



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-newsletter and social media. Please respond no later than **Friday, September 6.**

Instructions - Please provide your name and answer to each question below and email to jmcintyre57@gmail.com.

Name: Paul Weiss

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?

Arlington Public Schools **should commit to carbon neutrality by 2040**, with a strong emphasis on integrating sustainability into education and investing in renewable energy. Implementing a green curriculum across all grade levels will empower students to understand and tackle environmental challenges, making sustainability a core part of their learning experience. At the same time, investing in renewable energy, such as **installing solar panels** on school buildings and **transitioning to electric buses**, will reduce the district's carbon footprint and serve as a living example of environmental responsibility. By combining education with actionable steps, APS can inspire the next generation of eco-conscious leaders while actively reducing its environmental impact.

I also support compensating staff sufficiently so that they can live and therefore walk or bike or take public transportation to their buildings rather than drive from miles away.

2. **Reducing harmful diesel bus emissions and reducing greenhouse gases 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?

To efficiently meet student transportation needs while prioritizing health and sustainability, I would advocate for a dual approach that builds on **both the electric bus transition** and the success of the iRide program. First, **I would push for a phased introduction of electric buses**. To address space constraints, **APS could explore shared charging stations with county facilities**. Simultaneously, I would work to **expand the iRide program by increasing awareness and ensuring that bus routes are safe, accessible, and aligned with school schedules**. This program not only reduces emissions but also fosters independence among students. By combining these efforts, APS can create a more sustainable, flexible, and efficient transportation system that meets the diverse needs of our students.

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?

APS can create a more nature-integrated school environment by expanding outdoor learning spaces and incorporating green spaces into school grounds. I would promote policies that prioritize the development of outdoor classrooms, school gardens, and natural play areas at every school, ensuring students have daily opportunities to connect with nature. **Supporting and expanding existing nature-based programs like The Outdoor Lab** is essential to providing students with easy access to nature, fostering a deep appreciation for sustainability, and nurturing their curiosity about the environment. **I would also advocate for the equitable distribution of resources to schools in more dense areas**, where green spaces may be limited, and **work with the county to improve safe routes to parks and nature trails**. By making nature central to the school experience, we can enhance the mental and physical well-being of all Arlington students.

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?

To reduce plastic, paper, and food waste in APS and align with Arlington County's zero-waste goals, I would advocate for a comprehensive waste reduction program focused on eliminating single-use plastics, minimizing packaging, and maximizing recycling efforts. **First, APS should transition away from single-use plastic utensils and packaging**, replacing them with reusable or compostable alternatives. **I would also support the decentralization of food preparation** to reduce the need for excessive packaging and promote the use of bulk food options. Additionally, **I would push for the expansion of composting programs in all schools**, coupled with **student-led initiatives to educate peers about waste reduction and recycling**. Implementing clear waste separation stations and regular audits to track progress can help ensure that recycling efforts are effective.

These efforts will not only contribute to Arlington's zero-waste goals but also offer significant benefits for students. Reducing waste and promoting recycling can serve as practical lessons in environmental stewardship, giving students the opportunity to lead sustainability initiatives and develop sustainable habits. From my experience as a teacher, I've seen how empowering students to take charge of projects fosters a deeper sense of responsibility and pride. By creating a cleaner, more eco-friendly school environment, we not only enhance students' engagement in environmental issues but also reduce the school system's overall environmental impact.

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 would strongly 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.

That's why **I would also advocate for the inclusion of student representatives in this advisory body**, giving them a platform to share their perspectives and spearhead sustainability initiatives within their schools. As a 22-year APS teacher, I've seen firsthand that students gain invaluable learning opportunities when they are allowed to lead programs and contribute their own input toward solving real-world problems. By involving students directly, we empower them to take ownership of these efforts and ensure that our policies reflect their experiences and ideas. This advisory group would not only support the School Board in implementing sustainable practices but also provide students with hands-on experience in driving positive change, fostering a healthier and more resilient future for our community.