



AARTI KAUSHAL CHOPRA

CANDIDATE STATEMENT

For over 26 years, I have been a teacher, educator, student life coach, and grassroots organizer/activist for students, youth, and women in Irvine/OC. A former elementary special education teacher, I understand the devastating impact school closures has had on all students. As a longtime trusted advocate in my community, I remain closely connected to the ever-changing needs of vulnerable students attending community college as their only higher education option left in this ongoing pandemic.

An Irvine resident for 34+ years, I was raised in Irvine USD's world class schools as a 1st generation Indian American woman of color raised by a single mother, and I bring a strong track record for collaborative solutions. My leadership will ensure accountability, equitable access, and sustainable budget provisions for all essential services. College campuses will reopen safely for the overall wellbeing of every student, faculty, and employee.

Ensuring that curriculum matches current social changes is also my goal, to ensure representation of all diverse student body experiences.

I am proudly endorsed by hundreds of parents, educators, faculty, elected leaders, and PAC's from Irvine, Orange County and beyond, ensuring all stakeholders' voices will be included for an exceptional higher educational experience. Please reach me at aarti4soccdd1@gmail.com.

PLATFORM

A longtime educator and student wellness advocate, Aarti's leadership will focus on:

- Overseeing safe reopening of Irvine Valley College, Saddleback College, and ATEP
- Collaborating and balancing fiscal accountability and sustainability for essential services
- Fair, equitable access for educational and/or employment opportunities for students, faculty, and employees
- Providing overall curriculum and training that is affordable, socially and economically relevant, while retaining world-class higher education experiences.

CURRENT WORK

Aarti is a mindful life coach for youth and families, a teacher and educator who has practiced and taught conscious living most of her life since childhood. In these challenging times due to the pandemic and social justice issues, she has empowered students of all ages through her "Quarantined Student Life Hacks" classes and built a mindful wellness tribe called "SIPAAHIS". She has brought other teachers on board to introduce young people to easy daily mindful practices to heal trauma, boost immunity, resilience, independence, and confidence in care-taking skills for themselves, family, and friends. Under Aarti's guidance, students are encouraged to pursue creative learning ventures not just online but especially outdoors in nature, while practicing safety, compassionate responsibility, and staying connected with peers and loved ones during ongoing school and college closures.

Aarti has worked through her own extreme hardships to hone her innate qualities as a visionary leader for students and youth, giving them a voice, a sense of belonging, and rising them in leadership as the most critical stakeholders

in our education systems. She is grateful to have single-handedly built *SIPAAHIS* as her mindful education-based community service platform, and to highlight it in such challenging times with her unique life story helping lay the strong foundation. Her extensive network with wonderful local community groups, non-profit and faith-based organizations, and active engagement with community, business, and elected leaders and candidates, have been the building blocks fortifying her platform.

CHILDHOOD

A British-born, first-generation, Indian American immigrant, Aarti was raised in both U.S. and India by her divorced mother and grandparents in a humble middle class family of doctors, engineers, scientists, and scholars. She completed most of her elementary schooling in New Delhi, immersed in her rich culture and heritage which cemented her multi-lingual and bi-cultural foundation. Despite her mother's struggles as a survivor of domestic violence, she and her family members made numerous sacrifices to ensure the children thrived in close-knit joint, extended, and blended family units and assimilated into daily American life. Starting at age 10, Aarti became accomplished in Indian and world dances as a performing artist and dance teacher; upon returning to the U.S. at age 11, she was introduced to meditation and mindful living by her mother. Combining this inclusive upbringing with her teaching career, these factors proved a winning formula for Aarti to overcome numerous traumatic life events, going from surviving to thriving and building resilience. She now uses her story of triumph to encourage students to do the same in this increasingly challenging world.

EDUCATION AND CAREER

For Aarti's family, education and immigrating to America was the only path to economic security and the promise of a better life. Residing in Irvine for over 34 years, she completed her education in Irvine's world class public schools at University Park, Rancho San Joaquin Middle, and Woodbridge High School. She completed her bachelor's degree in 1996 in Social Ecology at UC Irvine (emphasis in psychology and social behavior), and master's degree and teaching credentials in Special Education at Chapman University. Her upbringing taught her strong family values, being balanced and rooted in two beautiful cultures, lifelong learning, and most importantly, solidified the value of hard work ethic.

Aarti's career experience spans over 26 years in Orange County as a special education teacher, mentor, tutor (including SAT), educational therapist, advocate, consultant, and now student life coach. From 1999-2009, she taught in three local school districts as a mild-moderate special educator in both self-contained classrooms (SDC) and as a resource specialist (RSP). From 2009-2011, she was an educational therapist at UCI's Child Development School for ADHD and Related Disorders in their day treatment program. For the last 12 years, she has focused on increasing youth academic success by improving their mental and emotional health, centered on multi-sensory and holistic approaches. In the years 2015 to 2018, she became a devoted student and proponent of Oprah Winfrey's parenting expert, Dr. Shefali Tsabary, being fully immersed in Dr. Shefali's "conscious parenting" and "conscious teaching" principles. This was a game-changing period of growth for Aarti as both a co-parent and educator. She has cherished her classroom experiences, teaching students with diverse learning challenges mainly from low socio-economic backgrounds, and hopes to eventually return to school teaching due to pandemic-driven teacher shortages.

SOCIAL ACTIVISM AND VOTING

After the November 2016 presidential election and her own personal challenges that year, Aarti decided to venture more into grassroots community organizing for vulnerable populations of children, students, women survivors of abuse/violence, and racial and educational justice. Her background as a divorcee and survivor of family violence finally propelled her to share her own traumatic life experiences, shaping her brave, outlier character and fueling her drive to help others with similar backgrounds. She is known in her greater OC community to have worked tirelessly advocating for mental health and victims' rights, creating safe spaces for victims to build courage to share vulnerable stories, heal emotional trauma into strength, and confidently pursue more empowered life paths.

Aarti's strong activist pedigree is evident. She was raised by her grandmother on stories of her and her great-grandfather's role as freedom fighters under Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent "Satyagraha" movement – the culmination of a century-long struggle for India's independence from oppressive British colonial rule. India's hard-won independence in August 1947 also divided the sub-continent and created present-day Pakistan, forcing her entire family to leave everything and flee, resettling as refugees in New Delhi in 1946 to an independent but traumatized India. This fateful "Partition" by the British yielded still the largest and one of the most devastating human exoduses in history. She is committed to educating about the oppressive divide-and-conquer remnants of the British "Raj" (colonial rule) that still haunt citizens and immigrants from the Indian sub-continent (South Asia), and still affect impressionable younger generations even today. Increasingly, Aarti's personal knowledge, background, and training in collaborative problem solving techniques have especially well-positioned her to address recent socio-political developments and objectively negotiate diplomatic and mutually beneficial outcomes.

Aarti's commitment to voting in each election was inspired by 3-generations of voters in her family, setting forth a model example of good American citizenship. Special memories etched in her mind are the extreme pride her grandparents felt upon taking the oath to become U.S. citizens, and when they diligently exercised their right and duty to vote in every single presidential election. This same call to duty is being brought by Aarti's campaign to energize and encourage registered voters – young, old, and in between – to be civically engaged at all levels.

GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Aarti strongly believes the combination of literacy, vocational skills and workforce training, STEAM opportunities, entrepreneurial ventures, and active civic engagement are all equalizers required to create successful economic opportunities to level the field – especially for vulnerable and marginalized populations. From 2008-2018, she did special needs' advocacy and ran support groups with various ADHD, dyslexia, and autism organizations, while raising awareness about "1-in-5" students having invisible learning disabilities. December 2016 to April 2018 was dedicated to creating a "Taboo Topics' Facebook talk show, raising awareness of the following: removing stigma of disabilities and mental health, the school-to-prison pipeline, OC Women's March, gun violence prevention, protests for homeless housing, and local city council candidate interviews. Taboo Topics helped her become an increasingly informed and engaged activist in many local campaigns as a strong voice lobbying for various social issues.

From April to June 2019, she traveled to Sacramento to lobby for gun safety, gun violence prevention, mental health legislation, affordable housing, and increasing federal special education funding. She attended state party conventions in San Francisco and Long Beach, connecting with many Asian American/AAPI elected leaders from all levels, local to national, and worked on many public issue campaigns that have shaped local and state policies. She serves as a member of many organizations that champion equality and social justice; however, because mental health is her priority, she actively supports the advocacy work by the Irvine Prevention Coalition (IPC). Aarti advocates for sensible climate action plans steering away from reliance on fossil fuels and towards more sustainable means of energy.

2020 HONORS: STORY CORPS & CITY COMMISSIONER APPOINTMENTS

Even during the ongoing pandemic, Aarti has shown to be a highly effective, out-of-the-box thinker with a successful track record of creative problem solving. Her unifying leadership approach towards grassroots coalition-building assures that student social justice and employment issues will be a laser focus, solidified by the following honorable recognition:

- January – one of only seven residents interviewed for "**STORYCORPS – Stories From the OC**", by prominent female Haitian American activist, Guerline Josef. Interview is nationally archived forever in the **U.S. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS** (link here): <https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/conversation-with-the-phenomenal-aarti-kaushal-chopra-a-south-asian-immigrant-womans-voice/>.

- February – *Honorable Irvine City Councilmember Melissa Fox* made Aarti her newest city commissioner to the “Child Care Committee”, which then appointed her as liaison to the “ICYFAC – Irvine Children, Youth, and Families Advisory Council”.

GANDHI PEACE MARCH AND UNITY RALLY

In June 2020, during the heart of the lockdown and immediately following George Floyd’s death by police, Aarti helped organize a ground-breaking event in Irvine. Along with two prominent Indian American community leaders, they held a “Gandhi Peace March and Unity Rally” with the goal of showing support for black lives lost to injustice. Powerful speakers, including youth, extolled the teachings from the most prominent civil rights’ leaders – Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela – of nonviolent civil disobedience against systematic racism, oppressive brutality, and towards freedom. Despite opposition and organizational challenges due to city closures, this socially distanced event was well-attended by over 60 enthusiastic, committed peace and unity marchers and city council members, and was endorsed by the city and Irvine Police Department.

This event became an unprecedented game-changer for Indian/South Asian Americans; it helped open up conversations around racial tensions and law enforcement brutality against blacks and marginalized people of color. Aarti has built alliances with the esteemed speakers who represent different organizations; the event’s special guest Pastor Williamson of OC’s second largest black church (COR AME Church) has become an ardent supporter of her grassroots organizing efforts as a woman of color. Together with other leaders, they are committed to working for justice through voter empowerment on issues faced by immigrants, communities of color, women, and youth.

The Gandhi Peace March and Unity Rally also led to Aarti being recently appointed to the *“Diversity Council”* for the campaign of Lauren Johnson-Norris for Irvine City Council.

COMMUNITY SERVICE AND SCHOOL INITIATIVES

- During school closures in April-May, held a series of online forums to hear students, parents, teachers’ concerns about the change in Irvine Unified School District policy from grades to credit/no credit for spring semester.
- Currently supporting the following initiatives:
 - additional COVID-mental health outreach for more vulnerable students served by the districts
 - increased student representation via dedicated public comment time during board meetings
 - adoption of culturally-sensitive curriculum for history/ethnic studies
 - education about misappropriated symbols used to target groups for hate crimes
- Volunteers frequently at non-profit food drives for those experiencing COVID-related hardship.

CANDIDATE IN 2020 ELECTIONS

Aarti believes all levels of government must shift focus from divisiveness to collaborative, visionary leadership, sound legislation and policies, incorporate voices of all citizens/stakeholders, remove voter suppression through increased registration and education – because she knows representation matters. To translate and evolve these beliefs into practice, she decided to run as a candidate in local elections. She ran in the March Primary for the 74th Assembly District on the Central Committee of the OC Democratic Party, and was the only AAPI immigrant woman in this most competitive central committee race. As a new candidate, she secured an impressive 6061 votes from Irvine and Coastal OC Democratic voters, who related to her platform of student mental health and positive representation for women of color and Asian Americans. These were also twice the amount of votes received compared to candidates with longtime party involvement and Members’ of Congress endorsements.

Immediately after this election run, COVID-19 completely upended the lives and traditional educational experiences of all K-12 and college students, forcing prolonged institutional closures. This made Aarti even more committed to

empowering students of all ages regarding their overall wellbeing, ensuring equitable educational access, training, and career opportunities, as schools and colleges remain online while awaiting safe reopening.

Currently, Aarti has qualified on the Nov. 3rd presidential election ballot for the South Orange County Community College District, Trustee Area 1 race. SOCCCD includes Irvine Valley College, Saddleback College, and ATEP in Tustin Legacy; Trustee Area 1 represents most of Irvine. In these challenging times, community colleges increasingly offer exceptional possibilities for a world-class higher education experience. Aarti's youth-powered campaign and message has energized and resonated with voters from diverse ages, backgrounds, and political affiliations, bringing her pragmatic solution-generating prowess and solid leadership to these three institutions. While this is the largest nonpartisan race in all of OC (over 580,000 voters), the sum total of Aarti's experience and track record positions her well to win this race.

As a down ballot candidate, she is running in this election's most critical local race, because representation matters. Vote for Aarti Kaushal Chopra on November 3rd – she is the only candidate committed to advancing higher education and economic opportunities for all hard-working Americans. Email her at Aarti4SOCCCD1@gmail.com for questions or sharing concerns. More details and donation link can be found at:

WEBSITE: www.aarti4communitycollege.com

FACEBOOK: “Aarti 4 Community College”

INSTAGRAM: @Aarti4CommunityCollege

TWITTER: @Aarti4SOCCCD1