

# Chapter 5

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## Education and Training

### Key Points

- The education system needs to equip Marshallese to make their way in life both in the Marshall Islands and overseas.
- Output standards of RMI schools are generally below regional norms.
- The school attendance requirements of the Education Act are not enforced, and attendance figures for several years are suspect.
- Private schools generally produce better results than public schools.
- Qualified teachers and relevant instructional materials are essential for improving the quality of education.
- Parental and community support are key factors in student educational achievements.
- Coordination and cooperation is needed between all stakeholders in the provision of vocational training.
- Better coordination of the sources of funding, and greater flexibility in Compact-derived sources, is required to ensure the available funds are allocated to meet educational priorities.
- An ambitious 2000 Strategic Education Plan addressing those and other issues has now been given a sharper and more operational focus by the implementing guidelines for the Ten-Year Master Plan for Education.

## Structure of the Education System

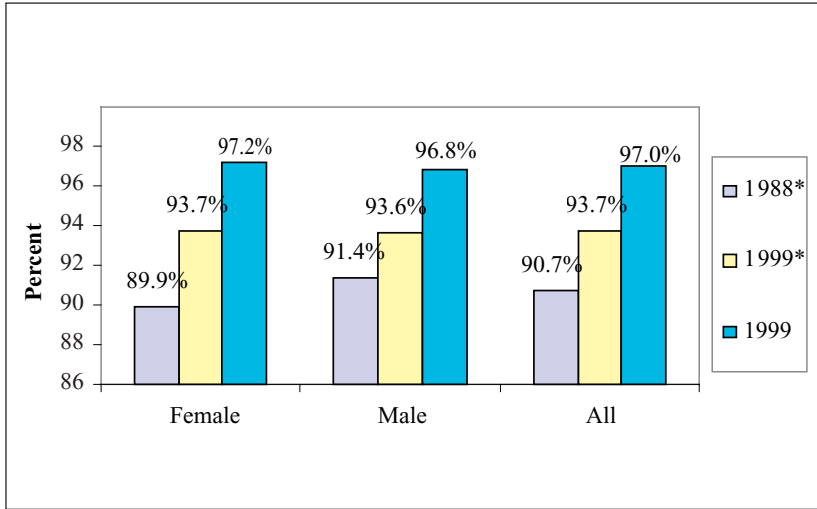
The education system in the Marshall Islands consists of three levels: preparatory education followed by elementary (also called primary) school of 8 years, secondary education of 4 years and post-secondary education and training. Preparatory, elementary, and secondary education are provided in public and private schools. There are 77 public elementary schools and 3 public secondary schools. There are 26 private elementary schools and 13 private secondary schools. The churches run all of the private schools except two. Of the total 103 elementary schools and 16 secondary schools in the Marshall Islands, 19 elementary schools and 8 secondary schools are located on Majuro Atoll and 9 elementary and 5 secondary schools are located on Kwajalein Atoll. The remaining 76 elementary schools and 3 secondary schools are located on the other atolls and islands.

There are some indications that literacy levels have improved. The 1999 census reported that 97% of household residents 10 years and older are literate—a rise of six percentage points since 1988—but the definition of literacy in the 1999 census (ability to read and write a simple message in any language) was different from that in the 1988 census (attainment of at least a Grade 4 education). However, based on the 1988 census definition literacy rates also increased slightly over the last 10 years (Figure 5.1).

## Access to Education

Preparatory education is provided in the public school system through the Head Start program in 48 centers around the country. The program serves to 1,200 children. A number of the private schools, mostly on Majuro Atoll and Ebeye Island, also provide preparatory education in pre-school and kindergarten for about 300 children a year. The Head Start program and private pre-school and kindergartens reach only 35% of the children who are 3–5 years of age, most of whom live in urban areas. Most rural children do not have access to preparatory education before starting elementary school.

Figure 5.1: Adult Literacy Rates, 1988–1999



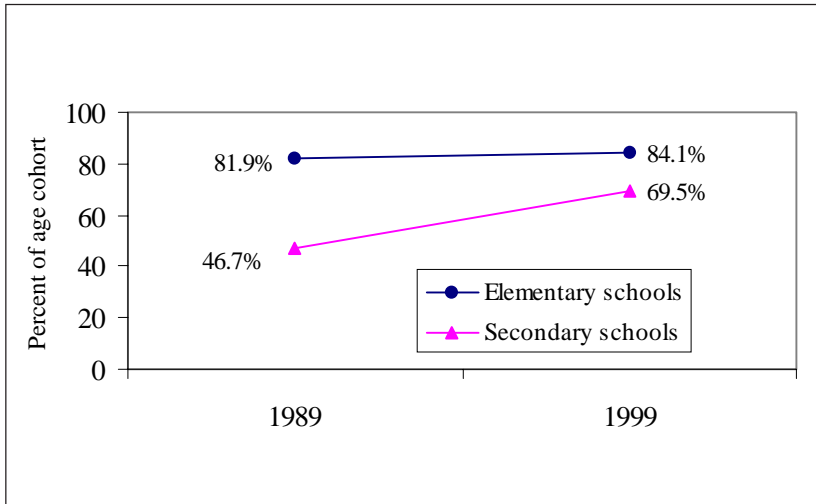
Note: 1988, 1999 - Adult literacy defined as: a person is literate if he/she attained at least a Grade 4 education; 1999 - Adult literacy defined as: a person is literate if he/she can, with understanding, both read and write a simple message in any language.

Source: RMI 1999 Census Final Report, OPS.

Access to elementary and secondary education has increased during the last 10 years. Overall, a greater proportion of school age children attended school in 1999 than in 1988 (Figure 5.2). However, the percentage of school age children enrolled in elementary schools increased only slightly since 1988, from 82–84% in 1999. The Government is the main provider of elementary education with a total roll of 8,763 students in 1999/2000 compared with 2,976 students in private elementary schools.

Access to secondary education has increased substantially during the last 10 years, but enrollment is still unsatisfactorily low. In 1988 nearly 47% of secondary school age children were enrolled in secondary schools. This has increased to over 69% in 1999, but three out of every ten children of secondary school age were still not receiving secondary education in 1999. In 1999/2000, the private secondary schools provided education for 1,390 students and the public secondary schools served 1,196 students.

**Figure 5.2: Elementary and Secondary School Enrollment Rates, 1988–1999**

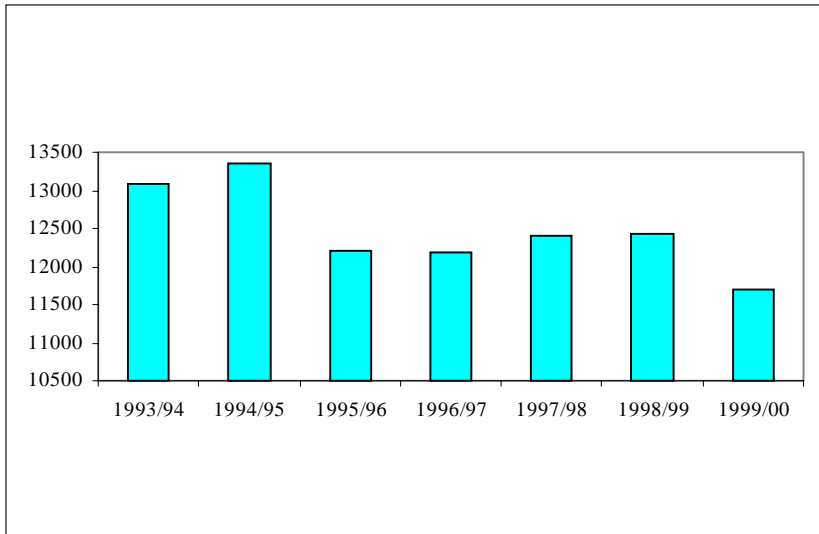


Source: RMI 1999 Census Final Report, OPS.

Looking at enrollments over the past few years, the data for elementary schools showed a substantial drop in 1995/96 and again in 1999/2000 (Figure 5.3). There is no obvious explanation for these large falls in enrollment in a single year. Emigration may explain some of the fall in enrollment in 1995/96 and similarly for the fall in 1999/2000. The reduction in fertility rates and therefore the proportion of children under 15 may also be a factor. However, these factors are not sufficient to explain the substantial drop in enrollment in a single year (1995/96 and 1999/2000). It seems likely that recording and reporting on student enrollments may have been inaccurate.

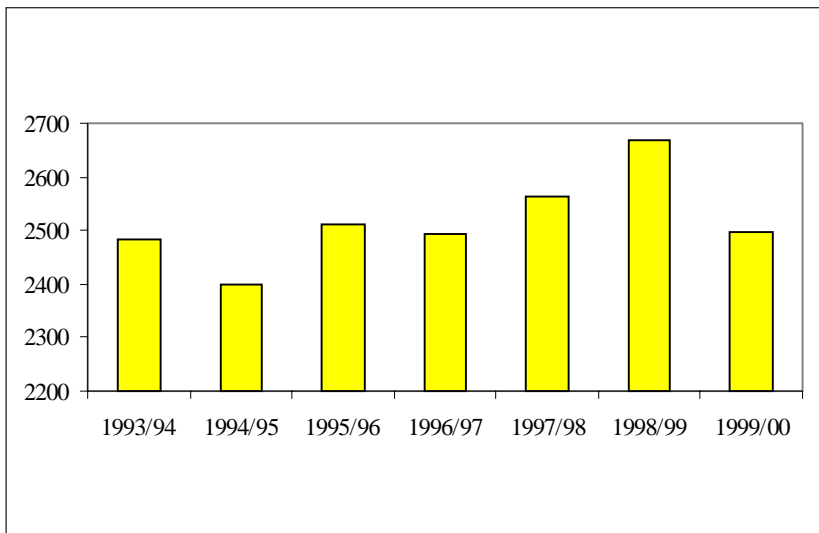
Enrollment in secondary schools in the 1990s fluctuated and reached its highest level of well over 2,600 students in 1998/99 (Figure 5.4). In 1999/2000, secondary school enrollment went down to the 1996/97 level. The comments above about the accuracy of the data on elementary school enrollment also applies to the reported fall in secondary school enrollment for 1994/95 and 1999/2000.

**Figure 5.3: Elementary School Enrollment,  
1993/1994–1999/2000**



Source: RMI Statistical Abstract 1998 and 1999, OPS (2000), Ministry of Education (MOE) (2000).

**Figure 5.4: Secondary Education Enrollment,  
1993/1994–1999/2000**

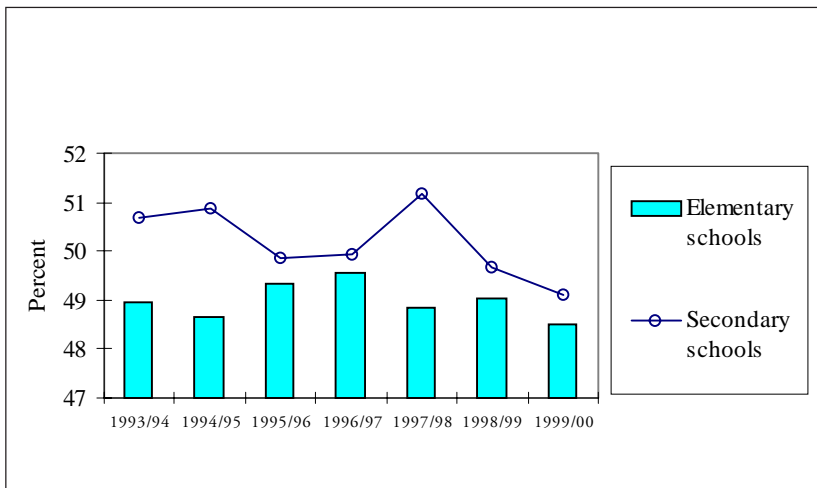


Source: RMI Statistical Abstract 1998 and 1999, OPS (2000), MOE (2000).

Enrollment of boys in elementary schools generally declined during the last 5 years. Enrollment of girls fluctuated from year to year but there is a declining trend. There are more boys enrolled in the elementary schools than girls (Figure 5.5). Girls make up about 49% of students in elementary schools. In secondary schools there were more girls in previous years until the last 2 years when boys outnumbered girls (Figure 5.5). There has been only a slight difference in enrollment between boys and girls in secondary schools. In general, it can be said that boys and girls are almost equally represented in secondary schools.

The dropout rates between grades in the school system are particularly high in secondary schools. Of the students enrolled in elementary school Grades 1–7 in 1997/98, about 2% (about 210 students) were no longer in school in 1998/99. Of those enrolled in Grades 9–11 in 1997/98, about 20% (422 students) were no longer in school in 1998/99. Of the Grade 9 cohort of 879 students attending secondary school during 1995/96, just 57% (498 students) reached Grade 12 in 1998/99.

**Figure 5.5: Female Enrollment in Elementary and Secondary Schools, 1994–2000**



Source: RMI Statistical Abstract 1998 and 1999, OPS (2000) and MOE (2000).

The 1991 Education Act makes school attendance compulsory for children aged between 6–14 years old or until a student graduates from elementary school. At the elementary school level there is sufficient classroom capacity in total for more school-age children to attend school. However, there are variations in the availability of school places in the different atolls and lack of classroom space may not be obvious in the enrollment rates. For example, on Majuro two public elementary schools provide half-day sessions because of lack of classroom space. This has a detrimental effect on student learning. The locational variations in availability of classroom space as well as the availability at the upper level of elementary education need to be assessed and addressed accordingly.

Apart from availability of access to an elementary school, other factors are responsible for the high level of non-attendance. These include the importance attached by parents to the education of their children, the capacity and ability to support the children, as well as general community involvement and support for education. The Ministry of Education needs to address these factors, including awareness raising among parents and the enforcement of the Education Act. An important innovation, which had been introduced by the Government to encourage participation and support of parents and the community in the education system, is the community-based governance system. The implementation of the system in the public elementary schools on Majuro and Ebeye has resulted in considerable improvement in the community participation and support in these schools.

Access to secondary education is limited by the availability of space. There is also a high dropout rate. In 1998/99, over one-quarter (over 330 students) of those enrolled in Grade 8 did not continue on to Grade 9 in secondary schools. In the previous 3 years, about one-third of Grade 8 students (425–450 students each year) did not enter secondary school. In the last 3 years an average of about 60% of those who did not continue on to Grade 9 of secondary education were girls (200–270 girls each year).

Both the space and dropout issues need to be addressed. With regard to availability, some of the private schools are in-

terested in increasing the availability of secondary education but the capital costs of establishing facilities is beyond the resources of the private schools. As budget resources become available over the next few years, the Government should be able to increase subsidies to private schools and facilitate their access to external development funds. Reduction of dropout rates requires both better teaching and stronger family and community commitment to better education.

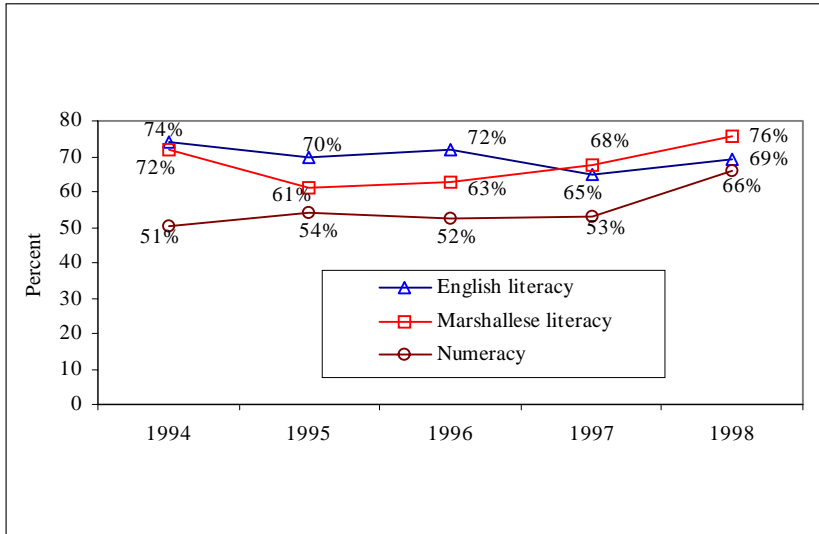
## Standards and Effectiveness

A number of indicators show that standards and effectiveness of education at the elementary and secondary levels need to be considerably improved. One of the indicators is the result of Pacific Islands Literacy Levels (PILL) tests administered by the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment. PILL is a standardized measure of children's early acquisition of language and numeracy after 4 years of schooling. The PILL test is a useful and reliable indicator of the extent to which children have developed their literacy and learning skills after 4 years of formal schooling.

The PILL test covers English, vernacular language (Marshallese), and numeracy. The data from the PILL tests in the Marshall Islands show that in the areas of literacy and numeracy at the elementary schools the standards are generally low in comparison with international and Pacific Island country norms. The data also show that there was little overall improvement in the results over the period since 1994 when the PILL tests were first administered in the Marshall Islands (Figure 5.6).

Over the period 1994–1998, there has been some improvement in the results for literacy in English with the proportion of "students at risk" showing a declining trend from 74% in 1994 to 69% in 1998. Students "at risk" in Marshallese literacy, however, has increased since 1995 to 76% in 1998. With respect to numeracy skills, the test results show an increasing trend of students "at risk" during the period from 51% in 1994 to 66%

**Figure 5.6: Pacific Islands' Literacy Levels,  
Percent of RMI Grade 4 Students "At Risk,"  
1994–1998**



Source: A Digest of Marshall Islands Education Data, MOE (1999).

in 1998, i.e., indicating a worsening of the quality of instruction with regard to developing the numeracy skills of children.

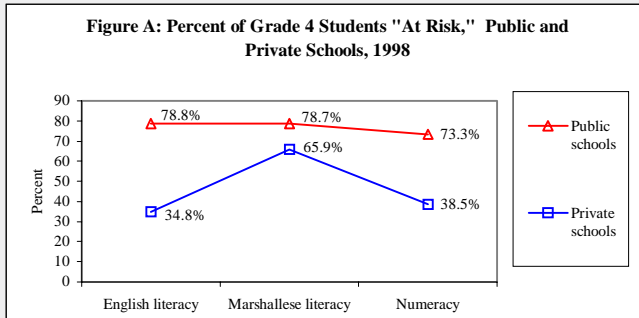
The PILL test results for 1998 showed that Grade 4 children in private schools performed better than those in public schools in all the three areas, particularly in English literacy and numeracy (Box 5.1). The same data also showed that girls performed better than boys in all three areas.

The PILL results give an independent assessment of the performance of the Marshall Islands' education system in the key education performance indicators. The proportion of Marshallese students falling in the "at risk" category is very high and requires urgent attention, particularly in the public school system. Students in the "at risk" categories will continue to have difficulty learning throughout the rest of their elementary and secondary education unless they receive remedial help as early as possible. It is clear that fundamental literacy and

**Box 5.1: Pacific Islands' Literacy Levels: RMI Test Results, by Public and Private Schools and Gender, 1998**

Grade 4 private school students performed better than those in public schools in English literacy, Marshallese literacy, and numeracy in the 1998 PILL tests. The differences in their performance were particularly striking for English literacy and numeracy (Figure A).

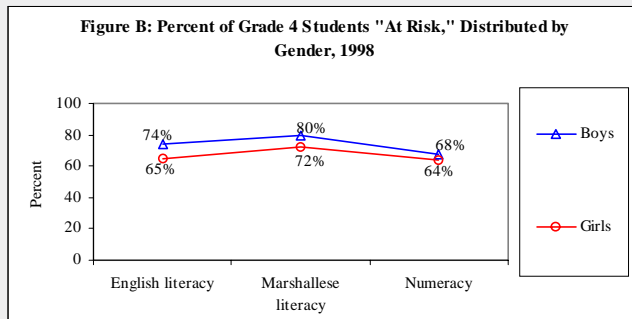
In English literacy, 35% of private school students were "at risk" compared



Source: A Digest of Marshall Islands Education Data, MOE (1999).

with 79% of those in public schools. In numeracy, 39% of private school students were "at risk" compared with 73% in public schools. In the vernacular language, about two-thirds (66%) of private school children were "at risk" in Marshallese literacy compared with 79% for public schools.

With regard to gender, PILL test results for 1998 showed that Grade 4 girls performed better than boys in all three areas (Figure B). In English literacy, 65% of girls were "at risk" compared with 74% for boys. In Marshallese literacy 70% of girls were



Source: A Digest of Marshall Islands Education Data, MOE (1999).

"at risk" compared with 80% of boys. For numeracy, 64% of girls were "at risk" compared with 68% of boys.

numeracy problems persist with these students throughout the rest of their elementary and secondary education.

The Ministry of Education, under the ADB-funded basic education project, developed and field-tested national student evaluation tests, called the Marshall Islands Standardized Achievement Test, for Grades 4, 6, and 8. Implementation of these tests, which will start in the 2000/01 school year, will assist in monitoring the quality of education and raising standards in the elementary school system. The current annual high school entrance test is primarily to determine entrance to public secondary schools, given the limited number of available places at the schools. Presently there is no prescribed academic standard for entry into the secondary schools.

An indicator of the quality of secondary education is the scoring on the College of the Marshall Islands (CMI) entrance tests. Of secondary school seniors who took the tests in February 2000, only 27% could enroll in traditional college credit courses. For mathematics, only 10% could register for credit math courses. Of the 1,004 secondary school graduates who enrolled at CMI from 1993–99, only 21% could take credit English and 20% credit math. The results vary between the different secondary school graduates. In general, the students graduating from the secondary schools have not been equipped with the basic education required for further education and training in academic and technical fields.

The key factor in raising the quality of education is the quality of teaching staff. The student/teacher ratio is quite low, but the quality of education is still poor. In 1999/2000 there were 434 teachers in the public elementary school for a total school roll of some 8,700 students, a student/teacher ratio of 20. With the student/teacher ratio for private elementary schools of 15, the overall student/teacher ratio is 19.

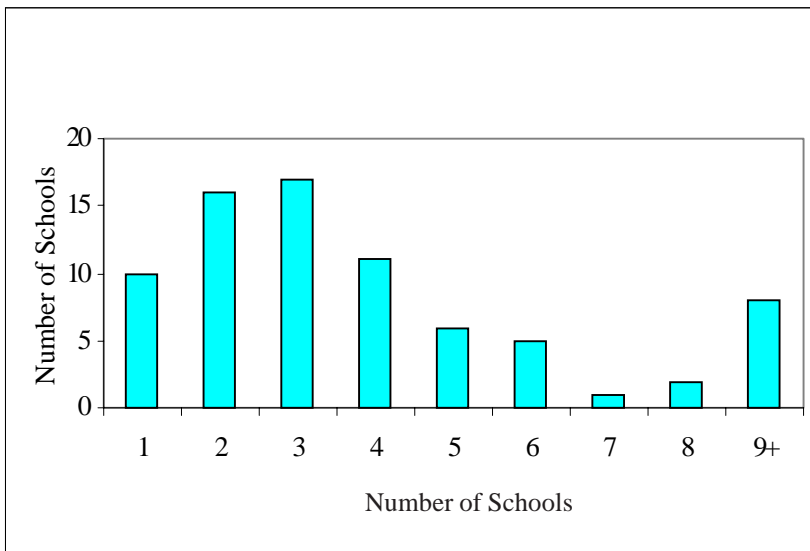
Presently, nearly half of the teachers in the Marshall Islands have only a secondary school diploma as their highest qualification. This issue of improving the quality of teaching staff is being addressed by the Ministry of Education by introducing new regulations for teacher certification and encouraging teachers to get their associate of science (AS) degrees or higher in collaboration with the College of the Marshall Islands.

Apart from the availability of qualified teachers, other important factors in improving the quality of education include the availability of appropriate instructional materials and other resources as well as the effectiveness of management at the school and the classroom levels.

The quality of school facilities is also a relevant factor in the delivery of education and learning. Many of the schools need major repairs, upgrading of facilities, and new buildings. In the 1999/2000 supplementary budget, the Government allocated some of the aid funds provided by Taipei, China for renovations of school buildings on Ebeye, Jaluit, and Wotje. Urgent implementation of a planned program for repairing and upgrading of school facilities is needed as well as an overall policy on the management of school buildings and facilities and their maintenance.

Another factor affecting the quality of education, especially in the outer islands, is the large number of schools with only one or two teachers (Figure 5.7). Consequently, multigrade teaching occurs. Successful multigrade teaching requires quali-

**Figure 5.7: Elementary Schools and Teachers**



Source: Developing a Strategy Plan for the Ministry of Education Final Report (TA No. 2599-RMI).

fied teachers in the subject areas as well as in multigrade teaching methodologies. There is lack of capacity on both accounts.

Another factor impacting the quality of education at the secondary level is the high level of vocational subject content, especially in the public secondary schools. It is arguable that, given currently poor attainment levels, secondary education should concentrate on fulfilling basic education requirements without being diverted by vocational subjects. This issue is currently under consideration by the Government with assistance from ADB.

The quality of education, access, and relevance as well as organizational and management issues are addressed in the medium-term strategic plan for the Ministry of Education. The strategic plan was prepared by the Ministry of Education with technical assistance funded by ADB and was completed in 2000. A National Education Summit was convened in August 2000 to discuss the plan. The strategic plan endorses the continuation of the objectives of the Ten-Year Master Plan for Education for 1990–1999 and the Education Improvement Plan 2000 (Box 5.2).

The new plan has to be read with the implementing guidelines subsequently prepared by the ministry with the assistance of Pacific Resources for Education and Learning. These stress the priority to be given to strengthening community support and sustaining pupil enrollment, better language and literacy teaching and academic standards generally, and effective coordination of post-secondary education and training.

## **Post-Secondary Education and Vocational Training**

Post-secondary education and training in the Marshall Islands is provided largely by CMI. The Marshall Islands Center of the University of the South Pacific (USP) also provides post-secondary education through its extension and foundation programs. The Fisheries and Nautical Training Center provides deckhand training for employment on ships. The National Training Council is now responsible for assessment and certification of skills training and vocational education. Overall planning and coordination is crucially important to the effectiveness of these

### **Box 5.2: Objectives for the Education System in the Marshall Islands**

The Strategic Plan for the Ministry of Education, 2000 endorsed the relevance of the following revised broad objectives of the 1989 Ten-Year Master Plan for Education as a basis for planning and implementing education policy:

- Establish a quality primary education as the national standard for all citizens and promote school attendance by all children between the ages of 6 and 14.
- Provide access to a quality secondary education for all citizens.
- Adopt national and community self-reliance as the basis for developing the RMI education system.
- Expand community responsibility for schools and build a sense of community ownership and pride in the schools.
- Give primary schools the main responsibility for building self-reliance in individuals, along with pride in their cultural heritage and appreciation of their natural environment.
- Make pre-vocational education the primary responsibility of public secondary schools.
- Expand access to external training and employment opportunities for out-of-school youth by providing needed preparation and counseling.
- Increase self-sufficiency in post-secondary education.
- Increase the success rate among students entering college.
- Adopt, maintain, and follow a comprehensive long-range plan for the continued development and improvement of education.
- Expand the sources of financial support (local and international)

institutions, and is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

CMI provides courses in liberal arts and sciences, teacher education, nursing and allied health, business and computer science, and vocational and occupational education and training. These are AS degree and certificate programs. CMI also runs a developmental program to prepare students to enter its degree programs. It also has an adult education program for

and the total amount of funding needed to strengthen and expand educational opportunities.

- Increase the cost-effectiveness of schools through such means as establishing national standards on viable size, ratios of teachers per student, and performance accountability.
- Expand the role and performance of private schools through increasing financial support based on performance criteria.
- Establish and monitor output measures such as academic scores, graduation rates, employment rates, college admission rates, etc.
- Increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession and expand the cadre of trained professionals by elevating the importance of their role, strengthening recruitment and motivation efforts, and increasing salaries.
- Establish firm language practices to promote the achievement of both Marshallese and English language teaching goals.

These objectives are cast in broad terms and are not capable of being pursued all at the same time. Realizing this, the Ministry has produced more tightly drawn and sequenced implementing guidelines for each of the key areas—pre-school, primary, secondary, and post-secondary education and training, and the overall planning and management of education. Resource allocations will need to be decided within the rolling economic and financial planning framework described elsewhere in this report.

*Source:* Strategic Plan for the Ministry of Education, 2000.

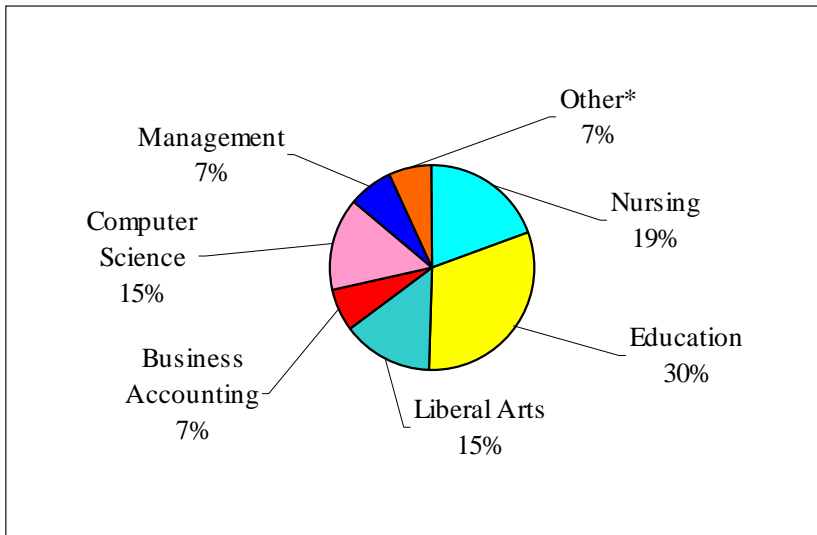
young people and adults that provides an opportunity for them to complete their high school education to increase their opportunity for employment or enable them to attend post-secondary training.

Since its establishment as an independent college in 1993, CMI's student population has increased to over 1,500 in 1999/2000. CMI produced a total of 389 graduates during the period. The largest number of CMI graduates is in education and

nursing. During the last 3 years, 3 out of 10 graduates specialized in education (Figure 5.8). Most of the graduates in education became in-service teachers. In the last 3 years only 5 of the 51 graduates in education were pre-service. In 1999/2000 all 19 graduates in education were in-service. This was the highest number of education graduates produced by CMI since 1993. In nursing, all the graduates over the last 3 years were non-Marshallese.

CMI's partnership program under the Job Training Partnership Act, now renamed the Workforce Investment Act, which is US-funded, provides training for out-of-school youth in seven specific training programs. These are occupational skills training, institutional skills training, cooperative work experience, entrepreneurship and small business operation, pre-employment skills training, school enhancement, and summer youth employment and training. From 1994–1999 about 1,620 youths and adults, of which about 34% were female, participated in these training programs.

**Figure 5.8: College of the Marshall Islands Graduates, 1997–2000**



\* Other consists of office administration and engineering.

Source: College of the Marshall Islands.

USP, through its Marshall Islands Center, offers extension courses in preliminary and foundation studies as well as vocational, diploma (AS degree) and degree courses. As of March 2000, a total of 21 students enrolled in preliminary and foundations courses, another 21 students enrolled in vocational certificate courses, and 58 in degree courses. The extension program students have access to individual instruction on Majuro with lecturers and instructors through the USPNET (a satellite communication system). The USP extension program students will be able to complete full majors and degrees without having to attend classes on USP campuses. The center has also provided training in conjunction with US federally funded programs such as the Head Start Program for pre-school certificates and diplomas in early childhood education and community nutrition.

USP also implements the RMI-USP Joint Education Program, which started in 1996 and is funded by the RMI. The program offers preliminary and foundation courses to prepare students for tertiary training to be able to complete their studies in the shortest possible time and return to the RMI. Selected students from Year 12 in public high schools (Marshall Islands High School and Jaluit High School), and other students who have completed Grade 12, are taught in the preliminary program. The students who successfully complete the preliminary program and meet the requirements enter the USP foundation program. A number of students who have successfully completed the foundation program have obtained scholarships from the Australian Agency for International Development to do bachelor degree studies at USP and from the New Zealand Agency for International Development for studies in universities in New Zealand and the Fiji Islands.

The National Training Council (NTC), established by legislation in 1991, has the responsibility for the overall coordination of skills training in the Marshall Islands. It is responsible for establishing skills standards, and testing and certification of trainees. Because of limited capacity and resources over the last few years, NTC has not been very active in carrying out its mandated functions. However, NTC has formulated a strategic plan designed to strengthen its institutional capabilities in the

shortest time possible in the areas of labor market surveys and needs assessment, monitoring, skill-testing, and certification, all of which are essential for ensuring the maintenance of national standards. NTC is implementing the first phase of its strategic plan in partnership with UNDP on a cost-sharing basis.

An essential part of the plan is the creation of a collaborative mechanism between NTC and other stakeholders including the training providers and employers. Indeed, the main issue in the provision of vocational education and training is the need for coordination and a clear policy to avoid duplication and unnecessary conflicts between the various providers. Such conflicts detract from the important task of providing vocational training in the necessary skills and systematically creating a skilled workforce, which is critical for national development and self-reliance. This issue among others is currently being addressed in the design of an ADB-funded skills improvement program.

Tertiary education and training in areas that are not available in the Marshall Islands are taken overseas, mainly in the US mainland, Hawaii, and Guam, as well as tertiary educational institutions in other countries such as Palau, Fiji Islands, New Zealand, and Australia. In 1999/2000, over 80 Marshallese students received scholarships for studies overseas for majors in various fields including medicine, economics, and political science.

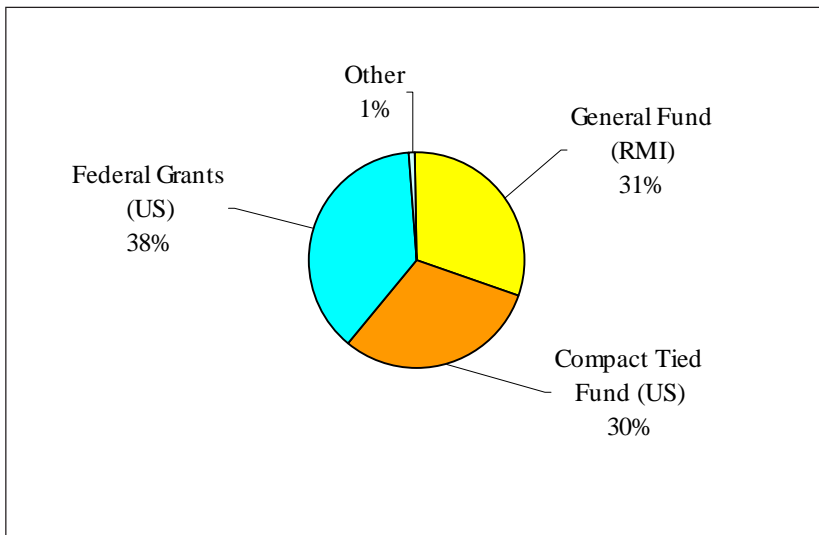
Between 1996 and 1999, the RMI Scholarship Grant and Loan Board provided financial assistance to least 883 Marshallese for tertiary studies in the RMI and overseas. About 29% of the students graduated from the respective courses and about 11% were current students. The majority of students, about 60%, either failed their programs of study or did not report on the completion of their studies to the board. It is understood that most of the Marshallese in the latter category who were studying outside the RMI have remained overseas. The board and Ministry of Education are looking into options to address these issues of high failure rates and non-reporting as well as related financial issues.

## Education Financing

Sources of funds for government financing of education include the Government's general fund, Compact Tied Fund, US federal funds, a Special Revenue Fund and other recurrent funds from multilateral and bilateral arrangements. Funds for capital projects are mainly from the Asian Development Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency, and Taipei,China.

Over two-thirds of the Ministry of Education's recurrent budget is funded by the US through the Compact and US federal grants (Figure 5.9). In 1999, Compact and US federal grants for education amounted to \$9.3 million and the RMI general fund provided \$4.9 million. Much of the US funding is designed as enhancement grants to lift the performance of an assumed basic level of educational activities and standards. The present system in the RMI is defective in ways that prevent the full use of available US grants. The other source of funds is the Special

Figure 5.9: Financing of Education, 1999



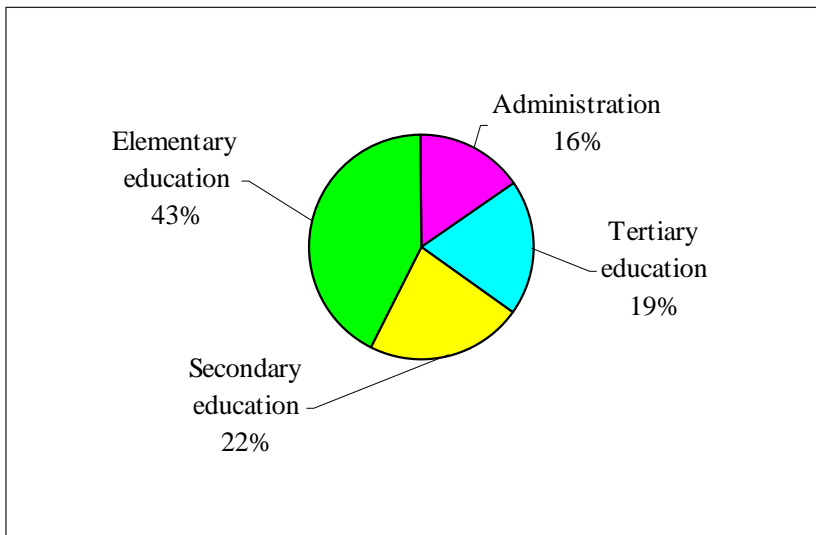
Source: Developing a Strategy Plan for the Ministry of Education: Final Report (TA No. 2599 RMI); MOF.

Revenue Fund, which includes funds received by the National Training Council from the alien workers tax.

The US federal grants are for specific programs such as special education for handicapped children and the Workforce Investment Act. The Government has some flexibility in allocating Compact-designated funds, but the allocation for scholarships has to be used for that purpose. The allocation of the RMI General Fund and Compact Designated Fund for education in the 2000 budget for the Ministry of Education provided nearly two-thirds of the budget for elementary and secondary education, with elementary education having a share of 43% and secondary education 22% (Figure 5.10).

Funding for secondary education is largely for the three public high schools and comes from Compact funds. The funds allocated to elementary education and administration are mostly from the RMI general fund. The Government also provides financial aid, albeit very modest, to private elementary and sec-

**Figure 5.10: Allocation of General and Compact Funds in Education, 2000**



Source: Developing a Strategy Plan for the Ministry of Education Final Report (TA No. 2599 – RMI); MOE.

ondary schools. The allocation for tertiary education includes designated Compact funding for scholarships of \$797,400 annually. The *Nitijela* also allocates funds from the general fund, as third country scholarships, for Marshallese students to study abroad. About \$100,000 annually is allocated for students to attend colleges and universities other than those in the US and its territories, e.g., colleges and universities in Fiji, New Zealand, and Australia.

Finances for public education thus come from various sources, and appear not to be well coordinated. Effective coordination of the various funding sources is important to determine whether resources are being allocated according to education priorities, and to reallocate if necessary. The major source of external funding for education is Compact and US federal grants. These grants are largely tied to specific activities and therefore do not provide flexibility for reallocation to other priority areas such as educational instruction materials. Such flexibility to pursue agreed educational priorities should be sought under renegotiated Compact arrangements. Finally, in a way that has not been common practice in the RMI, allocations of resources to and within the education sector will need to be consistent with, and form part of, the more robust and transparent framework of public sector planning and financial management described elsewhere in this report.