

Maryland SMOB Video Transcript - Dhriti Vadlakonda

This past year has been quite a tumultuous journey (to say the least!), but you have stayed strong through it all. No matter what challenge came before you, be it a global pandemic, racial injustice, virtual education, or a loss of connection with your friends, you haven't let these hardships break you. And there is no way we will ever let them dominate our education. We will continue to fight back with a new sense of purpose until we have achieved the change that we want to see in our education. And I couldn't be more proud to have the opportunity to serve such dedicated and fearless students like you.

Hi MASC! My name is Dhriti Vadlakonda, and I am honored to be running for YOUR 36th Maryland Student Member on the Board of Education (SMOB). I am so excited to meet you all very soon!

Leadership has always been such a great passion of mine. From Class President to an officer for the Howard County Association of Student Councils to a speaker at the National Association of Student Councils Conference, I have always loved exacting positive change in my community and representing student voice at really any level I could reach. To elevate the voices of 900,000 wonderful Maryland students is an opportunity that I am humbled to have. I am so excited to work with new, talented student leaders like YOU and to hear YOUR diverse stories.

I see the Maryland SMOB as essentially a bridge between Maryland students and members of the Board of Education (BOE). Like any effective bridge, a SMOB must be accountable and dependable to her constituents, as well as a strong support for their educational journeys. My responsibility will not only be to proudly represent all Maryland students, but also to put myself in the plethora of shoes that represent your diversity. This way, I can fully understand the struggles and ambitions of all Maryland students to best represent you. On a Board with many adults, I will balance the dynamic by unhesitantly pushing forward the viewpoints of a student like you.

As SMOB, one of my top priorities will be to tackle learning loss. School shutdowns cause disproportionate learning losses and persistent achievement disparities. As SMOB, I will push for the educational recovery of at-risk students especially, such as English as Second Language (ESL) speakers, younger students, and students with disabilities. I will encourage the Board to reach out to every student to get a reliable assessment of health, trauma, abuse, addiction, and domestic violence. I will make certain that the Board continues to support tutoring and will advocate for the partnership with mental and social health services for students coping with stresses of the pandemic.

This school year has especially highlighted the digital divide that Maryland students face. Students in chronically underfunded schools have not had reliable access to technology this school year, at school or at home. As SMOB, I will push for the collective effort at the state and county levels to address internet access for all, including additional funding for counties that were hit the hardest with a lack of access to technology this year. As SMOB, I will also encourage the continuation of funding for up-to-date devices and connectivity and will make sure that we account for additional expenses for this next school year.

You have just heard some of my legislative priorities; the rest are open for you to contribute to! I am ready to whole-heartedly welcome any and all feedback that you have for me! I will fight tirelessly for you. I will ensure that you are given everything and more that you need to be successful in YOUR education. Should I be given the honor of serving in this position, I will strive to exceed all expectations and broaden the legacy of the Maryland SMOB.

We will make schools a safe place for all students, we will close the learning gaps, we will eliminate education disparities, and we will secure a world-class education for all. With your vote, we won't just be yearning for these changes anymore. We're gonna make them happen.

My name is Dhriti Vadlakonda, and I am honored to be running for your 36th Maryland Student Member on the Board of Education. I want you all to know that I am here for you—not only as a candidate for the state SMOB, but also as a fellow student who is going through everything with you. :)