

**Testimony for the Committee of the Whole & Committee on Government Operations & Facilities**

**Joint Public Oversight Roundtable: School Facility Conditions During the Re-Opening for School Year 2021-2022**

**Wednesday September 28, 2021**

To: Council of the District of Columbia

From: Tara Brown, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) Citywide PLE Board and Ward 8 PLE Board Member

Date: September 28, 2021

Good Morning Council. My name is Tara Brown. I am testifying today as a Mother, Aunt, Godmother and staunch advocate for 100,000 school age children. The city's approach to education during a pandemic seriously lacks equity, inclusivity, empathy and creativity. Because of the insistence that every child must be educated in person, with minimal exceptions, the buildings in which the city is forcing our children to be located must be pristine. I'm testifying today to remind you that they are most certainly not. There are approximately 228 public and public charter schools and the horror stories circulating around social media about the conditions of some of these buildings are shameful. I expect for you to hear some of these stories today. I saw one complaint about a school with broken bathroom sinks and another waiting for their HVAC system to be fixed for over a month. How does our leadership demand in person learning without setting a very high standard for building maintenance? We are in the throes of a pandemic that has never been more contagious and more deadly for more people, including the 100,000 children educated in this city's public schools. These issues our school buildings are having with plumbing and HVAC systems existed before the pandemic. Now, during this pandemic, where hand washing and good filtered airflow are imperative for safety, students, faculty and staff in some buildings are at much greater risk.

The inequities facing our children have always been apparent as they negatively affect educational outcomes. Now, these inequities, as they relate to the facilities in which our children are learning are creating negative health outcomes. The city's building improvement plans have to be accelerated. The city's commitment to the safety of our children and families have to be demonstrated. At the very least, ALL of the facilities housing our children and educators should be maintained at a habitable level. ALL of the facilities housing our children and educators should be equipped with the elements most conducive to COVID safety. ALL of the facilities housing our children and educators should be monitored and quality checked frequently to make sure that a high standard is consistently met.

Note the emphasis on the word ALL.

In addition to upkeep and repairs, this council needs to use its considerable influence and

resources to create new learning spaces that will more safely house our students as they attempt to get an education. School buildings are not the only buildings at your disposal. Problem solve creatively. There are 26 libraries and 68 recreation facilities in this city. The Washington Convention Center has 2.3 million sq. ft of space. The Entertainment and Sports Arena is 91, 600 sq. ft. These spaces can also be utilized to create the kind of social distancing necessary for safety, that cannot be achieved inside school buildings operating at capacity (again because there is not a comprehensive online/virtual learning option). Leckie Education Campus is a good example of the space problem. They recently had to quarantine their entire middle school. My daughter used to attend Leckie. The middle school classrooms are too small for real social distancing.

There are so many possible solutions to the dilemma of safety and education. I've just named some of them. Parent Leaders have many more ideas than what I've presented today. We all have the same goals here. Parents want what DCPS and the Charter schools want. We want our children to get an education, but in the time of COVID and this Delta variant, we need to LIVE AND LEARN. The latter without the former is pointless.

To parents and all other education stakeholders:

If you have concerns/stories that you would like to share beyond this hearing, I am committed to collecting them and sharing them with the leaders empowered to do something about it. Email them to [dcdobetter@gmail.com](mailto:dcdobetter@gmail.com). Use #dcdobetter in your online posts. Our power lies in our collective experience. We need to show our leadership the realities happening behind these policies. Perhaps, if they are confronted with that knowledge, they will be more inclined to do something about it.

Thank You