

**Andrea Jones
Committee of the Whole
Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy
Tuesday, December 12th 2023**

Good afternoon, Councilmembers;

My name is Andrea Jones, and I am a Ward 8 resident and mother of 4 children: 18, 12, 7, and 4. I am a Citywide and Ward 8 PAVE PLE Board member and an advocate for children with special needs.

The data shows that in the 21-22 school year, 48 percent of DC students were chronically absent, missing more than 10% of the school year. I am curious about the percentage of disabled students, which is within 48% percent.

Children with disabilities rely heavily on transportation services to get them to and from school. We have already seen data showing that most children in wards 7 and 8 do not attend their neighborhood school, so that leaves a lot of disabled children relying on transportation services. The barrier of parents taking their child to school if the bus is late or does not show up at all is a barrier that should be considered. This could mean financial consequences if the parent needs to be at work at a certain time or just does not have the financial means or capacity to get their child to school without the assistance of transportation.

The situation is a layered one, and there is no one magic bullet that will rectify it. I feel that part of the high absenteeism stems from not having enough quality specialized programs east of the river and lack of funding in Ward 7 and 8 schools. Another part has me question how we are handling mental health support for both children and their families to make sure they are supported through their barriers. We have also seen an increase in fentanyl use, homelessness, and mental health support needs in our communities. Giving families wrap-around support can combat the decline of absenteeism because everyone in the household is supported.

I think this conversation should not focus on just one barrier but on multiple barriers that affect one another simultaneously.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Andrea Jones
Citywide and Ward 8 PAVE PLE Board Member