

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

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

From: LaKeshia Battle-Crim PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) Ward 5 Citywide Board Member

Date: March 28, 2022

Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is LaKeshia Battle-Crim and I am a proud parent of 3 children. My youngest Daughter Deyonna attends Rocketship Legacy Prep. I live in Ward 5 and also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 5 and Citywide Parent Leaders in Education (PLE) Boards.

First off, thank you so much to Mayor Bowser for her increased investments in School Based Mental Health in FY23!

My daughter is often overlooked in the school-based mental health system because she is doing well academically. But I still have concerns about her mental and behavioral health, because she has had many behavioral issues recently due to COVID-19. For many children, the 2019-2020 school year was a rough one. She had a hard time dealing with Covid-19 and it has had a lot of effects on her emotional and mental health. She started to show signs of depression, anxiety and anger through behavior issues and meltdowns and needed mental health support. But at school she's mostly been punished instead of recommended to mental health support. What I have learned in my experience with my daughter is that not every student has the same access and resources to SBMH (school-based mental health). From our [2021 Fall Back to School survey](#), ONLY 49% of parents are aware of the availability of SBMH resources in their school. You might

have heard other PAVE parents cite this data point because that number is way too high! Too many academically high-performing students are overlooked and even if students are having behavioral issues or their grades start slipping, there is a lack of evaluation. Lastly, there is a lack of resources and trained professionals in many schools. DC can't address these issues when we don't even know what the current needs and gaps in the system are. This is why we are advocating for the District to generate a comprehensive map of what mental health needs and supports currently exist in each school. This should include a corresponding gap analysis. A good way to start this is with \$300,000 to fund a cost study to determine the trust cost of expanding the school-based mental health program now and in the future to support our CBO clinicians and their important work.

At that time when I didn't receive any recommendations/resources for my child, I was forced to do my own research and get outside support from the Community of Hope. While presently she's receiving one-one therapy sessions and family therapy to help her cope with everyday life, the implementation of the School-based Mental Health System is not working for her in general.

Addressing these types of issues for kids across the District will require the Deputy Mayor of Education, Department of Behavioral Health, and the Council to develop a coordinated accountability system to address implementation issues of the School-based Mental Health System. There are inconsistencies in access to mental health supports, lack of training of teachers and staff to deal with traumatized children, and lack of coordination between departments and within individual school staff members. This lack of coordination is a major issue! I see children being left out and not being screened and supported, leadership not being held accountable. Parents also need transparency about what is specifically provided at each school and how the budget is being spent on the school level. Without these changes children will continue to be overlooked.

Finally, I want to emphasize the issue of lack of trained staff. Deyonna’s teachers are having to deal with so many behavioral issues in the classroom that it leaves little time for additional academic support. On top of this, not all teachers are trained in trauma-informed care and social, emotional learning skills. The combination of increased behavioral issues and lack of trained teachers lead to children being punished for their issues instead of being helped. Oftentimes students are not sent to the school counselor or social worker, but instead they are sent to time out or lunch detention. This only worsens the behavioral and emotional issues that a child may have instead of addressing the root cause of the issue which is trauma and adverse experiences!

We need to figure out how we can better support teachers and aids and SBMH clinicians. One way to do this is providing \$2.4M for stabilized grants to CBO providers . In general this will require a better and more consistent approach to behavioral issues and a strong School-based Mental Health Support staff to handle students struggling.

Thank You!

LaKeshia Battle-Crim

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