



Testimony for the Committee of the Whole
Joint Public Roundtable on Re-Opening District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)
Thursday January 21, 2021

To: DC Council Committee of the Whole

From: Elizabeth Reddick, PAVE Parent and Ward 7 Resident

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Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Elizabeth Reddick, and I am a proud parent of 5 children, 2 of whom attend DC schools' systems. My eldest attends Bard Early College Highschool where we live in Ward 7 and my 3rd grader attends Bridges Public charter school in Ward 5. I serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 7 PLE board, which brings me to this discussion today.

As a parent of children with special needs I can attest that virtual learning has been both a challenging yet eye opening experience. Both of my children have ADHD but the severity of just how much it affects their learning had not become apparent until now. Surprisingly, my child, also diagnosed with Autism and Sensory Processing Disorder, is thriving. Even when he is reluctant to participate in learning, I am available to coach him through his sessions and gauge what support he may need in any given situation. Virtual learning is a conducive learning environment for him. My older daughter however is really struggling to stay on task. It's not so much as a lack of desire to be successful but it's extremely difficult for her to remain focused. Her worst reprimand during in person learning was for recreational reading in class and now I see why she lacks the capacity to engage in lectured learning. She's constantly "spacing out" or lost in lessons. When she was younger, she would roam the halls or engage in undesirable behavior but quickly learned that as long as she was quiet and reading, people didn't seem to care. What was missed was that she was distracting herself and others from her inability to focus. She doesn't have a 504 Plan because she'd eventually figure it out or use resources like Khan Academy to catch up on missed lessons. But now she's in a situation where she has no written notes, no printed log to review later. We have no printer, so she is constantly having to remember to remember to check. Teachers have always naturally accommodated her with printed instructions to get her back on track when she would drift but now, she has to advocate for herself without knowing what that looks like or what she even needs.

Speaking from the perspective of a parent living the advocacy process of meeting my children's needs, I can say that there is no one size fits all solution. While I am extremely pleased with my children's school and the processes, they have put in place to include parents and family in the decision-making process, I know that it is not necessarily the case for all families. I do know that families would be more comfortable sending their children back to school if there were outdoor

options. One pertinent thing that my son is missing most is social emotional learning support and interaction with peers. He is comfortable which is important however he is not learning how to navigate the world or cope with different personalities and challenges. Being in the school building 6 hours a day was never a great method of teaching for students to begin with in my opinion, but I believe we have an opportunity here, to challenge normalcy, and create equity.

It is not new information for me to say that Black and brown children haven't been succeeding at the same rate as their white peers. Oftentimes recess is the first thing taken away from these children even when it goes against district policy. It is no surprise that the educational divide is increasing during COVID and I suspect that some relation correlates with the fact that these same students who need outdoor time to regulate their bodies are now insulated and perhaps not going outdoors at all. If sitting in a classroom did not work, how can we expect sitting at the dining table to be any more successful? I would like to challenge the Council to really consider the impact that outdoor learning could have on students' overall behavioral health and whether it could be transformative in flattening the educational divide between students. I also challenge the Council to consider how we can tap into the CARES Act to fill the fiscal burden that outdoor learning would create.

If there is going to be a return to in person learning, we are also going to have to address this festering Public Health emergency, Gun Violence, in our communities. In the midst of historical unprecedented, the murder rates of women and children in the district have reached record numbers. It appears that women and children are being targeted and attacked with little regard to time of day or place. How can I, as a mother, feel safe sending my daughter along the only bus route from our home, W4/V7 safely into the building knowing that her route to school is a dangerous one? While many are still deciding whether schools are safe, our neighborhoods remain unsafe, going to the store is unsafe, and a 1-year-old baby sitting in a car is unsafe. Certainly, at the very least we should be able to ensure that children can make it into the building safely and it's our civic duty to ensure they can make it home the same.

I would like to thank each and every Councilmember who has taken the time to hear my concerns today. It is imperative that we, elected officials and citizens, set clear intentions to tackle these injustices and inequalities head on. We must not only pave an equitable road in future but do so in a way that amplifies the voices of the disenfranchised and enact supports that are truly accessible to all of our neighbors.

In partnership,

Elizabeth Reddick
Ward 7 PAVE Parent Leader