



**Testimony for the Committee on Health Oversight Hearing
Wednesday, October 28th, 2020**

To: DC Council Committee on Health, Committee on Health Chairman Vince Gray, Committee on Health Members, and Committee on Health Staff

From: Kerry Savage, Director of Policy at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)

Date: October 28st, 2020

Good afternoon Councilmember Gray and members of the Committee on Health. My name is Kerry Savage, and I am the Director of Policy at PAVE. I have the honor and privilege of working alongside PAVE parent leaders, a truly awe-inspiring and diverse group of Washingtonians who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to develop and advocate for their vision for a family-centered response to Coronavirus in DC. I am grateful for the opportunity to testify today and share about that vision, [results from our recent Parent Back to School Survey](#) and how they compared to those from our [April COVID Impact Survey](#), and the key takeaways that relate to the public health element of the District’s response to COVID-19.

In the past few months, DC made several important efforts to support the public health of DC families that parent leaders laid out in their vision statement, including:

- Making food pick-up sites more accessible by expanding the number of them and adding delivery options;
- Putting policies in place to prevent residents from being evicted or having their utilities shut off;
- Expanding access to PPE and childcare, especially for essential workers;
- Adding funding for relief benefits to excluded workers; and
- Investing in technology and internet, which, now more than ever, are essential resources for work, school, and access to important information.

Each of these actions were necessary for an integrated and comprehensive approach to public health and effective response to COVID-19. Further, our September survey responses found a decrease in the percent of parents who listed managing learning from home, job or income insecurity, not getting good information from the city, and access to food as a top challenge (very or most challenging). However, there was no change in the percent of parents who listed housing insecurity as a top challenge.

Issue Area*	% of parents that responded is a TOP Challenge in April	% of parents that responded is a TOP Challenge in September	% Change
Managing learning from home	59%	44%	-15%
Job or income concerns/insecurity	42%	32%	-10%
Housing concerns/insecurity	22%	22%	No change
Not getting good information from the city	29%	21%	-8%
Access to enough food at home	23%	19%	-4%

**Note: not all issue-areas from each survey are recorded here as some questions were changed or added between the two surveys. Full results of each survey are included in the links above.*



Still, there are a number of areas that require attention and improvement.

- **Centering racial justice:**
 - This pandemic has further exposed the generational injustice done to Black and brown communities and they are bearing the brunt of the impact of the pandemic as seen in the rates around deaths, positive cases, unemployment, and more.
 - Passing the REACH Act is a strong start to help ensure that future legislation, budgets, and decisions center racial justice.

- **Access to health care:**
 - In April, 51% of parents responded that they were concerned about how the virus would affect the health of their family.
 - In September, 12% of parents responded that inconsistent access to health care was a top challenge, and this was reported at the highest rate for Spanish-speakers and Ward 1 residents.
 - Parents and many community advocates have consistently called for improvements to DC's Health Care Alliance Program, which include adjusting the requirements for in-person renewal to shift to once a year. Previous requirements were a barrier to access even before the pandemic. Now, it is even more vital to make this change to improve the online portal experience for families, so we can ensure everyone has access to the care they need and deserve.

- **Access to mental and behavioral health services:**
 - In our September survey, 24% of parents responded that they were not satisfied with the mental health supports and social emotional learning available for their child, and 30% were not satisfied with the resources for parents to support that at home.
 - Despite efforts, many parents also noted they were not aware of the mental health supports available at their school or in the community. We must rethink how we are currently communicating and engaging with families around this.
 - Further, DC cut funding for community-based health providers that were already operating on extremely thin margins, which has threatened the availability and accessibility of services in and outside of schools, not to mention losing out on the federal reimbursement multiplier. Given the increases in trauma, stress, anxiety and substance abuse, we must expand resources for communities and providers – not reduce them.

- **Access to technology and internet:**
 - Now more than ever, technology and internet are public health essentials. They are vital vehicles for health care, mental and behavioral health supports, work, and connection to others.
 - DC's pilot program to provide low-cost internet to those who are most in need it is a good start; however, more must be done to inform eligible residents and to raise the floor for "basic internet." Essential activities, like school, work, and some health care appointments, are extremely frustrating and challenging with limited bandwidth and an unreliable connection for many families.

When leaders listen to the powerful voices of DC families, we see positive changes in our system that can transform our DC into a more equitable city for all. We cannot do that work without Council leaders who also believe in the power and promise of parent voice and leadership.

Thank you,

Kerry Savage
Director of Policy
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)