

3 schools honored for student-led beautification

By Victoria Budiono

Today


Three public schools in Hawaii have been awarded the 2025 Cooke Beautification Award for Public Schools in recognition of campus projects that blend environmental education, Native Hawaiian culture and student-driven creativity.

Innovations Public Charter School and Mountain View Elementary School on Hawaii island, along with Kalaheo High School on Oahu, each received \$5,000 for completed beautification projects that engaged students and the broader school community.

The biennial award, administered by the Hawaii Community Foundation on behalf of the Cooke Foundation, honors schools for transformative efforts that improve campus environments and foster educational enrichment.



ADVERTISING



Stelo by Dexcom - Sponsored

Tips for better sleep and more stable blood sugar

Learn seven tips to help you establish a sleep routine, manage your blood sugar, and get better sleep.

Learn more >

“It is such an inspiration to see the creative hearts and minds of students at work producing beautiful and inviting spaces in which to learn and play,” said Greg Wrenn, president of the Cooke Foundation and coordinator of the Beautification Award program. “It has always been our premise that a beautiful environment at school is conducive to learning and encourages respect for one’s school, respect for others and respect for oneself. We are so proud to support these schools in a small way and recognize the students and their communities for their hard work and impressive achievements.”

Since the program’s launch in 2008, the Cooke Foundation has awarded \$145,000 to 29 public and charter schools across the state.

At Innovations Public Charter School in Kailua-Kona, students and volunteers transformed an underused section of the middle school campus into a thriving edible garden.

Don't miss out on what's happening!

Stay in touch with breaking news, as it happens, conveniently in your email inbox. It's FREE!

Sign Up

By clicking to sign up, you agree to Star-Advertiser's and Google's [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).
This form is protected by reCAPTCHA.

Led by a dedicated garden teacher and supported by faculty in environmental science and agriculture, 70 middle school students and 75 parents helped construct raised beds and plant crops like kale, herbs, papaya and dragon fruit. The school also built an imu and regularly sells produce at local farmers markets to support garden upkeep.

“Innovations seeks to create a learning environment that reflects attention to detail, tailored care and intentional purpose in the function and service of each element students interact with,” school director Jennifer Hiro said. “This focus ensures everyone who enters campus feels cared for, welcomed and supported. The outdoor environment sets the tone for a collaborative, caring community of learners.”

Kalaheo High School on Oahu expanded its Hawaiian Studies program with the construction of a traditional Hawaiian hale, built with the guidance of cultural practitioner Keahi Pi’iohia and the support of Paepae O He’eia. Students and faculty worked alongside community members to build Hale Kaleilenaokealoha — “Yellowing Lei of Love” — a 400-square foot structure named in honor of the guardian of Kawainui Marsh and the many hands that made the project possible.

“Hale Kaleilenaokealoha is the first legal indigenous structure on a Department

of Education campus,” said teacher and project coordinator Tara Gumapac. “It would not have been built without the ‘ike, or knowledge, of our Master Hale Builder Keahi Pi’iohia, along with the support of our administrators at the time, Resha Ramolete and James Rippard, as well as our faculty, staff, students, community and our community partner organization, Paepae O He’eia. We hope it serves as a puuhonua for our students — providing a safe place for them to learn, take a break or relax.”

At Mountain View Elementary School, students partnered with the Estria Foundation’s Mele Murals program to create a large mural rooted in Native Hawaiian storytelling. Drawing inspiration from the moolelo of Pele’s journey to find her home, the students incorporated oli, meditation, observation and creative reflection into the design process.

A visit to Hawai’i Volcanoes National Park during the mural’s development coincided with volcanic activity, deepening the students’ connection to the project.

“We are honored to continue our relationship with the Estria Foundation and Mele Murals Program,” MVES Principal Adria Medeiros said. “Our keiki have grown so much through their experiences each year, through each art installation, and through each opportunity to learn from these aina-based experiences.”

Twelve schools applied for the 2025 award cycle, with the winners selected based on the creativity, community involvement and educational value of their completed projects.

See more: [Editors' Picks](#) [Education](#)



0 COMMENTS

