



Alexandria
LIVING MAGAZINE
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Voter's Guide: Alexandria School Board 2018

Voters in the City of Alexandria will see school board candidates on their ballots this fall for the first time in three years.

As Alexandria City Public Schools officials grapple with capacity challenges, work toward re-envisioning the high school experience and educate thousands of local children and teenagers, those who lead the school board have a lot on their plate.

The Alexandria City Public Schools Board has nine members who are elected by voters. Several new people are running for the School Board this year. Three School Board members represent each zone (A, B and C). The voting district map on page 2 of this document shows the boundary lines for each school board zone.

SCHOOL BOARD MISSION AND PURPOSE

According to ACPS, the board “adopts policy for the daily operation of schools and sees that school laws are properly explained, enforced and observed. The City is divided into three voting districts, and three Board Members are elected from each district. Each member serves a three-year term. The School Board Chair receives \$17,000 and Board Members receive \$15,000 per year.”

The school board’s mission is to “ensure that ALL students reach their highest academic potential, and that they are prepared for citizenship, higher education and the workforce. To accomplish this goal, we will make policy, budget and leadership decisions that are aligned with our Vision and Strategic Plan; and we will communicate with and involve stakeholders actively and transparently.

Alexandria Voting Districts

Map Produced: 5/28/2015

Legend

- ★ Polling Place
- ▭ Precincts
- Virginia Senate Boundary
- Virginia House Boundary
- A B C School Board Districts

School District A

| ID | Polling Place | Address | House | Senate |
|-----|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------|--------|
| 101 | Ladrey Senior Building | 300 Wythe Street | 45 | 30 |
| 102 | City Hall | 301 King Street | 45 | 30 |
| 103 | Lyles Crouch School | 530 S. Saint Asaph Street | 45 | 30 |
| 104 | Durant Center | 1805 Cameron Street | 45 | 30 |
| 105 | Lee Center | 1108 Jefferson Street | 45 | 30 |
| 106 | Cora Kelly Center | 25 W. Reed Avenue | 45 | 30 |
| 107 | Mt. Vernon Center | 2701 Commonwealth Avenue | 45 | 30 |
| 108 | George Washington School | 1005 Mt Vernon Avenue | 45 | 30 |
| 109 | Fire Department Headquarters | 900 Second Street | 45 | 30 |
| 110 | Charles Houston Center | 901 Wythe Street | 45 | 30 |

School District B

| ID | Polling Place | Address | House | Senate |
|-----|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------|--------|
| 201 | Maury School | 600 Russell Road | 45 | 30 |
| 202 | George Mason School | 2601 Cameron Mills Road | 45 | 30 |
| 203 | Agudas Achim Congregation | 2908 Valley Drive | 45 | 30 |
| 204 | Blessed Sacrament Church | 1427 W. Braddock Road | 45 | 30 |
| 205 | *Douglas MacArthur School | 1101 Janneys Lane | 46 | 30 |
| 206 | Chinquapin Park Rec. Center | 3210 King Street | 46 | 30 |
| 207 | Temple Beth El Synagogue | 3830 Seminary Road | 46 | 39 |
| 208 | NOVA Arts Center | 3001 N. Beauford Street | 46 | 30 |
| 209 | James K. Polk School | 5000 Polk Avenue | 46 | 39 |
| 210 | Hermitage | 5000 Fairbanks Avenue | 46 | 35 |

School District C

| ID | Polling Place | Address | House | Senate |
|-----|------------------------|---------------------------|-------|--------|
| 302 | Patrick Henry Center | 4625 Taney Avenue | 46 | 39 |
| 303 | Beatley Library | 5005 Duke Street | 46 | 39 |
| 304 | *Tucker School | 435 Ferdinand Day Drive | 46 | 39 |
| 305 | John Adams School | 5651 Rayburn Avenue | 46 | 35 |
| 306 | *William Ramsay Center | 5650 Sanger Avenue | 46 | 35 |
| 307 | South Port Apts | 6112 Edsall Road | 46 | 35 |
| 308 | Cameron Station | 200 Cameron Station Blvd. | 46 | 39 |

*Polling place outside of precinct



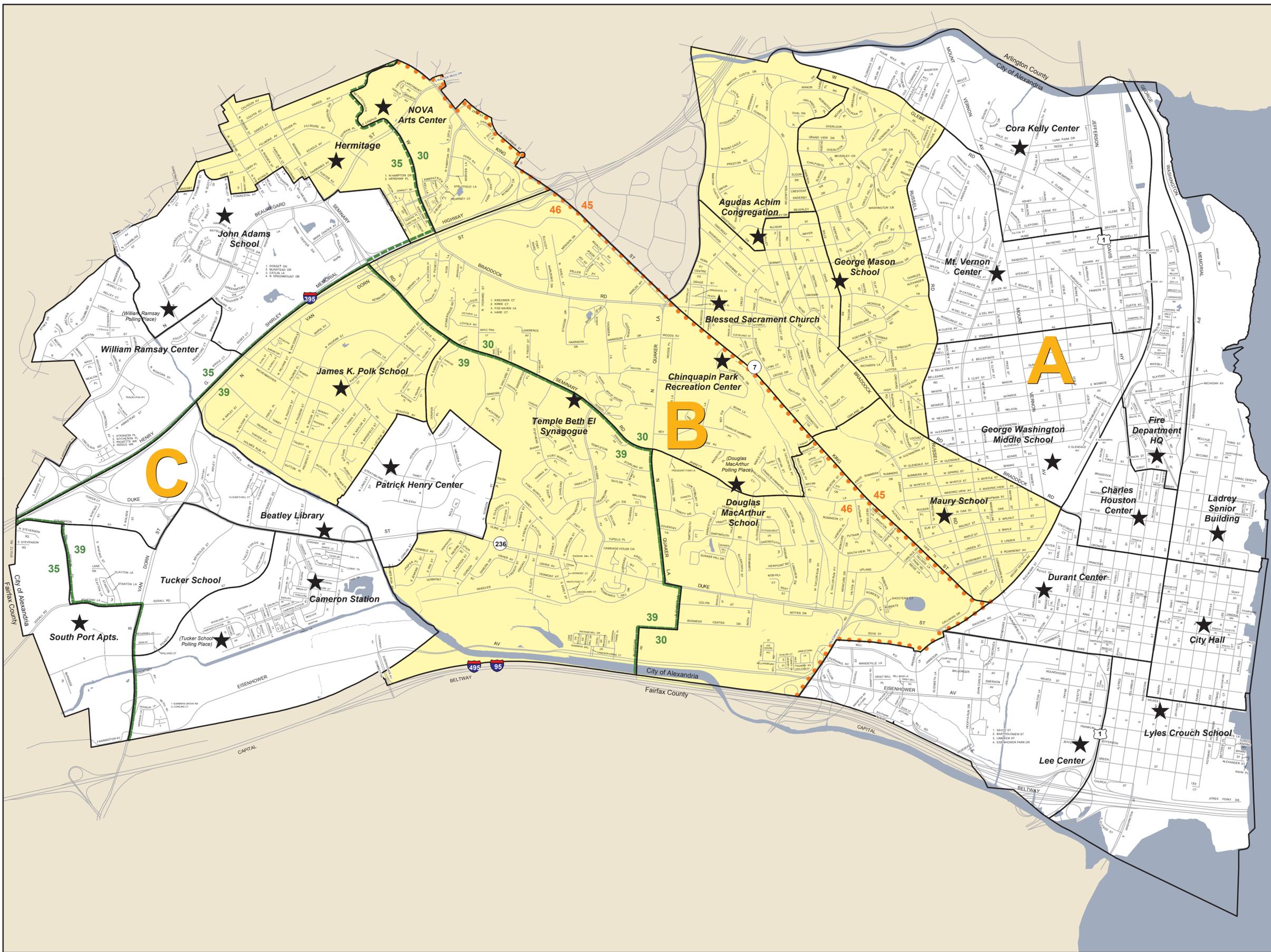
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This map was produced by the GIS Division of the ITS Department, City of Alexandria, VA

Data Resources:
 Voting Precincts and Polling Places were provided by the Voter Registration Office, City of Alexandria, VA. Virginia State House and Senate Districts are based on HB5005 Ch. 1, enacted on 4/29/11.

Mapping Standards:
 Coordinate System - NAD83 State Plane Virginia North
 Projection - Lambert Conformal Conic
 Map Units - Feet

The maps provided hereunder are provided "as is" and the City expressly disclaims all warranties, UCC and otherwise, express or implied, including warranties as to accuracy of the maps and merchantability and fitness for a particular purpose, and further expressly disclaims responsibility for all incidental, consequential or special damages arising out of or in connection with the use or performance of the maps.



2018 CANDIDATES

The following people are on the ballot as candidates for ACPS Board this fall (in alphabetical order). Those with a * are current School Board members:

District A

William (Bill) Campbell*
Jacinta Greene
W. Christopher (Chris) Harris
Michelle Rief
Marc Solomon
Chris Suarez

District B

Cynthia (Cindy) Anderson*
Jewelyn Cosgrove
Margaret Lorber*
Veronica Nolan*
Abigail Wacek

District C

Meagan Alderton
Ramee Gentry*
John Lennon
Dianara Saget
Heather Thornton

Alexandria Living Magazine sent questions to 16 all people registered as a candidate for the Alexandria City School Board.

Each candidate received the same questions and all were asked to keep their answers brief. Here are the questions:

1. What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?
2. What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?
3. When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?
4. What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?
5. Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?
6. What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?
7. What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city to entice them here?
8. What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

Note: Fairfax County Public Schools are not electing board members this year. The last election was in 2015 (with a special election for a vacant seat in 2017). The next round of Fairfax County School Board elections will be in 2019.

Here are the candidates' answers in the order that Alexandria Living Magazine received them by District. These answers have not been edited.

DISTRICT A

Jacinta Greene — Candidate in District A

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Diverse
Vibrant
Dedicated

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

After leaving successful career in Corporate America, I followed a dream by putting together and implementing a plan to start a new career and my own business. I am very proud and thankful to have achieved success through a vision, hard work and determination.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

In 10 years I envision ACPS providing ALL children with access to a high quality education, retaining a pool of diverse and highly qualified teachers, having adequate and appropriate facilities to learn and succeed and continuing to create and maintain partnerships between schools, community, and families to ensure success and opportunities for our children in Alexandria.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

During my childhood schooling I personally enjoyed creating new friendships, being taught by dynamic and amazing teachers that cared, valued and wanted the very best for me. I keep in touch with many of my childhood teachers to this day and truly thank them for providing me with a public education that led to my success as an adult.

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

Mr. David Savino, a World History teacher at Hermitage High School in Richmond, VA is my most influential teacher. I was blessed to have Mr. Savino as a young, motivated, and determined ninth grader who had a love for learning! Mr. Savino utilized interactive and real-life methods in his teaching that captivated each of his students. We were engaged from the first word spoken until the bell rang at the end of class. We did not read from the textbook or were we handed a piece of paper to learn the lesson. Each student was an active participant in every lesson that Mr. Savino taught. He inspired us to learn, to be an active part of our community and above all else, be the BEST that we could be. Teachers like this change the world and I hope that everyone has/had a Mr. Savino in their life. I have kept in touch with Mr. Savino since high school and he calls me his favorite student of all time!

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

As a student I was very active in the music program as a member of the concert band, symphonic band, and served as the drum major of the marching band. I played the flute as my primary instrument sitting

first chair and section leader. Research has shown that music in public schools has been found to facilitate the learning of other subjects and enhances skills that children will use in other areas.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

Alexandria City Public Schools has a very diverse student population. Students represent more than 118 countries and speak 120 different languages. Each child will have an opportunity to grow in a community that represents a global world, providing them with different issues, perspectives, knowledge, and ideas. In addition, each child will grow in an environment more accepting of differences and being tolerant and respectful of different points of view.

In addition, Alexandria City Public Schools provides students with the option of enrolling in a dual language program. This is a unique opportunity to be immersed in another language by integrating literacy and academic content knowledge in both languages. This will give our students an advantage by ensuring the students are more culturally aware and makes them more competitive in the future.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

I strongly believe that all children regardless of race, gender, or economic background must have access to a quality education. I have seen first-hand the disparities that still exist in our schools. While, Alexandria has come a long way, we still have the highest gap between white and Latino student pass rates on both science and writing tests at 38 percent.

The 2018 Standards of Learning tests show that Alexandria had one of the three lowest pass rates in the region on the state-run standardized tests. I will continue to work hard on addressing disparities in our schools by ensuring that all children are coming to school ready and prepared to learn.

We need to address overcrowding in our schools, hire the best teachers, and ensure that we are collaborating with parents and businesses in the community. These are three ways that I feel could address the achievement gap.

- Children need to have a safe and adequate learning environment. Overcrowding in Alexandria schools is an issue that we will need to continue to address now and in the future.
- We must ensure that we are hiring the best qualified teachers in Alexandria. This can only be done by ensuring we are being competitive in pay compared to other regions. Teachers must also continue to grow in their careers by having access to professional training.
- Finally, I will continue to prioritize partnerships with businesses and parents. In order for children to be successful we must ensure that parents are involved in the education of their children. Businesses in the community also play an important role in order for our children to be prepared to meet the demands of a global workforce.

Marc Solomon — Candidate in District A

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Underfunded, striving, diverse.

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

In the aftermath of the Parkland shootings, I led the creation of a security task force for Hopkins House pre-school academies to audit and recommend improvements to keep our young scholars safe from gun violence.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

I see safer, world-class schools with enough seats for all kids and programs that better enable our graduates to compete in the 21st century. I see my son thriving with a challenging curriculum in one of the top school districts in the country.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

I absolutely loved reading and learning about other cultures and history. My elementary school had a wonderful collection of books about myths and stories from around the world, which I tore through. I was also the kid that read his history and social studies text book cover to cover the first day we got them! This love of diversity and world culture eventually led me to explore the globe with the Department of State.

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

My parents always encouraged me to succeed in school as a pathway to a better life. Despite having this strong parental backing, we were still very limited in our budget and our horizons. My high school guidance counselor Mr. Kenny encouraged me to aim high and apply to Cornell University, opening up a whole new world to a blue-collar kid from Buffalo.

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

My high school Spanish teacher and faculty advisor of our student newspaper Marcus Deveso taught me how to create effective ledes, ask the right questions, and write thought-provoking pieces. I have used the skills I learned writing and editing our newspaper innumerable times in my professional career.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

Your children will have world-class opportunities and learn within a diverse community that will prepare them to be global citizens. If I am fortunate enough to win in November and I am successful in working with City Council and other School Board members, they will also have free, high quality pre-K starting at age 3.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

We need to do more to support and value working families in our city. That means we need to pay hardworking teachers what they deserve and finally fund universal pre-K for all children so that parents don't have to choose between a mortgage or early childhood education. That means increasing our career and technical education programs so that every kid graduates ready for college or the workforce. These are the working family friendly policies that I will work for on school board to make sure every kid gets a world-class education.

Michelle Rief — Candidate in District A

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Growing, Diverse, and Dynamic.

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

I was the first person in my family to go to college and went on to earn a PhD. I was a professor at the City University of New York (CUNY) before moving to Alexandria twelve years ago and becoming a mother to three ACPS students ages 11, 7 and 5. I currently work as an adjunct professor teaching U.S. history at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA).

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

In ten years, I envision ACPS having a clear strategy for how to meet the needs of our diverse and growing student population. We will have stable leadership at our schools and well-maintained buildings with plenty of classroom space. Every student will develop a strong foundation of knowledge and the ability to think critically. ACPS graduates will be well-advised about prospective college and career paths and see a future for themselves that is full of possibilities.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

During my childhood schooling I enjoyed project-based assignments where I got to use my creativity. One example that comes to mind is from my AP English class. My teacher was a big fan of *The New Yorker* and had us read book reviews and other excerpts from the magazine in class. We then had to write reviews for books that we read and design our own version of the magazine.

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

The most influential teacher I had in high school was my tenth-grade biology teacher, Coach Landingham. I was also a member of my high school swim team and he was my coach for three years. The team practiced every morning before school from 5:30-6:30 a.m., which taught me discipline and hard work. What made Coach Landingham so influential is that I knew he really cared about me and always wanted me to do my very best.

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

In middle school I joined the speech and drama club and began participating in oratory competitions. This experience improved my public speaking skills and boosted my confidence. It also taught me how to initiate conversations with new people that I meet, share my perspective and listen to other points of view.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city to entice them here?

Alexandria is a vibrant, diverse community with many young families and family-friendly activities. We have historical museums, many public parks and playgrounds, a terrific public library system, and a thriving arts community. If you would like to learn more about our schools, visit one and talk to the parents of current ACPS students.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

Alexandria has a larger percentage of English Learners (EL) and students receiving Free and Reduced Price Meals (FARM) than our neighboring districts. A top priority for me is to ensure that all ACPS students have equitable access to educational opportunities and receive the support they need to be successful. I want every student to know that they are unique, capable and deserving of a great education!

W. Christopher (Chris) Harris — Candidate in District A

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

The three words I would use to describe ACPS are diverse, progressive, and challenged.

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

I am most proud that I was able to earn my college degree while being a single dad and caring for an ill parent. Through those challenges I was able to build a successful career and business which would not have been possible by quitting. It was very important to give my children an example of perseverance to guide them through life. Everything does not always go according to plans. In order to succeed it is often necessary to fight through adversity.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

In ten years I see ACPS having the financial stability to properly address the increasing capacity issues in our schools, the opportunity gap that provide resources to all students to maintain equitable practice throughout the school system, and having the resources to properly hire, train, and retain the best educators in the country.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

I enjoyed being a kid. My mother told me I had two jobs, go to class and get good grades. Even in the midst of those expectations, I was never afraid to make a mistake in school. My teachers understood that they were a part of life. Any bumps in the road were met with constructive criticism that were turned into teachable moments. Those experiences helped me progress through life without a fear of failure.

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

My track coach Aly Khan Johnson was the most influential person during my school years. Not having a father in the home I often lacked discipline and maturity. Coach Johnson had a strong personality that demanded respect. He took the time to explain the importance of education and how it was the foundation of my future. Simply knowing that someone outside of my family was concerned with my success or failure played an instrumental role during the remainder of my educational career.

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

Athletics was most important to me as a student. I enjoyed going to practice everyday to improve my skills for competition. After long days of learning it was a much needed release to simply join friends and classmates in an atmosphere of sports and school spirit.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

Being a lifelong resident of Alexandria I have been directly involved in ACPS as a student, mentor, and parent. I would tell new families that Alexandria is a unique city. We are a growing locality with a small town feel that embraces diversity and is welcoming to kids of all ages. The greatness of our city comes from those who live here and the melting pot of backgrounds, demographics, and cultures that makes up our community.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

I would like to improve transparency. To meet the challenges of ACPS it is my strong belief that there should be a culture of sharing information in regard to the successes and failures of teaching and learning. Educating our children is a collaborative effort that can only be productive when all parties are informed and have a voice. Elected officials serve the community. Therefore, openness and integrity should not be a option. It should be mandatory.

William (Bill) Campbell — Candidate in District A and current School Board member

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Poised for improvement.

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

As I suspect would be the answer from most parents, one's children instantly comes to mind when considering major life accomplishments. My daughter Janay is twenty-six years old, a college graduate and a Pre-K teacher at Hopkins House in Alexandria. My middle child Cameron graduated from T.C. Williams and is a freshman at Old Dominion University. We became the legal guardians of Cameron's closest Kindergarten friend, Jaquan when he was six years old and he's now eighteen and a senior at T.C. Williams. Parenting coupled with our nearly thirty-five-year marriage have been our most major life accomplishments thus far!

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

A high school with over five thousand diverse, thriving and engaged students! High school students in various state-of-the-art facilities to include multiple learning environments and multi-use fields and

physical activity areas. Several new elementary schools and all elementary schools modernized to meet the newly developed education specifications for ideal twenty-first century learning spaces. Several middle school offerings to include three standard schools and several Pre-K-8 alternatives. Highly qualified teachers and support personnel who are truly satisfied with their compensation; have super exciting and engaged classrooms and all students are achieving at and beyond all required state and federal metrics.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

In the seventh grade, I had a small part in "Pippin". I was a guard and sang in the final song. I was and remain a terrible singer but somehow, I managed to find the courage to participate in the play and I truly enjoyed it and remember it fondly. As a coincidence, my middle school was turned into condominiums this summer and I helped my favorite aunt move in. I was able to go into the old auditorium, go on stage and I sang some of the tune in front of my wife! That is a vivid, forty-five-year-old memory!

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

My high school guidance counselor was easily my most influential school official. As I finished the ACT and SAT tests, he reviewed them and sat me down to discuss possible college majors. I was leaning heavily toward being a teacher and/or social worker, but he convinced me to consider engineering. I'm certain I would not otherwise had thought that I could become an engineer if he had not had high expectations for me and discussed college majors as he did. I have an undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering and I am forever grateful to Mr. Hawkins.

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

I participated in several varsity sports including football, basketball, track and baseball. I went to West Virginia University on a track scholarship. My strongest and longest friendships and many of my most memorable experiences were related to my many extracurricular activities in high school and college. That is the primary reason why I am a staunch advocate for trying to engage as many of our students as possible in sports and other after-school clubs and activities. The more engaged a student is with school-related and spirit generating activities, the more likely that they will be academically and emotionally successful.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

Alexandria, as a richly historic seaport practically sells itself (to families that can afford it!) As it relates to schools, I would tell families to do more homework than reading the blogs and other things that you find on the internet! Speak with our parents and students. Go into our schools and speak with our Principals, teachers and other staff personnel. Also talk with our elected officials. If an ethnically-diverse, culturally-rich district with multiple elementary and middle-school offerings and the most popular high school in the country is what you are seeking, then Alexandria is the place for your family!

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

We truly need to put a laser focus on improving the academic and life outcomes for more of our students with disabilities, our English-language learners and our free and reduced lunch population (which nearly all are students of color!) ACPS has incredible offerings in terms of Honors, Advanced

Placement and College Dual Enrollment classes as well as unbelievable elective course offerings. We need to better prepare more students early in their elementary schooling so that they can access all the great offerings that we have as our students matriculate through middle and high school.

Chris Suarez — Candidate in District A

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Diverse, Promising, Reflective

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

My biggest life accomplishment has been marrying my wife Sophia and raising our two year old son, Gabriel. I am also proud to have been a sixth grade teacher, a co-founder of an educational nonprofit devoted to strengthening diverse and inclusive schools, and a lawyer who has represented students with special needs and has advocated for school finance equity.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

I envision ACPS as being a school division that will meet all kids where they are regardless of their zip codes, special needs, or special talents, and will provide all students with meaningful opportunities to succeed. ACPS schools will be known as being diverse, equitable and inclusive and will be recognized for their ability to prepare all kids to be democratic citizens who will function well in a 21st century, globalizing economy. ACPS will be recognized as a leader that has innovative programs that prepare students for a wide range of career possibilities, whether those careers require graduate school, four year college, or vocational school. ACPS will have the capacity, infrastructure, and educational resources that will allow all kids to prepare to be leaders in their chosen fields.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

I personally enjoyed learning from peers who came from a wide range of races, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and I also appreciated having the opportunity to take courses in critical thinking, logic, and computer science from an early age.

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

There are too many teachers to name who were influential in my life, but my Fourth Grade teacher, Mrs. Nicholus, stands out because she was the teacher whose “tough love” allowed me to focus better academically and stop talking too much in class! She made me appreciate the importance of high expectations and setting lofty goals, and this set me on a track that helped me to succeed in my future classes and in life.

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

The extracurriculars that were most important to me were baseball and the debate team. I've been a lifelong baseball fan and, while academics are important, staying active physically has always been important to me. The debate team was an incredible experience because it taught me that urban public school students can have a meaningful voice in public policy and civic affairs; debate taught me that the meaningful exchange of ideas and policy perspectives are vital to a functioning democracy. I

would like all ACPS students to graduate having the confidence that they can engage in their communities to effect change.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

I would say to those families that Alexandria is a rich and vibrant community that has a wide range of school options that can provide their children with opportunities to succeed. The school division will expose their children to students of many backgrounds, preparing them to thrive in our increasingly diverse society. And I would add that this is an exciting time to move here because we have just hired a new superintendent who is from Alexandria and excited to be here for the long-term to improve our schools. Alexandria provides families with a unique opportunity to experience urban living with a small-town community feel, and is a great place to raise a family.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

If elected, I would address a number of concerns, but I would like to proactively focus on ensuring that our schools address all students' needs. To that end, I will work hard to make sure that ACPS recruits, retains, and provides support for our teachers, principals, and administrators so that they are best prepared to fight for meaningful educational opportunities for all students - whether those students have special needs, special talents, or fall somewhere in-between. Along with providing resources to our teachers, we must ensure that our students have access to safe buildings that are equipped with the resources they need to be competitive in a 21st century economy, including the needed technology, lab equipment, musical instruments, and other tools our students will need to succeed and thrive.

DISTRICT B

Margaret Lorber — Candidate in District B and current School Board member

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Multi-cultural; inclusive; striving.

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

I played a significant role in the nation-wide expansion of the school breakfast program.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

I see a school system with capacity to meet our needs, and based on smaller elementary and middle schools than we have now. I see a multi-campus high school that provides increased opportunities for career training and specialty concentrations such as STEM, Music, Art, World Language, History, and other areas. I see greatly reduced suspension and expulsion of students due to full implementation of restorative discipline practices in all of our schools. I see a vast reduction in the achievement gap as a result of commitments to meet all our students' needs. I see pre-K programs for all children.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

Creativity was heavily encouraged at my high school. I especially liked my chemistry class where the teacher let us decide how we would run an experiment, even if it turned out to be a failure. We learned from our mistakes. And we laughed a lot!

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

My 5th grade teacher, Miss Graham, had a huge influence on me. She was strict and had high expectations and I hated her for a few months until I started being able to meet those expectations. Then she became my favorite teacher and I was lucky enough to have her again for 6th grade. She taught me the importance of self-discipline and good study habits.

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

I was a cheerleader and loved it. Piano was the second most important.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

Alexandria is a city with a richly diverse population that exposes children to abundant cultural and academic offerings while helping acquire the social and emotional skills of living in a multi-cultural society. Our high school reflects these strengths, with its varied academic programs, unique extra-curricular offerings, and commitment to welcoming and encouraging students who come from all over the world. Our students have enormous support from the entire Alexandria community, reflected in entities ranging from the Alexandria Scholarship Fund to the Alexandria Tutoring Consortium, and in the large number of graduates who become the first in their families to attend college. Our elementary schools are very community-oriented and encourage parent involvement. In contrast to some other

communities, our elementary schools have continued to emphasize music and art education along with reading, mathematics, science and social studies. Physical activity is also emphasized with biking and swimming programs being phased in at all of our schools.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

We need to advance equity in our school system. I would like every student and every family, whatever their background and needs, to feel respected and supported in our schools, and to benefit from high-quality educational programs tailored to those needs. To promote equity, we also need to end the disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of minority students and students with disabilities. Full implementation of restorative justice practices in all of our schools can increase student achievement by reducing unnecessary suspensions and expulsions. These practices teach students mediation and negotiation skills, contribute to a more positive school environment and “shift the focus of discipline from punishment to learning and from the individual to the community.”

Abigail (Abby) Wacek — Candidate in District B

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Capable of greatness.

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

In 2014 my husband and I bought our first house, here, in Alexandria. I have always loved Alexandria and have known that this was where I wanted to be. Walking into our house for the first time was a moment I will never forget.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

I envision a school district where all Alexandrians want to send their children. I envision a school district where students have a choice in their route to success - either through robust vocational programs from which they can enter the workforce with valuable skills, or on their way to the top tier colleges and universities of their choice.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

Field trips. We are lucky to live in an area where we can visit George Washington's home, Lincoln's Cottage, and the Smithsonian without traveling more than a few minutes. I was fortunate that I was able to visit these places, and I would like ACPS to be a school district that fully takes advantage of these amazing resources.

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

My eighth grade English teacher, Ms. Frazier, because she taught me how to be a writer. She instilled in her students a love for the written word and for American literature. I still have my heavily annotated copy of *The Great Gatsby* at home, which she went through with us line by line to make sure that we understood all of Fitzgerald's references and hidden meanings. A whole lesson just on the importance of the color of Jay Gatsby's shirts! She was, and I am sure remains, a wonderful teacher.

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

Theater. I participated in theater, on stage, back stage, and as a “Cappie” critic, throughout high school. Theater teaches us that people from all sorts of backgrounds can come together to create something amazing. Some of my best memories from high school involve the theater department — whether building set pieces, hanging lights, or waiting to see what pranks arose on joke night.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

I often tell folks that I meet that Alexandria is a wonderful place to raise a child. I would know. I went to elementary, middle, and high school here, and returned here directly after college. From elementary school trips to Winkler Botanical Preserve to running into high school friends working at the Dairy Godmother in Del Ray, Alexandria retains the charm of a much smaller city. As someone who attended both private and public school in Alexandria I can speak to the merits of both, and I would tell those new families that I believe in what ACPS can do.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

More input from teachers before implementation of new educational programs. It is our teachers who are in the classroom and it is to our teachers that we should listen to first when considering whether a program is working, needs improvement, or should be replaced. We should not expect instant results in test scores - students need time to learn - and so we must look to our teachers as our guide for what is and is not working in the classroom.

Cynthia (Cindy) Anderson — Candidate in District B and current School Board member

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Caring, Committed, Community.

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

An education related life accomplishment for me was being the first person in my family to attend and graduate from college. I am proud to have paid for my education with a combination of scholarships, loans and employment earnings. This is one of the primary reasons I am such a strong supporter of the Scholarship Fund of Alexandria. I know how difficult paying for college can be, especially since costs have increased significantly since I was a student.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

I would love to see expanded pre-K, more play-based learning, foreign language in elementary school, and additional opportunities for middle school students both during school and for extra-curricular activities. I’m looking forward to the discussion about expanding our high school capacity this fall. I think there are exciting opportunities to explore that will allow us to provide greater opportunities for success for our students. I’m particularly interested in further expansion of our Career and Technical Education (CTE) career paths.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

Learning to read was a magical experience because then I was in control of what I could learn. During my time at Maury Elementary School, students helped run the library. I worked there before school and whenever I finished my classroom work. I was lucky to have the same teacher for both 3rd and 5th grade. She was a great female role model who shared her love of math and nature with students. She also gave us extra recess and would lead us in calisthenics in the gym on rainy days!

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

I had many great teachers but the most influential one was my ACPS middle school history teacher, Jack Esformes. He taught me to consider not just historical facts but to think about what life was like for the people we studied. In that way, it became a course in history with a healthy dose of empathy. More importantly, he made me promise I would attend college. It was a promise I kept in spite of my parents' less than enthusiastic views about the importance of a college education. This experience speaks to the importance of teachers.

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

My favorite extracurricular activity was soccer. I was a member of one of the first girls' soccer teams at TC. The team only existed after Title IX made it a requirement to provide girls with opportunities previously only available to boys. I also enjoyed the German Club and the many opportunities for community service.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

The first thing I would say to new families with children is they should ignore the websites that rate our schools on a ten point scale. Touring the schools and talking to principals are the best ways to determine what's best for your child. My entire family, including my husband and two sons, are products of ACPS. I believe the education my children received more recently was better than my own. We all benefitted from being a part of a diverse educational community.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

I wish there were community tutors or mentors for every child who needs one. Studies have shown that this type of positive student-adult interaction can improve students' academic performance and increase graduation rates. I firmly believe committed community members can improve educational outcomes for more of our students.

Jewelyn Cosgrove — Candidate in District B

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Inclusive. Activist. Worldly.

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

In 2017, as a young parent and long-time activist, I helped found a parent-led action committee called Raising Our Future PAC. Through ROFPAC, parents across the country have been able to pool their resources and support candidates who champion policies that matter to parenting: public K-12 education, paid parental leave, universal access to pre-kindergarten, family-friendly work policies, and more. Our work is helping change the conversation about these policies on a national level, underlining the importance of economic security in families where we are, literally, raising our future citizens and workforce.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

My vision of the future of ACPS involves an active and invested community supporting a school system devoted to self-motivated learning. Our common goal would be to ensure our students are prepared for their own individual futures and that all pathways to success are open to them, no matter which direction they choose. I envision personalized learning, individual support, and dynamic systems that give students and teachers academic freedom with a focus on being adaptive, resilient, and life-long learners.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

I enjoyed that my teachers always offered an opportunity to go deeper in a subject matter where I showed an interest. From a young age, I was fascinated by government and policy. Teachers throughout my academic career found ways to promote my interests – encouraging me to participate in clubs focused on activism and service, pushing me to attend Girls State and the National Student Leadership Conference, and ultimately to serve as an intern in the Colorado State Senate. These opportunities came to me through teachers who saw me as an individual and developed me in my unique way.

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

While I was blessed with many teachers and coaches who changed my life, I always look back fondly on Madame Jean O'Dell, my high school French teacher. In her class, she found ways to teach every single one of us in ways that worked for us. To this day, I still remember the passage of Le Petite Prince she had me memorize as we worked on pronunciation, and I've found myself as a parent reciting it to my daughter. She may never know how impactful her time with me was on my life, except now we have Facebook! Merci, Madame O'Dell!

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

I grew up in Colorado, outside of Denver. One of the best extracurricular programs I did was called the Green City Data Project in 6th grade. A few times a week we went out into the foothills of the Rockies and explored our environment. We identified plants and trees, took samples, and even submitted a recommendation to our local governing board about where they should build a new hiking trail. I had many extracurricular clubs over the course of my education, but that program taught me real world skills and gave me a perspective I hope all students can experience.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

As a pre-school mom myself, I know you're looking closely at the school system you want your child to enter, and the anxiety over such a decision is very real and can be intimidating. But Alexandria is the perfect place for your student. Alexandria is one of the most unique cities in all of Virginia. Our commitment to diversity and inclusion is incredibly admirable and serves to expand the minds of every student in our system, building future leaders and citizens of tomorrow who understand each other and everyone's different circumstances as a unique value-add to our community.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

I would most like to see a commitment to equity in all of our schools. Public schools, rightly, become a place every student can call home and that means we take students as they are and build upward. I believe an equitable education environment that serves each student for their unique needs and connects them to support outside of school will generate excellence across the board, and I believe we have a unique opportunity in Alexandria to be leaders in this space. To get there, we need to take a hard look at how we serve each student, assess and audit our progress, and commit to the hard work ahead.

Veronica Nolan — Candidate in District B and current School Board member

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Diverse, Community, Opportunity

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

I was the former CEO of a nonprofit (Urban Alliance) that provides high school seniors with paid internships, matches them with mentors and supports their post high school planning. Under my 12 years of leadership I grew the program from serving 42 students in one high school to thousands of students annually in over 30 high schools as well as formed partnerships with over 200 businesses to serve the youth. In 2013 I introduced the program to TC Williams and as a result over 150 TC students have been provided with internships in professional settings with over 75% of them attending college.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

Based on strategies we're in the midst of implementing I see other school systems asking to visit ACPS, eager to take notes, all asking the same questions – "How does ACPS provide such a quality, individualized, engaging education based on being one of the most diverse systems in the country?" Over the last term we've developed strong relationships with city council so they'll also be keen to understand how we all worked so collaboratively together to address — what 10 years ago — was considered a capacity crisis. Finally thanks to our robust staff support, instruction and technology the strong academic results will mirror the resources invested into the division.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

I loved reading as a child. Through books I was able to explore different cultures, ways of thinking, historical situations, and it opened up my mind in ways nothing else did. As a result I relied on my teachers and librarians for recommendations and appreciated their support of my continued interest of finding new titles to conquer. We had a Literature Bowl that was a "Jeopardy-style" contest of the school's required reading list. I was eager to represent my class at every occasion and equated each

opportunity to participate as if I was representing the Capitals of the recent Stanley Cup Championship (Go CAPS!).

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

That's tough as I've been extremely fortunate to have been taught by so many excellent teachers. I had teachers who pushed me, inspired me, challenged me. I've been involved in education for 20+ years and have been incredibly privileged to watch absolute masters at their craft transform a child's path. The outstanding ACPS educators I've witnessed are who have influenced me most because they inspire me to serve on the board. When I asked one recently why he's so committed he replied, "Because I truly feel like I can make this next generation better than mine. They give me hope."

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

I joined the swim team in high school and learned the importance of striving to do one's best so that the whole could advance versus individual accomplishments shine through. I recall one time in particular when a teammate was trying a stroke for the first time. This individual came in dead last but we all cheered her on till the bitter end as if she was in an Olympic tryout. The encouragement, support and collaboration everyone showed – with pure joy – is what I try to emulate on any team I'm a member of.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

I'm proud to be an ACPS parent and am humbled to daily serve the community as a board member. Not only does it provide opportunities to receive an excellent education but I believe its diversity is its strength. As someone who has been the boss to hundreds of individuals I'm a huge believer in one's emotional intelligence being a key advancer in one's career. The only way to attain a heightened level of emotional intelligence is if you have authentic relationships with folks who differ from your background. The ACPS experience offers that like no other district in the country can along with an engaging education.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

Alexandria is an exceptional community and we have a tremendous staff that works tirelessly to teach our students. It's been an honor to witness their talents in the classroom. In my first term we concentrated on reviewing academic results by aligning them with current 2020 strategic plan. The data suggests that more needs to be done to address the academic needs of many of our students. In order to continue improving academic results we need to continue working towards: ensuring school community's feedback is consistently present; providing staff with the necessary resources to teach; having systems in place to measure results in a timely fashion.

DISTRICT C

Meagan Alderton — Candidate in District C

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Diverse. Dynamic. Complex.

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

I am the mother of two amazing children. I met my husband while we were both teaching at George Washington Middle School, and I would have to say that our marriage and the family that we have created will always be paramount in my achievements.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

I see a school system where there are no disparities in achievement for students with disabilities, black students, latinx students, and English Language Learners. I believe that it is absolutely possible to significantly reduce performance gaps by implementing pedagogical practices that we know work best for the population that we serve. There are age-old educational theories that give us the answers that we seek. In some ways, we just need to get back to basics.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

I was a French Immersion student from K-10th grade. I learned all of my core subjects in French and that experience totally set the tone for my life. It opened up a world to me that I would have never experienced otherwise. As result, I am fluent in French. I received this type of world class education in a public-school system. This is the power of public education.

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

Mrs Virginia Lloyd. She was my music teacher in elementary school. She saw something in me that sparked her to give me quick little 10-minute piano lessons after school when I was in first grade. One day my mother came to pick me up and saw me sitting at the piano reading music. Needless to say, I ended up taking private lessons from Mrs Lloyd every week for the next 9 years. I love playing the piano and I have an immense appreciation for music, including vocal music, because of her. We are still in touch today and I even enjoy a meal at her home, with my family on occasion.

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

I have 3 that shaped me:

Private Piano Lessons

County Honors Choir (We sang at the Kennedy Center every year).

Cross-County/ Track and Field

To this day I play the piano, sing with a wonderful choir, and implement the strength and fitness techniques that I learned as a cross-country and track athlete. These are the things that I turn to and that always uplift me when I need to distress or unwind.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

If you want your children to experience the power of diversity, send them to ACPS. I have taught in Baltimore, I have taught in 3 of Alexandria City's schools, and I have done district level oversight in DC. There is no place in the DMV like ACPS. This presents a unique set of challenges but they can and will be overcome, because ultimately, the strength of diversity always wins. You can't lose.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

I have an intense passion for student achievement. As a special educator I know that achievement matters to kids. Our job in education is to create opportunities for success for ALL of our students, because success builds confidence and confidence encourages and inspires kids to want to learn more and to do better. As I stated in a previous response, educational theory and pedagogy have already given us the correct lenses through which to look. We need to use these lenses to magnify our issues, pick through them with a fine-toothed comb, be critical friends, and start implementing effective steps toward improvement. It's not impossible, but it will take courage. It's time to be courageous.

Heather Thornton — Candidate in District C

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Dynamic, Challenging, Distinct.

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

Although I have since left the U.S. Foreign Service due to family considerations, the steadfast journey I took to get there is one of my greatest accomplishments. I obtained scholarships all the way through graduate school, and with my master's degree finally in hand, I entered into the workforce debt-free. Along the way, I immersed myself in work as an Education Outreach Coordinator, and obtained internships at a non-profit in India, a Juvenile & Domestic Relations court and the U.S. Senate. These experiences prepared me not only for a career in diplomacy, but also for a lifetime of service.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

In ten years, I envision that ACPS will have developed solutions to address the capacity issue at many of our schools. Most likely, such solutions will include innovations like retrofitting existing spaces, as was done with our brand new Ferdinand T. Day Elementary school, or creating entirely new buildings, which is an option that should bear serious consideration in dealing with the overcrowding at our only high school. I also believe ACPS will have made significant progress in closing the achievement gaps existing among various segments of our city's diverse students.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

As much as I gained from learning in the classroom, I really enjoyed experiential learning that took me outside. I will never forget my field trips to museums, zoos, and art performances as an elementary student. In addition to inspiring curiosity and discovery, field trips helped expose me to the real-life application of what I learned in the classroom. Generating this type of excitement is one of the best ways to develop lifelong learners.

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

My sixth grade teacher, Mr. Cobb, taught me one of my greatest life lessons. When I entered his class, I truly struggled with math. Whenever I felt the inclination to give up, Mr. Cobb would display an encouraging smile and show the letter “P” written in marker on the inside of his hand. The letter stood as a reminder that Patience is a necessary virtue in any learning process. By the end of my sixth grade year, I was part of the Gifted and Talented program, and math was one of my strongest subjects.

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

My mother believed I should be exposed to as many activities as possible in order to determine where my skills and passions aligned. As a result, I was involved in just about every extracurricular activity imaginable from the Junior Honor Society and Spanish Club to the orchestra and basketball team. Each activity contributed to my holistic development, but my position as a captain on the high school basketball team helped me realize my leadership abilities. Learning to identify my teammates’ individual strengths, and to maximize them for the benefit of the team, was an indispensable part of my education.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

I would tell prospective families that an education in Alexandria offers the benefits that come from being one of the most diverse school divisions in Virginia. Such benefits include interacting with students from more than 125 countries, and being in classrooms with talented educators who recognize individual student needs. I would talk about our division’s focus on increasing access to early childhood education, as shown by the grand opening of the new Early Childhood Center; and on the other end of the spectrum, about existing opportunities from public-private partnerships like the newly established Health Sciences Academy at T.C. Williams.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

Being one of the most diverse school divisions in the state is a tremendous advantage, but it also presents unique challenges in ensuring equity of educational opportunities. When looking at the recently released SOL scores for the 2017-2018 school year for example, there are clear discrepancies in the scores between various student groups. If I am elected to the school board, I will continuously focus on the root causes of such achievement gaps in order to steadily close them.

Dianara Saget — Candidate in District C

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

I would use the words legacy, inclusive, and unparalleled to describe ACPS.

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

I take a lot of pride in being a mom. It is one of my greatest accomplishments. Being a mom has molded me and shaped me into the person I am today. All of my hard work, accomplishments, and aspirations can be seen in my children. I take pride and have great joy in knowing that I mother and raise good and productive human beings.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

In ten years, ACPS will be one of the top performing school systems. I see ACPS engaging families, teachers receiving competitive pay, and I see more schools being built to help with the overcrowding.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

I enjoyed learning! School was a safe place for me and really gave me a sense of community. My teachers challenged my thinking and helped me to think outside of the box. I can remember when learning was fun and not so complicated.

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

I always say the teachers that are the hardest on you, are the best teachers. Ms. Irma was tough, but in her toughness, she nurtured me into being a great student and taught me to believe in myself. She pushed me to see how important education is, but more importantly she always pushed me to win, thus why I am running for school board.

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

I was good at science and math; however, I've always been creative. Art and music have always allowed me to express myself and kept me engaged in school and opened my mind up to different cultures and the world around me.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city to entice them here?

There is a legacy in Alexandria. This is a great a city, in which the residents are engrained and vested in their community. Success, greatness, and leaders are birthed here; and this is a great city to build and raise a family.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

ACPS is one big melting pot and our students come from all over the world. As beautiful as that is, there is a cultural disconnect within our schools. This disconnect affects family engagement and the achievement gap. I think it's imperative that we invest in the proper trainings that will aide in fostering better relationships with our students and their families. Once we improve in this area, I believe that we will see a reduction in the achievement gap and families will want to be more involved.

Ramee A. Gentry — Candidate in District C and current School Board member

What three words would you choose to describe Alexandria City Public Schools?

Diverse, growing, exciting.

What is a major life accomplishment you'd like to share?

I truly consider the opportunity to serve on the School Board of Alexandria as one of the greatest honors of my life. It is both deeply challenging and immensely rewarding. I hope to have the

opportunity to take what I've learned over the last term and offer experience and continuity to the community by serving another term on the School Board.

When you envision what ACPS will look like in ten years, what do you see?

I see fully accredited schools, with more exciting career development opportunities such as the newly opened Health Sciences Academy. I also see new, expanded learning spaces to accommodate our growing student population.

What was something that you personally enjoyed as a part of your childhood schooling?

I loved opportunities to get up from my desk, such as directing a play we had written, or doing hands on science experiments. Injecting that variety is something that both our students and teachers love to do, and we get to see many presentations before the school board of those types of activities.

Who was your most influential teacher or school official and why?

Ms. Pearson, my U.S. History teacher in 9th grade. She the person that helped me realize by passion for history. I know my current work at the U.S. Holocaust Museum is due in large part to her influence. I love to hear from our students tell similar stories about the incredible, lifelong impact our teachers have on their lives.

What extracurriculars were most important to you as a student?

Drama was an amazing opportunity for me to express myself creatively, and also learn to be comfortable speaking in front of crowds. Cross country taught me the value of working hard every day, that while talent is important, a strong work ethic is even more important.

What would you say to new families, with school-aged or preschool children, considering moving to Alexandria to encourage them to join our city/to entice them here?

Please join us! We carefully researched school options when making the decision to settle our family in Alexandria. As my twins begin their junior year at TC Williams, I am more than ever convinced we made the right choice. The rich diversity of students and incredible dedication of our teachers has provided my children with wonderful school years and prepared them well for life after school.

What is one thing you would like to improve about our schools?

We need to continue our focus on increasing academic achievement across all populations of students in our division. Persistent achievement gaps remain. We must craft a follow up strategic plan to the ACPS 2020 plan that will provide the focus and prioritization we need to address these areas.

Alexandria Living Magazine did not receive responses from John Lennon, a candidate for School Board in District C.