



**D.C. POLICY**  

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**CENTER**

JOINT PUBLIC ROUNDTABLE

**PR23-0193, THE "MASTER FACILITIES PLAN  
APPROVAL RESOLUTION OF 2019"**

Before the Committee of the Whole and the Committee on Education,  
Chairman Phil Mendelson and Councilmember David Grosso

June 5 at 10am  
John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Chelsea Coffin  
Director, Education Policy Initiative  
D.C. Policy Center

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Grosso, and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Chelsea Coffin and I am the Director of the Education Policy Initiative at the D.C. Policy Center, an independent think tank focused on advancing policies for a growing and vibrant economy in D.C. I thank you for the opportunity to testify at this Joint Public Roundtable on the Master Facilities Plan Approval Resolution of 2019.

Among other takeaways, the Master Facilities Plan 2018 finds that in school year 2027-28, there will be large gaps in terms of available space in certain areas of the city for each sector. According to the Plan, DCPS would need space for at least a thousand additional students in Wards 3 and 4, and public charter schools would need seats for at least a thousand additional students in Wards 4, 7, and 8.

However, data released after the publication of the Master Facilities Plan show that [population growth in the District of Columbia is slowing and migration patterns are changing](#). Specifically, for the first time in many years, net migration is negative. Given these trends, should we revise down the need for space for new students?

To answer this question, we revisited the D.C. Policy Center's enrollment projections model with updated demographic and enrollment data. To summarize:

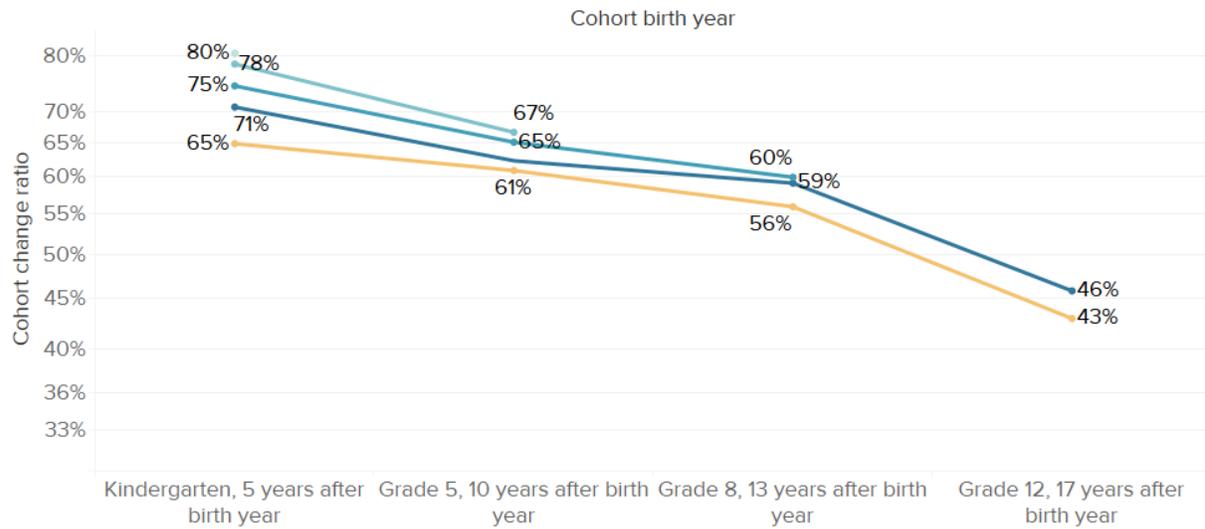
- Enrollment growth in DC has two main drivers: the number of babies born in the District, and the rate at which parents opt into the public schools. Both have increased over time.
- Census estimates show that births have stabilized in D.C. at about 9,700 per year. We do not yet know the actual number of births for 2018.

- With each cohort, a higher percentage of students are staying in public schools. In 2018, the number of students attending kindergarten in public schools was 80 percent of the number of children born five years earlier. We can call this “cohort retention.” Cohort retention rates steadily improved for cohorts that are completing a grade band in school year 2018-19. For example, the cohort retention rate from birth to kindergarten improved by 15 percentage points compared to the cohort born in 1998. Grade 5 retention rate improved from 61 percent for students born in 1998 to 67 percent for students born in 2008.
- In parallel, a smaller share of D.C. children are attending private schools. An estimated 17.6 percent of kindergarten through grade 12 students were in private schools over the period of 2008-2012 compared to 15.6 percent from 2013-2017.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> American Community Survey 5-year Estimates. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data.html>

## 2018-19 students compared to earlier births by grade band



### Cohort

- Kindergarten in 2018-19, born in 2013
- Grade 5 in 2018-19, born in 2008
- Grade 8 in 2018-19, born in 2005
- Grade 12 in 2018-19, born in 2001
- Grade 12 in 2016-17, born in 1998 (previous baseline)

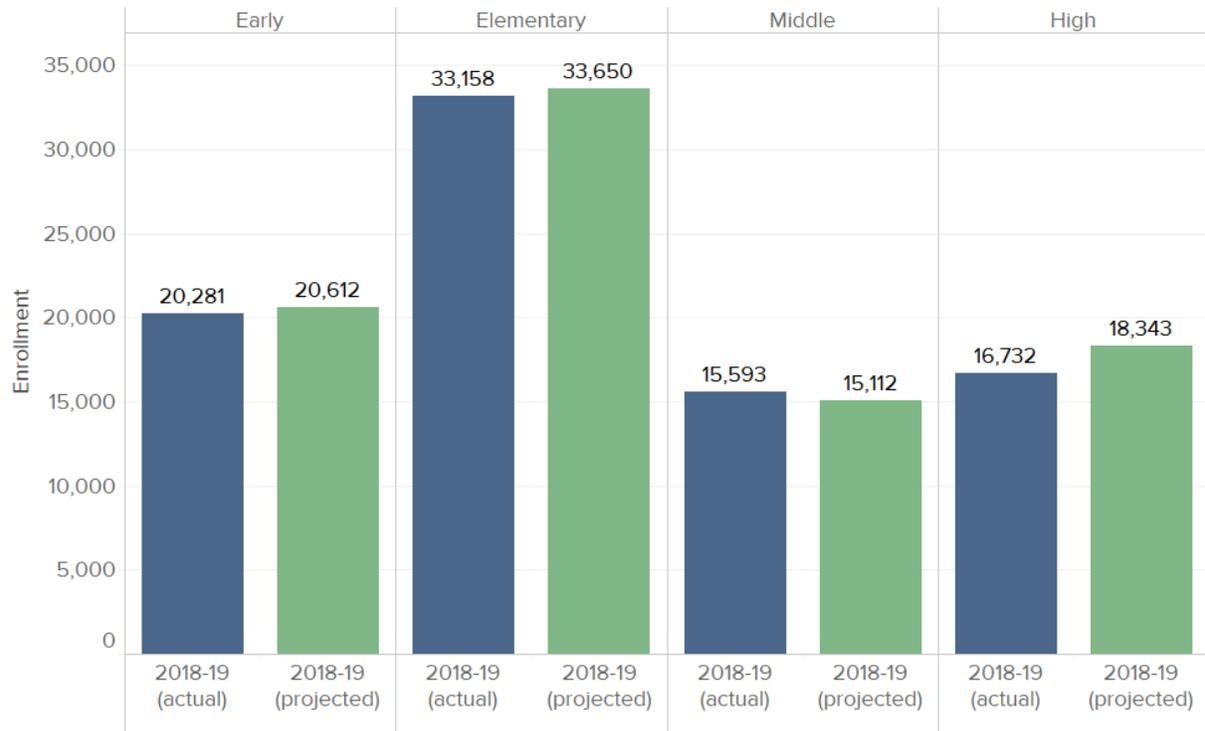
Source: D.C. Policy Center analysis of Center for Disease Control (CDC), WONDER database and Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE)'s enrollment audits.



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However, drawing students especially into high schools at greater rates will be necessary to realize projections. Overall enrollment in pre-kindergarten to grade 12 has grown by 1,136 students on average per year over the last two years, or about half of the projected growth. Much of this discrepancy is due to slower than projected growth in high schools. Actual 2018-19 enrollment in grades 9 to 12 is 1,611 students lower than the projected amount, which continues the trend of high school as the point with the greatest number of exits from the system.

## Comparison of 2018-19 enrollment to D.C. Policy Center projections



Source: D.C. Policy Center analysis of Center for Disease Control (CDC), WONDER database and Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE)'s enrollment audits.



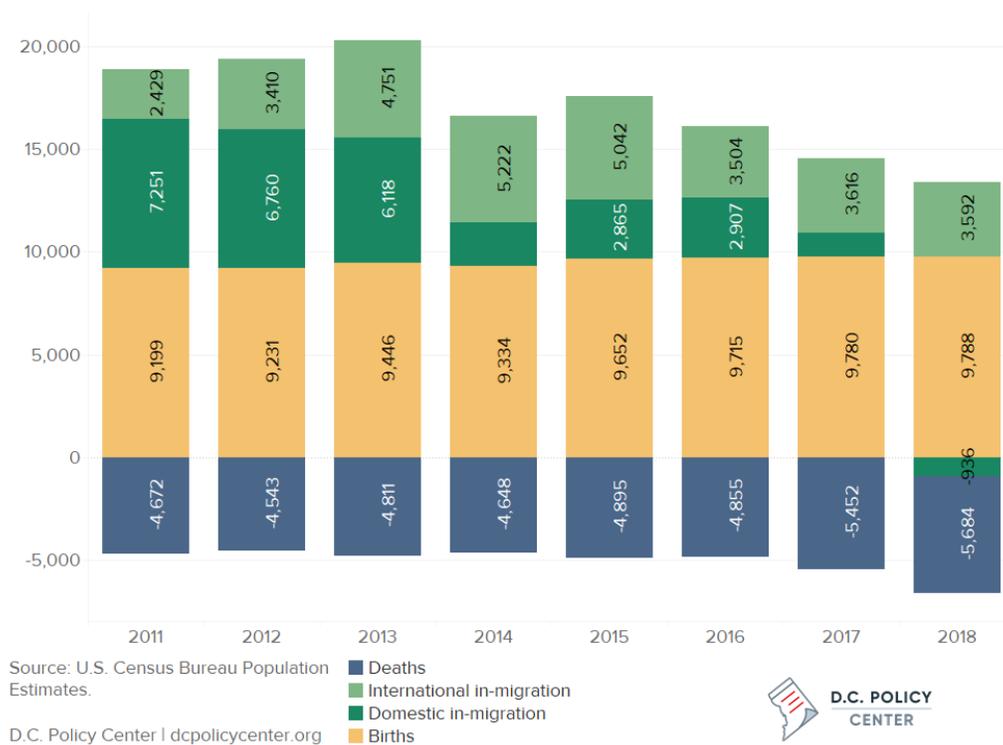
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Quality school options must continue to attract and retain students from pre-kindergarten throughout high school. If this happens, strong trends in births will continue to drive enrollment. Importantly, realizing future growth in enrollment depends on stronger middle and high schools as half of growth is projected in these grades. Information from the Master Facilities Plan should be used to support facilities planning in the District. Specifically, next steps from the Master Facilities Plan should continue to anticipate growth in public school enrollment, with a focus on improving options for middle and high schools.

## Appendix

D.C.'s public<sup>2</sup> school enrollment and population have been increasing in tandem since 2012, so changing demographic patterns raise questions about projected growth in public school enrollment. Population growth in 2018 was 2,400 lower than the previous year (growth of 6,764 in 2018 compared to 9,116 in 2017).<sup>3</sup> While D.C.'s growth [used to be driven in part by domestic migration](#), the District's current population gains are propelled entirely by new births and international immigration. In 2018, [936 more people](#) left the District ([including for other parts of the metropolitan area](#)) than moved in, reversing [the trend of strong in-migration](#) that had added nearly 58,000 residents to the District between 2000 and 2017.

Components of Population Growth, District of Columbia



<sup>2</sup> Here and throughout, public schools refer to both traditional public and public charter schools.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest.html>