



Literacy Instruction & Support Division

**CELEBRATING EARLY LITERACY GROWTH IN KEA'AU, KA'Ū, & PĀHOA:**  
A FIVE YEAR LOOK AT 3RD GRADE LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT TRENDS AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

*He 'a'ali'i ku makani mai au;  
'a'ohe makani nana e kula'i*

*I am a wind resisting 'a'ali'i;  
No gale can push me over*

*Pukui, 'Ōlelo No'eau #507*

**INTRODUCTION**

Over the past five years, amidst winds of large-scale change ignited by the implementation of Race to the Top (RTTT) and other state and district reform initiatives, children in the Kea'au, Ka'ū & Pāhoa school complex area (KKP) resilient and steadfast, have made considerable early literacy<sup>1</sup> achievement gains. For the school years starting in 2008 and ending in 2012, data on third grade reading achievement outcomes<sup>2</sup> for the entire KKP show:

- For all students, a **16 percent increase** in reading proficiency achievement on the Hawai'i Standardized Assessment (HSA).
- For Native Hawaiian students, an **18 percent increase** in reading proficiency achievement on the HSA.

The gains represented by these data are most notable because they illustrate growth for KKP students that has largely outpaced historical growth for not only this complex area but also for the state. More importantly, these gains are representative of the unity and perseverance of the entire complex area community. In KKP, higher achievement over the past five years is reflected across the K-12 spectrum, indicating the systemic impact of the complex area's vision and focus on effective leadership and teaching. While the complex area has made significant improvements across the board, for purposes of this brief, we will share and celebrate early literacy achievement gains as well as highlight several of the key efforts that have contributed to this growth.

<sup>1</sup>For the purpose of this brief, early literacy refers to preschool through grade 3 literacy education.

<sup>2</sup>Data Source: Hawai'i Department of Education (DOE) Systems Accountability Office: school years 2008-09 through 2011-12.



**THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY LITERACY**

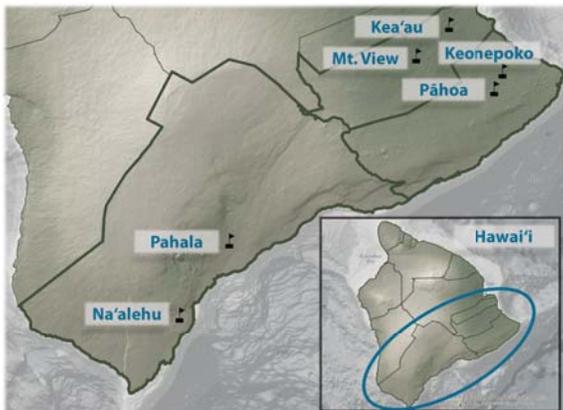
Literacy is a critical component of childhood development and needs to be nurtured well before a child enters elementary kindergarten. “The level to which a child progresses in reading and writing is one of the best predictors of whether the child will function competently in school and in life” (Neuman, Copple, and Bredekamp, 2000). More than thirty years ago, research began to indicate that the lower a child's third-grade reading score, the less likely she/he were to graduate from high school on time (as compared to children with higher reading scores) (Lloyd, 1978). Studies show that 16 percent of children who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade do not graduate from high school on time. Only 4 percent of children who are reading proficiently by the end of third grade experience the same outcome. This research suggests that children who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely than proficient readers to not graduate from high school on time (Annie E. Casey, 2013).

The picture for children who are economically disadvantaged or living in poverty (for at least a year) is even more troubling. Studies show that approximately one quarter (26%) of children who come from economically disadvantaged home environments and who are also not reading proficiently by the end of third grade, do not graduate from high school on time (Hernandez, 2012). However, “effective instruction in the early years can have a large impact on children’s literacy development. Children who would otherwise be most at-risk for school failure stand to benefit the most from high-quality experiences” according to Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson (2002). While much of the current reform efforts focus on career and college readiness, these facts remind us that it is important to continue to address the cumulative effects of early education on these important longer-term outcomes.

## EARLY LITERACY IN KKP

### Context

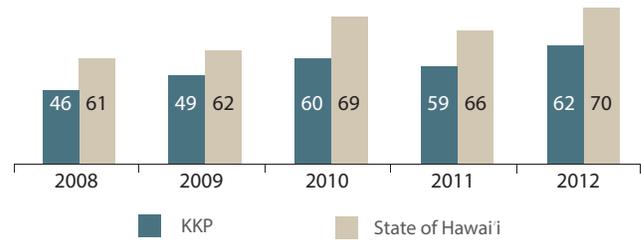
KKP covers a wide geographic area from Hilo to Nā‘ālehu (65 mile distance) and is home to a variety of public schools: five elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, one combined middle and high school, and one combined elementary, middle and high school. In this complex area, eight in ten students are economically disadvantaged and five in ten students are Native Hawaiian (NH). Historically, students in KKP of this demographic composition have not fared as well as their non-disadvantaged and non-NH classmates in both reading and math proficiency achievement. With this context in mind, the RTTT initiative provided an opportunity for educators to strengthen the quality of existing preschool through grade 3 (P-3) education and to increase the availability of P-3 options in the complex area.



### Outcomes

By working together to closely examine and address the early literacy needs of children in KKP, public schools, community providers, and families have helped children experience substantial gains in reading proficiency over the past five years (SY 2008-09 – SY 2011-12).

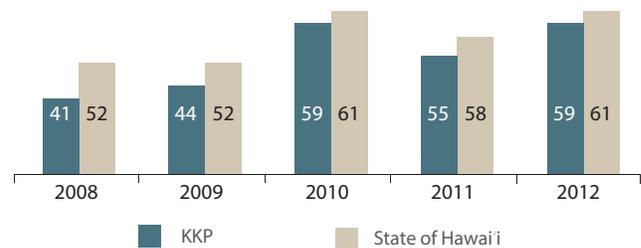
**Figure 1. Percentage of all 3rd Grade Students Meeting Proficiency in HSA Reading (Statewide)**



Over the past five years:

- For all students in the KKP complex area, there was a 16 percent increase in reading proficiency achievement on the HSA.
- The growth in reading proficiency achievement (16%) for KKP students outpaced the state average growth (9%) by 7 percentage points.

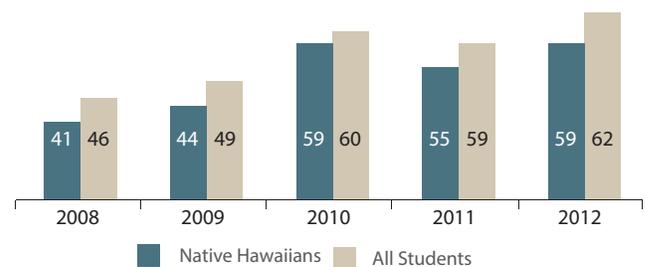
**Figure 2. Percentage of Native Hawaiian 3rd Grade Students Meeting Proficiency in HSA Reading (Statewide)**



Over the past five years:

- KKP NH reading proficiency has steadily grown at an average annual rate of 4.5 percent.
- NH students across the state experienced an average annual rate of growth in HSA reading proficiency achievement at half the rate of NH students in KKP (2.25 percent annually).

**Figure 3. Percentage of all 3rd Grade Students Meeting Proficiency in HSA Reading (within the KKP Complex Area)**

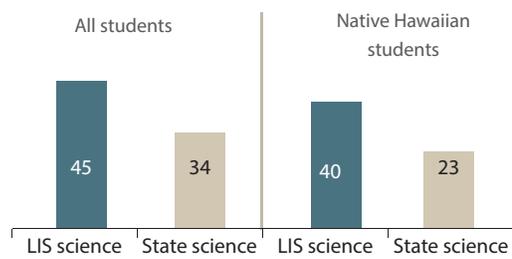


Over the past five years:

- NH students in KKP had an 18 percent increase in reading proficiency achievement on the HSA (as compared to a 16 percent increase for all students in KKP).



**Figure 4. Percentage of Students Meeting Proficiency in HSA Science at KKP/LIS Science Sites with 5 (or more) Years at Site (school-level, SYE 2013)**



## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

### Increasing access to preschools

Over the past few years, P-3 efforts in KKP strategically focused on creating more preschool seats and early childhood development options for our earliest learners. Four new preschool classrooms on KKP elementary school campuses were created through the use of early childhood subsidies to meet the need for preschool programs in the community. Three of these classrooms are inclusion classrooms that serve preschool children with disabilities. For school year 2014-15, all six elementary schools in KKP (which represent 20% of the state's total preschool funding allocation of 30 schools) were selected by the State to include preschool classrooms that will be free to four-year-olds of families that meet eligibility criteria for financial need.

Recognizing that some parents and caregivers choose home-based care, two Family Child Interaction Learning groups were also supported through the KKP P-3 Initiative in two communities. Both programs met weekly and offered early learning activities for young children 3-5 years of age who were not enrolled in preschool. In addition, to prepare children who have not attended a preschool, KKP P-3 has partnered with Keiki Steps to Kindergarten to provide funding for summer transition programs that prepare children for the expectations of kindergarten at select elementary schools across the complex area.

### Improving the overall quality and professional culture of early childhood education

Investing in teacher capacity building related to quality instruction for early learners has been a key strategy for KKP. While this strategy aims to develop overall teacher professionalism, the primary objective of this effort is to support teachers' improvement of instruction and assessment to positively impact student achievement.

Efforts by the KKP P-3 initiative provided preschool and grade K-3 teachers with professional development focusing on child development, classroom assessments, standards-based

lesson development, reflective and intentional teaching, and developmentally-appropriate classroom practices. In addition, P-3 teachers also experienced professional learning aimed at recognizing and addressing the underlying challenges for children who may enter school for the first time with a limited vocabulary and lack of early learning experiences. Through these learning opportunities, teachers were able to develop a deeper understanding of the needs of children and families who are economically disadvantaged.

To enhance these professional offerings, the complex area has partnered with Kamehameha Schools Literacy Instruction and Support Division (LIS) to provide additional complex-wide professional development (PD) geared toward improving K-3 instruction. One example of such PD offering includes training on the use of Thinking Maps, an instructional tool for improving student critical thinking skills. Other PD supports include the integration of relevant, place-based curriculum and job-embedded coaching supports for science literacy instruction.

In addition to these focused efforts in teacher development, the KKP complex has also significantly invested in instructional leadership for administrators and teacher leaders. In partnership with School Synergy, all K-12 schools in KKP have a school-based leadership team comprised of teachers and administrators (TIPS team) who focus on improving instructional quality in systematic ways through on-site school reviews. In addition, LIS is working with the complex area to strengthen instructional leadership through the KKP Instructional Coaches Academy. These instructional support systems are embedded within schools and the complex area to sustain the resources and learning opportunities funded by RTTT beyond the initiative's end in 2014.

Coupled with investments in instructional capacity-building, accountability and evaluation supports have also become more systemic in KKP. Preschool teachers are being supported and evaluated with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observations and feedback, while K-12 administrators and teachers are using The Framework for Teaching to promote understandings and expectations around quality instruction. To ensure that these evaluation systems meet their intended purposes of providing clarity and supports around effective teaching, both administrators and teachers have participated in training.

Most Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers in KKP participated in training to better understand overall expectations around quality early childhood education as reflected by CLASS. Additionally, recognizing CLASS to be a new system of evaluation, observation data was provided for individual teacher reflection rather than used for evaluation. Moreover, coaching support was provided between initial and final observations for early educators.



Through collaboration with LIS, introductory sessions for the Framework for Teaching were provided to all K-12 teachers in KKP to build shared understandings around quality teaching and to reinforce the establishment of systems for effective teacher evaluation and feedback. These systems and supports for teacher evaluation will help to build a reflective and accountable teacher workforce in the complex area.

### Creating relevant ways to engage students and families

Engagement has been another key strategy for actively involving students in the learning and meaning-making. A key lever to fostering student engagement through curiosity, inquiry, collaboration and exploration has been through partnership with LIS. Resource teachers and coaches provide direct science literacy instruction to K-3 students, collaboration and coaching supports to grade K-4 teachers and develop place-based, culturally-relevant literature and resources to support student and professional learning in all six elementary schools in the complex area.

Overall, schools that have committed to five years of K-3 science literacy instruction, experienced an average science proficiency rate that is 11 percentage points greater than the state average. Native Hawaiians in these schools achieve at rates that are 6 percentage points higher than state and 17 percentage points better than the overall average for Native Hawaiians in the state (see Figure 4).

The complex area has also strategically prioritized efforts to engage families in their children's learning. LIS works with all complex area elementary schools to support their initiatives to engage families. In partnership, they have served hundreds of families by providing school-wide family events, culture-based/science literacy workshops, home projects, and newsletters.

A community partners' group that includes Parent Community Networking Coordinators met regularly to share ideas and resources for the communities in KKP. Parent workshops were provided annually at KKP elementary schools that focused on family values, support for enhancing literacy in the home, and building lasting and loving relationships. Additionally, KKP's P-3 initiative provided a home-school book bag rotation for all children in KKP preschools, Kindergarten, Grade 1 and Family Child Interaction Learning programs. KKP P-3 has also developed and widely distributed family-friendly brochures demonstrating ways in which parents can provide literacy, math, and science activities in the home through family routines.

## CONCLUSION

### On the horizon

To continuously strengthen early educational efforts, the KKP complex area will focus on increasing articulation between preschool and K-3 experiences. And while early literacy achievement remains a focal point for KKP, educators recognize that Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) disciplines are also critical building blocks for young learners. KKP is poised to be a model for other complex areas in the area of early science instruction considering that the growth and achievement component of the new Strive HI accountability system includes science as a core academic content area. With KKP's significant investment in early science learning, we are beginning to see powerful results for students and schools that have focused on K-3 science inquiry and learning.

The KKP complex area has spent the past several years maximizing its resources to establish a sound educational support system to transition to new accountability measures like the Common Core State Standards, Smarter Balance Assessment, and Strive HI. This solid foundation will sustain the benefits of RTTT – in early literacy and throughout K-12 – well beyond the end of the initiative, supporting positive early learner growth for years to come.



Mahalo nui kākou! This brief was written with the collaborative contributions of many. Mahalo to the following:

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