



HCAS Education Advocacy Committee: 2018 Summary

2018 was a year to build on the changes brought about in 2017 (highlighted by new Board of Education (BOE) members and a new Superintendent). This included the selection of a new Executive Director in Special Education (Dr. Terri Savage), and the rebirth of school/community collaboration highlighted by the development of a new Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) Special Education Strategic Plan and 5-10 workgroups stood up to examine improvements and developments in specific areas. The members of the Howard County Autism Society (HCAS) Education Advocacy Committee have been front and center in this collaboration with both HCPSS and our community advocacy partners.

Our community has been hard at work over the past year to continue the push for progress and change across the county. Make no mistake; there is still plenty to work on. However, I believe my optimism heading into 2018 was well-founded. The community has made strides over the past 12 months rebuilding a foundation of communication and collaboration with HCPSS. While measurable improvements can appear small at times, this foundation allows for accelerated growth opportunities in the years to come assuming appropriate resources are brought to bear.

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 2018. 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 2019 activities.

Thank you,
Roger Thibaudeau, Chair, HCAS Education Advocacy Committee.
roger.thibaudeau@howard-autism.org

2018 HCAS Committee Members:

- Beth Benevides (FAPE Lead)
- Linda Boit
- Katie Gandy
- Nora Hart (Board Member)
- Melissa Rosenberg (Executive Director)
- Sara Sommerville (HCAS Special Education News Center Lead)
- Roger Thibaudeau (Committee Chair)
- Cheri Truett
- Lisa Wilson (Co-chair, Board Member)

See next page for the 2018 Accomplishments.

Providing Support • Promoting Awareness • Advocating for Change

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Howard County Autism Society

Education Advocacy Committee Accomplishments: 2018

2018 Year-round Activities:

- Various committee members met with DSESS leadership to discuss collaborative ideas and systemic community concerns (~10 meetings held throughout the year). A sampling of topics included the Collaborative Funding Agreement, ESY services, participation in graduation ceremonies, Early Intervention Services, community/school ABA and related services intersections, transportation and strategic plan status.
- Continued coordination on education-related items throughout the year with our community partners including the Family Support and Resource Center (FSRC), Special Education Community Advisory Committee (SECAC), RISE for Autism and the Arc of Howard County.
- One committee member 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.
- Committee members participated in summer special education workgroups focused on various topics including ESY, Program Expansion, and Staffing to name a few.
- Administered the Family Advocacy and Parent Education (FAPE) Grant provided by the Howard County Department of Citizens Services. This five-pronged program allows for:
 - The upkeep of the Special Education News Center (<http://specialed.howard-autism.org>)
 - Annual conferences featuring national speakers on special education and transition to adulthood topics.
 - HCAS to provide advice, guidance and assistance to parents related to special education questions and issues they are having. Most of the assistance is provided by an educational consultant.
 - HCAS to provide a caregiver with a free initial consult with a lawyer from Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) for concerns related to potential legal issues with HCPSS.
 - HCAS to contract with a social worker to assist when community members have challenging personal situations that extend beyond the autism diagnosis.

2018 Specific Activities/Events:

- January: Through our FAPE grant, contracted with DRM to provide training and guidance to DSE leadership on the new parental consent law. Later in the month, also held an information session for parents led by DRM.
- March: Sponsored our annual HCPSS meeting open to community as the monthly HCAS general meeting. Dr. Savage provided an introduction and had breakout sessions by age group with multiple school personnel.
- May: Held FAPE conference in collaboration with RISE for Autism and HCPSS. Tamara Kasper from Penn State was the speaker. Over 100 participants attended.
- May: In partnership with SECAC and FSRC, held a BOE Candidates forum on Special Education. Over 75 participants attended, including all 11 candidates.
- June: Met with HCPSS, SECAC, Arc of Howard County and other community organizations to map out an events schedule in an attempt to develop an overall special education community calendar of events.
- September: Provided a presentation at HCAS to families newer to or less familiar with the details of the IEP process and the role of the family.
- October: Held our 2nd FAPE conference of the year in collaboration with RISE for Autism and HCPSS. Nancy Tarshis from Social Thinking was the speaker. Over 125 participants attended.
- October: Authored letter to HCPSS requesting policy clarification on access to Special Education busses by peers and siblings.
- November: Presented to the HCPSS International Office about HCAS services and programs.
- November: Sent welcome letter to newly-elected BOE members providing information on HCAS and inviting them to meet with us.
- November: HCAS awarded HCPSS a \$5,000 grant for the expansion of the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Modeling Project that was piloted at Dayton Oaks in 2017.
- December: Committee member Beth Benevides served as the co-chair of HCPSS Inclusive Schools Week campaign and programming.
- December: Three HCAS representatives gave autism-related talks to every grade level and to staff at Dayton Oaks Elementary School.