

DONNA SMITH

1. Do you believe the district's access and equity policy introduced in 2016 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

No.

Please clarify your answer.

While the Access & Equity policy was an essential first step in addressing the issues of inequity, it was intended to be a step, and not a singular solution. There is more work to be done. The Board also adopted policies and resolutions intended to protect transgender students and immigrants in the district. Policies on paper are not enough and effective regulations must be enacted, providing specifics on implementation. The first roll-out of the Access & Equity policy has been a bit rocky, but we already see increased participation in Honors and AP classes among groups of students who would not have had access before, and expect to see more as implementation continues. I also believe, as Dr. Ficarra does, that we need to dig deeper into data to better understand how to provide more holistic supports for students that go beyond academic interventions (though those are necessary) but also address social emotional needs of students. I look forward to working with the Administration to see these efforts developed and improved, to truly provide an equitable education to the district's students.

2. Do you have a specific plan to move the SOMSD forward in dismantling the segregation and racial achievement gap that exist in our schools ? Yes or No

No.
Please clarify your answer (in addressing both segregation and the racial achievement gap)

The role of the Board is to develop policies that serve to guide the Administration in its operations. It is not to develop plans to operate the district. However, with regard to the two issues raised, segregation and the racial achievement gap, there are several things the Board can do in its policy governance role. First, with regard to dismantling segregation, the Board can make addressing our physical plant issues, starting with elementary school, one of the key priorities over the next year. Through a Guiding Change document to lead the work addressing elementary school over-crowding and capital improvements, the Board can ensure that segregated school populations are no longer allowable as part of district operations.

Likewise, the development and adoption of policies and plans like the Access & Equity Policy and the Action Plans for the Strategic Direction, have allowed the BOE to start addressing issues of both segregation and the achievement gap. In its perfect implementation, The Access & Equity policy will provide students with access to both rigorous curriculum in the earlier grades and access to challenging coursework in the secondary schools and the right supports to succeed. The Strategic Direction will enable the district to meet the needs of

individual learners. The future of learning and teaching will be individual pathways that are supported by an array of choices for educational programming and teachers who are specifically trained to provide instruction to a range of student needs and pacing. In this future state of teaching and learning, I believe there is space for levels, including Honors and AP courses, as a means of choice, not as a gate to deny students access to a rich curriculum.

Addressing the achievement gap is a complex, nationwide issue. Two things the board can do is support the district's efforts in better data collection and analysis to understand the drivers behind the racial achievement gap and to tackle it at the individual child level through holistic but targeted supports. In addition, the board should encourage and seek financial innovation to support programmatic changes like expanded school year and pre-kindergarten programs. The work here will be to use a transparent and open communication to get the public receptive to use of public/private partnership funding as much as securing the funding itself.

3. Do you support a vision for a new approach to professional development including a holistic, culturally-informed, comprehensive, systematic and sustained equitable practices? Yes or No

Yes.

Please clarify your answer.

The school Board should ensure that the district's policies are helping heal rifts, not furthering them. The district has been conducting professional development on cultural competency, but I believe that discrete points of action happening in a vacuum will not move us forward. There has to be a much more comprehensive means of developing the right kind of practices, one that ensures all parties feel respected and validated, so that meaningful conversations and work can be accomplished.

4. Do you think that SOMSD should take steps to 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

Yes.

Please clarify your answer.

While the district has been working on restorative practices to reduce the amount of disciplinary actions, this work must continue. The suspension and expulsion rates continue to be a red flag, so we must press the Administration to dig deeper into the data to determine the cause(s) and develop the right supports for students.

5. Have you had any training or professional development on addressing racism and inequality in education ? Yes or No

No.

Please clarify your answer.

I have not had any official training, other than a cursory introduction to the district's cultural competency training, on addressing racism and inequality in education. Nevertheless, I have sought out advice and commentary on these issues from respected authorities and written texts on the subject. Recently I have been reading Glenn Singleton's Courageous Conversations About Race, for example.

6. Do you support the placement of School Resource Officers in SOMSD schools. Yes or No

No.

Please clarify your answer.

Initially I supported the placement of SROs in the schools, not as disciplinarians but as a chance for students to have a positive experience with police. The right type of person would have to be in that position, in order to generate trust. Nevertheless, it was clear from the public outcry over the proposal that this is not a good time to bring in SROs, so I no longer support the idea.

7. Are you open to the creation of a small, special/private fund that will ensure that all students get access to the same lunch and forgiveness for small fees that hamper the receipt of a high school diploma? Yes or No

Yes.

Please clarify your answer.

I wholeheartedly support this idea and in fact such a fund already exists. I think it needs to be publicized more, as it certainly would resonate with most people in our two towns!

8. Given the aging infrastructure of buildings across the school district plus the requirement for dedicated capital expense funds which may be limited for repair and renovation; do you believe the district should seek funding with corporations and other private organizations ? Yes or No.

Yes.

Please clarify your answer.

As long as the District makes it clear to any organizations willing to provide funding, that it must adhere to the mission statement and district goals and will not allow any pressure to promote another agenda, then it makes sense to seek such funding. The financial constraints faced by the District are severe, so any additional funding should be welcomed. A great example is the grant that allowed for a Mandarin teacher to be placed at the high school, which is incredibly exciting. I would like to see more efforts along these lines to continue to provide an enriching teaching and learning environment.

9. What are your two top priorities if elected ?

1. Facilities planning and re-imagining our physical plant. The biggest challenge we face is addressing our facilities, from overcrowding to aging buildings to out-of-date classroom setups. We need a facilities plan that will finally take care of a tremendous amount of deferred maintenance throughout the district. We also

need to address the matter of increased student populations and de-facto segregation, in the elementary schools. The demographer estimates a need for 26 additional classrooms at the elementary level and has noted that the portables in many cases are close to reaching their shelf life. The high school also needs re-imagining to be more adaptive to 21st century learning. All of this work must be done in a manner that is fiscally responsible and allows stakeholders to have a voice in the process. We will begin this process of shoring up the infrastructure and providing new space during the tenure of the Interim Superintendent, but the work will continue once a new Superintendent is in place. During our Superintendent search, we must find the right person for the job, who can focus on this issue as a priority while also managing the many other areas of concern our district is facing, including climate and culture, access and equity, and implementation of the Strategic Direction.

2. Proper implementation of key policies and the Strategic Direction. We have passed some important policies to support transgender students but we also need to re-visit our flawed Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying policy and ensure that it works in concert with our Code of Conduct. In addition, the initial implementation of the Access & Equity Policy has been difficult. While we are seeing increased participation in Honors and AP courses by those who may have been overlooked for consideration in the past, several parts of scheduling and implementation still need to be worked through for better operational excellence to truly accommodate student needs. The passage of the Policy also dovetails well with the Strategic Direction, which focuses on individualized learning, a much needed break from the ‘traditional’ model of education that is no longer meeting the needs of our diverse student body.

Anthony Mazzocchi

1. Do you believe the district's access and equity policy introduced in 2016 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)?

No.

As I write this today, we do not have processes and mechanisms in place to facilitate fluid movement between course offerings. While I believe the policy is worthy of supporting and implementing with all of our might, it does not address the issues of inequity in our district in the larger sense.

My essential question is this: How do we promote “access and equity” when the breadth and depth of our subject offerings – especially K-12 – are so anemic at the same time? Does access and equity and opportunity only apply to

academics? Our budget and scheduling tells us this is so, and I am opposed to this ideology.

I have found that it is extremely important to re-calibrate many of our discussions regarding education to remind ourselves that we are in a human enterprise. It's a personal process, with real human beings at the core of it. After all the testing is completed and the data is collated, these are our youngest citizens who will reimagine our world. They must be seen as having strengths and passion when they arrive in school, not deficits that must be fixed. We must then reimagine and reorganize our schools around those strengths, and that includes access and equity for all students to all subjects.

2. Do you have a specific plan to move the SOMSD forward in dismantling the segregation and racial achievement gap that exist in our schools ? Please clarify your answer (in addressing both segregation and the racial achievement gap)

Yes and No

I will be one of nine members on a Board, who then must collaborate with Administration to make these plans come to fruition. Therefore, I am reticent to say here and now that I am “running on a specific plan”.

That said, the district paid a redistricting consultant to give us recommendations, and the recommendations were:

1. Create more space (build)
2. Renovate existing space
3. Redistrict
4. Innovate

Although I am disappointed we paid serious money for these obvious takeaways, I believe we must embrace recommendation #4 in addressing these issues; not only to break away from reactive measures and move toward proactive initiatives, but to also realize that our nation has been battling the racial achievement gap for years with anywhere from little to uneven results – I believe it is time to try something different.

I suggest we look deeply into the following:

1. Reorganizing our elementary schools into K-4 buildings. This will alleviate much-needed space; allow us to do away with portables; perhaps lower class sizes, and more.
2. Reorganize one middle school into a 5/6 building; the other middle school would be 7/8. Students would now travel with each other as one cohort from 5th -12th grades, as opposed to meeting up for the first time in 9th. I also believe 5/6 is extremely appropriate as far as child development

- goes, as is a 7/8 pairing. Multi-age classrooms and innovative programming could be addressed easier with this pairing.
3. Create 2 magnet elementary schools in district. This could address the de-facto segregation issues as well as a dearth of curricular offering at the K-5 level I am so passionate about. I endorse a performing arts magnet school proposal i We could add a multi-language immersion school, STEAM, etc.

I have been a champion of a rich, diverse, challenging curriculum in order to address the Opportunity Gap, which is in direct correlation with our Achievement Gap, in my opinion. The definition of our Achievement Gap has almost everything to do with the results of standardized testing. While I personally believe that a student's success should not be determined by test scores, let's play that game while referencing some data:

Not only do the arts improve standardized test scores, a 2012 report from the National Endowment for the Arts showed that, by nearly every indicator studied, a student from a low-socioeconomic (SES) background with a high-arts educational experience significantly outperformed peers from a low-arts, low-SES background, closing (and in some cases eliminating) the gap that often appears between low-SES students and their more advantaged peers. These improvements were in graduation rates, college attendance and completion rates, and science and writing scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

My point is that we have tried giving SES students "more school" to boost test scores, and not only has it barely worked — it's not making them like school any more than they already do (and many are miserable). What if we engaged them in an artistic and creative manner and test scores go up as a result? When are we going to try something different?

3. Do you support a vision for a new approach to professional development including a holistic, culturally-informed, comprehensive, systematic and sustained equitable practices?

YES

If we only address this through professional development, it is not holistic or comprehensive, and we will fail to achieve our goals.

Again, how do we address this problem when our school system in its current paradigm is so deeply flawed? We must embrace a complete paradigm shift in our schools which embraces student strengths and passions, as opposed to seeing them as having deficits through our narrow, test-centric lens. Broadening our curriculum and changing the culture in our schools through following our children's lead is a start. We need to celebrate more than academic achievement in order for this to occur.

I could write pages about this, of course, and look forward to having these conversations and taking action.

4. Do you think that SOMSD should take steps to 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

This is directly linked to my answer above. On one hand, we need a code of conduct. On the other, if we continue to embrace an educational paradigm that is built upon conformity (one pathway to “success”), compliance (butts in seats), and linearity in learning, as opposed to what we know is true about human beings: we are diverse, creative, and grow organically – we will continue to see this awful trend.

5. Have you had any training or professional development on addressing racism and inequality in education ?

YES

Every year for the past 8 years

6. Do you support the placement of School Resource Officers in SOMSD schools.

NO

7. Are you open to the creation of a small, special/private fund that will ensure that all students get access to the same lunch and forgiveness for small fees that hamper the receipt of a high school diploma?

YES

I also recommend funds for musical instrument rentals for students who cannot afford it and funds for many other purposes in this spirit.

8. Given the aging infrastructure of buildings across the school district plus the requirement for dedicated capital expense funds which may be limited for repair and renovation; do you believe the district should seek funding with corporations and other private organizations ?

YES

I am in favor of public/private initiatives in certain situations – I would need to see a particular plan in order to comment. Similar to the renovation of our auditorium at CHS through collaboration with ACHIEVE and private donors.

9. What are your two top priorities if elected ?

You will never hear me say that academics are not important. Additionally, you will never hear me say that the arts are more important than academics. But I will always argue for more balance, broadness, and depth in our curriculum. I want to see all children excited and impassioned by the curriculum offered. From this excitement comes a hunger for learning, and that is what we all want to see our children leave school having obtained (or in many cases, maintained). Providing our youngest citizens access to excellence in all subjects – and celebrating their strengths and passions in the ones that speak to them -- is an essential part of their humanity.

We need to call a big “time out” on the exam-factory model, get back to ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum in our schools, and focus on improving teaching and learning in all its forms instead of chipping away at our misguided one-size-fits-all structure. Not only because a childhood at school should be a rich, enjoyable and challenging time, but also because the coming economy demands exactly the kind of deep creativity and personal resilience that are the results of that diverse educational experience.

We also must address our crumbling infrastructure to accommodate this paradigm shift. I have years of experience in capital planning and have physically transformed the institutions where I have worked. Our schools need this and our students deserve it now more than ever.

Elizabeth Baker

1. Do you believe the district’s access and equity policy introduced in 2016 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)? No.

The District’s Access and Equity Policy, which was adopted in October 2015, cannot alone address the deep, systemic issues of inequity and climate that have developed and continued in our schools for decades. But this policy, along with the revisions to the Academic Placement policy, the Section 504 policy, and the Transgender Student policy are essential foundational steps in that they dismantle structural and programmatic barriers that have perpetuated inequity. They also set forth the policy vision to guide the deep, sustained work in school climate, curriculum, instructional practice, guidance, and support (academic, social/emotional, and funding) necessary if we are to meaningfully address inequity, segregation, and the climate issues in our schools.

2. Do you have a specific plan to move the SOMSD forward in dismantling the segregation and racial achievement gap that exist in our schools ? Yes

Dismantling segregation, the racial achievement gap, the many opportunity gaps, and countering bias (implicit, institutional, and at times explicit) are, and must remain, the highest priorities for our District.

We must attack all forms of segregation -- racial, socioeconomic, and disability-based segregation – on two levels.

First, we must ensure that throughout the district our elementary and middle schools are integrated both racially and socioeconomically, and that students with disabilities are welcomed and supported in district to the fullest extent possible. We cannot continue to rely on the current neighborhood zone-based model to ensure racial and socioeconomic integration in our elementary and middle schools, as the model is subject to the vagaries of housing and economic trends, including steering in the real estate industry. As we undertake the construction of (approximately) 26 new classrooms and attendant spaces that we need to replace deteriorating portables and meet the greatly increased elementary enrollment, we must articulate a programmatic and organizational model for our elementary and middle schools that will sustain racial and socioeconomic integration, allow every student and family to fully participate in the life of our schools (including afterschool programs and enrichment activities for which distance, transportation and fee structures can create barriers to entry), and ensure that students with disabilities are welcomed, supported and challenged in district. There are different models for ensuring that our schools become and remain integrated. These models include a magnet model for all elementary schools (similar to Montclair), pairings such as our own Marshall-Jefferson pairing, or a structure where we have districtwide schools by specific grade levels (which several neighboring districts are moving towards). We don't need to reinvent the wheel. Rather, the Board -- based on recommendations from the Interim Superintendent, input from all stakeholders (including the Hilton and Boyden communities and our building leaders), coupled with an analysis of the merits and costs (capital, operating and pedagogical) -- must choose which option or options not only align best with our educational mission and vision but can be implemented effectively. Whichever model we choose, we must ensure that the climate in every school is welcoming, supportive, and learner-centered – with consistently high-quality instruction and opportunities so that all students are equally well prepared as they move up from elementary to middle and then to our flagship high school,

Second, we cannot tolerate and must actively, and continuously, combat the internal segregation that exists in our secondary schools and many student programs – the “school within a school” segregation. This segregation is toxic to

all of our students' well-being and to the climate within our secondary schools. It results not only from segregation at the elementary level, but continues with hyper- or micro-leveling in our secondary schools (which is not only educationally unsound but results in scheduling distortions where a student's entire day and contact with other students is often an extension of their level placement in core subjects such as math). It is further exacerbated by the lack of active recruitment and mentoring for students of color in both higher-level classes and many extracurricular activities and the systemic failure by our schools and teachers to recognize and effectively surmount barriers -- including lack of digital access or economic barriers -- that continue to exist in extracurricular programming and access to afterschool academic support. And most damaging are the outdated and/or biased instructional practices that result in low expectations and low engagement by teachers for students of color. We have begun to dismantle hyper-leveling (such as the elimination of Level 2 Algebra, and the de-leveling of three core subjects in the middle schools) and we have eliminated formal, official barriers to higher level courses. We must move forward and take this work to scale – with intense focus at the transition points from elementary to middle school and middle to high school.

While I believe we must continuously and publicly use a variety of data points to assess the achievement of our students (which the Board has made a priority with Dr. Ficarra), including achievement by subgroup and disparities in both participation and outcomes by subgroups, I believe the divergent outcomes for students of color and students with disabilities in our district, what has been termed the "achievement gap," is not a reflection of student potential but rather the result of the opportunity gap, segregation, and school building climate that is tolerant of bias and poor instructional practice in some of our classrooms. As a community and school district we have also not recognized – let alone assessed -- the impact of the pre-K gap that exists in our towns due to a lack of affordable, accessible, high quality pre-K for low income and working-class families in our community.

As an individual Board member, I alone cannot impose or implement any plan of action. However, I will push our Board and Administration to adopt measurable goals with clear time frames to:

- end hyper-leveling and the tracking that results from hyper-leveling;
- proceed with the K-12 curricular and instructional review required by the Access & Equity and Placement Policies as well as the strategic plan;
- ensure via policy, implementation and budgeting that we are eliminating economic barriers to participation in academic and student programs -- including sufficient funding to ensure that every student has access to technology, academic support, and extracurricular and enrichment opportunities;
- strengthen our Guidance department especially at the high school to ensure that every student and family receives proactive, high quality, and informed guidance about opportunities and support within our schools and

- comprehensive and meaningful planning for post-secondary college and career success, and expanding programs such as MAC Scholars that have proven track records of success;
- deliver ongoing anti-bias and positive climate work – not only for District staff but our broader community to ensure that every student feels welcomed, respected, challenged and valued in every building and every classroom;
 - create an ongoing advisory body on equity and climate that consists of community leaders and educators , parents, and students that can provide feedback and assistance and their expertise in developing actionable plans for the district and building leaders; and
 - develop age-appropriate climate surveys through which students can share their experiences and recommendations.

3. Do you support a vision for a new approach to professional development including a holistic, culturally-informed, comprehensive, systematic and sustained equitable practices? Yes

Please clarify your answer.

If we are to meet the needs and recognize the potential of every student who enters our schools, and address the decades old structures and climate that have held students back, we must 1) clearly, expressly, and repeatedly counter institutional and implicit bias as well as acts or words of bias; 2) deconstruct and account for the ways in which our pedagogy and curricula have been impacted by bias, and 3) take affirmative and restorative actions to address racism and bias in each aspect and level of our operations.

Anti-bias and culturally responsive training – both non-embedded and embedded professional development for our administrators, department heads, building leaders, teachers and support staff (including contracted personnel) – must be the cornerstone of this work. This training, however, should not be limited to our paid staff – but should involve the Board, students, and the broader school community – so that we are approaching our students and our collective work with a common awareness and commitment. In the last two years, we have incorporated anti-bias training in the new teacher institute, added four half days of professional development in the 2017-18 school year to focus on combatting bias and creating a positive climate (and this work will continue during the school year at the school level staff meetings), provided anti-bias training to the Board, dedicated additional funding in the budget for this work, and expanded our community and parent discussions and trainings. These efforts must be sustained going forward, expanded upon, and reflected in a professional development plan for the District that recognizes the urgency of this work and the need to ensure that all stakeholders, staff, parents, students are included.

Further, we must be intentional in our recruitment, hiring, and staff development work to ensure that we are not only recruiting and hiring building leaders, teachers, and other professionals of color, but also LGBTQ educators and

persons with disabilities so that every student not only works with teachers in whom they can see themselves but that we are bringing a broad and culturally responsive lens to our internal curricular work and instructional practice.

4. Do you think that SOMSD should take steps to 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 Yes.

To combat racially disproportionate discipline practices and patterns we need all the training and anti-bias programming that I describe in my answers above and we must:

- Move forward to revise our code of conduct to ensure equitable treatment for all students, timely and proactive interventions to provide students with support early on and to ensure that consequences for code of conduct violations are both reparative and corrective, rather than punitive and shaming. This process has already begun with external, community stakeholder input and it must include student input.
- Require advance review by the Superintendent's office before in-school, or out-of-school suspensions are recommended or imposed (whatever the duration).
- Ensure proactive, positive climate work with each school that will not only promote greater student engagement and achievement but reduce disciplinary incidents.
- Develop an electronic record-keeping system for student discipline and a centralized monitoring of discipline patterns and trends within each school (which at present focused mainly on out of school suspensions). With this we will not only monitor and root out disparate treatment of students of color and students with disabilities, but will be able to identify trends and climate issues in a school so that proactive, positive interventions for individual students and the broader school community can be implemented.
- The Principals and Assistant Principals must be required to work as a cohort group to ensure that the Code of Conduct and positive school climate initiatives are being implemented consistently across the district and within each school, and to identify, share, and implement best practices.
- We must increase age-appropriate social and emotional supports in every school – this should include increasing social work, mentoring, and crisis intervention services.

- When students with an IEP, 504, or I&RS plan are involved in incidents that may violate the code of conduct, there should be reviews at the building level, and within the Special Services Department to ensure that the student's plan is being complied with and that required services are being provided.

With respect to the disproportionate number of students of color identified for special education services –

We have all heard too many stories and over too many years of African American students, particularly boys, who are referred for identification or labelled as having an emotional or behavior disorder without first evaluating whether they are being sufficiently challenged and supported academically, whether their classroom(s) are engaging and positive environments, or what other interventions, including Intervention & Referral Service ("I&RS") or Section 504 Plan accommodations can be provided. Our special education data and the overrepresentation of students of color confirms that these are not isolated incidents or mere anecdotes. As with discipline, anti-bias training and positive climate work are key, but so too are high-quality, and timely I&RS and 504 interventions.

Data collection and monitoring of I&RS, 504 and Special Education referrals and identification rates – particularly by school, demographic sub-group and grade – are essential for identifying and addressing the patterns and causes of disproportionality. This data should not only be regularly shared with the Board for monitoring purposes but it should be included in the annual reports that are required by Board policy.

5. Have you had any training or professional development on addressing racism and inequality in education ? Yes.

In my professional life, I have both training and advocacy experience in a broad range of civil rights issues including housing, employment, and voting rights, and have been working for several years on the rights and employment opportunities for young adults with disabilities who are transitioning from special education. This experience informs my work as a Board member.

In my two and a half years on the SOMSD Board, I have also participated in training on restorative practices, school climate and HIB. Under my leadership as Board President, the entire SOMSD Board participated in anti-bias training with Dr. Khyati Joshi in February 2017 and HIB Training in June 2017.

6. Do you support the placement of School Resource Officers in SOMSD schools. No.

While every school district is required by New Jersey law to consider placement of an SRO, I do not believe an SRO is appropriate in our school district – both because the presence of an SRO can lead to the criminalization of what should otherwise be school-based discipline matters, and due to the long-standing and documented issues of bias, profiling and abuse within our local police departments towards residents and young persons of color. Further, CHS students have repeatedly and clearly stated that they would be afraid and intimidated by an SRO in their school.

While school safety and security require significant expertise, I believe that this expertise must be housed and developed within the District and school administration and that all our safety and security practices must be informed by our anti-bias and positive school climate work.

7. Are you open to the creation of a small, special/private fund that will ensure that all students get access to the same lunch and forgiveness for small fees that hamper the receipt of a high school diploma? Yes

I support the efforts by local parents and community leaders to raise private funds to ensure that no child is denied a full lunch due to lunch account arrears or an inability to pay. While these funds are privately raised or donated (and I would like to include the option for families leaving the district at graduation to donate unused lunch account balances to this fund), it my understanding that the funds do need to be accepted as a donation to the district and then administered by the district according to transparent criteria. We accepted our first such donation this past summer and adopted criteria that would ensure that the funds were used to prevent any student from being able to receive a full lunch.

While the requirement of the federal school lunch program does not allow the district to disregard school lunch account arrears (hence the need for notices to be provided to parents and guardians, and the need for the fund), I believe that other penalties or the withholding from students of opportunities to participate in school activities such as prom or field trips due to lunch account arrears or library fines is inconsistent with our obligation to provide all students access to our student programs irrespective of socioeconomic status, and it requires examination both by the superintendent and the Board.

8. Given the aging infrastructure of buildings across the school district plus the requirement for dedicated capital expense funds which may be limited for repair and renovation; do you believe the district should seek funding with corporations and other private organizations? No

While the amount of capital funding that our District will need to raise to expand and renovate our school buildings will likely run into the tens of millions of dollars, we should supplement these funds first with public dollars (including state grants)

and then through grants and other donations made through and administered by our district's educational foundation (Achieve), the CHS alumni association, and other educational foundations whose mission aligns with our District's vision and our community's values. Across the country and regionally, we have seen school districts that are strapped for money become beholden to private or corporate donors whose mission or aims are inconsistent with the school district's. We need to bear that in mind when considering any public-private partnership – whether with a not-for-profit or for-profit – and require substantial vetting, review, and transparency.

However, I strongly believe that real estate developers who are being granted variances, rezoning, or other incentives such as tax abatements or "PILOTs" (Payments in Lieu of Taxes) to build in our communities, should be required to contribute either revenue or infrastructure improvements to our school district because the increasing density in our towns impacts the health of our schools. Our municipal governments routinely negotiate for improvements and revenue streams that benefit the town budget and town services but to date, town officials have failed to include the school district in these negotiations. This cannot continue.

With respect to corporate donations or partnerships, I would prefer that we focus our efforts not on capital contributions but on providing internships, scholarships and pathways to careers -- especially for the large number of students in our district who are economically disadvantaged, newly immigrated, and/or the first in their families to go to college.

9. What are your two top priorities if elected ?

I have three inter-related programmatic priorities:

1. Educational opportunity for every child – This means addressing racism, inequality and bias in all forms and requires that we focus our efforts on the needs of students of color, students with a disability, and students who are otherwise vulnerable or at risk.

The BOE has adopted the Access and Equity Policy and revised the Academic Placement policy to remove the structural barriers to higher-level courses that were holding students back. The BOE has adopted a Section 504 Policy that protects the rights of students with disabilities. SOMSD was one of the first districts in the state to adopt a policy protecting the rights of Transgender students. SOMSD HAS also developed a comprehensive equity plan that is intended to ensure that we are addressing racism, bias and inequity in their many manifestations. As discussed above in response to Question No. 1, these policies are the beginning of the work – not the end. They each require ongoing, transparent and measured goals, implementation and monitoring. They require funding, and they must be complemented by anti-bias training and a positive school climate.

We must also ensure that every student is benefitting from high quality, culturally responsive curriculum and high-quality instruction, and is provided with the academic and social and emotional support needed to help them succeed. With respect to curriculum and instruction, I would like our district to undertake a curriculum audit – both with respect to issues of bias and cultural responsiveness but also to assess whether our curricula go beyond minimum standards to ensure best practices and that we are opening doors for our students once they leave Columbia High School. Two questions I would like to focus on specifically are whether we should be realigning our K-8 math curriculum to ensure that all students have access to Algebra by 8th grade, and whether we are effectively infusing technology in our curricula and instruction.

2. School Climate -- Opportunity and climate go hand in hand. Too many students -- particularly African American and other students of color, students with disabilities, newly immigrated and economically disadvantaged students -- experience bias, a culture of low expectations, and indifference to their needs and potential. We must create a positive, respectful climate in every school that is free of bias and focused on and responsive to students' needs. The Board and district leadership must provide this mandate to building leaders who must then own the work and lead our teachers and be accountable for the climate and practices in their buildings. The Board must create the structures and metrics for this accountability and must also prioritize and fund this work in the budget.

3. Facilities -- As set forth above in response to question No. 2, the facilities work that THE BOE is undertaking will not only allow us to modernize our schools and ensure that our schools have the capacity to meet our enrollment, but we must use this expansion to adopt a programmatic and organizational vision for our elementary and middle schools that moves away from the current neighborhood zoning to a model that ensures racial and socioeconomic integration, and a high quality inclusive environment for students with disabilities.

Robin Baker

1. Do you believe the district's access and equity policy introduced in 2016 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.

NO, because I do not believe any policy can address issues of inequity. A policy is a starting point and not an end in itself. It is how a policy is implemented that determines its effectiveness. I do believe Policy 5755 ("Equity in Educational Programs and Services") and policy 5755.1 ("Access and Equity") adequately define the OUTCOMES that should be sought and measured to determine whether the district is achieving its goals of fair and equitable treatment of all

students, and ultimately advancing the actual achievement levels of all students such that race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion, level of English proficiency, socio-economic status, or disability do not impede any student or group of students from reaching their highest potential. Excellent implementation of the Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying policies (HIB) also would play a key role in ensuring each school has an environment where access and equity can flourish.

2. Do you have a specific plan to move the SOMSD forward in dismantling the segregation and racial achievement gap that exist in our schools? Yes or No
Please clarify your answer (in addressing both segregation and the racial achievement gap)

YES. I believe any approach must address the issues on both a tactical and philosophical level, and must start by targeting and dismantling the imbedded behaviors and attitudes that have resulted in segregation within our schools and institutionalization of the performance gap. While the BoE functions as a board-of-the-whole, it would be my intention to help ensure effective policy implementation on the tactical side by encouraging the board to establish clear and measurable expectations of what “change” should look like in concrete, statistical measures (i.e. many more students from underrepresented groups opting into and successfully completing upper-level courses, elimination of the disparity in punishment between groups of students for similar infractions, etc). On the philosophical side, I would encourage the board to require significant improvement in the district-wide infrastructure that supports the flow of communication both within the district, and between the district and its various stakeholders. Better communication means faster and more transparent district responsiveness to issues, in addition to improved ability to accumulate anecdotal evidence of disparate treatment and identify where it is coming from. While qualitative in nature, shining a light on behavior and interactions that violate the spirit of inclusiveness and equal treatment is a very effective method of rooting out those behaviors and providing opportunities for the offending parties to be brought along, or moved out.

There is much, much more to any plan for addressing such complex issues, but I have provided what I believe to be “low-hanging fruit” and two (2) specific opportunities to immediately begin establishing a framework for moving forward on the changes that will be necessary for our district to successfully address segregation and the racial performance gap.

Separate from the within-school segregation, is the school-by-school segregation that is driven primarily by the housing market. It, too, is a detriment to equity and access and the diversity we say we value and want as a community. While I do not have a specific plan prepared to address this level of segregation, I do feel strongly that it is to our benefit as a district to have our schools all reflect our community and fulfill our values for academic excellence and diversity. I have seen this “play” before, and served on the board that addressed a similar

imbalance by creating the Seth Boyden Demonstration School. With nine (9) heads together on the BoE and input from the community, we can surely establish a plan to successfully address reintegrating our schools.

3. Do you support a vision for a new approach to professional development including a holistic, culturally-informed, comprehensive, systematic and sustained equitable practices? Yes or No

Please clarify your answer.

YES. There is no other defensible answer to this question, even in a predominately homogeneous district, let alone in SOM.

4. Do you think that SOMSD should take steps to 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.

YES. This disparate treatment (as referred to in my answer to #2) and placement is measurable and identifiable at the building and educator level. My druthers would be to see the Administration root out the biases that are often hidden (and sometimes unintentional) drivers of the disparities by: 1) collecting accurate information about the incidence of disciplinary actions by demographic parameter, 2) identifying where the disparities seem to be originating, 3) providing mentoring from peers and school leadership in addition to anti-bias counselling and training in the application of "restorative practices" (Note: It is important that resources for anti-bias training go to everyone, but especially to where it is demonstrably needed first.), 4) taking action to mitigate the impact on the students of improper placement, 5) on-going measures to establish the success or failure of interventions, and finally 6) acting to remove the offender if the behavior is not corrected.

5. Have you had any training or professional development on addressing racism and inequality in education ? Yes or No

Please clarify your answer.

NO, but I have plenty of life experience in addressing racism and inequality in all areas of life. . Additionally, I have taken and initiated , anti-bias training for the groups I have managed in my professional life. I am adept at identifying the subtle signs of racial discomfort or straight up bias and have never shied away from dealing with it head on, in a constructive manner, and would bring the same acumen to my role on the board.

6. Do you support the placement of School Resource Officers in SOMSD schools.Yes or No

Please clarify your answer.

NO. Certainly not at this time. SRO's have a place in schools only when the climate and posture of interaction is one of service and support to all students. While I know that the current discord between children of color and the Police Department is not the fault of every officer, the relationship was, in fact, severely damaged by the July 2016 event and must be wholly repaired before the presence of an SRO can become a positive influence in schools again.

7. Are you open to the creation of a small, special/private fund that will ensure that all students get access to the same lunch and forgiveness for small fees that hamper the receipt of a high school diploma? Yes or No
Please clarify your answer.

YES. Food shaming is a source of low self-esteem, and low self-esteem is often a precursor to low-performance that has little to do with a child's actual academic potential. It creates an environment ripe for harassment, intimidation and bullying that can easily and confidentially be eliminated.

8. Given the aging infrastructure of buildings across the school district plus the requirement for dedicated capital expense funds which may be limited for repair and renovation; do you believe the district should seek funding with corporations and other private organizations ? Yes or No.
Please clarify your answer.

YES, but only if the acquisition of such funding can be accomplished without the commercialization of our schools and without some requirement for outside entities to have influence in the running of our district. My recommendation would be to start with foundations and endowments whose missions align well with our most pressing goals and that have the altruistic objective of supporting public education.

9. What are your two top priorities if elected ?

There are many, but my top two (2) priorities would be to drive: 1) excellent and measurable implementation of our district's access and equity policy for all categories of students who have been underserved (e.g. POC, children with disabilities, etc.) and 2) development, community support, approval and implementation of a capital improvement plan that efficiently addresses overcrowding and foreseeable long-term space needs.

Shannon Cuttle

1. Do you believe the district's access and equity policy introduced in 2016 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.

No. My key concerns are whether the policy goes far enough with its implementation, and whether the right supports and opportunities are available to make all students successful (and whether students and families are being made aware of the supports and encouraged to access them in a proactive manner). We need to actively engage in professional development and awareness trainings across the school community at all levels. Even with the policy in place, there is more work to do on integrating the reality of what it looks like to actively combat inequality and disenfranchisement for all vulnerable populations. And that means we need to hire strong leaders, hold them accountable at all levels, and not accept that policy implementation without verifiable results is good enough. We still have much more work to do to ensure that all students have a safe, affirming, welcoming school environment so they thrive both inside and outside of the classroom.

2. Do you have a specific plan to move the SOMSD forward in dismantling the segregation and racial achievement gap that exist in our schools ? Yes or No
Please clarify your answer (in addressing both segregation and the racial achievement gap)

Yes. The role of a board member is not to propose specific plans, but to develop policy and engage the superintendent. Yet requiring tangible results from the superintendent, through thoughtful implementation of a coordinated effort to dismantle segregation and get rid of the achievement gap, is not only a reasonable ask, but an imperative for my support of any superintendent. There are best practices which this district doesn't (or only partially) embraces that would desegregate the schools; and though known, they are mired in the logistics of class scheduling and the limits of the school day.. We need to do better, and those are not excuses that should be allowed to stand. Research has shown that students do better in school when they have teachers and school support staff who mirror them, both in the classrooms and hallways. We know that segregation in our schools and in our communities has not gone away but remains a reality in our community (and others across the country). We need to dismantle policies and procedures that push marginalized youth, especially youth of color, out of our classrooms, and we need to address the impacts of bias and systemic racism across the school community. To close the achievement gap, we need to work to eliminate obstacles and increase opportunities while also addressing stereotypes, stigmas, inherent bias, and institutional racism across the school community

3. Do you support a vision for a new approach to professional development including a holistic, culturally-informed, comprehensive, systematic and sustained equitable practices? Yes or No

Please clarify your answer.

Yes. Professional Development in the district needs to be, like so many other things, tied to the district Strategic Plan and its high priority goals, such as the Equity and Access Policy and underlying issues and more. Professional development needs to be part of the culture and competency spectrum that the district should be delivering and requiring of its teachers, administrators, and school support staff. A comprehensive approach to the issues this district continues to grapple with regarding the uneven education that students receive and the overall culture and climate needs to start in leadership. That leadership needs to come from the board and the next superintendent. Until equitable practices are not just something in the abstract, but something actually practiced, seamlessly, in the delivery of education and in the very fiber of the district we will continue to nibble around the edges and fail our students.

4. Do you think that SOMSD should take steps to 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.

Most definitely. Research has shown that youth of color, especially young girls of color face disproportionately higher rates of school discipline and school push out. Youth of color often experience not only harsher rates of school discipline overall but have higher rates of suspension vs. white students. We need to actively address and take proactive critical steps to address the disproportionate numbers of youth of color and marginalized youth in regards to suspensions, expulsions and the disproportionate number of students of color placed in special education. I believe in the value of a restorative justice philosophy into the school community.

5. Have you had any training or professional development on addressing racism and inequality in education ? Yes or No

Please clarify your answer.

Yes. I have had extensive training And I actively engage in ongoing professional development in research, best practices and education in addressing racism and inequality in the classroom and across the school community through training, conferences, and more.

6. Do you support the placement of School Resource Officers in SOMSD schools. Yes or No

NO Please clarify your answer.

School resource officers can create a false sense of safety in a school setting. We all want our schools to be safe for all students without threats from violence. While school districts most often have the best intentions when implementing school resource officers, the reality and impact they have on the everyday lives of students and a school community can be a stark contrast. School safety officers often have little to no training in how to respond and interact with youth, including students with special needs. Research has shown that school resource officers often use zero tolerance when engaging with youth, even on minor disciplinary infractions, and contribute to school push out and the school-to-prison pipeline. Research has also shown that school safety, and the overall

school climate and culture, play a significant role not only in equity but also the success of a student. If a school resource officer or designated safety personnel are not aligned with the training, best practices in youth crisis prevention, restorative justice practices, de-escalation, school emergency management, special needs populations, diversity and inclusion, and are not aligned with the climate and culture the district is striving to achieve, there is a higher chance that the inconsistency of their presence in schools will be seen to undermine the goals articulated by the BOE, and by district and school leadership.

7. Are you open to the creation of a small, special/private fund that will ensure that all students get access to the same lunch and forgiveness for small fees that hamper the receipt of a high school diploma? Yes or No

Please clarify your answer.

Yes. Most definitely. This issue has also been addressed in the higher education arena as one that is disproportionately detrimental to the populations most in need of educational attainment. It is a highly unfortunate road block and, again, does not align with the stated mission and goals of the district. I would also love to see SOMSD take a step further, with support of stakeholders, to provide free onsite school pantries that offer free personal hygiene products, toiletries, snacks and other essentials, without questions, for students that need them.

8. Given the aging infrastructure of buildings across the school district plus the requirement for dedicated capital expense funds which may be limited for repair and renovation; do you believe the district should seek funding with corporations and other private organizations ? Yes or No.

Please clarify your answer.

No. I don't believe that it is legal in the state of New Jersey to fund public school buildings privately unless it is for a charter school.

9. What are your two top priorities if elected ?

Addressing climate and culture to make our schools safe, welcoming, and affirming for every student to thrive. This is what I will bring to this community on the board of education. All the stakeholders and the community need to be involved, and we need to connect best practices, policy, research and implementation to move our district forward using an intersectional approach. We need to bring effective solutions into the classrooms and hallways of our schools to make systemic change while raising the critical questions. Communicating and pursuing engagement to unite the hearts and minds of parents, students, bodies of influence, and school leaders to help make our schools welcoming and safe for all. Acknowledging that healing needs to be pursued in our district. That can only be accomplished by communication, consistent engagement in best practices, and proactive policy ensuring that what we envision is happening in our classrooms and in every student's experiences behind school doors, or the trust to bring about the lasting change we desire will not be there.

Felishia George

1. Do you believe the district's access and equity policy introduced in 2016 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

No it doesn't. When it comes to the achievement gap and access and equity our district has yet to even get close to solving the problem. It was a problem before and it is still a problem today even with the Access and Equity policy that is in place now. It is difficult for students of color to level up, and extremely easy for them to level down. There is a hold in the guidance department in place that isn't allowing students to level up for the first month of school, causing them to be placed in a class that they are uncomfortable in for a month which then can cause confusion once they are allowed to level up due to the one month learning at a different pace. While, special needs students aren't even given the proper attention and or resources to help further and enhance their education. Our district was proven to be one of the ten worst in the state in the treatment of Black special needs students, its apparent that we have much more work to do.

2. Do you have a specific plan to move the SOMSD forward in dismantling the segregation and racial achievement gap that exist in our schools ?
Yes to the achievement gap, No to segregation. My plan to help move the district forward in terms of the achievement gap would be first and foremost to talk to the students. Create a talking space where they can express their concerns of how they feel the district isn't supporting them or isn't giving them the proper tools to reach their full potential. It's impossible to help a body of people without speaking to THEM directly on what the issues are, we'd just be fixing what we "think" the issues are. Secondly, we should eliminate academic trafficking of all students and to support that move we need to restructure courses and add more support and learning opportunities for students. As for dismantling segregation in our schools I don't have a specific plan in mind but one thing I do know is that how students (Elementary school specifically) are assigned to schools could be apart of the issue. A plan needs to be developed to achieve integration, especially within Seth Boyden. As for the high school, once leveling seriously becomes a choice and students are allowed to take classes they want and not the ones they are given it is a possibility that more brown and black faces will be seen in higher level classes. Most level 2 classes are MAJORITY black while AP classes are MAJORITY white. Segregation is an issue and should not be welcomed in our district in 2017, its ridiculous.

Do you support a vision for a new approach to professional development including a holistic, culturally-informed, comprehensive, systematic and sustained equitable practices?

3. Yes, its as simple as what we're doing now isn't working. ALL students are not respected and cared for. ALL cultures are not welcomed as the town says they are. The system at this point is built for POC to fail more than it is for POC to win. That's a problem, and its time for the district to take a new approach in solving it.

4. Do you think that SOMSD should take steps to 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. black students get suspended over things that white kids do everyday, black students get kicked out of classes for talking as white students are doing the exact same thing, causing them to now be a day behind in their learning because what they have done is "unacceptable". The district needs to realize that this hinders the path of students. It shows them that we don't care, that we aren't concerned and that we do not believe in them at all. Students are placed in special education classes at a young age for ADD and get stuck in them because the district believed that's where they need to be. This stunts student growth tremendously and unless they have parents who demanded education be equal to others. Unfortunately not all students have that, so it is our job to make sure that they get what they NEED at all times.

5. Have you had any training or professional development on addressing racism and inequality in education ? No, I haven't had any training but I do have experience. I know how it feels, I'm dedicated in making sure that the inequality in our district is put to an end.

6. Do you support the placement of School Resource Officers in SOMSD schools.

No. Having officers in the school would scare students. We have to look at what's happening on our streets and in America and make the conscious decision to not allow that in our schools. To me I see it going downhill fast. What happens when two young black men get into a fight and it LOOKS bad and an officer "fears for his life" or for the life of the other student and instead of breaking it up uses a weapon? What about the students who have PTSD from personal experience with police? Students who are regularly profiled or who just fit a description as the "bad" student? All of that matters in this situation and there is no need to have officers present in school.

7. Are you open to the creation of a small, special/private fund that will ensure that all students get access to the same lunch and forgiveness for small fees that hamper the receipt of a high school diploma? Yes, unfortunately too many students have to pay an amount of money in order to graduate. We are fearful because after paying for prom, midnight madness, SAT and college applications parents may not be able to pay another fee in that short time. I believe that it shouldn't be something students have to fear. If there is a way we can help then it should be done.

8. Given the aging infrastructure of buildings across the school district plus the requirement for dedicated capital expense funds which may be limited for repair and renovation; do you believe the district should seek funding with corporations and other private organizations ? At this point I would have to say I'm unsure. I do believe that if we can receive funding to fix issues that our budget cannot handle then we should. But I would like to look further into it before giving a direct answer.

9. What are your two top priorities if elected ?

10. My biggest priority is the equality for students. All students should and MUST be treated equally, and as of right now they are not and haven't been for years. We can't yell about being a progressive town without any progression.

Black and brown, LGBTQ, special needs, and ESL students should all be given the proper tools to achieve high in our district, not be forced to learn within a system that isn't built for them. Changing this mentality could help us in fixing the gap and segregation of schools and the way students are treated by teachers, security guards, deans and principals. It's a BIG step in solving BIG problem.

11. Secondly, another big issue I'd like to solve and address is the health and protection of our students. We have lead pipes, ceilings falling, trailers in middle schools, outdated HVAC systems and most importantly a security team that looks at students as danger more than they do the people on the outside. If students aren't safe learning wise, health wise and protected are we even doing our job as a district? This budget needs to be able to accommodate students and tax payers. We need to make sure the money is going to the right places and is actually helping. There is no reason why only some water fountains are available at SOMS and others are not, that's scary and I wouldn't advise students to drink out of any of them. There is no reason why students are being manhandled by security guards and that they act as police instead of just making sure students are safe. Most importantly there is no reason for students to sit in an updated, beautifully renovated auditorium while classrooms are falling apart and elementary students are learning in trailers that anyone can easily enter. These things need to be reviewed and fixed immediately.