

**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: Rostina Miller, Ward 8 PLE Board Member

Date: April 8, 2022

Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Rostina Miller and my daughter is a recent graduate of Washington Leadership Academy in Ward 4. I serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 8 PLE Board.

Thank you Mayor Bowser for your commitment to invest \$3.8M in school based mental health in the FY 23 budget. We can do even more by investing \$300K to fund a cost study to determine the true cost of expanding the school-based behavioral health program now and in the future, as well as providing \$2.4M to increase grants to community-based organization (CBO) clinicians.

My daughter has a diagnosed learning disability and she was able to get support through the school's partnerships with organizations like Mary's Center and WISE. Although there was one school psychologist on staff there, that person often focused on students with the most acute mental health needs. It was great that the school could outsource help for other students, from community based organizations. These CBO's provided resources like newsletters, mental wellness training and information sessions for students who might seem fine, but who still needed support in terms of social and emotional learning.

My daughter was a B+ student then started turning in work late. Sometimes when a kid who never struggled before, starts drowning academically, it can be a sign that something is going on mentally or emotionally. During my daughter's senior year she participated in a peer to peer tutoring program, which provided an opportunity for students to engage with their friends and pull along peers. The academic aspect was important, but the biggest thing is that this was a great opportunity to connect to create a positive school climate. Participating in this program

helped improve both my daughter's grades which in turn improved her mood, mostly because she was able to get out of the house and interact with her peers.

My daughter went on to graduate, but going through this major transition during the pandemic was hard on her. She is still struggling to this day with socialization and asking for help in her college classes. She didn't gain the important skills and socialization that most young people get because her last two years of high school were virtual. When you're a teen who's been affected by the pandemic in this way, it follows you into life after graduation. It's so important especially for high schoolers to get the mental health support they deserve. Covid has gotten better, but it's not over. They're still suffering from the effects of isolation and missed learning opportunities. Let's give our young people the confidence and social emotional skills to be successful after they graduate!

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our District. Again, I hope you will help make this a reality by investing \$300K to fund a cost study to determine the true cost of expanding the school-based behavioral health program, as well as providing \$2.4M for stabilized grants to Community Based Organization providers.

Rostina Miller
Ward 8 PLE Board Member