

Faith Gibson Hubbard
SBOE, OSA, and PCSB Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony
Tuesday, February 27th, 2024

To: DC Council Committee of the Whole, Committee of the Whole Chairperson Phil Mendelson, Committee of the Whole committee members, and Committee of the Whole staff

From: Faith Gibson Hubbard, Chief Strategy Officer at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)

Date: February 27th, 2024

Good afternoon Chairperson Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and Committee staff. My name is Faith Gibson Hubbard. I am a Ward 5 resident, the Chief Strategy Officer at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education), and a parent!

For background, PAVE parent leaders are mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and other caregivers who share their stories, dig deeply into understanding education policy, and bring their voices to our city's leaders in order to impact the educational experience of all children in DC. Our parent leaders are overwhelmingly Black, many are native Washingtonians, and the majority live in neighborhoods that wrestle with community violence, food and housing insecurity, and a lack of excellent school options.

Each year, PAVE parent leaders come together at their annual PAVE Parent Policy Summit to choose which issues to prioritize for the next year. After roughly six years of focusing on school-based mental health and out-of-school time programs, PAVE parent leaders chose to anchor those issues as areas they will always engage around, but focus one of their advocacy campaigns on safe passage given the volume and severity of incidents youth witness or experience as they get to and from school. Their other campaign will focus on specialized school programs and ensuring students have access to high-quality programs and the information they need to make informed decisions about schools. In their work to develop their safe passage and specialized school programs policy solutions, PAVE and our parent leaders formed coalitions with school leaders, policy experts, community organizations, and students to ensure their statement truly reflected the needs and vision of communities across DC.

Today, I am testifying on the performance of the Office of the Student Advocate (OSA), State Board of Education (SBOE), and the Public Charter School Board (PCSB). I will begin with areas for celebration:

- **OSA:**
 - We deeply appreciate our partnership with the OSA and all of the great work they do. They consistently share their perspectives working with different schools and school communities

which helps inform our work. They provide essential resources and information sessions for families like their bullying workshop and Special Education Know Your Rights sessions.

- We are especially grateful for their partnership around Safe Passage, a new priority for PAVE parents this year. In particular, I want to highlight that they have agreed to take the lead on one of parents' policy solutions: for OSA to convene stakeholders on a hyper-local level monthly to help build relationships and further student safety, including school leaders, Safe Passage Workers, MPD, WMATA PD, and safe passage and community partners (violence interrupters, Cure the Streets, Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE) office, Mayor's Office of Community Relations and Services (MOCRS) liaisons, agency staff, DPR, DCPL, etc.).
- This is a critical need, and because of the trust OSA has built across the community, schools, partners, and families alike, this recommendation has received broad support.

- **SBOE:**

- SBOE has consistently engaged with PAVE families through their public meetings, individual meet-and-greets, events in the community, and on social media. We are especially grateful for the option to testify in person at the monthly meetings. You can't beat face-to-face engagement, it gets us so much further with more robust dialogue and more meaningful relationship building. We have had 18 parents testify this year and all of them spoke of how they felt heard by the SBOE representatives. We hope to continue that engagement around our two new policy issue areas, as it will take all of us!
- To that end, we hope the SBOE continues to center the voices of families in the work around the school report card. PAVE parent leaders have helped drive many of the decisions around the report card over the years, pushing for an emphasis on growth, transparent data broken down by student groups that's contextualized, accurate information about school offerings, and more.
- Now, parents are eager for the updated report card to be released and want to be a partner in making it as user-friendly for families as possible. PAVE will help aggregate and share families' perspectives about what information should be included and how it should be displayed in the coming weeks, and we hope the SBOE will heed their calls for a clear, fair, and robust report card as they cast the next vote.

- **PCSB:** Lastly, we applaud how PCSB has engaged with us in past years, especially around budget transparency. This laid a strong foundation for more equitable school and program funding.

Still, there are several areas we must see improvements. We are at a true crisis point when it comes to the safety of our children in the District. Children have increased both as victims and perpetrators of violent crimes. In the first half of 2022, in safe passage priority areas, there were 56 weapons violations, 13 robberies,

and 2 homicides.¹ Students need to feel like they are safe as they travel to school, but too often they are fearful of what they will experience, which impacts their mental health and attendance at school. Overall, parents report not feeling safe for their children. In a report by the Office of the Student Advocate, they found nearly 60 percent of parents did not feel like their children were safe as they traveled to and from school.²

We will focus our recommendations on PCSB. As a quasi-governmental agency and the sole charter authorizer in the city, PCSB must go beyond approving, closing, and monitoring schools. It should also take responsibility for convening and coordinating LEAs to ensure they are able to do their best work educating kids. We hear from school leaders and families alike that the lack of guidance, communication, and coordination negatively impacts how well they can serve our kids and families. For example, public charter schools often feel disconnected to all of the programs or resources available and ask us to provide support in introducing them to the agencies and departments in the DC government that support our schools and communities. PCSB needs to be that intergovernmental bridge. This isn't on one individual, but it's something the whole organization must own given the significant investment of public dollars in the agency, especially as their staff capacity continues to increase. Here are our recommendations:

First, we need stronger coordination among safe passage entities and schools.

- PCSB should work with District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and all public charter school leaders to convene in person for a citywide meeting, at least annually, with MPD, WMATA PD, and Safe Passage program leadership to build relationships and discuss ways they can collaborate around safe passage.
 - Before COVID, PCSB used to host regular in-person school leader safety convenings that have now gone away. We need to bring this back! While we know there are some convenings happening again, attendance is varied, it isn't face-to-face, and they often focus on more immediate issues.
 - We've heard from parents and school leaders that these in-person convenings would be incredibly helpful to build relationships and support student safety. We strongly urge for this shift to occur as soon as possible.

Second, we need more comprehensive information about who handles safety at each school.

- PCSB should create a list of all of the security leads at each of their local education agencies (LEAs) and post it publicly.
 - Parents, school leaders, and other safe passage entities want to know who the security leads are at each school so they have a point of contact if incidents occur. The PCSB should compile

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/01/29/dc-schools-safe-passage-school-commute/>

² <https://studentadvocate.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/Safe%20Passage%20Report%20SY%202019-20%20Final.pdf>

and release this information publicly so leaders and those on the ground can quickly access the vital information they need.

Third, we need reliable data for post-graduation outcomes for specialized school programs.

- Parents want to know which specialized school programs across both sectors have strong results post-graduation to help them make informed decisions about what schools will best serve their child.
- PCSB should support schools in collecting and aggregating data and work in partnership with the DME and other education/workforce agencies to ensure the upcoming post-graduation outcome databases and performance management frameworks include:
 - Post-graduation outcomes (college AND employment) broken down by elementary and secondary program type and disaggregated data such as race, income, Ward of residence, students with disabilities, etc.
 - An analysis of student academic outcomes in specialized school programs and how they connect to post-graduation outcomes and share the results publicly.

This upcoming budget and oversight season is an opportunity to show our values - that DC truly takes care of its people, especially when times get hard, and one that will courageously act to right the wrongs of historic injustice and step up with bold, innovative action to meet this unprecedented moment, with investments in our future, our children.

This work is only possible with leaders on the Council and our education agencies who also believe in the power and promise of community voice. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today, I hope that we can count on your leadership.

In service,

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