

**Education Agencies  
Budget Oversight Hearing Testimony  
Committee of the Whole  
Monday, March 28, 2022**

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

**From:** Kisha Clark, Ward 6 Parent Leader in Education Board Member

**Date:** March 28, 2022

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Kisha Clark and my daughter attends Eastern Highschool. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 6 PLE board.

Thank you to [Mayor Bowser investing nearly \\$16 million dollars for OST programs](#). Personally, I'm hopeful that these funds will be used to provide a variety of sport OST programs, like Girls on the Run, swim classes and camps, and that these funds can be used to provide more opportunities for students with special needs and disabilities to participate in programs like them.

Nationwide, [one in five children and adolescents experience a mental health problem](#) during their school years. And among the 3.8 million teens who reported a major depressive episode in the past year, nearly [60% did not receive any treatment](#). Even here in DC we have a problem we need to fix. According to the [PAVE 2021 Fall Back to School Survey, only 49% of families reported](#) that they know where to look for and receive School-Based Mental Health (SBMH) support for their kids if they were in need.

I often think about the ways Out-of-School Time (OST) programs complement mental health. Which is why I am asking you to ensure that these increases in funding will be equitably

distributed by conducting an up to date needs assessment and community engagement around these programs.

I'm a strong believer that OST programs - especially ones centered around physical activity - benefit our children's mental, spiritual, and emotional health. This is not to say that academic programs are not beneficial to mental health, but in my own experience as a mother of a student athlete and as an athlete myself, I've seen first hand and experienced the ways in which sport-related OST programs lead to strong mental health.

It's my personal experience that OST sports programs can be an additional intervention to improve mental health. Good mental health is critical to children's success in school and life. Research demonstrates that students who receive social-emotional and mental and behavioral health support achieve better academically. School climate, classroom behavior, engagement in learning, and students' sense of connectedness and well-being all improve as well. Mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness but also encompasses wellness promotion; social, emotional, and behavioral health; and the ability to cope with life's challenges. Left unmet, mental health problems are linked to costly negative outcomes such as academic and behavior problems, dropping out, and delinquency. Mental and behavioral health problems not only affect students' short-term classroom engagement, but also interfere with long-term development of positive relationships and work-related skills.

What if we could reach families to give them the SBMH supports they need by meeting them where they are? If we reimagine the way we look at OST programs, especially sports specific programs, we can meet our families at a place where they wouldn't need to take extra steps to find them. Increased access to OST programs can work hand in hand with access to School based mental health to help create brighter futures for our youth!



Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our District!

Kisha Clark

Ward 6 Parent Leader in Education Board Member