

**Charlia Acree**  
**State Board of Education**  
**State Board of Education Meeting**  
**February 15, 2023**

Greetings,

My name is Charlia Acree and I live in Ward 4. My daughter is a kindergartner at Latin American Montessori Bilingual (LAMB) and I currently serve as a PAVE parent leader on the Ward 4 Board.

I'm testifying today to share my vision that every family in DC to has access to high-quality Out-of-school Time (OST) programs for our children that, 1) support their individual needs, 2) create space for them to explore their passions and 3) enrich their learning - regardless of income level or where they live in the city.

I am a product of high-quality OST programming. Girl Scouts, Band, afterschool activities, summer camp, book clubs, cultural experiences like operation understanding DC, the list goes on. Programs throughout my youth shaped the woman I am today. A Black female born and raised in the United States cannot easily escape being othered. I have never truly felt safe, so I learned quickly to be brave- brave in my wholeness. My privilege to participate in OST programs instilled in me a deep sense of community and achievement, but now in 2023, this should not be a privilege. Our children both need and deserve these opportunities to explore their communities and better understand their whole selves.

In addition to advocating with PAVE, I am also a resident creative entrepreneur in Mayor Bowser's 202Creates Winter 2023 Cohort. I recognize and directly benefit from the Mayor's efforts to build DC's creative economy. I applaud her investment in the arts and extensive funding for small businesses, especially in Wards 7 and 8.

**IMAGINE**, through your partnership and leadership to

- Increase access to OST programs
- Improve information sharing about programs and cost-saving options
- Improve and expand access to scholarships, vouchers, and financial aid, and
- Increase transparency and oversight for OST

We can create a pipeline of engaged, enriched and equipped youth who can seamlessly enter DC's vibrant creative community, as their whole selves. They will benefit from what we do now, together.

Research shows that art-based practices show promise as a beneficial solution for mental health services because they are in line with the whole person recovery framework...offering key benefits such as psychological and social recovery, particularly in the areas of self-discovery, self-expression, relationships and social identity. As we emerge and recover from the residual effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, **IMAGINE** accessible, equitable and high-quality OST programs as critical a way to support our children, socially and emotionally. Wholeness should not be a privilege. Why imagine when this can be real?



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**Work with PAVE to improve OST programs and learn more about prioritizing school based mental health. Partner with us to help you connect the dots between DC's endless opportunities and the families living right here who deserve priority access to all this city has to offer. You can set our youth up for success by investing in their wholeness. Continue to lead our dynamic communities, with bravery.**

**I stand behind these parent priorities and I accept the challenge to make positive change, do you?  
Thank you.**