

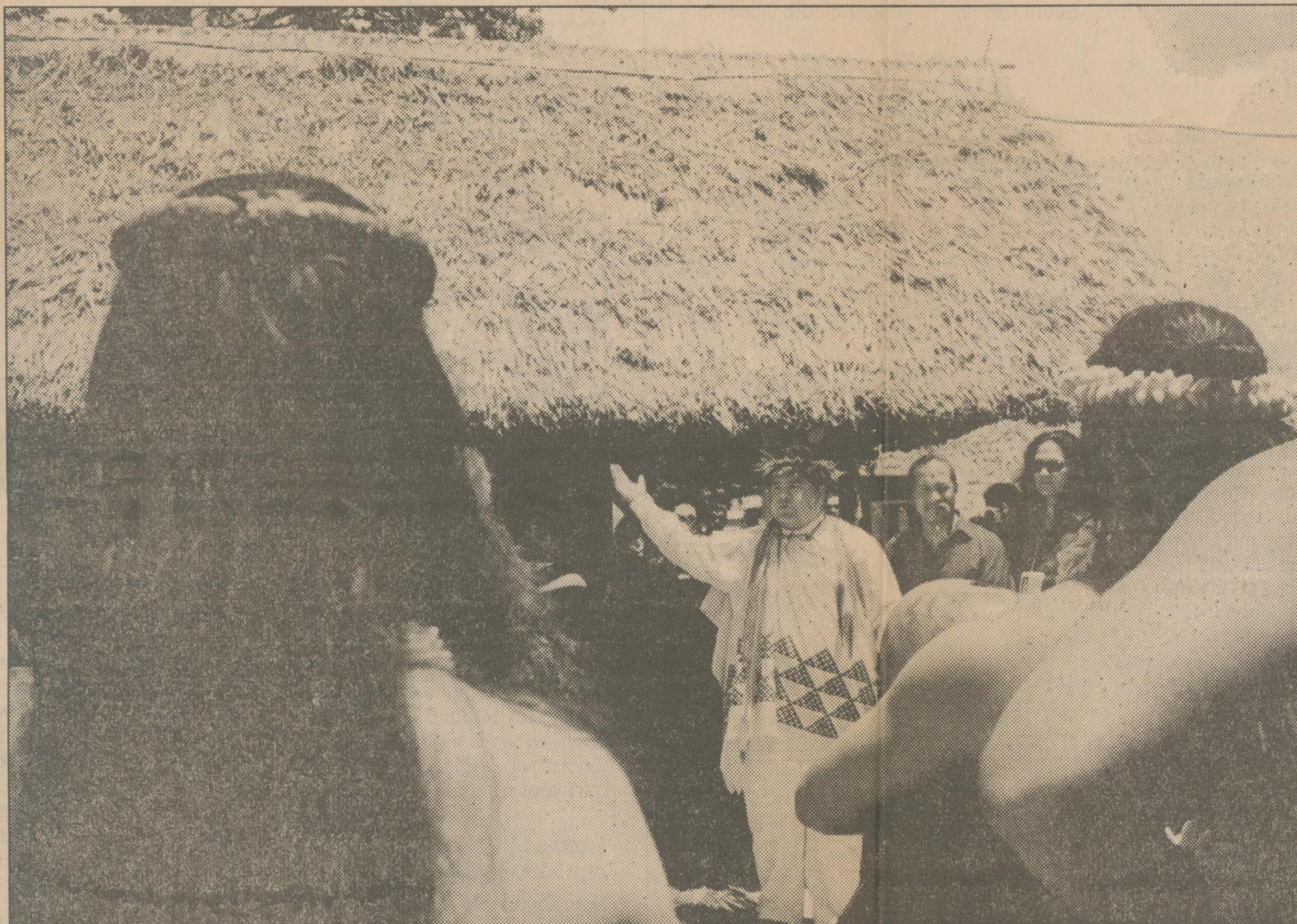
“They say teaching is a calling, Hawaiian immersion is even more of a calling. ... It’s a calling because if we don’t take charge now and do our best, we’re going to lose the language, I don’t want future generations to say, ‘You didn’t do anything.’”

KALANI AKANA, INTERIM VICE PRINCIPAL, WAIIAU ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Eugene Tanner •
The Honolulu Advertiser

IMMERSED IN HAWAIIAN



Courtesy Lynn Cook

Vice principal at Waiiau Elementary promotes language

By Vicki Viotti
ADVERTISER STAFF WRITER

On a shelf in Kalani Akana’s office, a row of pictures serves as his touchstone, a reminder of why he entered this teaching profession. The kids in the pictures call now and then.

“This was the first class,” he said, pointing to one photo of 10 smiling youths who once ran through the halls of Waiiau Elementary School and studied the Hawaiian language. “Now they call me ‘Uncle,’ which is frightening.”

Akana is single and has no children of his own, but, in effect, his students are his children and he seems to have been born to teach. At the moment, however, he has veered a little off course. Call it a vocational detour.

Better yet, call it a pit stop, a pause for refueling, something that may speed his way to the finish line.

That, in Akana’s view, means the advancement of Hawaiian-language education.

After a dozen years teaching Waiiau children entirely in Hawaiian through the state’s “immersion” program, Akana on Jan. 21 donned the mantle of school vice

Kalani Akana chants during a ceremony in Noumea, New Caledonia, during the Pacific Arts Festival last October. Akana was in the first Hawai’i delegation to the festival some 20 years ago; this time, he helped organize the Hawai’i contingent.

See **AKANA, C3**