

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: Star Simmons, Ward 7 PAVE Parent Leader

Date: March 28, 2022

My name is Star Simmons. I am a resident of Ward 7 and a parent of a child who attends Digital Pioneers Academy in Ward 5. I am here today advocating with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education. Thank you Mayor Bowser for your investments of \$15.3M in Out of School Time funding and \$3.8M in school based mental health support. Both of these areas are important to me as a grandparent.

My Grandson is 12 years old and has been diagnosed with anxiety disorder, epilepsy, ADHD and dysgraphia. We know this because of the safe, affordable testing provided by the District. I've fought for my grandson to get the services he needs to manage these diagnoses in school, and I continue to fight for him! I want to see the District fund the \$300,000 cost study to determine the true cost of the school based mental health expansion, which will benefit students like my grandson.

My grandson needs safe places that he can do out of school time activities that can accommodate his special needs. He can not stay home alone due to anxiety, which many don't understand. Yet, because he is 12, he doesn't qualify for childcare and he is too young to get a Summer Job. I work and can't stay home with him, so this puts our family in a hard position. Where is he going to go? I am blessed that my job has allowed me to bring him to work with me for now, but I don't know how long that will be. I have worked all my life, have custody of my grandson with special needs and I need the city to support families like ours with more high quality programs, especially East of the River.

I feel like children who are pre-teens (12-13 years old) often get forgotten! And so do children with disabilities that you can't see. This is why I want to see a needs assessment and community engagement around OST. You won't know what communities want to see unless you ask parents and kids themselves! Although it's great that DPR has expanded programs this Summer, it is important that there is a needs assessment to ensure funding is distributed equitably. We also need to do more to make sure that the rec centers and programs are safe in every neighborhood. Sometimes the beefs that start in school extend into the neighborhood. I believe in plain school security officers in schools and at activities because in one week my grandson experienced 3 or 4 fights and two people being shot just 1 block away from the school. He is afraid and so am I, but this shouldn't be the reason he doesn't get to participate in out of school time activities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about what's needed for not just my child, but all kids in DC.

Star Simmons

Ward 7 PAVE Parent Leader