

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**GreenRibbonSchools**

**School Nominee Presentation Form**

**ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATIONS**

**School and District's Certifications**

The signatures of the school principal and district superintendent (or equivalents) on the next page certify that each of the statements below concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with the following requirements is true and correct to the best of their knowledge. *In no case is a private school required to make any certification with regard to the public school district in which it is located.*

1. The school has some configuration that includes grades early learning to 12.
2. The school has been evaluated and selected from among schools within the Nominating Authority's jurisdiction, based on high achievement in the three ED-GRS Pillars: 1) reduced environmental impact and costs; 2) improved health and wellness; and 3) effective environmental and sustainability education.
3. Neither the nominated public school nor its public school district is refusing the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district wide compliance review. The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) is not subject to the jurisdiction of OCR. The nominated DoDEA schools, however, are subject to and in compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements to comply with Federal civil rights laws.
4. OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the public school district concluding that the nominated public school or the public school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan to remedy the violation.
5. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the public school or the public school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
6. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the public school or public school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or public school district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.
7. The school meets all applicable federal, state, local and tribal health, environmental and safety requirements in law, regulations and policy and is willing to undergo EPA on-site verification.

**U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools**

☐ Public ☒ Charter ☐ Title I ☐ Magnet ☐ Private ☐ Independent ☐ Rural

Name of Principal: Ms. Buffy Cushman-Patz

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name: SEEQS: the School for Examining Essential Questions of Sustainability  
(As it should appear on an award)

Official School Name Mailing Address: 2705 Kaimuki Ave. Honolulu, HI, 96816  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

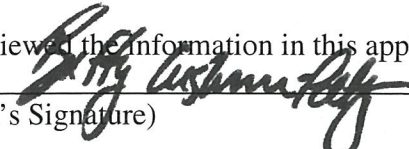
County: Honolulu State School Code Number \*: 567

Telephone: (808) 677-3377 Fax:

Web site/URL: <http://www.seeqs.org/> E-mail: [bcp@seeqs.org](mailto:bcp@seeqs.org)

\*Private Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space

I have reviewed the information in this application and certify that to the best of my knowledge all information is accurate.

  
(Principal's Signature) Date: February 12, 2020


Name of Superintendent: Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in official records)



District Name: HAWAII STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

I have reviewed the information in this application and certify that to the best of my knowledge all information is accurate.

  
(Superintendent's Signature) Date: February 14, 2020

### Nominating Authority's Certifications

The signature by the Nominating Authority on this page certifies that each of the statements below concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with the following requirements is true and correct to the best of the Authority's knowledge.

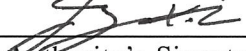
1. The school has some configuration that includes grades Pre-K-12.
2. The school is one of those overseen by the Nominating Authority which is highest achieving in the three ED-GRS Pillars: 1) reduced environmental impact and costs; 2) improved health and wellness; and 3) effective environmental and sustainability education.
3. The school meets all applicable federal civil rights and federal, state, local and tribal health, environmental and safety requirements in law, regulations and policy and is willing to undergo EPA on-site verification.

Name of Nominating Agency: Hawaii Department of Education

Name of Nominating Authority: Mr Jeremy Koki

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application and certify to the best of my knowledge that the school meets the provisions above.

  
(Nominating Authority's Signature) Date: February 12, 2020

### SUBMISSION

The nomination package, including the signed certifications, narrative summary, documentation of evaluation in the three Pillars, and photos should be submitted online according to the instructions in the Nominee Submission Procedure.

OMB Control Number: 1860-0509

Expiration Date: March 31, 2021

### Public Burden Statement

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless such collection displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1860-0509. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 37 hours per response, including time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. The obligation to respond to this collection is required to obtain or retain benefit P.L. 107-110, Sec. 501, Innovative Programs and Parental Choice Provisions. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20202-4536 or email [ICDocketMgr@ed.gov](mailto:ICDocketMgr@ed.gov) and reference the OMB Control Number 1860-0509. Note: Please do not return the completed ED-Green Ribbon Schools application to this address.

## **Green Ribbon Schools - SEEQS**

### **Nominee Information**

School Type: Charter

Name of Principal: Ms. Buffy Cushman-Patz (Executive Director)

Official School Name: SEEQS: the School for Examining Essential Questions of Sustainability

Mailing Address: 2705 Kaimuki Ave. Honolulu, HI, 96816

County: Honolulu

State School Code Number: 567

Telephone: (808) 677-3377

Website: <http://www.seeqs.org/>

Email: [bcp@seeqs.org](mailto:bcp@seeqs.org)

### **Summary Description**

*SEEQers will be stewards of planet Earth and healthy, effective citizens of the world.*

SEEQS is a public charter middle school where students have powerful learning experiences, facilitated by passionate educators, that connect them to the place they live in so they can make meaningful change in their lives and for our planet. Students take ownership of their learning and do real work, with real impacts.

Over the course of their middle school experience, each student engages in three year-long investigations into a sustainability topic, presents related project work at six public project exhibitions, and compiles a portfolio of these accomplishments.

SEEQS manages its environmental impact and costs through the use of two semi-permanent classroom structures primarily cooled by natural breeze and requiring minimal energy consumption. SEEQS has also shifted away from the use of styrofoam lunch trays, implemented a one-to-one chromebook program to reduce paper waste, and instituted a (student-championed) ban on single-use plastic drink containers on campus.

SEEQS uses recycling bins for paper, plastic, and glass and students maintain a composting system for food waste that is collected during lunch. Students also collect compostable materials from nearby restaurants to maintain proper balance of nutrients in the compost.

SEEQS has built-in structures to support both the physical and mental wellness of students. These include a focus on intentional community-building based on a number of social-emotional



learning frameworks, a student schedule built to accommodate adolescent sleep needs, school lunches that meet state wellness and nutrition guidelines, and regular physical activity with options that have included gardening, hula, basketball, and more.

However, where SEEQS excels most is in its delivery of environmental and sustainability education. Every student enrolls in one of three year-long, project-based, interdisciplinary Essential Question of Sustainability (EQS) courses, each designed around an essential question on a topic relevant to Hawaii. Past questions have included, “How do humans and the oceans impact each other?” or “Why harness energy, and how?”

Each EQS course meets four afternoons per week for two hours and is co-taught by five teachers from a variety of disciplines. Courses focus on interconnections between humans and the environment, create a real-world context to apply disciplinary knowledge, engage community members as partners in learning, empower students to choose the focus of their projects, and motivate students through authentic public project exhibitions.

Student project work has included the construction and maintenance of rain gardens, raised garden bed, aquaponics, and composting systems on campus as well as regular conservation work at the nearby Manoa-Palolo stream.

### **School Introduction**

SEEQS: the School for Examining Essential Questions of Sustainability is a high-performing public charter middle school in Honolulu serving 180 students in grades six, seven, and eight.

Every element of the SEEQS model is designed to live out a vision that “SEEQers will be stewards of planet Earth and healthy, effective citizens of the world.” Students have powerful learning experiences, facilitated by passionate educators, that connect them to the place they live in so they can make meaningful change in their lives and for our planet.

While at SEEQS, students take ownership of their learning and do real work with real impacts. Over the course of their middle school experience, each student engages in three year-long investigations into a sustainability topic, presents related project work at six public project exhibitions, and compiles a portfolio of their accomplishments which they use to publicly “defend” their readiness to move on to high school in front of a panel of supportive teachers, peers, and community members.

## Overview of the SEEQS School Model

One of SEEQS's greatest strengths is its innovative school model, which features key structures that work together to drive student outcomes.



(1) Community: A strong school community serves as the foundation [*the soil*]. Deliberate community-building and maintenance during advisory block and throughout the school day create an intellectually safe learning environment that allows for collaborative learning.

(2) Content Courses: In academic content courses, students cultivate the knowledge and skills [*the seeds*] of the academic disciplines. Courses—designed by teachers to teach their passions—include mathematical applications, scientific explorations, English Language Arts, historical perspectives, and visual and performing arts. These courses, which align with Common Core Standards and Next Generation Science Standards, extend over 70-minute blocks, which allows for scientific lab activities, in-depth explorations in the humanities, intensive reading and writing sessions in English language arts, student collaboration in mathematics, and ample time to create and perform in the arts.

(3) Essential Question of Sustainability (EQS) Courses: Year-long, project-based, interdisciplinary, sustainability-focused, inquiry-driven courses are the heart of the SEEQS experience. EQS courses meet for nearly eight hours a week (spread over four days), enabling real-world opportunities for students to apply the knowledge and skills [*water the seeds*] they gain in content courses to impact the world around them through student-led projects.

(4) SEEQS Student Growth - Sustainability Skills & Connection to Place: By applying disciplinary skills in real-world settings, grounded in a strong foundation of community, students grow [*sprout!*] in their ability to Reason Analytically, Manage Effectively, Communicate Powerfully, Collaborate Productively, and Think Systemically. These five “Sustainability Skills” enable students to live out the SEEQS vision and become *stewards of planet Earth and healthy, effective citizens of the world*.

## **Connections to the ED-Green Ribbon Schools Pillars and Elements**

### **Pillar I. Reduced Environmental Impact and Costs**

**Energy Use & Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** SEEQS is located on the campus of Kaimuki High School, a Hawaii Department of Education school. This arrangement enables both SEEQS and Kaimuki High School to take advantage of efficiencies of scale related to energy consumption and facilities maintenance. Additionally, two of the SEEQS classrooms are large outdoor tents. These tents are primarily cooled by natural breeze and require only minimal energy consumption to power oscillating fans, a wireless router, and a flat-screen television that teachers use to project lesson materials.

Furthermore, students are involved in the process of identifying opportunities to reduce our energy use and greenhouse gas emissions both as individuals and as a school. Energy has been the focus of EQS courses in the past and SEEQS intends to cycle this EQS topic again.

**Water Quality, Efficiency, and Conservation:** Water quality on campus is monitored by the Hawaii Department of Education, however, students take an active role in supporting SEEQS's efficient use of water. For example, students transformed previously unused plots of land into "Rain Gardens," built with natural slopes designed to capture and hold rainwater. This reduces the need for irrigation, decreases flooding impacts, and contributes to the health of our local watershed. Students also maintain raised garden beds, aquaponics, and field systems on campus. They considered water conservation when installing drip irrigation systems and incorporated flow meters to track use.

**Reducing Consumption:** The SEEQS community has taken a number of steps to reduce harmful consumption. These include shifting away from the use of styrofoam lunch trays, implementing a one-to-one chromebook program to reduce paper waste, and instituting a ban on single-use plastic drink containers at school. In fact, the plastic ban was championed by students and brought to life through SEEQS's democratic Town Hall structure. At last count, after only two years in service by our modest student body, our reusable water bottle filler showed savings of over 50,000 plastic bottles from ending up in landfills or the ocean.

As mentioned, students maintain raised garden beds, aquaponics and field systems on campus. Students learn about the impacts of their food consumption choices and study the issues of food security and food independence in the islands. The food produced is offered to families at no charge through a weekly farm stand.

**Recycling & Composting:** SEEQS uses recycling bins for paper, plastic, and glass, and students maintain a composting system for any food waste that is collected during lunch. Students also collect compostable materials from nearby restaurants and businesses to maintain the proper balance of nutrients in the compost piles.

Alternative Transportation: SEEQS's urban location enables students and faculty members to travel to school using public transit or human-powered options. SEEQS has installed bicycle and skateboard racks to support anyone who chooses these forms of transportation. Some students also travel to and from school by foot.

## Pillar II. Improved Health and Wellness

Whole-School Community & Whole-Child Health: At SEEQS, our focus on intentional community-building fosters an environment where each student is known by each adult and by their classmates and peers. Since many SEEQS classes are multi-aged, all community members form deep relationships over multiple years.

During a 2018 visit, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) committee reported that "the SEEQS campus feels safe and supportive of individual differences; students clearly articulated that they feel cared for by their peers and the adults on campus."

SEEQS uses an advisory model in which all students are part of a multi-aged advisory of 10-12 students and 1-2 adults that serves as a "home" community-within-a-community. Advisory is a natural support network and a place to implement our social-emotional learning curriculum; SEEQS uses the RULER curriculum developed by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence.

The Philosophy for Children (p4c) Hawaii approach is another cornerstone of the SEEQS model and includes research-supported protocols for establishing and maintaining an intellectually safe community of inquiry. We find that students and teachers who have the opportunity to experience this feeling of safety and community are likely to become advocates for defending it.

At SEEQS we believe that restorative practices are more impactful than punitive practices. SEEQS employs a school counselor to lead the implementation of these practices as well as providing an array of support services to students. In addition, SEEQS continues to pursue professional development opportunities for all faculty to continue to grow as practitioners of restorative practices.

The idea of whole-school community does not only apply to students. These principles are also used by staff to guide faculty meetings and the entire faculty spends significant time at the beginning of each semester engaged in community-building activities, including drafting a faculty charter (a key element of the RULER SEL curriculum).

Physical Health: Most days begin with physical activity to stimulate the body and brain. On Tuesday and Thursday, students participate in an activity chosen from a rotating selection that has included gardening, hula, basketball, and more. These offerings rotate quarterly and are determined by the initiative and interest of students, community members, parents, and teachers. On Monday and Friday, students and adults play as an advisory (often in friendly

competition against another advisory) following their morning meeting. Wednesday is a late school start, which creates the possibility of physical activity with families.

Many adolescents experience a sleep phase delay, which means a tendency toward later times for both falling asleep and waking up. In recognition of this, academic content does not begin until 9:20 am on most days and 9:30 am on Wednesdays (following the late start).

Nutrition: SEEQS offers school lunch through the Hawaii Department of Education. These meals meet the state's wellness and nutrition guidelines. SEEQS also provides financial support for students who qualify for Free & Reduced Lunch. This increases access to nutritious meals for qualifying students, currently 32% of our student body. SEEQS's student-run food production systems are an important lesson in the cultivation of healthy, fresh vegetables. Through partnerships with organizations such as the Blue Zones Project, students learn to live longer, healthier lives informed by best practices from the world's longest-lived cultures.

Environmental Health Program: SEEQS employs a facilities manager and part-time custodian to oversee the maintenance and care of facilities and grounds with a focus on maintaining a healthy and safe environment for students. Steps taken include regular cleaning and maintenance of all classroom and restroom facilities to manage dust, bacteria, and mold, as well as regular inspection of doors, windows, and other physical structures. In addition, families are encouraged to shut off engines while waiting to pick-up students to reduce emissions and improve air quality in the immediate vicinity of students.

### Pillar III. Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education

Deeper Dive into Essential Question of Sustainability (EQS) Courses: Each year, every student enrolls in one of three (3) year-long, project-based, interdisciplinary EQS courses, each designed around an essential question. These questions are all centered on topics relevant to Hawaii, but left intentionally broad to give students and teachers the freedom to take their examinations in a variety of directions. Past essential questions have included these, among many others:

- "How do humans and the oceans impact each other?" (2016-2017)
- "How can I care for my ahupuaa?" (2017-2018)
- "Why harness energy, and how?" (2016-2017)
- "What are the ways and reasons to restore and preserve native marine and freshwater habitats in Hawai'i?" (2015-2016)
- "What is required to feed our community?" (2017-2018)
- "How does water sustain us?" (2014-2015)

Each EQS course meets four afternoons per week for two hours and is co-taught by five teachers from a variety of disciplines. EQS courses are mixed-age, combining students in



grades six through eight. They capitalize on the strengths of multiple instructors with a diversity of content area expertise and life experience to maximize the benefits of team instruction.

EQS courses focus on interconnections between humans and the environment, create a real-world context to apply disciplinary knowledge, engage community members as partners in learning, empower students to choose the focus of their projects, and motivate students through authentic public project exhibitions.

During EQS, students have the opportunity to engage with professional experts in the real work of problem-solving and solution-finding, and simultaneously learn the skills and tools necessary for understanding and engaging with such work. Learning experiences are grounded in real life, both by bringing simulations of real life into the classroom as well as by making real life (the natural environment) the classroom.

Each semester begins with EQS Camp, a series of day-long field studies off-campus, in collaboration with local community partners, that launches students into their investigations. Through these experiences, students become familiar with the real work already being done in the field and begin to consider the aspects of the broader topic that resonate most.

Each semester culminates in a public EQS Project Exhibition, where students present their work to an authentic audience. Project work is first scaffolded by teacher-led group projects in the first semester, followed by student-led individual and small group projects in the second semester.

Interdisciplinary Learning: As each EQS course is taught by a mix of teachers from a variety of disciplines, students are encouraged to consider these topics through a variety of lenses. Naturally, student-led projects will encompass a variety of disciplines and students are encouraged to explore these intersections.

Past Examples of Student Projects: EQS has been a key part of the SEEQS experience since its very beginning. Through a constant process of reflection, iteration, and improvement, EQS has evolved over time. Its current form is the best it has ever been.

During the 2018-2020 period, SEEQS students engaged in stewardship activities including building "Rain Gardens" featuring native plants on campus. As mentioned, these gardens contribute to the health of the local watershed as they are built with natural slopes designed to capture and hold rainwater; they also significantly improve the school campus by preventing flooding in our classroom tent structures. This project was inspired by a survey of permeable and impervious surfaces on campus and the study of the impact that development has had on the local watershed.

During the same period, students built and maintained raised garden bed, aquaponics, and composting systems on campus and produced enough food to host a feast for nearly 100 community members.

Students regularly spend time at the Manoa-Palolo stream, which runs alongside the SEEQS campus and is a central feature of our local watershed. They learn about the factors that contribute to stream health, participate in projects to study water quality and remove invasive species, and have hosted two Aloha Aina community work days which resulted in the removal of an estimated 2,000 lbs of trash and 35 cubic yards of invasive flora from our stream.

Integration of STEM: The scientific lens is a key component of the investigative process in EQS. Students have opportunities to perform their own data-collection while also learning through the examination of historical data collected by scientists that speaks to longer-term trends in environmental conditions.

For example, SEEQS is partnered with Watershed Investigations Research Education and Design (WIRED), an organization that connects 6th-12th grade students and their teachers with university researchers, graduate students, undergraduate students, and private and public sector entities such as the Department of Land and Natural Resources. WIRED supports SEEQS by providing access to specialized equipment, access to lab space, and expertise in stream, estuary, and ocean assessment.

SEEQS students outperformed the state average on the Hawaii State Science Assessment by 27% (percent proficiency) during the most recent 2018-2019 assessment.

Civic Engagement: Students have many opportunities to develop a knowledge of civic engagement and cultivate the skills to become involved in and act on sustainability issues within their community. A key pillar is SEEQS Town Hall, a democratic structure enabling students and teachers to work together to steer the school. It gives voice to all members of the community and allows everyone to contribute to the decision-making process at SEEQS.

In Town Hall, anyone can present a formal motion to propose a change in our school. Attendees are invited to speak for or against the motion before it is voted upon. Students and teachers have an equal vote and a two-thirds majority is required for a motion to pass. The school leader holds veto power, but in seven years it has never been used--an affirmation of the trust the structure places in the community to govern itself. By building transparency and involvement in the process, students begin to think about how social structures come to be, gain confidence in their potential to make change, and grow into engaged citizens.

As a result, students have gone beyond this platform and given speeches at the Youth Climate Strike, presented on panels and at conferences, and even drafted a bill banning polystyrene food containers in Hawaii public schools that, with the help of Senator Stanley Chang, was introduced to the legislature.

## **Photos**



Students wash produce grown on campus. December 2019.



Students tend the compost in this on-campus system. December 2019.



Students use a special technique to remove invasive fish species from the Manoa-Palolo stream that runs alongside campus. September 2019.



Students present their ongoing stream conservation and restoration work to attendees during EQS Project Exhibitions. December 2019.



Students conduct "Dialogical Interviews" during Advisory as part of the social-emotional curriculum designed to promote whole-school community and whole-child health. November 2018.



SEEQS faculty engage in a community-building activity during a professional development teacher work day. March 2019.