

Hello MASC! My name is Shruti Vadlakonda and I am honored to be running for YOUR next Maryland Student Member on the Board of Education.

I am currently a part of the Maryland Association of Student Councils (MASC). I serve as the Treasurer on the MASC Executive Board. At MASC executive board meetings and conferences, I have spoken with students all across the state and built strong connections. I have substantial experience at the state level and first-hand knowledge of issues that affect students *statewide*.

I now want to be the voice for ALL of the students across Maryland by being your next SMOB.

In the state of Maryland there are 880,000+ students from Pre-K through high school, each with their own voice, concerns, and issues. The purpose of the student member is to bridge the gap between the students and the Board of Education. As the student member, I will amplify student voices by effectively conveying your opinions to the Board.

In addition to my experience with MASC, I am a part of the Howard County Association of Student Councils (HCASC). I was an appointed officer in both the Legislative Affairs Committee where I formed legislative stances and corresponded with state and county officials about student affairs, as well as the Election Coordinating Committee where I planned our countywide SMOB election. In addition, I have attended the National Student Council Conference (NatStuCo) and the Maryland Youth Advisory Council (MYAC) Community Conversation.

All of these experiences have invigorated a passion in me for student government and uplifting student voices.

That's why I want to serve as your next SMOB.

Here are some of the issues I wish to advocate for as SMOB and hope to hear about *more* from YOU.

1) Mental Health: With busy lives inside and outside of school, students face stressful situations on a daily basis. Individual schools and counties have their own resources for students but there is no uniform plan that can be implemented by all the school systems in the state to address students' mental health and wellbeing. Therefore, I would advocate for a standard, comprehensive mental health plan for Maryland schools. It is important that we destigmatize mental health and make it easier for students to reach out when they are struggling.

2) Learning Loss: Even though the pandemic started three years ago, students are still facing its consequences. Following virtual schooling due to the Covid-19 crisis, a statewide learning loss was observed. The annual Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) conference this year revealed drops in Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) proficiency scores in Grades 3-8. I will advocate for increased access to technology and teaching support for all students, especially in underserved communities.

3) College and Career Readiness: Although resources and counselors are available for guidance, there is a need for a stronger college and career preparedness program across the state. Schools have shifted the attention mainly to a one-size-fits-all academic based curriculum, instead of focusing on post high school preparedness. In order to bridge the widening gap between high school graduates and college/workforce, I will advocate for a high school education that can adapt to the current needs and is based on student input. I will stress the importance of hands-on experience in high school and push to expand college and career counseling sessions.

The Maryland Education System has always produced bright scholars and skilled workers. As your next SMOB, I will advocate for the best education for all of YOU.

Shruti Vadlakonda