



HOWARD COUNTY AUTISM SOCIETY

June 14, 2020

To: Howard County Board of Education

CC: Dr. Michael Martirano, HCPSS Superintendent
William Barnes, HCPSS Chief Academic Officer
Dr. Terri Savage, HCPSS Executive Director of Special Education
Mai Hall, Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee (SECAC) Co-Chair
Stephanie Carr, Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee (SECAC) Co-Chair

From: Education Advocacy Committee – Howard County Autism Society (HCAS)

Subject: HCAS Statement on the HCPSS Special Education Budget

Dear HCPSS Board of Education Members,

On behalf of the Howard County Autism Society (HCAS) and specifically its Education Advocacy Committee, I am writing to you today to express our deep concern over the Special Education portion of the FY21 Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) Budget.

Over the past two years, HCAS has provided testimonials, both written and verbal, regarding the Special Education portion of the HCPSS Budget. Each time, however, the BOE voted to reduce funding requested by Dr. Martirano for special education staffing prior to submitting the overall budget to the County. This year's cut included half of the requested 216 additional special education staffing positions, despite the superintendent specifically stating that "Special education is a priority of the budget proposal." This cut also came on the heels of BOE testimony by four brave special education staff members in November 2019 about the dire nature of the barriers impeding them from offering the services to our children that these teachers yearn to provide. And it came after an HCEA class action grievance on behalf of 70 educators focusing on the severe effects of underfunding in special education on the staff, and on our children.

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And this brings us to the present. Where the BOE must make some extremely hard choices to cut down another ~\$30M out of the proposed budget to align with planned funding resources, and account for likely additional funding shortfalls due to fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. We certainly do not envy the position the BOE is in right now. There are many groups with concerns over cuts from various programs, all likely advocating in a similar manner right now. So, we want to bring a few key points to the forefront of your thoughts as you head into your final deliberations and decisions:

- Special Education is an equity issue.
- The change in routines from COVID-19, the virtual learning methodology, and the lack of available brick and mortar supports commonly required by those with IEPs have made these last few months disproportionately hard on our special education children, families and educators.
- Reduction in the summer services combined with the online learning environment is likely to lead to significant requests for compensatory services as our children risk falling further behind their peers.

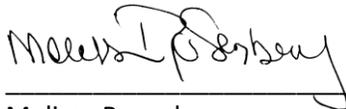
Make no mistake, we understand that that fiscal realities of the county budget provided to HCPSS means more cuts are required. And we understand there are many worthy programs that deserve funding. We just ask that our most vulnerable students, who have been marginalized in past budgets under previous school leadership, and who are particularly impacted by the change in school structure necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, be taken into special consideration as new cuts are considered.

We must provide the resources necessary to keep our dedicated special educators in place and our children in classrooms with required supports. We fear that any further cuts to special education could push the already strained special education programming to a breaking point.

Yours sincerely,



Roger E. Thibaudeau, Jr.
Chair, Education Advocacy Cmte
Howard County Autism Society



Melissa Rosenberg
Executive Director
Howard County Autism Society