



## 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..**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ James "Vell" Rives \_\_\_\_\_

### 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?

I realize we could have several possible paths to carbon neutrality, but some general approaches are replacing gas appliances and systems with electric, replacing diesel buses with electric (see #2 below), and reducing overall net energy consumption. Installing solar panel systems on APS property can help supplement our energy sources. New projects should achieve the highest environmental ratings, e.g. LEED Zero or Platinum certifications. Our neutrality goals should be met within our system, i.e., I do not support APS using funds to purchase carbon offsets. Neutrality by 2040 or 2045 is ambitious, and I support our aiming high. APS meeting such a commitment will require that the clean technology be affordable, taking into account *savings* recovered over a reasonable time frame, e.g. from significantly reduced net energy or fuel consumption.

**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?

Land and monetary constraints do make it difficult to switch over bus fleets. I support adding electric buses in phases, with phased lot redevelopment for charging, when equal numbers of diesel buses need to be retired for age. Metrobus and ART transit for students commuting to/from school should be provided for free (i.e. paid for by APS) when students are attending a non-neighborhood school to which APS transportation is not otherwise provided (e.g. in elective school transfers or in grandfathered attendance after moving to a new attendance zone). This would encourage use of public transportation and also provide households without a private vehicle more equitable access to non-neighborhood schools. We should also explore use of Metrobus and ART for other students when routes duplicate APS bus routes. Related to this, we already have vehicle idling limits, even posted at many schools, but we need to improve awareness and compliance for APS buses as well as private vehicles.

**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?

Many of our schools have wonderful surroundings, natural and/or landscaped. I support maintaining these and creating more of such spaces at schools where they are minimal. Natural light inside buildings should also be a priority. All science instruction at all grade levels should incorporate natural material and phenomena in the immediate surroundings whenever feasible. I would support dedicating some of the time now spent in TA period and SEL (socio-emotional learning) to outdoor learning and/or fresh air breaks. As for policy, the School Board could set a target for time spent outdoors at each grade level (factoring in P.E., recess, and inclement or extreme weather). TA and SEL changes could be reflected in curriculum (under the Superintendent's office, see question 5).

- 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?

I value flexibility here, as there are many competing considerations: expense, relative landfill usage, efficiency and energy/water consumption from washing reusables, and recyclability. Vendors change products, packaging, and pricing frequently. Some serving portion sizes are required under our meal programs that receive Federal/State funding. And of course, reusable / recyclable/ compostable materials won't help if they're not being reused / recycled / composted. So while meeting the charge to provide nutritious and palatable



meals, APS should continue to aim for zero-waste status by encouraging and providing infrastructure for in-house reusing, dual-stream recycling, and composting – all of these are educational when the students participate!

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?

I am grateful for the many years of important work by our Sustainability Advisory Committee! I do believe it is most appropriate that the committee report to the Superintendent's office, as the recommendations will be realized in system operations, and that's where recommendations can be adjusted as practical implementation is explored more thoroughly. The School Board will of course set the broader policies and goals as described in questions 1-4 above. There should continue to be a liaison from the Superintendent's Sustainability Committee attending meetings of the School Board's Facilities Committee. I would like to see *all* advisory committees (whether Superintendent's or School Board's), have a yearly close-out process where some statement is given of how the committee's formal recommendations factored into final decisions.

