

'A'ole pau ka 'ike i ka hualau hio'okali

Connections Public Charter School

August 7, 2017

Dear Families,

On behalf of the Connections PCS Governing Board and staff, I'd like to welcome all new and returning families to the new school year. We look forward to an exciting new year as we work together to provide our children with a meaningful and nurturing education.

Our morning buses will run on the same schedule as last year. All of our students need a well balanced diet to do their best in school. Through the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 the Community Eligibility Program was established. This program eliminates the need for household applications for free and reduced meals. ***Through the CEP, ALL CONNECTIONS' STUDENTS ARE ENTITLED TO A FREE BREAKFAST AND LUNCH EVERY SCHOOL DAY.***

Enclosed in this orientation packet are materials concerning our discipline policy, lunch program, a school calendar, various consent releases for activities, special needs information, emergency cards, and other important information. We are revising our discipline policy and seeking input from our families and the community. Comments should be in writing and addressed to the Connections PCS Governing Board.

These forms are also on our website (www.connectionscharterschool.org/parents.html).

A weekly *Stay Connected Newsletter* is available every week and can also be found on our website.

School will start promptly (for all K-6 students) at 8:15 am and finish at 2:30 pm. Middle and high school classes will begin at 8:30 am and finish at 2:45 pm. We will continue to offer after-school programs for all of our students. Our A+ program will be run by a private vendor and held on the first floor of the Kress Building. The secondary (grade 6-12 program), Studio SHAKA, will be on the second floor of the Kress Building. Information and registration materials are available in the school office and through our after-school program staff. **All students remaining on campus after 2:45 pm will be expected to be participating in one of our after-school programs or another school sponsored activity.**

This year we will continue the process of establishing our new campus in Kaumana. On May 29, 2015 Connections' challenged the Windward Planning Commission's denial of our special use permit. Our initial challenge was denied. We are continuing to appeal the Windward Planning Commission's denial through the legal system. This could take several years. We

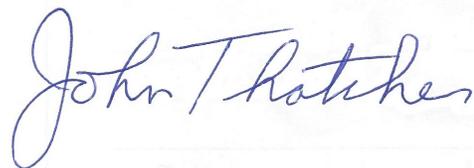
have been working on plans for this new campus site since 2007, and intend to continue moving forward. We look forward to providing our keiki with a high-quality 21st century education that will include agricultural, ecological, and sustainability-oriented experiences. Mahalo to all who have supported these efforts through our years of political struggles with a small group of Kaumana residents who oppose our project.

The founders of the original Connections school within-a-school spent an entire year researching and discussing various educational models. We were significantly influenced by the writings of Ted Sizer, the founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES). The CES “10 Common Principles” embody principles that we have been firmly committed to from the beginning. The vision, mission and overall concept for education at Connections is firmly rooted in constructivist principles. Constructivists believe that the emphasis for learning needs to be placed on the learner rather than solely on the teacher. The learner constructs her/his own conceptualizations and solutions to problems. Learner autonomy and initiative is accepted and encouraged. Students learn by fitting new information together with what they already know. People learn best when they actively construct their own understandings. They learn when they are encouraged to invent their own solutions and to try out new ideas. This provides an opportunity to build on their prior knowledge.

Last year we began implementation of the Learning Cultures school reform model created by New York University professor, Dr. Cynthia McCallister. This year we will focus on Dr. McCallister’s Cooperative Unison Reading. The process involves a small group of no more than five children in an oral, synchronized reading of a common text within an explicit set of rules and procedures. Cooperative Unison Reading entails a few simple rules: Read aloud in sync, loudly enough that others can hear you (but not too loudly that your voice overpowers the voices of peers); stop the group and speak up when you are confused or have an idea that others would benefit from hearing; and act in ways that promote the learning of others. Cooperative Unison Reading draws its inspiration from a variety of sources including John Dewey’s emphasis on the importance of agency and responsibility for education in a democracy, Lev Vgotsky’s emphasis on the importance of learning from one’s peers as well as from teachers, Jerome Bruner’s theory of formats for scaffolding social interactions, and David Olson’s analysis of the relation between social accountability and self-control.

Connections has always been a place where learning is at the forefront. We continue to utilize research-based approaches with a focus on REAL, not ROTE, learning. Children have the opportunity to stay in stable groups and spend several years with the same team of teachers and peers. This allows students to feel supported enough to take educational risks and develop their ability to become intrinsically motivated learners. Connections’ staff strives to lead every student to reach her or his best potential. We look forward to continuing to work with families to build our K-12 community of learners: our Connections ‘ohana.

‘O wau iho nō me ke aloha,



John Thatcher, Principal