



**Nancy Van Doren**  
**School Board Organizational Meeting – July 1, 2020**

2020 will go down in history as a year that altered our lives, our habits, and our expectations.

With advances in technology, we know we should be able to move seamlessly between home and work, home and school, but we all must acknowledge there are significant shortcomings in our current systems and operations. We are all doing our best and we are going to have to keep improving. This frustratingly long pandemic has made that an imperative.

Some people move easily in the digital world. I marvel at the twenty-year-olds in my home who finished their college classes on-line, graduated on-line, and now work from home. I will not say they like it, but it can be done. We all miss being with each other, we miss being together. My young adult children miss their friends and classmates. All of our children miss their friends, their social activities, and we do, too. We are all struggling together, looking forward to the time in the future we can be together.

We must acknowledge there are children and adults for whom this virtual manner of learning and working just does not work. Our challenge going forward is going to be to figure out how to make learning and working virtually the best it can be for everyone, understanding its definite limitations. And we are going to have to do that while ensuring we do not leave out a single adult or child. We will need to find solutions we just cannot imagine quite yet. We are going to have to do that quickly. I have faith we will.

Regarding challenges ahead, I would like to stress that in this time of Corona, as I call it, there is also opportunity. There is the opportunity and necessity to focus on what is essential, what is most important and to do that well. As I look to my last six months on this Board, I implore my colleagues, the APS staff, and the community to focus on reading. If we make that our top priority, let other things go that just cannot get done in this virtual world, and focus our efforts on ensuring that every child can read proficiently by third grade and then foster those skills along with writing through high school, we can and will close our opportunity gap. I really see an opportunity right now to focus on reading, take bold steps, and get the reading job done. Ensuring all our children can read proficiently is one of the top equity issues of our time.

We can do this together. We will get through this time, together. We must see opportunity in these challenges. We will draw on our reservoir of resilience and our children will build their reservoirs. We will help them. Every day brings a new opportunity to do just that. And soon, we will all look back and tell stories of 2020, how we coped, how we made it through. And we will use these stories and these experiences to support our joys and challenges in the years ahead. When I first joined the Board six years ago, seasoned board members would always tell us newbies to leave room for the curve ball that would come every year – that event or challenge no one could have anticipated that requires resources and time to handle.

Well, 2020 brought us more than several huge curve balls. First, Dr. Murphy retired. Blessedly, we had an excellent, trusted, steady leader to rely on-- Ms. Johnson. We did excellent work, laying plans to strengthen our focus on equity and improve outcomes for all our children. We developed a solid budget to bring that work forward. Then, COVID-19 hit. The time of Corona was upon us. None of us could have imagined this. Staff reworked the budget in less than a month, we closed a huge budget gap and moved to on-line schooling. We hired a new Superintendent after an extensive virtual search, learned to hold our Board meetings virtually, and began educating our children virtually. We have learned a lot and have a lot more to learn.

To the APS leadership team and staff, thank you. There are not enough thanks for what you all have done this year. To my board colleagues, this year has been unbelievably challenging, and I do think we did it with focus, grit, and grace. To Ms. Johnson, thank you, thank you for your kind, steady, calm, insightful and focused leadership. Dr. Durán, thank you for jumping on board with such gusto, rolling up your sleeves, leading, and getting right to the work that must be done in these unprecedented times.

This was all possible due to the amazing, absolutely amazing leadership of Tannia Talento, whose steady hand, unbelievable work ethic, attention to detail and organization, and ability to bring this board together to meet our challenges and make decisions was unparalleled. Thank you, Tannia. And thank you to Ms. O'Grady, Mr. Goldstein, Dr. Kanninen, Ms. Elliott, Ms. Mercado, and Ms. Jones as well as all the APS staff for making this unbelievable year work.

Our work continues, our new habits, our changed lives, and our changed expectations will now be with us forever. I pray that we all have the grace and wisdom to keep making improvements, hold on to what is good, help each other each day, and just be better than the day before. These difficult times will end, and I am certain that in the very near future, we will emerge in a new reality. We will be able to hug and hold each other, and we will be stronger, more resilient, and ready for the years ahead, bringing each and every child successfully with us along the way.

Thank you.

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