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K12 Scholarships Awarded to Micronesian Students

Twenty-one students from across Micronesia will enroll in prestigious private schools this fall with the help of scholarships from the Habele Outer Island Education Fund.

The students, whose families come from isolated islands and atolls throughout Yap and Chuuk States, have been awarded tuition assistance covering 75 percent of the cost of their 2010-11 enrollment. They will be attending independent K-12 schools on the islands of Yap, Chuuk and Pohnpei, where most will live with relatives or sponsors for the length of the school year.

Habele is a US-based charity that awards scholarships to Micronesian students each fall. Since 2006 the organization has provided over \$17,000 in tuition assistance, as well as hundreds of boxes of donated books for public school libraries. The group also published a comprehensive Ulithian-English Dictionary earlier this year for island educators.

"Every child from every island deserves access to an effective and appropriate classroom," explains Alex Sidles, a Habele board member. Sidles observed that scholarships for low-income and isolated students also had a broader impact. "We are working to change attitudes and expectations... when parents see that students from their community can excel academically they come to expect—even demand—more from all types schools."

Sildes and other former teachers established Habele to meet the strong local demand for greater educational access. This year's scholarship winners come from the islands of Ulithi, Fais, Eauripik, Woleai and Satewal in Yap State and from Ta, Lekinoch and Kutu in Chuuk State. More than 50 students from throughout Micronesia applied for tuition support for the 2010 school year.

"My parents and I really want to thank Habele for everything they've done for us," writes Maia Lesarof, a fifth grade student from Falalop Woleai who attends Saint May's School in Yap. Rising High School senior Parkey Mwarike of Kuttu in Chuuk echoes Maia's enthusiasm: "Again, this year, without the help, I could not afford to attend Saramen Academy."

The "Outer" or "Neighboring" Islands are a loosely connected group of islands and atolls that stretch across the Central Pacific Ocean, slightly north of the Equator. The term "outer" derives from their location outside of the larger, more densely populated islands now serving as the state capitals of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). A strong traditional culture, focused on fishing, weaving and gardening still guides daily life in the Outer Islands of Micronesia.

"These islands remain some of the most isolated and underdeveloped areas on the planet," said Neil Mellen, another Habele board member. Nationwide, one-in-three Micronesians live below the basic needs poverty line, but the rate is much higher in the Outer Islands. "Families and island leaders keep telling us that education is the key for the lives of their children and the future of their communities." ###