

Candidate's Name: ARUN VADLAMANI

1. Do you believe the district's current access and equity policy goes far enough in addressing systemic racism, issues of inequality, and the needs of vulnerable student populations, i.e. OPC, queer, special education students, immigrants, second-language learners, etc? Yes or No. Please clarify your answer.

No. No single policy or act will eliminate systemic racism or issues of inequality; it is a journey that is neither linear nor continuous and must be addressed by successive generations of BOEs. The original policy laid out the basics of what one should expect in terms of an Academic setting that allows students to pick their courses and does not have (potentially biased) staff acting as gatekeepers. Access  $\neq$  Equity.

We need an updated version of the policy that allows academic choice and directs the district to make plans to support every child on their individual "spectrum of abilities." I am very hopeful for the new initiatives introduced by the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent of C&I. Though the spectrum is for all students, this policy should target vulnerable students who need support the most.

2. Does the current SOMSD Intentional Integration Initiative do enough to address systemic racism experienced by Black and other students of color in schools? Yes or No. If applicable, please clarify your answer with your own ideas about how continuing racism may be addressed beyond current plans.

A: Again, no single policy will eliminate systemic racism, but of all the policies we have, I very strongly support the International Integration Initiative. It is a program where students go to schools that look like our two towns' demographics and not local neighborhood demographics. The benefits are apparent, and though it may not reduce the achievement gap, it will reduce the resource gap between schools and student groups. The policy "5120 - ASSIGNMENT OF STUDENTS" details how this should work.

We have one more year before the entire school is integrated. I would wait for another year before trying to optimize it further. One of the policy's most important sentences is, "the Board, of course, expects an equitable unbiased proposal that after review and testing does not undermine the intent of III." We must be vigilant against amendments to this policy that will chip away at this initiative.

3. 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. Armed law enforcement officers do not belong in schools. The Board policy I worked on explicitly prevents the use of SROs in our schools.

4. Do you believe that punitive discipline measures like suspension and expulsion should be used more or less than they currently are? Please answer “more” or “less,” and please clarify your answer. What strategies do you think will be effective to ensure that all students, particularly those targeted because of a marginalized identity, are safe and have an environment where they are able to learn?

A: About the same but show less bias towards black and special needs students. Black students face a significantly higher number of suspensions than any other student group. The best place for a student to be is in the school, so the fewer days missed by the student, the better it is for them both in the short and long term. The superintendent and principals should use their suspension to give authority to spar and maximize school time. The policy “5600 - STUDENT DISCIPLINE/CODE OF CONDUCT” should be reviewed and updated periodically to keep it current with state regulations and the community's will.

5. In the last several years, state law has been updated to align with nationwide recommendations for active shooter drills advocated by SOMA Justice and other SOMA community members, such as announcing that a drill is a drill. Still, state law does not mandate recommendations such as advanced notice for drills (required in a number of states including Florida and Texas), using more tabletop drills that instruct students on what to do in an emergency and less acting it out, minimizing/eliminating police presence (so that children are not confused about whether it is an actual emergency and officers are able to get familiar with building after students have left), and/or allowing students to opt out if impacted by anxiety/mental health. Do you support bringing our current policy in line with the [recommendations](#) from Everytown, American Federation of Teachers, [National Association of School Psychologists](#), and [National Association of School Resource Officers](#)? Yes or No. Please clarify your answer.

A: Performing active shooter drills, like fire drills, is integral to training building occupants to move to safety and protect themselves from harm in case of extreme events. The benefits of drills are i) improving the muscle memory on what to do during an emergency, where to go and where not to go, ii) Testing all equipment like PA and video surveillance systems, iii) testing all procedures and improving them if necessary, and iv) helping identify weak points

like unlockable doors or doors that are propped open. I support the change to provide advance notice for parents, staff, and children about these drills.

Academic research (from the NASP website) has shown the efficacy of drills (Jones & Randall, 1994; Miltenberger et al., 2005). Also, lockdown drills have shown how to better respond without increasing anxiety (Zhe & Nickerson, 2007).

Our current policy on active shooter drills, “8420 - EMERGENCY AND CRISIS SITUATIONS,” was updated in June 2023 and follows all Everytown Research and Policy recommendations. The Policy Committee and the Board discussed the need to minimize trauma for all children involved.

6. In 2013, the BOE voted to not repair the almost 100-year old pool in Columbia High School, while the BOE assured the community that it would work with the towns for a “year-round community pool” to provide every child in the district with access to swimming and swim lessons. In 2023, the current BOE moved forward with destroying the high school pool, ending the only public and free water safety program in our towns. Do you believe the school district should fulfill its promise to ensure that SOMA students learn to swim? Yes or no. Please explain what you would propose.

A: Every year, more than 4000 people die because of drowning deaths, and that includes almost 1000 children. Drowning is a leading cause of death among children aged 1-4 years. Learning to swim is an essential life skill; all communities must do everything possible to ensure that children learn survival swimming.

I support all programs that will teach survival swimming to our students regardless of age. We should partner without Municipal Partners to fulfil this promise.

7. What services do you think SOMSD can reasonably develop in-district over the next 5 years to better support neurodiverse students and students with emotional regulation challenges?

A: I hope the district fully fleshes out the germ of an idea presented at the Board meeting in August 2024. We look at students from a spectrum of their individual abilities. There is a continuum of support given to the student, from critical support to enrichment, and this could vary for every student. A student could need support in ELA and emotion management but be brilliant in Math, where they may need to be part of the G&T program. Creating such a

“scorecard” can help everyone involved, from parents, staff, and teachers, personalize the educational experience and improve outcomes for everyone.

8. Should making more gender neutral restrooms available in schools be a priority? Yes or no.

Please clarify your answer. What will you do to help ensure that students of all gender identities have unstigmatized access to bathrooms where they feel safe and welcome?

A: Yes. All school bathrooms should be gender-neutral, as we have them in our houses. In the current LRFP, many bathrooms have been designated as gender-neutral bathrooms, funded and built as such. It is an ongoing process, and we need to increase the availability across all schools, wings, floors,

9. Do you support making cost estimates and budgets public in order to allow community members to evaluate how aligned SOMSD’s spending practices are to its commitment to equity? Yes or no. How will you ensure that this happens as a member of the board?

A: Absolutely. Yes. This is a great idea. We know the amount allocated for the Rutgers Implementation plan for the next two years. We should also be able to assess the money spent on equity issues and other categories like Special Education. If re-elected, I will bring this up to the board as a new initiative to categorize and demonstrate the chunk of the budget spent on the community’s priorities.

10. Do you prioritize dismantling racism and other forms of oppression in your everyday work, either as a member of the community or in another role? Please give specific examples of how you have done this.

A: As a Board member and member of the FFT Committee, I have pushed for gender-neutral bathrooms and locker rooms for girls' student-athletes and for bringing equity to previously ignored segments of our student population.

**If you are an incumbent or former school board member:**

Please describe any work you have already done as a member of the school board that is related to any of these questions.

Q1: Participated in the Access and Equity plan discussion in September 2023. Though it was never completed and never went beyond first reads, it had many good ideas for updating the policy based on the latest research.

Q2: Worked with the board and spoke against undermining the intent of the III during policy update in December 2023.

Q3: Worked on the policy to ensure that SRO are not present in schools

Q4: The Board policy I worked on explicitly prevents the use of SROs in our schools.

Q5. Participated in discussions to improve and voted Yes for policy “8420 - EMERGENCY AND CRISIS SITUATIONS,” in 2023.

Q8: I have worked on the FFT committee to increase the number of gender-neutral-bathroom.

Q10: As a Board member and member of the FFT Committee, I have pushed for gender-neutral bathrooms and locker rooms for girls' student-athletes and for bringing equity to previously ignored segments of our student population.