

**Dawn Smith**  
**Committee of the Whole**  
**Teacher and Principal Retention**  
**Tuesday, November 28th 2023**

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and DC Council staff.

My name is Dawn Smith. I'm a Ward 7 resident and two of my children attend public charter schools in Wards 5 and 6, and I'm a Ward 7 and Citywide Board parent leader with PAVE.

I want to thank every teacher and administrator for doing their due diligence with helping not only my children, but all the children in the District of Columbia. I'm testifying today on the issue of teacher retention regarding early childhood education. According to the OSSE website on early childhood education, they focus on the whole child and include a broad range of domains because young children's learning and development are interrelated and cross all areas of learning. The Early Learning Standards acknowledge the essential role of the teacher in intentionally guiding children's learning and development in a high-quality early care and education environment in partnership with families.

This school year alone my four year old had two teachers leave the school within one month of school opening. And my child is very aware that her school is short staffed. This was disheartening not only to my child but to other teachers, administrators and myself. The impact of a teacher leaving a classroom is very overwhelming to a young child especially if they are familiar with the teacher and starting to have a great relationship with them and a dutiful routine. Yes, switching jobs can be great in the workforce for the worker however, it can have adverse side effects in the context of early childhood development. According to the research literature, children benefit from stable attachment to caregivers (Folbre [2012](#)), and a break in the child-teacher relationship due to teacher turnover can disrupt the benefits of positive child-teacher interactions, which include early language and literacy skills, social development, and inhibitory control (Hamre et al. [2014](#)).

Correlational evidence links higher teacher turnover to poorer-quality child-teacher relationships (Phillips, Austin, and Whitebook [2016](#)). In addition, a recent study of Head Start participants found that kids who experienced higher teacher turnover during the school year had smaller gains in vocabulary and literacy and higher levels of parent-reported behavior problems than peers who had more continuity with their caregivers (Markowitz [2019](#)).<sup>1</sup> The lack of staff members at my daughters facility has allowed my child along with other children to be susceptible to communicable diseases that inherently have the child being out of school and the parents taking off work. Also, the lack of adequate staffing strands teachers, aides and administrators to find coverage and this is a constant issue where they become tiresome. It will ultimately affect our children's ability to grow further if this trend continues.

We need to look at how and why teachers are leaving the classroom and what is being done to recruit teachers and offer stabilization, as far as maximum wages and also offer more than two mental health days per school year. This will not only increase the wellbeing of our children but also the teachers in their lives. I believe as a parent, teachers want the best for our children and if they are in the right environment, both our children and teachers will thrive and have not only a better future but a happier and prosperous one.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,  
Dawn Smith  
Ward 7 and Citywide PAVE PLE Board Member