

***Arlington Education Association Political Action Committee
(AEA-PAC)***

2008 School Board Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate's name: Dr. Emma Violand-Sánchez

Candidate's signature _____

- 1. Which of your experiences will enable you to serve effectively on the Arlington Public Schools (APS) School Board? Do you have children in the school system?**

As many of you know, I am no stranger to the Arlington Public School system and Arlington community. For more than thirty years, I worked as an educator in the Arlington schools, developing and implementing the ESOL/HILT (English for Speakers of Other Languages and High Intensity Language Training), a program for English Language Learners. Proudly, this program has been cited as a national model and implemented by other school systems across the country. Importantly, my duties as supervisor of this program included responsibility for staff development, curriculum development, parent education, registration, placement and counseling services for English Language Learners.

I also have a personal connection to the system. My two adult children, James and Julia, were educated in the Arlington School system attending Key, Taylor, Williamsburg, H.B. Woodlawn and Yorktown High School. Today, both are educators.

Over the years, I have also been involved in educational development and growth in the community. I am currently a member of the Northern Virginia Community College Board, representing Arlington County. I have a doctorate degree in education from George Washington University and serve as an adjunct professor at Georgetown University. I have expertise in English and Second Language and Foreign Language education, family involvement, multicultural education, and learning styles and have had several papers and articles published on these topics.

It is also no secret that I am a community activist. My commitment to education and family learning has been at the heart of my volunteer work in the community. I have been privileged to provide the leadership for beginning several programs which serve families at both the state and county level. One such program is the Virginia Bilingual General Education Diploma, which has enabled many adult learners to obtain an equivalent high school diploma. In Arlington, I have provided leadership in the establishment of Project Family which serves families with children from birth to four years of age. I also was a founding member of several nongovernmental organizations: the League of Latin America Citizens Council 4606 which funds scholarships; Escuela

Bolivia, Inc., offering educational programs for children, youth and parents; and the Mongolian School of the National Capital Area.

In short, I am a long time educator with up to date knowledge of educational research that can guide sound policies, and who has participated in local, state and national level commissions and organizations. Additionally, my multicultural background and my bilingual skills in Spanish, as well as my experience in family and community involvement, will provide the leadership needed on the School Board to serve a culturally and linguistically diverse student body. Though I recently retired from the school system, I am running for the School Board because I want to continue contributing to education. I believe that my professional experience and passionate belief in the power of education will contribute to the Board's work.

2. Please describe two of your goals for Arlington Public Schools. How would your goals align with the Strategic Plan?

My vision for the Arlington Public Schools is that of a caring school community where students come first, where teachers and families are supported and where school facilities are a community asset.

My goals are for all students to receive the highest quality education and to eliminate the achievement gap. Arlington educators need to be supported to ensure educational excellence for all students. Importantly, I believe that every student needs to graduate from high school prepared to succeed at the college level and in a technologically-driven global workforce. My goals are aligned with the Strategic Plan.

3. Considering Arlington has the highest cost of living in the Commonwealth, how would you maintain the competitive advantage for APS in recruiting and retaining quality educators, including support professionals?

From the moment our children step into a classroom, the single most important factor in determining their achievement is their teacher. It is my priority to recruit and retain high quality educators, including support professionals, by providing competitive salaries and benefits. Additionally educators need excellent working conditions, outstanding professional development, mentoring and supportive principal leadership.

As a result, I think it is important to promote and strengthen career advancement for teachers and support staff. As a supervisor I worked in partnerships with local universities to prepare and train teachers. For example, in the past, Arlington Public Schools collaborated with George Mason to provided funding for courses and book stipends to instructional assistants who wanted to become teachers. I also worked tirelessly to seek professional development opportunities for educators in partnership

with universities and the best researchers in the field. I support meaningful training that will stimulate student achievement and engagement. We as educators are lifelong learners and should have cutting edge training and support in order to best serve the needs of our students. As a School Board member, I would work hard to see that this goal is achieved.

- 4. APS and AEA participate in a process known as interest-based negotiations for T-Scale employees through a group known as the Collaborative Problem-Solving Team (CPST). Seven representatives from APS administration meet with seven members of the T-Scale employee group to discuss issues of mutual concern, with minutes and recommendations going to the Superintendent. Other employee groups (A-, G-, M-, and X-Scales) participate in negotiations through employee Advisory Committees. What should be the role of the School Board in these negotiation processes?**

The Collaborative Problem Solving Team seems to be an effective process to keep the Superintendent and Board informed about teachers concerns. I strongly support the notion that all employees groups should actively participate in discussing issues of mutual concern and make recommendations to the School Board. As a School Board member, I will promote a decision making process that is inclusive, transparent and fair.

- 5. The CPST has recommended phasing in a defined contribution plan for a local retirement supplement, which would match an increasing percentage of the employee's contribution based on years of service with APS. Currently, the School Board provides a maximum matching contribution of 1.4% of salary for employees with less than 24 years of service, and a maximum matching contribution of 5.25% for employees who have 24 or more years of service and who are not eligible for a defined benefit from the County. How do you think the defined contribution plan should be structured**

As an Arlington Public School's retiree, I know how important it is for the system to have retirement benefits that attract and retain quality employees. I would like to learn how we can enhance retirement benefits for employees with less than 24 years of service. I need to discuss this issue with AEA leaders, School Board Members and APS staff so I can work with the Board to develop a better contribution plan.

- 6. What role should instructional staff have in the evaluation and selection of principals and supervisors?**

I believe that instructional staff can play a very important role in evaluating administrators and should participate in the panel selecting principals and supervisors. It

is also essential that we have administrators who appreciate the work of the instructional staff and who motivate, encourage and support them.

7. Currently, the School Board is developing a program called STEM. This program would be available for students throughout Arlington. There is some concern that this program will pull the most able students away from home schools, impacting testing results. How do you see this program impacting the school system?

I believe that integrated Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education (STEM) will benefit Arlington students. STEM education will prepare students to succeed in a global, technological society.

Arlington Public schools has a partnership with Northern Virginia Community College and Virginia Tech to explore dual enrollment opportunities and professional development opportunities in the STEM program. Importantly, as a result of this partnership, the State of Virginia received an award from the National Governors' Association.

According to the recent report to the Advisory Council of Instruction from the Career, Technical and Adult Education Advisory Committee (2008), the essence of STEM is integrative and interdisciplinary. Arlington Public Schools uses existing STEM principles from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade.

The Superintendent recommended that the Career Center offer the Integrative STEM delivery model. According to the final report of the STEM Task Group released earlier this year, STEM would neither supplant any existing programs, including those in the comprehensive high schools and HB Woodlawn nor reduce the ability of Arlington students to apply to Thomas Jefferson School for Science and Technology. My understand is that the goal of the integrative STEM program is to create new and enhanced opportunities for all Arlington students who choose to participate. However, being mindful of the concerns expressed in your question, I would certainly be on the lookout for any potential adverse impact STEM might have on the system.

8. What do you perceive to be the greatest school safety issues in Arlington? How would you address these issues?

According to policy (25 1.11) principals review procedures for school security every six months. I understand that the greatest school safety issue is the easy access to many APS buildings. We need to have a secure visitor management system in all our schools. Some parents have expressed concerns about safe walking zones, and others are concerned about some areas in their schools that are not safe. I need to learn more from educators and parents about their concerns about school safety issues so that we can work together on solutions.

- 9. Presently, high school teachers have, on average; 94 minutes of daily planning time and middle school teachers have about the same, although as much as half of that time may be used for team planning. However, elementary teachers in schools with Early Release Wednesdays, receive a minimum of 30 minutes on four days and 150 minutes on early release Wednesdays, for an average of 54 minutes “per day”. Elementary teachers in non-early release Wednesday schools receive on average 45 minutes of planning time per day. What would you propose to provide elementary school teachers an equitable amount of planning time, comparable to that provided to secondary school teachers?**

Elementary teachers need to have an equitable amount of uninterrupted planning time comparable to secondary teachers. Teachers need time to collaborate with other teachers, to review student work, to use assessments to shape and inform instruction, to develop lesson plans, to revise programs and policies, to prepare materials, to find resources for instruction and, importantly, to confer with parents and other educators. Planning time is essential for good instruction. I will certainly advocate for an equitable amount of planning time for elementary teachers.

- 10. The AEA believes there should be programs and/or strategies to enable APS employees to become and remain Arlington residents. What would you propose and/or support to enable APS employees’ Arlington residency?**

We need to retain excellent teachers. The primary reason teachers cite for leaving Arlington is because they live far from work. I support the APS Live Where You Work program. The grant is equal to 1% of the full purchase of a home for the maximum of \$5,375. Currently only \$57,555 is available for this effort and only six staff persons benefit from this program. Clearly, we need to collaborate with Arlington County Government officials to seek additional programs and funds to enable Arlington Public Schools employees to live in Arlington. I am a strong advocate for affordable housing in Arlington and believe these efforts should definitely include those working in our school system.

- 11. How can the School Board best manage the program of benefits it offers APS employees and retirees in light of the prospect of a decreasing revenue stream and the need to address unfunded liabilities identified in the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) report?**

According the Arlington Public Schools Budget (2009, p.32), the Government Accounting Standards Board Statement requires governments to acknowledge the liabilities associated with post-employment benefit plans and other pensions plans and to

acknowledge an annual required contribution. The system's annual required contribution is estimated at \$16.9 million of which \$8.2 million is estimated to already be included in the annual budget as part of retiree health care benefits costs. The actuary estimated that more funds are needed to meet the net annual required contribution level. It is obvious that the Arlington Public Schools will face major financial challenges in light of decreasing revenues. While these accounting rules are complex, I stand ready to work with fellow Board members on finding a way to meet the requirements and strongly believe that APS should not reduce our commitment to a competitive package of salary and benefits for our employees.

12. What would be your response to community requests for additional requirements for the already crowded elementary school day schedule, including the elimination of Wednesday early release planning time?

I understand the concerns from teachers about the elimination of Wednesday early release planning time. I am an advocate of elementary teachers planning time while supporting Foreign Language instruction at the elementary level. Early Release Wednesday provides additional instructional time for students. But we also need to evaluate the implementation of existing foreign language programs and its impact on teacher's planning time.

13. Please share with us your understanding of the impact of the "No Child Left Behind" Act on APS with regard to funding, standardized testing, at-risk populations, and staffing as well as consequences for schools that don't make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

While I support the general goal of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of having students learn to high standards, I am concerned about the NCLB unintended consequences for students, schools and educators. Students and teachers have lost valuable instructional time for additional testing requirements. Assessments for English Language Learners and students with disabilities are not valid or reliable. Funding is inadequate. I strongly believe that the current law needs to be changed and have worked hard at the local, state and national level to achieve this important overhaul of NCLB.

At the local level, nine of our schools currently do not meet the Adequate Yearly Progress standard required under NCLB. The system provides the transfer option with transportation and additional tutors at Title 1 schools that do not meet AYP. I am concerned about students who are not meeting standards. While hopefully in the future changes will be made to make NCLB a more realistic and well-funded effort, in the meantime, we need to review our current interventions and resources in our schools that have not met AYP for more than two years.

- 14. APS has adopted a differentiated compensation program for teachers called the Career Advancement Program (CAP). What is your position on the advisability and desirability of differentiated compensation for teachers? Also, please address continued funding for the program.**

In April 2007 the School Board approved the Career Advancement Program (CAP). My understanding is that it is a “knowledge and skills based differentiated compensation program” that is designed to reward outstanding T-Scale staff who demonstrate, and document, high quality professional practice and leadership that cultivates student achievement. Participation in the program is voluntary and requires a portfolio that is locally developed.

The School Board will need to evaluate the implementation of this differentiated compensation program and allocate the resources needed to fund the program. I support the salary adjustment to teachers who have achieved National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification

Arlington County is currently involved in discussions on the disposition of the Wilson School/Firehouse #10 site. What would your position be on the use of this site?

In the case of the Wilson School building, I support keeping the building for educational and community purposes and maintaining the green space associated with the school. My position is that the Wilson School be a place dedicated to education. This building could provide badly needed space for the school system and for auxiliary educational and cultural purposes such as its current use on Saturdays by the Mongolian School of the National Capital Area. The outdoor space associated with the Wilson School building provides a recreational green space that has almost all but disappeared from the Courthouse-Rosslyn area of Arlington.