



**Chapel Hill - Carrboro NAACP  
2019 School Board Candidate Questionnaire**

*Please type out your responses in full below; take as much space as you need to answer the question in full. We thank you in advance for your participation.*

Full Name:	Rani Dasi
Age/Race/Gender (with preferred pronouns):	48/Black/She/Her/Hers
Occupation/Title/Retired:	Corporate Finance and Strategy
Relationship to school district/particular school(s)	Board member and parent

Headshot Photograph  
(published with your  
questionnaire responses):



## Background

Please provide an overview of your local civic leadership/organizational affiliations:

- Please describe in particular your engagement with the local school system and local educational advocacy.
- What specific insights into our local community have you garnered from this work?
- In what ways has this work motivated you to campaign for school board membership?

### *Civic leadership/Engagement:*

Education is the key to addressing many of the issues that affect society. As someone who cares about community health, I have long been an active contributor to the Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools (CHCCS). As a classroom volunteer, Reading Partners program participant, elected member of School Improvement Teams (SIT) and parent chair of the Smith Middle School SIT. Additionally, as a parent of four children in different stages of the education process, I've worked with teachers, staff and administrators to help drive my children's learning. My children have attended Seawell Elementary, Frank Porter Graham Elementary, Smith Middle school, McDougle Middle School and Chapel Hill High School and my engagement has provided perspective on the challenges of all the parties involved.

In 2015, I was elected to the CHCCS Board of Education and over the last 4 years I have served as a board member including terms as vice chair and chair of the board.

Additionally, I currently serve various community organizations:

- Executive board of the North Carolina Caucus of Black School Board Members
- Board Chair of The Walking Classroom, a national award-winning education non-profit organization that provides students and teachers with an innovative way to get exercise without sacrificing instructional time
- Chapel Hill-Carrboro YMCA Board member
- North Carolina Beginning Teacher of the Year Steering Committee

### *Insights/Motivation:*

CHCCS is touted as a top-rated school system based on overall graduation rates and the success of some of our graduates. However, detailed data shows that the district has not been successful in educating students of color, students with disabilities and students with less access to economic resources. About 80% of African American students, 60% of Latinx students and about 75% of students with disabilities in the district are not on track to be college/career ready. Incredibly, some less resourced districts across the state show higher rates of proficiency for students in these groups. So we can conclude that the local concentration of students from highly educated, highly resourced white families have masked structural gaps in the CHCCS system's ability to provide effective instruction for all students. Improving outcomes for all students will require intentional changes to create an environment in which all students can be successful.

We are fortunate to be a district with more resources than many in the state of North Carolina. We also have parents, students and community members who care deeply about education. These resources create the opportunity for us to become a national model for the transformative power of education.

I'm motivated to be part of this change because I believe we can deliver better outcomes and I know that we **MUST** deliver better outcomes. Education is a critical foundation which impacts many community issues (hunger, violence, health and wellness, environment, etc.) and investment in education is much less costly than paying for corrective measures to rehabilitate individuals. As Frederick Douglass said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." We want an educated community to build our common understanding of how we are to engage with each other and we want economic growth which comes from educated people who can contribute to our society. We must care about all children because we are all connected and everyone's success matters.

I grew up the eldest of ten siblings in a family with few financial resources but with a mother who embedded in us the importance of education of curiosity and learning. My background included experience with various education environments (homeschool, public, private, and charter schools) and I know firsthand how transformational education can be to a life trajectory. I want to ensure all students can have this opportunity.

**Racial Disparities in Academic and Disciplinary Outcomes;  
Application of the REIA & Racial Equity Analysis**

1. **The racial achievement gap on test scores in CHCCS is the second largest in the state and one of the largest in the U.S. (e.g., in school year 2017-2018, 83.8% of White students in grades 3-8 scored "College and Career Ready" on EOG exams, as compared to only 29.4% of Black students, and 37.3% of Latinx students)<sup>1</sup>. In fact, according to the recent [Racial Equity Report Card](#), CHCCS, one of the wealthiest school districts in the state, ranks #47 compared to other districts in terms of the academic outcomes of our Black students.**
  - a. **What is your explanation for this large achievement gap and our relatively poor performance in the education of our Black students?**
  - b. **What proposals do you have for reducing these achievement disparities and poor academic performance outcomes?**

We must redesign our core education systems to create success for all students. This requires proactive efforts to eliminate institutional structures and practices that create barriers to student learning and achievement. Specifically, we must:

- Increase recruitment and retention of teachers of color
- Build a school and district climate which welcomes and engages families and students of color including the implementation of culturally inclusive rigorous curriculum and instruction to meet the wide range of student abilities
- Continue to advocate for increased compensation and supports for teachers
- Build community support to address issues of race
- Strengthen accountability systems, communicating progress on success metrics and check points for interventions as needed
- Renovate our school buildings to create appropriate learning spaces

- c. **In what ways should our school system be evaluated according to its ability to reduce these disparities?**

A successful school district should enable all students to become highly proficient community members who can effectively participate in the global economy. CHCCS can be considered a top-rated school district when we improve educational outcomes for all children by eliminating racial predictability and inequalities in achievement.

- d. **Which group, students, teachers or administrators, is most responsible for current academic achievement outcomes in CHCCS? Why?**

The persistent inability to provide effective instruction to Black and brown students indicates systemic issues which exist across departments and groups. To address instructional gaps the primary focus must be on the school and district processes as well as individual implicit bias.

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<sup>1</sup> Id.

2. Data show that each year, students of color in CHCCS, and particularly Black students, are disproportionately subject to both short and long-term suspensions (e.g., in 2016-2017, Black students in CHCCS were 13.9 times more likely to receive a short-term suspension than White students, and 5.6 times more likely to be referred to a juvenile delinquency court)<sup>2</sup>. While racial disproportionality in discipline is prevalent across the nation, [the NC relative rate index of Black student short-term suspensions compared to White students is 4.4](#), again one of the largest racial inequities in the state.
  - a. What is your explanation for the large disproportionate discipline rate in our district?

Implicit bias is a key driver of racial disproportionality in school discipline. Implicit bias is the mental process that causes us to have negative feelings and attitudes about people based on characteristics like race, ethnicity, age and appearance. Because this cognitive process functions in our unconscious mind, we are typically not conscious of the negative racial biases that develop over the course of our lifetime.

Existing research suggests implicit racial bias may influence a teacher's expectations for academic success. For example, a 2007 meta-analysis of research found statistically significant evidence that teachers hold lower expectations—either implicitly or explicitly, or both—for African American and Latino children compared to European American children (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

Lowered expectations in the classroom may result in differential treatment for students of color, including less praise and more disciplinary action from teachers. Research suggests that when given an opportunity to choose among several disciplinary options for a relatively minor offense, teachers and school administrators often choose more severe punishment for Black students than for White students for the same offense.

“In the general population, implicit racial bias often supports the stereotypical caricature of Black youth—especially males—as irresponsible, dishonest, and dangerous. In an ideal world, teachers and school administrators would be immune to these unconscious negative attitudes and predispositions about race. But, of course, they are not. So, for example, a 2003 study found that students who displayed a “black walking style” were perceived by their teachers as lower in academic achievement, highly aggressive and more likely to be in need of special education services (Neal, et al., 2003).”

When discussing racial discipline disparities, issues such as poverty, or the hypothesis that black students are more likely to misbehave are sometimes raised as drivers. These questions researched and data have found that these ideas do not explain discipline disparities. Black students and white students are sent to the principal's office at similar rates; states report they commit more serious offenses, such as carrying weapons or drugs at school, at similar rates; and when surveyed about their own behavior, they report similar patterns.

A study by researchers at Villanova University found that the percentage of black students at a school corresponded with how frequently that school suspended and expelled students. Strikingly, there was no relationship between how often schools suspended students and how much violence and drug activity the schools actually reported. When it came to how

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.southerncoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2018-RERC-Chapel-Hill-Carborro.pdf>

often schools doled out punishment, students' race appeared far more significant than their actual behavior.

“A sweeping 2012 study of discipline policies in Texas found black students are more likely to be disciplined for subjective offenses: ***Even after controlling for 83 other factors, black students were 31 percent more likely to be suspended for discretionary reasons, rather than because they committed infractions where suspension was a mandatory punishment.*** That suggests implicit bias is at play that leads to harsher punishment for black students than for others.”

Sources: <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/racial-disproportionality-in-school-discipline-implicit-bias-is-heavily-implicated/>  
<https://www.vox.com/2015/10/31/9646504/discipline-race-charts>

**b. What proposals do you have for reducing these disparities?**

- Raising awareness on implicit bias and training school staff to apply school discipline policies and practices in a fair and equitable manner so as not to disproportionately impact students of color, students with disabilities, or at-risk students
- Robust system of accountability with metrics that are frequently reviewed by leadership
- Ensuring that school-based law enforcement are not involved in minor disciplinary matters
- Implementing Restorative practices and other resources

**3. The [Racial Equity Impact Assessment](#) was recommended as a tool to guide the district's decision-making about current policy and new initiatives. What are your views about the usefulness of this tool for our district?**

The REIA is an important tool to guide decision-making and policy setting. It provides a systemic lens to consider changes for CHCCS.

**What aspects of the tool do you think are most important?**

The detailed process which considers potential adverse consequences of proposed actions on different racial groups supports long term change. Critical elements include engaging stakeholders, examining alternatives and success indicators.

**4. Have you attended Racial Equity Institute (REI) training or any other racial equity trainings in the past three years? (Note: This training is not the same as diversity or cultural competence training.) If so, what have been your key “lessons learned” about how to approach racial inequities in our school system?**

I attended REI training in August, 2019. Key take-aways are:

- Critical importance of addressing race to repair race created issues
- The clear story of the impact of race on outcomes in education and across other sectors of community life
- The importance of understanding what perspectives students and teachers bring to the classroom and school environment and how that enables or disables learning

## **Academic Tracking and Special Programs for Academically/Intellectually Gifted**

### **1. Please provide your assessment of the LEAP program, as conceived and as currently implemented.**

LEAP exists to serve a small percentage of students who demonstrate severe academic needs beyond grade level. Because there have been gaps in the level of rigor outside of LEAP, some families have used resources to gain access to the program (outside tutoring/testing, etc). The district must continue to increase supports so that all students have access to a challenging education appropriate for their needs.

### **2. What is your opinion about other initiatives that sort and divide children into academically and intellectually gifted in elementary and middle school and into “Honors” vs. “Standard” in high school?**

Education is affected by access to resources that extend learning opportunities, previous instruction and teacher quality. In addition, students learn differently and at different rates so classroom environments should be structured to meet students where they are in their learning trajectory.

Classes which include students within a similar academic level allow students to learn at their own levels and allow teachers in larger classes to teach effectively. Large classes where children with a wide range of different needs and skill levels are mixed together can be more challenging for instructors.

What we often see in school districts is that Black and brown students are overrepresented in standard classes while white students are overrepresented in gifted and talented programs, advanced placement courses or other upper-level classes. For Black and brown students, this lack of access depresses future opportunities for learning.

The idea of removing labels on classes is to ensure that students learn in environments where high expectations are set for all students, where there are a range of experiences that meet individual students at their starting point and where a rigorous curriculum supports learning growth for all students. All students benefit from higher expectations and greater exposure to challenging curriculum. Additionally, there are benefits to the entire school system when students of all level can engage and learn from each other.

To effectively deliver instruction in combined classes, requires additional class supports:

- Resources that support individualized instruction - Teachers need to be fluent in differentiation – necessitates more time for planning, grading and assessments, professional development
- Scaffolding support for students to catch up
- Smaller class sizes, more adults in the room
- Teachers who have high expectations of all students
- Support from parents and staff
- Specific defined criteria and standards for students of all levels

The district has begun implementing combined (standard/honor) classes at the high school level. This model must be supported by training and support to enable teaching staff to provide effective instruction for all students. It will require conversations across the community on issues related to race, implicit bias and a commitment to high expectations for all students.



### Faculty/Staff Diversity & Equity

1. **Please provide your assessment of the current state of CHCCS faculty and staff diversity. Do you think faculty and staff diversity is important? Please discuss why, or why not. If you see room for improvement in faculty and staff diversity, what specific proposals do you have to address the issue? List possible faculty/staff equity-related policies or best practices that could be introduced and implemented in CHCCS to improve outcomes?**

CHCCS needs more teachers of color in our classrooms. This is strongly supported by research which concludes that having just one black teacher in third, fourth or fifth grade reduced low-income black boys' probability of dropping out of high school by 39 percent. By high school, Black students, both boys and girls, who had one Black teacher had much stronger expectations of going to college.

According to the Atlantic, "Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that teachers of color can help disrupt what are often one-sided portrayals of the world and offer invaluable insight to students from different backgrounds." Other sources cite additional benefits of having teachers of color in the classroom. "All students--regardless of race--have favorable perceptions of Black and Latino teachers vis-à-vis White teachers. They are perceived as more supportive and provide clearer and more useful feedback."

*Proposals must address recruitment and retention*

#### *Recruitment*

- Intentional recruitment and retention of teachers of color (TOC) must be a priority for the district and school leadership including accountability for leadership
- Advocate for state and local programs which support pipeline growth into education (ex. Teaching Fellows program focused on recruiting teachers of color)
- Build community understanding of the critical need for TOC

#### *Addressing retention:*

- Create opportunities for community building with the current teachers and staff of color across the district
- Survey teachers to understand and address barriers to retention
- Provide training for white staff on issues related to race to improve school climates for TOC

### Dual Language Programs

1. **Please provide your assessment of our school system's dual language programs.**
  - a. **How do the District's dual language programs help to *improve* inequities in academic achievement?**

In the dual language immersion model, students are taught literacy and content in two languages. The classroom setting integrates native English speakers and native speakers of another language in an environment which offers an opportunity to develop bilingual, bicultural students. The model is highly supportive of English Language Learners as students do not need to relearn how to read in English; teachers help them transfer their literacy skills from one language to the other.

This program benefits both the English-speaking students and the foreign language-speaking students, because they all get to learn a new language. Multiple research

studies have demonstrated the significant cognitive benefits derived from early language learning, as well as the potential long-term educational and career benefits that multilingual students accrue.

**b. How do dual language programs *contribute* to inequities in academic achievement?**

The need to develop bilingualism in an increasingly globalized society has made the program appealing for many parents of children who are native English speakers (Calderón, 2000). As noted above, there are significant cognitive benefits derived from early language learning, as well as the potential long-term educational and career benefits that multilingual students accrue.

Typically, there are fewer spots available in these programs than there are families who want to participate. So, we see inequities persist when parents of privilege are overrepresented in the program and other students have low access to the benefits of acquiring a second language.

**c. How can dual language programs, in their current state and resource allocation, help to close the achievement gap?**

- Ensure dual language programs have demographics consistent with student population (ensure equal opportunities for all students to access programs)
- Ensure native speakers are appropriately represented
- Provide appropriate supports for all students to learn the non-native language
- Ensure teachers receive training in implicit bias and race history

**d. If unsuccessful in meeting metrics for closing the achievement gap, should resources allocated toward dual language programs be diverted to other programs with greater potential and a demonstrated track record in addressing inequities in achievement? Why or why not?**

When the dual language program is fully supported and structured to ensure equal opportunity for participation, dual language should be a strong tool in closing the gap. If it is unsuccessful in meeting metrics, the district should review the program to make interventions.

### **School Safety**

**1. Please provide your assessment of our current school safety plan, and its implementation.**

**a. What are your biggest concerns regarding school safety?**

- Country's easy access to guns
- Lack of race based understanding of what causes trauma to students
- Gaps in community mental health supports
- Lack of funding for repairing school buildings

**b. Describe the role of School Resource Officers in our elementary through high schools.**

SROs duties include foot patrol of campus and site inspections to ensure safety; act as a link to other service agencies that provide preventative and counseling services and respond to major disruptions and flagrant criminal offenses that occur on campus and threaten the safety of students and staff.

- c. Do you believe that School Resource Officers should be armed? Why or why not? If yes, please describe the type of weapon.**

This is a really hard question to answer. In general, the fewer guns around children the better. However, as a parent living in the current climate of increasing school (and other) shootings in America, there is a sense that SROs (with handguns) offer protection against potential threats to student safety. I lean towards no guns but am still undecided.

- d. What concrete changes in school safety policy would you like to see?**

Nationally and statewide schools would be safer if they followed a model of training and accountability as does CHCCS.

- *Training:* In our district, SROs receive training in the following areas: Restorative Practice, Equity, Autism, Crisis Prevention Intervention, Sexual Violence in Students' Lives, Sexual Assault in Teen Lives, What First Responders Need To Know About Non-Caregiver Assault, Child Sexual Abuse and others.
- *Defined/aligned expectations:* school principals and leadership set clear expectations of the role of the SRO and alignment that building leaders are responsible for most discipline management
- *Accountability:* Discipline data is reviewed by the board frequently

### **Community Engagement**

- 1. What changes would you suggest in how the school system communicates with parents and other community stakeholders?**

- a. Please provide your assessment of current levels of transparency and the integrity of process in CHCCS decision-making. In what ways should transparency and accountability to the community be improved?**

Accountability will be improved through timely relevant communication including metrics that demonstrate progress and processes that enable stakeholders to be active participants in the education process.

- b. In what ways can the school board better promote student engagement in school system governance? What are you doing to engage students and student voice in your campaign?**

- Surveys, listening sessions
- Inclusion in decision making
- Superintendent convenes a student council which provides student insights to district leadership

My campaign actively engages multiple students in our process as advisors, planners, and marketing advisors.

- c. How would you characterize our school system's readiness to ensure a full and accurate count in the upcoming census?**

Census data is critical to community health and must be prioritized by all of us. The more accurate the census count is in our community, the more likely our community is to get the resources that we need to serve community members.

Census data is used:

- Federally to allocate funds including support for infrastructure and roads, health care, schools, and more

- Determine violations of Civil Rights issues and enforcement (housing, employment, or education, etc)
- Locally to determine services like bus routes, school districts, where to build businesses, and how to prepare for emergencies
- As an important part of reapportionment and redistricting. Reapportionment happens following the census and is the process that decides how many seats a state has in the House of Representatives. Districts are also drawn using census data for state legislative bodies. Redistricting should keep communities together, which is not possible without an accurate census that tells us where people are

The school district is positioned to include the 2020 Census in outreach programs in educating our community about the important role the census plays in determining funding for our community.

The 2020 Census will rely more heavily on the use of computer based surveys. The district can act as central locations to provide internet access for those who are looking to respond to the 2020 Census but lack appropriate internet access to respond at home.

### **Budgeting**

**1. What should be the priorities for the CHCCS's 2020-2021 budget?**

**a. In what ways would they differ from 2019-2020 budget priorities?**

**b. How would you re-prioritize current programs?**

2020-21 priorities should be largely consistent with current year priorities with more intentional focus on allocating resources to needs

- Teacher compensation and support, family leave benefits
- Recruiting and retaining teachers of color
- Social/emotional resources
- Continued implementation of rigorous, culturally relevant curriculum and materials to support learning
- Equity training
- Rebuilding our school facilities

**c. What other changes would you like to see in the budgeting process?**

- More detail on effectiveness of programs and investments
- More detail on program costs