

Kisha Clark
Committee of the Whole
Deputy Mayor for Education, Office of the State Superintendent of Education,
and District of Columbia Public Schools Budget Hearing
Thursday, April 4th, 2024

Good afternoon,

My name is Kisha Clark, a PAVE Citywide and PLE Ward 6 board member and resident. I come before you today to advocate for the safety and well-being of our students in the District of Columbia. As a community, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that every child can access education without fear or concern for their safety on their journey to and from school.

The need for safe passage for DC students is not merely a matter of convenience; it is a fundamental requirement for their academic success and overall well-being. According to recent statistics, students living in Wards 5, 7, and 8, on average, travel 2 or more miles to and from school each day. These figures underscore the urgent need for greater coordination and collaboration among key stakeholders to address safety concerns and provide safe passage for our students.

In a survey conducted by the Office of the Student Advocate in School Year 2021-22, 20.4% of students replied that they felt uncomfortable or in danger while traveling to school which correlates to the the high number of robberies within a block of public schools during dismissal times according to the DC Metropolitan Police Department in 2023: <https://mpdc.dc.gov/>). Data repeatedly shows a high concentration of gun violence near schools. This means students are more likely to witness an incident or even be directly involved in one while traveling to or from school.

These statistics paint a stark reality of the challenges our students face as they navigate their neighborhoods, often encountering unsafe environments and potential threats to their well-being. Our children deserve a safe commute to school.

Effective safe passage requires the concerted efforts of multiple agencies and organizations, including DCPS, public charter schools, Metropolitan Police Department, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice, safe passage workers, and violence interrupters. I want to thank Mayor Bowser for allotting \$9.7 million to maintain the District's Safe Passage Program and expanding coverage of roving teams in school areas where violence or crime happens and for maintaining funds for the DC School Connect program. However, to achieve meaningful progress, it is imperative that all schools and safe



passage stakeholders work together seamlessly, with clear communication channels and shared objectives.

PAVE parents have a budget friendly ask for the DMPSJ and the Office of the Student Advocate to bring together leaders from all safety entities with school leaders from both DCPS and charter schools in person at least once a year. It is critically important that leaders know all the government systems so they are aware of what's already happening, understand who to call for what, and center and community relationships which we know keeps us safe. Right now, law enforcement entities are meeting in person with DCPS leaders, but not all leaders in public charter schools. We need all school leaders involved in talking to one another, especially as many DCPS and public charter schools are in close proximity and must work together when incidents arrive. Exploring how to leverage technology for rapid response alerts and messaging can go a long way to support coordination across schools.

In closing, I believe together, we can create a safer environment for our students to learn, grow, and thrive.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Kisha Clark

Citywide and Ward 6 PLE Board Member, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)