

Arun Vadlamani

1. Do you believe the district's access and equity policy introduced in 2020 goes far enough in addressing the issues of inequity in our district (particularly in regard to vulnerable populations, i.e., POC, queer, special needs, immigrant, second-language learners, etc.)? Yes or No
Please clarify your answer.

No.

I believe that the Access and Equity policy was the first step. Over the past few years, we have eliminated gatekeeping to the advanced classes by teachers and have structured class selection so that students to pick the appropriate levels for themselves.

I have personally seen my friends' children, who are African American, have a challenging time in joining an advanced Math class even though they were very well qualified to be in that advanced class. I am sure that the number of such incidences have decreased over the past few years, but they still occur at an alarming rate.

But evidently, the information and welcome gap persists, especially amongst parents who are POC, immigrants and families with English as a second language.

We can enhance the participation of all students by providing clear and complete information to their parents via multiple media channels (email, text, telephone, etc.) and explicitly highlight the numerous ways students can accelerate their progress even if they start at an on-level course. We should also create a culture of incentivizing educators to see potential in every single student and not give in to stereotypes.

We have also seen that students in on-level classes receive fewer instructional days than those in the Honors classes. The goal is to create a robust experience for all kids while removing barriers for historically underrepresented children.

2. This current integration plan relies heavily on professional development, but research shows that this is not an effective way to reduce bias. Do you have other specific ideas about what other forms of data the district could collect or actions it could implement to address the educational disparities in regard to Black students? Yes or No
Please clarify your answer (in addressing both segregation and the racial achievement gap)

Yes.

Bias can be somewhat remediated by professional development, but in my opinion, processes and algorithms should be created that reduce the impact of the human prejudice that dictates student's access to course choice. Of course, we should not stop providing professional development for anti-bias training and integration; however professional development is not sufficient. An educator's job, among many others, is to identify a child's talents and affirmatively invest in cultivating those talents. Imagine if

the teachers had done that with my friend's kid: then, instead of being discouraged and feeling hurt by school, the child would have flourished and achieved at the highest level.

E.g., Students are currently offered a choice to pick an appropriate Math class at the beginning of the Middle School; they should be explicitly offered choices and the end of every year after 6th grade so that a late blooming student can still take the most rigorous math class even after starting at on-level Math during 6th grade. Currently the course selection is not malleable enough to allow students to catch up.

3. Realistic active shooter and lockdown drills are used nationwide with little to no evidence of efficacy in a real emergency. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, our schools have had to replace physical reenactments of active shooter drills with tabletop exercises (in which teachers explain and review emergency protocols in a lesson or game). Are you open to keeping this approach and implementing it as research-based district policy for school security drills (within the state law) even after kids are vaccinated against COVID-19? Yes or No
Please clarify your answer.

Yes.

If there is overwhelming evidence to show that these active shooter drills are ineffective then I am all for eliminating them. During middle school, my daughter was negatively impacted by such a drill, no mention was made that it was a test and many of her classmates were in emotional distress.

After 9/11 I take all fire drills seriously, it is important to have muscle memory of the escape routes and basic hazard avoidance information. I work in a skyscraper and twice a year we are perform a mandatory fire drill. We are informed multiple times (in advance) that "this s a test." This procedure reduces emotional stress and allows people to absorb life-saving information without distress.

Our school district should learn from FDNY and clearly announce tests so that students can learn how best to react in a simulated-real-life situation without being in one.

4. Do you think that the current policies in place for the SOMSD adequately address the racially disproportionate discipline of students in regard to suspensions and expulsions, and the disproportionate number of students of color placed in special education? Yes or No
Please clarify your answer.

I will answer the question in 2 separate but related parts

No. The current policy on student discipline at first glance seems sound, but it is still implemented in a way that it disproportionately impacts students of color. Instead of having traditional draconian punishments, the district should move more quickly on implementing innovative practices like restorative justice, ensuring that parents and community members are involved.

No. With regards to special education, the manner in which students are referred and identified needs to be much clearer and less subjective. It should be based on the child's learning style and an objective perception of what the child needs. Like with all other classifications and gatekeeping to access

performed by teachers and administrators, we need data on the racial breakdown of students in inclusion class vs. resource room etc.

5. Do you think that there should be more accountability in ensuring that educators in our district do not discriminate against students of color in the classroom in regard to instruction, advising, curriculum, or discipline? Yes or No
Please clarify your answer.

Yes. All monitoring of accountability starts with collection and analysis of data. Clearly primary data is not available as most discrimination happens in private, but its effects can be seen in public data. E.g., We are starting with the Intentional Integration Plan: Though we may not be able to see if it impacts an individual child, we can see the distribution of children from various neighborhoods across schools. Similarly looking at data for class composition, discipline of students by race we can see if the bias is decreasing.

6. Do you think the district should specifically address the social and educational disparities that result from the COVID crisis for those students who don't have access to resources at home? Yes or No.
Please clarify your answer. (If possible, be sure to specifically include mention of students with special needs in your response)

Yes.

Though the communication from the district was not perfect, the district has made robust attempts to reduce resource disparities by Chromebook distribution. The district should also treat this as a data collection issue in collating data about what the district families need and understanding the hurdles to resource acquisition. Another example where the district has done well is to offer free lunches to all students through 2022.

7. Do you support the placement of School Resource Officers (police officers assigned to and stationed) in SOMSD schools? Yes or No
Please clarify your answer.

No.

Police Officers (even if unarmed) have no place inside a school, they should enter the school only if a crime has been committed or if invited by the teacher or the school administration or in an active shooter situation. All other scenarios are best served by non-uniformed social workers and community volunteers.

8. Given that swimming and pool access has been eliminated as a part of the high school curriculum, do you think that the district should work to ensure access to swim education for all students in the district, especially those who do not have access to pools or lessons outside of school? Yes or No.
Please clarify your answer.

Yes.

As per the CDC “Drowning deaths are the second leading cause of unintentional injury deaths for children aged 0–17 years” and “In 1999–2019, unintentional drowning death rates were higher for non-Hispanic black children compared with non-Hispanic white and Hispanic children.”

If we think of survival swimming as a life skill, then it should be taught in schools like Drivers Education. I propose that all children entering our school district (from pre-k to 12th grade) be allowed to receive survival swimming lessons in our town’s swimming pools. No more than 500 students enter our district every year and at volume pricing can be taught survival swimming for \$200 for a total of \$100,000; this is less than 1/10th of 1% of our total school budget.

I am a proud supporter of the Josh Project (<http://www.joshproject.org/>) which provides financial support and survival swim lessons to children especially children of color.

9. Do you think the district should work to provide equitable access to be in dialogue with our school district leaders to address parent concerns? Yes or No.
Please clarify your answer.

Yes.

Traditionally, the majority of communication between parents and district leadership has been dominated by those in higher socio-economic strata, leaving others out of this dialogue. The district can ameliorate this near monopoly by proactively reaching out to targeted demographics of parents and provide more opportunities for input.

e.g., decreasing the over-reliance on emails (which traditionally need computers and internet access) and shifting to text messages (universal, no internet needed)

e.g., providing multi-lingual translations of the same material

e.g., sending paper notifications back with students, even in higher grades. There have been many cases of parents with special education children missing out on programs as they did not know the deadlines to apply etc.

10. For incumbents only: If you are an incumbent, please explain how you have worked to address race and inequality in SOMSD during your previous tenure.

Other:

- Please feel free to include a link to a video clip (posted to YouTube or Vimeo) in which you explain what personal/professional commitment and understanding of educational access, equity, and racial justice you bring to the role.

https://youtu.be/aydwlOtWS_Y