

**Testimony for the DC State Board of Education
March 17th, 2021**

To: Members of the State Board of Education, Executive Director Hayworth, and Staff

From: Maya Martin Cadogan, Executive Director of PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)

Date: March 17th, 2021

Good evening State Board of Education members and State Board of Education Executive Director Hayworth. My name is Maya Martin Cadogan, and I serve as the Executive Director of PAVE. Our parent leaders at PAVE already did a great job highlighting their budget priorities for #DCSchoolsRecovery. So, I will use my time to reiterate their asks, as we are at a critical juncture for education in DC and across the country. In the midst of one of the greatest periods of inequity in our history, now is the time for a bold and comprehensive plan.

First: Lead with Equity and Fully Fund the At-Risk Weight

America and DC's long standing wealth, health, and education disparities are a result of historic injustice which have been exacerbated by COVID. Access to essential resources for learning during a pandemic, like reliable internet connection, additional academic supports, enrichment opportunities, and mental health services vary dramatically across Wards, race, and class and has adversely impacted generations of Black and Brown families.

The lack of equitable access to support has widened the already unconscionable opportunity gap. To address this inequity, we must **fully fund the at-risk weight to 0.37 which would add \$78.5 million** and provide the funding that **nearly half of the student population needs**. Importantly, each child presents their own needs for learning as there is not one universal experience for those that are at-risk. Therefore, guidelines on how to use at-risk funds should not be rigid but instead allow for targeted school-based plans. This could include, but should not be limited to, enrichment programs, family engagement supports, reading specialists, devices for students, targeted curriculum, mental health supports, more teachers to lower class sizes, and/or additional support staff.

As schools determine what is most needed, they must seek out the input of families who have children who are considered at-risk to develop creative and community-driven solutions. What if at-risk funds included an "Equity Council," where parents, students, teachers, and school leaders could come together to identify solutions to address educational opportunity gaps,

shared what’s worked and what hasn’t from the people most impacted, and weighed in on decisions about how to best invest in our kids? Families have unique insight that we must continue to tap into as schools allocate funding and evaluate the efficacy of those investments.

Further, we need to redefine the term at-risk as it is deficit-language. Let’s respect our families and use language that centers their humanity and a need for equitable change, like an “Equity Index”.

Second: Fully Fund Our Schools

The **per-pupil base is nearly 6 percent below the inflation-adjusted recommended base by DC’s own adequacy study, which does not account for the steep costs of providing educational opportunities during the pandemic and its recovery.** As a result, at-risk funds have been supplanted to fill gaps around essential staffing and materials. This past year, schools have gone above and beyond to a myriad of supports during the pandemic. Some have seemingly been running two schools at once - one remote and one in-person. We cannot and should not expect schools to continue to fill gaps in the same way for another year and ask educators and parents to do more with less.

Fully funding the UPSFF would increase funding by \$106.7 million for LEAs - which is the minimum for what schools need. While stimulus funding will be immensely helpful to address these gaps - it is not a long-term solution. Additionally, raising the base UPSFF, has the compounding benefit of increasing the funding for at-risk students, English Language Learners, Special Education students, and more.

Third: Ensure Access to Mental Health Supports at School

In particular, the outsized trauma in Ward 7 and 8, especially from COVID and record high gun violence, calls for place-based and extensive mental health supports for all.

We strongly urge DC to add \$6.4 million to fully fund the next cohort in the expansion to add clinicians to 80 more schools. To help transition back to in-person learning and address the pain and trauma of the pandemic, the city should also invest a **total of \$10.8 million for high-quality social emotional learning programs as well as trauma-informed and restorative practices training in all schools.**

We also ask the city to **reverse the \$4 million in cuts to community-based behavioral health providers**, who are the backbone of the District’s mental health programs. By restoring these

cuts, DC will receive an additional \$5 million in federal funding as every dollar of local spending for Medicaid-eligible services equals more than three dollars in federal reimbursement rates.

Lastly: Invest in the Continuum of Care

- **Expand funding for OST programs**
- **Add \$60 million to increase subsidies for child care providers**
- **Make sure families' basic needs are met** by adding funding for internet, health care, housing, and food programs.

Let's Go Big on a Family-Centered Response to COVID and #DCSchoolsRecovery

Due to the unexpected surplus from FY20 and President Biden's federal stimulus funding, DC's budget landscape is looking better--but we need major, long-term changes and increased revenue to ensure we can continue to fund the priorities DC's children need.

Now is an opportunity to show that we are a city that prioritizes our District's children and creates a brighter future for DC than we could ever imagine. This work is only possible with leaders in our education system who believe in the power and promise of parent voice and leadership, I hope you will hear their call. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today.