

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

From: Marcia Huff PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) Ward 7 PLE Board Member

Date: March 2, 2022

Greetings Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Marcia Huff and I am a proud parent of two children that attend Two Rivers PCS located in Ward 5. We live in the Marshall Heights community located in Ward 7. I serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 7 PLE board and I also have the honor of serving as the Ward 7 Policy Captain. In addition to my work with PAVE, I serve as the Deputy Director of the Young Women’s Project (YWP) a DC nonprofit that builds the leadership and power of young people so that they can shape DC policies and institutions to expand rights and opportunities.

I am here today because every family deserves access to high-quality OST programs for their children that supports their individual needs where they can explore their passions and enrich their learning--regardless of income, ward, or ability. When I say OST I mean whenever students are out of school---after school, school year breaks, and summer. I urge you to prioritize OST funding because OST is critical for student and family success.

Students of all ages need ways outside of the classroom to develop/sharpen skills, explore interests, and make friends. Unfortunately, not all students have access to high-quality OST programs due to significant barriers including cost, transportation, access to information, and limited programming connected to their interests.¹ A barrier that is not equally considered is accessibility. Students with more profound disabilities face unimaginable barriers to OST programming therefore rarely allowing for their invitation or participation. As DCPS continues to expand their full time special education programming across Wards, the need to offer inclusive

¹ <https://dcpave.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FINAL-Back-to-School-Survey-Nov-2021.pdf>

and equitable OST programming must be immediately prioritized. We are also still dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and many caregivers are concerned about safety and exposure. These barriers are most significant for those living in wards 7 and 8.

We have two children (PK4 & 3rd grade) who attend a charter school located in ward 5. It is interesting that the typical work schedule is 9-5:30 (or some variation) yet the school day ends at 3:15. We pay almost \$500 a month for our children to attend aftercare at their school because my husband and I work full time. We are fortunate to have employers that are supportive and are flexible when we need to adjust our schedules. Last week was mid-winter break, a much needed pause for students, teachers, and staff. I hope that we continue to have this break but we need more camp options. With that said it was an extremely stressful week. A break for the kids means either finding a slot in a DPR break camp for \$40, paying about \$400-500 for a private camp (most are not in ward 7 or 8), or using the week as a family vacation (requiring money and leave). We scored a spot for our son at a DPR camp but our daughter never made it off the waitlist. It also felt like many camps raised their minimum age to 5, I will assume to require vaccinations. Our only choice was to just have our daughter stay home with us while we worked. It was challenging to put it mildly.

Finding a fun, engaging, convenient, and reasonably priced summer camp is a significant challenge. We have been fortunate to land DPR camp slots the last few years and overall our experience has been positive. Finding a spot in these camps is a major triumph because slots are filled within minutes of registration opening. The system favors those who are organized (I have spreadsheets and alarms to manage the process) and have flexibility in their work schedule. DPR camps are significantly less expensive than most private camps. For years, we spent \$300-500/a week for our son to attend camp. DPR camps range from \$55-90/week. I experienced more stress trying to get into a DPR camp than when I was trying to get tickets for the last Beyonce tour. Even with the savings, we mix and match DPR with private camps because

we want our son to have a diverse experience and overall DPR camps (even the speciality) are pretty basic. He has attended camps for dance, swim, music, soccer, art, and outdoor adventure. None of these other camps are in our ward and required my husband and I to travel across the city. To make the experiences of families across the city better when it comes to participating in DPR camps, we need the District to invest at least \$25 million in local, recurring funding for OST programs.

Before the pandemic our kids' school had various options for after school enrichment. Our son participated in dance, gymnastics, engineering, science, yoga, art, music, coding, and cooking. This year we don't have any enrichment activities through the school but I am hoping they will return next year. We were thankful for the assortment of on-site options because transportation would have been an issue. None of these activities were free and most cost between \$150-250 per 8 weeks and thankfully we could afford to pay the fees. If there were options for reduced fees those options were not shared and I assume if you needed financial assistance you would have to request it--not a great system. This is why it is critical to redesign the OST voucher cost structure and requirements and work to ensure all families are aware of the available financial resources.

Our kids have also had the opportunity to take golf-lessons, dance, and our son has been involved with the Cub Scouts where he gained confidence and deepened relationships with both peers and caring adults. Both of our kids also take swimming lessons through Fairfax County recreation.

All DC children and teens need access to quality OST programming--and we need to ensure that those facing the most barriers are prioritized as we make funding decisions. Youth who regularly attend after school programs were 26% more likely to finish the year at or on track for grade

level reading compared to non-attending peers². The Afterschool Alliance has found that students participating in afterschool programs exhibited significant improvement in their feelings, and attitudes of behavioral adjustment.³ I have seen our children grow more confident, assertive, and passionate through their activities. Their activities enhance fine motor and executive functioning skills. They learn how to navigate different environments and make new friends. They see connections to the material they are learning in the classroom. They connect with caring adults who are invested in their lifelong success and all children need access to these opportunities. All students deserve these opportunities yet this is not the reality and we know it therefore we must get to work to make the needed changes.

We at PAVE put our heart and soul into creating policy solutions for OST. Through research and connecting with parents through community discussions and surveys we developed a set of OST solutions that will move our system closer to truly meeting the needs of students and families. These solutions include:

- **Increase funding for out-of-school time programs.** We need at least \$25 million in local, recurring funding for OST programs and allocate based on performance-based evaluations to ensure quality. This will require approximately \$8million in additional local, recurring dollars.
- **Provide dedicated funding for schools** for before/after school, summer, and winter programs.
- **Redesign cost structure and requirements for vouchers and financial aid.**
- **Create a strategic plan with families, educators, OST providers and community partners to ensure access to in-demand programs for all kids.** This plan should include:
 - Defining what a high-quality OST program looks like and metrics for evaluation.

² https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE200/PE267/RAND_PE267.pdf

³ http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/what_does_the_research_say_about_afterschool.pdf

- An updated needs assessment to identify existing program gaps/needs, and looking at both location and program type.
- Identify opportunities for public-private partnership programs.
- Innovative and consistent engagement with families to determine the types of programs they want in their ward and community.
- Working with OST providers to understand what they need to expand (i.e. increased number of seats, new locations, offer additional types of programming, etc.).
- Working with schools to ensure they have resources and policies in place to host programs, including staff capacity, space, etc.).

Thank you for allowing me to testify and I hope that you prioritize investments in OST.

Marcia Huff

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