

Tyesha Andrews
All Education Agencies
Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony
Committee of the Whole
Wednesday, March 1st, 2023

Good evening, everyone. My name is Tyesha Andrews. I am a Native Washingtonian, Ward 8 resident, 14-year D.C. government employee, advocate, mother, & wife. I come before you today to speak about my thoughts on funding SBMH support for D.C. Public Schools, specifically schools in my ward, ward 8, and schools in wards 6 & 7, where my children attend school. I have a 13-year-old, 8th-grade son at Jefferson Middle Academy and a 6-year-old, 1st-grade son at Plummer Elementary.

My sons were diagnosed, at a young age, on the spectrum of having High-Functioning Autism. Due to my assistance, both of my sons have been doing very well in D.C. public schools. However, I would like all D.C. students to do well in school, and I would like D.C. public schools in ward 8 to provide the same level of education, safety, and enrichment my children are getting in wards 6 & 7,

Mental health will continue to be the core focus for families and teachers to provide a successful educational experience for all students. Plummer Elementary, where my youngest son attends school, embodies this environment but needs additional funds and resources to succeed and go above and beyond.

The Benning Ridge neighborhood, located on the borderline of Southeast and Northeast D.C., has not had an excellent reputation over the years. The community has a fair amount of crime, drugs, and loitering. This area usually would incur many individuals dealing with mental health issues, and not typically a place you would send your child to learn. No wonder you would never know the precious gem we call Mary H. Plummer Elementary School.

As a parent, I had many reservations about sending my youngest to Plummer. However, Plummer has created a village that continuously exceeds my family's expectations. Plummer Elementary school has and continues to defy the odds as a small grade school, with most of its students being considered low-income. Imagine the heights and academic goals the school could reach with additional funding to support the mental health needs of the Plummer Community, including students, staff, and families.

Plummer has taught me that just because a school is in a troubled neighborhood doesn't mean that greatness isn't happening within the school walls. Over the years, Plummer Elementary has consistently scored the highest in Wards 7 & 8 of the district on the nationwide assessment called Classroom Scoring System (CLASS). Due to the COVID pandemic, no assessments were conducted during the 2019-2020 school year. However, in August 2022, Plummer scored #1 in all DCPS. In addition, Plummer's PARCC scores have increased by 15% this year. Despite all this, in initial budgets for this year, Plummer is set to lose nearly \$260,000 in its budget. And our school still has many unmet needs.

The Plummer building has not been renovated since about 2005, and that renovation took place in just one summer break. Plummer needs at least an additional \$30,000 to furnish and renovate its library fully. Plummer needs a full renovation with a new library, gymnasium, green space and a space with more light. Additional funding needs to be provided for the before and after-school staff. The staff at Plummer get a base salary for their positions but having them come in early for before-care and stay late for after-care is only realistic with premium pay, therefore administrative premium is needed to manage a before and after school program that many parents need.

In closing, being a PAVE parent leader has encouraged me to be more involved in my children's educational and social growth. I confidently suggest or request anything to ensure a successful school experience. Therefore, I am advocating for all DCPS, including Plummer elementary, to receive increased mental health support funding and proper renovations. Plummer is a beautiful rose in a concrete jungle that needs additional love and care to continue to blossom and grow.