



## **HCAS Education Advocacy Committee: 2017 Summary**

2017 could be described as a 'year of change' in education with the arrival of new members of the Board of Education, and a change in the Superintendent position at the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). With that change came renewed energy across the system, and a fresh opportunity to advocate for our children. It is not a stretch to say that Special Education has been at the forefront of this push for improvements, thanks to the many county-wide advocates and community members, including the HCAS Education Advocacy Committee.

Our community has been hard at work over the past year to lay the foundation for change across the county. Due to these significant 2017 efforts, I have optimism that some of the changes and improvements we have been advocating for over the past few years will begin to be implemented. I would like to thank all of our committee members, and the HCAS Board and Staff, for their work to advocate for all our children navigating the school system. Listed below are some highlights from our advocacy efforts in 2017. This is only a snapshot of what we have worked on over the past year. If you have any feedback or questions, or would like additional information on our other advocacy efforts, please do not hesitate to reach out to me! We would love to have your involvement in our 2018 activities.

Thank you,  
Roger Thibaudeau, Chair, HCAS Education Advocacy Committee.  
[roger.thibaudeau@howard-autism.org](mailto:roger.thibaudeau@howard-autism.org)

### 2017 HCAS Committee Members:

- Beth Benevides (FAPE Lead)
- Linda Boit
- Nora Hart (Board Member)
- Laura Norgart
- Melissa Rosenberg (Executive Director)
- Roger Thibaudeau (Committee Chair)
- Cheri Truett
- Lisa Wilson (Board Member)

*See next page for the 2017 Accomplishments.*

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**Providing Support • Promoting Awareness • Advocating for Change**

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# Howard County Autism Society

## Education Advocacy Committee Accomplishments: 2017

### 2017 Year-round Activities:

- Held committee meetings in February and September to plan efforts, discuss task status, and provide an update of committee activities.
- Various committee members met with DSESS leadership to discuss collaborative ideas and systemic community concerns. Meetings held in January, March, May, July and October. A sampling of topics included the Cornerstone program, Middle School Workgroup recommendations, the Collaborative Funding Agreement, MINC-EL program, MINC-PL program, para-professional training and HCPSS special education strategic plan status.
- One of our committee members participates in the statewide Education Advocacy Coalition. As part of that group, HCAS signs on to letters of support for key legislation bills to support or improve special education across the state. This also provides HCAS with key insight into issues involving broader special education concerns.
- Continued 'The Lions' Den'; a "Best Buddies" like program at Murray Hill Middle School. Program still going strong. Looking for opportunities to spread to other schools.
- Continued to advocate for the implementation of the 10 recommendations from the Middle School Autism Workgroup Report. Worked with HCPSS to distribute the report to those participating in the strategic plan development and to key middle school personnel including all principals.
- Committee members participated in the strategic plan workgroups and were instrumental in the development in the soon-to-be-released HCPSS Special Education Strategic Plan.
- Several committee members are part of a group of parents who meet periodically with Dr. Martirano and his staff. This advisory group, called SAC, is a subgroup affiliated with SECAC.
- Administered the 'Family Advocacy and Parent Education (FAPE) Grant provided by the Howard County Department of Citizens Services. This 4-pronged program allows for:
  - The upkeep of the Special Education News Center (<http://specialed.howard-autism.org>)
  - Annual conferences featuring national speakers on general special education topics and transition to adulthood topics.
  - HCAS to provide advice, guidance and assistance to parents through a consultant related to special education questions and issues they are having.
  - HCAS to provide a parent with a free initial consult with a lawyer from Disability Rights Maryland for concerns related to potential legal issues with HCPSS.

### 2017 Specific Activities/Events:

- March: Sponsored our annual DSESS meeting open to community as the monthly HCAS general meeting. Nancy Fitzgerald provided an introduction and had breakout sessions by age group with multiple school personnel participating.
- July: Provided a grant of \$1200 to HCPSS to train a few SLPs in the use of the PROMPT method
- September: Committee and Board members met with Dr. Martirano to provide an in-depth welcome to HCAS, engage in two-way communication of HCPSS efforts and discuss ways to work together to continue to improve situations for those receiving special education services.
- September: Sent a welcome letter to newly-appointed BOE member Ananta Hejeebu to provide details and information related to our various advocacy efforts. As a long-time HCAS member, Ananta was familiar with HCAS and its many programs.
- October: Met with members of HCPSS to express our concerns related to current and proposed changes to the Collaborative Funding Agreement. A follow-up letter was sent in November.
- October: A committee member presented information regarding special education services at the 'Teachers as Learners Academy'
- November: Participated in meeting with HCPSS and multiple advocacy organizations around the county to discuss status and paths forward regarding special education services in Howard County.
- December: Provided posters to all HCPSS schools to help the school system promote Inclusive Schools Week, held on the week of 12/4-12/8 across the country.