



**Testimony for Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)
Performance Oversight Hearing
Wednesday, February 26, 2020**

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

From: Yvette Selby, Ward 5 PAVE PLE Board Member

Date: Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Grosso, and members of the Committee on Education and Committee of the Whole. My name is Yvette Selby and I am a proud parent of twins that attend Capital City Public Charter School in Ward. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 5 and Citywide Parent Leader Boards. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am here because I would like to see our city be a leader in investing and sustaining academic and educational enrichment programs for our DC students. Specifically, I want to discuss providing the funds necessary so our students have real access to a variety of high-quality specialized school programs.

Currently, my 9th-grade son loves robotics and recently participated in the VEX Robotics DC State Championship. He has been participating in robotics as part of a community-based organization for 6 years as his current school does not offer robotics. His community-based team competed against teams that were DC school-based. These competitions focus on using hands-on, project-based learning, technical skills, and mathematical concepts as well as teamwork, creative and analytical thinking as part of their programming. Many of the coaches consist of volunteer technical engineering professionals. My son's participation in this robotics and other engineering-based programs has led him to want to be a mechanical engineer. As a



first-year high school student, he understands the classes he has to take to prepare him for college and an engineering career. He's motivated to achieve his goal and has gone from an average to an honor roll student. I say all this to say that as a parent and engineering professional, I will do everything I can to support my children succeed in school and get a great education, even when their schools don't offer the specialty programs that fuel their interests. I know a lot of other parents feel the same way.

While public schools in DC currently offer a range of specialized school programs, not all families have real access to these options from PreK through high school — or a voice in conversations on how to change that fact. This lack of access is especially challenging for families of color, families that are low-income, experiencing homelessness, and immigrant communities, which is profoundly inequitable and unjust. One example of the glaring disparity in access is highlighted by the difference in the availability of sought-after program options between areas east and west of the Anacostia River.

OSSE should support schools in getting federal funding and resources for the implementation of specialized programs within their schools, and this investment could provide resources for school infrastructure designed to support the particular requirements for a specific specialized school program; strong partnerships with community organizations, government agencies, and the private sector to leverage community assets and connect students to content experts, mentors, and future opportunities; and supports for teachers and staff, including teachers who are masters in their content area and can mentor newer teachers; ongoing professional development to help teachers grow their craft; and school materials and opportunities that meet the needs of a diverse community of learners and abilities, including access to technology, experts, field trips, and evidence-based and culturally responsive curriculum. In addition, we need to provide safe and reliable



transportation options to address barriers to students' ability to attend specialized school programs, regardless of the students' address and the school's location.

We as a city need to take aggressive steps in closing achievement gaps and removing them within our schools, and focus on doing what it takes to give ALL of our kids, teachers, and school leaders the tools they need to make positive changes. I am excited that our city is working towards this goal, but we need to make sure we are doing this right, that we have all of the pieces in place, and that we provide the funding necessary to move forward. My children – and every child in DC – deserves to have access to quality and equitable educational programs to help them learn and grow. Let's work together to make that a reality. Thank you to Councilmembers for your commitment to this work and for fighting to make DC's schools the best they can be so we can have Great Schools in EVERY Ward.

Thank you,

Yvette Selby

Ward 5 PAVE PLE Board Member

PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)