



Monique O'Grady
School Board Organizational Meeting – July 1, 2020

Thank you, Ms. Van Doren, for the kind words and nomination to be this year's School Board Chair. I would like to thank my colleagues for trusting me with this honor and responsibility. I appreciate your support now and, in the future, as we look to the year ahead.

I am about to enter my 23rd year as an APS parent, and I can't think of a more challenging school year for our students, staff, and community.

The pandemic and the focus on racial and equity concerns require us to examine priorities and practices.

This year was already going to be one of change with a new superintendent and required work to prepare for our growing school system. As a board, we have heard that the most important thing that we can do is hire a new superintendent. I believe Dr. Francisco Duran is the right seasoned leader for this time. In his few short weeks, he has held virtual town halls with students, staff, and the community, has worked with a community task force to look at re-entering schools, and has started virtual conversations around race.

The community has also shown leadership during COVID. Even though in most cases we have been required to stay at least six feet apart, in many ways this crisis has brought us together.

Our PTAs have worked across schools to safely help many in need, the county and the school system have come together to make digital access a right and not a privilege, our teachers have stretched to support students they desperately miss seeing in school each school day, and our community is coming together in support of our strategic plan to address equity issues.

Communication and collaboration are setting an important foundation as we prepare to reenter school this fall. We are stronger together and these two actions will help us serve our students, families, and staff through these challenging times.

We will need to continue to collaborate with the County to maximize success within new fiscal constraints that may get worse before they get better. We will need to lean on our community leaders and partners to support our families in need. We must honor our teachers and staff as they work with students in different ways, and we must be ready to support our students social emotional and learning needs because they will be on the frontlines of this change.

I enter this situation ready to lead because of the support of the school board staff and each of my colleagues, who have all been board chairs before. I have learned a lot from you and will continue to treasure your expertise and guidance. I have special gratitude for Ms. Talento who mentored me through the past year as her vice chair. She has very big and often very fancy shoes to fill. Her intelligence, kindness, wit and compassion are an inspiration to me.

Thank you executive leadership team as you work overtime to craft and support a reopening plan that serves our students. Thank you to all the women and people of color who have served on this board before me, including Evelyn Syphax, for whom our offices are named. Thank you to my family for their constant support in my effort to serve our community. And thank you to all those who helped me earn the opportunity to be the first black elected woman in Arlington so I can serve our students and families in this important role.
