

Crystal Gray
State Board of Education
State Board of Education Meeting
March 15, 2023

Good afternoon President Thompson, Vice President O’Leary, and members of the SBOE,

My name is Crystal Gray. I am a proud parent of Amani Walker, who is a 2nd grader and attends Watkins Elementary School. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) as a PAVE Citywide and Ward 6 PLE Board Member, Leaders of Color fellow, and a member of the Advisory Committee of the student assignment and school boundary process.

First, I want to thank the District and DPR for creating a lottery sign-up system for their summer programming along with expanded programming options. Having DPR centers expand their hours can keep children off the street. Also thanks to the District for creating more than 600 positions! Out of school time is personally my top priority because I have a daughter who will need to stay active and engaged. I hope that we will continue to see an even greater investment in our kids, families, and communities for the upcoming years.

My daughter Amani has been participating in DPR programs since she was three years old and she's now seven! This means that each year, for half of her life, we've traveled to rec centers all over the District so she could swim, cheer, enroll in summer rec camps, and little discoverers. We have so many great memories of celebrating family birthdays and graduations at these sites! Access to safe, well-resourced recreational spaces is important in general, but DPR sites hold an extra special place in my family's heart!

I am testifying today because even though we have made it easier for us to sign up for the lottery system for DPR, it needs to be easier for people who are not knowledgeable about the process to access DPR programming. Many of our underserved students have underserved parents who can't read, write, or have the resources to fill out the applications or apply for financial aid.

DPR services are so resourceful and helpful, but if you're not a parent in the know then you just won't know, and that's not fair at all! I often must coordinate information sharing with parents in my community about DPR sites and registration. I do independent research on program availability and key registration dates to send information out to residents because many parents aren't aware of sites like Learn24dc.gov and would likely miss out without the extra



outreach. To address these and other issues which are barriers to accessing OST programs, I am asking that you create a strategic plan with families, educators, OST providers, and community partners to ensure access to in-demand programs for all kids and to use this to provide recommendations to the council. This plan must begin with innovative and consistent engagement with families to determine the types of programs we want in our wards and community! I shouldn't have had to move out my ward because of the quality of programming being offered in our neighborhoods.

This step is especially important because the quality of DPR sites and program offerings east of the river. We travel over to Navy Yard and Turkey Thicket for most of Amani's programming. I know that my family isn't alone in this, and I hope that as you prioritize this strategic plan and host Community Info Sessions to better understand how we want to see our program offerings improve so that more families can feel good about utilizing DPR sites closer to home.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our District!

Crystal Gray
PAVE Citywide and Ward 6 PLE Board Member