A lifetime of schooling

At UR Warner School, dean puts his love of education to work

By DIANA LOUISE CARTER

A
nand R. Marri has been shaped by education as few people have. One entered into his new job as dean of the Warner School of Education at the University of Rochester. Marri is a proponent of shape education in return. The pursuit of education was the reason Marri didn’t see his father for much of his first nine years. While Marri was living in Hyderabad, India, his fa-
thor, Madhava Marri, was in the United States pursuing an MBA and setting up a business. In 1981, Marri, his younger brother and mother all joined Madhava in the United States.

Despite their struggles to gain a financial foothold in their new country, Marri pursued an education that valued a good education of making sacrifices so he and his brother could attend Catholic schools in Queens, considered better than the local public schools.

Marri could only speak his native language of Telu-
gu and struggled with English, particularly with his mother; Sarala Marri, enrolled both of her sons in an English language class. The family’s first summer in the United States, still when he started fifth grade, he hadn’t mastered the new language yet.

“I was a straight student because I didn’t know En-
glish,” he said. “I did well.” He learned speak En-
glish (without either an Indian or an American accent) but he hadn’t learned enough about equity and the prac-
tice of education in America.

When a teacher told Marri and his fifth-grade classmates that they needed to include a “bumper stick-
er” in their report on U.S. states, he didn’t know what that meant. A bumper sticker, he thought, was more of a motto or slogan than a bumper sticker.

His parents, who also didn’t speak English, thought about trying to find a bumper sticker for their report. “Also, you don’t question teachers,” he said of their old-world outlook.

His only option was handing in the report without the bumper sticker. “I had to learn at a young age that I could clearly still rankle the school education.”

The experience taught him about how education has evolved in the U.S. from his classmates and aren’t assuming cultural understanding they don’t have.

“When you think of equity, it’s important to recog-
nize where people are coming from,” Marri said.

He still speaks with pride of earning the title of most improved student in his class when he graduated from eighth grade, on his way to a prestigious Catholic col-
lege.

“School has always been a comfortable place for me,” Marri said. And that familiarity goes back to his own childhood.

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