

**Committee of the Whole
Budget Oversight Testimony
Friday, April 8, 2022**

To: Chairman Mendelson, Committee of the Whole members, and Committee staff
From: Jane Feldmesser, Senior Policy Analyst at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)
Date: April 8, 2022

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole and Committee staff. My name is Jane Feldmesser and I am the Senior Policy Analyst at PAVE. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the FY23 budget and to further amplify PAVE parents' priorities and policy solutions around Out-of-School Time (OST) programs and school-based mental health - two issues that parents have been steadfastly advocating for since 2018.

Today, you'll hear from many PAVE parent leaders about their experiences.

- Some will share about the **barriers** they have faced while participating in OST:
 - Sometimes because there **aren't enough high-quality spots** within a 45-min drive of their home or child's school;
 - Or there not enough programs that support **all types of learners or age-levels**,
 - Or the **cost is too high** even for middle class families, let alone those with lower incomes.
 - Or, in many cases, especially this week, the mounting challenges to **accessing summer DPR programs** for their children.
- But also, some will share how **impactful OST programs** have been for their child's **academics, mental wellness, and overall wellbeing** - and for their **own ability as a caregiver to work**.
- Some parents will share how they have been **left in the dark** on how to access mental health services and support for their children.
- And some will share about watching their child **thrive** at school with the support of their CBO clinician and their gratitude for caring teachers and school staff who worked with them to make sure they had all of the information and resources they needed.

I urge you to listen to these stories today and take action to ensure OST programs and school-based mental health are adequately funded and implemented WELL for our students.

We want to thank the Mayor for her initial increase of \$15.3 million in local funds for OST programs, including funding to Learn24, DPR, and SYEP. These investments are crucial to support OST providers and expand access to DC students. However, the work is not done. To ensure these funds are used in an effective and equitable way, PAVE parents are asking for this

increase to be recurring and also for a **strategic plan that is created WITH families, educators, OST providers and community partners.** This should include:

- Defining what a high-quality OST program looks like and metrics for evaluation.
- An updated needs assessment to identify existing program gaps/needs, looking at both location and program type, which should include DPR programs.
- Accessible community engagement to inform expansion plans and allocation of funding.

We also want to thank the Mayor's initial investment of \$3.8 million for school-based mental health. However, the Mayor's current plans for this investment do not address many of our schools' and CBO's challenges and needs to implement this program WELL now and sustain this work in the future.

In partnership with the Strengthening Schools through Behavioral Health Coalition, PAVE parents have identified the following steps as **top priorities** to support the mental wellness of all of our children.

- 1. Right-size the grant amounts for our CBO clinicians with an investment of \$2.4 million.**
 - Thank you, Chairman, for your leadership on increasing grant sizes for CBO clinicians to \$78,000 in last year's budget. However, since that funding increase was only one-time and not continued in the Mayor's current budget, CBOs are now facing significant cuts.
 - With the budget as is, CBO clinicians are receiving grants based on the 2016 rates, which does not account for inflation, nor does it account for our students' outsized need and increased costs of care for mental health services the pandemic has caused. That's why we are asking to increase grant sizes to at least \$80,000 per clinician, for a total of \$2.4 million. Let's keep our current providers whole by stabilizing their funding, so we do not ask them to do more with less.
- 2. Provide at least \$300,000 to fund a cost study to determine the correct cost of the school-based mental health program** This includes assessing the cost of ALL things needed for strong implementation:
 - Community engagement (information-sharing, getting community input around needs, barriers, and implementation)
 - Technical assistance for schools around evaluation and planning
 - Strengthening the Community of Practice
 - Updated formula to compensate clinicians
 - School coordinators
 - This is the epitome of a "work smarter not harder" strategy. It is well worth this investment so we can make targeted, high-impact, and long term investments and plans.



While there have been strong steps taken to improve access to mental health supports and OST programs at schools in DC, far too many families are not aware or able to receive the support and services that they need. It is only when we authentically put our communities at the center of our work, listen to and value each other's perspectives, and honor the leadership of parents - who are experts on their kids and communities - that we can advance equity and excellence for each and every one of our kids.

This work is only possible with leaders on the Council and our education agencies who also believe in the power and promise of community voice. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today, I hope that we can count on your leadership.

In service,

Jane Feldmeser
Policy Analyst
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)