

Ana Rodriguez
Committee of the Whole
Education Agencies Budget Hearing
Friday, April 5th, 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: Ana Rodriguez, Citywide and Ward 5 PLE Board member and PAVE Parent Leader

Date: April 4th, 2024

Good afternoon Chairperson Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and Committee staff. My name is Ana Rodriguez, and I am a proud parent of an 8th grader who attends McKinley Middle School in Ward 5 and I also serve with PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) on the Citywide and Ward 5 Parent Leaderboards.

I'm testifying today on access to specialized programming. Specialized school programs are not being administered equitably or at the same quality across the city. Even schools that score high on academic performance on the school report card do not always have the high-quality programs they claim to have or the support kids need to succeed in specialized programs. My daughter wants to work in STEM fields, and I saw how tough it was to ensure students get the curriculum they need to succeed in STEM specialized school programs.

I want to start by thanking Mayor Bowser and Deputy Mayor Kihn for the increase of \$21.8 million in funding for CTE programs, for maintaining the \$700,000 in funding for the District's dual enrollment programs, and for the \$581,000 to expand access to support the Ward 8 Advanced Technical Center. My daughter currently is an eighth grader at Mckinley Middle School and I have first hand experience of how important it is for all students in DC to have access to these types of programs.

I transferred my daughter during the second term because of the issues that I've been having with my daughter not having access to algebra. When my daughter was in seventh grade at Brookland she came in and they put her in cohort 7A. I didn't know that each cohort functioned differently from 7A all the way to 7E. In cohort 7D, they put all the "smart students" and gave them access to an accelerated math curriculum, which my daughter did not get. The 7D Cohort was given access to high-impact tutoring and other additional resources that my daughter, again, could not access. I was shocked, especially with the money being used from the high-impact tutoring funds. I am grateful for the \$4.8 million allotment of funds in the FY 2025 budget for

High Impact Tutoring and hope these funds are used to increase accessibility to tutoring and find a way to hold schools accountable to include students with the highest needs in high quality tutoring. The one at my daughter's school was supposed to be for all students, but how is she supposed to succeed in a STEM program if she can't get the math curriculum or extra support she needs? This increase in funding for high impact tutoring can save parents from having to find separate, outside tutoring programs like I had to for my daughter so that she could gain confidence in her math skills and be successful.

Her summer tutor, who teaches math at McKinley Middle School, sent a letter to Brookland letting them know she was prepared for algebra. When my daughter started 8th grade, I was told by the school things would be different. But before that, at the end of seventh grade, my daughter had just received her 504 medical plan. I had been debating on getting this because I heard that they don't give kids with 504s and IEPs access to the accelerated curriculum and they move them from their cohorts. On her first day of school, she was in cohort 8A. Two days later she was moved to 8C. This class had over 50% of kids who had IEPs and 504s. And the math was below what she already knew. This wasn't fair. Children should be mixed, and I wanted her to be moved back to 8A because her access was being taken. By the time I finally got her moved back to her original class, she had missed a whole term of algebra.

I was determined as a parent that no school was going to stop my daughter from having access to math and set her back because she had a medical disability or because she wasn't in the right cohort so I moved her to McKinley Middle School which is my neighborhood school. I never told McKinley about my issues with Brookland Middle School. She has algebra now, but my concern is how many kids are not getting access to math or even a specialized program like dual language because they are measuring our kids on how we test or if the kid has a 504 or an IEP. I'm not gonna allow DCPS or any other school to stop my daughter from having equitable access to programming especially when my daughter wants to focus on STEM. It took me a long battle to navigate this system to make sure she had equitable access to the programming she deserved. I believe OSSE should verify that schools are offering the programs they claim to provide, a budget friendly ask, and that the FY 2025 budget set aside \$750,000 in funding for a school navigator program to help parents navigate through this process so families don't have to go it alone. As a school system, we should make sure all kids are able to access the programs they want and not fight to ensure they don't.

Best,

Ana Rodriguez

Citywide and Ward 5 PLE board member, PAVE parent Leader