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## Averting the 'danger zone'

After-school programs eye additional REACH dollars, in part to lower rates of juvenile drug use and crime

By **GRANT PHILLIPS**  
*Hawaii Tribune-Herald*

After-school programs could be getting a boost in funding after a

bill unanimously passed the House Committee on Finance on Thursday.

House Bill 69 would appropriate additional funds for

the Department of Education's Resources for Enrichment, Athletics, Culture, and Health, or REACH program.

REACH helps fund free after-school programs for 6th-8th grade students at 42 public and charter, middle and intermediate schools



**HAYASHI**

throughout the state.

During the 2022-23 school year, REACH



**ADAMS**

programs supported 6,250 students state-wide and received \$500,000 annually from the general fund.

While a specific financial allocation was removed from the bill during a

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# REACH

From the front page

House Committee on Education hearing, an initial sum of \$2.5 million for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years was proposed.

"The need far exceeds the current \$500,000," said DOE Superintendent Keith Hayashi in written testimony. "With the proposed increase in REACH funding, there is an opportunity for the 33,000 middle/intermediate school students attending Hawaii's 87 public and charter schools to participate in high-quality, school-based, out-of-school activities."

According to the 2022 America After 3PM report, 81% of Hawaii parents said after-school programs helped them keep their jobs or work more hours. But cost was the main reason behind parents not enrolling their children in after-school programs.

"Although our programs are free for all our participants, they are certainly not free to provide," said After-School All-Stars President and CEO Paula Fitzell. "This year, successful applicants for the REACH grant received \$12,000 to provide after-school programs; this is a rather inadequate amount even to fund a very small portion of an effective after-school program."

After-School All-Stars is a nonprofit that launched in 2009 and provides after-school programs to



Courtesy photo

Kids learn real-life skills such as gardening, farm-to-table and using the vegetables and fruits they planted at the New Horizons Youth Day Camp at the YMCA in Hilo. The YMCA is hoping to expand the program to include after-school programs every day.

more than 2,600 middle school students, including three Big Island schools in Keaau, Pahoa, and Waiakea.

"We have utilized REACH for many years now," said Fitzell. "Although it's a very small amount, it's extremely important."

REACH funds helped ASAS launch sports leagues on both the Big Island and Oahu, which includes 16 game days featuring four sports.

A 2018 study from

the McDowell research group found that participating in after-school activities for two days per week resulted in a lower likelihood of alcohol use, marijuana use, and chronic absenteeism in students. Another report from the National Institute of Justice found after-school programs were associated with a lower likelihood of juvenile crime, which peaks between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.

"We call that the

danger zone," said Fitzell of the time frame. "Kids are more likely to get involved with delinquency, drug taking, or alcohol because most parents are working as they have to pay for rent, food and other necessities."

Fitzell said several programs could benefit from increased REACH funding including the ASAS sports, musical and esports programs.

"Because each school can apply for

REACH depending on their needs, it's really important that funding remains flexible," she added. "That way, we can meet the needs of whatever after-school program is best for each school and community."

Additional REACH programs are supported by the Hawaii Afterschool Alliance, a network of individuals and organizations that offer after-school and summer learning opportunities.

"For every youth in an after-school program, two are waiting to get in, with 35,067 youth alone and unsupervised after school," said Executive Director of Hawaii Afterschool Alliance Paula Adams in written testimony. "The intermediate years are important for reversing high school drop-out rates and ensuring students remain engaged in their education and community."

The Hawaii Afterschool Alliance also provides funding for the YMCA-based New Horizons program, an out-of-school camp designed for students ages 5 1/2 to 13.

In the summer of 2022, roughly 150 Big Island students benefited from the program, participating in activities ranging from gardening to performances and other arts and crafts.

"Having these programs is extremely important and absolutely necessary," said Martha Rodillas, head of the Hilo-based New Horizons Youth Day Camp, adding she hopes to expand after-school programs as well. "There are a lot of parents who work past 4:30 p.m. and don't have the constant care that their kids need."

The bill will undergo a third reading in the House prior to crossing over to the state Senate for further review.

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Courtesy of Martha Rodillas Junior Leader program volunteers hold up the "word of the day" at the New Horizons Youth Day Camp at the YMCA in Hilo. The YMCA is hoping to expand the program to include after-school programs every day.

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Courtesy of Martha Rodillas Kids participate in the end of summer ho'ike, where kids learn about the Hawaiian culture, song, dance and food, during the New Horizons Youth Day Camp at the YMCA in Hilo. The YMCA is hoping to expand the program to include after-school programs every day.



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Courtesy of Martha Rodillas Kids learn real-life skills such as gardening, farm-to-table and using the vegetables and fruits they planted at the New Horizons Youth Day Camp at the YMCA in Hilo. The YMCA is hoping to expand the program to include after-school programs every day.