



#6 IN THE SERIES

Building Parent Power

*A Case Study on Parents Amplifying
Voices in Education (PAVE)*

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JUNE 2023





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Series Overview

Parents' should be a school district's most powerful partners. They know their children deeply and have a profound, personal stake in their children's education. Yet too often in school systems across the country, parents are left out of decision-making. They aren't in the room when decisions are made about policy and funding. Frequently, they aren't even invited into the building.

Efforts termed "parent engagement" often fall short because they dictate an ask to parents, or at best seek parent input on a predetermined agenda. True parent organizingⁱ and movement building starts by acknowledging that parents from all communities have an innate power that they should be able to exercise — individually and collectively — to create and sustain the change they believe is right for their children and their school system. However, many school systems disenfranchise parents — particularly parents who are low income, first-generation immigrants, and/or Black, Latino, or Native American.

Fortunately, there are strong examples of organizations across the country that are working to alter this power dynamic. These groups, which we call "parent power" organizations, inform and organize parents so they can exercise their innate power.

As new parent power organizations emerge in communities across the country, there is an opportunity to support them by sharing lessons — some very hard won — from more established parent power organizations that have a track record of success. What makes these organizations successful? How do they inform and organize parents? How do they structure themselves internally? What have been their biggest successes, and what challenges have they overcome? How have their approaches to building power, internal organization, and fundraising changed as they have grown?

To lift up strong examples and lessons for emerging parent power organizations, and for funders supporting this work, we have researched and written case studies on five parent power organizations from around the country. Each organization is unique in its origin, structure, and impact, but what they all have in common is an unwavering belief in the power of parents and a tireless dedication to helping parents build and unleash that power. A handful of themes emerged across the five case studies:

- Leaders must develop a strong mission and vision that provides clarity about the work and facilitates decision-making.
- Leaders must establish structures to build power among parents and support their success.
- Leaders must approach staffing and organizational structures with a flexible mindset and a willingness to make changes over time.
- Leaders must build strategic relationships with funders and diversify revenue streams.
- Funders must think differently about how to support parent power organizations as strong allies and partners.

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3 i We use the term "parent" to refer to any family or community member taking responsibility for the education and future of a child, including grandparents, foster parents, legal guardians, and other family members.

ii We use "organizing" and "advocacy" interchangeably throughout this document.

Each case study provides a deeper dive into the design, structure, and work of a particular organization. This case study highlights the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit **Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE)**. Key lessons include:

- Parent leadership boards offer opportunities for parents to grow in their leadership and advocacy skills.
- An annual cycle of planning and advocacy events had led to consistent impact over time.
- Surveys allow parents' perspectives to inform decision-making.
- A focus on national funders has created a strong base of philanthropic support.
- Organizational structure and staffing shifts ensure mission alignment as PAVE evolves.

The lessons and practices highlighted, as well as the themes that surfaced, can be adapted to a variety of contexts and used by leaders and funders of parent power organizations in communities across the country.



"I started seeing PAVE's purple shirts and testimony from those parents, and I was like, 'Wow, they're really effective.' And I wanted to be part of that. PAVE has given me an understanding of how government works, how testimony works, and it's given me access to the policymakers who can effect change."

—PAVE PARENT LEADER

"At PAVE, we have a collection of parents where it doesn't matter what your background is; all that matters is that you are there for the betterment of children. PAVE has supported me in existing in spaces of leadership and in amplifying my voice. Now I get to be that example in my community, where we are often forgotten about because we don't have certain credentials to be in spaces, but we absolutely belong there. I am so appreciative that PAVE has created that for me."

—PAVE PARENT LEADER

"PAVE has done a lot of personal and professional development across the board, through meaningful engagement and interaction with parents like me. We all have various backgrounds, and they [PAVE staff] train and teach us to do things like engage council members or people with power, build our resumes, use social media effectively, you name it. Whatever it takes to advocate for our children, they have shown us how to do it. And they will walk you through it, hold your hand, and build you as a leader from within."

—PAVE PARENT LEADER

An Organization Built By and With Washingtonians

In reflecting on her time as a leader in schools, before she became a leader in organizing, PAVE founder and CEO Maya Martin Cadogan said, “I wound up being in a lot of rooms where I thought I was just saying common sense things about why Black and brown communities were frustrated with some of D.C.’s recent education reforms. Turns out it wasn’t common sense. I kept talking, and people started asking me what I wanted to do about it” (Sidebar 1).

Martin Cadogan had a vision for an education system that builds education policies *with* parents, rather than *for* them. Her original plan was to lay the groundwork for a new organization with strong leadership, not to found and lead a parent power organization. However, as she narrowed in on the profile of the ideal leader, she realized it was her: “One of the things that was important was that the person had to be a Washingtonian. They had to know and love this place. And that person had to be Black. It had to be someone who understood the Black community in terms of their personal story and perspective. And they needed connections and relationships, and a willingness to open themselves up to parents and let parents do the work. There were not a lot of people who fit that profile. And then I realized it sounded like who I was talking about was me. So, I said, ‘Let me go do it.’”

In November 2015, Martin Cadogan became an Entrepreneur in Residence at NewSchools Venture Fund, where she was able to learn from organizations building and organizing parent power and voice in communities across the country. During National School Choice Week in January 2016, Martin Cadogan did her first set of parent advocacy events at the John A. Wilson Building in D.C. (which houses the municipal offices for the D.C. mayor and council). She brought together 45 parents to share stories with D.C. officials of how they chose their children’s schools and ask their officials any questions they had about education in the city. She explained,

SIDEBAR 1

Leader Profile: Maya Martin Cadogan

Maya Martin Cadogan is a sixth-generation Washingtonian whose family had varying experiences with the education system in D.C. She said, “Being a multigenerational Washingtonian, a lot of my family had made decisions about leaving the city because of the schools in particular. A lot of my family went to Catholic school. ... And my grandfather and my grandmother met at Dunbar High School, which was one of the most prestigious high schools, at the time, for African American students in the country, and it’s here in D.C.”

After graduating from Dartmouth College, she worked there as an assistant director of admissions for a couple of years before moving to New York City to work for Sponsors for Educational Opportunity, an organization that supports low-income students and students of color to access college and career opportunities. In both roles, Martin Cadogan felt like she was meeting young people way too late in the education system, so she decided to pivot to pre-K through grade 12 education.

She went on to graduate from the Harvard Kennedy School, where she had an opportunity to complete the Education Pioneers summer fellowship with KIPP D.C. After graduation, Martin Cadogan took a job as the director of policy and special programs with Center City Public Charter Schools in D.C. and then became the chief of staff at Achievement Prep. In 2015, she left Achievement Prep to become an Entrepreneur in Residence with NewSchools Venture Fund, where she laid the foundation for PAVE’s launch in April 2016.

“It was a breeding ground for me to understand what Black and brown parents want when you took the wheels off — what were their issues? What did they want? What were they talking about?”

Following the meetings with elected officials, Martin Cadogan continued meeting with the families one-on-one. Eight of them ultimately joined the founding board of directors of Martin Cadogan’s organization. They helped write the mission, vision, and business plan for what, in April 2016, became PAVE.

In founding PAVE, Martin Cadogan wanted to create a space for Black and brown parents to be leaders and to own the work. She explained: “When you look at organizing models for Black folks in particular, they’re not Black-led. There are Black-led models that I really love, but a lot of non-Black-led models tend to just kind of capitalize on our trauma. They want parents and students to come and tell their story and pour out their difficult experiences. But they’re not giving back to the parents in any way.”

Martin Cadogan wanted to change that model. She created an organization that gives parents knowledge about how systems work, the policy process, and the data and research, while at the same time providing them with the skills and support to organize and advocate. “A lot of what I wanted to shift in the organizing space was to get back to that Black model of organizing where the parents were the leaders, the ones building relationships, not just with each other, but with the system’s leaders.”

Today, PAVE “connects, informs, and empowers parent leaders to give families in D.C. a voice and choice in the vision for education in our city.”¹ The organization’s work is guided by five core values, all of which undergird PAVE’s vision for D.C., where “parents are partners and leaders with schools and policymakers to develop a diversity of safe, nurturing, and great schools for every child in every ward and community.” Those core values are:

- 1. All families have access to high-quality schools and the information they need to make the best decisions for their children.**
- 2. All schools have adequate and equitable funding to support the needs of children and families.**
- 3. All students have a safe, healthy, and welcoming school environment.**
- 4. All students have access to out-of-school time (OST) and summer school programs that allow them to foster their passions and enrich their learning.**
- 5. All parents have the resources they need to support the success of their children at home — and in school.**

“Connects, informs, and empowers parent leaders to give families in D.C. a voice and choice in the vision for education in our city.”

PAVE MISSION

“One of the things that was important was that [PAVE’S leader] had to be a Washingtonian. They had to know and love this place. And that person had to be Black. It had to be someone who understood the Black community in terms of their personal story and perspective. And they needed connections and relationships, and a willingness to open themselves up to parents and let parents do the work.”

—MAYA MARTIN CADOGAN
Founder and CEO, PAVE

Parent Leadership Structures, Advocacy Events, and Agenda Setting

At the heart of PAVE's work are the structures through which parents become engaged and emboldened to use their power to drive change across D.C. These structures, in concert with annual advocacy initiatives and ongoing engagement with city leaders, are creating meaningful change in D.C.'s education system.

Key Lessons Learned

- 1. Parent leadership boards offer opportunities for parents to grow in their leadership and advocacy skills.** Ward-based boards (WBBs) and a citywide board (CWB) are the backbone of parent leadership at PAVE. These boards provide opportunities for parents to learn and grow in their expertise on policy issues and knowledge of the system as well as leadership and advocacy skills. At the same time, WBBs and the CWB are the structures through which parents develop PAVE's agenda and drive its work.
- 2. An annual cycle of planning and advocacy events has led to consistent impact over time.** PAVE has established an annual cycle for developing and executing parents' agendas. This consistency helps ensure that parent leaders, partner organizations, and school and city leaders can anticipate interacting with PAVE and be prepared to engage.
- 3. Surveys allow parents' perspectives to inform decision-making.** PAVE conducts regular surveys of parents to inform its internal programming; PAVE also publishes the data and findings to ensure parents' perspectives are accessible to policymakers and key decision-makers.



Parent leadership boards offer opportunities for parents to grow in their leadership and advocacy skills.

Governance — specifically self-governance — is critical to PAVE's success. Martin Cadogan developed a board structure through which parents develop leadership skills and drive the organization's education campaigns. Members of these boards, called Parent Leadership in Education (PLE) boards, are responsible for engaging in leadership and advocacy activities throughout the academic year in a variety of ways, ranging from casual coffee chats to formal testimonies before the D.C. Council. Crucially, PAVE doesn't look for potential leaders with the biggest voice, but for those leaders most committed to the collective agenda. And PAVE has succeeded. As Paul Kihn, D.C.'s deputy mayor for education (DME), notes, "I think part of their magic is the way they carefully promote and support the voices of parents. Not in the sense of the elite or in a selective manner. When they come to sit down with me, it's a powerhouse group of people who are not backing off because they're ready and prepared."

Initially, PAVE launched a WBB PLE board structure (for city planning purposes, D.C. groups neighborhoods into eight regions, called wards). Parent leaders opt into the WBB they most identify with — typically either the ward where they live or the ward where their children attend school — and then learn and lead together as a cohort over the course of a year. At the close of the first cycle of the PLE boards, parents expressed a desire to continue their leadership and advocacy work with PAVE. Martin Cadogan and her team created the citywide PLE board (CWB) as an opportunity both for parent leaders to take on more leadership and ownership over PAVE's work, and for parents to hear from peers in other wards. This structure gives parents a better understanding of what's happening across the city, leading to stronger policy solutions.

To be on a WBB, parents must be nominated by a current board member, a school leader, or a PAVE partner, or they can nominate themselves. Prospective board members must live in D.C., have at least one child in a D.C. public school (traditional or charter),

and agree that they will advocate for all children in D.C., not just their child. This last part is critical to serving on a WBB. As Kerry Savage, PAVE's director of policy and advocacy, said, "The parent must also agree to fight for whatever the collective PAVE priorities are, even if it's not the top priority for them."

Following a nomination, potential WBB members go through an interview process, which is led by the CWB members. Once selected, the WBB membership requires a 10-month commitment, beginning in August and ending in June (Table A1).² Parents may remain on WBB for multiple years.

Existing WBB members can nominate themselves to be on the CWB. However, because that board requires additional responsibilities and commitments, PAVE staff lead the interview and selection process. Savage explained, "If parents want to level up and participate on the citywide board, which is a significantly greater time commitment, they go through a more intensive interview process that our staff leads, mostly because it's not just about the additional time commitment, but it's also about mindset. It's about how committed you are to leadership growth and not just your leadership, but bringing in and building up others around you."

The CWB members are expected to spend six to seven hours per month for 11 months on CWB-related activities, actions, and opportunities (Table A2). This commitment is on top of their WBB duties, resulting in a total time commitment of approximately 10 hours per month.

The CWB affords members ample opportunity to grow in their leadership, with support from PAVE staff. Like WBB members, CWB members may remain on the board for multiple years. One CWB member explained, "On the citywide PLE, they allow us so much autonomy with how we engage our ward-based parents and how they encourage us to engage others and advocate and then build relationships with them as well. It's like a domino effect. If you stay within PAVE, you're bound to grow. They are nurturing, and you will grow and blossom."

Martin Cadogan and Savage are currently considering whether to expand the board structure further to include an advisory board or other opportunities to provide further growth and leadership opportunities to “alumni” who have been on the CWB for a long time.

An annual cycle of planning and advocacy events has led to consistent impact over time.

PAVE has developed an annual scope and sequence for its agenda-setting process, aligned to both the academic year and D.C.'s budget cycle (Figure 1).

There are four main events that PAVE hosts throughout the year, which align with the organization's annual scope and sequence. The first event is the **PAVE Parent Policy Summit**, held each June. During this summit, parent leaders share with their peers about the issues they feel are most important to address to improve their children's education. Parents meet in small groups and discuss the various issues raised and, ultimately, vote on the two that will form PAVE's policy agenda for the upcoming year. One PLE member described the voting process: “[The Parent Policy Summit is] open to all parents; you don't have to be specifically associated with PAVE to attend the summit. It is a live, in-the-moment voting process where selected parents who are passionate about the particular issues that are up for the vote can share why they are passionate about it, what the issue is, and we take some more moments to deep-dive into it collectively.”

While the summit is critical for setting the next year's policy priorities, it's also a place to have fun and celebrate. Savage said, “We try to make the summit as fun as possible because the summit is often the first PAVE event that our new PLE board members come to. So, at the summit they very much feel like there's opportunity for their voice to be heard, regardless of whether they have been with PAVE for five years or if this is their first event. Everybody has an equal chance to share and have an equal vote. We also always have good food, cake, DJs playing music, and activities for the kids.”

FIGURE 1: PAVE'S ANNUAL SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

JUNE

PAVE Parent Policy Summit

The annual event that determines PAVE's agenda for the upcoming year.

SEPTEMBER

PLE Board Kickoff

This event kicks off the new year, welcoming new and returning PLE board members and focusing on community-building within the WBBs and the CWB.

SEPTEMBER-JANUARY

Creating Statements of Belief

Parent leaders conduct outreach to more parents and build policy expertise on the chosen agenda items, ultimately creating documents that summarize PAVE parents' vision and policy solutions for each identified organizational policy issue. These documents include goals and specific policy or administrative actions PAVE will advocate for to achieve those goals.

The policy learning and vision-setting process is focused on ensuring parent leaders are ready to advocate for their policy issues and engage with policymakers in January.

JANUARY-MAY

Organizing and Advocacy

Through large events, like D.C. Parent Voice and Choice Week, and more individualized advocacy efforts, including one-on-ones, letters, and testimonies, parent leaders advocate for the changes they've identified.

This work is tightly aligned with D.C.'s budgeting process: In February, the mayor hosts forums to gather input into the budget, which is released in mid-March. From late-March through June, the D.C. Council finalizes that budget.

In December, PAVE hosts an **All Ward Learning Day**, where all PLE boards come together to do a deep dive on the issues identified during the summit and begin to discuss potential solutions. The Learning Day is an important precursor to developing the statement of beliefs, which PLE board members finalize in January.

In January, PAVE hosts **D.C. Parent Voice and Choice Week**. Over the course of the week, PAVE hosts breakfasts, luncheons, and in-person meetings (virtual during the COVID-19 pandemic) between PLE board members and D.C. policymakers. During these meetings, PLE board members have the opportunity to share their stories and discuss PAVE's policy priorities, as well as hear from policymakers about their work and answer their questions.

To prepare for policymaker meetings during D.C. Parent Voice and Choice Week — as well as meetings with policymakers that take place throughout the year — PAVE trains parents in crafting their message and making clear asks of policymakers. PAVE staff also role-play the policymaker meetings so the parents can see them modeled and have a safe space and an opportunity to practice. Savage said that PAVE prepares parents for multiple possible scenarios. “We want to make sure that the parents really feel confident and comfortable in pushing back if a policymaker is saying something that is wrong or if they are not answering a question or giving a non-answer. We want the parents to know that they are the experts.”

The team also provides PLE parent leaders with an intensive rundown of who key policymakers are. In 2022, the PAVE staff created a look book and provided extensive background information on D.C. policymakers. Savage said: “Before any of our big policymaker events we give information like, ‘Who is this person? What’s their background? What do they care about? What’s their personality? Are they a numbers person? Do they need to have their heartstrings tugged on and like to hear about stories about kids?’ We also talk about what’s moved them before and how to target our strategy based on that.”



PAVE is intentional about supporting parent leaders to own relationships with the policymakers they meet with. Savage said, “Because parents have been in the rooms with folks for so long, they are starting to build those relationships, either with policymakers themselves or their staff. It’s been great that parents have built those relationships themselves so they can do it all at one time. They can ask for information, share information, and then make the push or the ask.” Deputy Mayor for Education Kihn affirmed this value: “The most important thing about them as an organization is how incredibly well prepared they are for their interactions with me. It suggests a lot of preparation, both in terms of figuring out their issues and their talking points. They spend a lot of time determining collectively what’s most important to them. When I sit down every year with these parents, they all have their comments written down. It’s a deeply authentic experience where they are telling me their experiences and they are also helping to promote parents who otherwise would not feel comfortable.” Dr. Christina Grant, D.C.’s state superintendent of education, echoed Kihn’s feelings and described a powerful interaction in one meeting with PAVE parents: “There was definitely a moment where the PAVE parents weren’t parent advocates, and the mayor wasn’t the mayor, and I wasn’t the superintendent. It was just moms and dads talking about their kids.”

Critical to ensuring parents can develop and manage these relationships are processes to support and prepare them to be content experts. In March or April, PAVE hosts its **Budget Forum**, where parents talk about what is included in the mayor’s budget and what is still needed. During this event, parents also learn about and discuss other issues related to the city’s budget, including D.C.’s relationship with Congress and Congress’ role in the city’s budgeting process.

Outside of these four main events, PAVE also hosts a variety of other opportunities that enable parents to meet with policymakers and their staff on a more frequent, less formal basis, including happy hours, small group meetings, and Council Office Walkarounds.

Surveys allow parents’ perspectives to inform decision-making.

The PLE boards and the direct-to-policymaker action aren’t necessarily right for everyone, and one of PAVE’s keys to success is helping parents figure out how they can best help. “We leave no talent and passion on the table” is a de facto motto at PAVE.³ Martin Cadogan explained, “We meet members of our community where they are — there is not a single individual who can’t contribute to community-led change, but not everyone wants to contribute in the same way, and many people need a chance to discover the potential of their voice and actions.”⁴

One way that PAVE engages parents in shaping policy and practice is through surveys. Prior to the pandemic, PAVE worked closely with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and the DME’s office to survey parents about the D.C. School Report Card and OST. Findings from those two surveys directly informed the work of both OSSE and the DME.

In response to the pandemic in 2020, PAVE launched parent and school leader surveys to provide actionable information about how families and school communities were faring, what they needed, and where there were gaps in resources or services. Since then, PAVE has continued to survey parents multiple times per year about their experiences with their children’s schools and, more broadly, about core education issues. These surveys inform PAVE’s work internally, ensuring PAVE leaders understand parents’ perspectives as they develop organizational programming. PAVE also publishes the data and findings on its website to share with schools, policymakers, and partners to inform its advocacy work.

PAVE has an established track record of success.

PAVE parents have a long track record of tangible success on key issues. Thanks to advocacy from PAVE parents and partners, there are two more high-quality

schools to serve students in D.C.'s most marginalized communities, located east of the Anacostia River. In 2018, PAVE parents advocated for a new district-run, early college high school to be located east of the river. In fall 2019, Bard High School Early College opened a campus in the Congress Heights community of southeast D.C., providing families with a high-quality, selective-admissions school in their neighborhood.⁵ In 2021, PAVE parents participated in a parent-driven process to select an operator to open a new charter school to serve D.C.'s Ward 8 community. The process brought together the vision of families living in Ward 8 and its military families (Ward 8 is home to U.S. Air Force Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling). Through a rigorous, parent-driven request for proposals process, parents selected the LEARN Charter School Network. In August 2021, LEARN D.C. opened its doors.⁶

New, high-quality public schools are just the beginning. For the past several years, two issues have consistently risen to the top of PAVE parents' agenda: school-based mental health and OST (Sidebars 2, 3). Across both issues, PAVE parents have won critical improvements in policy and practice and millions of dollars to support D.C.'s students.

In addition to those policy wins, parent leaders are open about how PAVE has helped them recognize their own power and grow professionally. According to one parent leader and WBB member, "I use PAVE strategies and skills in everything, not just in education. I use them to get something done, so it influences everything because it shows you how to approach a problem and be more effective in getting results."

Another parent leader had similar sentiments. "There was already an ember, but when I started working with PAVE it became an inferno. PAVE has helped me understand my power as a parent in the education space. The sky is the limit. They not only help us understand how the system works, but they have shown me that I have a voice and have let me direct it in such a way that it can be effective. And I can be heard. One of the best things PAVE has given us are strategies on a pathway to make things happen."

SIDEBAR 2

Story of Success: School-Based Mental Health

School-based mental health has been one of PAVE's primary agenda items since 2018, well before the COVID-19 pandemic propelled the issue to the forefront of families' and educators' minds. As a result of PAVE parents' work, D.C.'s schools were in a much better place to deal with the mental health effects of COVID-19 than they otherwise might have been. According to Savage, "We are not where we need to be, but we would have been way worse off if parents hadn't been working on this before the pandemic. It made a huge difference when COVID hit and everything fell apart. We at least had some foundation to build off for recovery, where a lot of other places didn't have that. I think that's huge."

PAVE parents have successfully advocated for tangible changes to how D.C. funds school-based mental health services. In 2022, PAVE advocated for \$300,000 for a cost study to determine the cost of comprehensive school-based supports, including salaries and coordination of care. In the end, \$150,000 was allocated for the study, which was completed by D.C.'s Department of Behavioral Health. In March 2023, PAVE achieved two big budget wins related to school-based mental health:

- PAVE asked for an increase of at least 5% in funding to keep up with inflation, and D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser proposed a 5.05% (\$145 million) increase.
- PAVE asked for investments in the school-based mental health workforce, and OSSE received a \$9.7 million grant over the next four years to support the recruitment and retention of school-based mental health clinicians.

The work on this issue is far from finished. However, PAVE parents have laid critical groundwork and helped secure millions of dollars to ensure their children have access to quality mental health services throughout D.C.'s schools.

There is also the collective power that comes from hundreds of parents recognizing the value of their voice. One parent leader said, “I’ve seen through the years of working with PAVE that if enough voices come together and they truly believe in what they’re doing, and they tell their story authentically, show examples, and share experiences that are directly impacted by the broken system, then you can make a difference with that testimony or that conversation. All those things end up having a positive domino effect on the greater good, which is what we are all here for. And in the process, we grow professionally and personally.”

“There was definitely a moment where the PAVE parents weren’t parent advocates, and the mayor wasn’t the mayor, and I wasn’t the superintendent. It was just moms and dads talking about their kids.”

—**DR. CHRISTINA GRANT**
D.C. Deputy Mayor for Education

“PAVE has helped me understand my power as a parent in the education space. ... They not only help us understand how the system works, but they have shown me that I have a voice and have let me direct it in such a way that it can be effective. And I can be heard. One of the best things PAVE has given us are strategies on a pathway to make things happen.”

—**PAVE PARENT LEADER**

SIDEBAR 3

Story of Success: Out-of-School Time

Increasing access to OST programs — programs that provide a safe, high-quality learning environment for children when school is not in session (e.g., after school, during school breaks) — has been a PAVE parent priority since 2018. That first year, PAVE started with one goal: to get to \$25 million in OST funding. Martin Cadogan said, “There was a trust that had previously funded all of D.C.’s OST programs, but that trust had been poorly managed and ultimately dissolved. At our first summit, parents identified that there were not enough OST programs to meet the needs of families, and that the programs that remained had shriveled and were less than they used to be.” Following the summit and the identification of OST as one of PAVE’s agenda items, Martin Cadogan approached the mayor’s office and was able to convince the administration to commission a study on OST. That study found that there were more students, particularly in grades K-8, needing a seat in OST programs than there were seats available.⁷ The needs assessment also found disparities in accessing the programs, with fewer programs available in Ward 8 — which mainly serves economically disadvantaged families and families of color.⁸

Based on the previous funding levels and the number of seats needed to address the inequities, PAVE’s coalition partners calculated that there used to be about \$25 million in the budget for OST. From this, PAVE started the #WeNeed25 campaign, which included parent leaders meeting with council members and the mayor’s office, testifying at D.C. Council meetings, and participating in social media and online advocacy. In 2018, the mayor and council increased OST funding to \$22.5 million — nearly all of PAVE’s ask. Martin Cadogan said of the impact of that win, “We didn’t quite reach the \$25 million, but that increase in funding did mean that we nearly doubled how much investment the city was making in OST programming.”

PAVE parent leaders have continued working on OST over the past several years. In addition to improvements to OST funding, in March 2023 PAVE achieved another policy win when Bowser and Delano Hunter, director of the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, announced that summer camp sign-ups would be done through a lottery rather than on a first-come, first-served basis.⁹ According to Bowser, the new lottery system will allow the “summer camp registration to be more inclusive and equitable.”¹⁰ The shift in the enrollment process was one of PAVE’s 2023 policy priorities for OST.¹¹

These PAVE policy and budget wins didn’t just happen overnight. The organization’s parents have been working on making OST more equitable and accessible for nearly five years. These wins are reflective of the credibility they’ve built and a testament to their dedication and persistence over the years.

Fundraising and Organizational Structure

PAVE has built and continues to build a strong base of parents leading change across D.C. Martin Cadogan's deliberate approach to fundraising, paired with her ability to make staffing changes when things are not working, has created a strong organization that is able to focus its time on developing parent leaders.

Key Lessons Learned

- 1. A focus on national funders has created a strong base of philanthropic support.** D.C. is a small city, so Martin Cadogan has focused her fundraising efforts on national funders who can provide sustainable funding over time, even as she continues to build and expand the base of local funders and individual donors.
- 2. Organizational structure and staffing shifts ensure mission alignment as PAVE evolves.** Martin Cadogan has made several strategic shifts in how PAVE is structured and staffed, including disbanding the organizing department and sunseting programs, to ensure PAVE's systems and strategies directly support its mission.



A focus on national funders has created a strong base of philanthropic support.

Martin Cadogan founded PAVE with an initial seed investment of \$400,000 from Education Forward DC and the Walton Family Foundation. Since then, Martin Cadogan has worked hard to grow PAVE’s foundation support, particularly from national funders, and its overall revenues. From fiscal year (FY) 2017 to FY 2022, PAVE’s revenue streams grew sixfold — from \$451,000 to nearly \$3 million. Increases in funding from foundations have driven the overall budget increase, with government grants and individual contributions composing just 6% of total revenues (Figure 2).

In terms of expenses, in FY23, PAVE spent approximately \$2.2 million. More than two-thirds of its expenses (57%) went to salaries and benefits, and one-fourth (28%) went to general and administrative expenses and professional services. The remaining 15% of funds supported the costs of meetings, travel and conferences, and marketing (Figure 3).

The organization's revenues and expenses reflect several strategic approaches to fundraising and budgeting. First, the majority of PAVE’s funding comes from big foundations, with a particular focus on national funders — a result of Martin Cadogan’s deliberate efforts to cultivate relationships with this group. She said: “I recognize that D.C. is a small place, and there’s only so much funding here. There are not a lot of individual donors here, and D.C. has the lowest giving rate of all major cities. There are also a lot of people living in Maryland and Virginia who are wealthy, and they don’t necessarily care about what’s happening in D.C. It makes the fundraising picture more complicated. I decided instead to figure out how I could capture national funding.”

To keep PAVE’s name in the national conversation, Martin Cadogan stays active in the national landscape. “If someone asks me to be part of a group or be on a panel, then I will do it because that puts us in front of them [funders] more frequently. ... But it’s the national stuff that matters to me and where I make sure I prioritize my time, because funding happens through word of mouth. And you never know who the quarterback is for some of these funders and who they are going to get feedback from about who they should fund.”

FIGURE 2: PAVE REVENUE BY TYPE, FY22

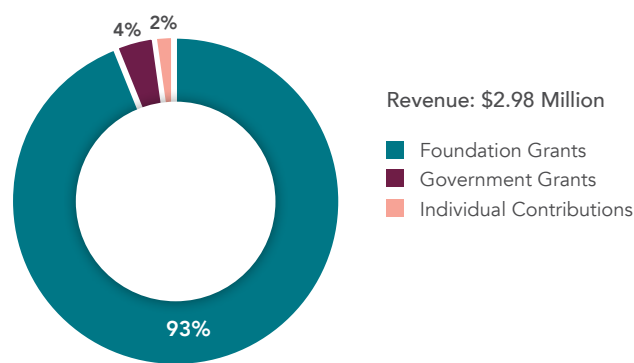
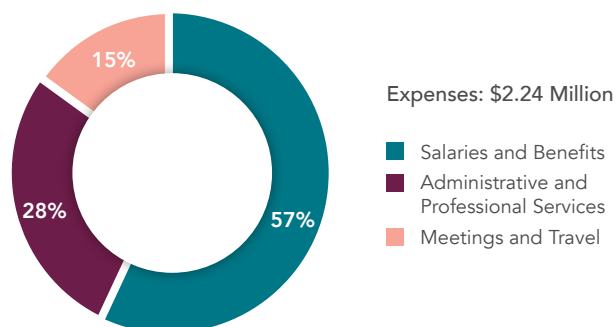


FIGURE 3: PAVE EXPENSES BY TYPE, FY23



Note: Totals may exceed 100 due to rounding.

Sources: FY22 and FY23 financials provided by PAVE.

Second, Martin Cadogan is making a deliberate shift away from taking government contracts. These contracts have never been a large source of revenue for PAVE, but they will be phased out entirely in the future. This is largely because the budgets for such contracts tend to be small and are often insufficient to cover the costs of the extensive community engagement work that PAVE undertakes. PAVE pays for food and child care at any event it asks parents to attend, for example, but costs like these are typically not covered by government grants. Given these challenges, Martin Cadogan is exploring other opportunities to diversify PAVE's revenue streams.

One of those more recent efforts is the Parent Power Gala, which PAVE first hosted in 2019. Ticket proceeds for the gala go to PAVE. While the pandemic forced it to put the gala on pause, PAVE decided to host an in-person gala again in 2023. The event is a big initiative for PAVE's board. Margie Yeager, managing partner at Education Forward DC and PAVE's board chair, said, "It's a big lift, and it involves everyone on the board reaching out to their networks, making sure to get folks in the room, and engaging people to be sponsors. But we don't want the room to just be rich, white people. We want to have a lot of parents in the room and a more diverse set of folks. We want it to be an exciting, fun, and celebratory event."

Finally, Martin Cadogan has made some changes in the composition of the organization's executive board to address several needs, one of which is fundraising. PAVE was founded by an all-parent executive board that was primarily focused on programming. However, as the organization has grown, Martin Cadogan has shifted away from an all-parent board to one that includes other areas of expertise necessary to operate a \$3 million organization. Martin Cadogan said: "The original board did a lot of the programmatic work so that I wasn't the only one doing it. At the time, I didn't need them to do fundraising and external relationships. But once I started hitting \$1.5 million in funding and above, it became clear I needed a board who could help me do some high-level things, not just around fundraising but also strategy and risk management."

Underlying all of Martin Cadogan's fundraising strategies is an unwavering belief in ensuring that parents remain the drivers of PAVE's agenda. She said, "I will have conversations with funders to understand what their interests are, but also to demonstrate that if they let parents lead, then it will actually get them to where they want to go. But they have to be okay with the journey, which is not them controlling what our issues are directly." Martin Cadogan said that, due to PAVE's track record of success and her strong relationships with funders, she has seen a lot of success with fundraising nationally. "Mostly I think the funders stay hands-off because we're doing a good job. We're winning. We have a good reputation, locally and nationally."



“I will have conversations with funders to understand what their interests are, but also to demonstrate that if they let parents lead, then it will actually get them to where they want to go. But they have to be okay with the journey, which is not them controlling what our issues are directly.”

—MAYA MARTIN CADOGAN

Founder and CEO, PAVE

And PAVE’s funders see and understand the power behind this approach. Bisi Oyedele, CEO of Education Forward DC, said, “PAVE has developed a practice that is unique, and it’s hard to emulate because it requires trusting the process and not trying to steer and force-navigate an outcome. I may have a specific viewpoint on a particular issue or piece of legislation, but I cannot and should not go to PAVE and ask them to get their parents to advocate for that thing. That’s not how it works.”

Organizational structure and staffing shifts ensure mission alignment as PAVE evolves.

PAVE’s staffing and model have shifted over several years as Martin Cadogan has sought to strike the right balance of knowledge and skills across the team. Martin Cadogan was the only PAVE staff member until January 2017. “Most parents will tell you that I was their first one-to-one. I ran the meetings and facilitated them.” Since then, PAVE has continued to grow its team, first hiring an organizer and then a chief of staff. At its peak in 2020, PAVE had 15 staff members across four departments: policy and advocacy, operations, organizing, and communications. Currently, PAVE has eight staff members across three departments: policy and advocacy, operations, and communications.

Martin Cadogan has made changes over the years to get to what she feels is the right staffing structure to meet the organization’s goals. This included two major cuts. First, until 2020, PAVE had a department and

two full-time staff dedicated to running professional learning communities for school-based staff. However, the work was time-intensive and didn’t yield clear results for students or the community. Martin Cadogan engaged with PAVE’s board and decided to disband the department. Yeager explained how they decided to move away from their school-based work: “We loved the school-based work, but we had to force ourselves to think whether it had an impact. We have finite resources, and Maya’s leadership has been extraordinary to be self-critical and be honest about what’s working well, what’s the most effective, and what’s driving the work the most.”

Then, in 2021, Martin Cadogan decided to disband PAVE’s organizing department. She said: “During the pandemic, we realized that our organizers struggled to do the systematic work of organizing. They were meeting with people, but if you actually looked at what that was resulting in, then it wasn’t going where we needed it to go because their relationships were surface-level. They were meeting with different people all the time versus deepening relationships with parents and offering them the skill development that would grow them as leaders. And they were not building strong relationships with schools and community leaders in order to meet new parents and teach our current parents how to do organizing themselves in their schools and communities. Both parents and community leaders liked our organizers but they didn’t feel called to action by them, and that meant that our organizing wasn’t working.”

The organization no longer employs dedicated organizers; instead, the work of organizing has been embedded throughout all remaining roles. Martin Cadogan explained that this shift is more in line with the mission and charge of PAVE, and it’s also resulted in the rebuilding and deepening of relationships: “When we now meet with parents and you ask them to come out, you are saying ‘I will build a relationship with you so that we can follow up from that testimony’ or whatever the thing is, but it’s a two-way street that now feels worth their time.” PAVE staff have participated in several trainings to ensure this embedded-organizing approach works well.

Now, when Martin Cadogan thinks about staffing, she's focused on several factors. The first is finding more senior leaders who can take on pieces of the work that Martin Cadogan holds. PAVE recently hired a chief strategy officer, but finding senior leaders has been a struggle, due in part to the demanding nature of PAVE's work. Martin Cadogan said, "We are a parent organization. We have to hold meetings when parents can come. And the only way to learn our programmatic work is if they [PAVE's senior leaders] are actually in the work with parents. We've had a big challenge when we try and hire high-level leaders and they say, 'I thought because I'm a high-level leader, I don't need to be at these meetings.' And for me that's like saying, 'I'm a principal who doesn't need to be in the building.'"

The second consideration is fit with the organization's mission. Martin Cadogan noted that PAVE has struggled to find people who are a good fit for the organization's culture and tempo, not just good at the tasks outlined in the job description. The fast-paced nature of the work can be challenging for some people. Martin Cadogan said: "We will have a lot of people come in saying, 'I work in a fast-paced environment. I'm good with that.' And then they come to PAVE and they're like, 'Whoa.' They don't realize we do organizing, advocacy, and policy. It's not slow-moving work. People don't understand what it takes to be successful. They see it and they want to be part of it, but it takes a lot to get there."

As PAVE has evolved its internal staffing structures to better meet the needs of parents and the community, Martin Cadogan has also become increasingly explicit to external stakeholders about what PAVE is. She said, "I've had to recognize that this isn't really a D.C. organization; it's a Black D.C. organization. A lot of decisions we'd made were based on that assumption, but we weren't naming it outright. It's not just that we're Black-led or have Black parents. This is really an organization about and for Black people. And I talk about it that way now, because our decisions about what we do are influenced by what is going to be best for, and what is going to reach and serve Black people."

This sharpened focus has had two big strategic implications. First, PAVE does not have WBBs in Wards 2 and 3 — the regions in D.C. with the smallest number of Black students and Black families. While families living in those wards are welcome to join PAVE and attend events, Martin Cadogan has decided not to invest PAVE's limited resources to build PLE boards in those wards. Second, during COVID, Martin Cadogan chose to move away from seeking out and serving the city's Latino communities. She explained: "We aren't well equipped to do that. We didn't have the language resources necessary, or the resources to help those families in the way they needed. We don't do crisis support; we couldn't do the kind of food, health care, or other basic resource allocation that many of our Latino families were asking us for. We're an advocacy organization; we're not social workers. So we had to recognize and honor that. That doesn't mean we turn away Latino families, but we have to center who we are, who we're created to serve, and how we can do that work well." Moving forward, PAVE's impact on the Latino community will be more indirect, by demonstrating what is possible for parents to achieve when they organize and elevate their voices.

"PAVE has developed a practice that is unique, and it's hard to emulate because it requires trusting the process and not trying to steer and force-navigate an outcome. I may have a specific viewpoint on a particular issue or piece of legislation, but I cannot and should not go to PAVE and ask them to get their parents to advocate for that thing. That's not how it works."

—BISI OYEDELE

Chief Executive Officer, Education Forward DC

Conclusion

PAVE's successes over the past seven years are the result of deliberate and strategic decisions that Martin Cadogan and her team have made about how to structure and support parent leadership opportunities, how to engage city leaders and policymakers in their advocacy efforts, and how to build a strong organization both financially and culturally. While D.C.'s schools are far from providing all students with equitable access to a high-quality education, the work that PAVE's parent leaders continue to do is making a meaningful impact on the city's public school students and their families. ♦

"I've had to recognize that this isn't really a D.C. organization; it's a Black D.C. organization. A lot of decisions we'd made were based on that assumption, but we weren't naming it outright. It's not just that we're Black-led or have Black parents. This is really an organization about and for Black people. And I talk about it that way now, because our decisions about what we do are influenced by what is going to be best for, and what is going to reach and serve Black people."

—MAYA MARTIN CADOGAN
Founder and CEO, PAVE



Appendix

TABLE A1. TIMELINE OF WBB PLE BOARD MEMBER COMMITMENTS¹²

Month	Required Event or Action
August	Complete all necessary documents to be on WBB.
September	PLE Board Kickoff
October	Attend at least one PAVE event (e.g., coffee chat or candidate forum).
November	PLE Board Meeting
December	All Ward PLE Meeting
January	Attend PLE Board Meeting and D.C. Parent Voice and Choice Week. During the themed week, WBB members must attend their ward's meeting and at least one other meeting.
February	Attend at least one PAVE event, like a coffee chat, citywide board-led happy hour, or advocacy workshop.
March	Attend at least one PAVE event, like a coffee chat, citywide board-led happy hour, or advocacy workshop.
April	PAVE Budget Forum
February-May	Testify before the D.C. City Council at least once, as well as complete and share a petition on social media during at least one Day of Action.
June	Parent Policy Summit

TABLE A2. TIMELINE OF ADDITIONAL CWB MEMBER COMMITMENTS¹³

Month	Required Event or Action
August	One-on-one meeting with PAVE staff to complete your Profile of a Leader
September	CWB Kickoff
October	CWB Meeting
November	CWB Meeting
December	CWB Meeting
January	CWB Meeting Attend PLE Board Meeting and D.C. Parent Voice and Choice Week. During this themed week, CWB members must attend at least two more meetings, in addition to their WBB-required meetings.
February	CWB Meeting
March	CWB Meeting Host a community-building event with your WBB and confirm parent attendance.
April	CWB Meeting
May	CWB Meeting PAVE Gala
June	CWB Meeting Parent Policy Summit End-of-year Happy Hour
August-January; February-June	CWB members must take two leadership actions among the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair a PAVE-sponsored meeting. • Host a house meeting to recruit new PAVE parent leaders. • Attend a community event or meeting to promote the PAVE Parent Policy Summit. • Social media takeover for a PAVE event or action. • Write a blog or op-ed. • Serve on a panel or committee as a PAVE representative. • Provide a media quote to a national or local outlet and identify yourself as a PAVE parent leader. • Draft and ask a question for a PAVE-sponsored meeting. • Attend a meeting with an elected official or policymaker and share PAVE priorities. • Testify at a hearing as a PAVE parent leader.

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About Bellwether

Bellwether is a national nonprofit that exists to transform education to ensure systemically marginalized young people achieve outcomes that lead to fulfilling lives and flourishing communities. Founded in 2010, we work hand in hand with education leaders and organizations to accelerate their impact, inform and influence policy and program design, and share what we learn along the way. For more, visit bellwether.org.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the many individuals who gave their time and shared their knowledge with us to inform our work, including The Barr Foundation and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative for their financial support of this project. We want to thank PAVE staff, parent leaders, and external partners for being generous with their time and allowing us to tell their story.

We would also like to thank our Bellwether colleagues Juliet Squire for her input on earlier drafts of this document and Alexis Richardson for her support. Thank you to Alyssa Schwenk, Andy Jacob, Zoe Campbell, Julie Nguyen, and Amber Walker for shepherding and disseminating this work, and to Super Copy Editors.

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