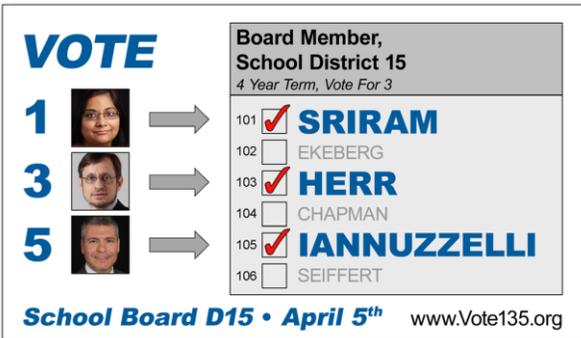


Strengthening the Curriculum

By **Manjula Sriram** – Candidate for District 15 Board of Education - March 16, 2011



The Situation

District 15 is one of the top school districts in the state of Illinois. The residents of our district should be proud of this great achievement and be thankful to our faculty, students, parents, and the administration for doing the hard work needed for that achievement. However, even a great school district, with tremendous community support, needs to think ahead.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "I don't think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday." If we want to continue to be one of the top districts, we need to learn how to challenge our

children to think critically and build their problem solving skills. This will require a curriculum that goes beyond the [Illinois Learning Standards](#), and sets a higher goal of achievement for our students.

The Challenge

District 15's goal is to produce world class learners. In order to produce world class learners and compete in the global economy, we must compare our schools against other successful countries. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is just one way to assess the educational performance of schools in the areas of reading, math and science. According to PISA, the United States scored average or below average in all three of these areas. As a country we need to work on this goal – that is a given.

In addition to producing world class learners, our District also has a responsibility towards every child, and their individual needs as a learner. Progress made by each child is key to a successful school district and every child moves forward at their own pace, in their own style. Here are some thoughts as to how CCSD15 can approach these challenges.

Strong Faculty: As a district, we need to ensure that we continually bring in and retain the right talent. The faculty imparts knowledge and motivates the future leaders of our country. We need to have an evaluation system, so we can ensure that every student in every classroom has a teacher capable of instructing them and motivating them to learn. We need to work with those educators that need help by providing support and guidance as a district, as well as help strong teachers become even better.

Balanced Budget: Having a balanced budget and allocated funds means we can introduce new programs and services that a strengthened curriculum will require, as well as making sure current programs are properly funded.

Navigate 15: This forum should be grown, so that global curriculum can be researched and ideas for enriching curriculum can be generated. This forum provides a way for parents to give direct input into the curriculum they believe their children need to be successful in the global marketplace or the local market regardless of the profession chosen by the children.

Articulation: Elementary Schools need to partner with the Junior High and the Junior High with the High School to identify how we as a district can best suit the needs of the ever changing global marketplace. Every student should be prepared to advance to the next level and should not have to take remedial classes upon graduation.

Communication with Parents: We need to ensure there is proper communication between the school and the parents. There is often a disconnect between what the children hear and what the parents are told by the school. The parents should be subject matter experts about their children's education. Better communication between the schools and parents means better help from parents at home.

Communication from Parents: Parents need to set proper expectations with their children and support them to ensure these expectations are met or exceeded. Parents need to communicate with their children's teachers to ensure a strong relationship for learning.

Motivated Students: Based on the scores and the caliber of students District 15 produces, we already know many are motivated to excel and give it their best. Students at all levels should be supported and encouraged to reach higher and to raise the level of expectation for themselves.

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Knowledge Support System

Strong curriculum implementation: As Navigate 15 generates new ideas, and as gaps or improvements are discovered, we need to implement these concepts in a faster manner than before.

Identify and implement innovative educational programs.

Every child is an individual and learns differently. Innovative programs will motivate students who are not interested in books and learn through research and games.

Some examples of innovative educational programs that can be implemented at all levels :

1. Science Competitions for our Elementary and Junior High Students.
2. Math Olympics for our Elementary School Students.
3. General Knowledge programs to provide our students with opportunity to learn a variety of subjects that may not be part of the curriculum.
4. Support our students and encourage them to participate in external educational offerings like the Intel Student Research program and Argonne Labs Educational days.
5. Strengthening the rigor of science curriculum at all grade levels.
6. Providing “out of level” Science and English opportunities within the classroom for advanced students.

The Urgency of Change

Many District 15 classrooms exercise some of these ideas, but we need them implemented across the district. Each year that passes by without raised standards and strengthened curriculum is another year that students will irretrievably lose in their education. We must move quickly to enhance the education of every student in the district, so that they are prepared for the 21st century jobs that await them when they graduate. Only lifelong learners will be successful in the global marketplace, and District 15 has an urgent mandate to create a lifelong learner from every student.