



## *Testimony on SEL and Connected Schools*

***Testimony of Jackie Iloh, Connected Schools Manager at Ballou Senior High School, DC Public Schools  
SBOE Monthly Public Meeting – February 17, 2021***

Good Evening, my name is Jackie Iloh and I am the Connected Schools Manager at Ballou Senior High School in Ward 8. Additionally, I am a former special education teacher at Calvin Coolidge Senior High School. At Ballou, our motto is that we are building our best Ballou with love, grace, equity, and empathy and our mission is to design and implement effective teaching experiences in a safe and engaging environment with empathy and support services. I am thrilled to be here this evening to discuss the social and emotional wellbeing we have been diligently working on here at Ballou.

DCPS Connected Schools prioritizes the whole child, whole school, whole community approach to leading schools. Being a Connected School is a philosophy and school-wide strategy for how a school community partners to accelerate student success. Here at Ballou, we are integrating academics with student services, healing centered practices, and family engagement.

For the next few minutes, I would like to take you on the journey of hearing about all the key initiatives we have put into place to create healing centered practices for our students, families, teachers and staff. As Mrs. Hoffman discussed, we are on a mission to have 100% of our students feeling loved, challenged, and prepared. Our key focus here is love and when COVID-19 began, we saw the ways that the social determinants of health could negatively impact our students access to learning. We created the Family Support team and the Ballou Strong survey where families could share if they needed groceries, transportation, toiletries, access to technology, and access to mental health support services.

We have connected with over 250 of our families to build trust and show up when they need us the most. We partnered with Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc to host a community day in the summer where we gifted over 300 backpacks of supplies, and in November and December, we hosted holiday pull up days to give food, grocery cards, toiletries, and presents to 150 families. We delivered more than half of those to address the transportation concerns of our families. This is in addition to our family Success Market in collaboration with the Capital Area Food Bank, which is in its 5<sup>th</sup> year of partnership with Ballou to provide monthly groceries to the community.

As a Project Aware school, which stands for Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Schools, we completed surveys and focus groups and determined that our focal points would be staff wellness and care. We collaborated to create staff wellness kits to launch the school year.

Recommended to us by the Office of the Attorney General, we established a partnership with Sky Schools, a social-emotional learning focused organization whose priority outcomes for our students and families include reducing conflict, increasing sense of belonging, improving school climate, and helping students to understand and create dreams for their future by making responsible choices. They have offered a variety of workshops to support students, staff, and the greater Ballou community. Right now, we are focusing on a targeted approach to engage 80 students and parents in healing conversations, as well as engage 100 students and parents in stress relief sessions.

As co-School Behavioral Health Coordinator and secondary Homeless Liaison, I am part of an amazing Mental Health team that is committed to identifying when students and families could benefit from therapy and other support services and ensuring that they receive them in a timely manner.

Further, we recognized our students were grieving loved ones and friends who have passed away during this pandemic. Additionally, our teachers and staff members have experienced personal loss, as well as the impact of Covid-19 stressors. We developed a partnership with the Wendt Center to offer grief counseling to our students and short-term counseling to our teachers and support staff.

Finally, we have established a Family Engagement Leadership Team where our vision is that families are our most important partners. Family engagement at Ballou rests on the following tenets: honoring families' value systems, collaborative and open spirit for learning, as well as viewing families as experts on their scholars. We are collaborating with the Flamboyant Foundation and have launched our pilot for grades 10-12 and begun the process for our 9<sup>th</sup> grade implementation.

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to share Ballou's focus on social-emotional support services for students and healing centered practices. We appreciate your continued partnership in support of our students. I welcome any questions you may have at this time.