

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Educators Network
Virtual Meeting – Thursday, February 3, 2022

Moderator and Panelists Bios



Sofia Fojas

Arts Coordinator, Santa Clara County Office of Education

Sofia Fojas is a leader for cultural equity and social justice in the arts. She was born in Honolulu and grew up in San José, California. A classroom music teacher and high school music director for 20 years, she taught orchestra, band, IB Music, and mariachi. In the last 6 years, she has served as a district arts leader in San Francisco and Elk Grove school districts. Ms. Fojas is the Arts Coordinator for the Santa Clara County Office of Education in San José, California. She was a member of the California Alliance for Arts Education and is currently a member of the board of directors for the National Guild for Community Arts Education and serves on its Racial Equity Committee.

Ms. Fojas started her musical career as a violinist in the pit orchestra of the San José Children's Musical Theater and continues to play violin and viola with SF Bay Area choirs and orchestras. She has also performed with Mariachi Cali, Mariachi Atzlan and as a guest in a performance with Mariachi Sol de Mexico. She performed with Los Cenzontles and recorded with them on an album of the Chieftans. She has played in backup orchestras behind Natalie Cole, Dionne Warwick, Andy Williams, Smokey Robinson, and Johnny Mathis. Contact: sfojas@sccoe.org



Kawika Alfiche

kumu hula of the Halau o Keikiali'i, South San Francisco

Kumu Hula Kawika Keikiali'ihiwahiwa Alfiche has been teaching hula and Hawaiian cultural arts for 29 years. Kawika is the Kumu Hula (Master teacher) for Hālau o Keikiali'i, and Director for the Kaululehua Hawaiian Cultural Center in South San Francisco & Napa. With a mission to preserve and perpetuate all things Hawaiian, Kawika spends his life learning, teaching and sharing his culture through the hula and cultural arts and teaches throughout the Globe.

Kawika has had impeccable training from his Nā Kumu. His first Kumu Hula was Tiare Maka-Olanolan Clifford of Hanalei, Kaua'i. After her passing in 1992, Kumu Kawika became haumana of Kumu Hula Harriet Kahalepoli Keahilihau-Spalding of Keaukaha, Hawai'i who had Kawika open Hālau in 1994. Aunty Harriet's kumu was her grandmother, Mary Ahi`eha Kekuewa, who was affectionately known as Mama Fuji'i. In 1996, Aunty Harriet had Kawika fall under Kumu Hula Rae Kahikilaulani Fonseca of Hilo, Hawai'i who is an `uniki (formal graduate) of Uncle George Lanakilakekiahiali'i Na`ope, hula master and treasure of Hawai'i. In March 2007, Kumu Kāwika was one of six to be a part of Kumu Rae's first and only `uniki.

Kumu Kawika is also a composer and recording artist with 4 cd's, Nālei (2005), Kale`a (2011), Nā Mele Kahiko (2013), White Ships (2015) and 5 dvd's Nānā I Ke Kumu (2010), Hula Pahu (2012) and Ho`okupu (2014), Hilo Hanakahi (2016) and Mohala (2020). Currently he is in the studio recording a 5th cd due in 2022.



Kanani Toni Densing

Hula Halau 'O Pi'ilani, Sunnyvale

Kumu Kanani has continued her late mom, Kumuhula Auntie Linda Pi'ilani Danek's legacy by continuing the Hālau and sharing its teachings. She participates in most local and out of state cultural events and hula competitions.

She is creative and continues to delight audiences with her choreography that allows everyone to experience Hawai'i through the many chants and songs. She sings, plays Ukulele and chants all her own Mele.

Kumu Kanani Densing began her formal hula training at the young age of 12 under Loea Naomi Kalama and later studied under Ehulani Lum where she became an Alaka'i. She has extensive training in many private workshops with notable and distinguished Kumu Hula. She has been teaching at Hula Halau 'O Pi'ilani in the Sunnyvale area for over 35+ years.

She has begun to train her daughters, Sam Kaleleonalani and Ashley Puamelia to continue the family legacy. They

are already leaders in the Hālau. They assist in teaching all classes by doing basics, chanting and singing. Her husband is also a musician for the Hālau but began as a Kane Hula dancer.

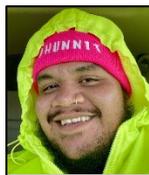
Stop by the Hālau for a visit and begin your hula journey. The Hālau is located at 475 N. Wolfe Road, Sunnyvale, California.



John Ilesha Ena

Program Coordinator, Samoan Community Development Center in San Francisco

Talofa, my name is John Ilesha Ena, and I am currently the Director of Programs at the Samoan Community Development Center (SCDC). I am a trans-female Samoan working at SCDC for 19 years; making 20 years March 4, 2022. Starting at SCDC as a youth program coordinator then the Program Manager to where I am now. I had the honor of creating Polynesian support groups in the high schools, middle schools and elementary schools with the most at-risk Samoan and PI youth in SFUSD; and bringing in indigenous practices to support our at-risk youth. I have also had the honor of building up our youth program Pacific Islander Youth Alliance; and is the biggest program in our office. From this program, we were able to create 2 other youth programs to further provide our Samoan and PI youth with culturally relevant support. Being a part of this great family at SCDC has provided me with much personal growth and spirituality as well.



Daniel Naha-Veevalu

Samoan Community Development Center

Daniel “DannyBoy” Naha-Ve'evalu was born and raised in the Bay Area and has recently moved back after being gone for 10 years. DannyBoy had moved to Atlanta, GA to attend the Art Institute of Atlanta where he studied video production. After 2 years, he applied to the University of Southern California (USC) and was admitted Fall of 2009 into the School of Cinematic Arts and majored in Critical Studies of Film & Television. In 2013, DannyBoy graduated with his bachelor's degree. While in college, DannyBoy was a student organizer for a Pacific Islander initiative called Promoting Unity, Liberation and Education or PULE (pronounced pooh-leh) that he created while working with Asian Pacific American Student Services, a department of Student Affairs at USC.

After graduation, DannyBoy worked for Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC) as the Program Coordinator for Pacific Islander Leaders of Tomorrow, a culture-based and community-focused leadership development program designed to build the leadership within the Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (NHPI) community. After 4 years, DannyBoy decided to move back to the Bay Area to help take care of his family and worked for The Office of Diversity and Equity in San Mateo County as the NHPI Community Outreach Worker in a limited term position for 3 years. Currently, DannyBoy serves as the Program Manager for the Pasifika United Collaborative at The Samoan Community Development Center in San Francisco. DannyBoy recently found a strong sense of solace in his identity as a Queer Pacific Islander-Sāmoan-American male, a battle he has struggled with for a lifetime.



Leebo Pomele

Specialist, Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services, Youth Intervention Services

I was born in American Samoa, and my parents worked and saved all their earnings to bring us to America for a better education and a bright future. Unfortunately, it didn't quite work out as they had planned. My father passed away when I was only 11 years old, so as a teenager, I began to engage and choose another path in life.

I dropped out of high school as a freshman and decided to get involved with the street lifestyle. And, from there everything went downhill, but to make a long story short. At the age of 35, I decided to enroll back in school and pursue an MPA degree in Sociology/Criminal Justice. Honestly, it wasn't easy, but it was worth it!!!

I am currently working with the City of San Jose with the Youth Intervention Programs to help the disadvantaged, gang impacted youth and adults to find their purpose in life.
