



**Testimony for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)
Performance Oversight Hearing
Wednesday, February 19th, 2020**

To: DC Council Committee on Education, DC Council Committee of the Whole, Councilmember Grosso, Chairman Mendelson, and Committee Staff

From: Maya Martin Cadogan, Founder and Executive Director of PAVE and Ward 6 Resident

Date: February 19th, 2020

Good Morning Councilmember Grosso, Chairman Mendelson, and members of the Committee on Education and Committee of the Whole. My name is Maya Martin Cadogan and I am a Ward 6 resident and the founder and Executive Director of PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education). PAVE was founded in April 2016 with an all-parent governing board in order to connect, inform, and empower parent leaders to give families in DC a voice and a choice in the vision for education in our city.

Every year, PAVE hosts a Parent Policy Summit that brings together parent leaders from all across the city to share their experiences with the education system and decide on the issues that they want to advocate for in the coming year. We deeply appreciate that DCPS has responded to parent priorities last year, including:

- **Mental Health Supports and Trauma-Informed Training in All Schools**

- Parent leaders called on our city to ensure that every school has access to high-quality social-emotional learning programs, trauma-informed training for all school staff, and access to full-time school-based mental health professionals.
- DCPS redirected \$2.6 million more of their budget to mental health last year, but this funding should not come at the expense of another part of their budget. Instead, there should be additional money available for more support. We are grateful for the Mayor's proposed 4% increase to the UPSFF, now DCPS should work with our city leaders to further increase the base UPSFF and at-risk weight to the level recommended in the DC Adequacy Study, \$11,840 per pupil and 0.37, respectively, minimally by next year. This will help ensure schools are able to provide more mental health supports where kids already are – and that funding is allocated equitably to get to the school communities that need the most support.
- It is also extremely important that DCPS works to ensure that mental health supports in schools are implemented in a coordinated way – both on the agency and school level – and that there is a clear accountability system in place demonstrating an effective use of funds and quality of care and services.
- DCPS has convened multiple parent advisory boards to hear from families, including PAVE parent leaders, about their experiences and discuss strategies to improve. Still, DCPS should work with other agencies, schools, and providers to develop family engagement best practices around mental health supports. Parent voice must be included in this conversation in order to address stigma and find ways to work together to support students at school and at home.
- Lastly, parents want to see DCPS work together with the Department of Behavioral Health to produce and share a landscape analysis of mental health supports and develop a pipeline of mental health professionals to serve in schools.



- **Transparent Citywide School Funding**

- Parents want access to clear, robust information about how schools are spending their funding and be included in the decision-making process.
- DCPS has taken important steps to make school budgets more accessible by creating their new Family and Community Guide to DCPS School Budgets and the Pocket Budget guide.
- To be sure, DCPS should make sure all school budgets report at-risk funding, private donations, and program costs, and work to demystify their funding allocation process. It is still not clear to communities how budget decisions are made, nor how community input was included – which is critical to build trust and work towards a system that is centered in the voices of the people.

At the most recent PAVE Parent Policy Summit, parent leaders chose to continue to advocate for Mental Health Supports in All Schools and also prioritized Increased Access to Specialized School Programs, which includes dual enrollment, STEM, Montessori, and more. Parent leaders were thrilled to see Bard High School Early College open last year in Ward 7 - the first selective high school East of the River that allows students to graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate degree. In 2017, Ward 8 PAVE Parent Leader Reggie Workman accompanied Councilmember Trayon White to visit Bard's campus in Baltimore and expressed how much he wished this was an option for him when he was growing up in DC. Because DCPS opened Bard, more families East of the River have access to a high-quality school close to where they live.

Still, there is much more to be done to ensure all children have access to schools that meet their individual needs, allow them to explore their passions, and prepare them for a productive, fulfilling life after high school. The disparity between the availability of program options between areas East and West of the Anacostia River is especially stark. Even though 45% of public school children in DC live East of the River, the majority of which are low-income students of color, most specialized school programs are located West of the River, and many have waitlists.

In order to ensure all families have real access to these programs, DCPS should work with other education agencies to:

- Fully fund all schools so they have adequate resources to implement specialized programs,
- Create a common standard for each specialized school program type to build trust and ensure quality,
 - Critical to this work is ensuring all families have access to information about each of these programs, their benefits, and where they are located.
- Increase community partnerships in our schools, and;
- Pilot a cross-sector working group for family-centered school and specialized program planning.

Our parent leaders boldly share their stories and give so much of themselves to advocate for not just their child, but all children. We have seen that when leaders listen to their powerful voices, we see positive changes in our education system that can transform our DC into a more equitable city for us all. We cannot do that work without partners like DCPS who also believe in the power and promise of parent voice and leadership.

Thank you,

Maya Martin Cadogan
Founder and Executive Director,
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)
Ward 6 Resident