

2022 HawaiiKidsCAN Action Fund Candidate Survey

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

What HIDOE does well is attributed to our teachers. Our public education is home to some of the most dedicated and talented educators. Teachers show up and teach to the best of their abilities with the provided resources, and often what they purchase to enhance students' learning experience to achieve grade-level standards. Teachers sacrifice family time after work hours and weekends preparing lesson plans, correcting, and providing feedback to students. They often serve as a surrogate parent for parents who are absent or neglectful. Teachers without compensation extend themselves beyond academia and the classroom by offering students various extracurricular activities. Everything I know that is good in our public education is because of our educators' strength, dedication, fortitude, and commitment to Hawaii's keiki.

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

Hawaii's public education system provides many opportunities for improvement. There are so many things that come to mind on what we can do better--prioritize our educators, expand computer science, improve infrastructure, leverage technology, replace systemic bureaucratic policies that delay projects/progress, adopt fiscal austerity metrics, expand K12 CTE programs, redesign campuses to include PK early learning, expand post-secondary opportunities, etc. We certainly have many opportunities to improve. A quality education system is also equitable, and we need to do better in ensuring an equitable education across our state. While we want to empower and highlight the uniqueness of individual schools and communities, we must ensure every student, regardless of where they live, is provided with equal access to opportunities, resources, and the tools they need to succeed. While our education system does many things well, I believe we can certainly do better. I may sound critical, but as an educator, I will be the first to say we can do better in every aspect of our education system.

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.)?

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As one state system, I recognize that there will always be a need for increased resources to support education. In my experience at the District and State levels, I have always been provided adequate funds to operate our programs. However, for meaningful change to occur, a thoughtful and inclusive design must be initiated to ensure sufficient funds trickle down to our classrooms, so teachers have the means to effectuate instructional priorities. In the fiscal year of 2020, the Department's operating budget was \$2.1 billion. The Department reports that 85% of its budget (EDN100) passed directly onto the schools. Yet, we continually hear about the lack of student achievement, antiquated curriculum, backlogs of CIP projects, insufficient infrastructure, and so forth. Greater accountability with the appropriations and allotments provided is imperative. Our first priority must ensure we establish fiscal metrics as tools to ensure appropriated funds are allocated, budgeted, and encumbered accordingly. The HIDOE must be held accountable for the existing monies before advocating for any more. Like all other state agencies, HIDOE must be transparent and accountable through improved policies, responsive programs, and improved student achievement across our state. Fiscal metrics must be a tool required to inform, respond to, and measure the effectiveness of appropriations. If there is no meaningful and relevant data to measure the adequacy of our current budgets, our ability to improve them will be stifled. As far as prioritizing spending, I certainly believe we need to ensure we take care of our instructional leaders in the classroom. This past session was a victory for our teachers, but I still think we can do more. Instructional leadership in our classrooms is foundational to schools of excellence and growing strong, resilient students; therefore, I will continue to support spending towards improved teacher compensation and benefits. Policies that affect teachers play a vital role in creating equitable student access to deep and comprehensive learning experiences. Teaching is truly the noblest profession, and we must begin to treat it as such. Secondly, we must prioritize modernizing the infrastructure of our entire school system and leveraging technology. In today's modern, digital society, we must expand and scale computer science education if we are committed to preparing our students to compete globally.

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

College should be an opportunity for any student wanting to pursue that pathway. Completing the FAFSA can easily be included in students' Personal Transition Plan. I will certainly support commonsense policies that are aimed at improving better outcomes for our students.

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.

I do not think the Hawaii State Constitution needs to be amended to provide quality education as a fundamental right to our keiki. Qualifying language is not necessary to reiterate the apparent desirable outcome.

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

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Meaningful communication between the HIDOE and legislature, including the BOE, must occur more frequently and before legislative sessions. If elected, to improve this relationship, I would want to establish frequent and regular meetings with the Department and the BOE. We must work together and realize we need to work together and prioritize a quality education if we are committed to Hawaii's future!

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

Anyone who has worked with me can attest that I am a hands-on collaborator. I lead by example and will be in the trenches like everyone else. If elected, I will commit my time and prioritize working directly with the HIDOE, UH, and employers to work together to prioritize an equitable and excellent educational system.

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?

We must invest in early learning opportunities for our youngest children and those pursuing post-secondary education. I strongly advocate for early childhood education and support access to free universal preschools. This investment in our youngest learners will promote an equitable workforce by addressing the barriers so many young families face regarding high childcare rates to participate in the workforce or pursue post-secondary education. The investment we make in committing to free universal preschools will yield significant and sustainable outcomes—lower special education needs and crime rates and higher earnings, tax revenues, and college opportunities, to name a few. Post-secondary affordability is another area we must invest in if we are committed to raising our college-going rates, strengthening Hawaii's economy, and securing a place for our residents to work and live at home. Post-secondary affordability for our local students strategically keeps our homegrown talent and increases their opportunities to enter the workforce in areas of need. As a legislator, I would support increased funding of dual credit programs to encourage continuing education and support families by reducing the burden of college tuition for our high school students. Early College and Running Start are great programs that are catalysts to support our young students transitioning from high school to college and truly changing the trajectory of their lives. We should expand these opportunities to more students. I would also like to explore a college tuition freeze for residents and make community college free for our high school students.