

## GET TO KNOW

# Holy Family Catholic Academy



Celeste Akiu  
School Leader



## TYPE OF SCHOOL

Private school

## LOCATION

Honolulu, Hawaii

## TOTAL STUDENTS

300–400 students in  
preschool–8th grade

## THE VISION

### A whole child approach starts with teacher–student connections

At Holy Family Catholic Academy, which serves students in preschool through 8th grade, school leader Celeste Akiu works with her staff to create a caring community that prioritizes the whole child. This is part of a deep-rooted philosophy and commitment called “ho’āla hou,” which in Hawaiian means to “awaken anew.”

“Ho’āla hou is about the awakening of one’s self,” said Akiu. “I have always felt in my heart, as a teacher and as a community member, that we all need a sense of self and a sense of belonging. That’s been my guiding light.”

While academic excellence is at the core of each HFCA classroom, **Akiu said that school is “not just all about the learning. When children feel invisible or that they are not heard, the learning doesn’t happen. You need to have connections.”**

So when Akiu learned about Along, the teacher-student connection builder, she recognized that the tool could help her create a culture of community and individual awakening on her campus.



## THE STRATEGY

### Regular check-ins tailored to each classroom need

At the start of the school year, Akiu introduced Along to the staff with a very clear objective: knowing students helps create engagement in the classroom and connects teachers more directly with each child.

Teachers throughout HFCA—mainly in the upper elementary and middle school grade levels—began regularly using Along in a variety of ways, depending on the needs of their classroom. Some teachers posted an Along question weekly during homeroom time, while others used the content library to help create connections during classroom circles or morning meetings.

Fourth grade educator Alyssa Soto-Gelacio shares an Along question with her students at least once a week, sometimes focused on tie-ins to academic lessons or sometimes related to social-emotional topics.

**“One of my students barely talks in class, but she will put things in Along,” said Soto-Gelacio. “This helps me to understand what she likes and what she is struggling with. Along helps them to get things off their chest in a healthy way. The students really like**

it and I learn more about them. And, it is a good way to let them know that I’m another resource for them and that they can come talk to me”

## THE IMPACT



### Students feel valued and trust adults at school

A benefit to using Along at HFCA has been the ability to connect around topics of concern within each classroom, or to customize a question when needed. And, when using a question as part of a whole class discussion, teachers were able to talk with all of their students about life skills, specific topics of interest, or even check understanding around academic units.

**Through this focus on relationship building, students at HFCA feel understood and supported by their teacher. Soto-Gelacio said, “It’s important that kids feel that if they need to say something, they can, and that they see that you care no matter what.”**

Added Akiu, “The questions in Along don’t feel canned or generic. And teachers like being able to also tailor a question to whatever is being experienced in a classroom. It’s a wonderful way to reflect and grow together.”