

Monique Cole
State Board of Education
State Board of Education Meeting
February 15, 2023

Good evening SBOE members,

My name is Monique Cole and I live in Ward 6. My daughter goes to Mundo Verde PCS. I currently serve as a PAVE parent leader on the Ward 6 board and on the Citywide PLE Board. I want to thank you for your partnership on amplifying DC residents' voices by actively engaging in the community, testifying in front of the DC Council, communicating with agency partners, and providing this forum for DC residents to regularly testify about educational issues and concerns.

Today, I'm testifying to request your support for our PAVE School-Based Mental Health (SBMH) Supports. This year our parent priorities in this area include:

- Remove barriers to licensing – much like the DC Bar explore waiving into DC;
- Improve coordination of care between schools;
- Expand teacher/staff training; and
- Improve family engagement/awareness – improve dissemination of info.

This matters to me because as a parent I am very concerned about the mental health needs of ALL DC students. About 10 percent of the school population—9 to 13 million children—struggle with mental health problems. We've recognized the importance of mental health support in the past but now it's time to DO MORE. We need to treat our children like they have endured not just a COVID-19 pandemic but also a mental health pandemic. It is so important that we address the shortcomings of our school based mental health system including gaps in the system, where needs are not being met, and where more funds and staff are needed.

It is imperative that we increase funding for schools so that all school staff (teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, etc.) are trained in the science of how brains develop and function and trauma-informed, restorative practices. This training should include how mental health issues can manifest in many different ways, especially across cultures and age-levels. We need to equip our school staff with ongoing coaching and support to quickly identify needs and implement those practices/support collaboratively with students and parents.

We have children that are experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) at an alarming rate. Just look around – crime rates are high; inflation is high, which impacts our ability to buy basic items; many do not have the skills or training to acquire good paying, family-sustaining jobs, etc. It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during traumatic events such as mass shootings, natural disasters, or pandemics. Now, think about how this affects you as a “functional” adult. This is hard stuff for adults, but we expect our kids to see and be aware of all of these things and come to school in the right mind to receive a quality education. **NONE OF US CAN BE OUR BEST SELVES WHEN WE HAVE UNADDRESSED MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.**

I would like your support in pushing for an education system that prioritizes student mental health and wellness where ALL students and their families have readily accessible, high-quality school-based mental health services, supports, and education and is responsive to student needs. The purpose of an education is to provide students with the building blocks to become productive members of society. These building blocks are not limited to merely to reading, writing and arithmetic. We require health certifications regarding their physical health in order for students to come to school, yet we neglect mental health and do not place it on equal standing with physical health. Students cannot bring their A game to school when their mental health is compromised. I liken it to a boxer trying to fight with one arm behind their back – no matter how talented the fighter, the fight is less than optimal.

In conclusion, I challenge each of you to be **BOLD** in the approach to this issue! Let’s think about what we can do! Let’s be creative! We have to meet the moment! It is critical for all of our well-being and the future leaders of this nation.

Thank you for your time and continued partnership.

Best,
Monique Cole
Citywide/Ward 6 Board Member