

## Increased Access to Specialized School Programs

### The Background

Founded in 2016 by an all-parent Board, PAVE has since grown into a network of 3,000 DC parents and caregivers united behind a vision for an education system that is created not just for but **by and with** families and guided by the following core values:

- Value #1: All families have access to high-quality schools and the information they need to make the best decisions for their children.
- Value #2: All schools have adequate and equitable funding to support the needs of children and families.
- Value #3: All students have a safe, healthy, and welcoming school environment.
- Value #4: All students have access to out-of-school time and summer school programs that allow them to foster their passions and enrich their learning.
- Value #5: All parents have the resources they need to support the success of their children at home and in school.

As an organization, PAVE's mission is to connect, inform, and empower parent leaders so they have a **voice and a choice** in the vision for education in our city. In June 2019, 150 parent leaders from across the District convened at the 3rd Annual PAVE Parent Policy Summit and voted on "Increased Access to Specialized School Programs" as one of two top policy issues for SY 2019-2020. This issue area offers a critical opportunity to advance Value #1 by ensuring all DC families have access to high-quality schools and the information they need to make the best decisions for their children.

Specialized school programs provide students unique learning opportunities that focus on specific issues or topics. Common examples of specialized school programs include:

- Dual Language Programs are a type of education where students are taught literacy and content in two languages.
- STEM education builds a curriculum centered around science, technology, engineering, and math using applied approaches to solve problems (e.g. hands-on projects).
- Career and Technical Education (CTE) prepares students with academic and technical skills for the workforce by aligning curriculum with career paths to opportunities in specific fields, such as engineering, information technology (IT), business, health, hospitality, construction, and other industries.
- Arts Integration programs go beyond adding the arts as electives or additional activities, but rather these programs use the arts as core tools to teach and measure student progress across many academic subjects.

Specialized school programs can be the focus of an entire school or a program offered within a school for students to explore their interests and prepare them for a productive role in the nation's global competitiveness and economic stability.

Over the last several months, nearly 160 parent leaders have come together through PAVE's Parent Leaders in Education (PLE) Boards and other community meetings to learn more about specialized school programs (e.g. STEM, CTE, dual language, etc.). Through these discussions, parents worked together to identify barriers or challenges in expanding access and explored what it will take to create a system of great schools that meet the needs, talents, and passions of all children across the city. Together, parents have created a shared vision for what specialized school programs across the District *can and should* look like and a set of solutions for how we can achieve that vision.

### Our Beliefs

As parents, we believe that when it comes to education, one size does not fit all. Each of our children have unique talents, interests, and learning styles. We want to see more specialized school program options so that ALL parents can find the best fit for each of their children.

We also believe that specialized school programs are as much an employment issue as they are an education issue. With so much emphasis being placed on STEM/language/trade skills in the real world, that focus is not trickling down to the classroom. Through specialized studies that take students right from the classroom to the real world experiences, students begin to see career opportunities open up.

At the core of these beliefs are the following pillars:

- 1. ACCESS MUST BE EQUITABLE.** All families - especially those with the greatest needs (i.e. Families that are low-income, students with special needs, English language learners, etc.) deserve to have equitable access to high-quality programs close to where they live and that are capable of meeting their range of needs. Parents also need information that is both accurate and easy to understand about what programs are available, what they offer, and what the benefits are in order to make the best decisions for their children.
- 2. SPECIALIZED SCHOOL PROGRAMS SHOULD BE ENRICHING AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THAT SERVE THE WHOLE CHILD.** Like all great schools, it is critical that Specialized School Programs meet students where they are; support their physical, mental, and emotional well-being; and provide instruction that actively engages learners and fosters joy in the classroom, beyond standardized test scores. In order to create this type of learning environment, Specialized School Programs need sufficient resources to meet students' academic and socio-emotional needs.
- 3. FAMILIES ARE CRITICAL PARTNERS IN BOTH THE CREATION AND SUCCESS OF SPECIALIZED SCHOOL PROGRAMS.** Families (both parents and students) should lead conversations about what types of programs they want to see in their communities and what quality can and should look like for these programs. This requires building parent and students' informational power, creating more opportunities for community partnerships and mentoring, consistently using parent and student voice to identify gaps and areas for improvement, and proactively providing all parents with information and tools necessary to support their children's learning.

#### The Problem

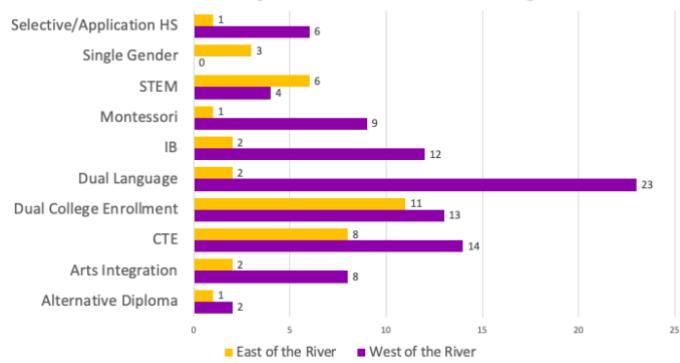
While public schools in DC currently offer a range of specialized school programs, not all families have real access to these options from PreK through high school -- or a voice in conversations on how to change that fact.

- This lack of access is especially challenging for families of color, families that are low-income or experiencing homelessness, and immigrant communities, which is profoundly inequitable and unjust.
- One example of the glaring disparity in access is highlighted by the difference in the availability of sought-after program options between areas East and West of the Anacostia River. *Even though 45% of public school children in DC live East of the River -- the majority of which are low-income students of color -- the vast majority of specialized school programs are located west of the River, and many have waitlists.*

#### Equitable Access to Programs

Program	# with Waitlists West of the River	# with Waitlists East of the River	Total with Waitlists
Alternative Diploma	n/a	n/a	n/a
Arts Integration	14	2	16
CTE	6	0	6
Dual Enrollment	6	1	7
Dual Language	10	1	11
IB	9	2	11
Montessori	4	1	5
Single- Gender	0	2	2
STEM	6	2	8
Application (Selective) HS	1	0	1

#### Location of Specialized School Programs



#### Our Solutions

To address this problem, we commit to working with elected officials, policymakers, school leaders, teachers, and community partners, to achieve the following:

- **Provide families with information** to help them understand the range of specialized school programs available. Outreach strategies should reflect the diversity of languages, literacy levels, technology access, and special needs among families.
- **Put families at the center of decision-making about increasing access to school programs.** This process should be cross-sector, in partnership with community members and organizations, extensively publicized using a variety of communication methods, and involve families in the decisions around planning, implementation, and accountability systems.
- **Develop a process to verify specialized school programming and ensure the quality.** Parents want a true understanding of the experience of students in school and to trust that when schools offer these programs, the models are being implemented with fidelity.
- **Provide schools with specialized programs with the resources, supports, and partners they need** to ensure all programs are implemented with fidelity and are able to provide our kids with the education and opportunities they deserve. Each specialized school program should be guided by a team of educators, school leaders, field experts, and parents. Specialized school programs should draw from the rich resources, businesses, universities/colleges, and other institutions that are located in DC to enrich the experiences and expand opportunities for our kids.

## Our Priorities

In order to have a system of great schools that 1) includes a diverse and expansive variety of specialized school programs and 2) offers increased access to these programs for students with the most need, we have identified a set of priorities:

1. **Increase Funding in Our Schools to Provide Necessary Base-Level of Resources for All Schools, including Specialized School Programs**
  - *Increasing the base Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) to the recommended adequacy level based on the 2013 adequacy study (until the forthcoming DME study is available). The 2013 study said the base UPSFF should be \$11,840 (when adjusted for inflation). The UPSFF is currently set at \$10,980 which is a gap of \$80 million. We recommend this gap be closed over two years: 4% in FY21, and 3% in FY22.*
  - OSSE should also support schools in getting federal funding and resources for the implementation of specialized programs within their schools.
  - This investment could provide the following resources:
    - School infrastructure that is designed to support the particular requirements for a specific specialized school program (e.g. robotics labs, performance space, etc);
    - Strong partnerships with community organizations, government agencies, and the private sector to leverage community assets and connect students to content experts, mentors, and future opportunities;
    - Supports for teachers and staff, including:
      - Teachers who are masters in their content area and can mentor newer teachers
      - Ongoing professional development to help teachers grow their craft
      - Schedules and structures that allow for collaborative planning time across subjects;
      - Class sizes that allow teachers to provide individualized and differentiated support
    - School materials and opportunities that meet the needs of a diverse community of learners and abilities, including access to technology, experts, field trips, and evidence-based and culturally responsive curriculum.
    - Safe and reliable transportation options to address barriers to students' ability to attend specialized school programs, regardless of the student's address and the school's location.

## 2. Create a Common Standard for Each Specialized School Program Type to Build Trust and Ensure Quality

- OSSE, DCPS, and PCSB should work with the community and experts in the field to:
  - Define key information that families want to know about specialized school programs and use this as a basis for creating a citywide set of publicly available, baseline standards for each type of specialized school program in DC.
  - Develop a verification system that includes qualitative reviews based on the above set of standards to verify fidelity to the model and quality implementation. Parent and student voice should be included in the assessment of program quality.
  - Design a clear indicator to demonstrate how a school implements a specialized school program to be included on existing parent resources, i.e. OSSE School Report Card and My School DC School Profile.
  - Develop an inclusive outreach campaign to share resources and information with families.

## 3. Increase Community Partnerships in Our Schools

- Community partners, such as local businesses and neighborhood institutions, all have an important role to play. To that end, the DC Council, the Mayor's office and relevant District agencies should:
  - Identify and provide incentives that aim to support community partnerships - both public and private. Such incentives should prioritize communities that are currently under-resourced. Examples can include financial incentives for businesses to locate in specific communities and develop educational partnerships to support specialized school programs.
  - Collaborate with DCPS and public charter schools to develop pipelines to recruit experts in specialized fields to support DCPS and public charter schools, with a priority focus on recruiting staff that reflect the cultural/racial composition of the school community.

## 4. Pilot a Cross-sector Working Group for Family-Centered School and Specialized Program Planning, that:

- Includes both DCPS and public charter schools students and families as well as community partners.
- Collaboratively identifies and plans for equitable specialized program expansion across the city, prioritizing access to families with the greatest needs.
- Develops feeder patterns for specialized school programs so students can continue their education and can also offer an opportunity for schools to share best practices.
- Uses and builds upon practices from successful models (e.g. Ward 8 POST).
- Identifies which entity is responsible for overseeing implementation, staffing, and resources to support this process.

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### Glossary of Specialized School Programs in DC

**Alternative Diploma Programs:** High schools for disengaged youth or youth who are not currently enrolled in an education or training program. They may have previously dropped out, be in juvenile court, or have had difficulties in traditional school settings.

- Offer smaller classes and more personalized learning environments with wrap around supports.
- Students may earn their high school diplomas or other alternatives and can also participate in career programs.

**Application High Schools:** Also known as “Selective high schools”, offer challenging and robust curriculum options and require students to apply. Some schools specialize in particular types of programs like STEM, art, or world languages and culture.

- Each school has different selection criteria.
- The application process could include a minimum Grade Point Average (GPA), teacher recommendation(s), an essay, and an interview process.

- There is no geographic boundary for these schools – they are all citywide DCPS schools, so any student who lives in DC may apply.

**Arts Integration:** teaches academic content through art, such as **drama, visual arts, music, and dance**. This happens throughout the school day, beyond dedicated arts periods.

**Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs:** teach students specific career skills centered around skilled trades, science, or technology. These programs prepare students for a variety of pathways after high school – including college and careers – including postsecondary (or after high school) degrees or certifications in a technical field as well as high-skilled careers.

**Dual Enrollment/Early College:** High school students can **take college courses to earn college credit**. Participating students, or “dual enrollees”, can enroll in colleges or universities that partner with the District **tuition-free**.

<u>Dual Enrollment</u>	<u>Early College</u>
Open to all eligible public school students in DC	Offered in 3 high schools in DC
On average, students earn 3-9 college credits	On average, students earn 60 credits – enough for an associate degree
Students generally begin taking college classes during 12th grade	Students take college classes in 11th & 12th grade
Student support varies by school and program	Integrated academic, social, emotional and college/career support are required for all students

**Dual Language:** Students are taught academic content (reading, writing, math, science, etc.) in both English and a partner language. This language and culture are central to the school’s mission and vision.

**International Baccalaureate (IB):** An international program that seeks to “develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.”

- Emphasizes research, student-led learning and critical thinking
- Prepares students for college-level work
- High school diploma program requires community service, second-language development, and extensive writing projects

**Montessori:** A student-led and project-based learning model.

- Students are encouraged to choose their own projects based on their interests as the teacher guides their learning.
- Students of mixed ages learn together in one classroom, as the goal is for students to learn at their own developmentally appropriate pace.

**Single-Gender:** Schools teach male and female students separately. The goal is to allow educators to adapt their school environments, teaching, and curriculum to each gender’s specific learning style and developmental needs.

**Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM):** Integrates science, technology, engineering, and math together equally alongside reading and writing. STEM programs help develop 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and use real-world application to deepen students learning.

**Special Education Schools:** Schools specifically designed for students with significant special education needs.