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After months in limbo, after-school program gets some good news

By KIRSTEN JOHNSON Hawaii Tribune-Herald | Friday, September 15, 2017, 10:06 a.m.

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HILO — A federal after-school program that has been on the chopping block is now almost certain to stay in the 2018-19 school year.

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The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program has been in limbo since March when President Donald Trump proposed to cut it in his 2018 fiscal budget.

The program targets high-poverty and low-performing schools. It serves more than 5,800 Hawaii students, including about 1,000 on the Big Island, largely at schools in the Kona area and Waimea.

Trump said at the time that the program “lacks strong evidence of meeting its objectives, such as improving student achievement.”

This month, the U.S. House and Senate each submitted education funding bills that call for the continuation of funding for the 21st Century program next year. The Senate bill keeps funding at its current level of \$1.2 billion. The House version, as approved in an amended form Wednesday, sets funding at \$1.1 billion.

Supporters of the 21st Century program say either bill is a victory.

“This is great news,” Executive Director of the Hawaii Afterschool Alliance Paula Adams said Thursday. “I’m so happy our Congress has supported after-school (programs). As you can imagine, when Trump released his skinny budget he zeroed out after-school programs and left nothing for us. So to go from zero to even \$1.1 billion is a great win for us. At least we know the program is not going to be eliminated.”

Adams said the Alliance is pushing for the Senate bill because even the slight funding drop in the House bill would equate to “thousands of kids without after-school care programs.”

Hawaii currently receives \$5.8 million to implement the 21st Century program.

Adams said after-school care reduces the likelihood kids will engage in risky behaviors. She said the program would like to expand to East Hawaii schools but needs more funding to do so.

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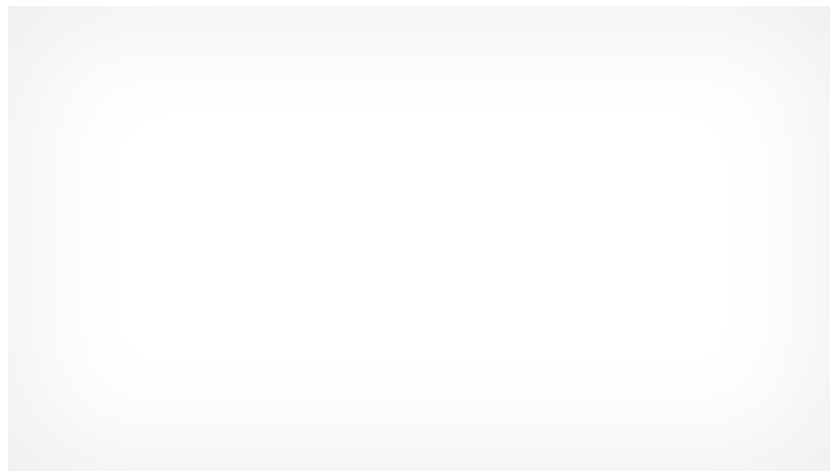
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There are more than 51,000 students statewide enrolled in some form of after-school care, according to the Hawaii Afterschool Alliance website. There are another 59,000 students waiting for openings. More than 36,000 Hawaii youth are left alone after school each day, according to the website.

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