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**Hawaii Dental Service Makes a \$500,000 Transformative Gift
to the 'Āina-Informatics Network to Make Genomic Science
More Accessible to Hawaii's Public, Private, and Charter School Students to Prepare the
Next Generation of Scientists**

Honolulu, Hawaii — Hawaii Dental Service (HDS), the state's leading dental benefits provider, has donated \$500,000 to the 'Āina-Informatics Network, a program that is preparing the next generation of scientists and professionals to take their place in the world and tackle future challenges.



“We’re pleased to partner with the 'Āina-Informatics Network to take this innovative program to a new level and to invest in Hawaii’s youth,” said **Dr. Diane Paloma**, president and CEO of Hawaii Dental Service. “It’s rewarding to nurture their love for exploration and discovery, and to watch them grow into responsible stewards of all of the things we love about our island home. It’s exciting to know more Hawaii residents will have a positive impact in the world.”

The 'Āina-Informatics Network is an initiative that 'Iolani School started three years ago to introduce genome science, or the study of DNA, while also nurturing ethical science practices, respect, and care for Hawaii’s environment that sustains life in the islands. This formed the perfect intersection of science and culture to create the Hawaii-based curriculum. The HDS contribution will help 'Iolani School expand the network and provide specialized equipment and teacher training for Hawaii’s public, private and charter schools.

One of the real-world projects that the students have worked on is SARS-CoV-2 surveillance. The 'Āina-Informatics Network, in collaboration with the Hawaii Department of Health and Dr. Marguerite Butler’s lab at UH Manoa, provide students an opportunity to join the effort to track SARS-CoV-2 variants of interest and

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concern. Using mobile sequencing technology, students safely sequence inert viral genomes isolated from samples collected locally, to better understand what makes them virulent, enabling students to reconstruct the virus' evolutionary history and transmission paths through the islands.

Dr. Yvonne Chan, the John Kay Teaching Chair in Research Science and the director of the Sullivan Center Research Lab at 'Iolani School, who holds a doctorate degree in conservation genetics from Stanford University; **Eric Tong**, 'Iolani genomics specialist; and **Joanna Kobayashi**, 'Iolani 'Āina-Informatics support, lead the network. Dr. Chan and her team work to create a space for teachers and students to have hands-on learning and authentic research opportunities, provide a support network for continued discussion and curriculum development, and provide equipment to conduct these labs so other Hawaii high school science teachers can implement these technologies in their respective schools.

“We started 'Āina-Informatics with the mission of bringing genome science into Hawaii's classrooms and developing place-based ethical curricula where students can collect real scientific data and wrestle with the impact of biotechnology on their lives and communities. Since 2018, we've reached more than 1,000 students and it's exciting to see the growing support and interest by schools throughout the state,” Dr. Chan said. “This gift from HDS will enable us to make strides towards our goal of expanding the network to every high school in Hawaii.”

“We appreciate the vision and commitment of the 'Āina-Informatics Network in expanding the impact of this revolutionary science curriculum to Hawaii's public and charter schools,” said **Keith Hayashi**, interim superintendent of the Hawaii State Department of Education. “This is a great example of how we, as a community, can align our energy and resources to offer exciting and meaningful learning opportunities that benefit not only our students, but also our economy and our state.”

To date, the following schools and programs participating in the 'Āina-Informatics Network include:

- Castle High School
- Governor Samuel Wilder King Intermediate School
- Hawaii Baptist Academy
- KA'I Program
- Kahuku High School
- Kalani High School
- Le Jardin Academy
- Mid-Pacific Institute
- Moanalua High School
- PaCES Program
- St. Andrew's Priory
- Waianae Intermediate School
- 'Aiea High School

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“This donation is probably the most significant donation to benefit public schools in decades. It has the potential to transform Hawaii’s economy from a visitor-based economy to a science-based economy and make Hawaii a technology leader in the world,” said **Kenneth Hiraki**, chair of the Public Schools of Hawaii Foundation. “This has been an awesome relationship with the ‘Āina-Informatics Network and this gift from HDS is transformative. We’ll be able to take this curriculum to more schools and eventually reverse the brain drain by creating opportunities for Hawaii’s youth to return to Hawaii.”

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Photo caption:

From left: Mark Yamakawa, HDS president and CEO (retiring); Dr. Diane Paloma, HDS president and CEO; Keith Hayashi, interim superintendent, Hawaii State Department of Education; Dr. Timothy Cottrell, head of school, ‘Iolani School; Dr. Yvonne Chan, the John Kay Teaching Chair in Research Science, ‘Iolani School; and Kenneth Hiraki, chair, Public Schools of Hawaii Foundation.

About Hawaii Dental Service

Hawaii Dental Service (HDS) is the leading dental benefits provider in the state, serving nearly one million residents throughout Hawaii, Guam, and Saipan. It has the largest network of dentists, with more than 95 percent of Hawaii’s licensed, practicing dentists participating with HDS.

As a nonprofit founded in Hawaii in 1962, HDS is committed to making quality oral health care affordable and accessible. Employers who offer HDS dental plans to their employees represent Hawaii’s diverse industries, companies, unions, associations, and nonprofit organizations. HDS also offers dental plans for individuals and families. HDS has been a part of Delta Dental, the nation’s largest and most experienced dental insurance benefits provider, since 1966. This affiliation gives members access to a nationwide network of participating dentists.

For more information, please visit www.HawaiiDentalService.com.