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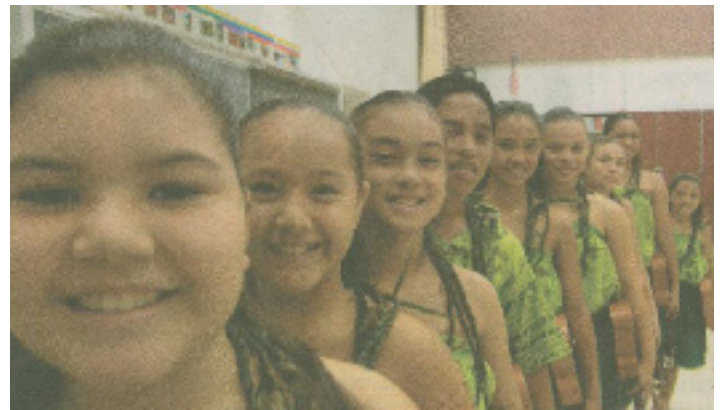
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# Hawaiian Charter Schools

By: Lisa Asato

On the first day back from winter break, 12 students of Hālau Kū Māna charter school wasted no time in getting their hands dirty. At a lo'i in Mānoa Valley, they cleared weeds, checked out the condition of the kalo, and when it was their turn for an outdoor science lecture, they gathered in small groups around one of their three kumu, Liloa Dunn, an ethnobotanist at Lyon Arboretum. The day's topic: genetic engineering. "What exactly is combined in genetic engineering?" Dunn asked the students, who found seats on the grass or a large rock. "Plants," a student answered. "What part of the plant?" "DNA," the answer came. "Exactly," the kumu said.

Among the state's 14 Hawaiian-culture focused or immersion charter schools, Hālau Kū Māna melds a conventional curriculum with hands-on outdoor learning, Hawaiian language, culture and values like mālama 'āina and aloha 'āina to foster learners who think about the community as well as academics. Besides having a campus in Makiki, students spend time in the lo'i, at He'eia fishpond, or aboard Kanehumanoku, the school's double-hulled canoe. "I like it because I see it as I get the best of both worlds," said



*Ka Waihona o ka Na'auao* Photo: Courtesy of Ka Waihona o ka Na'auao

14-year-old freshman Anthony "Kekoa" Lynch, as he worked in the lo'i. "I get the education that we need and the education that I want. I enjoy hula and 'ōlelo, but being that we need math and language arts and reading skills, we get that too."

Native Hawaiians make up about 96 percent of enrollees at Hawaiian-culture focused charter schools, and up to 40 percent at other charter schools. "There is no charter school in the entire system that doesn't have Native Hawaiian students," said Reshela Dupuis, the new executive director of the state Charter School Administrative Office. Some of the strengths of the Hawaiian-focused schools are teaching subjects like the environment and values like mālama 'āina, she said.

"Hawaiians took empirical observational science, they took care of their environment in extremely profound and important ways, and our students are learning the wisdom of that way as well as coming to understand the western scientific model," she said. "They are just as comfortable working within the Hawaiian traditional science and turning around and entering their data on a computer."

Charter schools are public schools within the state Department of Education that have more autonomy in curriculum and other matters than mainstream schools and face the same standards as any Hawai'i public school, including the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which can impose restructuring if a school doesn't meet Annual

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Yearly Progress, or AYP.

In northern Hawai'i Island, Kū Kahakalau, principal of Kanu o ka 'Āina charter school, was among the state's charter school pioneers who brought Hawaiian language, culture and values into a western model around 2001. She has two school-age daughters and calls herself "the proudest public school parent." "We have shown it can work for the kids, not just on an academic level, which is crucial, but also on a cultural and Hawaiian language level," she added.

In addition to meeting AYP for two years in a row, Kanu o Ka 'Āina is going through accreditation, "which is a very exciting process and speaks to our ongoing growth," she said. But she's also proud that her students chant, dance hula, volunteer in the community, can discuss issues like genetically modified kalo, and on top of that know their culture better than she did growing up.

Like many charter schools, Kanu has struggled with substandard facilities — its enrollment hasn't budged much from its original 150 because it couldn't afford bigger, better facilities. The school uses shipping containers housing a library, cafeteria and teachers' lounge. But now, she said, Kanu's nonprofit, Kanu o ka 'Āina Learning 'Ohana, is constructing — not a school, but a "learning center for the entire 'ohana," in which the school will rent space.

The first building, a \$3.9-million multimedia resource center, is already under construction, financed largely by a U.S. Agriculture Department construction loan, a U.S. Department of Education Native Hawaiian Education grant and funding from Kamehameha Schools. Future plans include a \$4 million early childhood complex.

"Bottom line is this is going to be a \$25 million-easy total figure once we're finished because we have to get away from looking at any of this as a school. We're talking about Hawaiian communities — empowerment, sustainability and designing and controlling our own models of education. In that way it's self-determination and education."

Kahakalau, a public school teacher since 1985, said she doesn't doubt that mainstream teachers care, but they're hindered by a system that is too big and impersonal, and the students suffer. "I know plenty of my colleagues then and now that do care for the kids, she said, adding, "The difference between coming to our Native Hawaiian charter schools and public DOE, is the students feel this is the first place they experienced in their career that somebody cares."

That's part of the reason Nani White of Ka Waihona o ka Na'auao drives from her home in 'Āina Haina to Nānākuli every day, where she teaches science and her husband, Paul, also teaches. The teacher-student ratio at Ka Waihona is around 1:22 compared to 1:33 at her previous mainstream school, Kapolei Middle. "There is a little more attention to the students' needs," she said. "I find that they've become more involved because of that."

Ka Waihona, which succeeds in a district that struggles with educational success, is considered a stellar example of the potential of a Hawaiian-culture focused charter school. Since opening its doors for 58 students in a renovated chicken coop, the school now occupies the former Nanaikapono Elementary campus, where its enrollment is 499 in grades K-8. About 400 more are on the waiting list.

"I want you to know, that even though we have a cultural component, essentially we started off as an academically rigorous school," said Ka Waihona principal Alvin Parker, chairman of the newly created Charter School Review Panel, which authorizes new charters. "In other words, academic rigor was important for us to implement as a cornerstone of our curriculum. ... It was not until this year that

our Hawaiian language component entered the curriculum."

While other charter schools have struggled with a per-pupil funding below what mainstream schools receive, Ka Waihona has overcome that hurdle. "The magic number is 200 students," Parker said, "that's where you can be financially strong and sustain your programs."

"We have 500 students and our financial stability is very, very good." The school just re-roofed its cafeteria, and plans to have P.E. facilities built and shipped from Oregon. In a year, the school receives about \$8,000 per pupil, plus more than \$1 million in combined grants through the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and Kamehameha Schools, as well as substantial Title I funding, the nation's free and reduced lunch program.

At Ka Waihona, success is measured in various ways: eight tenured DOE teachers transferred to the school last year, nine students were accepted into Kamehameha Schools, more than 90 percent of its faculty has master's degrees in education, 90 percent of its teachers are licensed (compared to 60 percent in mainstream schools) and it has passed AYP three of the last four years. Parker said he also measures success in another way, "It's about the fact that we are Hawaiian people in a Hawaiian community doing something they said couldn't be done."

Reshela DuPuis was named executive director of the state Charter School Administrative Office in December, overseeing a system that boasts high enrollments of Native Hawaiians, who make up 96 percent of students in Hawaiian-culture focused charter schools and as high as 40 percent of other charter schools. Total enrollment statewide is around 8,000 students in 28 schools on five islands.

Along with an undergraduate degree from the University of Hawai'i and master's and doctorate degrees from the University of Michigan, her 20 years in education and advocacy include teaching at the college level and administering programs for Kamehameha Schools, Alu Like Inc. and Good Beginnings Alliance.

Under her watch at the Office of Hawaiian Affairs' Education Hale, the Board of Trustees approved a two-year \$4.4 million supplemental funding initiative to support Native Hawaiian charter schools. The effort was done in cooperation with Kamehameha Schools, which decreased administrative costs and streamlined the process for charter schools. DuPuis, who was born in Indiana and grew up attending public school in Wahiawā, also had a previous life as a foodie. She sat down with KWO to discuss what's ahead for charter schools and why she compares

**KWO: Following Maunalei Love's interim term, you're stepping in as CSAO's first full-time, permanent director in 15 months. Does that pose special challenges?**

RD: Coming in as Maunalei did on the heels of a director who was fired by the Board of Ed in a closed executive session meeting, it was so difficult. She healed a lot of bridges that were broken or rocky, she opened doors for the system in ways that had not been opened previously, so she really deserves a huge mahalo from all Native Hawaiians and from the charter school system.

**KWO: For the new legislative session, besides funding, you said your top priorities include facilities.**

RD: Almost all of the Native Hawaiian charter schools are start-ups, where facilities are a major issue. Start-up schools don't have facilities, and they've never had equitable facilities funding. We have students who are still being educated in tents, in Quonset huts, in very temporary kinds of lodgings and this means that Hawaiian students are being educated without full funding for facilities by the state because they go to a public charter school.

**KWO: Do you see much external support for Hawaiian culture-focused charter schools?**

RD: I think there is increasing support in the Native Hawaiian community as well in the general Hawai'i community for Native Hawaiian charter schools and for the cultural job that they're doing in perpetuating and maintaining the culture.

One of the critical things is that two of our charter schools on Kaua'i — Ke Kula Ni'ihau o Kekaha and Kula Aupuni Ni'ihau a Kahalelani Aloha — are the only two formal instruction sites for Ni'ihau dialect of Hawaiian language anywhere in the state and therefore the world. And not only are they preserving that dialect but they're teaching it to new generations.

**KWO: As far as what the future holds for charter schools, what ideas do you hear that are exciting?**

RD: We have heard in our office as well as at the review panel that there have been some very focused kükäkükä on the Wai'anae Coast about making either part or all of the coast into a charter district. Now, of course, this is the coastline on O'ahu that has the highest percentage of Native Hawaiians. If that community chooses to become a charter district, what you're going to see is even more native Hawaiian activism in public education.

**KWO: In your job, you work with many diverse groups: the charter schools, review panel, Board of Education, lawmakers, the governor's office, media and the public. I once heard you compare your job to doing the hula, can you elaborate?**

RD: That's my metaphor for doing the job I do. 'Uwehe is a movement in hula where you bend your knees and you move your hips and step with the beat. And because my office sits at a point of contact between a lot of different groups, my job sometimes feels like I'm dancing on lava, on Pele, and she's shaking and she's rocking and rolling, and I gotta keep my knees bent and my feet light and keep that beat.

We gotta keep the dance going whether the ground cracks or shakes beneath our feet. So it's a huge hālau that I get to mālama, and I'm certainly not the kumu for that hālau. My job in some ways is to be alaka'i, to be a leader, or koa alaka'i in some ways, a warrior leader, because my job is to go out there and advocate and fight for justice for the schools. Anything that I do has to be directed by the schools themselves and by the review panel because that's who I serve and the people of Hawai'i, and I feel very strongly about that.

**KWO: Your life before education was food-related. You worked for Paul Mitchell, the hair guy?**

RD: I lived on his estate on Diamond Head. I had my own little house on his estate, I was his private chef for almost three years. I did all his big parties, and before working for him, I did weddings for 500 people with a seven-tiered wedding cake (laughs). When I worked for Paul Mitchell, he shaved my head. He's the one who encouraged me to go to school, so I went to the University of Hawai'i, took a couple of courses, found I loved it and decided I didn't want to spend the rest of my life standing on my feet in a hot, sweaty kitchen.

**KWO: Can you share a little about your family and background?**

RD: I'm Cherokee-Irish-French. We moved to Hawai'i from Indiana

when I was 2. I went to Leilehua High School. In those days before H3, Wahiawā was country. I was a country girl. My first boyfriend was from Kamehameha though (laughs). He was president of his senior class.

Benefit concerts have been critical to the survival of Hawaiian immersion schools since the beginning of the movement to save Hawai'i's native language from near extinction. When the movement was in its fledgling stages some 20 years ago, nearly every immersion school throughout the state organized its own benefit concert. But the problem with this was that the schools on O'ahu ended up competing with each other for the same Hawaiian musicians and went through the same work of putting on virtually the same event, with many of the concerts sharing the same name, Ho'omau, which means to persevere. In 1998, all the schools on O'ahu finally decided to pool their resources together to create 'Aha Mele o Ho'omau, a nonprofit group dedicated to organizing a single Ho'omau concert, held at Waikiki Shell, to benefit the entire Hawaiian language immersion movement on O'ahu.

On Feb. 17, Ho'omau will celebrate its 10th concert, with the 2008 event benefiting all of O'ahu's 11 immersion schools, which combine to serve nearly 1,000 students from preschool to high school.

While the state's 1978 Constitutional Convention established Hawaiian as one of Hawai'i's two official languages, by the early 1980s, many feared the language would be lost forever. The number of native speakers was quickly dwindling, and few keiki under the age of 18 were fluent in the language. A small group of educators intervened and created an immersion program, called 'Aha Pūnana Leo, in which young children were taught completely in Hawaiian, with no English. There were many challenges along the way, most notably having to repeal an 1896 law prohibiting Hawaiian from being spoken in schools.

Despite the setbacks and funding shortages, however, the Hawaiian language education movement on O'ahu has made great strides in the last 20 years. The first Hawaiian immersion school on O'ahu, Pūnana Leo o Honolulu Preschool, opened its doors in 1985, and this year's Class of 2008 will mark the 10th high school graduating class.

A lot has changed since the days when each school held its own concert. "We used to all book the top bands in Hawaiian music," says 'Aha Mele o Ho'omau president Kau'i Keola, who has been an immersion school parent since 1987. "So in one year, there could be four concerts, and Mākaha Sons would be headlining each one. Then we would hit up the same people to buy tickets for each concert. And back then the Hawaiian language community was a lot smaller than today."

Back then, there was also much more of a sense of urgency. At the time, parents were expected to raise money to pay for basic school infrastructure, like teacher salaries. "It was all about survival," Keola says. "They'd tell us we needed 'X' amount of dollars by the end of the month or our school would close. So we'd throw together a bake sale or sell Portuguese sausage. There was no burn out back then. If you burned out, your school burned out."



*Lokahi Haka Pu'u  
Photo: Blain Fegerstrom*

# PEPELUALI

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17 Ho'omau Benefit	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	