

To ensure our independent newsroom has the resources next year to continue our impactful reporting, we need to raise \$225,000 by December 31.



We've raised \$65,000 toward our year-end goal!

DONATE



More than 1412 donors have already made gifts during our year-end campaign!

Education

After-School Programs Have More Funding But Staffing And Enrollment Remain Challenges

Beneficial after-school programs received millions in pandemic-relief funding, but more than 1,000 Oahu families are still waitlisted because of staffing shortages.



By Viola Gaskell   / November 30, 2022

 Reading time: 8 minutes.



After-school programs are one of the main ways the education system has set out to regain academic and social-emotional learning lost during the height of the pandemic, but despite more than \$4 million in extra funding, the DOE is having a hard time reaching kids.

Kids in after-school programs do better on tests, are absent from school less, and get more socialization than many of their peers, but the number of kids reaping these benefits is much lower than it could be.

Last fall, there were 15,600 students enrolled in After School Plus, or A+, the department's after-school program — now there are only 10,234, a drop of 34%.

Demand for the programs, as well as capacity, decreased while schools closed and learning went online. Some families have been slow to re-enroll while others remain waitlisted as program directors scramble to hire back staff. After-school staff positions have been [exceedingly difficult to fill](#) despite wage increases, additional bonuses, and proactive recruiting, including instant-hire nights.

Ed Silva, School Age Manager of [Kama'aina Kids](#), one of the state's largest providers, says he worries demand will recover just as the federal funding that has bolstered his recruitment effort expires. Kama'aina Kids is serving around 4,000 kids this year, fewer than half the number before the pandemic, according to Silva. Many of the 78 sites it runs throughout the islands are at capacity because of difficulties refilling positions vacated during the pandemic. YMCA Maui has also reached capacity at multiple sites because it doesn't have the staff to let in more kids.



Viola Gaskell/Civil Beat/2022

Emyrose Erwin helps students with their homework during After-School All-Stars at Ke'elikolani Middle School. Students at Ke'elikolani did better on standardized tests in 2022 than in 2019, when ASAS was not operating at the school.

Demand for after-school programs was high in Hawaii before the pandemic. [Afterschool Alliance](#) projected that in 2020 more than 74,000 children would have enrolled in a program if one were accessible. Parents said their main barriers were program availability, cost and transportation.

Overall enrollment drops and waitlist numbers are difficult to track in Hawaii where the programs are split between the DOE, and two federally funded and one state-funded program frameworks: [UPLINK and 21st Century Community Learning Centers](#), and REACH. Last year ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) was added to the list.

Federal relief funds have helped with availability, but the effects may be short-lived if replacement funding is not earmarked before the relief funding expires.

YMCA Honolulu, Oahu's largest A+ provider, received \$5 million from the Department of Human Services, a windfall that YMCA Honolulu CEO Greg

Waibel said moved hundreds of families off waitlists and into programs. But 905 families are still waitlisted, due mainly to staffing shortages.

Before the pandemic, around 6,200 kids were enrolled in YMCA Honolulu's A+ program, compared to around 3,400 this year.

Visible Outcomes For Schools That Manage To Leverage Funding

One small Honolulu school, Ke'elikolani Middle, has made the most of its after-school program by bringing part-time staff on campus as aides securing two positions that are highly beneficial, but often understaffed.

Fitzell says crossover of part-time staff is not necessarily uncommon, but Ke'elikolani has managed to hire more after-school staff than other schools where the nonprofit After-School All-Stars operates. The school's principal, Joe Passantino, says it's made a marked difference in student achievement and morale.

While test results [declined or stagnated](#) at most schools between 2019 and 2022, Ke'elikolani Middle School students actually tested 6 percentage points higher in English language arts and 3 percentage points higher in science in 2022 than they did in 2019, when ASAS was not working with the school.

Emyrose Erwin planned to move back to Micronesia to teach after finishing her degree at Kapiolani Community College, but working with ASAS at Ke'elikolani changed her mind.

The 22-year-old started working with ASAS in July and when the school year began, Passantino offered her and three other ASAS staff part-time work as teacher aides in the classroom.

"Some of the part-time staff speaks Chuukese, and it's like a godsend," Passantino said.

When he saw the rapport bilingual staff had with kids in the after-school program, he used the school's Title I funds to bring as many as he could into the classroom.



Viola Gaskell/Civil Beat/2022

Emyrose Erwin works as an aide at Ke'elikolani Middle School in the morning and with the school's After-School All-Stars program in the afternoon.

The move upped the appeal of part-time work for young adults who enjoy the work but need more paid hours than most after-school positions offer.

Erwin works as an aide in the morning, then with ASAS in the afternoons and the scheduling is still flexible enough for her to keep up in her classes at Kapiolani Community College.

And having more qualified adults on campus has made a huge difference for kids and teachers, according to Passantino.

“They’ve become a part of our school, so we have this overarching umbrella support to all these kids, not only academically but behaviorally and socially and sports-wise ... we have all these caring adults who know all these kids at a high level. If we lost this, the kids would lose out big time,” he said.

Jarrett Middle School in Palolo Valley has 266 students, and 127 of them are signed up for ASAS. Pauline Taufu, whose 12-year-old son Nico joined earlier this year said the program has made a big difference for her family.

“I work full time — and I have two jobs, so it’s been a major stress reliever,” she said.

Taufu initially wanted to enroll her son to keep him off the streets after seeing kids his age getting in trouble with police in their neighborhood.

By the time Nico gets home, he’s spent hours socializing, playing sports, finishing his homework and trying new things like baking and archery. Taufu says all of the physical activity is helping her son lose the weight he gained while school was online. Nico also joined the ASAS student board and went to the state capitol to advocate for government funding for after-school programs.

“It’s really teaching him to be a better person in the community and to be a positive leader,” Taufu said.



A+ Program providers are trying to boost staff to allow more students to enroll.

Smaller Schools Have Need But Lack Enrollment

Jennifer Masutani of Afterschool Alliance said that some schools don't have after-school programs because they don't have the administrative capacity to apply for, and monitor, another program on campus.

Despite the overall influx of funds, low funding for individual programs was another reason some school leaders did not apply. Last year's applications for 21st Century CLC funding said schools would receive \$700 per student per year including a two week summer program — less than half of the national average last year.

“You just wouldn't be able to do an after-school program with that amount without having to fundraise elsewhere,” Masutani said.

ASAS helped four Title I schools access \$500,000 in pandemic relief funds to run their programs this year. Some of the schools, including Ke'elikolani Middle School, had no other after-school funding.

Passantino said that roughly 150 students — nearly half of the student body — are now signed up for the program at least one day a week.



After-School All-Stars Big Island-based program specialist Joe Pacheco (center) attends a professional development seminar in Honolulu. Pacheco says ASAS offers professional development opportunities every month.

So far, \$2.57 million of the \$4.1 million in ESSER relief funds has been awarded to 16 schools according to Elaine Medina, the DOE's community engagement network coordinator. Medina said plans are in place to distribute the remaining \$1.53 million by the end of the school year.

Smaller schools, with 300 students or fewer, got the baseline grant amount of \$50,000 — generally not enough to run a robust program, according to ASAS Director Paula Fitzell.

She said that though the additional funds have been helpful, there are still many smaller rural schools that have been waiting a long time for an after-school program because their enrollment numbers aren't high enough. A+ programs require a minimum of 15 students, whereas UPLINK and 21st Century CLC require a minimum of 25% of elementary and middle school students and 15% of high school students at any given school.

“The schools in most of these rural communities are the only thing — there’s not a community center, there’s not a local football team, there’s no clubs — so they are the ones who very specifically need this,” Fitzell said.

Civil Beat’s education reporting is supported by a grant from Chamberlin Family Philanthropy.

An Important Note

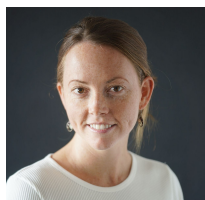
If you consider nonprofit, independent news to be an essential service that helps keep our community informed, please include Civil Beat among your year-end contributions.

And for those who can, consider supporting us with a monthly gift, which helps keep our content free for those who need it most.

This year, we are making it our goal to raise \$225,000 in reader support by December 31, to support our news coverage statewide and throughout the Pacific. Are you ready to help us continue this work?

CONTRIBUTE

About the Author



Viola Gaskell  

Viola Gaskell is an education reporter for Civil Beat. You can reach her by email at vgaskell@civilbeat.org.

Use the RSS feed to subscribe to Viola Gaskell's posts today

