

Questionnaire for Candidates for School Board, April 26, 2020, from Arlington Mental Health & Disability Alliance (AMH&DA)

## **SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATE RESPONSES TO AMH&DA QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **JUVENILE JUSTICE**

*Detention itself is criminogenic (meaning it causes or is likely to cause criminal behavior). There are some localities across the country that have committed to achieving zero youth detention using a public health approach. Arlington has a one-year effort underway to develop restorative practices to better respond to conflict, crime and other harm. This program, known as "Restorative Arlington," explores how we can use restorative practices in the legal system and in school and community settings.*

#### **1. Should Arlington adopt zero youth detention as a goal?**

**Diaz-Torres:** Yes, Arlington should adopt a goal of zero youth detention.

**Krieger:** Yes. As a Guardian *ad litem* for children, which is a court-appointed lawyer for children involved in the court system, I have seen first-hand how the decisions we make today have long-term impacts on our children. Especially when it comes to children, our justice system shouldn't focus solely on punishment, but also on helping youth who made a mistake (sometimes for reasons for which they lacked complete control) turn themselves into the sort of persons who will not harm again. We should be treating kids like kids, as scientific evidence tells us that their brains are still developing and they are biologically prone to use bad judgement sometimes.

Zero youth detention would be ideal and the process we use to achieve that goal is critical. We as a community need to get to the heart of why some youth exhibit behaviors that are likely to lead to criminal action and possible detention. If all of our children, particularly the most vulnerable, are given the proper assistance to succeed as a valuable member of our community, then there would be no need for youth detention at all.

As a school board member, I will work to actualize APS's noble vision as a diverse and inclusive school community by maximizing intervention and support for all students. APS needs to ensure that the commitment to student wellbeing and success is realized for all students, including our most vulnerable students with special and dual needs.

**Munnell:** This should be a goal for Arlington only with a plan to intervene in the youth's behavior immediately in some other fashion. Research has shown that outcomes improve for youth when they don't interact with the justice system.

**Priddy:** Yes. Studies have shown that if you can prevent children from entering the legal system at a young age, they have a better chance to succeed. Therefore, we

should use alternative approaches to entering the legal system and combine with Arlington County's Destination 2027 plan to support this initiative.

**Sims:** I believe zero youth detention ought to be a goal, while understanding that there may exist outlier situations where detention is necessary. The first step in making such a goal come to fruition is for schools to not lean so heavily on SROs when it comes to student discipline. SROs exist for security purposes, not student discipline.

**Walker:** Yes, Arlington should absolutely adopt zero youth detention as a goal. We already have the beginnings of a framework in place with Restorative Arlington. That is a solid foundation upon which to build zero youth detention.

## **2. What alternatives to detention would you support to keep the community safe and achieve better outcomes?**

**Diaz-Torres:** I support programs that create a coherent continuum of support to prevent juvenile contact with the justice system at every level of escalation. The current Second Chance program, while theoretically appropriate for first-time incidents, is not an effective or adequate solution for students with a history of substance abuse. It results in additional risk for youth of color and youth with disabilities. The support options available to youth with multiple incidents are not equitably applied or accessible. To achieve zero youth detention, we must ensure that support is available for youth at every level of escalation.

**Krieger:** The historic approach to youth incarceration has been found to be costly, ineffective and damaging to youth. (Citation: "The Future of Youth Justice: A Community-Based Alternative to the Youth Prison Model." National Institute of Justice, in collaboration with Harvard Kennedy School's Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management. 2017) Most experts in juvenile justice agree that the youth prison model should be replaced with a continuum of community-based programs and, for the youth who require secure confinement, smaller homelike non-profit facilities that prioritize age-appropriate rehabilitation or hospitals. Examples of this include Argus House (for boys) and Aurora House (for girls). These types of programs should be expanded instead of focusing on detention – both because they are more effective at rehabilitation for the juveniles and I believe less costly in dollars than detention.

Part of Arlington Public School's goals under the 2018-2024 Strategic Plan is to create an environment that fosters all students' intellectual, physical, mental, and social-emotional growth in healthy, safe, and supportive learning environments. When I am on the board, I will make it a priority to improve student mental and physical wellness, especially for our middle school and high school students in order to promote a more positive and supportive environment where all children can thrive.

**Munnell:** There could be spaces made available with trained staff on the ready to use motivational or life space interviewing. This however, requires a significant commitment of staff and money.

**Priddy:** I support Diversion programs, Behavioral/Mental Health Docket, and Restorative Justice as alternatives to detention.

**Sims:** Two good alternatives to detention are community service and providing the children with mentors.

**Walker:** Prevention is always the first and most important step. Tackling and dismantling (to the extent possible) the systemic and implicit bias that plague our schools and law enforcement communities is paramount. I would ensure that the full restorative justice process is implemented throughout APS and that our county and school policies on restorative justice are aligned. I would work with the Commonwealth Attorney and other community stakeholders to ensure we have multiple diversion programs that are culturally responsive. (By contrast, our Second Chance is woefully inadequate and punitive.) Family engagement will be also key, as well as strengthening our mental health and substance abuse services, so working with the Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families will be essential.

### **3. How do you define restorative justice? Should these practices be adopted locally? Why or why not?**

**Diaz-Torres:** Restorative Justice is a set of practices or norms designed to repair the harm caused by criminal behavior. I wholeheartedly support the Restorative Arlington efforts as we must live out the values we espouse as a community. If elected to the school board, I'll work with stakeholders to determine and adopt best restorative practices for the county and school system.

**Krieger:** Restorative justice is the concept that any crime, regardless of size or severity, hurts the community. The fundamental premise of restorative justice is that offenders assume responsibility for their actions, realize that an injustice has been committed, either to an individual or to the community, and then take action in some way to repair the harm done and leave the community in a **better** condition than before the harm. To me, restorative justice requires an improvement in the community, where possible, and not just returning the community to the pre-harm state. In this way, a plan to "restore justice" is worked out, instead of a system of retribution, where no one benefits.

While some restorative justice programs exist in Arlington, there is certainly room to expand. One example of this is the Shoplifter Program, which is a diversion program for first-time petty larceny offenders. The child attends a 2.5 hour program instead of attending court and complete a community service assignment. Another example is the Victim Awareness Program that teaches offenders about the impact their actions had on others and the community as a whole through victim videos, role playing exercises, and written exercises.

Restorative justice is not just about prisons and courtrooms, but about schools and how we deal with both major and minor offenses occurring at our schools. As a school board member I will zealously support and expand upon the use of restorative justice in Arlington's public schools as well as encourage the building of restorative practices in community-based organizations and groups.

**Munnell:** A form of behavioral intervention as an alternative to punitive practices of discipline such as out of school suspensions or detentions and incarcerations.

- Harms and Needs: Who was harmed, what was the harm? How can it be repaired?
- Obligations: Who is responsible and accountable and how can he/she repair the harm?
- Engagement: Victims and Offenders have active roles in the Justice process.

Should these practices be adopted locally? Why or why not?

Yes. To the extent that it can be managed with well trained staff, professionals who are dedicated to that mission. Best practices would include staff able to address the root cause of the misbehavior which in turn requires trust between staff and students and families. I believe this practice is most effective for incidences of disrespect to teachers and/or peers through disruptive behaviors and language.

**Priddy:** Restorative Justice is when offenders and victims mutually decide to take accountability and work through the event(s) and decide the outcome as an alternate to seeking judgment via the traditional court system. This gives both parties a chance to understand the other person's point of view and adds perspective and accountability to their actions.

Yes, this should be adopted locally. I have attended two meetings led by Liane Rozzelle to get an introduction into how Restorative Justice will work in Arlington and I will support that initiative.

**Sims:** Restorative justice is defined as a system of criminal justice which focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large. As a Black man and a student of history, I believe that our country will never truly move forward in the spirit of our Constitution until restorative justice occurs across the nation...that includes here in Arlington where remnants of injustice still exist.

**Walker:** Restorative justice is a community-based approach to dealing with crime and holding the offender accountable for causing harm, by bringing the offender, victim, and community stakeholders together that promotes healing. Restorative justice should be adopted in Arlington because our community wants it, and it is the best way to transform our juvenile justice system, and by extension our criminal justice system, where disparities abound.

#### 4. Do you support closing the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center where Arlington incarcerates court-involved youth?

**Diaz-Torres:** While I'm ready to work with community members to close all juvenile detention centers, I fear we aren't yet ready to close the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center for two reasons. 1) Closing the facility would significantly burden the families of current occupants. Too many depend on public transportation and would be unable to visit their children if they were relocated to facilities in Fairfax. 2) Our community hasn't yet constructed restorative justice systems to prevent more children from being sent to the facility. Until we have a concrete plan to ensure no Arlington child is detained, we must have an option that is accessible for families and caregivers.

**Krieger:** Yes, if we have sufficient programs, including sufficient capacity, in place. Rather than promoting public safety, the detention of children accused of crimes is oftentimes more harmful than helpful. This incarceration interrupts healthy psychological development, disproportionately affects youths of color, is unnecessary for public safety and doesn't have as much data-supported success as do less costly community-based programs. As per my assertion in question two, juvenile detention centers should be replaced with a continuum of community-based programs and, for the youth who require secure confinement, smaller homelike non-profit facilities that prioritize age-appropriate rehabilitation or hospitals.

An example of this is the Detention Diversion Program. Children in this program return home to parents or guardians with strict conditions instead of being held at Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center.

**Munnell:** No, it should be maintained in some fashion for 1) very serious crimes so that **youth are not put in with adults**, and 2) part of it could be repurposed for a shelter type environment perhaps like the zero detention program.

**Priddy:** As a member of the Arlington Chapter of the NAACP, I agree with their opinion which was released in a public statement on January 7, 2020:

“ . . . it is the position of Arlington Branch NAACP that in the best interest of the community and youth who are detained at NVJDC, the Center should remain open subject to a redesign of the sleeping rooms, to allow for continued family engagement and participation in the programming and therapies available at NVJDC. We recommend that any unused space be repurposed for mental health, substance abuse treatment or other rehabilitative programs and if possible, that the barbed wire around the perimeter of the property be removed or replaced with a more attractive reinforcement.”

**Sims:** I do not support closing the NOVA Juvenile Detention Center primarily because doing so makes it harder for the children's parents to visit them. Several of the children from Green Valley and the Greenbrier neighborhood whom I have mentored throughout

the years have had to spend some time at Landmark. I also had a relationship with their families, some of whom only had metro as a means of transportation.

**Walker:** I do not support the incarceration of Juveniles and believe that zero youth detention should be the goal. However, with that caveat, I understand that for a variety of non-punitive administrative reasons, some percentage of juveniles will need to be assigned to the NVJDC prior to adjudication for periods of time ranging from one to 30 days. My understanding is that those juveniles who received a sentence to be served at NVJDC are sentenced with a specific treatment plan for a period of up to 180 days. I do not know whether the youth sentenced to the NVJDC would be appropriate candidates for Argus House or Aurora House. I do understand that NVJDC is a short-term facility, as opposed to Bon Air Juvenile Corrections Center, located in North Chesterfield, VA, where youth may be sentenced up to 21 years of age.

I toured the NVJDC with the NAACP. After receiving very disheartening and dismal reports regarding dangerousness, poor lighting, and lack of recreational facilities at the NVJDC from advocates for the closure of the facility, the branch president and representatives of the executive and education committees of the Arlington Branch of the NAACP visited the site for a firsthand view. What we found was a well-illuminated facility with windows in each classroom providing natural light, windows in each sleeping room which were frosted for privacy, and large windows in each of the common areas. There were basketball courts both inside and outside of the facility in addition to a multi-purpose surface outside for soccer and skating. There was an interior video-game lounge adjacent to the indoor basketball court, where the youth could earn points.

We also had the benefit of seeing the classrooms and speaking with Dr. Victor Martin, Principal of the NVJDC school which is part of the Alexandria City Public Schools. The school has bright, vibrant hallways, adorned with the students' artwork. The school had the look and feel of a regular high school outside of the NVJDC. Dr. Martin discussed the advantage of the small class sizes which were conducive to learning as well as separate study rooms to minimize distractions. The Executive Director has added a commencement ceremony for graduates, complete with caps and gowns, and their family members as well as staff. In addition, there appeared to be reasonable safety measures in place for staff as well as residents such as electronically documented checks of residents every 15 minutes during night hours. The residential rooms are stark, with mattresses on top of a large concrete platform. Because of the need for privacy, the windows are frosted, limiting access to natural light. We recommended that redesigning the sleeping areas should be a high priority if the facility remains open, in accordance with the state's specifications. In addition, the barbed wire around the perimeter and the vast chain-link fencing at the front makes for a harsh and unwelcoming feel to the facility. If possible, the barbed wire around the perimeter of the property should be removed or replaced with a more attractive reinforcement.

According to the Executive Director, juveniles are scheduled 5-6 hours daily for educational classes and counseling, thus the rooms are primarily used for sleeping. In addition, we were told that staff members are trained in restorative justice techniques so

that conflicts are actually resolved rather than simply imposing punishment for inappropriate or impulsive behavior. We were told that as a result, the juveniles are not secluded in the sleeping rooms as punishment for infractions. The Executive Director and the Operations Chief of the NVJDC are both nationally certified and conduct inspections of juvenile facilities around the country and seem committed to identifying and applying best practices at the NVJDC.

Maintaining NVJDC would facilitate family continuity and involvement with the juveniles housed there, in that the location permits easy access by public transportation as well as by car. This was a significant concern for us. Furthermore, the philosophy of the Executive Director aligns with progressive criminal justice reforms and she and her staff appear to truly care about the residents. A real positive impact of the decreased number of residents (27 at the time we toured) is that the staff can have better opportunities to positively influence residents through counseling, modeling, and mentoring. I have not factored the cost-benefit analysis of only 27 residents from a budgetary perspective.

For these reasons, I believe that it is in the best interest of the community and youth who are detained at NVJDC, that it should remain open subject to a redesign of the sleeping rooms, to allow for continued family engagement and participation in the programming and therapies available at NVJDC. In addition to the loss of family engagement due to transportation concerns, we would have no control over the structure or programming if the facility closed and the youth are moved to Fairfax City or Winchester, which have been proposed as alternative locations. My understanding from speaking to people in the mental health community is that Fairfax County resents having to service Arlington residents, and that could filter down to the treatment of your youth detained there. If they moved to Winchester, they would see much less of their family, if at all.

5. AMH&DA withdrew this question item because we realized the question was unclear.

## **ACCESSIBILITY**

*Several public buildings and digital assets of Arlington County are not fully accessible to all individuals with disabilities. In addition, some programs lack accommodations in services and program design. The need for accommodations goes far beyond physical access. Barriers exist relating to communication, social emotional and sensory needs.*

6. **Do you agree that Arlington needs to improve accessibility in its county and public school buildings and programs? If so, what steps would you take to improve accessibility and accommodations for school and county programming?**

**Diaz-Torres:** Arlington must improve accessibility for county and school buildings and programs to ensure the promise that every student has a right to succeed. Of particular concern is how new construction fails to prioritize all student needs. When scoping,

designing, and constructing, we must make decisions that 1) begin with clear and consistent goals, 2) operate from the same set of data, and 3) ensure that everyone in the community is given the chance to engage authentically. A collaborative framework for decision-making minimizes the chance of overlooking or deprioritizing accessibility issues.

**Krieger:** Yes. Unfortunately, accessibility issues have been longstanding in APS, particularly when new or redesigned schools open.

A variety of design elements at these schools have rightly been criticized for failures to address accessibility needs of students, staff and the community. It is unacceptable that we spend tens of millions of dollars on capital projects that fail to adhere to the measures established by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This results in consequences that are not only inequitable and embarrassing, but costly. For instance, the School Board in 2018 had to approve an extra \$250,000 in spending at Alice West Fleet Elementary School to ensure entrances at the adjacent TJMS were accessible. And in February 2020 school staff laid out a proposal to spend \$500,000 to rectify additional accessibility problems at Fleet including (1) installing an elevator from the garage to the main entrance, (2) adding accessible parking spaces; (3) building inclusive playground equipment; and (4) implementing video intercoms.

Can you imagine the impact APS could have on the lives of students with disabilities if the money that was used to correct these issues went to more substantive programming or staffing needs for these students? While the money is problematic, the most offensive aspect is not the dollar figure, but what appears to be a basic lack of understanding about what is needed and how decisions impact students with disabilities at the schools.

Another accessibility issue is the systemic lack of compliance and accountability throughout APS. As an example, transportation staff are not sufficiently trained as to their obligations to uphold the rights of students with disabilities on the buses. In fact, only recently has OSE provided students' medical information on regular and specialized APS buses. While knowledge and information about who is on the bus and their individual needs is the correct initial step, it's only the beginning. The bus drivers need, and have requested, training on how to respond to a student with disabilities that requires services while riding the bus. However, APS has yet to provide this training, so this is another example of parents having to perform tasks for the betterment of their children, but that should be done by APS as a standard practice. Training bus drivers about the needs of students with disabilities is not an optional "best practice." APS is actively not complying with 34 CFR §300.34(c)(16) of the IDEA regulations.

APS wouldn't need to train as many bus drivers if APS was willing to transport more SWD on regular buses with accommodations, than to run nearly empty specialized buses -- plus having this integration is beneficial for all students and saves money that could be used elsewhere to benefit students with disabilities.



As an attorney, it should go without saying that in the future APS must make better decisions related to APS' legal requirements. I would have expected that someone on the construction team with knowledge, if not expertise, of the needs of special needs students would have reviewed the plans and designs, but perhaps that did not happen. Similarly, I wouldn't think that education and training on the APS legal obligations for bus drivers would be necessary, but apparently, it is.

**Munnell:** Physical buildings - Oversight with the planning and development of new buildings and an assessment of the needs of built schools. The Department of Facilities is now required to perform this task and report on it. The repurposing of the old Ed Center on Quincy street calls into question how will student with disabilities - even short term ones like a broken leg - will be able to access the renovated space. How will the student who has sensory needs be able to navigate successfully from one building to the other, or will they simply be denied access to a course that is being taught there? This concerns me greatly and suggests another lawsuit in the future. Hampering a rectification of this concern is that a program has not been decided for this facility to date.

Transportation - The current location of Syphax and Human Services is a detriment to accessibility. Youth mental health offices which were once in Clarendon, accessible by walking or ART, are now in the rather remote area of 5th and Washington Blvd.

Digital - the County Board needs to step up its efforts to provide internet accessibility throughout the county. APS is already providing the devices. Mifi hot spots are tenuous solutions when APS knows a student lacks access.

**Priddy:** Yes, pushing for accessibility has been a key part of my advocacy this year, focusing on the newly built Fleet building. During construction at Fleet there were budget overruns which led to some items which were key components for accessibility that were omitted from the final design. Items such as the second elevator, playground equipment, access to the building, and others, were "value engineered" out of the scope of work to save money. Consequently, we have a building that is not accessible for all and we need to have those items installed at Fleet. My role in this process has been to speak at PTA meetings, help organize a group to speak at School Board meetings, meet individually with various stakeholders (parents, APS Staff, School Board Members, County Board Members, etc.) to advocate for the re-issuing of funds to complete the items. This spring, we successfully lobbied to get the funds allocated. Now I am on a parent committee with a special APS liaison to manage the checklist and ensure the items at Fleet will be installed.

We need to use the lessons learned from Fleet to move forward positively in our upcoming projects (Reed, Ed Center, etc.). The solution to remedy this situation for future projects requires implementation of my plan for equity in APS. Part of my equity plan is to have cultural competence training for all of APS including third-party vendors. If our facilities division along with the architect that APS hired had cultural competence training, understanding those values would have kept the Universal Design Standards in

the project instead of ‘value engineering’ them out of the project. With that training, all parties would have been able to see through the lens of all students and staff when designing the building.

**Sims:** This is an issue I have been tackling for over a decade. When it comes to Arlington’s traditional Black community, there exists a lack of trust with the county government because, not too long ago, services were purposely withheld or hidden. The service mechanisms for both the county government and APS must get out into the community where the people are. Too often, community leaders have to go fishing for information when said information ought to instead be pushed down to them. There is too much reliance on information being on-line or meetings having been recorded. Periodically sending links to resources that are relevant to community leaders is necessary.

**Walker:** Yes. Arlington must improve accessibility in its county school buildings and programs. Both Arlington County and APS lack a bona fide **culture** of inclusion for physical as well as socio-emotional accessibility. APS may issue spots well in terms of messaging, but often falls short on execution, or is wildly inconsistent amongst schools. Arlington knows how to convey the right messaging and utilize the right “buzz phrases” to convey that it cares about inclusion, equity, and accessibility, but its actions often do not align with their messaging.

Developing a culture of inclusion requires intentionality, and will not succeed unless and until Arlington reckons with its disability shortcomings and decides to atone for its missteps. I would recommend the county and school district join forces in hiring an independent expert to conduct a disability and accessibility audit of its practices, policies, and buildings. Such an audit can be accomplished by a study or task force looking more broadly at systemic issues through an equity lens. Since the county and the schools share facilities, their strategy for inclusion in accessibility should be consistently aligned. With having the county’s buy-in in this process, I would stress the importance of prioritizing budget for amelioration across the county and school district. Doing this prospectively will save both APS and the county money in expensive remediation, possible litigation costs, and hikes in insurance premiums from claims filed.

7. **There are communication barriers throughout APS as evidenced by the 2019 settlement between the Department of Justice (DOJ) and APS, related to English language learners. DOJ required APS to translate Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and Section 504 Plan forms into the 4 most commonly requested foreign languages. DoJ also imposed additional notification and interpretation requirements. In addition to English language learners and their families, there are also non-speaking students, hearing- and vision-impaired students, traumatized students, etc. How would you ensure barriers to accessing the general education curriculum are eliminated in APS?**

**Diaz-Torres:** Addressing these barriers requires that we 1) change our conversations about data to be action-oriented rather than punitive and 2) redesign our planning factors to be explicitly driven by student needs. In the past, highlighting areas in need of improvement was often interpreted as an attack on APS and staff. This perception furnished a culture of distrust toward our data. Conversations about data must be viewed as an *opportunity* to solve problems. Decisions must be made *with* the students and staff as partners and co-designers of solutions. Together, we must redesign factors as a function of student needs. Then, we must renormalize how school leaders reallocate positions and spending per these better planning factor allocations.

**Krieger:** APS must begin to operate as a school system, rather than a system of schools. To achieve this goal, APS must develop a consistent, high quality special education program in *every* school, further close the opportunity gaps, and prepare all students, particularly its most vulnerable, for post-secondary success. In terms of educational improvement, there are several ways that APS can improve. Currently the access to advanced courses is limited for students with disabilities and ELL students. One of the reasons that this exists is the lack of co-teaching in key courses at the secondary level. This has a significant impact on ELL students and those with disabilities and their ability to have equal access to accelerated courses in high school.

Likewise, while students with disabilities in APS perform higher than the state average on reading and math Standards of Learning (SOLs) they perform below district and state averages for students without disabilities. APS needs robust cultural competency and professional learning opportunities and training for all staff, not just special education teachers. Nowhere has this point been made more obvious than in the Department of Justice settlement agreement. APS needs to fulfill those requirements specific to students with disabilities, and schools need additional support to understand how to provide services to meet the needs of twice exceptional learners.

Presently, APS lacks a system of accountability that aligns with its policies and procedures and would help the school system achieve its vision for high expectations, greater consistency, compliance, and results. As an example of this, in 2015, APS authorized a Dyslexia Task Force, which provided important recommendations on literacy and effective methods for teaching all children to read. A year later the district hired a consultant to assess the district's work with dyslexic students. Even though APS has these results and recommendations on their website, to date there has been very little follow-through in order to put these guidelines into practice in every school. If APS cannot implement the required systemic changes to better serve dyslexic students the time and money spent on these evaluations means nothing. Systemic best practices and accountability are necessary to realize APS' vision of inclusivity. Without it APS will never create the robust special education program that the community deserves.

In addition, our Inclusion Policy is designed to embrace multiple aspects of diversity and inclusion not just for students with disabilities. Professional learning and cultural competency training must be mandatory for all teachers and staff, not just special education specialists or ELL teachers. As a community we need to acknowledge the

bias and able-ism that exist in our system and creates inequitable outcomes for our children.

And finally, developing trusting and productive relationships with the parent and family community for students with disabilities and in particular these students that are of color and non-native English speakers. This requires greater effort at transparency and better cultural competency at every level of staffing in APS. Not only do we need to ensure that there are adequate teachers and administrators of color as well as ELL within APS, but we need to ensure that there are adequate parents and community leaders representing these groups who serve as leaders on the various committees and task force members in Arlington's diverse disability community.

**Munnell:** The message was made loud and clear in the evaluation report of the Department of Student Services - APS is a system of schools and not a school system. Addressing this issue requires the principals of each school to adhere to a defined approach established by DSS. 80% of the instructional day to the extent where possible is the law and must be adhered to. I support the DSS approach to ensuring schools all work on the same commitment to inclusion.

As far as EL instruction is concerned, teachers are taking the required professional development to be completed in the next two years.

**Priddy:** Jefferson Middle School was the school listed in the DOJ Settlement. As the president of the Jefferson PTA, I have worked with Principal Boggan, her staff, and the APS central office, to ensure we are on the correct path for compliance with the Settlement. One of the key pieces to ensure the barriers are removed from the general education curriculum is to staff the teachers and personnel that have the skillsets to handle English language learners and their families, non-speaking students, hearing- and vision-impaired students, traumatized students, etc.

**Sims:** As stated in my answer to #6, open lines of communication with community leaders are necessary. Additionally, which kind of goes away from the DOJ settlement, yet speaks to the spirit of it, APS must figure out how to hire guidance counselors and teachers who believe in the greatness of all of their students. There are high school students whom I have mentored and tutored whose guidance counselors had failed, one of whom, if I had not caught the "error" would not have been eligible to graduate.

**Walker:** Building on the disability and accessibility audit I mentioned in #6 above, APS needs to aggressively get on the front-end of identification and intervention to prevent barriers in the first place. Doing so would yield more favorable outcomes emotionally for students and families. APS needs a paradigm shift from one of avoidance to one of prevention. The paradigm shift is to make the investment up front to properly and effectively identify, remediate, and accommodate students with disabilities, which will yield a return on investment of fewer students in SpEd, including English Learners (ELs), fewer behavioral problems (usually, but not always), fewer disciplinary matters, and few to no ADA and IDEA compliance violations. The status quo of avoidance just

isn't working and the end result is that APS ends up in a vicious and never ending cycle of triaging special education for both ELs and native English speaking students, which winds up costing more. This cycle of "triage" is exactly what is currently playing out with the DOJ settlement. This then saps all the resources so that other problems fester to the point of investigation, and the triage cycle starts all over again. The longer APS delays addressing problems up front, the longer the and more costly the intervention or remediation in both financial and socioemotional costs. In addition to prevention via early identification and intervention, I would ensure that APS fully and authentically adopts inclusion to the maximum extent possible in order to eliminate barriers to accessing general education curriculum.

## **SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

*Research indicates that consistent attendance at school is the number one predictor for on-time graduation rates. Parents of children with mental illness in APS report significant obstacles due to lack of timely responses or adequate support when children are in crisis.*

### **8. Do you agree some students with social emotional needs face obstacles that prevent them from regularly attending public school in Arlington? If so, what processes or supports would you propose to address this?**

**Diaz-Torres:** Yes, I agree that some students, particularly those who experience social anxiety or have been subjected to bullying, face obstacles that lead them to frequently miss school. To best address their needs, we must improve how we deliver services to these students. Too often, parents or caregivers with a child in crisis are given lists of service providers that aren't updated or are populated by providers who are not taking on new patients. We must investigate expanding co-located mental health providers, invest in on-site support, and update our systems of communicating with families.

**Krieger:** Yes, I agree. Every child is different and must be educated according to their own physical, mental and emotional needs. Any child with social emotional needs that would prevent them from regularly attending public school in Arlington should be evaluated by medical and/or mental health professionals for an IEP to determine what type of accommodations or modifications are appropriate for that individual child to help that child achieve greatness.

**Munnell:** Yes. In some cases, just getting a wake up call from a counselor can help a student feel connected. I've seen counselors who meet students at the bus in the morning to greet them and thank them for coming.

Where are the gaps in service for these students, I would recommend the director of counselor do a needs assessment of their staff to determine where counselors may be in understanding of the services that can be provided through APS and the county. A series of guidelines for teachers should be established so that when a teacher identifies

a pattern of absenteeism, the teacher alerts the counselor. The counselor follows by reaching out to the home.

**Priddy:** Yes, we have students that are unable to participate in regularly attending public schools. We need to make accommodations for them. This begins with starting with the school (teachers, counselors) and determining what level of support that student needs. Together they need to come up with a plan – intervention plan, 504 plan, IEP, distance learning, etc - in order to address the unique needs of the student.

**Sims:** I do agree, and this issue goes to access to mental health resources. Being that APS will not be in a position to properly fund mental health workers, it is imperative that it and Arlington County government work and partner with area hospitals and medical schools in having their doctors, physician assistants, nurses, and students help us fill those voids.

**Walker:** Yes, I agree that some students with social-emotional needs face obstacles that prevent them from regularly attending school. APS has already begun to implement a model for social-emotional learning that may address some of these obstacles. It is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (“CASEL”). Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decision. To the extent that our students aren’t attending school because they and by extension their parents lack the tools of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, or responsible decision-making with regards to managing emotions, I would ramp up APS’s implementation of SEL district-wide, so that our students and by extension their parents will be in supportive and welcoming learning environments.

However, I would like for APS to do more, by adopting a trauma-informed approach to teaching. Beginning next school year, I would prioritize this training. When teachers are proactive and responsive to the needs of students suffering from traumatic stress and make small changes in the classroom that foster a feeling of safety, it makes a huge difference in their ability to learn. Up to two-thirds of U.S. children have experienced at least one type of serious childhood trauma, such as abuse, neglect, natural disaster, or experiencing or witnessing violence. In Arlington we have the additional trauma that undocumented students face in this political climate and worrying about deportation of themselves or a parent. Now, the physical and economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic including isolation caused by social distancing mandates and stay-at-home orders, including the early and prolonged closure of schools will add an even heavier layer of trauma for our students. Traumatized students are especially prone to difficulty in self-regulation, negative thinking, being on high alert, difficulty trusting adults, and inappropriate social interactions. They often haven’t learned to express emotions healthily and instead show their distress through aggression, avoidance, shutting down, or other off-putting behaviors. These actions can feel antagonistic to teachers who don’t understand the root cause of the student’s behavior, which can lead to

misunderstandings, ineffective interventions, and missed learning time. Students can't learn if they don't feel safe, known, and cared for within their schools.

## **EQUITY IN SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

*Across the school district, the percentage of the students with disabilities varies between schools from 6% to 21%.*

### **9. What steps would you take to ensure students with disabilities are being identified and appropriately served at schools with a low percentage of students with disabilities?**

**Diaz-Torres:** In order to ensure that students with disabilities are appropriately identified, we must establish a clear, simple, district-wide protocol for professional learning communities to identify students for IAT team review. One step might be a rubric that orients PLCs at the start of the year. If a student exhibits indicators on the rubric, their case is automatically escalated to IAT team review. Any system must ensure practices are consistent for all students at all schools.

**Krieger:** I know that special education services are not consistently available to all students and their families. A gap exists between families that have access to external resources, such as testing, and can advocate for and obtain services for their children, while others who rely on APS systems receive less support.

Currently, APS does not have a universal screening tool or related practices for the identification of students. APS needs to transition to a universal screening method that would include valid, reliable, and evidence-based assessments conducted with all students or targeted groups of students. This is crucial in order to identify students who are truly at risk and, therefore, likely to need additional or alternative forms of instruction to supplement the conventional general education approach.

An alarming example of why this is necessary is in the review of the data regarding identification of students with 504 Plans.

- Section 504 race/ethnicity. 65.7% of students referred for a 504 Plan were White. White students account for 45% of the overall district population.
- Section 504 economically disadvantaged. Students identified as economically disadvantaged only accounted for 8.4% of 504 referrals, compared to the overall district average of 32%.
- Section 504 variability by grade and school. The largest number of students referred for a 504 Plan was in the 11th grade, with referral rates substantially higher at some high schools than others.

The data suggests that the appropriate consideration and usage of Section 504 is limited, with consideration for eligibility most often occurring when parents brought in outside evaluations. There is historical concern that this circumstance frequently

involves relatively high performing students and that similar advocacy does not exist for lower performing students with less involved parents. This fear is corroborated by the low proportionality of economically disadvantaged students identified for 504 referrals compared to their district average. It's also alarming that white students are overly represented in 504 Plan referrals, particularly when further data suggests that the largest number of students referred for a 504 Plan is in the 11th grade, with referral rates substantially higher at some high schools than others.

With the predominance of white students with 504 Plans, APS needs to review its eligibility practices and analyze student demographic data, at the school and grade levels, to determine which students have qualified for 504 Plans and what trends exist. A tested and confirmed equitable universal screening process with sufficient monitoring would alleviate these issues.

Another way to support better identification is to improve early childhood outcomes and expand the continuum of services. APS already has comprehensive, inclusive Pre-K programs, including VPI, which provides quality preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds in the county. APS can continue to improve outcomes by working with the county to ensure that these families actually know about and utilize the VPI program, thus enabling the school system to begin identification of these children with disabilities as quickly as possible in order to produce earlier and better outcomes.

**Munnell:** This question, similar to 7, goes to the issue of standardization across the schools. We need a floor of effective practice that is consistent across all our schools. School leadership must be held accountable.

**Priddy:** The steps that I would take are:

1. Set mechanisms to recognize, identify, and determine student needs.
2. Make sure we follow the new student support coordinator processes.
3. Ensure that the teachers are empowered to work with the parents if they think a student is struggling.
4. Ensure that staff listens to parents

Interventions that occur need to be tracked and measured.

**Sims:** A basic standard needs to apply to every school where, whether a school has one child with a disability or one hundred children, that they meet that same standard. This goes for both facilities and instruction.

**Walker:** I would ensure that all of our teachers (especially in elementary school) are trained on the Child Find obligation under IDEA. This training should be conducted at all schools regardless of percentage of students with disabilities to ensure adequate and accurate identification. I would ensure that there are sufficient resources in terms of personnel and materials available at each school for intervention based on the percentage of students there. Schools with higher percentages should get more



resources. I would also ensure that all schools have access to a vast array of assessments for assessing and identifying various disabilities.

**10. Should APS alter its transfer or staffing policies to avoid high percentages of students with disabilities at particular schools to ensure equity in the school district?**

**Diaz-Torres:** APS should consider altering transfer or staffing policies once we are certain about the validity of our data. Per my earlier response, APS doesn't have consistent practices for identifying students with disabilities. We must enact solutions based on accurate data rather than incomplete assumptions.

**Krieger:** To have a truly equitable school system, APS needs to do more than just change the transfer or staffing policies. In order for APS to develop a consistent, high quality special education program in every school, further close the opportunity gaps, and prepare *all* students for post-secondary success, it must begin to operate as a school system, rather than a system of schools. This model must be changed to accommodate best practices and a more equitable delivery of services. There must be more consistency throughout schools. Striking a balance between school level decision making and the cohesiveness and standardization required to ensure high quality service delivery in all schools is a must to deliver the equity and inclusion to all students that APS envisions to truly be an excellent school system.

The School Board has to stop relying on walkability above all the other factors in defining school boundaries and financial considerations. Walkability and diversity are arguably mutually exclusive goals. Both are important, so the question becomes, how do you integrate both goals into a school system. One option to consider is Controlled Choice Policy, which originated in Cambridge, MA in 1980 when the Cambridge School Committee voted to desegregate the schools and made it clear that diversity and equity were the top priorities.

The Controlled Choice Policy was designed to "create diverse, academically rigorous schools with equal access to educational resources." To summarize, families rank their top choices for schools and a lottery is held to see what students are admitted into each school based on their choices. Once a school reaches the pre-determined number of students that school is full. To ensure equity, Cambridge uses a set percentage of students who qualify for the Federal Free & Reduced Lunch Program. When a school has a percentage of students enrolled who do and do not qualify for this benefit based on the district averages, the school is full. Arlington could use a similar system based on FARMs and add additional factors such as ELL as students with disabilities.

**Munnell:** Keep kids where they are. Shifting them puts extra strain on families and takes the student away from the familiarity of his neighborhood friends and teachers with whom they may have developed a relationship.

**Priddy:** Students with disabilities need to be given the same opportunities to succeed

as students in general education setting and the same high quality of expectation. All students should be able to be educated at their home school. We need to ensure that ALL schools have the staff and resources to accommodate students with disabilities. This also requires APS to be open and honest if they can meet the needs of the student so that students are placed in schools where they can get the support they require.

**Sims:** The goal is to have a school system that, no matter the disability or how many students are in the school who have disabilities, that they all receive a quality education. The school board and superintendent must hold principals accountable when it comes to educating all of their students.

**Walker:** This is not an easy or straightforward answer. I think doing so could be a slippery slope, but is worthy of contemplation and discussion, and “it depends” is probably the appropriate answer, even if not a definitive answer. I think it should depend on the consideration of many factors such as the types of disability, location, desire of parents, staffing, resources available to the school, transportation, etc. For example, if there is a high percentage of deaf students at a particular school, services delivered could be more efficient and cost effective rather than transferring those students around the county to different schools. Another consideration should be the impact on the students with disabilities. Some students may feel more confident and less “othered” if they are around a sufficient number of their peers with the same or similar disabilities and/or receiving the same or similar interventions. Likewise, if there is a high number of blind students in a district, it may be beneficial to have them in one location in a building that is easy to navigate (e.g., little to no stairs) that is well suited to their disability. On the other hand, having a high number of students with emotional disabilities in one school, and especially in one classroom, can be taxing on the student with the disability, on his/her peers, and on the teacher, which is not beneficial. Ultimately, there should be a good balance among schools, but in special situations depending on the type of disability, it could be better to have those students clustered together.

## **SCHOOL DISCIPLINE**

### **11. Do you believe that APS needs to change its approach to school discipline? If so, in what way?**

**Diaz-Torres:** APS must amend its approach to school discipline practices to be more equitable and restoration-oriented instead of punitive. At present, APS discipline practices tend to fall into two broad categories: 1) We punish first and ask questions later or 2) Students are asked to self-mediate with minimal structure or support from adults. The right path is a middle ground that allows students to be comfortable resolving differences among themselves - knowing they can count on the adults to provide structure and enforce resolutions.

**Krieger:** Yes. There is currently no district-wide tiered approach to behavior management. Instead, the adoption of a school-wide behavior framework is at the

discretion of each building principal. While over the past few years, APS has added approximately 6-7 more school-based psychologists and social workers, social-emotional interventions and school-wide behavior frameworks are still at the discretion of each school. This is shown very clearly in the disproportionality in suspension rates. It is unfathomable that students with disabilities represent 19% of the student population (when you combine students with IEPs and students with 504s) but make-up 42% of the secondary suspensions.

We need to look to streamlined behavioral management procedures in all of our schools and look to restorative justice initiatives to build empathy, leadership, and community. These initiatives will keep more students in school and disrupt culturally incentives processes and mentalities that create these types of disparities.

**Munnell:** I believe a concerted effort by school administrators to reworked their approaches has been taking place over several years now. Continuous professional learning on cultural competency, restorative justice practice, trauma informed teaching practice should be provided to all staff.

**Priddy:** Yes. APS is already changing its approach to school discipline. Adding the disproportionality in student suspension rates to the Strategic Plan in 2018 with the goal of reducing suspensions and educating staff on other techniques for discipline besides suspension was a step in the right direction. Now we need to take it further and not only measure and hold people accountable, but make those numbers public so the community can see the changes.

Additionally the MOU between ACPD and APS established a framework and guidelines for action by both administrators and Student Resource Officers (SRO) in order to reduce the number of arrests on school grounds. This past September, the MOU was reviewed by APS and ACPD. To quote Dr. Allen from APS, "No substantial changes were made." Dr Allen explained that they review every reported case and have taken appropriate measures for each one, including replacing one of the SROs. These actions and explanations would lead one to believe that we are headed in the right direction. However, we need to see the data and the evaluation criteria for how we are measuring the results before we can come to that conclusion.

In summary, APS is changing its approach but I would like to see it move faster, evolve quicker, and be more transparent than what is currently happening.

**Sims:** This is an issue I have been tackling for over a decade. One of the major issues APS has with discipline is principals being afraid to report "bad news". A young man I mentor was being severely bullied at school, and at times, accosted by a group of older boys. The principal and his team purposely did not report these incidents to APS, and I believe he chose this action to cover his discipline numbers. My point is that we cannot fix a problem if we do not truly know the problem. Being that I am Black and was once a student, I was improperly disciplined at times, but there were times when I was properly

disciplined. We all must work together to figure out what proper discipline looks like in Arlington and in our nation.

**Walker:** Absolutely. The Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) have historical data on the proportionate number of students with disabilities and minority students who are disciplined as compared to their nondisable and white and asian counterparts. There are many factors that need to change with regards to school discipline: 1. Early identification and intervention for students with disabilities; 2. Requiring bias (implicit and explicit) training for staff and School Resource Officers (SROs); 3. Implementing social and emotional learning and trauma informed teaching; 4. Requiring cultural sensitivity training; 5. Providing more mental health professionals in our schools - counselors, psychologists; and social workers; 6. Having a robust and well implemented anti bullying policy; and 7. Full implementation of restorative practices. All of these factors will reduce anti-social behavior and bias, and the need, desire, and disproportionality of discipline will significantly decline. The state has already taken a critically important step in decriminalizing disorderly conduct. House Bill HB256 Disorderly conduct; students. "Provides that an elementary or secondary school student is not guilty of disorderly conduct in a public place if the disorderly conduct occurred on the property of an elementary or secondary school, on a school bus, or at any activity conducted or sponsored by any elementary or secondary school." Educating our school administrators and SROs about the passage of this bill is paramount.

## **12. Should students with disabilities be treated any differently than non-disabled students in a disciplinary context? Why or why not?**

**Diaz-Torres:** This depends on whether the disciplinary incident is related to the child's disability. I taught in a co-taught classroom, where about half of my students had IEPs. In my experience, more than half of the discipline issues my students with disabilities faced related to their diagnoses and did not merit punitive escalation. Whether they were unable to process matters calmly, or were anxious from previous interactions, or were simply having a bad day - these students navigated normal issues while differently burdened. Allowing some grace, depending on the particular incident or context, benefits all students involved.

**Krieger:** The court system has sentencing *guidelines* because it does not make sense to apply a one-size fits all approach to every situation and the schools should not apply a one-size fits all approach to every student. Every child is different and must be educated and disciplined according to their own unique physical, mental and emotional needs. It is the duty of the school system to aid students whose misbehavior is caused by a disability, which can include learning and thinking differences.

The procedural safeguards of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act were designed to assure that students with disabilities are not arbitrarily removed from their parent-approved program without consent and were guaranteed a free and appropriate public education within the least restrictive environment. The discipline should be

student-appropriate. If a student acts in a manner that requires discipline, whether the student has a disability or not, the school should discipline appropriately based on the student. In fact, some would say that, by not addressing dangerous behaviors, the student, regardless of whether the student has special needs is not receiving an "appropriate" education. APS must end situations where SWD are disciplined more severely because of the disability when compared to students without disabilities. What SWD need, and what APS should deliver, are services meant to change disruptive behavior and to make sure that whatever discipline is used works in preventing a reoccurrence of that behavior. In essence- restorative justice.

**Munnell:** Each student needs to be dealt with as an individual. Policy needs to be uniform, but attention needs to be paid to each child - may they didn't breakfast, maybe their parents had a fight at or a job has been lost - obviously this goes to the trauma informed strategies and restorative justice. You need to deal with where those children are. A framework needs to be established. Staff members need to be thoughtful about their decisions which can be explained (what I did and why I did it) within the framework.

With the Second Chance and the 45 Day programs APS has structures in place. As with Langston - part of the intervention of initial meeting kids have to have IEPs entrance and exit meeting to determine what is the best placement for the kid.

**Priddy:** Yes, it is the law that their disability must be taken into account considering an incident and subsequent discipline. There needs to be an understanding of the disability that the student has before assessing discipline.

**Sims:** It depends on the disability. Children should not be disciplined (in the negative sense) if their disability is listed in their IEP. At the same time, our role as adults is to teach children how to live and function in society, so we must ensure that we are not afraid to correct students with disabilities when we see them do wrong.

**Walker:** Absolutely. APS both equity and APS policy requires it. APS policy on discipline, J-7.4, provides:

"Disciplinary Actions for Identified Students with Disabilities

Disciplinary action taken with an identified student with a disability shall be administered within the context of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), or Section 504 Plan, taking into account the unique needs of the student."

The administrator imposing discipline should ensure that the student's conduct is not a manifestation of or result of their disability before deciding to take action. Furthermore, J-7.4 s also provides that "discipline shall be imposed in a way that is proportional to the conduct that gives rise to the need for that discipline."

## **SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

*The AMHD&A considers youth risk data to be highly relevant to the likelihood that a student will require mental health or substance use treatment.*

*Arlington County has no treatment facility within the county for either mental health or substance use for juveniles who need a more intensive treatment than outpatient.*

*The most recent reported Arlington Youth Risk Behavior Survey is from 2017. As compared to 2013, 2017 results show an increase in the percentage of APS students feeling sad or hopeless for 2+ weeks in the past year (rising from 29% to 37% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders) and an increase in the percentage of those reporting having been victims of bullying in the past year. Of those who reported bullying, 25% reported being bullied because of their race in 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. Self-harm was included for the first time in the 2017 survey, which showed that 12% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 13% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 15% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 17% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders had engaged in self-harm. In the category of sexual violence which is also new, 54% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported unwanted sexual contact at school during school hours. Further, approximately 50% of females across grades report being sexually harassed at school. Overall, those reporting ever using marijuana is down and those reporting ever using alcohol in middle school is up.*

### **13. What are your thoughts on the overall youth risk trends of APS students?**

**Diaz-Torres:** While APS might provide more resources than other school districts, our students face difficult challenges just like their peers across the country. The strife is only exacerbated by the current crisis. Students who found a respite from other challenges while in school are likely to feel even more isolated now that they are at home. We must prepare ourselves to handle a mental health crisis this fall and beyond by increasing the number of trained staff, increasing awareness of existing resources, and tapping into partners at the county and state level for support.

**Krieger:** I am extremely concerned. Our students are overworked and are struggling to cope with the pressures of a highly competitive education system and everyday social pressures. Middle school and high school should be a time to develop social skills and long-lasting relationships with other students while still having fun as a teenager. Unfortunately, when you look at the data from the 2019 Community Report on the Status of Children, Young, and Families produced by the Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families, the reality is that students are cracking and are unable to adequately cope with mounting pressures and unrealistic expectations:

- Fewer than 1 in 3 teens feel that they can talk to their parent or caregiver about difficult topics;
- 11% of middle school students do not identify an adult they would go to if they were upset;
- Approximately 23% to 37% of high school students (variation based on race) experienced feelings of hopelessness or sadness for 2 or more weeks in a row;

- 46% of female high school students experienced sexual harassment on school property;
- More middle school boys (85%) and girls (88%) have passed an aerobic fitness test than high school boys (71%) and girls (68%); and
- Students of color get significantly less exercise per week than white students in middle school and high school.

In 2018-19 APS had 1 school social worker for 959 students and 1 school psychologist for 885 students when the guidelines recommend a 250:1 ratio. We need to make sure schools are properly staffed with social workers, psychologists, and counselors based on the school's need and not just X number of staff per school based on school size. In addition, we need other adults and staff such as nurses, teachers, substance abuse counselors, administrators, parents, coaches, extended day staff, and front office staff to play a key role in making connections with our youth. But, we also need to ensure that programs like Girls' Outreach are maintained and expanded.

**Munnell:** Worrisome - Children are not dealing well with the digital world. The loss of civility with each and the risk taking all speak to the difficulties children face growing up.

We are better at reporting data than we used to be. I think the risks have been with us always, we just see it more clearly. Risky behavior is inherent in the developing adolescent. The extent of experimentation has more to do with the child's family and their own personality than with any other factor. We don't know the circumstances of each child which is why I support the School Board's vision that each child has at least one adult in their school whom they can trust.

**Priddy:** The trends listed above are a main reason why one of the initiatives this year in the School Board Action Plan (which aligns with the Strategic Plan) was to have all students identify a school-based adult who they can trust. Relating this to my role as the PTA President at Thomas Jefferson, I received updates in my meetings with the Principal, which showed the school's progress on this initiative and their action items to achieve this goal. Other programs like Sources of Strength and Second Step are paths we can take to help students. Additionally, mental health first-aid should be mandatory for teachers.

**Sims:** There is always work to do in this arena, which is one of the reasons why I have volunteered much of my time and energy in Green Valley. It is why we on the Green Valley civic association work with the community and Drew in planning events and working with the county in providing resources and activities for our kids so that they can have positive options.

**Walker:** I think more APS students are feeling stress and anxiety. I met with a relatively large group of Yorktown Young Democrats who expressed that they and their peers feel a lot of pressure and anxiety to pursue advanced placement classes, and follow a specific high-achieving track for college acceptance. I think this upward trend of stress and anxiety is naturally leading to higher instances of alcohol and drug

abuse. Separately, according to the most recent APCYF survey, 53% of our LGBTQIA students reported feeling depressive symptoms as compared to 30% of their peers.

**14. What changes would you make to improve access to mental health treatment and substance use treatment in Arlington through APS or county services?**

**Diaz-Torres:** We must work with our partners on the County Board and in the mental health community to create a coherent system of services to address student needs at every level. These services must be accessible to all students. At present, services are haphazard and poorly configured. Arlingtonians deserve to feel confident about the resources available to address their child's needs in a timely, action-oriented manner. An aligned and coherent system requires persistent funding and coordination from both the County and the School Boards.

**Krieger:** Arlington County has a Substance Abuse Program and Psychological Services as part of the Courts and Judicial Services, but these programs are not enough. The first step is to ensure we have data and indicators or benchmarks for all our programs, not just some of them, to compare the data against our indicators to know if we're actually solving problems the programs are designed to correct. Fortunately, APS has introduced new initiatives and interventions with youth to help prevent suicide and ensure that youth who need mental health services can receive them. It will be important to monitor the impact of these programs on youth of color, however. For example, as noted in the APCYF 2019 Community Report, Hispanic youth reported higher incidents of depression and attempted suicide in 2017. The number of youth who said they received the help they needed for depression was so low for Black and Asian youth that a percentage could not be reported for fear of identifying the actual individuals.

Adult supports are one of the most vital influences in mitigating negative experiences in the life of a young person. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including child abuse and household problems, will continue to occur, unfortunately, and will leave exposed children to increased risks of poor health and mental well-being. But continuous trusted adult validation in childhood imparts life-course resilience against ACEs. It is our job as a community to create this type of resiliency for all of Arlington's children, particularly the most vulnerable.

**Munnell:** A continuum of services with point people in each school working together with the county, for example the Second Chance program. Referrals should be seamless so that the sharing of information can happen between county schools. This waxes and wanes because there is not always a consistent structure between DHS and APS.

So I recommend consistency and standardization for a formal structure for communication and collaboration that is not dependent on specific individuals.



Collaboration is critical; it can't just fall on the school or the county mental health services - too many kids will fall through the cracks without collaboration.

**Priddy:** The School Board has made a concerted effort to increase the number of Counselors, Psychologists, and Social Workers and Substance Abuse Counselors in APS. I support that effort and will continue to push to hire more staff that will help with the behavioral and mental health of the students.

**Sims:** DHS needs to implement an outreach program where the staff physically leaves their offices and goes to where the people are. Additionally, the county and APS must form official partnerships with area medical services and schools to assist in filling our mental health and substance treatment voids. The latter I could implement as a school board member.

**Walker:** We need to remove the stigma of mental health and substance abuse treatment to "normalize" the experience, so that students will normalize their request for help. The high school students that I heard from during my student town hall report that many of their peers are afraid to disclose that they need help, and once disclosed, the peer who received the disclosure did not know what to do or who to go to help their friend. Therefore, we need an education campaign in our schools, prioritizing middle and high schools, but also elementary schools, of clear steps to take when a student themselves or a friend needs mental and/or substance abuse help; what number to call, who to talk to; what steps to take. In addition, we need to work with our legislatures to decriminalize addiction, and work with our Commonwealth Attorney to identify more diversion programs. Arlington county should fund county-based mental health and substance abuse treatments to ensure we are able to help more students. We need to strengthen confidentiality assurances and assure our youth that their admissions of needing help will not hurt them during their college application process and employment prospects. That alone is a huge deterrent for students to seek help. Seeking help should be emphasised as a strength, so APS needs to do a better job of recognizing character traits in our students like self reflection and self efficacy.