

SECAC and HCAS Questionnaire

Dr. Yun Lu

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?

Given the budget constraints, we need to advocate for more state and federal funding. I would hire more grant writers, so they can bring in more special education funding from the State or the Federal in the future.

We need to make sure that special education teachers and staff have the skills to appropriately serve special education students. I will give priority to trainings for special education teachers and staff. The first step is to identify areas of improvement by communicating with teachers, staff, and parents. The second step is to design trainings that are tailored to the needs of HCPSS special education programs. It is very important that teachers, paraeducators, student assistants, and related service providers all receive appropriate trainings to give proper intervention to special education students.

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?

As a new candidate, in order to learn more about special education, I studied Maryland Early Intervention and Special Education Services Census Data & Related Tables from 2018, the HCPSS Special Education Staffing plan FY2020, and the FY2021 Superintendent proposed operating budget regarding special education. I talked with special education parents and listened to their concerns. I have advocated for more state and federal funding for special education, and advocated for raising special education awareness, early detection, early intervention and teacher training.

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

Each special education student could have his/her own sets of individual behavior triggers. To alleviate the rise in behaviors in the school system, we need to understand the students, recognize triggers of disruptions, and know the appropriate and effective way to handle each student's behavior problems. I would promote communications between the school system and parents regarding each student's individual behaviors, so the educators and parents can work together to know the student better and potentially reduce behavior problems. I would support more trainings for special education teachers, paraeducators, student

assistants so they can improve their skills to appropriately serve special education students. I would also suggest the school system to explore distance learning for special education students. During this COVID-19 school closure, distance learning has been rolled out. Some special education students found distance learning more effective. It will be helpful if the school system seeks feedback from special education students and families, and give families options if they prefer distance learning when schools reopen. Our special educators' workload is already very heavy, some of them work with many special education students each day, and they also need to spend hours working on paperwork. I would advocate for reducing paperwork load.

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

I think we need to acknowledge individual differences and provide teaching approaches that best suit the students. There are different types of disabilities: specific learning disability, speech and language impairment, autism, developmental delay, etc. Whether a general education classroom fits the needs of a student with disabilities depends on student characteristics, the course, the teacher, the environment, and many more factors. A student may do great in a general music classroom but may do better in a special education math classroom. We really need to spend time understanding students better and find the best teaching approach for each of them.

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

In HCPSS, there are Black Student Achievement Program (BSAP) achievement liaisons, Hispanic Achievement Liaisons, and special education parent liaisons. Special education parent liaisons support communications between parents and district personnel through phone calls, emails, and meetings. They help parents to understand the progress reports, law, and IEP process. They monitor and maintain required records, assist schools to increase family involvement, locate community resources, and coordinate learning opportunities for parents. They are a communication link.

A special education case manager is a certified teacher or related service provider who is a member of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. Special education case managers oversee the special education processes and assure that the IEPs are implemented in compliance with regulations. Case managers are responsible to ensure that a special education student receives services as outlined in the student's plan. They schedule and develop IEPs, manage the case load, provide case management services.

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

The HCPSS Special Education is better than many other counties in Maryland, however, we are still facing challenges.

In FY2018, the percentage of HCPSS students receiving special education is 9.9%, which is lower than the Maryland state average of 12.2% and many surrounding counties such as Baltimore City (15.7%), Baltimore County (13.6%), Montgomery County (12.2%), Carroll County (12.0%), Frederick County (11.4%), Prince George's County (11.4%), Anne Arundel County (10.9%).

(<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20182019Student/2019CensusPubSpecEd.pdf>)

In HCPSS, the special education teacher vs paraeducator ratio is about 1:1. The job qualification for paraeducators in Howard County requires a high school diploma, which is lower than surrounding counties. We need to add some additional requirements such as passing the parapro test, college courses related to education and special education. HCPSS is also losing many highly qualified teachers to other counties due to the lengthy hiring process.

Many families with special education students decided to move into Howard County because of the good special education program and excellent school system. We are welcoming new families to Howard County, but at the same time, the increasing number of special education teachers does not meet the needs of the increasing number of special education students. As a result, the special education student to teacher ratio increases, which makes the work of special education teacher more demanding. The number of special education students not only increases by school year, it also increases within the school year. The County Council and BOE need to work together in the budget planning stage to take into account the increasing trend of special education students.