

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

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

**From:** DaSean Jones, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) Ward 8 PLE Board Member and Advocacy Captain

**Date:** April 8, 2022

Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is DaSean Jones and I am a proud Dad to 4 children that attend CHEC and Eagle Academy and I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 8 PLE Board and as an Advocacy Captain.

Thank you for your FY22 investments in School-based mental health. This includes the full funding for the school-based mental health expansion. Mayor Boweser's FY23 investment of of \$ 3.8M to support the expansion is a good start and I hope you will build on these advances by investing \$300,000 for a cost study analysis to find out the true cost of the expansion, which is a step in addressing current vacancies across all 4 cohorts of schools.

My children are not diagnosed with any mental health disorders; however like many students, they still suffer from a number of different issues at school and pressures at home. Having to continue learning through a pandemic did not make things a lot easier, especially when they were not able to socialize with their friends! It's important for the District to provide a mental health need assessment to better understand what's going on with students right now. Everybody has their own issues that they're dealing with! Traumas come in all different shapes and sizes and you don't necessarily have to be diagnosed to be faced with a number of challenges.

With this needs assessment, the District should generate a comprehensive map of what mental health needs and supports *currently* exist in each school, including a gap analysis. This should be made public to help create a comprehensive and long-term plan for the future. It's important to also build off of *existing* data and information (like the School Strengthening Tool, DC Student

Wellbeing survey, and DC School Report Card) and consider new, innovative models to capture a holistic picture. This holistic picture includes the needs of *all* students, those with diagnosed needs and those without.

From what I understand, mental health support needs can be identified in three tiers. Tier 1 supports are guaranteed for all students, but it is the students in need of tier 2 and tier 3 support who generally get the most attention. The clinicians and the professionals in the school building focus most of the time on those students. Yet, as we know many children, especially those living East of the River, have most likely *already* experienced trauma which can affect their learning. This means that although a student may technically be considered tier 1, they might have needs that require attention too. In a typical classroom of 20, chances are good that one or two students are dealing with serious psychosocial stressors relating to poverty, domestic violence, [abuse](#) and neglect, [and trauma](#). Considering that we don't even really understand the lasting psychological and emotional effects related to the pandemic, getting this needs assessment is urgent for DC students.

I am very concerned about the students who might *appear* like they're not having any issues but actually are. I've addressed my kids' schools about having a clinician sit down and talk to my children, but they were not a priority because they weren't diagnosed with any disabilities that were of great concern. When I spoke to social workers, therapists and clinicians that were at the school they clearly told me that they were there to work with children who had IEPs and 504 plans. Those students should obviously get the help they need, but when I identified the concerns that my children were dealing with certain forms of depression and not actually being able to focus for a long period of time, I really didn't get an answer or any potential solutions.

My daughter Kayla was eventually able to see a therapist at her school because Mary's center partners with CHEC and was located inside of the building. Those sessions were helpful to Kayla, but the therapist explained to me that the only way that she was able to continue the services with Kayla was if she gave her a diagnosis of something like 'adjustment disorder'. There are so many students just like my daughter who might be passed by because they aren't diagnosed with anything that brings about immediate attention. If we don't include these students in our plan to provide school-based mental health, then we're telling them it's okay because they've learned how to internalize their trauma.



Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our District. I hope you will continue to prioritize school based mental health by assessing the mental health needs of DC school communities. The first step to doing this is by providing \$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. I also hope you will provide \$2.4M to increase grants to our CBO providers, like Mary's center.

Thank you!

Dasean Jones

PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) Ward 8 PLE Board Member and Advocacy Captain