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A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE



2013 J-LEAP REPORT BY KANAE HIGUCHI

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Aloha! My name is Kanae Higuchi and I'm currently working as a Japanese Assistant Teacher at Waipahu High School (WHS) in Hawaii.

Hawaii is well known as a resort destination with many beautiful beaches, mountains, and the Aloha spirit. People are really friendly and kind. Because of that, I've never had any major problems since I came here. Waipahu is a rural area in West Oahu. There is a beautiful view of Pearl Harbor from the school.

As you might already know, people in Hawaii enjoy Japanese culture in their daily life. My first surprise in Hawaii was that people here love Katsu Curry, which is Japanese style curry with chicken cutlet. And recently, the traditional Japanese toy called Kendama is popular in kids in Oahu. You can see kids playing Kendama almost everywhere now. It is interesting to compare Japanese culture in Hawaii and Japanese culture in Japan, because some ideas develop differently compared to Japan. So I'm excited to have discussions about the differences with my students.

Almost every high school in Hawaii, including private schools, teaches Japanese. Some of the reasons are the large population of Japanese Americans and the many Japanese tourists coming to Hawaii. So HATJ (The Hawaii Association of Teachers of Japanese) organizes a Benkyokai, sharing information and teaching ideas, every month in order to improve and encourage Japanese language education in Hawaii.

WHS is the second biggest high school in Oahu in both the size of the school and the number of ethnic groups. The school campus is so huge with about 2500 students attending the school. There are seven foreign language classes (Japanese, Spanish, Hawaiian, Ilocano, Chinese, Samoan, and Korean) so that the school can meet the interests of all the students.

Regarding the Japanese classes, we have five different levels, JP1~4 and AP, and 400 students are enrolled. After three years studying Japanese, students can choose JP4 or AP. There are several reasons why the students are taking Japanese class. Some of them have Japanese ethnic background, some

them like Japanese sub-culture, and some parents expect their children to be able to speak Japanese because they might have a chance to get better job in Hawaii if they can speak Japanese.

There are three Japanese teachers in WHS. My supervisor is Mr. Smith and we have the following classes.

Japanese 1 (about 30 students in each class, 2 classes)

Japanese 2 honors (7 students)

Japanese 3 honors (17 students)

Japanese AP (7 students)

My challenge in WHS is to build up our AP class with Smith Sensei because it just started last year. And I also want to encourage students to speak Japanese both in and outside of the class. A few months ago, a student told me "I helped Japanese tourists who were lost in Honolulu." That's what I want students to do. Experiencing Japanese in real life is the best way to motivate students and to improve their Japanese skills. Smith sensei is also eager to get students to experience Japan firsthand. Some WHS students could go to Japan through various programs since he started teaching Japanese at WHS and the school has several chances to welcome many Japanese students visitors on school trips from Japan.

WHS became a sister school with a high school in Hiroshima this year and the schools will start an exchange program next year. Students are really excited to go to Japan and welcome students from Japan. I'm also happy to help to maintain good relationship between the two schools.

Lastly I would like to thank all the people who gave me this opportunity and support me to live and adjust to my life in Hawaii, especially my supervisor Smith sensei and my host mother Deli Oania. Mahalo.

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