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Aspire! Afterschool Learning Achieves Additional Board Diversity With Newly Named Members

New Board Members Mirror the Community Served

(ARLINGTON, VA) - Aspire! Afterschool Learning today announced five new members to their board of directors that reflect the diversity of the students and families served by their educational afterschool programs. Aspire!, a south Arlington VA based not-for-profit provides daily afterschool support to students at-risk of falling into the achievement gap. In fall 2020, Aspire! plans to expand and provide three levels of online and in-person service to meet the needs of students experiencing vulnerability.

“The learning opportunities created by Aspire! should reflect the diversity of the communities we serve,” said Debbie Kaplan, secretary and former vice chair, Aspire! board of directors. “Better decisions are always made when there are diverse voices at the table. At Aspire!, we especially want the board composition to better reflect the families we serve in the community who are primarily Latinx and Black.”

In order to achieve better board diversity, Aspire! formed the Representation and Inclusion Committee. This committee was comprised of talented and passionate people from outside of Aspire! representing a variety of organizations including CareFirst, Challenging Racism, City National Bank, Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Telemundo, and the Weissberg Foundation.

“As a result of our efforts, we increased our percentage of people of color serving on our board from 19% in FY20 to 39% in FY21 and we’re not stopping here,” said Kaplan.

Joining the Aspire! board of directors are:

Claudia Williams, program officer, Washington Area Women’s Foundation
Erika Dogan, general counsel & controls manager, Capitol Petroleum Group
Sue Keith, managing partner, Ceres Talent
Ligia Leon, director, global public affairs, AT&T
Valerie Colimon, senior manager, assurance services, RSM

These five new board members bring a variety of backgrounds and skills that will serve Aspire!’s mission and meet their goal of expanding learning opportunities that help young people fulfill their potential through afterschool and summer learning programs.

“As an immigrant of this country at the tender age of 5 years old from Haiti; the values, mission and vision of Aspire! are those that resonate at a personal level for me,” said Colimon. “I can remember the feeling of insecurity as a young child due to not knowing the language of a new country and navigating a new environment altogether. Yet, programs similar to Aspire! got me through those tender years and for that main reason the need to give back to similar vulnerable populations and programs is imperative to me.”

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Ms. Williams and Ms. Leon shared a similar stories as immigrants and non-native English speakers and how it influences their work with Aspire!.

“As an immigrant and a Spanish native speaker, I know how incredibly hard it is to excel at reading proficiency and writing in a second language,” said Williams. “I joined Aspire!’s board because I want to support an organization that is meeting the needs of immigrant students, who are often learning English, to succeed in school.

“As a Hispanic immigrant, I have experienced first-hand what it is like to not have the necessary resources to reach one’s full potential,” said Leon. “Many immigrant families have parents who work more than one job and/or aren’t fluent in the English language enough to help their children with their schoolwork. Therefore, Aspire!’s programs are crucial for children who need that extra afterschool and summer support.”

Ms. Dogan shared how Aspire!’s mission aligns with the value she places on education.

“Aspire!’s mission aligns with my personal belief in the importance of a well-rounded education as a base for opportunity and future success. The support and tools Aspire! provides the children it serves can be a critical component in changing the course of a child’s life from one of disappointment and failure to achievement and thriving and I believe that every child deserves the opportunity to thrive.”

Ms. Keith provides the Aspire! board with another perspective from a more conventional background.

“It was pure luck that I was born in the U.S, to middle class parents who paved the path for me to go to college,” said Keith. “But my work with Aspire! has made the abstract concept of underprivilege real with every kid I meet and reaffirms my commitment to creating opportunity for each one of them.”

For more information on Aspire!, go to <https://www.aspireafterschool.org>

For full biographic information on the newly appointed board members or to arrange interviews, contact Courtney C. Reeve, Executive Director, at courtney@aspireafterschool.org

About Aspire! Afterschool

Aspire! is deeply rooted in the South Arlington communities it has been serving since 1994. Founded as Greenbrier Learning Center in response to community demand, Aspire! Afterschool Learning (rebranded in Fall 2015) has since grown from a grassroots effort providing enrichment activities to a handful of students into a robust academic program reaching about 1,000 students each year, including serving 80-100 students intensively each day afterschool and in the summer. In the fall of 2020, they will expand to include three levels of programs, both in-person and online, to meet the growing need for support as a result of COVID-19 school closures.

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