

2022 HawaiiKidsCAN Action Fund Candidate Survey

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

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As a former public high school English teacher, I'm a proponent of the Career Pathways System, which helps high school students get real-world, hands-on education to assist them in choosing a career, and provides a framework for Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs of study. I also think the Early College and GEAR UP Running Start programs are very good. As the State Agriculture and Environment Senate Committee Chair, I've been invited to visit public schools across the state to learn more about their ag-related programs. I've witnessed first-hand the excellent implementation and integration of school gardens and agriculture into the curriculum. I support our public school system continuing to expand such programs, which is key to getting young people interested in the farming profession.

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

All schools need to do a better job in protecting our keiki from mass shootings and break-ins. If I'm voted back into office, I plan to work on legislation to make sure this happens. Also, many of our schools are overcrowded and in need of better electrical systems, air conditioning, and access to broadband. While we're making progress, we must be smart in how we deal with this problem going forward, especially in light of what we've learned with the COVID-19 pandemic and the likelihood we'll continue to have a mix of in-class and online instruction for the foreseeable future. School infrastructure and broadband access have been a big issue for a while now. In today's world, it's critical that keiki have equal access to quality broadband. I'm supporting bills that improve access for all students. In addition, with the large population of Military families in Hawai'i, it's important to improve communication. Military families sometimes get a negative perception of Hawai'i Public Education before they even leave the mainland. With Hawai'i schools ranking 40 out of 50, there's a poor perception of education here. We need to do all we can to improve the perception of K-12 education in Hawai'i. A campaign could begin to put education in a better light. Less emphasis should be placed on test scores for ranking schools because each state has different "standardized" tests.

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.)?

Prioritizing our spending on K-12 public education, given the examples above, would go in the following order: teacher salaries, technology, distance learning options, computer science education, community partnerships and projects, charter schools, and programs to address learning loss

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

Yes

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.

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Yes. Many states talk about the right to quality education. If we seriously want education to be on par with other rights (such as religion and free speech) the language should be included in our state constitution. We need to be clear about what constitutes a “quality education.” If there are no statutes that protect one’s right to a quality education, we can turn to the state constitution to guarantee this right. By including “quality education” in the constitution it strengthens its legal standing. If there’s a gap in the law it can cause certain unintended consequences. Regulations and laws offer limited enforcement. If we have a constitutional right, one can get access to the court without being limited by the law, which ensures greater protection.

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

I’d consider introducing a concurrent resolution in the Senate and the House formally requesting the BOE and Legislature work more closely together on all aspects of public education. We obviously need better communication and more transparency. Being the only state with P-20 education supported by a single governing district for K-12 public education and higher education, the BOE and the UH Board of Regents, respectively, puts us in a unique position. We need to work together to ensure this helps rather than hinders the educational community.

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

Last session, I worked hard to pass legislation to facilitate farm-to-school programs, including hiring a farm-to-school coordinator. Next session, I plan to work together with DOE and UH/CTAHR to re-introduce legislation to make this happen. In addition, DOE and UH/CTAHR need to work together to erase the negative stigma attached to farming as a career. Farming is a noble profession, no less noble than being a doctor, lawyer, teacher, or businessperson. Instead of shaking our heads in disgust at the \$3 billion we spend annually importing 85-90% of our food, even though we have over a million acres of available ag land that’s not being used, we should be doing more to attract young people to become farmers and assist in feeding our state with local agricultural products. I also plan to look into school safety legislation efforts. In 2018, I introduced Senate Bill 2576, which called for the DOE to retrofit all classroom doors with interior locks by Jan. 1, 2019, and all schools with an intercom system by 2020. It was approved by the Senate Ways and Means Committee a week after 14 students and three faculty members were killed by an armed former student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. I had several meetings with DAGS and HPD and was told the cost was going to be prohibitive. I learned that one of the challenges of doing something system-wide is that school doors and locks aren’t uniform across schools, or even within an individual school. Each school has its own unique design. Some doors are more modern and are built differently than others. I’d like to work with teachers, the DOE, and perhaps UH to come up with a new bill to protect the safety of our keiki and teachers.

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?

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In order to increase the number of high school graduates who go on to college after graduation, the bottom line is keiki need to feel supported, they need to see value and have some expectation for success. I mentioned the Early College program. This is a partnership between DOE and the UH System that allows high school students to take college classes while still in high school - whether in-person or online and earn dual credit. Giving students the opportunity to experience success in a college-level course helps remove the fear and doubt that they may not make it in higher ed. Dual credit can provide a huge incentive for students to continue onto college after graduation. It's critical that we support students in their educational journey, so they're motivated to continue their education upon graduation. In addition, when students have access to career and workforce training partnerships, this can be a motivator. Students need to know that by continuing on to a 2 or 4-year college, they can gain access to quality information to help prepare them when they go out into the workforce I plan to encourage legislation, such as House Bill 2350, that supports educator loan programs or Running Start programs, which unfortunately didn't pass this year. It requires DOE to establish a pilot program that provides grants for high school students enrolled in a career and technical education or career academy program to enroll in college courses through the Running Start program or other similar programs that allow students to earn college credits that are applicable to the requirements for a career discipline of high need, including teaching and renewable energy and related industries. It expands the eligibility criteria for the Hawai'i educator loan program to include students who have graduated from a career academy, provided that the loan recipient agrees to teach for three years at a public school in the State. It appropriates funds into and out of the Hawai'i educator loan program revolving fund and requires reports to the legislature.

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