

**Maya Martin Cadogan**  
**SBOE, OSA, and PCSB**  
**Budget Oversight Hearing Testimony**  
**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:** Maya Martin Cadogan, Founder and Executive Director at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)  
**Date:** April 5th, 2024

Good afternoon Chairperson Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and Committee staff. My name is Maya Martin Cadogan. 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), and a parent of a 15-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.

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 will outline areas we see as key priorities for OSA, SBOE, and PCSB and what investments and resources are necessary for success:

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

Despite pleas from school leaders, families, and community members, consistent hyper-local convenings around safety that are not just in response to incidents have not been happening. We applaud the Office of the Student Advocate (OSA) for stepping up and committing to host ward/neighborhood-based convenings with folks doing the work on the ground (i.e. safe passage workers, school principals, MPD and WMATA PD officers, etc.) to build relationships and foster partnerships/collaboration. OSA is a trusted and neutral source to bring people together as they have built strong relationships across the District. Doing this regularly will take resources and staff time. They have a small team, so we hope that the upcoming budget for the OSA supports this critical work.

We have also learned that public charter schools are often not included in all conversations about safety with District agencies. It should be a priority to ensure that public safety agencies are regularly meeting with *both* DCPS and public charter schools. We want to give kudos to the work the PCSB has done in partnership with the DC Charter Alliance to host bi-weekly meetings with leaders from MPD, WMATA PD, Safe Passage Program leads, OAG, and LEA leaders to discuss safety. We hope they continue this important work to get to 100% participation from all LEAs. We also encourage in-person convenings, minimally at the start of the school year, to deepen relationships and collaboration. These are budget-friendly solutions that can have a huge impact on students and school communities.

**Second, we need to revisit the change to DC's attendance policy.**

We are at a true crisis point regarding chronic absenteeism and truancy rates in DC.<sup>1</sup> While multiple pieces of legislation have been introduced recently to address this crisis, SBOE's policy around what counts for a student to be "present" is one of the most important policies that needs to change.

Prior to the last school year, students were required to attend 80% of the school day in order to be counted present. Now, students in DC can attend just 60% of the school day. This was done to provide grace and flexibility for students with outsized barriers or challenges like getting

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/chronic-absenteeism-dc-public-schools/>

siblings to school, needing to work as caregivers or to bring in income, etc., but the unintended consequences are vast and must be addressed.

Essentially, this choice means students can miss up to 40% of the school day. We need to hold our students to high standards and make sure they are prepared for the real world. If I showed up to my job for only 60% of the day, I wouldn't have a job. Should students be able to pass (or graduate<sup>2</sup>) if they turn in only 60% of their work?

It is also a safety issue. We have heard stories from school leaders of students standing outside of the school, sometimes smoking weed, robbing other kids, or getting into fights. They wait until 11/11:30am to come into school because there isn't any consequence. Despite missing most of their first two class periods for the year, they can still have perfect attendance. This isn't good for kids or our communities.

We need to revisit the attendance policy and its purpose, including the supports we are putting in place not just to address chronic absenteeism but also tardiness. We need to set the standard that attending school is vital, not optional. That it is one thing to be 10-15 minutes late for school and another to be 2 - 3 hours late and miss critical instruction. In theory, a student could miss their first period reading class every single day and still be counted as present with no issue. We can be flexible depending on student circumstances (for instance, students who are late due to OSSE transportation should not be counted absent), but the current policy is not working. And while we certainly have an issue with students who are not attending school at all, we also have an equally important issue with students who are not attending much school even when they show up.

We understand this may require more resources (such as funding, agency staff, staff time, expanded transportation options, etc.) to ensure students are attending school, but we cannot respond to this crisis by lowering the standard. We need to keep the standard high and provide resources to make sure more students and families can reach it.

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

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/dc-graduation-rates-and-sat-scores/>



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unprecedented moment, with investments in our future, our children. We know funding is tight, but we need to make sure we continue to prioritize students in this budget and not allow those cuts to rest on the communities most in need.

This work is only possible with leaders on the Council and in OSA, SBOE, and PCSB 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,

Maya Martin Cadogan  
Founder and Executive Director  
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)