

# Efforts to fund public after-school programs cut short by lawmakers

Hawaii Public Radio | By [Casey Harlow](#)

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State-sponsored expansion of public after-school programs may have to wait another year to see traction.

Despite overwhelming support at the Legislature this session, the Senate Ways and Means Committee deferred [House Bill 69](#) on Thursday. It was the last surviving measure that would have provided additional funding to public after-school programs.

The measure would have given another \$2.5 million to the state education department's [REACH program](#) for middle school students to experience additional opportunities in academic, arts and athletics.

"I was a little disappointed that the bill [died]," said Paula Adams, executive director of a different nonprofit known as Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance.

"There's so much need for after-school programs. Especially for middle and intermediate school kids."

Adams told HPR the state only invests \$500,000 toward public after-school programs.

"It doesn't go far, right? We need to have a safe place, there is the student-adult ratio that we need to respect, there are also costs associated with activities and professional development," she said.

According to Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance, the state relies mostly on federal or private funding for after-school support. State contributions only amount to roughly 1.3%, according to their [recent report](#). Compared to other states, California contributes more than 80% to its programs, New York 50% and Alaska 17%.

Coming out of the pandemic, education and state leaders saw after-school programs as another vehicle to address learning loss. Specifically, programs helped students with their mental and social needs.

Advocates say 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. is "at-risk" time for students. Yet the final bell for most public schools rings by 3 p.m., and generally earlier for elementary and middle schools.

Nearly two years after in-person learning returned full-time, the impacts of virtual learning linger for many students.

"We see a lot of need in the kids, especially supporting their mental health development," Adams said.

"Talking to people working directly with the kids, they are expressing their concern about how the kids came out of the pandemic. You have to think some of these kids were in their own room for a whole year. They were learning through a computer, and interacting with people through a screen."

The need for after-school programs among local families is slowly returning to the same level as before the pandemic, but for the rest of this year and next school year, students and families [may still have a difficult time finding support outside of school](#).

"There is always a need to increase programming," Adams said.