



**Testimony for the Education Agencies Budget Oversight Hearing
Friday, October 2nd, 2020**

To: DC Council Committee on Education, DC Council Committee of the Whole, Councilmember Grosso, Chairman Mendelson, and Committee Staff

From: DaSean Jones, PAVE Parent and Ward 8 Resident

Date: October 2nd, 2020

Good morning Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Grosso, Council and staff. My name is DaSean Jones, and I am a native Washingtonian and Ward 8 resident. I am a proud parent of 4 children. Three of them attend Columbia Heights Educational Campus and one is in Pre-K 4 at Eagle Academy Public Charter School. I also serve as a Parent Leader in Education board member and Ward 8 City Wide board member with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education. I am excited to share my experience with distance learning and what I'd like to see from the city.

Ever since the city shut down in mid-March and our kids started distance learning on March 16th, I really didn't know what to expect. I'm fortunate enough to be a city employee who has been provided the opportunity to work remotely. I also share custody of my children with their mom, every other week from Monday to Monday. Having three older children, who have all shown tremendous growth, responsibility, and accountability since the start of distance learning, has allowed me the time to focus on the academic success of my Pre-K 4 scholar. Due to my relatively fortunate circumstances, I've been able to manage pretty well in providing structure and organization in maintaining a routine for all of my children, so that they would know and understand what to expect each day.

When it comes to distance learning, two issues that many of the families in our communities face are technology access and attendance. My family has not had any technology or Internet issues due to PAVE's assistance at the start of the pandemic. And as a precautionary measure, I also received a hotspot from Columbia Heights Educational Campus, to help make sure that the kids had access to the Internet. This enables them to get their work done, even when staying with family members who aren't connected. Although I was very pleased to see that CHEC was making sure that each student was equipped with 1 to 1 with technology and Internet access, getting a hotspot was still a true test of patience because it took me about 8 hours to complete the process of receiving it. We are also lucky to say that our family hasn't had many issues with attendance either. This is due to the strict schedule that I've maintained for my children; making sure that they get up to eat breakfast and have time to relax before getting online. Additionally, the few attendance errors that did occur were easily rectified because the staff at CHEC was so easily accessible through email and telephone once we went virtual.

To give you an idea of what distance learning looks like for our family, it's important to know that to do their virtual learning, my children are using platforms like Teams and Zones for face-to-face contact. Teachers are regularly talking to the students and requiring them to answer questions to ensure their engagement; often requesting they respond to the chat or by calling on each student individually. And throughout the day I move around to observe what's going on in each of my children's classrooms. My high schoolers and middle schoolers have full day schedules from 8:40am to 4 o'clock, and CHEC has done an outstanding job in making sure that the schedule and times were clear. Wednesdays are for the



students to engage in certain activities to bring them closer together. This includes participating in "specials" such as career and college pathways, business and entrepreneurship, PlayStation parties, basketball workouts, cooking, yoga, and girls' talk.

Although things have gone smoothly for my older kids, for my child in Pre- K 4 it is a very frightening situation. Science tells us that the development of our children in the early ages, 0 to 5, is when they consume the most information. Knowing that distance learning started for my daughter at the end of her Pre K 3 year now that she's in the 1st quarter of Pre K4, I do not have the confidence that she will obtain the necessary knowledge needed to move on to kindergarten and have the skills necessary for reading, writing, and arithmetic. All grade levels including early childhood education need to provide families with a structured guide for lesson planning and Curriculum implementation, sort of like a syllabus when you go to college.

CHEC has done a wonderful job in keeping the lines of communication open, providing information through email text and telephone calls. There is a newsletter that goes out to provide mental health supports and services as well as community supports and services for families.

I am very grateful that DC was one of very few cities to maintain limited cuts to education funding and has been able to help make sure that technology reached each and every family; all the while extending services throughout the city to support families in need because of the pandemic! Despite this, I'd still like to see our city be more forward thinking and preparing for times like this, instead of having a rushed and thrown together system of education. This type of reactionary thinking puts our children and our families at a deficit and will most likely widen the achievement gaps that already exist.

Thank You