Testimony of Jacqueline Stevens, Academic Dean

Maya Angelou Public Charter School

The Committee of the Whole’s Hearing on

**Reopening and Academic Recovery: Hearing from Ward 7 & 8 Families**

Council of the District of Columbia

May 26, 2021

Good evening.

My name is Jacqueline Stevens and I am an Academic Dean at Maya Angelou Public Charter School. As a dean, my responsibility is to be an advocate for the students as they progress in high school towards the diploma and a plan for their future. It is my job to know the academic strengths and weaknesses of students along with their learning styles in order to design a master schedule and student schedule that meets their needs and propels them to achieve their goals. I work closely with teachers, support staff, and leadership to ensure equity in learning and achievement in learning.

When schools were closed in March of 2020, everyone hoped that our absence from the building would be temporary. But, we quickly recognized that students would not be under our physical care for a part, and possibly, the entire school year. We took the steps to improve and acquire more technology. Our teachers collaborated to provide the most effective virtual instruction in order to maintain and further the growth obtained by so many of our students. As August approached and we committed to the safety of all, we realized as a school that we needed to find some way to have even more tangible connections with students and families so that students would not disengage from their learning goals and opportunities. The school extended its Community Eats program and offered groceries and hot meals to the community weekly. There was also a need to encourage physical movement for our school community and our “Ride Through It” program was birthed. Students and staff used Wednesdays to ride bicycles through various trails and parks throughout the DMV. Our students who have individual education plans were invited to receive in-person tutoring two times a week throughout the entire school year and in the Spring semester, all students were offered in-person tutoring three days a week. Beginning in April, seniors were allowed to come to the building on Saturdays to receive extra support as they work to finish their pursuit of the diploma. The school building has been open daily so that students and families could receive technology assistance and have access to staff members to meet unexpected needs. The Office of Parent Engagement has hosted a number of workshops and events to assist parents with the needs of their children academically, physically, mentally, and emotionally. The school also secured services to conduct weekly Covid-19 testing. In addition, the staff has united to fill the gaps caused by virtual learning through field trips, virtual and safely in-person, inviting guest speakers from all over the country, and through town halls. We have staff members who reach out to families by phone daily. We also have a devoted team, our Culture team, who drives to our families anytime that they are in need of assistance and cannot come to the building.

Many of our students have had to work during the pandemic and care for other family members including siblings and parents. Some students have faced the challenges of securing housing, food, and medical care during this time. Our students miss their friends and the comfort that a classroom chair and desk bring to their daily routine. They also miss the instructors who inspire and motivate them to be all they desire and are destined to be. And to be fully transparent, the staff misses interacting face to face with our students in our home on East Capitol St.

Despite the challenges of the past year, the school is committed to providing a safe environment for all of our school’s community members. We need to uphold social distancing while in person and masks mandates. We need everyone to have access to testing, vaccinations, and proper medical care when needed. We need to be able to use our building and other secure outside spaces to deliver instruction. We need the understanding that a limited number of families may still request virtual learning as everyone adjusts to returning to their pre-pandemic schedules. We need flexibility in our daily schedules to ensure that social distancing is respected and expected. We need the full support of our community to ensure the safety of everyone attached to our school and its mission to educate and prepare all students for a successful after high school life. And finally, we need the resources to make all of this happen.

Thank you for affording me this opportunity to speak.