



**Barbara Kanninen
School Board Organizational Meeting – July 1, 2021**

Let me start by saying thank you to Mr. Priddy for the nomination and to my colleagues for your support. I am truly honored to work with each of you and to have this opportunity to serve.

Congratulations, Mr. Goldstein, our new vice-chair. We were a leadership team together before – in 2017-2018 – and I am looking forward to working with you again as a team.

Thank you, Ms. O’Grady for your service this past year as chair. We all experienced history this past year. You led through this historic time. And you made history in Arlington in several ways: you were the first elected African American woman to serve as Chair of the School Board, the first elected School Board member to serve a complete term as Chair during a global pandemic, the first to lead us in adopting an equity policy – something you worked and advocated very hard for. You led every day with an equity focus, with deep caring for our children, and with a tireless smile. You deserve a bit of rest but I am looking forward to continuing our work together for the rest of the year.

Dr. Durán – Thank you, also, for leading us through this difficult time. I am very much looking forward to working closely with you this coming year. You bring a passion for our students and our educators that is inspirational, and you have assembled an outstanding leadership team – our new Cabinet. I am truly looking forward to collaborating and innovating with you and your full team.

Many thanks to our executive leadership team, our school leaders, teachers, and staff across our system, and to our clerk, Melanie Elliott, and her staff, Claudia Mercado and Julieanne Jones: you are all champions, pure and simple, and I look forward to our ongoing collaboration as we continue to work together every day.

Special shout-out to our colleagues on the County Board and the County Manager. Thank you for joining us today and I look forward to our continued work together.

Finally, I am so pleased to have my husband, Kevin Wolf, here. Kevin and our two boys, Fred and Markus (who were both K-12 APS students) continue to inspire and challenge me. Most importantly, I know that they always believe in me, and they are always ready to support me, especially now as I take on this role.

We have been tested as a community this past year. The upheaval caused by the pandemic truly was unprecedented. I hope we can begin this year by agreeing on three things:

- First, that we have all been through trauma.
- Second, that over the next decade and even over the next century, there will be many academic studies, books, articles and more written about whether we as nation, as a community, and as a school system made the right calls over the course of the pandemic.
- But third, that what matters most right now is doing right by the kids.

Are the kids all right? This is the question we need to ask ourselves and them every day. Are they being challenged? Are they finding opportunities that suit them? Do they have a trusted adult they can go to? Is there too much screen time? How is their reading? Are they engaged?

These are questions we aim to ask every year, but this year, we need to ask them with a renewed sense of urgency.

Our kids need to heal, and they need to move forward, socio-emotionally and academically. And we need to provide that balance to them, even as we all seek to heal and move forward ourselves.

Same with our school system as a whole: we have work to do this coming year (and beyond) to bring APS back to being a fiscally healthy and sustainable school system, to build our operational efficiency, and to move APS forward.

Some things to watch for this year as we re-group and re-build:

- A laser-focus on improving our literacy program, with special focus on our Special Ed and English Learner students
- The re-launch of our strategic plan dashboard, to provide transparency and renewed accountability
- The development of our first-ever equity profile, as we continue to promote equity, excellence, and consistency across our schools
- A continued focus on improving staff compensation and a plan for collective bargaining, so that we can ensure that all staff are fairly and consistently rewarded for their great work
- A new elementary school, new buildings, boundary refinements, a 10-year capital improvement plan, and
- A very challenging budget season (that basically starts tomorrow)

All this in the context of our asking, every day, are the kids okay? And, what is worked, what's no longer working, how can we do better?

I am energized by our agenda and about taking on the role of Chair this year. For those of you who do not know me, here are three things that I would like you to know: First, I love kids. Second, I'm a huge believer in the power of education, and third, I do not like long meetings.

My motto when I was last chair in 2017-2018 was “fair and efficient” and my new-and-improved version of this motto is “fair and efficient and respectful.” And I am sure that no elaboration on that is necessary.

However, speaking of respect, let me say a word about our staff. The strength of Arlington Public Schools has always been grounded, first and foremost, in the expertise, creativity, passion, and commitment of our top-notch staff. Year-in and year-out, with or without institutional support, which has varied over the years, our staff has built, brick by brick, all that is best about Arlington Public Schools.

One of our graduation student speakers this year, in referring to her cohort during the pandemic year, said, “We are here, we have grown, and we have changed... We are smart, strong, and courageous.” All that is true, and we know that behind every one of those graduates is a cadre of resilient, relentless, innovative, and now battle-tested APS educators who built up the smarts, the strength, and the courageousness of every one of those students, layer by layer, starting in pre-K and going all the way to grade 12.

Educators (which is everyone on our APS staff): we will do our best to support YOU this coming year. Please let us know how we can help.

Let me close by, again, saying thank you to all of you for putting your trust in me this year. I want you to know that I believe I have the most important job in Arlington right now. Maybe we could quibble over one or two other jobs, but I believe this job, as we work every day to continue building up the smarts, strengths, and courageousness of all our students, is the most important job in Arlington and I promise you that I will get up every day ready to give my all to support our students, our staff, and our community. Thank you.