



Tannia Talento
School Board Organizational Meeting – July 5, 2017

First, I do want to thank our outgoing chair. Her strong and committed leadership has really been something that has gotten us through what has been a hard, contentious, challenging year, but a year with great success as well. And I am looking forward to our new leadership, Dr. Barbara Kanninen, alongside her, Mr. Goldstein, because I think this year has set the tone for years to come. I do not foresee it getting easier.

With that, I will note that I started in January, and as God often likes to do with my life direction, he just throws me in, full speed ahead. Within just a couple of weeks, we were dealing with immigration and the terror that our immigrant community was living with here in Arlington. That was hard, and I want to thank my School Board Colleagues and my County Board colleagues for the tremendous work that we did together – apart and together – to ensure that Arlington is a welcoming and inclusive community, and that we advocate for all of our neighbors, and our community; and we do it together, we do it as individuals, we do it as leadership, so thank you for that. The experience I had being a Board Member in leadership during that time was exceptional, and the guidance and advice that I received from my School Board colleagues, as well as my County Board colleagues – I want to say thank you. Thank you for that, because coming in to a new leadership role with the tremendous amount of work that all 10 of us do for our community, and being thrown into a time of division and contention was challenging, and I could not have done it without our team, both on the County and School Board.

I also entered at a time when our students were feeling the political divide in our community, and whether I was going to get involved in the process and the details, I was not allowed to lose focus of what matters most – our students. The courage that our students have shown this year, both our immigrants and our community students, and our students who are sitting on two different sides of politics, was humbling and impressive, and it shows again the work that our County and School Board does, and APS leadership, that our students felt the strength and ability to have those conversations with us. So I do believe that set the tone for the time to come because it was on the heels of a boundary change, and boundary changes we will be encountering next year as well. Our budget was passed, and I want to thank our County Board for supporting us in that, but I know that in future budget years we may not have that ability.

And so moving forward, the few things that I will continue to focus on are support, focus and continued advocating for mental health awareness in education, and to ensure that we are providing that support to our students. Because again, I believe that we are going to continue to have times of stress and divide, and I hope to grow from that, unity and success. And mental health awareness education and support is critical to the success of all of our students, regardless of your background, whether it be social class or race or gender. Anxiety, stress,

trauma, our students face times that we didn't face when we were young necessarily, and it's through community support, I do believe it takes a village, so I will continue to advocate for that in all of our policies and future initiatives.

I will continue to advocate for eliminating the gap. I want us to continue to focus on granular data and seeing our students as students, in understanding the systematic issues that we have as a country so we can address our students as students and ensure their success and their access to opportunities for all. And I also want to make sure that I continue to focus on community outreach and specifically on outreach to our communities that don't always have a voice at the table. This is one of the reasons I ran for School Board; I wanted to bring different perspectives to the table so that as we move forward with policy decisions that affect every single person in Arlington, that all voices are heard. And again I want to thank my school board colleagues and my County Board colleagues because I know that when those voices are brought, they stop and listen. And it's easy to get caught up in listening to the voices that are the loudest, which I am grateful for, because they are the voices that really bring about a lot of the things that we can't always see or grasp or understand, because we are working so hard behind the dais. But I still have yet to encounter a community member or leadership team member who has not stopped and listened.

And I think that moving forward we are going to be a great team, I think we are going to need to focus on our continuing collaboration, communication with our communities, engagement with our communities, and recognizing that we are living through challenging times, both economically and politically. And it's going to be our strong leadership and focus on what is best for our community that is going to get through. So while we may weather some storms, there is some sunshine at the end, and I look forward to reaching that sun with all of you. Thank you.
