

Arkansas Tech University

## Online Research Commons @ ATU

---

Theses and Dissertations from 2019

Student Research and Publications

---

Spring 5-7-2019

### A Study of Marshallese Student Attendance in a Northwest Arkansas Secondary School

Paula Lynn Floyd-Faught  
*Arkansas Tech University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://orc.library.atu.edu/etds\\_2019](https://orc.library.atu.edu/etds_2019)



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Floyd-Faught, Paula Lynn, "A Study of Marshallese Student Attendance in a Northwest Arkansas Secondary School" (2019). *Theses and Dissertations from 2019*. 4.  
[https://orc.library.atu.edu/etds\\_2019/4](https://orc.library.atu.edu/etds_2019/4)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research and Publications at Online Research Commons @ ATU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations from 2019 by an authorized administrator of Online Research Commons @ ATU. For more information, please contact [cpark@atu.edu](mailto:cpark@atu.edu).



A STUDY OF MARSHALLESE STUDENT ATTENDANCE IN A NORTHWEST  
ARKANSAS SECONDARY SCHOOL

A Dissertation Submitted  
to the Graduate College  
Arkansas Tech University

in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION  
in School Leadership

in the Department of Leadership and Learning  
of the College of Education

May 2019

Paula Lynn Floyd-Faught

Educational Specialist, Arkansas State University, 2017  
Master of Arts, Arkansas Tech University, 2009  
Bachelor of Arts, Arkansas Tech University, 1999

Dissertation Approval

This dissertation, "A Study of Marshallese Student Attendance in a Northwest Arkansas  
Secondary School"

by Paula L. Faught, is approved by:

Dissertation Chair:

---

Ellen Treadway  
Associate Professor of Teaching,  
Learning, and Leadership  
Center for Leadership and Learning

Dissertation Committee

---

John Freeman  
Professor and Interim Department Head  
Center for Leadership and Learning

---

Christy Smith  
Educational Consultant with Script, LLC

Program Director:

---

John Freeman  
Professor and Interim Department Head  
Center for Leadership and Learning

Graduate College Dean:

---

Jeff Robertson  
Professor and Interim Dean

© Paula L. Faught

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my family for all of their support and understanding throughout the process of writing this dissertation. Landyn and Travis, you both have encouraged me countless times, and that encouragement helped me push past barriers and frustrations to achieve this goal. Landyn, it has always been my goal to set a positive example for you as a human being, but it has also been a goal of mine to show you that you can pursue your dreams and accomplish whatever you set your mind to despite challenges you may face along the way. Travis, I could not have done this without you. As you always say, I have been in school since you have known me, and without your continued support, I would not have reached this goal of mine. Thank you for being a wonderful father and example to our son.

To my inspirations, my mother and my grandmother, I deeply appreciate the examples you set for me in pursuing my education. You were both dedicated educators who continually encouraged me to pursue my own education to the fullest. Mom, even though you are not here to see it, I know I have made you proud, and that brings indescribable joy to my heart. Grandma, thank you for teaching me to read and setting the stage for the rest of my academic career.

To my dad, I know first and foremost, you have told me that you are proud of me for being a good mother and wife who models a Christian attitude for Landyn, but I want to thank you for your support in pursuing my dreams on a personal and professional level. Papa, I also want to thank you for loving and encouraging me throughout my life.

To my in-laws, Larry and Trudy, thank you for your help with making sure Landyn had all the love, guidance, and support he needs, even when I was able to be there.

I would also like to thank my cousins and aunts for always encouraging me to be a strong female who is not afraid to follow her dreams. To my school family, thank you for always encouraging me and for being understanding of my shortcomings. To my support group (Angie, Candra, Karla, and Missy), thank you for always helping me stay on track and for encouraging me to never give up. To my committee, Dr. Treadway, Dr. Freeman, and Dr. Smith, thank you for all of your help in guiding and refining my work. I would not have reached this milestone without your leadership.

## Abstract

Northwest Arkansas has one of the largest populations of Marshall Islanders outside of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The first know Marshallese immigrant arrived in the 1986, and the first Marshallese student in Northwest Public Schools arrived in the late 1980's. Since that time, an estimated 10,000–12,000 Marshallese have settled in Northwest Arkansas (McElfish, 2016, p. 2). Almost 3,000 Marshallese students attend Northwest Public Schools, with Northwest High School having the largest population in the state. There is a perception that Marshallese students have lower attendance rates than peers, and this study was conducted to determine which factors most impact the attendance of Marshallese students attending NHS. Research was conducted through analysis of archival data and one-on-one interviews with stakeholders. Archival data included attendance as well as English language proficiency scores, standardized assessment scores, graduation rate, and disciplinary infractions. Stakeholders interviewed included recent Marshallese graduates (five years or less), Marshallese parents/guardians, Marshallese community liaisons, and non-Marshallese school personnel to capture a diverse set of perspectives. Findings were analyzed, and the data revealed that family and connectivity to school were the major factors impacting the attendance of Marshallese students at this Northwest Arkansas high school. Based on these findings, implications and recommendations for future research were discussed. As stated by Helen Keller, “Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.” I could not have reached this point without the love, support, and guidance from each of you, and I offer my most sincere appreciation to you all.



## Table of Contents

	Page
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	22
Schooling in the Marshall Islands.....	32
Special Education Identification.....	46
Theoretical Frameworks .....	55
Implications.....	57
III. METHODOLOGY .....	58
Research Design.....	60
Data Collection / Data Analysis.....	61
Participants.....	62
Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations .....	64
Interviews.....	69
Summary.....	78
IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	79
Findings from Archival Data .....	79
Summary of Archival Data.....	97
Findings from Interviews.....	97

Conclusions.....	150
V. CONCLUSIONS.....	151
Summary of Findings.....	151
Recommendations for Future Research.....	163
Summary.....	164
Conclusion.....	165
REFERENCES.....	167
APPENDICES.....	179
Appendix A. Letter of Informed Consent.....	179
Appendix B. Permission to Use Research Questions.....	180

## List of Tables

Table 2. 1: Student Enrollment and Teacher Count by Location .....	36
Table 2. 2: Elementary Student Enrollment Trends by Location .....	36
Table 2. 3: Student Distribution by Grade Level and Age .....	39
Table 2. 4: Proficient and Above Scores on the Grade 3 MISAT from 2012-2017 .....	43
Table 2. 5: Proficient and Above Scores on the Grade 6 MISAT from 2012-2017 .....	43
Table 2. 6: Proficient and Above Scores on the Grade 8 MISAT from 2012-2017 .....	43
Table 2. 7: Proficient and Above Scores on the Grade 10 and Grade 12 MISAT from 2012-2017 .....	44
Table 2. 8: 2017 MISAT Proficiency by School Type .....	44
Table 2. 9: Highest Level of Education for Teachers in the 2016-2017 Academic Year	.46
Table 4. 1: ELDA to ELPA21 Conversion Chart .....	90
Table 4. 2: Total Students with Disabilities in RMI .....	96

## List of Figures

Figure 1. 1: Race/Ethnicity for NPS .....	2
Figure 1. 2: Race/Ethnicity for NHS.....	3
Figure 1. 3: Map of the Republic of the Marshall Islands .....	5
Figure 2. 1: 2017 Enrollment by Grade Level .....	37
Figure 2. 2: RMI and US Primary Education Gross and Net Enrollment.....	39
Figure 2. 3: RMI and US Secondary Education Gross and Net Enrollment.....	40
Figure 2. 4: English Proficiency Levels at the College of the Marshall Islands.....	45
Figure 4. 1: Enrollment for Grades Pre-K through 12, 1999-2018 .....	81
Figure 4. 2: 2018-19 Exits by Language.....	83
Figure 4. 3: NHS Classification by Level of English Proficiency .....	85
Figure 4. 4: Birth Country and Level of English Proficiency.....	86
Figure 4. 5: Age of Entry for Current Marshallese English Learners.....	87
Figure 4. 6: Age of U. S. Entry for Marshallese Former English Learners .....	88
Figure 4. 7: 2018 NPS Long-Term English Learners .....	89
Figure 4. 8: NHS Graduation Rates, 2014-2017.....	92
Figure 4. 9: 2018 Act Results for NHS 11 <sup>th</sup> Grade Students .....	94
Figure 4. 10: 2018 Act Aspire Results for NHS 10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Students .....	95

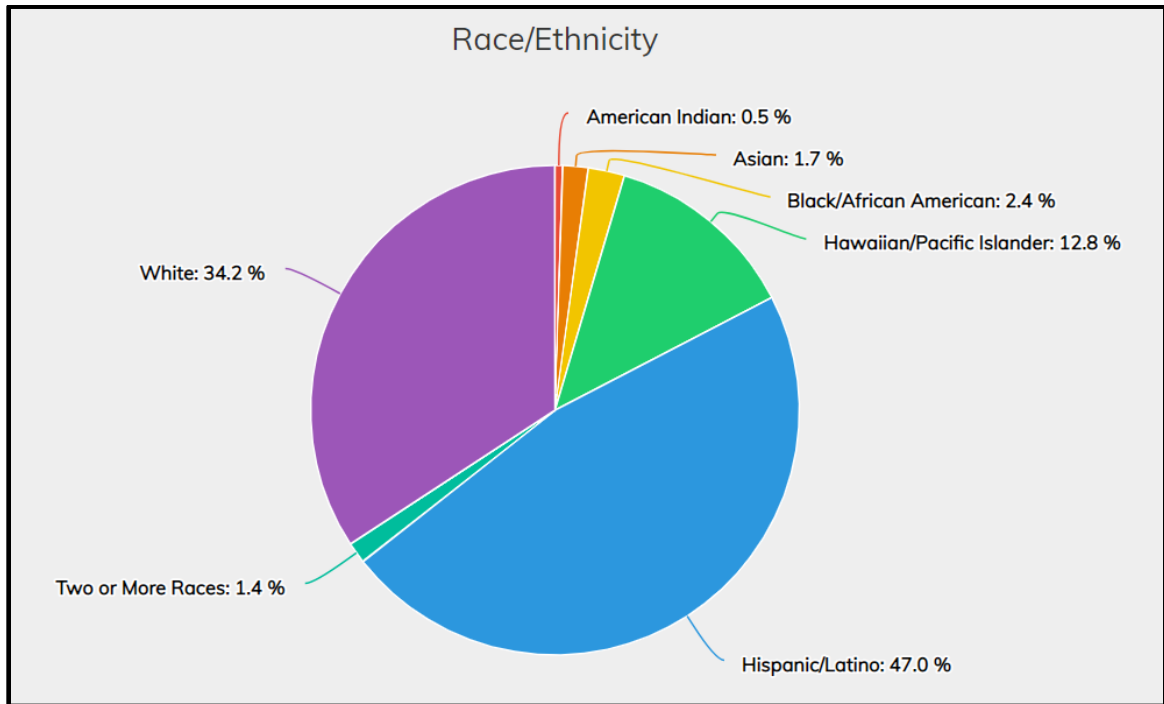
## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

English Learners (ELs) compose an increasing number of the K-12 student population in the United States (US), with an increase of 84% from 1992 to 2002, when the overall K-12 population only grew by 10%, and these numbers continue to rise (Walqui, 2006). In 2015, the percentage of students attending public schools in the US who are identified as ELs was 9.5%, or 4.8 million students, an increase from 8.1%, or 3.8 million, in the fall of 2000 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). The percentage of ELs in each state varies, ranging “from 1.0 percent in West Virginia to 21.0 percent in California” (NCES, 2018).

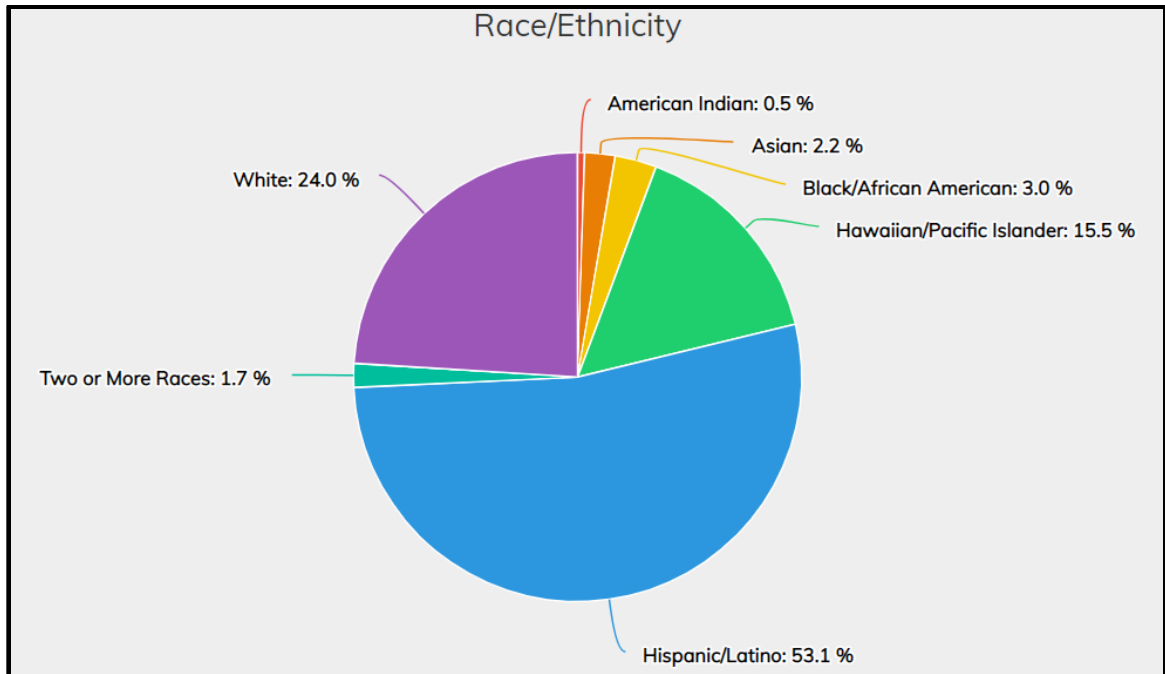
The population of Northwest Arkansas reflects that growth, and one school district in the area educates the highest EL population in the state: Northwest Public Schools (NPS). The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) Data Center reports that Arkansas public schools educated a total of 479,258 students in the 2017-18 academic year, with 8%, or over 38,000, of those students designated as English Learners; approximately 10,000 of those ELs attend NPS (2018). In 2017-18, NPS had a total enrollment of 21,828 students in Grades K-12, with 45% of those students designated as ELs (Arkansas Department of Education [ADE], 2018). The predominate race/ethnicity of students attending NPS was Hispanic/Latino, at 47% (ADE, 2018). The next largest demographic group was White, with 34.2%, followed by Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, who constituted 12.8% of the population (ADE, 2018), with higher concentrations at certain schools within the district. Of the total student population in the state, only 0.8%, or approximately 3,800, were Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, with 2,793 attending NPS.

This number is up from Watts’ 2010 study that revealed a Hawaiian/Pacific Islander population of 1,579 students attending NPS schools, when they comprised 8.39% of the population (p. 1). Jung (2016) reported that those numbers have steadily grown, reporting that “the Pacific Islander population in the schools has increased steadily by 200 to 300 students each year since 2009” (para. 15).



*Figure 1. 1: 2017-18 Race/Ethnicity for NPS (ADE, 2018)*

One secondary school in NPS educated the largest concentration of Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders in the state. This particular school, Northwest Arkansas High School (NHS), is the site of this study. NHS educated 2,155 students in the 2017-18 school year, with 46% of students qualifying for services as English Learners. NHS’s predominate race/ethnicity was Hispanic/Latino (53.1%), followed by White (24.0%) and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (15.5%).



*Figure 1.2: 2017-18 Race/Ethnicity for NHS (ADE, 2018)*

The US Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines the term "native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander" as "people who are descended from any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands" (U.S. Census Bureau [USCB], 2008, p. 2). Due to the variation among the islands, "Pacific Islanders include diverse populations that differ in language and culture. They are of Polynesian, Micronesian, and Melanesian cultural backgrounds" (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2010, para. 1). Estimates by the USCB indicate that of the 301.2 million individuals living in the US, "446,164 or 0.1 percent, reported Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander" (ASHA, 2010, para. 1). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that in 2015 the student populations of Pacific Islanders, American Indians/Alaska Natives, and individuals of "Two or More Races" comprised less than 40,000 English Learners across the US for each group (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018).

The total Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHPI) population “grew 40% between 2000 and 2010, a rate that approached that of Asian Americans and Latinos,” with over 1.2 million NHPI living in the US at that time (Empowering Pacific Islander Communities and Asian Americans Advancing Justice [EPIC/AAAJ], 2014, p. 5). Approximately 43% of this population is Native Hawaiian, but

the NHPI racial group is incredibly diverse and includes over 20 distinct ethnic groups, all of which are growing at a faster pace than the total population.

Micronesian groups such as Chuukese, Kosraean, Marshallese, Carolinian, and Pohnpeian are some of the fastest-growing NHPI ethnic groups. NHPI live in every state in the country, with a majority residing in Hawai‘i and California. Arkansas, Nevada, and Alaska had the fastest-growing populations over the decade. (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 5)

The estimated total NHPI population in Arkansas according to the 2010 census was 7,849, a 151% increase from 2000; the Marshallese population was 4,324, constituting the majority of the NHPI population in the state (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p.66-67).

The majority of the Pacific Islander students attending Arkansas schools originate in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). The Marshall Islands are located about 2,400 miles southwest of Honolulu, Hawaii, and consist of widely dispersed, low-lying coral islands and atolls (Duke, 2014). The territory is isolated and sparsely populated, with the highest point at ten meters above sea level (United States Department of State [DOS], n.d., para. 4). The territory of RMI covers more than 750,000 square miles of ocean, yet the country’s total land



mass is only 113 square miles, approximately the size of Washington, DC (Duke, 2014, para. 3).

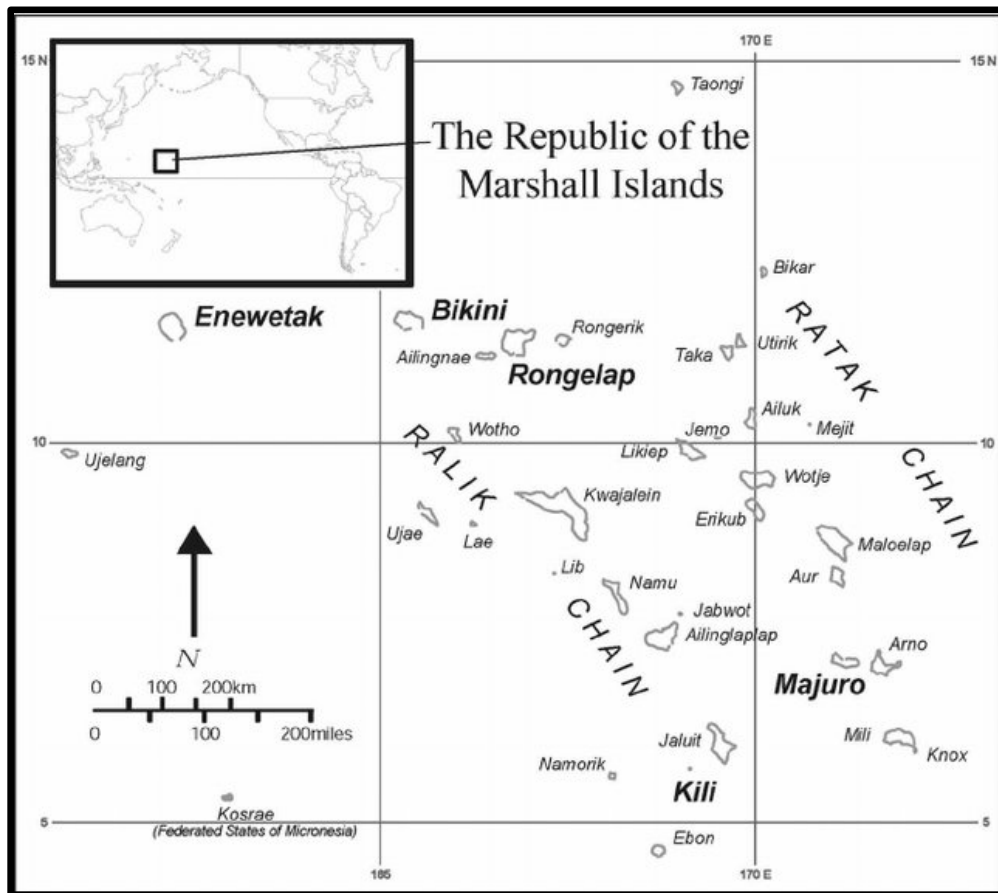


Figure 1.3. Map of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (Sasha Davis, 2007, p. 216)

Following World War II, the United States gained military and administrative control of the Marshall Islands. From 1946 to 1958, the US conducted 67 nuclear explosive tests in the Marshall Islands, and these tests have had long-lasting ramifications (U.S. Embassy Marshall Islands [USEMI], 2012). Since 1944, the US has occupied the Kwajalein Atoll, and the United States Army (US Army) has maintained a military base with 1,250 residents on the Kwajalein Atoll to conduct base operations and installation management

functions. As part of an agreement resulting from the hardships caused by US nuclear testing, the Marshall Islands signed a Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the US in 1983, and this compact allows Marshallese citizens to serve in the US military as well providing them with the opportunity to work, live, and study in the United States without a visa (DOS, n.d.). In 2010, a total of 22,434 Marshallese lived in the United States, a 237% increase from 2000, and 48% of those individuals were under the age of 18 (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 9-10).

Arkansas is reported to be home to the largest community of Marshallese in the continental United States, and one man, John Moody, is credited for establishing the Marshallese community in Northwest Arkansas (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014). Moody moved from the Marshall Islands to Oklahoma to attend college in 1979 but did not feel that his education in the Marshall Islands adequately prepared him for college classes in the US. He ended up leaving college to work in a chicken plant in Oklahoma, eventually moving to Springdale, Arkansas, in 1986 to work at Tyson Foods (Leonard, 2005). According to Moody, he told his friends and family back in the Marshall Islands, “If they want a better life, they better come here. So I start bringing them over, little by little. All those people I brought, they still live there today” (Leonard, 2005, para. 37). Moody also stated that he thought his people would return to the RMI, but instead, they brought their family, neighbors, and friends as well (Leonard, 2005, para. 37).

Migration from the RMI to Arkansas first began in the 1980’s, but US census estimates report that Marshallese migration to Arkansas and other areas of the US grew rapidly between 2000 and 2010, growing from 6,700 to 22,434.

However, because RMI citizens can travel freely between the RMI and the US without a visa or other resident card, the exact number of Marshallese migrants is unknown (McElfish, 2016). McElfish (2016) utilized school enrollment data to estimate that “~10,000-12,000 live in Arkansas and ~40,000 COFA migrants live in the US” (para. 2). The Marshallese population in Arkansas is so significant that the Empowering Pacific Islander Communities and Asian Americans Advancing Justice (EPIC/AAAJ) organizations included them as one of six areas in the United States with a large enough population to study. As defined by the US Office of Management and Budget, the Fayetteville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) includes Benton County, Arkansas; Madison County, Arkansas; Washington County, Arkansas; and McDonald County, Missouri. A 2014 report from EPIC/AAAJ noted that the NHPI population in the Fayetteville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) grew 294% over the decade, more than any other racial group. The report identified an NHPI population of 6,000 in the Fayetteville MSA, constituting nearly 87% of the region’s Marshallese American population.

Marshall Islanders migrate to the US for varied reasons, but health, education, and economic hardship are among the leading causes. EPIC/AAAJ suggested that the Marshallese American community in Arkansas continues to grow due to opportunities for education, health care, and jobs in the poultry industry. In 2015, Dan Zak of *The Washington Post* reported that of students in the RMI, the “most promising students often emigrate — or enlist in the US military — and rarely return. They settle in Hawaii, on the West Coast or in northwest Arkansas, where Marshallese expats represent up to 38 percent of the

workforce at major poultry producers such as Tyson Foods” (para. 42). Many reasons contribute to the decision to leave the islands, but Zak (2015) argues “young Marshallese confront problems more emergent than the past: rampant alcohol abuse, schools that don’t provide lunches, and an ongoing suicide epidemic” (para. 40). Bret Schulte of *The New York Times* (2012) investigated the massive influx of Marshallese to Northwest Arkansas and found that opportunities for a steady income not always found in the RMI attract many Marshall Islanders, and the \$8.70 an hour starting wage at Tyson Foods is “a relative fortune for Marshallese” (para. 7). Schulte (2012) identified the majority of the Marshallese population in Arkansas moved to the northwest corner of the state in hopes of escaping poverty and obtaining access to health care, leaving a home which ranks third in tuberculosis deaths per capita, continues to have cases of leprosy, and abounds with diabetes. The number one cause of death in the RMI is obesity-related diabetes, and researchers attribute high rates of obesity and diabetes to US food aid that contains heavily process food items, such as chicken and white rice (Zak, 2015, para. 40).

Health concerns on the islands stem from nuclear testing as well as a shift in diet due to reliance on processed foods from the US. Marshall Islanders initially became heavily dependent upon such processed foods when nuclear testing poisoned much of their natural food supply, and the continued lack of natural food sources has perpetuated this dependence upon unhealthy processed foods. Nuclear testing conducted by the US caused numerous Marshall Islanders to be exposed to dangerous levels of radiation because residents of the atolls near

the test sites were not relocated prior to the detonations. Nearby islanders suffered radiation exposure both due to nuclear fallout and the consumption of contaminated water and food (McElfish, 2016). Food and water contamination as well as urbanization due to the relocation of citizens from one island to another caused a dramatic change in Marshall Islanders' diet and lifestyle. McElfish (2016) correlates these changes to disproportionately high incidences of chronic diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. McElfish further suggests that the residual effects of nuclear testing have resulted in the continuation infectious diseases that are less common in other parts of the world, such as Hansen's disease (leprosy), tuberculosis, and types of hepatitis. Duke (2014) claims that "[a]ccess to education and health care—critically important for a population that has reduced life expectancy and significant health indicators—also represent key factors that propel a sizeable share of the Marshall Island's population of 68,000 to the United States" (Duke, 2014, para. 2).

In addition to health care, many Marshallese citizens migrate to the US due to economic hardship. One factor that has negatively affected economic opportunities in RMI can be traced to the heavy US military presence on the islands. When the US military began to occupy the Kwajalein Atoll, Marshallese citizens were relocated to other islands. Additional Marshallese citizens were relocated due to nuclear testing; both of these relocations led to increased populations on the receiving islands. Prior to the arrival of the United States military, most Marshall Islanders existed on a subsistence lifestyle, eating fish from the bountiful sea and breadfruit grown on the island. Overpopulation has

had a detrimental effect on the islanders' ability to survive on the subsistence lifestyle they had previously enjoyed, as the RMI's geographic isolation, lack of healthy soil, and inconsistent access to fresh water sources have limited agricultural production (Duke, 2014). For this reason, it became essential for the Marshallese to earn an income in order to provide food for their families, when previously, fishing and gathering food had successfully sustained them. Duke (2014) reported that the RMI government has had limited success in attracting industry or business investments critical for providing job opportunities for its citizens, and the nation's ecosystem of coral atolls is extremely fragile significantly limits other forms of economic development, such as large-scale tourism prominent on other island nations. Climate change has also damaged the RMI's economy, as rising sea levels pose a significant threat to the low-lying coral islands and atolls. For this reason, the RMI has played a prominent role in the United Nations' international efforts to reduce greenhouse gases and fight the climate change threatening their native land (Duke, 2014). These challenges have limited the economic opportunities of the Marshallese in their homeland, and McElfish (2016) predicts the combination of climate change and limited employment opportunities in the Marshall Islands would cause increased migration to the United States in the next few decades.

Another significant factor in the high number of Marshallese relocating to the US is the pursuit of education, which Duke (2014) attributes to a "relative absence of educational opportunities in the RMI" (Duke, 2014, para. 4). Hirata (2015) reports receiving an adequate education in the Marshall Islands "is

difficult, where schools are underfunded and children have to live on islands away from their families in order to attend school” (p. 20). In his interviews with Marshallese parents in NPS, all of the parents stated education played a role in their decision to come to the United States, believing “completing formal education in the US will earn their children institutionalized cultural capital (e.g., diplomas and college degrees) that can be translated into economic capital by enabling them to get better-paying jobs” (Hirata, 2015, p. 29). Hirata’s interviews revealed many Marshallese living in Northwest Arkansas have not obtained a high school diploma, and even fewer had pursued post-secondary education. Those interviewed reported a perception that an education obtained in the US is superior to that of the Marshall Islands, viewing the attainment of a US education as the key to financial success for their children. Interview participants expressed a perception that Marshallese who attain post-graduate and professional degrees are seen in even higher regard by their community (Hirata, 2015). Opportunities for completing high school in RMI is difficult due to limited secondary school opportunities, and earning these post-secondary degrees at home in the Marshall Islands is even more of a challenge. Majuro, the RMI capital, includes the College of the Marshall Islands (CMI) as well as a branch of the University of the South Pacific (USP), but their academic programs are rather limited when compared to those offered in the US. Even when a program of study is offered by CMI or USP, “there remains a widely held perception among Marshall Islanders that educational institutions in the United States are of better quality and more prestigious” (Duke, 2014, para. 10).

According to current Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, “Arkansas contains the largest Marshallese population in the continental United States with the highest concentrations in Carroll, Madison, Washington, and Benton counties” (Gaps in Services to Marshallese Task Force [GAPS], 2016, p. 3). This growing Marshallese workforce has drastically increased the number of Pacific Islander students in Northwest Arkansas schools. One district, Northwest Arkansas School District (NPS) has seen a dramatic influx of Pacific Islander students in the past two decades; of the 3,800 Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students in the state, over 2,600 of those students attend NPS (ADE, 2018).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many factors impact the success of Marshallese students attending Arkansas schools. Marshallese culture and language differ greatly from that of the United States. Jung (2016) states “[l]anguage is the greatest and most obvious barrier for the Marshallese population, and Arkansas does not allow the use of languages other than English in its classrooms — the state has been English-only by law since 1987” (para. 16). Arkansas is not the only English-only state in the US. Jung (2016) reported that four other states (Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, and South Carolina) joined Arkansas in 1987 in banning the use of another language in the classroom. In 1998, California passed a law that significantly limited the implementation of bilingual education programs in the state. In the 1980’s, Massachusetts and Arizona played prominent roles in the dual-language movement but have begun moving toward a model where English abilities determine a student’s placement for instruction. At this time,



only 19 states allow the use of languages other than English in the classroom (Jung, 2016).

Among all NHPI ethnic groups in the US, Marshallese (78%) are the most likely to speak a language other than English at home, with rates higher than any racial group (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 24). In the Fayetteville Arkansas Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), the number is even higher, with 85% of Marshallese Americans speaking a language other than English in their homes (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 57). Forty-one percent of all Marshallese in the US are considered Limited English Proficient (LEP), again the highest of all racial groups (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 24). Once again, the percentage in the Fayetteville MSA is even higher at 55% (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 57).

More challenging than simply having another language in the home, 26% of “Marshallese American households are linguistically isolated, meaning that everyone in the household over the age of 14 is LEP,” significantly limiting these students’ access to proficient English language models to school (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 24). In the Fayetteville MSA, this number is 47%, again higher than any racial group (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 57).

In addition to language barriers, research conducted by Portland State University suggests that certain cultural traits specific to the Marshallese “may be in contrast to the American ideals of status equality, individualism, nuclear family, and future-focused time orientation” (Feuerherd, Hunt, & Virani, n.d.). These differences can impact a student’s ability to adapt to social, cultural, and academic expectations in the United States.

Outside factors impact students’ ability to learn English and achieve academically, and Marshallese families experience many challenges that may negatively

impact their acclimation to Arkansas schools. Cultural factors stemming from a move from an island to a landlocked region impact adjustment when “islanders discover that they will need to buy a car to get to work and, before that, they will need to pass a driver’s test, which is not offered in their language. Many must pay rent for the first time. They puzzle over the American obsession of time, and they are ignorant of bureaucracy and health care systems” (Schulte, 2012, para. 7). Additionally, many of NPS’s Marshallese students fall into a segment of the EL population that is frequently excluded from research, “namely older English-learner students with interrupted formal education . . . including unaccompanied minors separated from parents and other family” (Mitchell, 2016, para. 3). In many cases, their families make great sacrifices to send their children ahead to live with relatives while they save money to relocate themselves to the US. At times, these students face additional challenges with adjustment, as they do not always have strong parental support in the home.

There is limited research available about Marshallese students attending US schools. In one study conducted in the Spokane School District in Spokane, Washington, the 2016 four-year graduation rate for Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders was an astonishing 51.4%, while the rate for the general population was 85.4% (Francovich, 2017). A 2014 EPIC/AAAJ study found that Marshallese, Fijian, and Tongan Americans are the NHPI ethnic groups who are least likely to earn a high school diploma or GED. The study found that in the Fayetteville MSA, roughly 51% of NHPI students in the 2011 four-year cohort graduated from high school, lower than any other racial group and significantly below the average rate of 81%. Study findings suggest that Marshallese American adults in the area

have low levels of educational attainment, with 54% possessing a high school degree or GED and only 1% holding a bachelor's degree (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014). This data suggests that Marshallese students lag dramatically behind their non-Marshallese counterparts in a four-year graduation rate, which is a significant indicator of student achievement.

Claudio Sanchez (2017) of National Public Radio reports that the national graduation rate for English Learners (63%) lags significantly behind that on non-English Learners (82%). In Arkansas, the graduation rate is slightly lower than that of non-English Learners, at 84% for ELs compared to 86.9% for non-ELs, but this number does not identify the graduation rate of different language minority groups. This achievement gap for the combined ELL population is enough to warrant investigation, but data from other states suggest that the achievement gap for Marshallese students is drastic, making an investigation into Marshallese student achievement in Arkansas schools especially significant.

One factor that can significantly inhibit a student's ability to achieve in an Arkansas schools is a high rate of absenteeism. If students are not at school, teachers do not have the opportunity to support the students in moving forward in their academic development. For this study, the researcher is a scholar practitioner practicing in a large high school, Northwest Arkansas High School (NHS), in Northwest Arkansas with a large population of Marshallese students and has observed a significant number of absences for Marshallese students. I hypothesize that school systems in Arkansas may not provide the highest yield services to optimize student attendance for Marshallese students due to a lack of understanding of the students' culture.

Students who are not academically successful may experience social, legal, and academic consequences. One area of concern is students referred for special education. Cultural and linguistic differences that result in comparatively low achievement may lead schools to over-refer Marshallese students for special education services and under-refer them for advanced studies.

Teachers deeply desire their students to be successful, and when a student exhibits a lack of expected progress, schools may be prone to refer students for special education services. Educators, in an effort to support struggling learners, may mistake stages of second language acquisition for learning disabilities, resulting in inappropriate referrals. When that happens, schools may struggle to conduct valid eligibility evaluations that can distinguish between language differences and language disabilities. Once a student is referred, the student may then be subjected to culturally biased assessments performed by psychological examiners who are not knowledgeable about typical second language acquisition phases or about the culture of the student. If students are inaccurately identified for special education services, they may be subjected to inappropriate educational services, which can prevent them from reaching their full academic potential. The National Research Council, as cited by Raj (2016), suggests that the label required for a student to receive additional resources indicates substandard performance, and even though special education identification is meant to provide a student with access to supplemental resources, the label may also be harmful to the child, as it comes with lowered expectations by the teacher, peers, and the student himself. Raj further claims “the harm of being labeled and subsequently treated as a child with a disability can be

significant. It can equate to stigma, lowered educational opportunity, and increased contact with the juvenile justice system (Raj, 2016, p. 387).

Research is not available regarding the number of Marshallese students who may have been over-referred for special education, and this study will investigate the number of Marshallese special education students as compared to the total number of students identified for special education services in the district.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to examine the factors that impact the attendance of Marshallese students in NHS. The researcher works at NHS, the secondary school with the highest population of Marshallese students in the state, making the topic significant to me as an educator as well as contributing to the educational field at large.

### **Significance of the Study**

The intent of this study is to contribute to the education field by providing useful information regarding how to appropriately educate Marshallese students attending schools in Arkansas. The researcher will collect and analyze data regarding Marshallese students in an urban secondary school in Northwest Arkansas through surveys and interviews. The goal of the study is to deepen educators' understanding of the needs of Marshallese students and families attending schools in this area of the United States.

### **Definition of Terms**

Asian – a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 161)

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) – an education term used by the US Department of Education to define students enrolled in education programs who are either non-English proficient (NEP) or limited-English proficient (LEP). The term is also used to identify students from homes and communities where English is not the primary language of communication. (Gonzalez, Pagan, Wendell, & Love, 2011, p. xiii)

Compact of Free Association (COFA) – an agreement signed between the United States and the Republic of the Marshall Islands giving the United States full authority and responsibility for security and defense of the Marshall Islands. The Government of the Marshall Islands is obligated to refrain from taking actions that would be incompatible with these security and defense responsibilities. Eligible Marshallese citizens may work, live, and study in the United States without a visa, and serve in the US military (DOS, n.d., para. 2).

Child Study Team (CST) – a multidisciplinary group of school personnel who meet to identify the academic, behavioral, emotional and/or needs of a struggling student who has not shown significant progress with prior interventions (Austin Independent School District Learning Support Services [AISDLSSD], n.d.)

English Learner (EL) – a student who is unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English, often coming from non-English-speaking homes and backgrounds. These students who typically require specialized or modified instruction in both the English language and in their academic courses (<https://www.edglossary.org/english-language-learner/>)

English as a Second Language (ESL) – also known as English Language Development (ELD), a program of techniques, methodology, and special curriculum designed to teach

EL students explicitly about the English language, including the academic vocabulary needed to access content instruction, and to develop their English language proficiency in all four language domains (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing). ESL instruction is usually in English with little use of the EL students' primary language(s). (United States Department of Justice and United States Department of Education USDOJ/USDOE], 2015)

English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) – a program for teaching English to individuals who do not have English as their first language

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – a law that makes available a free, appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children.

The IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. (United States Department of Education [USDOE], n.d.)

Individualized Education Program (IEP) – a written document that is developed for each eligible child with a disability addressing current level of performance, annual goals, special education and related services, participation with nondisabled students, participation in state and district-wide tests, dates and places, measuring progress, and transition service needs (when age appropriate) (United States Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services [OSERS], 2000)

L<sub>1</sub> – an individual's native or primary language

L<sub>2</sub> – an individual's second language

Language Minority Student (LMS) – a student who speaks a language other than English, whether or not the student also speaks English. The student may have grown up, or lived in, an environment where a non-English language was present and influential (whether they were born in the United States or any of its jurisdictions, or because they were born and raised in a different country). (Encyclopedia of Education, n.d.)

Marshallese – a native or inhabitant of the Marshall Islands

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (NHPI) – a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 161)

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) – the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.)

Northwest Arkansas High School (NHS) – pseudonym for the high school used in this study

Northwest Arkansas Public Schools (NPS) – pseudonym for the school district used in this study

Office of Civil Rights (OCR) – The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces federal civil rights laws, conscience and religious freedom laws, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy, Security, and Breach Notification Rules, and the Patient Safety Act and Rule (United States Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], n.d.)

PHLOTE – Primary Home Language Other Than English



Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) – The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is a nation of about 60,000 people living on 29 coral atolls and five low-lying islands in the central Pacific, mid-way between Hawaii and Australia. The RMI adopted its Constitution in 1979 and signed the Compact of Free Association with the United States in 1986. (Embassy of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to the United States of America, n.d.)

Response to Intervention (RTI) – a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom. Struggling learners are provided with interventions at increasing levels of intensity to accelerate their rate of learning. These services may be provided by a variety of personnel, including general education teachers, special educators, and specialists. Progress is closely monitored to assess both the learning rate and level of performance of individual students. Educational decisions about the intensity and duration of interventions are based on individual student response to instruction. RTI is designed for use when making decisions in both general education and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction and intervention guided by child outcome data. (RTI Action Network, n.d.)

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of the Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to research possible factors that impact the attendance of Marshallese students in US schools. The topic is significant due to its potential impact on the academic achievement among Marshallese students attending Northwest Arkansas High School (NHS). The Marshallese race/ethnicity is not well-known across the United States, and federal reporting combines it with other students of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI) heritage, but a large population of Marshallese students attend NHS.

A major source for this review is *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Group 2017 (Status and Trends)*, a report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). This report examines the educational progress of US students by analyzing differences in educational participation and attainment of students in the racial/ethnic groups of White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian/ Alaska Native, and Two or more races (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 1). In *Higher Education: Gaps in Access and Persistence Study* (2012), Ross et al. argues that racial/ethnic groups in the United States experience disparate levels of educational participation and attainment of achievement measures. Citing Reardon and Portilla, Musu-Gillette et al. (2017) acknowledge school readiness gaps narrowed between 1998 and 2010, but they note progress was uneven among racial/ethnic groups. The success of all students is critical, yet it does not occur equally across demographics, making the measurement of population growth, diversity, and

achievement critical for anticipating the tools necessary for schools to meet the needs of a diversifying student population (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017).

*Status and Trends* analyzes recent data collected on demographics, student achievement, student behaviors and persistence, postsecondary education, and outcomes among preprimary, elementary, and secondary education to highlight targeted areas of improvement necessary to better serve segments of the student population who may be underserved (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). National information specific to Marshallese is difficult to obtain, but it can also be challenging to obtain accurate information for the broader group of NHPI students. For the *Status and Trends* report, certain indicators provide details for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, while other indicators include Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island in the Asian racial/ethnic category. In 2003, NCES expanded race/ethnicity questions to include information on people of two or more races, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander data was collected separately from Asian data. For the *Status and Trends* report, individuals self-report the race/ethnicity with which they identify, but Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders are not specifically included in all indicators. The report defines Asian as a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders are defined as a “person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands, and the shortened form used is Pacific Islander” (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017).

For the purpose of reporting the data analyzed, Musu-Gillette et al. selected 28 indicators of educational performance by which to compare students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and the 28 indicators were divided into six categories, including Demographics, Education Participation, Achievement, Student Behaviors and Persistence, Postsecondary Education, and Outcomes of Education. Due to relatively small populations of American Indian/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander, limited data exists specifically for NHPI students, resulting in measurement difficulties when conducting statistical analyses, and these small sample sizes diminish the reliability of the results. Musu-Gillette et al. (2017) report that the data for NHPI students tend to have higher standard errors than data for other populations which results in differences that appear significant even when they are not statistically significant, and these statistics are excluded in the NCES report.

Further complicating educational research of NHPI students is the inclusion of Asian students who are not of NHPI origin in the published data. When the data for Asian and Pacific Islander students are combined into one category, the combined category masks significant variances between subgroups (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 4). The 1997 “Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity” released by the US Office of Management and Budget (OMB) reported that the organization, which conducts US census efforts, elected to follow the Interagency Committee for the Review of the Racial and Ethnic Standards’ recommendation to modify its practice of combining Asian and Pacific Islanders and create two distinct categories, “Asian” and “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” (p. 58782). The two categories remain combined in some data sources, yet 96% of all Asian/ Pacific Islander

5- to 24-year-olds are Asian, not Pacific Islander; therefore, the Asian/Pacific Islander combined category predominately represents the Asian population, not Pacific Islanders (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 4). Certain data sources began collected separate data for the two subgroups in 2000, as prescribed by the OMB, and when the two subgroups are separated, significant gaps appear. The majority of data reviewed during this literature review suggest a discrepancy in student achievement between NHPI students and their non-NHPI Asian peers on indicators of educational performance.

Data collected by Musu-Gillette et al. (2017) reports that from 2000 to 2016, the percentage of school-age children who were White and Black decreased while the percentage of school-age children from other racial/ ethnic groups increased. In this time period, the percentage of Asian students grew slightly from 3% to 5%, and the percentage of Pacific Islanders students remained at less than 1% during this time (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 10). The traditional college-age population of 18- to 24-year-olds increased, and the percentage of Whites in this age group decreased while the population percentages of other races/ethnicities increased. The percentage of college-age Asians grew from 4% to 6%, while the percentage of college-age Pacific Islanders remained less than 1%, even with an increase since 2000 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 11). Musu-Gillette et al. (2017) also reported that during that same time, the overall US Asian population increased by 72%, climbing from 10.5 to 18.0 million, while the Pacific Islander population increased by 55%, with a climb from 370,000 to 572,000 (p. 6). The percentage of Asians in the total population increased from 4% to 6%, while the percentage of Pacific Islanders remained below less than 0.5% (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 9). There is a significant difference between the amount of individuals residing

in the US from Asian and from Pacific Islander populations, and lumping these two groups together provides dangerously misleading information.

One indicator in the *Status and Trends* report examines the relationship between absenteeism and achievement. Musu-Gillette et al. (2017) identify a strong relationship between absenteeism and achievement, stating students with high rates of absenteeism have a higher likelihood of suffering academic difficulties, making them less likely to complete school if no intervention takes place. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) gathers information regarding student performance in the areas of mathematics and reading in grades four, eight, and 12 across the United States. In order to analyze the relationship between absenteeism and achievement, NAEP collected data from eighth grade students, focusing on students who reported zero absences as well as those reporting over ten absences in the last month of school prior to taking the assessment. NAEP then disaggregated the data by race/ethnicity and analyzed differences in the achievement of eighth grade students on reading and mathematics portions of the NAEP by the number of absences and race/ethnicity. This indicator revealed a significant discrepancy between the data of Asian and NHPI students. In 2015, the percentage of Asian eighth grade students who reported that they had zero absences from school in the last month was 65%, while the percentage of NHPI students was only 47% (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 54). Had these two categories been averaged together, the much lower perfect attendance percentage for the NHPI students would have been masked by the much higher percentage for Asian students. The percentage of NHPI students reporting zero absences was three points higher than those for White students; however, 5% of NHPI students reported missing more than ten days

in the last month, while only 1% of White and Asian students reported this level of absences (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 54). While a higher percentage of NHPI students reported zero absences than their White peers (gap of 3), a higher percentage of NHPI students than their White or Asian peers (gap of 5) also reported having more than ten absences (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 54). NAEP data identified correlation between students with fewer absences achieving higher scores than their peers with more absences on the NAEP 2015 mathematics assessment. Reporting standards were not met for NHPI students with more than ten absences on the reading assessment, but a comparison can be made between those missing zero days, 1-2 days, 3-4 days, and 5-10 days.

NAEP data revealed that eighth-grade White, Black, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander students who self-reported zero absences from school in the last month had higher reading scale scores than eighth-grade students who had any other number of absences; however, even with NHPI students had zero absences, they still scored 13 points lower than White students and 19 points lower than Asian students with zero absences (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 55-56). With 1-2 absences, NHPI students scored 26 points lower than their White peers and 31 points lower than their Asian peers with the same absences; when the NHPI students missed 3-4 days, they were outscored by their White and Asian peers by 16 and 18 points, respectively (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 55-56). White students with 5-10 absences outscored NHPIs by 26 points, and Asian students with the same absences outscored NHPI students by 35 points (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 55-56). These data suggest that higher attendance rates lead to higher achievement on standardized measurements of reading and mathematics.

Another area in which differences between Asian and NHPI students arise is living arrangements. Musu-Gillette et al. (2017) examined the living arrangements and poverty status of children under the age of 18, revealing a lower percentage of NHPI children (65%) than of Asian children (82%) who lived with married parents (p.6). In 2014, 25% of NHPI children lived with a female parent with no spouse present, more than double the percentage for Asian children, and the percentage of children living with a male parent with no spouse present was lower for Asian children (5%) than any other racial/ethnic group (NCES, 2017, p. 6-16). Despite the fact that only 65% of NHPI children live in a home with married parents, Marshallese families have an average household size of 5.7, compared to an average of 3.4 for the combined NHPI community (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 20). In the Fayetteville MSA, the average Marshallese American household included 6.0 individuals, significantly higher than the regional average of 2.6. This number was the highest of all racial/ethnic groups (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 58).

Poverty levels also vary greatly between Asian and NHPI students. Musu-Gillette et al. (2017) reported that in 2014, approximately 21% of all US children under age 18 were living in poverty, which is significant because research identifies a correlation between early childhood poverty and lower-than-average academic performance, beginning in kindergarten and extending through high school, leading to lower-than-average rates of school completion (p. 20-24). The report further revealed that in 2014, 27% of NHPI children in the US were living in poverty, which is more than double the number of Asian students (12%) living in poverty (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 24). From 2007 to 2011, the number of NHPI living in poverty increased 56%, this highest of any racial/ethnic group, and of the NHPI group, Marshallese, Tongan, Samoan, and



Palauan Americans had higher-than-average poverty rates and lower per capita incomes than any other racial/ethnic (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 6). Of all NHPI groups, Marshallese Americans experience the greater challenges than any other racial/ethnic group across multiple measures of income. Nationally, 73% percent of Marshallese Americans are low-income, 49% live in poverty, and their per capita income of \$7,097 is the lowest of all racial/ethnic groups (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 17). In the Fayetteville MSA, those numbers are even more alarming. Seventy-seven percent of Marshallese Americans in the Fayetteville MSA are low-income, and 52% live in poverty, much higher than the regional average 37% and 15% respectively (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 58). These numbers are even worse among the youth. Sixty-four percent of Marshallese American children in the Fayetteville MSA live in poverty, over three times higher than the regional average of 20% (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 58).

Other indicators in Musu-Gillette et al.'s 2017 *Status and Trends* report delved into special demographics for students who received additional support in order to achieve academic success. The seventh indicator for the report was English Language learners (ELs). In 2014, approximately 4.7 million public school students participated in programs for ELs, and while Hispanic students made up the majority of the group, Asian students comprised the second largest group, with an approximate total of 496,400 participants (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 38). NHPI students constituted less than 1% (25,600 students) of the total EL program participants.

Another indicator, Students with Disabilities, also referred to a special student population who may require additional support to achieve optimal academic success. In 2013-14, about 6.5 million students ages 3-21, about 13% of the total population, were

served for disabilities that qualify under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and NHPI and Asian student participants both fell below the average, at 11% and 6%, respectively (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 40). The percentage of students served for disability types vary by race and ethnicity. Data detailing the distribution by category revealed that a significantly higher number of NHPI students (42%) received services for a specific learning disability than Asian students (22%); conversely, a higher percentage of Asian students (27%) received services for a speech or language impairment, while NHPI students only constituted 14% of the population (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 41). Another area of significant discrepancies between Asian and NHPI students was the category of autism. A higher percentage of Asian students (19%) received services under the category of autism than any other race/ethnicity, with NHPI at only 7% (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 41).

Musu-Gillette et al.'s 2017 *Status and Trends* report further reveals data regarding the reason that students ages 14-21 exited school, including graduating with a regular diploma, an alternative certification, and dropping out of school. Seventy percent of Asian students and 66% of NHPI students with disabilities exit with a regular high school diploma, and sixteen percent of Asian and 10% of NHPI students with disabilities receive an alternative certification (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 42). Twenty-one percent of NHPI students with disabilities drop out of high school, while only 9% of Asian students drop out, the lowest of any race/ethnicity (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 42).

Indicators from national standardized assessments in the areas of reading and mathematics also highlighted discrepancies between NHPI students and their peers. In 2015, White fourth grade students taking the reading portion of the National Assessment

of Educational Progress (NAEP) scored 17 points higher than NHPI students, while Asian students scored nine points higher than White students; in the same year, White eighth grade students taking the reading portion of the NAEP scored 19 points higher than NHPI students, while Asian students scored seven points higher than White students (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 46). Reporting levels were not met for 12<sup>th</sup> grade in 2015, but 2013 data revealed that 12<sup>th</sup> grade White students scored eight points higher than NHPI students and one point higher than Asian students on the reading portion of the NAEP (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 48). In all three grade levels, NHPI students underperformed their White and Asian peers.

2015 NAEP results for mathematics revealed that fourth grade White students scored 17 points higher than NHPI students, but Asian students scored 11 points higher than White students (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 51). For eighth grade students taking the mathematics portion of the NAEP, White students scored 16 points higher than NHPI students, but Asian students scored 15 points higher than White students (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 50). Results were similar for 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. As with the reading assessment, data was not available for 2015, but 2013 mathematics results show that White students scored 11 points higher than NHPI students, but Asian students scored 12 points higher than White students (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 52).

An additional indicator analyzed various levels of educational attainment, which is significant because it impacts the median income of adults. Adults with higher levels of education earned higher median incomes while facing lower unemployment rates than their less educated peers (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 126). Indicator 16 analyzed high school status dropout rates for 16-24 year olds, which is defined as “no longer attending

school (public or private) and do not have a high school level of educational attainment” (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 78). Data from 2014 suggests that the 3% status dropout rate for Asian 16- to 24-year-olds was lower than that of all other groups measured; however, the rate for NHPI (10%) was higher than the rates for students of any other race/ethnicity (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 79).

In addition to racial/ethnic differences, status dropout rates varied between US- and foreign-born individuals ages 16-24 living in the United States. In 2014, the status dropout rates for Hispanic, Asian, and NHPI 16- to 24-year-olds born in the United States were lower than their peers who were born outside of the US. This gap was 16 percentage points higher for NHPI born outside the US than for those born in the US (23% vs. 7%) but only two percentage points for Asians (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 80). Approximately 62% of Marshallese living in the Fayetteville MSA were foreign born, while the average in the area is only 10% (EPIC/AAAJ, 2014, p. 57). In NPS schools, 59.1% of students in Grades 8-12 who identify Marshallese as their home language are foreign-born, and 57.4% of the Marshallese students at NHS are foreign-born. High school students who enroll in NPS in their first year in the US are able to attend a Language Academy at the high school across town, making the NHS percentage lower than it would be otherwise.

The researcher has observed disparities in her own school as well as those found in *Status and Trends*. It is each school’s duty to ensure that every student, including Pacific Islander English Learners (ELs), can *meaningfully participate in educational programs and services*, regardless of *race, color, or national origin* (Office for Civil Rights [OCR], 2015). From 2006 to 2015, the number of ELs in the State of Arkansas

has risen 85%, (Bureau of Legislative Research [BLR], 2015). Due to cultural and linguistic differences, ELs face academic challenges in classrooms across the United States. When ELs, who already struggle to learn content presented in a language they do not fully understand, have a non-Western culture that is vastly different from the predominant culture of the school, they experience additional impediments to their learning.

### **Schooling in the Marshall Islands**

In addition to language differences, some students arriving to NHS from the Marshall Islands may struggle due to deficiencies in their prior schooling. While this does not characterize all students from the Marshall Islands, some students may experience challenges based on their educational background. These deficiencies may be due to a lack of education or the quality of education received.

**Marshallese educational system.** A 2018 report from the Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC), an organization that provides global education data, states that the academic year in the Marshall Islands runs from August to July, and the official age at which students should enter primary school is six (p. 1). A 2015 report from the World Education Forum (WEF) describes the RMI educational system and states that the Marshall Islands school system requires 200 school days with 1,750 minutes of instruction each week in grades 1-3 and 1,800 minutes in grades 4-8 (p. 6). In addition to mandatory core classes, educators must provide weekly instruction for elective classes, including career education, health and population, physical education, and art/music. Curriculum at the primary and secondary levels centers on English Language Arts, Marshallese Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies/Marshallese Studies. The

language of instruction in grades K-3 is Marshallese except for English Language Arts classes, but beginning in grade 4, the official language of instruction is reversed, and students receive instruction primarily in English—with the exception of Marshallese Language Arts classes. Despite this regulation, many educators continue using Marshallese, as the language of instruction, especially when they are weak in English themselves. Many students arriving in NHS report being “fluent” in Marshallese, but many of them have weak literacy skills in their L<sub>1</sub>, reducing the opportunity for a transfer of skills from L<sub>1</sub> to L<sub>2</sub>. Additionally, although children attending schools in RMI learn English beginning in Kindergarten, students entering college demonstrate poor literacy skills in English. The College of Marshall Islands conducts language assessments to determine incoming students’ literacy levels, and the vast majority of the students score poorly, resulting in their placement in the lower developmental English class (UNESCO, 2015, p. 31).

WEF (2015) reports that students spend six years in primary, four in lower secondary, and two in upper secondary schools. In 2018, the Marshall Islands had 13,000 students enrolled in primary and secondary schools, with 59% (8,000) enrolled in primary schools; this number is up from 2015, when the Marshallese educational system served “nearly 12,000 primary school students (9,588 public and 2,063 private) in 93 schools and nearly 3,000 secondary students (2,158 public and 739 private) in 17 schools” (WEF, 2015, p. 4-5).

The majority of schools in RMI are divided into primary schools with grades 1-8 and secondary schools with grades 9-12. A 2017 report from the Marshall Islands Public School System (MIPSS) states that RMI provides “95 public and private elementary

schools and 17 public and private secondary schools spread out over 23 atolls and islands,” which makes data collection on the educational system difficult (p. 2).

Education in RMI is compulsory for children ages 5-18, and public schools are free; private schools charge a fee for tuition. The educational system in RMI is based on the American model of education, consisting of early childhood education, elementary, high school, and college/university. MIPSS (2017) reports that some private schools offer early childhood education for children ages 3-4, but no public early childhood services are offered. There are 80 public and 15 private elementary schools, six public and 11 private high schools, and two college level institutions (p. 6).

Schools in RMI are evaluated for accreditation and assigned a level, typically one through four. According to MIPPS (2017), a Level 1 school partially meets the accreditation standard, a 2 substantially complies, a 3 complies with the accreditation standards, and a 4 exceeds the accreditation standards (MIPPS, 2017, p. 7). MIPPS (2017) reports that sixty RMI schools are assigned a Level 2, 35 a Level 3, and one a Level 4 (p. 7-10). Six schools received an international WASC rating from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, which is a major accrediting agency in the United States. Schools with four or more Level 1 ratings are classified as Special Measure. Four schools received a Special Measure rating, which means that the school that has not complied with Public School System (PSS) accreditation standards and requirements. These schools have not implemented a plan or program to address identified defects or shortcomings within an established time period. Five schools are identified as SDA, which means the school is accredited through the Seventh-day Adventist accreditation process. One school, RongRong Protestant Elementary School, was rated as “not

chartered,” and it is unclear what this designation means. This school has two teachers and 25 students.

School size ranged from 14 students in Melang Elementary School to 1,091 students at Marshall Islands High School. The number of teachers at each school ranged from two in multiple schools to 77 at Marshall Islands High School. While almost 70% of all students are enrolled in schools in Majuro and on Kwajalein Atoll, the outer islands have more schools and teachers due to the number of smaller islands and atolls that have low populations and multi-grade schools. *Table 2. 1* represents the allotment of schools and teachers when compared to the number of students enrolled.

Table 2.1

<i>Student Enrollment and Teacher Count by Location 2016-17</i>						
<i>Location</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>% of Students</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>% of Teachers</i>	<i>S/T Ratio</i>
Urban (Majuro/Kwajalein)	45	10540	69.8%	648	59.7%	16:1
Outer Islands	67	4564	30.2%	437	40.3%	10:1
Total	112	15104	100.0%	1085	100.0%	14:1

Note: Reprinted from Marshall Islands Public School Systems (MIPSS, 2017, p. 12)

MIPPS provided no distribution data regarding secondary schools but reported that elementary school enrollment in urban areas, like Majuro and Kwajalein Atoll, rose from 2013-2017 while enrollment in the outer islands has declined. MIPPS attributes this trend to people migrating to urban areas in pursuit of economic opportunities. *Table 2.2* represents elementary enrollment trends by location.



Table 2.2

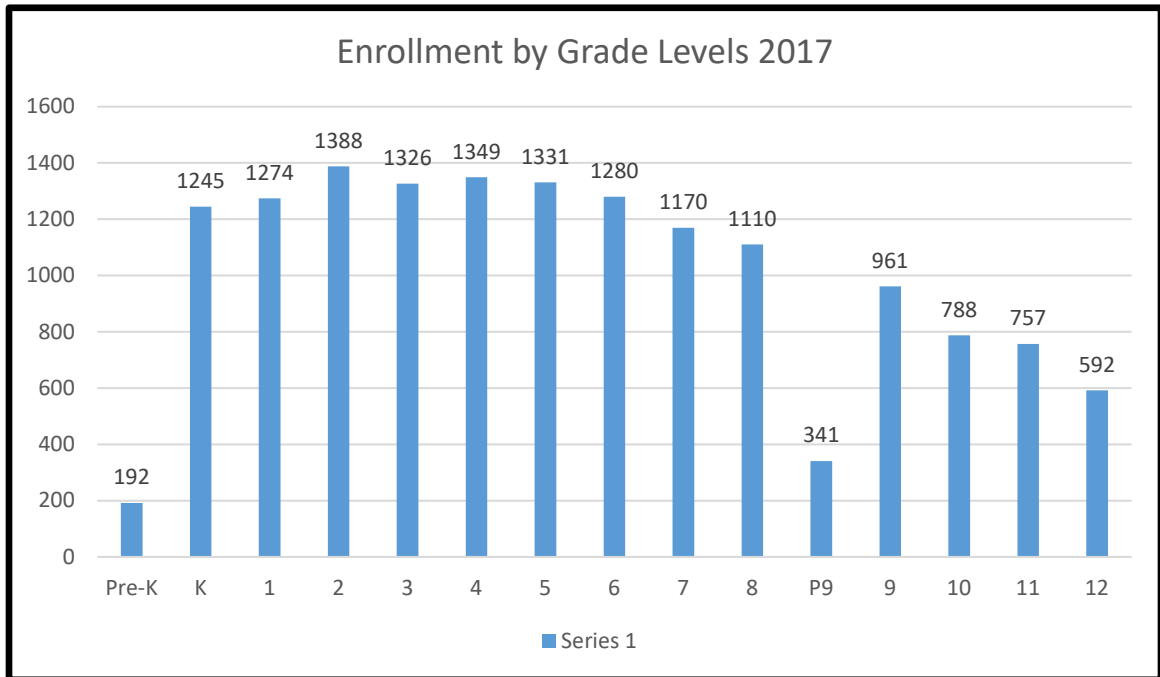
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Urban (Majuro/Kwaj)	7,340	7,428	8,213	8,033	7,823
Outer Islands	4,336	4,248	4,259	3,878	3,915
Total	11,676	11,676	12,472	11,911	11,738
Urban (Majuro/Kwaj)	63%	64%	66%	67%	67%
Outer Islands	37%	36%	34%	33%	33%

Note: Reprinted from Marshall Islands Public School Systems (MIPSS, 2017, p. 13)

**Lack of education.** Even though the distribution of elementary school enrollment has changed, enrollment trends show the number of elementary age children enrolled in schools has remained relatively consistent. Data from secondary schools tell another story. While school is compulsory in the Marshall Islands for all children from age 5-18, many students arrive to NHS, which begins in grade 10, having a gap in education after the seventh or eighth grade. According to the Pacific Education for All 2015 Review, over 65% youth aged 14–25 are neither enrolled in some form of formal education nor employed (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UNESCO Apia Office [UNESCO], 2015, p. 25). The review further found that approximately two-thirds of youth in the RMI are estimated to be out-of-work, a major source of social tension. UNESCO indicates that unemployment frequently triggers low self-esteem, making youth susceptible to substance abuse and violence (UNESCO, 2015, p. 25).

In 2017, 1,245 students were enrolled in Kindergarten in RMI, with enrollment remaining relatively steady through elementary grades, but enrollment numbers began declining after Grade 6. Grade 7 had an enrollment of 1,170, with a steady decline to Grade 12, with only 592 students. A 2011 census conducted by the Marshall Islands found that “28.6% of people aged 25 or older had started but not completed high school,”

which is an increase since the late 1990s (21.6%) (RMI Ministry of Foreign Affairs [RMI MFA], 2014, p. 12). *Figure 2.1* illustrates the enrollment by grade level in the Marshall Islands in 2017.



*Figure 2.1.* 2017 enrollment by grade level. (MIPSS, 2017, p. 14)

The age and grade of enrollment varies significantly from what typical in the United States, with Kindergarten students in the Marshall Islands ranging from ages 3-8, first grade from ages 4-12, and tenth grade students ranging from ages 13-23. *Table 2.3* shows enrollment numbers and the distribution of students in Pre-K through Grade 12.

Table 2.3

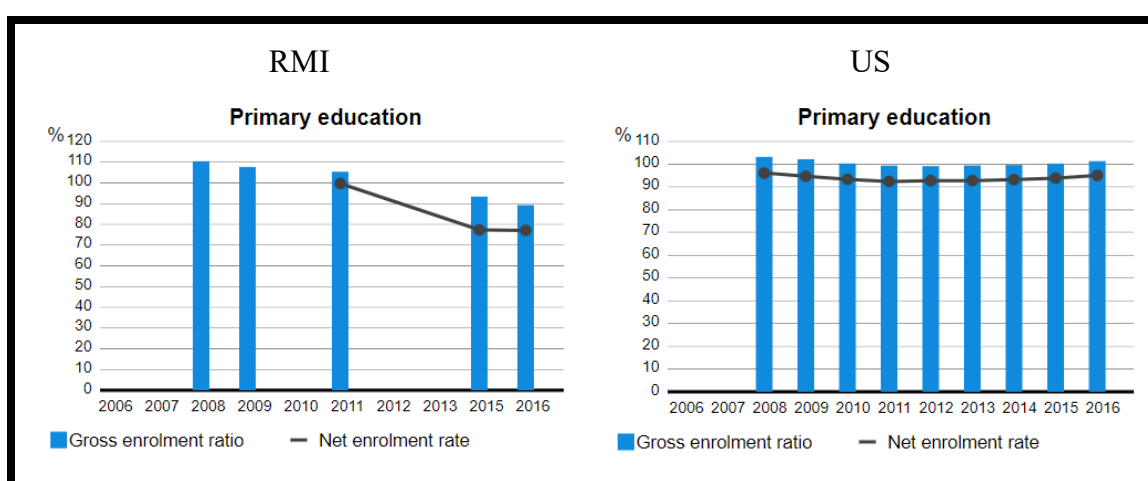
*Student distribution by grade level and age*

Age	Pre-K	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	P9	9	10	11	12	Gtot
All	192	1245	1274	1388	1326	1349	1331	1280	1170	1110	341	961	788	757	592	15104
3	24	1														25
4	135	74	4													213
5	30	1003	117	3												1153
6		128	852	105	6	2			1							1094
7		12	230	860	90	4		1		2					1	1200
8		4	40	288	767	102	3	6	2							1212
9			6	73	316	719	101	4	3	1		1				1244
10			2	28	80	348	690	104	7	1						1270
11			1	4	33	110	349	620	116	4		1				1254
12			1	1	3	33	137	303	509	112	1	1				1121
13					6	10	39	158	341	524	15	46	2			1141
14					1	1	6	55	143	301	122	307	54	1		991
15		1				1	2	8	45	125	61	308	270	47	4	872
16							2	4	11	44	64	195	232	290	51	893
17									2	7	43	48	151	240	198	689
18									1	1	18	14	45	116	208	403
19											5	4	15	33	91	148
20											3	0	4	10	23	40
21														3	9	12
23													1			1
NA	3	15	11	16	11	13	7	8	5	4	3	13	8	9	4	128

Note: Reprinted from Marshall Islands Public School Systems (MIPSS, 2017, p. 14)

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute of Statistics reports that in 2016, 577 female adolescents and 633 male adolescents were not attending school (2016). Two measures of enrollment, gross enrollment ration and net enrollment rate, are used by UNESCO to evaluate the percentage of school-aged children who are enrolled in schools. UNESCO defines Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) as the number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education. The GER includes over-aged and under-aged students who were early or late entrants, as well as students who were retained, resulting in a percentage that may exceed 100. UNESCO defines Net Enrollment Rate

(NER) as the total number of students in the theoretical age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group. The NER is derived by taking the number of children enrolled in school who belong to the age group that officially corresponds to that age of schooling, divided by the total population of the same age group. *Figure 2.2* illustrates the net and gross enrollment numbers for primary education students in the Marshall Islands and the United States from 2006-2016.



*Figure 2.2.* RMI and US primary education gross and net enrollment.

In 2008, the GER for primary education in the Marshall Islands was 110.45%, and in 2016, the GER had declined to 89.29%. In the United States, the 2008 GER for primary education was 103.23%, and the 2016 GER declined slightly to 101.36%. The NER for the Marshall Islands in 2008 is unavailable, but for the NER for 2016 was 77.08%. This indicates that almost 23% of primary school-aged children in the Marshall Islands were not in school. In the United States, the 2008 NER for primary children was 96.13%, and the 2016 NER was 95.07%, almost 18% higher than that of the Marshall Islands. *Figure 2.3* illustrates the net and gross enrollment numbers for secondary education students in the Marshall Islands and the United States from 2006-2016.

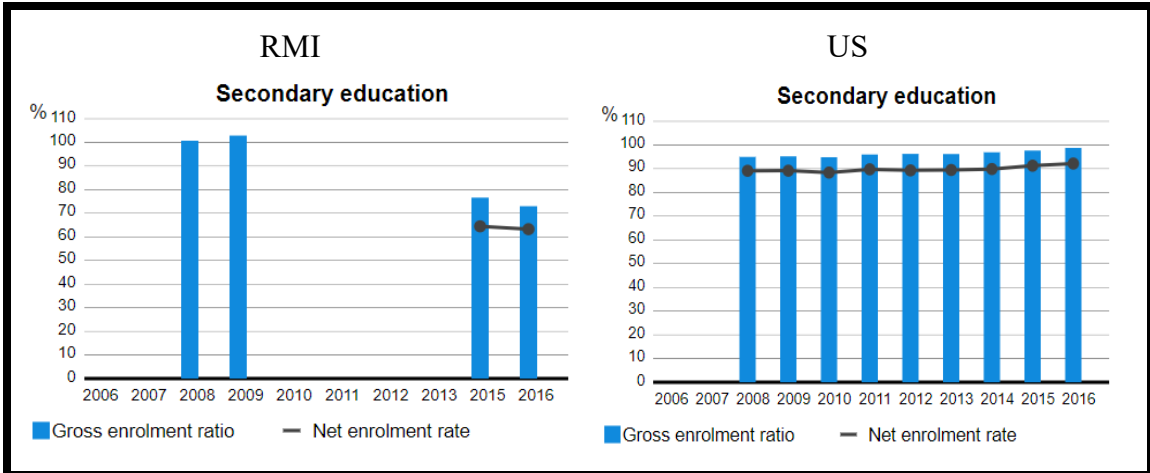


Figure 2.3. RMI and US secondary education gross and net enrollment.

In 2008, the GER, which may include students who are older or younger than the age cohort, for secondary education in the Marshall Islands was 100.71%. Data from 2016 reported a 90.87% primary to secondary transition rate, but in 2016, the GER for secondary education was only 72.99%, a decrease of 27.72% (UNESCO, 2016). In 2008, the GER for secondary education in the United States was 94.98%, and the number increased to 98.77% in 2016. The NER for secondary education in the Marshall Islands was unavailable in 2008, but the 2016 number was 63.26%. The 2008 NER for secondary education in the United States was 89.13%, with an increase to 92.18% in 2016. These numbers cause concern for the educational development of Marshallese students who immigrate to the United States and attend Northwest Public Schools.

MIPPS (2017) data revealed a significant drop-off rate at the secondary level. In 2017, the elementary gross enrollment rate was 86%, while the secondary rate was only 48%. The net enrollment rates were lower for both age groups, at 79% for elementary and 45% for secondary in 2017. MIPPS also collected data on dropout rates for both age groups, revealing a 23% dropout rate for elementary students and a 42% dropout rate at

the secondary level. Only 45% of students completed 12<sup>th</sup> grade in 2017 with their four-year cohort, down from 67% in 2014.

**Academic achievement in the Marshall Islands.** Even for those who maintained enrollment in school, the quality of education may constitute a significant challenge. Jung (2016) reports that the Marshallese educational system is “one of the most poorly performing in the Pacific” (para. 23). A 2005 draft for the RMI’s Ministry of Education National Action Plan stated that the quality of education in the RMI is poor, making it an area of significant concern. The Pacific Islands Language and Literacy Test (PILL), a standardized test used across the Pacific Islands, identifies approximately 70% of fourth grade students in the Marshall Islands as “at-risk,” signifying that this segment of the population performs below the standard in basic numeracy and English as well as Marshallese literacy and comprehension. (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2005)

Just as Arkansas schools are required to conduct wide-scale standardized assessments, student achievement of core content standards is measured by the Marshall Islands Standards Assessment Test (MISAT) series (MIPPS, 2017). The exam was initially administered to all students in grades 3, 6, and 8, later expanding to include grades 10 and 12. Students are evaluated to determine proficiency, and data is collected to report the percentage of students who score at the proficient level or above. Data from the 2012-2017 Grade 3 MISAT revealed a 12% gain in Math and slight growth in English Reading, Marshallese Reading, and Science (MIPSS, 2017, p. 23). *Table 2.4* illustrates Grade 3 MISAT scores from 2012 to 2017 in all four content areas.

Table 2.4

*Proficient and above scores on the Grade 3 MISAT from 2012 to 2017.*

3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Change from 2012
English Reading	20%	21%	19%	19%	25%	25%	5%
Marshallese Reading	32%	34%	33%	28%	33%	36%	4%
Math	29%	30%	28%	33%	37%	41%	12%
Science	27%	28%	30%	34%	29%	28%	1%

Note: Adapted from Marshall Islands Public School Systems (MIPSS, 2017, p. 23)

Data from the Grade 6 MISAT from 2012-17 shows a slight decline in proficiency for students in English Reading, Math, and Science, and proficiency in Marshallese Reading remained the same (MIPSS, 2017, p. 24). In 2017, only 16% of students were considered to be proficient or above in English Reading, 18% in Math, and 13% in Science. Proficiency in Marshallese Reading, at 36%, was much higher, but those skills do not appear to transfer to English reading skills since there is such a significant discrepancy in scores, which means that this area of strength may not benefit students attending US schools. *Table 2.5* illustrates Grade 6 MISAT scores from 2012 to 2017 in all four content areas.

Table 2.5

*Proficient and above scores on the Grade 6 MISAT from 2012 to 2017.*

6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Change from 2012
English Reading	19%	19%	18%	19%	19%	16%	-3%
Marshallese Reading	36%	33%	34%	32%	39%	36%	0%
Math	20%	19%	21%	21%	20%	18%	-2%
Science	11%	14%	15%	15%	15%	13%	2%

Note: Adapted from Marshall Islands Public School Systems (MIPSS, 2017, p. 24)

MISAT scores for Grade 8 were more promising, with an 8% increase in all subjects combined from 2012 to 2017. In 2012, 33% of students scored proficient or

above, with an increase to 41% in 2017. *Table 2.6* illustrates Grade 8 MISAT scores from 2012 to 2017 with all subjects combined.

Table 2.6

*Proficient and above scores on the Grade 8 MISAT from 2012 to 2017.*

8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Change from 2012
All Subjects Combined	33%	36%	39%	37%	41%	41%	8%

Note: Adapted from Marshall Islands Public School Systems (MIPSS, 2017, p. 25)

Scores declined significantly from Grade 8 to Grade 10, but information regarding cross-grade correlation was not available. Proficiency in English rose slightly from 22% in 2013 to 24% in 2017. Math proficiency scores declined slightly from 10% in 2013 to 8% in 2017. Scores for Grade 12 showed significant declines in both English and Math proficiency, dropping from 32% in English in 2013 to 19% in 2017 and from 39% in Math in 2013 to 13% in Math in 2017. *Table 2.7* illustrates Grade 10 and Grade 12 MISAT scores from 2013 to 2017 in English and Math.

Table 2.7

*Proficient and above scores on the Grade 10 and Grade 12 MISAT from 2012 to 2017.*

Grade and Subject	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Change from 2013
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade English	22%	23%	24%	25%	24%	2%
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math	10%	11%	12%	13%	8%	-2%
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade English	32%	29%	30%	31%	19%	-12%
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math	39%	32%	37%	25%	13%	-12%

Note: Adapted from Marshall Islands Public School Systems (MIPSS, 2017, p. 25-26)



Private schools score higher than public schools in all grade levels, with a significant discrepancy in Grade 8. *Table 2.8* illustrates 2017 public and private school proficiency scores in Grades 3, 6, 8, 10, and 12.

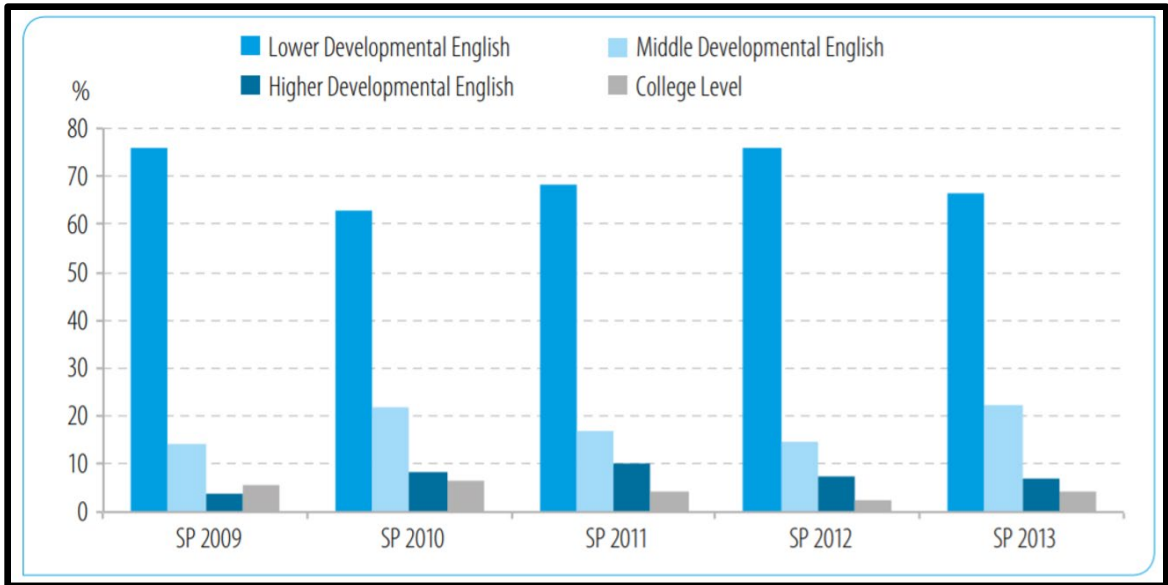
Table 2.8

*2017 MISAT proficiency by school type.*

Grade Level	Public	Private	All
Grade 3 Combined	31.2%	38.2%	32.6%
Grade 6 Combined	18.1%	26.9%	19.5%
Grade 8 All	26.4%	44.4%	29.7%
Grade 10 Combined	14.6%	17.5%	15.7%
Grade 12 Combined	17.0%	20.8%	18.0%

Note: Adapted from Marshall Islands Public School Systems (MIPSS, 2017, p. 27)

Research conducted by UNESCO’s Office in APPIA produced the Pacific Education for All 2015 Review to note progress made by the 15 Pacific member states toward goals established by Education for All (EFA) in 2000. As previously indicated, their research found that placement tests conducted by the College of Marshall Islands revealed low levels of literacy for incoming students, with the majority being placed in the lower developmental English class due to their poor reading and writing abilities in English.



*Figure 2.4.* English proficiency levels at the College of the Marshall Islands, 2009-2013. (UNESCO, 2015, p. 32)

**Teacher qualifications.** Another factor that may impact the academic preparation of Marshallese students entering US schools is teacher qualifications. Unlike in the United States, teacher in the Marshall Islands are not required to have a Bachelor’s Degree. Teachers have varying levels of education as well as a variety of certifications and training, which may correlate to the quality of education students receive in the Marshall Islands prior to entering US schools. *Table 2.9* illustrates the educational levels of teachers from the 2016-2017 academic year.

Table 2.9

*Highest level of education for teachers in the 2016-2017 academic year.*

Educational Level	2016-2017	
	Number	Percent
Elem. Diploma	0	0%
HS Diploma	120	14%
Certificate	125	15%
Associate's Degree	362	43%
Bachelor's Degree	223	27%
Master's Degree	10	1%

Note: Adapted from Marshall Islands Public School Systems (MIPSS, 2017, p. 21)

In 2012, the RMI Ministry of Education (MOE) was the largest employer in the Marshall Islands, with 1,121 employees, but the qualifications for teachers are lower than what is required of teachers in many other nations. For an individual to receive a Professional Certificate I, the base qualification for a teacher, one must have obtained an Associate's degree in Education or an Associate's degree in another field plus 16 credits in Education. Teacher candidates must maintain a 2.5 GPA and successfully complete teaching practicum. However, individuals possessing a high school diploma who have earned at least 30 college credits may qualify for a provisional certificates for up to three years as long as they continue progressing towards Professional Certification.

### **Special Education Identification**

In addition to a high dropout rate, students from the Marshall Islands may experience a lack of support services. Studies have not been conducted to determine if there is a correlation between students who dropout and students who have special needs. While 13% of US students qualify for Special Education services, only 3.8% (578) of

Marshallese students received services in 2017. Over 11,000 students were enrolled in elementary schools (Pre-K to Grade 8), only 552 students received Special Education services. Approximately 4,000 were enrolled in Grades 9-12, and 126 of those students were supported by Special Education.

While special education numbers appear to be lower than average in the Marshall Islands, one concern with regard to these culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students attending US schools is that they are misidentified as in need of special education services. Studies indicate that CLD students are inequitably represented in the number of students receiving special education services in the United States (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higuera, 2005; Guiberson, 2009; Macswan & Rolstad, 2006; Rinaldi & Samson, 2008). In 2014-15, the national average of US students receiving special education services was 13% of total public school enrollment; for ELs, the percentage was 13.8%. (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). While the difference may not appear statistically significant, this 0.8% variance in special education identification accounts for 36,472 English Learners. A previous study revealed that at one point, Latino ELs enrolled in San Diego USD were 70% more likely to be referred for special education than Latino students who were not ELs. ELs typically were identified for special education earlier in their schooling than non-ELs, often being placed in more restrictive settings” (Smith, 2014, para. 2). Percentages of ELs who are identified as in need of special education services vary considerably from state to state. California has the highest percentage (28.36%), followed by New Mexico (20.50%), Nevada, (16.70%), and Texas (15.45%. Virginia holds the lowest percentage at 0.35% ("Differentiating," 2014, para. 6).

Despite the concern of over-representation of English Learners in special education programs, other literature expresses ELs may be under-identified for special education eligibility. As with any other student, it is essential an EL with a disability is identified and provided appropriate services in a timely manner. Special Education departments in many schools are hesitant to evaluate recent arrival ELs for special education eligibility due to a concern students have not had enough time to develop adequate English language skills for an evaluation to be valid. While English language development should be considered when determining eligibility, it should never be an impediment to proper identification.

While misidentification has historically skewed toward over-identification, this trend has shifted. In recent years, litigation and civil rights complaints have resulted in the under-identification or delayed identification of ELs with legitimate special education needs (Maxwell & Shah, 2012). This trend is equally concerning, as students are denied a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). A 2003 United States Department of Education (USDOE) study revealed districts with less than 99 ELs tend to over-identify for special education while districts with larger EL populations are more likely to under-identify ELs for special education services. Nationally, data suggests that in some cases, under-identification may be a greater concern than over-identification. In a 2009-10 study reported by the NCES, ELs comprised 9.7% of students enrolled in public schools, yet they represent only 8.3% of public school students served under the IDEA (Maxwell & Shah, 2012). If an EL has an undiagnosed learning disability, he receives inadequate services to support his learning deficits, causing him to fall further and further behind. By delaying an evaluation for special education eligibility, schools violate the Individuals

with Disabilities Education Act's (IDEA) child find policies that mandate that a "free appropriate public education is available to all children with disabilities residing in the State between the ages of 3 and 21" (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). This law establishes the concept of "child find," which mandates that all children with disabilities residing in the state who require special education and related services to access their education are identified, located, and evaluated. Child find regulations include "[c]hildren who are suspected of being a child with a disability under §300.8 and in need of special education, even though they are advancing from grade to grade," (IDEA, 2004).

The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems provides data tables for each state that report risk ratios for each ethnic group in comparison to the subtotal of all other ethnicities, with ratios less than 1.0 indicating that a group is less likely to be identified as having disabilities. While studies report national over-representation for ELs, 13 states have risk ratios less than 0.70 for Latino students; in fact, the lowest risk ratio for Latinos is 0.51, which signifies that Latino students are half as likely as students of other ethnicities to be identified for special education programming (Watkins, 2009, p. 14).

Schools do not want to over-refer ELs to Special Education; however, if a student has a disability and does not receive appropriate educational support services, students are denied their right to a Free Appropriate Public Education that meets their educational needs (IDEA, 2004).

### **Complicating Factors.**

***Second language acquisition.*** The appropriate identification of English Learners for special education services is a complex due to a number of issues. One of the primary issues is that “the characteristics of second language learning can easily be misinterpreted as signs of a learning disability” (Stein, 2011, p. 35) by educational leaders, classroom teachers, and psychological evaluators. The State of Washington’s Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OPSI) reports that when “no accommodations are made to a child's lack of proficiency in the language of the EC [early childhood] setting, children are left without means of understanding what is being said or expressing what they need to say. Their performance then becomes similar to that of children with disabilities” (State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [OPSI], 2009, p. 4). Due to apparent developmental similarities, school personnel who do not understand the second language acquisition process may assume that a student’s lack of progress or poor performance on assessments is the result of a language disability rather than a language difference.

***Cultural and linguistic bias.*** Another contributing factor is psychoeducational evaluations present cultural and linguistic bias (Stein, 2011, p. 35). The assessments themselves can utilize language structures and vocabulary that are unfamiliar to the student, resulting in poor performance due to language difference rather than disability. Additionally, the evaluations are normed for students of a certain age who have had consistent schooling in a US public school system, disregarding environmental factors that may influence a student’s performance (Kraemer, Carrizo, & Montelongo, n.d.). A student who has experienced trauma, poor health, poor attendance, unfamiliarity with the English language, environmental and economic issues, cultural differences, and lack of

appropriate instruction, including interrupted schooling, may be behind due to factors other than disability (Archerd, 2015). When an EL is referred for special education evaluation, the inherent cultural and linguistic bias in the assessments may result in poor performance based on environmental factors other than a disability, and the student may incorrectly be deemed eligible for services.

***Misguided Educators.*** In schools with short-term, concentrated English language support, concerned educators may view special education services as a way to continue to provide a high level of support for ELs who no longer qualify for intensive English language development support. In schools without such language support programs, educators may view the special education environment as the only way to provide a high level of support with low teacher-to-student ratios. Special education students often benefit from small group and/or individual attention, which may appear to the educator as a means of continuing to provide intensive instruction to ELs; however, if a student does not have a disability, this practice could negatively impact the student by segregating her from general education classes with a more challenging curriculum (Stein, 2011). Students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds have special instructional needs, but educators must not confuse these learning differences with a disability (Cloud, 1988, p. 4).

**Pre-Referral Process.** According to research by the OPSI (2009), one of the most common reasons for referrals to special education has been a lack of English proficiency. While it is imperative that all English Learners who face a disability receive appropriate services, it is essential that students are not incorrectly identified to receive special education services. The OPSI (2009) states that when a child has the cognitive



abilities and age appropriate skillset, special education evaluation is inappropriate. In these instances, conducting a full interdisciplinary assessment and developing special education programming for the student rather than providing appropriate linguistic support is wasteful of the state's financial and human resources as well as potentially detrimental to the student's educational outcomes (Barrera, 1995). One way to reduce the number of English Learners who are misidentified for special education eligibility is a systematic pre-referral process (OPSI, 2009; Stein, 2011).

***Child study team development and data collection.*** The research varies on the exact steps that educators should take in the pre-referral process, but one consistent component is a Child Study Team (CST), also known as a Student Centered Team, Early Intervention Team, Intervention Assistance Team, Student Support Team, Teacher Assistance Team, or Instructional Support Team (Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities [TCDD], 2013; Stein, 2011). Child Study Teams must consist of an interdisciplinary assembly of knowledgeable representatives, including a special education teacher, an English as a Second Language (ESL) educator, a classroom teacher knowledgeable about the student, a parent/guardian, a school administrator, and any other adult who is involved in the student's education, such as other a school nurse or a guidance counselor (TCDD, 2013; Stein, 2011). The CST collects a wide range of data, including but not limited to the student's developmental milestones, proficiency in the student's home language (L<sub>1</sub>), and standardized assessments. The collected data is then compared to peer data to determine if there is a discrepancy from the norm.

***Peer comparison.*** In order to determine if there is a disability present, the CST must compare the data collected to that of a true peer group rather than monolingual

speakers of English who perform with an average level of academic proficiency. To the extent possible, the school district should collect data from a large peer group with longitudinal data. In order to provide an accurate comparison, the peer group should consist of ELs from the same language background, equal amount of years in the ESL program, the same grade of entry into the school, similar language proficiency scores upon arrival, and a similar level of mobility (OPSI, 2009). While it is not always possible to find a large sample of peers who meet all of these criteria, school leaders should ensure that CSTs scour data to find as true of a peer group as possible.

***Culturally responsive interventions.*** Response to Intervention (RTI) was introduced with the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA when legislators and the USDOE Office of Special Programs requested schools utilize interventions through RTI rather than the discrepancy model that was traditionally used to identify students with specific learning disabilities. Since that time, US schools frequently use Response to Intervention (RTI) as a systematic process to support students who are struggling in the general education classroom, and a lack of response to the interventions generally ends in a referral to special education. According to the RTI Action Network, RTI “is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs” (RTI Action Network [RTIAN], n.d.). RTI’s essential components include high-quality, scientifically-based classroom instruction, ongoing student assessment, tiered instruction, and parent involvement. Communication among general education, special education, and related specialists also contributes to a successful RTI program.

In order for the RTI process to be effective, teachers must provide high-quality instruction and administer universal screening of all children in the general education

classroom. When students are unsuccessful, they receive targeted interventions at increasing levels of intensity to accelerate their rate of learning (RTIAN, n.d.). Students who do not respond to this tier of interventions receive even more intense and frequent interventions. Throughout the entire process, educators communicate with parents and closely monitor student progress. A student's response to the interventions determines the team's next steps. When students do not make progress despite a series of intense, targeted interventions, they may be referred for an evaluation to determine eligibility for special education.

One way that RTI can be culturally responsive is to make student assessment comparisons among "true peers" rather than all of the students in the class or all of the students in a grade level. Additionally, when determining research-based interventions, RTI teams must investigate strategies that have proven to be effective for students of similar cultural and linguistic populations.

RTI is also culturally responsive if the team facilitates collaboration between the general education, special education, ESL, and any other individual with knowledge of the student and contributes to a deeper, more accurate understanding of a student's abilities and difficulties. Additionally, educators from a wide variety of specialty areas can provide an enhanced toolkit for recognizing strengths and weaknesses and developing interventions to best support the student. When parents are part of the RTI team, they can provide critical background information about the student, such as the age of accomplishing developmental milestones as compared to siblings, prior schooling or lack thereof, L<sub>1</sub> language skills when compared to siblings, the amount of English spoken

in the home and community, mobility, and personal factors that impact a student's ability to learn (Brown & Doolittle, 2008).

Another way to alter RTI so it is more culturally responsive is to analyze a student's development in his home language. Students who are proficient in the L<sub>1</sub> can transfer literacy, math, and language skills to English, but students who are not proficient in the L<sub>1</sub> do not have these skills to transfer. If the RTI team understands a student's level of L<sub>1</sub> proficiency, they can provide guided instruction for the student on how to transfer the primary language skills.

**Evaluation for special education.** It is only after the RTI team has "determined that a child's behavior and performance cannot be explained solely by language or cultural differences, the acculturation process, or the learning environment" that a formal referral to special services is justified (OPSI, 2009).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

**Sociocultural Theory.** Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory relates to the identification of English Learners for special education services because Vygotsky proposes that all learning is a cultural and social process. Specifically, he purports that "developmental processes take place through participation in cultural, linguistic, and historically formed settings such as family life and peer group interaction, and in institutional contexts like schooling, organized sports activities, and work places" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2015, p. 197). This theory supports the understanding that language difference can present itself as a language disability due to cultural and linguistic influences.

**Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition.** Stephen Krashen is one of the most highly regarded second language acquisition theorists. Krashen proposes that "[r]eal language acquisition develops slowly, and speaking skills emerge significantly later than listening skills, even when conditions are perfect (Krashen, 1982, p. 7). Due to the time it takes to develop "real language," students' academic development can be slowed because the student does not understand the language of instruction. When a student performs below grade level, observers can incorrectly assume that students' delay in progress is a result of disability when, in fact, it is due to the normal second language development.

**Cultural Difference Theory.** Another theory that relates to the difficulty of distinguishing between language differences and disabilities is cultural difference theory. One of its major proponents, Fredrick Erickson, argues that this theory provides "a way of seeing classroom troubles as inadvertent misunderstanding--teachers and students playing into each other's cultural blind spots" (Bolima, n.d., para. 7). To further this supposition, researcher Shirley Brice Heath closely studied three populations in the Carolinas. Her research revealed that even within a community of native speakers of English, significant cultural and socio-linguistic micro-communication differences exist among sub-cultures living in the region (Bolima, n.d.). These cultural differences can lead to students struggling to understand, resulting in delayed academic and language progress. Additionally, when there is a cultural barrier, teachers may be unable to fairly assess what a student understands because the teacher can student cannot effectively communicate. With this breakdown in communication, educators can erroneously

conclude that a student does not possess certain knowledge and skills, leading to inappropriate special education referrals.

### **Implications**

As a scholar practitioner, I will be in a position to provide guidance regarding the attendance of Marshallese students to colleagues across the state who are experiencing growth in their Pacific Islander population. The objective of this study is to deepen educators' understanding of the needs of Pacific Islander students and their families attending schools in this area of the United States so that they may more appropriately provide an education to Pacific Islander students who attend public schools in Arkansas through an enhanced understanding of the attendance challenges of Marshallese students.

## CHAPTER 3

### Method

The number of English Learners (ELs) attending schools in the United States has risen considerably in the past two decades, particularly in Arkansas. Data collected in 2018 from the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) Data Center reports that of the 477,268 total student population in the state of Arkansas, almost 43,000 of those students are identified as English Learners. This number does not include the number of Language Minority Students (LMS) who have another language in their home but who have a level of English proficiency that excludes them from being classified as an English Learner (ADE, 2018). ADE further reports that of those 43,000 ELs, over 3,800 are Pacific Islander students, the majority of whom attend Northwest Arkansas High School (NHS) (ADE, 2018).

The largest group of Pacific Islanders in Arkansas is the Marshallese community. According Pearl McElfish (2016) of the National Center for Biotechnology Information, migration from the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) to the US, with a large concentration in Arkansas, tripled between 2000 and 2010. Census results estimate the population grew from 6,700 to 22,434 in that ten-year period. This high number is attributed to the Compact of Free Association (COFA) developed between the United States and RMI which allows migrants to “come and go freely between the RMI and the US without a visa or resident card,” making an accurate number of Marshallese in the US difficult to establish (McElfish, 2016, p. 259).

According to research conducted through the Winthrop Rockefeller Center in 2012, the Marshallese community in Arkansas “began with one man, John Moody, who

left the islands in the 1970s for educational and employment opportunities and then spread the word about Arkansas to relatives and friends,” with the first significant number of Marshallese immigrants arriving in the 1980s (Jimeno, 2013, p. 10). The research suggests that these immigrants chose to move to Arkansas for “educational opportunities for their children and better employment for themselves, but also better health-care than was available in the Marshall Islands” (Jimeno, 2013, p. 10). Educating Marshallese students has been challenging for Arkansas schools, as their culture and language bases are markedly different than the predominant culture represented in the Arkansas schools. These schools, and NHS in particular, are currently investigating ways to better reach the Marshallese community to provide better outcomes for students.

**Purpose of the study.** This study examined the factors that impact the attendance of Pacific Islander students, particularly the Marshallese. The findings from the study will contribute to the field by aiding schools in understanding the factors that affect the attendance of Marshallese students in the State of Arkansas. The study, through information revealed in interviews with Marshallese individuals and school personnel, will aid educators and the community-at-large in implementing culturally responsive practices to better support this growing population. The researcher is particularly interested in the findings of this study due to her position as a school administrator serving a large population of Marshallese students.

**Research question.** In this study, the researcher collected phenomenological data to address the following question about the education of Marshallese students:

What factors most impact the attendance of Marshallese students at one Arkansas high school?



This study utilized historical data, including achievement data, graduation rates, attendance, and discipline reports, collected from the district. The researcher then conducted phenomenological interviews in “an informal, interactive process . . . aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the [teacher’s] experience” (Moustakas, as cited in Patton, 2015, p. 433). The researcher used a semi-structured interview approach to conduct the interviews. This method was selected to provide standardization to the interviews while allowing the researcher flexibility to probe for more in-depth responses. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews that were audio-recorded, and a transcript was shared with the respondent in order to ensure reliability.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative approach was used to conduct a case study on the attendance of secondary school Marshallese students in US schools. The study employed qualitative phenomenological methodology to ascertain student, school personnel, guardian, and community perspectives regarding appropriate supports to maximize the attendance of Marshallese students. Phenomenology is defined as “a project that is driven by fascination: being swept up in a spell of wonder, a fascination with meaning” (Kridel, 2010, p. 641). A phenomenological method was selected to describe the phenomenon as accurately as possible, preserving the factual reporting of findings in the absence of any pre-given framework (Groenewald, 2004). The primary objective was to understand the “social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of the people involved,” which includes the students, guardians, community members, and school personnel who work together to educate this student population (Welman and Kruger, as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 44). The study centered around interviews of various stakeholders

involved in the education of the target student population. The study site was a high school in Northwest Arkansas, NHS, and the researcher's position within the school provided access to interview recent graduates, school personnel, guardians, and community liaisons who chose to participate in the study.

In addition to interviews, archived data regarding attendance, graduation rates, sub-population academic achievement, special education identification, and English language proficiency growth was examined to better understand the current level of achievement of Marshallese students at NHS. The researcher analyzed trends that provide insight into more effective ways to support the educational needs of Marshallese students in Arkansas.

### **Data Collection / Data Analysis**

This study was conducted in a suburban public school district in Arkansas that serves approximately 22,000 students in Pre-K through twelfth grade. The specific study site was a high school serving approximately 2,100 students. The researcher is a certified educator in the district and gained access through approval from the district's Institutional Review Board to work with the district's Special Services and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) departments to obtain historical data as well as to conduct interviews from recent Marshallese graduates, parents/guardians of current Marshallese students, Marshallese community members, and current school personnel serving Marshallese students. As a basis for the case study, historical data regarding the educational history of Marshallese students in the district was collected and analyzed. The researcher's position in the district provided access to archived achievement data, graduation rates, attendance, and discipline reports disaggregated by sub-population.

Further, records from the district's ESOL Department regarding Marshallese students' age, grade, and level of language proficiency upon initial enrollment into US schools, number of years in US schools, home language, and English proficiency growth throughout their time in US schools were analyzed to look for trends. The district educates approximately 9,000 English Learners, and approximately 13% of these students are identified as Marshallese. The researcher examined longitudinal data from the Special Services Department regarding referrals and placement or lack of placement of Marshallese ELs.

The researcher conducted interviews with five recent Marshallese graduates (five years or less), five secondary school personnel, five guardians of currently enrolled Marshallese students, and five Marshallese community members. A key component of the research was to ascertain these individuals' perceptions of the factors that affect the attendance of Marshallese students.

The researcher interviewed school personnel, recent graduates, guardians, and community members at a time that was convenient to the interviewee. For teacher interviews, the researcher conducted teacher interviews during the teachers' planning periods. The researcher conducted the interviews individually to ascertain a broad perspective of individuals' perceptions of the district's responsiveness to the needs of Marshallese students.

### **Participants**

Purposive sampling was initially utilized to solicit participants for interviews. Maxwell (2015) defines purposive sampling as "a selection strategy in which particular settings, persons or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that

can't be gotten as well from other choices," (p. 88). This method is considered by Welman and Kruger to be "the most important kind of non-probability sampling, to identify the primary participants (as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 45). Lavrakas (2008) describes purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or expert sampling, as a type of nonprobability sampling where the main objective is to identify a sample that one can logically presume is representative of the population. This is achieved "by applying expert knowledge of the population to select in a nonrandom manner a sample of elements that represents a cross-section of the population" (Lavrakas, 2008, p. 645). To conduct purposive sampling, expert knowledge of the population is used to identify the characteristics the researcher aspires to represent in the sample and then to identify a sample that meets the various characteristics that are viewed as being most important (Lavrakas, 2008). Lavrakas (2008) suggests that purposive sampling is considered to be the most appropriate selection method for the identification of small samples within a limited geographic area or from a restricted population definition.

The purposive sample for school personnel interviews was selected from English language development teachers, special education teachers, school nurses, counselors, and administrators due to their knowledge of various facets of schooling. All five school personnel solicited agreed to be interviewed. One administrator, one counselor, one Special Education teacher, one English Language Development teacher, and a school nurse were interviewed. Five recent graduates, one parent, and five community members were also selected through purposive sampling due to their known experiences with the school as well as within the Marshallese community in the area. The recent graduates selected were individuals who graduated from NHS within the last five years who

indicated that they were willing to participate in the interview process. All recent graduates solicited agreed to be interviewed. A government official, two community activists, an interpreter in the community, a pastor, and a Department of Human Services employee were solicited for Community Liaison interviews. The pastor was unable to participate, but the other five individuals consented to interviews. As the process developed, snowball sampling was used to identify three additional guardian participants based on the recommendations of Marshallese community liaisons and parents. Groenewald (2004) describes snowball sampling as a method to expand the initial sample by asking one participant to recommend other interview candidates. Four of the five guardians of Marshallese students attending NHS were selected from the recommendations of a guardian and a community liaison.

### **Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations**

According to Guillemin & Gillam (2004), two of the major dimensions of ethics in qualitative research are procedural ethics and ethics in practice (p. 263). Procedural ethics requires a researcher to seek approval from a relevant ethics committee prior to conducting research involving humans, a clearly defined step required by universities prior to permitting any research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 263). Individuals conducting research through a university must present a research proposal to an Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to commencing the research. As an individual conducting research within a school district, I also had to submit a research proposal to the school district that is the site of the study. An original set of interview questions was submitted to the school district's IRB, at which point revisions were required due to a concern that questions could be offensive and alienate individuals who were interviewed.

After a revision process guided by individuals considered to be knowledgeable about research and Marshallese culture, a new set of interview questions was eventually approved. At that point, the next procedure was to present the proposal to the university's IRB, at which point the research proposal was approved to commence.

The second dimension of research, ethics in practice, involves the “everyday ethical issues that arise in the doing of research,” and this dimension requires frequent, intense reflection in order to ensure research credibility (Guilleman & Gillam, 2004, p. 264). Guilleman & Gillam (2004) state research “is an active process that requires scrutiny, reflection, and interrogation of the data, the researcher, the participants, and the context that they inhabit” (p. 274). A researcher must not only carefully examine the topic of study but also the researcher's own positionality, biases, experiences, customs, beliefs, and knowledge. Mason, as cited in Guillemin & Gillam (2004), suggests researchers must continually examine “their actions and their role in the research process and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their ‘data’” (p. 274). When conducting research, it is essential to consider reflexivity, typically defined as a process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's positionality. Consideration of reflexivity reminds the researcher to actively acknowledge and explicitly recognize that a researcher's position may affect the research process and, ultimately, its outcomes (Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Pillow, 2003; Stronach et al., 2007 as cited in Berger, 2015). The application of reflexivity requires the researcher to carefully reflect upon the construction of knowledge resulting from the research process, including “what sorts of factors influence the researcher's construction of knowledge and how these influences are revealed in the

planning, conduct, and writing up of the research” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 275). When conducting a phenomenological study, the researcher must consider reflexivity and be aware of potential influences. Guillemin & Gillam argue “the reflexive researcher does not merely report the ‘facts’ of the research but also actively constructs interpretations . . . while at the same time questioning how those interpretations came about” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274). Guillemin & Gillam (2004), citing Harding, maintain that a researcher’s interests, as well as the questions he selects or rejects, reveals something about the essence of the researcher. Even “our choice of research design, the research methodology, and the theoretical framework that informs our research are governed by our values and reciprocally, help shape these values” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274). The target audience, participants included and excluded from the study, interpretation and analysis, and presentation of findings reveal truths about the researcher and are indicative of the researcher’s values. Overall, reflexivity in research is “a process of critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how that knowledge is generated” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274). McGraw, Zvonkovic, and Walker (2000) propose reflexivity is “a process whereby researchers place themselves and their practices under scrutiny, acknowledging the ethical dilemmas that permeate the research process and impinge on the creation of knowledge” (as cited in (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 276). When considering positionality, a researcher must consider “personal characteristics, such as gender, race, affiliation, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, personal experiences, linguistic tradition, beliefs, biases, preferences, theoretical, political and ideological stances, and emotional responses to participant

(Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Finlay, 2000; Hamzeh and Oliver, 2010; Horsburgh, 2003; Kosygina, 2005; Padgett, 2008; Primeau, 2003 as cited in Berger, 2015, p. 220).

As an administrator at NHS, the results of this study are particularly significant on a personal and a professional level. Examining this particular demographic is important to me as a researcher due to the positive relationships I have developed with Marshallese students, parents, and community members, and it is the passion for this segment of my school population that led me to research the topic in order to better serve this community. As a native Arkansan, I had never heard of the Marshall Islands until I attended the Arkansas English as a Second Language Academy in 2007. It was there I learned of the nuclear testing that the US conducting on the Marshall Islands and the devastating effects to the health, economy, and way of life. In my work at NHS, I have seen firsthand the health ramifications still being felt by the Marshallese. When compared by percentage of students, we seem to have a higher incidence of significant physical disabilities with our Marshallese population than with our other demographics. Several of our Marshallese students became close to me because they needed help with medical or social care that their parents or guardians were unable to obtain due to a lack of resources. I am personally invested in better serving the students and community surrounding my school, and this position impacts my reflexivity and how I view the study.

My position as an administrator had the potential to inhibit the responses of some participants. One step I took to help participants feel at ease was conveying that I would use pseudonyms rather than individuals' names, and all participants were assured that their identities would be kept strictly confidential. For my interviews with school



personnel, I ensured them that the information collected would be used for research purposes only, and anything they shared would not impact their position within the school.

For the community and student interviews, I recognized that my position as a school administrator and as a member of the dominant social group could be intimidating and could potentially have led participants to be fearful or distrustful of me. I worked extensively with community liaisons to learn appropriate methods of facilitating an open and honest sharing of information so that participants did not feel afraid to share their experiences and aspirations. I reinforced that the information they would share was for research purposes only, and their identities would be maintained strictly confidential. Additionally, I advised the participants that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any repercussions.

Prior to conducting interviews, I sought participants' consent through a letter of invitation; this invitation clearly stated the purpose of the study. This letter can be found in Appendix 1. The letter also informed participants that their participation was entirely voluntary, and there would be no consequence for individuals who did not wish to participate.

Only adults were interviewed in the study, and confidentiality was maintained, significantly minimizing any risk to participants in the study. Due to holding a leadership position in the district studied, I had a strong interest in the study, and my interest in the study was clearly shared with the interview participants. Prior to commencing with interviews, I reviewed suggested interview question with a district Marshallese

interpreter, and great care was taken to ensure the language utilized in the interview questions was free from unintentionally offensive or discriminatory language.

### **Interviews**

All interviews were held at a mutually agreed upon location and time, with the majority taking place at NHS. All interviews were audiotaped, and a written transcript was provided for all participants. One participant provided a corrected spelling of a location in the Marshall Islands on the transcript. No other corrections were requested.

**Interview questions for recent graduates.** Recent graduates were selected based on recommendations from informally polled school staff who were known to have strong connections to Marshallese students, including the school administration and an Instructional Facilitator who works closely with English Learners and the school's Islander Club. Experience in working with the school's Marshallese Parent Liaison revealed Facebook is a successful way to contact Marshallese parents who may have phone numbers that frequently changed. Based on this knowledge, Facebook was successfully utilized to contact the recent graduates to solicit interviews. All potential participants immediately agreed and expressed pleasure to contribute to helping the Marshallese community. All interviews were conducted at the study site, and three of the five interviews were held as scheduled. Two were rescheduled; one due to the participant's work schedule changing and one due to a participant's personal needs. The length of the interview varied based on the elaboration of the participant, with a range from 6:19 to 15:34. Participants graduated between the years of 2016 and 2018. Three males and two females were interviewed. The questions were crafted to obtain information regarding the things that recent graduates enjoyed about school and what

encouraged them to attend, to learn about students' perceptions regarding their attendance and its importance, what they think contributes to positive and negative attendance, and what they feel the school could do to better serve Marshallese students.

1. What did you enjoy most in school? Do you consider your education a success? Why or why not?
2. How would you describe your attendance as a high school student? What was the average number of days you missed each semester of high school?
3. Did your attendance change throughout high school? If so, why?
4. What impact, if any, do you think attendance had on your success in our school?
5. What factors do you think had the biggest impact on your attendance in high school? (potential prompts: family encouragement, family obligations, supportive teachers, engaging activities/clubs/organizations, difficulty understanding English, peers, access to healthcare, health of family members)
6. What impact, if any, do you predict that your education and the education of other students in US schools will have on the Marshallese community in our town? Do you think this will affect Marshallese in the Marshall Islands?
7. What do you believe our educators need to know and do to help Marshallese students have increased attendance in our school?
8. What can our educators do to ensure the educational success of Marshallese immigrant students and for Marshallese students born in the US?

**Interview questions for educational service providers.** School personnel desired for the interviews included English language development teachers, special education teachers, school nurses, school counselors, and school administrators in order

to examine the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and cultural aspects impacting this student population. The researcher utilized email to contact all potential educational service provided participants, and all agreed. Participants expressed interest in collaborating to help the target student population. Three of the five interviews were held as scheduled. Two had to be rescheduled due to unscheduled professional responsibilities that arose. One participant was a Special Education teacher, and that participant's interview had to be rescheduled multiple times due to student needs. The other participant who had to be rescheduled was the school administrator, and a behavior issue arose that the administrator had to address in a timely manner, resulting in the interview being rescheduled. Two males and three females were interviewed, and interviews lasted between 10:15 and 20:18. The questions were crafted to obtain information regarding individuals' experience in working with Marshallese students, what training they have had to work with Marshallese students, perceptions regarding attendance and its importance, what they see as positive and negative characteristic that impact schooling, and what they feel the school could do to better serve Marshallese students.

1. Tell me about your work with Marshallese students.
  - A. What do you teach?
  - B. Are most of your Marshallese students English Learners?
  - C. What is the average length of time your students have been in the US?
  - D. What training have you received to prepare you to work with Marshallese students?
2. What is your perception of how Marshallese students view the following?

- A. Time
  - B. Family
  - C. Goals
3. As a teacher of Marshallese students, what do you think motivates Marshallese students?
  4. How do you perceive that the study habits and strides in English language acquisition broadly compare to students of other cultures?
  5. Do Marshallese students have content area strengths, weaknesses, or interests that differ from your non-Marshallese students? If so, please explain.
  6. What is your perception regarding the attendance of Marshallese students in our school?
  7. How does attendance impact the success of your Marshallese students?
  8. From your perspective, what factors do you think have the biggest impact on the attendance of Marshallese students in our school? (potential prompts: family encouragement, family obligations, supportive teachers, difficulty understanding English, peers, access to healthcare, health of family members)
  9. Have you employed strategies to support the attendance of Marshallese students or students in general? What are they? Were they successful?
  10. What strategies have you employed to support the academic achievement of students? Have you employed strategies specifically for Marshallese students? What were they? Were they successful?
  11. What do you think parents/guardians of Marshallese students need to understand most in order to help their student(s) be successful in our school?

12. What would you like to understand so that you are better equipped to support the success of Marshallese student?

**Interview questions for guardians.** The first guardian was selected due to her active involvement in the school, and other guardians were selected based on the recommendation of community liaisons and other parents. One caution shared by both a guardian and community liaison was that the researcher would need to find guardians who were “not too shy” to speak with a non-Marshallese researcher; therefore, the researcher relied on suggestions from the community liaison and the guardian in selecting candidates to solicit for interviews. It was anticipated that an interpreter would be required, but all guardian participants recommended were bilingual in English and Marshallese.

The guardian segment of participants was the most difficult to secure for interviews. Some guardians expressed hesitation but agreed when they were assured that all responses would be confidential, and guardians would not be identified in any way. The researcher utilized email, phone, and face-to-face methods to secure participants for parent interview. Interviews took place at Northwest High School. Guardians solicited volunteered to visit NHS to conduct interviews; home or work visits were offered but denied. Three interviews were held as scheduled, and two were rescheduled due to the guardians’ schedule. All five guardians interviewed were females, and interview times ranged from 16:56 to 33:43. The questions were crafted to obtain background information about guardians’ own experiences with education, information about schooling in the Marshall Islands, perceptions regarding attendance and its importance,

what participants think contributes to positive and negative attendance, and what participants feel the school could do to better serve Marshallese students.

1. Where did you grow up?
2. Would you tell me about your family and growing up in the Marshall Islands? (Type of work your family did... house you grew up in...siblings, extended family unit.)
3. What schools did you attend? On what islands are these schools located? (Prompt for highest level of education if not indicated in response.)
4. Please help me know more about schooling in the Marshall Islands.
  - A. At what age do children usually begin school? At what age do they complete school? Approximately what percent of students graduate from high school and go on to college?
  - B. Do you know if there is a national policy about students attending school in the Marshall Islands? Are there attendance requirements? If so, are those requirements enforced? How are they enforced?
  - C. Can you tell me anything about the school systems on the heavily populated islands of Majuro and Ebeye? Can you tell me anything about the schools on the outer islands?
5. Why do you think that such a large number of Marshallese families live in Northwest Arkansas?
6. Did your child(ren) attend school in the Marshall Islands prior to attending school in the United States? If so, did anyone in the Marshall Islands help prepare your child(ren) for differences in the school system in the United States? If so, how did they help? Once in the United States, did anyone help you or your child(ren) prepare

- for attending US schools? How did they help? Why did your family make the choice for your child(ren) to be educated in our schools?
7. What are your educational expectations and hopes for your child(ren)?
  8. What do you need to know more about to help your child(ren) be successful? (Are there things about our school system that you do not understand that cause concern for you or your child(ren)?)
  9. What impact, if any, do you think attendance has on the success of your child(ren) in our schools?
  10. What factors do you think have the biggest impact on the attendance of Marshallese students in American schools? (potential prompts: family encouragement, family obligations, supportive teachers, difficulty understanding English, peers, access to healthcare, health of family members)
  11. What do our schools need to know and do to better support the attendance of Marshallese students in our schools?
  12. Is there anything that would be helpful for our schools to know about the Marshallese culture so that we can better support the academic achievement of our Marshallese students?

**Interview questions for Marshallese community members.** The community liaisons were selected due to their roles within the community, such as governmental roles, community activism, and connections to the school. Each community liaison was bilingual in English and Marshallese. Marshallese community members who were solicited for interviews were the Marshallese Consul General, pastors, community activists, and interpreters who were active in the community. Community liaison



participants were solicited in person, and email was utilized to secure dates, times, and locations for interviews. As with recent graduate participants, all community liaison participants immediately agreed and expressed pleasure to contribute to helping the Marshallese community. Three interviews were conducted at the study site, and two interviews were conducted at the participants' work sites. Four of the five interviews were held as scheduled. One had to be rescheduled due for unspecified reasons. Four females and one male were interviewed, and the length of the interviews varied from 14:38 and 25:56. The questions were constructed to obtain background information about individuals' own experiences with education, information about schooling in the Marshall Islands, perceptions regarding attendance and its importance, what participants think contributes to positive and negative attendance, and what participants feel the school could do to better serve Marshallese students.

1. Where did you grow up?
2. Could you tell me about your family and growing up in the Marshall Islands? (Type of work your family did... home and property.... siblings, extended family unit.)
3. Please describe schooling in the Marshall Islands.
  - A. How do the educational systems on the very populated islands of Ebeye and Majuro compare with each other and schools on the outer islands? Are the expectations regarding school attendance the same?
  - B. Are there private and public schools on most of the islands? What percent of students do you think attend public schools?
  - C. Are there attendance requirements for schools in the Marshall Islands? Do the same requirements pertain to private schools as to public schools?

- D. In the Marshall Islands, what obstacles might a student face that would hinder their school attendance?
- E. Who is responsible for a student's school attendance, and how are attendance requirements enforced in the Marshall Islands?
4. Why do you think that such a large number of Marshallese families live in Northwest Arkansas?
  5. What, if any, Marshallese educational or social program helps students prepare for transition to the United States? What do you think schools in the US could do to help students/families transitioning from the Marshall Islands to the United States?
  6. What are your greatest concerns regarding the success of Marshallese children in our schools?
  7. What impact, if any, do you predict that a successful American education will have on the Marshallese community in our town? Do you think this will affect Marshallese in the Marshall Islands?
  8. What impact, if any, do you think attendance has on the success of Marshallese students in our schools?
  9. What factors do you think have the biggest impact on the attendance of Marshallese students in American schools? (potential prompts: family encouragement, family obligations, supportive teachers, difficulty understanding English, peers, access to healthcare, health of family members)
  10. What factors do you think have the biggest impact on the academic achievement of Marshallese students in American schools?

11. What do you believe that our schools need to know and do to better support the attendance of Marshallese students in our schools?
12. What do you believe that our schools need to know and do to better support the academic achievement of Marshallese students in our schools?

### **Summary of Chapter**

This chapter includes sections detailing the research methodology utilized in this qualitative case study. The background of the study includes the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the research question to be addressed. The rationale for the design selected for the study is followed by a detailed description of the data collection and analysis procedures. This chapter also details the instrumentation, population, and sampling that will be utilized. Finally, the chapter addresses the ethical concerns of investigating this population.

## CHAPTER 4

### Research Findings

The focus of this qualitative study was to examine the factors that impact the attendance of Marshallese students in one Northwest Arkansas high school. Northwest High School (NHS) is in the school district with the largest population of Marshallese students outside of the Marshall Islands and Hawaii, providing access to candidates for interviews and rich data on the topic, such as graduation rates, attendance rates, assessment data. Through this study, the researcher collected phenomenological data to address the following question about the education of Marshallese students:

What factors most impact the attendance of Marshallese students at one Arkansas high school?

The researcher hypothesized that school systems in Arkansas may not provide the highest yield services to optimize student attendance for Marshallese students due to a lack of understanding of the students' culture. This chapter reports the findings from data collected to answer the research questions, including archival data and interview data. Findings from the research are presented in two main sections: findings from archival data and findings from interviews with stakeholders. Excerpts from interviews are included in the narrative to personalize the experiences of participants, achieving a rich description (Holloway, 1997).

#### **Findings from Archival Data**

The study was completed through analyzing archived data, as well as conducting interviews with recent graduates, guardians, community liaisons, and school personnel. The archived data utilized in the study included attendance, graduation rates, sub-

population academic achievement, special education identification, and English language proficiency growth to examine the current level of achievement of Marshallese students in the study site. Archival data was included to provide a greater understanding of the context in which to examine facts that have impacted attendance of Marshallese students in one secondary school.

**Enrollment.** Northwest Public Schools has seen a tremendous increase in the total Marshallese student population in the past 20 years, rising from 10,767 in the 1999-2000 academic year to 23,288 in 2017-18. The district also saw a rapid increase in the number of English Learners enrolled in the district between 1995 and 2018, with the largest growth among Hispanic students, but the number of Pacific Islander students increased significantly as well. The district's 2018-19 ESL Program Handbook reported that English Learners (ELs) comprised 4% of the total student population of [Northwest] Public Schools in 1995. Just five years later, in 2000, the percentage of ELs quadrupled, comprising approximately 16% of the total student population. During the 2017-2018 school year, the percentage of ELs had increased to represent 42% of the student population (NPS, 2018, p. 42). *Figure 4.1* illustrates changing enrollment numbers in Pre-K through Grade 12 at NPS from 2000-2018.

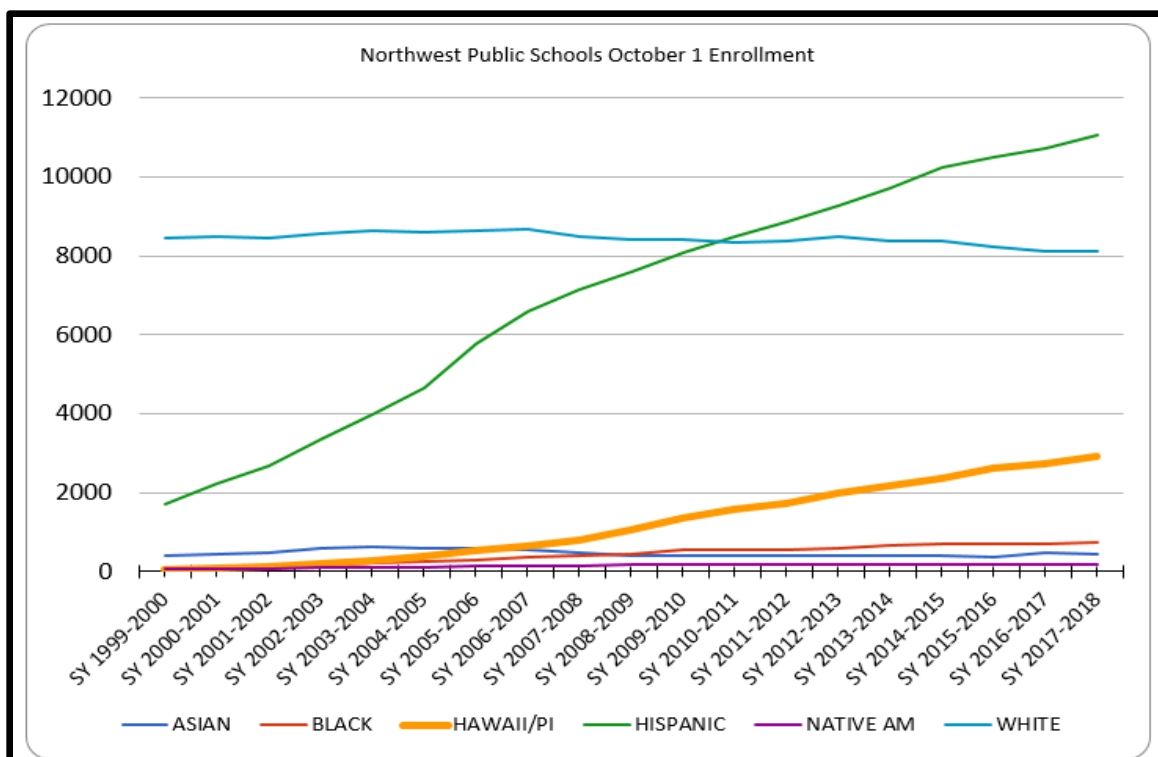


Figure 4.1. Enrollment for Grades Pre-K through 12, 1999-2018 (NPS, 2018)

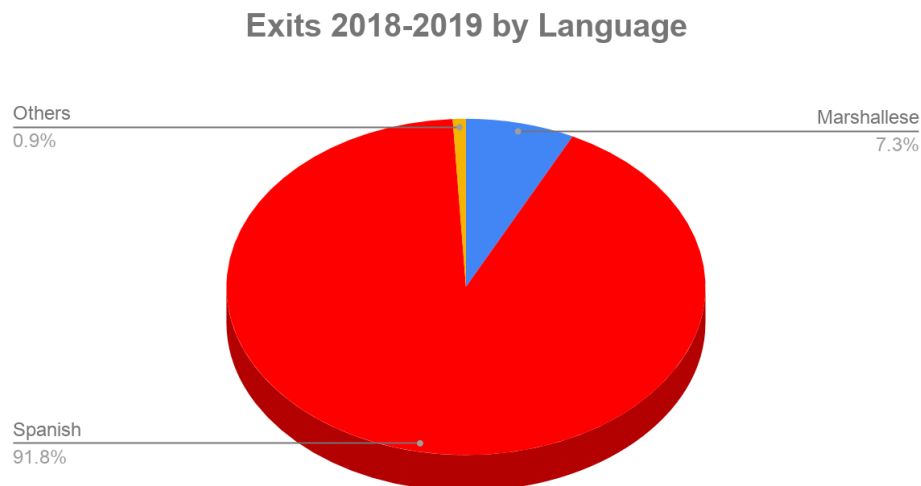
One of largest sub-population increases is found within the Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders demographic. Marshallese students are the largest group identified as Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders in state reporting systems. The first Marshallese students arrived in the late 1980's, and their numbers have continued to grow since that time. In 2018-19, almost 3,000 Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders (NHPI) attend NPS, constituting 12.8% of the total student population.

**English language proficiency.** In the 2018-19 school year, over 56% of NPS students had a home language other than English (NPS, 2018, p. 1). The district used the term PHOLTES for these students who had a Primary Home Language Other Than English (PHLOTES) (NPS, 2018, p. 40). Among the PHLOTES enrolled in 2018-19, 48 home languages other than English were represented, with 75% speaking Spanish in their home, 22% Marshallese, and the remaining 3% a variety of other languages. In the 2018-

19 school year, 21,974 students were enrolled in NPS. Of that total, 8,241 were identified as English Learners (NPS, 2018, p. 41). Fifty-three percent of those ELs were elementary students, with the other 47% attending secondary schools in grades 6-12 (NPS, 2018, p. 41).

In 2018-19, of the 21,974 students enrolled, over 4,000 students were identified as PHLOTES who were not classified as English Learners, meaning that they either were considered English proficient upon enrollment or they had already exited the ESL Program. In order to exit the ESL program, a student must meet the Arkansas Department of Education guidelines, including three pieces of evidence supporting the decision. One requirement is a Proficient score on the ELPA21, and the other two are pieces of local data that demonstrate success in Literacy through English Language Arts (ELA), Science, Social Studies and/or Math as comparable to non-EL/native English speaking peers” (Kerr & Lytle, 2018).

In 2018-19, 92% of Northwest Public Schools students who were reclassified to former EL status “had a home language of Spanish, 7.3% spoke Marshallese, with all other languages comprising less than 1%” (NPS, 2018, p. 45). This percentage is disproportionate with the 22% of PHLOTES who identify Marshallese as their primary home longer. *Figure 4.2* illustrates the percentage of students exited from the ESL program by language in the 2018-2019 school year.



*Figure 4.2.* 2018-19 exits by language. (NPS, 2018, p. 45)

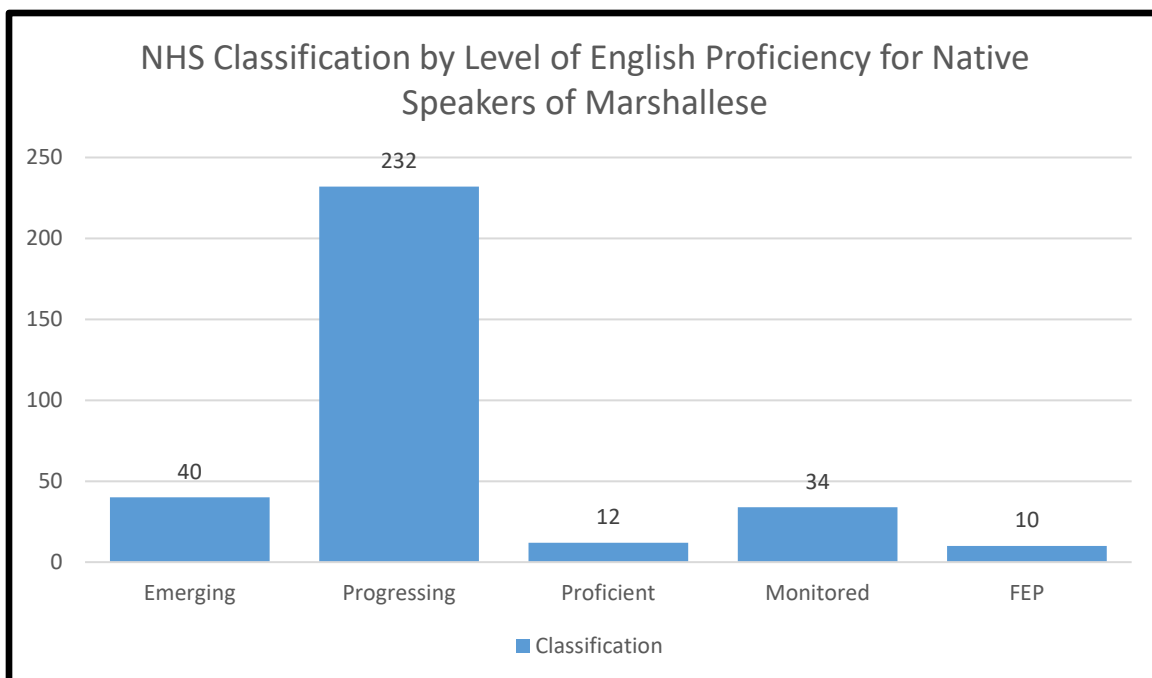
In 2018-19, Northwest High School educated 330 PHLOTES who identified Marshallese as their native language. Of those students, two were born in Guam (0.6%), two in Kiribati (0.6%), 141 in the United States (42.7%), and 185 in the Marshall Islands (56%). Of the 330 PHLOTES, 284 students (86%) were served as English Learners, and 46 (14%) were identified as former ELs. Each EL student was assigned a level of proficiency based on the ELPA21: Emerging, Progressing, or Proficient. Former ELs were identified by the terms “Monitored” and “Fluent English Proficient” (FEP). The Arkansas ELPA21 Scoring Interpretation Guide defines Emerging as a descriptor for students who “have not yet attained a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level content-related academic tasks in English” (Arkansas Department of Education [ADE], n.d., p. 18). Progressing is used to describe students who can, with support, “approach a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate, on grade-level content-related academic tasks in English” (ADE, n.d., p. 18). Proficient describes students who “attain a level of



English language skill necessary to independently produce, interpret, collaborate on, and succeed in grade-level content-related academic tasks in English” (ADE, n.d., p. 18).

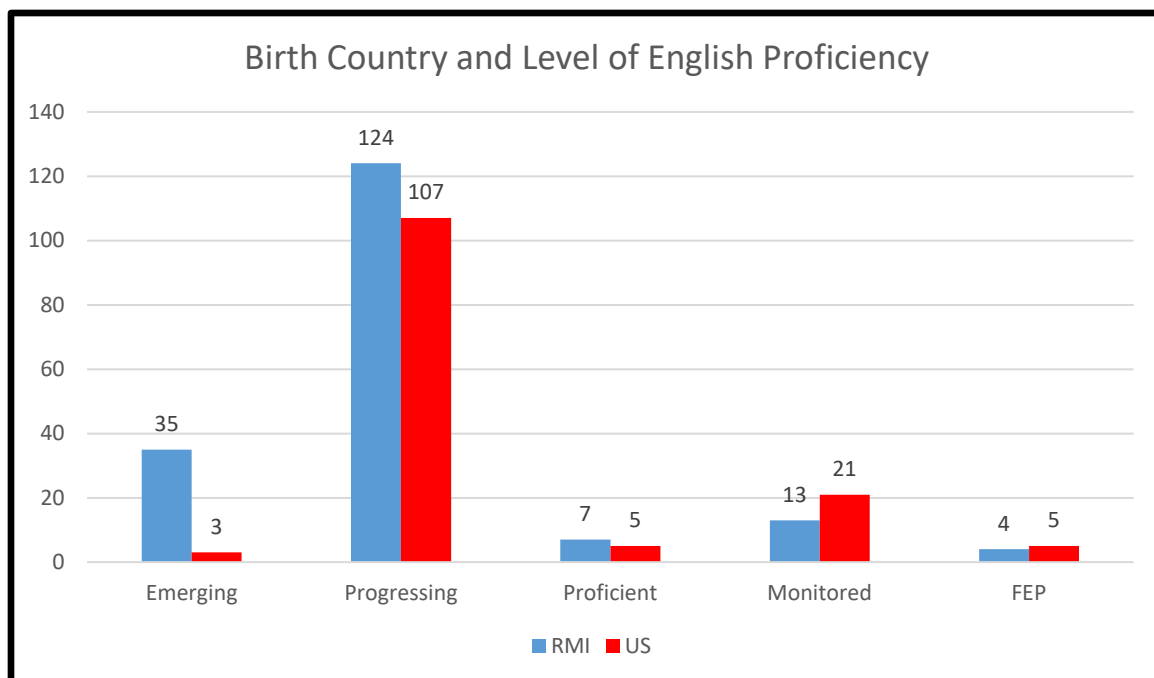
The term Monitored refers to students who have received a Proficient score on ELPA21, the state’s ELP assessment, and have met all other exit criteria required by the state. Title VI requires that school districts monitor students for two years after they have exited the ESL program to ensure that they are academically successful without the support of the ESL program. If students are unsuccessful, they are placed back in the program to receive additional support. NPS monitors former ELs for four years, twice as long as federal legislation mandates. The final category that NPS uses to classify students in regard to English language proficiency is Fluent English Proficient (FEP). This term is used to describe students who do not need ESL support services, either because they were deemed FEP upon initial assessment or because they exited the ESL program more than four years prior and continued to be academically successful without ESL supports.

Of the 330 Marshallese-speaking PHLOTES enrolled in NHS, 40 were classified as Emerging, 232 Progressing, 12 Proficient, 34 Monitored, and ten Fluent English Proficient (FEP). *Figure 4.3* illustrates the classification by English proficiency level for Native Speakers of Marshallese attending NHS.



*Figure 4.3.* NHS Classification by level of English proficiency. English language proficiency classification by level for Marshallese-speaking PHLOTES.

More PHLOTES born in the Marshall Islands than in the United States were classified as performing at the Emerging, Progressing, and Proficient levels of English proficiency, with Emerging at a 35:3 ratio, Progressing at 124:107, and Proficient at 7:5. On the other hand, more US born students than students born in the Marshall Islands were classified as former ELs, including Monitored at 21:13 and FEP 5:4. *Figure 4.4* demonstrates the birth country and level of English proficiency of Marshallese PHLOTES attending NHS.



*Figure 4.4.* Birth country and level of English proficiency. Student data for Marshallese-speaking PHLOTES, excluding students from Guam and Kiribati.

***Current English learners age of entry.*** Emerging is the lowest level of English proficiency as measured by the ELPA21. The majority, 63%, of Emerging students entered the United States from ages 11-15. Ages 6-10 had the next highest percentage, at 20%, followed by age 16 or older, 14%. Only 3% of students in the Emerging category arrive at age five or younger.

Progressing is the next level of English proficiency. Of the 124 Progressing Marshall Islands-born students, 37% (46) entered the US at age five or younger, 33% (41) between ages six and ten, 21% between ages 11 and 15, and the remaining 9% at age 16 or older.

Students who fall into the Proficient category score at the Proficient or Advanced level on the ELPA21, but they fail to meet other exit criteria, which requires them to remain in the ESL program. The age of arrival for the seven students identified as

Proficient on the ELPA21 only fell into two categories. Of the seven Proficient students born in the Marshall Islands, 43% entered the US at age five or younger, while the remaining 57% entered between ages six and ten. *Figure 4.5* demonstrates the age of entry into the United States for current Marshallese English learners, classified by English language proficiency levels.

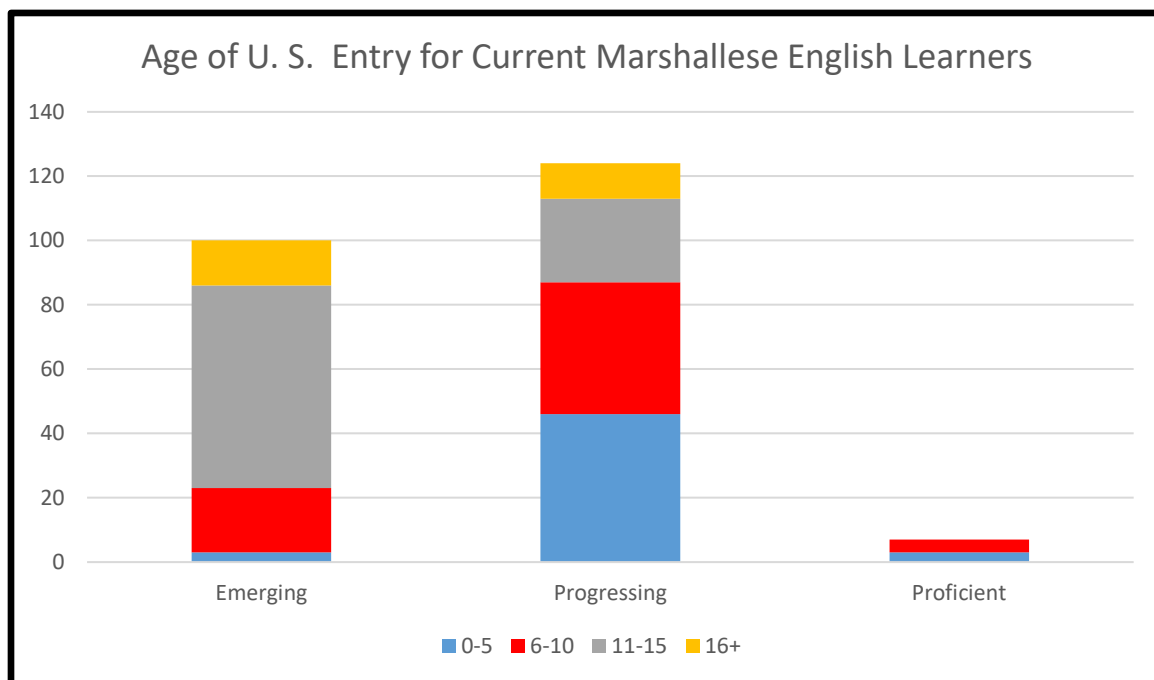
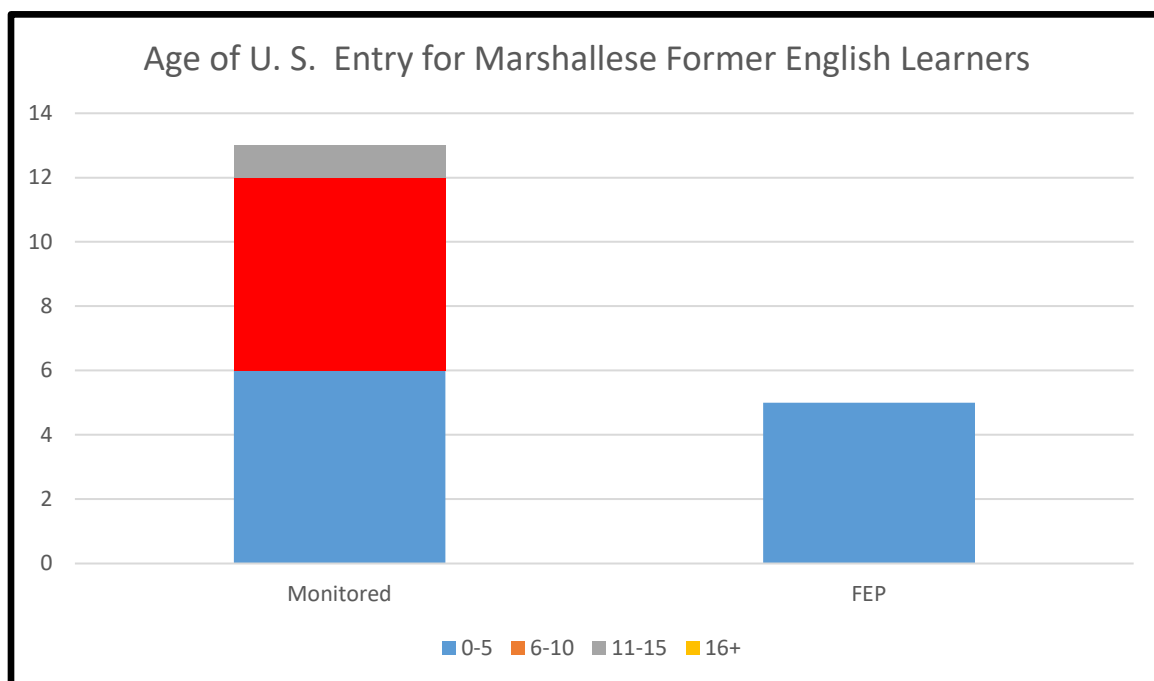


Figure 4.5. Age of entry for current Marshallese English learners. Current Marshallese ELs' age of US entry for Emerging, Progressing, and Proficient levels of English proficiency categorized by the age at which they entered the United States.

**Former English learners.** For students to be classified as Monitored, they have to meet all criteria to exit the ESL program. Only 13 Marshallese students are identified as Monitored at NHS, with 46% of the Monitored students born in the Marshall Islands entering the US at age five or younger, and another 46% (6) entering between ages six and ten. The remaining 8% entered the US at age 14. For a student to be classified as Fluent English Proficient (FEP) in Northwest Public Schools, the student has to have

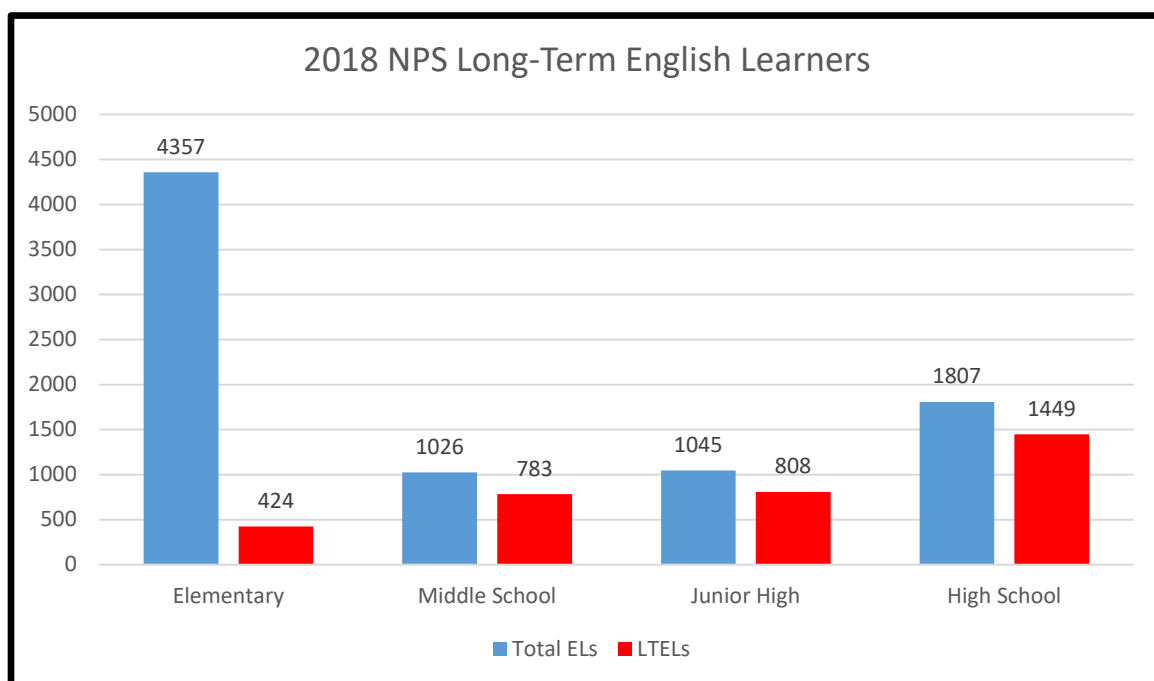
exited the ESL program at least four years prior. Only five NHS students born in the Marshall Islands are classified as FEP. All five of those students entered the US at age five or younger. *Figure 4.6* illustrates the age of US entry for Marshallese students who are identified as former English learners.



*Figure 4.6.* Age of US entry for Marshallese former English learners. Age of US entry for students at the Monitored and FEP levels of English proficiency.

***Long-term English learners.*** Another consideration when examining data for English Learners is evaluating whether or not students are considered Long-term English Learners (LTELs). LTELs are English Learners who have attended school in the United States for 5 years or more but who have not achieved expected growth levels in English language development. Data in the NPS 2018-19 ESL Program Handbook revealed that almost 10% of Elementary ELs, 76% of Middle School ELs, 77% of Junior High ELs, and 80% of High School ELs were classified as long-term English Learners. District data reveals that 85.9% of LTELs fall into the Progressing category of English proficiency,

and 9.2% are Proficient but failed to meet other exit criteria. Almost 5% are Emerging, even after at least five years of attending US schools. It is worth noting that even the most cognitively disabled students are assessed annually with their peers, and many of the Emerging LTELs attending NHS fall into this category. *Figure 4.7* illustrates the number of Marshallese long-term English learners compared to the total number of English learners.



*Figure 4.7.* 2018 NPS Long-term English learners. Total number of ELs compared to the number of LTELs attending NPS. (NPS, 2018, p. 44)

***English language proficiency growth since enrollment.*** English language proficiency (ELP) growth in Arkansas is currently measured by the ELPA21 (English Language Proficiency Assessment), but it was previously measured by the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA), which makes measuring growth a challenging process. The ELDA had a 5-point scale, and the ELPA21 a 3-point scale, so a score conversion chart was devised in order to evaluate ELP growth for this study.

*Table 4.1* illustrates the conversion descriptors as well as the corresponding number assigned. ELDA scores of pre-functional were given a zero, which does not correlate with the ELPA21 scores. ELDA scores of Beginner and Emerging were assigned a one to correlate to the ELPA21 Emerging level. ELDA scores of Intermediate were assigned a two to correlate with the ELPA21 Progressing level. ELDA scores of Advanced and Fluent English Proficient were assigned a three to correlate with the ELPA21 Proficient score.

Table 4.1.

*ELDA to ELPA21 conversion chart*

ELDA Level	ELPA21 Level	Number Assigned
Pre-Functional	N/A	0
Beginner	Emerging	1
Emerging	Emerging	1
Intermediate	Progressing	2
Advanced	Proficient	3
Fluent English Proficient	Proficient	3

At the beginning of March 2019, 331 students identified as Pacific Islanders were enrolled at NHS. Of those students, 21 students only had one year's ELP data available, and eleven were never identified as English Learners. The ELP growth for the remaining 307 students was analyzed. The average amount of time those students were enrolled in Northwest Public Schools was 8.98 years. The average scores on the initial score reported was a 1.08, which falls in the Beginner/Emerging level. The average score for the group on the most recent ELPA21 assessment was a 2.02, which falls in the Intermediate/Progressing level. This shows a 46.53% increase in scores. Forty-nine of those 307 students are now considered Fluent English proficient, but the remaining 258

students were still identified as English Learners. Of the 258 ELs, 231 were considered Long-term ELs, which demonstrates a lack of progress as expected.

**Attendance.** An attendance report was pulled in February 2019 to analyze attendance for Marshallese students for the year. At that time, 320 NHS students were identified as Marshallese, but only 254 of those students had been enrolled for the entire year. Out of the 254 Marshallese students who had been enrolled for the entire year, the average amount of days absent was 5.89. The average for the combined student body was 4.73 absences. Twelve of the 254 Marshallese students had perfect attendance, but seven students had absences in the twenties, and another six had missed 30 or more days. Eleven Marshallese students had been dropped for a lack of attendance, and the school was unable to locate them to get them re-enrolled. Other students had been dropped for a lack of attendance but had been located to re-enroll.

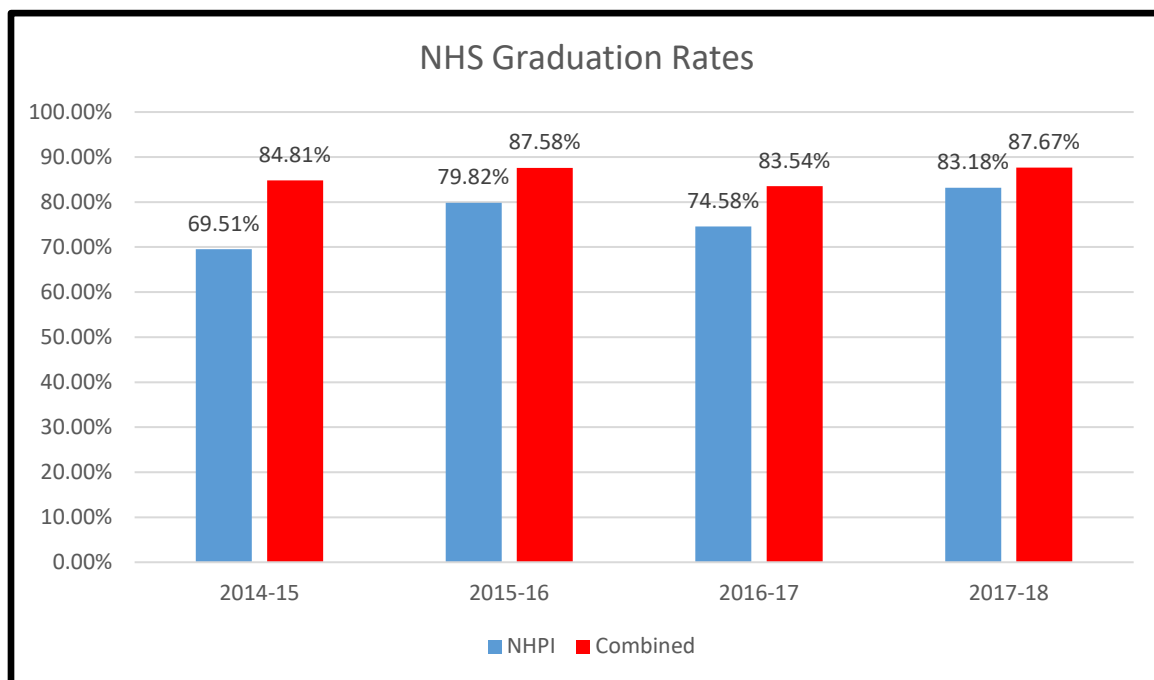
Another measure for attendance is a loss of credit report. Students who miss more than eight days in a class period lose credit in that particular class. In the fall of 2018, 170 students lost credit in at least one class, with some losing credit in all seven of their classes. Of those 170 students, 47 were Marshallese, comprising 27.6% of all students losing credit even though Marshallese students only represent approximately 16% of the population. Marshallese sophomores had the highest rate of credit loss at 38%, 23% of juniors were Marshallese, and 17% of seniors losing credit were Marshallese. The percentage of Marshallese students losing credit is significantly disproportionate to the percentage of Marshallese students in the entire student body.

**Discipline.** Numbers related to disciplinary actions are incongruent with the number of Marshallese students attending NHS. While only accounting for



approximately 16% of the total student population, students identified as Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders accounted for 29.7% of the recorded disciplinary infractions in 2017-18. These infractions resulted in consequences of warnings, detentions, bus suspensions, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students accounted for 29.3% of the more severe consequences of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions.

**Graduation rates.** ADE Data Center reported graduation rates from the 2014-15 academic year to the 2017-18 year, and the Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI) students lagged behind the combined population each year. The gap between the NHPI and combined population graduation rate at NHS was at its highest in 2014-15 at over 15%, with a decrease to 4.49% in 2017-18. *Figure 4.8* compares the graduation rate for Marshallese students to the graduation rate for the general population.



*Figure 4.8.* NHS Graduation Rates, 2014-2017 (ADE, 2018)

**Sub-population academic achievement.** All Arkansas schools are required to administer annual summative assessments each spring to measure student progress. From 2007 to 2014, Arkansas utilized the Augmented Benchmark Exam to measure progress in literacy and math for students in Grades 3-10. During this period, the state also used End-of-Course exams in Algebra I, Geometry, and 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Literacy to measure math and literacy achievement in high schools. From 2007 to 2015, the state also administered the Augmented Benchmark Exam in science in Grades 5 and 7 and the End-of-Course Biology exam to measure progress in science. In 2015, for one year only, the state adopted the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) exam to measure English Language Arts (Grades 3-10) and mathematics (Grades 3-8) achievement and continued to utilize the End-of-Course Algebra I and Geometry exams. In the 2015-16 school year, Arkansas transitioned to the American College Testing (ACT) exam for Grade 11 students and the ACT Aspire to measure English, reading, writing, science, and math achievement for students in Grades 3-10.

*ACT.* Northwest High School administers the ACT each spring to students in Grade 11, and results show an achievement gap between the NHPI population and the combined student population. In 2018, the school average was 17.8, while the average for NHPI students was 14.5, the lowest of any ethnicity. Only 10% of the students tested identified as NHPI. The majority of the NHPI students assessed are identified as English Learners, which could contribute to the score discrepancies, but this fact is not taken into consideration on state assessments. *Figure 4.9* exhibits the 2018 ACT results for NHS Grade 11 grade students.

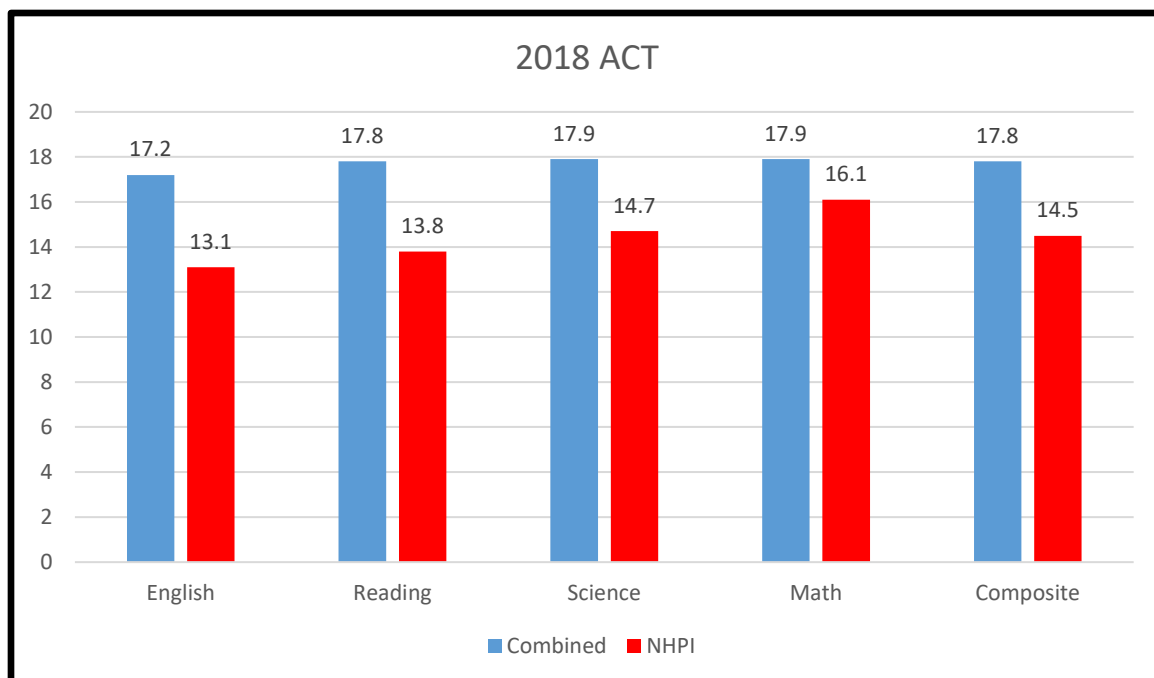


Figure 4.9. 2018 ACT results for NHS 11<sup>th</sup> grade students.

**ACT Aspire.** NHS administers the ACT Aspire each spring to measure students' academic progress in Grades 10. As with the ACT, the NHPI demographic scored below the combined population average in every subject area. Students must receive a score of Ready or Exceeding to be considered proficient in the subject area assessed. Of the 753 sophomores assessed, 47% were considered Ready or Exceeding in English, while only 27% of NHPI students met this mark. Twenty-four percent of the combined population were proficient in Reading, with 16% for NHPI students. Twenty-three percent of the NHS students were proficient in Science, with only 8% for NHPI. In Mathematics, 27% of the combined population was proficient, with 12% for NHPI. As with the ACT, the majority of the NHPI students assessed are identified as English Learners. A lack of English proficiency may contribute to the achievement gap identified by this assessment, but this fact is not taken into consideration on state assessments. Figure 4.10 exhibits the 2018 ACT Aspire results for NHS Grade 10 grade students.

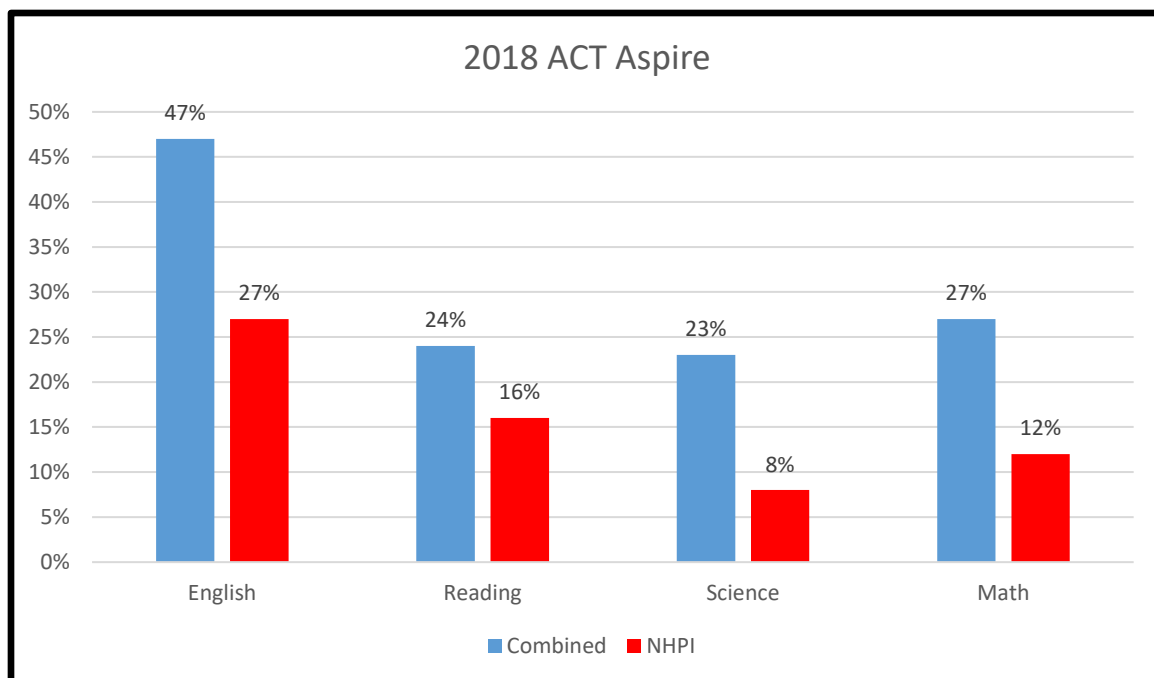


Figure 4.10. 2018 ACT Aspire results for NHS 10<sup>th</sup> grade students.

**Special education identification.** In the 2018-19 academic year, Northwest Public Schools (NPS) had a total Special Education population of 2,362 students, with 9.9% of them (236) identified as NHPI. This number is lower than the district percentage of Pacific Islanders at 12.8%. Northwest High School (NHS) had a Special Education population of 203 students, with 11.8% of Special Education students identified as NHPI. This percentage is higher than the district average of 9.9%, but it is lower than the building's percentage of Pacific Islanders (15.5%).

By February of 2019, 293 NPS students had been referred for Special Education, with 16.7% (49) of them identified as Pacific Islanders. Seventeen of the referred Pacific Islander students qualified and were placed in the Special Education program. Eight of the students who qualified were in Kindergarten, another six in elementary, two in middle school, and one in junior high. One referred student moved, and the remaining 31 students' referrals are still in progress, or the student did not qualify.

Special Education percentages are much different in the Marshall Islands. Of the 15,104 students enrolled in Marshall Islands schools in 2016-2017, 552 elementary students and 126 secondary students received Special Education services, comprising only 4.4% of the total student population. The majority (67%) of the students who qualified were categorized with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). At the elementary level, students qualified in 12 different categories, but at the secondary level, students only qualified for SLD, Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment, and Severe Multiple Disabilities. No reporting identified a rationale explaining why the secondary schools did not have any students with Intellectual Disabilities, Developmental Delays, Orthopedic Impairments, Other Health Impairments, Emotional Disturbances, Autism, Speech-Language Impairments, Deaf Blindness, or Traumatic Brain Injuries. *Table 4.2* illustrates the total number of students with disabilities attending school in the Marshall Islands, disaggregated by disability category, gender, and age group.

Table 4.2.

*Total students with disabilities attending schools in RMI*

Grade Level and Disability Category	Male	Female	Total
Elementary	361	191	552
Secondary	82	44	126
Elementary and Secondary Total:	443	235	678
Hearing Impairment (HI)	40	27	67
Visual Impairment (VI)	6	11	17
Specific Learning Disability (SLD)	322	148	470
Severe Multiple Disabilities (SMD)	5	7	12
Intellectual Disability (ID)	2	3	5
Developmental Delay (DD)	30	19	49
Orthopedic Impairment (OI)	8	4	12
Other Health Impairment (OHI)	2	1	3
Emotional Disturbance (ED)	5	1	6
Autism (AUT)	4	2	6
Speech-Language Impairment (SLI)	19	11	30
Deaf Blindness (DB)	0	1	1
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)	0	0	0

Note: Adapted from Marshall Islands Public School Systems (MIPSS, 2017, p. 19)

## **Summary of Archival Data**

Enrollment in Northwest Public Schools has doubled in the past twenty years, with significant increases in the number of English Learners attending NPS. Likewise, the Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI) student enrollment in NPS has increased significantly since the late 1980's, with the vast majority of those students identifying as Marshallese. Based on 2013-14 October 1 counts, approximately 2,830 NHPI students were enrolled in Arkansas schools, with 2,108 (74.5%) in NPS alone. Pacific Islander student numbers in the area have continued to rise in the last five years, and 3,917 NHPI students attended Arkansas schools in 2017-18, with 2,791 (71.3%) enrolled in NPS. More Pacific Islanders attend Northwest High School than any other school in the state. In 2013-14, 227 of the 2,849 NHPI students in Arkansas attended NHS, and in 2017-18, this number increased to 335 NHPI students.

With the increase in the number of NHPI students attending NHS, data disaggregation for this demographic has become increasingly important. Disproportionate numbers of NHPI students are displaying lower levels of English proficiency, graduation rates are lower, academic achievement scores are lower, and disciplinary infraction rates are higher. Additionally, data shows absenteeism is higher for this population, and poor school attendance can have an impact on all of the other factors identified. Findings from interviews provide more insight into the reasons for absences and are discussed in detail in the next section.

## **Findings from Interviews**

After analyzing archival data, interviews were conducted with individuals from different groups: recent Marshallese graduates, Marshallese parents/guardians,

Marshallese community liaisons, and school personnel. The two overarching themes that emerged from the analysis of the responses are the impact of the family on attendance and the impact of connectivity with the school. This section is divided into each finding from each interviewee group, including the two primary themes as well as other issues that provide insight to the unique perspective of each stakeholder group.

**Responses from recent Marshallese graduates.** Interviews with the five recent graduates revealed two major themes concerning the attendance of Marshallese students: family and connectivity. These themes will be explored in this section, as well as an overview of the graduates' perceptions of their own educations and their recommendations for the school.

**Background.** Recent Marshallese graduate participants interviewed for this study are from diverse backgrounds, but all graduated from Northwest High School. The participants lived in diverse households as well, with some living with their biological parents and siblings only while others lived with extended family members and in multi-generational households. Two of the participants were female, while the other three were male.

Participant 1 entered the United States from the Marshall Islands on June 1, 2006, entering US schools on August 22, 2006. This participant began attending NPS in Grade 2 and was a 2017 NHS graduate with a 3.08 GPA. When initially assessed by the MAC II English language proficiency screener (MAC II) in Grade 2, this participant's scores ranged from "Low Intermediate" to "Advanced." The student was given the EAMES assessment in English to determine the level of math proficiency, and the student scored on grade level. Participant 1 scored "Basic" on the Grade 3 state math

assessment and “Below Basic” in literacy but improved greatly between Grades 3 and 7. Participant 1 scored “Proficient” on the state literacy exam in seventh and eighth grades, “Proficient” in math in seventh grade, and “Below Basic” in math in eighth grade. This student also battled cancer from approximately 2010-2014 and spent most of those years receiving homebound services. Despite being homebound, in 2014, the student scored “Fully English Proficient” on the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA) but could not exit ESL services due to failing to meet other exit criteria. In 2018, in Grade 12, Participant 1 received a “Progressing” score on the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA21), with scores ranging from “Intermediate” in writing to “Advanced” in listening and speaking. This participant did not take the ACT. Since graduating, this participant has obtained a job working at a local elementary school and has begun college.

Participant 2 arrived in the United States on April 4, 2012 and entered US schools on August 20, 2012. This student began attending NPS in Grade 7 and is a 2018 NHS graduate with a 2.24 GPA. Upon arrival at the end of the sixth grade, EAMES testing showed the participant to be at a fourth-grade math level. The MAC II showed English proficiency scores ranging from “Low Intermediate” in writing and listening to “High Intermediate” in speaking and reading upon arrival in the US in 2012. On the Spring 2013 ELDA, Participant 2’s scores ranged from “Beginning” in speaking and writing to “Intermediate” in listening and reading. Participant 2 scored “Below Basic” in math Grades 7 and 8 and “Approached expectations” on the 9<sup>th</sup> grade Algebra I exam. The participant was exempt from the literacy exam in Grade 7 as a first year in the US student but scored “Basic” in Grade 8. The participant’s ELPA scores from 2016 to



2018 consistently ranged from “Early Intermediate” to “Intermediate”, with reading consistently being the lowest area. This student took the ACT in Grade 11 and scored a Composite of 13, with a 12 in Reading and English and a 14 in Math and Science. This participant faced many obstacles to graduation, including having two children, but successfully completed requirements for graduation and plans to attend college when financially able.

Participant 3 entered the United States on October 1, 2002 and entered NPS on January 27, 2003 in kindergarten. When this participant graduated in 2016 with a 2.9 GPA, he was classified as FEP 7, which means the participant exited the ESL program seven years prior. Participant 3 was “Proficient” on the math and literacy state assessments in Grades 3-6. In Grades 7 and 8, the student achieved the “Advanced” score on the state literacy exam in addition to scoring “Proficient” in math. The participant also scored “Proficient” on the state Algebra I and Geometry exams. In Grade 12, Participant 3 scored a 19 Composite on the ACT, with a 17 in Reading, an 18 in Math and English, and a 22 in Science.

Participant 4 entered US schools on August 19, 2004 in kindergarten and graduated from NHS in 2017 with a 2.87 GPA. This participant scored “Proficient” on the state literacy and math exam in Grades 3-7 except for scoring “Basic” on the literacy exam in Grade 4. Participant 4 scored “Basic” in both math and literacy in Grade 8. In Grade 9, this participant scored “Advanced” on the state Algebra I exam. Participant 4’s first recorded ELDA test is from 2010, and he received “Advanced” scores in reading and writing and “Fully English Proficient” scores in listening and speaking. His ELDA scores were similar from 2010-2015 except for an “Intermediate” score in reading in

2011. Participant 4's 2016 ELPA scores included "Intermediate" in reading and writing and "Advanced" in listening and speaking. In 2017, this participant scored "Early Intermediate" in reading and "Intermediate" in all other areas. Participant 4 took the ACT as part of the Grade 11 cohort in 2016 and received a Composite score of 13, with a 10 in English, a 13 in Science, a 14 in Reading, and a 15 in Math. Since graduating in 2017, Participant 4 has attended and graduated from a trade school.

Participant 5 entered the United States from the Marshall Islands on October 10, 2012 and entered US schools on October 30 of the same year. Participant 5 is a 2018 NHS graduate with a 2.46 GPA. This participant received special education services for a visual impairment initially and then for a Specific Learning Disability as well beginning in Grade 10. When given the 2013, 2014, and 2015 ELDA, Participant 5 scored "Pre-functional" in all areas. The English language proficiency assessment changed in 2016 to the ELPA21, and the participant scored the same in 2016, 2017, and 2018 on the ELPA21, receiving a "Beginner" score in Reading and "Early Intermediate" scores in all other areas. This participant scored "Below Basic" in math Grades 7 and 8 and "Did not meet expectations" on the 9<sup>th</sup> grade Algebra I exam. The participant was exempt from the literacy exam in Grade 7 as a first year in the US student but scored "Below Basic" in Grade 8. This student did not take the ACT.

All five participants considered their education a success, either because they made their families proud or because they persevered in spite of significant obstacles, such as language barriers, illnesses, or raising children of their own. All five recent graduates also felt that their success, as well as that of their peers, would positively benefit the Marshallese community in the city by allowing them to serve as role models

to younger students as well as enabling them to better serve the needs of the community. Three of the five graduates stated that the success of Marshallese students attending NPS would also impact Marshallese in the Marshall Islands. When asked, one graduate stated,

Yes, for sure. That was probably the main thing why we came here in the first place was because of education, and like seeing the progress that we have here with the Marshallese Community, I believe that it will bring more Marshallese back from our homeland to be here to learn more about what they can be in life and what their dreams are. (December 13, 2018)

Another graduated stated, “It makes better education, higher education, more higher education, not just here or where other islander kids are, but back home as well” (December 18, 2018). Another participant suggested that Marshallese graduates would use their education to take what they have learned back to the Marshall Islands and teach islanders in their homeland, thus positively impacting the community in the Marshall Islands.

Three of the recent graduates reported less than five absences per year, while the remaining two graduates reported significant absences. One participants’ high number of absences was due to having two children in high school, which resulted in a need to make up courses in night school. The other participants’ absences were the result of a combination of health challenges and not wanting to come to school because the work was too hard. The graduate who reported not wanting to come to school received low English language proficiency scores on standardized assessments and received Special Education services. One recent graduate reported that attendance did not personally impact school success, but the other four graduates reported that it had a tremendous

impact on their success in school, noting that absences made it difficult to stay caught up with their academics. One participant stated, “Oh, if I missed school, it so hard because I don’t know what did they do because I missed school” (December 28, 2018).

***Impact of family.*** Recent graduates reported that their families were the most significant factor impacting their attendance. Family responsibilities, such as interpreting for parents at medical or legal visits or caring for family members, at times caused students to miss school, but families were also a source of great encouragement to go to school. One graduated explained a Marshallese student’s responsibility to help his parents, saying

Sometimes when my parents really need my help because, my parents, they don't know how to speak English, and usually the Marshallese parents turn to their kids to translate for them when they go to appointments and all that stuff, and I was usually the main one who translated from my parents, and so those were some days that I missed school unexcused was because I went to the doctors and helped my parents out. (December 13, 2018)

Despite familial responsibilities that prevented students from attending school, a sense of responsibility to make their families proud encouraged the graduates to attend school. One recent graduate stated

They would always says something like – this thing gets stuck in my head every time. They saying, "Keep going to school. Don't stop here. Like after graduation." They said, "Don't stop here. Don't be like us. We stopped in high school and look, it's tough for us." I guess that's what pushed me ‘til I was done. (December 18, 2018)

Participant 1 suggested schools need to work better with Marshallese parents to ensure they fully understand what is expected in regard to attendance and why it is considered to be extremely important to the student's success. This participant suggested sending letters home in Marshallese that clearly define these expectations, which would also include what happens if students have excessive absences, such as loss of credit or potential legal ramifications. Another participant provided cultural information that might be included in such a letter. She stated that church or cultural activities may last until late at night, and students may be up until two or three o'clock in the morning on Sunday nights cleaning up from such events. She stated parents tell their children, "Wait until we are finished with everything" (December 14, 2018). She stated many students may still attend school the next day, but they may get in trouble for falling asleep at school due to the lack of sleep received the previous night. This student also stated most Marshallese children do not have a set bedtime or wake time, which also contributes to oversleeping or being tired at school. Information addressing these factors that negatively impact attendance or achievement while at school could be included in the letter the participant suggested be sent to guardians.

**Connectivity.** In addition to family, the recent graduates interviewed also related increased attendance to a sense of ownership, acceptance, or responsibility within the school. One participant suggested that making students feel like they made a positive contribution to the school would be a way to increase attendance, stating,

If you get Islander Club to do a lot more within the school, and all those Islander kids gets together, they're gonna realize how important it is, they're gonna want to

do more, they're gonna want to attend school more . . . It's gonna make them want to just come back more and just, like, hey, we gotta help them. They're helping us. We gotta help them. (December 18, 2018)

Overall, the recent graduates expressed extracurricular activities, such as choir, athletics, Student Council, television production, time with friends, and the school's Islander Club, an organization specifically for Pacific Islander students, were the most enjoyable aspects of school. These activities positively impacted attendance because they made students feel connected to the school and also like they contributed something positive to the school. In addition to enjoyable extracurricular activities, strong connections to teachers also contributed positively to student attendance. One recent graduate reported "really nice teachers" made him want to come to school, stating,

They were just like a blessing to me and I really love how they just been there for me and helped me out whenever I needed it, and they did take a little extra time to be with me, just meet up with me in the library and just help me with my studies and so, I'm very grateful. (December 13, 2018).

When asked for ways schools can better support students in achievement and increased attendance, some recent graduates suggested ensuring students feel connected to the school and valued by the school would result in increased attendance. One way to make students feel connection is to "have someone with the same background as them to be there and encourage them to do their work" (December 13, 2018). A Marshallese school employee could help aid the school in "connecting with the kids and being there for them and letting them know that everything's going to be alright," and this is especially helpful for students who are new to the US and may be facing a language

barrier (December 13, 2018). Another way to make Marshallese students feel connected to the school is by connecting with them through one-on-one learning. One participant stated, “If you can just take that time when they’re struggling with something, we really appreciate that. We like it cuz it draws us to you to even learn more because there is someone that is willing to help” (December 13, 2018). By showing the teacher sees their struggles and is willing to be patient and take the time to help a student individually, students may feel more drawn to the teacher and more comfortable in the classroom environment, which lowers the affective filter and allows them to learn. Another critical component to making students feel comfortable in the school is for teachers or other school personnel to “just understand them” (December 14, 2018).

***Additional factors.*** Another cultural aspect recent graduates suggested educators should be aware of is the tendency for Marshallese students to seem shy and not want to speak in class. It is not that the student cannot speak in English or that the student is worried about speaking English in front of English-speaking peers. One participant stated, “If the teacher asks them a question they wouldn't want to answer because that's how Marshallese students are. They just like making fun of each other” for speaking English (December 19, 2018). Marshallese students are uncomfortable speaking English in front of their Marshallese peers, which can result in teachers perceiving them as unable to respond due to difficulty understanding English or unwilling to participate due to behavioral issues.

**Responses from Marshallese guardians.** Five female guardians were interviewed, and all interviews took place at NHS. Three of the guardians were biological parents to their NHS student, and two were adoptive or legal guardians of their

NHS student. One of the parents interviewed was one of the first two Marshallese students to ever attend NPS in the 1980's, and her biological father was John Moody, the man responsible for establishing the Marshallese community in Northwest Arkansas. She is the legal guardian of a student attending NHS, who is also a descendent of John Moody. Another guardian was among the first Marshallese students to ever attend NPS schools. These two guardians shared their experiences as new arrival students who were not fluent in English and who were experiencing culture shock while attempting to learn in a school where they were almost the only Marshallese students in the entire school. They reported seeing much progress in the supports the district and the community provide to Marshallese students, as well as students from other cultures.

*Marshallese in Northwest Arkansas.* When asked why they think there is such a large Marshallese population in Northwest Arkansas, guardians replied family, jobs, education, and health were the reasons so many Marshallese had relocated to the area. These themes were consistent with other participant groups' responses. Guardians explained the established Marshallese community played a role in the population growth because they invited other family members to come for the jobs and education. Immigrants also knew the established Marshallese community would support them and help them find their way in the new culture that is vastly different than the island culture from which they came. Participant 6 stated, "They want to come because they know there are Marshallese here that would them too . . . they won't feel not welcome" (December 18, 2018). Participant 8 stated her biological father, the first Marshallese person in Northwest Arkansas, called home once he moved to the area and told his



family, “Just send them here so they can come to school and get a better education” (January 25, 2019).

When asked about their educational expectations and hopes for their children, the primary response was for their children to have a better life. The majority of the guardians hoped that their children would finish college, but some stated they want their children to at least finish high school. Participant 7 stated,

For them to have a better life for themselves and a better future, so that they can take care of themselves. I don't know how long am I gonna be in their lives.

That's just my expectation of my kids. Go to school every day. Learn something.

Obey, be obedient, and then just go through college. (December 18, 2018)

Participant 9 stated she wanted her children to have a better job and be better off than she is, but she did not want them to lose their culture. Her main goal was for her children to “have their own house so that they can help more people” (February 11, 2019). This aspiration is due to housing regulation in the city, which only allow a certain number of people to live in an apartment. In a house, her children could take in as many people from the Marshall Islands as they want, and thus give back more to their community. She saw a successful education as a way to achieve this goal.

*Value of attendance.* As with the recent graduates, guardians agreed attendance is important to students’ academic success. When asked about the impact of attendance, Participant 7 stated,

I mean, for a kid that doesn't attend school, pretty much everything. For the kid between these two, for a kid that attending school every day, they learn a lot, they learn something new. It's kind of like a big progress in their life, but then the kid

that doesn't go to school, they don't know anything. It's just like, how are you gonna learn if you don't go to school and get educated? That's a big difference.

(December 18, 2018)

***Impact of Family.*** The predominate theme that emerged from interviews with guardians was the role of families in positively or negatively impacting student attendance. Families that consistently spend time with their children and know when their child is absent positively impact attendance. These parents share their belief that education is valuable, and they pass this on to their children. One participant shared why she believes her child has good attendance, stating, “I think it's because we told him, or we kind of explained to him how important it is for him to be in school every single day. If he wants a good future, he needs to be in school” (December 18, 2018). When the family stresses the value of education, students internalize that value and are successful at school in regard to attendance, which positively impacts academics.

As previously noted, while families are the most influential positive factor impacting attendance, they can also be the least supportive factor. Participants noted awareness that parents do not always spend enough time with their children, whether it is out of necessity or choice. Some parents must work shifts that cause them to be out of the home when students should be completing homework or sleeping, and these activities may not take place as needed when the guardian is not there to encourage the students. One participant stated some parents place other activities before spending time with their children, and this can negatively impact attendance. Participant 7 stated,

I think it's parents not explaining how important it is to them, and not spending a lot of time with them as needed . . . I know there are parents that . . . would leave

their kids in the house and then go do whatever, go home, kids are already in bed, or not in the house, somewhere else, and they won't see their kid until whenever they come back from wherever they're at. And also because they don't . . . they focus on what they want to do, before their child. (December 18, 2018)

Other ways family can negatively impact attendance is when students live with guardians other than their biological parents. These students may struggle due to missing their parents, as some of them are living with people they had never met before coming to Arkansas. Participant 8 noted that students not living with biological parents may also have difficulties because they are afraid to ask for help if they miss the bus or have other school-related needs, “Especially when you like never been away from your parents. Especially they're not open to you” (January 25, 2019).

Participants emphasized the shy nature of many Marshallese, with one participant suggesting, “If you want to talk to a parent or a student, you have to be in a private place, because they get really shy a lot” (Participant 6, December 18, 2018). One suggestion was to ensure guardians know in advance how many people will be in a meeting. One example would be an Individualized Education Program meeting. Sometimes, these meetings can have multiple teachers, administrators, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and/or psychological examiners. Guardians who are unaware of the large number of school personnel who will participate in the meeting may be overwhelmed and too shy to voice any concerns. If they know in advance, they can prepare and potentially invite another person to accompany them for support.

Guardians also suggested that they schools need to be persistent in attempting to communicate with families. While families may move regularly, other Marshallese in the

community may know where they are, and schools can use a network to locate students who are not attending school. One participant suggested schools need to communicate with parents earlier so they do not get in legal trouble for absences, and schools need to educate the parents. They do not know to call in when their kid is sick, and they do not always send medical or dental notes. Schools should provide parent information sessions for Marshallese families. Participant 9 suggested

If you want to let them know about events, you should share it on the Marshallese radio station and at the churches. You could have the parent liaison church hop and try to share the information. If you can get a way for them to use Facebook to report absences, that would help because they don't always have a phone that works. (February 11, 2019)

One participant also provided some cultural information vital in communicating effectively. School personnel unfamiliar with Marshallese culture related to gender may be unaware of how and with whom to communicate. Participant 9 stated

Discipline comes from the fathers, and the mother is the one that nurtures them. When you call, you need to talk to the mom, not dad. And you can't go to the house to talk to dad if there are no females present. You need to ask if it's okay, or if you can come at another time. (February 11, 2019)

**Connectivity.** The second major factor that Marshallese guardians felt greatly impact student attendance was connectivity to the school. Factors that positively impact attendance are clubs and programs that the school offers, such as academic academies that connect students to a core group of students and teachers while they focus on a program of study, such as medical, law and public safety, agriculture, information

technology, or teaching. In a school of 2,000 students, this connection to a group of students as well as caring adults can provide students with a sense of belonging that encourages their school attendances. One participant shared her observations of how these activities impact school, stating

School is fun. Who wouldn't want to come to school? I mean, there's a lot of great opportunities happening nowadays than back then, when I was in school. I graduated and then the next year, after I graduate, they had Law Academy and Medical Academy. I'm like, 'Who does not want to be a part of this things in school?' I mean, these are exciting! " (Participant 7, December 18, 2018)

Participant 9 stated in addition to academies, sports and Marshallese cultural events also positively impact student attendance. Students enjoy playing the sports, but they also gain a sense of belonging from being a member of a team, and this connects them to the school and encourages attendance. Cultural activities, such as those hosted by the school's Islander Club, also make students feel valued and connected to peers at the school, thus positively impacting attendance.

Guardians suggested when students do not feel this sense of connectivity, attendance often suffers due to a student's lack of comfort within the school. One participant shared her story of being one of the first Marshallese students in the school, which at times made her feel unwelcome. She attributed her success to her mentality and the ability to focus on her future instead of the moment, but she recognized that other student might not be able to look to the future as she did. They might choose to avoid school due to the language barriers, academic difficulties, and disconnection from school, stating

I mean, imagine yourself being on a foreign land. You don't know the language, you don't know anybody, and then you're just all by yourself. All these negative thoughts are gonna be in your mind of, "What are you doing? What are you even doing here? Go to do something else." (December 18, 2018)

Another factor that may negatively impact attendance is communication.

Guardians may not understand the regulations for attending school, and they may also be unaware of when students are absent. The district has an automated call service for report absences, but when parents change phone numbers or have disconnected phones, they do not receive these calls. The district also sends letters out when certain absence thresholds have been met, but when families are transient, they may not receive these notifications either.

Peers were also noted as either a positive or negative factor impacting attendance, depending on whether or not the friends value and attend school. Students who had friends with good attendance tend to also have good attendance, but students who have friends who skip school may choose to do so as well. A lack of friends at school may also negatively impact attendance. Participant 7 stated, "Or they don't have friends. They don't have anybody to eat lunch with. Instead of going to lunch, they'll go to the bathroom" (December 18, 2018).

The guardians interviewed had many ideas for how schools can increase Marshallese students' connectivity to the school as a means of better supporting their attendance and academic achievement. Teachers and school personnel need to take the time to get to know the students and earn their trust. Participant 7 replied,

I think it's letting them blossom in their own way, or finding things that makes them happy, or just sit there and just talk with them and just see what things other than coming to school that makes them happy. What do they look forward to of coming to school? If they're not looking forward to coming to school, ask them why. What's the reason? Just being patient with our kids is just the most important thing that we can do right now. I mean, I know that we see a lot of kids just skipping out, but we don't know the reason behind it. I usually just sit down with them and just talk with them of what's going on. I wanna dig a little deeper. Getting to know them in a personal level . . . I think with a lot of our kids they are very shy. It's just on their trust level of you welcoming another person and just trusting that person . . . Are they gonna be there for the rest of my life, or are they gonna be there, whenever I need them? It's just that trust. (December 18, 2018)

Participant 7 had personal experience, enrolling in NPS schools as a newcomer ESL student in middle school.

Just like one of my teachers in school. All she can do at that time was just, whenever I go inside of the class, she would just smile. And then, welcoming me, making me feel like I'm part of the class. I'm new and I'm the only Marshallese in the class. All she did was just smile, or she would come and whisper something to my ear and say, 'You can do this. I know that you can. You're smart. I can see your work, even though you're not gonna say anything, but I know that. I can tell by the way that you do your work.' Just kind of like that encouragement. It just motivate you to do something, like do more or be better at something. (December 18, 2018)

Students need to be able to trust in the adults at the school so they “have someone that they will trust to talk to, if they ever need help, instead of just run away from the school” (December 18, 2018). Participant 8 added, “If they feel comfortable, they will come to you” (January 25, 2018).

***Additional Factors.*** Transportation was also noted as a factor that may negatively impact attendance. If a student misses the bus, there may be no one at the home who can drive them to school. Some Marshallese families share a car for a number of people, and there may not always be a vehicle available. The city does not have a large public transportation service, and the student may be unable to go to school if they did not ride the school bus in the morning.

Unmet personal needs were suggested reasons why students may not attend school regularly. One participant noted an experience with a student who had not been to school in many days, and the school contacted her to ask for help in locating the student. The participant located the student at home and personally asked the child why he was not attending school. The boy replied, “I need Mom to buy me a new shoes, because my shoes are so small they hurt my . . . they hurt my feet” (Participant 6, December 18, 2018). The mother stated she had to wait until pay day to purchase the shoes. When asked if she felt the student did not feel comfortable telling anyone at school, Participant 6 replied,

They never feel comfortable telling . . . I think the reason why he told me, because I'm Marshallese . . . That's the other thing about us Marshallese, we don't just come up and ask. We wait for whoever that is able to . . . able to ask us.  
(December 18, 2018)



The participant shared Marshallese will not complain or share these concerns, but if someone asks them, they will respond. Their shy nature prevents them from initiating these types of conversations.

**Summary.** As with the recent graduate interviews, interviews with Marshallese guardians revealed two major factors they perceive to impact attendance: family and connectivity to the school. While supportive, engaged families can positively encourage and support high attendance rates, families who are not involved with their child's education can result in higher absentee rates. Guardians suggested students who have a strong connection to the school are more likely to have more regular attendance, while students who do not have a connection to the school may miss more frequently. Additional factors, such as transportation challenges and unmet personal needs, can also impact attendance, but family and connectivity are the primary attendance influences. Guardians suggested concentrated efforts to communicate better with families and increased efforts to connect students with school personnel and activities as two methods of improving school attendance for Marshallese students.

**Responses from Marshallese community liaisons.** Five Community Liaison participants were interviewed and spoke to the impact of family on students' education and students' connectivity with the school as factors involved attendance. The participants came from diverse backgrounds, as one grew up on the outer islands, some that spent time in Majuro, and two in the United States, one of whom moved to the Marshall Islands as a teen. As with the recent Marshallese graduates, the Community Liaison participants grew up in diverse households, with some living with their biological parents and siblings only while others lived with extended family members and in multi-

generational households. Two of the participants attended private schools, while the other three attended public schools. One male and four females were interviewed. The first few questions were designed to get to know the participant and his/her experiences with schooling in the Marshall Islands, while the other questions pertained to schooling Marshallese students in the United States.

Responses from community liaison participants revealed common topics of interest and concern. This section is organized according to three of these common responses, followed by a description of responses that stood out and are subject to future research.

*Schooling in the Marshall Islands.* Community liaisons interviewed had varying levels of knowledge about the Marshallese educational system. Participants included those who attended public schools in the Marshall Islands, those who attended private schools in the Marshall Islands, those who were educated fully in the Marshall Islands, those who attended schools in the Marshall Islands and the United States, and those who attended school in the United States only.

Participants consistently described the public schools on the island of Majuro, the Marshallese capital, as more structured and as having access to more resources. Schools on some of the outer islands operated much more like the one-room-schoolhouse concept that used to be common in the United States, and students of varying ages and grade levels were taught together by one teacher. Participants also perceived that teachers on the outer islands were likely to be less fluent in English and potentially have lower education levels than those on Majuro. Due to the resources, teachers, and structure

available in Majuro, participants suggested that the education level is considered to be higher on Majuro than on the outer islands.

Participants also described private schools as much more structured, better supported by resources, and stricter in regard to attendance than public schools. Some islands have private and public schools, while others just have public schools, and many of the islands have schools that go through the eighth grade but no further. Students on those islands must travel to another island to attend high school. Some can pay for schooling and live in a dorm on another to continue their schooling, while others may live with family members on Majuro and attend public schools for free.

Participants agreed children are required to attend school, and the schools and government encourage attendance, but there are no legal consequences for the child or guardian if the student has poor attendance or drops out. Schools communicate with parents and may conference with parents if students are not at school, and it can reflect poorly on the parents if students do not attend, and this is an encouragement to many to ensure that their children attend school. In the Marshall Islands, students do not lose credit for having excessive absences, so attending US schools with restricted absences as well as legal consequences for excessive absences can be very surprising for Marshallese immigrant families.

***Transitioning to the United States.*** Participants were asked why they think such a large number of Marshallese families live in Northwest Arkansas (NWA). All five participants indicated jobs were a factor in the concentration of Marshallese in NWA, with one also indicating the cost of living is lower in Arkansas than other states where Marshallese have relocated. Four of the five participants also feel a good education is

another reason Marshallese families have concentrated here in NWA. Two participants indicated family and the comfort of having a strong Marshallese community in the area are another reason why the Marshallese community continues to grow in NWA. Marshallese feel comfortable here because they know they will be able to be around other Marshallese, which is consistent with their communal nature. One participant also indicated that medical care is a strong draw for Marshallese to come to this area.

Two of the community liaisons interviewed were aware of a non-profit organization in the Marshall Islands that exists to help individuals prepare for transition, but this program is optional and underutilized. One participant indicated most Marshallese are unaware of how different living in the States is, from taxes, to bill paying, to laws enforced regarding schooling, so they do not understand how valuable this service could be. Community liaisons were aware of multiple organizations in Northwest Arkansas that can aide Marshallese immigrants in learning how to function within a Western culture, but these organizations do not currently provide information specific to schooling.

Community liaison participants were also asked what they think schools in the US could do to help students/families transitioning from the Marshall Islands to the United States. There were multiple, diverse responses, but one theme was clear – connecting new arrivals with community resources. The first participant interviewed stated the study site’s school district “is a model for most Marshallese communities. Even the superintendent all the way down” (Participant 11, December 5, 2018). The participant further stated there are

no other communities like this where a whole portion of a population moves to one part of a country, so I think we are . . . doing something good here. I think a lot of communities can learn from [NPS]” (Participant 11, December 5, 2018).

When asked what the school already does that is helpful, the participant referenced multiple meetings that the district holds where Marshallese community members are specifically invited to participate, and the district is open and always willing to listen. The participant stated that many Marshallese are not aggressive and will not come forward even when they need something. Rather than waiting, the district is purposefully inviting Marshallese to meetings and even designing meetings specific to Marshallese so they are less shy. This participant also noted several of the principals and teachers speak to Marshallese “really close and talk to them like they really know them, and that really helps” (Participant 11, December 5, 2018). In addition to reaching out, the participant also shared the importance of being patient with Marshallese community members, stating it “takes a while for them to warm up” (Participant 11, December 5, 2018). Once they feel like people are genuine and really want to help, they are more willing to open up and express their needs. This will also lead to them volunteering and participating more in school events.

Another participant recommended talking to the Marshallese Consul General to encourage the Marshallese government to develop a transition education program because families do not understand the legal ramifications of excessive school absences. The families may lack English skills or may be too shy to ask questions, so it would be good for the government “back home” to educate them on what to expect. This participant also recommended partnering with organizations here in NWA, such as

Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese (ACOM) and the Marshallese Educational Initiative (MEI), to work together to educate those who come to enroll about requirements and expectations at the beginning of their time in NWA so they do not learn of the rules after they have already broken them because they were unaware. The participant stated many of the families are aware of ACOM and MEI, and they frequently visit these organizations upon arrival. One of the community liaisons interviewed works for MEI and stated the organization has many resources to help them because “it’s a big transition. It’s very different living here in Arkansas” when compared to the Marshall Islands (Participant 13, December 7, 2018). New arrivals need help in understanding the expectations that American non-Marshallese have in regard to “renting homes, paying bills on time, coming to school, attendance, consequences for their actions because there aren’t very many consequences in the Marshall Islands for those type of things. So it’s a completely different way of living here” (Participant 13, December 7, 2018). It was suggested the school district collaborate with local Marshallese to provide workshops and to produce videos on topics that may be unfamiliar to new arrival Marshallese. The video format was recommended over written products to ensure that literate and non-literate individuals would be able to access the information. The workshops and videos could provide information on everything from finances, such as paying taxes, to school attendance requirements, to the importance of immunizations.

Another participant had a unique idea among all participants interviewed. This participant suggested an exchange program for students and teachers to better understand both the American and Marshallese cultures. The suggestion was for five American students to live with families in the Marshall Islands and five Marshallese students to live

with non-Marshallese Americans in the United States. The same would hold for teachers. The American teachers would be able to see how Marshallese teachers engage and motivate their students, and Marshallese teachers would see how education looks in the US.

*Benefits of education.* All five participants agreed a successful education from NPS will have a positive impact on the Marshallese community in the area. Participants stated students with a good education will strive to help their community through many means, such as interpreting for those who are not fluent speakers of English and helping them find the resources necessary to meet their needs. One participant had seen an example of an American-educated Marshallese doctor who had chosen to move to NWA from Hawaii because he knew there was a high concentration of Marshallese in the area, and he wanted to serve his community.

Participant 14 stated there are many examples around the community of students with a successful education who are staying in the area to improve the community. They are graduating from college and working in places that previous generations would not have imagined, such as banks. Participant 14 stated the first generation that came to the area was not really educated, and they quickly found jobs in factories. The newer generation is pursuing higher education and working in more lucrative careers that provide them a more financially stable life. Participant 14 feels this expansion enhances the community, and “we might all be different types of fruits, but one put in a basket to live together, we have no choice but to love each other and make the community better” (December 12, 2018). Participant 13 also noted the “more successful Marshallese students we have, the more successful Marshallese student we’ll have,” suggesting more

students will be encouraged to pursue their education when they see members of their own community being successful (December 7, 2018).

In addition to enhancing the Marshallese community in NWA, all five participants expressed they believe a successful education from NPS will definitely impact the Marshall Islands. They feel it will encourage students in the Marshall Islands to strive to achieve a successful education, and it will also make an impact because some of the students return to the Marshall Islands to help the community there. One participant also felt it would make individuals in the Marshall Islands want to come to NWA so that they can obtain the same type of education and lifestyle. Another participant stated part “of the reasons why things are changing so drastically the way that they’re changing right now for the better in the Marshall Islands is because of the education that students have received here in the States” (Participant 13, December 7, 2018). Participant 13 stated after completing school in NPS, individuals have “gone back to the Marshall Islands to pour into the country” (December 7, 2018).

***Role of attendance in education.*** All five participants agree attendance has a tremendous impact on the success of Marshallese students in our schools. All participants agreed students who do not attend school regularly may fall behind on their academics, which can lead to frustration and further absences. Students can disengage and “lose interest” in schooling when they miss too much. Participant 13 suggested absences can be compounded when a student is struggling with the English language. These students are already struggling to understand what is being taught in their classes; when they miss, they fall further and further behind. Participant 11, Participant, and Participant 15 stated attendance and timeliness are important life skills that have



ramifications beyond high school. They stressed the importance of learning time management. Participant 12 expressed concerns that the expectations with the Marshallese school system is much different than NHS, and parents do not understand how important regular attendance is in the United States.

*Impact of family.* Community Liaison participants were asked about their greatest concerns regarding the success of Marshallese children in Northwest Public Schools. As with other questions, the common theme of the responses was family. Participants indicated strong concerns centered around parents, ranging from parental supervision to school-home communication. Many parents have to devote much of their time to working, and this does not leave much time for taking part in their children's education. Many parents are just trying to survive in a foreign culture, which makes education secondary. In the Marshall Islands, parents were used to being less involved because the government and school played a larger part, and it takes a while to change that mentality. Participant 11's wish was that parents would recognize that their "kid's success is going to be their success. They all can get out of poverty with their education, when the kid's education is successful" (December 5, 2018).

While liaisons expressed a perception that many families saw education as a means to escape poverty, they noted a lack of strong family encouragement and prioritization of school negatively affects school attendance. They attributed this to a lack of value on education or personal problems within the home. When asked what the schools can do to better support student achievement, one participant stated, "I think you guys are already doing anything that I can think of," but also referenced learning what students need and connecting families with resources, encouraging school personnel to

“work with the parents, because I really believe that it starts with the family. . . Like with their bills,” adding that the more the school can help the parents, the more success will be seen in the students (Participant 11, December 5, 2018). This participant shared concerns about a student’s family structure negatively impacting attendance, stating,

Sometimes when the family is struggling at home, trying to make ends meet, it’s hard for the kid to attend school all the time because at home, maybe it’s not peaceful all the time. Parents are not there all the time to make sure kids go to sleep on time or do their homeworks [sic], so it’s family structure. When the parents are not stable, when they’re not in a stable home, that’s a huge impact.

(Participant 11, December 5, 2018)

Likewise, Participant 12 suggested what makes a student attendance and be successful in school is “a lot of support from family . . . but if there's no parent there to check up on them and see if they're doing their work, then it's gonna make their grades fall off” (Participant 12, December 21, 2018). Additionally, this participant stated, “It's part of our job to make sure that they're doing their school works . . . I think that's one of the main reason why students are being successful or not, just because we're not there for them” (Participant 12, December 21, 2018). Many students have parents who work early in the morning and are not around to ensure that students go to school, and students may take advantage of the opportunity to stay home from school. Participant 15 suggested the family’s mentality has a tremendous impact on attendance, stating, “Some families are, ‘You see our struggle? Do better in school. Finish what you . . . Be successful.’ Some families are, ‘Do you see us struggle? Get a job. You don't need school. We need money.’” (January 11, 2019). If the family takes the approach that the student needs to

focus on finances rather than schooling, a job takes precedence over school attendance. Students may also need to help take care of elders or young children, which may impede their ability to attend school.

Participant 12 reported social-emotional barriers may exist for some students who are living with extended family members. When students are not living with their biological parents, as is common with students attending NPS schools, they may have other needs that do not pertain to schooling, and these unmet needs may negatively impact a student's school attendance. Unstable homes can also negatively impact students' success in school. One participant gave the example of a student who was living in a home with domestic violence. The student may be experiencing a lot of negative experiences that the school is unaware of, and "that's one of the reasons why the kid is not showing up for school. I think to understand what's going on in their environment" is critical (Participant 12, December 21, 2018).

Participants also expressed concern regarding parental communication with the school. When parents are unable to attend school events or conferences due to work schedules or transportation issues, they may not be well-informed about their child's attendance and academic progress. When they are unaware of areas of concern, they are unable to encourage growth in those areas. If they are not home when students need to study or do homework, the student does not have adequate encouragement from home to make gains in those areas. Both schools and parents need to do more to improve school-home communication.

Additionally, participants expressed that Marshallese parents do not always show support for student activities that encourage active participation and ownership in

schools, such as band and athletics. The parents do not understand why it is important for them to be present, or they cannot afford the entrance fees to watch the activities. This lack of parental support may result in students being less engaged in school. Another area of concern was parental guidance in ensuring students are fed a proper diet, get plenty of sleep, and make time to get their homework finished. If these areas are deficient, students may not perform their best at school.

Despite the potential for families to have a negative impact on attendance and achievement, participants also stated the family and a sense of community were the primary factors lead to positive attendance at school. One participant stated, “All the kids that I see here and that I know are successful and I know their parents, their parents are stable, too. Stable marriage, stable jobs, they don’t move all the time. Stable home, that’s the biggest factor” (December 5, 2018). Another participant suggested positive attendance is a result of “the family structure. I see that they have stable parents and a stable home. It just flows down to the kids. The kids are super responsible. So, it starts with the parents and the family” (Participant 11, December 5, 2018).

**Connectivity.** In addition to the strong impact of the family on school attendance and achievement, participants also felt students not feeling connected to anyone at the school can lead to absences. All five participants expressed getting to know the students and what is going on in their lives outside of school is vital to better support them. Students’ involvement in the school impacts the amount of effort they put forth, and therefore, the amount of success they achieve at school. One participant stated,

If they’re not really socializing and they don’t have friends sand they’re feeling left out and alone, maybe that’s one reason that they don’t want to come to

school, because they don't have anything to look forward to. You know what I mean? They would come to school, and then feel left out and alone, and like a stranger to everybody, and maybe that's one reason. (Participant 12, December 21, 2018).

Students may choose not to come to school if they do not feel like part of the school and do not have friends. A lack of connection to the school can cause students to be susceptible to negative peer that negatively impacts attendance, but a sense of belonging in the school makes Marshallese students want to attend. They need to know that there are other Marshallese students and that they are not alone. Seeing other Marshallese students would “would open up the other kids; they would help them” (December 21, 2018). The more comfortable the students feel, the more willing they will be to take part in school. One participant stated the Northwest Public Schools is already making great strides by providing “supportive teachers, supportive staff, Marshallese liaisons in the schools helping out, mentors” (Participant 11, December 5, 2018).

Participant 14 stated in order to help Marshallese students feel more connected to the school, it is critical for staff to know about the students' culture. The staff “really cannot help somebody if you don't know them that well. And coming from different backgrounds with different language, there's always learning there that somebody has to do” (Participant 14, December 12, 2018). When the staff better understands the students and their culture, they can find ways to connect with the students and help the students feel connected to the school, which is critical for the students to be successful. One participant expressed concern the students do not feel that there is anyone at the school that they can trust, stating, “they may be at school, but they're not doing anything, they're

not doing their work, they're not doing homework, they're not getting involved probably because they don't trust that environment, they don't trust the people” (Participant 15, January 11, 2019). Rather than surface level greetings, teachers should use statements like, "Hey, remember when you told me this?" (Participant 15, January 11, 2019). This type of ongoing communication would demonstrate to students, "Oh, I can really open up and tell them what I really need" (January 11, 2019).

Participants suggested it is important for teachers, counselors, and administrators to form trusting relationships with the students so that they are able to share their troubles with a trusted adult who cares about them. School personnel should be purposeful in their efforts to earn a student’s trust. If they succeed, “just maybe [the students] will open up to us, and we'll understand why they're missing school a lot and not just report them” (Participant 12, December 21, 2018). School personnel must keep “encouraging them, letting them know that it's really important for them to be in school, not to just think about present, to think about the future and the future of their family as well (Participant 15, January 11, 2019). Connecting with students and making them feel comfortable is vital so school personnel can first “know the family situation, try to figure out what's going on first. Second, see what other resources are available so that the student doesn't have to miss school” (Participant 15, January 11, 2019). School counselors and teachers who “push them and show interest and really want to help them” positively impact student achievement (Participant 14, December 21, 2018).

Participants expressed concerns about students not getting involved and “staying in the background” due to shyness. Schools need to actively work to get students involved so that they feel part of the school community. If the students do not feel part of

the school, they will not take pride in their successes and what they accomplish. One way to help Marshallese students feel better connected to the school would be to invite more Marshallese-speakers to the schools. Participant 11 added, “You guys are already doing it, but having more Marshallese at the school, and try to bridge the language barrier” (December 5, 2018). One participant added

just recognizing that they may need somebody that speaks their language to help them understand something more clearly, I feel like that would help with their learning. So, having a tutor or someone that speaks Marshallese, I think would be good, a mentor. And having people that they feel comfortable, someone like them, to encourage them along the way, I think that’s very impactful as well, both for attendance and for their academic achievement, but you guys are doing that, so that’s really awesome. (Participant 13, December 7, 2018)

Participants suggested current activities like school-sponsored college nights with Marshallese interpreters and speakers designed specifically for Marshallese families show students and families that they are valued at the school and helps establish a connection.

**Summary.** As with recent graduates and guardians, Marshallese community liaisons identified family and connectivity to the school as the primary factors that impact student attendance. Community liaisons expressed concern about a lack of family involvement as well as ineffective communication between school and home. They expressed concerns about students not feeling like they belong at the school, which may contribute poor attendance and disengagement from school.

**Responses from school personnel.** School personnel selected for interviews include an administrator (Participant 16), a school guidance counselor (Participant 17), an English Language Development teacher (Participant 18), a school nurse (Participant 19), and an Instructional Facilitator (Participant 20). Initially, a Special Education teacher was solicited for an interview but was unable to participate. Instead, an Instructional Facilitator with fourteen years of experience in the school and a high level of involvement with Marshallese students was selected and agreed to participate. Two males and three females were interviewed. Three of the participants have spent their entire careers at Northwest High School, while the other two participants had professional experience outside of NHS. Participants were initially asked questions about their experience in the profession as well as their training in working with Marshallese students. After these initial questions, participants were asked about their perceptions, recommendations, and desire to learn more about working with Marshallese students. As with other interviewee groups, school personnel identified the family and connectivity with the school as primary factors affecting attendance. Participant 18 shared that “family support, definitely a bond with teacher, being aware of future possibilities” are all factors motivate her Marshallese students (January 7, 2019).

**General Observations.** As a non-Western island culture, many Marshallese students exhibit traits that are at times different from the rest of the student body. The five school personnel participants interviewed had varying levels of training to prepare them for working successfully with Marshallese students. Three participants attended the Arkansas English as a Second Language (ESL) Academy, which provides some information about the Marshallese presence in the United States as well as strategies for



teaching ELs. Two participants made connections to Master's level coursework on multiculturalism, bias, and poverty that was identified as beneficial in working with Marshallese students. One participant related that the extent of his training was an overview of Marshallese culture, but he had been trained to work with English Learners in general. Another participant identified other trainings that were not specific to Marshallese students as beneficial to working with the Marshallese population at NHS, including Ruby Paine poverty training, Kagan workshops, and others.

One participant, the school nurse, is the only participant that had two training sessions geared specifically toward working with Marshallese. School nurses received training on general health information for Marshallese as well as one training specifically for diabetes. Training specifically on diabetes was provided in response to an identified area of concern in the community, as "the prevalence of type 2 diabetes among adult RMI residents and Marshallese living in the US is 25% to 50%," as compared to 8.3% of non-Marshallese individuals in the United States, and this trend is seen among the Marshallese in Northwest Arkansas (McElfish, 2016, p. 2). When asked why the nurses had training specific to Marshallese, the participant replied:

They have different health concerns than the other students we treat. They also have cultural traditions of treating health concerns that are very different from Western medicine, and that sometimes leads students to have more severe conditions because they are not treated as early as other students. They also have a lot of skin conditions that are unlike what we see in our other students. We had the training on diabetes because they don't always understand the consequences of not changing their diet and taking steps to keep themselves healthy. We have

to teach them basic things that we think all students this age know, like how much a teaspoon of a medicine is or how to know when to take medicine as prescribed.

(Participant 19, January 7, 2019)

Upon further discussion, Participant 19 added:

Also, our Marshallese students tend to not complain very much, so by the time they come see us, sometimes their conditions are very serious. One example would be a student who kept coming in and asking for large Band-Aids. When he finally showed us what they were for, we saw that he had a huge abscess with a big, hard circle around it. He said that it would be fine because he was using a Marshallese oil, but we told him he needed to go to the doctor. The abscess appeared to be staph, and finally Mr. [Administrator] told him he could not return until he had a doctor note saying it was safe for him to return since staph is spread so easily. He ended up going to a doctor, but by the time he went to the doctor, the infection was severe, and the abscess had to be drained. He ended up having to miss several days until he had healed. His absences were medically excused, but he still missed a lot of school. We also see the same thing with dental conditions. If they come in and complain about their mouth hurting, they usually have a tooth that is rotting and needs dental care. A big concern with our Marshallese students is that they and their parents often don't understand the severity of disease and illness. We had a student who needed a heart valve replacement. His parents had known this for years and kept delaying. When we finally got a surgery scheduled, his mother was going to cancel because she had a dental appointment that day and also because she didn't have gas money to get to

the Children's Hospital on the other side of the state. We convinced her that it was extremely important to keep the appointment for the surgery and even gave her money for the gas. Thankfully, the student had the surgery and recovered.

(Participant 19, January 7, 2019)

While the educational personnel interviewed had limited training specifically for working with the Marshallese, the school nurse had received two trainings just for treating Marshallese students, and these training sessions proved to be highly beneficial in preparing them for unexpected medical occurrences, such as high occurrence with diabetes and skin disorders.

Participants were asked what more they needed to understand so that they are better equipped to support the success of Marshallese students, and all participants were interested in learning more about their Marshallese students and their culture in order to better support their success in high school and beyond. One participant stated, "I do think anything we can learn more about their culture, it helps us better understand the students and why they do what they do. (Participant 19, January 7, 2019). Participant responses suggested a desire to better understand their Marshallese students and their families so that they will understand how to communicate more effectively with and learn from the Marshallese community to provide more effective services for this demographic.

Participant 20 stated, in general, work ethic was comparable to non-Marshallese peers. She never assigned homework because she did not want students practicing skills incorrectly at home and many students who had responsibilities outside of school that would prevent them from being able to complete homework. Structure and routine was a growth area for this participant's Marshallese students, and she had to concentrate on

overtly teaching these skills to students who may not fully understand the American school system and cultural norms. This participant also stated “gaps in education and education on the islands that is not comparable to US schools was hard to overcome when no extra time/effort was put in. We could do it, but it took time” (Participant 20, February 1, 2019). Additionally, maturity among male Marshallese students was a factor impacting her students’ study habits, resulting in a lack of focus or ability to have a serious nature.

Participants noted their Marshallese students exhibited many assets, and creative areas, particularly music, were a strength for their Marshallese students. Participant 17 stated music plays a prominent role in the Marshallese culture, and:

students can be heard vocally harmonizing walking to class or playing a ukulele in the courtyard. The school choir teachers have created small ensembles of Marshallese students to entertain at district events and concerts. Music is also a great talking point with Marshallese students. Whenever I first meet a Marshallese student, I ask about music interests or sports teams. This is a great way to connect with their interest and to ease the awkwardness of meeting someone for the first time. (November 16, 2018)

Participant 20 added her Marshallese students liked “singing, dancing, drums, and/or playing the ukulele,” and she regularly incorporated these activities into her academics in order to engage her Marshallese students (February 1, 2019). Further, non-Marshallese peers appreciated the artistic skills of their Marshallese classmates when completing group poster projects or alternative assessments. She stated, “Their creativity was something they could share with their classmates, and it also built confidence in what

they had to offer to our class” (February 1, 2019). Participant 20 also felt that “[m]ath was always a good content area for my Marshallese students to be successful in. They could pick it up pretty quickly” (February 1, 2019). Participant 18 added that in addition to thinking or working creatively, comprehension, work ethic, and pride in their work were strengths observed among Marshallese students.

Despite the strengths observed, school personnel also identified some areas of concern for their Marshallese students, reinforcing that these are generalizations that cannot be applied to all students. Participant 20 observed gaps in education or lower levels of education in math class, and Participant 18 acknowledged time constraints and reading were challenges, although auditory comprehension was much higher. Participant 18 also felt finding books of interest for her Marshallese students was a challenge due to lower reading levels not always having high interest books for teens from the islands. Participant 16 has spent a significant amount of time analyzing standardized testing data, and he noted a trend among the Marshallese population under-performing other demographics and the school average on the ACT Aspire, in both math and English Language Arts.

Participants perceived that Marshallese students at NHS sometimes lag behind their non-Marshallese peers in regard to English language acquisition due to multiple factors. One challenge is that the Marshallese language is completely different than English. The majority of English Learners at NHS are native Spanish-speakers, and Spanish has “a lot of cognates, or words that are nearly identical in English and Spanish. There are similar roots and phrasing patterns. That is simply not the case for the Marshallese language,” which may make it more challenging for Marshallese students

than Spanish-speaking students to learn English (Participant 16, November 16, 2018). Responsibilities at home may cause Marshallese students to lag behind in language acquisition due to limited time and exposure to improve language skills outside of school, and the laid-back attitude of some Marshallese students is perceived to cause less of an emphasis on acquiring English. One participant stated English reading and writing levels were low among her Marshallese students, and retention of material was sometimes low. Responsibilities outside of school may reduce students' time to study and complete work at home as well as prevent them from participating in before or after school tutoring, which carries over into language acquisition, slowing the process of acquiring English.

All five participants identified attendance as a concern for the Marshallese student population at NHS. One participant stated the “Marshallese lack of attendance in comparison to other ethnic and race demographics is astounding. The Marshallese population does not attend school regularly and frequently attend school late or skip classes throughout the day” (Participant 17, November 16, 2018). Participant 16 observed previous data studies revealed the school’s “Marshallese students tend to have much poorer attendance than any other group” (November 16, 2018). Participant 20 stated, “My perception now is that our attendance, as a whole, is a challenge and major concern” (February 1, 2019).

All participants agreed poor attendance negatively impacts the success of their Marshallese students. Participant 19 summed up the ideas of many participants, “They can’t learn if they aren’t here, so it has to have a negative impact if they are absent” (January 7, 2019). Participant 16 stated, “It is a **huge** factor in their achievement . . . I think if they came to school every day that the achievement gap between the Marshallese

and every other sub-population would diminish greatly” (November 16, 2018). Participant 17 added, “Attendance is important so that students can gain knowledge. If a student is absent then their growth and development is halted . . . The question isn’t if they are capable of doing the work, the question is will they show up to do the work” (November 16, 2018). As a classroom teacher, Participant 18 stated, “It is a constant struggle to get them caught up. It’s hard for them to understand that you are still required to do the work if you are not here; also, many do not have Wi-Fi at home, which is yet another struggle for them to work when they are absent” (January 7, 2019). Participant 20 noted, “Daily practice and routine is key to retention” (February 1, 2019). Students who are absent lack this daily practice and may struggle more to retain the information. However, this participant noted “[w]hen my Marshallese students were present physically and mentally, they were capable of meeting and exceeding expectations and goals set forth for the class” (February 1, 2019).

***Impact of family.*** School personnel identified family as a major factor impacting the attendance of Marshallese students. Participant 20 stated, “I think nowadays families will have to be the biggest motivator of our Marshallese students to come to school, do their best, and set goals” (February 1, 2019). Participants observed that Marshallese families may not always understand the ramifications of absenteeism. Participant 17 added that the school must ensure guardians “understand what is expected and the consequences of not meeting expectations” so parents do not later find themselves in a court proceeding or other negative situation due to a lack of understanding (November 16, 2018). Participant 16 cited difficulty in getting parents involved due to changing or

disconnected phone numbers, which tends to happen at a higher rate than with other demographics.

Participant 16 stated many of the Marshallese students at NHS are not living with biological parents, which may also play a role in students' performance at school.

However, all participants noted the high prioritization of the family within the Marshallese community, even if it is not a nuclear family that is prioritized in Western culture. One participant noted:

their families appear to be much more fluid. It's not uncommon for our students to be raised by their aunt or uncle or their neighbor who they now call their aunt or uncle. They have very close-knit communities that become an extended family. (Participant 16, November 16, 2018)

Participants noted what Westerners would consider extended families often work collaboratively to take responsibility for finances and childcare. This can positively or negatively affect attendance. At times, these extended families provide additional support for supervision and transportation that can support attendance and academic achievement. Other times, students are responsible for assisting with family needs, and a student's responsibility assist with financial support or caring for a child or an elder may result in school absences.

Participants noted another way that the family may impact student attendance is through cultural practices that carry over into school. Participant 16 noted "it would be unfair to categorize all Marshallese students as being the same in anything. However, there are some patterns that emerge whether that is through the data or through my own personal experiences" (November 16, 2018). With this caveat, all participants agreed



that the concept of time is much less concrete among the Marshallese students at NHS as well as their guardians. Participants noted that Marshallese community events they have been invited to outside of school often do not start at a specified time; there is more of a sense of community that results in events starting “when everyone gets there” rather than at a specific time. They report they see this concept carry over into school, whether it be getting to school or class on time, turning things in, or guardians coming to pick up their children. Participants stated the open concept of time can negatively impact attendance. Students who miss the bus due to oversleeping or lack of time management often have difficulty getting to school. Marshallese families in the area often share vehicles, and when the vehicle is at work or otherwise occupied, students who missed the bus are unable to attend school. There is little access to public transportation in the area, so students are left at home sometimes even when they would like to attend school. If they do find a way to get to school, they often miss several morning classes, which can lead to a loss of credit.

Participants also perceive a lack of access to healthcare among Marshallese families negatively impacts student attendance. Until 2018, Marshallese children born outside of the US did not qualify for state-subsidized healthcare, leaving many Marshallese children either uninsured or underinsured. Whether due to a lack of medical insurance or cultural practices, Participant 19 observed guardians sometimes allow students to stay home for medical reasons when it is not necessary, but families may not seek medical treatment when necessary. Participant 18 stated, “Medical issues that should be minor have a tendency to become a bigger deal because of lack of healthcare” (January 7, 2019). Participant 19 added

sometimes medical conditions that could be easily treated early on end up advancing, and this results in them having to miss more days than would ordinarily be necessary, like with the kid that had staph. They don't seem to understand what we see as important medically or with attendance, like the heart surgery or like the laws regarding attendance. We have also seen a home remedy with some of our female students who have a treatment for feminine odor involving leaves and oil. It doesn't make them miss school altogether, but they miss class sometimes because each time they have to use the restroom, it takes them 10-15 minutes due to the process. (January 7, 2019)

This participant noted that the school nurses encourage families to take their student to the doctor quickly and to return to school as soon as possible. Students may also use home remedies, such as oil made from leaves from the Marshall Islands, which do not successfully treat the illness or injury. They tend to delay going to the doctor, which can lead to a more serious illness that results in longer absences. The school has one student who was recently discovered to have significant hearing permanent hearing loss due to untreated ear infections, and the school nurses see this as an example of what can happen when families do not seek medical treatment for what may be viewed as minor illnesses. There have been times when a student was ill and needed to go to the doctor, but the nurses have been unable to reach anyone in the student's home, and an administrator or teacher has taken the student to one of the school-based clinics. Additionally, Participant 19 noted, "We've had multiple teachers take students to the dentist or eye doctor because the family can't or won't do it, and we haven't seen that with any other demographic of students we treat" (January 7, 2019). This can be attributed to a lack of transportation,

work schedules, and a lack of understanding of the severity of some issues. Additionally, Participant 19 had a concern that a communication barrier may negatively impact students' health care. After seeing improper administration of medication and failure to pick up students' glasses, Participant 19 fears guardians "may not fully understand what the doctor tells them to do, but the provider may think they understand more than they do because they often nod and look like they understand" (Participant 19, January 7, 2019).

Participants recognize developing positive relationships with families is critical due to their strong influence on student attendance. Participant 18 noted forming strong relationships with students and their families can be challenging, but she viewed this as key to being able to fully support the student. She noted the most helpful way to form those relationships is "showing them you care about the whole child, not just school work" (Participant 18, January 7, 2019). Once relationships were formed, this participant would use Facebook to call or message the families, and they could work as partners to support the students. She stated that she wanted her students' families to know that she truly cares for their children and wants them to be successful. She also stated she feels "we need to be more positive when dealing with parents/family members" in order to form strong partnerships (Participant 18, January 7, 2019). Similarly, Participant 16 expressed a desire for parents to feel welcome at the school. He stated parents are not always comfortable approaching school personnel, and he feels like the school needs to employ strategies for "making sure they feel welcome, giving them good reasons to come out to the school for activities, and working around their work schedules" (November 16, 2018).

School personnel expressed a desire to better communicate with Marshallese families in order to meet their needs, ranging from educating them on the “rules of the game” to be successful in the United States to understanding how to support their students who get into college. One participant reported that she had assisted several Marshallese students get into college, but many of them never actually attended. She attributes this to a lack of understanding the steps necessary to follow through, stating, “I think we need to find a way to help ‘hold their hands’ through this process. They are bright and creative kids who can do anything they want!” (Participant 18, January 7, 2019). Their families may not have the knowledge of what is required to attend a US university, and this participant would like to better support them in learning how to navigate the system to support their children’s post-secondary education.

**Connectivity.** As with other categories of participants interviewed, school personnel identified connectivity as a key motivator for improving the attendance and achievement of Marshallese students attending NHS. While this is often true as well with other student demographics, participants cited a connection to or a positive relationship with an adult at school as a key motivating factor for Marshallese students. Participant 17 stated that “the connection between student and adult makes a tremendous difference in the student’s expectations, self-assuredness and acclimation to societal norms” (November 16, 2018).

One participant noted asking about students’ family, home life, church, and social events as well as displaying Marshallese cultural items that were gifts from former students helped him build relationships with Marshallese students. He also displayed pictures of students involved in school activities he has sponsored, viewing these as

“talking points, and opportunities to connect with students” (Participant 17, November 16, 2018). Participant 17 recognized that building trust is vital to forming a supportive relationship with a student, and that this trust is not quickly established. He found that “when a student sees their cultural items or a picture of a cousin in a new space, it helps to bridge the trust gap quicker” (November 16, 2018). This participant noted earning the student’s trust is vital, and

There is a loyalty and familial quality to Marshallese students that exists in small portions in other student demographics. Those qualities lend themselves to becoming attached to teachers and school faculty as if they are their own family. Once that connection is built, then strides can be made towards improving attendance, academics, and overall school presence. I stay in contact with these students more throughout the school week. I help answer questions about school processes and even city government processes. I have a group of past graduates that call me Dad and still email me questions about obtaining State ID's or Tax preparation, several years after they graduated. That is the bond that not only helps struggling students but helps the students become productive citizens in our community. A community that they don't always feel welcome in or know how to navigate. (Participant 17, November 16, 2018)

Participant 20 used the sense of community her Marshallese students were accustomed to in the classroom as a way of connecting with students and motivating them to be in class every day. She noted, “In my personal classes I had good attendance. Even when they stayed at church until 3am they’d still show up the next day. Super tired, but they were there” (Participant 20, February 1, 2019). She further stated she as well as

the students' classmates "made them feel so important and like class could not go on if they were not there," stating "this way of thinking was familiar to my kids and accepted due to their clan-based upbringing. We depended on each other and were all held accountable for upholding our classroom norms. Number one was always be here!" (February 1, 2019). As members of the classroom community, she let her students set classroom norms, and she as well as the students were expected to follow them, stating, "We couldn't do group work if members were missing, and they couldn't be taught if I wasn't there" (February 1, 2019). She used her connection to her students to learn about their interests and motivators, using this knowledge to encourage her students. If the class as a whole had good attendance, they could earn privileges, such as "review games, donut parties, alternative settings for class like the rotunda or courtyard, notebook passes, positive notes or calls home bragging on how well students are doing" (February 1, 2019). Due to these strong connections, the students did not want to disappoint her or their peers, and they responded by improving attendance and grades.

In addition to seeking ways to make students feel connected to the school, Participants 17 revealed an additional strategy he uses to support Marshallese students at NHS. He reinforced that making connections is the key to supporting students, and he extended the sense of community identified by Participant 20 to the student's community of teachers. A strategy that has proven beneficial for supporting his Marshallese students is what he calls a teacher web, which means "being in contact with multiple teachers to create a dialogue of support and concern for the student" (November 16, 2018). He finds this critical in painting "a complete picture of the student's struggles and strengths, as well as provide teachers with strategies that are working in other areas of the student's

day” (November 16, 2018). Based on this experience, Participant 17 suggests “when a Marshallese student knows the expectations and has a strong voice reminding them of those expectations, as well as, guiding them they tend to be more motivated and successful” (November 16, 2018). Participant 20 revealed NHS previously utilized a similar concept for sophomores entering the school, which she felt was quite beneficial. She stated,

Our Sophomore Center teams tracked our kids’ grades, behavior, and attendance. There were calls made home each period if a kid was absent, and the kids knew we’d have power meetings with them weekly if any of the previously mentioned were a concern in any way. (Participant 20, February 1, 2019)

The majority of the participants noted they have observed a lack of long-term goal planning among their Marshallese students. Students often focus on the moment or short-term goals but do not always have a plan for life after high school. Participants clarified they would never want to suggest that Marshallese students do not have goals and aspirations. Students may pursue college or technical schools, but conversations initiated by school personnel have often revealed a lack of future plans until teachers, counselors, or administrators have led discussions and tried to help students focus on a goal and a path to attain such a goal. Participant 20 suggested the power meeting concept previously used at NHS is a strategy that can help guide these conversations and provide some focus for students. Power meetings referred to a team of teachers who shared the same students, and they met weekly to discuss students. They discussed those who were doing well in addition to those who struggled in any area, such as grades, behavior, or attendance. Students were discussed by the whole team, and teachers shared ideas on

what they found worked or did not work in their classrooms, and they collaborated to find solutions for the better assisting the students. They met with the students, both those who were doing well and those who were struggling, to counsel and encourage them, and they were able to initiate conversations about short- and long-term goals. They worked as a team to establish connections so students knew they had adults who cared and wanted to see them succeed.

Participant 16 noted the school has established multiple programs to meet the needs of all students, including Response to Intervention (RtI) time, tutoring, clubs, interest groups, and professional development for teachers. He noted the school has had a strong focus on literacy strategies and skills to better support the large EL population, which also helps the other students in the building. The participant noted the school's Islander Club, "a group that gathers and celebrates our Marshallese population and their culture," is the only Marshallese-specific strategy of which he was aware. When asked if the literacy strategy focus and inclusion of the Islander Club had been beneficial in supporting the academic achievement of the school's Marshallese population, he replied,

Whether or not we are successful depends on how you define success. If an outsider looked at our test scores and just wanted to know if our students passed the state exams, they probably wouldn't think we're a very good school. However, when you look at growth from one year to the next, our students experience academic growth at a good rate, especially when you consider the poverty, ELL, and SPED populations we serve. (November 16, 2018)

Participant 20 noted that a deep understanding of students' strengths and growth areas should guide classroom instructional strategies. This knowledge can guide teachers



in providing a high level of scaffolding for all types of practice in the classroom, “whether it be by worksheet, on the Chromebook, conversations with peers about the material, and assessing what they knew” (February 1, 2019). Due to her understanding of students’ needs, she stayed at school every day until 5:15 in order to support students after school who may have needed some additional instruction time in a smaller setting. Additionally, she used past professional development and applied it in various ways to meet the needs of her students, noting modified Kagan strategies proved to be the most effective, along with resources from Google. When teaching new material, she found interactive cloze notes to be highly beneficial, stating,

I already had the pictures drawn, and the bricks and mortar fill-in sentences part was minimal, so we could focus on the content and not waiting around for my kids to copy word by word, some letter by letter. We were able to get to the meat of the lesson, and I could provide valuable time for practice and feedback during class. (February 1, 2019)

For her Marshallese students, she recognized the benefit of giving the students the opportunity to share experiences, background, and previous knowledge that were specific to the Marshallese culture, which she believes helped them feel like they belonged in the class. Further, she showed value to her students by incorporating what they shared into lessons, always trying “to make what they said or shared seem appreciated so they would feel safe in doing so and always have a voice” (February 1, 2019). By doing so, she saw success in her students’ attendance and willingness to participate in class, which was key to increasing their achievement. Participant 20 utilized a variety of strategies to motivate her students to attend and achieve academically. She stated

Knowing there would be food, like snacks, a couple times per week helped, too. They enjoyed the group work, review games, and assessments that let them showcase their strengths and interests. They knew we would not be doing the same thing every day, so they appreciated the non-traditional classroom setting. They never knew what we'd be doing. They did know that the desks would be arranged different every day, though. (Participant 20, February 1, 2019)

This participant also noted that while the concept of time may be fluid within the Marshallese community, classroom incentives, such as food, partner activities, and social activities were successful for her in encouraging promptness to class.

Participant 18 stated one strategy she uses to better connect with and support her Marshallese students is to make herself available to help them as much possible and added, “and let them know we both have the same goal . . . success” (Participant 18, January 7, 2019). She noted she made sure she was available at lunch since transportation made it difficult for many of her students to come to school early or stay late to receive additional support. Her students recognize she is giving up her own time beyond her contractual obligations and understand her efforts are an expression of how much she cares about their success.

**Summary.** School personnel identified many strengths of their Marshallese students while recognizing that this demographic also faces challenges. Overarching themes identified by school personnel include the impact of a student's family and connectivity with the school to a student's attendance, which impacts student achievement. School personnel related personal successes with developing connections

with students as well as steps taken to improve communication with families in order to work together to support the Marshallese students attending NHS.

### **Conclusion**

Archival data revealed evidence the enrollment of Pacific Islanders, particularly Marshallese, has increased significantly in the past two decades. While enrollment numbers continue to rise, a disproportionate the level of absenteeism has also become evident. Along with a higher than average number of absences, Marshallese students lag behind peers in academic achievement, English language development, and graduation rates, while disciplinary infractions occur more frequently.

Interviews were conducted with recent Marshallese graduates, Marshallese parents/guardians, Marshallese community liaisons, and school personnel to investigate their perceptions regarding the factors that most impact student attendance. Two principal themes, connectivity to the school and the impact of family, emerged from all four interviewee groups. In Chapter 5, the overarching themes of family and connectivity to school as they relate to student attendance are analyzed with the goals of elucidating lessons learned from this study, providing recommendations from the perspective of the researcher's vantage point as a school administrator, and examining areas for future research.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusions

#### Introduction

This study utilized qualitative phenomenological methodology to conduct a case study on the attendance of secondary school Marshallese students in a Northwest Arkansas secondary school. I hypothesized school systems in Arkansas may not provide the highest yield services to optimize student attendance for Marshallese students due to a lack of understand of the students' culture. Archival data was collected to evaluate attendance, discipline, academic achievement, English language development, and special education identification in relation to Marshallese students attending Northwest Public Schools.

Additionally, Marshallese recent graduates, Marshallese guardians, Marshallese community liaisons, and non-Marshallese school personnel were interviewed, and common themes were identified in their responses with the goal of understanding factors impacting student achievement. The result is a greater understanding of higher leverage opportunities for increasing student attendance, and by extension, student achievement.

This chapter reports a summary of findings, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research.

#### Summary of Findings

**Archival data.** Data analysis of attendance, graduation rate, discipline, academic achievement, English language proficiency, and special education records suggest there is a gap between the combined population and Marshallese students in terms of students enrolled and students receiving services.

English language development data reveals that a smaller percentage of Marshallese than Hispanic students demonstrate English proficiency, with a higher percentage of Marshallese students are enrolled in long-term services for English language learning than other language minority group. Twenty-two percent of NPS students with a Primary Home Language Other Than English (PHLOTES) identify as Marshallese, but only 7.3% of the PHLOTES that are considered Fluent English Proficient are Marshallese, compared to 92.8% Hispanic. Of the 330 Marshallese students at NHS, only 46 (14%) are considered Fluent English Proficient.

Data from the ACT and ACT Aspire expose a content achievement in addition to difficulty gaining English proficiency. Marshallese students scored below the general population in all four domains on the ACT Aspire, with an average of 15.75% proficiency for all four domains, compared to an average of 30.25% proficient for the general student population. ACT data reveals a three-point discrepancy, with a composite of 14.5 for Marshallese students compared to a school average of 17.8.

Another area of discrepancy is the graduation rate. The graduation rate of 83.18% for Marshallese students is lower than the general population rate of 87.67%; however, this gap has lessened from a 15% gap in 2014-15. Attendance data reveals a higher absentee rate for Marshallese students than any other demographic. In 2018-19, Marshallese students attending NHS averaged 5.89 absences for the first seven months of school, while the general population averaged 4.73 absences. NHS students must be dropped for a lack of attendance after ten consecutive absences, and the school attempts in multiple ways to locate and re-enroll students who have been dropped. However, 11 Marshallese students who had been dropped for a lack of attendance were unable to be

located to re-enroll. The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) identified a strong relationship between absenteeism and achievement, suggesting that students with frequent absences may experience academic difficulties, making them less likely to complete school unless interventions are implemented (p. 54).

Disaggregating data reveals insights into the educational experience of Marshallese students, and it is apparent NHS needs to develop more responsive strategies to better support the attendance of Marshallese students.

**Interviews.** Five recent Marshallese graduates (less than five years), five parents/guardians of current NHS Marshallese students, five Marshallese community liaisons, and five school personnel were interviewed for the study. Participant groups interviewed agreed school attendance is critical, and it can serve to increase academic achievement, graduation rate, and English language development. Analysis of the interviews revealed two primary themes, family and connectivity to the school, emerged from all four interviewee groups.

***Impact of family.*** All four participant groups cited family as a key factor impacting attendance, either positively or negatively. Families that were involved in their child's education, established structure and routines for homework and bedtimes, and attended school events involving their children were deemed positive influences on a student's education. Families that struggled financially could be a strong encourager of students to complete their education as a step toward a better life. Or, they could negatively impact attendance by providing little oversight in regard to education and potentially encouraging students not to attend school so that they could assist the family financially.

**Connectivity.** In addition to the importance of family support, all four participant groups cited the need to connect students to the school, with engaging activities and personal connections to adults within the school. One of the most critical strategies suggested to improve attendance was to get adults to have authentic, nurturing relationships with their Marshallese students. Students need to have “trust” in their teachers and know that they can count on the teachers to help, whether in the academic realm or with personal matters. Teachers and other school staff should not wait for students to ask for help; they need to actively work to form relationships and ask students how they can help them. By establishing these relationships, school personnel can determine what outside factors may be impacting a student’s education, and they can work collaboratively with a network of adults, both in and outside of school, to meet a student’s social, emotional, personnel, and academic needs.

Along those lines, when the school staff knows a student well, they can help the student find clubs, sports, and academic programs that engage the student and provide another layer of support to encourage school attendance. Providing cultural relevant events can also help students see themselves in the school, ensuring students feel their culture is valued. This serves to build a deeper connection to the school, where students not only welcome but needed as a part of the larger community.

### **Implications for Practice**

**Implications for students.** Based on the interviews of recent graduates, parents/guardians, community liaisons, and school personnel, two crucial implications stood out for students. First, successful students typically have a strong relationship with an adult that they trust. While it is not solely the responsibility of the student, the student

must be open to school personnel who make efforts to build caring relationships with them, and they need to use these adults as resources to problem-solve when they face a challenge. Students can open themselves up and be willing to allow the educators in. This is a crucial step in developing the trust that participants repeatedly mentioned in regard to connectivity to school.

The second implication for students is the benefit of getting involved in school-sponsored activities. NHS provides a variety of clubs, sports, and academic programs designed to engage students of different backgrounds, ethnicities, socio-economic status, academic skills, and physical abilities. One club that can serve as an anchor to many Marshallese students at NHS is the Islander Club. This club provides students the opportunity to connect with peers who may share similar backgrounds and culture, providing them with a positive connection to others in the school. Sports are another activity which can support students' engagement in the school, providing them with a peer group with a similar passion and deep connection to the school. The wrestling and volleyball teams have high Marshallese membership, and membership is growing in basketball, softball, football, and track, among others. Students on a team have their teammates as well as coaches that hold them accountable for attendance, academics, and behavior, and the sense of community common in the Marshallese community lends itself to a commitment to work together toward a common goal. Academic programs, such as the school's Law, Medical, Agriculture, Information Technology, and Teaching Academies, can also serve to provide students with a network of peers that prevent them from feeling disconnected among the other two thousand students walking the halls. Academy students, as do athletes, have additional accountability and support from their



Academy classmates and advisors, who spend all three years of their NHS career planning a career path and steps to achieve their goals.

**Implications for guardians.** Two main themes emerged from the research to provide guidance for families in better supporting Marshallese students: family involvement and communication. Recent graduates, parents/guardians, community liaisons, and school personnel all stressed the importance of the family in supporting the success of Marshallese students. Participants conveyed families who are highly involved in their students' lives and in their education provide essential support and encouragement to their students to be successful. Families that established high expectations and took measures to ensure that routines supporting academic success were established the home produced students who were successful.

Guardians of successful Marshallese students provided structure and routines for homework and limited students' time spent on videogames, social media, and television. These guardians knew their children's whereabouts at all times and ensured that students had sleep schedules that allowed them wake up on time to attend school as well as be attentive while there. Two guardians interviewed noted that church or other social activities may last late into the night and cause students to either be tired or miss school the next day. While these are positive family activities, they can have a negative impact on a student's school performance when they are tired at school or miss school altogether. Families can work with their church or social organizations to alter meeting and activity times to allow students to follow a routine that is more conducive to their education.

In order for families to be highly involved in and supportive of their children's education, effective communication to and from the school is critical. A concern voiced by interview participants was a lack of parent and family engagement, at least partially due to ineffective communication. Participants view Marshallese families as having high rates of incorrect phone numbers and addresses, making effective communication from the school difficult. When parents do not receive the school's automated phone calls and mail outs regarding attendance, they are often unaware of the number of absences their child has, and they may also be unaware of potential legal ramifications for continued absences. Outdated phone numbers and address also prevent teachers from being able to call about positive or negative academic performance, and outdated addresses prevent progress and quarterly grade reports from reaching guardians. Outdated information also prevents notifications for parent nights or extracurricular activities that may provide parents with additional information or opportunities to better connect with the school. In order for schools to communicate with students' guardians regarding grades, attendance, parent meetings, or extracurricular activities, guardians must provide up-to-date contact information. Guardians also need to know that schools have Marshallese parent liaisons, and they are welcome to come to the school at any time to find out how their child is doing academically and in regard to attendance.

**Implications for educators.** The major themes to provide guidance for educators that arose from the study were the strong need to increase communication efforts with families and to establish a connection with students on a personal level. Northwest Public Schools have long struggled to increase levels of family engagement in the Marshallese community, and these findings indicate that this is an area in which

resources must be directed if the schools have a goal of better supporting the attendance and achievement among Marshallese students. As noted by interview participants, family involvement is an important part of student success; however, schools cannot rely on families alone to encourage student success. Students from families who are not highly involved require additional support from school personnel based on a strong personal connection.

In order for families to partner with the school to provide the highest level of support possible, effective and regular communication between home and school is essential. Because there is a language barrier, as none of the certified staff speaks Marshallese, the school employs a Marshallese Parent Liaison to assist with making phone calls, sending written information home, and translating for parents who come to the school. While this is a positive step by the school to facilitate communication, multiple interviews referenced communication difficulties due to incorrect phone numbers and addresses. Due to these challenges, educators must utilize alternate methods of communication to contact families to keep them informed about and engaged in their child's education.

One suggestion from the interviews was social media, specifically Facebook. The Marshallese Parent Liaison at NHS frequently uses Facebook to contact parents, guardians, or relatives of students. Even when phone numbers and addresses change, individuals typically maintain a consistent Facebook account, often making it the most reliable form of contact. Additionally, even when cellular service is disconnected, students and their families utilize Wi-Fi to video call and send messages through Facebook. Post-interview conversations with interview participants discussed a plan to

develop an official Marshallese NHS Facebook page where parents can report absences, ask questions, and receive notifications about their own child as well as general information from the school in Marshallese. This alternate method of communication may provide families with a way to better communicate with the school and the school a better way to communicate with families. Interview participants suggested this method as well as using the local Marshallese radio station and churches to communicate with families. The Marshallese churches play a large role in the Marshallese community, making pastors and church leaders highly influential. Working with these community leaders may also be a high leverage strategy to educate families and increase family engagement.

In addition to improved communication with families, making personal connections with Marshallese students is critical to build their success. Numerous interview participants used the word *trust* to describe the deep, personal connection that must be established in order for Marshallese students to open themselves and be responsive to school personnel's efforts to help them. Surface level pleasantries are not sufficient. Educators must learn about students' families and interests, asking questions specific to previous knowledge learned about the student. Students need to feel that their teachers and other school staff care about them as a person and want to know what is going on in their life, to feel that there is a genuine desire to be a part of the student's life.

The school personnel interviewed reported success with making personal connections with students by demonstrating knowledge of and value of the Marshallese culture, asking about their family, home life, church, and social events. Incorporating photos of current or former Marshallese students and displaying Marshallese cultural

items can help students see the individual cares about them and has an interest to connect with them. Educators must show students they care about the student as a person, not just about the student completing classwork. When teachers learn about a Marshallese student's family or culture, they can weave this knowledge into their teaching and classroom activities, further demonstrating that they value the Marshallese students' sense of belonging in the class. Marshallese have a strong sense of community, and teachers can use this to build a sense of community within classrooms, encouraging students to be in attendance because their absence negatively impacts the classroom community. As previously noted, one interview participant stated that she made her students feel so important that the class could not go on if they were not there, and she felt that this method resonated with her students due to their clan-based upbringing that is part of the traditional Marshallese culture.

Educators can also use what one participant described as a "teacher web" to work collaboratively to connect with and support the student. When multiple teachers discuss their common interest in and knowledge of a student, they can all work together to make sure that student feels valued. When a student has an increase in absences or negative behaviors or a drop in grades, they can communicate to try to build a common understanding of what is going on in the student's life and what steps they can take as a team to assist the student.

**Implications for community.** The Marshallese community in the area is a critical actor in the education of Marshallese students attending NPS. Individuals who immigrated previously understand the struggles and confusion newer immigrants face and can be guides to more recent arrivals. Those who are more experienced with the US

culture and educational system can serve as role models and teachers for students and guardians who are unfamiliar with the public schools in the area. Community organizations supporting the Marshallese already exist, as seen with the Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese (ACOM) and the Marshallese Educational Initiative (MEI), as well as the Marshallese Consulate office. One way these organizations can better support Marshallese families in educating their children is by partnering with the schools to see what challenges they face in working with Marshallese students and guardians. Organizations like ACOM and MEI can partner with schools to discuss what each views as information that is foreign to most new families and work together to ensure this information is shared in a language and manner that is comprehensible.

One area in which the Marshallese community organizations can help is by working with families to explain what factors positively impact the academic success of students. Families need to understand the importance of structure and routine within the home as well as study habits. Community organizations can share with parents how important regular attendance is, even when students are tired, and they can work with families to understand the importance of regular sleep schedules. Organizations can share information with families about how important it is for them to communicate with the school to understand their child's progress, as well as guide them on how to do so. They can stress the positive impact of establishing structure for students to study and complete homework after school, with supervision by an adult who oversees this routine. With the number of extended family members, family members could work together to share these responsibilities even when the child's direct guardians have to work when the children are home in the evenings. Families can also work together to ensure students

have regular bedtimes, without access to electronic devices that negatively impact the amount of sleep they receive. By working together as a community, with the support of Marshallese community organizations, families can establish structures and supervision that better facilitate academic success.

Another example of ways community organizations can help is by ensuring that Marshallese guardians understand that Arkansas law requires all individuals under the age of 18 to be in school unless they have already graduated. While education is compulsory in the Marshall Islands, there is no legal consequence for students or families if students do not attend. This is not the case in Arkansas. By law, schools are required to report excessive absences, and this is done through filing a Family In Need of Services (FINS) petition with the court system. Students who are “habitually and without justification absent from school while subject to compulsory school attendance” are reported to the juvenile court system (“FINS FAQ,” n.d.). Absence phone calls are made daily, and the school sends out letters at five and eight absences informing guardians about potential legal issues if absences continue, but due to frequent address and phone number changes, this information is not always received. The school has seen many occasions when parents who work in the mornings believe their child is attending school every day and are unaware that the child has either stayed home all day or left home without attending school. There have also been many occasions when the student rode the bus to school but left campus without permission and was absent all day. If parents understood the potential legal consequences they might face, they might come to the school more frequently to check in on their student’s progress. Attendance is critical for student learning to occur, and high rates of absenteeism lead to gaps in learning that

prevent academic success. By ensuring that guardians understand the consequences of excessive student absences, community organizations can better support Marshallese students' academic achievement.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As a school leader in a school with the largest Marshallese population in the state of Arkansas, it is critical for me to find ways to partner with our Marshallese community to support student success. As a scholar practitioner, I have observed a correlation between high attendance rates and academic success. Based on this observation, I chose to research the factors that impact the attendance of Marshallese students in my school.

Through this study, my goal as the researcher was to collect phenomenological data to address the following question about the education of Marshallese students: What factors most impact the attendance of Marshallese students at one Arkansas high school? As hypothesized, data corroborated the study site may not provide the highest yield services to optimize student attendance for Marshallese students.

While the findings of this study were limited due to the small sample size of interview participants, this study reinforces the need to develop relationships with students, families, and communities to gain insights into factors impacting students' performance in schools. One recommendation for future research would be to interview a larger segment of each category interviewed. Additionally, this study only interviewed parents who have students who are "successful" by American standards, as these were the parents I was able to contact. Contacting parents of students with high numbers of absences and/or low grades or who have dropped out may provide additional information not learned in this study.



## Summary

As an outsider to the Marshallese community, I was initially concerned about being able to find enough willing Marshallese participants to complete my interviews. However, everyone I asked was either willing to participate or helpful in suggesting someone they felt might be a better candidate for interviews. All Marshallese participants were eager to participate in an effort to better support their community. Through this process, I learned how truly community-minded Marshallese individuals are, and they are willing to sacrifice their time and, at times, face their own fears in order to benefit their community. Some participants were very shy and self-conscious about participating but agreed upon notification that only I, as the researcher, would hear their interviews. They wanted to help their community but did not feel comfortable with their interview recording being shared.

School personnel were also willing to participate, as they too had a strong desire to help the Marshallese students attending Northwest Public Schools (NPS). Some of the school staff were humble and felt they were inadequate in serving as a resource for the interviews, but they all agreed due to a strong desire to serve their school community.

Through this research, I learned more about myself as an educational leader and reflected on my efforts to form positive, meaningful relationships with students and their families. As the child and grandchild of educators, I was fortunate to fully understand the American educational system and how to be successful within its confines. As a former ESL teacher and Spanish-speaker, I felt confident in my ability to connect with the majority of the student body at Northwest High School, which is predominantly Hispanic. This study helped me better understand the necessity of reaching out to the Marshallese

community and establishing connections so that our school's students and families know that they can trust me and that I have their best interest at heart. As a marginalized community, Marshallese do not always trust outsiders, especially those who may be considered as authorities. In order to establish positive relationships, it is essential for educators to make genuine, purposeful efforts to show true concern for the well-being of our Marshallese students. Our Marshallese students have enriched our school environment, and it is time that we recognize their contributions and find ways to better support them in the pursuit of their post-secondary goals.

### **Conclusion**

This study on the factors that impact the attendance of Marshallese students in a Northwest Arkansas secondary school applied qualitative phenomenological methodology. The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper insight into the factors impacting attendance and, consequently, student achievement. In order to evaluate the attendance and achievement of the Marshallese students attending Northwest High School, archival data was collected and analyzed on attendance, discipline, academic achievement, English language development, and special education identification. Following analysis of archival data, interviews with stakeholders working directly with Marshallese students were conducted to deepen understanding of the variety of factors that may impact attendance among Marshallese students.

Examination of interview transcripts elucidated that family and connectivity with schools were two aspects of the Marshallese student experience that interviewees stated were important for educators to be aware of, as they leverage strategies for improving students' educational experience at NHS. Each interviewee group plays a role in the

education of Marshallese students and can use this study as a means to better support the attendance and achievement for Marshallese students. As stated by Helen Keller, “Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.”

## References

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2010). Epidemiology across cultures: Asian/Pacific Islander populations. Retrieved June 12, 2018, from <https://www.asha.org/practice/multicultural/API.htm>
- Archerd, E. (2015). An IDEA for improving English language learners' access to education. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 41, 351-401. Retrieved from <http://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ulj/vol41/iss2/2>
- Arkansas Department of Education. (n.d.). *Arkansas ELPA21 Scoring Interpretation Guide* [Guidance Document]. Retrieved from [http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Learning\\_Services/English%20Language%20Learners/ELPA21/ELPA21\\_Score\\_Interpretation\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Learning_Services/English%20Language%20Learners/ELPA21/ELPA21_Score_Interpretation_Guide.pdf)
- Arkansas Department of Education. (2018). *My School Info* [Data Center]. Retrieved from <https://adedata.arkansas.gov/sis>
- Artiles, A. J., Rueda, R., Salazar, J. J., & HigaReda, I. (2005). Within-group diversity in minority disproportionate representation: English language learners in urban school districts. *Council for Exceptional Children*, 71, 283-300. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/1400057/Artiles\\_A.\\_J.\\_Rueda\\_R.\\_Salazar\\_J.\\_and\\_Higareda\\_I.\\_2005\\_.\\_.Within-group\\_diversity\\_in\\_minority\\_disproportionate\\_representation\\_English\\_Language\\_Learners\\_in\\_urban\\_school\\_districts.\\_Exceptional\\_Children\\_71\\_283-300](https://www.academia.edu/1400057/Artiles_A._J._Rueda_R._Salazar_J._and_Higareda_I._2005_._.Within-group_diversity_in_minority_disproportionate_representation_English_Language_Learners_in_urban_school_districts._Exceptional_Children_71_283-300)

- Austin Independent School District Learning Support Services. (n.d.). *Child Study System*. Retrieved from [https://www.childstudysystem.org/uploads/6/1/9/1/6191025/child\\_study\\_systems\\_process\\_manual.pdf](https://www.childstudysystem.org/uploads/6/1/9/1/6191025/child_study_systems_process_manual.pdf)
- Barrera, I. (1995). To refer or not to refer: Untangling the web of diversity, “deficit,” and disability. *New York State Association for Bilingual Education Journal*, 10, 54-66. Retrieved from [https://ncela.ed.gov/files/rcd/BE020617/To\\_Refer\\_or\\_Not.pdf](https://ncela.ed.gov/files/rcd/BE020617/To_Refer_or_Not.pdf)
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don’t: researcher’s position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219-234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>
- Bolima, D. (n.d.). Contexts for understanding: Educational learning theories. Retrieved from [http://staff.washington.edu/saki/strategies/101/new\\_page\\_5.htm](http://staff.washington.edu/saki/strategies/101/new_page_5.htm)
- Bureau of Legislative Research. (2015). *English language learners (ELL) state categorical funding review*. Retrieved from <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/2017/Meeting%20Attachments/410/I14102/ELL%20State%20Categorical%20Funding%20Review.pdf>
- Cloud, N. (1988). *ESL in special education*. Retrieved from Educational Resources Information Center: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED303044.pdf>
- Differentiating between language acquisition and learning disabilities with English language learners. (2014). Retrieved from <https://www.cec.sped.org/News/Special-Education-Today/Need-to-Know/Need-to-Know-ELL>

Duke, M. R. (2014). Marshall Islanders: Migration patterns and health-care challenges.

Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/marshall-islanders-migration-patterns-and-health-care-challenges>

Education Policy and Data Center. (2018). *Marshall Islands National Education Profile*

2018. Retrieved from

[https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EPDC\\_NEP\\_2018\\_MarshallIslands.pdf](https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EPDC_NEP_2018_MarshallIslands.pdf)

Embassy of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to the United States of America. (n.d.).

<http://www.rmiembassyus.org/index.php>

Empowering Pacific Islander Communities and Asian Americans Advancing Justice.

(2014). *A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the*

*United States, 2014*. Retrieved from <https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/7521763051.pdf>

Encyclopedia of Education. (n.d.). Language minority students. Retrieved March 14,

2019, from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/language-minority-students>

Feuerherd, M., Hunt, E., & Virani, A. (n.d.). Marshall Islands. Retrieved April 20, 2018,

from <https://www.pdx.edu/multicultural-topics-communication-sciences-disorders/marshall-islands>

FINS FAQ. (n.d.). Retrieved March 1, 2019, from

<https://www.co.washington.ar.us/government/departments-a-e/circuit-courts/circuit-court-division-3-juvenile/fins-faq#q1>

Francovich, E. (2017, April 4, 2017). Low-graduation rates among Marshallese students

prompt study in Spokane Public Schools. *The Spokesman-Review*. Retrieved from

<http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2017/apr/04/low-graduation-rates-among-marshallese-students-pr/#/0>

Gaps in Services to Marshallese Task Force. (2016). *Living in Northwest Arkansas: What you need to know as a Marshallese*. Retrieved from <http://arminorityhealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2016-Marshallese-Acculturation-booklet.pdf>

Gonzalez, R. J., Pagan, M., Wendell, L., & Love, C. (2011). *Supporting ELL/culturally and linguistically diverse students for academic achievement*. Retrieved from Brown University International Center for Leadership in Education: [https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/sites/brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/files/uploads/ELL%20Strategies%20Kit\\_Intl%20Ctr%20for%20Leadership%20in%20Educ%202011.pdf](https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/sites/brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/files/uploads/ELL%20Strategies%20Kit_Intl%20Ctr%20for%20Leadership%20in%20Educ%202011.pdf)

Groenewald, T. (2004). A Phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1), 42-55. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/160940690400300104>

Guiberson, M. M. (2009). Hispanic representation in special education: Patterns and implications. *Preventing School Failure*, 53(3), 167-176. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228772988\\_Hispanic\\_representation\\_in\\_special\\_education\\_Patterns\\_and\\_implications](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228772988_Hispanic_representation_in_special_education_Patterns_and_implications)

Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004, April 1). Ethics, reflexivity, and “ethically important moments” in research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(1), 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360>

- Hirata, A. J. (2015). *Postcolonialism and the Marshallese diaspora: Structural violence and health in the Marshallese community in Springdale, Arkansas* (Doctoral dissertation, University of San Francisco). Retrieved from <https://repository.usfca.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1205&context=theses>
- Holloway, I. (1997). *Basic concepts for qualitative research*. London: Blackwell Science.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, art. 20 U.S.C. §1412 § (2004).
- Jimeno S., R. A. (2013). *A Profile of the Marshallese community in Arkansas*. Little Rock, AR, and Fayetteville, AR: Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation and University of Arkansas.
- Jung, J. H. (2016). In Arkansas, schools are supposed to teach in English. Here's how one district gets around it. Retrieved from <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-09-28/arkansas-schools-are-supposed-teach-english-here-s-how-one-district-gets-around>
- Kerr, T. (2015). *ELL Updates 2015-16* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from Arkansas Department of Education: [http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Learning\\_Services/English%20Language%20Learners/EL\\_Updates\\_Summer\\_AAEA\\_Conference\\_2015-16.pdf](http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Learning_Services/English%20Language%20Learners/EL_Updates_Summer_AAEA_Conference_2015-16.pdf)
- Kerr, T., & Lytle, A. (2018). *Arkansas Professional Judgment Rubric-Exit Criteria Guidance* [Guidance document]. Retrieved from Arkansas Department of Education: [http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Learning\\_Services/English%20Language%20Learners/Webinar\\_Arkansas\\_Professional\\_Judgment\\_Rubric-Exit\\_Criteria\\_Guidance\\_final.pdf](http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Learning_Services/English%20Language%20Learners/Webinar_Arkansas_Professional_Judgment_Rubric-Exit_Criteria_Guidance_final.pdf)



- Kraemer, R., Carrizo, J., & Montelongo, A. (n.d.). *Relevant issues surrounding the assessment of English language learning children suspected of primary language impairment*. Retrieved from Arizona Speech-Language-Hearing Association:  
[http://www.arsha.org/documents/2015\\_con/handouts/Kraemer-Relevant\\_Issues\\_Surrounding\\_the\\_Assessment\\_of\\_English\\_Language\\_Learning\\_Children\\_Suspected\\_of\\_Primary\\_Language\\_Impairment.pdf](http://www.arsha.org/documents/2015_con/handouts/Kraemer-Relevant_Issues_Surrounding_the_Assessment_of_English_Language_Learning_Children_Suspected_of_Primary_Language_Impairment.pdf)
- Kridel, C. A. (2010). *Encyclopedia of curriculum studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Lavrakas, P. J. (2008). *Encyclopedia of survey research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Leonard, C. (2005). Leaving the Marshall Islands. *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*. Retrieved from  
<https://showtime.arkansasonline.com/e/media/gallery/mi/articles/paradise.html>
- Macswan, J., & Rolstad, K. (2006). How language proficiency tests mislead us about ability: Implications for English language learner placement in special education. *Teachers College Record*, 108, 2304-2328.
- Marshall Islands Public School Systems. (2013). *School accreditation system policy and procedures*. Retrieved from  
[http://www.pss.edu.mh/files/PSSDocuments/Public%20School%20System%20%20Policies/PSS\\_School\\_Accreditation\\_Policy\\_and\\_Procedures.pdf](http://www.pss.edu.mh/files/PSSDocuments/Public%20School%20System%20%20Policies/PSS_School_Accreditation_Policy_and_Procedures.pdf)
- Marshall Islands Public School System. (2017). *Digest of Education Statistics 2016-2017*. Retrieved from  
[http://www.pss.edu.mh/images/PSS\\_Key\\_Documents/Digest-2016-2017.pdf](http://www.pss.edu.mh/images/PSS_Key_Documents/Digest-2016-2017.pdf)

- McElfish, P. A. (2016, May). Marshallese COFA migrants in Arkansas. *Journal of the Arkansas Medical Society*, 112(13), 259-262. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5418851/pdf/nihms855779.pdf>
- Mitchell, C. (2016, December 7). Majority of English-learner students are born in the United States, analysis finds [Blog post]. Retrieved from [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/learning-the-language/2016/12/majority\\_of\\_english-learner\\_students\\_are\\_born\\_in\\_the\\_united\\_states.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/learning-the-language/2016/12/majority_of_english-learner_students_are_born_in_the_united_states.html)
- Musu-Gillette, L., De Brey, C., McFarland, J., Hussar, W., Sonnenberg, W., & Wilkinson-Flicker, S. (2017). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups 2017* (NCES 2017-051). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved June 1, 2018 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017051.pdf>
- National Center for Educational Statistics. (2017). *English language learners in public schools*. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgf.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp)
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups 2017* (NCES 2017-051). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). English language learners in public schools. Retrieved August 8, 2018, from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgf.asp#info](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp#info)
- National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). <https://nces.ed.gov>

- Office for Civil Rights. (2015). *Schools' civil rights obligations to English learner students and limited English proficient parents*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html>
- Office of Management and Budget. (1997). *Revisions to the standards for the classification of federal data (97-28653)*. Retrieved from Government Publishing Office: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-1997-10-30/pdf/97-28653.pdf>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice: The definitive text of qualitative inquiry frameworks and options* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Raj, C. (2016). The Misidentification of children with disabilities: A harm with no foul. *University of South Carolina Scholar Commons*, 374-437. Retrieved from [https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2068&context=law\\_fa\\_cpub](https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2068&context=law_fa_cpub)
- Republic of the Marshall Islands Ministry of Education. (2005). *Republic of the Marshall Islands education for all national action plan 2002 – 2005*. Retrieved from <http://www.paddle.usp.ac.fj/collect/paddle/index/assoc/rmi004.dir/doc.pdf>
- Republic of the Marshall Islands Ministry of Education. (2014). *Education for all 2015 national review report: Marshall Islands*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002297/229722E.pdf>
- Republic of the Marshall Islands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2014). *Republic of the Marshall Islands: National report May 2013*. Retrieved from <http://www.sids2014>.

org/content/documents/216Marshall%20Is%20SIDSReport\_endorsed-Final%20May%2012%202013.pdf

Rinaldi, C., & Samson, J. (2008). English language learners and response to intervention. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 40*, 6-14.

Ross, T., Kena, G., Rathbun, A., KewalRamani, A., Zhang, J., Kristapovich, P., & Manning, E. (2012). *Higher education: Gaps in access and persistence study (NCES 2012-046)* [Statistical Analysis Report]. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012046.pdf>

RTI Action Network. (n.d.). <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti>

Sanchez, C. (2017). English language learners: How your state is doing. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/02/23/512451228/5-million-english-language-learners-a-vast-pool-of-talent-at-risk>

Sasha Davis, J. (2007). Scales of Eden: conservation and pristine devastation on Bikini Atoll. *Environment and Planning D Society and Space, 25*(2), 213-235. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d1405>

Schulte, B. (2012, July 4). For Pacific Islanders, hopes and troubles in Arkansas. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/05/us/for-marshall-islanders-hopes-and-troubles-in-arkansas.html>

Smith, H. (2014). Assessing ELLs for special education: 5 pitfalls to avoid. Retrieved from <https://www.scilearn.com/blog/assessing-ells-for-special-education-5-pitfalls-to-avoid>

- Springdale Schools. (2018). *ESL Program Handbook*. Retrieved from <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GQASVXtzfFYqkrtRETMykT3OJFP4ehDkEcdqrJel49w/edit?usp=sharing>
- State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2009). *When is it appropriate to refer an ELL for special education?* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction: <http://www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/ProgramReview/Monitoring/StudentPerformance.aspx>
- Stein, J. C. (2011). The case for collaboration: Integrating information on English learners and special education in teacher preparation programs. *Multicultural Education, 19*(3), 35-40.
- Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities. (2013). The special education referral process. Retrieved from <http://www.projectidealonline.org/v/special-education-referral-process/>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2016). Marshall Islands Education and Literacy. Retrieved January 19, 2019, from <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/mh>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UNESCO Apia Office. (2015). *Pacific Education for All 2015 Review*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002432/243250E.pdf>
- United States Army. (2018). USAG Kwajalein Atoll: Mission. Retrieved October 11, 2018, from <https://www.army.mil/kwajalein#org-about>

- United States Census Bureau. (2008). *2006-2008 American community survey*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-12.pdf>
- United States Department of Education. (n.d.). About IDEA. Retrieved October 2, 2018, from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>
- United States Department of Education. (n.d.). *Sec. 300.111 child find*. Retrieved from IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/b/300.111>
- United States Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. (2000). *A Guide to the individualized education program*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/iepguide.pdf>
- United States Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). About us. Retrieved October 1, 2018, from <https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/about-us/index.html>
- United States Department of Justice and United States Department of Education. (2015). *Dear colleague*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>
- United States Department of State. (n.d.). U.S. Relations with Marshall Islands. Retrieved April 28, 2018, from <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26551.htm>
- United States Embassy Marshall Islands. (2012). The Legacy of U.S. Nuclear Testing and Radiation Exposure in the Marshall Islands. Retrieved from <https://mh.usembassy.gov/the-legacy-of-u-s-nuclear-testing-and-radiation-exposure-in-the-marshall-islands/>
- Walqui, A. (2006). Scaffolding instruction for English language learners: A conceptual framework. *The International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*,

9(2), 159-180. Retrieved from

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/eeaf/a59d9a254ac843f9d8fb94aebd017dae6b76.pdf>

Welman, J. C., & Kruger, S. J. (1999). *Research methodology for the business and administrative sciences*. Johannesburg, South Africa: International Thompson.

World Education Forum. (2015). *Education for all 2015 national review report:*

*Marshall Islands*. Retrieved from

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002297/229722E.pdf>

Zak, D. (2015, November 27). A ground zero forgotten: The Marshall Islands, once a

U.S. nuclear test site, face oblivion again. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2015/11/27/a-ground-zero-forgotten/?utm\\_term=.39ca7e3f5cbc](http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2015/11/27/a-ground-zero-forgotten/?utm_term=.39ca7e3f5cbc)

## Appendix A

### Letter of Informed Consent

#### **Informed Consent**

Your participation is requested in the study of perceptions regarding the attendance of Marshallese students. Your participation in this study will help complete my dissertation topic. This study will be completed through Arkansas Tech University, Educational Leadership Program. The title of this research study is: A Study of Marshallese Student Attendance in a Northwest Arkansas Secondary School.

The data will be used to analyze the factors that impact the attendance of Marshallese students in a Northwest Arkansas Secondary School. The expectation is that schools with Marshallese students can utilize this research to better design strategies to support attendance for this population. Your responses will be kept confidential. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. No identifiable district, building, or individual information will be shared. All recorded data will remain with the researcher and will not be identifiable in this paper. Analysis of interviews will be stored by the researcher in the event that a presentation or publication comes about due to the study. No personally identifiable information will be shared in any presentation or publication.

Taking part in this study is strictly voluntary. There are no costs associated for the participant in any part of this study. No monetary compensation will be provided to participants. There is no funding for this research. If you choose to participate, your responsibility will be to answer the questions asked as honestly and without bias as you are able. Again, participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you can stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalty for deciding not to participate. If you have any questions regarding this interview or regarding your rights as a participant, please contact me at [pfaught@atu.edu](mailto:pfaught@atu.edu). If you prefer, you may also contact my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Ellen Treadway, at [etreadway@atu.edu](mailto:etreadway@atu.edu) or by phone at 479-880-4901.

I look forward to your participation in this research. More information about participating in a research study and about the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a group who reviews the research to protect your rights, can be found on Arkansas Tech University's IRB web site at: [https://www.atu.edu/research/human\\_subject.php](https://www.atu.edu/research/human_subject.php). Included on the website under the heading "Participant Info", there is access to federal regulations/information about the protection of human research participants. If you do not have access to the internet, you may call Arkansas Tech University at 479-968-0319 for copies of these federal regulations.



## Appendix B

## Permission to Use Research Questions



Springdale  
Public Schools

Lynn Faight <lfaught@sdale.org>

---

**permission**

---

**Darrell Watts** <darrellwatts@cox.net>  
To: Lynn Faight <lfaught@sdale.org>

Tue, Nov 13, 2018 at 4:11 PM

Good afternoon Lynn,

You have my permission to use questions from my 2011 dissertation, "Factors Affecting Marshallese Student Achievement in an Elementary School: A Case Study," in your own research. What is your research topic and where are you in the process? I look forward to hearing from you. I would also enjoy reading your study when completed. Best wishes, both now as you complete your research, and in your career as you positively affect the lives of students, teachers and the educational community at large.

DW

Darrell Watts, Ed.D  
692 Brush Creek Road  
Springdale, AR 72762  
via iPhone

[Quoted text hidden]