

## Arlington Democrats / Arlington Young Democrats School Board Forum

16APR2024 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-v-aR5tOiyw>

### Questions and Larry's Answers

- 1. Arlington County Schools incorporate finding money in the budget. What are your plans for tackling the persistent educator shortage and if your solution involves increasing educator salaries how does that solution impact the budget?**

“So, I can tell you that we are losing teachers, we are just hemorrhaging skill and experience because everything is overloaded at this point. Teachers are very stressed out. Paying them is one part of it, the other part of it is that we can stop doing stupid things. One of the things that Fairfax does is they retain talent because they have a core of highly trained Mentor Teachers that help make new teachers successful. What we need to do is get those [new] teachers into our classes so that they can see how well they will be supported, how well our collaboration works in Arlington, it’s not like Fairfax.”

- 2. Capital improvement project in Arlington County: Arlington County is about to begin work on its capital improvement project setting the slate for the next 10 years. What projects would you like to see prioritized?**

“Well, Kathleen is right about the Debt Service, that is part of operating, however construction is not that’s a separate thing, it’s Bond funded. Now the question is: What do we need to do to make sure what the county is doing is compatible with what we are receiving, in the way of students. So, we need coordination with them to understand what they intend to build out in order to make sure that we have school capacity in the right place and ready to receive students. So that’s a coordination between two bodies – I would just like to say that I was disappointed to hear the facilities – sorry – the Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee chairperson opine that APS’s was not clear and was not transparent, we got to fix that.”

- 3. Student accessibility: Accessibility includes everything from learning materials, to exit signs, to administrative communications, to students and faculty. What policies will you revise, eliminate, or institute to close the accessibility gap for all students?**

“Ok, so we do have, as I understand, some physical accessibility problems, especially in some of our elementary school. I’m not familiar with all of them but that is an issue that can be looked into. I can do that. Accessibility in terms of materials that students use to learn, we have a lot of work to do on that and that is because a lot of what happened in the COVID period was everything had to go online – and online is not, what I consider, the fullest extent of what you can do with a student. It’s the interaction between a student and the teacher: the teacher gets to know what that student needs. I have

504 [a 504 plan outlines support for students with disabilities so they can learn in a regular classroom] and various students with disabilities in my class; I learn how to work with them.”

- 4. School resource officers: In 2020, Arlington County convened a working group that school resource officers were not advisable in Arlington County Public Schools, furthermore, students of color and students with disabilities are at a significantly higher risk of disciplinary action than their white counterparts. What are your thoughts on the use of school resource officers in Arlington County?**

“Being a teacher and being at Wakefield and Washington-Liberty, I think I have a bit of a different perspective on this. So, I came in for a teacher who retired because she couldn’t take the pressure anymore. Second day I was there – she was still there – she was working the transition. That was the first day of the three lockdowns at Wakefield. One of our students had gone out, and on a bad drug deal and encountered a gang and had rushed back into the school and he was pursued by a student with a gun. I think you need to go to school by school and examine what makes it safe. At Wakefield, even if you ask the principal, he’ll tell you it’s not safe.”

- 5. Recently, we have seen highly passionate discussions at School Board meetings. As a member you will be on the front line of the local education policy discussions. What tactics can you deploy to ensure that all opinions and mindsets, including those that you do not support, are heard in a positive and constructive way during these contentious discussions?**

“Sitting on the School Board, parents and other people in the community come and speak to us, we listen respectfully. My take on this is you listen – listen carefully – take notes. I’ve made a pledge that if you send me an email, you’ll get a response in 48 hours – Sunday not counting. I take those things seriously because it’s not what’s on the surface. You have to look through the presentation, through the mantle to understand what is the concern underneath all that. Parents are very passionate about their children. That’s right and proper and we just have to listen, understand what their concern is, and respond.”

- 6. Arlington’s robust education system prepares students for learning beyond K-12 classrooms, however, a one-size-fits-all, or college-focused approach isn’t always the right answer for every student. How would you address the needs of students interested in exploring career paths such as skilled trades or military service?**

“Ok, as a teacher, I have had in my classes, a number of students that go to the career center because I have a certain background in Automotive Engineering, some of them do that at the career center. That’s a method of connecting. It’s very interesting, it’s fun; they’re having a good time. It’s true that

not everybody's ready for college. In the back there, that guy, my son, Eduardo, did not go on to college, he went into the military, was very successful there, you can talk to him about it. The other thing that I want to point out is that transitions, especially for special ed and student with disabilities – the transition from high school into what's next is really important and we need to make sure we're doing all we can to get them into a good spot.”

**7. Arlington County and surrounding school districts have experienced a spike in the number of student overdoses while on campus. What policies, procedures, and preventive measures would you enact to combat this growing crisis?**

“Ok, so I told you about the story of my second day last year of lockdown, and that's the drug story and the gangs. We have a lot of work to do, and that work has to come in coordination with the County. The principal at Wakefield and I often arrived at the same time in the morning, so we walked in together and chat. He said that one of the problems that we have is, for those students that we know and have identified as having drug issues, we have no place to put them, no services that are available for residency and drug treatment. That has to get fixed with the County, the schools cannot do that by themselves, it's just too much, but we need to fix that.”