

2022 HawaiiKidsCAN Action Fund Candidate Survey

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Robert M. Armstrong (@singabob)

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

Without question, providing a diverse setting for learning. I think generally public education is well-funded although it has administrative costs and may spending choices would differ from current decisions.

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

I think HI could do many things better but the obvious priority would be with facilities and the technology found within. My observation of the physical plants and with talking to teachers is the buildings are generally in disrepair. Salaries and housing for new educators are other immediate concerns.

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.)?

I think schools have to be ready for students and then students deserve teachers who are not worried about making end meet. Those are my 1-2 priorities (and they are admittedly huge areas of need). Obviously, the pandemic has exposed huge deficiencies in learning loss and this is a third priority and enormous area of concern.

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

I don't think it hurts but I'm also a big advocate for providing the first to years of college free to state residents and the last two years (if desired) available and affordable to state residents, provided they complete a 'service requirement' of volunteerism.

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.

Interesting idea and I am open to it, because quality is as essential as quantity. I know (as we all do) that HI lags behind many, if not most, national indices for quality and that is shameful. After we hire a new superintendent, a full-scale, multi-year educational summit with national and international leaders needs to be called for HI. We need to have a robust discussion of what education here should look like from 2030 and beyond and begin that process NOW.

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

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I'm not completely sure other than changing a few members on the Educational Legislative Committee! Additionally, I am troubled by the size of the BOE size and their 'remoteness' from the community and accountability. How to address that is much more problematic and complex. I think the Ombudsman and Civil Rights Offices are essential in this effort. In addition, I would like to see the PR division create a more accessible and transparent, if not a third-party approach, to daily communication of education in our State. My goal here is not to create another bureaucracy but accountability to taxpayers and develop a unique, daily dialogue about schooling in our State.

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 must stop being adversarial. Quality education at all levels is good business and good FOR business. It affects our quality of life and the ability to keep graduates in State. Teachers should be at the top of our 'respect for others' pyramid (in the same vein as the A'ina, Kapuna, etc. but sadly is not). I lived in Asia for seven years and taught for twenty years, so I think I know the importance education plays as a central tenet in a successful society...sadly, I don't see it here and that needs to change along with the other issues we've discussed.

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?

Again, this goes back to placing education into the centrality of life here. When it becomes more important to us as a State, young people will pick-up on that and want to be ready for the future they will soon face. It's not where we are at the moment and the cost/return on investment is not being demonstrated here at the moment. A top to bottom evaluation is needed as I propose with the Summit idea I proposed earlier. (It also feels something that could be funded by the Gates or Bloomberg Foundations as well.) A lot of people, including your non-profit are aware of the issues, but the question is how do we bring this all together to make a difference for the future? In the end, it'll take more than just one center-city newly-elected State legislator to make a difference...but it's a challenge worthy of our time and attention!

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