Ken Kang addresses a surprise award assembly at which he was named Hawaii’s Milken Educator for the 2017-18 school year.

Kang wins ‘Oscar of Teaching’

Ken Kang, an ‘Aiea High graduate who returned to teach, has become the latest recipient of the coveted Milken Educator Award, which honors outstanding excellence in education and comes with an unrestricted $25,000 cash prize.

Kang’s work with students in STEM courses and his leadership in developing the technological infrastructure at ‘Aiea High and six other schools in the ‘Aiea Complex impressed the Milken Family Foundation.

After working in the engineering field, Kang was asked by his former teacher and mentor, Wayne Tokuhama, to assist ‘Aiea High’s Career and Technical Education department. He got his teaching degree and started as a part-time teacher in 2004. “I realized that this warm feeling of working with students, being able to help them focus on their futures, was so much more rewarding than just finishing up my project or my design,” said Kang.
More than halfway through the first school year of an updated Strategic Plan and a state plan for federal funding under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) law, there’s a lot of discussion about putting more control of education into the hands of teachers, schools and communities.

Kea’au Elementary is testing what that looks like — one idea at a time.

That started with getting everyone to believe that it was okay to try new things. First-year principal Janice Ochoa Blaber is still working on developing that trust, she says.

“We should be focusing on figuring out what our students need,” said Blaber, who was vice principal at Kealakehe Elementary in the five years prior to her new post, and a teacher before that. “And I get questions back like, ‘Can we change what we know is not working?’ And of course we can. But it’s tough, because that’s not what the culture has been.”

At its core, the approach is to have teachers, staff and stakeholders collaborate to design lessons and activities that strengthen academics, health, and community, backed by research and documented to track its effectiveness.

“It’s opened doors and opened my mind to the power a classroom teacher has,” said Brynn Alcain, a 5th grade teacher in her fifth year at Kea’au El.

NEW IDEAS

The team launched Action Research in Education this year to help stir teacher leadership in designing effective lessons that resonate for Kea’au’s students, but which are backed by inquiry, research and results. A sample of efforts under way:

- Kindergarten teacher Blake Ann Antida is trying new curricula based on dinosaurs. Observationally, it’s well suited for students at a range of learning levels: the more proficient are learning and using terms like “herbivore” and “predator,” and others who are still learning words and letters are engaged and the joy of learning is there because of the subject matter.
- Vice Principal Jason Britt is identifying practices to build trauma awareness, empathy, and mindfulness. He’s gathering data from their students to help design professional development with Team Resilience for the teachers and staff to create whole child learning environments that are informed by conditions in the community, which is high poverty and high needs.
- Special education inclusion teacher Lynn Nagata is documenting the effects of “Brain Breaks” on her students’ learning and well-being — taking them outside, doing rounds of jumping jacks, making movement a regular part of class.
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“My message to teachers is: You have the power to transform the lives of the kids in your classroom. You don’t have to ask if I’m going to like it. You do have to ask, How is this going to change the learning in a positive, optimal way for students?” Blaber said. “But I can’t just say all that and then close the door to my office. I have to model it, I have to teach, they have to see me taking the risk.”

This has been key in helping those first teachers take the leap, Alcain said. “She’s building with us — incorporating student voice, teaching alongside teachers, hosting Socratic Seminars with students. She’ll jump into classrooms to select student exemplar work, talk about what their goals are.”

Kelly added that the Action Research Hui, with the principal’s guidance and modeling, is providing the framework teachers need to work within so there’s organization behind the drive to try new things, not a free for all.

“It gives us the flexibility to try the things we know have great promise for kids while documenting whether they’re effective for our kids,” Kellei said.

BUILDING VOICE

The school finds all kinds of ways to bring student voice into the design of the school. Kelly brought her students into a leadership meeting to add their input to the school’s Comprehensive Needs Assessment, an exercise schools do annually to inform their academic plans and financial plans.

“We asked them questions about who they are. The answers they give are the answers we need to use to create a school for them,” Blaber said. “We need to have the personalities of our students in those documents.”

Students also took over the February edition of the school’s newsletter, The Nene, to feature interviews with teachers, bus drivers and administrators about their work.

The monthly Parent Coffee Hours are seeing stronger life with the help of Parent-Community Networking Center coordinator Sally Deryke, with about 15 parents and other community regulars in attendance. School walkthroughs, normally the purview of teachers and administrators learning from each other, are open to anyone from the community who’s interested in discussing ideas, needs and improvements.

There’s also a literacy push that applies to more than the students. In addition to monthly literacy reviews to track student progress, a literacy night has been created to showcase student learning and pull in parents and the community, including Kea’au High students who read to students. Blaber also encourages teachers to read books on promising new educational trends in order to have open discussions with their colleagues and share ideas.

“The expectations we have of students she also puts on us,” Alcain said. “We can read whatever we want based on our school’s focus areas: differentiation, place-based learning, multicultural education. It’s improving our collaboration in our PLCs.”

Blaber said she’ll keep working to expand trust. “I’m still learning how to be an effective leader. We’re all learners, and I’m learning with the teachers and the students,” she said. “As trust is being built, we see how much stronger we can be as a community.”

Full profile online: bit.ly/KeaauEl
Success Stories  MORE AT HAWAIIPUBLICSCHOOLS.ORG

Central Middle connects students with royal past

The pillars of Central Middle School’s main building showcase an architectural style from long ago, and its foundation still has remnants of the site’s royal past. Commuters on their way to downtown Honolulu may not realize the significance of the area. A hint can be seen walking along Kukui Street, where the name Keʻelikōlani is etched into the side of the school building. Keʻelikōlani was the granddaughter of King Kamehameha I and a powerful aliʻi. She was well educated and had a firm grasp of the English language, however, she chose to only speak and write in Hawaiian.

“Ruth Luka Keanolani Kanāhoahoa Keʻelikōlani was the epitome of Hawaiian strength, generosity and resilience,” said Dr. Kalehua Krug of HIDOE’s Office of Hawaiian Education. “Her dedication to the native language and culture of Hawai‘i was second to none and it continues to inspire the role of the Hawaiian language in today’s society.”

The legacy of Keʻelikōlani is perpetuated through the work of the Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop Estate. At the time of her death, Keʻelikōlani was Hawai‘i’s largest landowner. Before her passing, she had willed all of her land and possessions to her favorite cousin, making Bishop the largest landholder in Hawai‘i and laying the foundation for what has become Kamehameha Schools.

“As the largest landowner in the Hawaiian kingdom, she was a proud woman who was also humble, resilient and extremely loyal to her people and culture. These are qualities we want our students to learn, practice, and promote throughout their time at Central Middle School and through the rest of their lives forward,” said Principal Anne Marie Murphy.

A mural of Princess Ruth Keʻelikōlani graces one of the walls at Central Middle — a connection to the culturally rich past of its campus.

Moanalua High freshman Arianne Javier with “Creator,” an American Visions nominee in the Hawaii Regional Scholastic Art Awards program.

ARTIST’S VIBRANT ‘CREATOR’ EARNS TOP AWARD

During the second quarter of this school year, teacher Jeffrey Fujimoto gave his fine arts students at Moanalua High an assignment: a self portrait. As she mulled over the assignment, freshman Arianne Javier was contemplating her ability to bring alternate worlds to life when her pencils touched paper. Fleshing the images out, these worlds seem more brilliant and enchanting than the one we all occupy.

“I just get immersed in these worlds I’m creating,” she said.

Her surrealist and whimsical illustration, Creator, earned her the prestigious American Visions nomination in the 2018 Hawaii Regional Scholastic Art Awards. This year, more than 1,500 student artworks were submitted for consideration and 233 were selected for the awards program and an exhibit at the Hawaii State Art Museum to run Feb. 16 to April 13. Nominated works are eligible for national recognition and scholarships to be awarded in the spring.

Only five artworks in Hawai‘i are nominated for the American Visions award, meant to reflect the “best in show” of the selected works. The school’s last nomination was in 2013. Arianne said she was astonished to learn of the honor. “I couldn’t breathe right. My parents were really excited about it.”

This generation of Javiers is something of an artistic dynasty: her two older sisters are also accomplished artists and one has earned a degree in graphics design. The best artistry tip they ever gave their little sister? “Don’t be lazy,” Arianne said.

Having that work ethic is as important as root talent when it comes to professional level artistry, Fujimoto said, which is what he sees in Arianne’s work.

“It’s pretty rare to see this level of skill in a freshman,” Fujimoto said. “But she really put in the time and energy.”

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS EXPLORE CAREER PATHS

Students from Central, Dole, Jarret, Kalakaua, Nānākuli, Waimānalo, Wai‘anae, Waipahu and Washington middle schools visited with more than 65 exhibitors and learned about career pathways at the 3rd annual Hawai‘i P-20’s Middle School Career Industry Fair at the Hawaii Convention Center.

“By starting this dialogue when they’re in middle school, it will give our students a sense of purpose when it comes to their high school educational experiences,” said Supt. Christina Kishimoto.

Prior to attending, students took the RIASEC quiz to assess their skills and interests; they were given a “Passport” and tasked with visiting five exhibitors aligned with results.

In celebration of Career and Technical Education Month in February, the event features exhibitors from UH programs, companies and industry partners representing the nine CTE pathways.

EXPLORE CAREER PATHS
questions surfaced about HI-
DOE’s readiness for a nuclear at-
tack. Following the false missile alert,
our public schools. In January,
Supt.’s Corner: The security of our
schools came under scrutiny fol-
lowing the mass shooting in
Florida. The 17 lives lost in that
district are dealing with rumors or
threats being made against school
camuses. HIDOE faced more
discipline, including suspension.
Individuals connected to a threat can
case criminal charges of terroris-
tic threatening along with school
discipline, including suspension.
Police officials reinforced the
fact that our schools are safe. The
well-being of our students is a
community effort and it takes all of
us to keep all of our students safe.
School districts are now deal-
ing with a rise of student-led civic
engagement efforts and actions,
including the idea of school walk-
outs. HIDOE supports students’
Constitutional rights to peaceful
assembly and free expression.
Our goal in responding to walkout
plans and other forms of peaceful
assembly is to support student and
staff safety and keep the focus on
teaching and learning.
What we hope to gain from
these experiences are student
voices that help to shape how we
can better design schools with
safety in mind.

Don’t Miss This! EVENTS, DEADLINES & FUN STUFF

HAWAII STATE SPELLING BEE
The 2018 Kama’aina Kids Hawaii State Spelling Bee returns to The New Hope Oahu auditorium at Sand Island with the top regional spellers across the Islands. The top finisher will compete in the national competition in Washington, D.C. May 27 to June 1. Even if you’re not competing, you can join the The Bee’s Bookshelf, the official book club of the Scripps Spelling Bee — because great readers make great spellers! spellingbee.com/bookshelf

FUTURE SCIENTISTS UNITE!
The top scientific work of students from across the Islands will be showcased at the Hawaii State Science and Engineering Fair at the Hawaii Convention Center — awards, scholarships and cash prizes are on the line! The best will move on to the International Science and Engineering Fair May 13-19 in Pittsburgh, PA. (Pictured: the 2017 Hawaii delegation to ISEF.) www.hawaiiacademyofscience.org/science-fair

GLOBAL TEACHER PRIZE
What makes a great teacher? A mastery of their subject? A passion for learning? A drive to make the world a better place? All of these qualities can be found in abundance among the 10 teachers from around the world shortlisted by the Varkey Foundation for the 2018 Global Teacher Prize and $1 million. Waialua High & Intermediate’s Glenn Lee is a finalist. The world will learn who the winner is at the Global Education and Skills Forum in Dubai.

SUPT.’S CORNER
DR. CHRISTINA M. KISHIMOTO

There has been a lot of atten-
tion on the safety and security of
our public schools. In January,
following the false missile alert,
questions surfaced about HI-
DOE’s readiness for a nuclear at-
tack. Under the advisement of the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency, our schools were pro-
vided guidance on sheltering in
place. Our Safety, Security and
Preparedness Branch also met
with schools to assist principals
in locating appropriate spaces for
sheltering in place.

The safety and security for stu-
dents and staff are top priorities
for HIDOE schools. All of our
schools are annually required to
perform five emergency prepared-
ness drills and shelter in place is
one of those exercises. The other
four drills are: lockdown, evacua-
tion, tsunami and earthquake.
Schools are also required to create
and update their own safety plans,
which are reviewed by the Emer-
gency Management Office.

In February, the security of our
schools came under scrutiny fol-
lowing the mass shooting in
Florida. The 17 lives lost in that
massacre left many of our stu-
dents, staff and parents shaken.
Across the country, school dis-
tricts are dealing with rumors or
threats being made against school
camuses. HIDOE faced more

TSUNAMI AWARENESS MONTH
A tsunami is a series of ocean wave
masses generated primarily by
earthquakes. Underwater volcanic
eruptions and landslides can also
generate them. If you are near the ocean
and you feel the earth shake, move to
higher ground. Schools that lie in
tsunami zones practice evacuating
within 10 minutes, with designated site
arrivals within 20 minutes. Resources:
http://dod.hawaii.gov/hiema/public-
resources/types-of-disaster/#tsunami

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