

Testimony for the Special Committee on COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Wednesday, May 26th, 2021

To: Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Charles Allen, Councilmember Vincent Gray, Special Committee on COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery members, Committee of the Whole members, and staff

From: Lisa Weddington, Ward 8 PAVE Parent Leader

Date: May 26th, 2021

Good morning Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Allen, Councilmember Gray, and members of the committees. My name is Lisa Weddington and I am a proud parent of a son who will be a freshman at Mckinley Technology High School in the fall. Our family lives in Ward 8 and I am here today advocating with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE).

First, thank you for uplifting PAVE parent priorities in the Fiscal Year 2021 budget; including adding 300k in funding for at-risk students, almost +4M to social emotional learning and +3.3M to school-based mental health. These are important investments, especially for families East of the River, who have been most negatively impacted by the pandemic! I am testifying today, not only on behalf of my son, Langston, who is entering into high school, which is an important time of transition and development in his life, but for all kids across the district--kids who deserve support and a sense of normalcy while returning to in-person instruction.

As we see light at the end of the tunnel of this pandemic, I'm asking you to remain invested in the mental wellness and social and emotional advancement of students. Throughout his junior high school, Langston was an introverted and mild mannered kid. It seemed like his deepest social connections were made through video games. I am concerned that during virtual learning, his opportunities to make meaningful real-life connections have become even more limited. Over the course of virtual learning, I've watched him become almost reclusive--and as a mom, it's scary. I hope that this lack of interaction with peers will not be a hurdle for him as he navigates his first year of high school. This is one reason I believe the District should invest \$10.8M in social emotional learning programs, restorative practices and trauma informed training. I want to see a school system in DC that supports the whole child; one that makes sure SEL and trauma-informed training is embedded into ALL parts of the school day.

We know that it's not only what happens *within* the school day that matters experts say that after school and summer programs are [linked](#) to increased engagement in class, social emotional skills, and self-esteem--all factors that drive improved academic performance. At my son's previous school, OST opportunities were few, and the robotics program was discontinued. Langston was so disappointed and this is part of the reason we chose to attend Mckinley Tech.

However, despite his excitement for starting high school and joining the robotics team, just to get to the building, Langston will have to leave the house and cross two streets by himself to get on the city bus. For us, the rate of violent crime in the District is a major issue and could be a factor in our decision to participate in extracurriculars.

As the mother of a soon to be high school freshman, it's my job to navigate being my son's advocate and protector, while still giving him the freedom to experience new things and grow. I hope that schools and the city will be there to support parents like me in this, by investing \$10.8M in social and emotional learning, as well as investing funds in out-of-school time funding. These investments alongside strengthening family engagement around Safe Passage, can make sure that academic and out of school time activities not only *exist*, but that kids feel safe and secure to participate in them as we return to in-person learning in the fall.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our District.

Sincerely,

Lisa Weddington
Ward 8 PAVE Parent Leader