

An Introduction to the 'Ōpio Project

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Information Brief Series

Kamehameha Schools Research & Evaluation Division



Premise of the Project

Much of the research about Native Hawaiian children and youth has been based on a deficits model that highlights shortcomings of the Hawaiian population. Recognizing the importance of a culturally appropriate and strengths-based learning environment as a route to academic success, Kamehameha Schools, several of the Hawaiian culture-based charter schools with whom we partner, and Search Institute are developing a new survey to better understand and support the development of Native Hawaiian youth. This survey builds on the work already conducted by Search Institute and their substantial expertise in this area.

Foundation of the Project

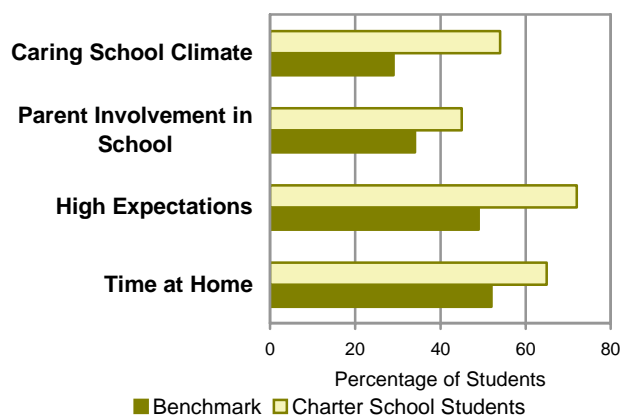
An independent, non-profit organization, Search Institute provides a well-researched and established perspective on understanding and measuring assets through its surveys for young people of all age groups. Based on research with over two million youth since 1989, the surveys measure 40 developmental assets and are constructed around a framework of “concrete, common sense, positive experiences and qualities essential to raising successful young people...with the power to influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible adults” (Search Institute, 2005a, p. 1). The 40 developmental assets are divided into two equally important categories, external and internal, which respectively capture the experiences and qualities of young people referred to in the framework.

In May 2005, Kamehameha Schools partnered with several Hawaiian-focused public charter schools to administer Search Institute's *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors* survey. A total of 187 surveys were completed by students in grades 6 through 12 from six of the charter

schools, representing 72% of the schools' total student populations. The data were then compared with a benchmark group of 148,000 students across the nation who participated in the survey in 2003. The results revealed areas of relative strength for the charter school students consistent with traditional Hawaiian values and emphasis on 'ohana and community.

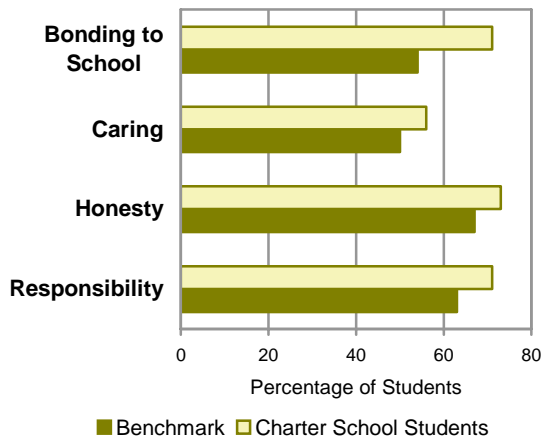
The external areas of strength are shown in Figure 1, taken from Tibbetts *et al.* (2006). *Caring School Climate* and *Parent Involvement in School* both concern the support young people receive, in terms of a positive and encouraging school environment and the extent of their parents' involvement in school-related activities and events. *High Expectations* reflects young people's beliefs that they are being positively pushed to reach their full potential, and *Time at Home* is related to a constructive, purposeful use of time.

Figure 1. Areas of relative strength for external assets



The internal areas of strength are presented in Figure 2 (*Ibid*). *Bonding to School* captures a respondent's commitment to learning while *Caring*, *Honesty*, and *Responsibility* portray the internalization of the values of helping others, being truthful, and accepting responsibility for one's actions.

Figure 2. Areas of relative strength for internal assets



Other assets were less well represented among the charter school students relative to the benchmark group, including those related to positive identity. This may be partly explained by cross-cultural research on self-esteem and self-promotion which suggests that although self-esteem is considered a universal component of healthy development, the ways it is manifested may vary across cultures. It is therefore possible that the under-representation of these assets was “in part, a function of cultural differences in how students present themselves” (Tibbetts *et al.*, 2006). As seen in Figures 1 and 2, other assets with clearly evident counterparts in Hawaiian culture whose reporting did not entail self-promotion were communicated as strengths.

Necessity of the Project

As previously touched upon, research shows that behaviors, expectations, and communication patterns found in ethnic minority communities often conflict with mainstream school culture and curricula (Jordan, 1992). While commonly used tools such as the surveys developed by Search Institute have been shown to work with minority populations (Scales *et al.*, 2000), they still represent a mainstream perspective on well-being. For example, there are differences in how Search Institute defines some assets (e.g., cultural identity) and minority peoples’ understandings of them. Other assets that are important to many indigenous peoples, such as factors relating to spirituality and sense of place, are omitted from the survey altogether.

Consequently, the new ‘Ōpio survey, which will be adapted from the existing Search Institute surveys, will be more reflective of a Hawaiian perspective on well-being. The survey will focus on areas most directly affected by schools and existing assets of particular importance in Hawaiian culture. It will also redefine certain assets, such as those related to cultural identity, and introduce assets significant to Hawaiian culture not currently in the Search Institute’s *Attitudes and Behaviors* survey.

Implementation of the Project

The ‘Ōpio Project will be conducted in four phases:

Phase 1: Baseline Data Collection & Planning (*pau*)

Data collection from KS Hawai‘i Campus and participating charter schools using the *Me and My World* and *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors* surveys.

Phase 2. New Item Try-Outs (*May 2008*)

Development and validation of new items for use with Hawaiian population in collaboration with an advisory committee and Search Institute researchers.

Phase 3: Field Test (*October 2008*)

Revision of survey based on pilot-test results and field-testing at KS campuses and in selected charter schools.

Phase 4: Dissemination (*February 2009*)

Completion of final survey along with scoring protocols and possible development of a web-based application for administration and reporting. Dissemination to KS educational programs and partner organizations, and indigenous education, research, and evaluation communities through existing collaborative relationships with Search Institute.

Sources:

- Jordan, C. 2005. The role of culture in minority school achievement. *Kamehameha Journal of Education* 4:135-149.
- Scales, P.C., P.L. Benson, N. Leffert. 2000. Contribution of developmental assets to the prediction of thriving among adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science* 4 (1): 27-46.
- Search Institute. 2005. *Introduction to Assets*. <http://www.search-institute.org/assets>.
- Tibbetts, K., K. Kahakalau, and Z. Johnson. 2007. Education with Aloha and Student Assets. *Hulili* 4:147-181.

