

Combating Asthma & Allergy Triggers at Konewaena Elementary

Allison Hitchner, a Hawaii Keiki: Healthy & Ready to Learn Program advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) was awarded a two-year \$8,000 grant from the Regional Asthma Management & Prevention Collaborative and the California School-Based Health Alliance. The grant provided funding to combat indoor environmental asthma and allergy triggers for students at Konawaena Elementary School in Kealahou on the Big Island.

Residents of the Big Island are naturally exposed to more environmental asthma and allergy triggers due to the active Kilauea volcano. Although the Kilauea Volcano is located about 90 miles from Kona, trade winds often carry vog – a hazy air pollutant that contains volcanic dust and gases – directly to Kona. The 2018 eruption caused an increase of vog and negatively impacts those with asthma and allergy conditions.

After receiving the grant, Hitchner assessed the school and identified multiple triggers in the communal space of the library. Hitchner and the school's administration and maintenance departments developed a plan and schedule for pest mitigation, routine dusting, and a vacuuming schedule. In the second year of the grant, Hitchner worked closely with the school's administration and maintenance departments to continue addressing asthma and allergy triggers.



The grant provided resources for the school to hire outside contractors to shampoo carpets to eliminate allergens and hire private contractors to remove the 20 year old carpet in the library. Additionally, Hitchner contacted a local Kailua Kona business, Floor Coverings Hawaii, LLC, who generously donated materials and labor to cover costs exceeding the grant's funding. At the end of 2019, new solid surface flooring material was installed in the library.

The Konawaena Elementary School project was selected by the Regional Asthma Management & Prevention Collaborative and Hitchner was invited to present at the annual School-Based Health Alliance conference in Washington D.C. On June 25,



2019, Hitchner presented her project findings and activities to about 60 school nurses. She shared her experience with assessing the school and developing plans to mitigate allergens impacting students with asthma and allergies.

For more information about the Hawaii Keiki Program contact Margo Lalich, MPH, BA, RN, CDPM, executive director at (808) 956-2619 or mlalich@ucera.org.