

**Maya Martin Cadogan
All Education Agencies
Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony
Committee of the Whole
Wednesday, March 1st, 2023**

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and Committee staff. My name is Maya Martin Cadogan. I am a Ward 4 resident and the founder and Executive Director of PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) and a parent.

Today, I am pleased to testify on the performance of District education agencies in Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023 to date and the priorities of PAVE parent leaders as articulated in their 2023 PAVE Statement of Beliefs.

Already in 2023, PAVE parent leaders are bringing voice to the needs and aspirations of their children and communities: 66 parents attended the Mayor’s Budget Forums and ward-based budget forums. More than 20 parents have testified before the Council and the State Board of Education. Nearly 70 parent leaders met with Mayor Bowser, 12 members of Council, and 2 Deputy Mayors during our annual series of meetings during DC Parent Voice and Choice Week.

During those conversations and today, PAVE parents leaders urge the Council and the Mayor to continue to build on their existing commitment to DC students and families in the following ways: (1) prioritize Out-of-School Time programming, funding and quality improvements and (2) strengthen our School-based Mental Health system.

You will hear more about these priorities from our Parent Leaders. I will focus my testimony on the specific performance of agencies over the past year—what PAVE parent leaders consistently tell us about how these agencies are actually meeting their needs and where they are coming up short.

Overall, the impression from parents is that we are doing a lot of individual good work. Certain programs or parts of agency performance are good, but there’s not a cohesive vision for what we want in our education system—a cohesive vision that is centered on and driven by what our

children and families need; that is articulated constantly by the system leaders and their teams and is DONE together, collectively, cooperatively, not individually.

We need to see our public education system and its wellbeing as we would a family: if even one family member isn't doing well, the family isn't thriving. Though there have been real improvements to how we operate and serve students post-pandemic, it's not universally being felt by or communicated to the people it's intended to serve: kids, parents, educators.

Starting first with the Deputy Mayor for Education, I want to celebrate the good work that the DME has been doing: particularly around being an advocate for enhanced education funding, OST and school-based mental health.

The DME has been a consistent champion of increased funding for schools. We are grateful for DME's consistent leadership to ensure that more funding goes toward our children.

The expansion of OST programming and the growth of Learn 24 are also admirable achievements by the DME. So too has been the DME's focus on making school-based mental health care a priority. DME has worked with the Department of Behavioral Health to expand access to all DCPS and public charters, so that all schools have the budget for at least one clinician.

The office has also been tasked with standing up two major studies: the school boundary review and the next iteration of the Master Facilities Plan. These two major undertakings will shape the long-term success of our schools and questions of equity and access in this system of choice.

At the same time, there are areas where the office can do more and better. With respect to OST, we know we continue to have serious gaps in certain grade levels. We are doing nowhere near enough to engage high school youth outside of the Summer Youth Employment Program and breadth in programmatic offerings for younger kids is not equitably distributed across the city.

The Department of Parks and Recreation is also failing to keep up with demand. The system of rushing online at exactly the right time for too few program seats is failing families and programs are still cost-prohibitive for parents just above poverty threshold which exacerbates inequity.

We also need to see more from the DME on building out the mental health provider pipeline. This should have been a major focus 5 years ago during the start of the SBMH expansion, but it wasn't and as a result we're trying to play catch up. We need to accelerate the buildout of the pipeline through expanded reciprocity and removing bureaucratic red tape. While we do this, we must also focus on the retention of existing providers.

And while the DME has been a consistent champion for enhanced funding for our schools, the fact is that despite major investments, we are not keeping pace with historic inflation. What's more, 10 years post-adequacy study, we are still not funding to a level we said was adequate.

Speaking of the adequacy study, has anyone heard about where the most recent one stands?

The issue remains that we are keep trying to make piecemeal adjustments without putting the needs of both sectors at the forefront. If we can't answer the question of how funding decisions benefit 100 percent of our students, we are not asking the right questions. To that end, we need the DME to put forward a vision around these major issues that create a meaningful throughline, rather than what can appear as a disjointed push for incremental improvements.

Turning to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education:

Under Dr. Christina Grant's leadership, OSSE has been noticeably more visible in the community, which historically has not been the case. A new vision of OSSE led by Dr. Grant has highlighted the schools and programs doing good work across the District.

OSSE has seen a number of specific wins including:

- The award of a new federal grant for recruitment and retention for school-based mental health professionals.
- Moving the state report card in a direction that focuses more on student growth in tandem with the State Board of Education.
- Child care provider payments and pay increases that have made District early childhood centers more competitive in the expensive DMV market.
- And finally, real improvements have been made in the special education transportation program—buses have gotten considerably better and more reliable.

But there are real challenges facing OSSE:

- 21st Century schools funding being pulled out of schools is devastating and must be backfilled. Mayor has said in her inaugural she wants equitable access to these programs in every school, that's going to require a state agency's oversight and attention.
- We need to improve the coordination of care for students. That means creating standards and effective systems for agencies to collaborate. Coordination should include practices that focus on:
 - Clarity regarding which agencies/institutions are accountable for effective implementation.
 - Improving coordination of services and support at the school level, including data-sharing for continuous improvement, providing resources and support for school mental health teams and a school mental health team coordinator.
 - Coordinate care as students move from elementary, to middle, and then high school in order to provide seamless transitions.

And finally, the agency needs to remain laser focused on compliance with the rights of students who have specific needs including English Language Learners and Special Education Students. Parents still have questions and needs that demand immediate attention.

Turning to DCPS:

DCPS continues to make the whole child a priority, with new initiatives like the Whole DC initiative. The school system's enrollment growth is also a positive development after several years of stagnation and slight decline.

But there is an urgent need to improve transparency at DCPS. Parents consistently express frustration and confusion due to messaging from DCPS leadership that doesn't actually explain the why and how of policies.

School budgets are a prime example: DCPS leadership should have been clear for the past several months that some school budgets may look different and were likely to be reduced as they moved to a new student-based budgeting system—and explained *why*. But that was never shared with LSAT's and other parent and community groups in the lead up to the release of

those budgets. Instead, system leaders are now trying to explain these changes after the fact. This is a recipe for continued frustration and confusion.

Now to the Public Charter School Board:

The PCSB has done a good job of ensuring that new schools or those seeking to grow have demonstrated substantial community engagement and provided evidence of student and family demand. PCSB leadership and staff have also made major strides in working with schools on expanding transparency and making more information available to families and members of the public. I'd also like to commend the PCSB for its stakeholder engagement across its strategic planning process and revamp of the Performance Management framework.

At the same time, there is a real need for the PCSB to articulate a vision of how they'll center their decisions on parent and students needs over the long-term: the next 5, 10 and 15 years. This work can be the foundation for helping parents and families understand and invest in the long-term vision for the role of charters in the DC education landscape long term.

And finally, the State Board of Education:

SBOE's work on rewriting social studies standards and modifying the state report card are both commendable. The Chief Student Advocate also deserves kudos for engaging in more positive work with partners and being visible in the community on issues that impact families such as safe passage and special education.

In terms of specific areas for improvement, the SBOE needs to provide clarity about the role and purpose of the Special Education HUB. Parents are not clear about its purpose or how it can be a resource for them.

But fundamentally, the State Board has more work to do to get beyond the echo chamber of their hearings where the same voices often dominate. SBOE now has a robust full-time staff that should focus on reaching out to a broader range of voices that better reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of DC families.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Council, for your commitment to our students and families. Together we can continue to build the equitable, just public schools that our

children are entitled to, our families deserve, and the District needs to truly live our shared values.

Becoming a parent myself and looking at the system that I have both worked inside of and fought for improvements from outside, I am now seeing it from a position of soon needing to make decisions about how my own child will participate in it. Still today, I see that our system is not built to adequately support my Black boy and children like him. I see glimmers of potential, but I want him to feel enveloped by a just and equitable reality when I choose a public school.

Thank you,

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