

Jen Mallo

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?

I would prioritize adding qualified special education staff and paraeducators. The families and the administration have consistently underscored the need to add qualified staff to fully meet the needs of our students receiving special education.

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

Prior to my time on the BOE, as the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Community Advisory Council to the Board, I worked with the administrations to educate our community about the many special education programs that HCPSS provides. We regularly had presentations by staff members to inform our community and then to provide feedback to the Board about what the community expressed or learned.

During 2018, I began to educate myself about how dyslexia is addressed and how reading is taught in Howard County. This has resulted in multiple meetings to understand the nature of the problem. In recent months, I again met with experts from the dyslexia community in order to hear their recommendations and concerns. It is through this type of self-education that I attempt to fully understand the needs of the community and the obligations of the school system. Being open to new and different points of view is critical to being a supporter of special education

Since becoming a board member, one of my focuses has been on fully understanding the disproportionate discipline that is being meted out to our students receiving special education. By becoming more versed in the problem, I have been better able to advocate for identifying the root causes and strategies for eliminating them.

I have been one of the lead voices in the last year questioning budget shortfalls in special education and trying to improve financial planning. I have consistently advocated for spending the full amount allotted for special education within HCPSS and for allotting additional funds to educate students who have out of county placements. It is critical that we fully staff and not just transfer money and children out of the county. It is also important that we fully fund our students who have out of county placements because without that, we will have additional deficits and financial mismanagement.

Additionally, one of the important roles of the Board is ask questions in order to both learn and analyze the status quo and then to direct the Superintendent. I consistently do my homework to learn about our programs, to ask questions that may lead to improved outcomes, and ensure that special education is not cut or ignored. I do my homework and take hard votes. Special education has received increased funding in last year's budget and is likely to do so this year. It is not as much as I would like to allocate to special education, but believe it is headed in the correct direction to add needed special education

staff. Finally, I consider it critical to vote yes on a budget, so that our school system can continue to operate, educate, and improve.

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

The rise in student behaviors that negatively impact the classroom must be addressed with a multi-pronged strategy.

First, the school system needs to add qualified educators and paraeducators in order to reduce the caseload of the current educators. Smaller caseloads will allow more focused and individualized attention on the students receiving special education. This alone has the potential to make a significant impact on the behaviors that interrupt the classroom and learning.

Second, the school system must continue to provide robust mental health support and mental health education. If the aforementioned rise in behaviors is tied to unmet mental health needs, then by addressing the root cause of the problem, perhaps the problem will decrease in frequency.

Children who display these behaviors are often dealing with trauma. When that is the case, their foundational needs are not being met, so they are acting out. Our schools need to holistically address the child. We need to be able to connect the child with supports in the community—whether it be counseling, food, healthcare, material goods or something else.

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

The student learning experience is enriched by have students with disabilities integrated within inclusive classrooms. Students who are have ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, vision impairment, speech impairment, orthopedic or mobility impairments (just a few examples, but not limited to this list) can effectively be taught in the general education classroom. My own children benefitted from inclusion of students in the Academic Life Skills program within their classrooms. Not only is the least restrictive environment required by law, but it is also good practice.

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

Special education case managers develop, coordinate, and execute the educational plan of the students receiving special education services. They are often the primary educator of the student though the

student likely receives additional specialized services like occupational therapy, speech therapy, and vision therapy as needed from other educators. The special education case manager's job is to ensure that the student receives a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment.

The student achievement liaisons function more as a go-between the student/student family and the school and the community. The student achievement liaisons do not by job-definition teach. They work with students and families to provide information, to act as a conduit for communication between the school and the family, to connect the families with resources in the communities that might help students achieve greater academic success. They are more likely to provide referrals to programs and services rather than provide the services themselves (as a special education case manager would). Their job is to help students remove obstacles that might be impeding their academic success.

6. Explain your understanding of how HCPSS special education compares to surrounding counties. While many families move to Howard County in order to receive special education services here, HCPSS does have some notable differences from surrounding counties.

In Montgomery County, there are specific programs for students who have Autism Spectrum Disorders. At the elementary school level--they are:

- The PreK—Comprehensive Autism Preschool Program which uses applied behavior analysis to prepare autistic students for kindergarten as well and
- The PreK-PEP program for students with mild to moderate learning disabilities and may include students who are high functioning with autism.
- Two schools with regional centers for students with Asperger Syndrome at the elementary level as well as
- The Carl Sandberg Learning Center, where 70% of the student body has an autism spectrum disorder.

At the middle school level, there are specialized Autism Resource Services for students in general education that are diploma bound, as well as a specialized school regional program. Howard County does not have any Autism Spectrum Disorder specific programs nor Asperger Syndrome specific programming. Howard County does have the Elementary/Primary Learner program for students with multiple intensive special education needs as well as Academic Life Skills program, but there are not necessarily targeted for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Other surrounding counties have a program(s) for students who receive special education services for emotional disabilities in a separate school program for all grade levels. Howard County's separate program for emotional disabilities, Bridges, is limited to grades 6-12.

Another significant different in special education in Howard County and other local jurisdictions is how we address dyslexia. For example, in Baltimore County, there has been a significant push to train educators in Orton-Gillingham, generally considered to be the gold standard for teaching children with dyslexia. Baltimore County is using a "train the trainers" method of developing a cadre of educators at every school who are proficient in Orton-Gillingham. These educators will teach those

strategies and techniques to other school-based team members. This approach is one that allows for sufficient staff to be able to better serve students learning to read in the place of first instruction and potentially circumvent the need for additional special education services. These staff can then also provide tier 2 and 3 supports for students who need additional services for reading problems like dyslexia. Howard County does not use OrtonGillingham and until recently did not employ specific phonics instruction, which is critical to literacy acquisition.