



**Testimony for the Committee of the Whole Budget Oversight Hearing
Thursday June 3, 2021**

To: DC Council Committee of the Whole
From: Renee Davis, PAVE Parent and Ward 1 Resident
Date: June 3, 2021

Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Renee Davis and I am a proud parent of two children with disabilities, and also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 1 PLE Board.

I want to start by thanking our District's leaders for increasing investments for public education, including a 3.6% increase to the UPSFF. As a parent, I appreciate that this will allow for greater investments in our children's futures. However – we are not yet achieving equity, particularly for our children with disabilities.

Today, I want to share my story and my vision for DC education and for my daughter, Alexa. Alexa, like me, is autistic. She also has a mental illness. Because of her dual diagnosis, Alexa has a private placement at a school in Maryland with IEP support from a public charter school here in DC. Alexa, also like me, is Twice-Exceptional. Her math skills are beyond intelligent – I haven't seen a student crunch numbers quite as she does. There's also her artistic edge – the designs Alexa creates just with the flick of her Apple pen astonishes me daily. No matter how much I celebrate and recognize my daughter's Twice-Exceptionality, it feels as though the world never will.

Even with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which mandates states to provide children with disabilities with free and appropriate public education, Alexa, and other autistic students, rarely receive equal and fair learning opportunities that neurotypical students receive. Most students, like Alexa, will go through their elementary and secondary education without having taken accelerated courses like Algebra or participating in elective courses like Studio Arts. While I'm thankful that our schools are focused on ensuring autistic students engage in the core curriculum as neurotypical students do, students like Alexa deserve to participate in ALL that our schools have to offer. And I'm told too many excuses for this issue.

DC's UPSFF is not only underfunded according to the District's own adequacy study, but it also grossly underfunds our children with disabilities by not accounting for the funding required to meet their unique needs - and our neurodiverse children deserve their futures to be equitably funded. Twice-Exceptional students like my daughter deserve exceptional learning opportunities.



In this budget, I urge you to *protect* and *expand* the Mayor's UPSFF increase, while also using the large influx of federal dollars to fund opportunities for children like my daughter Alexa. In that process, it is essential that policymakers and schools engage with families of children with disabilities to understand how to best support our kids, to ensure these funds are used to give children like mine the exceptional learning opportunities they deserve. Long-term, our definition of who is considered "at-risk" by DC's education system also needs to be more inclusive of our children with disabilities.

Thank you Chairman and members of the Committee of the Whole.

Renee Davis
Ward 1 Resident and PAVE Parent Leader