

FEMA-Funded Temporary School Receives National Award for Construction Management Achievement

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YouTube Video Here: [Temporary King Kamehameha III Elementary School Installation is Complete - YouTube](#)

LAHAINA, Maui– Every school day, on a hillside overlooking the West Maui coastline, King Kamehameha III Elementary welcomes hundreds of children to its campus.

It's a temporary replacement for their former waterfront school, which served Lahaina's children for more than a century until wildfires destroyed the school and much of the historic town. Remarkably, the temporary school was built in a matter of months.

The major federal disaster declaration on Aug. 10, 2023, enabled the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide funding for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to develop a temporary school.

USACE hired local workers and sub-contracted with Pono Aina Management, a native Hawaiian organization, and soon the new school began to take shape. Construction of the \$78.8 million project, which can accommodate up to 600 students, began in November 2023 and was completed in 95 days.

The results garnered national praise. The Construction Management Association of America recently named the temporary school the 2024 Project of the Year, an award celebrating the skill, collaboration and impact of its construction management.

“Some of you may think that 95 days is a long time, but I have news for you. In the construction industry it's merely a blip,” said Col. Eric Swenson, who was the USACE recovery field officer at the time of the school's dedication ceremony on



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March 25. “We got this work done quickly because the hands behind the tools were invested in the community and committed to delivering for their families, their neighbors, their neighborhood and their community. For most, this was personal and something for which failure was simply not an option.”

The school first opened to students April 1, 2024. After summer vacation, it opened Aug. 7 for the first day of the 2024-2025 school year.

The temporary school spreads across a 10.2-acre campus and is composed of 336 modular units assembled into 38 buildings, including 30 air-conditioned classrooms, restrooms, a dining room, community space, administrative offices and learning resources areas.

The Hawaiʻi Department of Education furnished and installed telecommunication equipment before opening the school for the fourth school quarter of the year.

FEMA Regional Administrator Robert J. Fenton said that FEMA worked closely with USACE to fund the temporary replacement of the King Kamehameha III Elementary School.

“They did a tremendous job of accomplishing that in 95 days and being able to reopen the school on the first of April,” Fenton said. “This is one of several projects demonstrating our commitment to the community.”

In a tribute to the school’s history, distinctive features of the old school were saved and installed at the new site -- its gate, for instance, and also a bust of Kamehameha III, the Hawaiian king for whom the school is named.

The bust of Kamehameha III had special meaning for the community. Families had raised funds to purchase it for the school’s centennial celebration in 2013.

The students have two new playgrounds created with equipment donated by Berliner, a German company, and Playworld, a Pennsylvania-based company. Additional playground funding was donated by Maui United Way and the Public Schools Hawaiʻi Foundation. Others have donated school uniforms or supplies.

“This is a whole community effort to do what’s best to create a successful student,” said Principal Ian Haskins. “We are doing everything we can to create successful students.”



The school is expected to continue operating for three to five years until a new permanent school is built. As of Dec. 3, 2024, it had 362 students enrolled.

For now, the temporary school has become more than a center for education. It serves as a symbol of resilience – and what can be achieved when community and government work together.

