



**D.C. POLICY**  
**CENTER**

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
PUBLIC AND PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS**

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

November 22<sup>nd</sup> at 9:30am

John A. Wilson Building

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

Good morning, Chairperson 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 Public Hearing on Academic Achievement in the District of Columbia Public and Public Charter Schools.

Learning outcomes in D.C. are on the rise compared to the rest of the nation and other large cities. This is something to celebrate. Back in 2003, D.C.'s results on the national assessment (NAEP) in all four grade and subject combinations ranked last or almost last compared to the eight other participating large cities. By 2019, D.C. surpassed many cities, rising to the middle of the pack or better out of 25 cities – and the list of surpassed cities includes other gentrifying cities like Los Angeles and Philadelphia.

In addition, learning outcomes are improving across student groups in recent years on the state assessment (PARCC). From 2014-15 to 2018-19, students in all major subgroups (Black, Latino, white, at-risk, Special Education, and English Learner students) made gains in both Math and English Language Arts (ELA). There are a few trends to note. Overall, students made larger improvements in ELA than Math. By race and ethnicity, Latino students made the largest combined gains across both subjects. By special population, English Learners and at-risk students had higher gains than Students with Disabilities.

However, even with these positive trends, D.C. has a long way to go to close persistent achievement gaps. Achievement gaps in ELA are generally narrowing slowly, most of all for Latino students. On the other hand, achievement gaps in Math are generally widening for all groups aside from Latino students. Across both subjects, achievement gaps are now larger for Students with Disabilities, even though more students in this group are scoring higher (in Level 3), moving closer to the standard of meeting or exceeding expectations (Level 4).

To close achievement gaps especially for student groups where progress has been slower, D.C. must use growth as a guiding metric to highlight successful schools and their approaches. One way to do this is to examine Median Growth Percentile (MGP) data by student group and subject from D.C.'s school report card. MGP involves a complicated calculation, but it provides important insight by comparing the improvement in a student's score compared to students with similar performance in the previous year.

Using this metric, the D.C. Policy Center identified 20 elementary and 12 middle “leveler” schools with the very highest growth for at-risk students. These schools are located in all wards aside from Ward 3, and they serve student populations who are between 9 percent and 83 percent at-risk.

The District could then think about how to leverage this knowledge to best serve at-risk students. Here’s an example for at-risk students:

- More at-risk students could attend leveler schools through an at-risk preference in the common lottery or an emphasis on growth as a key metric for school decisions (currently, about 46 percent of students are at-risk at these schools).
- Transit options could be improved for neighborhoods where many at-risk students live but don’t have easy access on public transit to leveler schools.
- Best practices for improving at-risk students’ learning outcomes at leveler schools could be more widely shared – EmpowerK12 has done this with their Bold Improvement schools. This could expand high-quality options for at-risk students as there aren’t enough spaces for all at-risk students at leveler schools: leveler schools have capacity for about 12,500 students, far fewer than the estimated 32,000 elementary and middle school at-risk students.

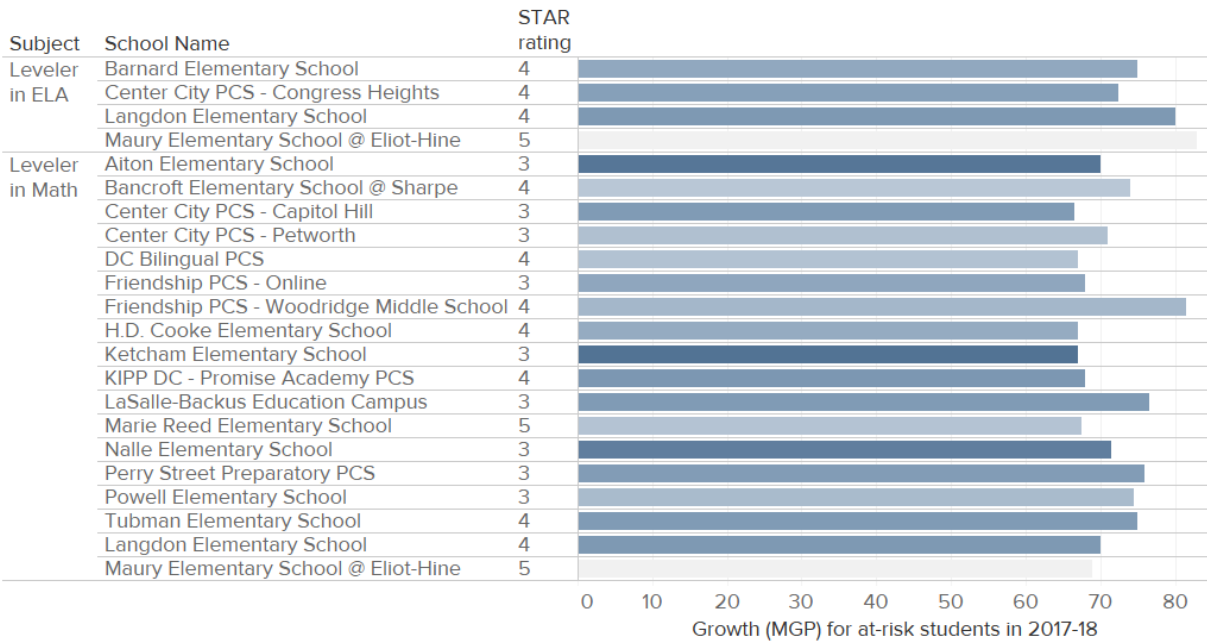
D.C. could also expand this analysis of growth to identify successful high schools when data are available next year and to highlight schools with high growth for other groups, including Black students, Students with Disabilities, and English Learners.

In addition to growth in learning outcomes to close achievement gaps, the District should monitor how well students are eventually prepared for college and career. Data from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) suggest that for every 100 students that begin 9th grade, 68 will graduate from high school, 53 will enroll in a college or university, and only 20 will receive a post-secondary degree within six years, but we don’t know how that differs by high school or over time. The District should review these post-secondary completion rates annually, and think creatively about how to track life and workforce outcomes for former high school students (especially for those who don’t attend post-secondary), perhaps through a longitudinal survey.

Thank you for your time. I’m happy to answer any questions you may have.

## Supporting figures

### Elementary schools that level the playing field for at-risk students



Percent at-risk



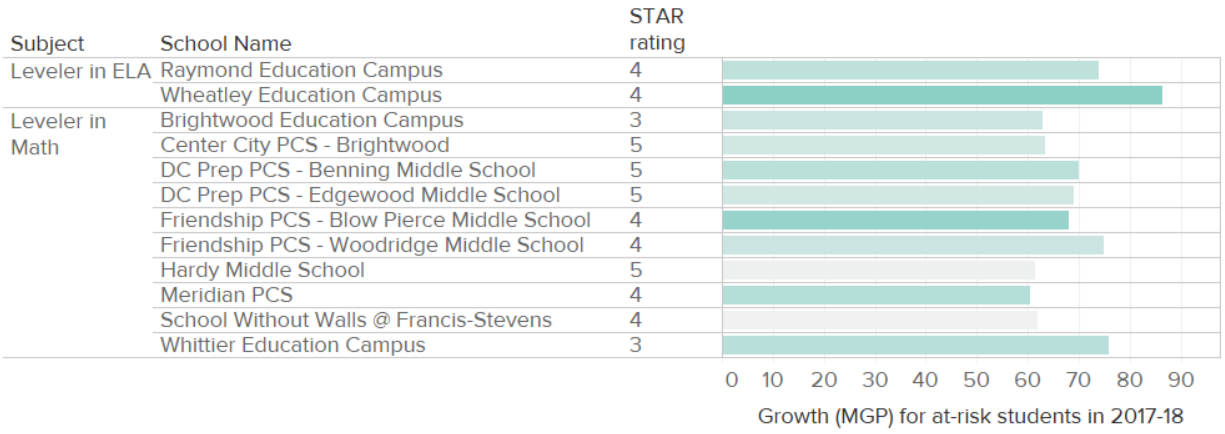
Source: D.C. Policy Center analysis of Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)'s state report card data.

Note: Friendship PCS - Woodridge Middle School is included as an elementary school because the school serves students in grades 4 and 5.



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## Middle schools that level the playing field for at-risk students

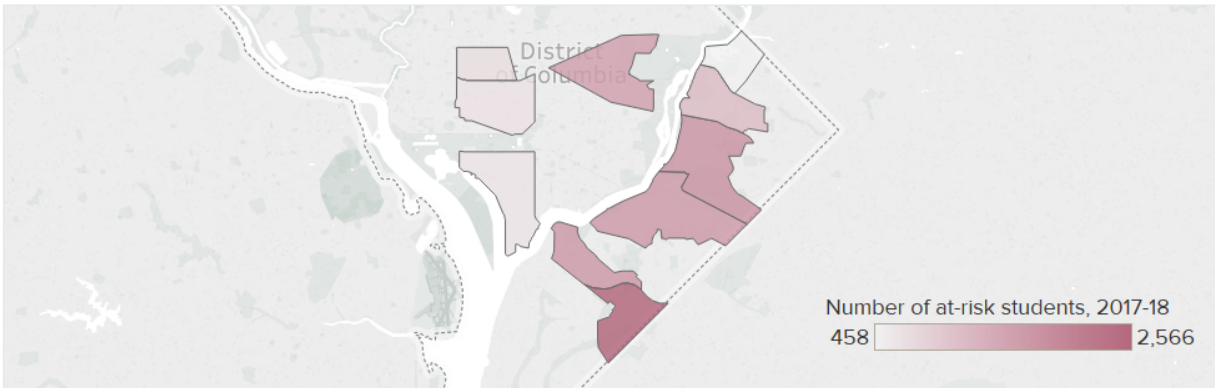


Source: D.C. Policy Center analysis of Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)'s state report card data.



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## Neighborhood clusters with high levels of need that lack easy access to elementary leveler schools



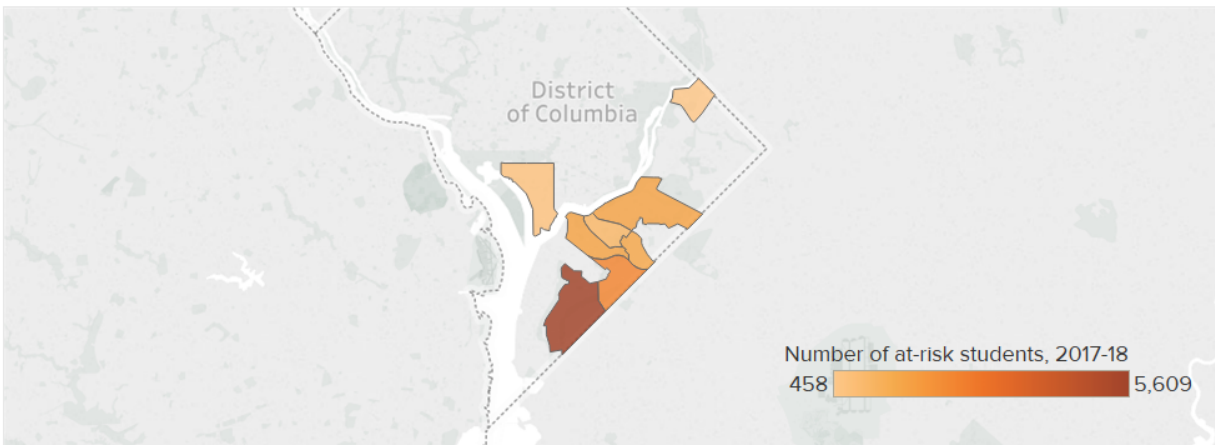
Neighborhood Clusters	Number of students who are at-risk	Percent of students who are at-risk
Douglas, Shipley Terrace	2,566	68%
River Terrace, Benning, Greenway, Dupont Park	1,798	60%
Sheridan, Barry Farm, Buena Vista	1,716	68%
Twining, Fairlawn, Randle Highlands, Penn Branch, Fort Davis Park, Fort Dupont	1,682	56%
Ivy City, Arboretum, Trinidad, Carver Langston	1,581	57%
Mayfair, Hillbrook, Mahaning Heights	1,179	58%
Shaw, Logan Circle	716	47%
Downtown, Chinatown, Penn Quarters, Mount Vernon Square, North Capitol Street	657	57%
Southwest Employment Area, Southwest/Waterfront, Fort McNair, Buzzard Point	631	59%
Eastland Gardens, Kenilworth	458	68%

Source: D.C. Policy Center analysis of Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)'s DC School Report Card data and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME)'s EdScape data.



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## Neighborhood clusters with high levels of need that lack easy access to middle leveler schools



Neighborhood Cluster Names	Number of students who are at-risk	Percent of students who are at-risk
Woodland/Fort Stanton, Garfield Heights, Knox Hill	1,602	74%
Historic Anacostia	1,029	69%
Congress Heights, Bellevue, Washington Highlands	5,609	68%
Douglas, Shipley Terrace	2,566	68%
Eastland Gardens, Kenilworth	458	68%
Sheridan, Barry Farm, Buena Vista	1,716	68%
Southwest Employment Area, Southwest/Waterfront, Fort McNair, Buzzard Point	631	59%
Twining, Fairlawn, Randle Highlands, Penn Branch, Fort Davis Park, Fort Dupont	1,682	56%

Source: D.C. Policy Center analysis of Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)'s DC School Report Card data and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME)'s EdScape data.



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