

VOICES OF THE COMMUNITY



Photo: John Wehrheim

‘Āina-Based Learning Takes Root in Kīlauea



DR. KAPUA CHANDLER

KĪLAUEA, KAUA‘I

SCHOOL LEADER, NAMAHAHA

Along Kaua‘i’s north shore, a sense of community runs deep. However, for Dr. Kapua Chandler, upholding a connection to the people, places and history of her ancestral home holds an even more profound significance. For the past eight years, she’s tirelessly worked to bring the first public charter middle and high school, Namahana, to her community. Through an ‘āina-based curriculum, students will receive a dynamic education that strengthens their relationships with land and community when the school opens its doors in 2025.

Tell us about the north shore of Kaua‘i and what it means to bring a school like Namahana to the community.

The north shore of Kaua‘i is my home in every sense of the word. Generations of my kūpuna are in this place on kuleana lands in Ko‘olau and Halele‘a. I want to make sure that this place is cared for, as my kūpuna did, so that future generations can also call it home. Historically, the area has never had a tuition-free middle and high school, which means that many students have had to commute up to three hours per day. However, for the past eight years, we’ve been working very hard to change that. And because we believe that the success of Namahana and the community are intertwined, we’ve reimagined the educational model using an ‘āina-based approach to learning.

Can you tell us more about what an ‘āina-based learning model looks like?

‘Āina-based learning is a unique way of viewing one’s relationship with the world. It requires the students to build a genuine relationship with the land. Unlike place-based learning, where students visit a location, learn, and then quickly depart, ‘āina-based learning is about forming that deeper connection that lasts a lifetime.

It’s like falling in love. True love requires time. It doesn’t happen overnight. But once you develop this relationship, everything changes. You have a whole new way of interacting with the world around you. The wonderful thing is that the rewards aren’t just for the students, but for the community as a whole. So much of what we’re doing is about uplifting the entire community.

How does HPR help strengthen your community?

It can be easy to feel disconnected in a remote location, but HPR plays a vital role in bridging this gap. HPR goes beyond surface-level news, bringing deeper stories that might otherwise remain unheard. I believe that having access to information is crucial for understanding our place in the world, and I’m grateful to have them on the airwaves. Our whole office will listen to HPR online while we work through the day, and I feel like it’s really helped to inform and spark some captivating conversations.

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