



**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: Tara Brown, PAVE Parent and Ward 8 Resident  
Date: October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020

Good morning Council members. My name is Tara Brown and I am the proud mother and aunt of two children attending Friendship Public Charter School Online in Ward 8. I am also supported by Parents Amplifying Voices in Education; you know us as PAVE. I am a member of their Ward 8 PLE Board and honored to be selected as one of their Community Change Fellows. I am compelled to share my experiences with distance learning and what I'd like to see from the city.

This testimony is not going to be unique, but I hope that you hear from enough of us today to get a true understanding of the struggles that we go through daily as a result of distance learning. With this understanding, I want you all to know that I start every day feeling behind. K12 is a rigorous online program. It requires a serious time commitment from the Learning Coach, which is me. I also have a full-time job, for which I am grateful to be able to do from home. I have physical therapy twice a week, which takes me away from both her schoolwork and my job. Coupled with my advocacy work, I get very little sleep. My daughter has A's and B's, but I'm not sure if I give her enough of my attention during the school day. To put it simply, my days never end, I'm sleep deprived, constantly worried about the quality of her education and my performance at work, and I struggle to keep up with my commitments.

However, I didn't want to testify for these reasons. Despite my extremely debilitating and oppressive circumstances, I know that I have it easy. I only have one child. I CAN work from home. The children in my household have their OWN laptops for learning. There is high speed internet service. There is food security in my home. My daughter and my nephew have everything they need to learn. I am testifying because I know that if I am struggling mentally and physically with distance learning under fairly comfortable circumstances, I must speak out for the families missing one or more of these necessary components, who are likely suffering even more.

[Although the data regarding the number of missing children from enrollment is sparse, earlier this month, according to Deputy Mayor Kihn, the amount in DCPS numbered around 20,000.](#) As a council and as a city this number should keep us all up at night. The absence screams of economic disparities, a deficiency of resources and a diminished quality of life. The very fact that a pandemic creates a void into which tens of thousands of children are disappearing, should be a call to action for the Mayor, this Council and every government agency that serves our communities. The fact is that they are not only missing academic education, they are missing the services that are required for school attendance, like



dental and medical care. Some of our Title I children get their primary source of nutrition from their schools. That is no longer an option now that we are virtual learning.

I want to urge you to make sure that these children are not invisible anymore. Make sure these families are lifted up during this pandemic. The things that are currently being done to support families through this Pandemic: eviction protection, technology offerings, meals at recreation centers and free groceries are all needed and should continue. On top of addressing these immediate issues, there are underlying needs like mental health supports that should also be offered to families. The City can take steps like making these resources available in the same places food is provided. or inform the community while handing out technology and hot spots. I assure you, the hour I spend with my therapist bi-weekly is needed and gratefully utilized.

It's time like these that we see the importance of a community school. In the absence of the support that usually comes from school educators within school buildings, there needs to be a creative approach to bringing these missing services to families outside of the building. For our most vulnerable children, the school building is tied to so many other aspects of the mind and body. We need to nurture the entire child before they have a chance to live up to the fantastic potential of which they are all capable and we need to make sure we do it whether we are doing in-building instruction or virtual learning.

Please don't lose sight of our families. Throw all of your power, influence and resources at covering our babies and their families. We are all suffering to some degree. Your leadership, empathy and resources have never been more important.

Thank You