

Committee of the Whole Roundtable on School Reopening and Academic
Recovery: Hearing from Ward 7 & 8 Families
Wednesday, May 26th, 2021

To: Chairman Mendelson and the Committee of the Whole

From: Sharon Culver

Date: May 26, 2021

Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Sharon Culver and I am a proud parent of 3 amazing children attending DC Public Schools. Two of them attend Anne Beers Elementary School and I have a Young King attending Ron Brown College Preparatory High School, both of which are located in Ward 7. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 7 PLE Board as well as the Citywide PLE Board.

First, thank you for the PAVE Parent Priorities were funded in Fiscal Year 2021 budget:

- *3% increase in the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF)*
- *+300k for funding for at-risk students*
- *Almost +4M to social-emotional learning*
- *+3.3M to school-based mental health*
- *+5M for emergency child care funding*
- *+6.9M for distance learning supports (tech, internet)*
- *+9M for relief for excluded workers*
- *+500k for Out of School Time (OST) programs*

Those are important investments, and we thank you for answering the call to help get DC's children to a more equitable place. I am testifying today because I want children attending DC public schools in Wards 7 & 8 to have the equitable education they so rightfully deserve, by ensuring that schools serving children in these wards receive the funding to support not only the child's academic needs, but to also support their social-emotional needs.

In order to address the issues of learning loss, DC should commit to investing a total of \$10.8 million for social-emotional learning and trauma-informed training in all schools, especially those that serve children in Wards 7 & 8 that are furthest from opportunity, because we know that children can not learn if they are not mentally and emotionally well.

This is important for my family because a child's mental health is just as important as their physical health. One of my children struggles with reading comprehension and processing issues while another struggles with depression. Because of these challenges, they are becoming less and less engaged in school and in learning. I have even had my first grader say to me that she hates school, and question why she has to attend. My children are not the only ones with these feelings, as the COVID-19 pandemic has caused chronic stress and trauma for many children across the District and across the country.

Our children need access to these crucial mental health supports this because, as reported by EmpowerK12 in their fall [Student Wellbeing Survey](#), 77% of DC students that have been surveyed are concerned about the health of their families, one in five children have recently experienced the loss of a family member that they live with, and 45% of children have reported that their family's financial situation has changed or become more stressful due to the pandemic. It is clear that our children are trying their best to cope with all that is going on in their personal worlds as well as the world at large, however, at the start of the Fall, nearly 60% of children reported no longer having the ability to participate in activities that once brought them joy and would help them to cope during difficult times.

While my husband and I are planning to allow them to return to the physical school building in the fall, we know that if their social-emotional and mental health needs are not addressed they will continue to fall further behind. [Research](#) has shown that children that aren't mentally well or are not having their social-emotional needs met, are unable to learn. My family has done our best to ensure that those needs are met here at home; however, we know that it takes a village to raise a child. In order for our children to be their most successful selves, they will need to have those same supports when they return to school. This is why we need to make sure that SEL and trauma-informed training are embedded into ALL parts of the school day AND to ensure that students with more intensive needs have access to mental health professionals. Additionally, investing an additional \$6.4 million to fully fund the school-based mental health expansion and add clinicians in 80 more schools and \$4 million to restore the cuts to community-based health providers, would further ensure that the children and community members who need it most have their needs met.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our District. For these reasons and so many more, I urge you all to invest the \$10.8 million that is needed to ensure our children can have access to the resources needed to help



them cope with the traumas they are facing today, and not allow it to become a problem our society will judge them for tomorrow.

Sharon Culver
Ward 7 PAVE Parent Leader in Education Board Member