



A'O A MĀLAMA REPORT

CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING ON HAWAI'I ISLAND



INTRODUCTION

EARLY LEARNING & CHILDCARE

Early childhood education and child care are pivotal components in the developmental journey of children, laying a foundation that significantly influences their future learning and success. On Hawai'i Island, the landscape of early learning and child care is as diverse and dynamic as the island itself, presenting unique opportunities and challenges for families, educators, and service providers alike.

E lawe i ke a'o a mālama, a e 'oi mau ka na'auao. "He who takes his teachings and applies them increases his knowledge." – Mary Kawena Pukui, 'Ōlelo No'eau No. 328

In partnership with Vibrant Hawai'i's network of over 40 Resilience Hubs, the Vibrant Hawai'i Ambassadors and UH Hilo's Ka Pouhana students connected with over 800 parents of children ages 5 and below to learn more about their child care and early learning preferences, barriers, and experiences engaging with providers.

This report provides the results of the A'o A Mālama Early Child care Survey and individual parent interviews conducted between November 2022 and July 2023.

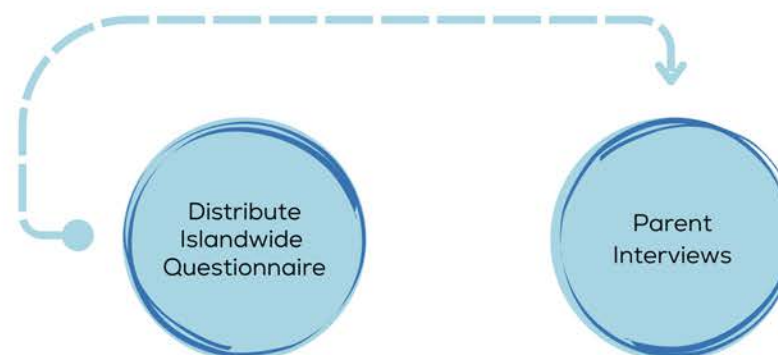
REFLECTION POINT

The report's findings can foster community discussions and collaborations, leading to innovative solutions and enhanced services. Investing in quality early education can pave the way for long-term positive outcomes, benefiting both the current generation and those to come.

Our research aimed to:

- Identify preferences in child care and early learning and early learning, by Hawai'i Island district
- Identify barriers and challenges to accessing child care and early learning and early learning, by district
- Inform a strategic roadmap for child care and early learning and early learning providers on Hawai'i Island

Two Phase Research Approach:



The research consists of two phases. During **Phase 1**, the goal was to recruit 700 parents and caregivers of children ages 5 and below across Hawai'i Island to complete a questionnaire on their access to early child care. To gain deeper insight, **Phase 2** involves the facilitation of interviews with a subset of parents and caregivers to share their knowledge and experience related to the research goals. In this report, we provide findings from the A'o A Mālama Early Child care Survey, parent interviews, and preliminary recommendations.

The survey was administered between November 12, 2022 and March 16, 2023.

Administered at community events held islandwide in partnership with Vibrant Hawai'i Resilience Hubs, and via the Vibrant Hawai'i newsletter. Participants received a \$10 stipend upon completing the online survey, which they accessed via a QR code or hyperlink.

The data from **756 households with 1,085 children** are included in this report.

Dates and Locations of Survey Distribution:

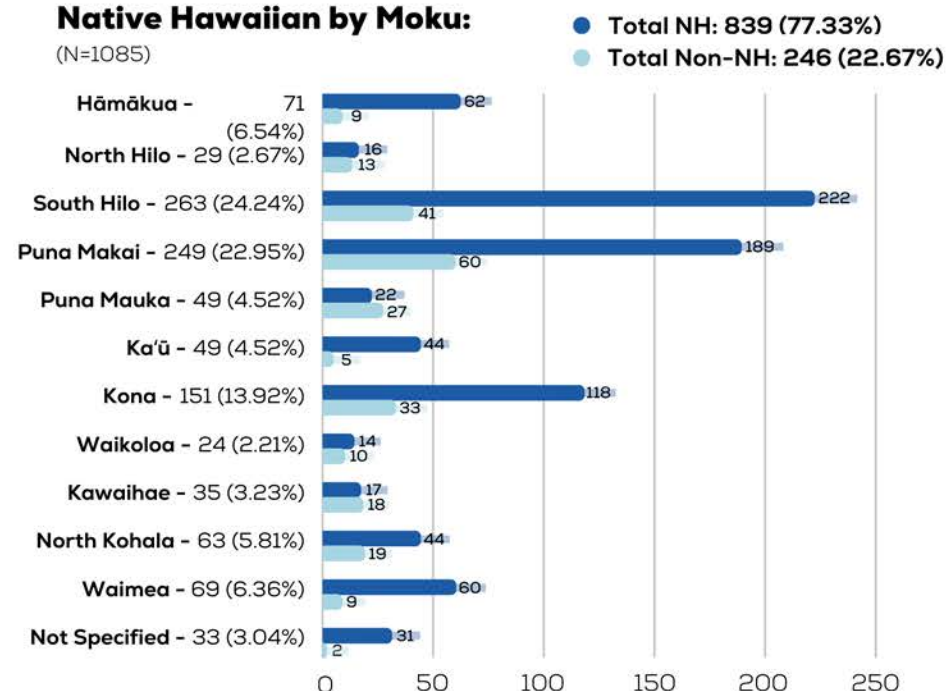
Date	Event/Activity
Nov 12, 2022	Puna Makahiki
Nov 19, 2022	North Hawai'i Resilience Fair
Dec 3, 2022	Hāmākua Recreation Christmas Carnival
Dec 12, 2022	Hilo Makahiki
Dec 13, 2023	Merry Mea'ai Food Distribution Sign Up
Jan 21, 2023	Ka'ū Makahiki
Jan 28, 2023	Laupāhoehoe Resilience Fair
Feb 4, 2023	Revitalize Puna
Feb 14, 2023	Vibrant Hawai'i Newsletter and Direct Recruitment

Participating Communities by Moku:

Hāmākua - Honoka'a, Kukuihaili, 'O'okala, Pa'auilo
North Hilo - Ahualoa, Hakalau, Honomū, Laupāhoehoe, Pāpa'ikou, Pepe'ekeo
South Hilo - Hilo, Ka'ūmana, Keaukaha, Pana'ewa, Waiākea
Puna Makai - Ainaloa, Hawaiian Beaches, Hawaiian Paradise Park, Hawaiian Shores, Ka'ena Community, Kalapana, Kea'au, Maku'u Hawaiian Homestead, Nānāwale, Orchidland, Pāhoa,
Puna Mauka - Fern Acres, Hawaiian Acres, Kurtistown, Mt. View, Volcano
Ka'ū - Hawaiian Ocean View Estates, Nā'ālehu, Pāhala
Kona - Capt. Cook, Hōlualoa, Hōnaunau, Kailua-Kona, Kealakehe, Kealakekua, Keauhou, La'i'ōpua Village, Palisades, Pu'uanahulu
Waikoloa - Kūki'o, Waikoloa
Kawaihae - Kailapa
North Kohala - North Kohala
Waimea - Kamuela
Not Specified - Hawai'i, Hawai'i Big Island, Hawai'i Community, Hawai'i County, Hawaiian Community

Native Hawaiian by Moku:

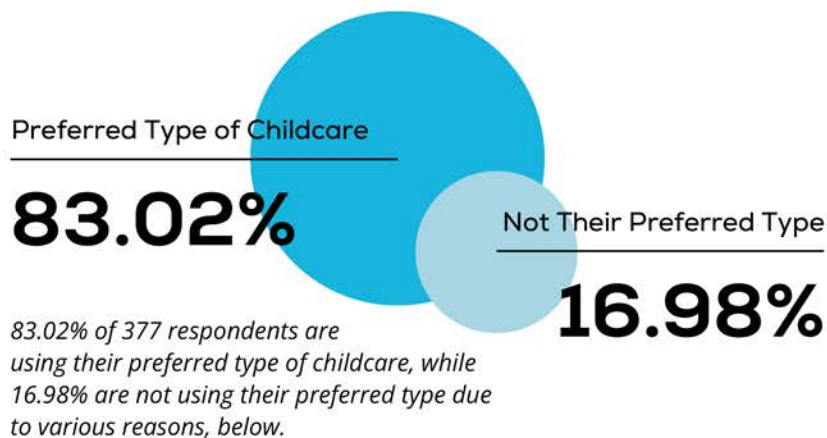
(N=1085)



Summary of Findings:

Cost was the largest consideration in terms of child care/early learning decisions. Examining subsidy and support structure for families can widen access for those families who would like child care/early learning opportunities for their keiki but cannot afford it.

Child Care and Early Learning Preferences:



Reasons for Not Using Preferred Childcare Type:

Cost	83.93%	Hours of Operation	33.93%
No Openings	55.36%	Other	10.71%
Distance	25.00%		



How are your child care needs met?

(N=1037)

At home with parent or primary caregiver	44.26%
Elementary School	18.03%
Preschool	15.72%
Kūpuna/family/family friend	14.75%
Licensed childcare and early learning provider	7.23%

The respondents were then asked if they could, would their preferences change.

52.97% Experienced a change in childcare preferences from pre-pandemic to the present.



67.12% of respondents indicated their preferences would change if they had access to paid family leave.

FINDINGS & CHALLENGES

Childcare Availability and Access: Impact on Employment or School Participation

60.37% of 429 respondents, whose primary child care is at home, stated that the lack of child care affects their ability to work or attend school.

By Moku, is this child care or early learning option available 95% of the time that you need it?

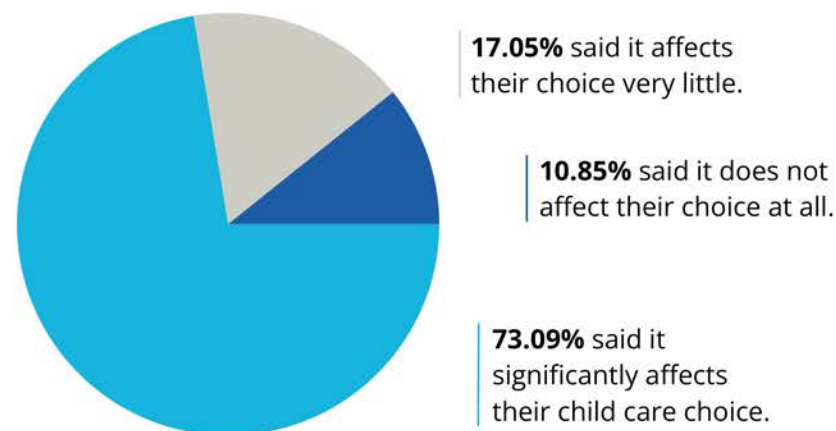
Moku	No	Yes
Hāmākua	0.00%	4.53%
North Hilo	1.23%	4.12%
South Hilo	4.12%	23.46%
Puna Makai	1.23%	16.46%
Puna Mauka	0.41%	2.06%
Ka'ū	0.41%	1.65%
Kona	2.88%	9.88%
Waikoloa	0.00%	2.06%
Kawaihae	0.00%	1.23%
North Kohala	1.23%	4.94%
Waimea	0.00%	10.29%
Not Specified	2.47%	5.35%
Total (N=243)	13.99%	86.01%

86% of 243 respondents have child care available 95% of the time, while 14% do not.

Financial Assistance:

53% of respondents receive financial assistance or subsidies for child care, early learning, or preschool.

Among those receiving financial support: How much does the receipt of financial assistance/subsidy affect your preference/choice?



Commute Times:

40 min Average Commute Time

- Average time from home to provider: 19 minutes
- Average additional time from provider to work/school: 21 minutes

Commute times vary significantly based on respondents' locations.

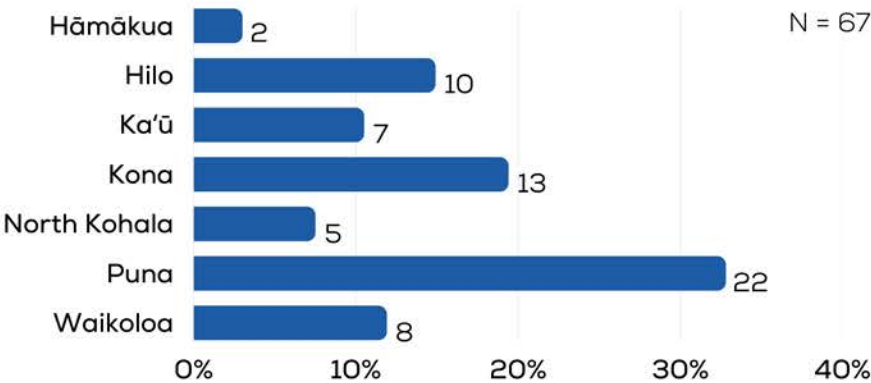


PHASE 2: INTERVIEWS

WITH PARENTS AND CARETAKERS

Vibrant Hawai'i reached out to potential participants across Hawai'i Island.

The research team contacted 96 individuals who either signed up to participate or were referred by other participants. Each person was contacted up to three times via telephone call or text to participate in the interviews. Of those, **67 qualified** (had keiki that were 3-4 years old and not currently enrolled in preschool) and completed the phone interviews.



Employment Status:

55.2% of caretakers reported being employed.

Of these, **62.2%** worked full-time, and almost one-quarter (**24.3%**) juggled two or three jobs.

Native Hawaiian:



More than half identified their keiki as Native Hawaiian:

61.2%

Research Methodology

Descriptive statistics like frequencies and averages helped identify prevailing responses and patterns. However, due to the potential of small sample sizes to skew results, findings were disaggregated by district and Native Hawaiian identity only when sample sizes were sufficiently large. Interview responses were transcribed and qualitatively analyzed, using inductive coding to allow themes to emerge organically from caregivers' shared experiences, ensuring a grounded understanding of their narratives.

Research Protocol:

Awareness of Preschool Options:

This section focused on evaluating the respondents' knowledge and familiarity with the preschool options available in their communities, and how they came to know about these options.

Experience with Preschool Enrollment:

In this part, respondents who were aware of their options were asked about their past experiences, if any, in applying and enrolling their children in preschool.

Exploration of Other Early Learning Options:

This section was dedicated to discussing other early learning opportunities available within the respondents' communities.

Satisfaction and Importance of Preschool:

The last section aimed to assess the satisfaction of respondents with the available preschool options and understand how crucial they believe preschool education is for their children. Open-ended questions were also included to garner a broader perspective and uncover aspects the caretakers deem significant in a preschool setting.

AWARENESS OF PRESCHOOL & EARLY LEARNING OPTIONS

What preschool options (if any) are you aware of in your community?

- **88.1%** of 67 respondents were aware of at least one preschool in their community.
- **23%** of respondents in Puna were unaware of any preschool options.

Moku	N	%
Hilo	9	90.0%
Kona	11	84.6%
Puna	13	77.2%
All Other Districts	26	100%
Overall	59	88.1%

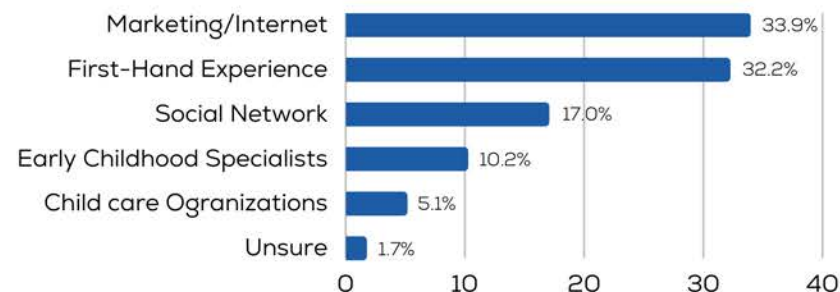
Types of Preschools:

- Over two-thirds named federally or state-funded, public, or charter school programs.
- Six respondents mentioned programs for special needs students, expressing frustration due to inaccessibility for their children.



The pediatrician and developmental pediatrician provided a list of services; however, the information on the list was outdated. Some of the services were either not servicing at the moment or full. [Parent conducted] further extensive research on their own from the information provided on the lists and found a few resources.

How did you hear about these preschools?



- **33.9%** learned about preschools through marketing or internet searches.
- **32.2%** had first-hand experience.
- **17%** learned through their social network.

Familiarity with Application Process:

- **79.6%** of respondents familiar with preschool options knew the application process.
- Only **61%** knew when enrollment periods opened.

Awareness of Other Early Learning Options:

- **Over 25%** stated no other early learning options were available.
- **23.2%** named daycares as other options.
- **16.1%** were unsure of other options.
- **12.5%** mentioned home school



[There are] none. Not even babysitters available in the community. There is an aunty across the street who sometimes can babysit, but only occasionally. We don't have any extended family on the island to help babysit either.

Application to Preschool:

Among 28 respondents who applied for preschool

- **41.7%** were from Puna.
- **28.6%** were from Kona.
- **43.9%** of caretakers of Native Hawaiian keiki applied, compared to **36.0%** of non-Native Hawaiian keiki caretakers.
- On average, respondents applied to **1.9** schools.

Reasons for Not Enrolling:

- Affordability was a major barrier to enrollment.
- Some families had too much income for Headstart but too little for other options.
- Long distances and lack of transportation were also barriers.

What, if any, challenges did you experience during the application process?

Challenges	N	%
Application was challenging	10	37%
Eligibility for financial support/cost prohibitive	8	30%
Enrollment caps/long waitlist	7	25.9%
Developmental milestones no met	5	19%
Medical screening requirements	3	11.1%



I did go through most of the process of enrolling {their keiki} in [preschool]. It just turned out that they wanted our tax information and we weren't interested in sharing it. I felt like the application for the PreK program was actually pretty involved for being a public school.



Enrollment Communication/Affordability Hurdles

There's not a lot of communication about when you find out or if you get in and then when they do, they have a waitlist to even look at your application and then when you come up, they send a letter where you have to put down a deposit by a certain time and our challenge was that we couldn't afford it and if we couldn't afford to put down the deposit we may not be matched without knowing if we could source other funds.

ACCEPTANCE AND INITIAL ENROLLMENT

Acceptance and Initial Enrollment:

- **51.8%** of the 27 caregivers who completed applications had their keiki accepted.
- Of the 14 accepted, all but two initially enrolled their keiki in preschool.



Limited Enrollment Options

We were on the waiting list for YWCA for a year and a half and were finally recently enrolled. We chose this school because it was the only one we could get into.

If your child was accepted to preschool, did you enroll? Why or why not?

- Primary reason for enrollment: perceived benefits of early childhood education.
- Reasons for not enrolling: affordability and lack of specialized services for special needs.



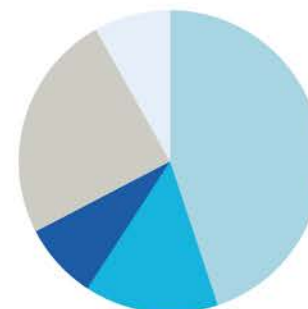
Exposure To A Classroom Setting

We decided to send him to Tūtū & Me, though it's not an everyday preschool, it's at least twice a week just to expose him to a school setting and help prepare him for when we do eventually get him to preschool...Tūtū & Me is to slowly introduce him to the classroom setting. They also do monthly field trips, and offer new opportunities to socialize with kids his age.

How satisfied are you with Early Learning Options?

- Average satisfaction rating: **2.5** (between “not satisfied” and “neutral”).
- **59.2%** of 49 respondents were very unsatisfied, while **32.7%** were satisfied or very satisfied.

Very Unsatisfied	44.9%
Not Satisfied	14.3%
Neutral	8.16%
Satisfied	24.49%
Very Satisfied	8.16%



Caretakers with experience in the preschool process tend to be more satisfied, possibly due to familiarity with navigating the system.

Limited Options and Costs:

- Limited options and costs were major concerns, especially for working parents.
- Caretakers with previous experience in the preschool process reported higher satisfaction levels.



Limited Options, Employment Challenges

I wish there was more options. . . and it's hard to find work without the proper school or daycares available.

IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

How important do you think it is to enroll young children in preschool?

On a scale of 0–10, with 0 being not important at all and 10 being very important

- Ratings ranged from 4 to 10.
- Average rating: **8.7**
- Native Hawaiian-identified keiki’s respondents had a slightly higher average rating of **9.1**

Audience	N	Avg.	SD
Native Hawaiian	39	9.1	1.5
All Respondents	66	8.7	2.0

Reasons for Importance:

- **70.6%** mentioned the importance of social skills, communication skills, and social-emotional skills development.
- Respondents emphasized the importance of preschool for school readiness, especially for children who experienced **isolation** due to the pandemic.

Bridging Isolation and Readiness

[Preschool is] critical for kids to get readiness skills for actual school in terms of handling conflict and sharing. It is important to learn with peers... [my child] is a pandemic baby so there’s a layer of isolation. Preschool would be the environment for child to make friends.

Varied Perceptions:

- Even those who rated the importance of preschool as “7” or less acknowledged the importance of socialization for school readiness.
- Some caretakers believe that while preschool is beneficial for social communication, it is not necessarily crucial for academic success.

If you could create the ideal early learning or preschool environment for your child, what would it be?

- Caretakers envision ideal preschool environments that **promote socialization** through hands-on activities.
- Descriptions of ideal settings include classrooms that are fun, educational, and provide a positive first experience for children transitioning into kindergarten.
- **Affordability and flexibility** in schedules were also highlighted as important factors.



What’s Your Ideal Learning Environment?

[I would like] More exposure to other girls with smaller classroom sizes about 10 students, good teacher-child ratio, something child-led, not so much structure, and teacher-directed, but still learning the basics foundations, like reading, writing, and math, but in a way that works for each individual learning styles.. My daughter has big feelings, so I would love to see a preschool that allows children to feel their feelings instead of telling them they can’t cry or to go into the corner. I would love for a school to help her manage her emotions, like we do at home.

1. Enhance Communication and Information

Dissemination:

Improve the communication strategies to ensure that parents and caregivers are well-informed about the available preschool options, application processes, and eligibility criteria.

2. Expand Availability and Accessibility:

Explore partnerships with community organizations to create more preschool slots and enhance the diversity of available options.

3. Financial Assistance and Affordability:

Advocate for policies that make preschool education more affordable, such as subsidies or sliding scale fees based on income.

Promote awareness of available financial assistance options and simplify the application process for subsidies and scholarships.

4. Support for Diverse Needs:

Ensure that preschools are equipped to support children with diverse needs, including those requiring special education services.

5. Facilitate Transition to Preschool:

Develop programs that help children and families transition smoothly into the preschool environment, such as orientation sessions or gradual entry processes.

6. Continuous Improvement and Feedback:

Implement mechanisms for ongoing feedback from families to continuously improve services, responsiveness, and the relevance of preschool programs.

7. Promote the Importance of Early Education:

Engage in community outreach and education to enhance understanding of the benefits of preschool and the options available to families.

8. Review and Update Policies:

Ensure that policies facilitate access and inclusivity, removing barriers that may hinder families from accessing preschool education.



Appendix A: Survey and Interview Protocols

- See full survey and phone interview protocols [here](#).

Appendix B: Data Tables and Graphs

- See data tables and graphs with descriptions [here](#).

Appendix C: Glossary of Terms

- **Caretaker/Caregiver:** An individual who takes care of a child's needs, education, and welfare, such as a parent, guardian, or designated adult.
- **Early Childhood Education (ECE):** A branch of education theory that relates to the teaching of young children (formally and informally) up until the age of about eight.
- **Keiki:** A Hawaiian term for child or children.
- **Kupuna:** A Hawaiian term meaning elder, grandparent, or an older person.
- **Moku:** A Hawaiian term for district, used in the context of the report to refer to different areas or districts in Hawai'i.
- **Pandemic Baby:** A term used to refer to babies born during the COVID-19 pandemic, who have had limited social exposure due to lockdowns and social distancing measures.
- **Preschool/Pre-K:** An early childhood program where children learn social skills and basic pre-academic skills to prepare them for kindergarten and future schooling.
- **Tūtū & Me:** A traveling preschool in Hawai'i that provides an interactive learning experience for keiki and their caregivers.
- **Waitlist:** A list of children waiting to get admission into a preschool or early learning center due to lack of immediate availability.
- **YWCA:** Young Women's Christian Association, a nonprofit organization that provides various services, including child care and early learning programs.

Appendix D: Acknowledgements

- **Participants and Families:** A heartfelt mahalo to the caretakers and families who participated in this study. Your experiences and insights were crucial in shaping the findings and recommendations of this report.
- **Community Partners and Organizations:** We appreciate the collaboration and support of Dr. Margary Martin, Executive Director of the University of Hawai'i at Hilo's Center for Place-Based Socioemotional Development, who played a vital role in facilitating this research.
- **Research Team:** Mahalo to the dedicated team of researchers who worked diligently to collect, analyze, and present the data in a comprehensive manner. Fellows and Ambassadors of Vibrant Hawai'i's 'OAKA (Benjamin Rudo, David Freund, Amylia-Rae Gandolf, Makana Waikiki, Ku'uhiapo Jeong, Makamae Manious Thill), students and faculty of UH Hilo's Ka Pouhana program (Adam Bento, Hōku Brown, Ewalea Dameg, Fishman-DeVera, Kalehua Kukahiko, La'akea Judd, and U'ilani Miner-Ching), Dr. Rick Kobayashi.
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- **Reviewers:** Thank you to those who took the time to review and provide constructive feedback on the report, ensuring its accuracy and comprehensiveness.

Appendix E: Contact Information

- For further information, questions, or to discuss collaboration opportunities related to this report, please feel free to reach out to the appropriate contact listed below:

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