

**Testimony to the Committee on Education
FY21 Budget Oversight Hearing for DCPS & PCSB**

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June 2020

Greeting Chairman Grosso and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Marcia Huff and I am a Ward 7 resident. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for your committee. My husband Kevin and I have two children ages 2 and 6. Our son attends Two Rivers at Young PCS located in Ward 5. Our daughter will enter PK3 at Two Rivers at Young in the fall. I am also a member of Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE). **I am here to share my thoughts on student mental health resources as well as OST and aftercare services.**

Students and their families need a fully accessible mental health system within our schools and communities. We need to make sure that students and their families have access to an array of resources. Some might need individual counseling; others might benefit from groups and there should be an array of resources for maintaining positive mental health. Resources around sleep, stress reduction, resolving conflict, and self-care. Services should be easy to obtain and appointments easy to schedule. Students and families should be able to use a website or app to view the available resources, vet professionals, and schedule appointments. There are many great models for this such as Kaiser Permanente's scheduling system. Simply having social workers or a share psychologist (who most parents do not know about or how to reach) on site is not enough. Sending students and their families to the Access Helpline is not acceptable. The staff at the Access Helpline is not prepared to support youth needs. They do not have specialized knowledge of youth resources nor are they sensitive to the mental health needs of children and youth.

I would also like to share my thoughts on after school care and programming. We made the decision to seek schools outside of our boundary and enter the lottery because the school behind our home in Ward 7 does not have aftercare services. Aftercare services are essential for most families. Most parents who work outside of the home are not able to make it to school by 3 or 3:30 to pick up their children. My husband and I certainly are not able to. Thankfully, we found a school that has an aftercare program (initially run by Springboard and now Alphabest). Unfortunately, these services are not free, and vouchers were not always accepted (I believe they were as of January). Since our son started school, we have spent between \$250-500 a month for aftercare services. This is simply not possible for many families.

Our school also provides extracurricular programming but nearly all for a cost of \$100-250 per session. Over the past three years, we have spent more than \$1500 for after school programming. We are able to pay for this programming, but many families are not. All children should have access to stem programming, dance, soccer,

music, cooking, gymnastics, chess, etc. Through these activities, our son has made friends, strengthened physically, and gained confidence. He also learned new skills and gained new interests. One of the teachers seeing the disparities started their own club but unfortunately, they did not return after winter break. These activities should not be luxuries because they are essential for growth and development. DC needs to fully fund OST programming and make sure that all families have access to afterschool enrichment programming and aftercare if needed. Funding should be for all schools both DCPS and charter schools.

While adequate funding is crucial, we need more than just money. We need transparent and inclusive planning. Programs that are based on the needs of the students, their families, and the community. We also need agency leaders, staff, and schools to be held accountable for the money they are spending and the services that they are providing. Schools need to submit reports on what interventions are being used to support students, how many have received or are receiving services, and at what costs. The stakes are too high to continue the current approach. We also need to make sure that resources are going directly to students and not assume a trickle-down only approach where professionals train and coach teachers and then teachers implement various approaches. Students need direct support from professionals. They need access to interventions not multiple layers of bureaucracy with hundreds in backrooms creating curricula, coaching staff, and advising administration. Our city needs strong leadership on these issues. This is not a charter nor DCPS issue, but it is a student issue. All students should have full access to mental health and wellness supports, after school enrichment programming, and after school care regardless of where they live or where they attend school.

Thank you for your leadership, time, and attention.