

Maya Martin Cadogan
Committee of the Whole
Academic Achievement in the District of Columbia
Wednesday, December 6th, 2023

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

Thank you for hosting this public roundtable on academic achievement. As a sixth-generation Washingtonian, new mother of a Black boy, and the Executive Director of PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education), the disparities in the academic outcomes of students in the District are extremely disheartening. Too many of our kids aren't reading at grade level. They aren't able to do basic math. Youth violence has skyrocketed, in no small part because our kids aren't consistently in school. Frankly, this makes me fearful of the future of our city that should be a state. We are in a state of educational emergency and we must act accordingly - and act NOW.

First: we need to be explicit about the problem and where we are.

PARCC proficiency rates only improved marginally last year across the District. Last school year was supposed to be a year of recovery, but the PARCC results showed us that just over one-third of students are proficient in reading, and just over one-fifth are proficient in math. After breaking this data down by subgroups, we can see how inequitable the (slight) progress we have made truly is. I have included more of this breakdown in my written testimony, but I'll share some of the most worrying of those statistics: **only 11% of Black students are proficient in math, compared to 19% of Hispanic/Latino students and 75% of white students.**

- Fewer than 1 in 5 students from economically disadvantaged households met or exceeded expectations in reading, and less than 1 in 12 in math.
- For students with disabilities, just 8% demonstrated proficiency in math, and 10% in reading.
- High school students made almost no gains in math, with a proficiency rate just above 10% in both 2022 and 2023. Reading hovered around 33% for both years.

- 23% of Black students are proficient in reading, compared to 32% and 82% for Hispanic/Latino and white students, respectively.
- SOURCE: [2022-2023 Statewide Assessment Results](#)

We have also reached **record-high levels of chronic absenteeism and truancy** coming out of the pandemic. This has serious detrimental effects on students' abilities to perform academically, their mental health, and ultimately their safety.

Next, we have to take accountability for the policy choices we made so we can address the harm and change the trajectory.

During the pandemic, we said that we would meet the moment and reimagine the way that we approach school; but we have yet to do so in a comprehensive way. We waited to return to school in person knowing virtual instruction wasn't working writ large. We paid the price, as [other countries](#) and even [other states](#) in the US that reopened sooner saw smaller declines - especially in math. When kids did come back, we kept families out of the building, hindering engagement. We lowered the bar for attendance and counted students as present if they only attended 60% of the school day, when they needed - and still need - more instructional time, not less.

Now, we need to get back to the basics we know work, and we need to go ALL in on kids, families, and our schools.

We need to solidify the core components of a good education: great instruction, strong family engagement, and a variety of enrichment opportunities - and then go beyond. We need to follow the lead of the 12 [DC Bold schools](#) who, while serving high-priority student populations, have outperformed other schools by an average of 15 percentage points. They do this by extending instructional time, going big on improving student attendance, using data to target instruction and engaging families in conversations about academic data, and creating joyful learning environments.

In our experience talking with our PAVE parent leaders, nearly all of the parents told us that they were not given information about their child's academic progress. And if they were, it wasn't comprehensible, meaningful, and/or they didn't know what to do with it. This matches up with data from across the country; according to a recent [Learning Heroes study](#), about 9 in



10 parents report that their students get B's or better in school - even though only half of students are performing at grade level. Parents need accurate, holistic data (read: not only grades on report cards) about how their students are doing in school so that they can best support them. This means that parents need to know specifically what skills or areas their kids might be struggling with and what opportunities there are for their kids to get additional support. Only then can they be REAL partners in their children's education.

We need to look to these PROVEN strategies to make sure that all families and all students have access to schools that excite them about learning and that they are truly prepared for life after graduation - whatever path they choose. Whether that be a trade, a teacher, an accountant, a doctor, a lawyer, a community leader, or a staff member at a District agency to keep our city safe, clean, and flourishing for us all - they need to be able to read, write, do math, and develop social emotional skills. If our students thrive, our communities thrive. So let's make sure schools have the funding, policies, and infrastructure to make it all a reality.

Our communities deserve better. Our families deserve better. And most importantly, our students deserve better. I look forward to learning more about your solutions that will make DC's education system one that I am excited for my own son to experience.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Maya Martin Cadogan

Founder and Executive Director, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)