

ASF Questions for School Board Candidates, May 2021

Responses from Mary Kadera

1. In November 2019 the County Manager wrote a [letter to the interim superintendent of the Arlington Public Schools offering to provide County lands, including County parks, for use for school facilities](#). Do you agree that school buildings and other facilities should be built on what is now park land? If so, under what conditions would you agree to place school facilities on what is now park land?

I believe that we will need close coordination between APS and County planning teams over the next decade to manage the projected increases in student enrollment. I support the development of a comprehensive Public Facilities Master Plan, a project that the JFAC was set to begin last year but which was postponed because of the pandemic.

APS has a variety of tools at its disposal to meet the demand for additional student seats. Those include expansion or replacement of existing school sites, as was demonstrated in the 14 Design Studies that APS staff presented to the School Board in April 2020. APS can also incentivize transfers to schools that are currently *under* capacity and balance enrollment across its schools through boundary changes; we will go through a middle and high school boundary process in Fall 2021 and a comprehensive elementary boundary process in Fall 2022.

I also believe that we need more creative thinking about how to design school facilities that create a smaller footprint and leverage existing vacant space in Arlington—including vacant commercial space. I have seen many good examples of this in other school systems over my career in education, and I [wrote about four examples](#) last month as part of my campaign.

It may be that we need to look at County lands to site additional APS seats, but *only after* we have exhausted the other possibilities I've mentioned above and only if we can do so in a way that minimally disrupts the amenities and programs that those properties already offer.

2. School grounds need old growth canopy trees and trees in all stages of growth for science lessons and observation of growth and trees' place in the scheme of nature and change of seasons. We are, after all, in favor of respecting the natural world and how everything is interrelated and dependent on each other, and we want to do our part to end climate change. Do you agree? If so, what would you do to ensure trees in all stages of growth are maintained on APS properties?

As a former high school science teacher and a longtime volunteer with the local Sierra Club group, I certainly understand the importance of the tree canopy in combating climate change and I also support a variety of other measures that school systems including APS can take to combat climate change. These include use of alternative energy, particularly solar, to cut APS's energy costs and reduce its dependence on fossil fuels; energy efficiency retrofits during school building renovations; adherence to LEED standards in all new construction; and transportation

policies and practices that reduce traffic congestion and vehicle emissions, which I have described more fully [here](#).

It's very important for students to study our natural world and have opportunities for outdoor education, on school grounds and in other settings like the Outdoor Lab and leveraging Arlington's incredible system of parks and trails. For example, at McKinley Elementary, while I served as PTA president the PTA funded the refurbishment of an outdoor classroom space that had been neglected for several years and was underutilized by staff and students. Additionally, when the McKinley facility was expanded in 2015-16, staff parking was configured in such a way that it would preserve and protect several mature trees in front of the school. That's a common sense practice that we can adopt every time we expand APS facilities or construct new ones.

3. The County is already projecting an additional 60,000 residents in the County by 2045 and with accelerating growth, the number will undoubtedly be even higher. Given our already overcrowded schools, how do you propose to address the undoubted need for significant additional seats when there is no remaining undeveloped land in the County?

Much of what I wrote in response to Question #1 applies here as well. There is a significant and urgent need for the County and APS to be planning in tandem, and for County planners to use the tools at their disposal so that we're proceeding on a path of smart growth rather than unmanaged growth. I know from my volunteer experience with the Sierra Club that Arlington is [somewhat constrained](#) in its ability to manage by-right development, particularly given that Virginia is a [Dillon's Rule](#) state.

4. In recent budget cycles, to help APS balance its budget, the County has allocated to APS additional "one-time funds" that exceed the previously agreed allocated percentages of revenues as between County (53%) versus APS (47%) while property taxes have been rising in absolute terms each year and costs per pupil have also been rising. How do you propose to balance the APS budget within the above agreed upon percentage allocations and not contribute to increasing property taxes moving forward?

APS has been working hard to manage significant enrollment growth: a 38% increase in the student population over the past decade. I am concerned about the use of one-time funds to balance the budget during this period of rapid growth, including the projected depletion of available reserves within the next three years and most recently the \$18.9 million in federal relief funds (American Rescue Plan Act) being used in the FY22 budget to help mitigate a \$42 million shortfall. As APS itself has noted, this practice is unsustainable.

According to the [Washington Area Boards of Education Guide](#), Arlington lags behind several other local jurisdictions in its funding for education (see p.27): 39% of its general fund as opposed to 52.4% in Fairfax County and 54.1% in the City of Falls Church. (WABE measures according to percent of general fund rather than percent of local tax revenues, which accounts for the difference in how revenue sharing is reported—39% of overall general fund vs. 47% of local tax revenues.) It may be the case that Arlington should consider a greater revenue share

for its schools, but as a School Board member I would not be comfortable making that case until I was absolutely sure that the school system was doing everything in its power to maximize the *existing* revenues in its stewardship.

I have written about the budget several times during the campaign: initially, looking at ways to [improve the budget process](#) to achieve a better result, and then analyzing expenditures in categories like [staffing and instruction](#) as well as [facilities and operations](#). I believe there are substantial cost savings that we can achieve, and I shared many of my ideas with APS Leadership in January when the budget was still in development.