



**Testimony for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)
Performance Oversight Hearing
Wednesday, February 19th, 2020**

To: DC Council Committee on Education, DC Council Committee of the Whole, Councilmember Grosso, Chairman Mendelson, and Committee Staff

From: Lisa F McCullers, PAVE City-wide Parent Leaders (PLE) Board member and Ward 4 Resident

Date: February 19th, 2020

Good morning/afternoon Councilmember Grosso, Chairman Mendelson, and members of the Committee on Education and Committee of the Whole. My name is Lisa McCullers I am a proud parent at Washington Latin PCS, Ward 4 resident and also serve on the Parent Leadership in Education Board at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education). At the most recent Parent Policy Summit, PAVE parent leaders chose Mental Health Supports and Trauma-Informed Training in All Schools and Increased Access to Specialized School Programs as our top two priorities for what we want to see from city leaders. I am grateful for the increased funding of \$13.1 million new dollars that went into mental health last year, and that the mayor recently proposed a 4% increase the UPSFF. Although we are headed in the right direction, we still have a way to go.

I am raising a 13-year-old daughter who was diagnosed with ADHD, characterized by emotional and defiant disorder from age 9 to now. At age 3 she was tested at Early Stages after our neighborhood school, DC Head Start Program, expelled her. What was supposed to have been a very exciting experience in my child's life within the walls of DC public schools proved to be just the opposite and I am here to share Vanessa's story.

For two years, Vanessa had to be taken out of school once a week during afternoon instructional time to go to Children's National Medical Hospital. I sometimes relied on her Medicaid transportation insurance to get her to a 4:00pm or 5:00pm appointment, and in order for this to happen, she could only be picked up from her home address. This was a hardship for me because every week I had to figure out just how I was going to get from point A to B and be there on time for pick up.

My daughter began resenting going to her appointments and shared this with her behavior psychiatrist on many occasions. However, there were many reasons for her dismay; she was consistently being seen by someone new every six months. This meant that just as she was getting comfortable and used to the individual supporting her, they would transition out and she would be seeing someone else.

PAVE parent leaders believe that not only is increased funding necessary for school-based mental health supports, but we also need to improve the coordination of services and care, so that navigating the systems to get my child the appropriate services she needs is not a nightmare which holds her back from school and delays her academic progress.

One of the reasons I chose Washington Latin through My School DC lottery is because her old school would not support me with an IEP, which Vanessa now has and it's been in place since she started there. Vanessa is thriving despite small challenges which pluck her preteen nerves, mostly her classmates. My daughter's goal is



to become an Architect. It is my goal to support her on this journey and I am asking this council to support Mental Health Supports and Trauma-Informed Training in All Schools.

There are a lot of Vanessa's in our city who will fall through the cracks if we blindly sit back and act as if our children can adapt to their surroundings when terrible things are always surrounding them. Our children are angry and rightfully so. With over 50% of students aged 14 and older, with emotional behavioral disabilities dropping out of high school. We need this support because ALL children deserve better.

Thank you,

Lisa F McCullers

Parent Leader

PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)