Testimony for the State Board of Education Public Meeting
Wednesday, July 20th, 2022

To: State Board of Education members and staff
From: Kerry Savage, Director of Policy and Advocacy at PAVE
Date: July 20th, 2022

Good evening, State Board of Education members and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Kerry Savage and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education). Thank you to all SBOE representatives and staff for your commitment to the continuous improvement of our state accountability system and for seeking out feedback from the community, experts, and researchers to create recommendations for improvement on the STAR Framework.

This issue is critically important to PAVE parent leaders. At the 2017 PAVE Parent Policy Summit, parents selected One Citywide Report Card as one of their top priorities. As a result, PAVE hosted focus groups and surveyed 515 parents to determine what information about schools they most wanted to see. That work concluded that parents:

- *Want information summarized in one place,*
- *Are most interested in student performance by subgroup and teacher quality, with re-enrollment, school funding, and attendance also rated highly,*
- *Are looking for a combination of quantitative (student achievement, suspension rates, etc.) and qualitative (special programming, after-school programs, etc.) information.*

In July of 2018, we surveyed 560 parents on how they would use the report card, with the top three responses being: to help choose a school for my child(ren), to better understand how a school is doing and the support a school would need, and to learn more about the school's programs (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: How would you use the information on the Report Card?
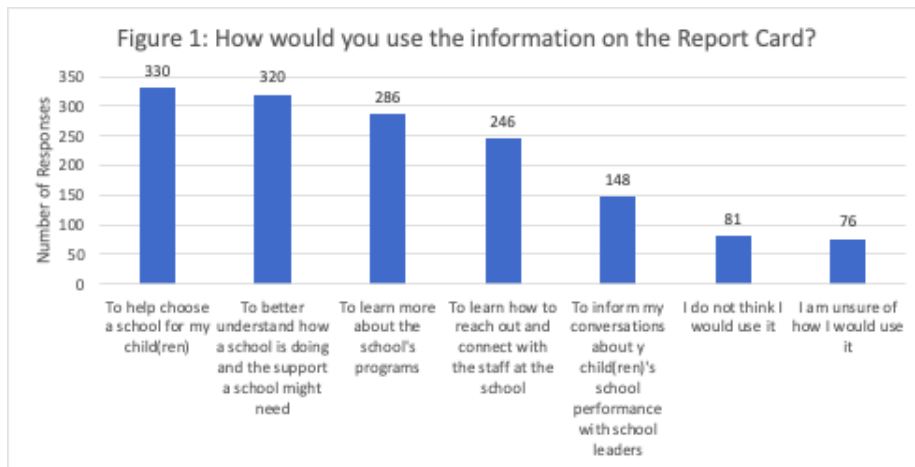
Further, in every Statement of Beliefs parents have written on their top issues (i.e. mental health, specialized school programs, COVID recovery, and OST programs), strong **accountability across all of these areas is *always* a top priority.** Parents have seen announcements about investments, initiatives, and plans – but too many are not seeing any differences in their own and their children's lived experiences. Here are key themes we've heard from families on what they want to see in an accountability system:

- **Benchmarks are vital for parents to contextualize and interpret information.**
    - During early focus groups, many parents felt that they did not have a good understanding of what was good, needed improvement, or was average for various metrics. Clearly displaying benchmarks helps inform their decisions.
    - The proposed changes include metric floors and targets, which is important. Clear information about how the floor and target metrics were reached is absolutely essential to make this information accessible and useful.
- **Accountability needs a strong focus on academics** - **achievement *and* growth.**
    - Performance data must be clearly displayed by subgroup to highlight bright spots and inequities.
    - Schools should be celebrated for growth. Still, we cannot shy away from looking at student outcomes as they are so we can work in partnership with educators and families to determine what is needed to ensure kids are truly prepared for life after school.
    - It is encouraging to see that a growth metric for high school students approaching expectations on ELA and math state assessments is included in the recommendations, something families have been eager to see.
- **Accountability must be coupled with robust funding and supports – and not just for schools scoring in the lowest 5%.**
    - According to our own adequacy study, we have consistently underfunded our schools and students, especially at-risk students.
    - Given inflation, outsized needs since COVID, and the need to develop and sustain a strong workforce in a competitive period, we need to ensure schools are fully resourced to improve how they serve all students.
- **Parents want information about 21st Century learning experiences (especially in light of the persistence of COVID):** they want to know what their kids will need to be ready for college and careers and what measures will help them determine if their students are on the right track. In particular:
    - *Will this school effectively support my child's **learning and social emotional development?** How will this school **work with parents and caregivers** to support their kids develop their social, emotional, and academic skills?*

- *What **community partnerships and programs** to help build life skills are available **during and outside the school day?***
    - *Will this be a place where my child can find joy, explore their passions, and build a path for a fulfilling and productive life?*
    - *Especially for high school students, what programs or experiences will instill critical life skills (building a network, time/project management, budgeting, etc.) in young people so they can navigate college and careers successfully upon graduation?*
        - *The proposed addition of dual enrollment participation reflects parents' desire for more robust options for high school students. While there is no plan for measuring performance for dual enrollment at this time, we look forward to continued discussion to find the most accurate and fair way to do so in the future.*
    - *How can we assess if schools are providing a well-rounded experience?*
        - *There is still no standard for specialized school programs to ensure quality or any accounting for participation in other school program offerings (in our outside of the school day) to support learning like tutoring/supplemental learning programs, clubs, or other enrichment experiences.*
- *What **wrap-around services** and **mental health supports** are available to all kids and what's available for students with acute and intensive needs?*
- ***Looking beyond attendance*** *- how well schools are adjusting to the current environment, i.e. access to technology, high-quality wifi, virtual instruction - both synchronous and asynchronous, etc.?*
    - *The additional attendance growth measure is one helpful way of indicating to families how a school is responding and can help inspire best practice sharing, especially when looking at disaggregated data for certain student groups.*
- **Information on the school report card (and all information shared with families) should be accessible and in plain language.** Clear definitions and descriptions of all indicators on the report card are essential.
- **Presentation matters.** Interactive dashboards with intuitive navigation are helpful to parents to focus on the information they are most interested in and prevent the tool from becoming overwhelming.

I also want to reiterate other sentiments we've heard from families about our accountability system:

Desire for clear, comparable data

Importantly, families are not a monolith, nor are their opinions on the STAR rating. Some families have shared with us that they appreciate the accessibility of the simplified STAR rating, most noting they use it as a starting point in their research about how their child's current school is doing or in their search for a new school. Others have shared they don't focus as much on the overall STAR rating, but rather on the specific data they are most passionate about for their child within it - academics, school culture, etc., and continue to look outside of the rating at school program offerings, what they've heard from others in the school community, etc. Parents recognize that one data point cannot tell the whole story of any one school, but comparable data is extremely valuable if done with nuance.

As is, the STAR rating does not always clearly demonstrate how well a school is educating *all* groups of students. There are schools with lower STAR ratings that are seeing *massive* student growth in achievement and impact on student learning - work that should be studied and replicated in other schools. There are also schools receiving higher STAR ratings that are not serving *all* groups of students well. Adjusting the weights to center students who are economically disadvantaged as well as each racial group is an important start to addressing bias in the system and this issue. Regardless of the end result of any decision on changes to the STAR framework, we must ensure schools are equipped to share and contextualize the data with families and educators, and all are true partners in the work to address inequities.

Using data consistently at each level of the system

DC's opportunity gap overall has continued to persist across race, at-risk status, and for students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers across too many schools. COVID has exacerbated these inequities in staggering ways. Policy choices can improve, maintain, or worsen this reality - it is up to all of us. If we want to make sure that every child has access to a great education, we need to better understand where students are, what opportunities they have access to, what families need, and what they think schools can and should do to improve. That means the same level of attention (and funding) given to this statewide accountability system that will be updated once a year must also be present at the school level - day to day.

An accountability system is only as good as the conversations and planning that come with it. Parents want school-level data to inform their choices and determine how to support their school, but they also want and deserve individual student data to inform choices and determine how they will support their *child*. How do we support schools in tracking student growth and achievement throughout the year and share that information with families? How are educators using data meaningfully to meet the growth and achievement goals they have for each of their students?

EmpowerK12 has highlighted some of the great work being done in Bold Improvement Schools where data is used strategically and consistently to inform planning. Despite those bright spots, our recent surveys and conversations show too many families aren't included in conversations about academic progress or supplemental learning/enrichment throughout the year - either at all or not often enough. In the Spring of 2021, PAVE hosted data chats with parents in partnership with EmpowerK12 to demystify academic assessment data. If parents did have access to information about their child's academic progress, and not all did, it was difficult to understand. It was hard to tell what numbers or terms meant, and most importantly, most parents didn't know what to do with the information once they worked through it. Parents wanted to understand three key things: 1) what their child should be learning and be able to do; 2) where their child was in relation to those learning goals; 3) what support could be provided to address gaps and/or areas where students could extend their learning. These conversations should be frequent and consistent, as we know family engagement is a key indicator of student success. The importance is greater than ever before given the persistent opportunity gap exacerbated by the pandemic, outsized for low-income and Black and Brown students.

Ultimately, we must have an inclusive and ongoing conversation about how to better connect the goals of our statewide accountability plan and metrics to the goals and experiences students, families, and educators have every day in their schools.

In Conclusion

Ultimately, what parents really want are tools that adapt to their needs and unearth inequities they face daily, so that they can best fight for their individual children and the children in their community. That goes far beyond academics - but these tools must keep learning and growth at the forefront, while also sharing holistic data that illustrates the key issues in the world we are now living in.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and for your work on putting together these recommendations. Together, parent leaders can and will reimagine an education system in DC to be created with parents, for *all* our children. And we cannot do that work without partners like the State Board of Education who also believe in the power and promise of parent voice and leadership. We look forward to working with the State Board of Education, OSSE, and other District leaders to ensure parents' voices are centered in conversations and are a part of the decisions that push DC towards educational equity for all of our kids.

Thank you,

Kerry Savage
Director of Policy and Advocacy
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)