

Kerry Savage
Department of Parks and Recreation
Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony
Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs
February 23, 2023

Good afternoon Chairman White, members of the Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs, and Committee staff. My name is Kerry Savage and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at PAVE. PAVE is also a member of the Out of School Time coalition - [a coalition committed to ensuring that DC children, youth, and families have access to OST programs.](#)

Today I will focus my testimony on DPR, which plays a key role in PAVE parent leaders' top two policy priorities: school-based mental health and out-of-school time (OST) programs. DPR facilities and programs offer DC residents the opportunity to engage in enrichment programs, learn new skills, explore their passions, and enjoy our beautiful city that should be a state. DPR is a critical source for OST programs, which we know provide numerous benefits for students and families, including but not limited to academic enrichment, social emotional learning and skill building, and providing a safe, productive environment while parents are working. As violence continues to impact families and communities across the District, OST programs play a critical role in violence prevention. Access to these programs directly impacts students' mental health - and we *must* ensure we have a comprehensive approach to supporting the mental health and wellness of our young people at all times of the day, and in every Ward and community.

For all of these reasons, parent leaders continue to elevate the need for improved access to and quality of DPR's OST programs - including after school programs, summer programs, and programs that take place during breaks in the school year like teacher PD days or spring break. They came together in countless meetings to develop actionable [policy solutions](#) that are foundational to lasting, systemic change around OST programs and would address the biggest gaps and needs in our current system. Today, I want to highlight their top priorities specific to DPR:

First, creating a lottery system that provides preferences to students with the greatest needs (i.e based on income-level, families with students with disabilities) similar to the MySchoolDC lottery system.

- First-come first-serve sign-up programs advantage those with more resources. I have heard the DPR sign-up process compared to “Hunger Games” more times than I can count. Families where parents are working during the sign-up period struggle to access programs and get spots in programs that interest their children. Families with limited internet access struggle to connect fast enough to get programs. Even those with privilege have shared photos of multiple computers and devices at the ready as a necessary measure to secure a spot.
- This means the many families who cannot get spots for their children have two options: to pay for (often expensive) programs or just not having OST programs for their children at all. These are often families who most need these programs. We cannot accept this outcome.
- Parents are calling on DPR to implement a ranked-choice lottery system, like MySchoolDC, so families' access to spots aren't determined solely on the flexibility of their work schedule and the strength of their internet connection.
- In addition, this lottery system should provide preference for students with the greatest needs, including at-risk students and students with disabilities. Given the limited number of programs that adequately support students with disabilities, we should take steps to make sure they are prioritized in getting matched to those as we work towards a long-term plan for accommodations in all offerings.

Second, improve and expand access to scholarships, vouchers, and financial aid.

- Many families rely on scholarships or at least partial financial assistance to attend DPR programs. However, programs are still out of reach for many families. In our Fall Back to School survey, we found nearly 1 in 5 families did not participate in OST programs due to cost.¹
- For instance, if a family of two wanted to send their children to a DPR program each of the four sessions of the year, even at the lower cost of \$135 per session - it would cost over \$1,000 dollars.² Even for middle income-families, this cost can prove prohibitive, especially those with multiple children.

¹ <https://dcpave.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FINAL-Back-to-School-Survey-Nov-2021.pdf>

² <https://dpr.dc.gov/service/summer-camps>

- DPR has made strides in improving their reduced rate program to ease the burdens on families to apply. However, even if families do apply and qualify for the reduced rate, they are still not guaranteed a spot in programs.
- This means families with the highest need, who go through the entire scholarship process, may still lose out on spots due to the first-come first-serve registration process. This causes significant frustration and feeling that the paperwork was for naught. This needs to change to ensure equitable access for families with the highest need.

Lastly, increase access to quality DPR programs in convenient locations.

- DPR has many great programs, however not all programs are available throughout the city, especially when you consider programs appropriate for different age groups. Programs for high school students are especially sparse.
- Many parents have to travel long distances in order to access programs that are the best fit for their kids. Some of our PAVE parents, especially those East of the River, have reported having to drive nearly an hour one-way just to bring their children to programs that interest them that aren't available near them. Some have had to pass on these programs because of the distance.
- In our Fall Back to School survey, 17% of parents identified transportation as a reason they did not enroll their children in an OST program and 20% did not enroll because they could not find a program that interested their child.
- DPR should work to ensure all of their program offerings are available in each of the eight wards so families and students do not have to miss out on programs simply due to lack of transportation or where they live.
- PAVE parents are asking for at least \$10 million more for OST programs to expand seats - and we hope this work is coordinated across DPR and LEARN24 offerings.

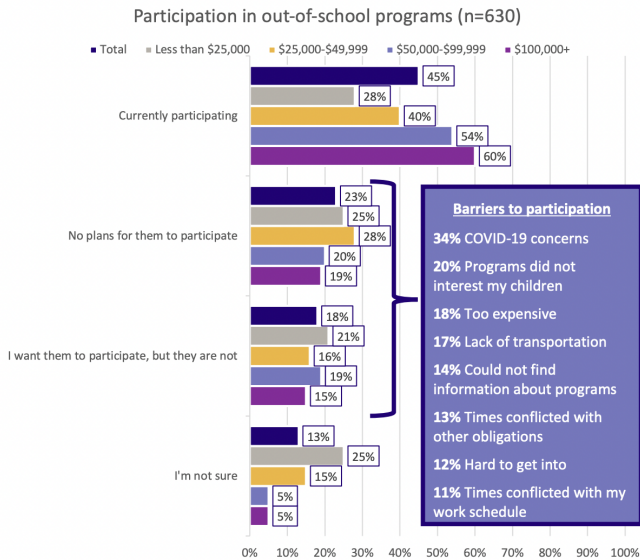
This upcoming budget and oversight season is an opportunity to show our values - that DC truly takes care of its people, especially when times get hard, and one that will courageously act to right the wrongs of historic injustice and step up with bold, innovative action to meet this moment, with investments in our future, and our children.

This work is only possible with leaders on the Council and in DPR who also believe in the power and promise of community voice. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today, I hope that we can count on your leadership.

In service,

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

Click [here](#) for PAVE parent priorities on OST programs
 Click [here](#) for PAVE parent priorities on SBMH programs



Registration Fees and Before/Aftercare Pricing

Camp	Registration Fee	Before/After Care Fee
Discovery	\$135 per session	\$20 per session
Little Explorers	\$135 per session	\$20 per session
Sports Camps	\$135 per session	\$20 per session
Therapeutic Recreation	\$135 per session	\$20 per session