



**Testimony for the Education Agencies Budget Oversight Hearing  
Friday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020**

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

From: Maya Martin Cadogan, Founder and Executive Director of PAVE and Ward 6 Resident

Date: October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020

Good Morning Councilmember Grosso, Chairman Mendelson, and members of the Committee on Education and Committee of the Whole. My name is Maya Martin Cadogan and I am a Ward 6 resident and the founder and Executive Director of PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education). PAVE was founded in April 2016 with an all-parent governing board in order to connect, inform, and empower parent leaders to give families in DC a voice and a choice in the vision for education in our city.

Later this morning, you will hear from several PAVE parent leaders who will share their personal experiences with distance learning. I hope that you listen to their needs, concerns, and calls to action – they are shouldering an unimaginable burden during this time and the classroom has moved into their home, so their voices should be centered in all of our decisions.

Today, I will try to share a little bit about the needs and concerns of families who could not testify today. Last month, PAVE surveyed 936 parents across the city to understand how they were impacted by Coronavirus and what their experiences were like with distance learning. The parents and caregivers we heard from were representative of our city's public school system across race and ward, and about a quarter of responses were from families with children with an IEP and half who have received at least one form of services or assistance during COVID. While we did conduct some surveys over the phone, it should be noted that most surveys were completed online given the health and safety concerns of the pandemic.

Our team will be sharing a more detailed analysis of the results of the survey for specific subgroups in the next few weeks with the support of our partners at EmpowerK12, but here are the high-level takeaways we've gleaned since the survey closed on Wednesday, September 30<sup>th</sup>:

- Regardless of race, socioeconomic status, and ward of residence, parents are primarily concerned about their child's growth, getting a well-rounded education, children's opportunities to socialize, and their own job/ability to work.
- Their secondary concerns are about child care, clear communication from school, and access to mental health/social emotional supports.
- Parents with children with IEPs are very concerned about schools meeting their child's IEP needs.
- Only half of parents with a special education or ELL student report that they are receiving services this year
- Texting is the top preferred form of communication for parents across the city, and especially preferred by those students who are receiving meals from a school at this time.
- Parents are looking for more guidance on how to support their students' social-emotional learning and development.
- 6% of parents report no internet access at home, and that rate was the same for parents who are receiving meals from school and those who don't.



- Right now, with the information available, only 33% of parents are likely to send their student for in-person learning in November. White parents and those living in Ward 1 were more likely to say they would send their student for some in-person. The racial gap on in-person learning is not surprising given the statistic that Vice President Biden shared at Monday's debate – that 1 in 1000 Black Americans in our country have been lost in seven months of the pandemic.
- And of the COVID-related challenges, getting solid updated information from the city and managing their children's educational experience from home were the greatest.

While we do not have comprehensive, comparable, and disaggregated data on our students learning from last spring or yet have disaggregated data from this survey – both our history and recent national trends undoubtedly leave us with a hard and painful truth: this pandemic is exacerbating inequities in our education system and Black, brown, and low-income kids are bearing the burden of our systemic failures. A few important datapoints:

- [From a recent McKinsey report:](#)
  - Data from Curriculum Associates, creators of the i-Ready digital-instruction and -assessment software, suggest that only 60 percent of low-income students are regularly logging into online instruction; 90 percent of high-income students do.
  - Engagement rates are also lagging behind in schools serving predominantly black and Hispanic students; just 60 to 70 percent are logging in regularly.
  - Their modeling analysis estimates that black students may fall behind by 10.3 months, Hispanic students by 9.2 months, and low-income students by more than a year.
  - They estimate that this would exacerbate existing achievement gaps by 15 to 20 percent.
  - Further, they noted closures will probably increase high-school drop-out rates (currently 6.5 percent for Hispanic, 5.5 percent for black, and 3.9 percent for white students, respectively). The virus is disrupting many of the supports that can help vulnerable kids stay in school: academic engagement and achievement, strong relationships with caring adults, and supportive home environments.

*This report should serve as a call to action that we must be both thoughtful and vigilant about how we assess student progress and the quality of our learning environments this year. Data is the only way we will truly understand the growth, gaps, and work needed to get our most vulnerable students who have been left behind for too long the support that they need and deserve.*

- [From a recent Hechinger Report:](#)
  - Due to existing social inequalities that influence health outcomes like food insecurity, affordable housing, education and access to health care, Black Americans are more likely to have pre-existing health challenges, such as diabetes and hypertension, that put them at higher risk for Covid-19 complications.
  - One-third of Black respondents to a Washington Post/Ipsos poll said they personally knew someone who died from the virus, compared to 17 percent of Hispanic adults and 9 percent of white adults.
  - Although the majority of parents in a poll released on Thursday from the publication said returning to schools in their communities this fall would be unsafe, Black and Hispanic parents were more likely to view in-person instruction as unsafe compared to white participants.

Importantly, these national trends are about disparate impacts of coronavirus and preference of returning to school differing across race are mirrored here in the District. Earlier this year, the American Academy of Pediatrics guidance on school reopening noted the importance of districts basing their decisions on science while urging them to take every step possible to return to school in person because of the critical benefits for students, chiefly the supports students receive beyond academics. As these supports are especially important for students of color and from low-income families, this is a matter of racial and economic justice.



We must do the work as city to build a system of care that nurtures the whole child and to create learning environments – in-person or virtual – that accounts for the trauma and challenges are kids and families are facing. We need to rebuild trust in communities that have been harmed and systematically discriminated against.

Most importantly, the way that we address our children’s experience with school during this pandemic is a racial justice issue. Black and Brown residents in our city are disproportionately getting the virus. We are disproportionately dying from the virus. We disproportionately have pre-existing conditions that make us more susceptible. Our households disproportionately don’t have access to internet. Our babies disproportionately aren’t getting the kind of academic growth they deserve – impacting not just their here and now but their futures. We painted a giant sign on the streets of our city to say, Black Lives Matter. Well, let’s make it mean something. By building trust with families. By being transparent with families. By asking families their thoughts. By letting families be at the tables where decisions are made. By every adult in our city pushing our hardest to in our leadership for the school year OUR CHILDREN deserve. DC families are here to do that with you and all of the education leaders in our city – will you do that with them?

Thank you,

Maya Martin Cadogan  
Founder and Executive Director,  
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)  
Ward 6 Resident