

# 2022 HawaiiKidsCAN Action Fund Candidate Survey

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[@NIKHILANANDA](https://twitter.com/home)

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

Supporting Hawaiian language programs and incorporating the native culture in education and schools appears quite good, considering that fifty years ago, the Hawaiian language was outlawed to be spoken in public. Hawaiian Language Immersion Programs seem to be growing, thriving and supported. Lots of outside sports activities are encouraged. At schools in which I taught, it seems that theater, music and art are offered to students. It also appears that the food program is improving, with healthier and more local ingredients. Computers and technology seem to be utilized extensively throughout the State. It appears that the elementary schools are better than the middle schools and thus by high school, many of the "better" students relocate to the private school system, which ranks as one of the largest, in percentage of students attending, plus are considered overall some of the best in the nation.

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

The single most challenging item is the O'ahu-centric, single statewide system. On too many national surveys, the DOE in Hawai'i ranks near the bottom in most indicators. Hawaii's public education spending is the lowest in the nation. The one size fits all approach is a failure, despite the funding. The system is very top heavy, bureaucratic, inefficient, and the money just does not make it down to the classroom student level, with too many administrators and not enough educators and support in the classroom. Even the infrastructure is underfunded, as there is never enough money or will to repair facilities. The physical plants are way behind in modernization and maintenance. When I taught, too many classrooms were dangerously hot and lacking in adequate ventilation. Other examples are: Hawai'i is one of the lowest for 8th grade reading scores according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress; less than half of students where English is not their first language, graduated in a recent survey. Completion for 9th grade is again near the bottom nationally. Less than twenty percent of Native Hawaiian learners complete post-secondary education/training. Hawai'i is ranked next to last in the nation for salary and support for teachers plus second from the bottom on teacher retention. The percentage of students in Hawai'i attending private schools is the highest in the nation. Learning could also be improved by encouraging innovation and creativity among students in the classroom, while utilizing the latest technology. In addition, generally, substitute teachers are not recognized nor paid as the professionals they are; they do not belong to the Hawai'i teachers union and are for the most part disrespected by the 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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It is impossible not to improve most of these items if we truly want to make our public schools better. Teacher salaries must be raised along with improving the working environment. With a culturally diverse student population, we must be cognizant of this and teach with this awareness foremost in all situations. Finding and funding affordable housing for teachers and staff is a must. I taught a few special education classes and some were excellent, whereas with others I had discussions with parents who were less than pleased. It seems we do a good job with computer and technology education from an early age. Charter schools need to be looked on as part of the public school system and thus need financial and all other levels of support. We must be sensitive to the needs of students who learn differently. I acknowledge that I am a verbal teacher and a kinesthetic learner. Every student is different and thus we must teach to the strengths and understand the weaknesses and challenges of pupils. Some students come from less than ideal home situations, with some students not having a permanent living space. The strategic plan of the DOE includes that they will achieve equity and excellence, so that all students can successfully discover and embark upon their chosen path in life. These are items and indicators which the DOE has focused on; absenteeism, school climate, inclusion rate, academic achievement, achievement gap, high school graduation, career and technical education, college-going rate, teacher positions filled, teacher retention, repair and maintenance backlog, plus family engagement.

## **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**

The most vital step in applying for federal grants, work study, and loans for college is the “Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)” form. The FAFSA® form allows students to request federal grants, work-study, and loans, all in one application. “FAFSA is the first step in the financial aid process. [Students] use the FAFSA form to apply for federal student aid, such as grants, work-study, and loans. In addition, most states and colleges use information from the FAFSA form to award non-federal aid.

## **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.**

Of course to both. The DOE states as their mission: “ ... serve our community by developing the academic achievement, character and social-emotional well-being of our students to the fullest potential. We work with partners, families and communities to ensure that all students reach their aspirations, from early learning through college, career and citizenship.” It is a responsibility of government to provide for the health, safety and welfare of its citizens, which includes students. The federal government guarantees that all kids be given equal educational opportunity no matter what their race, ethnic background, religion, sex, or whether they are rich or poor, citizen or non-citizen. This could be enumerated and included in the Hawai'i State Constitution. Most national surveys have Hawai'i at or near the bottom of most indicators. Thus, currently, the State of Hawai'i is not providing a quality education to too many of our students.

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

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I would meet with as many of the members of the BOE which I am able; to discuss their needs, wants, desires, vision. As an educator for many years, I would do whatever I can to open and keep a dialogue flowing with the BOE and the legislature. The Board is an appointed body, which to me is an improvement of the former elected Boards. In the legislature I would be an advocate for quality education, along with any legislation which would support this goal.

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

As stated above, I would meet with as many of the members of the BOE and administrators within the University of Hawai'i as I am able. I served for two years on the Mayor's [Maui] Task Force on Higher Education. As an educator for many years, I would do whatever I can to open and keep a dialogue flowing with the BOE and the University of Hawai'i system. In the legislature I would focus on what programs currently exist throughout the State where the University and the BOE are working together, increase the dialogue and examine how to strengthen, support, improve and expand those already existing programs.

## **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?**

What I have noticed in my years of involvement, activism, teaching and living in Hawai'i, is that it does not appear higher education is supported and encouraged as it could be, especially in our contemporary world. We do not have to be in competition with any other jurisdiction. However we must explain and delineate the immense benefits of education after high school, whether that is a technological institution, university, community or four year college. The Department must strive to ensure that the high school diploma is meaningful and represents career, college, and community readiness as embodied by clear academic standards. Included in the Department's strategic plan are high school graduation rate, career and technical education plus the college-going rate. Some ideas to increase graduation rates would include using technology to motivate students, personalize student learning by gearing instruction toward each students' strength while being sensitive to their challenges, increase the availability of tutoring for students, implement virtual options for those students who prefer this teaching method, engage parents/guardians and the community.

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