

Shannon Cuttle

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 regards to vulnerable populations, i.e., POC, queer, special needs, immigrant, second-language learners, etc)? Yes or No Please clarify your answer.

The district Access and Equity Policy (5751) was approved in 2015. Addressing education inequalities is an ongoing active process, not one solution or one methodology. The district has made a commitment over the past three years to building more welcoming inclusive schools and creating a community of care by addressing inequalities at every level. Connected to access and equity, the board unanimously approved in November, 2018, a once in a generation Long Range Facilities Plan (LRFP). The Board of School Estimate unanimously approved the \$160M bond for LRFP in June, 2019. In Fall of 2020, the board unanimously moved forward approving the first round of bids to go out to construction. In June 2021, the district's long planned and anticipated LRFP officially broke ground on the first set of buildings at Seth Boyden, Clinton, South Mountain and Tuscan Elementary to repair and expand buildings and facilities to meet 21st century learning needs. The board unanimously voted in September 2019 Resolution C.3921 District Goals that included laying the groundwork of the once in a generation facility plan, integration plan, student achievement, data collection and ongoing teacher development around cultural competencies and diversity staff recruitment and retention. Over the past two and half years, and even during the pandemic, the district has started to make strides addressing the real issues including radical changes to support marginalized students and overall climate and culture. In 2020, the Board unanimously approved the plan to bring in Dr. Fergus to begin the intentional integration work - connecting access and equity across multiple facets of our operations and instructional practices. In September, 2021, Dr. Fergus reported his initial assessment and findings to the Board. In 2019, the Board of Education approved an MOU and brought in HMI (Hetrick-Martin Institute) to conduct LGBTQ+ cultural competency training and professional development for all board members and district leaders and principals. In January, 2020 the district partnered with HMI to provide additional FREE student counseling, health and wellness, and student group support accessible to district students. When COVID-19 pandemic closed our SOMSD schools, the HMI services transitioned to virtual for access to support. The district has continued its commitment under Access and Equity with an intention to hire diverse candidates at all levels. All key district senior leadership positions at the central office are now filled. We have much more work to do and under the 2021 - 2022 school year budget that board passed (May 2021), under recommendation from Dr. Taylor, focuses and includes additional anti-bias and SEL, suicide prevention, inclusion, anti-bullying, LGBTQ+ cultural competency training for all teachers and staff, additional student social emotional support and health and wellness. We have much more work to do to ensure that we are truly creating a community of care for all students; we are on a path forward. The next two to three years will be crucial as we stay committed in supporting the district on the next steps as we move forward on these key areas as we have more work to do.

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 regards to Black students? Yes or No Please clarify your answer (in addressing both segregation and the racial achievement gap)

The Board of Education does not regulate day to day operations of the school district. The Board unanimously approved Dr. Fergus as a consultant to help guide the district intentional integration plan (III) with Dr. Taylor. In September 2021, the Board approved 2021-2022 district and board goals that include data collection and actions for the Board and district to address anti-bias, access and equity, professional development, student achievement, creating welcoming inclusive environments, supporting student needs and marginalized students, and communication with families. Understanding that our most important work is under curriculum and instruction, the Board unanimously approved moving the Board Curriculum and Instruction Committee (C&I) to a committee of the whole in July 2021. This was done for the Board to better address student instructional needs, special education, professional development, data collection, access and equity, intervention and prevention and monitor the intentional integration work, student educational disparities, and address the achievement gap. With the engagement of Equal Opportunity Schools, the district is moving forward on identifying the children that have not been best served by our district and helping the district create mechanisms to support those children to move forward. Coupled with this identification the board, as approved in 2021/22 District Goal #5, has worked with administration to identify the need to problem solve for the significant operational processes in our district that yield inequitable results. Unpacking all the inefficiencies, biases, and bottlenecks -- attention to detail and root cause analysis -- so that we understand the problem we are trying to solve (or the purpose of the process), we understand the limitations and tradeoffs we made in that solution, and we examine the outcomes to reexamine the process for equity. This will move the district from reactionary to proactive focusing on process improvement.

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.

The public emergency order by Governor Murphy during virtual learning allowed for some changes but the EO is now over and the NJ School Drill Law N.J.S. 184:41-1 is in effect. The COVID 19 adaptations as of August 2021 anticipated by NJDOE for N.J.S.184:41-1 allows for adjustments to drilling to my understanding, such as practicing safe social distancing, wearing face coverings etc. NJDOE OSEP Drilling initiative announced that the Unannounced Active Shooter Drill Observations are suspended until further notice and suggested a drill to be conducted and how these drills can be implemented during a state health crisis will be provided via webinars. NJ state law states that 18A:41 states that every NJ school shall have at least one school drill and one fire drill each month. Now that the COVID Emergency Executive Order is over, schools are required to be in person session the state code red mandated drill order remains in effect.

I agree with the use of table top exercises. The state law is the overall mandate for schools to follow and outside of any individual district or Board decision. I am against any active shooter drilling that is in addition to the state mandate, via outside additional vendors partnerships that conduct realistic school shooting drilling onsite or place children and/or staff in drilling actions that could be potentially hurtful or harmful. The board recently approved a job description for a reimagined School and Community Safety Liaison Director. This new position leader allows us to reimagine the role of safety in our District, continuing to move from an approach that is reactive and often punitive in nature to one that is proactive, preventative, collaborative and restorative. We expect an approach to safety is closely aligned with the District's goals. In addition to ensuring the physical safety of our students and buildings, while maintaining compliance in all security and emergency responsive trainings/drills, we envision this leader working collaboratively with our building leaders, guidance staff and educators to expand our view of safety to ensure SELF-aligned approaches are in place, such as tier one intervention supports, working to uncover root causes of outward symptoms like attendance issues and low-level classroom and building infractions, and working towards more embedded and sustainable implementation of our restorative practices that ensure that ALL our District staff engage in this work.

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

Please clarify your answer.

The district has been working to update and implement policies over the past two years to better address these concerns and move forward. The 2021 update to the Student Code of Conduct also has been updated to include a restorative justice lens, with additional professional staff development on restorative justice practices at all levels. This is an ongoing area of improvement the district is committed to address systemic challenges that have continued to impact students. The policy oversight and implementation is only one aspect to address these disparities along with training, policy and procedure, implementation and data collection. Over the past two years suspension and expulsion data has declined in the district. During my tenure on the Board these topics have been included and discussed across committees and Board and district goals to ensure they are addressed at all levels. The Board has in the past three years reimagined the Board policy committee and streamlined the process to better assess and address district policy and best practices. All our policies are now stored in a searchable database and will be updated seamlessly for our staff and our community. This is another important step in moving our district forward and I am committed to addressing these important areas for our district and community.

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 regards to instruction, advising, curriculum, or discipline? Yes or No Please clarify your answer.

The district has been working on policies that address these concerns across all marginalized students, as well as creating a robust professional development plan. More continues to be done and this is ongoing. The district has been working with community agencies and groups and internally with leadership at all levels to create a community of care and addressing climate and culture. There is additional growth in this area and the district has committed to engaging and growing to support all

students. This is a focus area that I continue to uplift and share advocacy, resources and information with the district and my colleagues.

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. The district has been working on continuing to address social emotional and health and wellness needs of all students (and staff) during COVID. The district budget that the Board passed in May 2021, also includes funding for new programs and new health and wellness initiatives to address and strengthen student (and staff) health and wellness support due to COVID. During my tenure the district also partnered with HMI to bring onsite and virtual health counseling FREE for district families and students. The district has also announced plans as part of the return to school to address additional support, training and resources for social emotional health and a well being focus for students and staff in the 2021- 2022 school year and beyond. Addressing climate and culture and student wellness and support is a critical issue. Only with a student-centered climate and culture can we achieve the equity and excellence that are our district's primary goals.

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.

The district does not currently use SRO (police officers assigned to schools) at this time. I do not support as an individual, assigned SRO in schools. The district currently only contracts with our vendor safety agents that are unarmed and certified trained for specific building protocols and needs. Evidence based research has shown that SRO in schools do not dramatically decrease safety concerns and may have potential unintentional consequences for our most marginalized students. The district maintains under state law a MOU with both the South Orange and Maplewood Police Departments for mandated and specific safety protocols and requirements.

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.

The CHS pool was unique to CHS and SOMSD and was closed due to structural problems with the antique pool structure. The Long Range Facilities Plan (LRFP) in motion includes converting the former antique unused pool space and converting it into additional much needed classrooms at CHS. The state of New Jersey does not currently require a swimming curriculum in order for students to graduate. Swimming safety is important for all persons at all ages and I would support a joint two town initiative to ensure more equitable access and swimming classes for SOMA youth and families as the Village of South Orange and the Township of Maplewood have designated and operate our local community pools.

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.

The district has made improvements since Dr. Taylor's tenure in regards to outreach with community stakeholders and participation. The SOMSD chain of command portal was launched in 2019 by Dr. Taylor gives clearer guidance on district channels for families and communities to address concerns. I have been a consistent vocal proponent to ensure more efficient and accessible communication to the community both offline and online. Ensuring communication that is transparent, accessible, multi-language and adaptable for those with various abilities for students, families and the public is vitally important to building a welcoming community.

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.

Since joining the Board of Education in 2019, I have been active since day one in uplifting and supporting student voices and all students' needs including supporting marginalized students and families while helping to move us forward in creating more welcoming inclusive schools towards 21st century learning.

During my tenure on the Board some sample highlights:

Advocated to expand and uplift Board Student Representative voices and more participation in our structure and committees. Our current Board Student Representative is an active participant now on the Policy Committee as well as Curriculum and Instruction. The Board passed the once in a generation Long Range Facilities Plan (LRFP). The Board hired a permanent superintendent, Dr. Taylor, after two interim superintendent's Dr. Carrick and Dr. Ficarra.

The Board approved the reorganization of the central office to ensure a commitment to Access and Equity, and approved the hiring of the key senior leadership team members that were previously interim appointments. The Board voted to bring in Dr. Fergus, as an expert to perform an equity audit at the elementary and secondary level. The Board adopted student focused policies including removing student library fines and fees. Also ensured all district handbooks, policies and job descriptions were updated to use gender inclusive language. The Board passed an updated comprehensive Transgender and LGBTQ+ Student policy. Working to partner with our two towns and district to bring Lavender Graduation to our school district community. The Board worked with HMI to bring anti-bias, anti-racist and LGBTQ+ cultural competency professional development training to Board Members, district senior leadership and staff. The Board worked to bring HMI as a FREE onsite partnership for student counseling, support and crisis prevention to the district. The Board passed a Resolution to ask the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) to adopt supporting LGBTQ students in its policy and positions governance manual in 2020. The Board formally supported/approved and worked to bring the FREE Summer Food Program for students to launch a pilot project in partnership with The Township of Maplewood and Township of Irvington and ongoing now permanent program for district families. As an elected member to the Essex County School Board Association (ECSBA) by Essex County School Board Member colleagues across the county representing SOMSD, serving as Vice President, I was able to not

only bring SOMSD to have a seat at the table but to bring anti-bias and anti-racist, access and equity, LGBTQ+ training and positions to the county level. As an elected member to New Jersey School Board Association Board of Directors, representing Essex County and SOMSD by ECSBA colleagues, representing SOMSD, I was able to not only bring SOMSD to have a seat at the table but to bring anti-bias and anti-racist, access and equity, inclusion, welcoming schools, LGBTQ+ student support to the state level. The Board successfully passed a Resolution at New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) Delegate Assembly in 2021 that formally adopted a NJSBA policy for all school boards that explicitly states its NJSBA commitment to cultivating school communities that are welcoming to LGBTQ+ students. This state level work is critical to ensure that all children in NJ begin to experience inclusive environments beyond just “not discrimination”. The Board/ SOMSD joined a consent brief with other districts across the country to SCOTUS in support of student Gavin Grimm in the historic case Grimm v. Gloucester in support of transgender student rights. The Board passed a resolution that created a district Task Force to address and make recommendations to address and support student sexual harassment and crisis intervention support. The Board created a group agreement unanimously approved by all Board Members via advice under NJSBA for our body governance and best practices in our shared commitment. As a member of C&I Committee, I supported the need to address updating curriculum, professional development around anti-bias, racial- bias, restorative justice, social emotional learning, trauma informed care, suicide prevention and intervention, LGBTQ+, Transgender students, racial- bias, inequities and access and equity. I was the first SOMSD Board Member accepted to present at NJSBA Workshop, and the first to ever to present at NJSBA Workshop on LGBTQ+ Cultural Competency, anti-bias, welcoming schools and health and wellness over two standing room only capacity sessions. (NJSBA Workshop is the annual state-wide Board Member and School Administrator conference in Atlantic City, New Jersey). Only with a student-centered climate and culture can we achieve the equity and excellence that are our district’s primary goals.

I also regularly share resources, news, updates and training opportunities including potential new community partnerships to keep my Board Member colleagues, the district and our students and families better informed in these areas.

I have also made a commitment to go further with additional non-required state mandated training beyond to become a NJSBA State Certified New Board Member and I also meet the requirements for the NJSBA State Master Board Member Certification. I have also completed the NJSBA School Board Leadership Training Institute to be the best informed Board Member that I can be for our community.

Supplemental Statement and Photo



My background is as a national leader in the safe schools movement. As a leader and advocate for over 20 years, I have driven innovation in education and civil rights policy including LGBTQ+ rights, welcoming schools, inclusion, anti-bias, advocacy and programming at the city, state, and federal levels. With a background in equity and inclusion, policymaking, advocacy, has led to successful statewide and international educational, LGBTQ and civil rights policy and programming focused on creating inclusive safe schools for all communities. I bring a background in equity and inclusion, policymaking, advocacy and research that has led to successful statewide, national and international educational and civil rights policy implementation, and best practices for students, schools and communities. I am a passionate advocate for intersectional inclusive safer schools and anti-bias educator, speaker, trainer, consultant and adviser to K-12 schools, colleges and universities, community organizations and governmental agencies. Locally, I have been actively engaged member in the community since 2013 and have been a strong, outspoken advocate for all youth and families, helping bridge inequalities and gaps as a community advocate to end food insecurity at CHS as co-organizer and co-founder of the CHS Food and Toiletry Pantry project, CHS Prom Pop Up Shop, CHS Senior Fund, as a youth mentor and organizer, serving previously on the Parenting Center Steering Committee, former SOMA Action Board Member, former founder of SOMA Action Student Leadership Committee, March For Our Lives New Jersey, former Board Member of the Newark LGBTQ Community Center, New Jersey Democratic LGBTQ+ Committee, North Jersey Pride, SOMA Equality March, Maplewood Youth Advisory Committee, SOMA Youth Pride and Family Picnic and more.