



**Testimony for the Committee of the Whole
Budget Oversight Hearing
June 25, 2021**

To: Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and Committee Staff
From: Kerry Savage, Director of Policy at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)
Date: June 25, 2021

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Kerry Savage and I am a Ward 1 resident, a former 6th grade teacher, and the daughter of a school nurse who has been giving her all throughout the pandemic to support the physical and mental health of school staff, students, and families in her community.

I also serve as the Director of Policy at PAVE, where I get to work alongside PAVE parent leaders who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to advocate for their vision for a family-centered education-system. This has brought me in community with a number of advocates you will hear from today, including the Strengthening Families Through Behavioral Health, OST, Under 3 DC, Strongest Year Yet, and Alliance Coalition members. I am excited to be here today as this is not just my job, this work is personal for me in many ways. I thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today.

We thank the Mayor for her commitment to fully fund the school-based mental health expansion to 83 more schools. However, the Mayor allocated \$5.8 million in the Department of Behavioral Health's budget for this expansion. This does not cover the cost. An additional \$841,000 is needed to right size the grants to community-based providers so they are able to be responsive to the needs of each individual school community.

Why do CBOs need larger grants to do their work?

School-based CBOs require at least \$80,000 per school to remain financially sustainable AND do this work well. Currently, under the school-based mental health model, CBO clinicians spend nearly 50% of their time on individual services that are reimbursable by Medicaid. However, the *other* 50% of their time is spent on school-wide and small group services that are *not* billable, which means the cost is borne by the organization. That is where these grants come in help to supplement the cost.

Without full funding of school-based grants including an additional \$10,000 per school, financial pressure on CBOs may make it difficult to continue providing services through the school-based mental health program at all. School leaders are already telling us it is extremely difficult to find more people to hire who are qualified to work in schools - we *need* CBOs that can place full-time clinicians in schools and give them the supervision and support they need to do their jobs well.

Beyond the operational challenge, we also must consider the impact this squeezing of the budget has on the clinicians themselves. Clinicians have outsized workloads due to the pandemic - both from seeing more students, but also from increased time spent on those caseloads. Coordinating with students both virtually and in-person while navigating health and safety requirements, tech problems, and ever-changing schedules has presented real challenges. Further, building relationships with students and their parents *outside* of the billable treatment sessions is critical especially during this time, and yet the outreach, check-ins, and one-on-one conversations are not billable, nor are the conversations with school staff about how to support individual students or help implement interventions that are class- or school-wide.

Further, the emotional burden clinicians have had to shoulder in the past year is unprecedented. They are working extremely long days and carrying the trauma of those they serve, in addition to their own personal trauma from this past year and beyond. Given that DC has long needed to bolster the pipeline of mental health professionals to work in schools, especially those of color, we are approaching asking more from a workforce that is burning out as we speak, but needed more than ever before. Let's make sure the clinicians that are doing this work on the ground everyday have what they need to take care of themselves so they can take care of our students and our communities.

Lastly, fully funding the school-based mental health expansion is a matter of equity. Without the additional \$10,000 per school, the consequences will be disproportionately felt most by Black, brown, and low-income students who, on average, cannot afford to access private services and may live in health care deserts.

All of this can be addressed with just an additional \$841,000. It is absolutely possible with your leadership.

Invest in the Continuum of Care

As I close, we call on you to invest in a continuum of care for kids.

- We join our partners in the Strongest Year Yet Coalition for increased local and recurring dollars for **per pupil and at-risk funding**.
- We join our partners in the OST coalition to **expand recurring funding for OST programs so kids can have access to enrichment opportunities that are fun and allow them to explore their passions**.
- We join our partners in the Under 3 DC coalition in asking for **\$60 million to increase subsidies for child care providers** so they can cover the increased cost of care for our youngest residents during a critical period in their development and afford to pay a fair wage for early childhood educators.
- We join our partners in the DC Alliance Coalition calling for an **annual, online renewal process** that **supports document uploads**, ensuring continued access to care and security.
- We join the broader advocacy community to make sure **families' basic needs are met** by adding funding for internet, housing, and food programs.

Over [80% of DC voters support](#) increasing taxes on wealthy residents to enable us to pay for all of these community needs. This next budget sets the precedent for how we care for our people, directly address the deep inequities across race and wealth in our District, and recover stronger together. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I hope we can count on your leadership and support.

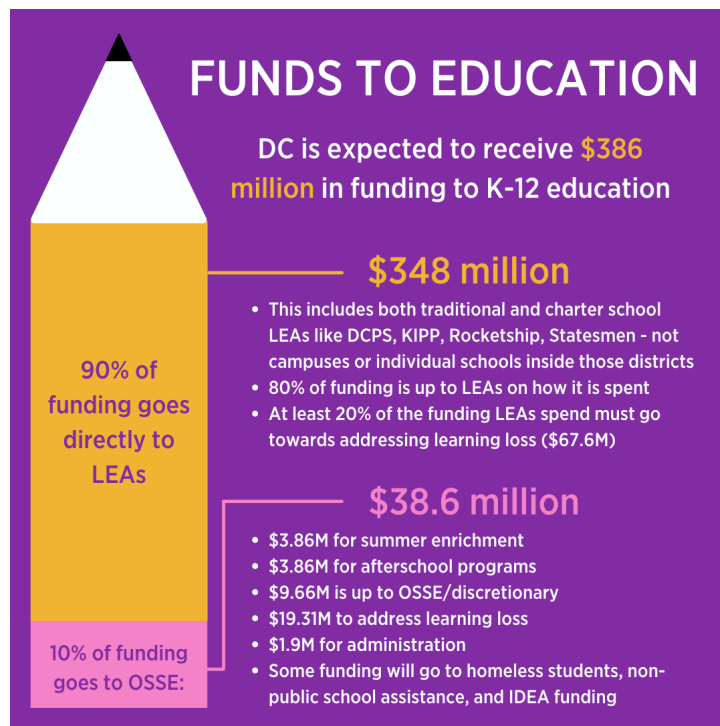
Sincerely,
Kerry Savage

Implementing ESSER III Funds and its Potential Implications

The District will receive \$386 million in ESSER III funds for public PreK3-12 education through FY 2024. 90% will be allocated directly to DCPS and public charter Local Education Agencies (LEAs). DCPS is receiving \$191 million and public charter schools are receiving \$157 million. 10% of the federal funds, or \$38.6 million, will be allocated to OSSE.

OSSE provided [guidance](#) on allowable uses for the ESSER III funds, which allows LEAs a lot of flexibility to invest their funds in ways to best meet the needs of their students, along with the use of local dollars. According to the [US Department of Education](#), school districts are “required to seek broad public input” when developing their plans for the use of the funds. These conversations should be grounded in choosing effective evidence-based interventions and prioritizing educational equity through inclusive stakeholder engagement. These funds are expected to provide support at a minimum:

- Summer 2021, 2022, 2023
- School Year (including after school): 2021-22, 2022-23
- Must be obligated by September 30, 2023



In consultation with PAVE parent leaders and their [Statement of Beliefs on #DCSchoolsRecovery](#), below is a list of possible investments that can be made from the ESSER III funds. Additionally, under each section, we included an analysis on the potential return on investment, which focuses on increases in student learning opportunities, scalability in schools, long-term economic growth, and more. The research below confirms and supports that PAVE parent leaders' prioritized investments have *significant and meaningful* impacts on students and the education system across DC.

PAVE parent leaders are diverse in their lived experiences; however, these recommendations are from just *some* of the many voices of DC parents. **To best and most equitably support students, family and community engagement must be centered as system leaders create guidance and as LEAs and schools implement these federal funds - which is why it is a requirement from the Department of Education to be able receive funds.** We hope this will serve as a catalyst to create more avenues for family and community engagement that center most on the voices who are often left out of the rooms of power: Black, brown, and low-income students and families.

[Investments for #DCSchoolsRecovery](#)

Support for Student Wellbeing

LEA and/or School-Level Investments

- Provide high-quality, culturally-affirming and responsive, and evidence-based **social emotional learning programs, trauma-informed training** for all staff at each school, and consistent access to **mental health professionals at all schools**.
- Develop guidance and systems to do **wellness checks and balance students' mental health needs and academic instruction** during distance and in-person learning.
- Incorporating social emotional learning into all lessons and best practices around building a supportive school culture to set students up for success.
- **Improve coordination and communication of services and support** at the school level, including providing resources and support for school mental health teams and a school mental health team coordinator.
- Hire additional **enrichment/specials staff** (Art, music, P.E., etc.) to expand students' learning.

OSSE/System-Level Investments

- **The Department of Behavioral Health should produce and share a school mental health landscape analysis.**
 - Share a comprehensive **resource map** of what mental health supports currently exist in each school and corresponding gap analysis to help create a long-term plan for the future.
 - DBH should work with OSSE and LEAs to **share the report and information with families and engage them in future planning.**
 - These findings should be used to hold LEAs accountable for providing adequate supports, as well as inform the allocation of funding mental health supports across schools and agencies, through a variety of opportunities beyond solely competitive grant application processes for schools.
- Incorporate **Out of School Time (OST) programs** in planning for both social and emotional development and academic growth.

The Return on Investment

Social Emotional Learning Programs

- The estimated total cost for high-quality, culturally-affirming and responsive, and evidence-based social emotional learning programs is **\$10.8 million** (\$45,000 per school x 236 schools). This number includes estimates for PreK-12 DCPS and public charter schools and estimated cost of training for teachers and staff.
 - The average return on investment for evidence-based SEL programs is 11 to 1, meaning for [every dollar invested there is an \\$11 return](#) that directly results from the increased labor market.
 - A [meta-analysis of 317 studies](#) on the effects of SEL programs on students in grades K-8 found that the average student in an intervention class saw gains across several domains, including improved **attitude** and **social behaviors**, **reduced behavioral problems** and **emotional distress**, and increased **academic performance**. The average student who participated in an intervention **gained 11 to 17 percentile points on standardized state achievement tests** compared to a student who did not participate.

Out of School Time Programs (including summer, before and after school)

- For every dollar invested in OST programs, [the city saves \\$2.50 in crime-related costs](#).
- After school and summer programs are linked to increased engagement in class, social emotional skills, and self-esteem--all factors that drive improved academic

performance.

- A lack of summer enrichment during elementary school years can account for about [two-thirds of the achievement gap](#) between lower and higher income students.
- Early summer education loss results in [consequences later in life](#), such as whether students drop-out of high school, and whether they attend college.

Family and Stakeholder Engagement

LEA and/or School-Level Investments

- **Resources** for parents/caregivers to learn the **academic content** so they can help teach it to kids, i.e. curriculum/study guides, answer sheets, etc.
- Resources with families in order to support kids' **social emotional learning and development** and overall mental health at home.
- Resources for schools to **host events** that safely bring **everyone - teachers, leaders, parents, students, and partners - in the school community together**.
 - This could be an opportunity for all members of the school community to reconnect, i.e. kids, parents, teachers, administrators, custodians, bus drivers, coaches, etc.
 - Schools could share best practices with each other by grade band, Ward, or community.
- Hire **parent liaisons** to support these family and stakeholder engagement measures.

OSSE/System-Level Investments

- Provide **resources and workshops** to engage parents who are applying for/accessing preschool.
- System leaders should support LEAs to **leverage existing structures to engage families** in plans around what they want to see in a safe and equitable reopening plan.

The Return on Investment

Family Engagement in Schools

- [Family engagement](#) in schools contributes to positive student outcomes, including improved child and student achievement, decreased disciplinary issues, improved parent-teacher and teacher-student relationships, and improved school environment.
- Across all income and education levels, when parents were highly involved in the workshops, attending sessions designed to their interests and getting training in how to use learning materials, their children were [more likely](#) to gain in reading and mathematics than their peers with less involved parents.
- [Research](#) shows family engagement benefits all children, but especially those furthest from opportunity.

Family Engagement in OST programs

- Research shows family engagement in afterschool and summer programs increases participation in programs, outcomes for students, and the impact of family engagement in school as well.

Teacher and Staff Support

LEA and/or School-Level Investments

- Provide robust **professional development** on:
 - How to **differentiate instruction** and personalize lesson plans to support students where they are to help them make the gains they need.
 - How to utilize **educational technology** to personalize and improve instruction and how to build on what worked well with distance learning during school closures.
 - How to include **new** and **creative approaches** into teaching and learning.
 - How to **communicate** to families, how to gather information or input from them, how to get parents engaged in their students' learning, etc.
- Hire **more academic support staff**:
 - Tutors and/or math and literacy specialists
 - Special education teachers and support staff
 - English language learner teachers
- Hire **full-time nurses**

OSSE/System-Level Investments

- **Support teachers and staff with their mental health**, as they have also experienced trauma and will need support as they navigate many competing priorities and challenges.

The Return on Investment

Teacher Retention and Professional Development

- Research shows that, to a point, experienced teachers are [more effective](#) than inexperienced teachers.
 - This suggests that efforts to retain and support early career teachers is one strategy for improving teacher quality.
 - Many teachers who leave within the first 5 years say they leave due to [inadequate support](#).
- Professional development, when done right, also has been shown by [research](#) to improve student outcomes. The most effective professional development:
 - Is **content focused**
 - Incorporates **active learning** utilizing adult learning theory
 - Supports **collaboration**, typically in **job-embedded** contexts
 - Uses **models and modeling** of effective practice
 - Provides **coaching and expert support**
 - Offers opportunities for **feedback and reflection**
 - Is of **sustained duration**
- [Professional development for SEL:](#)
 - Investing in developing teachers' social and emotional competence has important consequences for their students' social and emotional development, as well as for the likelihood of teacher retention in their classrooms.
 - When teachers and principals are aware of their own emotions and how these emotions impact the classroom and school environment, they are more likely to support students in understanding their own emotions.

Curriculum and Instruction

LEA and/or School-Level Investments

- **Use evidence-based and standard-aligned assessments to quickly assess what skills and standards students have mastered and where they still need to grow.**
 - These assessments should inform **data-driven instruction, targeted interventions, and conversations with parents** so that parents can also continue to support learning.
- Support for **technology devices** and uses:
 - **Developmentally appropriate devices** for families - especially those who are most in need or have multiple children at home and may need additional devices. This is critical for both learning and to access telehealth appointments.
- Student **learning materials** and **supplies**:
 - Textbooks, reading materials, etc.
- Instructor **curriculum, materials** and **technology**:
 - Learning platforms, computers, etc.

System-level investments:

- **Reliable, high-speed internet connection** that is available for students and families to complete homework and other assignments at home, as well as access health care, work, or other essential activities.

The Return on Investment

Assessments

- Administering assessments helps better [understand and address](#) the extent of gaps in education among students and student populations. These assessments are able to address the questions that many parents and educators have, including, but not limited to:
 - How have students made gains in math and reading?
 - What learning students of color, low-income students, and students with an IEP accomplished this year?
 - How can we best meet the needs of our students? How can we shape the curriculum to meet students where they are in their learning?
- [Instructionally relevant assessment processes](#) can help teachers and students recognize, celebrate, and leverage current student understanding and skills to propel student thinking forward through opportunities for feedback, reflection, and continuous improvement.

- Some of the [largest gains](#) in student performance come from teachers and students themselves (both peers and self) providing descriptive and actionable feedback that uses criteria applied to tasks that are grounded in student performance.

Educational Technology

- [Technology](#) can also enable educators to take a more personalized approach in their teaching efforts and other activities they undertake to support student learning and development.
- Students have [inequitable access](#) to digital learning resources outside of the classroom. This includes access to adequate wifi connectivity, reliable devices, and helpful education programs and applications.
 - During remote learning and in-person instruction, many students rely on their families' access to technology and wifi to complete homework and assignments. Thus, the lack of access further contributes to the opportunity gaps that persist for many Black, brown, and low-income students across the District.

Special Education

LEA and/or School-Level Investments

- Create **parent and student orientations** for special education services to help them understand the evaluation process results, their IEP, service delivery, and manage the emotional experiences related to the transition into special education.
- Provide and clearly communicate about LEA and/or school-level **remote and in-person training** to families to help them understand their child's diagnosis and services, strategies for supporting them at home, and ways to cope with their disability and promote family wellness.
- Create and moderate parent-to-parent peer support groups so parents can better support their kids.

OSSE/System-Level Investments

- Develop an **online family portal** that allows parents to easily access student records, IEP documents, and other important information. This portal could also allow parents to track communications, service delivery, and important dates.

- Provide information about and easy access to a **special education advocate** who can help a parent navigate the system, obtain resources, and comfortably express their needs and concerns.

The Return on Investment

- We have long underserved students with disabilities and have not made the investments to unlock their potential. [One study](#) offered that, “A rough back of the envelope calculation suggests returns on special education for marginal students that are nearly identical to the returns to early childhood programs such as Head Start.”
- Without adequate funding for special education supports in schools that leads to lower teachers salary, increased class size, and out of date classroom resources, highly qualified special education teachers are more difficult to retain.
- Family and teacher partnerships [lessen parents’ anxieties and support their confidence](#) about navigating through the special education processes.
 - Effective partnerships also help educators target their supports to best meet the needs of their students.

Important Considerations for Using Federal Funding

1. **Invest now and plan for the long-term.**
 - Federal pandemic funds give DC the opportunity to make investments that it would otherwise be unable to make today.
 - Because DC revenues are expected to grow in the coming years, as the economy recovers, DC can safely use *a portion* of its federal relief funds for investments that will have ongoing costs -- such as more mental health professionals or instructional staff in schools -- with plans to take over funding responsibility for these initiatives with its own funds as federal relief funds expire.
 - The CFO currently [projects revenues will grow \\$1.2 billion over the next four years](#), which is \$540 million beyond inflation. Given the rapid improvement in DC’s finances, it is likely that revenues may grow even faster than current projections, which are always cautious.
 - The DC budget always funds some new or expanded initiatives, especially when the economy and revenues are growing. The federal relief funds in effect give DC the chance to jumpstart some future investments now.

2. Family engagement is a moral and legal imperative.

- The Biden administration requires that states and LEAs engage families as they make their plans for how to use relief funds. This is essential work to ensure that community needs are driving decisions and can be met through additional funding, and so therefore this engagement work cannot be a “check box” activity.
- System and school leaders should look to use traditional methods for engaging with families, like surveys and focus groups, as well as exploring new and creative ways to listen and learn, including but not limited to: making space in parent teacher conferences to hear how parents want funds to be spent, attending community meetings, hosting summits and design-thinking workshops for families to learn about other models/resources and share their own ideas, etc.