

**Katrice Fuller-Whitaker**  
**All Education Agencies**  
**Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony**  
**Committee of the Whole**  
**Wednesday, March 1st, 2023**

Greetings Chairman Mendelson and the representatives of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Katrice Fuller-Whitaker and I am the proud mama of 5 boys who attend both DC Public & Charter Schools and I am Citywide Parent Leader with PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education). Additionally, I am a bonus mom, teacher, counselor, and confidant to the hundreds of students and families I serve under my role as Chief of Student & Family Engagement at Monument Academy PCS.

I am honored to be before you today, in my various hats, to discuss School Based Mental Health Supports, authentic Family Engagement, and the wonderful staff that are vital to the implementation of both in our schools. First, I want to commend you all for your continued support on these particular endeavors. I personally am very grateful for the \$3.8M given towards SBMH; the \$150k given towards a comprehensive cost study and the \$2.4M grant for CBOs. I too was pleased to see the 5.05% increase in UPSFF for fiscal year 24. These financial supports are sure to take the city closer to our collective goal of an equitable educational experience for all DC families; however, we still have much to do.

I am testifying today, in an era of so many overly qualified educational professionals (teachers, clinicians, social workers, & family engagement specialists) that are leaving school systems due to burnout, lack of support and mental health reprieve. The city is still in crisis - families who traditionally did not equate themselves to being school dependent or “at-risk” as many like to call it, are now feeling the massive effects the pandemic and community violence has left on all of us.

Before we let these professionals continue to walk out of our schools’ doors, we need to begin re-imagining a system that connects, easily certifies, incentivizes, and retains those who daily, choose to do the work in a system that currently does not benefit them; and that already happen to look like or empathetically understand the families we serve. These professionals are crying out for further professional development and for personnel support such as requiring

that every school is equipped with a Family Engagement Team in conjunction with accountability metrics in support of teachers and mental health professionals.

At Monument Academy specifically, we have recognized that in order to increase academic performance of our students and to implement our tiered level of mental health supports to fidelity, that we must first do the work to engage families at a high level (provide biological, physiological, educational and parenting resources) to ensure that our students are “available” for the classroom and our plethora of services.

I recognize that equipping schools with the proper internal personnel may be a heavy lift at this time, but this is also why it is important to implement a recurring plan to increase grant funding for CBOs, who are readily available to support this continuum of care that schools, in all honesty, require by at least \$2M. Doing such can directly improve school climate and culture, thus retaining staff and providing families with a positive, quality school experience.

District leaders, I leave you with this question as a parent and educational leader -

What will you commit to putting in place to eliminate the barriers of our professionals to be able to continue to eliminate the barriers of our families while simultaneously working towards making our schools the respite centers that our communities deserve?

Best,

Katrice Fuller  
Citywide and Ward 6 PLE Board Member  
Chief of Student & Family Engagement at Monument Academy PCS