Eleven students stand near the entrance of the Hawaiian I classroom with their teacher and open the class with this chant, E Ho Mai, written by Edith Kanaka‘ole. The chant is used for seeking knowledge, wisdom, and guidance and the students open all of their class sessions in this thoughtful way.

For the first time in its history, HPA is offering a Hawaiian language class, along with Japanese, Spanish, and French. Mākela Bruno-Kidani teaches the course, with assistance from Dana Petteys, HPA’s registrar, who has a background in linguistics.

“Looking at our mission statement and where we currently incorporate Hawaiiana into the school, we felt Hawaiian language was something we could build into the curriculum and it was a logical next step for our language offerings,” said Petteys.

The Hawaiian I course is a pilot project for both HPA and ‘Aha Pūnana Leo, which is based in Hilo. The course uses Pūnana Leo’s Niulolahiki Distance Learning Program, with each student assigned his/her own login information. The curriculum was developed by Dr. Pila Wilson and Professor Kauanoe Kamana of the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo and ‘Aha Pūnana Leo. HPA is the first to use Niulolahiki at the high school level.

“This curriculum is used in universities and community classes statewide,” said Bruno-Kidani, who has been involved with Pūnana Leo’s immersion programs statewide for 12 years, the last six as director of the Pūnana Leo o Wai‘anae preschool.

Students attend class two to three times per week, with Bruno-Kidani leading the class about once every other week. When she’s on campus, Bruno-Kidani facilitates the online program and encourages hands-on learning with her students. She provides interactive activities, speaking practice and pronunciation, and other tools to supplement the students’ online learning.

“If the students have a question about something online, I construct a learning activity so they can understand the online lesson in a hands-on way,” said Bruno-Kidani, who also is incorporating chants and songs, excursions to historic sites, such as Pu’ukohola Heiau, as well as lessons about Hawaiian cultural protocol and values in the class.

Petteys facilitates the class when Bruno-Kidani is not on campus. Students work independently online, in workbooks, and in pair practice. In-between Bruno-Kidani’s class visits, there are two blog components to extend the students’ interaction with their teacher. Bruno-Kidani posts a topic each week that covers a cultural aspect of the language and students respond. There also is an open question forum, where students can get help at any time.

“We knew when we went into this that we were using it as a bridge,” said Petteys. “It wasn’t intended to replace the teacher in the classroom every day.”

The school will hire an Upper School Hawaiian language instructor to teach Hawaiian I and Hawaiian II for the 2011-2012 school year.

“The ‘Aha Pūnana Leo and its Niulolahiki Distance Learning Program is honored to work in collaboration with HPA in bringing Hawaiian language to campus,” said ‘Alika McNicoll, Niulolahiki Distance Learning coordinator. “We are very pleased with the
students’ progress and we hope to replicate this program and make it available to other schools that currently do not offer any Hawaiian language classes. In the near future, we hope to be able to grant college credit to those students who successfully complete all 14 chapter modules, which could be a plus for a college-bound student.”

While the distance learning concept has presented some challenges, particularly in the areas of pronunciation and scheduling, i.e., not having the teacher physically available in class every day, the concept also has provided some unintentional side benefits for the students. Class members have become more responsible for their learning independently and less teacher-dependent. They also are more accountable for how they’re spending their time, observed Petteys.

In fact, students are thriving as they take charge of their learning.

Junior Sophia Stewart-Moore, of Canada, loves the Hawaiian language. She speaks French fluently, but wanted to learn Hawaiian because her Canadian grandmother traveled to Hawai‘i often and picked up Hawaiian words.

“One of the advantages of this class is that I can learn at my own pace and independently,” said Stewart-Moore. “I can type questions on forums anytime and our teacher responds quickly. Overall, I really enjoy it. It’s nice having a small class.”

Senior Gabby Menendez, who’s also taking AP Spanish, likes languages and decided to take the Hawaiian language class because “We live here, so it’s good to know the language of Hawai‘i.” Menendez also dances hula, so it’s easier to express the words. This class has helped my hula a lot.”

Menendez also sees several advantages in the self-directed class.

“You have to pay more attention because you have to teach yourself, which could help you in college,” she said. “This does give you more time to learn because you’re learning on your own. It’s fun and interesting. I’m glad I took this class.”

Although freshman Joey Kailimai is Hawaiian, this is the first time he is taking a Hawaiian language course. He studied Spanish at the Middle School last year.

“I’m interested in bringing Hawaiian back as a language,” he said. “It’s part of me and my family...I feel it was lost along the way.”

Like Stewart-Moore and Menendez, Kailimai likes learning at his own pace, although he cautions that the freedom to learn at one’s own pace can be a disadvantage if the student does not use the time wisely.

“You could sit in class and do nothing. If you don’t have the maturity, you could take a test and not know anything.”

Overall, Brune-Kidani is pleased with the students’ progress. “I think it’s been so great because the online component teaches the students to be responsible for their own learning,” she said. “It’s a whole new concept—it’s the Hawaiian language.

“We try to let everyone know this is not any like any other language course; it’s a language that’s on the brink of extinction, so the students need to realize that they’re part of language revitalization. They’re part of something that’s really big and important in terms of where they’re living and the Hawaiian culture.”

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Editor’s Note: Kuwaii Anakalea teaches Hawaiian language at the Middle School and incorporates Hawaiian studies in the K-5 classrooms. Ma Ke Kula will feature the K-8 Hawaiian program in the Summer 2011 issue.