



## **Testimony on the FY21 Budget for the Committee of the Whole**

**To: DC Council Committee of the Whole**

**From: Tara Brown, PAVE Parent, Ward 8 Resident**

**Date: June 17th, 2020**

Greetings. My name is Tara Brown and I have two kids at Leckie EC in Ward 8. I am here with the support of Parents Amplifying Voices in Education, also known as PAVE.

COVID-19 is a serious health crisis, but in my community it represents just the tip of the iceberg. This pandemic shines a spotlight on the ongoing crises in Ward 8. I'm talking specifically about Ward 8 because it is the epicenter of the issues which compound to strangle the growth, well being, and potential of many of DC's kids. Ward 8 has the largest public school student population along with the most children facing poverty and food insecurity. This is why Ward 8 has the most Title I and lowest performing schools in the city. Despite our great city's prosperity, 47% of our public school children are at-risk of academic failure, these students are either receiving public assistance like TANF/SNAP, facing homelessness, in foster care, or overage for their grade. These children (say the number again) are in a constant crisis of resources and services. It is also no coincidence that most of these children are black. As this country looks at the systemic racial inequities intentionally woven into the fabric of this nation, I ask you to look at DC through the same lense and take aggressive action to fix it.

I am immunocompromised and I commend the Council for prioritizing public safety over economics in your response to COVID-19. I would also like to thank the Mayor for increasing the UPSFF by 3%. It is clear that education is a priority in the district; but we need you to make education THE priority. The best way to address racial inequities is to remove the educational ones. That means every school gets what they need to meet our kids' needs, NOW. That means ALL schools get fully funded to provide social and emotional learning, mental health support, and Technology for ALL of its students. What we currently spend on education is not enough. We're not even funding our schools at the level recommended in the 2013 Adequacy Study from 7 years ago!. There is more than an \$80 million dollar gap between what we spend and should be spending. There is a more than \$68 million dollar gap between what is recommended for at-risk students. We need another \$4 million to ensure that more schools with the greatest needs have additional mental health support.



Every child should also have access to the technology and internet to successfully participate in Distance Learning. In 2020, during a pandemic, the digital divide can no longer be ignored. It's ongoing presence is a cornerstone of the inequities present in our educational system. There should be adequate technology and internet access to support ALL of our kids inside and outside of the school building.

Look at the school budget beyond the line items, address the need, and provide the funding to meet it. Black children are already 450 years behind. Covid is one more set-back. The systemic conditions that created the poverty, hunger, and constant trauma facing black children in this city need to be acknowledged and resolved. You can't fix 450 years of race based inequities with money, but you can use money to triage the catastrophic damage caused by it.

I see how my kids have benefitted from access to mental health, financial resources, and technology. They are able to thrive, learn, create and dream. Every child in this city should have that. Washington, DC has billions of dollars in revenue and can do this for our children. If they are important enough, you will.

Thank you for your time. May this testimony inform your decisions.