



**Testimony for Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)
Performance Oversight Hearing
Wednesday, February 26, 2020**

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

From: DaSean Jones

Date: February 26, 2020

Good morning Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Grosso, DC Council Committee of the Whole, DC Council Committee on Education and Committee Staff. My name is DaSean Jones. I am a native Washingtonian, a constituent of Ward 8, and an alumnus of both Anacostia High School and The University of the District of Columbia. I have 4 children; a 10th grader at Columbia Heights Education Campus, 6th and 7th graders who attend Achievement Prep Academy, and a 3-year-old who attends Eagle Academy PCS. I am also a Parent Leader in Education Board Member with PAVE.

I want to thank the Mayor for the proposed 4% increase to the UPSFF in this year's budget, as well as last year's \$13.1 million in funding for mental health supports, which can be used to bolster school culture, social emotional learning programs, and trauma informed training.

I additionally want to thank OSSE for offering their Fall 2019 professional development series in partnership with Restorative DC. This series on restorative justice, which was offered free to the community, was one of my greatest joys. I had the pleasure of attending two training sessions: *Trauma Awareness and Restorative Steps to Brain Regulation* and *Community of Practice*. If my work schedule permitted, I would have attended them all.

I was introduced to restorative practice in 2015 while working as a Seed PCS residential advisor. My job was to get the students up and ready for breakfast and school. The idea was that creating a school community with a positive climate and culture would lead to a more productive learning environment. So I gauged the temperature of the group I was working with to find out what I could do to get their morning started on the right track. At first, I didn't get many positive responses from the students. I figured if I was able to implement



the restorative-practice skills by maintaining a morning routine, clear expectations, and consistency, it would reduce the challenges for students once they made the adjustment to focusing on academics. I knew it would minimize disciplinary issues which occur while transitioning to class-time. I envisioned students leaving for class with a positive attitude; prepared to learn and allowing teachers to teach. I executed this vision by having signs posted with the rules and expectations and by always being positive, courteous, respectful and polite. I believed that providing positive examples and communicating effectively would produce the desired change for the group I was working with. I used strategies such as corrective teaching, practicing self-control, and effective praise to reinforce positive behaviors. Each day I would check in with the group to see how they were feeling before they left for class. Students didn't always necessarily *want to go to class*, but they almost always said they felt good about the morning they were having. That was a win for me. I no longer work as a resident advisor. However, in my role as a parent, I understand the significance of applying the same strategies in restorative practice at home. All children and families struggle with maintaining healthy relationships and managing conflict and tensions; but through consistent application of these practices, I've seen the positive effects of parents and families being critical partners with schools in promoting mental wellness.

At PAVE, parents collectively collaborated and came up with our own Statement of Beliefs regarding Mental Health Supports and Trauma Informed Training in Schools. We believe that all students, families, and staff should feel welcomed, accepted, supported and cared for in schools. Emotional safety allows students to be comfortable in their learning space and eases the parents' tension because they know their children are in good hands. Teachers building relationships with students is essential in connecting with those students. Social climate influences the school's culture; making it an inviting place where individuals can feel comfortable and perform at their best. It takes time and patience to forge those positive relationships, especially when negative attitudes and behaviors play a huge part in the learning environment. It also takes on-going training for all staff in the science of how brains develop and function, as well as trauma-informed and restorative practices.

Consistency with a positive approach through positive communication sets the stage for success. Building on strengths and supporting a child's weaknesses guides their responses, making the relationship manageable. Daniel Siegal's insight from *Positive Discipline and Interpersonal Neurobiology* identifies two brain cycles.



When educators take a negative approach, it sparks the survival brain cycle in children; which causes students to rebel, retreat, resent, or even seek revenge. On the other hand, a resilient brain cycle is activated through a more positive approach. If the student isn't feeling attacked, they are better able to manage their feelings, regulate their emotions, rationalize a positive way to relate, reflect on the situation and create a positive alternative.

The opportunity to be successful is made by mapping out routes to success. Teachers have to be intentional with identifying and making clear rules for the classroom that align with those at school and at home. Those rules have to be modeled by teachers, applied regularly, consistently, and most importantly uniformly. Making sure students see teachers, staff, and parents living by the rules, and not just telling them what to do is important. School is not a prison, it is an environment where students learn and are treated with dignity and respect. The attitude of 'do as I say and not as I do', has no place in schools! If we are trying to build a positive relationship and a culture, educators must lead by example and practice what they preach. This work is what OSSE's School Safety and Positive Climate Fund is for, and I hope that they expand it!

All schools need the proper services in place such as school-based mental health providers and staff who have received trauma informed training. As noted in *The Task Force on School Mental Health Report*, "in order for a school-based mental health system to be effective, clear communication and a strong collaboration needs to be evident across all adults in a school building." The provider must equally be aware that "delivering behavioral health services in school is different from clinic-based practice. Schools need providers who understand and are prepared to deliver school-based services. And, schools need to understand how developing school-wide behavioral health awareness can improve student academic success."

This is why I am here today to ask OSSE to support our children and schools by working with other agencies and allocate \$16 million to fully fund the DBH school-based mental health expansion, \$10.6 million for social emotional learning programs, trauma informed trainings, and restorative practices, \$80 million to fully fund schools and get to a level of adequacy in terms of the base Uniformed Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF), and \$68.8 million to fully fund supports for at-risk students and get to adequate weight in the UPSFF. These steps are necessary in creating an education system full of great schools that are supporting the mental health needs of our students.



Thank you,

DaSean Jones,

Ward 8 Parent Leader

PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)