



## Impact Story: Expanding Social and Emotional Learning Opportunities for Guam's Early Learners

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Guam is the largest and southernmost island of the Mariana archipelago. It is a territory of the United States with a population of approximately 168,000. Guam's official languages are Fino' CHamoru and English, and many people are bilingual in both. Guam's public school system is comprised of 26 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, and 7 high schools.

In 2019, the Region 18 Comprehensive Center (R18CC) partnered with the Guam Department of Education (GDOE) to support the roll-out of early learning policy and to train Early Childhood Education (ECE) leaders and teachers in Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Beyond SEL training and policy assistance, R18CC coached Education Specialists on how to monitor their Pilot Pre-Kindergarten (PreK) program.

Before working with R18CC, the GDOE's plans to scale the Pilot PreK program had been delayed due to multiple rounds of budget cuts at the territorial level, and they were unable to fully provide the policies and instructional supports needed to firmly establish and grow the program. Through the Strengthening and Scaling Public Pre-K project, R18CC has helped the GDOE to support, enhance, and expand their Pilot PreK program.

### Early Childhood Policy Development and Roll-out

In Year 1 of the Comprehensive Center (2019–2020), R18CC supported the Guam Education Board's (GEB) early learning policy initiative. The purpose of the policy was to build a shared understanding of SEL and consistent instructional approaches for children aged 0–5 across the GDOE. R18CC assisted the GEB's policy work by providing guidance and resources to the Guam Early Learning Council (Council), a territorial agency that advises organizations on policies that support youth from ages 0–8. Resources included work from the [National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#); WestEd's [Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety](#); and the RAND Corporation's [SEL Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act](#). Research has shown that students who participate in SEL programs show better outcomes, including social and emotional skills, behavior, and academic achievement. SEL programs help young children develop to their fullest potential and set them up for success in the future.

### Training Early Learning Specialists and Educators

Also in Year 1, R18CC chose to train teachers and education specialists using the Conscious Discipline framework. They decided on Conscious Discipline because it uses the most up-to-date evidence in SEL and includes ways for educators to work with students who have experienced trauma in their lives. Conscious Discipline trains educators in four parts: understanding behavioral science; adult self-regulation; creating school-family culture; and strategies for helping children to manage conflict and develop healthy behaviors.

## R18CC Key Technical Assistance Approaches

### I. Policy Assistance

- Provide guidance and resources on SEL
- Help align policy to GDOE Strategic Plan
- Ensure policy is based on community needs

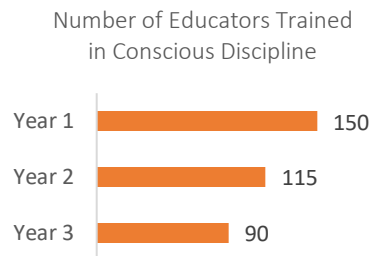
### II. Education Specialist and Teacher Capacity Building

- Conscious Discipline training on SEL strategies
- Coaching on using data to monitor PreK program

### III. Overall Service Approach

- Grounded in needs-sensing
- Staff understanding of local culture and history
- Adapting materials to local needs and context
- Good communication
- Flexibility and availability

Conscious Discipline provided a strong foundation for the development of social and emotional skills laid out by **Board Policy 383: “Social Emotional Learning for Early Childhood Education,”** which was passed in the early part of CC Program Year 2 (2020–2021). This policy grounded the PreK program in instructional goals for creating “a safe and nurturing learning environment” to foster “effective instruction that leads to academic achievement” (Board Policy 383). From there, R18CC facilitated work sessions with the GDOE to incorporate the policy’s early learning strategic priorities into the GDOE Strategic Plan. In addition, R18CC helped to make sure that the early learning policy being reviewed by the Council was based in evidence and responsive to the needs of the community. The GDOE performed needs sensing with local families and educators, which showed that they preferred to see early learning supports for their children guided by SEL principles.



The COVID-19 pandemic provided extra motivation for the initiative, as the GEB foresaw the need to strengthen early learning supports to make up for school closures and the demand to address the emotional needs of young students while observing COVID-19 classroom protocols. Interestingly, the pandemic quickened the growth of the PreK project, whereas many SEAs experienced project slowdowns. Conscious Discipline training, according to teachers, helped offset the fact they could not use physical contact with their students. They specifically reported using more language-heavy activities to help students safely explore and express their feelings. For example, one teacher used a “*Kindness Tree*,” which recognizes acts of kindness in the classroom, as well as an “*Emotion Box*” that helps children “*cope when [they] are scared to talk to others about how they feel*” (Early Childhood Educator).

R18CC also coached Education Specialists on how to collect, analyze, and reporting on data to monitor the program. Education Specialists have reported collecting evaluation data on the program and developing the annual National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) report on behalf of the GDOE.

## Outcomes of Conscious Discipline Training

*Changes in instructional practice were widely reported by Conscious Discipline participants* throughout Years 2 and 3 of the project. Teachers shared that their confidence to help students and families had increased, and they made positive changes in their classrooms by improving their own reflection and communication skills. One GDOE teacher explained, *“I’m stronger in my belief to have confidence in myself to help and assist my students and families... Self-regulation is a must to practice!”* Another teacher recounted that the training had influenced them to *“slow down more to absorb what is being said first, then answer to my best judgement, considering the other person’s point of view!”* (GDOE Teacher).

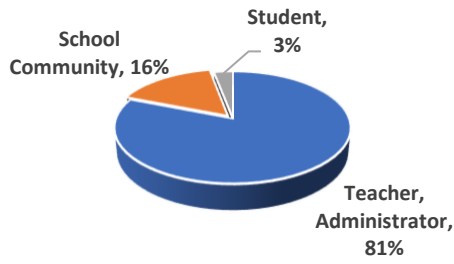


Figure 1. Types of Impacts, 2021–2022 (TA Feedback)

Teachers further described modeling mindful communication and behaviors in the classroom, using specific practices from the training (e.g., S.T.A.R. [“Smile, Take a deep breath And Relax”], breathing techniques, and themed days of the week), and trying conflict solving and safe space activities. They also became more intentional about identifying priorities for instruction and planning how to use them. One teacher even gave credit to the Conscious Discipline strategies she was using for improving student attendance.



GDOE educator using a puppet during a virtual lesson (photo by Josh Cruz)

**Change was also reported at the program- and school-level.** For example, a Special Education teacher was seen integrating Conscious Discipline strategies into their early intervention program, which works with families and children. In another instance, an entire school committed to using two of the learning models from the training. Other examples include instances of SEL curriculum integration, using Conscious Discipline methods when giving teachers feedback, and sharing SEL information with staff and families. Some teachers and administrators even reported teaching Conscious Discipline strategies in new teacher professional development seminars (K–12) and college-level teacher training courses.

*“The kids and the teachers have benefited from this experience because they’ve learned that learning can’t begin if you can’t deal with emotions. I feel that it’s given the teachers more gain in leading their classrooms, or facilitating learning, and given a lot of power to the students, too”.*

*- GDOE Education Specialist*

## Value-Added Impacts

An unexpected outcome of this project has been its influence on other SEAs in the region. In Years 2 and 3, the Guam DOE Early Childhood Educators, who were trained in the Conscious Discipline strategies, presented what they learned to the Kosrae DOE (KDOE) Early Childhood Educators. These exchanges created such enthusiasm among leadership and head teachers in the KDOE that the R18CC created a new capacity building concentration within the existing Continuity of Learning project, through which they intend to include SEL in their high school service-learning curriculum. Conscious Discipline made a similar impression on the Pohnpei Department of Education (PDOE), which now plans to include SEL in ECE.

## Approaches for Sustainable Change

The GDOE gave credit to R18CC for the improvements they experienced. The quality of the Conscious Discipline training series—and in particular, how it has been adapted to meet Guam’s early learning needs and reinforced participant learning—has been a big highlight for schools. GDOE participants also praised the R18CC team for their understanding of Guam’s history and culture, and how that has shaped their approach to technical assistance, from how they communicate and make themselves available, to the resources they have provided. These aspects of R18CC technical assistance were especially helpful to the GDOE as they dealt with the effects of big budget cuts, including reduced and overworked staff.



*GDOE educators using social-emotional learning materials (photo by Josh Cruz)*

## Next Steps

Moving forward in Year 4, the PreK project will focus on expanding the Pilot program. The project will continue to train new cohorts of educators in Conscious Discipline to help the GDOE to use SEL strategies consistently across more schools. R18CC will continue to coach Education Specialists on how to apply Conscious Discipline methods in their roles as instructional coaches and mentors, as well as conduct a biannual needs assessment. The Center will additionally work with the GDOE Central Office to finalize a student application process so that eligible students across Guam can apply to the program.

*"[R18CC staff] is...such a great resource. [They're] easily available if we need more guidance and then also [they're] really effective...I felt that those strategies that [they] implemented...make it feel like you are not being judged, and you're being nurtured...". - GDOE Key Stakeholder*

The GDOE PreK program has been strengthened by the policy and instructional capabilities developed through this project. The GDOE is now in a better place to pursue its long-term goal of a comprehensive early learning infrastructure in which all students can be academically successful through social and emotional development.

## Resources

Board Policy 383: Social and Emotional Learning for Early Childhood Education (2020).

Odango, E., Sanchez, E., and Speidel, A., (2021, March 24). Guam Department of Education's Conscious Discipline training. Region 18 Comprehensive Center. <https://region18cc.org/blog-updates/guam-department-of-educations-conscious-discipline-training/>

Sanchez, E., and Speidel, A. (2022, March 22). Engaging Guam's early childhood educators in social and emotional learning through Conscious Discipline. Region 18 Comprehensive Center. <https://region18cc.org/blog-updates/engaging-guams-early-childhood-educators-in-social-emotional-learning-through-conscious-discipline/>