



**Testimony for the Committee of the Whole
Re-Opening District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and District of Columbia Public Charter
Schools (DCPCS) for School Year 2021-2022 Hearing**

September 21, 2021

To: Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and Committee Staff

From: Tyesha Andrews, Ward 8 PAVE PLE Board Member (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)

Date: September 21, 2021

Good evening Council of the District of Columbia and all District family and friends.
Thanks to the Committee of the Whole for allowing me to speak this afternoon.

My name is Tyesha Andrews, and I am a current ward 8 resident, mother of a student at Plummer Elementary and Jefferson Middle Academy, and serve as a ward 8 PLE board member for Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE). In addition, I am a full-time wife and government employee.

I have provided you with all my job titles to provide context for this speech. During the week, while schools were in the Spring session, and as my husband continues to go out as an essential worker, I am usually at home, teleworking, and was "homeschooling" simultaneously. So, I say all of that to say, Yes, virtual learning and teleworking have been a colossal adjustment! Yes, it has been challenging! Yes, some days are worse than others, but I have been able to navigate them all. So, No, it has not been easy! However, I would prefer it over being bed-bound, hospital-bound, or worse, Dead! Today, I am to voice my opinions on behalf of the "little people" like my children aged 5 and 11.

It is necessary to provide a virtual option for all DCPS because we are currently under a national and a global health emergency/pandemic. The current vaccinations are only available to children ages 12 and older. However, children under the age of 12 can still contract, spread, and die from COVID, especially the new DELTA variant. It is foolish, impractical, unreasonable, and insensitive to send children who cannot be vaccinated back to school in person mandatorily. Winter is coming, which means flu season and COVID are about to flourish. There need to be virtual options for school this Winter. I do believe that children do tend to learn more when

having in-person interactions with their peers. However, with proper support from home, our children can still be successful with a virtual learning for all school children. Virtual learning should remain an option for all DCPS, especially our children aged 11 and under.

Moreover, to mitigate the learning loss, DCPS would need to improve communication and outreach to students and families; every DCPS family should receive at least bi-weekly updates via email, call, text, and/or postal service of updates involving the school and/or student. They should also consider sending home weekly work packets for the children to complete at home and be returned to the school every week. As opposed to going to school every day.

Both of my children have some form of high-functioning autism. My youngest son attends Plummer Elementary. His Kindergarten class consists of approximately ten students with a range of different disabilities. Some of his classmates have not gone to school because some parents fear that their children will contract the virus easily due to not wearing a mask. Due to a child's disability, they may not want to wear it and do not understand why they must wear it; this can cause the child to tantrum and trigger a more traumatic response and experience for the disabled child.

Our babies, our toddlers, and all our elementary school-aged children are not safe. They cannot get the COVID vaccination. Elementary school-aged children are most vulnerable as they are more active than and less likely to wear and/or keep a mask on all day. They are also least likely to follow directions of not touching certain items and staying 3-6 feet apart. Due to the number of children enrolled in all DCPS, I do not even see how social distancing will be possible in middle and high school students' classrooms, gyms, and cafeteria areas.

My oldest son attends Jefferson Middle Academy. The school had approximately four individuals test positive for COVID since the week before school started. I am blessed that my child was not in contact with any of the tested positive individuals. Nevertheless, what if he did? Would my 11-year-old son still be here today, would he be hospitalized, or would he be healthy at home?

So again, Yes, virtual learning AND teleworking has been a huge adjustment! Yes, they have been a hard job! Nevertheless, again, I have been able to navigate them all. So, No, it has not been easy! However, I would prefer it over being bed-bound, hospital-bound, or worse, Dead!

Thank you.



Tyesha Andrews
Ward 8 PAVE Parent Leader in Education