

IMPLEMENTING SYSTEMIC CHANGE IN EDUCATION

Education leaders in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) are developing and enacting culturally sustaining instructional models to improve consistency of instruction and student achievement, and to support culturally sustaining education initiatives across the four FSM states.

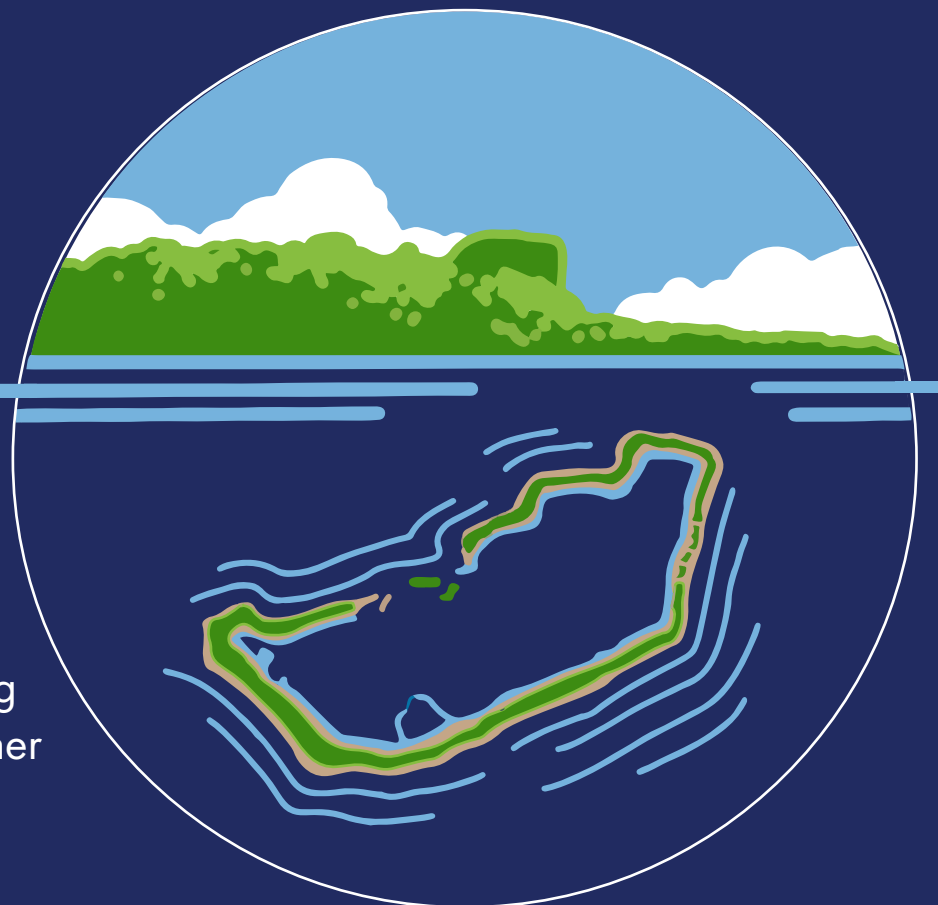
For example, the FSM states of Kosrae and Pohnpei are developing dual language policies for their school systems, and the state of Yap is revising its cultural curriculum. For effective and sustainable implementation of these new practices, educators at all levels are thinking about how systems will change to support implementation. This infographic outlines some key concepts and considerations drawn from research- and evidence-based literature for education leaders to effectively implement systemic change.

TWO COMMON APPROACHES TO LEADING A CHANGE PROCESS IN EDUCATION SYSTEMS^{1, 2}

The “Comprehensive Innovation” Model

Across state education agencies and local school systems, large-scale change initiatives require concerted efforts from leaders and stakeholders to ensure sustainable implementation.

This approach is centralized at the top level of the system and introduces change and innovations using a “top-down” approach, with policymakers and system leaders directing changes to be enacted across the education system.



The “Islands of Innovation” Model

Here the change is introduced on a smaller scale, taking place in small “islands” (also known as pilot locations) within the organization, with the goal being that the islands will serve as models for change in other areas, eventually leading to overall innovation within the entire organization.

COMMON ELEMENTS IN APPROACHES TO SYSTEMIC CHANGE³

Initiation

Develop a systems view of education.

A systems approach takes a broad perspective and considers the interaction of different stakeholders (such as administrators, teachers, parents, and students); existing policies, systems, and structures; the social, cultural, and political context of education in the community/region;⁴ and the data that will be used to measure implementation and impact. Often, a logic model is used to map out the overall change process and desired outcomes.⁵

Build broad stakeholder support for a systemic initiative.

Scholars have highlighted the importance of school or system leaders communicating with teachers, parents, and community members. Leaders can share information and engage in dialogue with stakeholders to help them envision positive results of the change and to draw their support for the change. Leaders can also gather input from stakeholders on key efforts that will be needed to ensure sustainability of the initiative.^{6, 7, 8}

Given the FSM's current focus on developing and implementing instructional model(s), a systems-level analysis would include curriculum, instruction, and cultural contexts, as well as the interactions among the national and state departments of education and local schools.

Implementation

Plan and prepare all levels of the system for transformation.⁹

This involves building staff capacity at different levels of the system (teachers, school leaders, system leaders) through professional learning. This could include creating resources, such as lesson plan templates and data systems; training staff on the use of the new policies, programs, and practices; and clearly identifying any previous policies, programs, and practices that will be discontinued.

The FSM's professional learning would focus on ensuring that educators at the school and state department level feel confident in their respective roles to implement the instructional model along the proposed timeline.

Pilot and scale new initiatives.

This includes developing an action plan that applies a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle to embed continuous improvement in the pilot process. Through this process, school and system leaders can assess the pilot location's progress, more readily identify challenges, knowledge gaps, or bright spots, and respond with supports. What is learned from this process can then be applied to new schools/locations implementing the change.

FSM state-specific instructional models will be first developed and implemented in two states. Insights from these states' processes and outcomes can then help inform similar instructional model efforts that may take place later in the other two states.

Institutionalization

Evaluate and sustain the transformation process.¹⁰

Research confirms the importance of evaluating and monitoring the implementation and impacts of a new initiative. This entails creating and maintaining systems of data and information about the implementation and effectiveness of the transformation efforts; identifying ongoing staff development needs; and promoting a continuous learning and improvement approach.

Because the FSM's instructional model would be rolled out in stages across individual states, this would include documenting and building on best practices identified during each state's implementation.

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REL RESOURCES

- **REL Midwest:** Illinois district uses a systems change approach to implement and evaluate a new curriculum. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/midwest/Blog/40031>
- **REL Appalachia:** When adopting new educational initiatives, reforms, and policies in schools and districts, what factors facilitate or hinder sustainable change, particularly at the elementary school level? <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/appalachia/Ask-A-REL/-89700>
- **REL Mid-Atlantic:** What does research say about necessary conditions in medium and small districts—especially in terms of planning for costs—for moving from early adopters to sustaining the implementation of research-based innovations? <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/midatlantic/Ask-A-REL/30069>