

1. Given the budget constraints and the likelihood of no further funding influx, what would you prioritize in special education and how would you go about implementing your ideas?

We need to ensure that we have appropriately educated and trained educators teaching our students with disabilities. We need to measure what we are doing and determine if the current programs/initiatives are working for our students, and if not, then redirect funding elsewhere. If organizations offer free training for our staff, the BOE should direct the superintendent to determine if this would be an option and bring his findings to the BOE.

We need to review grants, for reading interventions for example, for their effectiveness and invest in evidenced based interventions. We have to continue to work with our parents and community experts to provide what will work for our students and not focus on programs/initiatives that we use because that's the way that we've always done it.

For example, the system utilizes a "co-teaching" model that has been touted as being a success. However, when I asked staff during a BOE meeting which classes are co-taught, we were informed that staff does not know, because the decision to co-teach is made at the school level. How can an initiative be a success if we have no idea where it is being implemented? For example, if we do not provide for the general educator and the special educator to have planning time together, this is not implementing this model to fidelity.

We need more certificated teachers who understand disabilities teaching our students. Time should be taken over the summer to assign staff and students in a way that creates inclusive classrooms with the appropriate ratio of students with and without disabilities. We need to adjust the number of students with disabilities in each class to ensure that the teacher will be able to comply with each child's IEP. I would also like to see a position dedicated to compliance to check IEPs and identify areas needing additional staff training.

I believe that just having an adult with a student with disabilities does not satisfy the legal requirements under IDEA. We have over 200 teachers who are dual certificated teachers, yet they are not teaching students with disabilities. We have to change the ratio of highly qualified certificated teachers vs teacher assistants so that we have more certificated teachers with our students with disabilities. If we provide a certificated teacher to teach general education students, why are we not doing the same for students with disabilities? How is this equity?

2. **For Incumbents:** What have you done for special education before and during your time as a Board of Education member?

For new candidates: What have you done to learn about and advocate for special education concerns?

I joined SECAC before I was a member of the BOE so that I would have a better understanding of special education issues. As a parent of a student with a 504 Plan I have some personal experience with customized educational plans.

I will continue to ask questions about the budget and how it relates to special education - as we continue to spend money without knowing the results of that spending, we are not serving our students.

I continue to question HCPSS as to why we are spending money on TIENET to track IEPs when MSDE offers the Maryland Online IEP Tracking System for free.

I will continue to advocate for not cutting funding to special education and to allocate funding to what works. I consistently ask for measures to determine if our programs/initiatives are effective because without knowing this information, we will never be able to improve special education services. However, the challenge is that not all BOE members consider this a priority.

I will continue to ask questions about discipline of our students with disabilities. Why are we not looking at the data to determine why some schools have lower percentages of suspensions and expulsions of students with disabilities? What are the schools that have lower percentages doing, and are there best practices that we can replicate at other schools? Collecting data is one thing, but are we have to do a better job of using it in an accurate, thoughtful way to inform how we educate our students, especially those with disabilities.

When equity is discussed, I continue to include students with disabilities in these discussions, however, the actions of some BOE members do not indicate that they believe students with disabilities should be part of these discussions.

I established a BOE Liaison (and currently hold this position) for HCPSS students who attend non-public special education schools. I did this because it is important for all HCPSS parents to have a designated BOE member to contact if they need assistance, not just the parents of students who attend HCPSS schools.

3. How would you support educators within current fiscal constraints in order to alleviate the rise in behaviors in the school system?

We need to implement appropriate training for all educators on how to avoid behaviors of all students.

All behavior is communication. Students sometimes have trouble communicating because they cannot verbalize or do not know what to do in a situation, so they act out and this makes learning more difficult for the student and all students in the class. For example, it's important to have both general education and special education staff trained by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) on how to avoid negative behaviors in the first place. A BCBA will be able to provide training and tools on the ABCs of Behavior (antecedent-behavior-consequence) that's based on understanding what triggers a negative behavior and avoiding the trigger.

I had an opportunity to attend a training session on the ABCs of Behavior that SECAC paid for and provided to HCPSS special education staff. It was refreshing to see an approach that focused on avoiding the negative behavior and the disruption that it causes in the first place, as opposed to a punitive approach. However, HCPSS should not have to rely on an outside organization to provide this training to its staff.

We have to evaluate the effectiveness of all programs/initiatives we use and redirect funding as appropriate. For example, we could eliminate mileage stipends of central office staff and utilize the funding for training by BCBA's.

4. What are your thoughts on students with disabilities being a part of a general education classroom?

Almost all students with disabilities should be educated with their non-disabled peers. All students are unique and students with disabilities should receive the education that is best for their individual needs, and we need to be flexible to allow for changes in the IEP that are best for the student.

We have to ensure that we have the appropriate supports for our students with disabilities so that the experience will be a positive one and enable them to have an enriching education experience. However, we need to provide clear direction to our school-based staff that inclusion is not putting all students with disabilities in one class. We also need to conduct disability awareness for our employees and students to help ensure that not only our classrooms, but schools will be inclusive to students with disabilities.

5. Compare and contrast the roles and responsibilities of student achievement liaisons and special education case managers.

The role of the case manager is focused IEP meetings and documentation. The BSAP Achievement Liaisons, for example, focus more broadly on the education experience of students. For example, their job functions include:

- Supports African American students and their families in the Howard County Public School System
- Serves as a communication link between school staff and African American students and their families
- Monitors the progress of all African American students, in collaboration with school staff, to ensure their placement in appropriate programs, in order to accelerate their academic achievement
- Monitors the behavioral data of all African American students, in collaboration with school staff, in order to increase positive learning behaviors and ensure student achievement
- Educates the school community towards a deeper understanding of African American students and their families
- Facilitates the involvement of families of African American students in the educational process

- Collaborates with non-profits and government agencies to support African American students and their families

HCPSS currently has only one Special Education Parent Liaison whose role is to support families of students with disabilities, to help them navigate the IEP process, and to develop collaborative relationships between families and school teams. While there are 21 BSAP Liaisons, 18 Hispanic Achievement Liaisons, and 9 International Liaisons for a total of 48 achievement liaisons. We need to ensure that the achievement liaisons are also working with African American, Hispanic, and International students with disabilities. I would like to see a re-evaluation of the role of the Special Education Parent Liaison and incorporate the job functions of the achievement liaisons to assist students with disabilities and their families in the same manner as the achievement liaisons.

6. Explain your understanding of how HCPSS special education compares to surrounding counties.

When compared to neighboring counties, October 2018, data shows that the number of HCPSS special education teacher aides (794) outnumber special education teachers (646.5), and except for Frederick County, where special education aides (536.1) also outnumber special education teachers (314.5), all other neighboring counties have more special education teachers than special education teacher aides.

When compared to the county with the closest student population, Frederick County, with a total student population of 42,714, and 11.4% of students with disabilities, HCPSS has a larger total student population of 57,907, but a lower percentage of students with disabilities of 9.9%. The only two school systems in Maryland with a lower percentage of students with disabilities than HCPSS have each a total student population of less than 5,000.

I will continue to ask why we have more teacher aides than teachers and why our percentage of students with disabilities does not track with the data of other school systems so that we can continue to work toward equity for students with disabilities.

HCPSS spends a lot of money on special education and if not done well, impacts all students. We need to change how we allocate and spend special education funding - resources should be allocated based on data and allocated to interventions and programs/initiatives that work. We increase spending, yet teachers come before the BOE crying because they are not receiving the supports they need to do their jobs well. This pattern of spending more money and not doing it well has to stop.

All teachers need to be trained in disability awareness - this impacts all students because we have an inclusion model in HCPSS. The HCPSS has to come to terms with the fact that we have students who cannot read or are not reading at the appropriate level and that we need to have the right interventions to help them. Other school systems are implementing interventions and the necessary training and are seeing struggling readers making progress. How can we expect students to learn when we do not invest in appropriate reading interventions for struggling readers when reading is the foundation for all learning?

The recent Disproportionate Discipline Data report to the BOE identifies five elementary schools and one middle school as disproportionate and have been reported to MSDE for tracking and improvement. All 6 schools were identified as schools with disproportionate school discipline for students with disabilities. The report states that the root cause of the disproportionality is: that students have diverse needs and teachers do not always know how to meet their needs and/or have empathy with their experiences and that beliefs and expectations for student behaviors and culturally proficient knowledge are limited. The strategies that HCPSS is planning to use to address this root cause are: promotion of equitable and effective discipline practices and systemic implementation of restorative justice practices.

I'm concerned that these strategies will not include a focus on training for educators/staff or avoiding the behavior in the first place, and recommend the use of restorative justice, which has not been shown to be an effective strategy for students with disabilities. If we want to see meaningful changes we need strategies that take into consideration the unique needs of students with disabilities, look beyond what we are currently doing in HCPSS to other school systems to find best practices, focuses on what has been proven to work, and incorporates a way to measure strategies for effectiveness.