

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 ___Zuraya Tapia-Hadley_____

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, I support Arlington County's goal of achieving community-wide carbon neutrality by 2050, as established in the County's Community Energy Plan (CEP). Since the start of my campaign for School Board, I have stated that my vision is to build the safest, healthiest, and highest quality education system in the United States right here in Arlington. This vision cannot be achieved if we ignore the seriousness of the climate crisis. This crisis jeopardizes the security and health of our students and broader community, and risks leaving our children a world of natural disasters, drought, and reduced habitability. An effective school board must account not only for children while they attend Arlington Public Schools, but their futures as well. I believe that the Arlington School Board cannot achieve its mission, vision, and goals if it is not simultaneously working to achieve the goals of the CEP.

I believe that holistic development for *all* of our students means that we work to address issues they face outside of school as well. The Arlington School Board should be a proactive stakeholder in the implementation of the CEP, working with community groups, private enterprise, the public, and our students to implement parts of the plan

that will benefit our community's marginalized voices, who include some students that are disproportionately impacted by pollution and other environmental hazards. Furthermore, such actions will provide enhanced educational opportunities outside of the classroom in areas such as civic engagement and science.

Substantively, the plan provides a holistic approach to addressing the energy and climate challenges of the present, and future. It provides flexibility through five-year adaptation cycles that will ensure the steps taken to reach carbon-neutrality by 2050 are done in a pragmatic and responsible way. I approve the message and intent of the CEP, and look forward to helping Arlington Public Schools achieve carbon-neutrality by 2050.

I also believe APS should develop a plan to achieve carbon neutrality in its operations and ensure that facility renovations and new facility designs are consistent with the plan. Moreover, as a candidate I am focused on responsible stewardship of our finite resources and I think that the plan could help us be more energy efficient and cost effective in the long run. Furthermore, I believe that APS should leave all options on the table when securing new facilities. The County is currently experiencing a commercial office vacancy crisis, which is hampering our tax revenue and funding for our schools.

APS should think beyond conventional school facilities and consider adaptive reuse of office space to handle new administrative and school capacity as it is needed. We must think beyond the conventional 1-2 story school format and recognize that urban schools often take a myriad of forms. If elected, I will advocate for robust, high-quality schools irrespective of the shape that provide our students with a high quality education.

We must be scholastic leaders in the state and not lag behind other jurisdictions. This includes placing APS on track to achieve carbon neutrality in a time frame that is realistic and cost-effective without neglecting the urgency for which we must address climate change. Taking a proactive approach towards helping the county meet its carbon neutrality goals will signal that the Arlington School Board, and APS in general, aim to lead our community in creating a school system that prides itself on academic excellence, dedication to making a difference in the lives of our students, and commitment to a brighter future for community members.

The sustainability market as it pertains to the building sector has rapidly progressed over the past several years. We are now seeing sustainability solutions that promote energy efficiency, resiliency, innovation, and cost savings. I believe that by lending my voice to environmental and climate priorities, I can assist my colleagues and help propel the agenda forward.

Fundamentally, I believe that students who go to run-down and ill-equipped schools will not be excited to learn every day. Incorporating innovative technologies and carbon-neutral infrastructural designs, will facilitate excitement and pride amongst our students towards their schools and education. A forward-thinking school board that engages in innovative long-term planning sends a powerful message to our students: their futures are valued, and we are committed to prioritizing their well-being and education.

- 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?

For the well-being of our community, it is in our best interest to reduce our carbon footprint. Diesel fumes contribute to elevated rates of asthma which affects everyone but disproportionately impacts underserved communities. Earlier this year the Biden administration announced the Clean School Bus Program, a 5 billion dollar initiative to help school systems update their buses with zero emissions electric buses through grants and rebates. We should seize this opportunity and request federal funding to reach our climate goals as part of a broader Arlington County effort. Additionally, I would encourage APS to explore public-private partnerships with companies that sell and install EV charging stations, and I would look to work with the County Board to explore new or additional options for long term parking solutions. I am confident I can use my experience and relationships in both the public and private sector to advance these goals with key stakeholders for the benefit of Arlington students, Arlington community, and our environment as a whole.

- 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 have a few ideas on how we can not only promote connections to nature, but also leverage nature to help students better learn and retain knowledge across subject

areas. My main ideas are centered around: 1) Making opportunities available to teachers to teach outdoors, and in some cases uniformly establishing said opportunities across APS, 2) Keeping Outdoor Lab and related learning opportunities, and 3) Harmonizing an approach to prioritizing nature in school activities and learning.

Studies across the U.S.- from U.C. Berkeley and across California, to Illinois, to Indiana - agree that students learn better and retain more information if they are taught outdoors. While the School Board does not dictate curriculum, it does provide oversight over the Superintendent and can provide a vision for APS. If elected I would advocate for a vision and mission that includes fostering these critical connections to nature.

I would encourage subjects like social studies, physical education, music, and science to be taught outdoors when possible, particularly in elementary schools. Studies conclusively show that far from taking focus away, outdoor lessons leave students more engaged and ready for the work and lessons they undertake once back indoors.

If elected, I will also advocate to ensure that we keep funding essential programs like Outdoor Lab. As a parent of a fifth grader myself who has at times suffered with behavioral issues, I witnessed first hand how he and all the students were served by the overnight, almost 2 day long program at Outdoor Lab. This program not only teaches students about nature and animals around us, but incorporates a great deal of history into the program and allows for invaluable connections and social-emotional learning between kids and between kids and parent chaperones.

Lastly, I know many schools have wonderful gardening day events and after-school gardening programs. Our own school has a garden tended to by our kids. However, these efforts are unique to the school and vary greatly across the school system. I would work to establish APS-wide standards and policies that provide all students structured opportunities to engage in nature and gardening. This can help advance lessons around ecosystems, and earth science in general.

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?

While the school board does not directly decide on school food operations, it is under the board's purview to provide a vision and guidance to the Superintendent, and to conduct oversight over APS's administration of programs.

From a policy standpoint, I absolutely agree with the goal of reducing waste and increasing recycling. The prolific use of packaging in both our schools and society writ large creates both health and environmental problems. From a health standpoint, recent studies show the widespread use of BPA's in food packaging, particularly packaging used for hot oily foods, results in the increased presence of micro plastics in the food we consume. In addition to health risks these types of packaging require energy to produce, use, and dispose, which is wasteful and detrimental to our ecosystem.

If elected, I would work with the Superintendent and Arlington County to understand if there are specific hurdles to recycling that keep schools from maximizing the recycling program, and to understand the system of vendors utilized by APS for food services and how they approach sustainability.

A few ideas that could help address these challenges in the short term might be, first, to ensure that we have the right data collection relating to waste management so that we can be adequately informed about areas that need improvement. Additionally, we must ensure that all schools have sufficient and clearly labeled recycling bins. Lastly, I would look to recommendations by the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) as to how to reduce waste and improve healthy habits among our student population.

These recommendations include following the EPA's Food Recovery Hierarchy, having kids exercise before eating (P.E. or recess), and increasing the amount of time kids have to eat. I believe this would not only help reduce food waste, but could improve social emotional skills among students.

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?

We currently have the Climate Change, Energy, and Environment Commission (C2E2) to advise the County Board and departments on matters concerning climate change.

A focus of my campaign is to improve transparency and communication amongst APS, families, County government, and the community. I believe it is critical that we review the work and recommendations of C2E2 and evaluate whether we need a specific APS corollary commission, or if instead it is a matter of helping amplify C2E2's work and recommendations. If I find that the former is needed, then I would be willing to help create such an advisory body. I would also encourage us to work with our partners in the County such as the Planning Commission, Joint Facilities Advisory Commission, and Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Sustainability, Arlington Initiative to Rethink Air (AIRE), among others to promote a zero carbon future and higher energy efficiency.