



Good day Chairman Mendelson and other Honorable Members of the DC Council.

My name is Sharon Culver and I am a native Washingtonian, born and raised in Ward 7's River Terrace Community. I also serve as a Parent Leader on Education for PAVE, Vice-President of the River Terrace Community Organization, and member of the Chancellor's Parent Advisory Board in addition to being a DCPS Educator and an Adjunct Professor for the University of the District of Columbia (GO FIREBIRDS).

First, I'd like to briefly thank my Council Member, Vincent C. Gray, for championing both DC's comprehensive early childhood education policies and zero to three policies. My daughter, Kirsten (6 years old), is a graduate of Educare DC and Charity (3 years old) will begin Pre-K at Anne Beers Elementary School in the fall. The benefits of these policies for both students and working families cannot be overstated.

Now, what my children, our children, are experiencing is a time without precedent in living memory. The world-wide Covid-19 pandemic has forced them to stay home away from their extended families and friends, and they don't fully understand why. A swift transition from the classroom to the computer has affected, and in some cases, traumatized them in ways that we parents and educators struggle to understand not to mention explain. Parents in particular - between working from home, or no longer working at all, feeding their families and trying to pay bills, in addition to searching for, or not having, access to basic necessities - have an added level of stress that directly and indirectly impacts their children. Further, with all that parents are already attempting to cope with, both their and the emotional well-being of their children, can often go unattended.

As a parent of a rising first grader and Pre-kindergartener, and educator, I have spoken with many parents during this time of distance learning and one thing has echoed time and time again, "my kids miss their friends". With conversations around reopening schools currently taking place, there is a lot to consider concerning what that will look like for our city's youngest learners. Face masks, temperature checks, staying 6 feet away from teachers and friends, are just a few of the new protocols in store for children returning to school in the fall. And while much is being done to prepare for the academic regression we expect students may experience, and how to more effectively facilitate distance learning sessions with our students should that be necessary, what about the social-emotional and mental health supports they have missed for the last 3 months?

Even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, our nation was finally engaging in open honest dialog about social-emotional learning (SEL), the impact of A.C.E.'s, and the stigma surrounding mental health in general. Everyone already knows that the various factors effecting individual "emotional well-being", also impacts our society at every level. Prior to schools moving to distance learning due to Covid, many school districts, including DCPS, began work around SEL. We understand that when children's' emotional states are poorly modulated, it negatively impacts their motivation and engagement, making it much more difficult for them to access the parts of their brain used to think and learn effectively. Furthermore, research has shown that SEL is even more important than academic learning during crisis. Many children are confused about what all of this means which makes them feel unsafe and it is our duty to help kids feel safe and secure in the world around them. And for many of the children in the



Nation's Capital, school can be one of few places where that happens... where their physical, as well as emotional, safety and security is a primary focus.

In 2019 PAVE advocated for \$54 million for school-based mental health supports, yet \$13 million was the final increase. That said, PAVE Members voted to revisit and right size the SEL allocation as one of our 2020 budget advocacy priorities. In DC's current budget proposal, PAVE Parent Leaders are advocating for a \$4 million increase to fully fund the Department of Behavioral Health's School-based Mental Health Expansion. However only \$1.5 million was allocated. Additionally, we prioritized and advocated for \$10.6 million for Social-Emotional Learning and Trauma Informed Training, and yet we saw cuts to the DCPS School Climate and SEL programming to the tune of \$675,000, a \$250,000 cut to OSSE's School Safety and Positive School Culture Fund, and an allocation of \$169,000 for school mental health. These numbers are quite troubling given the overall need to do more to support students' emotional well-being and the social climate as we re-open post Covid.

Overall, social-emotional learning and Mental Health Supports are crucial to, our students', our children's academic and life-long success. In the midst of these unprecedented times, it essential that our educational leaders and elected officials keep SEL and School Mental Health Supports at the forefront when it comes to funding the needs of one of the District's most fragile populations. These students are our future. It's up to us to ensure their safety and security.