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Education

Here's How Hawaii Schools Plan To Spend \$412 Million In New Aid

Education officials also want to fund and implement a three-year study to track middle schoolers to see if these strategies stick.

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By Suevon Lee    / August 8, 2021

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The Hawaii Department of Education plans to offer individual tutoring, academic coaching and summer school counseling to help struggling

students amid the coronavirus crisis with the latest round of federal funding received through the American Rescue Plan.

These details are included in [Hawaii's plan for \\$412 million in COVID-19 relief](#) through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, which would distribute a total of \$122 billion to 50 states and the District of Columbia to address students' academic, social and emotional needs due to the disruptions of the pandemic.

Interim Superintendent Keith Hayashi said federal funds doled out to Hawaii throughout the pandemic have provided “a degree of certainty in very uncertain times.”

“We are committed to using these resources to, in turn, invest in our students and their futures,” he said in a statement.



Cory Lum/Civil Beat/2021

State and health officials say the benefits of getting students back on campus this year outweigh the risks as long as safety measures are maintained.

Under previous federal allocations through the CARES Act, [Hawaii's DOE received a combined](#) \$227 million, as well as an additional \$51 million from

the governor's allocations.

The \$412 million is the latest batch of federal funding to be distributed to the DOE.

State lawmakers tried, unsuccessfully, this past session to [designate specific uses](#) for that amount, including a proposal to award one-time \$2,200 bonuses to all teachers. But [Gov. David Ige vetoed the bill](#), saying it was inconsistent with federal guidance on how to use the money.

The [U.S. Department of Education on Thursday approved Hawaii's plan for using the \\$412 million](#), releasing the final third of that amount, or \$137 million.

Back To School

Hawaii's public school system [welcomed back](#) roughly 165,000 students to in-person classes on Aug. 3, despite a surge in new COVID-19 cases.

State education and health officials have emphasized [the importance of returning students to campuses](#) for their academic and social well-being while saying schools are exercising safety protocols such as requiring masks indoors and keeping kids in socially distanced groups.

The Hawaii DOE reported an increase in COVID-19 infections as students returned to school. It said 105 new cases had been confirmed between July 31 and Friday but added that "there has been no evidence of transmission on HIDOE campuses with this week's cases."

"Excluding cases where the infected individual was neither on campus this week nor whose case required any disinfection of HIDOE facilities, there were seven student cases — three at elementary schools and four at secondary schools — and 20 school staff cases," the DOE said in a press release Friday.

While the DOE's application for the new round of federal funds highlights some priorities, some advocates and board members during a [June 17 meeting](#) said they [want more specificity](#). A further breakdown is expected at the next August meeting.

The DOE specified a three-pronged strategy that rests on addressing academic impacts due to the loss of in-person instruction, tending to social and emotional needs from prolonged campus closures and mitigating COVID-19 spread on campuses.

"They listed some stuff that would be pretty impactful, like high dosage tutoring that is responsive to family schedules, extended learning and academic coaching," said David Miyashiro, executive director of [HawaiiKidsCAN](#).

"But how they're going to do that — that's what's going to make or break it," he added. "What does that look like? Will campuses be open late or go into the evening time?"

Funding Priorities

[In a fact sheet](#), the ideas the DOE lists include reengaging students through "high-interest programs" like Hawaiian education and performing arts; implementing transition programs for students entering kindergarten, middle school or high school; providing funding to beef up school counseling in the summer; and funding additional school nurse positions.

Additionally, the DOE said it's going to fund a three-year study to "track incoming sixth graders" as they move through middle school to "assess the strategies and interventions implemented."

The feds so far have approved 22 state plans. Many of them are broad, high-level frameworks but some do offer targeted interventions from establishing a tutoring corps to distributing grants to community organizations to help

with summer learning to offering free Advanced Placement summer courses to setting up an “acceleration academy.”

Broadly, the American Rescue Plan requires that at least 23% of funds be spent on addressing the academic impact of lost instructional time; 1% on summer learning and enrichment programs; 1% on after-school programs and targeting students who may have suffered the most during the pandemic, including those who are low-income, non-native English speakers, homeless, or who have special needs.

The Hawaii DOE said it also plans to set up something called “COVID-19 Impact Services” to supplement special education students’ Individualized Education Program plans that can be delivered beyond the school day and also better identify obstacles for homeless children, like lack of transportation or food insecurity.

Air Purifiers And Fans

The DOE also said it’s planning to “provide outreach to students who were chronically absent during the 2020-21 school year” as well as try and enlist family members to help with this effort.

States may also use the federal relief aid to create safer physical learning environments. The DOE said it will install air purifiers where needed and provide fans for windows that don’t open.

The funds must be committed by September 2024.

“There are a lot of allowable uses, but the primary use is to help students recover academically and socially and emotionally, and make sure schools are safe and healthy,” Phyllis Jordan, co-author of a [recent analysis of states’ plans](#) by FutureEd, an education think tank at Georgetown University, said of the latest batch of federal aid.

States are also required to solicit input from parents, teachers, students and other members of the education community.

The DOE said it conducted an online survey from May 21 to June 4, and received 4,338 responses.

Those survey results show that the top requests for addressing academic needs include “free out of school time tutoring,” an extended school year, summer school, tutoring and smaller classes as well as daily in-person instruction.

Another important element is identifying and tracking which students are most in need of support. Many states are updating their data systems to better track this information.



Interim Superintendent Keith Hayashi, center, says federal COVID-19 relief funds have provided “a degree of certainty in very uncertain times.”

The DOE said it will rely on existing systems like its “state longitudinal data system,” which includes assessment data, attendance, and grades; the BOE metrics dashboard; and the DOE strategic plan dynamic report dashboard.

Experts say good data collection will be especially critical moving forward.

“What’s going to pull people out of the pandemic slump is using data to identify which students need the most help,” said Jordan. “You’re flying blind if you’re not paying attention to your data.”

Under the requirements, the DOE must devote at least 1% of the latest federal aid, or \$4 million, to after-school programming. The [Hawaii Afterschool Alliance testified](#) that it would take at least \$42.6 million to offer high-quality services, based on an estimate of \$1,495 per student for 15,643 students who could most benefit from additional instruction or social and emotional support.

“We know the kids need tutoring, need homework help, but also other ways to engage them. Schools shouldn’t do it alone,” said Paula Adams, executive director of the group.

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