

## General Business Meeting

### Name

Ku'u Pasco

### Organization

Hoaloha Project

### Position/Title

Executive Director

### Agenda Item

VIII. Student Achievement Committee oral report on March 12, 2026, meeting

### Position

Support

## Written Testimony

### Upload Written Testimony Here

- [Kaiapuni.pdf](#)



# HOALOHA PROJECT

*Serving foster keiki of Hawai'i*

Aloha Chair Takumi, Vice Chair Arakaki, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ku'u, and I am testifying on behalf of Hoaloha Project, which supports the well-being of foster youth across Hawai'i. We respectfully request that the Department develop a clear plan for a middle school Kaiapuni pathway for students of Ke Kula Kaiapuni 'o Waiau.

Native Hawaiian children make up approximately 43 percent of foster youth in Hawai'i. We see firsthand how important cultural connection and identity are to their well-being, and increasing access to Kaiapuni education is one meaningful way to support this.

Kapolei is not a feasible option for many Central O'ahu families, and communities such as Pearl City, 'Aiea, Waipi'o, Waipahu, Wahiawā, and Mililani currently lack a practical pathway. While we have heard concerns about kumu availability, no efforts have been made to assess interest through outreach or recruitment.

We respectfully urge the Department to take the next step in developing a plan to expand access.

Mahalo nui,

*Ku'u Pasco*

Ku'u Pasco  
Executive Director  
Hoaloha Project

# KAIAPUNI IN PEARL CITY

FULL PATHWAY FOR KE KULA KAIAPUNI 'O WAIAU

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E Komo Mai  
PEARL CITY

2026

As the oldest Kaiapuni program, Waiau has an opportunity to create a full pathway for Central O'ahu students, helping to keep them engaged and prevent them from leaving school.



## The pipeline gap Waiau students face in seeking Kaiapuni education

The first Kaiapuni (Hawaiian Immersion) school was established at Ke Kula Kaiapuni 'o Waiau in 1987. Today, Waiau continues to thrive.

However students must still leave their district or transition into English programs for middle and high school.

# Impact On Students

## *Impact of the missing Kaiapuni pathway in Central O'ahu (Grades 7–12)*

### LONG COMMUTES

- Educational and developmental impacts
- Reduced energy for homework and academic success
- Increased fatigue and stress
- Significant time spent in traffic
- Limited participation in sports, music, and extracurricular activities
- Exhausting commutes across districts

### FAMILY IMPACT

- Families struggle to attend school events and activities
- Weakened school–family connection and community engagement

### HARD CHOICES

Students must face long commutes or switch to English-medium programs, disrupting Hawaiian language and cultural continuity. Daily trips from Central O'ahu to Kapolei are unsustainable for families who commute into town for work.





## Waiau Native Hawaiian Students

At Waiau Elementary, **40.3% of students are Native Hawaiian**. This drops sharply to 14.3% at Highlands Intermediate as many Native Hawaiian students leave the district for middle school.

## Impacted Communities

Students and families residing in Pearl City, 'Aiea, Waipi'o, Waipahu, Wahiawā, and Mililani do not have an accessible solution.

## Bilingual Benefits

- Stronger academic and cognitive outcomes
- Stronger memory, multitasking, and problem solving skills
- Workforce and economic advantages
- Enhanced metalinguistic awareness and improved attention

# Next Steps: Pathway to Intermediate



*We respectfully request your support for Ke Kula Kaiapuni 'o Waiau.*

- **Collaborative plan development from the Office of Hawaiian Education and CAS Fajardo:** Development of a plan and timeline to establish a pathway for Waiau students.
- **Support from leadership:** Commitment from CAS Fajardo, Principal Tanouye, and OHE in support of Waiau students. Principal Tanouye has agreed to work within the parameters provided.
- **Memorandum of Understanding:** Formalize a partnership with another Kaiapuni middle and high school to deliver a satellite program and curriculum.
- **Program staffing:** Recruitment efforts initiated for a kumu to gauge interest in a 7th-grade pilot, with support from Act 126 funding.

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*Mahalo nui for supporting keiki*

# Sources

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"*HB 2074: Relating to Kaiapuni Education.*" Hawaii State Legislature – Session Archives, Hawaii State Legislature, [capitol.hawaii.gov/session/archives/measure\\_indiv\\_Archives.aspx?billtype=HB&billnumber=2074&year=2024](http://capitol.hawaii.gov/session/archives/measure_indiv_Archives.aspx?billtype=HB&billnumber=2074&year=2024).

"*School Status and Improvement Report (SSIR).*" ARCH (Accountability Resource Center Hawai'i), Hawaii State Department of Education, [arch.k12.hi.us/reports/ssir](http://arch.k12.hi.us/reports/ssir).

Tagami, Megan. "*Hawaiian Language Schools Grow as DOE Shrinks. There's One Big Problem.*" Honolulu Civil Beat, 5 Jan. 2026, [civilbeat.org/2026/01/hawaiian-language-schools-grow-as-doe-shrinks-theres-one-big-problem/](http://civilbeat.org/2026/01/hawaiian-language-schools-grow-as-doe-shrinks-theres-one-big-problem/).

Ya, Liao. "Cognitive Benefits of Bilingualism across the Lifespan." *Language and Linguistics Research*, vol. 7, no. 03 (2024): doi:10.23977/langl.2024.070318.