

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?

Special education should be a priority as it affects children in special education as well as general education. I would prioritize spending at the elementary school level by providing additional supports. Paraeducators offer instructional assistance to educators that allow them to dedicate more time to students. Professional development for non-special educators also needs to be provided so that general educators know what children in special education need. The system also needs to continue working on bringing temporary employees in-house and requiring higher qualifications for these staff.

Another area of cost savings would be the decrease of non-public placements. The more services HCPSS can offer within our buildings will decrease the need for outside placement. Sometimes, though, a student's IEP can only be met through a highly specialized program that HCPSS cannot provide. But if there are many students with similar problems, trying to build out HCPSS' toolbox could be more cost-effective.

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?

When we hired Dr. Martirano, we made it clear that we wanted to stop the practice of out-sourcing special education legal cases and work with families on a more collaborative basis. We stopped using some attorneys that we believed had been billing us for exorbitant and unnecessary fees. We also encouraged the hiring of a Special Education Parent Liaison, and I continue to ask for feedback on that staff's performance. I would like to see us increase the number of Special Education Liaisons to provide specialized support to families. In this most recent budget cycle, I fought for increased funding for special education despite pushback from my colleagues. I have also made a concerted effort to visit special educators and staff in schools to learn more about their daily lives and the difficulties they encounter without support. I have been very interested in increasing my own awareness and knowledge of evidence-based reading programs and have spoken with several educators about the progress of the new system being implemented. I have also attended a training on this program to hear firsthand the challenges and struggles with the new program.

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

As the most recent Disproportionality in Discipline report indicated, African American males receiving special education have the highest number of disciplinary incidents. Special education is a diversity issue, and I have been disappointed in some of my colleagues' statements that erroneously conceptualize children receiving special education services from children of color, as these are not mutually exclusive populations. Improving disproportionate discipline requires addressing cultural proficiency and behavioral strategies for both special and general educators. As mentioned above, professional development for staff must be required so that all staff have the understanding and ability to support children in special education. Most general educators have very little training in special education, yet must respond to children receiving special education services in general education settings. Professional development curricula should be evidence-based and specifically applicable to special education students and diverse populations. Many behavioral challenges in classrooms can be prevented before they happen, with the right training and approach. Understanding the function or the meaning of behavior is a critical first step to addressing the need in a positive and effective way. Self-reflection and understanding biases and "hot button" issues for educators and staff is also important for reducing unnecessary or unhelpful disciplinary responses. We must do a better job of preparing all staff to better assess and implement different strategies when working with children.

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

Current special education laws require children to be in the least restrictive environment. Full inclusion should be the goal for all children receiving special education services. That means making sure that general education classrooms have the right supports to ensure children succeed. When I visited one school recently, I could see the joy in a teacher's face when they said a child in a self-contained special education class was ready to return to the general education classroom. Inclusion should always be the goal to the extent possible and should be a goal strived for among the special education team in conjunction with parents/caregivers.

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

Both positions are tasked with working with individual students to decrease obstacles and provide scaffolding to increase achievement. Student achievement liaisons work on some schoolwork specific areas, but also with wrap-around services that involve the external environment and the child's family, like clothing and food provision. Liaisons have more flexibility to also act in an advocacy and "communication link" role for students and focus on schoolwide data tracking on disproportionate outcomes. Special education case managers are more limited in their scope and are primarily focused on individual academic and social/behavioral outcomes of students on their caseloads as it

relates to their IEPs, ensuring adherence to legal requirements for service provision, and that progress goals are being met.

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

One of the biggest gaps with our special education programs compared to other counties is the lack of qualifications that our temporary employees have. They are only required to have a high school degree and no specific special education background. We have also had a reputation of being unwilling to acknowledge children needing services. Too often, parents have to obtain external advocates to help guide them through the complications of the special education program. We need to increase our testing so that our families do not have to incur the expensive costs of obtaining assessments outside of HCPSS.

A few other specific examples of differences between Howard County and other counties is the Autism-specific programming (and other associated services) provided by Montgomery County. Baltimore County provides regular professional development to educators in the OG reading curriculum, and evidence-based approach for serving children diagnosed with reading disorders. We do offer regional programs for students receiving Life Skills programming or self-contained classroom supports for ED needs, with self-contained ED-specific services being offered at the middle to high school level. Another bright spot in HCPSS is the Cedar Lane School, which offers a range of services to children with severe disabilities.