

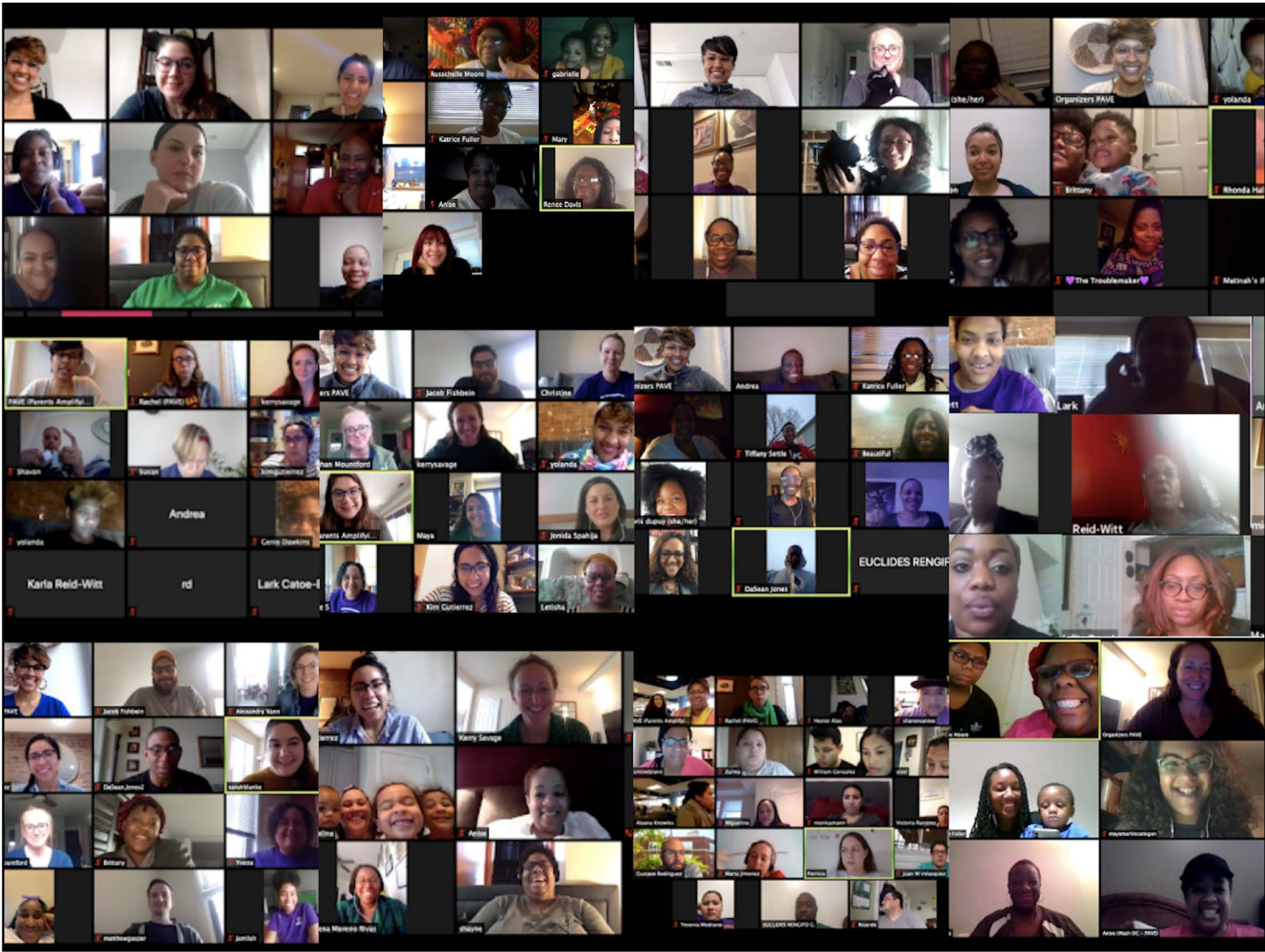


PARENTS AMPLIFYING
VOICES in EDUCATION

PARENT POWER PLAYBOOK

PAVE's Action and Impact in 2019-20





PAVE PARENT LEADERS AND STAFF MEET TOGETHER VIRTUALLY IN THE FIRST WEEKS OF THE PANDEMIC.

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WHO WE ARE

Our Mission

PAVE connects, informs, and empowers parent leaders in DC to give families a voice and a choice in the vision for education in our city.

Our Vision

Parents are partners and leaders with schools and policymakers to develop a diversity of safe, nurturing, and great schools for every child in every ward and community.

Our History

PAVE was founded in April 2016 because we believe that for too long, parents have been informed of our education policy decisions after they have already been made instead of being invited to the table to help make them. Since 2016, PAVE has grown into a network of 5,000 DC parents and caregivers united behind a vision for an education system that is created not just for, but by and with families and guided by the following core values:



VALUE #1:
All families need access to high-quality schools and the information they need to make the best decisions for their children.



VALUE #2:
All schools need adequate and equitable funding to support the needs of children and families.



VALUE #3:
All students need a safe, healthy, and welcoming school environment.



VALUE #4:
All students need access to out of school time and summer school programs that allow them to foster their passions and enrich their learning.



VALUE #5:
All parents should have the resources they need to support the success of their children at home – and in school.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PAVE is dedicated to reimagining an environment where the vision for education in DC is not created for children and families, but with children and families, shifting and changing the dynamics of power in our city so that communities and parents are partners and leaders in creating great schools for all children in DC.

PAVE intentionally and constructively asks parents to engage in education policy in DC, creates opportunities for parents to lead and advocate, helps parents to understand the system, builds relationships between parents and those who are making and influencing the education landscape in DC, and envisions an education system made up of great school options and equitable supports for all children, regardless of sector.

This year, we are especially proud of the way that parent leaders shifted the ways in which they did their work in response to an unprecedented crisis: Coronavirus. Less than a month after the pandemic hit, parents reimagined their priorities to include everything they would want to see in a family-centered response to the pandemic - education and beyond. They executed a powerhouse virtual advocacy campaign - all while navigating an unprecedented pandemic, managing learning at home, taking care of their households and families, and enduring a national reckoning around racial injustice. Despite all that they carry, parents once again rose to the challenge of this moment and gave so much of themselves to advocate for all of our city's children.

All of this work paid off! Parents' advocacy resulted in:

- A 3% increase in per pupil funding, while other states were slashing their education budgets.
- More funding for mental health supports, child care, distance learning, Out of School Time (OST) programs and relief for excluded workers.
- Legislation that included their priorities for budget transparency to move closer to more equitable funding in DC.

This advocacy will have an impact for generations to come - and we cannot wait to see what's next. As we look ahead, it is important to look back at how we did the work, reflect on our lessons learned, and determine what we need to build upon and improve in the new year.

Keys to success:

- Flexibility and responsiveness is essential - especially in times of crisis.
- It is critical to intentionally build and cultivate trust.
- This trust amplifies our impact.
- Strong Information + Organizing + Communication = Power.
- We must infuse joy into all that we do.
- This work is about changing who sits at the tables of power - and changing who is in power.

What we want to improve next year:

- How we develop parents individually as leaders.
- Opening the system to all parents - not just the parents in the PAVE network.
- Find the right balance between in-person and virtual advocacy.

Read on to learn more about the work PAVE and our parent leaders did in 2019-20, what lessons we learned, and what's up next!



JUST A FEW OF THE AWESOME PARENT LEADERS WHOSE ADVOCACY RESULTED IN WINS FOR DC FAMILIES IN 2019-20!

PARENTS SHARE THEIR STORIES AND IDENTIFY THEIR #PARENTPRIORITIES

May 2019

Parent power is only realized when parents are truly driving the change they want to see, so at PAVE, parent leaders identify the issues that **they** want to move forward on behalf of all of our kids and our schools. In May of 2019, **over 160 parents** across all wards and communities came together to select their top two priorities for the year at the third annual PAVE Parent Policy Summit.

After discussing the issues that mattered most to them and hearing each others' experience within the education system, parents voted to prioritize Mental Health Supports and Trauma-Informed Training in All Schools (for the second year in a row!) and Increased Access to Specialized School Programs.

How We Did The Work



PARENTS CELEBRATE A SUCCESSFUL PARENT POLICY SUMMIT IN MAY 2019.

September 2019

With their issues selected, the next step was to continue to build community.

Because this work comes from a place of love, it is critical for parents to have a space to share their Story of Self to find connections and shared experiences with other families across the city and across lines of difference.

Only then can communities truly do this work together - in a way that lifts up the needs and experiences of families from all wards and backgrounds. That is why we began the year with our Parent Leader in Education (PLE) Kickoff with 88 parent leaders from across the city and diverse backgrounds and identities who shared who they are, why they do this work, and how they want to engage with one another throughout the year. It was a powerful foundation that anchored our parent leaders in what would turn out to be one of the most challenging years yet.



PARENTS BUILD COMMUNITY AT THE PLE KICKOFF IN SEPTEMBER 2019.

PARENTS BUILD INFORMATIONAL POWER AND SET THEIR VISION

October - December 2019



PAVE ALL-WARD LEARNING DAY IN OCTOBER 2019.



PARENTS DIVE INTO DATA DURING A GALLERY WALK.

The PLE Board Kickoff was just the beginning. To become informed about the issues they prioritized at the Parent Policy Summit, parent leaders participated in monthly Parent Leader in Education (PLE) Board meetings, house meetings with experts and school leaders, Satellite Summits, feedback sessions, and conversations where they gained insight on:

- The current education system and policies,
- The challenges that exist across the system,
- What we would need to do, as a city, to overcome those challenges and live up to PAVE parents' vision for education in DC.

Too often, opportunities for parents to come together and get informed are inaccessible because of the time, location, or lack of parent-friendly materials. PAVE worked with schools and community partners to ensure our information-sharing and community-building opportunities were accessible and convenient for families. We are extremely grateful to everyone who helped make this possible.

After bringing together all of this research and a set of diverse perspectives, parents created a collective Statement of Beliefs around each of their priorities, which outlined what they want to be true in our education system and identified a set of solutions so, as a city, we can better care for all of our kids and provide equitable resources in all of our schools.

PARENTS SHARE THEIR VISION AND STORIES WITH CITY LEADERS

January - February 2020

Once parent leaders finalized their Statements of Beliefs, they set out to share their stories, vision, and priorities with city leaders.

JANUARY: Parent leaders hosted meetings with ten policymakers at DC Parent Voice and Choice Week (DCPVCW) to share their priorities and understand policymakers' positions. In just one week, parents had 153 touchpoints with city leaders.

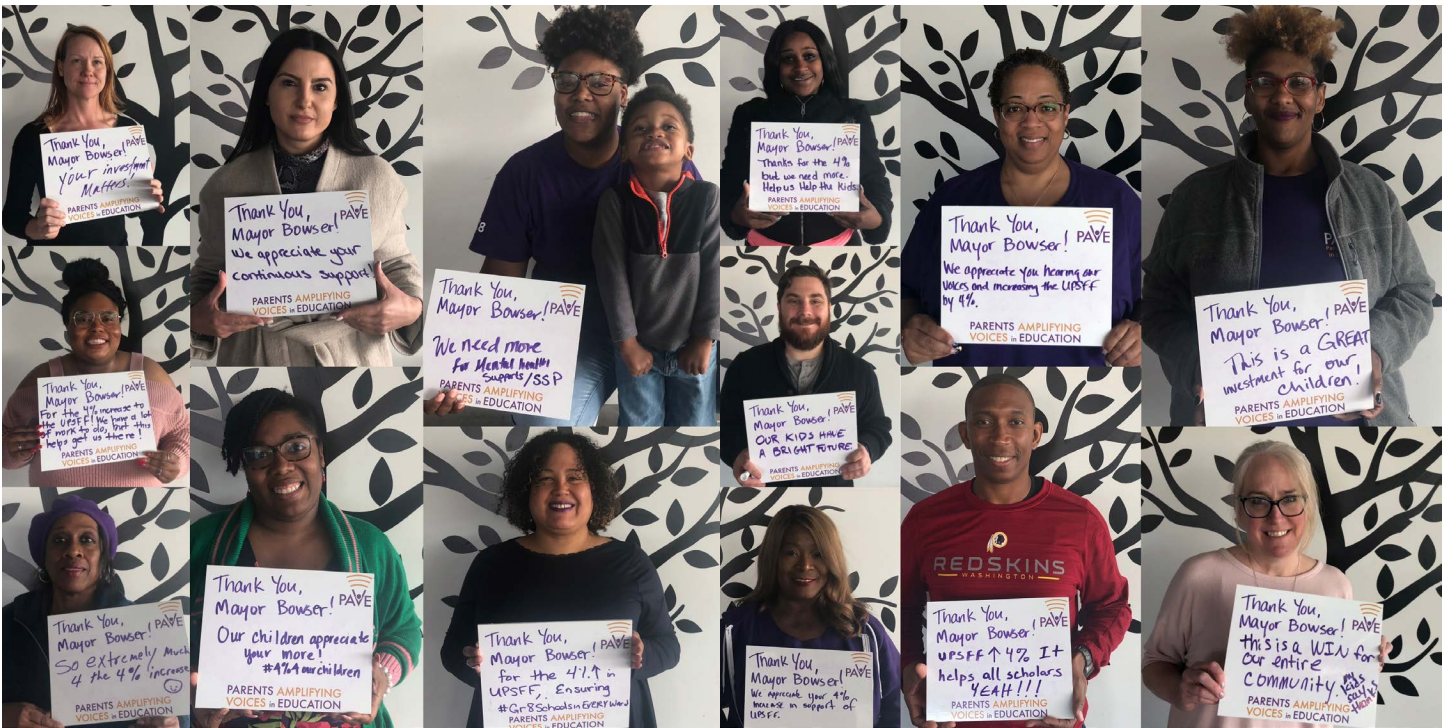
FEBRUARY: 48 parent leaders advocated for their priorities at the Mayor's Budget Engagement Forums.



PARENT LEADERS HOST MEETINGS WITH TEN POLICYMAKERS DURING DC PARENT VOICE AND CHOICE WEEK.



PARENT LEADERS DISCUSS THEIR PRIORITIES FOR THE DC BUDGET AT THE MAYOR'S BUDGET ENGAGEMENT FORUMS.



#PARENTPOWER IN ACTION: IN RESPONSE TO PARENTS' ADVOCACY, MAYOR BOWSER ANNOUNCED SHE WOULD PROPOSE A 4% INCREASE TO THE UNIFORM PER STUDENT FUNDING FORMULA (UPSFF) - A HISTORIC INCREASE THAT PARENTS INCLUDED IN BOTH OF THEIR STATEMENT OF BELIEFS.

How We Shifted The Work

PARENTS RESPOND TO COVID-19: AN UNPRECEDENTED GLOBAL CRISIS

March 2020

A Proactive Response Eased the Transition to Remote Work

In March of 2020, the emerging pandemic meant PAVE needed to immediately adapt and do things differently. Good organizing and advocacy is about being proactive in response to crisis - not reactive - and proactively planning for the worst case scenario.

As news about coronavirus came in from across the world, PAVE anticipated the necessity of remote work and began to put together a comprehensive, intentional plan and swift rollout of new systems and practices - all with families at the center. The week before DC shut down was a critical week that set everyone up for success for the remainder of the advocacy season and made sure that PAVE staff and parent leaders didn't have a difficult time adjusting to changes and challenges.

As soon as we got word that changes were brewing, before schools closed on Monday and shifted to distance learning, PAVE organizers conducted wellness checks to all parents that first weekend because we wanted them to know we were there for them. Many families shared with us that they were ok - that this was unexpected but schools would only be closed a couple weeks. By the time organizers started checking in again with families on the Monday that schools closed, parents had lost jobs, were worried about food, couldn't find toilet paper, and were worried about the possibility of a longer closure.

Through all of this uncertainty, parents were willing to open up and be vulnerable with PAVE staff about the difficulties they were facing because they knew we cared about them - and had built trust - before the crisis.

This trust would deepen over the coming months because of clear communication and consistent support, which families weren't always getting from schools or other systems. Ultimately, we wanted to reiterate to parents that we were here for them and we were in this together, in good times and bad.

In the same week, our **operations team** set up systems like Slack and Zoom so our team could work remotely. We also switched to and practiced Zoom meetings to replace our in-person monthly meetings with families and created detailed, family-friendly guides on how to safely access Zoom meetings - especially from a variety of devices, as many parents join meetings from their phones.

The **organizing team** put in extra time working with parents ahead of the newly virtual meetings to ensure parents were comfortable and knew PAVE staff were there with them to troubleshoot any challenges. This meant that when we did get the final word about school buildings closing, we were ready.

Especially at the beginning of the pandemic, many parents expressed frustration with lack of communication, conflicting information, or general confusion on where to find updates or resources. Our **policy and communications teams** worked closely to ensure parents had access to clear and reliable information about COVID, distance learning, and where they could get resources and support. PAVE was able to quickly and clearly synthesize key information for families and share it in a myriad of accessible ways. This also helped our whole team to serve as liaisons to ensure families were able to connect with the support they needed.



READY TO CONTINUE ADVOCATING FOR ALL DC KIDS - NOW ON ZOOM.

April 2020

Shifting to Meet an Unprecedented Challenge

Right before the pandemic, PAVE’s network was shrinking. We were seeing fewer parents join the network and parents that we had already connected with weren’t engaging as much. The pandemic only intensified this problem as its impact heightened swiftly. Families were hurting and in need of broad and immense support.

Many parents were struggling to put food on the table, worried about their job security, who would take care of their kids if they still needed to go to work, or how they’d cover rent and make ends meet. In addition, all parents were grappling with their new responsibility to manage learning at home and ensure their child was supported in this “new normal” without a clear end in sight.

We already knew we needed to change, but the pandemic really pushed us to respond. We restructured our organizing team and our goals so as to set us up to bring in more new parents and connect existing families with relevant support and accessible opportunities. We reallocated funds to be able to support families that were hurting the most and eliminate barriers to participation, like helping out with hotspots and devices.

During the early months of the pandemic, we did all we could internally for families in this regard, but quickly we’d need to find a different solution to meet the growing need. What followed was PAVE’s Fund for DC Families.

Despite the unprecedented challenges, one thing did not change: parent leaders’ commitment to advocating for the children of DC. Parent leaders looked to PAVE for support and our team quickly forged a path forward in a new all-virtual landscape. The first step: guiding parents to shift their goals in response to Coronavirus and meet the new moment.

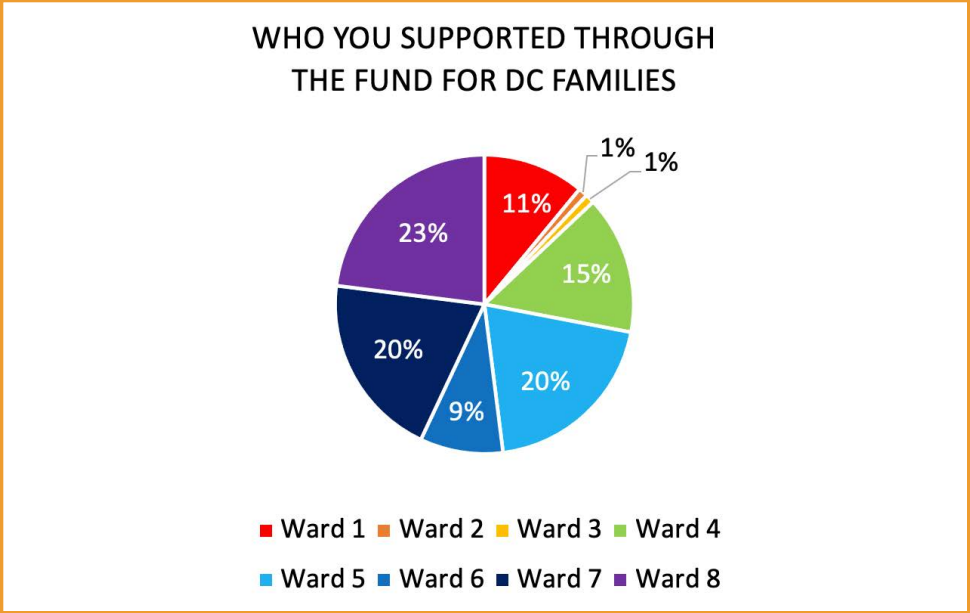
Based on what we were hearing from families and all they were facing and carrying, we knew we’d have to adjust and expand from parents’ initial two policy priorities and what they wanted to be true for specifically the DC education system. Instead, we centered around a different question:

“What would a family-centered response to Coronavirus in DC look like?”

SPOTLIGHT:

The Fund for DC Families

We do this work for and with families - and that means meeting them where they are and doing all we can to support one another - especially when times get hard.



PAVE'S FUND FOR DC FAMILIES SUPPORTED OVER 1,000 FAMILIES FROM ACROSS DC.

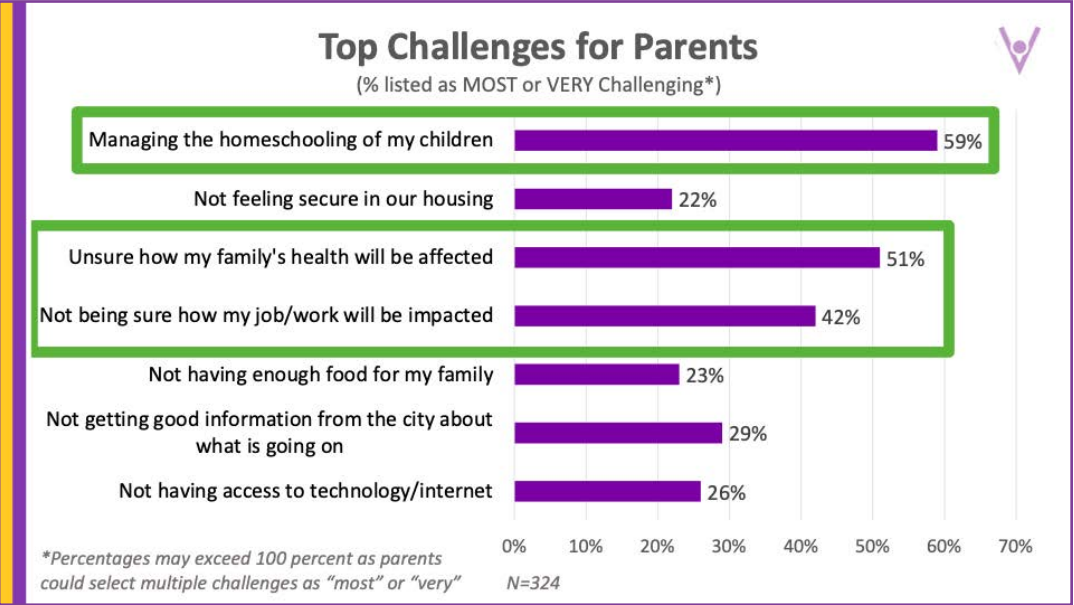
Just as challenges kids face in the classroom often stem from what is happening outside of school, we knew this would be the same for parents around advocacy during a crisis. The impacts of the pandemic weren't limited to schools and our education system; many families struggled to access technology, pay rent, buy groceries, or access mental health supports. Parents would need support in all of those areas in order to keep pushing their work forward. Importantly, the system most often listens to - and therefore favors - the wealthy because they have the time and resources to be able to advocate. We wanted to support families and address that inequity, so PAVE launched the Fund for DC Families to raise money for those struggling the most.

Because of the generosity of four foundations, 22 parents, and 116 partners, friends, and PAVE staff members who collectively gave **\$116,000**, we were able to ease some of the burden for families in need. None of that money ever went to PAVE - not staff salaries or benefits, nor our operations. This fund was only for families who weren't just worried about education; they were worried about their jobs, their health, and whether they could put food on the table every day. Despite the myriad of daily challenges, parents were dedicating hours of service to advocate for ALL kids across ALL wards.

This support helped create the space and opportunity for more parents to amplify their voices and vision for #DCSchoolsRecovery. We are humbled by and are eternally thankful to all who gave what they could to #SquadUp for DC families.

Understanding Community Needs

To help parents put together a new vision statement in response to COVID, we first needed to better understand the depth and breadth of the pandemic's impact. Between late March and early April, PAVE conducted a Coronavirus Impact Survey in English and Spanish and compiled insights from over 320 DC families. The majority of the survey responses came from parents of color and/or those who were considered at-risk or had received services in the past year - voices that are too often left out of the conversation. Importantly, the survey asked parents about a wide range of issues, including how COVID impacted their children's education as well as



their family's income, housing, health care, child care, and overall health and wellbeing. We believe in always giving something to families when they give something to us, so each of those families were able to receive a school supply kit - which was especially needed in the early months of distance learning!

PAVE also conducted a cross-sector school leader survey to understand their insights and challenges as a result of the shift to distance learning. We gathered a total of 67 responses, made up of leaders from 40% of charter Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and 20% of DCPS principals.

Overall, both the parent and school leader survey results showed that the challenges families and schools were facing were immense and greatly varied by community. Existing inequities across race and income were exacerbated, including the digital divide, income/job security, and access to basic needs like food, housing, and health care. The pandemic was impacting the mental health of kids, parents, and school staff, and many weren't aware of or didn't have access to mental health supports. Keeping students engaged and progressing in their learning was extremely difficult virtually, and everyone was working to balance academics with mental wellness.

The primary headline: there was so much work to be done.

Sharing Survey Insights

Our next step was sharing what we learned with parent, city, and school leaders. We presented our parent survey results during the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) LEA leader call with all 65 LEA leaders in the city, hosted a webinar to share the results of our school leader survey alongside family engagement best practices based on the findings, and amplified the each of the results on our website, in PAVE Posts, and in conversations with our partners around the city. Our partners and city agencies were grateful to have such extensive insight into how school communities were faring to inform their work.

Shifting Our Work with Families at the Center

Perhaps most importantly, we brought the results and a set of next steps to our parent leaders in their PLE Board meetings. It is important to note that while parents always drive the decisions, it is the job of PAVE staff to make sure we are intentional about our planning and framing for those conversations. Leading up to these meetings, we knew parents were stressed, worried, and tired, everyone was experiencing trauma. Emotions were understandably running high, and the burdens of the pandemic were disproportionately impacting so many of our Black, brown, and low-income parents who were already facing great challenges even before the pandemic.

We needed to be able to understand these various perspectives, create space for - and honor - parents’ personal experiences, and still find a way to bring the conversation towards finding solutions. To balance those needs, we decided we’d need to break out the conversation in two parts: response and long-term recovery. It was initially a challenge to shift parents thinking about the “right now” to the long-term, as many were understandably focused on getting through each day as it came. However, with deep belief in parents’ capacity for leadership alongside strong relationships, planning, and facilitation our team was able to push them to address the right now and think long-term and into the new year.

Rethinking #ParentPriorities

Part One: “What would a family-centered response to Coronavirus in DC look like RIGHT NOW?”

Less than three weeks after school closures, our Citywide PLE Board (made up of parent representatives from each of our Ward-based PLE Boards in Wards 1, 4, 5, 6 ,7 and 8) came together at their April meeting to rethink their advocacy goals to meet this unprecedented moment. We made space for parents to share how they were doing, presented the initial results from our parent impact surveys so parents could

see how families across the District were faring, and shared about related initiatives that other cities and states were planning.

Grounded in that information, parents brainstormed how they wanted DC to respond to meet families’ most immediate needs around food and groceries, health care and child care, access to resources and distance learning.



WE ASKED PARENTS WHAT “PARENT POWER” MEANS TO THEM - IT WAS NO SURPRISE THAT LOVE WAS AT THE CENTER.

Once we aggregated all of their ideas, we shared them with our Ward-based PLE Boards made up of 120 parents to get their feedback and ensure that vision truly represented the immediate needs of all families. Still, we knew the impacts of the pandemic would last long after schools and businesses could reopen - we also needed to make a plan for long-term recovery.

Part Two: “What would a family-centered recovery from Coronavirus look like in DC next school year?”

Just two weeks later, we brought the Citywide PLE Board together again to answer what DC would need to include in its budget and do next school year to support families in what we then thought would be the wake of Coronavirus. We asked parents what they would want to be true around many essential aspects of education: academics, Out of School Time (OST) programs, special education, mental health, and family engagement as we returned to school. In order to move them away from getting stuck in the current day-to-day, we asked them to close their eyes and think about what they would want for their child’s first day of school next year; what it would look like, feel like, and sound like. This allowed them to reframe their thinking and envision a new way forward together, and some parents even got their kids involved!

VOICES OFTEN UNHEARD:

SPOTLIGHT ON LATINX FAMILIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

Parents and families are at the center of everything we do at PAVE and drive all of our decision-making. Because the wants and needs of parent leaders shift and change, PAVE is constantly evolving, too. We heard from parents with children with disabilities and our Latinx families that they often felt unheard or that their needs and concerns were put on the back burner. Though special education was the main priority for many parents with children with disabilities, it was never voted as a top priority at any of our PAVE Parent Policy Summits. Across our PAVE PLE Boards, the majority of our parent leaders are Black, but almost 20% of kids in DC are Latinx.

As a result, parents in these communities wanted a space that was just for them - where they could come together to share their unique experiences and advocate for the issues they cared about most. To meet that need, we kicked off the Special Education PLE Board and Junta de Padres Latines in December of 2019! We were so impressed with how much they accomplished in just a few meetings this past year. Here are the highlights:

Special Education PLE Board

- **JANUARY:** Parent leaders shared their Stories of Self, dove into special education data in DC, and discussed what they wanted to accomplish this year.
- **MARCH:** With a shift to virtual meetings due to the pandemic, parents learned about DC's educational power structure with a specific focus on special education, parents shared their personal journeys with special education and found commonalities across the many highs and lows.
- **APRIL:** Parents met with Michael Yudin, Principal at The Raben Group, former Assistant Secretary of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in the Obama administration, and current member of PAVE's Board of Directors, to learn more about IDEA and how their experiences connect - or don't - with the goals and rights included in the law.
- **MAY:** Parents' individual journey maps were compiled together to visualize the trends, which helped them better understand where there might be opportunities for meaningful improvement. They also reviewed their survey responses about their experiences with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), while also co-developing their vision for what they wanted to see.
- **JUNE:** Parents wrote their own vision for what they wanted to see around special education in DC

and a specific set of recommendations for solutions to address their concerns. After finalizing their vision statement, parents presented their work to the special education team at OSSE to identify ways to work together and to ask questions about OSSE's strategic plan for special education and distance learning.

Latinx PLE Board

- **JANUARY:** Parents built a strong community by sharing their Story of Self and prepared to share their experiences and perspectives with policymakers at DC Parent Voice and Choice Week about the issues that mattered most to them.
- **MARCH:** Parents took time to support one another virtually amidst the pandemic and the shift to learning from home. Despite facing many challenges, the Latinx PLE Board members continued to plan their advocacy strategy by understanding systems of power in DC and identifying the actions they wanted to take moving forward: writing testimonies, meeting with policymakers, and amplifying their voices on social media.
- **MAY:** Parents joined in to support PAVE's broader PLE Board members' #DCSchoolSchoolRecovery Statement of Beliefs by joining town halls, our #VOTE4DCKids Summit, and amplifying their voices during digital days of action.
- **JUNE:** Parent leaders continued to advocate for #DCSchoolsRecovery in June's Day of Action on social media and in a virtual Town Hall with the Mayor's Office for Latino Affairs (MOLA). Parent leaders asked questions about supports for distance learning and school reopening plans, language accessibility, and support for undocumented and other under-resourced workers in the pandemic.
- **JULY:** Parents continued to engage policymakers during PAVE parent leaders' last Day of Action ahead of the last budget vote. Later, they met for the final time to reflect and review their progress as a Board, celebrate their successes and each other's growth, and plan for the upcoming year.

What's Next for These Boards?

This year, our special education and Latinx meetings are open to all parents - not just PLE Board members! These are no longer "formal" PLE Boards, but rather open meetings with community partners and experts so any parent can get information about the issues PLE Board members identified as top priorities throughout the previous year. To ensure that those same issues around special education and those facing the Latinx community are represented in PAVE parent leaders' #DCSchoolRecovery Statement of Beliefs in the coming year, former PLE Board members sit on the Citywide PLE Board and many Ward-based PLE Boards and will continue to lift up the voices and perspectives of their communities in those conversations. We know our parent leaders will PAVE-the-way for a more inclusive and representative vision for education and, ultimately, a better city for us all.

Once their sights were set on the next school year, parents used this opportunity to reimagine not just how to get back to “normal”, but a new normal that would better serve each and every one of our kids. They intentionally pushed each other, and our city, to recenter on racial and social justice and prioritize equity in order to lift up the Black, brown, immigrant, and low-income communities that a racist and classist system long underserved - even before the pandemic.

After putting all of the Citywide PLE Board (and some of their kids!) ideas together, we again shared that draft with our Ward-based PLE Boards for their feedback. Overall, parent leaders met over 35 times in just the month of April, all while managing the devastating impacts of Coronavirus, to put together a 28-page statement of their collective beliefs.

Parents Release their Vision for #DCSchoolsRecovery

The result: a comprehensive, family-centered vision for #DCSchoolsRecovery written by parents from all Wards and backgrounds just six weeks after the pandemic hit the United States. Parents’ dedication knows no end - we are forever in awe of each and everyone of them. We also know that this could not have happened without information sharing from great community and advocacy partners and a dedicated team who put in a monumental effort to support parents through the process. As they say, it takes a village!

Below is a summary of parent leaders’ #DCSchoolsRecovery priorities.

“ PAVE Parent Leaders’ Statement of Beliefs on a Family-Centered Response to Coronavirus in DC

PART ONE: Response - What DC Should Do Right Now

Schools and Learning

- Fund critical supports for children during distance learning.
- Develop and share best practices to partner with families and communities.
- Improve cross-sector coordination and communication with families.

Access to Food and Groceries

- Ensure all families have access to food and groceries and support with delivery for families without means to travel or have health risks.
- Expand communication about available resources and health and safety measures.
- Ensure all food sites are implementing health and safety guidelines and have PPE for all essential workers.

Access to Resources (Income, Housing, Utilities)

- Expand funding and outreach efforts so all residents can access unemployment benefits - including undocumented immigrants.
- Explore programs that allow residents to defer or delay payments for housing and repay them overtime.

Access to Health Care and Child Care

- Fund a child care stabilization package to support families now and in the future.
- Help schools and partners share information on health care services and insurance.
- Provide cleaning supplies for families that need them in places they already are.

PART TWO: Recovery - What DC Should Do For Next School Year

Support Schools in Planning for the Next School Year - With Families

- Provide support and resources for schools around planning for family engagement, redesigning school culture, adjusting academic plans, health and safety measures, and implementing mental health supports and special education services.
- Ensure schools and related agencies have what they need to support families as the year continues and have support in adjusting and adapting plans in this uncertain climate.

Make BOLD Investments in Our Kids and Our Schools

- Invest in Mental Health Supports in School
 - Expand Access to Mental health professionals: \$16 million
 - Resources for SEL programs and Trauma-Informed Training: \$10.6 million
 - Expand the Healthy Futures Program for children under three: \$1.5 million
- Fully Fund Every School: Increase the base UPSFF by 4% minimally 4% in FY21 - \$80 million
- Fully Fund Support for At-risk Students: Increase the at-risk weight to 0.37 - \$68.8 million
- Increase Funding for Out of School Time (OST) Programs: expand programs to provide access for all at-risk students - \$5 million

Ensure Strong and Sustainable Implementation of Supports

- Develop and Share Best Practices around Partnering with Families and Communities
- Increase Equity, Accountability, and Sustainability in School Based Mental Health Supports
 - Conduct and share a school mental health landscape analysis
 - Improve the coordination of services and care
 - Developing a clear accountability system
 - Create a pipeline of mental health professionals to serve in schools

”

PARENTS SHOW THEIR POWER
THROUGH (VIRTUAL) ADVOCACY

May - July 2020

Keeping Fidelity to the Model While Going Virtual

Alongside the world, PAVE parents needed to shift the ways in which they did their advocacy. Importantly, the core of this work was still the same. Particularly in a tight budget year due to the pandemic, parents would need to be armed with information and ready to show up in force at advocacy opportunities like public hearings or meetings with electeds; petitions would need to be signed in numbers that policymakers couldn't ignore and we'd need easy ways for the community to amplify that petition, like a Phone2Action campaign that lets signers send tweets and emails directly to their representatives; and parents would need a strong social media presence with clear, consistent, and compelling messages and timely responses to new developments. All were necessary - more so than ever before - so our team got to work to make all of this happen virtually.

- Instead of setting up in-person meetings with policymakers, our team organized several “Digital Days of Action” made up of Town Halls with policymakers on Zoom and simultaneous social media pushes to fortify their calls to action.
- Our testimony guides were revised to include our updated asks as well as support around voicemail testimonies, which were a new option in light of COVID and limited space at now virtual public hearings.
- We created tool kits and trainings to ramp up our social media and petition efforts to make sure policymakers' email inboxes and social media accounts were full of messages about #DCSchoolsRecovery through Phone2Action - as this was now a much more critical platform given remote work.
- The team also identified new platforms, like Thru Text and Click to Tweet to support with rapid response efforts. This made it easy for parents to elevate their stories in a quick and easy way ahead of budget votes or key decisions.
- As things developed, we shared clear and concise policy updates in texts, emails, and in virtual meetings so parents always knew what progress was made, where there was still work to be done, and what next steps were available to amplify their voices.

#ParentPower and the #PurpleWave

With the structures and supports in place from PAVE staff, parents adapted quickly and effectively to the ever-changing policy environment and schedule. Needless to say, not even a global pandemic could stop parent leaders from amplifying their voices and the needs of their communities! When budget releases and votes were delayed, parents adjusted their schedules to be able to respond. When hearings went virtual, parents learned to navigate online platforms or left voicemails to testify. When meeting in-person with city leaders wasn't an option, parents sent videos with calls to action and logged into virtual town halls with policymakers. Their campaign was the definition of flexible and “on it”!

- **55** parents testified at public hearings (7 parents testified in February, making 62 total testimonies!)
- **312** parents attended 7 town halls with city leaders.
- Parents sent **thousands of emails** to elected officials and **hundreds of tweets** amplifying their stories and asks

Bright Spots of Virtual Advocacy

While the cause for the shift to virtual advocacy was devastating, certain opportunities proved more accessible and equitable than ever before.

For example, many parents struggled to make it work to testify at in-person at public hearings. In-person hearings were always during the day and required many parents to take off of work or find child care, and everyone needed to factor in time for travel, parking, and a buffer window - there weren't exact times for individuals to testify, but rather a wide range that might not have worked for their schedule. Sometimes, parents waited to testify for hours and eventually had to leave to pick their kids up from school, only to be called to testify shortly after. Now, with virtual hearings, parents could testify from their homes. PAVE staff monitored the hearing and texted parents shortly before they would be called so they could be ready to login and get set up, but didn't have to wait around all day or leave their home or job.

Parents could always submit written testimony if they were unable to testify during a public hearing, and this was still an option - but the DC Council also opened up the opportunity for voicemail testimonies. Parents could call in at any time and leave a three minute message that would be transcribed - in multiple languages - to amplify their voices. This year, voicemail testimony was the most used option by our parent leaders because it was easily accessible especially for parents who were busier than ever or often faced language barriers.



PARENT LEADERS TESTIFYING AT SEVERAL VIRTUAL PUBLIC HEARINGS.

Though we all miss being together in person, virtual meetings did offer significant benefits. Our previous in-person meetings with policymakers usually capped at around 25 parent leaders - or as many that could fit in the room and were able to take time off to be there. Now, since parents could join the meetings remotely, we had higher attendance than ever before. We regularly had 30-50 parents join meetings, and most of these were during the day. One of our highest town hall attendances was at a meeting with the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME), where 72 parents joined. It was beautiful and powerful for policymakers to be able to see the Zoom “gallery view” of a diversity of parents - most of whom were Black and brown - and all of whom were informed, engaged, and demonstrating their collective power to fight for their kids.

Even as we recover from the pandemic, these practices should be continued to promote equitable access to advocacy opportunities and make sure the voices of families often marginalized are heard.

Critical Partners

Importantly, none of this work was done alone. We had a number of coalition partners support our team and our parents in this work.

STRONG AND STRATEGIC ADVOCACY COALITIONS

In previous years, we asked organizations to formally sign on to parents’ issue-specific Statements of Beliefs in order to ensure alignment as we advocated together. However, because the new statement encompassed so many issues, we decided to move away from that process. If an organization or partner was focused on one or a few issues in the statement - that worked for us! We asked that they use their platform to amplify whatever aspects of the statement aligned with their work, and that allowed us to get a much larger and more diverse coalition of partners.

We were able to be a part of several strategic coalitions focused on school funding, mental health supports, OST programs, and early childhood funding that worked together to amplify each other’s messages during public hearings and testimonies, on social media, and in meetings. Showing a united front from the advocacy community was critical when policymakers were facing difficult choices about funding, and we were able to stand together with our partners and reject false choices around having to pit one issue over another.

SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

The COVID impact survey work proved extremely helpful to school leaders and kept many of them engaged and eager to support parents’ Statement of Beliefs because it was grounded in the things they saw from their school communities every day. School leaders became essential partners in the campaign because they were able to elevate the importance of parents’ vision from a different perspective and share action opportunities with their school communities to get even more parents involved and broaden PAVE’s network.

This is especially true of the Education Leaders of Color, a group PAVE’s Executive Director helped start in 2019 that is made up of Black and brown education leaders in the city who regularly convene with policymakers. They consistently work to make sure those with decision-making power understand their critical perspective and that citywide decisions reflect the needs of their communities. These leaders helped advocate for parents’ priorities in their meetings with elected officials and policymakers and even in their personal capacities.

Our Vote is Our Voice - Getting Out the #Vote4DCKids

As the pandemic wore on and parents looked to city leaders to respond and support their communities, parents realized just how important it is to have elected officials who will truly understand and fight for their families. With the election coming up in November, parents saw an opportunity. They had always organized around policy issues - but now they wanted to flex that power to get out the vote! Wanting more than just a bigger turnout, parents sought to learn about Councilmember and State Board of Education candidates’ vision for education and how they would work alongside families to get things done. Overall, parents wanted to make sure that more Black, brown, and low-income parents were able to exercise their fundamental right to vote for leaders they trusted to prioritize education for their kids. And so, the #Vote4DCKids movement was born! From house meetings, Phone2Action campaigns, candidate forums, and sharing information at the polls - the results were astounding.

- **132** parent leaders attended the #VOTE4DCKIDS Summit on May 31st
- **195** community members attended our 3 Candidate Forums in May
- Secured **1,472** commits to #Vote4DCKids in 3 weeks, before the June 1st primary, led by 18 parent leaders who served as Parent Voting Captains!
- This work grew PAVE’s network by **956**, which had shrunk before COVID, and brought in new families to define what “voting for DC” kids really meant.

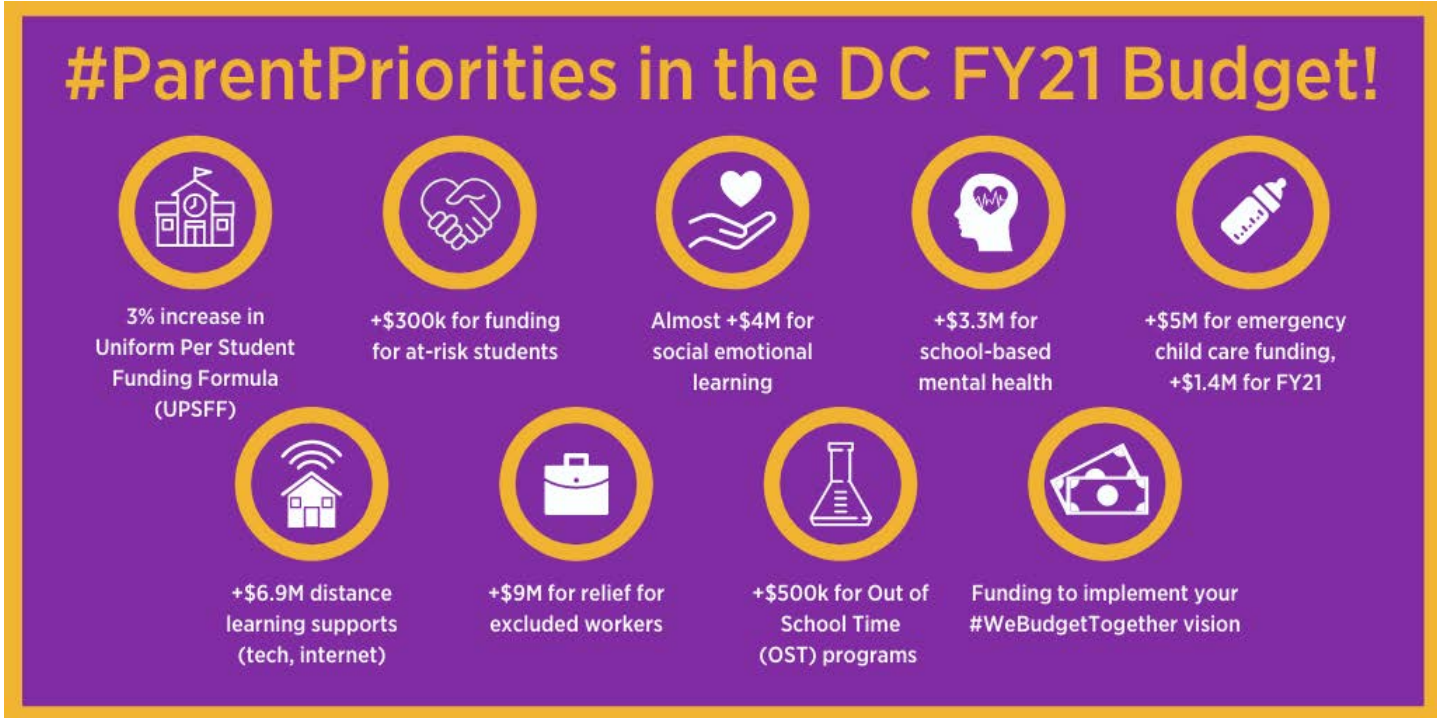


PAVE'S SALESFORCE DASHBOARD DETAILING THE NETWORK GROWTH THAT CAME FROM GETTING OUT THE #VOTE4DCKIDS!

PARENT POWER IN ACTION: ADVOCACY LEADS TO HISTORIC WINS FOR KIDS

Our Leaders Listened

The beauty of this parent-driven campaign was its diversity. Parents across all wards and backgrounds bravely and boldly shared their experiences, while showing their vulnerability so that city leaders could understand the true experiences of communities within the District AND using their strength and love for one another to reimagine what was possible. Leaders heard from parents of different races, who speak different languages at home, with different education and income levels, different documentation statuses or levels of job security, and different or comfort levels with education and how to support student learning. PAVE parent leaders' advocacy campaign reflected DC's people and what they really needed. And thankfully, our leaders listened.



Parent leaders' powerful advocacy led to huge wins for DC kids and families across a number of issue areas.



FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS

- At a time when other cities and states slashed education budgets, **DC increased the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) by 3%.**



FUNDING FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

- DC added **\$300,000 in funding for at-risk students this year.**



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

- DC invested **\$3.3 million for school-based mental health**, which allows the city to add at least one mental health professional at **47 more schools.**
- DCPS also has an additional **\$4 million for Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** as a result of the city diverting money from DCPS's contract with MPD.



PROTECTING OUT OF SCHOOL TIME (OST) PROGRAMS

- Parents' 2018 #WeNeed25 campaign helped lead to a **historic \$20.25 million in funding for OST programs.** This past year, parents successfully fought to **protect and increase funding for OST programs by \$500,000**, which is especially important for kids and families during distance learning.



PROVIDING COVID RELIEF BENEFITS FOR EXCLUDED WORKERS

- Not all federal and local relief benefits were available to all families, including undocumented immigrants and those with informal means of income. Parents successfully fought for **\$9 million in relief assistance for excluded workers.**



PRESERVING AND EXPANDING CHILD CARE

- Together with the Under 3 DC Coalition, parents helped secure **\$6.4 million in emergency grant funding for child care providers for this year and next to help cover increased costs.** This is in addition to the \$6 million in federal dollars.



SUPPORTS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING - INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY AND INTERNET

- Every family in DC should have access to devices and reliable, high-speed internet to support distance learning. PAVE parent leaders helped secure an additional **\$6.9 million in distance learning supports for technology & internet.**



GETTING CLOSER TO TRANSPARENT CITYWIDE SCHOOL FUNDING:

- To ensure an equitable education for our kids, we need complete information about how funds are spent in schools and across the system.
- This year, **requirements for added transparency that parents' outline in their #WeBudgetTogether vision were put into law**, including:
 - A uniform budget framework across all schools.
 - Requiring detailed reports of at-risk funding, personnel costs, research into educational financing, etc.
 - Funding for positions to make sure this gets implemented.

What Comes
Next?

WHAT'S NEXT FOR PARENT LEADERS?

While parents are proud of the progress our city has made, we know this budget does not reflect the needs of all members of our community - and that means our work is not done yet! Parent leaders will continue to advocate for our communities because the power of PARENT VOICE is truly the backbone of the success of EVERY student in our city.

What We Still Need



RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- We must do deep work to repair the harm and rectify the wrongs of systemic racism and injustice that have for too long harmed our Black, brown, immigrant, and low-income communities. This must happen in every corner of our system - not just education.



A SAFE AND EQUITABLE SCHOOL REOPENING PLAN

- The lack of trust in city leadership and a comprehensive plan resulted in extremely limited safe, in-person school options for our kids, which we know is necessary to support their learning and growth and prevent the further widening of opportunity gaps.
- DC needs a plan that will:
 - Meaningfully engage parents, students, teachers, and school communities in planning for reopening
 - Comprehensive health and safety guidance and resources
 - Systems to show fidelity to the plans and their execution in order to build trust
 - Clear, consistent, and accessible communication with communities
- We also need to ensure that schools and families are support while distance learning continues, and schools receive resources and support to strengthen family engagement every step of the way.



FULLY FUNDED SCHOOLS: INCREASES TO THE UPSFF AND AT-RISK WEIGHT

- Even with the increases to the budget, many schools are struggling to cover increased costs needed to keep students and staff safe and healthy as we look towards in-person options for students as well as those needed to support distance learning for those still at home. This means educational, enrichment, and other supports or programs may be cut - which we know will only hurt kids and families.
- As schools continue to address so many communities' needs, even more so during this time of hardship, we have to make sure they have all of the resources necessary to provide each of our kids with the education they deserve - especially schools that are serving our most vulnerable populations.
- Right now, almost half of DC's kids (47%) are considered at-risk. The needs of these families are even greater in light of the pandemic, and this definition doesn't even include many families who are struggling and in need of more support like undocumented immigrants or others who may not be eligible for public assistance.



CHILD CARE IS ESSENTIAL - BUT IN JEOPARDY

- Child care providers are at severe risk of closing due to high costs of operating within health and safety measures, and DC was already in short supply of high-quality, accessible, and affordable options for families. Providers need more funding to cover costs and ensure staff members are compensated fairly. As the majority of child care providers are women of color - this is a racial justice, women's, AND workforce issue just as much as it is a health and education issue.



ENSURE ALL STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY OST PROGRAMS

- The benefits of OST are more essential than ever: safe, productive activities and/or spaces for kids, opportunities for kids to explore their passions, critical time for students to develop socially and emotionally - this list goes on.
- We need to support OST programs as they shift to meet the changing needs of families and ensure all kids have access to these opportunities - no matter their ward, access to the internet, or income-level.



CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

- Distance learning has put a spotlight on the long-standing digital divide. Every child should have access to a device and the internet to get their education. This requires both investments and reforms - as the internet speed and reliability is severely limited for some families, resulting in an inequitable learning environment and deep frustration for parents and students.



TRUE BUDGET TRANSPARENCY

- We still don't know how all of our education funding is being spent, nor do we have a good idea of how DC has used their federal relief dollars. We need true transparency for all spending and accessible tools and resources to share that information with families and communities.
- As the city looks to put in place more standards for budget transparency, parents and educators must be engaged to ensure the information and tools truly work for communities.



MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

- The pandemic has been devastating for too many DC families. 1 in 5 students already had a mental health disorder and almost half of DC kids had experienced at least one traumatic experience prior to this year. Now - we must grapple with the hard truth that this year has been traumatic for every family - and that trauma and impact is not equally shared. Our most vulnerable communities need support more than ever to cope and heal from this trauma.
- Still, concerning cuts were made to funding for community-based behavioral health providers - and more could be coming. And despite the increases, we still need more funding for SEL, trauma-informed training and mental health supports.
- We also need to improve how we implement these supports, including:
 - A landscape analysis of school mental health supports
 - Improve coordination across systems of care
 - Better engage families
 - Develop a clear accountability system
 - Develop and sustain a pipeline of mental health professionals, especially professionals of color



ACCESS TO GREAT SCHOOLS & INFORMATION FOR ALL FAMILIES

- We need to improve access to specialized school programs, ensure there are great schools in every ward and community, and improve the school report card.
- We must ensure every student with an IEP or 504 and all of our English Learners have access to services, and that parents are partners with schools in supporting their children's learning.
- We must meaningfully engage families and communities in all of that work. We cannot settle for less for any of our DC kids.

PARENT POWER IN ACTION IN 2021

Updates to #DCSchoolsRecovery

To address these needs, parents have revised their #DCSchoolsRecovery Statement of Beliefs. They built off of the progress they already made by using insights from PAVE's Parent Back to School Survey that included feedback from 939 families and our community and school partners to inform their updated priorities. Given the uncertain timeline and nature of Coronavirus and the significant impact distance learning is having on kids and families, parents collectively developed their vision for a safe and equitable return to in-person school. In the spring, PAVE parent leaders will create and execute their advocacy campaign plan in hopes of a brighter future for each and every child in the District.

A Strong Foundation: Parents' Bill of Rights

At the core of all of this work is centering the voices and experiences of families so that parents can be truly valued partners in their children's education. In one of the most difficult years in our lives, almost 2,000 parent leaders turned out to #Vote4DCKids - for their needs, their concerns, and their futures. Parents know their children best and are their children's fiercest advocates, but, too often, parents and families are not included in the discussions where decisions about our children's education are made or where the vision for the future is imagined.

So, while getting out the vote, managing virtual learning in their homes, and holding down all of life's responsibilities amidst a pandemic and repeated racial injustices across our country, a coalition of Black, Brown, and white families across our city came together to write their own Parents' Bill of Rights. These are a set of universal rights written BY parent leaders and FOR systems leaders in DC, sharing what families want to see for every parent in our city in order to ensure that EVERY child has the great education they deserve and that our system of schools is rooted in equity.

This document will serve as a foundation for PAVE parent leaders' advocacy around issues moving forward and a roadmap for system leaders to better connect with and engage with our school communities.

Our Lessons Learned

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Flexibility and responsiveness is essential - especially in times of crisis.

PAVE's advocacy works because we quickly adapt and adjust to what is going on in the world, our communities, and with individual families. We were able to be nimble in the shift to virtual because our core work was already strong: we had good systems in place and strong relationships with families. We knew exactly what additional systems and supports we needed to create, how to communicate them, and who might need additional support.

Even in crisis, our team's flexibility allowed us to address the decline in our network growth with largely seamless shifts in our teams workflow and strategic updates to our goals. In fact, our network grew faster than ever before for parents at all levels: emerging, active, and leadership.

As a team of continuous learners, we found new ways to improve as virtual work persisted, and our work only got stronger through collaboration and innovation. Because we moved so quickly, oftentimes before schools or the system, others looked to PAVE as a model for responding and we were able to gain the attention and trust of many different stakeholders in our community and nationwide.

It is critical to intentionally build and cultivate trust.

Relationships are at the center of our work. Every single member of PAVE's team intentionally builds relationships with parents and other leaders in the space and that has allowed us to gain an exceptional level of trust with our community, partners in the work, and policymakers.

Just this year, we conducted wellness calls to parents when the pandemic first hit, and shifted our work to raise money to be able to provide direct support to address the needs we were hearing from families. This responsiveness to, and investment in, communities also contributed to our network growth.

Our team already had personal relationships with partners and school leaders that went beyond 9am-5pm, because the work never stopped then. We could call on them because they could call on us - and that has been developed over years of commitment to showing up and doing great work together.

Policymakers trust PAVE because when they ask to hear from parents, they know they will hear from a diverse myriad of parents from all Wards and backgrounds - and always see new faces. They know that parents will come to the table informed with a clear vision and the data and experiences to back it up. None of this was by accident - and all of it was critical to getting the work done and done well.

This trust amplifies our impact.

PAVE is a trusted resource for policy in the city - not just for parents, but also for schools, community partners, policymakers. Parents can come to us with problems or questions and know we will give them complete, objective, and reliable information that is easy to understand with all of the background or context they need. We consistently partner with other organizations to learn from and incorporate their expertise in our work, and our expertise pushes them in the same way.

Both partner organizations and policymakers look to PAVE to understand families' perspective, priorities, and needs and share information. Because of this citywide trust at all levels of the system, those in and outside of the system will respond to and work with PAVE. This allowed PAVE to be in know about changes or updates, to secure meetings with elected officials, and ensure they read key reports or messages. Overall, this was instrumental for parents' asks to be thoughtfully considered and ultimately prioritized.

Strong Information + Organizing + Communication = Power.

PAVE builds all of our policy, organizing, and communications content in-house. The strength of this content has opened doors for parents and catalyzed action and impact. To build parents' information power around policy, we pull in national and local context and data, translate the information so it is accessible and easy to understand, and give parents the whole picture in a way that resonates with them and their community with clear next steps for action. We take parents' perspectives and personalities into account when we build the content and design it to meet parents where they are - making space for them to share, connect, and ideate and have systems in place to ensure equity of voice and that all parents are heard and represented in the work.

Our organizing team consistently brings in new families while identifying new leadership opportunities for parents to take action around what they've learned and help them tell their story. The communications team makes sure that all of this work is shared with a clear, consistent message across multiple mediums - all with a wide reach to maximize impact and ensure the work translated into real change for kids and families. The level of excellence and synergy across these areas has allowed parents' work to grow in unprecedented ways.

We must infuse joy into all that we do.

This work is hard. It is emotional, personal, and doesn't ever really end. Our parent leaders constantly give so much, and it is our responsibility to make sure that we are also bringing JOY to the work. We brought in a DJ and hosted virtual dance parties and celebrations, we sent all sorts of swag to parents as thank you's for all that they do - from tumblers to t-shirts to face masks, and we make sure that anything we create is attractive, engaging, and parents' can see themselves in it. All of our meeting content, PAVE Post newsletters, and emails have colors, photos, emojis, and shoutouts - because parents deserve beautiful and professional materials and resources that celebrate and center each of them. We can only do this hard work together if we infuse joy in all that we do.

This work is about changing who sits at the tables of power - and changing who is in power.

One of the important things we learned during COVID is that we had to make sure that parents were setting the policy agenda that they wanted to see by inviting people in power to learn more about and partner with them in their vision. PAVE parent leaders hosted town halls and candidates forums with elected officials and policymakers to ensure that they listened to parent concerns. And parent leaders in this work also invited schools and other organizations to partner with them in coalitions around their advocacy issues. But it didn't stop there - this year, PAVE launched our Community Change Fellowship, a group of 20 of our parent leaders who are looking to take formal roles in the DC education and policymaking system to start to shift who is in power. The goal is to create a DC system where the next policymaker, elected official, mayoral appointee, or staffer at our schools and agencies isn't just listening to our parent leaders but they are one themselves and have the lived experience to understand the issues and advocate from the inside out versus the outside in.

WHAT WE WANT TO IMPROVE

How we develop parents individually as leaders.

Throughout the year, we celebrated the leadership growth of so many parent leaders, but we also reflected that PAVE was providing a lot of intensive support, and to build sustainability for our organization and independent leadership for parents, we will have to do things differently. We have always done things to make leadership and advocacy more accessible, like providing resources, access to information, and built relationships in the system, but we want to begin to build that muscle in each of our families. We are still envisioning what this could look like, but will begin with offering resources on how we do what we do - like reading and subscription lists to build informational power and offering professional development around social media, organizing, advocacy, and more.

Further, PAVE launched our first ever Community Change Fellowship in order to build parents as leaders to take on formal roles inside of the system, taking on positions of those they usually advocate towards. This is critical work to making the system more responsive to families - but requires intensive knowledge and skill-building and shifting of mindsets. We will continue to think about how we can push fellows to build their own leadership to be able to make the systemic change they wish to see.

Opening the system to all parents - not just parents in the PAVE network.

We know we're not reaching all families, and so we must reflect on how we push the system to open itself to not just PAVE parents or just around these issues - so parent voice is truly at the center. Parents wrote their own Parents' Bill of Rights for the DC Education System to show what PARENTS agreed their rights should be, now we must consider how we empower and catalyze other leaders throughout the system to inform and engage families so that vision can be realized.

Find the right balance between in-person and virtual advocacy.

There were many bright spots that arose from shifting our advocacy work to virtual, including higher event attendances and more parents submitting testimonies to public hearings that ever before, which we will work to continue. However, we need to go back to doing some things in person - most importantly for

parent-to-parent interactions. Part of what helped the work get done this year is that many parents already had relationships with each other, so they were able to lean on and support one another and hit the ground running when it came to advocacy. This was significantly harder for newer parents who, for the most part, got to know everyone through a screen and didn't have the organic moments before or after meetings to build relationships. This is paramount for our work. This also holds true for building relationships with partners and policymakers. Nothing can replace in-person connection, and we're excited for the day we can safely bring the PAVE family and community together again.

IN CLOSING

While the needs of DC kids and families are still great and there is no shortage of work ahead, we believe in the power and promise of parent voice. We commit to doing all we can to support parents as partners and leaders in the years ahead. Parents have consistently paved the way for authentic, community-centered change, and we have no doubt they will have even more impact in the future.

With parents in charge, the possibilities are endless.