
Maya Martin Cadogan
Deputy Mayor of Public Safety and Justice
Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony
Tuesday, February 27th, 2024

To: DC Council Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety Chairperson Brooke Pinto, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, and Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety staff

From: Maya Martin Cadogan, Founder and Executive Director at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)

Date: February 27th, 2024

Good afternoon Chairperson Pinto, members of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, and Committee staff. My name is Maya Martin Cadogan. I am a Ward 4 resident and the Founder and Executive Director of PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) a parent of a 14-month old Black boy, a seventh-generation Washingtonian!

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.

This year, PAVE parents voted to prioritize safe passage given the volume and severity of incidents youth witness or experience as they get to and from school. 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 safe as they travel to school, but too often they fear what they will experience, which impacts their mental health, attendance, and performance at school.

Safe passage is multi-faceted: it includes personal safety, violence reduction, infrastructure, and traffic measures - and all of that work must be coordinated. A critical throughline: relationships are vital to building trust and keeping our communities safe. There are lots of people who are doing good work - but too often in silos. We've hosted many conversations with violence interrupters, community groups, and school leaders across both DCPS and public charter schools to figure out where Safe Passage *is* working, and the common

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

factor every time a program is working and reducing incidents is when all safe passage entities are working closely together.

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. We want to extend deep gratitude to all of the people doing great work on the ground who are lending their expertise and perspective to improve safe passage across the District, in particular, our Safe Passage community-based organization (CBO) partners at Growing Up DC and the team at Collaborative Solutions for Communities (CSC).

Today, I will focus on the aspects of the work around safe passage that fall under the Deputy Mayor of Public Safety and Justice. We sincerely appreciate Deputy Mayor Appiah and her team's engagement with us through DC Parent Voice and Choice Week meetings and their commitment to keeping students safe through their Safe Passage, Safe Blocks program. Deputy Mayor Appiah and her team have been extremely open to continued conversations with parents, school leaders, and others in our coalition, and we look forward to ongoing collaboration.

Together with our partners, PAVE parent leaders have developed the following policy solutions for DMPSJ to improve safe passage:

- **Currently, the CBOs that manage safe passage contracts are the ones that direct the Safe Passage Workers** (informally those in green vests outside of schools during pick up and drop off hours). In places like KIPP College Prep, Johnson Middle School, and EL Haynes, **the schools have a shared relationship and coordinate with the CBO, which has proved to be much more effective.**
 - We need to ensure schools and Safe Passage Workers are coordinating with schools regularly.
 - In fact, incidents fell by as much as 47% at KIPP CP after making this change!
 - At EL Haynes, their safe passage contract is managed by someone who is also a parent at the school. This relationship makes their work more effective because of the open lines of communication, regular feedback about the Safe Passage Workers and where they should be stationed, and their knowledge of the school and surrounding community.
 - In this shift, CBOs should still perform all administrative management functions (manage grants, pay the Safe Passage Workers, etc.). The main change (for those who are not doing this already on their own) is that Safe Passage Workers should regularly work in partnership with school leaders to understand where they should be stationed and what to look out for to be ready to intervene and/or communicate incidents/response needs as quickly as possible.

- **Second, identify model Safe Passage Workers program partnerships with schools and host sessions with all stakeholders at those sites to share best practices with other schools and Safe Passage Workers programs.**
 - Creating an effective safe passage program is difficult and complex, but we know it *is* possible because these programs do exist throughout the District!
 - Leaders need guidance from partners/schools to envision, and then implement, what safe passage can and should look like at their school. These exemplars can provide real, tested strategies to improve implementation that school leaders can take back to their communities.
- **Third, to make sure the above coordination with school leaders is the norm and not an outlier, we recommend that DMPSJ restructure the Safe Passage CBO grant process.**
 - Include school leader input in the selection process and stakeholder feedback as a part of the annual evaluation to ensure awardees have trusted relationships and proven capacity to engage with school communities.
- **Furthermore, we need improved coordination between stakeholders.**
 - The DMPSJ should play an integral role in convening safe passage entities. In our meetings with MPD, DCPS, and public charter school leaders, they shared that more regular convenings would be extremely useful to improve student safety.
 - First, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and all public charter school leaders should 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 to collaborate around safe passage.
 - We've heard from so many people that it feels like they are doing this work in a silo. In the past, before COVID, there used to be yearly school leader safety convenings that have now gone away. We need DMPSJ to help to bring this back!

Last, the DMPSJ should regularly aggregate and release public data on Safe Passage, Safe Blocks program effectiveness and usage including but not limited to:

- Safety incidents year over year comparisons
- Type and amount of incidents
- Safe Passage Workers per school
- Capacity

Students deserve to feel safe traveling to school. We are grateful for the willingness DMPSJ has shown to work with PAVE parent leaders on their ideas and hope to see their solutions implemented so all students can get what they need and deserve.

In service,

Maya Martin Cadogan

Executive Director

PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)