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## Testimony for the Committee of the Whole Performance Oversight Hearing Tuesday March 9, 2021

**To:** DC Council Committee of the Whole, Chairman Phil Mendelson, Committee of the Whole Members, and Committee of the Whole Staff

**From:** Ricardo Villalba

**Date:** March 9, 2021

Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Ricardo Villalba and I am a proud parent of 4 children, including a daughter that attends Marie Reed Elementary School in Ward 1. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 5 PLE Board and the Citywide Board.

In the Fiscal Year 2021 budget, we saw many important investments in parent priorities. Today, I am testifying before you to share my vision for a family-centered education system in response to the impacts of COVID-19. This pandemic has caused a lot of pain and harm, but it's also giving us an opportunity - to do things right and better for our children, and to focus on the things that matter most.

30 years ago, I was not able to graduate from high school because I did not get the support I needed. Today, we're still struggling to support communities that need the most help. I want to call on our Councilmembers to take this pandemic as an opportunity to invest in a school system that is truly responsive to the needs of children and families.

Chairman Mendelson, one of the things that you've spoken to me about before is that our children are not reading at a level that is competitive with the rest of the country. That is true - I see that with my own daughter who is having challenges with reading and writing. I hired a tutor and am spending \$50 an hour to support her - but that is not an option for most of our parents. I've been a struggling parent before - I have 4 kids, and I've felt the challenge of putting food on the table for my family. We need to meet this moment with solutions for families that are struggling in this time. I believe that all students and families should be able to access tutoring services to address learning loss - to do this, we need to fully fund the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) to ensure that schools have the resources and flexibility to invest in the academic success of all our children.

School-based mental health also has to be a priority in our response to this crisis - not only for the students, having the option for the family, but also for our educators. Domestic violence is skyrocketing and the first to suffer the consequences of this are children. For many kids, school was a safe place - we are going to need to address this trauma, right now and especially as they return to in-person learning. DC needs to invest \$6.4 million to fully fund the school-based mental health expansion, restore the +\$4



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million cuts to community-based health providers, and dedicate a total of \$10.8 million to social emotional learning and trauma-informed training in all schools. Supporting our educators to be trauma-informed and trained will be crucial to our children's development.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our city.

Ricardo Villalba  
Ward 5 Parent Leader