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Archives

Aloha 'Ike grants fund project learning

By Cynthia Matsuoka — Special to the garden island

Posted: Friday, Aug 04, 2006 - 10:35:01 pm HST

Editor's note: This is the second part of a two-part story on the benefits of the Aloha 'Ike grant program in Kauai's public, private and charter schools.

Lisa Mireles is the principal at Kula Elementary School and creator of the "Ocean Communities" program that was funded in the first round of Aloha 'Ike summer 2005 grants.

Aloha 'Ike is a grant program that supports educators in project-based learning for their students.

"It takes community effort, but it works and has been wonderful," Mireles said.

The marine science program allows students to use technology to understand and preserve the ocean, Mireles said. Prior to the grant, the program focused on the sixth and tenth graders. With the help of the Aloha 'Ike grant, the program expanded to kindergarten through sixth grade. With the assistance of Save Our Seas, a nonprofit organization, the program has been institutionalized, she said.

Students in kindergarten through grade three receive instruction twice a week. In grades four through six, the program runs for 20 weeks. Every other week, students go to Anini Beach. With cameras in underwater housings and personal digital assistants, the students record data in order to monitor the reefs and identify and count fish. They use pictures and experiences to learn more about the ocean.

Captain Paul Clark is the president of SOS and a teacher at Kula Elementary and High School. "Throughout each grade and each class, we talk about human impact on the ocean and ways students can make a difference," he said.

Students do comparative studies of the data they have collected and inputted into spreadsheets and graphs. They also use the data to verify initial hypotheses like "sea cucumbers are abundant at this spot because of nutrient run off."

Data trends in schools and among scientists worldwide are moving towards

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more habitat monitoring, Clark said. This is done through the digital photos. With data collection, it could take years to see trends. With photos, differences can be seen in as short a time as a month, he said.

The fifth and sixth graders have created interactive Web sites on the marine science projects.

At the high school, Clark teaches an elective class for peer ecologists. These 10th through 12th grade student interns teach the elementary students about the cameras and PDAs. They facilitate the elementary group discussions. They also serve as life guards on the field trips to Anini beach.

Mireles said that project-based learning is embedded in their curriculum. It's a better way for students to make sense of the world.

"We start with what they know," Mireles said. Then the students are given authentic experiences to expand their circle of knowledge.

"It empowers them . . . and gives them ownership of their learning," she said.

Mireles said she has seen the other grant programs and is impressed with the diversity. "They are personalized to the schools and all the projects are phenomenal," she said.

The Kula, 'Ele'ele and Ke Kula Ni'ihau projects will be presented, along with projects from Kalaheo Elementary, Island School and Chiefess Kamakahalei Middle School, at the second annual KEDB fundraiser event on August 24, 2006 at 6:30 at the Kauai Marriott Kaua'i Ballroom. The event, "An Evening with Senator Inouye" is the fundraising event for the Aloha 'Ike grant program.

Edwin Nakaya is the chairperson for the KEDB education committee. He said that Carl Takamura, executive director of the Hawaii Business Roundtable, commented that there's something about Kaua'i that the businesses and communities are more involved.

Ako said she has heard similar comments to the effect that "Kaua'i people don't just talk about it, they do it."

"Everything is done in-house," Hill said. The money is raised, housed, administered from the KEDB office. The application process is simple. Teachers can get assistance with the write-up from Hill.

KEDB is offering a "Learning Champions" grant program that provides substitutes for teachers who would like to visit programs and/or projects and to consult with colleagues on program development and/or program delivery within the Kaua'i school district.

The next round of Aloha 'Ike grant applications are due on Oct. 1 with notification of grant funding on Nov. 1.

• Cynthia Matsuoka is a freelance writer for The Garden Island and former principal of Chiefess Kamakahalei Middle School. She can be reached by e-mail at aharju@kauaipubco.com.

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