Total Enrollment	Teachers*	Number Schools
2004-2005	10,217	795	98
2005-2006	10,505	705	98
2006-2007	10,327	847	98

*Note: Number of teachers includes Kindergarten teachers

The number of schools in the primary system has remained constant and is not expected to change significantly. Approximately 65% of students reside in the urban centers of Majuro and Kwajalein; the majority of the schools are located in the outer islands, where enrollments can be quite low because the island population is relatively small. There is periodic discussion in the government regarding the consolidation of smaller schools with enrollments under 50 students, but this is a highly contentious topic as it would likely force families from smaller islands to relocate to larger areas and dramatically alter traditional ways of life in the outer islands.

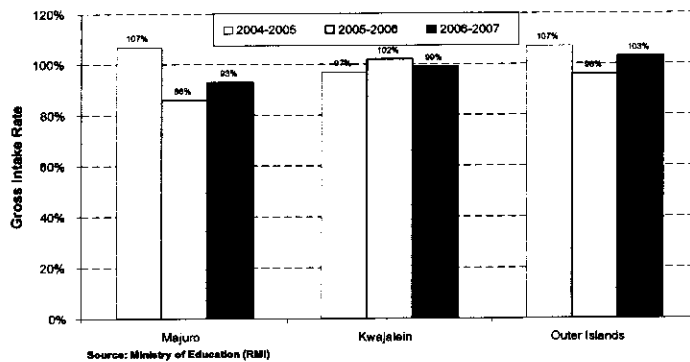
The overall coverage of the primary school system is good, as can be seen in the following data.

Figure 7: Gross Primary Intake Rate by Gender



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

Figure 8: Gross Primary Intake Rate by Location



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

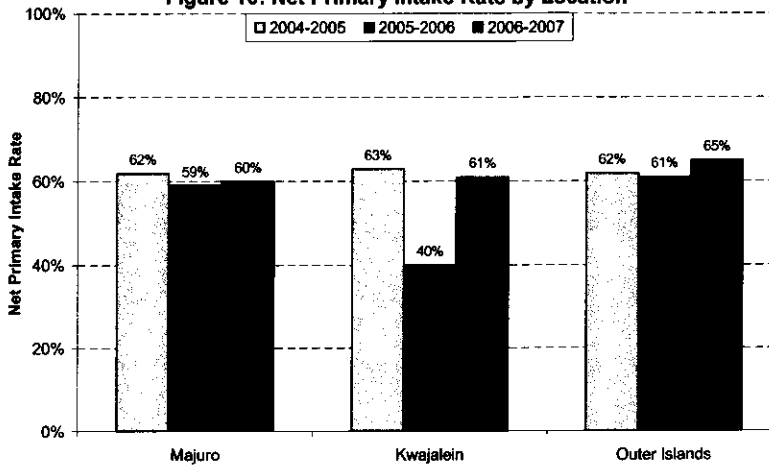
Based on these figures, the primary system has the capacity to take in all of the eligible students in the RMI. Gross intake rates have declined since 2004 for both boys and girls, with major fluctuations from 2004 to 2005. Geographically, rates have declined in Majuro and the outer islands, but increased slightly in Kwajalein. With the large fluctuations from year-to-year, MOE must gather additional years of data to present a clearer picture.

Figure 9: Net Primary Intake Rate by Gender



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

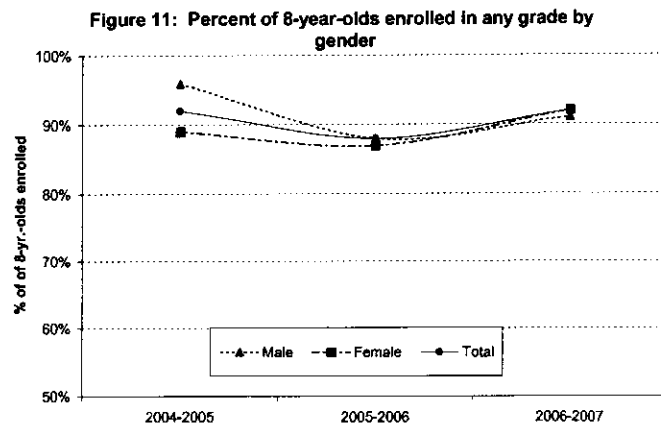
Figure 10: Net Primary Intake Rate by Location



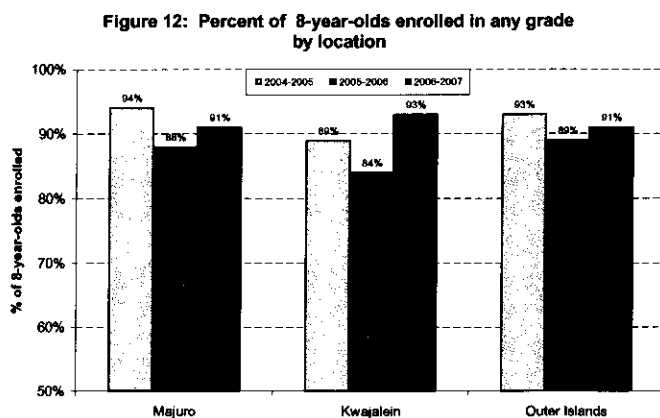
Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

Compared to the gross intake rates, the net intake throughout the RMI is low. This is due to many children starting the Kindergarten program after the official entry age, as well as late starters enrolling in grade 1. As can be seen below, by age 8, about 90% of children are enrolled in some grade level. These figures reinforce the findings of the intake rates for early childhood education.

Net intake rates for primary schools declined dramatically in 2005, particularly in Kwajalein Atoll. This may be due to misunderstandings and difficulties in implementing the new Kindergarten program, which could have enrolled many of the six-year-old children who would have otherwise started grade 1.



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

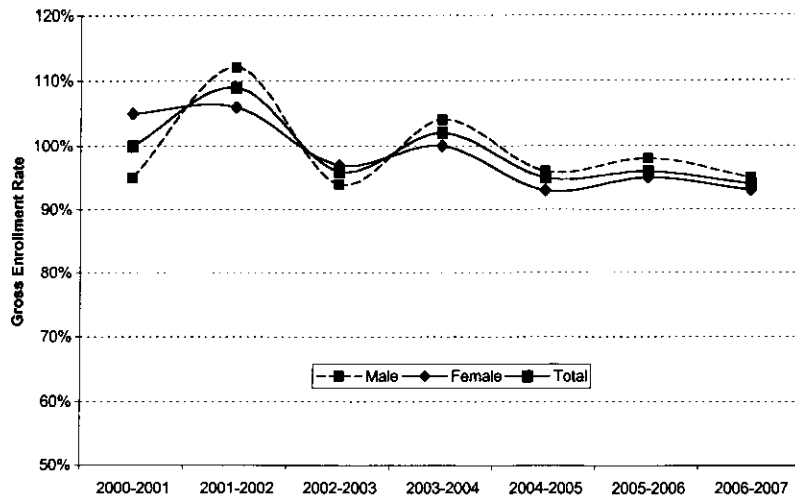


Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

These figures show relative equality between genders and locations for the number of children who are not in school. However, MOE, along with other government agencies and stakeholders, is quite concerned about the nearly 10% of children who are not in school. MOE hopes to work with the national statistics office to gather more detailed information about these children during the 2009 census and develop effective policies to reduce the number of out-of-school children.

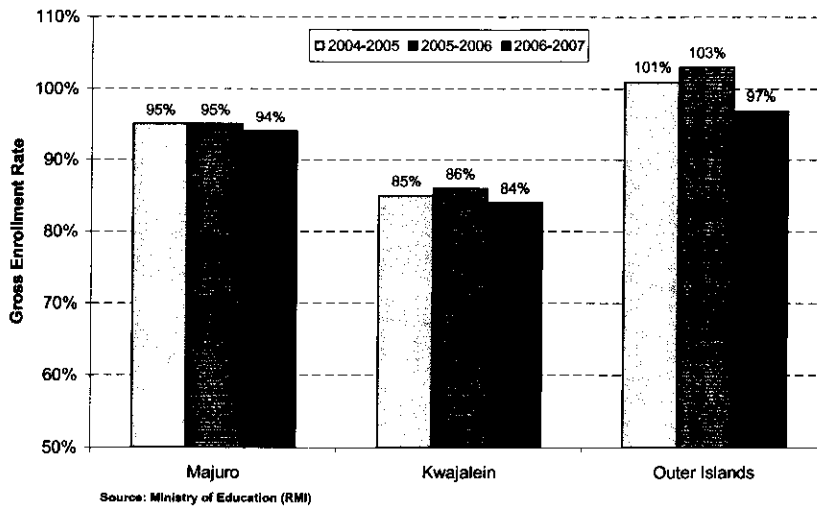
Overall participation in primary education is high, as can be seen in the gross enrollment rates below.

Figure 13: Gross Enrollment Rate by Gender



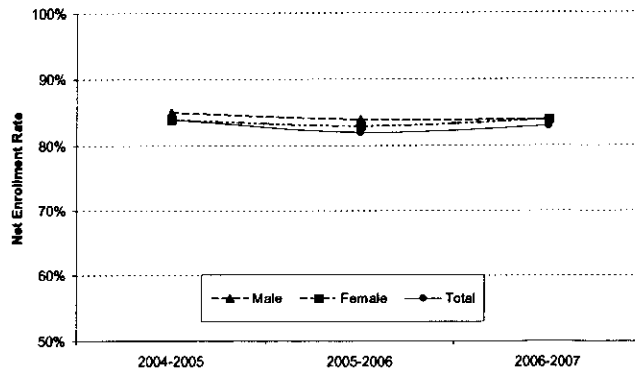
MOE enrollment data dating to 2000 shows that overall gross enrollment is declining slightly. Although the earlier data may not be completely reliable, the trend of declining female enrollment rates is worrisome. Since 2004 when MOE greatly improved its data gathering and analysis capacity, however, the rate has remained stable. MOE will continue to monitor this in coming years.

Figure 14: Gross Primary Enrollment Rate by Location



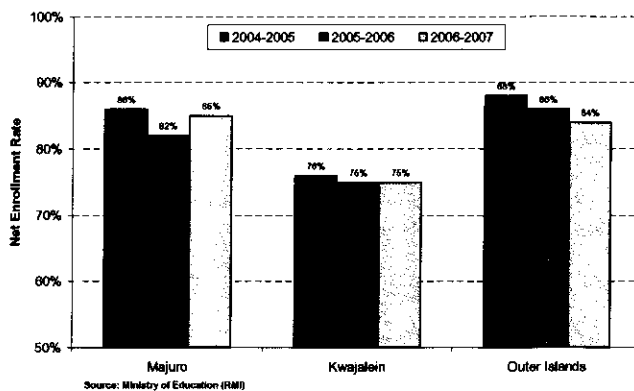
Examining the gross enrollments by location shows a significant and constant disparity between Kwajalein and Majuro. This agrees with observations of high truancy and non-enrollment on Ebeye Island. Plans to construct a new middle school in Ebeye may reduce classroom overcrowding and help to raise enrollment rates.

Figure 15: Net Primary Enrollment by Gender



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

Figure 16: Net Primary Enrollment Rate by Location



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

Net enrollment rates indicate that about 15% of school-aged students on Majuro and the outer islands are not in school, compared to one out of four on Kwajalein. Some of these non-enrolled students are likely six and seven-year olds who will start classes in coming years. The lower net rates in comparison to the gross rates are likely reflective of the repetition rate throughout primary school, which is discussed in more detail below.

These numbers also reinforce the geographical disparity of enrollment in Kwajalein and suggest that MOE must undertake a serious program to boost school attendance in Ebeye.

Enrollment rates for primary school still show need for improvement, and there is widespread concern among government leaders, non-government organizations and the private sector about the seemingly high number of children of primary school age who do not attend school.

Secondary Schools

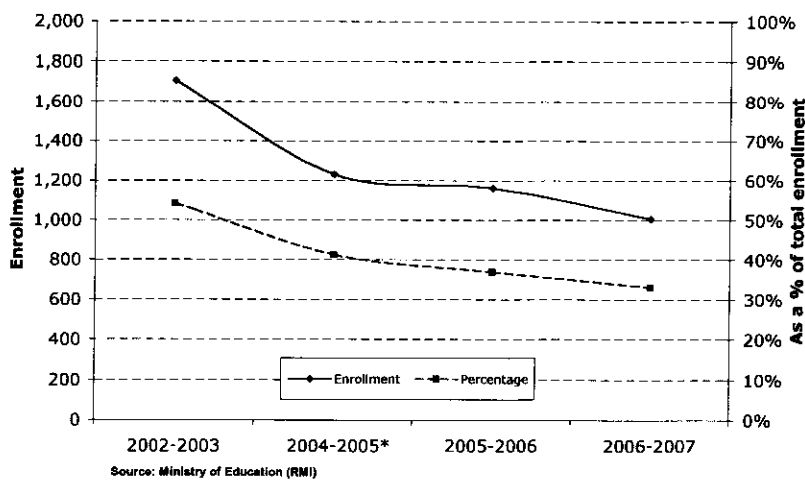
As noted earlier, MOE faces a major challenge in providing secondary schooling (grades 9 to 12) for all Marshallese young people. Currently, there is not sufficient capacity to accommodate all students who would wish to attend high school for free. This is reflected in the low overall enrollment rates presented below.

Figure 17: Secondary Enrollment 2000-2007



The overall secondary school enrollment has increased slightly since 2000, but less than expected. With three new schools opening their doors since 2002, MOE expected the enrollment to increase. However, examining the data more closely suggests that more students are now enrolled in public schools, while private school secondary enrollment has declined.

Figure 18: Private Secondary School Enrollment



*Note: Data for 2003-2004 is not available.

Based on these figures, there should be available capacity in the private schools that could be utilized to enroll more students. New public school capacity that became available as MOE built new schools has simply replaced private school enrollments, rather than dramatically increasing overall enrollment. As can be seen below, however, the gross enrollment rates are slowly increasing.

Figure 19: Gross Secondary Enrollment Rates



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

Enrollment rates have risen slightly since 2000, from about half of all of the population to nearly six out of ten. As noted previously, however, MOE expected a much greater increase. With public school capacity expected to increase further in the next two years, MOE must use this additional capacity as effectively as possible. Additionally, the government must examine its policies toward private schools and take advantage of available school capacity.

The level of qualifications of the primary and secondary school teaching force are discussed in more detail in Goal 6. Due to the difficulty of disaggregating budget data by grade level and location, a composite budget analysis is presented in Section X.

6. Goal 3: Promote Learning and Life Skills for Young People and Adults

The Education Act of 1991 mandates that MOE provide vocational and academic opportunities to all students, while the College of the Marshall Islands Act mandates that the college provide vocational skills programs as well as academic programs. Additionally, the law requires CMI to provide adult education programs and to coordinate national vocational training programs. The Industries Development Act of established the National Training Council as the lead government agency for overseeing non-formal skills training.

These laws govern the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector in the RMI; however this legal framework did not establish the necessary coordination between the agencies and institutions to provide effective integration and cooperation.

At a recent symposium on Technical and Vocational Education and Training in the RMI, participants recommended that the legal framework governing the TVET sector must be fixed to improve communication and coordination among the different agencies and institutions involved. A general consensus emerged that the National Training Council should take the lead for overseeing and coordinating the TVET programs, but it is not yet clear how these recommendations will translate into new legislation.

As noted above, the Education Act of 1991 mandates compulsory education for those between ages 5-18, however as noted above, it remains difficult for MOE to provide high school opportunities for all 8th graders.

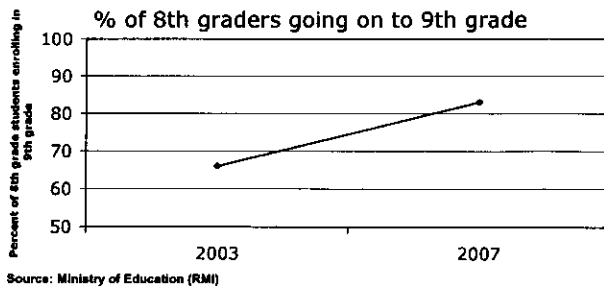
The Ministry of Education has started a system-wide effort in recent years to “vocalize” the education system in the RMI. In summary, this concept means that the school system should provide all students--kindergarten to high school--with hands-on learning that develops skills that can be used later in technical and vocational training. This includes a heavy emphasis on “life skills” that are required whether one chooses an academic path or a vocational one.

The concept also is based on the related idea of “Majolizing” (“Marshall-izing”) the curriculum so that it is based on Marshallese culture, customs and traditions. This will not only make education more relevant, but provide students with better preparation for when they enter the workforce.

MOE and the RMI government do not regularly track information about youth or adult literacy. The census, conducted every 10 years, provides some information; however, it is not disaggregated by age, making interpretation quite difficult. MOE may work with the national statistics office to develop an indicator based on the percentage of students who achieve a certain score on annual standardized tests and use this as a proxy for youth literacy.

The data in this section is incomplete. As noted above, there is no national tracking of literacy rates. Enrollment in secondary TVET programs is also not a suitable indicator for the RMI as all students at most high schools take some form of TVET classes each year, while the National Vocational Technical Institute is not really a TVET school (discussions are currently underway about renaming the school or redefining its mission).

The Ministry of Education has made much progress in improving the transition rate from 8th grade, which marks the end of primary schooling to 9th grade.



Estimates from before 2003 suggest that only one-third to one-half of primary school students were able to move on to high school. This improvement appears to have equally benefited boys and girls, but further analysis is needed. The Ministry hopes to continue improving so that all 8th graders will be able to attend 9th grade.

7. Goal 4: Increase Adult Literacy by 50 percent

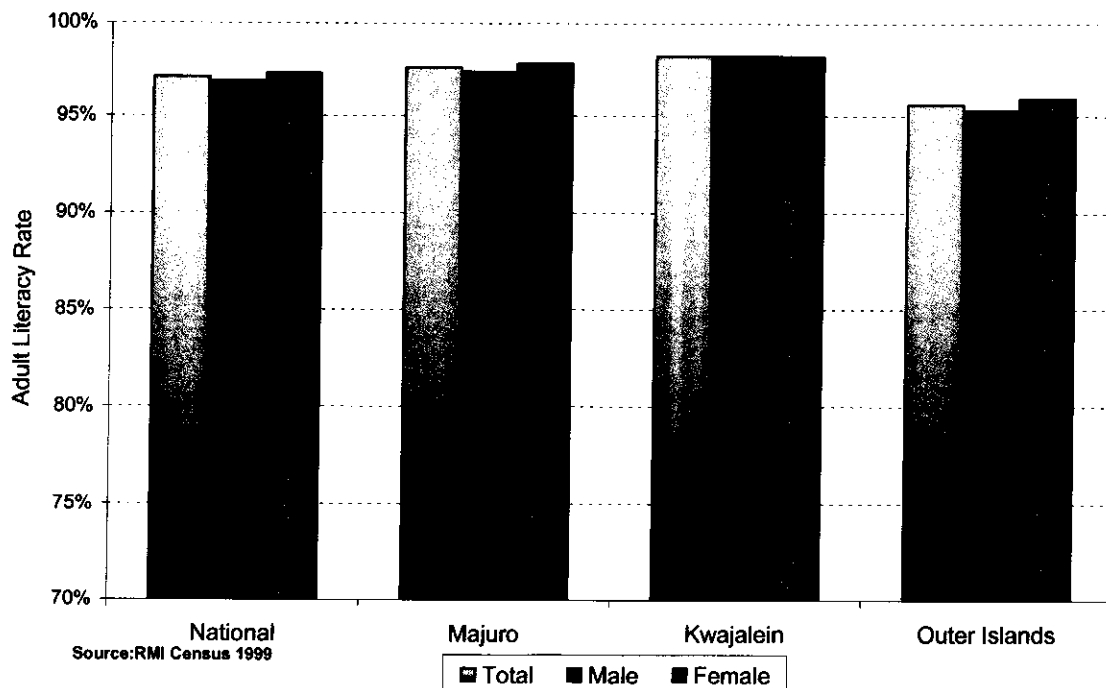
In the late 1990s, the RMI set a goal of establishing a national adult literacy program targeting 15 to 35-year olds. However, no program dedicated specifically to literacy has been established. Instead, the College of the Marshall Islands, which is mandated by law to provide adult education, operates the General Education Development program, which caters to those who were not able to attend high school, or left the regular school system.

Through this program, participants can obtain either the equivalent of a U.S. high school diploma, or a Marshallese high school diploma. Although some adults are enrolled, the overwhelming majority of students are youth.

MOE and CMI are among a group of stakeholders currently examining the secondary and adult education landscape in the RMI and may work to shift the equivalency program so that it targets adults exclusively, while trying to steer the youth into an alternative high school setting in the formal sector.

Adult literacy in the RMI is defined as the ability to read and write a simple message in any language, and measured for residents age 10 and older. As can be seen in the table below, the literacy rates in the RMI are quite high. However, the Census did not report the literacy level by youth (15 to 25) or other age groups.

Figure 20: Literacy Rates by gender and location



There is no significant difference in the literacy rates of males and females. The 1988 literacy rates are lower (91.4 percent for males and 89.9 percent for females.) However, the results of these censuses are not comparable because of the difference in the definitions used. In the 1999 census, a literate person was defined as one who can, with understanding, both read and write a simple message in any language. By this definition, a person who previously could read and write but can no longer do so because of old age or disability is considered as literate. By comparison, the 1988 definition is that a person is literate if he/she attained at least grade 4.

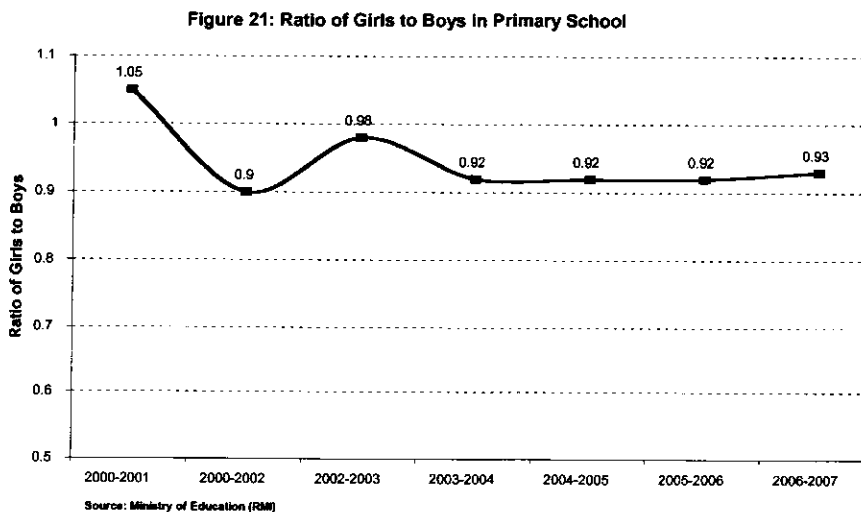
It is assumed that since most Marshallese were sufficiently literate with respect to basic skills or understanding in their own language and basic skills in numeracy there was no urgency to pursue an expanded adult literacy program. However, the definition used in the census is not overly stringent and relies heavily on self-reporting, so it may underestimate the overall skill level of the population.

As noted above, neither the Ministry of Education nor the Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office collect regular data on adult and youth literacy. MOE may work with the national statistics office to develop a proxy indicator to monitor adult and youth literacy rates between the 10-year census.

8. Goal 5: Achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015

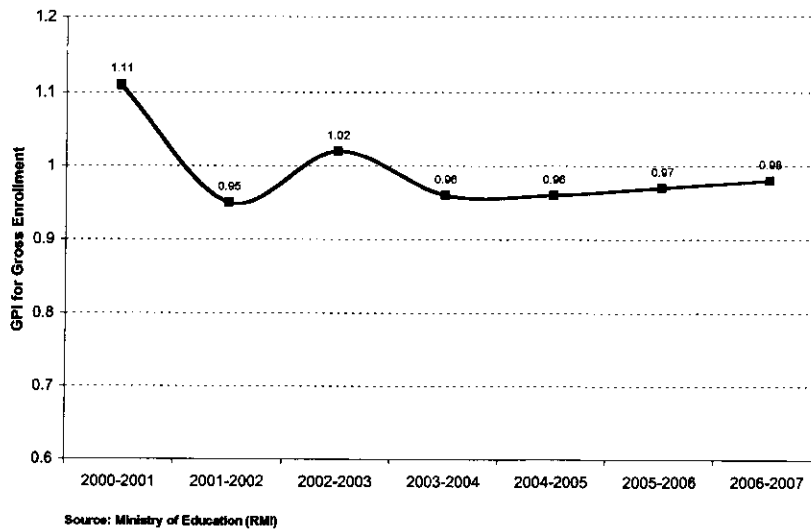
The Marshall Islands has nearly reached the goal of having gender equality in most areas of the education system. The legal framework supporting gender equality is limited to section 12 of the constitution, which states that “*all persons are equal under the law and are entitled to the equal protection of the law.*”

Because of Marshallese customs and traditions, gender equality is a sensitive issue. Women United Together in the Marshall Islands (WUTMI), a non government organization, has developed educational materials on gender equality and conducts workshops all over the Marshall Islands. This type of awareness program and the increasing number of educated females are changing how people view and are dealing with this issue. The following are the highlights showing gender equity with regards to the monitoring of achievement in EFA.



These figures show a decrease in girls' representation in primary school since 2000. However, as noted throughout the report, data before 2004 is not 100% reliable and the ratio has been relatively stable since then. Examining the enrollment of girls and boys based on their respective enrollment rates, which take into account the slight population disparity between the sexes, shows near gender equality.

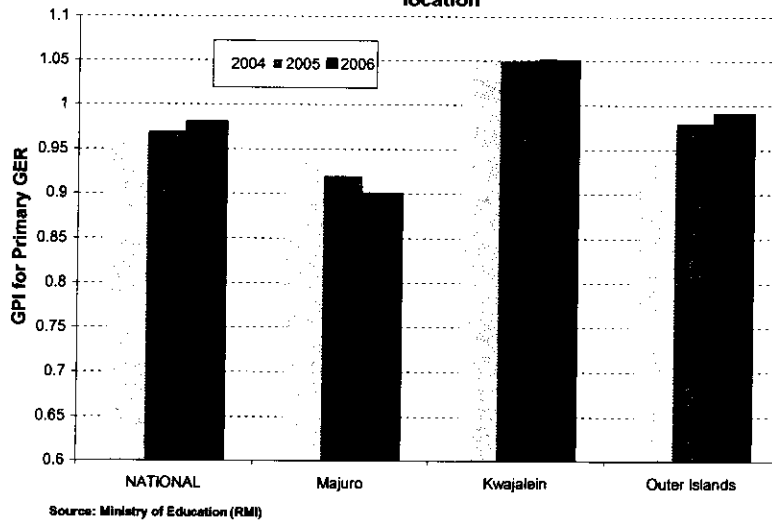
Figure 22: Gender parity index for primary gross enrollment rate



Although there is a large decrease in the gender parity index from 2000 to 2001, the parity index has stabilized since 2003, and has slowly increased to near equality. As MOE works to raise the gross enrollment rate, it will have to pay attention to the gender parity and try to maintain or improve the current figures.

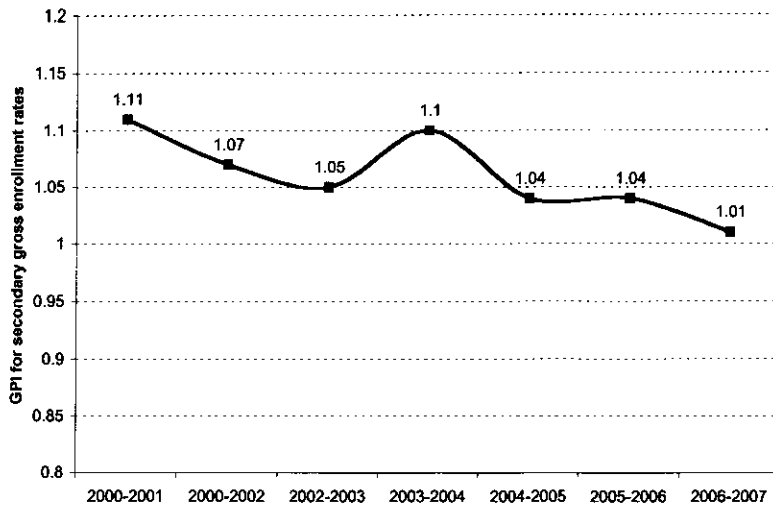
Analyzing gender parity in enrollment rates based on location shows differences based on where a child is located.

Figure 23: Gender parity index for primary gross enrollment rates by location



This shows that although the national figure for gender equality in primary school enrollment is good, there has been a steady decline in Majuro as boys are enrolling at a higher rate than girls. In Kwajalein, the gender parity has remained stable and favors

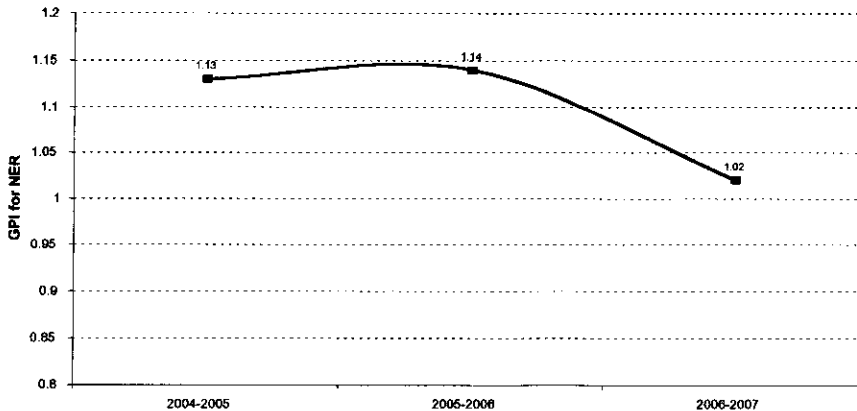
Figure 26: Gender parity index for secondary gross enrollment rates



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

The gender parity index for enrollment rates at the secondary level has been declining slowly since 2000, but this represents a move toward gender equality. As expected the gender parity index for net secondary enrollment rates shows a similar trend.

Figure 27: Gender parity index for secondary net enrollment rates

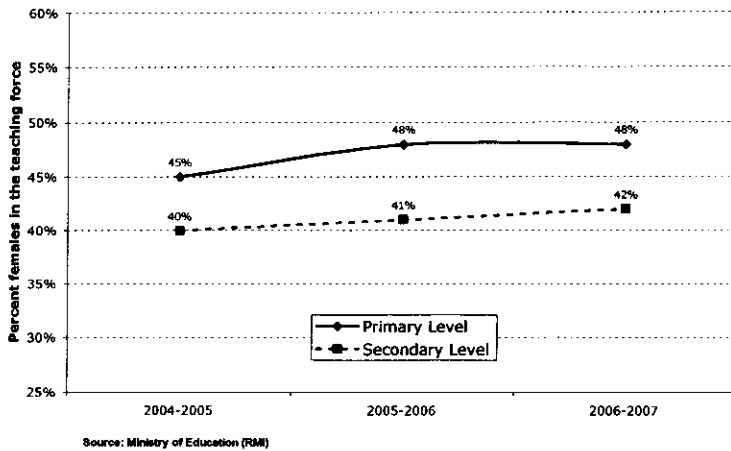


Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

The decrease in the parity index represents a move toward gender equality and may indicate that more boys are entering high school at the correct official age

In other indicators of gender equality throughout the education system the data show some disparities based on location and grade level. In all of the following data, the teaching force only includes public school teachers. As noted earlier, MOE did not have all of the teachers in its data system until 2006-2007, so the earlier figures do not represent the entire teaching force.

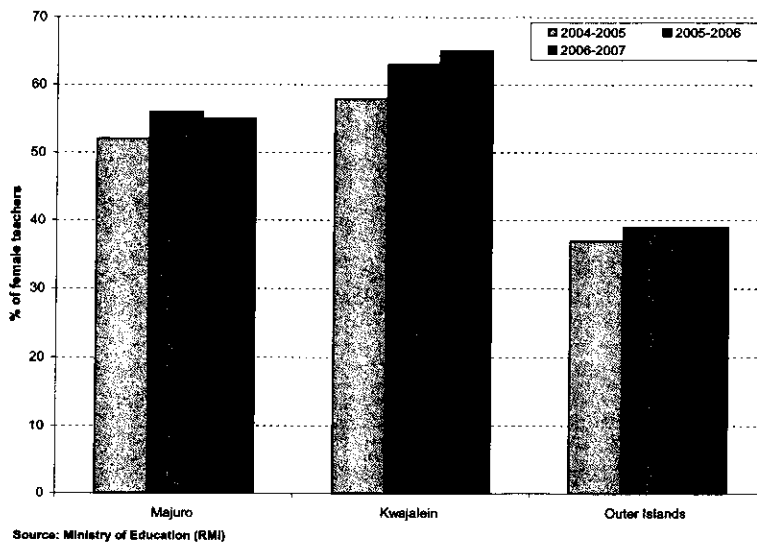
Figure 28: Percent of female teachers in the RMI teaching force



These results show a near balance between female and male teachers at the primary school level. But the number of female teachers is lower at the secondary level. As can be seen below, this may have to do with disparities in degree level between male and female teachers. If males have better opportunity to pursue their advanced degrees, it is more likely that they will end up teaching at the secondary level.

Examining the data for primary schools by location shows a geographical gender imbalance among teachers.

Figure 29: Percent of female primary teachers



These data show gender disparities depending on the teachers' location. In the outer islands, fewer than four out of ten teachers are female, while on Kwajalein, more than six out of ten are female. These disparities may be quite complex and relate to the socioeconomics of each location, as well as underlying cultural attitudes. Still, MOE and

the Public Service Commission (which controls hiring of all personnel) should study the issue in greater detail to ensure that there are no gender biases in its hiring processes.

In conclusion, there is generally gender equality at the student level in the RMI school system. Among the teaching force, there is evidence of some gender disparity, particularly in the different locations. Although gender equality can be a sensitive issue in the Marshall Islands, it is critical that it receives support and commitment from all levels of government. As MOE and other agencies work to improve on the indicators in this section, it will be important to involve all relevant stakeholders and educate all about the benefits due to a commitment to gender equality.

9. Goal 6: Improve the Quality of Education

The Education for All initiative aims to improve the quality of schooling by focusing on teacher quality, student-teacher ratio, budget allocations, school facilities, and provision of school supplies to measure the school quality.

The Education Act of 1991 has mandates on teacher qualifications and class size that are designed to provide quality education. MOE realizes that one of its biggest challenges is to improve the quality and training of its teaching force. As can be seen in the data section below, less than half of primary school teachers have a two-year post secondary degree.

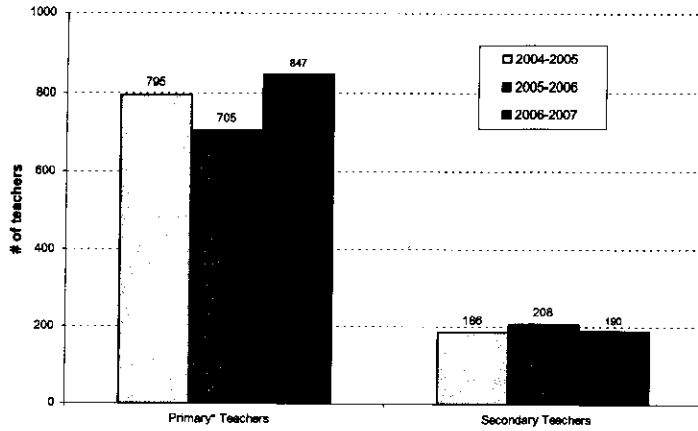
The law requires that every teacher, whether working in a public or private school, be certified by MOE before working in a classroom. MOE is currently working with the Cabinet and the Nitijela (the national parliament) to amend the sections of the law and the implementing regulations to improve the certification process. In practice, the current certification requirements are not enforced, and MOE does not issue any certifications.

MOE will soon issue new regulations on teacher certification requiring at least a two-year post-secondary degree for the basic certification. Additionally, maintaining a certification will require on-going professional development and regular evaluations. Although the education requirements for teacher certification do not differ significantly from the old system, MOE plans a concerted enforcement effort once the new regulations are approved and implemented.

Additionally, MOE has conducted teacher examinations in basic English and Math to assess the skill level of the teaching force in these areas. Only 25% of teachers were able to pass the initial English exam, which presents a significant challenge, while the results for math were even lower. MOE has launched an intensive summer program to boost teachers' skills in both areas, and initial evaluations suggest that this is helping the teachers to improve these skills.

MOE has also placed a high priority on improving the academic qualifications of its teaching force. About 50 teachers annually pursue their degrees full-time at the College of the Marshall Islands, while others enroll in classes during the summer holiday. Additionally, MOE has established partnerships with four-year colleges and universities in the United States to provide distance education courses to teachers via the internet.

Figure 30: Number of public school teachers in the RMI



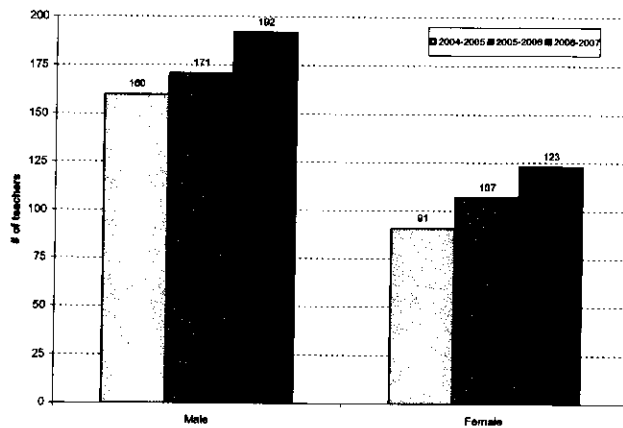
Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

*Note: "Primary" includes Kindergarten teachers as they are not separated in the MOE data system.

The primary school teaching force has grown since 2004, which is to be expected with the growth of the Kindergarten system. The data from the 2005-2006 school year is likely inaccurate. As noted earlier, MOE has worked to include all teachers in its data system, but was not able to accomplish this until the 2006-2007 school year. Data from 2004 come from school reports rather than the MOE system. With the inclusion of the full teaching force in the MOE data system in 2006, the data for the teaching force will be more complete and correct in coming years.

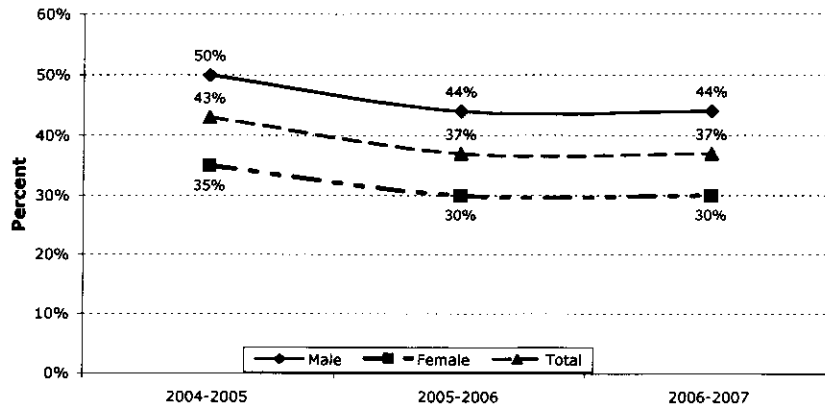
MOE cannot report the percentage of certified teachers until the new certification system is approved and implemented. Instead, MOE has been tracking the number and percentage of teachers who would theoretically qualify for at least a basic certification under the proposed regulations.

Figure 31: Number of teachers with at least a two-year degree



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

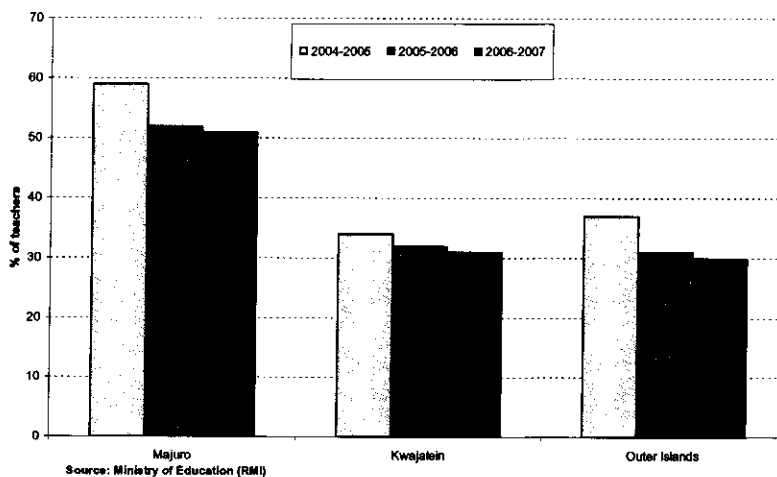
Figure 32: Percentage of primary school teachers with at least a two-year degree



Although the actual number of teachers with two-year degrees has increased every year since 2004, the overall percentage has declined. This is due to two reasons. First, the teaching force has expanded with the growth of the Kindergarten program and a high percentage of these teachers do not have degrees. Secondly, teachers were not fully incorporated into the data system until 2006 and it is likely that many of the teachers with incomplete records did not have degrees.

The gender disparity here suggests that female teachers may have less access to the educational leave program to pursue their degrees. MOE will have to examine the reasons for this disparity and develop programs to ensure female teachers have equal access to post-secondary degrees.

Figure 33: Percent of primary school teachers with at least a two-year post secondary degree by location



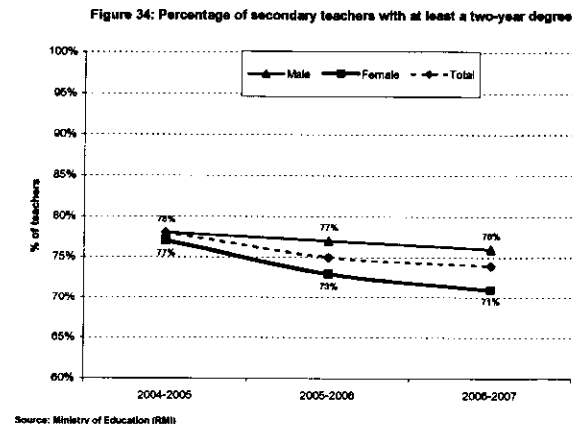
Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

There is a clear geographic disparity, with more than half of Majuro teachers having their degrees, compared to only three out of ten on Kwajalein and the outer islands. This reflects the difficulty teachers have in working on their degrees once they are stationed in Kwajalein or the outer islands.

As the College of the Marshall Islands has made efforts in recent years to make it easier for full-time teachers to also enroll in classes, this may actually increase the disparity, as only Majuro teachers will be able to take advantage. Some progress has been made by starting distance education classes in Kwajalein, but this will not benefit the outer islands.

MOE expects to show significant overall progress in this indicator in coming years as the size of the teaching force has now stabilized and distance education opportunities are allowing more teachers to work on their degrees while they are teaching regular classes. However, geographic and gender disparities may continue to affect the overall equity of the education system.

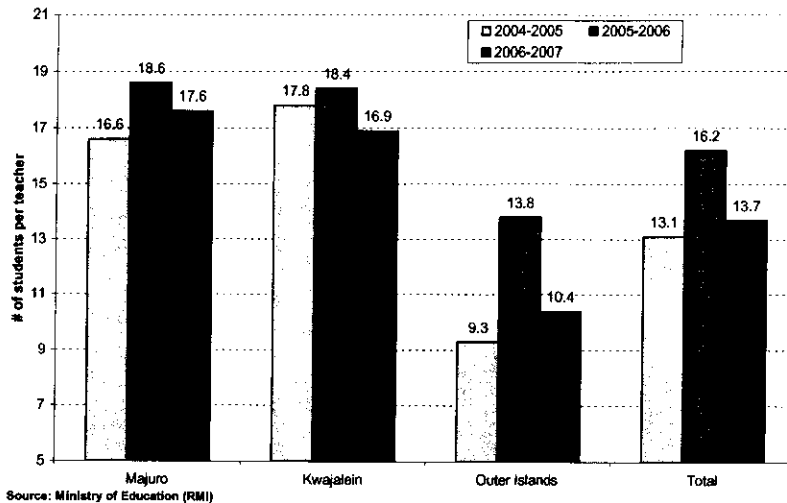
Although MOE has placed a priority on improving the overall qualifications of primary school teachers, the secondary system will also need attention.



Although the number of teachers with degrees is significantly higher than the primary school system, MOE still hopes to make progress in this area. The rate of qualified teachers has declined slightly since 2004, while the gender disparity has increased. The slight overall decline comes during a period of overall expansion of the public secondary system, so the drop is likely due to the hiring of under-qualified teachers to fill new positions.

Student teacher ratios throughout the Marshall Islands are quite low compared to international standards. Due to the unique geography of the country, with many small, lightly populated islands, this is unsurprising.

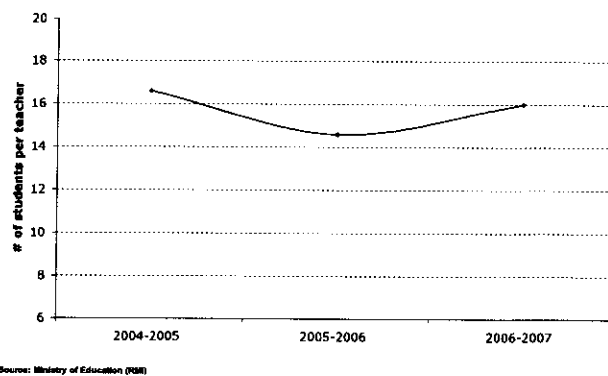
Figure 35: Primary student-teacher ratios by location



As expected, the student-teacher ratios for the outer islands are well below Majuro and Kwajalein. With the small size of these schools, this is not unexpected, however it does raise the question of whether MOE could use its teaching resources more efficiently, although it is not just a matter of reassigning teachers and can be a more complex matter.

Overall, these rates are well within internationally acceptable measures for effective learning, however there are reports of excessively large class sizes at a few schools in Majuro.

Figure 36: Secondary student-teacher ratio

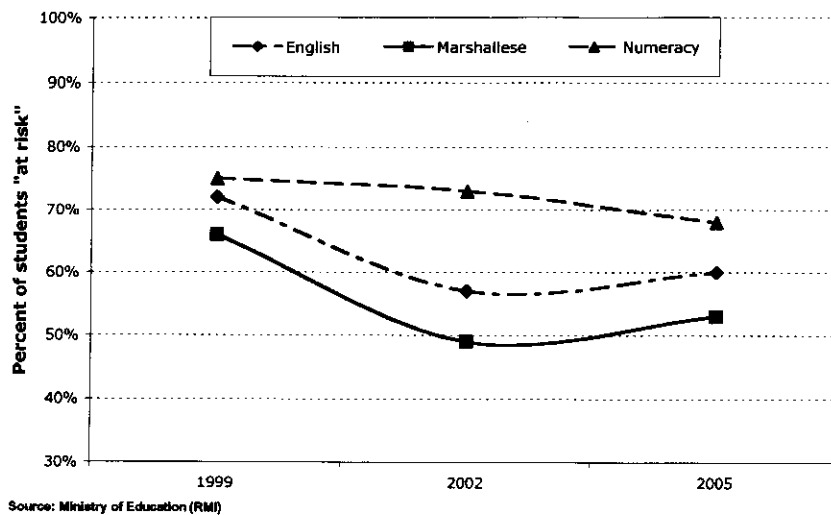


Similar to the primary system, the student-teacher ratios for secondary schools are well within acceptable standards. MOE must continue to work to raise the quality of these teachers while maintaining the same ratio.

MOE uses the Pacific Islands Literacy Levels (PILL) test as one of its main measures of student performance.

This provides information about achievement from year-to-year in three subjects and also allows comparisons with other countries in the region. The test was given regularly through 1999, and every three years since then.

Figure 37: Results on Pacific Island Literacy Levels exam



The “at risk” students are those who perform below the established national standards. Much progress has been made in reducing the number of under-performing students since 1999, although it appears that the 2005 results are slightly worse than 2002. These results are cause for major concern as six out of ten students are below standard in English; more than half below standard in Marshallese; and almost seven out of ten in numeracy. The test was given again in 2007, and these results are expected soon.

MOE is currently developing data to evaluate other measures of school quality, particularly in the area of textbooks. After a major effort over the last four years to acquire textbooks, MOE is now developing a comprehensive inventory to track the number of books per student.

Repetition rates throughout primary school also provide a measure of the quality of education in the RMI. As seen below, by 2006, the RMI has been able to lower repetition rates below 10%.

Schools in the RMI do not practice automatic promotion, but there are no established criteria throughout the system for promotion to the next grade. A student’s teacher and principal will usually determine whether the child is promoted to the next grade. As can be seen in the tables below, between five and ten percent of students may repeat each year.

Figure 39: Repetition rates for girls

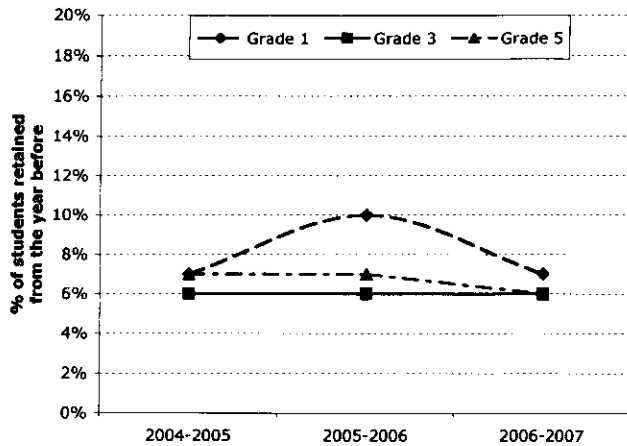
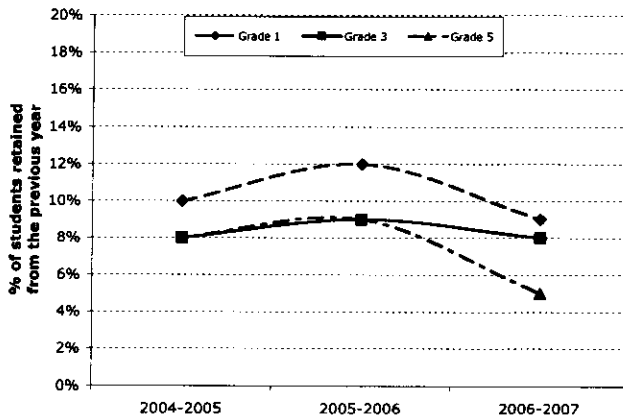


Figure 38: Repetition rates for boys

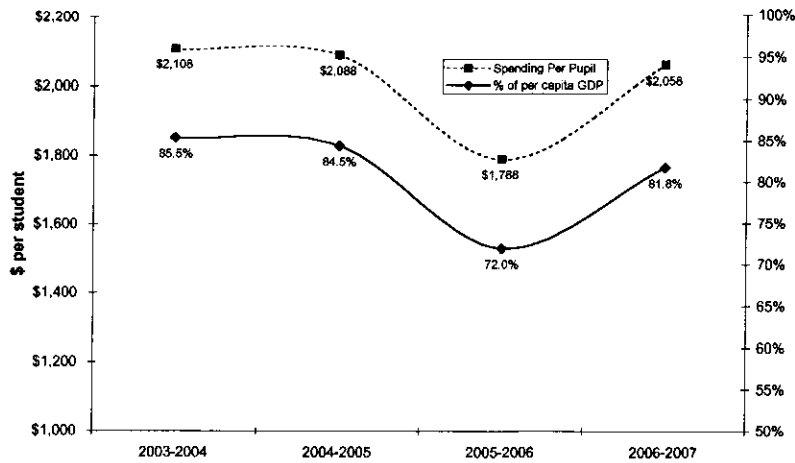


The rates here have generally declined from 2004 to 2006, although they have increased slightly in some grade levels. The repetition rates for higher grades are consistently lower than lower grades. Perhaps students become more used to the school environment as they grow older, but it is difficult to draw conclusions due to the lack of a uniform repetition policy.

Financing EFA

Spending on education in the Marshall Islands is quite high and reflects the government's continuing commitment to providing quality education and meeting the goals of EFA. The education sector annually receives a higher percentage of public funding than any other sector. As noted in the earlier sections due to the difficulty in disaggregating expenditures by grade level and location, the data presented here is the composite spending on public schools for Kindergarten through Grade 12.

Figure 40: Annual spending per pupil 2003-2007



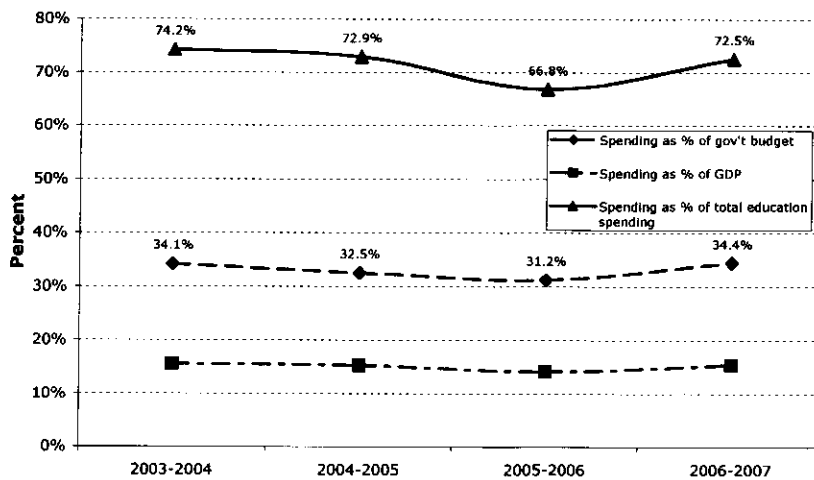
Source: RMI Ministry of Education

Note: Spending was calculated without including major capital construction funds which are inconsistent from year to year and would make it difficult to interpret trends.

Public funding for Kindergarten through Grade 12 has declined slightly since 2003 on a per student basis, although total funds have increased from \$20 million to \$23 million. The decrease per student reflects the growth of the public school system, particularly in the secondary schools and the Kindergarten program, as noted earlier in this report.

The government's commitment to education and the Kindergarten to Grade 12 system, as measured by the percentage of public funding dedicated to the sector, has remained relatively consistent since 2003.

Figure 41: Government spending on education



Source: Ministry of Education (RMI)

The percentage of the government budget dedicated to the Kindergarten to Grade 12 system has declined slightly from 2004 to 2006, but returned to the 2003 levels for the

2006-2007 year. Measured as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product, RMI spending on education is one of the highest in the world.

Within the education sector, the government dedicates nearly 30% of funding to programs outside the Kindergarten to Grade 12 system. The bulk of this funding is used to support the College of the Marshall Islands, although non-formal education and a scholarship program for Marshallese who attend college overseas also receive funds.

Although the expenditure per student and government commitment is quite high, the cost to supply such basic items as textbooks and school supplies is also high, and current budget cannot cover most of the costs.

10. Conclusion

It is important to continue to collect and update data for these goals as they are critical for Ministry wide decision making. This will also help the Ministry in seeking outside funding to help in our mission to provide at least a basic education to all Marshallese people. This information will also help outside funding sources design grants based on our needs. We look forward in using this report to help us in our present and future planning and also to share with our Teachers, Principals and other stakeholders.