

*What's
Working in*

HAWAII'S SCHOOLS

Highlighting Practices Schools are Proud Of

Featuring

★ **Family
Involvement**

Focusing our strengths is a proven way to build on them, a way to spark enthusiasm and plant the seeds of innovation, creation and collaboration. In this spirit the Center on Disability Studies contacted Student Service Coordinators that participated in the Interdisciplinary Disability and Diversity Studies Certificate Program and invited them to identify What's Working in their school. We asked that the chosen practice be an outgrowth of current research. What they shared demonstrates how individual schools have chosen to craft their unique approach to what the research tells us. These examples are not necessarily DOE endorsed, they do however reflect practices that each of these schools feels proud of and has identified as "What's Working" for them.



Family Involvement

A family's involvement in their child's education is noted as the single most important factor in school success and achievement. (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 1999). Research has shown that not only does parental involvement increase academic achievement through higher test scores and graduation rates, it also increases the likelihood that a child will pursue a higher education (Henderson & Berla, 1994), and positively affects behavior and optimistic attitudes in students, according to the California Department of Education.

In recent years there has been a significant shift in how schools conceptualize family involvement. This shift moves from an earlier focus on what families could give to the school system to aid in student learning, to a more current orientation of what schools can do to support families, and ultimately toward the most ideal and progressive mindset: parent and school partnerships that nurture and support all children to learn.

With an expanded definition of what parent and home involvement means, it is critical to remember the great diversity among our families. These differences are not only cultural or socio-economic and their wide range requires that school staff “put themselves in the shoes” of parents and families while working to understand the diverse needs and interests families bring. With this awareness it becomes clear that no one-size-fits-all approach will build a strong home involvement practice at school.

As you review these What's Working practices, allow them to spark your imagination. Maybe something similar would work well in your school.



Kaumana Elementary offers a monthly **Family Reading Night**, to students and their families for an enlivening evening of family involvement, fun, and reading for all. The school opens its library to students and their families as a way of encouraging literacy in a small, relatively isolated community with high poverty rates. **Family Reading Night** provides free entertainment for families; gives access to books, and promotes family involvement in student learning.

The elementary school partners with the community to provide guest speakers, such as retired teachers and volunteers, who read stories aloud before families break off into their separate groups. The event starts around 6:30pm and refreshments are provided. The atmosphere is cozy and informal, creating a welcoming experience for the whole family and the keiki are encouraged to come in their pajamas. **Family Reading Night** has continued to draw families, to encourage literacy, family involvement and a sense of community at the school for the past several years.

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Blanch Pope Elementary has an **Even Start** program developed to teach parents how to build literacy skills in their children at an early age. Parents are invited to bring their children, but the focus is on working with the parents. In this program, families are taught how to read to their children, the importance of tone and proximity, and what kinds of books are appropriate. The school makes a special effort to involve parents that are new to the state or the country.

The **Even Start** program was created in response to students performing poorly on standardized tests in this high poverty area. By bringing literacy into the home at an early age, educators hope to improve the outcomes for students with exposure to books and reading. **Even Start** is an early intervention program that has been successful in inviting family involvement into the School. Families are encouraged to bring all their children, especially the younger ones and parents have been really pleased. In fact, one family that previously home-schooled their children decided to enroll their child in Blanch Pope Elementary after participating in this program. Also, by spending time with students and younger siblings, teachers have been able to see problems early on. Children who are behind in reading and those with disabilities have been identified and referred for services.

Contact: Bee Hawkins, SSC, 259-0450

Chiefess Kamakahahelei Middle School hosts *The Open Forum*, which invites families to school and presents information on various issues of interest to parents, with specific focus on transitions into and out of middle school. The evening events have been a successful way to welcome new 6th graders and their families into the school community by offering dinner, booths that display student's work and describe programs offered, music by the school band, and small parent discussion groups. Over 400 people attended the last *Open Forum* and their evaluations report parents being grateful for the opportunity to ask questions and receive a tour of the school. For teachers, the experience was valuable and worth their time and effort. They were excited about meeting parents and having an opportunity to share what their students are working on. Community collaboration enriched the evening with the Kauai Economic Opportunity (KEO) and public health nurse. The school plans to work with the Police Department, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), Mokihana, and the Drug Free Coalition for the next meeting. The huge turnout has prompted Chiefess Kamakahahelei Middle School to continue the program. The next *Open Forum* focuses on drugs and school safety and is scheduled for November 3rd 2002. The Vice Principle began this program as part of an administration assignment on successful programs and scaling up
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Waikoloa Elementary puts on an open house every year, locally known as *Picnic on the Green*. This event features informational and food booths, a speech by the principle and a chance for families to picnic on the campus lawn. *Picnic on the Green* was originally created to encourage a feeling of ohana in the school community. Classes eat together, which gives families a chance to meet other parents and get to know the classroom teacher. The PTSA, School Community Based Management (SCB) and other organizations put together booths to provide information and encourage parental involvement in the school. This annual affair was originally meant for the small school community of 250 students and their families. However, the event has expanded to include numerous community organizations that sell bentos as fundraisers. People from the community use this as an opportunity to visit the school and even the senior citizens in the area look forward to the occasion as an evening out. *Picnic on the Green* is hugely attended and is an enjoyable event for students, families, and the community.
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Hau'ula Elementary feels that their school has been especially successful in getting parents involved in the **IEP process**. As a small school, situated in a rural community, it has been difficult for the school to get parents engaged in student planning. Karen Loeffler felt that this was due to the school's commitment to be sensitive to diverse cultural practices. To meet this need, Hau'ula Elementary has committed itself to involving parents. Often times they go into the home when parents have no transportation, doing whatever it takes to get families interested in the education of their children. Some parents were afraid to meet with the group, so two meetings would be held. By holding a small meeting with the family beforehand, teachers can communicate parent concerns with the rest of the group. Remaining sensitive to cultural issues and committed to the **IEP process** has made Hau'ula Elementary more effective in increasing parental participation.

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James Campbell High School is tying their parent involvement programs directly to research:

"Programs need to be tailored to be responsive to the needs and characteristics of the population being served, taking into consideration cultural characteristics and values of ethnic populations, and those who live in low-income and high-risk circumstances." – D. Powell.

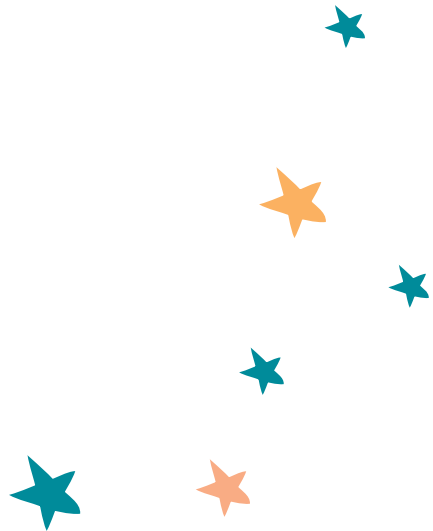
At Campbell parents are invited to a dinner (with free baby-sitting) to learn about and meet the School Based Behavioral Health team, they are invited to sit with principals, SSCs, and counselors and discuss their needs. Based on these needs, topics for **Parent Support Nights** were planned.

"A significant amount of time needs to be devoted to open-ended parent-dominated discussion with a strong experiential component." – D. Powell.

Campbell's clinical psychologist presented a **Parent Support Night** on ADD/ADHD for the Complex. While a full and rather academic presentation was planned, the parent's active participation guided the evening and was far more meaningful to parents and family members, it was so valuable they requested a Part II on the subject for the next meeting.

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1. Henderson, A. T. & Berla, N. (1994). A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement. California Department of Education, National Committee for Citizens in Education. [On-line] Available: http://www.cde.gov/board/policies/parent_involvement.html.
2. Center for Mental Health in Schools. (1999). A Sampling of Outcome Findings from Interventions Relevant to Addressing Barriers to Learning. Technical Assistance Sampler. [on-line] Available: <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu>



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For more information on the certificate program contact Dr. Norma Jean Stodden (808) 956-4454, for additional publications or to share What's Working practices contact Dr. Shannon Simonelli (808) 956-8710.

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