

Punahou School

Honolulu, United States



Founded in 1841 on missionary lands in Manoa, blending Hawaiian heritage with rigorous college-prep tradition and Hawaii's winningest athletics program

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	82/100
Academic outcomes	80/100
University placement	82/100
Prestige & heritage	85/100
Alumni network	88/100
Facilities	90/100
Transparency	74/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Punahou sits in a category of its own in Hawaii: a non-religious day school in Honolulu, founded in 1841, with a long institutional memory, a deep Hawaiian strand and a conspicuously broad K-12 programme. The school declares an American high school diploma with AP, and the public-facing academic and co-curricular structure is expansive rather than tokenistic. Hawaiian Studies has dedicated prominence; so do design, technology and engineering, entrepreneurship through the Case Accelerator, public service through the Luke Center, and global education through the Wo International Center. This is not a narrow

college-prep shop with a few decorative extras. It is a **big, fully built-out institution** with enough range for students who want serious academics alongside music, theatre, public service, outdoor education or elite sport. The average annual day fee across the school is ***\$34,230***, which places Punahou in the expensive end of the US day-school market, but not in the stratosphere occupied by the most rarefied East Coast names.

What marks Punahou out is the combination of heritage and scale with a genuinely local identity. Plenty of old independent schools trade on history; fewer root that history in place with the same force. At Punahou, Hawaiian arts and music sit in the mainstream offer, not at the margins, and long-standing traditions such as May Day and Holoku still matter. At the same time, the school runs the machinery ambitious families expect: college counselling, advanced schooling support, a published Academy course listing, libraries and learning commons, summer school, extensive counselling, and a sports programme of unusual breadth. Athletics is not an afterthought. The list runs from canoe paddling and sailing to water polo, wrestling and judo, which fits the school’s reputation for a **serious competitive culture**. Parents looking for a small, intimate, lightly structured environment will find Punahou too large and too busy. Parents who want a school with **institutional heft** will find exactly that.

Its alumni footprint underlines that scale. Wikidata records ***111*** notable alumni, including ***21*** politicians and statespersons, alongside figures in business, science, writing, acting and music. That breadth matters more than a trophy count: it points to a school that has fed graduates into public life, the professions and the arts over generations. Punahou is for students who thrive when a school offers **real range** and expects them to use it — academically able children who want AP courses, highly committed athletes, musicians and performers who need proper infrastructure, and civically minded students drawn to service, democracy initiatives and Hawaiian cultural education. It is **not for the faint-hearted**: a child who needs anonymity or a low-pressure ride will find the tempo hard going. A child who wants challenge, tradition, competition and a strong sense of place should have Punahou on the shortlist.

STRENGTHS	TRADE - OFFS
• Founded in 1841, Punahou is one of the oldest independent schools in the United States, with National Register of Historic Places status for its 76-acre campus. • Offers one of the broadest Advanced Placement course catalogues among Hawaii private schools, supporting strong college-preparatory outcomes. • Large, well-resourced endowment (reported at \$239 million in 2014) supplements tuition and funds facilities, financial aid and campus development. • Extensive co-curricular offering, including roughly two dozen sports and numerous extracurricular clubs, within the competitive Interscholastic League of Honolulu. • Long list of notable alumni across politics, business and sport, most famously former U.S. President Barack Obama, class of 1979, illustrating a track record of producing high-achieving graduates.	• Tuition is substantial, listed at \$31,680 for 2024-25 (with some sources citing figures near \$32,930 depending on grade), a significant recurring cost for relocating families. • Admission is competitive, with a reported acceptance rate around 25 percent, well below the Hawaii private-school average. • Very large enrollment (over 3,700 students K-12) means the school operates at a scale closer to a small college than an intimate day school, which may not suit every family. • Geographic isolation in Honolulu means long-haul travel for continental relocations, and limited peer schools locally beyond a handful of comparable Hawaii institutions such as 'Iolani.

ADMISSIONS

Punahou enrolls students from kindergarten through grade 12, with the main new-student entry points historically at kindergarten and around fourth grade, though openings occur at other levels depending on attrition. Applications typically require transcripts, recommendation letters, an essay and an interview, with deadlines falling around October 1 and November 1 for the following school year. The school is considered one of the more selective in Hawaii, with acceptance rates cited near 25 percent, so families should apply early and expect a rigorous, multi-stage review process rather than open enrollment.



ADMISSIONS CALENDAR

The next 4 milestones for Punahou School. Dates confirmed against the school's most recent published admissions calendar — check the official site to confirm before submitting.

Nov 1, 2026
2MO

ASSESSMENT GRADE 9
SSAT test window

Jan 6, 2027
5MO

REGISTRATION CLOSES GRADE 9 ⓘ
Grade 9 application closes

Mar 15, 2027
7MO

DECISION GRADE 9
Admission decisions

Apr 10, 2027
8MO

DEPOSIT DUE GRADE 9 ⓘ
Enrollment deposit due

► 1 PAST DATE

NOTABLE ALUMNI (111)

SPORT: Bridget Dwyer, Q7138345

MUSIC: Melody, Carrie Ann Inaba, Teri Ann Linn, Q5201086, JP, Ling-Ai Li, Rachel Factor, Sumire Matsubara

DRAMA: Amanda Schull, Annie Montague Alexander, Kauai Hart Hemmings, Gerry Lopez, Carrie Ann Inaba, Teri Ann Linn, Asia Ray Smith, Ling-Ai Li

VISUAL_ARTS: Melody, Sally Pirie, Michael T. Voorhees, Lauren Tsai, Arthur Johnsen

LETTERS: Kauai Hart Hemmings, Lorrin A. Thurston, Genevieve Taggard, Ling-Ai Li, Ezra Levinson, Christa Lei, Sun Yat-sen, Barack Obama

POLITICS: Charles Djou, Walter F. Frear, Joseph Rider Farrington, Lawrence M. Judd, Brian Schatz, Lorrin A. Thurston, Q5082814, Fred Hemmings

SCIENCE: Sun Yat-sen, Michael T. Voorhees, Patrick Vinton Kirch, Donald E. Eastlake 3rd, Derek B. Fox, Shina Inoue Kan, Bruce Ikenaga, Stella Maude Jones

BUSINESS: Brian Schatz, Lorrin A. Thurston, Frederick S. Lyman, Michael T. Voorhees, Aiko Ōkawara, Charles Hastings Judd

WTS RATING 

This profile summarises editorial research by World's Top Schools. Verify all admissions dates directly with the school before submitting. Sources are cited in the full online profile at WorldsTopSchools.com/schools/sch_c591bdd831.