

Young delegates get a unique opportunity to build global ties

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As world leaders gather this week to talk trade and cooperation, a host of youth leaders from APEC member nations will be doing the same, as part of a convention aimed at helping young people hone their statesmanship skills.

The APEC Voices of the Future conference, with 110 delegates all in their teens and early 20s, kicked off Tuesday at Kamehameha Schools' Kapalama campus with

a welcome from the governor and Honolulu Mayor Peter Carlisle, who urged the young people to "take the time to teach us and learn from us."

Over the course of the week, the delegates, five of whom are from the islands, will be in the middle of the APEC summit action, attending high-level sessions and -- the youths hope -- meeting dignitaries. One student said breathlessly there's a rumor the group might meet President Barack Obama.

LeShae Henderson, a senior at Kamehameha Schools-Kapalama who is participating in the youth conference, said she's interested in working with peers from other countries over the week and "getting to know them better."

She said learning about each others' differences and similarities is vital.

APEC YOUTH EVENTS

» **Voices of the Future conference:** Youth delegates from Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation member nations will attend APEC meetings and gather for other events, all aimed at promoting cultural understanding and cooperation.

» **Volunteers:** Dozens of students are volunteering at a host of APEC-related events. Among the schools participating: Waipahu High, McKinley High, Le Jardin Academy, La Pietra, University of Hawaii, Chaminade University and Hawaii Pacific University.

» **Palolo Elementary visit:** The wife of the Malaysian prime minister will visit Palolo Elementary School on Saturday to see its sustainability curriculum at work, through gardens and aquaponics systems. Students and staff plan to be there for the visit.

"We have to coexist with each other," she said.

On top of lots of learning, the delegates will also get to have some fun. Today, after APEC meetings in the morning, the group will head to Manoa to get muddy tending a taro patch. On Thursday night the delegates head to Bishop Museum for dinner and a group tour. On the docket for Friday afternoon: surfing, followed by a luau with hula, music and games.

Noel Gould, a founding member of the Voices of the Future conference, which is held with every Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, said the youth convention is meant to show young people that their opinions count and that they can make connections today to make big changes tomorrow.

Of APEC, Gould said, "This is the greatest classroom."

The Voices of the Future conference is one of several ways youth are participating in the APEC summit, seen by educators as a once-in-a-lifetime learning opportunity and a unique chance to learn about other countries, teach the virtues of working together and think about creative solutions.

This week, dozens of high school and college students are volunteering at APEC-related events, while student journalists are being given access to cover APEC meetings. "The world is coming to them," said Jill Canfield, executive director of the Pacific and Asian Affairs Council.

The council held APEC-themed events before summit week, including a model APEC for students on Hawaii island last month and on Oahu in March.

Among schools volunteering this week is Waipahu High, which sent about 30 tourism students to the Hawai'i Convention Center to open doors and direct people. Todd Nakayama, director of the Waipahu High Academy of Hospitality and Tourism, said students prepared for the event by studying customs and the logistics of an APEC summit.

"There's so many things to grasp from this," he said.

On Saturday, Palolo Elementary School students and staff will be at the campus on their day off for a visit from the Malaysian prime minister's wife.

Palolo Elementary Principal Ruth Silberstein called the visit a chance to share the school's sustainability curriculum and showcase its students, who have seen continual progress despite big challenges. Just about all of Palolo's students are low-income, and many speak English as a second language.

Silberstein said of the visit, "We are honored."

The Voices for the Future conference features three delegates from Kamehameha Schools and two from Punahou School. There are five other U.S. delegates from the mainland, while other delegates hail from 16 APEC nations.

Aina Akamu, a social studies teacher at Kamehameha who helped organize the conference, said the event is

infused with Hawaiian culture. "Our hope is they will leave forever changed by experiencing the aloha spirit," he said, adding students will also be presented with arguments in favor and opposed to APEC. "We want to provide a balanced experience," he said.

Philippine delegate Jason Gavina, 23, who calls himself a "global changemaker" on his business card, said he hopes to promote understanding at the youth summit. The event, he said, "brings us to the table."

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