

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: Lindsey Jones-Renaud, Ward 7 resident - 25th PL NE 20002, parent leader with PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) and an advocate with Decoding Dyslexia DC

Date: March 28, 2022

My name is Lindsey Jones-Renaud. I am a resident of Ward 7, a parent of two children in a Ward 7 charter school, and a parent leader with PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) as well as an advocate with Decoding Dyslexia DC.

Today I am testifying to advocate for better and more holistic school-based mental health supports, including funding for a cost study to better understand the scope of the school-based behavioral and mental health situation.

I know you have all worked hard to make mental health supports in schools a priority and I thank you for that. I am sure that all of you agree that we need better mental health supports in schools.

But I want to ask you a question. Do you believe that it is the role of the school to support the *whole* child? Not just the child who shows up at school, but the whole child. Not just the child who “disrupts” or “causes problems” in the classroom. But the child who leaves and goes home – wherever that may be. What about the child who puts on a ‘mask’ and uses all their energy while they’re at school to be good, or even perfect, but on the inside, underneath that mask, they are struggling?

I ask all of you to think about and answer that question, at least for yourself.

Because I know many parents, myself included, who have been told by our school that there is nothing they can do for our children because they seem to be fine while they're at school. And yet, we know, as parents, when they are home, or in other situations, we see that they are struggling.

Just because a child is not "causing problems" in school, or not struggling academically does not mean that they are not struggling on the inside. Those struggles may not show up inside the classroom. At least not yet. At some point – whether it is at the end of the day after they come home from school – or when they get older and they just can't wear the mask anymore – they fall apart.

I read an article in the Washington Post yesterday that said that "on average, it takes eight to 10 years from the time when a child first starts having symptoms for them to receive treatment." What, do you believe, is the role of our schools in the situation where in those first few years, only the parents see those symptoms. But they build up over time, until 8 years later, everyone can see those symptoms. The article said that "many children don't get care until they're in a 'late stage' of their disorders." What do you believe is the role of the school in helping children before they get to that late stage?

As a parent, I am not going to wait. And I want to be a part of a community support system that includes the school, that doesn't want to wait either.

This is why I am asking you to provide funding for the District to comprehensively assess the mental health needs of DC school communities and a cost study to help us understand what investment we would need to meet that need. This would help us to figure out the true cost of the school based mental health expansion now and in the future. We need a comprehensive map of what mental health needs and supports currently exist in each school, including a corresponding gap analysis, and make it public to help create a comprehensive and long-term plan for the future. This gap analysis must be intersectional. It must look at how children

experience mental health challenges and access/receive support depending on multiple intersecting factors including race, socioeconomic status as well as gender, disability, sexuality, and other factors. We know that girls often go undiagnosed for disabilities as well as mental health needs like autism and ADHD. This is a gap that the study must continue to explore in an intersectional way.

I am also asking for you to invest accountability. For example, we need transparency around parent requests from school systems for mental health support and how the school responded. Because many families are not getting the responses and support from their school leaders and partners that they deserve.

Thank You!

Lindsey Jones Renaud

Ward 7 PLE Board Member and Decoding Dyslexia Advocate