

**Department of Parks and Recreation  
Performance Oversight Hearing  
Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs  
Wednesday, February 16, 2022**

**To:** Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs, Councilmember Trayon White, Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs members, and Committee staff  
**From:** Jane Feldmesser, Policy Analyst at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)  
**Date:** February 16, 2022

Good afternoon Chairman White, members of the Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs, and Committee staff. My name is Jane Feldmesser, and I am the Policy Analyst at PAVE.

PAVE parent leaders have been steadfastly advocating for OST programs since 2018. Their collective vision is simple but powerful: every family has access to a high-quality OST program for their children that supports their individual needs where they can explore their passions and enrich their learning - regardless of income level or where they live.

However, this is not our current reality. The pandemic and the exacerbation of existing racial disparities has continued to cause significant trauma to our children; Black, brown, and low-income residents are bearing the brunt on all fronts as all [data and research](#) points to a K-shaped recovery. They have witnessed their families' financial and housing instability, experienced loss and grief, all while having dealt with these big emotions away from peers, their schools, and their out-of-school time programs. Our students' traumatizing experiences over the past two years have culminated into [acute mental health crises](#), [increased crime](#), and an [increased need for academic support](#).

Regular participation in high-quality out-of-school time programs has been proven time and time again to [support](#) students' academic growth and engagement in learning, boosting students' well-being, and setting students up to thrive post high school. And, importantly, OST programs give kids a safe and enriching place to go when their parents are at work or managing their households.

To address this, it will take all of us and it *must* include investing more local, recurring dollars into high-quality out-of-school time programs to expand access and variety to all students, regardless of income and location. Local dollars are important because they are more consistent than federal funds which can change dramatically per administration, and the grant process is more efficient. Thank you to the Mayor, and the DC Council for the critical investments in

out-of-school time programs in last year's budget with the use of \$17 million in local, recurring funds and \$5 million in federal ARP funds.

Despite this progress, we have to be honest about our shortcomings. In many conversations with parents across the District, parents have reported significant barriers to participation, including cost, transportation, finding programs that interest their children, accessing adequate information, and many more. These barriers to OST programs are outsized when disaggregated by race and income. In PAVE's [2021 Back to School Survey](#), roughly three in five white students participate in OST programs, compared to only two in five Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx students. Participation also varies inversely with income, meaning those from low-income families are less likely than those in higher income families to participate at all. The cost of the programs was a particular barrier for Hispanic/Latinx families (32%), and currently, undocumented students are not eligible for financial aid or program vouchers.

There are clear areas for improvement, but we CAN do this! PAVE parent leaders came together in countless meetings to discuss what [policy solutions](#) are foundational to lasting, systemic change around out-of-school time programs and would address the biggest gaps and needs for our students and families. Today, I want to amplify their top priorities:

### **1. Increase funding for Out-of-School Time Programs**

- This includes providing **at least \$25 million** in *recurring, local* funding for OST programs and allocate based on performance-based evaluations to ensure quality.
- The increased funding should provide **dedicated funding for schools** for before/after school, summer, and winter programs.
- To eliminate barriers to financial aid based on documentation status and student age, PAVE parents are advocating for **redesigning the cost structure and requirements for vouchers and financial aid.**

### **2. Create a strategic plan with families, educators, OST providers and community partners to ensure access to in-demand programs for all kids.**

- This should include:
  - Defining what a high-quality OST program looks like and metrics for evaluation.
  - An updated needs assessment to identify existing program gaps/needs, and looking at both location and program type, which should include DPR programs.

Today, you've heard from PAVE parent leaders Sherry McDaniel Thomas and Crystal Gray who emphasized the urgency of investing in these crucial OST programs to support our children and their growth as well as about the need for developing a strategic plan to expand access to OST programs, like DPR programs to all families. I urge you to act on their stories as they represent some of the many experiences of parents around DC.

This upcoming budget and oversight season is an opportunity to show our values - that DC truly takes care of its people, especially when times get hard, and one that will courageously act to right the wrongs of historic injustice and step up with bold, innovative action to meet this unprecedented moment, with investments in our future and in our children.

This work is only possible with leaders on the Council who also believe in the power and promise of community voice. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today, I hope that we can count on your leadership.

In service,

Jane Feldmesser  
Policy Analyst  
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