



**Testimony for Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)  
Performance Oversight Hearing  
Wednesday, February 26, 2020**

**To:** DC Council Committee on Education, Chairman David Grosso & Committee of the Whole, Chairman Phil Mendelson

**From:** Martinique Robb, Ward 5 PAVE PLE Board Member

**Date:** Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Good morning/afternoon Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Grosso, members of the Committee on Education and Council staff. My name is Martinique Robb, I live in Ward 5 and I am a very proud parent of three children. Two attend John Burroughs Elementary School and one attends Luke C. Moore High School. I am a member of the PAVE Ward 5 Parent Leaders in Education Board, as well as the PAVE Special Education Board. I am thankful and appreciative of the \$13.1 million increase for mental health supports in DC. However, this is not enough!

I think it's clear from the data that the level of mental health supports needed for all schools needs to be rectified. We need more supports, not just for students with special needs or intensive mental health needs, but for students with other disabilities as well. Moreover, I find that many parents, including myself, do not know what supports exist and need to be more informed about what's available.

The disbursement of funding is not right - it's not enough and the money isn't going where it needs to be. I'm specifically talking about the lack of supports for kids with special needs, disabilities, and mental health issues within the schools, plus the lack of the "right" mental health supports for teachers, and staff.



I want to give you an example of the impact this has on my family. I have a son who is autistic with ADHD and non-verbal, and at times it's hard to get the school to determine what he needs. I've had to work hard with his teachers and staff to get him the adequate and proper supports that he needs to thrive. He's been at John Burroughs for six years, and for the first three years, he had a stable and consistent learning environment with the same teacher the entire time. He was able to build a relationship with them which had a positive impact on him. Then it was time for him to have a new teacher, the school took the steps to make sure my son had a smooth transition. This helped greatly and he was with that teacher for two years.

Last school year, was time for another transition where he'd be in a new classroom with a new teacher. This was a difficult time for our family. He was acting out at school and I knew the root cause of the problem, my son needs significant support during transitions, whether big or small. For example, getting a new speech therapist, or moving from one classroom to another, or even being in an integrated classroom with general education students - every change has an impact on my son and these are just a few of the instances where he needs to be supported.

At his school, they do not have staff equipped or trained to help him. I found that the school was not giving him consistent personal aid in the classroom. When he wasn't supported, he had difficulties learning and as a result, had a challenging relationship with that teacher - and both my son and his teachers needed more mental health supports. Now this year, he's back on track because he's with a teacher he is familiar with and he feels safe. But this is a small win in a BIG battle for me. The challenge now is looking ahead to next year, at 5th grade and where he will go to school.



What will happen next year? Will he have the same teacher? Will he have the same mental health professional staff? Eventually, he will have to switch schools and I'll have to find one with ABA inside of the school. He needs more support, and this is something that isn't just a problem for me but for other families too. I want to find a school with more, and more consistent, support for his needs. I'm here fighting for all of our children, those who have special needs, and how they are being treated. I'm standing up and speaking out today because having hearings like these will keep me and other parents showing up to testify until we are heard. We want to know, who is going to take care of our "special children of the future?"

Thank you,

Martinique Robb,  
Ward 5 Parent Leader  
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)