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**From:** Hui-I Tom <hiktom@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 25, 2024 1:00 AM  
**To:** Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; CouncilMail; bill\_barnes@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Elementary GT programs.

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Calvin Ball, Superintendent and BOE:

I am writing to urge you NOT to cut the budgets for item listed below:

- 20 positions cut from the Elementary School Gifted & Talented programs

This Elementary School GT program provides means for Howard County schools to offer appropriate challenges to elementary school students who are eligible in this program and make school education more meaningful for these students.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Hui-I Tom, PhD  
13213 Westmeath Lane  
Clarksville, MD 21029

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**From:** Jenny Pacheco <jennyculbertson@hotmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 25, 2024 4:06 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** HCPSS proposed budget FY 2025

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

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January 25, 2024

Jenny M. Pacheco  
9771 Diversified Lane  
Ellicott City, MD 21042  
Phone: 760-613-2073

Dear Council Members,

I am writing as a concerned resident of Howard County and a parent of a child who is a student receiving special education services at a Howard County Public School. After reviewing the proposed budget cuts for FY 2025, I am greatly concerned regarding the \$4 million dollar proposed cut to special education which will negatively impact staffing, pay wage, supplies, and services. Without appropriate staffing ratios as directed by a student's IEP, the ability for a student to receive FAPE cannot be safely and effectively delivered. Special education staff, including those who provide direct adult supervision, require additional training to directly work with a special needs student safely, efficiently, and respectfully. Proposed cuts also target removing funding that supports special education supplies and equipment which can be detrimental to a student who has needs that require additional resources to learn. There is also a proposed \$2.2 million budget cut to Summer School services which directly impacts students who require additional educational services and time to learn. Behavioral, health, speech and language, and psychological services are also proposed for a \$2.2 million budget cut.

HCPSS's "Equity in Action" states that equity is involved in everything they do and every decision they make; however, the proposed budget cuts directed at special education services do not reflect that statement. The proposed cuts will negatively impact students by not providing students the "individualized supports they need at the time they need them" which hinders their ability to achieve full potential, as well as to receive FAPE, a legal right. Please reconsider the proposed budget cuts that are directed at special education services. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jenny M. Pacheco

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**From:** Robin McClave <robin.mcclave@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 25, 2024 8:50 AM  
**To:** Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; CouncilMail; bill\_barnes@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Please do not cut the HCPSS budget for special education

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear County Executive Ball, HCPSS School Board of Education, and Superintendent Barnes,

I am writing to express my most sincere plea that you NOT continue with the \$4 million in proposed cuts to special education. My 3rd grade daughter struggles immensely with reading and was getting support from a reading specialist for half of 1st grade and all of 2nd grade. ONLY this year, with an IEP in place and the start of Kathy Davidson, her Special Educator at Dayton Oaks Elementary School, has she started to make slow progress and get a degree of comfort and confidence with reading and writing.

Special education is essential to public school. There are many types of learners and all students deserve to feel successful in learning. This is only possible with the immense work of special educators. They see the unique challenges of individual students and provide the **individualized** education that isn't possible in classrooms of 25+ students.

Please DO NOT cut the budget for special education. Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Respectfully,  
Robin McClave  
13983 Triadelphia Mill Road

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**From:** Stacey Yellen <stago77@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 25, 2024 7:54 AM  
**To:** Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; CouncilMail; bill\_barnes@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Urgent Appeal for HCPSS funding

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Dr. Ball, members of the Howard County Council, members of the Howard County Board of Education, and Acting-Superintendent Barnes,

I hope this letter finds you well. As a parent of 2 Howard County students, I am writing to express my sincere concern regarding the potential program and staffing cuts in the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS).

It is shocking to see the report in the Baltimore Sun regarding so many cuts to positions in the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). Students and teachers have already endured increased class sizes over the last few years. This news is devastating to our entire county. We urge all of our elected officials to work together with HCPSS to help during this crisis and continue to solve the funding issues that seem to plague the system every year.

Please do not make cuts to the Elementary School Gifted & Talented Programs. This program is so important in our county.

I kindly request that you work together to solve any proposed cuts to music funding and continue to support all programs that are considered well-managed and essential in our county.

Smile!  
Stacey

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**From:** Stacey Yellen <stago77@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 25, 2024 7:51 AM  
**To:** Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; CouncilMail; bill\_barnes@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Urgent Appeal for HCPSS funding

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Dr. Ball, members of the Howard County Council, members of the Howard County Board of Education, and Acting-Superintendent Barnes,

I hope this letter finds you well. As a parent of 2 Howard County students, I am writing to express my sincere concern regarding the potential program and staffing cuts in the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS).

It is shocking to see the report in the Baltimore Sun regarding so many cuts to positions in the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). Students and teachers have already endured increased class sizes over the last few years. This news is devastating to our entire county. We urge all of our elected officials to work together with HCPSS to help during this crisis and continue to solve the funding issues that seem to plague the system every year.

Please do not make cuts to the Special Education program. This program is so important in our county.

I kindly request that you work together to solve any proposed cuts to music funding and continue to support all programs that are considered well-managed and essential in our county.

Smile!  
Stacey

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**From:** Valerie Ann <valerie.braulio@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 25, 2024 6:37 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** END BUDGET CUTS TO SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

To whom it may concern,

As a mother of an autistic boy who benefits from the special education program at Dayton Oaks Elementary School, I urge you to stop the proposed budget cuts to the program and to the staff. Education is the most important thing a person can have, it's something no one can take away from you, but these cuts are going to make it that much harder for our special needs kids to achieve their learning goals. I hope you and your team reconsider and look for ways to make sure our special needs children are not affected by this.

Best,

Valerie Braulio

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**From:** Stephanie Holmbeck <stephanieholmbeck@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, January 26, 2024 10:30 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** School Budget Cuts

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the proposed cuts to the special education budget. As a parent of a child with special needs, I strongly urge the school board to reconsider these reductions.

Special education plays a crucial role in providing tailored support for students with diverse learning needs. These programs not only enhance academic outcomes but also contribute to fostering an inclusive and compassionate learning environment.

Reducing the budget for special education would jeopardize the well-being and educational progress of some of our most vulnerable students. It is essential to recognize that investing in special education is an investment in the overall success and inclusivity of our educational system.

I kindly request the school board to explore alternative solutions to address budgetary concerns without compromising the vital services and resources that special education provides. Our collective commitment to providing equal opportunities for all students should guide these important decisions.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I trust that the school board will make decisions that prioritize the needs of every student in our community.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Holmbeck

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**From:** Lisa Pope <lisagreenpope@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 1, 2024 10:18 AM  
**To:** Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; CouncilMail; bill\_barnes@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Unacceptable Proposed Budget Cuts

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Primary talent development in K and 1st for EVERY student is being proposed as a cut. That is unacceptable! Where are our tax dollars going? Many people, including myself, only moved to this county for the exceptional education. Our child deserve a free and appropriate education in public schools, and it appears its at risk. Not only have Special Education programs been impacted, but now talent development. This is inexcusable! We need to do better, or we should look to vote the current administration in office out. Our children deserve better than what you are providing at the current time.

Sincerely,  
A disappointed county resident.



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**From:** Stephanie Anderson <stepande@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 14, 2024 3:19 PM  
**To:** budgetfeedback@hcpss.org; boe@hcpss.org; CouncilMail; bill\_barnes@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Budget Testimony 2-15-2024

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

My name is Stephanie McAllister, and I have dedicated 33 years of my professional life to the HCPSS Department of Special Education, with 26 of those years serving as a Technical Assistant on the Instructional Access Team. Sadly, I learned on Friday, January 12th my position will be surplusd at the end of the school year and to make it even worse I was told that my position was being downgraded to a ParaProfessional after all these years.

I am a devoted member of the Howard County community, who has lived here for 47 years. My connection to Howard County Public Schools is deeply rooted, as I not only attended and graduated from these schools but also raised two children who received their education within this district. Remarkably, both of my children have gone on to work for Howard County Public Schools.

My devotion to the Department of Special Education and Assistive Technology goes beyond what is expected professionally; it is a genuine passion. Raising two children who required assistive technology devices and services has instilled in me a heartfelt commitment to supporting students who encounter barriers to accessing the curriculum through the use of specialized technology tools.

Currently, the Assistive Technology team is composed of two SLPs, one Special Educator, and two Assistants and is designed to address the unique requirements of each student (birth-21). A reduction to just one Special Educator and one SLP will compromise the comprehensive support needed for the diverse range of AT options available.

Integrating Assistive Technology (AT) into Special Education through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans is a crucial component in ensuring that students with diverse needs receive the support necessary for their educational success. The proposed restructuring raises concerns about the ability to effectively support the entire county, both staff and students.

Our team has been at the forefront of innovation, implementation, and support for assistive technologies that empower students to overcome barriers to learning. From customized learning tools to communication devices, we have made a tangible difference in the lives of countless

students, helping them achieve academic success and fostering a sense of inclusivity within the school community.

We also work closely with other departments within the school system to make curriculum and materials accessible. With a recent law implemented in October 2023 mandating that all digital tools provided to students must be accessible, we meticulously review every digital tool used in the county. This process, which involved six other departments, ensured equal access to students with and without disabilities. Given the downsizing of our team and the increased demand on the remaining two staff members, concerns arise regarding our ability to continue this essential process efficiently. It is crucial to emphasize that this process is not optional; it is mandated by law, and we must report to the MSDE annually, justifying all digital tools. The workload, especially now that the new law is in place, may exceed the capacity of the reduced team, jeopardizing the thoroughness and effectiveness of the process.

By eliminating key positions within the Instructional Access Team, the school district risks compromising the quality of education for students who depend on these assistive technology devices and services. The ripple effect is felt not only by students but also by teachers, parents, and the entire school community. The Instructional Access Team is not just a group of professionals; it is a lifeline for students with special needs, ensuring that they have the tools and resources necessary to thrive academically and socially.

In summary, downsizing our team poses significant challenges in maintaining a high level of support, collaboration, and adherence to the legal requirements that we currently provide within an IEP and the 504 Plan. This concern is particularly pronounced in ensuring accessibility and compliance with digital tools, which has become a legal obligation. The impact on the efficiency and thoroughness of our work cannot be ignored, which raises questions regarding how this critical process will continue with only two staff members.

I appreciate your attention on this matter and trust that you will carefully consider the long-term consequences of these personnel changes. Thank you for your consideration.

*Stephanie McAllister*



*Remember to give your children a hug and kiss today!*

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**From:** Lauri Silver <Lauri\_Silver@hcpss.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 15, 2024 3:34 PM  
**To:** Budget Feedback; BoE Email; CouncilMail; Bill Barnes  
**Subject:** L. Silver Testimony 2/15/2024

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Acting Superintendent Barnes, Board Members, Colleagues, and Community Members,

My name is Lauri Silver, and I am the Program Head of the Instructional Access Team referred to as IAT. I am standing here tonight to express my concerns regarding the potential release of three out of five valuable team members from IAT.

Assistive Technology (AT) plays a pivotal role in supporting students with diverse learning needs. It encompasses a wide variety of tools, devices, software, and strategies designed to enhance accessibility and promote student success. By providing personalized support and accommodations, AT empowers students to overcome barriers and reach their full potential. Who supports this in HCPSS? The Instructional Access Team. Our team is responsible for all facets of AT device procurement, professional learning, ongoing coaching for implementation, guidance for documenting AT in IEPs and 504 Plans, and ongoing maintenance of all devices.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates the provision of assistive technology devices and services to eligible students and must be considered annually. These services are not just optional; they are legally required to fulfill the promise of equal educational opportunities for students with disabilities.

At a time when regulations related to accessibility are increasing, and the rate at which assistive technology devices and tools are advancing, acknowledging the importance of technical expertise in AT is crucial. Special education professionals do not receive the level of coursework or preparation needed to effectively support students using AT. The Instructional Access Team has been instrumental in providing AT support and essential training to staff, students, and families, facilitating the successful implementation of various tools. There are currently 2996 students with documented AT needs, and we have received over 300 additional requests for support since August. Moreover, our efforts have resulted in over 2,000,000 uses of the accessibility tool, Read and Write for Google Chrome, benefiting all students. Cutting personnel with such expertise could potentially lead to litigation and adversely affect the ability of students with disabilities to receive the necessary tools and support necessary for success.

I request your reconsideration in releasing any team members from the Instructional Access Team. Their expertise and contributions have been invaluable, and their continued presence is vital in ensuring the ongoing success of our efforts to support students with diverse learning needs in HCPSS. I understand that decisions related to personnel are complex, and I appreciate your time in reconsidering this matter.

In closing, I am sharing a quote from Mary Pat Radabaugh, "For people without disabilities, technology makes things easier. For people with disabilities, technology makes things possible."

Sincerely,

Lauri Silver

Additional Resources:

The U.S. Department of Education is pleased to share the following guidance in support of children with disabilities who need assistive technology (AT) devices and services for meaningful access and engagement in education.

A [Dear Colleague Letter](#) on providing assistive technology devices and services for children with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

[Myths and Facts Surrounding Assistive Technology Devices and Services](#) (PDF) is designed to increase understanding of the IDEA's AT requirements, dispel common misconceptions regarding AT, provide examples of the use of AT devices and services for children with disabilities, and to highlight the different requirements under Part C and Part B of IDEA.

[The Maryland Assistive Technology Guide](#)



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**From:** Robin McClave <robin.mcclave@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, February 23, 2024 4:33 PM  
**To:** Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; CouncilMail; bill\_barnes@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Please do not cut the HCPSS budget for special education

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear County Executive Ball, HCPSS School Board of Education, and Superintendent Barnes,

I am writing to express my most sincere plea that you NOT proceed with the \$4 million in proposed cuts to special education. My 3rd grade daughter struggles immensely with reading and was getting support from a reading specialist for half of 1st grade and all of 2nd grade. ONLY this year in 3rd grade, with an IEP in place and the start of Kathy Davidson, her Special Educator at Dayton Oaks Elementary School, has she started to make slow progress and get a degree of comfort and confidence with reading and writing.

Special education is essential to public school. There are many types of learners and all students deserve to feel successful in learning. This is only possible with the immense work of special educators. They see the unique challenges of individual students and provide the **individualized** education that isn't possible in classrooms of 25+ students.

Please DO NOT cut the budget for special education. Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Respectfully,  
Robin McClave  
13983 Triadelphia Mill Road

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**From:** Veronica Pavon <veroa1923@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, February 23, 2024 9:22 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Reasons to not cut the budget of 2025.

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Council Members,

I am writing to encourage you to work with the Howard County Public School System to adequately fund our schools. This year millions of dollars in cuts have been proposed that will greatly impact our school system. It is important if we want to continue to have one of the country's best school system we need to make it a priority.

I am also writing to implore you not to cut the personal aids for students receiving special education services and should not increase class sizes by 2 (change class ratio).

The reason is because I have a son, 7 years old, diagnosed with autism and ADHD. He has an IEP and therefore receives special education services/aids in order to have a safer and better experience. I'm not testifying just for my son but for all of the other children that need these aids/services to actually learn. It has already been hard enough to make my child have some sort of progress and that at least he is getting some support from a close-by adult, who is taking care of other kids at the same time. Therefore, having the budget cut on these services will regress the progress he has achieved. He does not have a personal aid 1 on 1, he is supervised by an adult which is his teacher or paraeducator. My son does not know how to do certain things and the assistance has helped him improve his learning and understanding which is vital for his progress and independence. It is important to recognize the contribution of paraeducators/personal aids because making classes bigger and with less staff members will create a poor quality education. Moreover, this will lead to a more stressful and unsafe environment for the children.

Please do not neglect these services for special education, these children require special care and they deserve an appropriate education, just like everyone else. I believe that cutting these services will just increase more problems within the community and I would suggest finding other options to better the financial situation instead of messing with the school budget so that the education and well being of our children won't be affected. I appreciate your support.

Thank you for your time,

Veronica Pavon.

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**From:** Bryan Weinstein <usfbryan@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Saturday, February 24, 2024 4:55 PM  
**To:** Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; CouncilMail; bill\_barnes@hcpss.org; BudgetFeedback@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Gifted and Talented Funding

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

I relocated my wife and two young children from Florida to Maryland 4 years ago. We could have moved anywhere in the Baltimore Metro area, but chose Howard County as our new home due to their highly rated school system.

By reducing funding to the County's elementary school Gifted and Talented program, a program that helps inspire our children and one of the few that really encourages them to want to attend school, you are doing a disservice to the students and citizens of Howard County. You are reducing our school system's overall competence, from a highly rated school district that encourages our children to excel to a system that only requires the bare minimum of our children.

By removing or even reducing funding to this program, you are decreasing the overall effectiveness of our school system and encouraging potential residents of Howard County to seek housing in adjacent counties who prioritize our children's education.

I understand that budget cuts have to be made, but please seek alternatives than to reduce funding to the Gifted and Talented program.

Thank you for your consideration,

Bryan Weinstein

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**From:** Teresa L. Roberts <Teresa\_Roberts@hcpss.org>  
**Sent:** Saturday, February 24, 2024 10:26 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** AT Support Testimonial  
**Attachments:** AT Team Support! .pdf

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Good Morning!

I would so appreciate you taking the time to read the attached testimonial in support of the AT Team. I wrote this as both a parent and a special ed teacher in the county.

Thank you so much,

Teresa Roberts



Can you imagine what it must feel like to have something important to say but no one can understand you?

Or being a mother or teacher who desperately wants to help their child or student but do not know what he/she needs.

Our son Andrew was a very challenging toddler for that reason and many more because of his special needs. He would get so frustrated because he could not communicate that he would have tantrums and become aggressive both at home and in school. Luckily, the assistive technology team at HCPSS came to our rescue! We are forever indebted to the AT Team for getting our son on the right track. We are so appreciative of the countless hours the AT team spent getting to know Andrew so they could figure out the best communication device for him. They also spent time teaching him, the school staff and us how to operate and program his complicated Dynavox device. Success! Andrew quickly learned the value of his new device. Because the AT team was able to give Andrew a "voice", his behaviors significantly improved and he became available for learning. Today, twenty eight years later, Andrew is a friendly and sociable adult! He is even employed at a local business, thanks to the kind owners who took initiative to offer him a job after he visited their store a few times. It took a village to raise Andrew, and we are so grateful to the support of Howard County Public Schools, especially his teachers and the crucial Assistive Technology Team.

As a special ed teacher in the county, I have also witnessed the "magic" that the AT team has made happen with many of my own students. In rolls Jake, an adorable young boy who has cerebral palsy. He only has limited control of one arm but the AT team zeros in and finds a way for him to communicate and demonstrate his learning. I realized the invaluable assets of the AT team as I observed their work with Jake. I watched as they trialed different devices and switches with Jake. I listened as they taught him how to use the carefully selected devices and programs so he could actively participate in the classroom. I participated in the many inservices they held to train staff and his parents in using and programming his devices. The AT Team's wealth of educational planning knowledge was also instrumental for me as Jake's teacher. The team shared their wisdom and expertise to help me utilize technology and different educational programs so that Jake could access and share his learning. Jake's face lit up with excitement the day he discovered that he could effectively and independently use a symbolic writing program to finally convey his thoughts and ideas in writing. The AT team continually supported us year after year as technology and Jake's needs changed. Today Jake's enthusiasm lights up the room when he enters. He so efficiently uses his communication device that he has modeled and trained other students to use their own devices. Jake is an inspiration to all, in thanks to the innovations and support of the AT Team.

In 2021, Jason walked into school for the first time since HCPSS shut down. He spent the first few months of Kindergarten tantruming or screaming because he had no way to communicate his needs, wants or even knowledge. Because he was so disruptive, he could only stay in the general education classroom for a few minutes. Once again, the AT team came to the rescue! Jason quickly adapted to using his new communication device! Through teacher modeling,

Jason realized that he could use Touch Chat to communicate his needs and wants instead of crying or screaming. But most importantly, this new device opened up the world of learning to him. He could now use the device to share what he learned or to answer questions. But most importantly, through his device, Jason could finally show the world what he already knew. As his teachers, we had no idea that he knew the sounds and names of each letter or even more, that he could combine these letters to spell words such as "Triceratops". We even discovered that he could already read many words! Jason developed such a passion for learning that he was finally able to participate in the general education classroom. I wish I could show you a heartbreaking video of Jason participating in a reading lesson with his first grade gen ed teacher, Mrs. Shultz. In the 20 minute video, Jason is totally engaged as the two of them interact in a meaningful reading lesson. The teacher is actively using his device to model and reinforce the vocabulary in the story. Jason is responding to questions, reading words, commenting about the story and spelling words, all through his assistive technology device. The rest of the students in the classroom are quietly engaged in independent activities because they too recognize the change and value of Jason's progress. The AT Team was instrumental in giving Jason access to communicating and learning, which in turn improved his behaviors significantly.

I was shocked to hear that budget cuts may interrupt this valuable and life changing service for our students. The five members of the AT team work in tandem to ensure that every student can access an equitable education through assistive technology. The team's main function is much more than just delivering and maintaining devices. They spend time talking to the school teams and getting to know each child so they can figure out the best types of technology to trial for that student. The wealth of knowledge and training they share with the school team is invaluable in planning for our students! If we lose part of the team because of budget cuts, the limited AT Team will not possibly be able to offer the same level of support to consult, train and change the lives of so many students in the county who so desperately need assistive technology.

It is not enough to have the technology if the students, staff or parents do not know how to effectively use it! Please, for the sake of our students and the families/teachers who live and work with them, we need the entire Assistive Technology Team as it is staffed now so they can continue to make such an impactful, positive and life altering change to so many of our students. We want all of our students to reach their full potential!

Thank You!

Teresa Roberts  
Parent and Special Education Teacher

**From:** [Valerie Smothers](#)  
**To:** [CouncilMail](#)  
**Subject:** Fund special education services  
**Date:** Thursday, February 29, 2024 4:37:15 PM

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[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Council Members:

I am writing to encourage you to work with the Howard County Public School System to adequately fund our schools, and in particular special education services. This year millions of dollars in cuts have been proposed that will greatly impact our school system. If we want to continue to have one of the country's best school systems, we need to make school funding a priority.

As the parent of a child with a learning disability, I have seen firsthand the positive impact that our special education services have on youth with learning disabilities. My son currently participates in an Algebra 1 seminar class that provides an additional hour of Math instruction every day with support from special educators. He needs every minute of extra time required, as well as the expertise of the Math and Special Education instructors. With this support, he is thriving in Algebra I and shows increased confidence and independence in completing Math assignments. He also receives support in English and Science that enable him to access the curriculum in a way that would not be possible without supports.

If the County cuts special education programs like Math Seminar due to budget constraints, I fear that my son, along with many other students with learning disabilities, will fall further behind. While the Maryland report card for Howard County schools shows that proficiency rates for HCPSS students with disabilities has improved to 10.5% for Math and 28.7% for ELA, these proficiency rates lag far behind those of the general student population, which are 56.6% for Math and 69.9% for English.

Please do not leave our most vulnerable learners behind. Work with the school system to continue the current level of services for special education.

Very respectfully,

Valerie Smothers

**From:** [Whitney Johnson](#)  
**To:** [CouncilMail](#)  
**Subject:** School budget cuts  
**Date:** Saturday, March 9, 2024 8:40:18 AM

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[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

**Please do not cut GT programs for our children. I am in District 5 and my daughter is in 4th grade GT math and has GREATLY benefited from her GT teacher. We will be forced to go private if this occurs. I expect more from our elected officials for all of the taxes we pay. Thank you.**

Sent from my iPhone

## Respass, Charity

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**From:** Jmorgan G Mail <jmorgan.lehrer@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 12, 2024 11:58 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Gifted and talented

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Good Morning,

I am a very concerned parent and educator. I am a primary talent development coach in Montgomery County Public Schools and all the research shows how important it is to expose ALL students to the gifted and talented curriculum. The main reason we moved our family to Howard County was for the public schools. They have a wonderful reputation and there is no doubt in my mind that this kind of seclusion would tarnish HCPSS's reputation. ALL children should be able to have access to the curriculum and the academic standards that they need. The level of rigor should remain up to the individual student, not the area in which they live. I am appalled by the discriminatory nature of this action and am worried for my own children's future education. Please consider revamping this initiative to include our children. I don't understand why this part of the county should suffer!

Jesse Lehrer Kaplan

Sent from my iPhone

**From:** [Sara Goggin](#)  
**To:** [Budget Testimony](#); [Ball, Calvin](#); [CouncilMail](#)  
**Subject:** Concern over cuts to GT Programing  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 12, 2024 3:21:06 PM

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[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

I am writing to encourage you to increase the funding provided to the Howard County Public school system so that cuts in current levels of services do not need to be made.

While 13 higher FARMs percentage schools will keep GT programming, **29 Howard County elementary schools will completely eliminate the program for GT recess seminars and science & social studies curriculum extension units under the current proposal.**

While this action was taken in the name of equity, there is nothing equitable about it. There are FARM students in *every* elementary school in Howard County. Many accelerated learners including students who are part of the FARM program but attend schools with low FARM rates will be cut from these services. Some of these children being cut are part of the FARM program and travel further away from their neighborhood schools to help balance FARM rates in county schools.

My oldest daughter in second grade has taken two recess seminars this year, and she has enjoyed learning in depth about subjects that she otherwise would not have been exposed to, and enjoyed them so much that she would gladly take them during recess, which is saying a lot. She also just started a social studies curriculum extension unit (CEU) this month and every day last week she told me that it was the best part of her day. These programs are really installing in her a love for learning that is so important to teach our young students.

Therefore, I request that when providing allocations to HCPSS, please earmark funds for the continuation of full GT programming in **ALL** HCPSS elementary schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sara Goggin

**From:** [Torie Grant](#)  
**To:** [CouncilMail](#)  
**Subject:** Restore current GT to all elementary schools - continued budget concerns  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 12, 2024 5:34:35 PM

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[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Howard County Council Members,

I appreciate that the process surrounding the HCPSS FY25 Operating Budget has been difficult for everyone. *I remain very concerned about cuts at the elementary level. I am asking that you work with the County Executive and the HCPSS BOE to restore GT and music teachers and programming to ALL elementary schools in Howard County.*

Many families and community members were surprised by Scenario D, as this option had not been publicly available during the budget testimony process. Restoring elementary GT teachers and programming and 3rd grade orchestra to only schools with 40% or higher students who receive FARMs will leave the majority of HCPSS schools and students cut from these programs.

Consider the following groups of students who will not receive the same level of GT and orchestra programming:

- Students who receive FARMs at elementary schools with rates lower than 40%. Every elementary school in HCPSS has students who receive FARMs.
- Students who receive FARMs who travel to schools further than their closest school to balance FARM rates across the county. Many of these students would receive the lost GT and orchestra services at their neighborhood school, but instead are spending a significant amount of time traveling to a further school which now has reduced elementary enrichment services.
- Students whose families do not qualify for FARM, but are still struggling financially in Howard County given the extremely high cost of living. The current FARM annual income cap for a family of 4 in Howard County is \$55,500. Many families just above this income or even several thousands of dollars above this income are making financial sacrifices to make ends meet and are worried about putting food on their tables and keeping their homes heated in the winter.

All of the above families lack resources to provide enrichment programs outside of school. Moreover, young students are tired upon returning home from a full school day and often do not have the time or energy for supplemental GT material exposure after school. Children need exercise, fresh air, and a chance to recharge emotionally after school. *We should be maximizing learning that occurs during the school day.* Additionally, the long-term academic effects of school closures and virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be felt. Public schools need to be the place that bridges the gap and allows ALL students access to early GT STEM and music enrichment during the school day.

There are many other valuable community reasons to restore GT and orchestra programming to ALL HCPSS elementary schools:

- When accelerated students take part in GT CEUs, *the student-to-teacher ratios are*



*decreased.* As a result, students across all ability levels are given more individualized instruction. One teacher told me her class size drops from 25 students to 14 students during GT instructional time. This is a significant reduction in class size and benefits all students.

- Families move to Howard County for its sterling school reputation. Many of these families are immigrant families or first generation Americans who seek an excellent education for their children. These families add cultural diversity and vibrancy to our community and make Howard County better. Cutting elementary GT and orchestra programming could cause these families to move out of Howard County or leave HCPSS in pursuit of better education elsewhere. Additionally, we will no longer attract families to our county if the school system reputation suffers. This would be a great cultural and economic loss to our county.
- Accelerated students across all income levels deserve to be challenged appropriately. Acting Superintendent Barnes said in his HCPSS email on 3/08/24, "I remain committed to working alongside the Board of Education, our bargaining units, the County Executive, and County Council to secure the most possible funding so that our school system can continue in its pursuit to be great for every student." Taking away GT programming from certain elementary schools does NOT make HCPSS great for every student. If we want to continue to be a premier school system, we need to continue to offer GT programming to ALL students, *especially students who need to be challenged beyond the standard curriculum.*
- Providing different GT and orchestra curriculum in different elementary schools is divisive and creates community discord. Great education for every student unites the community. In seeking equity, perhaps we consider restoring safe and reliable bus transportation to all Title I schools, which reduces tardiness, absenteeism, and allows students to arrive safely and ready to learn in all weather conditions. Or we perhaps consider additional resources at Title I schools, which are not a difference in curriculum, but could add extra support at these schools, such as additional reading and math support.

My spouse and I moved our family to Howard County to improve our quality of life; the quality of HCPSS was the leading factor in that decision process. My oldest child has benefited tremendously from GT CEUs and Seminars and 3rd grade strings. She is engaged at school and excited to learn every day. Taking GT and orchestra away from her and similar learners is a setback and a disservice to our advanced students across all income levels and risks them not reaching their full academic potential.

The range of home exposure to science, logic, communication, critical thinking, creative thinking, and music varies across Howard County. HCPSS needs to be the unifying source of *early exposure* to these academic skills for every child. **Decreasing GT and music programming for our youngest students delays academic development and is inconsistent with the HCPSS Mission to ensure academic success for each student.**

**Please restore GT and music teachers and programming to ALL elementary schools in Howard County. This is a minor cost compared to the overall budget and the educational richness it adds to our students, our schools, and our community.** It is the best course of action to continue our world-class education system for every student in HCPSS. I look forward to working with you in the months and years to come.

Respectfully,

Torie Grant, MD, MHS

**From:** [erinhanrahan@aol.com](mailto:erinhanrahan@aol.com)  
**To:** [Ball, Calvin](#)  
**Subject:** Funding Cuts - Howard County Elementary School GT Programs  
**Date:** Sunday, March 17, 2024 11:08:38 AM

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[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Board of Education Members,

As life-long Howard County resident, and now a parent to three young children, I am writing because I believe it is important that the Board of Education ask the County Executive for the money needed to maintain our current level of services and comply with the new Blueprint mandates.

Deciding to keep our family in Howard County, rather than moving to Montgomery County or NoVa, was primarily driven by my own experiences in the Howard County public school systems. The preeminent education that I was afforded during my time in Howard County was the springboard for the rest of my academic career. If we want to continue to have one of the country's best school systems we need to make it priority - or those with options **will** leave.

**I am writing to implore you not to cut funding for the GT programs in elementary schools.** Cutting 20 positions from the Elementary School Gifted & Talented programs will create a variety of problems - the most obvious being that Howard County would be less equipped to provide the actual level of education necessary for certain kids to succeed. If children are not being asked to reach their full potential in elementary school, that will continue into middle school and eventually high school. Without the positions at the elementary school level, we will see more boredom in the classroom and less children reaching GT potential in the high school years.

I have to wonder why we insist on stunting the growth of children, especially after the academic hardship these kids have had to endure post-covid.

Howard County is better than this - do not cut GT funding in elementary schools.

Sincerely,

Erin Hayes

**From:** [Erin and Christian](#)  
**To:** [Ball, Calvin](#)  
**Cc:** [Christian Hayes](#)  
**Subject:** Funding Cuts - GT Elementary School  
**Date:** Sunday, March 17, 2024 11:01:11 AM

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[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Board of Education Members,

As a life-long Howard County resident, and now a parent to three young children, I am writing because I believe it is important that the Board of Education ask the County Executive for the money needed to maintain our current level of services and comply with the new Blueprint mandates.

Deciding to keep our family in Howard County, rather than moving to Montgomery County or NoVa, was primarily driven by my own experiences in the Howard County public school systems. The preeminent education that I was afforded during my time in Howard County was the springboard for the rest of my academic career. If we want to continue to have one of the country's best school systems we need to make it a priority - or those with options **will** leave.

**I am writing to implore you not to cut funding for the GT programs in elementary schools.** Cutting 20 positions from the Elementary School Gifted & Talented programs will create a variety of problems - the most obvious being that Howard County would be less equipped to provide the actual level of education necessary for certain kids to succeed. If children are not being asked to reach their full potential in elementary school, that will continue into middle school and eventually high school. Without the positions at the elementary school level, we will see more boredom in the classroom and less children reaching GT potential in the high school years.

I have to wonder why we insist on stunting the growth of children, especially after the academic hardship so many of these kids have had to endure post-covid.

Howard County is better than this - do not cut GT funding in elementary schools.

Sincerely,

Erin Hayes