

2014 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

# Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

## Ellison S. Onizuka Memorial Award

*Champion of the Native Hawaiian Culture*

◆ **U.S. Senator (retired) Daniel K. Akaka** ◆



Daniel K. Akaka served for 36 years in the United States Congress, where he championed the needs of Asian and Pacific Islander communities. Before that, he was a ground-breaking educator who introduced the Native Hawaiian language and culture into schools.

Most notably, he was the establishing principal of Pohokea Elementary school, which he named. “Poho” means “to give forth,” and “kea” means light, and together they mean “Giving students a brighter future through education.” The school was the first of its kind in Hawaii.

Having grown up in an era when the Native Hawaiian language and culture were shunned and suppressed, Daniel Akaka advocated for bringing the language back into the classroom. He supported the establishment of the Ke Kula Kaiapuni O Anuenue Hawaiian Language Immersion School, K-12. He also worked to create some of the first Head Start programs in the state. The high poverty rate among Native Hawaiian children was a special concern of his.

First elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1976, he served there for 14 years. He served in the U.S. Senate from 1990 until January 3, 2013, when he retired. Senator Akaka was the first U.S. Senator of Native Hawaiian ancestry. His legislative accomplishments were many. He sponsored the House legislation that would become the Native Hawaiian Education Act, enacted in 1988. It creates innovative education programs to enhance the education of Native Hawaiians. In the Senate, he introduced the “Apology Resolution,” which extends parity in federal recognition to the Native Hawaiian community. It became law, and acknowledges the role the U.S. government played in the illegal overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1893.

Says NEA/Hawaii State Teachers Association member Laverne Ferandes Moore: “The word ‘No’ was never in Senator Akaka’s vocabulary. He spent his career in Congress finding ways to better the lives of Asian and Pacific Islanders.” The saying on his door was, “Hele Mai,” Come In and You’re Welcomed.