

Maya Martin Cadogan
State Board of Education Testimony
Wednesday, April 17th, 2024

To: State Board of Education Representatives and SBOE Staff

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

Date: April 17th, 2024

Good evening members of the State Board of Education and SBOE staff. My name is Maya Martin Cadogan. I am a Ward 4 resident, the Founder and Executive Director of PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education), and the parent of a 16-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.

We want to thank the SBOE for their consistent engagement 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. It gets us so much further with more robust dialogue and more meaningful relationship-building. We have had 18 parents testify over this past school year and all of them spoke of how they felt heard by the SBOE representatives. Thank you all!

Today, I am testifying on PAVE’s glows and grows for the proposed FY25 budget. We hope the SBOE will join us in advocating for our two #ParentPriorities, safe passage and specialized school programs, in the final budget. I will focus on safe passage, while my colleague Kerry Savage will focus on specialized school programs.

PAVE has been involved in improving safe passage in the District since 2016 when it joined the Office of the Student Advocate’s Safe Passage Working Group under then-Chief Student Advocate Faith Gibson Hubbard. Last June, PAVE parent leaders voted to prioritize safe passage as one of their top policy issues areas for this year given the volume and severity of incidents youth witness or experience as they get to and from school. In their work to develop their safe passage 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. We’re so proud of the work of this coalition and the collective

vision for how to keep students safe, and we are excited to see many asks included in the Mayor’s proposed budget.

I will start with our “glows”.

- We were very glad to see the sustained investment of \$9.7 million in the Safe Passage program.
 - The Safe Passage program is an important component of the safety ecosystem, and we hope to see DMPSJ work in partnership with school leaders to improve/centralize training and make sure each Safe Passage Worker gets an orientation to the school and their community to maximize the return on this investment.
 - We also want to celebrate the inclusion of “roving teams,” which will give more schools access to safe passage support in the short term when incidents increase near a campus.
- We were also happy the budget maintains \$7 million in funding for the DC School Connect program.
 - Many parents and students we have spoken with who have access to DC School Connect have had great experiences with the program.
 - We were especially impressed to hear from DFHV that there have been no safety incidents on any of their routes since the program began, which they attribute to the bus attendant positioned on each bus.
 - We need to further invest in DC School Connect to ensure even more students can participate in the program. This could include not just transporting students from their communities to schools but also expanding DC School Connect to take students from metro stops/bus stations to/from their schools for those with long commutes.
 - We should also consider adding DPR and/or OST sites to support safe transportation for students who attend programs after hours.

Next, we will discuss our “grows” for the FY25 budget.

- First, we need more resources to improve coordination between safe passage entities.
 - We’ve heard from so many people that it feels like they are doing this work in a silo. When agencies don’t coordinate, it can make students less safe.
 - Fortunately, we are especially grateful for the Office of the Student Advocate’s partnership around Safe Passage. In particular, I want to highlight that they have agreed to take the lead on one of the 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.
- However, the OSA has a small team, and to bring together people in person to convene (which is critical to building stronger relationships!) they will need more resources.
- We would love to see the SBOE advocate for increased resources for the OSA so they can engage in this critical work, as well as annual in-person convenings with public safety agency leadership and all DCPS and public charter school leaders run by DMPSJ .
- Second, we want to see targeted investments in youth-only WMATA buses and metro cars with safety personnel.
 - Students would feel safer if they were not sharing a bus or train car with other adults. During school commute hours, reserving one metro car per train on select priority routes that are staffed with trusted adults can help ensure students' safety.
 - We suggest that SPWs and WMATA PD should be stationed on those routes during school arrival and dismissal times. We know that will require support for enforcement, but if we value the safety of our youth, we should consider how to make them safer in the policy innovations we put forward.
 - Around implementation, we need equitable sources of funding for program expansion across both sectors (DCPS and public charter) and a process for schools to opt into the program.
 - Right now, students in upper Northwest have access to what effectively functions as a WMATA-run youth-only metro bus that transports them to and from school. Yet not all students in the city have access to this, especially communities with the highest needs. This simply isn't fair.
 - WMATA should focus on piloting this across the city, not just in communities of privilege, to make sure more students have safe options to travel to school safely.
- Third, PAVE parent leaders are calling on MPD to expand their community policing model to include training on youth-focused interventions (i.e. responding to youth in crisis, restorative practices, de-escalation, interacting with students with disabilities, youth development, etc.)
 - As the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives or NOBLE notes, “community policing as a philosophy [must be] embedded into the DNA of a police agency” and that has to include a community policing model that focuses on youth, given that our youth are critical members of our communities and are experiencing the greatest increases in violence.
- Last, we want to see more resources and support for Crossing Guards.

- School crossing guards are essential to keeping students safe and building community. They are a welcoming and happy face for students during their commute and can help students start their day out on a positive note. Despite this, we've heard that crossing guards don't feel valued. They can face frequent changes in their school placements, have limited career advancement opportunities, and face low pay with limited hours - sometimes under extreme weather. We want DDOT to create consistency in crossing guard placements, hiring, and training as well as increase pay and provide career advancement opportunities.

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 SBOE who also believe in the power and promise of community voice and will stand hand-in-hand with parents to ensure students get what they need and deserve. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today, I hope we can count on your leadership.

In service,
Maya Martin Cadogan
Executive Director
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)