

# Nāwahī Hawaiian Laboratory School

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## Program Description and History

**N**āwahī's student enrollment of approximately 200 is over 95% Native Hawaiian and taught by a primarily Native Hawaiian staff fluent and literate in the Hawaiian language. Children enter through early education or kindergarten. At seventh grade a considerable number transfer in from another local Hawaiian medium elementary charter school.

The Nāwahī program has its origins in the nonprofit Native Hawaiian education organization, the 'Aha Pūnana Leo founded in 1983. The 'Aha Pūnana Leo has led the Hawaiian language medium education movement through establishing Hawaiian medium preschools statewide and providing for the development of small public Hawaiian medium programs grade by grade around its matriculating students. Since 1994, Nāwahī has served as the 'Aha Pūnana Leo's model for this effort and has been strengthened by the 1998 establishment of Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani, the state's Hawaiian language college, which is located at the University of Hawaii at Hilo.

## Program Successes

When the 'Aha Pūnana Leo began its language revitalization efforts in the early 1980s, a nearly century long legal ban on the use of Hawaiian as a medium of instruction remained in effect. The number of children speaking Hawaiian was less than 50 statewide. There are now over 2,000 children who have been educated through the Hawaiian language medium and those numbers are increasing. Families who speak Hawaiian at home are also increasing and Nāwahī has an infant/toddler program for Hawaiian speaking working parents. Hawaiian medium education has also expanded into graduate school and teacher training.

Native Hawaiians have a low academic profile in Hawai'i public schools and a lower graduation rate than other ethnic groups. Nāwahī has made a significant impact towards improving that profile. It has a 100% high school graduation rate and a college attendance rate of approximately 80% since its first graduation in 1999. There are a number of Nāwahī students in prestigious universities including Stanford and Oxford.

## Innovative Features

Nāwahī has developed for more than a decade within the context of the federal 1990 Native American Languages Act (NALA) recognizing unique rights of language continuity for Native Americans. Its Indigenous Language Medium approach to developing high fluency and literacy in Hawaiian, as a primary

language, and English, as a second language, among all students is distinct from both standard Maintenance Bilingual Programs and Foreign Language Immersion Programs. Those programs typically introduce English by third grade and increase the number of subjects taught in English until the non-English language is confined to a foreign language style course in intermediate and high school if taught at all at those levels.

Nāwahī begins formal teaching of English language arts in grade five. From grade five, the program follows the state's college preparatory English Language Arts course stream as a single class per semester. English is not used as a medium of instruction in other classes. Nāwahī student testing shows increased oral and literacy development in English through the elementary grades when language arts is solely in Hawaiian and parity or better with peers in English medium schools upon graduation from high school.

The integration of a traditional Hawaiian horticultural, agricultural and animal husbandry component at the Nāwahī campus is another feature that distinguishes Nāwahī from standard public schools in Hawai'i. The administration of Nāwahī is an example of a high level of partnering with four separate administrative entities. The Nāwahī property itself is owned by the nonprofit 'Aha Pūnana Leo which also administers the early childhood program. The elementary school program is a charter school. The intermediate and high school programs are a program of Hilo High School, a "school within a school." And by state law, Nāwahī is a laboratory school of Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language which provides pre service and inservice teacher training at the site as well as early access to university courses for Nāwahī high school students. Direction for the program is provided primarily through the 'Aha Pūnana Leo and Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani.

### **Lessons Learned and Future Plans**

Standard bilingual programs have not been successful in reaching the goals of maintaining or revitalizing Native American languages. Nāwahī is showing that an Indigenous Language Medium Program can reach those goals. A successful language revitalization program requires strong leadership and determination to go in a direction different from that of the mainstream. Such leadership can come from, or be strengthened by, a nonprofit and/or college. Nāwahī has also shown that in a community that interacts at a high level with English monolinguals and English media, limiting use of English to language arts classes, results in graduates with the same or a higher level of academic success and English mastery as monolingual English speaking peers educated totally in English. The benefit of such an approach for Native Hawaiian students is a much higher level of fluency and literacy in the indigenous language plus psychological benefits to their identity that encourage high academic achievement and pursuit of education to the end of high school and beyond.

The challenge now for Hawaiian medium education is to include more children. This will require further strengthening of Hawaiian language medium

education across the state. A much larger pool of teachers will be required. Another challenge is to increase the number of families using Hawaiian at home, which will strengthen use of Hawaiian among students and allow early teaching of foreign languages. Nāwahī is considering adding Japanese in elementary school and Latin for intermediate school students.

### **Recommendations**

Our recommendation is to build within the context of your own history and community conditions while opening your eyes internationally for inspiration. We also recommend visit to others, for when we have been away from our program and visiting others, we have been able to reflect better on our own situation and develop ideas to help us grow. (To learn more about the Hawaiian language revitalization movement, visit the following web sites:<<http://www.ahapunaleo.org/>> and <<http://www.olelo.hawaii.edu/>>.)

**William H. Wilson** and **Kauanoë Kamanā** are founding board members of the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo and faculty of Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke’elikōlani. They have been key figures in the development of Nāwahī and continue to teach students at the site. They have two children who graduated from Nāwahī.

**Nāmaka Rawlins** is the director of the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo, Inc. She began as a volunteer in the Pūnana Leo schools and has led the organization for most of its history. She is responsible for many innovative developments in Hawaiian medium education including the establishment of Nāwahī and Ka Haka’’Ula O Ke’elikōlani.