

2024/2025 J-LEAP REPORT



By Chihiro Goto

Waipahu High School

O'ahu, HI

Aloha! My name is Chihiro Goto. I'm working at Waipahu High School (WHS) on O'ahu, Hawai'i with an amazing teacher, Smith Sensei. This is my first experience working as a teacher. Before applying for J-LEAP, I was a college student. While in college, I met English teachers and international students from a variety of backgrounds, which sparked my interest in the field of education. During my senior year of college, I volunteered to teach Japanese while studying for a test to apply for this program. I've been here in Hawai'i for about 3 months now. Although there are some points that are different from Japan but I'm gradually getting used to life in Hawai'i. I would like to share about my work at WHS and my life.

About Waipahu High School

Waipahu High School is in southwest of O'ahu. The name Waipahu means "Gushing Water". And Waipahu area is a former sugar plantation town. Because of this, 60% of the students are Asian. Among them, Filipino students are the largest. It is said that WHS is the second biggest high school on O'ahu. The school campus is huge with more than 2,600 students and about 200 teachers. There are 7 types of foreign languages, including Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Ilocano, Samoan and Hawaiian.



In my time at WHS so far, there is a unique thing I could see. The students must choose their main academy of study before enrollment. This system is like choosing a department at college. WHS offers the following academies, Arts & Communication, Health & Sciences, Industrial

& Engineering Technology, Natural Resources and Professional & Public Services.

Our Japanese Class



For Japanese class, there are three teachers, and Japanese level range from 1 to 4/AP (college level). My leading teacher, Smith Sensei and I are teaching the following classes, JPN 2 honors (13 students), JPN 3 honors (20+13 students, 2 classes), JPN AP (17 students). Each class is 80-88 minutes long, except on Mondays. For my impression, students' motivation to study Japanese is relatively higher because they are in honors and AP class. In our class, we start the class just like in Japanese school, with “Kiritsu 起立, Kiotsuke 気をつけ, Rei 礼.” After that, we check how to say the date and day, and start small talk. The topics for small talk are national holidays or Japanese culture. My role in the

classroom currently is walking around the classroom and support students in their conversations and answering their questions. When there are three classes in a day, I sometimes lead small talk by following the example set by Smith Sensei in the first class.

No textbooks? Focused on conversation class

Smith Sensei's class style is very unique. In his class, students study Japanese without using textbooks or workbooks, and there are no desks in the classroom. By having students repeatedly practice words and phrases they have learned, he helps them to get used to speaking, and lead them toward acquiring Japanese. I was shocked by his class style at first, but now I feel it is an effective approach for language study focused on conversation.

What we want our students to learn from learning Japanese

Smith Sensei and I share the belief that while classes are important, we also want to ensure that meeting native Japanese people and students of the same age provides meaningful experiences that positively impact our students' lives. We believe that interacting with native Japanese people, other than just Sensei, is incredibly precious. So far, exchange students from Japan have visited WHS twice this year. The first visit was from Edogawa-ku and 20 students came, and they stayed at a WHS student's house for about a week. The second visit was from

Fukuoka, and it was a one-day exchange. After these visits, I could see that some of our students continued to stay in touch with them through social media, rather than it being just a one-time encounter. I have seen students apply what they learned in class and ask questions because they genuinely want to learn more. Seeing students actively use Japanese in real-life situations outside the classroom is exactly the kind of experience we want them to have. Of course, sometimes regular class lessons fall behind, but when I see how much the students are enjoying themselves, I realized that the Japanese language learning we should pursue in our class is not just about studying Japanese itself, but about offering something beyond that.

My private and work life in Hawai'i

My life in Hawai'i is amazing! I have stayed with two WHS teachers so far. They helped me with my driving practice and took me hiking to Diamond Head and Koko Head, and to recommended restaurants and beaches. My host teacher teaches ceramics, so I experienced it at home and made a bowl and a flower vase. Recently, my current host family and I traveled together to a neighbor island, Kaua'i, during fall break. It was truly a wonderful experience! I enjoyed the good old days of Hawai'i that have been passed down in the small towns. My host family welcomed me like a member of their family, and I really appreciate it.



In my work, I was given many opportunities to interact with teachers of other subjects as well as world languages. Recently, we had homecoming week, and it was a great opportunity to get to know the American culture and Waipahu community by watching the school song and cheering competitions and going to the football game with other teachers. Again, I'm very grateful to everyone who gave me a lot of support to help me get used to the new environment. I have met so many people in such a short 3 months. And I would like to say thank you to J-LEAP program, Laurasian Institution for offering such a wonderful program and Waipahu High School. I cherish the encounters and connections I have made so far. I want to do my best here in Hawai'i. I hope that as many students as possible will have the opportunity to learn about new perspectives and cultures other than their own through studying Japanese. Mahalo!