School Board Candidates Questionnaire on Environmental Issues

Climate change is among the most urgent problems facing the country and threatens the health and future well-being of our children. For Arlington to achieve its goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, expanding access to natural resources, and reducing waste, all members of the Arlington Community need to participate, especially Arlington Public Schools. To help inform voters on your positions in addressing these pressing issues, we request that you answer the following questions. We will share your answers through our e-newsletter and social media. Please respond no later than **Friday, September 19**.

Name_____**James Vell Rives IV**_____

1. **Aligning with the County's Climate Action Resolution:** In February, the County Board adopted a Climate Action Resolution that calls for a whole-of-government, whole-of-community comprehensive energy and environmental strategy to address the climate crisis. Should APS commit to meeting the goals laid out in the resolution and what strategies should APS adopt to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in its buildings and transportation fleet to become carbon neutral no later than 2050?

   Yes, APS should commit. Carbon neutrality by 2050 is ambitious, but it is the right target, and APS should do its part alongside the County's broader efforts. The most effective first step is reducing overall energy use in our buildings through efficiency upgrades such as better insulation, modern HVAC, and lighting improvements. We should also continue planning for full electrification of the bus fleet, as I discuss in Question 2. Installing solar panels — ideally paired with storage — can both lower emissions and at sufficient scale could provide resiliency during power outages.

   New construction and major renovations should aim for the highest available standards, such as LEED Zero or Platinum. Our priority must be cutting emissions within APS operations; I do not support relying on purchased carbon offsets. Achieving these goals will depend on clean technologies being affordable, but investments should be evaluated in terms of long-term stewardship of public funds, including savings from reduced energy and fuel consumption.

2. **Reducing harmful diesel bus emissions and reducing greenhouse gases through transportation improvements:** Despite the known health benefits, APS has been slow to commit to electric school buses, citing, in particular, space constraints for EV charging infrastructure. At the same time the iRide program allowing students to use ART and, most recently, Metro buses for free has proven very popular among middle and high school students. How would you approach building on both these efforts to most efficiently meet student transportation needs?

   Land and monetary constraints do make it difficult to switch over bus fleets. I support adding electric buses in phases, with lot redevelopment for charging when equal numbers of diesel buses need to be retired for age. Metrobus and ART transit should be provided at no cost (paid for by APS) for students who are attending a non-neighborhood school to which APS transportation is not otherwise provided, e.g. in elective school transfers or continued enrollment at a previous school after moving to a new zone. This would encourage use of public transportation and also provide households without a private vehicle more equitable access to non-neighborhood schools. We should also explore use of Metrobus and ART for other students when routes duplicate APS bus routes. Reducing the overall number of buses could create more lot space for charging stations. Also related to emissions reduction, we already have vehicle idling limits posted at many schools, but we need to improve awareness and compliance for APS buses as well as private vehicles.

3. **Incorporating nature into development and protecting green spaces:** Numerous studies demonstrate the importance of access to nature on the mental and physical well-being of children. How can APS create an environment that incorporates nature into the school environment and curriculum and what policies would you promote to ensure that all of Arlington's students have easy access to nature?

   I believe we all benefit from daily contact with nature—whether that's a grove of trees, a school garden, or simply fresh air and sunlight. Many of our schools are fortunate to have wonderful natural or landscaped surroundings, and I support both preserving those spaces and creating more where they are minimal. Natural light inside buildings should also be a priority.

   In the classroom, science instruction at all grade levels should incorporate living materials and natural phenomena right outside whenever feasible. I would also support dedicating part of the time now used for TA period and SEL (socio-emotional learning) to outdoor learning and fresh-air breaks. As policy, the School Board could establish reasonable targets for outdoor time at each grade level, while factoring in recess, physical education, and weather limitations. This fits my broader view that curriculum should emphasize learning that is grounded in real-world experience, as I discuss in Question 5.

4. **Achieving zero waste:** Arlington County passed a zero-waste resolution in 2015. In recent years, APS has had a poor record of recycling and waste reduction. When APS centralized food preparation, that led to a great deal of packaging for meals. Such packaging, along with single-use plastic utensils and food waste, now accounts for a large portion of the APS waste stream. What would you do to reduce plastic, paper, and food waste and maximize recycling at schools to help the County achieve its goals and what benefits will this provide for Arlington students?

   I strongly support moving APS toward zero waste. Doing it well means balancing several real-world factors: the cost and availability of products, energy and water required for washing reusables, and federal rules that govern school meal programs. Food packaging and portion sizes are often dictated by vendors or compliance requirements, and those realities can shift quickly. Just as important, reusable, recyclable, or compostable materials only achieve their purpose if they are actually reused, recycled, or composted—otherwise they can be even more wasteful than traditional options. So I want APS to focus on strengthening the school culture and in-house systems that make reusing, composting, and dual-stream recycling simple and reliable, engaging students directly in these practices. When students see how their choices reduce waste, they learn environmental responsibility and practical problem-solving skills that will serve them well beyond graduation.

5. **Climate Education**: Our students will face the impacts of climate change throughout their whole lives and need to be prepared to prosper in a changing world and yet currently climate change and its solutions are addressed only sporadically. What changes would you advance that would integrate climate change and other related environmental issues more comprehensively into the curriculum?

   Climate change is best taught where it naturally fits. In physics and earth sciences, students can learn the physical laws and processes behind it—such as the transfer and buildup of heat energy in the atmosphere and oceans. In the life sciences, they can see how species adapt to changing conditions and how ecosystems respond to environmental stress. And in social studies, students can examine the policy, economic, and civic questions that come with managing resources and protecting the common good. I will advocate for these connections to be written into our state standards, and I also support Arlington making thoughtful local enhancements to reflect our community's needs and priorities. More broadly, I believe students benefit when textbooks and lessons use current, real-world examples that bring the material to life—climate and environmental issues included.