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## **Aspire! Afterschool Learning Welcomes New Members To The Board Of Directors**

New board members accelerate efforts to reduce the educational opportunity gap

(ARLINGTON, VA) Aspire! Afterschool Learning announces two new members to their board of directors at a pivotal time when the organization is poised to play a critical role supporting Arlington students experiencing the educational opportunity gap – a gap made even wider by COVID-19 and distance learning, by providing the extra educational time needed to get back on track with their learning.

The “opportunity gap” is defined as the circumstances in which people are born—such as their race, ethnicity, ZIP code, and socioeconomic status—that determine their opportunities in life, rather than all students having the chance to achieve their full potential. According to the McKinsey Report (2020), low low-income households and children of color were estimated to experience 7 to 10 months of additional learning loss as a result of school closure and distance learning. In response, Aspire! adapted their programs three times since the pandemic began, offering underserved Arlington students in grades 3 - 5 more robust support and doubled the number of hours they serve students.

Joining the Aspire! board of directors are:

**Tannia Talento**, community leader and former Chair, Arlington School Board  
**Xochitl Yañez**, corporate relationships manager, State Farm Insurance

These two new board members bring a variety of experience and skills that will serve Aspire!’s mission and meet their goal of expanding learning opportunities that help underserved young people fulfill their potential through afterschool and summer learning programs. Ms. Talento and Ms. Yañez join Aspire! as the Arlington-based organization experienced one of their largest summer program cohorts to date and as students prepare to head back to the classroom after a year of distance learning.

Tannia Talento, is a Latina community leader, activist and the former Chair of the Arlington School Board. She was a member of the Arlington School Board from 2017-2020

“I believe Aspire! is a program that holds keys for every child served and strives to unlock their potential, teaching children the confidence and skills needed to teach themselves and to overcome barriers as they navigate their educational future in a world that is sometimes unfair. Having the opportunity to serve on the board for Aspire! and to be part of this work is exciting and aligns with so much of the community service I have done and am doing,” Talento said.

Also joining the board is Xochitl Yañez, an experienced communications and philanthropy professional. She was the past advisory board chair of the Epilepsy Foundation Metro DC

“Aspire! programs are critical in the success of students. They not only offer students exposure to educational and leadership opportunities, but they engage the entire family unit. I know that a holistic approach in looking at a child’s overall experience is what enables students to succeed and communities to thrive,” said Yañez. “As a board member, I want to help advance Aspire!’s mission, help identify opportunities to expand reach, and be actively engaged on the ground with students and families.”

Aspire! also welcomes a new board chair Richard Knight, Partner, Technology Risk, KPMG, LLP. Mr. Knight moved to Northern Virginia in 2013 from London and has since started a family. During Richard’s time on Aspire!’s board of directors, the program has expanded its reach to more underserved children in Arlington.

“Covid was a tough time for everyone, but even more so for the families we support. We got through it with arduous work by the team and expanded the services we delivered. We’re in a good place, but there’s more to do. I’m excited about the strength of the Board we have, and it is potential for taking Aspire! to the next level,” said Knight.

Additional board leadership role changes are Debbie Kaplan (Vice-Chair), Chief Operating Officer and VP, Leadership Greater Washington; Sue Keith (Treasurer) Managing Partner, Ceres Talent, and Erika Dogan (Secretary) General Counsel & Controls Manager, Capitol Petroleum Group, LLC.

### **About Aspire! Afterschool Learning**

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 underserved students each year, including serving 80-100 students intensively each day afterschool and in the summer. In the fall of 2021, they will expand to additional classroom space at the Arlington Mill Community Center and reopen affordable housing partner locations to serve more students experiencing the educational opportunity gap – a gap made even wider by COVID-19 and distance learning related learning loss. The organization aspires to provide access to the students and families most impacted by the educational opportunity gap and treat Aspire! students and families with dignity, fairness, and respect.