



**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:	Jillian Joy La Serna
Age/Race/Gender (with preferred pronouns):	38/White/Female (She/Her/Hers)
Occupation/Title/Retired:	Professor/Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership
Relationship to school district/particular school(s)	Former Principal of Carrboro Elementary School (2013-2019) Parent of an 8 <sup>th</sup> grader at McDougle Middle School Parent of a 5 <sup>th</sup> grader at Carrboro Elementary School

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? Please describe, in particular, your engagement with the local school system and local educational advocacy.

*I have been an educator of public schools for 20 years. I have spent the past ten years as an educator in Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, having served as teacher, assistant principal, and principal. This experience has taught me the value of a public school education and of the critical role that the grassroots can and should play in public education. In addition to serving as principal of Carrboro Elementary school for the past six years, I have obtained my Masters and Doctoral degrees in Educational Leadership from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I currently serve on the North Carolina Dual Language Advisory committee and have researched and written on North Carolina schools.*

**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?
    - *Addressing the achievement gap is my primary motivation for running for school board. While equity has always been a focus of discussion in the district, it has not been a priority when it comes to the allocation of coveted district resources.*
  - b. What proposals do you have for reducing these achievement disparities and poor academic performance outcomes?
    - *I believe in implementing research based, data-driven policies to address the achievement gap. A number of studies have pointed toward best practices for lowering the achievement gap (e.g., extending the school day and school year; using culturally relevant instruction and texts in the classroom; offering a rigorous and challenging curriculum to every student, and community-school partnerships).*
  - c. In what ways should our school system be evaluated according to its ability to reduce these disparities?
    - *Rather than focus strictly on proficiency, we should be tracking and reporting on each individual student's personal growth, analyzing each subgroup.*
  - d. Which group, students, teachers or administrators, is most responsible for current academic achievement outcomes in CHCCS? Why?
    - *Studies show that teachers are the number one factor in student achievement. We should be doing whatever it takes to attract **and retain** the most talented, diverse teachers and principals.*
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?
    - *Unconscious racial bias and systemic racism have been proven to lead to disproportionate suspensions and behavior referrals not just for black students, but for Hispanic/Latino students as well.*
  - b. What proposals do you have for reducing these disparities?
  - c.

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<sup>1</sup> Id.

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

- *We need to reconsider the ways in which we conduct racial sensitivity training in this district. Too often non-black teachers believe themselves incapable of racial bias because they do not consider themselves racist. Training should focus on raising awareness about racial bias and its manifestations, and empowering teachers to acknowledge their own inherent assumptions.*

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

*\* This is an effective tool in decision making, but it must be made prior to decisions being made, and not, as is sometimes the case, as an ex-post facto justification for decisions that have already been made.*

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 have attended Social Justice Standards by Teaching Tolerance and led the implementation of Social Justice units in my school.*

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

1. Please provide your assessment of the LEAP program, as conceived and as currently implemented.
  - *A small percentage of students require extreme differentiation based on their individual academic, social, behavioral and emotional needs. For the small percentage who fit this criteria, LEAP can be an effective program.*
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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?
  - *These programs should be called for what they are: tracking. Studies show that tracking adversely impacts racial minorities more than any other group, and therefore should not be implemented no matter what term is used to describe it.*

### **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?
  - *The district faculty and staff does not represent the student or parent population. The district should continue its efforts to recruit and retain a diverse staff, including black and Latino faculty.*

2. List possible faculty/staff equity-related policies or best practices that could be introduced and implemented in CHCCS to improve outcomes?
  - *I believe that there are talented faculty of color within this state, and our district needs to develop relationships with universities and teaching candidates beginning in the undergraduate level. We also need to ensure that administrators are trained to recognize micro-aggressions so that they can appropriately respond when faculty of color encounter them at the workplace.*

### **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?
    - *Research shows that all dual language students, no matter their racial or socioeconomic background, outperform their peers in comparable English-only settings. For my doctoral dissertation at UNC Chapel Hill, I conducted a longitudinal study of the state's most successful dual language programs to understand why black students in dual language classrooms outperform their peers in traditional classrooms. I found that the nature of dual language instruction lends itself to best teaching practices in the classroom, which explains the higher level of achievement for all students, regardless of their demographics.*
  - b. How do dual language programs *contribute* to inequities in academic achievement?
    - *In my research, I found that dual language teachers do not always use culturally relevant teaching in their classroom instruction. This, together with teachers' own implicit biases, can be obstacles to achievement not just in dual language programs, but in any classroom setting.*
  - c. How can dual language programs, in their current state and resource allocation, help to close the achievement gap?
    - *A long-term study by Collier and Thomas showed that students of color in dual language settings outperform their peers in traditional classrooms. My dissertation confirmed this study, showing that dual language instruction necessitates best teaching practices, therefore helping students of all backgrounds fulfill their greatest academic potential.*
  - 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?
    - *Yes, but studies show that this is not the case for dual language around the country. In fact, it is the opposite. We must always defer to the most current, data-driven research before making any decisions that may impact district-level policy and instruction. Therefore, if our district metrics show dual language to be less effective in CHCCS than elsewhere in the state and country, we should be asking ourselves what we should be doing differently.*

### **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?

- *Loose gun control policy is the biggest threat to school safety. Our district should take a leadership role in addressing this national issue.*
- b. Describe the role of School Resource Officers in our elementary through high schools.
    - *The SRO's primary role should be to build relationships with students and communities.*
  - c. Do you believe that School Resource Officers should be armed? Why or why not? If yes, please describe the type of weapon.
    - *SROs are currently armed. I led a school with no SRO during an active shooter lockdown. My relationship with the town police department, and my staff's preparedness, was the most important factor in our response.*
  - d. What concrete changes in school safety policy would you like to see?
    - *The district should adapt a public stance against assault weapons.*

### **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?
    - *Transparency and accountability are the two leading platforms of my campaign. Parents and citizens deserve to know why their school board and central office make decisions, from hiring administrators to policy changes. Without this, there can be no mutual trust between the community and the district.*
  - 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?
    - *As an outgoing principal, I was in a unique position to hear 500 student voices for 6 years. I consistently surveyed all students, ran school clubs open to all and at no charge, and created engagement opportunities for students during the school day as well as after school. I look forward to taking this level of engagement to the school board.*
  - c. How would you characterize our school system's readiness to ensure a full and accurate count in the upcoming census?
    - *Principals should feel empowered to take a leadership role with their communities, even if this happens off campus.*

### **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?
    - *We should extend learning opportunities during the school day and the school year.*
  - b. How would you re-prioritize current programs?
    - *Every program we run should prioritize addressing the achievement gap.*
  - c. What other changes would you like to see in the budgeting process?
    - *Increased transparency and staff participation in budgeting decisions. Budget decisions should be based on research-based practices.*