School Community WASC Report

Criteria: Your school effectively informs and involves parents, other school constituencies, and the wider community in the life of the school. Student enrollment, including the admission process, financial aid and record keeping, is consistent with the school’s mission.

Wai’alae PCS places a high importance on our role within the larger community. 97% of teachers surveyed agree “This school encourages family and community involvement” (School Synergy Report; pg.35). In support of this objective, Wai’alae employs a full-time School Parent Community Networking coordinator (SPCNC). The Coordinator’s role is to implement and support programs that include parents and community members. In July 2008, in response to the need for a physical gathering place on campus, the School Parent Community Networking Center (SPCNC) was created and supported by the Friends of Wai’alae (FWS.) As confirmed by observation during Wai’alae’s self study period, this room offers visitors comfortable seating, meeting space, access to computers, copier, fresh coffee, and temporary storage space for various volunteer groups.

Wai’alae School has several programs designed to reach and involve parents and families interested in volunteering at the school:

FWS is Wai’alae School’s Parent Teacher Community Organization. It is a non-profit organization with 501(C)3 status. The mission of FWS is to inspire active parent, family, and community support of and partnership with Wai`alae School.

FWS has two main objectives: fundraising and encouraging parent/family involvement. Their fundraising efforts provide classroom subsidies and SPCNC support and in the past have paid for playground equipment and computers. Their family volunteers help at the many school events (See Supporting Materials 5: FWS Support). Monthly FWS meetings are open to all and meeting notes are posted in the FWS website.

The Learning Hui Program (LHP) is another school sponsored parent group. Its mission is to provide involvement in the classroom to help improve student’s educational outcomes, teacher’s resources, and parent/child development skills. One or two parents per classroom, volunteer to be Learning Hui Coordinators (LHC) and are responsible for communicating
with their teacher, increasing parent participation by organizing volunteers for class activities, and coordinating with other LHCs for grade level and school-wide events. There is a high level of participation in the LHP. (See Supporting Materials 6: Learning Hui Support).

Waiʻalae School Board (WSB) is a third organization open to families and community members. It is the governing board for Waiʻalae. It consists of an administration member, faculty and staff members, community members, parent members and a student member. Board meetings are held once a month and are open to all. Board meeting notes are posted on Waiʻalae’s website.

Waiʻalae participates in a number of programs designed to reach and involve those other than parents. These include the Fellowship Education Lifelong Learning Opportunities With Seniors (FELLOWS,) Actively Integrating Nutrition and Agriculture In Schools (‘AINA IS) and Common Grace programs (See Supporting Materials 7: Community Involved Programs).

As a public entity, school facilities are available to members of the public for either one-time, limited-use or ongoing events or activities. The dining hall and grounds are available for rent during weekday evening and weekend hours, and classrooms are available and used by a variety of after-school enrichment programs. For a list of the current and past programs see Supporting Materials 11: Programs.

There is a meaningful effort to engage parents using various forms of communication, such as Orientation, Curriculum Night, Waiʻalae and FWS websites, Waiʻalae Weekly, student planners, e-mails, flyers, and some classroom websites. (See Supporting Materials 8: Forms of Communication).

In surveys, 96% of parent respondents said that the “school involves families of all cultures in school activities.” In addition, 82% of the teachers agreed with the statement, “Families from all cultures feel welcome and comfortable at this school.” (School Synergy report; pg. 35)

Waiʻalae has an English Language Learners (ELL) program for students. Interpreters for non-English speaking families are provided through this program upon request.
The administration provides new families with information about Waiʻalae to make an informed decision whether to enroll their child at this school. Families are provided with an admission packet after their registration forms have been submitted to the registrar (See Supporting Materials 1: Admissions Packet). These forms request information that is either essential for record-keeping and legal purposes or for building a better understanding of the child to be enrolled. The Waiʻalae Student and Family Handbook is distributed to each student after the first day of school (See Supporting Materials 3: Student Handbook). The handbook includes information about various school procedures, school rules, civil rights policy, student programs, volunteer opportunities for adults, and information on how to contact the administration and office staff. A listing of faculty and staff and their direct classroom phone number is also distributed at the same time.

Students who are admitted to Waiʻalae PCS fall into one of three categories.

1) “In-district” students: These are students whose residence is within geographic boundaries that have been determined by the DOE.

2) Students whose residence is out of district but whose home school is a NCLB school. Students whose home school is being restructured are given priority over other “Geographic Exception” (GE) student.

3) Students whose residence is “out of district” These students must submit an application for a GE. The GE needs to be approved prior to enrollment. GE’s are chosen based on a lottery.

Families applying for a GE to Waiʻalae are required to attend an Orientation prior to their GE application being considered. Families applying for a GE have a window/time frame in which they must apply (January to March). “In-district” families may enroll at Waiʻalae at any point during the year.
At the orientation, information about the school’s mission, vision, educational philosophy, curriculum, attitudes regarding parent/family involvement, general information about the school day, after school enrichment programs, and ways families and community members can be involved in the school are shared with perspective families (See Supporting Materials 9: Orientation Slides.) Families are also encouraged to sign up for a campus tour, which provides them with opportunities to enter the classrooms and see the teachers and students “in action.”

As a public school, Wai’alae does not charge tuition. Wai’alae is funded by the State and Federal government. Information about budget and other fiscal and financial matters is presented to families at orientation. Board minutes covering financial issues are posted on the Wai’alae website. Although Wai’alae School does not charge tuition, and does not have a financial aid policy for tuition, financial aid is provided in other ways. Aid is provided to families through the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program (NSLBP.) If a family applies and qualifies for this program, the child can purchase breakfast and lunch at a partially- or fully-subsidized price.

Financial aid is also provided through Wai’alae’s after school care program, Wai’alae Plus (W+). Families enrolled in W+ who qualify for NSLBP automatically qualify for a reduced tuition rate of $55 per month (current rate as of August 2011.) The school has also established a “Needy Student Fund,” which provides financial assistance for field trips.

There are periodic internal and external reviews to ensure that Wai’alae is in compliance with the policies and contractual agreements of these programs. The CEO, dean of students, and registrar are the reviewers of the admission policies, procedures, and materials. All contractual agreements are submitted for review by the Attorney General’s office.

Wai’alae PCS follows all state and federal laws prohibiting discrimination and follows all guidelines set forth by the state and federal agencies. For example, Wai’alae’s meal tracker system ensures disadvantaged children have equal access to all offered meals and provides privacy for all applicants. These laws are communicated through the Student and Family
Handbook, which outlines the Civil Rights Policy printed on pg. 39. The following forms are distributed on the first day of school: 1) Free and Reduced-Price School Meals, 2) Notification of rights under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 3) The McKinney-Vento Act form which describes the rights of homeless families (See Supporting Materials 10: First Day Packet). A Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) brochure is given to all parents of current and prospective SPED children.

The following posters are displayed in the office: 1) State and Federal labor laws (describes discrimination and retaliation laws), 2) Justice For All, 3) Equal Education Opportunity 4) McKinny-Vento Act, 5) USDA National School Lunch Program (ensures meals are served on a non-discriminatory basis).

Each student at Waiʻalae School has a cumulative folder, which is kept in a metal file box with the current teacher during the school year. In the summer, the folders are housed in the office. The cumulative folder contains the student’s registration documents, test scores and progress reports. Waiʻalae School keeps records on special education students. These confidential folders are stored in a locked file cabinet in the CSSS office. Only authorized people who work with that child have access to these folders. These people must sign a log if they take the folder out of the CSSS office. Information about special education students is also stored electronically in the state’s e-CSSS database.

In addition, meeting notes and referral paperwork for all level 2 and 3 children are kept in the CSSS office. Level 2 children are those children who are officially identified as needing specific instruction in the classroom. Level 3 children are those children receiving intervention. The counselor keeps records on children on a Behavior Support Plan. The Literacy Resource teacher keeps records of children receiving reading intervention services. The ELL teacher keeps records on the children who receive her services. Access to this paperwork is open to any staff member who works with the child.

Health records for all children are kept in the health room by the school Health Aide. The Health Aide compiles a list called a “Health History List” of all children with health
problems. This list is marked confidential and is distributed to the faculty. At the end of the year each teacher shreds his/her list.

Students (Grades K-5) are assessed three times a year in reading, writing and math. Scores of these assessments are kept by the administration as well as the CSSS. Children, grades 3-5, complete the Hawaii State Assessment (HSA). These scores are kept by the administration, CSSS and the counselor, and are accessible to any faculty member as well as the parents of the individual student. The scores are kept until the child leaves the school, so that each child’s progress can be monitored over the years.

Attendance records are kept on the IST database, which is an online, web-based database. Records are also kept on volunteers and visitors to the school. This is done for security purposes.

Summary

Community involvement in education is valued at Wai’alae PCS. The school invites and expects parent and community involvement in the school’s activities, from participation on the school board to enjoying the family fun fair. The school also participates in many community activities. This involvement is a strength of Wai’alae PCS.

The administration puts forth great effort during the admission process to provide parents with information on what it means to be a public charter school and Wai’alae School’s mission, vision and goals, so that the parents’ understanding of and commitment to the school is maximized.

Wai’alae PCS does a fairly good job communicating with the school community. With the addition of the SPCNC center and its constant interaction with parents, the Wai’alae weekly, and the Wai’alae website etc., the school continues to work on improving its communication.

Areas of strength:
• School administration provides prospective families with as much information as possible about the school to allow them to make an informed decision when enrolling their child at Wai’alae.

• The SPCNC center is well used by parents, staff and community members.

• FWS has been effective in providing financial support for school programs and other needs, through their fundraising efforts.

• Monthly FWS meetings provide a forum for sharing of ideas with parents, community, and the CEO. It also provides a time and place for LHCs to meet and plan for events.

• The Learning Hui Program is effective in communicating and generating support for school activities.

• Wai’alae hosts a wide-range of after-school activities and many students participate in these additional programs.

Areas in need of improvement

• While parent/family involvement is relatively high, more participation is needed from a broader percentage of the families.

• The current Wai’alae website does a good job at posting certain things in a timely manner, however it could be more user-friendly and informative, and include items such as a school-wide calendar and easy to find announcements.

• There are various ways the school communicates with families, however there is a need for visual reminders around campus, such as banners, marquees etc.

• In the past, there has been a volunteer faculty/staff who attended the monthly FWS meetings and reported back to the others. More recently, there has been no faculty
presence other than the CEO. Improved lines of communication is needed between faculty/staff and FWS, so FWS can help address any financial or volunteer needs.

While overall communication between the school and families is good, further improvements can be made at the classroom level such as monthly class/grade level newsletters, classroom websites for all classes.