

For Immediate Release
August 2, 2022

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Aspire! Afterschool Learning Thanks Outgoing Board of Directors Members

Outgoing Board Members Guided Organization Toward Growth

(ARLINGTON, VA) - Aspire! Afterschool Learning announces three members of its board of directors are stepping down after several years of service, during which the organization had to undergo rapid changes to adjust to the pandemic. Despite the challenges of COVID-19 and the increased learning loss associated with distance learning, particularly for low-income households and children of color, Aspire! doubled direct service hours and students performed above predicted learning-loss expectations.

The outgoing board members provided critical assistance in meeting the needs of historically underserved students, working to close the educational opportunity gap, and supporting Aspire!'s efforts to diversify its board and expand the organization's reach.

Leaving the Aspire! board of directors are:

Jim Arnold, Senior Partner, Deliver Strategies
Gitika Kaul, Senior Vice President, COMPASS
Gail Markulin, retired Director, Capital Markets

These three board members have brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to Aspire!, where they continuously offered their expert insight into how the organization could best serve its students and families. Mr. Arnold, Ms. Kaul, and Ms. Markulin leave Aspire! after helping ensure that it can continue to adapt and provide high-quality academic enrichment to its students. All three board members noted their excitement for Aspire!'s new strategic three-year plan and the plans to expand the organization so that it can serve even more students.

Jim Arnold served two terms, a total of six years, on Aspire!'s board of directors. He is an experienced communication consulting professional and served on the Finance Committee with Aspire!.

Aspire! adopted five key organizational values this year with the board of directors' leadership. When asked to pick which one he felt was most important, Arnold said "This is a tough one – they are all important and I don't think one stands alone – because, "Excellence" without "Connection" and "Equity & Access" doesn't matter! And we are all about our students' "Growth" while being "Fun and Caring" – so my answer is all five – they work together so well to tell the story of what we want Aspire! to be."

Gitika Kaul has worked as an Emmy award-winning TV producer, war correspondent, broadcast journalist, and now works in real estate. She served one term, a total of three years, as a board of directors member with Aspire! and served on the Resource Generation Committee.

When reflecting on her time with Aspire!, Ms. Kaul noted how far Aspire! has come in the past three years. "What an honor it has been to help see this wonderful organization along to its destiny to serve even more kids. I was thoroughly impressed to watch the organization adapt to the curveballs of COVID

and quickly ensure that our children were not left behind. I truly believe the organization is more nimble today and able to deal with the realities of daily challenges in a much more efficient and effective manner. I also believe the communication channels with the community at large have been improved with the multiple fundraisers, outreach channels, and events. More people know about Aspire! today and I am happy to have contributed to that effort,” Kaul said.

Gail Markulin served two terms, a total of six years, on Aspire!'s board of directors. She had a successful career in finance and investor relations and chaired Aspire!'s Performance Committee.

“The two areas that I believe were most impactful during my tenure as a Board member are the build-out of the Arlington Mill space (which is a welcoming and vibrant area for the children and their families) and the implementation of independent assessment tools which allows more frequent and extensive assessments of our students' growth,” Markulin said when thinking back on Aspire!'s accomplishments over the past few years.

Looking forward to the next three years, as outlined in Aspire!'s strategic plan that the board of directors helped craft, all three board members are excited to see Aspire! expand. The goals of the strategic plan include increasing the number of students that the organization can serve. At the same time, historically underserved students are entering the program further behind past cohorts due to the pandemic and learning loss and need individualized support. Aspire! is committed to growing in a way that does not compromise the highly personalized, robust, and impactful service the organization has become known for.

Aspire! is grateful for the years of service that Mr. Arnold, Ms. Kaul, and Ms. Markulin have dedicated to the organization and looks forward to building on the progress that they have made.

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 historically underserved students each year, including serving 80-100 students intensively each day afterschool and in the summer. 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.