

Testimony for the Committee of the Whole
Joint Public Roundtable on Re-Opening District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)
Thursday January 21, 2021

To: DC Council Committee of the Whole, Chairman Mendelson

From: Luz Valera, Ward 1 PAVE Parent Leader in Education

Date: Friday, February 5th, 2021

My name is Luz Valera and I am a proud parent of 3 daughters. My first daughter is 10 years old and in 5th grade and I have 6-year-old twins in kindergarten. They all attend Hearst Elementary School in Ward 3 and also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 1 PLE Board. Personally, living through this pandemic has been very difficult for my family. My oldest daughter connects to all her classes independently, it is difficult for her to receive instructions, listen to her lessons, participate in class or understand Mathematics in English because it is not her first language. However, she connects every day and tries to do her best to learn. In the case of my twins, we arrived in this country in December 2019, we started classes in January and March 15 their classes came to an abrupt halt due to the pandemic. It has all still been a shock for our family.

With support from their School and the larger community, we connect to Canvas without fail every day but how do you explain to a child who does not speak English, does not read English, does not understand English...each of the videos, stories and instructions that are in English? I have done my best to help them in their classes. I am also a Mom who does not know the language (English) very well myself, but I have the desire to see my daughters learn and succeed. It is a struggle every day to see them cry and say they don't want to be in class. It is very difficult for them to understand the circumstances of our world, that mixed with the fact that all their school applications are in English and their instructions in English, I see my daughters struggle and follow along without understanding much.

I know I am one of many parents facing this challenge in our city but as we continue to be teachers of distance learning to our children it is so important that parents like me (native Spanish speakers) receive the information from the school and from our city in our language. I know that is KEY to building trust in the education system of our kids, but it is also important that our children, especially children who are learning English, classified here as the 'ELL',

receive the highest quality education and attention they need to continue to focus on their virtual classes.

This is so important so that my daughters and many children like mine do not find themselves falling through the cracks and disengaged in school. I know that we are in a pandemic and it is no one's fault but it is through this challenge that we must all be called to collaborate and adapt to these unique circumstances especially because the impact of these decisions is felt by our kids the most. Thank you for considering my testimony.

Thank You!

Luz Valera
Ward 1 PAVE Parent Leader