

What is HawaiiKidsCAN?



We see an education system of the future in Hawaii, one where students—regardless of zip code or income level—have access to high-quality educational experiences and graduate with the adaptability, creativity and curiosity to be our local and global leaders. We envision a system that promotes and celebrates multilingualism, diversity and our Hawaiian host culture. We envision an education system where school leaders and teachers are celebrated as professionals and individuals, that fosters engaged citizens in politics and community issues and in which our students' identities are affirmed as residents of Hawaii. By high school graduation, students would be set up for success and ready to contribute to our local community, economy and society.

Hawaii has made great progress toward creating a public education system that levels the playing field for all students. To ensure that all children, across all communities, receive a high-quality education, HawaiiKidsCAN must advocate to maintain and build on the progress that has been made to date. We will build a stronger, more equitable and responsive education system that addresses the needs of our students and sets them up for future success. With so many committed local advocates and communities looking out for our kids, HawaiiKidsCAN understands that we will be successful only if we harness this passion through collaboration and empowerment.

Our Values

- We believe a successful education system is one that puts Hawaii's children first by prioritizing what students need to succeed, thrive and grow into our local and global leaders.
- We believe that real and lasting change toward an equitable education system will only occur when communities and kids themselves are deeply engaged, supported and heard.
- We believe Hawaii needs to be urgent in its approach to both protect the progress we have made and also continue to strive for excellence and innovation on behalf of all students. Our children cannot wait.

Our Mission

HawaiiKidsCAN empowers communities with accessible information about our schools, and elevates their voices and concerns to build the conditions for all students in Hawaii to thrive. We use research and communications, grassroots organizing and direct advocacy to ensure a more equitable future for our keiki.

HawaiiKidsCAN advocates for the success of every Hawaii student, from pre-K through college and career. We improve policy to help all students thrive and share promising practices and stories to demonstrate that all kids CAN succeed.

We recognize that student voice has been severely lacking from Hawaii's education conversation, and we want to change this. Through HawaiiKids-CAN's student advocacy program, we strive to empower students to more fully participate in the decisions being made regarding their education.

Our Leadership

David Miyashiro
Founding Executive Director

David partners with communities and people of all sectors to promote educational equity in Hawaii. His interest in policy and advocacy started with his experience as a DOE special education middle school teacher during Furlough Fridays. He has seen the power of community action during his professional experience with the U.S. Senate, political campaigns, and Teach For America-Hawaii. David lives in Kailua, where he grew up and currently serves as an elected member of the Kailua Neighborhood Board, with his wife Amy, who is a math teacher at charter school Hawaii Technology Academy, and their cat Lychee.

Peggy Mierzwa
Community Outreach & Organizing Manager

Peggy joined HawaiiKidsCAN after serving in the Hawaii State Capitol and teaching for ten years to bring together her love of kids, education and policy. In her role, Peggy works alongside community members to inspire them to become advocates and challenge the status quo. Peggy has been living in Kailua with her husband Mark for seven years after living in Kaneohe. Now she is a board member of the Windward YMCA, where her children are enrolled. Her two oldest children attend public school in Enchanted Lake and her youngest is excited to start kindergarten next year.

Our Board

Jeff Arce
Partner, The MacNaughton Group

Jeff joined the MacNaughton Group in 1989 following a nine-year career in public accounting and consulting. His commitment to philanthropy includes serving as a board member for Teach for America-Hawaii, Child and Family Service Real Property, the GIFT Foundation of Hawaii, which he helped found in 2002, and Kapiolani Health Foundation where he serves as the Foundation's Chair. Jeff serves on HawaiiKidsCAN board because believes all kids are inherently creative, resilient, persistent and enthusiastic. Given the right opportunity, proper environment and inspirational leadership and support, they can all achieve their full potential.

Jill Baldemor
Executive Director, Teach for America—Hawaii

Jill develops and executes a strategic vision and plan to maximize TFA's efforts to provide all students equal access to educational and life opportunities. She works with the Hawaii Board of Advisors, the Department of Education and community organizations to align, evolve and contextualize TFA's work to Hawaii's educational landscape. Jill was a 1995 New York City corps member and taught second grade in Washington Heights, New York City. Prior to joining TFA's staff, she practiced law at Goodsill Anderson Quinn & Stifel, LLP, for seven years.

AJ Halagao
Executive Vice President, HEI Charitable Foundation

AJ is chairman of the Honolulu Grants-in-Aid Advisory Commission and president of Hawaii Cares. His other board commitments include: After-School All-Stars, Aloha Medical Mission, Filipino Community Center, Hawaii Catholic Community Foundation, Hawaii Presidential Center, Japanese American Citizens League, UH Pacific Asian Center for Entrepreneurship (PACE) and Aloha United Way Community Impact Committee.

Dr. Maya Soetoro-Ng
Director, University of Hawaii at Manoa's Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace & Conflict Resolution

Maya is currently the Director of the Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace & Conflict Resolution at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Maya teaches courses on Peace Education, the History of Peace Movements and Leadership for Social Change. She also oversees externships for undergraduates who are majoring or minoring in Peace Studies and coordinates the Institute's community and global service learning programs. Maya was an Assistant Professor at the Institute for Teacher Education at the University of Hawaii College of Education and continues to do some consulting work, promoting international exchange and understanding, in partnership with the East West Center. She was formerly a high school history teacher at La Pietra: Hawaii School for Girls and the Education Laboratory School, both in Honolulu, Hawaii.

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