

HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH

HONOLULU WALDORF SCHOOL

Honolulu, Hawai'i

honoluluwaldorf.org

Start Date: July 2025



HONOLULU
WALDORF
SCHOOL
KULA HO'OMOHALA PUA



Carney
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& ASSOCIATES

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Mission Statement

At Honolulu Waldorf School, we educate each child to find meaning, passion, and purpose in life and to contribute to the creation of a better world for all. Through a curriculum based on the developmental stages of the human being and on the integration of art and academics, our children learn to meet the world with clear and creative thinking, compassion, and moral strength, and with the courage and freedom to act.

Overview

Since its founding in 1961, Honolulu Waldorf School has occupied a distinct place in the landscape of independent schools in Hawai'i. The school has a proud history of blending both the "Waldorf magic" and the place-based relationship with the land and nature that is a unique and powerful aspect of Hawaiian culture. The school day starts with the children and adults gathered around the plantings in the courtyard, singing a chant in the Hawaiian language, complete with the blowing of a conch shell. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/Q2ukBMKPpjH3PmTE6> It brings tears to your eyes and warmth to your soul. There is no mistaking that there is something spiritual and wonderful going on at this school.

The school welcomes 174 students in grades PK – 12. The Early Childhood (EC) program with about half of the total student body is recognized as one of the best, if not THE best on the island of Oahu. The school's wonderful campus allows students to be outside at least three hours every school day. After a set of unavoidable circumstances forced the closure of High School (including being flooded out of its facility that was separate from the main campus), it is now open again and growing.

The school is not without its challenges. On the one hand, they benefited from figuring out how to stay open when many other schools were closed by the pandemic. On the other hand, the long-standing sense of community and some of the activities that have long been special aspects of the school life, were necessarily curtailed during COVID. As with all schools, the rebuilding process is ongoing. Waldorf education has been undergoing transitions in governance structure and self-examination of what it means to be true to Waldorf values and beliefs and also relevant to the here and now of 21st century life in the US. HWS has completed the transition to the typical independent school model of a single Head of School reporting to the Board, working in partnership with pedagogical leadership. The exact structure of the Head's leadership team is in something of a state of flux with several key functions outsourced.

One of the primary challenges facing the school is gathering and retaining Waldorf-trained faculty. There is no question that the teachers in the school are wonderful, child-centered, and dedicated. The ability of the school to optimally deliver grounded Waldorf education and come to a clear understanding of what that means in today's world, will be enhanced as more of the faculty become Waldorf-trained.

Challenges notwithstanding, this is a school where the promise is both inspiring and unlimited. Many on campus express a sense that the school is on the cusp of its new "golden age." Under the leadership of a wise and skilled interim Head of School for the 2024-2025 school year, the school will be ready for an inspired and inspiring new leader to begin in July 2025 to partner with the school's 'Ohana (extended family) to realize that golden future.



Strengths of the School

Among the many strengths of the school, those most often cited include:

- Its commitment to Waldorf pedagogy.
- Its place-based understanding of nature and its commitment to teaching Hawaiian culture.
- All children study two world languages through the elementary grades and select one for a deeper dive starting in middle school.
- The 1.5 acre campus (complete with six massive and sheltering monkeypod trees) is ideally suited to the Waldorf pedagogy that embraces nature and all things natural.
- A wonderfully dedicated faculty and staff.
- Everyone knows everybody. There is a sense of community that is coming back post-pandemic. Small classes in a small school engender a sense of togetherness. One parent remarked, “The feeling that all teachers and staff know our children and we have a relationship with them is invaluable.... The festivals, parent involvement, the feeling of community and the multi-cultural environment... Approaching children with empathy and love, understanding, and meeting them where they are, has been a blessing.”
- Another parent observed something echoed by many: “If I come in on a Saturday, you will find staff and children throughout the campus. Teachers working in their classrooms, faculty and staff and spouses working in gardens or on other campus projects, kids playing or receiving tutoring. I love that we have dogs and other animals on campus.” (*Chickens, ducks, birds and Keoki, the giant tortoise. You have to love a school with a tortoise named Keoki!*)
- HWS is fully accredited by AWSNA (Association of Waldorf Schools of North America); HAIS (Hawai'i Association of Independent Schools) and WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges). The most recent re-accreditation was only a few years ago.
- HAIS is an exceptionally strong and collegial independent school association. All the heads know each other; their menu of professional development activities is strong, and there is a real sense of community among the heads. The new HWS Head will find a group of welcoming colleagues who are eager to be as supportive as possible.
- The school has been operating with a very favorable lease, has maintained balanced budgets for the past several years and is debt free.



Challenges and Opportunities

- As with all schools, it takes hard work and intention to rebuild “community” after the pandemic. Many of the prior community-wide events were volunteer driven and the school is only now starting to cultivate more volunteers. Finding balanced ways to invite parents back on campus is eagerly anticipated.
- Likewise, with a large number of relatively new faculty members and some long-tenured Waldorf faculty, blending a single collaborative, mutually supportive and respectful culture among and between faculty and staff takes a lot of work as well.
- While the EC is near capacity, building enrollment across the grades (1-8) and into the High School will provide needed financial resources to enable the school to blossom in many ways. Conversion of Kindergarteners into the first grade varies from year to year; some classes in the grades are large, others are not. There is plenty of competition in the O’ahu market. The school would benefit from some thoughtful targeted marketing and messaging and branding work. Waldorf remains either unknown or misunderstood in the larger community and the school needs to tell its story far better to the external community.
- The school’s ability to do its best work and thrive in a community of like-minded educators, will be enhanced by a significant increase in the number of faculty who are Waldorf-trained. There is no “ready pool” of Waldorf faculty available. Finding ways to train and retain Waldorf faculty will produce a very positive ripple effect throughout the school.
- As noted above, the High School has recently re-opened after a period of closure. It will be important to plan the future of the high school and then execute on that plan.



- Everyone wants the school to be an exemplar of Waldorf Education, but not everyone shares the same understanding of what that means in practice. To the extent that there are differing ideas, there needs to be a process where everyone can agree on how the Pedagogy is/should be manifest in this school, especially in conjunction with the Hawaiian place-based aspects of the school program.
- The school has engaged in episodic DEIJ work. Despite the multicultural nature of the general population in Hawai'i and on O'ahu, there is work to be done to further diversify the student and adult populations of the school, just as there is a need to continue to embrace all aspects of DEIJ/DEIB work.
- The school needs to create a campus master plan of facilities, preceded by some thoughtful planning on program and size of the student body.
- It is ongoing work to operate effectively and efficiently. There is a sense that fundraising would benefit from the return of community-building activities, and the long-term financial stability of the school will be greater as a culture of philanthropy is reintroduced to the school.
- The new Head will have the opportunity to adjust the administrative structure of the school to maximize the head's ability to do what they do best, while assuring that other administrative functions are accomplished professionally and capably.



Desired Personal Skills and Attributes

Among the characteristics desired in successful candidates are:

- A background in Waldorf Education is ideal, but not required. If not Waldorf trained, candidates should have an eagerness to learn about and embrace Waldorf in order to be both a compelling spokesperson for the school, and a trusted leader by the faculty.
- A collaborative, inclusive leadership style that prioritizes listening in the decision making.
- The ability to make decisions in a timely manner and effectively communicate what those are and why they were made.
- Prior experience with Hawai'i and real-world understanding of what it would be like to live there. Ideally someone who wants to make Honolulu their long-term home.
- A passion for, and strong experience with DEIJ.
- A systems thinker, able to oversee a professional administration that is both responsive and fiscally prudent.
- A leader experienced in designing an excellent administrative structure. Someone who can continue to develop the best-practices relationship between the Head and the Board.
- An excellent, charismatic communicator, able to tell the school's story, celebrate student outcomes, and reassure prospective parents.
- A skilled problem-solver, mediator-when-necessary, and someone who is accessible and willing to listen to everyone.
- Financial literacy sufficient to manage the budget; fundraising experience sufficient to lead the development of a culture of philanthropy within the school community.

Learn More

Click on the links below to learn more about Honolulu Waldorf School.

[School Website](#)

[Virtual Tour](#)

[School History](#)

[About Honolulu, Hawaii](#)



To Apply

Interested and qualified candidates are invited to contact the consultant in confidence. Candidates will ultimately need to submit the following materials as separate PDF documents:

- A cover letter expressing their interest in this particular position;
- A current résumé;
- A statement of experience and/or familiarity with Waldorf education. Also include any prior experience with the lifestyle and culture of Hawai'i;
- A list of five professional references with name, relationship, phone number, and email address of each (references will not be contacted without the candidate's permission) to:

Skip Kotkins

Senior Consultant

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