

**Department of Behavioral Health
Budget Oversight Hearing Testimony
Committee on Health
Monday, March 21, 2022**

To: Committee on Health, Councilmember Vincent Gray, Committee on Health members, and Committee on Health staff

From: Tara Brown, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) Ward 8 PLE Board Member and Citywide Board Member

Date: March 21, 2022

Hello Councilmember Gray, The Committee on Health, HBX and DBH. My name is Tara Brown. I am a Ward 8 resident, and a PAVE parent.

My child suffers from severe clinical depression and extreme social anxiety. Their mental health issues are treated with therapy and medication. Their ability to learn was significantly impaired by their condition. Once they received their diagnosis, it was even more important to understand the impact of their mental health on their learning process. We did a needs assessment and then tailored their education to fit their mental health needs. Now, they are managing both their mental health and their education better. We have over 94,000 more students that need the same assessments and customized plans for aligning their mental health needs with their education.

Today, I'm talking about trauma and learning. There is plenty of research compiled about what trauma does to the brain-especially developing brains, and how that stress and trauma can impede the learning process. I do not have to convince this group that there is a need for School Based Mental Health.

Considering that this pandemic is a collective traumatic experience, it is logical to assume that virtually every school-age child in DC has gone through trauma. When you also factor in violence, abuse, poverty and the unmet mental needs of some caregivers, this assumption has even more credibility.

Considering how adults have struggled with Covid, how does a child process it, while simultaneously getting an education that is integral to their life long success and develop into a fully functioning adult? DBH is integral to the success of our students operating under a cloud of trauma and this trauma existed before COVID and will continue beyond COVID. School Based Mental Health will always be foundational to the education of our students.

However, before you can determine where a student falls on the Multi-Tiered System of Support, you must understand what each school community needs to support their students. The first step towards addressing the problem is understanding it.

Our PAVE parent priorities around SBMH include:

- Assessing the mental health needs of each school. Generating a gap analysis to determine what is needed, compared to what each school has.
- Using this gap analysis to create a comprehensive and transparent plan for the future, inclusive of families and investing \$300,000 to fund a cost study to determine the true cost of expanding the school-based mental health program now and into the future.

On behalf of the PAVE parents who were surveyed and collaborated to come up with our parent priorities around school based mental health, I urge you to listen to our recommendations. Figure out what you are doing, figure out what needs to be done, then work together to make it happen. DC invests billions in education. It is a colossal waste of money if we don't also invest in comprehensive school based mental health supports that will insure our children are equipped to benefit from that investment and can actually learn.

Thank you!

Tara Brown

PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) Ward 8 PLE Board Member and Citywide Board Member