EMPLEYEE OF THE YEAR

RENE IWAMOTO
School Health Aide, Olomana School

Rene Iwamoto has been a state employee for 27 years and is cherished by her students, faculty, staff and parents as “Aunty Rene.” Her welcoming greetings lift everyone’s spirits throughout the day and into evening events. She embraces every member of the Olomana ‘Ohana with her concern for his or her dignity and well-being. In this challenging school environment, she has bridged the gap between the school and the community by encouraging and increasing parental involvement in the school’s ‘Ohana nights. Her gentleness and constancy have redefined her role at the school as not only a health aide, but also as an event planner, extra hand, Parent Community Network Center coordinator, counselor and trusted friend. Each of these functions, she performs enthusiastically to make “everyone’s day a good one.”

— Nominated by Principal Stacey Oshio

TEAM OF THE YEAR

CUSTODIAL TEAM, INOYUE ELEMENTARY
Jessie Cardenas, Schuyler Castellano, Moises Lopez, Randall Naki, Terence Omori, Jose Senas, Maria Villanueva

From early morning to the close of the work day, this team assists the school community with all requests to assure uninterrupted learning for keiki.

By initiative, collaboration, and expertise, they fix campus problems. They are ready with tools for the garden; paint, cleaners, and sealants for the buildings; screwdrivers to tighten things; and assorted traps for pests. Conscious of costs, this team conducts off campus visits to other schools to learn different techniques to address needs. When new rubber flooring was not as durable as expected, they experimented until they found the proper sealant; removed all the furniture; applied the solution to all the floors; and then replaced all the furniture in three buildings in time for the next school day. Their efficiency and initiative produced the double reward of saving future cleaning time and replacement costs.

Working with the Parent Community Networking Center coordinator and the military, they contribute time and expertise to the annual “Make a Difference Day.” Their involvement with students extends their work day with coaching or scrimmages.

The high quality of their work, their responsiveness, and their tireless efforts to create a comfortable and safe environment make this team incomparable.

— Nominated by Vice Principal Yuuko Arikawa

The Program

The Hawai‘i State Department of Education (HIDOE) celebrates outstanding employees during the Annual Incentive and Service Awards ceremony, recognizing HIDOE employees for special and continued contributions to improve the quality and effectiveness of school services. Their dedication inspires all of us who are working to make Hawai‘i’s public schools better for all students.
TEAM EXCELLENCE AWARD OF MERIT

SPEECH/LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS, BALDWIN-KEKAULIKE-MAUI COMPLEX AREA
Sommer Aumiller, Richard Beilke, Loretta Brem, Ciera Crowe, Valerie Donnalson, Christina Gonzalez, Lueann Kessler, Janel Merritt, Jill Mutch, Sue Lee, Laurie Norman, Emma Pognant, Barbara Rolph, Eve-Noel Uaiwa, Jenna Nakama, Janine Williams, Tami Yamamura

This team delivers school-level speech therapy services for pre-K-12 students with Individual Educational Programs. Their professionalism is their hallmark. They develop practices and design programs to ensure that each child has the appropriate learning environment to thrive, aligned with state and federal law. They have raised literacy achievement by implementing recommendations from research showing the interrelationship of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Their approach includes cultural sensitivity, ensures a continuum of service, is carefully monitored and provides collaboration between professionals. They willingly share and increase knowledge of Speech and Language practices in their community by mentoring professionals, educators and parents. Their continuing research into innovative, efficacious therapies and practices expand educational methodology and advance student achievement.

— Nominated by Denise Guerin, District Educational Specialist

TEAM EXCELLENCE AWARD OF MERIT

CUSTODIAL STAFF, NĀNĀKULI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Debbie Chun, Jon Damas, Ethan Jones, Lenora Jones, Perry Kainoa, Roy Kainoa, Colbert Kaio, Douglas Ned

The pristine Nānākuli Elementary campus is an outward reflection of values held by its custodial staff who live and work in Nanakuli. The clean and safe campus instills in the students, faculty and staff a “pride of place” that enables everyone to combine work, learning and play. The aquaponics and gardening projects developed by the custodial team are examples of the traditional values of ‘aina, or stewardship of the land; children are mentored to be caretakers of these projects, the campus, and community. Their school relationships are intertwined with their community involvement and build a sense of ‘ohana, a continuum of caring and responsibility for each other beyond the school day. These values are everyday practices among the custodial team members and reflect the leadership of Head Custodian Roy Kainoa. The value of pono, what is proper and right, directs the action of this team.

— Nominated by Principal Lisa Ann Higa

TEAM EXCELLENCE AWARD OF MERIT

TRANSFORMATION TEAM, OLOMANA SCHOOL
Dorothy Adams, Colin Awa, Matthew Bunyan, Wima Chulakote, Sheri Dennis, Tulifau Esene, Elizabeth Frilles, Joseph Halli, Debbie Heyler, Lester Higa, Davin Inamine, Nicole Ilae, Jennifer Ishida, Barbara Kiakona, Ilikea Malava, Vernon McMillian, Thomas Moon, Del Onaga, Maheshwary Post, Ellen Schroeder, John Secreto, Elizabeth Silva, Natalie Sur, Amber Williams

This team is the engine behind a shared leadership system consisting of the Academic Review Team (ART) and Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). The members use their wide range of talents, knowledge and experiences to educate and manage the diverse circumstances of their students, offering purpose and direction for youth who are incarcerated, detained or at-risk at five school sites. The ART analyzes school data to identify areas of need for the school’s Academic Plan. The ILT implements directives of the data teams, which reflect the voice of all teachers and students. The Transformation Team designed and implemented a Powerful Instructional Practices plan to address student needs; enable effective communication among stakeholders and coordination among school sites; and provide stability amid a constant shift in student population and learning environments. Their reward: a steady increase in average daily attendance, improved reading scores, and more students earning college credits through the Dual Credit program.

— Nominated by Principal Stacey Oshio