

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?

In a perfect world we would be adding more special educators to our classrooms to offset the missteps over the last several years. Absent of that funding, we need to be investigating what resources we have in place that can be better optimized. This includes more robust professional development for staff to provide everyone in our system the tools to support our students with disabilities. Some have not taken many specific courses on special education prior to certification and others may be further removed from when they did take any courses. It has to be a collaborative effort when it comes to meeting their needs and any investment in special education is shown to be an investment in general education, while not every general education investment contributes to special education.

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?

Education has always been an interest to me, but my experience with special education escalated dramatically when my son entered kindergarten. Behaviors that we attributed to youth escalated drastically but were quickly identified by his classroom teacher and we began the journey of seeking a diagnosis and IEP. We continue to learn a great deal about ways we can support him through supports and advocacy. Every year has presented its own form of challenges, changes, friction and seeking solutions. We are fortunate in our experience for the most part, but we have become part of a community while discussing resources with other families and know that everyone's experience is different and many face an exhausting struggle that seems to always go uphill. My advocacy has also led me to testify for increased special education funding and it is pivotal to why I want a seat as an advocate on the Board of Education. More than personal experience, data drives decisions and my experience in the higher education environment has exposed me to numerous outlets for studies, research and best practices.

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

First, I am grateful for the way that this question is presented. Classroom behaviors are not isolated to just students with disabilities, but their experiences can be disproportionately disruptive as indicated by a suspension rate that is more than three times that of all students. Instruction time missed due to out of school discipline and in school interventions

heavily impact academic achievement, which in turn contributes to further behaviors. In a perfect world, there would be more educators in our classrooms to support achievement, foster relationships and address the mental health needs of our students. In the current fiscal climate, we need to look for efficiencies and scalable practices. Professional development in behavior management would be beneficial for all of our educators and administrators. There are unique strategies for students with disabilities that can support early interventions in the classroom, especially when it comes to those working with students in a general education setting. There are also universal strategies in terms of early interventions to get students connected to existing supports sooner, which again can come down to more universal professional development around identifying more of the invisible disabilities. We also need to do a better job of establishing a culture of value for our special educators. They are fighting uphill every single day, giving of themselves to fill in the gaps. The funding may not be there, but they should always be made to feel like they have advocates in their corner.

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

Students with disabilities need to be in general education classrooms whenever feasible. The data is very clear about the connection to a student's time spent in a general education classroom and their achievement. NCEO research estimated that 85% of students with disabilities could master general education content if they receive supports. Students are likely to experience increased attendance, be exposed to the higher expectations of a general education classroom and experience a decrease in the negative effects of stigmas associated with their disability. There are not negative impacts on the other students in the class and general education students are able to develop important interpersonal skills via the acquired understanding. My son and daughter are both in inclusive classroom settings and are better for it. My 3rd grade son has high functioning ASD/ADHD and thrives when pushed academically and constantly working on his interpersonal skills via the exposure to interactions impossible to replicate in a therapy setting. It melted my heart when I went on a kindergarten field trip with him and he was struggling with the bus ride. His teacher passed along a box and as I asked what was in the box, another student so nonchalantly answered "oh, those are just his fidgets" and went back to another conversation. He wasn't a student with a disability in that moment. To his peers, he was just a student and that has always stood out to me as why inclusion is so vital.

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

Student achievement liaisons are meant to serve as more macro level resources for parents to help them navigate policies, procedures, protections and information to help parents better advocate for their children. Liaisons also work with staff on professional development to

facilitate effective interaction with parents. Case managers are tasked with managing IEPs, assessments and directly working with the students in addition to communicating with families on strategies for student success. In addition to supporting students directly, case managers also coordinate any additional resources, supports or pull-outs.

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

While every county has their own approach to addressing special education, there is a common trend between many jurisdictions when it comes to underserving their respective special education communities. Anne Arundel County has had significant lapses, lawsuits and the death of a special education student in the fall while under the care of the school. Baltimore County on the other hand has done a much better job of continuing to add special education positions over each of the last several years, which is something HCPSS has not been able to do and will not be able to do to the level desired in this budget cycle. As a result, we experience a lower graduation rate for students with disabilities in Howard county when compared to Baltimore County. To be fair, we do have a higher graduation rate than Anne Arundel and Montgomery county, which is one of the most significant indicators of student success.