

**Committee of the Whole**

**Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony**

**March 2, 2022**

**Xavier Thompson**

I am Xavier Thompson. I live in Ward 4 and I am a proud DESA 10<sup>th</sup> grader in Instrumental Music. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I am here because I am concerned about the future sustainability of Duke Ellington School of the Arts given some of the recent comments and communications from School Chancellor Ferebee and DC Public Schools. I am concerned because I haven't been at this school for a full year and it has already changed my life for the better. The school has helped my self-confidence issues and it has been helpful to be around other students dedicated to their arts. I have never had as many teachers, in my core and arts academic courses, that I feel have been so active in making sure that we know what we are doing, what they are teaching, and how to apply the knowledge and skills. Some teachers are the type of people you can go to when you are really in need of help.

Ellington classes have already begun to improve my work. I study French horn. I picked up a French Horn for the first time just a few months before school started and I have grown so much. The family atmosphere that the department staff nurtures has helped me learn how to work in groups, has instilled the importance of collective effort, and improved my discipline. I am learning how to do my work, how to be on top of my skills and my teachers and classmates have helped me to gain more confidence in this. This has built my confidence and I know will prepare me for leadership in the future

I also am a self-taught piano player and developing my music production skills through Project Create and Out of School Time program. My theory classes at Ellington have already helped me so much. Sometimes it is a simple thing like recognizing what key a song is in. When I am making my beats and coming up with melodies and baselines, it used to take me forever to figure out how to play what I would hear in my head. Now I know what key I'm hearing and it is now so much easier to create my music and to finish my music productions. As I consider my future goals, there are several classes that I want to assure are available to me, such as Jazz Tech and Composition.

I share this with you because it is important to me that we maintain our pre-professional program and extended day. In this program, I receive mentorship, increased exposure to more information and new skills, and the time to practice and receive constructive feedback to improve at my craft. It is also important that our teachers are paid well because I want to keep them at the school. I have to admit. Ellington has been a challenge but this is the best school-related stress I've ever had to manage.

I also would like to offer my support for the PAVE parent's call for increased Out of School time program and in-school mental health supports and accountability. There are very few programs in the city for students my age or I struggle to find them. I am grateful for my instructors at Project Create and gladly travel to SE for what I am able to learn from the music production classes and the working artists that run the class. I have already been able to make money from the beats I've created, participate in panel discussions for local music conferences, and this spring we will be releasing an album that we've been developing over the past year. All students, especially in high schoolers, need access to quality programs that allow us to see our way to careers in adulthood. We need to know how what we are learning will be useful in our future.

As a student, we go through a lot and you never know what your classmates are going through. Negotiating friend drama, family drama, figuring out our own moods, even making sense of the conflict in other parts of the world. It is difficult to learn when you are stressed, worried, anxious or fearful. For some of my friends, school is their only safe space. All students need access to qualified mental health professionals to help us succeed. I am grateful for my family and the supportive counselors and teachers at my school. All students need to have access to trusted adults to help them learn important social-emotional skills before a crisis happens.