

**Faith Gibson Hubbard  
Committee of the Whole  
Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy  
Tuesday, December 12th 2023**

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and DC Council staff. My name is Faith Gibson Hubbard and I serve as the Chief Strategy Office for PAVE - I am also a Ward 5 resident and I am the parent of two DCPS students.

Thank you for recognizing the need for a larger discussion surrounding our city's absenteeism problem. As a current DCPS parent, former Chief Student Advocate, and former Executive Director of the Thrive by Five DC, I have seen firsthand both the importance and impact of strong attendance in our schools. But, without the focus from District leaders around this issue, we are missing the opportunity to boost the outcomes of our students.

In the 21-22 school year, chronic absenteeism in DC rose to 48 percent (up from 29 percent in school year 2018-19). An increase in chronic absenteeism was seen across the country, though DC's rate of chronic absenteeism is 15% higher than the national average.

Chronic absenteeism not only affects students' abilities to perform academically but also increases their chances of being involved in the justice system or witnessing/experiencing acts of violence. And yet, when faced with this reality, we did not dig into and address the variety of factors that caused this increase.

Instead, we lowered our attendance standards in the name of "equity." While communities need support and grace for navigating a once-in-a-lifetime global

crisis like the pandemic, we also have to consider an unpopular truth: how can we expect students to hold high standards for themselves and their learning when we don't hold high standards for them? Moreover, how can we expect our students to succeed when we aren't providing the necessary supports to ensure that they get the education that they deserve? How can we expect our students to feel cared for when we aren't working to address issues that are keeping them from attending school?

In my written testimony I detailed the statistics that exemplify how detrimental chronic absenteeism is for student outcomes. But for brevity, I'll leave those for you to read after.

**Written Only:** Let me read off a few statistics:

- Chronically absent children in kindergarten and 1st grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade - which is when students begin to read to learn.
- By 6th grade, chronic absence is a warning sign for students at risk of dropping out of school.
- By 9th grade, good attendance can predict graduation rates even better than 8th grade test scores.
- Black, American Indian, and students from high poverty communities are far more likely to be chronically absent than their peers.

We have heard from parents, including Native Washingtonian and Ward 6 resident Russchelle Moore, that supportive school staff plays a huge role in guaranteeing students arrive and stay in school. Her son's school leader was present during pick and dropoff everyday - even getting on the bus to make sure kids felt safe and that someone cared about them getting to and from school each day. While that is commendable, we need to find sustainable solutions for ALL kids. What are we doing to support our school staff, community partners and neighbors, and

students so that they can form deeper relationships inside and outside of the classroom? What does the communication and coordination look like in real-time when students are missing from school?

PAVE parent leaders and school leaders agree: one solution to remedy our chronic absenteeism crisis is getting our kids **excited** to go to school again. We need to follow the lead of the [12 DC Bold schools](#) highlighted in EmpowerK12's most recent report. All of these 12 schools, while serving high-priority student populations, have outperformed other schools by an average of 15.1 percentage points. How do they do this? By engaging families, focusing on improving student attendance, and by creating joyful learning environments.

We need to look to other comparable jurisdictions that are making strides. We can look at states like [Rhode Island](#) that have developed a real-time publicly available dashboard that identifies students who were on track to miss 10% or more of the school year.

We need to stop adjusting policies to *excuse* students being absent or truant, and we need to start adding layers of support to keep pouring into our students. We need to do better - for our city, for our families, and for our children.

We are in an ever-changing “new normal.” We have to meet the times and work with our families and communities to implement innovative solutions to get our kids back on the track to success. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing about the strategies you will present to remedy this issue soon.

Sincerely,  
Faith Gibson Hubbard



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Chief Strategy Officer, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)