

**Question 1 - Discipline: The FCPS 2018-2019 Discipline Study conducted by the FCPS Office on Equity, led by Dr. Francisco Durán, revealed that students with disabilities are nearly \*4 times\* more likely to be subject to the discipline process than any other peer group in FCPS. How would you address this disparity of outcomes? \***

My son has autism and he is now a junior in high school. He started in preschool autism class, was in the enhanced autism class, the non-cat class in elementary school, with part time in general education for specials and some for academics in the general education class. In middle and high school, he has been in cat A special education small group classes for academics but included in general education for music electives and PE. He and my daughter are both twice exceptional students – he for his music ability and my daughter who was in the AAP program but also has a disability. I have spent the last twelve years advocating for improvements to our special education system and have been on the School Board’s advisory committee for students with disabilities since 2011 and was on the board of SEPTA as well as started the FCPS Inclusion Workgroup. Part of my advocacy work has been on juvenile justice and criminal justice reform, especially for people with disabilities. I participated on Chairman Bulova’s commission last summer which revised the Memorandum of Understanding between FCPS and the FCPD (police department) regarding the roles and responsibilities of the SROs (police officers) in our school. Some of the things we were able to get in place in the new MOU was that the SROs must have disability awareness training, that special education departments are considered part of the key personnel in the SRO program, that SROs must ensure students have the intellectual capacity to understand questioning before being questioned. There is more that needs to be done but it was a start to helping protect students with disabilities from SRO interactions.

There are so many things I would like to do to address discipline disparities. I’ve tried to highlight much of what I want to do but I feel I could write ten pages on just this question. 😊 Discipline disparities for students with disabilities are worse than for any other subgroup yet have gotten consistently less attention than other subgroups. We need to ensure our teachers, staff, and administrators have an understanding of the behavioral manifestations of disability and the training and support to proactively and positively address behaviors. We also need to ensure we have research based best practices for the education of students with disabilities.

I would like mandated training for administrators and general education teachers on understanding disability and the manifestations of disability, especially for the fastest growing developmental disabilities such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia - the disabilities that are often not seen on the surface. Mandated training would help general education teachers and administrators know how to help students manage behaviors, how to provide proactive positive behavior management support for students, how to understand disability related behavior so as to not punish behavior that is related to a disability, and so as to not accidentally trigger behavior through actions or words of the teachers and administrators. This includes all teachers – “specials,” electives, related service personnel, etc.

We need to ensure students are provided consistent access to and support for using augmented communication devices so they can make their needs and wants known before they become frustrated, which can lead to behavior issues.

We need better training for our IAs to help them know how to help student's manage behavior and communicate their needs. We need more support for students with disabilities in the general education settings, including access to sensory items, breaks, IA support, team taught classes for electives and so much more. We need more support personnel to support students in inclusive settings.

We need more behavior interventionists. Our behavior interventionists are assigned 10 or more schools, which does not leave them enough time to provide enough \*reactive\* support much less the ability to provide proactive support to our teachers to help them support students to prevent behavior issues. Even when the need for behavior support has been identified and an FBA is requested. students are often waiting weeks after the request for an FBA before services can be provided and a BIP put into place. This can lead to escalation of behaviors, which can lead to unnecessary discipline that could have been avoided with timely support from a BIT or other central office staff trained in helping classroom teachers with proactive and positive behavior interventions.

IEP teams must be involved in discipline matters/hearings and IEPs must be taken into consideration during discipline hearings. Hearing officers must also get training on understanding disability and understanding the manifestations of disability so as to take those into account during discipline hearings. There should be mandated manifestation reviews in all discipline hearings, not just those with the potential of more than 10 days suspension. If the behavior is the manifestation of a disability, behavior supports must be put into place, teacher training must be considered, not just punitive measures or even just restorative justice. We must teach our students to understand the consequences of their action, but we must also ensure that they are being taught how to manage behavior that is the result of a disability, not just taught why that behavior is incorrect. While it is important to ensure we have safe schools, we need to make sure students are provided proper supports to address behavior concerns and the underlying needs.

I'd like mandated training specifically for administrators in knowing what programs, services, central office supports, and interventions are available so they can help better educate parents and facilitate access to these supports that can help students manage behaviors before they escalate. Too often parents have to know what to ask for rather than being provided this information. Administrators, teachers, and other personnel should have consistent knowledge of what supports are available, such as BITs.

We need consistent collaboration between special education teachers and general education teachers to best support inclusion where a child's behavior management plan is understood. There are still too many inconsistencies in knowledge of the reason for behavior management techniques, which leads to inconsistencies of implementation of behavior management techniques. For example, I have heard of some instances where a child was denied access to a token system or "stress ball." We need to ensure consistent understanding of and implementation of behavior management techniques so as to ensure all teachers know how and why to implement behavior plans. This will help prevent behaviors from escalating into the need for discipline.

Students with disabilities must be consistently and intentionally included in other FCPS initiatives looking to address inequities, such as the new equity initiative and personnel, such as the equity specialists and program manager. While it is a good start that the FCPS equity profiles include students with disabilities (SWD) as a group, we need to ensure the equity personnel have training in special education, that there is a consistent pathway for collaboration between the equity personnel and the special education departments and there is intentionality in ensuring the needs of special education students are heard and met in our efforts to ensure equity.

We need much more consistent support to help students in general education settings. We also need better programming for students with sensory/behavior challenges that are designed for today's complex disabilities. While we have CSS sites, those were intended for students with ED – not necessarily for students with autism, ADHD, anxiety and many of the other disabilities of the students who end up at CSS sites. The reality is that we have not holistically adjusted our special education offerings – whether that be support in general education, advanced classes with special education support, more inclusive classrooms, programming that was designed for today's complex disabilities, (i.e. the autism specific programming that ends in elementary school), sensory supports and small group classes for advanced students, programming that meets the academic and social/emotional needs, and the appropriate supports needed to better include all students in social or academic settings. We have left many of our children to be educated in a system that wasn't designed for their needs. We are putting square pegs into round holes, with teachers who don't necessarily have the proper training, special education departments that are often siloed, administrators with inconsistent training and knowledge of special education, and that is a combination that can lead to students having behavior issues because we do not have the appropriate settings or support that meet their needs.

Consistent implementation of policy and procedures and IEP accommodations is also important, especially for students in general education settings but really for all special education students. IEPs often have social, emotional and behavior goals – all teachers and administrators working with a student must understand how to ensure the supports students need are in place, how to help support the goals and provide the appropriate accommodations.

I would like to see mandated special education department participation (ideally a case manager, special education teacher) before a special education student is questioned by an SRO or administrator in relation to a potential discipline matter so that the special education personnel can help ensure the student understands the nature of the questioning, what is being asked, and that the student can meaningfully and knowingly participate. We must ensure the SROs get the required disability awareness training, that the collaboration with special ed is happening and that parents are able to participate before questioning a special education student. A student's IEP accommodations and team must be part of this questioning process except in exigent circumstances – immediate threat of serious harm etc.

Even when SROs aren't involved, we need to have special education support for questioning of students with disabilities and manifestation reviews for discipline not just greater than 10 day suspensions. While it is important to maintain safety in schools and teach appropriate behavior, we need to provide the correct supports for students with disabilities to learn to manage behavior.

I would like to see updates to the SR&R that make it clear that a parent or guardian and special education teacher or case manager must be allowed to participate to support a student with disabilities in connection with questioning by an administrator or SRO for behavior that could be subject to discipline.

Understanding the intersectionality of race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability when it comes to understanding and addressing discipline disparities is also important and there is work to be done, especially with the intersectionality of race and disability.

Adding additional best practices programming embedded in core academic classes and throughout a student's day such as executive functioning (EF) programs such as Unstuck and on Target, Social thinking programs such as Michelle Garcia Winner, which would help with direct instruction and proactively teaching skills to students to learn to manage some of the executive functioning and social skills needs that can lead to discipline (i.e. a student disciplined for saying inappropriate things or inappropriate social behavior or a student easily frustrated due to lack of executive functioning skills or a student disciplined for organizational challenges arising from lack of executive functioning skills – all these could be proactively addressed with opportunities for more direct instruction and practice. We need consistent EF programming, social skills programming, along with mindfulness and trauma informed education, to help students directly learn to manage the anxiety, the lack of EF skills, the lack of social skills, etc., that can lead to inappropriate behavior.

More counselors would be great also, but we need to make sure our counselors have training in working with special education students and we need more consistent collaboration between special education departments and counseling.

More social inclusion – buddies programs, opportunities for SWD to find friendships and a place to belong, supported inclusion in after school programs etc. – would give SWD a sense of belonging, friendships, confidence etc. that could possibly help with the frustration, loneliness, feelings of isolation that can lead to school refusal or behavioral issues.

Short answer – better programming designed to understand today's complex disabilities, better training and support for general education teachers, hearings officers, and administrators, more support for students in general education, IEP team involvement in and IEP accommodations for questioning that may lead to discipline, consistent implementation of IEP accommodations and policies, more IA support, more behavior interventionists, proactive EF and social skills programming throughout the day, trauma informed education, mindfulness, parent/special education teacher involvement in questioning, manifestation reviews for all discipline cases ... these would be a great start to addressing these disparities, better social inclusion.

At minimum, we NEED to ensure the fact that these disparities exist is DISCUSSED as part of the greater conversations around addressing disparities. We need special education specialists similar to equity specialists to help general education teachers and administrators but at minimum the equity specialists need special education training in understanding the needs and challenges of SWD, legal protections, behavior management with consistent collaboration with SPED departments and consistent implementation of IEP accommodations.

**Question 2 - Access: Access to Academy Programs, AAP, Honors classes, and electives (other than Strategies for Success and Personal Development) is often limited for students with disabilities. The same applies to after-school clubs and sports. This occurs despite the ADA requirement that all programming must be accessible to all students, regardless of ability. How do you propose to make all programming accessible to students with disabilities in FCPS? \***

FCPS School Board has currently ordered a review of access to the AAP program, which hopefully will also consider access for students with disabilities (SWD) to these programs. There are many issues around access for SWDs to these programs, mostly due to lack of support for the students and training/understanding by general education teachers.

I have two children who are twice exceptional (2e) – my daughter was in AAP classes and I found it challenging for the teachers to always understand her accommodations. Consistent implementation was always a battle. My son is a little understood 2e – he is musically gifted, but his disability impacts his communication and comprehension, so he needs advanced music classes with support. We also had much difficulty with his ability to access and inclusion in after school and extracurricular activities when he was in elementary school, so I have lived this question and continue to live it. Similar to above, I could write ten pages on this question without the time constraints. I also have presented at the FCPS Special Education conference on strengths focused inclusion of students with disabilities that talks some about the importance of electives and after school activities and how to better schedule for a student to be able access classes in areas of strength, whether that be electives such as music, business, vocational education, etc. or through classes or after school activities. 😊

**Here is the overarching answer, with each area addressed specifically below:**

We need a culture of strengths focused education for ALL students so children with disabilities can learn the skills needed to compensate for their *disability* while accessing classes in areas of *ability* and interest to gain skills to maximize their chances to become productive citizens. Equity means all students are educated to their full potential, as part of their community, included and belonging. This often means a holistic education of academic, career, technical, social and workplace skills so all students have a chance to find areas of interest and strength. We need to play to all students' strengths. We need to find a way to provide the varied settings (such as large, co-taught, or small group) that provide social, emotional and behavioral support with challenging curriculum and high standards in the area of exception for our twice exceptional students.

We need more transparency and consistency of programs across the county, with flexibility to tailor programs to the needs of any particular school population. Key to this is providing robust training and implementation support to school administrators and teachers to make sure all understand the programs that are being implemented at the schools and have the proper support to implement those programs.

We need more collaboration between general education and special education administrators, teachers, and staff to ensure all our teachers and staff have the resources, training, and ability to support all of our students across environments. We need to provide the support for schools to

facilitate an inclusive school culture that embraces the diversity in mental as well as physical being, embracing both as part of the “norm” of human experience. The largest barrier to people with disabilities being successful citizens of their world is acceptance by those without disabilities. It is usually lack of societal acceptance of the behavioral differences of disability rather than actual skill that prevents people from becoming productive citizens of their society. We need to break down the silos between special education and general education so that children with disabilities are meaningfully included in their school community and a full integrated part of their school community. We need to teach all students to be citizens who can work with others, who are inclusive, who have social skills, work skills, resiliency, life skills, and can function in a diverse world. This can only come from inclusive settings where children with disabilities and those without learn how to work with and accept each other as part of the “norm.” Studies have shown inclusive settings benefit all children. But this can only be done if our teachers and staff have the proper training and support.

Diversity must include those with disabilities and it must start in the school. Building a culture of inclusion that means children with disabilities are included in the school community, in classes with extracurricular components such as chorus and in extracurricular and after school activities. It means finding opportunities for inclusion outside of just academic inclusion for children with disabilities to practice their social, language, teamwork, and other skills. We must ensure our teachers and staff have the training, tools, and support they need to foster meaningful inclusion.

We need to review special education programming to provide more holistic focus on the whole child, with school options that are not just based on academic ability and designed for the spectrum of ability and disability. We need better differentiation in placement based on the spectrum of abilities and with social, emotional, language processing, behavioral, sensory needs in mind. We need to change the culture to stop equating academic ability with all ability.

This can include a study of FCPS current SPED programming with an understanding of neurodiversity, increases in disability prevalence and increasing complex needs for all students regardless of ability (i.e. anxiety, depression, language processing, sensory needs, behavioral issues, trauma, understanding splinter skills, etc.)

I would love to have a special education lead at the Region Level or other Mechanism/Region Level Staff to Address Inconsistency of Services/Programs/Knowledge and to ensure consistent implementation of best practices to work towards equity for student with disabilities.

Finally, we need to ensure we have a culture of collaboration and respect and transparency between administrators, special education teachers and staff and parents.

### **Specific Answer**

I am going to break this question down into three parts.

#### **PART 1 – access to AAP/Honors/AP classes.**

There are several challenges here that need to be addressed to making these classes more accessible. First, we need better training for general education teachers and administrators in knowing how to support the needs of SWD (2e students), how to implement IEP

accommodations, how to support executive functioning needs. We need better and more consistent special ed support for students – IA support, team taught classes, more consistent collaboration between gen ed and special ed. The reality right now is that too many students have to choose between advanced classes with no support or special education support in small group classes that do not provide the academically rigorous curriculum the student is capable of accessing. This is especially an issue for students with greater social and emotional or behavioral needs – the ones who often end up at CSS sites – because those sites often do not offer advanced classes. For example, the highest math class in high school for CSS sites is often Algebra II, meaning many of these students cannot get advanced diplomas or higher level math classes. We also have the issue of AAP being “all or nothing” when some students need advanced programming in one subject – such as math – but not all subjects. I would like to look into offering team taught and/or small group advanced classes, provide better support for SWD in AAP classes through IAs and/or better collaboration between special education and general ed/advanced academics, mandated disability awareness, EF and social skills training for general ed and advanced ed teachers and administrators so they understand those needs and can support them, and more options for students to be able to access education in areas of strength while receiving supports in areas of needs. (Options including team taught or small group advanced classes, advanced classes at CSS sites, consistent social/emotional and EF support and consistent IEP implementation in all settings by all staff.) I’d love to see partial AAP programming so students can access advanced classes in a particular area of strength such as math. At the middle and high school level, more team taught or small group honors or AP classes, or at minimum IA support in classes.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Training for all staff, especially AAP and teachers of advanced classes regarding twice-exceptionality and how to support it, manifestations of disability, behavioral intervention and sensory needs training to better support 2e kids in the classroom
2. Systematic collaboration between special education staff and AAP staff to provide behavioral supports and other accommodations
3. Develop programming to allow for 2e students to access AAP or advanced curriculum in areas of strengths rather than across all disciplines or not at all
4. AAP enrichment should be available and accessible in all environments
5. Summer camps for 2e students to provide academic enrichment and social skills intervention
6. A 2e specialist should be hired for the county to lead an initiative to making AAP and Honors classes accessible to 2e students in every school
7. A 2e/inclusion specialist should be hired for the school with 2e/inclusion resource teachers to help facilitate student inclusion in advanced, electives, academy and after school activities

**Part 2: access to electives and academy classes** (other than Strategies for Success and Personal Development) Violation of IDEA regarding access to electives. IDEA mandates that SWD have equal access to academic and non-academic programming. Yet too often SWDs are told that they must give up electives in middle school and high school for personal development/strategies or remedial reading or math classes. This has been a huge issue for my son and I have lived this

life. While those classes have value, a student should not have to give up an elective to take those classes. Electives often provide students the best chance to be in inclusive settings where they and their non SWD peers learn to work together – vital for postsecondary inclusion in the workplace and society. Electives sometimes are where SWDs find areas of strength, pursue their interests or find career paths. Same with academy classes. It is vital students have supported access to those classes. Some of things we can do are:

1. Better teacher training and implementation support– the teachers of those classes do not have the proper training or support to include students. We need better training for electives and academy teachers on how to better support SWDs. We also need more support for those teachers – IAs or other support – for those students.
2. Counselor consistent interaction and work with IEP teams – too often IEP teams make these class decisions in a silo without exploring all the options and counselors don't get involved more than in a minimal way. We need to end the siloing so the IEP teams are more aware of options such as academy classes and electives
3. While I think PD and Strategies are very useful classes for some students, offering intervention or remedial classes during intervention times such as “Bruin Block” or after school so that there are more options and ways for students can have those needs met while still having access to electives.
4. Embedding more social, emotional and organizational learning into core academic classes that may reduce the need for personal development type classes.
5. Better conversations in IEP meetings about the pros and cons of giving up electives – lack of inclusion in terms of building meaningful bonds and finding a place to belong that is often found through co-curricular classes such as band, finding areas of strength for postsecondary success, learning to be and work with peers, and better discussion of options such as academy classes.
6. Teaching our staff and administrators and IEP teams the importance of inclusion and especially social whenever possible – inclusive settings have been shown to improve education and social and emotional outcomes for SWDs. Those inclusive opportunities do not always have to be in academic settings but we do need to maximize them as appropriate for long term success.
7. I would like to see a county-wide initiative to provide extracurricular and co-curricular activities that are inclusive of SWD in every school and work with activities directors/arts teachers/coaches to provide and stipend more unified or inclusive programs either during or after school.

**Part 3: After school activities** – for similar reasons as above, it is important for students to be included in after school activities. Inclusion leads to better postsecondary outcomes, learning to work together towards a project or goal, learning and practicing social skills, building acceptance and understanding by all students, giving SWD a place to belong in school is vitally important. We need to work with PTAs at the elementary school level and coaches, after school programs, and teachers who sponsor clubs to make sure they have training and support to support SWDs. We also need to make sure SWD are aware of these clubs/activities and encouraged to participate – and not just in “Special needs” activities but included in all. Sometimes the information doesn't always get to special ed students, especially those in self contained classes. Breaking down some of the silos between special ed and general ed to ensure students are

encouraged, supported and included is vital to giving SWD a sense of belonging – very important for mental health and wellbeing especially at the middle and high school levels. We need to have much better collaboration between special ed departments. I'd love to see a special education after school specialist to work with the middle school after school specialist to ensure accessibility. Late buses that provide appropriate special ed transportation is also important for access at the middle and high school level.

**Question 3 - Transitions: Students with disabilities often are most at-risk for negative outcomes during times of transition. Currently, explicit transition programming and plans for students with disabilities vary from school to school and team to team. How do you propose that transition planning could be standardized throughout the county to ensure our most vulnerable students are supported during the most difficult transitions in education (including pre-k - kindergarten, elementary-middle, middle-high, and post graduation)? \***

For the last two years, I have presented on transitions at the FCPS special ed conference. In 2018, I along with Toby Latham and Brianne Russell Morris presented on helping parents understand the ITC-preschool transition, the preschool to kindergarten transition, and the elementary to middle school and middle to high school transition. In 2019 FCPS PSL Susan Kannengeiser and I presented on transitions – elementary to middle school, middle school and high school and postsecondary. These presentations were designed to help parents navigate these important transition times to best set their children up for success in their transitions. I've added links to the PowerPoints related to those transitions here for more information. This will give more information to my answer and I hope is also helpful to parents who need it.

2018 Presentation:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dHjRqJsVcTh0GJgox53BRqPf7WeEwESH/view?usp=sharing>

2019 Presentation: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1j7odJBKR-Ulcn\\_NcHZfi3g7fs\\_hUGsjw/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1j7odJBKR-Ulcn_NcHZfi3g7fs_hUGsjw/view?usp=sharing)

The problem is that discussions about transitions, what is needed to help each child transition, what the new environment is like and how that may impact a child, knowledge of what the new environment is like, is inconsistent from IEP team to IEP team. Some teams have the knowledge to have more robust conversations and others do not. I feel like we need to standardize the knowledge and conversations during the transition IEPs. We also need to standardize participation by both the current school personnel and the student's new school personnel.

While I feel like I could write ten pages to answer this question, especially since each part is often a one hour presentation, here is my more succinct answer.

1. I'd like to have a transition handbook that guides parents through these important transition IEPs, with questions to ask, understanding of the new environment, etc.
2. I would also like to have checklists developed to help guide IEP team discussions, especially for those important transition IEPs, this would help
  - a. Pre-K to kindergarten – some of the issues to understand would be the difference in availability of settings (gen ed, pull out, non cat for the schools that have it, enhanced

autism, and the fact that the kids can be in a combination, the issues of ensuring support in specials, during lunch and facilitating social interaction during recess, just to name a few. Conversations also needs to start regarding VAAP vs SOL track so parents are aware of long term consequences of those choices so when more conversations happens before the first SOLs, parents are aware of the issues. Discussions regarding inclusion also need to be had, as well as after school activities. Just as a start.

- b. Elementary to Middle school – again I would love to create a checklist for IEP teams to guide discussions regarding transition support. This would help ensure consistency of transition planning. It is vital to have appropriate conversations to ensure there is proactive support to set students up for success for the changing environment of middle school versus elementary school. It is vital IEP teams discuss the greater organizational, independence, and social needs that come with middle school, such as using lockers, PE, block scheduling, etc. These need to be discussed with a proactive plan to set students up for success. I also think postsecondary transition conversations need to consistently start during this process, including discussions of long-term planning for diploma options, postsecondary plans, accommodations for SAT and other college testing so parents know how long some of these accommodations take to put in place. There are so many ways to set students up for proactive success in transitioning and this starts with standardizing some of the things that need to be discussed during the transition IEP. Long term postsecondary planning also need to be discussed during these IEPs, with parents being informed of postsecondary options and limitations, such as the fact that postgraduate programs such as Davis and Pulley and STEP are not available to students who earn the standard diploma but are available for students who earn an applied studies diploma or those who are working towards a standard diploma. These programs should be explained fully to parents, as well as the DARS options of the Wilson center, in conjunction with conversations about high school class planning with a view towards potential postsecondary options.
- c. Transition IEPs start at age 14 but too often these are only developed with the student and case manager, without participation by CTS and ETR. These goals are often not measurable and lack short term objectives, data collection or progress reports. We need to have consistent CTS and ETR and parent participation in the development of transition IEP goals, date and measurements to check for progress towards these goals, and collaboration between CTS, ETR, and special education and general education staff in the teaching and measurements of these goals.
- d. Middle school to high school – again a checklist would be useful to guide conversations. Planning for class schedules beyond one year should be discussed, as well the process for accommodations for SATs, college prep or planning and long term postsecondary planning also need to be discussed during these IEPs, with parents being informed of postsecondary options and limitations, such as the fact that postgraduate programs such as Davis and Pulley and STEP are not available to students who earn the standard diploma but are available for students who earn an applied studies diploma or those who are working towards a standard diploma. These programs should be explained fully to parents, as well as the DARS options of the Wilson center, in conjunction with conversations about high school class planning with a view towards potential postsecondary options.

- e. We also need checklists to talk about inclusion opportunities, as well as robust conversation about electives versus classes such as strategies for success, how to facilitate participation in the school community, the difference in programming and setting options, just to name a few. This applies to middle school and high school.
3. I'd like to have checklists for all IEP teams to use to ensure all appropriate conversations have happened.
  4. We need checklists to guide conversations to break down silos and segregation - Better and earlier collaboration between special ed, gen ed, CTE, career and transition and counselors who are helping plan schedules and after school activities/extracurriculars
    - a. Better collaboration between gen ed teams, special ed teams, and after school or PTA sponsored programs, co-curricular and extracurricular programs
    - b. Holistic planning with keeping in mind independence and all the skills needed to be productive citizen
      - i. Tied to Portrait of a Graduate
      - ii. Life, work, social, resiliency, communication, teamwork etc
      - iii. Stop the low expectations and over prompting that leads to learned helplessness
      - iv. More holistic planning for postsecondary planning
      - v. Better and earlier transition plans

To sum up, we need much greater guidance for IEP teams to ensure the proper information is being discussed. We need better training for parents before these important transition points to know the questions to ask. I would recommend development and use of checklists to discuss the changing environment, need for long term planning, and issues to discuss and document along with a requirement that staff from the new school participate in the development of the transition IEP.

**Question 4 - Staff Support: Our FCPS special education staff express frustration with the overwhelming demands of paperwork, planning and classroom instruction for their high caseloads of students, each of whom has a unique IEP to address their individual needs. How do you propose FCPS could better support our special education teachers, related service providers, and support staff? How do you propose administration improve support and understanding for general education teachers who are also responsible for addressing the needs of these students? \***

The reality is that our special education teachers and related service providers have too high caseloads. Some of our SLPs and OTs have caseloads of 50+ students over more than one school. Parents often complain about pressure to reduce related services, including eliminating or reducing speech services for students who have significant communication needs. Special education teachers are overwhelmed with paperwork. We desperately need more related service providers. There is no way around it. We also need to look at the case manager as teacher model – it is overwhelming to try to teach students, support students in general education and manage cases, especially for those students who are often more in general education than in special education, meaning the special education teacher may not spend as much time with the student. We need more administrative support to help case managers manage the paperwork demand –

IEP process, progress reports, drafting goals. Special education teachers cannot keep doing all this work alone. And from what I have heard this is one of the major reasons we have issues with special education teacher recruitment and retention.

Here is what I would like to do – again this is not an exhaustive list as I feel I could write ten pages on this

1. We need more consistent support for the caseload and paperwork demands of IEPs, meetings, progress reports, coordination with central office staff etc. I'd like to see more of this work be part of the role of the special education administrator.
2. We need better training for administrators to know how to support special education teachers to help with some of this administrative work and also to just simply understand the different requirements and needs.
3. General education teachers need to have more requirement to participate in the process of data collection, IEP development, goal development, progress reports etc. This is especially important for those students who spend more time in general ed so the special ed case manager doesn't know them as well. There needs to be shared responsibility for case management and the paperwork demands.
4. We need to study the "Teacher as Case Manager" model to see if this is the best way. It seems to me by putting so much responsibility on the teachers, it becomes overwhelming and gets in the way of classroom teaching. Some other schools systems have administrators as case managers who collaborate with the team but also manage much of the administrative work of case managing. I'd like to explore this or other models to help alleviate the burden.
5. We need more time for gen ed teachers and special ed teachers to collaborate. In general we need to break down the silos between gen ed and special ed to ensure everyone is doing their part to support a student, which includes the paperwork and coordination involved.
6. We need to look at caseloads to make sure teachers do not have too many students they are case managing or that they are not case managing students they hardly know – which is especially an issue at middle and high school.
7. We need to be intentional about how this process (paperwork, data collection, progress reports, IEP development etc) is adapted for secondary school where there are multiple teachers. We need to make sure all the teachers are full members of the team and the data, teaching etc reflects goals implemented across settings when appropriate etc.
8. We need better training for IAs and other support staff to help teach and implement IEP goals.
9. We need better training for all staff on the teaching and use of AAC devices to make sure all students learn to communicate in the way that is right for them.

There is much more but this is an area that is vital to address so we stop losing our good special education teachers and we can recruit new ones as well. This is vital to addressing our critical special education teacher shortage.

**Question 5 - Restraint and Seclusion: As you know, the use of restraint and seclusion on any students including, disproportionately, those receiving special education in FCPS, is a controversial topic. What are your views on this issue? \***

Restraint and seclusion are very traumatic to our special education students and can be very dangerous, especially prone restraint that has led to deaths. So this is a very serious issue – especially considering the failures of FCPS part regarding proper reporting to both the Office of Civil Rights and parents. There is little evidence that restraint or seclusion helps a student learn proper behavior management techniques but rather causes trauma, fear, school avoidance and other behavioral issues and can amount to child abuse when inappropriately done. On the other hand, I have heard from several teachers regarding situations where their safety or other students was imminently at risk and serious injuries were or did occur. However, the use of restraint and seclusion in FCPS is not well regulated, without proper guidelines, and without proper oversight. We should not allow restraint unless as a last resort and not unless absolutely necessary to prevent imminent bodily harm and we must ensure positive behavior modifications and de-escalation techniques were used first. We must prohibit seclusion, mechanical or chemical restraint, any physical restraint such as prone restraint that restricts breathing or is life threatening. We need to ensure staff have proper training in behavior modification, positive behavior techniques, de-escalation techniques – important to use things like PBIS, Multi-tiered systems of support, and other behavior techniques – to prevent behaviors from escalating in the first place. We need more support for teachers from administration and behavior intervention teachers – of whom we need MANY more. If a child needs to be removed from a classroom, that cannot include isolation in a seclusion room but supported removal to deescalate (i.e. with a staff member trained in de-escalation and behavior intervention). We need administrator training to help better oversee our teacher to ensure improper restraint and seclusion are not happening. This also needs to be part of the equity team’s purview – we cannot have equity if we are traumatizing our most vulnerable instead of providing them the supports we need.

The task force FCPS has convened and the special ed ombudsman are a good start but we need more staff at the region or school level who have the proper training to provide support and oversight to ensure proper behavioral techniques are being using We need to have better oversight to make sure our staff are getting training and using their training and that we are not restraining or secluding our children unnecessarily – and especially NOT as a punitive measure. I personally know several students who were secluded as punishment, not because of a need for safety of the teacher or students. That is unacceptable and we need better training and oversight at the building level.

We need more support for our teachers and staff – more BITS, more administrators who have the training to provide support and more oversight. And much stricter regulations on when and how we can restrain. Our current policies are much too vague and open to interpretation regarding when R&S may or may not be used. And we need supported “in class or out of class timeout” not seclusion, where a teacher or staff member work with students who may need a break to deescalate, not where students are isolated in spaces by themselves from where they cannot escape, such as seclusion spaces in class or seclusion rooms.

At minimum schools must not be places where children are traumatized. This is a serious issue that needs to be addressed through better policy, training, support and oversight. Parents must be notified, paperwork MUST be filled out and reporting MUST be accurate.