



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

Good morning/afternoon Chairman Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Grosso, members of the Committee of Education and Council staff. My name is Rhonda Hall and I am a proud parent of 2 children who attend schools in Ward 7 and I also serve on the Ward 7 Parent Leaders in Education Board with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE). Last year PAVE parent leaders came together to write what WE want to see around Mental Health and Trauma-Informed Training in All Schools.

I'm so grateful that last year mental health funding increased by \$13.1 million. Each and every dollar that goes toward mental health funding in schools makes the educational experience of children and families in our city better. I am here today to share my personal story about why the need for increased investment towards trauma informed-training in all schools is important.

This year alone my 13 year old daughter has witnessed over five fights in her school. This daily violence upsets her so much that she often comes home in tears. At the same time, in my 15 year old son's school there is a "beef" between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade. When he comes home from school, my son has said on more than one occasion that he feels like he's "about to explode" from the pressure of having to go through these incidents at school. Children in our communities cannot learn in school if they are preoccupied and concerned about their safety while dealing with the emotional and psychological after-math of these types of incidents. Almost half of children in DC have had at least one traumatic experience and 22 percent of children have experienced more than one. If unaddressed, these factors can result in chronic physical health issues and lower academic performance as well as contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline; this is especially true for children with 6 or more ACES.

While there are many factors that lead to these statistics both inside and outside of the school building; it's our responsibility to provide all of the resources we can to help school children to cope with, overcome and in the best-case-scenario, *avoid* the stress and trauma of violence which occurs in our communities. One of the mental health practices which is working and I think should be expanded is increased access to social-emotional learning curricula. This type of curriculum expansion can potentially help students to understand and manage their emotions, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. I also think there should be increased access to trauma-informed and restorative practices, which create a more positive learning community for all students and educators once a violent incident has occurred.

Another of the most meaningful ways you can work toward providing the mental health support and trauma informed care our schools need is in the development of a set of best practices for engaging families and communities. By engaging all stakeholders in conversations about mental health support and providing mental health resources and learning opportunities for both students and their families - we make sure that the support can continue beyond the school day.



We should also produce and share a landscape analysis. This landscape analysis will give the city a greater understanding of where the resources are and where they need to be in order to better serve our communities.

As a parent and a D.C resident I am deeply concerned about the access to trauma informed training and mental health supports for our children. In a perfect world, we would be able to protect and shield our babies from the effects of violence in our communities, homes and schools. But until we can prevent these incidents from happening, I hope that policy makers will join us in the fight to provide the appropriate care for children who need it most by further investing in our schools.

Thank you,

Rhonda Hall  
Parent Leader  
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)