

**Education Agencies
Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony
Committee of the Whole
Wednesday, March 2, 2022**

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

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

Date: March 2, 2022

Hello Chairman Mendelson, The Committee of the Whole, and all of the agencies supporting education here today. My name is Tara Brown. I am a Ward 8 resident, and a PAVE parent.

My child suffers from severe clinical we 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.

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 mental instability 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 foundational to their life long success and developing into fully functioning adults? Research shows that our children are not doing well. According to the CDC, the average proportion of children's mental health-related emergency visits was 44% higher in 2020 than in 2019. This is even more sobering when you consider that it does not account for the number of mental health emergencies that never made it to the hospital or ended in suicide.

I am here to address all of you

empowered to service all of the educational needs of over 94,000 children in both public and charter schools. It is important that I talk about these children as a whole group and even more important for you to start thinking of them this way.

Operating from that premise, each agency and organization can overcome the first obstacle to our efforts to establish comprehensive School Based Mental Health supports, your lack of cooperation with one another.

Once you all decide to pool your resources and work in collaboration with each other, we can take the first step towards solving the problem and that 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.
- 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. It is not enough just to spend money. You can throw a lot of money at a problem, but it is wasted if you haven't actually solved it.

DC invests billions in education. It is a colossal waste of money if we don't also invest in enough 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