

LONGstorySHORT

with LESLIE WILCOX



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The discussions that we have with our students is, you know, when, when, when we talk to high school kids, and we say, you know, "Why, why is school important?" And they'll, they'll start that, um, you know, that, that that response about, "Well, I need to come to school because, so I can go to college, or I, I can get a good job." Right, so it's college or career. To get a good job. And then-so we asked them, "Well, why do you want to get a good job?" "Well, 'cause I want to make a lot of money." Right, and so before it was, "I want to make a lot of money so that I can buy a new car," or "I can buy a new house," or "I can buy, I can buy, I can, I can." But it's not about the I. Right, so we've shifted that, I think, to, um, 'I want to get a good job so I can support my family. I can give back to mom, who worked multiple jobs, right, to put food on the table as a single parent. Um, I want, I want to, um, have a good job so that I can give back to my community. You know, it's about how do we help-we better ourselves so that we can help others?

So, you've shifted that conversation?

That conversation, right. And it's about-not about what do you want to be when you grow up, but it's about what kind of problems do you want to solve.

He's brought change and heart to Waipahu High School. Meet this humble, rock star educator next on Long Story Short.

One-on-one, engaging conversations with some of Hawai'i's most intriguing people. Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox.

Aloha māi kakou. I'm Leslie Wilcox. Keith Hayashi has led Waipahu High School in central O'ahu as principal since 2009, and has changed many perceptions about the school and public education. He's implemented innovative approaches to help prepare students for college and careers. In Hawai'i education, he is considered a rock star. Hayashi helped to create an Early College program, in which high school students earn college credits within the University of Hawai'i system. It's since been adapted for other public schools, and Waipahu High School has one of the largest Early College programs in the state. He's also fostered partnerships with businesses and organizations, such as Oceanit, Hawai'i Pacific Health, and Hawai'i USA Federal Credit Union to

prepare students for life beyond high school. Keith Hayashi grew up in Kaimukī, O'ahu, and credits his work ethic and success to the lessons he learned at an early age from judo.

Did it hurt you in any way, that, that sport?

I did. I got a bunch of injuries. You know, um, I, I, I remember my parents, uh, my mom especially, had a hard time sometimes coming to the, the tournaments. Um, 'cause, uh, I would regularly go to the hospital for-to the ER, and, um-

What for?

To, um...broken collar bones, dislocated shoulders, uh, dislocated elbows. Um, and it was a point where the, uh, ER personnel, the nurses there, they, they would, they recognize me, right. And, um, I thank my parents 'cause I know all those medical bills are really expensive, yeah, but they continued to support me.

Did you consider giving up after one or two dislocations?

Actually no, because, you know, it's, it's-uh, you become passionate about it, right, and it's something that is a part of you already. We weren't rich, definitely, we weren't, um, but my parents sacrificed a lot, I think, to provide for me. Mom was-worked at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, and my dad, uh, Ed, um, was working at Teritoriya Motors, uh, an auto, auto parts store, and then, uh, later on became a realtor.

And what were you like as a kid?

Um, I was-I wasn't very healthy, though. Uh, I was actually, um...asthma and allergic to different things. So, my, my mom and my dad both said, hey, you know, they gotta get me into some, some kind of athletics. So, they enrolled me in judo. And so, I started when I was five, and initially I hated it. It was hard, you know, um...but I think through the, the guidance of my, my-the instructors there, uh, and-my parents wouldn't let me quit. They wouldn't let me quit, which I-

Did you try hard to quit?

I did, actually, I-it was at Ali'iolani Elementary, the practices. And I remember one time, um...after they dropped me off, I'd sneak around the back and go to the auditorium and sit at the auditorium steps until practice was over. Then I'd get water and put it on my hair, and then come back around, and they'd pick me up, and, you know, "How was practice?" "Oh, it was okay. Was rough. We-sweaty." And I did that a couple of times, then it was, ah, you know, I might as well get in there.

It was harder work to avoid it, right?

It was hard to avoid, right. And so, um, um...the instructor really took me under his wing, you know, and, uh, helped guide me and supported me, and so I learned to love it. You know, and, uh, so did that from five, and then on to Kaimukī High School, and participate in the judo team, met, uh-made a lot of great friends, uh, and those friendships are, you know, to today.

And the principles in judo, do they help you in life, uh, away from the physical side?

They do. Uh, you know, the, uh, uh, judo saying, or what, what the-Professor Kanō, who was the founder of Judo, uh: *seiryoku zen'yō jita kyōei*. Meaning maximum efficiency with mutual welfare and benefit. And I think, um, through the years, I've really taken that to heart, that it's about really putting an effort, not, not only for me, but even for my students at Waipahu. We want to support them, and-so that they can put in the maximum effort, um, but also the importance of that is to benefit others, right, it's mutual benefit. And, um, that, that I think is one thing that has really stuck with me throughout, throughout life. Through judo I think I've met a lot of different people, not only instructors, but competitors, and friendships. Uh, growing up, participating in competitions, uh, not giving up, you know, really trying, and, and I think judo has taught me and, and, and other judoka, um, the importance of perseverance, you know, and that when-if you have a goal, you need to work towards it. And it's hard work, but you, you know, you eventually can do it, as long as you don't give up. Um, I was fortunate also to referee in judo. Um, I was able to travel across the United States refereeing nationally, as well as, um, internationally.

So that decision your parents made when you were five, that's had terrific dividends.

Oh...yes, yes. The impact has been huge. And, uh, you know, traveling to places like, uh, uh, Venezuela twice, and to, uh, uh, Vienna, Austria, you know, this-but meeting different people, and I think it's-that, that, um, that experience and opportunity to travel, uh, is, I think also why it's important, for me, that our students have opportunities to experience other things.

Did you, uh, did you know what you were going to do after high school?

No, actually, uh, after Kaimukī, I, I knew definitely that I needed to go to college. I mean, that was something that my parents always instilled in me.

Had they gone to college?

No, they didn't. Um, my, my mom went to business school. Uh, my dad didn't; went straight into work, um, but worked really hard. And-but from an early age, the importance of education, and also the importance of, no matter what you do, you have to love what you do. And, ad that was really stressed, um, for me.

Well, were you a good student?

Uh, average. Uh-

Are you sure?

Average. Oh yeah, average.

You're not being modest?

No, no, no. not at all, just an average, average student. Um, made it into the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Um...uh, I took my classes, uh...my junior year came around and I got a letter saying you need to declare. You have those credits already, and I didn't know what I wanted to do. So, a friend of mine, uh, she was in education, and she said, um, "Hey Keith, you know, you're in judo. You work with kids, so you should try teaching." You know, and, I was like, "Well okay, I don't know what I'm going to do, so why not? I'll take a shot." So, um, I applied for the College of Education, I got accepted. Um, great-it was, uh-learned a lot about children, uh, became a, uh, first-grade teacher, actually. I was hired as a first-grade teacher at Lehua Elementary, uh, by Gracie Matsua, who was-also was a mentor. And, uh, but then after-in the first year, she asked me if, um, I would be willing to switch and go to sixth grade. I said, "Sure, what, whatever you want me to do." And, uh, just loved sixth grade. And I, and I, I taught fifth and sixth grade for the next, oh, five years.

What did you like about fifth and sixth?

You know, the age. That you could talk to the students. I mean, I love the kinder-uh, first graders, too, but the level that you could talk to the students about, you know, about getting prepared for, for intermediate school to high lands. Um, we would take them on trips to the neighbor island, you know. Uh, we would do mini-society, um, you know, create businesses, and, you know, students would, would problem-solve different things. This is, uh, that level of complexity, I think, that you could work with students was, was exciting.

After teaching at Lehua Elementary School in Pearl City, O'ahu, and then spending a few more years as a resource teacher in the Leeward District Office, Keith Hayashi decided to make the jump into school administration. He trained at Waipahu Intermediate school, and then became a Vice Principal at Waipahu High School, the campus that he would revisit later in his career.

I remember Waipahu High School in the mid 70's, and it was-there, there was a lot of crime. There, there was stabbings, there were fights. There was a lot of rivalry gangs. Um, how much did it change by the 90's?

Uh, there was still quite a bit of fights. Um, there were still rivalries. Um, no, no stabbings or anything like that. I, I think, tough, it, it was, it was a busy time at Waipahu High in that, in that period, and that was in the late 90's, early 2000's. You know, teachers tried really hard. Um, Pat Pederson was the new Principal there, and she was really working to, to change the culture of the school. And so, I, I stayed with Pat for about five years and then became Principal at Waipahu Elementary. Then I got to see both the high school end, but also the elementary, right, and how we can help to support the students, and to prepare them better for the high school. Uh, stayed at Waipahu Elementary for about three years, and then an opportunity to, um, join Superintendent Hamamoto's leadership team as an Area Superintendent for, uh, Pearl City, Waipahu, and Nānākuli complexes.

That's what we call the complex Area Superintendent job-

Right.

So regional boss.

Yeah.

So, you-when you were the CAS, the Complex Area Superintendent, um, did you like doing that? Regional, uh, administration?

I, I did. You know, and yeah, and, and I think it was about the people, you know, and being able to meet and talk with different people, and, um, just kind of get different points of views, you know, and work with the principals. Uh, the, the principals that I had the opportunity to work with were, were outstanding. Uh, then, um, Principal Pederson was going to retire from the high school. And so, I, I had asked, uh, Superintendent Hamamoto if I could step down and, and apply, and you, you know, fortunately she said yes. And so, I applied to Waipahu High School. Luckily, I got the job.

It was 2009.

That was 2009. And here I am, uh, just graduated my tenth class.

Keith Hayashi and the principals who came before him at Waipahu High battled to overcome challenges and negative stereotypes of the area. Hayashi has reshaped the focus of the school, and has elevated the mindset of what his students can achieve.

I ran into a girl who lived on the Pupu streets. She said there were 29 people in a two-bedroom, uh, apartment. The landlord didn't know, but they had 29, and it was-there were a lot of issues having to do with being too close to each other in that place.

Sure, sure. Um, you know, and, and we-and we have multiple families in one unit. We also have families who are living in, um, in, in shelter. We have families who are living in cars, you know. And so, to expect, sometimes, kids to come to school and be ready to learn when they're dealing with multiple, multiple issues, uh...is, is-we gotta remember, yeah, that we gotta take care of these kids first and-with, with their, their basic needs. I tell you, uh, students that come to school and the kinds of challenges that they have. Parents are definite-they're trying to support them, right. It's, it's not that the parents not trying. They're trying, they're working multiple jobs, they're trying to put-they, they want, they want the education for their kids just as much as any other, any other parent in Hawai'i. But there's challenges. Everyone pulls together at the school, and I think that's what really makes Waipahu special, is that everyone's on the same page, and everyone's talking about how we can help the students, right.

How did that happen? Was that a culture you brought, or was that already there?

Um, I, I, I think-well, Principal Pederson, Pat, did a lot of work in helping to build, um, smaller learning communities. Uh, Waipahu, when I got there, was the recipient of federal grants, federal smaller learning community grants. And what that meant was that on, on a large, um, high school, how do we restructure and redesign high schools to be-for it to be more personalized? Uh, I, I think what, what we did, though, was to kind of, maybe, even refine it a little more and to build upon that work. And so early on when we got to Waipahu, it was about who's our client? Who is our customer? And at that time, we had talked about the students being our client and our customer, and-but what happened was the students, at that time, wanted their diploma. So-and that was their goal. So, the focus was a little bit more on the credits to get the diploma, but we needed to shift that. So, the question to our, our faculty and our staff was, 'What if we looked at our clients as post-secondary? What if our clients was industry, or the military? What are they asking for?' And so, uh, we would-in different sessions, you know, kind of brainstorm. What, what kind of people do you want to work with? What qualities do they have?

That's so interesting, 'cause most, um, young people, at least when I was growing up, that-you were never exposed to that question. You didn't really think about that.

Right. And, and so, but, but, but that's, that's important, right? So, so when we talked with the teachers about that, um, they listed all these different qualities. You know, um, they want to work with people who, uh, can get along with each other, that can leverage technology, that are committed to the organization, that are innovative, that can think critically. And so, the question then was if that's what our clients are asking for, that's the kind of people you want to work with, what are we doing in our classrooms to help facilitate that kind of learning? And to provide opportunities for our students to demonstrate that in the classes? And so that, I think, helped to-helped shift some, some of what our focus was to, to, um more clearly define what our purpose was at Waipahu High School. You know, Mark Silliman, uh, had the idea of, hey-

He, he works on your staff?

He is. He's our Director for Early College, Dr. Silliman. Um, uh...and, and wealth of experiences in, in, uh, post-secondary education. You know, at Leeward Community College he was the Chancellor there. And, so he-we worked together, and, you know, Mark came on staff and he was saying, "You know, what about-what if we start thinking about opportunities for students in, in, uh-college opportunities on our campus?" And so, uh, we, we started off with a partnership with the University of Hawai'i West O'ahu with Dr. Garret Suru, and we did a Psych 100 class, and we opened it up to students, and we said, "Seniors and Juniors," and, "Who's interested in taking a college course?" And we had about 30 kids apply, and so we put the 30 kids in a class over summer of, uh, uh...it was 2012, I believe, and in that summer, um, students did really well.

Yeah, these, these candidates, were they your best students, or were they, um-

It was, it was open enrollment. Whoever wanted to come.

And so, who came?

And, and-it was, uh-we had a mix of, mix of kids.

And it did offer them a chance to go-to, to get college credits for free, so that's, that had to be, uh, an incentive?

It was, it was. And-but we didn't know how it would, it would go. So, um, you know, we did the, we did the course, and it was successful. You know, kids did really well. Um, so we said okay, maybe we'll try-in the, in the, uh, fall of 2012, we did a, um, English 100 and a Speech 151 course. Great, great turnout. Kids did well again.

So, you've been doing this since 2012.

Right.

And it sounds like it's grown. What, what's the size of the-how many students now do this?

We have, uh, let's see...last school year, we had, um, 643 students in Early College courses.

How, how large is the student body?

Uh, it's about 2777 students, almost, almost 2800 kids. So that's about one in every four students that's earning college credit on campus.

That's incredible. And how many people are, are going on to graduate from college?

Um, our college numbers are up. Uh, we had students who are-who've earned their associates degrees before they graduated high school. Uh, I think about 21 in the last two years-

So, the-two years done by the time they actually start college.

Right, right. And so, parents, um, love it, you know, because they don't have to pay for two years of college. The students love it because they, they come back and say, "Hey, Mr. Hayashi, the great thing about it is that I'm a college junior, so, uh, my dorms-it-we're, we're not in the freshman dorm. I'm in the junior dorm." You know, and so, um, they're really excited, you know, about that, and it, it's-that's that having that experience and the opportunity builds confidence.

During his tenure as the Vice Principal at Waipahu High School in the mid-90's, Keith Hayashi got married and started a family. Hayashi says he owes a great deal to the support of his family. His elder daughter made the decision to attend Waipahu High School with her father serving as a Principal.

My wife, Donna, who's actually a teacher at Waiau Elementary, and my, my daughter, Kara, is a, um...is currently at Hawai'i Pacific University. She's, uh, she's gonna be a nurse, majoring in nursing, which is great. My second daughter was born, Cammie...and-so she's, uh, she's a sophomore now, and, uh-

What school does she goes to?

She goes to 'Iolani.

'Iolani?

'Iolani. My oldest, my older daughter, Kara, graduated from, uh, Waipahu High School in 2018.

So that's when you, you were, you were there then?

I was, I was there, right. I was at that school.

What was that like being the Principal of...your daughter.

It, it was great. You know, and we, we gave Kara a, a choice, right. And we said, "Where do you want to go to school?" after she finished, uh, middle school. And it was, um-she got into a private school, uh, or public schools. You know, it was, uh-choices

were, like, Moanaloa, or Pearl City, you know, and so forth. And, um-but she said she wanted to go to Waipahu. And so, my wife and I, Donna and I asked her, you know, "Okay, why Waipahu? Right, and you, you know, your, your dad's a Principal there. So, you know, do you really want to go to the, the school?" And she said yeah. She said that she hears about the opportunities, and, uh, she said, "Dad, I think it'd be really cool if you can give me my diploma." And that was a really special moment, you know, to actually, um, have her get-come on stage, and, um, yeah. I gave her the diploma, you know, uh, very emotional. And-but it, it was great. I'm really fortunate to have a very supportive family. I don't think I could do this without, without their support you know, um-

How do they support you?

Well, my, my wife, as a teacher, uh-she also has, uh, she has her Master's Degree in, in administration.

So, you can talk shop with her?

I can, I can talk shop with her. But, um, but definitely I can bounce ideas off of her, which is really good, right, and, and she understands what the challenges are.

Are, are you a workaholic?

Um, I, I, I think I kind of am. I try to balance family and work, but it, it's really hard often times. Um, the, the-my family's so important to me. Um, but the challenges, sometimes, of the principalship is, is great. And, uh, I'm not sure if people really realize, uh...educators, as a whole, have a whole lot of challenges, right? 'Cause we're so committed and passionate about helping, helping our students, helping to build a community. It's a 24-hour job. Uh, you know, we get calls at two o'clock in the morning, you know, by, uh, an alarm company, or by the, uh, the police station who's working with us, right, and saying, "Hey, something's going on in school." I've gotten a call on, uh, New Year's Eve at eleven thirty, ten o'clock-ten to eleven thirty, around there, right before midnight, uh, that there was a break-in at the school. Can you come down? And, you know, I go down and-but we're-I'm with the family ready to celebrate the New Year. We gotta go to the school.

In the spring of 2017, Keith Hayashi was tapped to become Deputy Superintendent of the Hawai'i State Department of Education, and then a few months later, as interim Superintendent for the outgoing Kathryn Matayoshi. Although he was now in the top position with the DOE, Hayashi decided to step away to return to Waipahu High School as Principal in the fall of 2017. He said that there was so much more that he wanted to accomplish.

So, you know, as we build this system of national, national academies, you know, we want to, we want to show everyone in, in the states that, hey, Hawaii is for real. You know, and, uh, we, we, we, uh, we have this robust academy system, um, for schools that choose to do it, and come to Hawai'i, and see what we're doing, you know. And it, and we, we, we can really build on that. Um, and, and, and so that's, I think, that's the exciting part of the work. We, we, we had a, um, a partnership with Hawai'i Pacific Health. We have a medical assistant program. Uh, and that students in their junior or in the senior take, uh, the medical assistant classes so that they can get their national certification. So, at the end of the year, last year, at the end of the year, they took their national certification, and 100% of them passed. We had a celebration with Hawai'i Pacific Health, and, uh...students are making \$20 an hour, yeah, as, uh-HPH guaranteed employment, and they're working there. What a great partnership with industry. Other students have gone onto the mainland, but because there's a national certification, they can work in another state as a medical assistant. Some of the kids are saying they're going to go-save that money to go on to college. One of the parents shared, "Hey, my daughter's making more than I am." You know...I think that's important because if we're looking at supporting and breaking that cycle of poverty, um, it's important that we provide the, these students, and we give kids opportunities and provide them with the skills so that we can, we can break that cycle, you know, and, uh, they can, um, eventually find somewhere that they can better their life. So, and, and I think that's how, in education, we not only create a better school and a better learning environment for our kids, but it's the impact that we have in changing community, you know. And hopefully that-what we're doing at Waipahu, and, and with the support of our intermediate and our elementary schools, we are changing the perception, not only of what others have of Waipahu, but what-of our Waipahu community feels that they can accomplish. You know, and, and, and I think we're doing that.

Keith Hayashi says that he hasn't ruled out returning to a higher-level position within the DOE, but as of this conversation in the fall of 2019, his focus is on Waipahu High School. In 2014, Hayashi was awarded State Principal of the Year by the Hawai'i Association of Secondary School Administrators. He was quick to credit his teachers, staff, partnerships, and students for the success of his school. Mahalo to Keith Hayashi of Pearl City, O'ahu, for sharing his story, and thank you for joining us for this edition of Long Story Short on PBS Hawai'i. I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha nui.

I, I think I, I've been fortunate to work with a lot of different people, right, and it's not-it is not me that's coming up with different ideas. It's not. It's about how we network with others and those opportunities come, and, and it's-there's different people that have shared their experiences and their knowledge, um, that has helped, I think, us to grow. So, I'm appreciative of that, that, that...so, it's all about the people.

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