



School Board Candidates Questionnaire on Environmental Issues

Climate change is among the most urgent problems facing the country and threatens the health and future well-being of our children. For Arlington to achieve its goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, expanding access to natural resources, and reducing waste, all members of the Arlington community need to participate, especially Arlington Public Schools. To help inform voters on your positions in addressing these pressing issues, we request that you answer the following questions. We will share your answers through our e-newsletters and social media. Please respond no later than **Monday, April 8**.

Instructions - Please provide your name and answer to each question below and email to Joan McIntyre (jfmcintyre57@gmail.com).

Name Kathleen Clark

1. **Achieving the County goals for renewable energy and carbon neutrality:**

Fairfax County Public Schools committed to achieving [carbon neutrality for its operations by 2040](#). Should Arlington Public Schools make a similar commitment, and what strategies and policies would you pursue to reduce carbon emissions in APS?

Yes, it is important to lead by example with our younger generations, and one way we should do that is by making the commitment to carbon neutrality and the use of renewable energy. APS frequently states cost as a barrier to pursuing more projects with geothermal sources, but as a school board member I would ask for better cost analysis to determine short-term and long-term capital expenses and operating savings. There could be very real savings long-term that we may not even be exploring due to initial costs; we need to be mindful of this.

From a policy perspective, I would focus on geothermal sourcing and transportation, including:

- Support the existing School Board policy that requires staff to first use environmentally friendly practices and shift to other practices only if the first attempt doesn't work and with written justification (e.g., space constraints for charging stations for electrical buses).
- Set a reasonable goal date for carbon neutrality.
- Re-examine our transportation policies and consider synthesizing efforts of Arlington County (ART and Metro buses) and APS buses; we could look to combine efforts to increase sustainability and operational efficiencies.

2. **Reducing harmful diesel bus emissions and reducing greenhouse gasses through transportation improvements:** Despite the known health benefits, APS has been slow to commit to electric school buses, citing, in particular, space constraints for EV charging infrastructure. At the same time the iRide program allowing students to use ART and, most recently, Metro buses for free has proven very popular among middle and high school students. How would you approach building on both these efforts to most efficiently meet student transportation needs?

At the middle and high school levels, we should consider utilizing more public transportation options, thereby streamlining the number of buses required for operation. If we can reduce the number of diesel buses, we will have the physical space necessary for the charging stations to start investing in electric buses for APS.

3. **Incorporating nature into development and protecting green spaces:** Numerous studies demonstrate the importance of access to nature on the mental and physical well-being of children. With the pandemic, the need for increasing connections to nature is extremely critical. How can APS create an environment that incorporates nature into the school environment and curriculum, and what policies would you promote to ensure that all of Arlington's students have easy access to nature?

I fully support outdoor learning spaces for classes and installing gardens at all elementary and middle schools. Our oldest son was able to experience an outdoor classroom with Dani Greene at Jamestown in the early intervention program for students with disabilities. Seeing her outdoor classroom in action was amazing. Some young students benefiting from early intervention programs struggle to engage with others and the environment; yet, in Dani's class you could clearly see ALL students making connections to each other and interacting with their environment. It was incredible! I would like to see APS students growing and harvesting food for AFAC. We have a small garden at home and grow strawberries, cucumbers, tomatoes, and peppers, which we later use in our home meals. Kids love this kind of hands-on learning and it is a critical life skill that all students should participate in.

4. **Achieving zero waste:** Arlington County passed a zero-waste resolution in 2015. In recent years, APS has had a poor record of recycling and waste reduction. When APS centralized food preparation, that led to a great deal of packaging for meals. Such packaging, along with single-use plastic utensils, now accounts for a large portion of the APS waste stream. What would you do to reduce plastic, paper, and food waste and maximize recycling at schools to help the County achieve its goals, and what benefits will this provide for Arlington students?

Regarding waste due to excessive packaging, to my knowledge, there has been a push for individual school kitchens to manage the process again (rather than a centralized process). I'd like to see APS install dispensers for utensils, similar to what they have at Whole Foods, which would be better for the environment while still protecting students' health from the potential transfer of germs on unwrapped utensils.

A few other things that I would like to see with respect to leading by example for our younger generation include

- A system for composting efforts at schools (collecting compostable materials); APS could join in the County program.
- A "food bus" at every school. Currently, there are requirements around cafeteria workers giving each student the full meal regardless of whether or not the child wants it. Food buses are a more constructive way to collect the unwanted food so that it could be donated. There are volunteer efforts underway at several schools, but this could be an area in which AFAC, or other organizations, can lean in and support getting this effort more centrally organized.

5. **Advisory Committee:** Currently, there is a Sustainability Advisory Committee that advises the Superintendent for APS, but a similar advisory body does not exist for the School Board. Would you support the creation of an expert advisory body for the School Board to provide best practice recommendations on clean energy, climate justice, climate adaptation, energy resilience, solid waste, and environmental health issues? Would you be willing to help create such an advisory body?

Yes, I support strong community input with an advisory body, but my experience tells me that our best chance of success is to have a more centralized approach so that there is a consistent message amongst the two proposed advisory committees. In my experience, I think the best chance of success starts with the following:

- a. Ensure we have staff with this expertise. If we do not, we need to train existing staff and as turnover occurs, we need to fill open roles with experts in the field.
- b. Ensure that the right staff has access to new project builds and renovations from the project inception. My expectation is collaboration on issues to ensure we are meeting the needs of our broader community with sustainable practices in place from the beginning.
- c. Improve ease of navigation for environmental issues on the APS website, with targeted messaging highlighting steps being taken and tracking goals and performance.