

2022 HawaiiKidsCAN Action Fund Candidate Survey

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1. What does Hawaii do well with regards to K-12 public education?

It distributes the inadequate state funds it receives fairly -- every district/school/student gets an equitable crumb. It manages the delivery of some degree of education to the broadest range of students, more than any other education provider in the state: from gifted and talented to minimal brain function, from extreme economic privilege to students living in homeless shelters or parks, and students from the widest range of cultural/language backgrounds. Hawaii does not have a statewide curriculum, instead it has benchmarks that districts/schools/teachers can aspire to -- but the path they take to reach that outcome can be determined locally.

2. What should Hawaii do better with regards to K-12 public education?

There is a long list of what we can do better, but every item requires adequate funding provided by the legislature. We need individualized education plans for every student and enough teachers to implement those plans. We need to pay teachers enough to keep the best ones teaching in our schools for a long time -- every student should have a teacher qualified with content + pedagogy in every subject and grade level they are teaching. We need universal public preschool in every community that pays those teachers wages that reflect how important we see early childhood education.

3. How should Hawaii prioritize our spending on K-12 public education (for example: teacher salaries, programs to address learning loss, technology, community partnerships and projects, computer science education, charter schools, distance learning options, etc.)?

This is premature and distracting. We need to stop prioritizing in a vacuum of scarcity when there is abundant revenue waiting to be collected from the wealthiest residents, landowners, corporations and foreign investors. We are playing into the "divide and conquer" strategy of the "low-taxes-small-government" DINOS. When I was on the BOE I kept urging the DOE and the HSPLS to submit budgets to the legislature that truly reflect the costs of delivering the quality of education we want for our students.

4. Hawaii should require all students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid before graduating from high school, or complete a waiver.

Yes

4.a Comment

But also understand that pushing a young person to begin adulthood with the financial debt of student loans might limit other choices down the line. Just because you might be eligible for \$20K in student aid, still may leave you with more than \$100K student loan debt when you graduate from college. They should make an informed decision and weigh the pros and cons of each path they may take.

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5. The Hawaii State Constitution provides for the “establishment, support and control of a statewide system of public schools,” but does not guarantee quality education. Should the State Constitution be amended to provide quality education as a fundamental right? Should Hawaii students have a constitutional right to a quality education? Please explain your answer.

We should not be distracted by the addition of the qualifier "quality", that is a lot of energy to expend to achieve something that is equally ambiguous. We already have many non-constitutional mechanism to elevate the quality education services in Hawaii, we simply allow policymakers and lawmakers to get away with shortchanging our school system. We need to elect lawmakers who are open, honest and courageous enough to clearly identify and remedy the root cause of failing to deliver a "quality" education to our students -- we need legislators who recognize they are the only ones who have the responsibility and power to raise revenue to fund quality education.

6. What will you do to improve the relationship between the Hawaii State Board of Education and legislature?

We need to sideline those legislators that want to micromanage the BOE and UH - instead they should be leading the charge for adequate funding for each system. If the lawmaker wanted to set BOE policy they should have supported an elected BOE and run for that office. Instead, the most antagonistic lawmakers were the very ones that pushed to have an appointed BOE so that the Governor could be accountable for the DOE - so let the Gov be in charge and stop micromanaging.

7. What leadership actions will you take for the Hawaii Department of Education, University of Hawaii system, and employers to work more effectively together?

We need to identify whether the majority of legislators agree that we are underfunding our public education systems. If there is this agreement in the majority, we must also agree to stop distracting each other from reaching the most impactful solution -- full-funding! It is too easy for the "don't-raise-taxes" lawmakers to mislead the public by dog-whistling the failures caused by the inadequate funding. No rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic until we steer clear of the iceberg.

8. College going remains flat, with roughly 50% of recent Hawaii public high school graduates going on to college (2 or 4 year). How do you propose to raise these levels so Hawaii is more competitive with states like California, which has a nearly 65% rate?

I hope this question was meant to separate the candidates who really understand public education in Hawaii and those who don't. :-) Hawaii has the highest number of private school graduates to public school graduates in the nation; the difference in these ratios between California and Hawaii would explain the 15% differential you cite. That clarified, we still need to fully fund our public university system so that locals do not need to go into debt to get the certificate or degree they need to support their families and remain in Hawaii. California has a more diversified economy and more accessible/affordable housing opportunities available - we need to focus on emulating those California numbers first. Calibrated for our high costs of living and low wages, Hawaii residents already have the highest average credit card debt per capita in the nation - how much more debt can we expect our young people to carry. All those interest payments on credit card and student loan debt leave our local economy and we lose the opportunity to strengthen our circular economy.