

# 2018-19 STATE OF D.C. SCHOOLS



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Education Policy Initiative

## About the D.C. Policy Center

The D.C. Policy Center is a non-partisan, independent 501(c)(3) think tank focused on advancing policies for a vibrant and growing economy in the District of Columbia. We are dedicated to providing objective, targeted, and high-quality data analyses to support a rigorous and productive policy debate.

## About this report

This *State of D.C. Schools* report is a first-of-its-kind systemwide overview of education in D.C. meant to help local residents, and especially parents of current and future D.C. public school children, better understand where D.C.'s traditional public and public charter schools have made progress. This report also addresses where targeted improvements are still necessary. We hope this *State of D.C. Schools* report will help inform local education policymakers in the development of future policy decisions.

## Acknowledgements

This report was prepared with generous support from Education Forward DC. We are grateful to the DC Public Charter School Board for the use of their beautiful photos throughout this report. Photos courtesy of the DC Public Charter School Board except where otherwise noted.

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# 2018-19

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# STATE OF D.C. SCHOOLS

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# INTRODUCTION

There are two major reasons to be optimistic about the state of public education in the District of Columbia. After decades of decline, enrollment in public schools has increased annually since 2010. Learning outcomes are also on the rise as measured by both state and national assessments.

Nonetheless, public confidence in the progress of D.C.'s schools is uneven, especially in the wake of developments around enrollment, suspensions, special education, school closure, and graduation practices. Achievement gaps persist, especially for Black students, English learners, and students with disabilities.

Amid this broader context, this *State of D.C. Schools* report examines systemwide changes, gains, and weaknesses of the past several years, in order to give a sense of how families and students experience public education in the District of Columbia. The report presents high-level information on schools, students, performance, and school environment in schools citywide, with special attention to the experiences of students with disabilities, English learners,

and at-risk students. The report closes with a year in review and a look toward what's next for public education in D.C.

**\$10,980**

D.C.'s per-pupil funding level in fiscal year 2020, a very high level compared to other large urban districts.

## What makes D.C. unique?

While some other school systems like New York City or Boston experience unique systemwide factors of mayoral control, high per-pupil funding that is not tied to property taxes, and a lot of public school choice, D.C. is unique in that it exhibits all three of these factors.

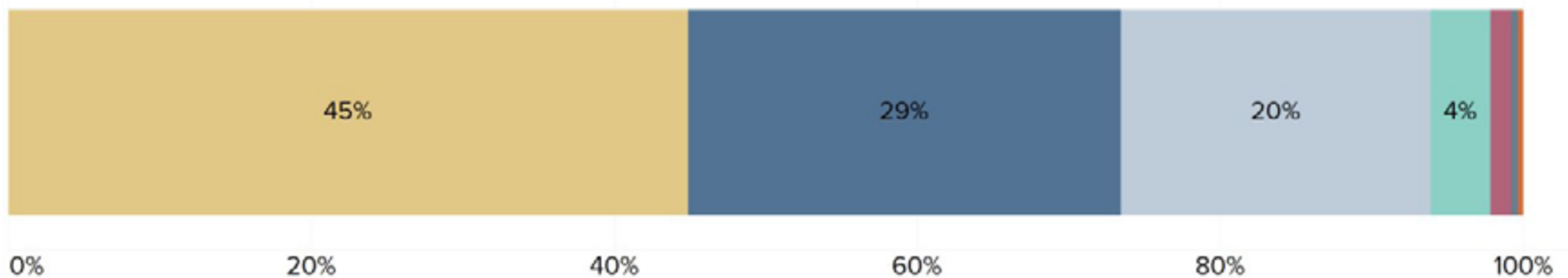
## MAYORAL CONTROL

The 2007 Public Education Reform Amendment Act established mayoral control over District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), the traditional public school system in D.C. It also created a state education agency, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), which is responsible for administering federal education programs, compiling and sharing citywide data, and providing non-academic services (for example, transportation of

students with disabilities), among other duties. Today, both DCPS and OSSE report to the Mayor of the District of Columbia.

The same law made several other significant reforms as well. It replaced the former local board of education with the State Board of Education (SBOE), which has approval authority over statewide regulations. It also established the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) as the sole authorizer of public charter schools in the District.

*Public pre-kindergarten through grade 12 school enrollment by school type in school year 2018-19*



Source: Deputy Mayor for Education (DME). 2019. EdScape Beta: "Trends in Enrollment by Sector". Available at [edscape.dc.gov](https://edscape.dc.gov).

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Enrollment category

- DCPS non-geocoded
- DCPS alternative
- DCPS citywide
- DCPS application high school
- DCPS out of boundary
- DCPS in-boundary
- Public charter



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# 2007

The year mayoral control was established over public schools in the District of Columbia.

## FINANCING

D.C. has one of the of very highest per-pupil funding levels (\$10,980 in fiscal year 2020) when compared to other large urban districts, according to an EdBuild analysis. D.C.'s financing is also unique in that local revenue for education comes from general funds, not property taxes, which means that school budgets should not necessarily be higher in areas of the city with more expensive real estate.

## A HIGH DEGREE OF PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE

In D.C., 29 percent of pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students attend their in-boundary DCPS school. About half of students enroll in public charter schools, and the remaining quarter of students enroll at DCPS schools as out-of-boundary students or at citywide DCPS schools, including application high schools.

This report – an analysis of the overall educational ecosystem — shows that D.C.'s schools have made dramatic gains, but still have more to do to achieve success for all students. It focuses on school year 2018-19, and changes since 2014-15, which is the year that data quality and reporting improved in many areas.





ROSS SCHOOL



# SCHOOLS

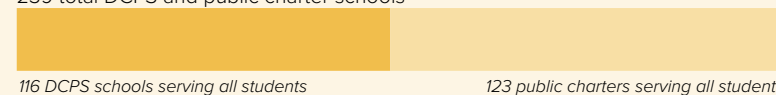
D.C. has 239 DCPS and public charter schools: 19 that serve adults, youth in alternative programs, or students with disabilities, and 220 that serve students in pre-kindergarten to grade 12. This section scans the public education landscape by sector, type, size, location, diversity of students, program offerings, and ratings.

## D.C. has similar numbers of traditional public and public charter schools.

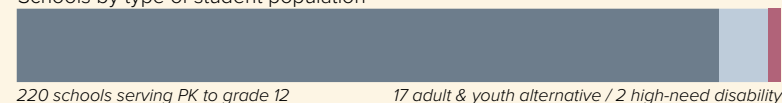
In school year 2018-19, there were 239 public schools serving students in all grades, 15 more schools than five years earlier (school year 2014-15). These 239 schools were almost equally distributed between DCPS and public charter Local Education Agencies (LEAs, or school districts), making D.C. a unique education system. Of these 239 schools, 116 were DCPS schools and 123 were public charter schools managed by 66 LEAs.

### At-a-glance: DCPS and public charter schools and the students they serve

239 total DCPS and public charter schools



Schools by type of student population



220 total schools serving PK to grade 12 by sector



Out of these 239 total schools, 220 schools serve students in pre-kindergarten to grade 12.

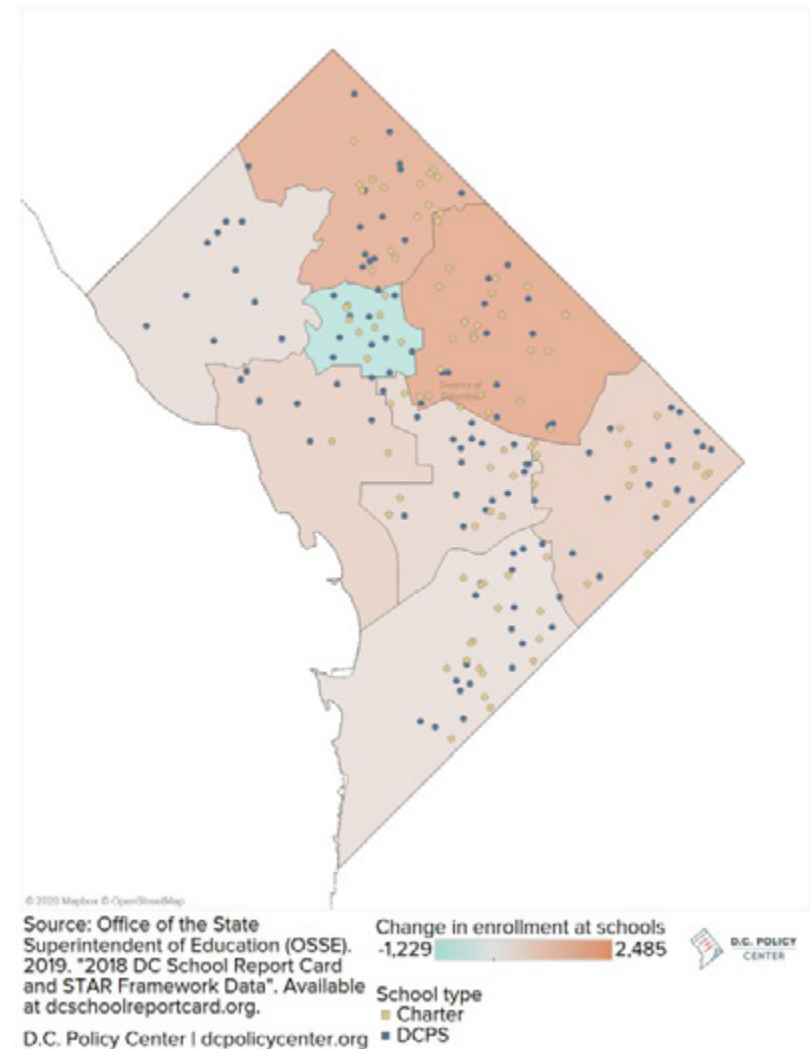
DCPS served about 47,100 pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students across 108 schools in school year 2018-19. KIPP DC was the largest public charter LEA, with about 6,300 students in 16 schools. Among public charter LEAs serving pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students, 16 had more than one school (like KIPP) and the other 40 public charter LEAs only had one school. D.C. also stands out for its 17 schools that are focused on serving adults or offering alternative programs to youth.

**239** In school year 2018-19, there were 239 DCPS and public charter schools serving students in all grades, 15 more schools than 5 years earlier.

## Wards 5, 7, and 8 have the most schools in the District.

The ward with the highest number of schools in the District is Ward 8, with 41 public schools. (Ward 8 is also the ward with the highest number of students living within its boundaries.) Wards 5 and 7 have the next highest number of schools, with 39 and 37 schools, respectively. Out of all wards, Wards 6 and 8 have the highest number of DCPS schools (19 DCPS schools each in Ward 6

## School locations 2018-2019 and pre-kindergarten to grade 12 enrollment change 2014-15 to 2018-19





and Ward 8), while Ward 5 has the most public charter schools (27 schools).

Pre-kindergarten to grade 12 enrollment grew the most between 2014-15 and 2018-19 at schools in Wards 4 and 5, increasing by 2,214 students in Ward 4 and by 2,485 students in Ward 5. Enrollment at schools in Ward 1, on the other hand, decreased by 1,229 students.

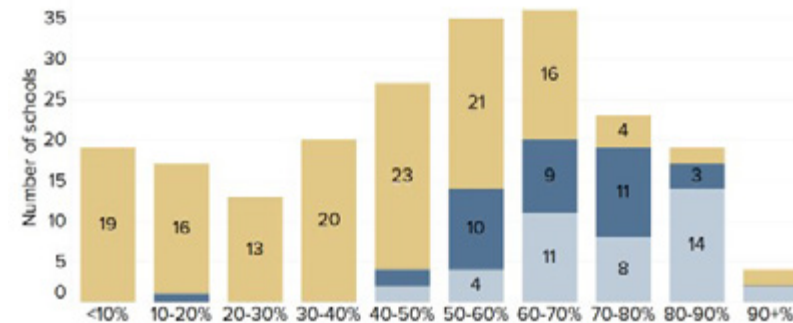
## Schools are more diverse economically than racially and ethnically.

Racial and ethnic diversity among D.C. public schools is low. In school year 2018-19, the District's public school population was 67 percent Black. Within that context, 102 out of 220 schools had a student body that was at least 90 percent Black. Seventy of these 102 schools were in Wards 7 and 8. Amid a District-wide public school student population that was 12 percent white, 13 schools had a majority-white student body. Eleven of these 13 majority-white schools were in Wards 3 and 6.

**102**

In school year 2018-2019, 102 of the District's 220 pre-kindergarten through grade 12 schools had a student body that was at least 90 percent Black.

### Distribution of at-risk students

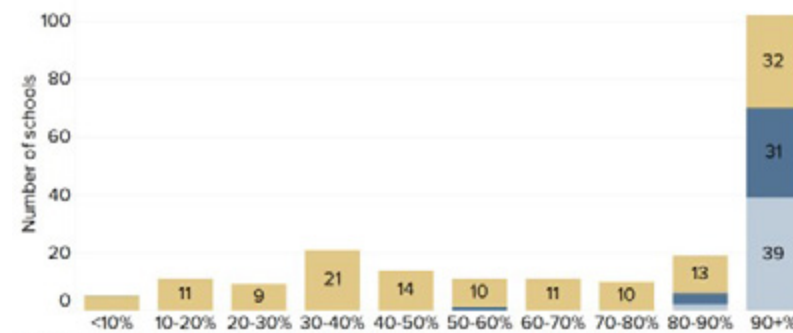


Source: DC School Report Card, 2019. Available at [dcschoolreportcard.org](https://dcschoolreportcard.org)

Note: Adult and Alternative schools have been excluded. Seven closed schools that did not have data for school year 2018-19 have also been excluded.

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### Distribution of Black students



Source: DC School Report Card, 2019. Available at [dcschoolreportcard.org](https://dcschoolreportcard.org)

Note: Adult and Alternative schools have been excluded. Seven closed schools that did not have data for school year 2018-19 have also been excluded.

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19

While the distribution of at-risk students is more even than racial distribution across schools citywide, 19 schools still have a student body made up of less than 10 percent of at-risk students. Nine of these 19 schools are in Ward 3.

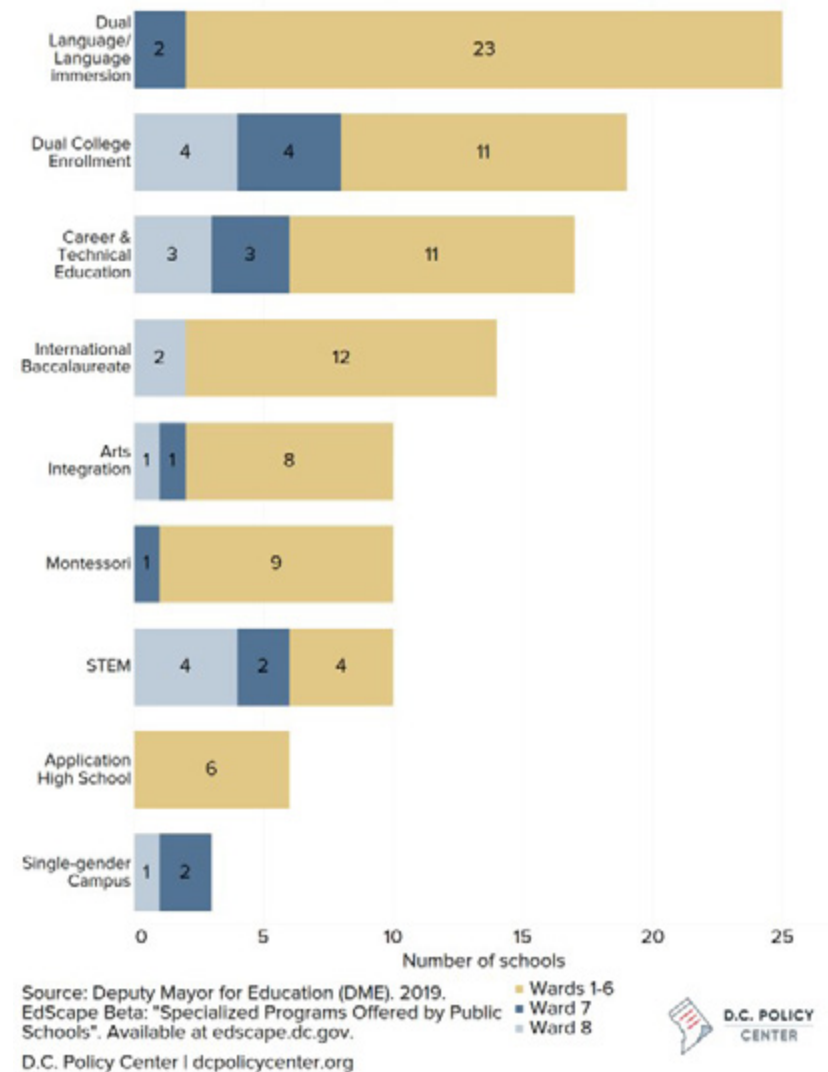
About half of D.C.'s public school students were considered to be "at-risk" for academic failure in school year 2018-19 (a local statutory designation covering students receiving public benefits, experiencing homelessness, being in the foster care system, or being over-age in high school).

At-risk students were distributed more evenly across schools citywide, demonstrating that schools are more likely to have students from a mix of economic backgrounds than they are to have students from a mix of racial or ethnic backgrounds. Even so, 19 schools had a low concentration (less than 10 percent) of at-risk students – and nine of these schools were in Ward 3.

## Dual language, dual college enrollment, and career and technical education are the most frequently offered specialized programs.

Across all 220 pre-kindergarten through grade 12 public schools in the city, 67 offer specialized programs (and some schools offer

*Specialized programs offered in school year 2018-19*





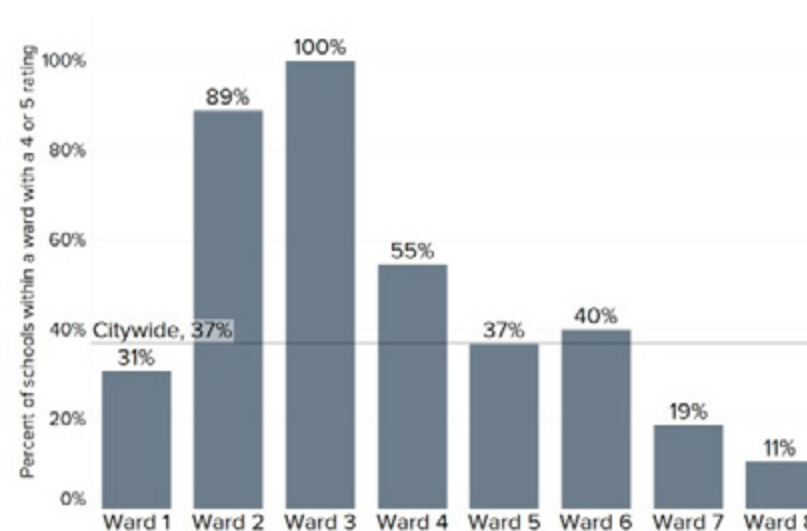
**67** of the 220 pre-kindergarten to grade 12 DCPS and public charter schools offer at least one specialized program. Dual language, dual enrollment in college, and career and technical education are the most commonly offered programs.

more than one). Of 10 commonly offered specialized programs, dual language, dual enrollment in college, and career and technical education are the most common, offered across at least 17 schools. The number of dual college enrollment program offerings has increased the most since school year 2014-15, and dual college enrollment is the only specialized program offered across all of the city's eight wards. Wards 2 and 3 have the fewest specialized programs, while Ward 5 has the most, offering 29 programs.

## School performance

School year 2018-19 is the second year running that public schools have been rated on the D.C. School Report Card, which gives District of Columbia families a look into all public schools in the District. Citywide, 37 percent of schools received the highest overall ratings of a 4 or 5 on the school report card, but these schools are not equally distributed across the city: Wards 1, 7, and 8 have lower shares of these schools than other wards.

*Distribution of schools with a rating of 4 or 5, by ward*



Source: Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE). 2019. DC School Report Card data. Available at [dcschoolreportcard.org](https://dcschoolreportcard.org).

Note: The distribution was calculated as the number of schools in a particular ward with a rating of 4 or 5 on D.C.'s school report card divided by the total number of schools with ratings in that ward.

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**37%** The proportion of DCPS and public charter schools that received a 4 or 5 – the highest ratings – on the D.C. School Report Card in school year 2018-19.





# STUDENTS

The number of students in D.C.'s public schools has been increasing in recent years, and the demographics of public school students are shifting as the city changes. This section examines enrollment over time, students' demographics, where students live and go to school, and characteristics of special populations.

## **More and more students are attending DCPS and public charter schools, especially in middle school grades.**

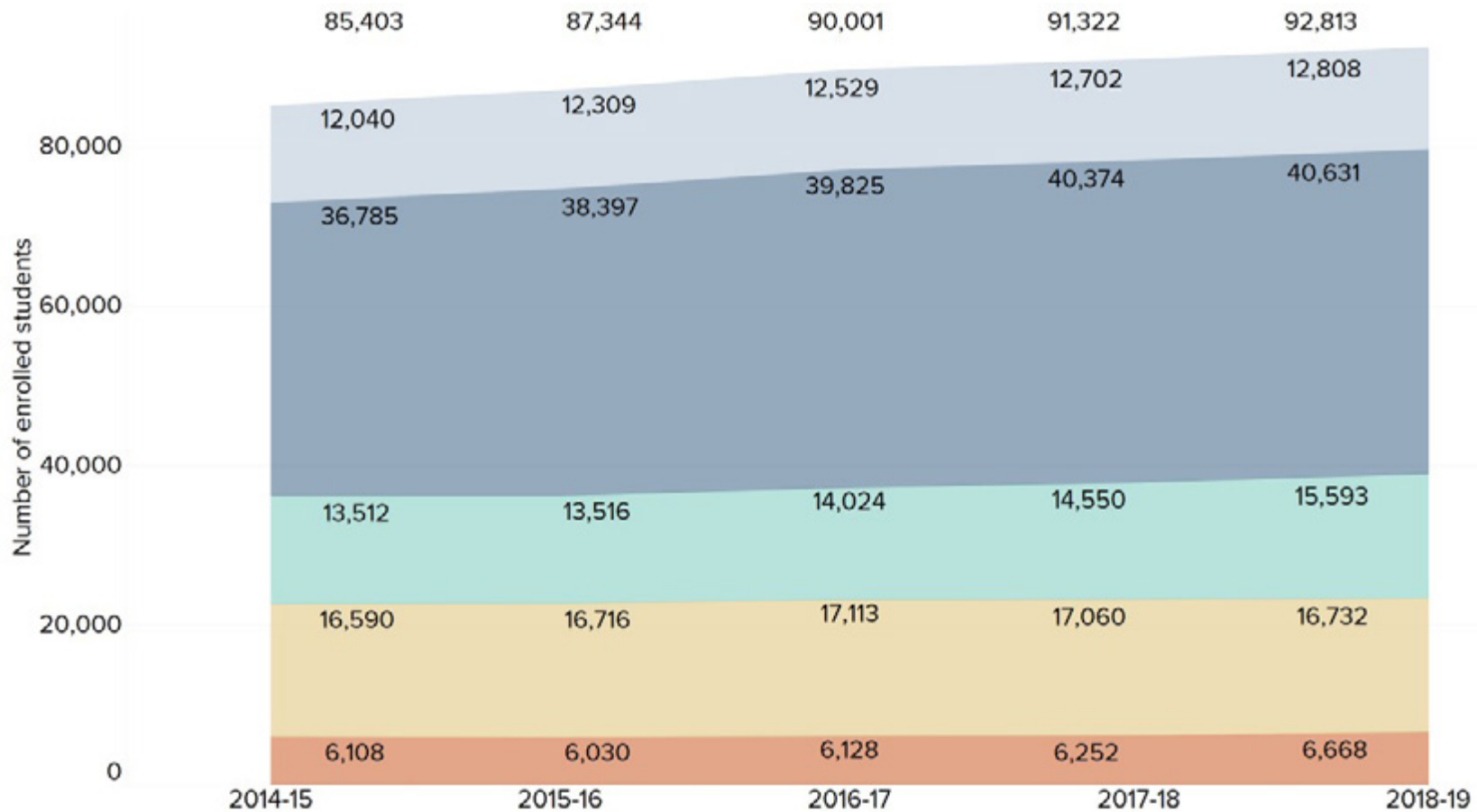
Enrollment in the city's public schools rose to almost 85,800 pre-kindergarten through grade 12 students in school year 2018-19. In that year, DCPS and public charter schools also enrolled 6,700 students at adult and alternative schools, and an additional 400 students at schools exclusively serving students with disabilities who had high levels of need.

Each school year from 2014-15 to 2018-19, an average of 1,700 more pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students enrolled in DCPS and public charter schools, representing two percent growth per year. Importantly, enrollment over this period grew the fastest in middle school grades, at four percent per year.

## **Most DCPS and public charter school students are Black, but the share of Latino and white students is growing every year.**

In 2018-19, 67 percent of pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students were Black, followed by 16 percent of students who were Latino, and 12 percent of students who were white. Since 2014-15, the share of Latino students grew by one percentage point and the share of white students increased by two percentage points, while the share of Black students declined by five percentage

### Enrollment by grade band



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2019.  
Available at [osse.dc.gov](http://osse.dc.gov).

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Grade band

- Pre-kindergarten (PK3-PK4)
- Elementary (K-5)
- Middle (6-8)
- High (9-12)
- Adult and Alternative



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points. This lines up with broader shifts in the racial and ethnic composition of 5 to 17 year-olds in the District: between 2014 and 2018, there was a three percentage point increase in the share of Latino residents, a two percentage point increase in white residents, and a five percent decrease in Black residents.

## In recent years, the percentage of students who are English learners has increased, while the percentage of students considered at-risk has decreased.

The share of DCPS and public charter school students who are students with disabilities increased from 14 percent of students in 2014-15 to 15 percent in 2018-19. The share of English learners increased from 9 percent to 12 percent over this same period.

The percentage of students identified as at-risk decreased from 50 percent in 2014-15 to 45 percent in 2018-19. This decline in at-risk students could reflect increasing incomes in D.C.: According to American Community Survey estimates, median family income rose significantly over roughly the same time frame, from \$87,151 in 2014 to \$106,528 in 2017 (adjusted for inflation).

### At-a-glance: Student special populations

D.C. provides supplementary funding for three special populations of students: at-risk students, English learners, and students with disabilities:

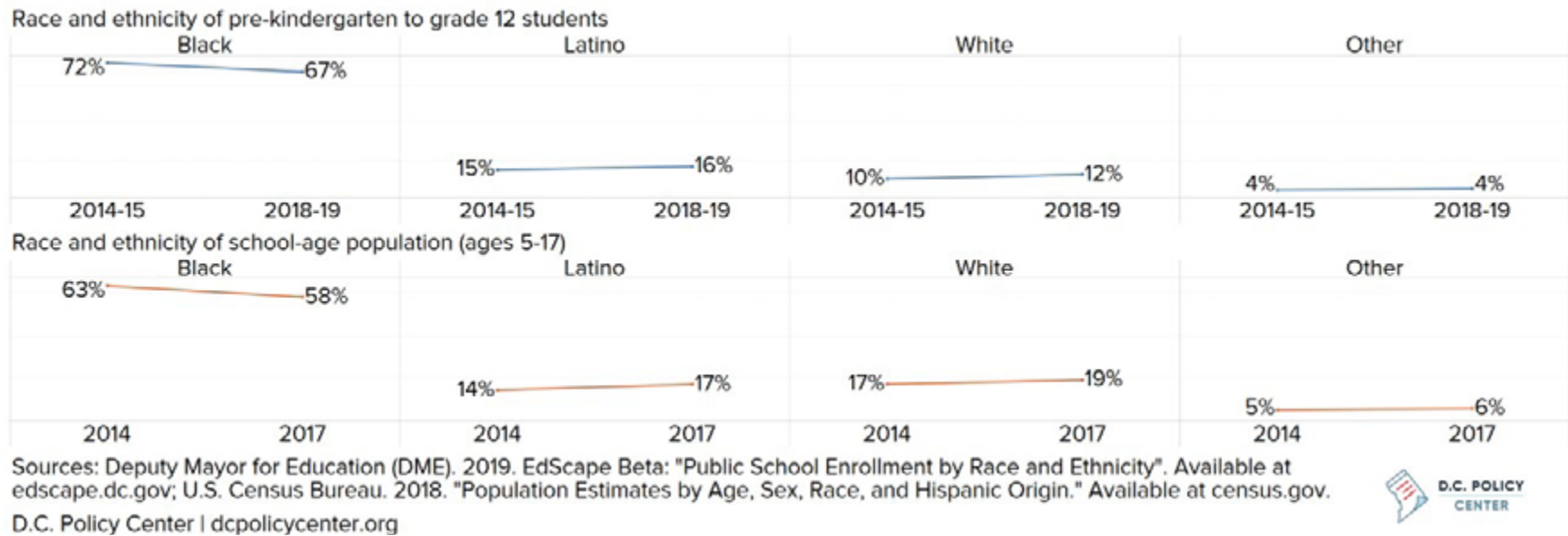
**At-risk:** In D.C., students are considered to be at-risk for academic failure for funding purposes if they receive food stamp or public benefits, are involved in the foster care system, experience homelessness, or are over-age in high school.

**English learners:** Students who have been screened for English language proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking by any school, and have been determined to be English learners, and who have not yet received a score of 5.0 or higher on the ACCESS assessment of English language proficiency, are identified as English learners.

**Students with disabilities:** Students who have been evaluated and found eligible to receive specialized instruction and related services in school and have been provided a finalized individual education program (IEP) are identified as students with disabilities.

*Source: D.C. School Report Card Technical Guide.*

### Race and ethnicity of pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students compared to school-age population



## The largest share of students live in Wards 7 and 8.

In school year 2018-19, almost half of school-aged students lived in Wards 7 and 8. Together, these wards were home to 43 percent of all pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students.

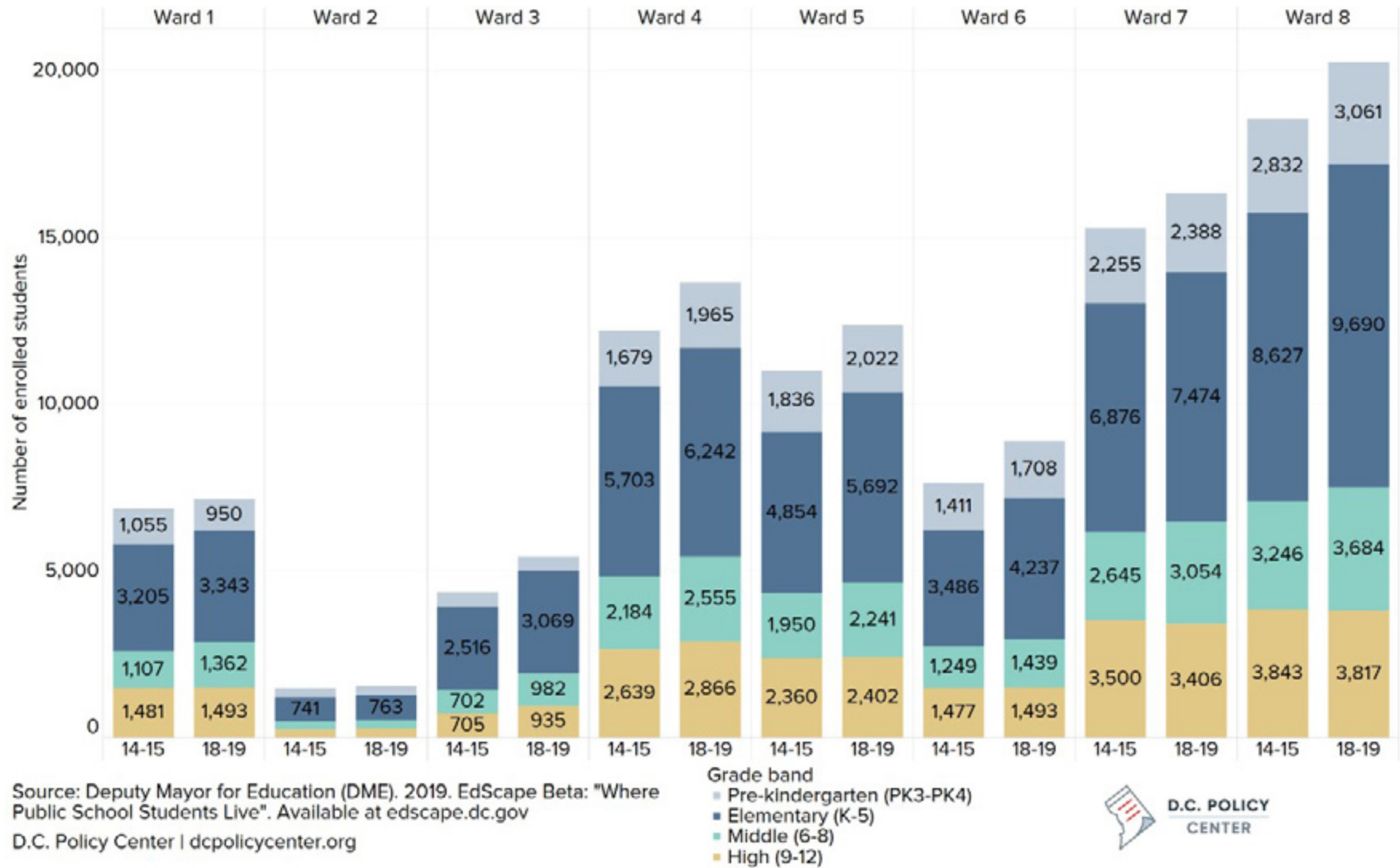
Student populations are growing in other wards. Ward 3 had the largest growth in students overall, with a 25 percent increase from school year 2014-15 to 2018-19. When looking at growth by grade

level, Ward 6 had the largest increase in pre-kindergarten students with a 21 percent gain, and Ward 3 had the largest increase in high school students, at 33 percent.

## Students in special populations are clustered in certain D.C. neighborhoods.

English learners tend to live in Columbia Heights, Mount Pleasant,

Where pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students live, school year 2018-19







Pleasant Plains, and Park View (Ward 1) and Brightwood Park, Crestwood, and Petworth (Ward 4). The neighborhoods with the greatest numbers of students with disabilities are Congress Heights, Bellevue, and Washington Highlands (Ward 8). Finally, neighborhoods in Wards 7 and 8 have the highest numbers of at-risk students. Over the past five years, the number of at-risk students in both of these wards has increased, while the number of at-risk students elsewhere in the city has largely decreased.

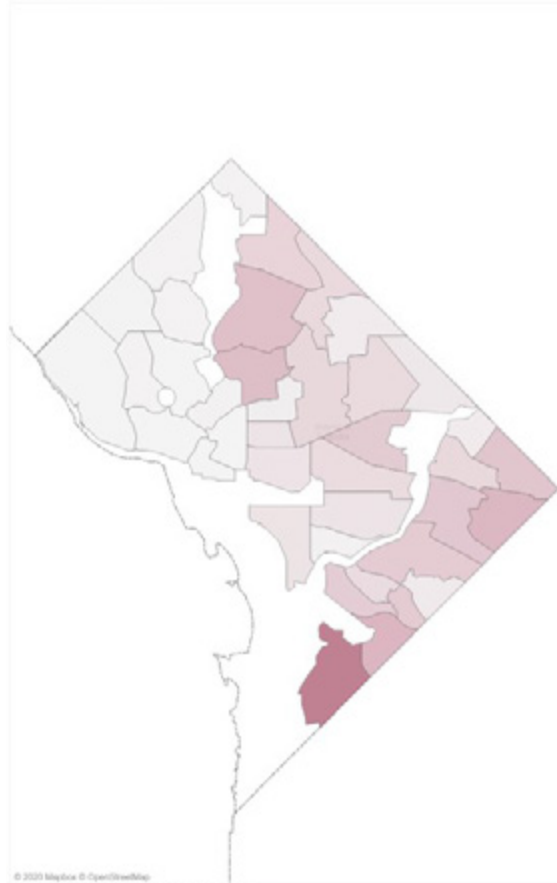
## **D.C. students exercise a lot of public school choice across DCPS and public charter schools.**

Public school students in D.C. can attend their in-boundary DCPS school, another DCPS school as an out-of-boundary student, a DCPS citywide school, or a public charter school.

In school year 2018-19, less than a third of students attended their in-boundary DCPS school, while 45 percent of the student population attended a public charter school, and 26 percent attended a DCPS school other than their in-boundary school. Students attend their in-boundary school at the highest rates in Ward 3, where schools have the lowest percentages of students who are at-risk, and at the lowest rates across Wards 5, 7, and 8. The share of students enrolled at public charter schools is largest in middle school grades.

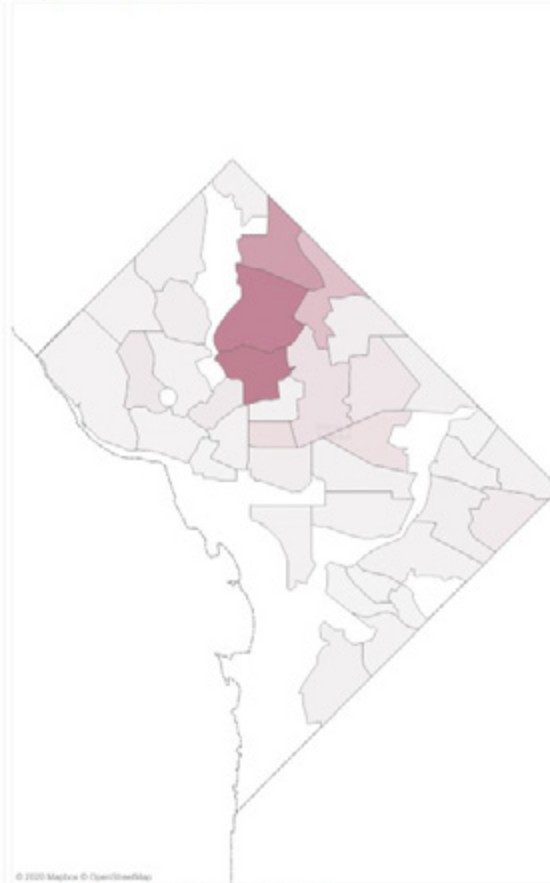
## Where students in special populations live

At-risk students



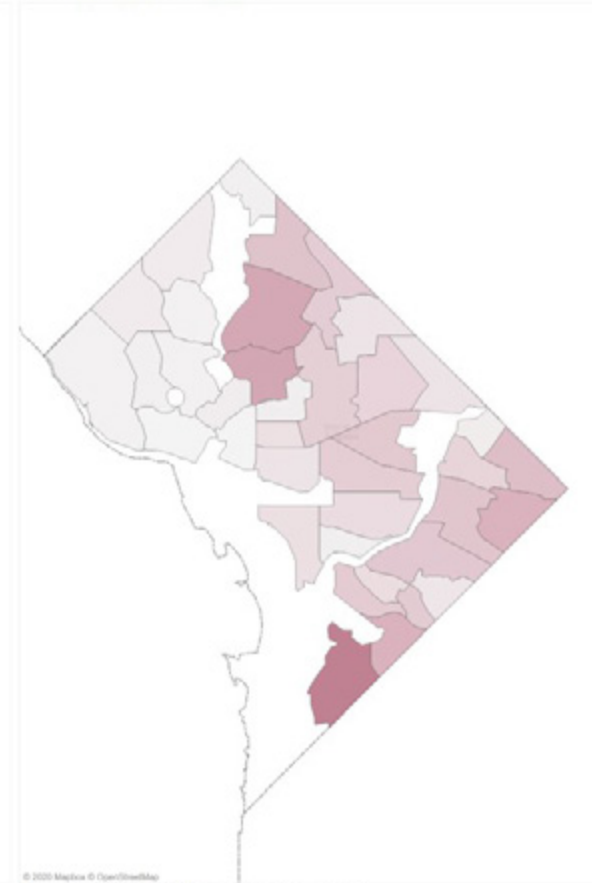
Count of At-risk Students  
13

English Learner students



Count of English Learner Students  
12

Students with Disabilities

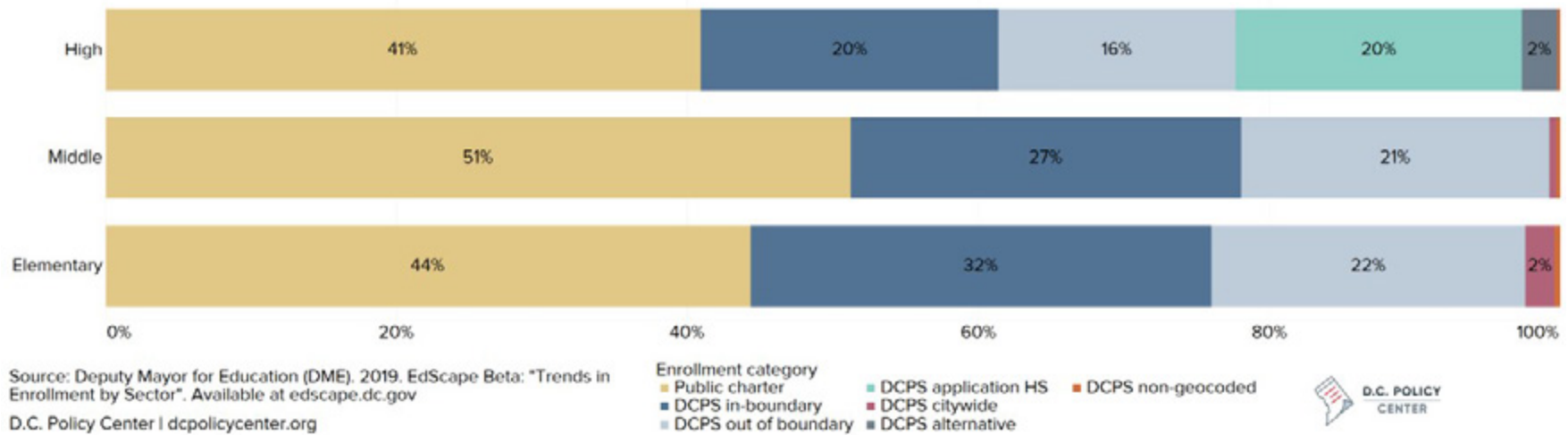


Count of Special Education Students  
19

Source: Deputy Mayor for Education (DME). 2019. EdScape Beta: "Where Students Receiving Special Education Services Live". "Where Students At Risk of Academic Failure Live". "Where English Language Public School Students Live". Available at [edscape.dc.gov](https://edscape.dc.gov).  
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### Public school enrollment by school type and grade band, school year 2018-19



## Students who live in Wards 1, 5, and 7 attend school outside their home ward at the highest rates.

The share of students commuting to a school outside their ward is highest for students living in Wards 1, 5, or 7. The most common commutes for students living in these wards are to Wards 4 and 5. Students living in Ward 3 attend school in their home ward at the highest rate.

High school students living in Wards 7 and 8 currently have the longest commutes: they live a median of 3.3 miles away (as measured by walking distance) from their school. In elementary

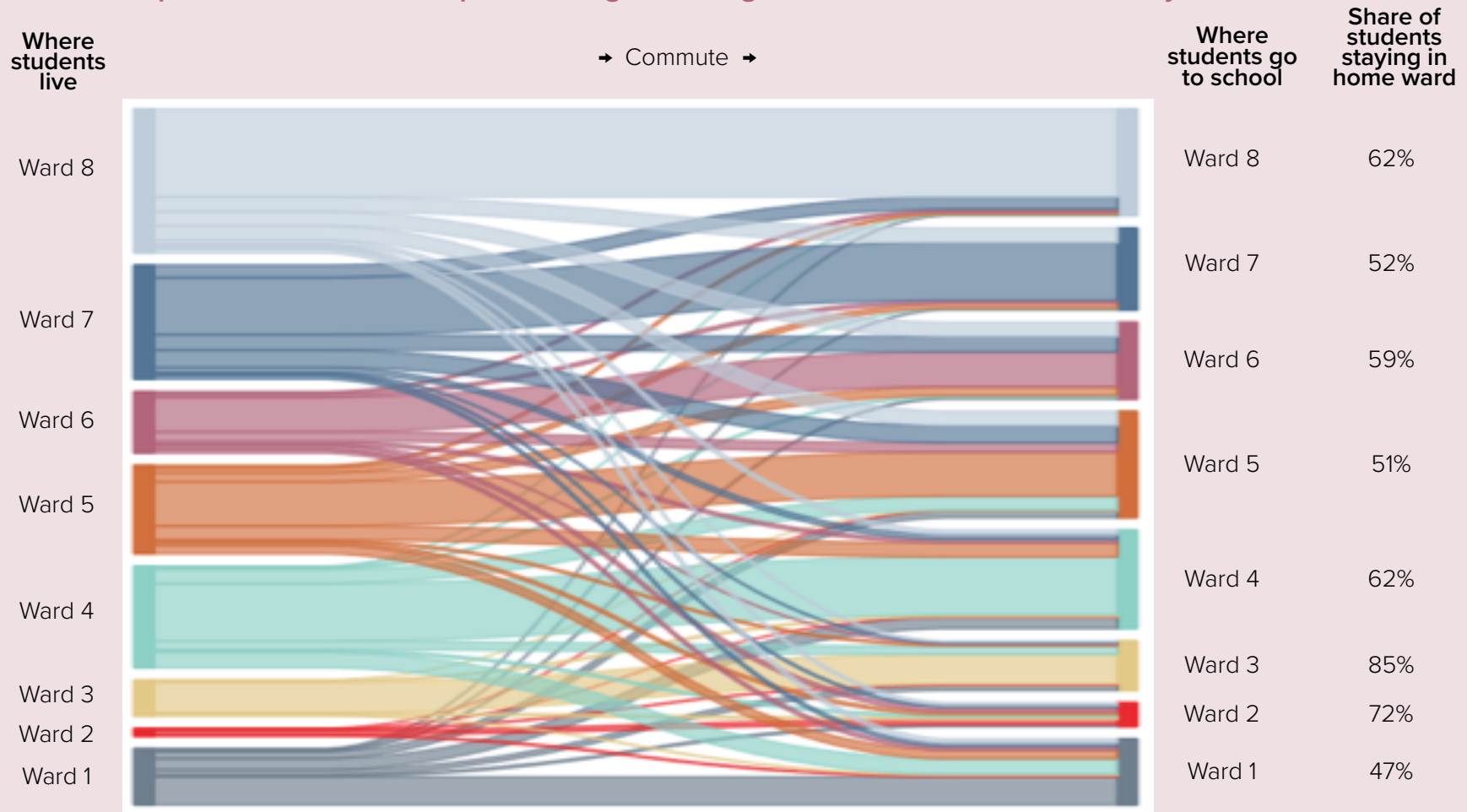
< 1/3

Less than 1/3 of students attend their in-boundary DCPS school, while 45 percent attend a public charter school and 26 percent attend a DCPS school other than their in-boundary school.





## DCPS and public charter school pre-kindergarten to grade 12 student commutes, by ward



Source: Deputy Mayor for Education (DME). 2019. EdScape Beta. Available at [edscape.dc.gov](https://edscape.dc.gov).  
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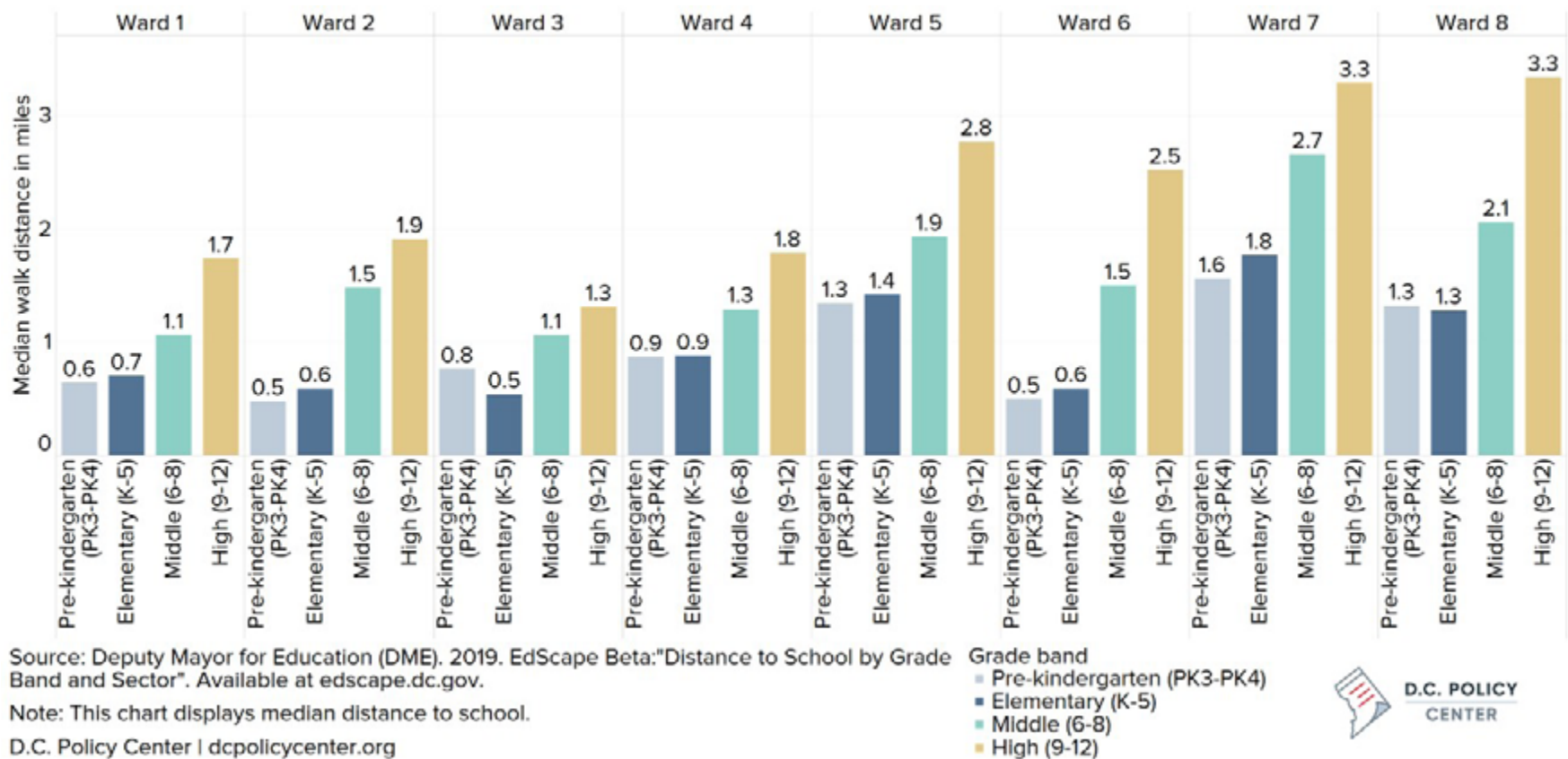




school grades, students living in Wards 5 and 7 live the farthest from their school. Students in Ward 3 generally have the shortest distance between home and school (and attend in-boundary

schools at the highest rates). In every ward, high school students experience the longest commutes, while pre-kindergarten and elementary school students have the shortest commutes.

*How far pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students live from school by ward, school year 2018-19*







# PERFORMANCE

Discussion of student performance explores the extent to which students are prepared for successful lives as adults. This section covers student performance on state and national assessments, the state report card, and post-secondary outcomes, with a focus on achievement gaps and progress over time.

## D.C. outperforms other large cities with improvements in learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes in D.C. are on the rise, relative to the rest of the nation and to other large cities. Every other year, D.C.'s fourth and eighth graders participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is often referred to as "the nation's report card."

NAEP results for math and reading in 2019 showed that while the score for the average U.S. student slipped or stayed flat over the

### Change in the gap between NAEP scores for D.C. and the national average, 2003 to 2019

#### Eighth grade math

↓  
↑  
Decreased  
from  
33 to 12  
points

#### Eighth grade reading

↓  
↑  
Decreased  
from  
22 to 12  
points

#### Fourth grade math

↓  
↑  
Decreased  
from  
29 to 5  
points

#### Fourth grade reading

↓  
↑  
Decreased  
from  
28 to 5  
points

previous two years, student achievement levels in D.C. improved in three out of four grade and subject combinations (only one other state did so). D.C.'s growth on this assessment since 2003 (the first year of NAEP assessments for large cities) reveals that the gap between scores in D.C. and in the U.S. has been closing.

In 2003, D.C.'s statewide results on the national assessment ranked last or almost last among the eight other large cities participating in a city-level NAEP assessment in all four grade and

subject combinations. By 2019, D.C. had surpassed many cities, rising to the middle of the group or better in all four grade and subject combinations out of 25 participating cities.

## Black and Latino students in D.C. now outperform their peers across the U.S.

Black and Latino students in D.C. have closed the gaps relative to their national peers. For example, between 2003 and 2019, the overall score for Black students in D.C. in fourth grade math grew by 24 points compared to an 8-point increase nationally. The overall score for Latino students in D.C. grew by 28 points compared to a 10-point increase nationally. In 2019, both groups outperformed their Black and Latino peers across the country by two points. NAEP scores on the grade 4 math assessment improved by more for D.C.'s Black and Latino students than several other cities, including Los Angeles and Boston.

## Student achievement on D.C.'s state assessment is also on the rise, both overall and across student groups.

Since 2014-15, the District has participated in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

### Change in the gap between NAEP scores for D.C. and other large cities, 2003 to 2019

#### Eighth grade math



2003:  
Ranked last  
2019:  
13th of 25

#### Eighth grade reading



2003:  
8th of 9  
2019:  
13th of 25

#### Fourth grade math



2003:  
Ranked last  
2019:  
10th of 25

#### Fourth grade reading



2003:  
Ranked last  
2019:  
9th of 25



# 37%

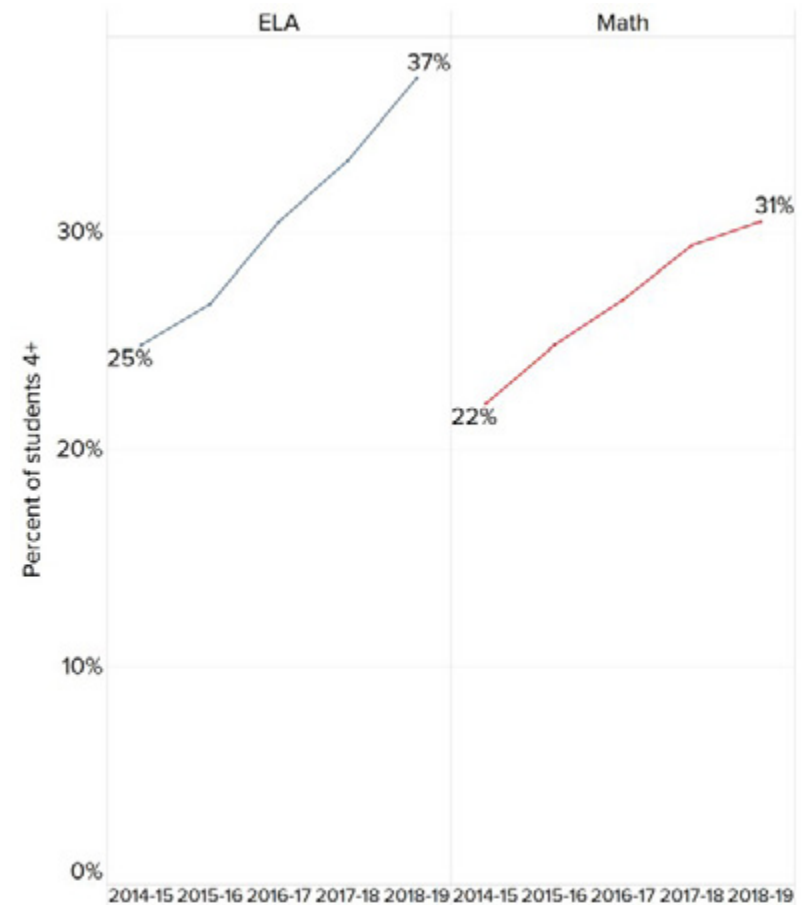
The proportion of students whose PARCC scores met or exceeded expectations in English Language Arts (ELA) in school year 2018-19.

PARCC is more rigorous than the previous state assessment, and measures the knowledge and skills ultimately needed to succeed in college and careers. PARCC is administered every year to students in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school in Math and English Language Arts (ELA).

Compared to NAEP, PARCC provides more detail on the achievement levels of D.C.'s students at the school level in addition to the state.

Student achievement as measured by PARCC has improved from school year 2014-15 to 2018-19 for both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, but those who met or exceeded expectations – the standard for being ready for college or career – remained low at 37 percent of students in ELA and 31 percent in Math in school year 2018-19. Students improved faster for ELA with the share of those meeting and exceeding expectations increasing by 12 percentage points over the past five years. Math gains were also strong, but lagged behind ELA with a 9 percentage point increase.

*Students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PARCC assessment, overall*



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2019. Available at [results.osse.dc.gov](https://results.osse.dc.gov)



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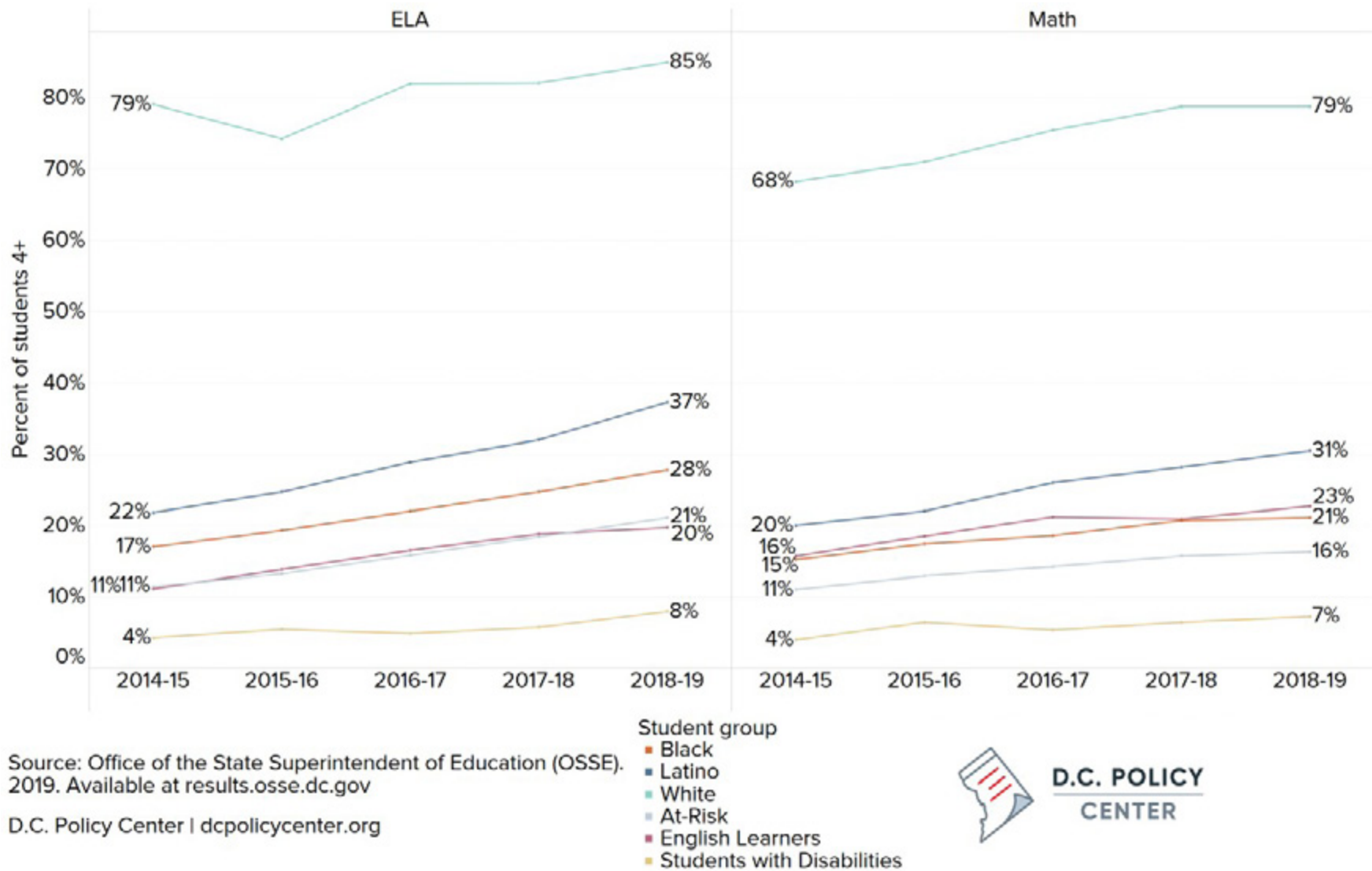
## Latino students made the largest PARCC gains across both ELA and Math.

While students in all six major subgroups (Black, Latino, and white students, as well as at-risk students, English learners, and students with disabilities) made gains on the PARCC assessment since 2014-15, Latino students showed the largest growth: 15 percentage points in ELA, and 11 points in Math. Students with disabilities made the smallest gains at four percentage points in ELA and three percentage points in Math.

## Despite improvements, achievement gaps persist between student groups.

Achievement gaps are measured as the difference in test scores between the highest scoring students and other subgroups. In ELA, achievement gaps are slowly closing for every subgroup except for students with disabilities. The ELA achievement gap narrowed the most for Latino students (a ten percentage point decrease). In Math, on the other hand, achievement gaps are generally widening for every subgroup (except Latino students, where results stayed the same).

Students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PARCC assessment, by race and special population



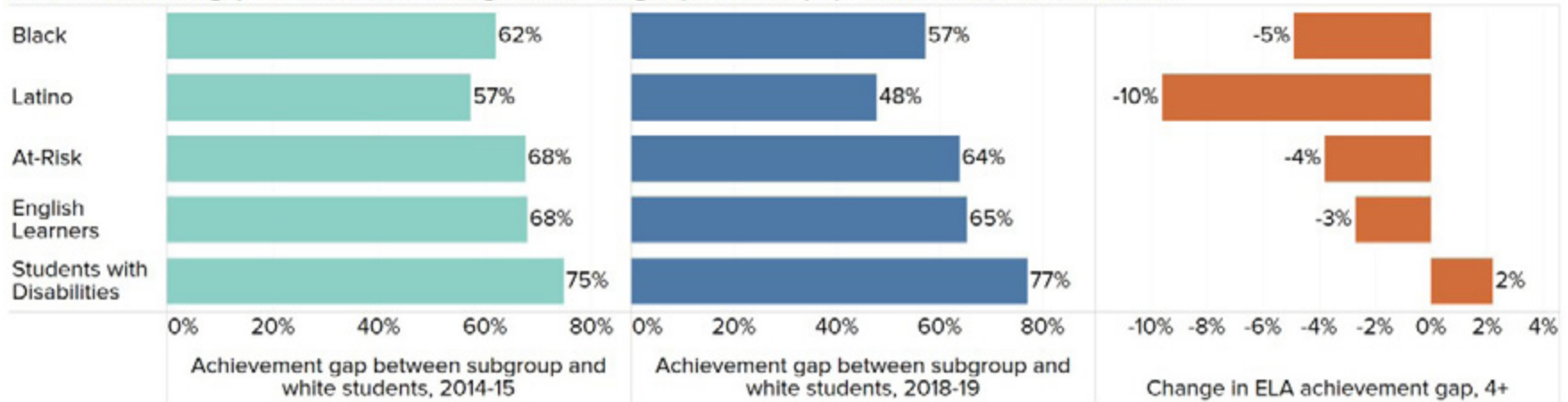




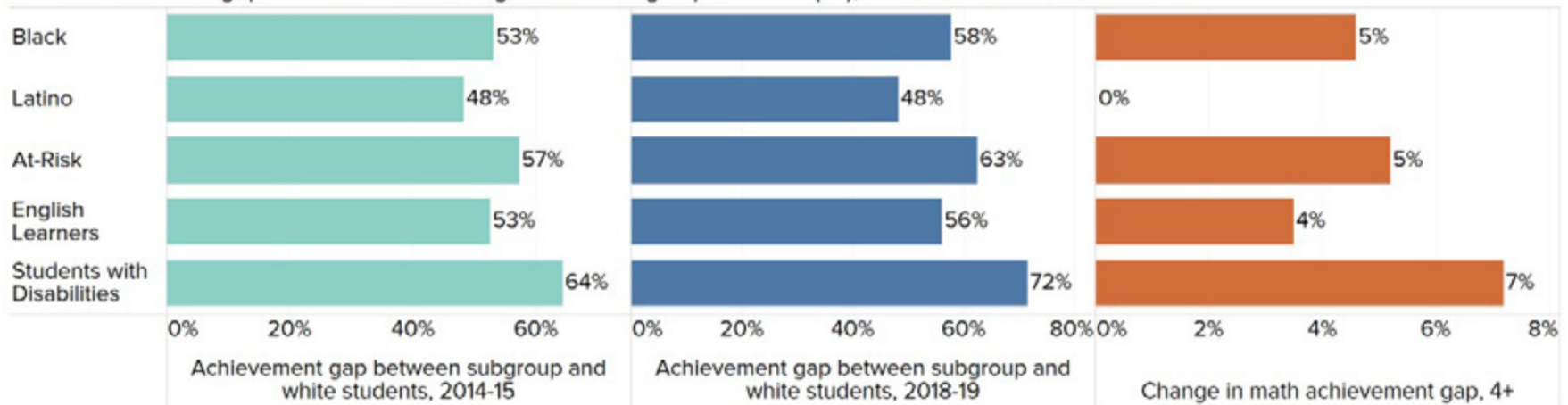


*ELA and math achievement gaps meeting or exceeding expectations (4+), between 2014-15 and 2018-19*

ELA achievement gaps for students meeting or exceeding expectations (4+), between 2014-15 and 2018-19



Math achievement gaps for students meeting or exceeding expectations (4+), between 2014-15 and 2018-19



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2019. Available at [results.osse.dc.gov](https://results.osse.dc.gov)

D.C. Policy Center | [dcpolicycenter.org](https://dcpolicycenter.org)

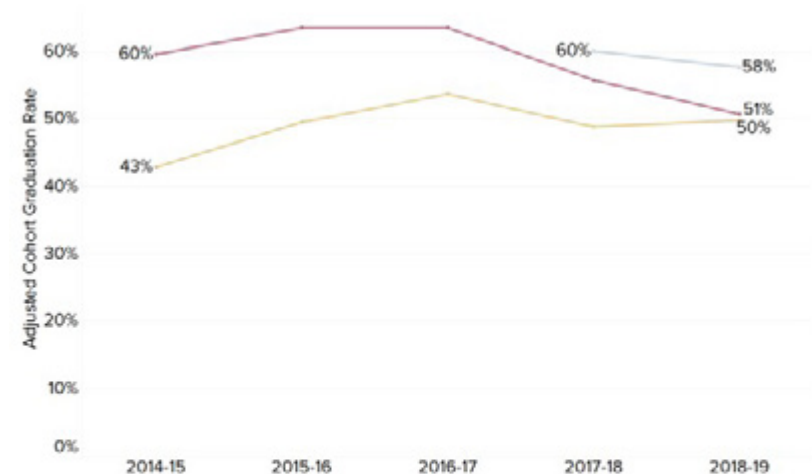




## Graduation rates are experiencing a downward trend.

Statewide graduation rates rose from school year 2014-15 through 2016-17. Since then, graduation rates have declined toward rates of school year 2014-15.

*Graduation rates from 2014-15 to 2018-19 statewide by special population*



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2019. "High School Graduation Rates". Available at [osse.dc.gov](https://osse.dc.gov)

Note: At-risk graduation rates are only available for school year 2017-18 and school year 2018-19. The process for reporting graduation requirements changed in school year 2017-18.

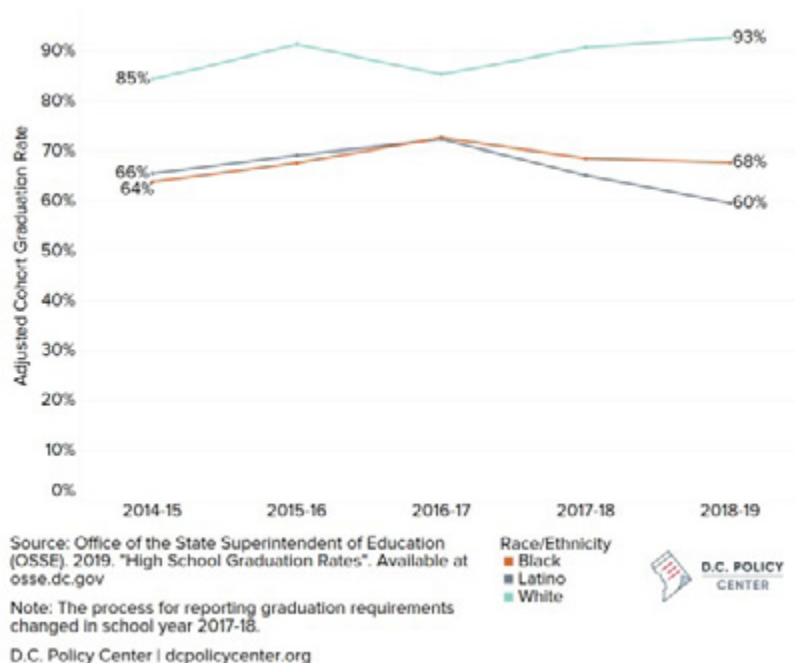
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Special population  
 ■ At-Risk  
 ■ English Learners  
 ■ Students with Disabilities

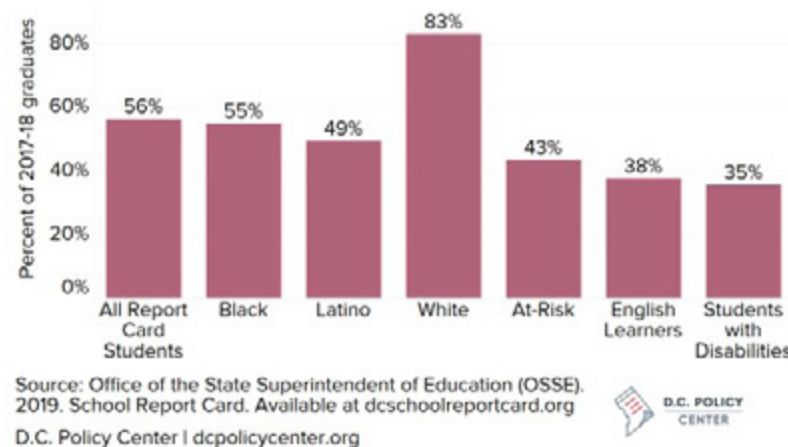


Graduation rates in school year 2018-19 for Latino students and English learners were lower than they were in 2014-15; these students experienced declines in graduation rates of six and nine percent, respectively. Over the same period, graduation rates increased by seven percent for students with disabilities, four percent for Black students, and eight percent for white students.

### Graduation rates from 2014-15 to 2018-19 statewide by race and ethnicity



### Enrollment in postsecondary within six months for 2017-18 high school graduates



### About half of high school graduates enroll in college or university within six months.

Out of all high school graduates in 2017-18 (the first year that data were available), 56 percent continued to postsecondary education within six months of their graduation. While 83 percent of white students enrolled in a college or university within six months of graduation, this share was only 35 percent for students with disabilities. Postsecondary enrollment rates, however, give an incomplete picture of whether graduates of D.C. public schools go on to complete college.





# SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

School environment reflects how students experience schools outside of academics. This section explores attendance, discipline, reenrollment, student movement between schools, and the common lottery.

## Attendance

Overall, D.C.'s public school students are attending as many days of school now as they did in the previous school year: the average in-seat attendance rate – or the percentage of days attended –

stayed mostly flat at 90 percent in school year 2018-19. At-risk students had worse-than-average gains in attendance (-0.6 percentage points), although their attendance remains lower than the average for the city.

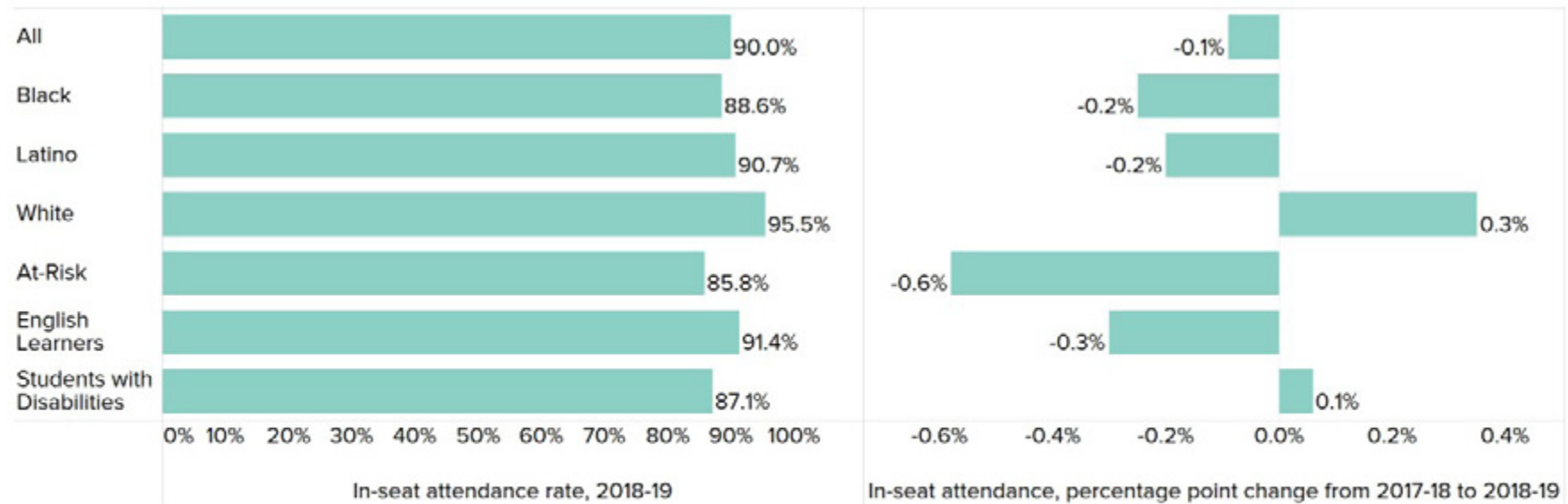
Change in the average attendance rate was not driven by students who miss many days of school. Students who were chronically absent, or students who missed 10 percent or more of the school year (roughly 18 days out of 180 days for a DCPS school), stayed flat at 29.4 percent and 29.7 percent during the last two school years. At-risk students had the highest levels of chronic

absenteeism, with 43.5 percent of at-risk students missing more than 10 days in school year 2018-19. Research shows that this level of absenteeism has negative implications for academic outcomes and graduation rates in high school.

90%

The average in-seat attendance (percentage of school days attended) in school year 2018-19.

### *In-seat attendance, school year 2018-19*



Source: Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE). 2019. DC School Report Card data. Available at [dcschoolreportcard.org](https://dcschoolreportcard.org)

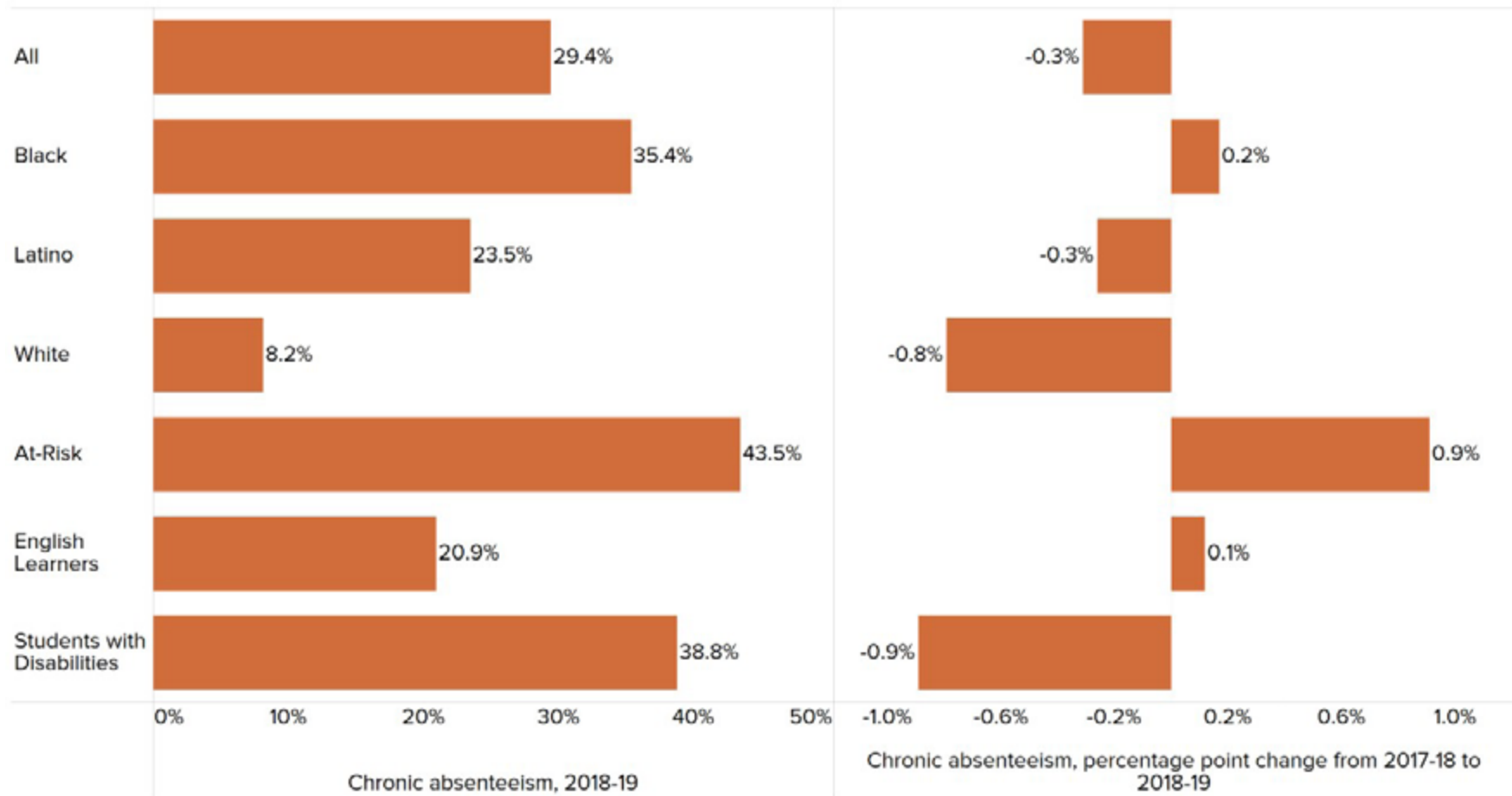
Note: Annual changes show the percentage point change from school year 2017-18 to 2018-19.

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Chronic absenteeism, school year 2018-19



Source: Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE). 2019. DC School Report Card data. Available at: [dcschoolreportcard.org](https://dcschoolreportcard.org)

Note: Chronic absenteeism was calculated as the inverse of 90% attendance on DC's school report cards. It reflects the percentage of students who are absent 10% or more of the school year.

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photo/Aimee Custis

## Students with disabilities, at-risk students, and Black students are suspended at disproportionately high rates.

During school year 2018-19, the District began implementation of the Student Fair Access to School Act (new legislation passed by the D.C. Council), which restricted out-of-school suspensions for one incident to fewer than five days for elementary school students, fewer than 10 days for middle and high school students, and fewer than 20 cumulative days for all students. However, the share of students who received out-of-school suspensions stayed flat from school year 2017-18 to 2018-19.

Students with disabilities and at-risk students had a larger than average decrease in out-of-school suspensions at one percentage point, but they were still suspended at the highest rates along with Black students, who were suspended at more than nine times the rate of white students.

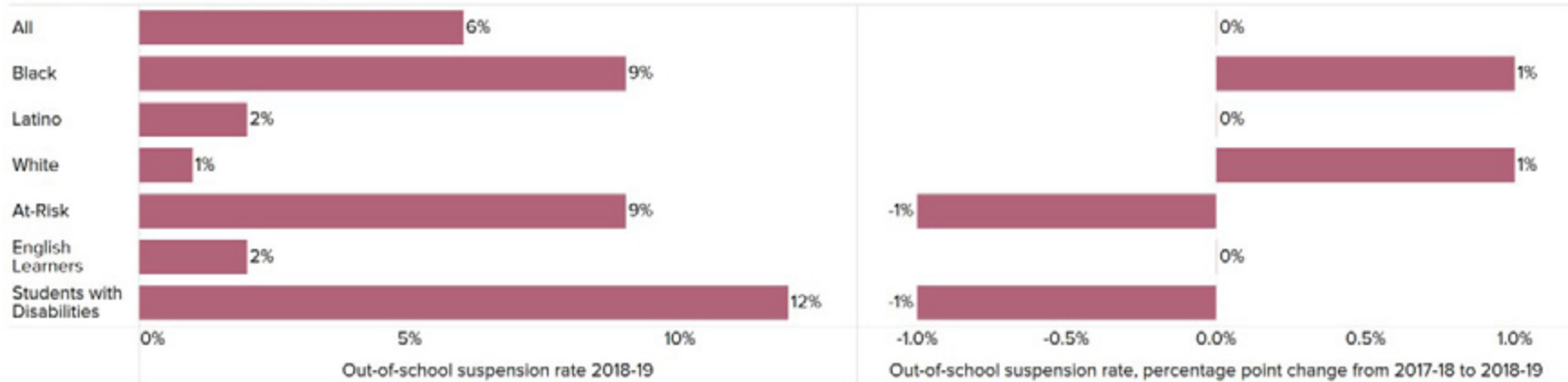
During the same period, reported in-school suspensions increased (by one percentage point).

<5

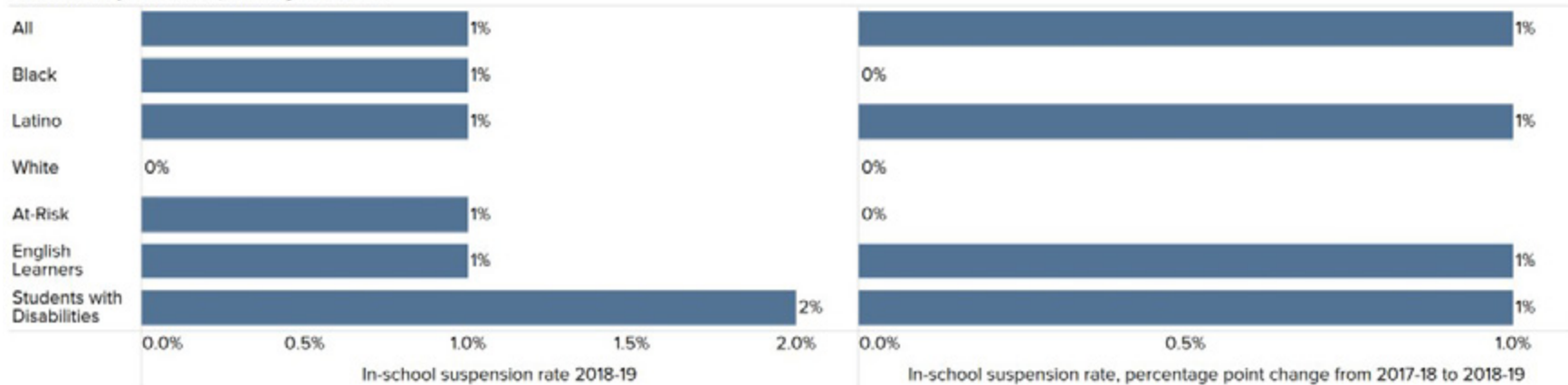
The total number of days an elementary school student can receive out-of-school suspensions for one incident, as mandated by the Student Fair Access to School Act.

## Suspensions, school year 2018-19

Out-of-school suspension rate, school year 2018-19



In-school suspension rate, school year 2018-19



Source: Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE). 2019. DC School Report Card data. Available at [dcschoolreportcard.org](https://dcschoolreportcard.org).

Note: Suspension rates are calculated as the total number of students receiving a suspension divided by the total number of students ever enrolled in a school year.

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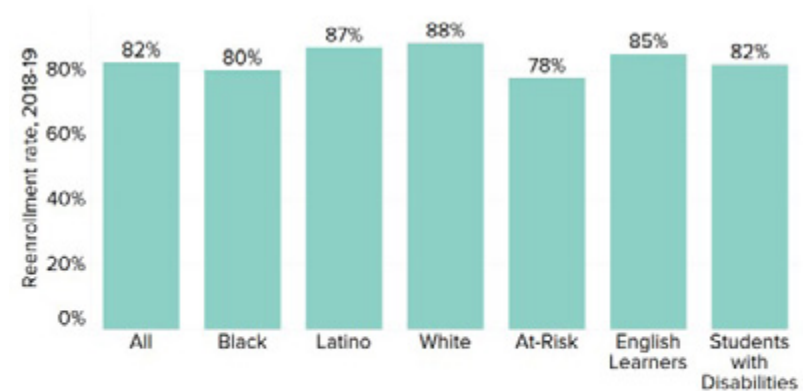


## Most of D.C.'s students reenroll at their school for multiple school years.

Some of D.C.'s students move from school to school aside from entry grades. Across the city, about 82 percent of students (outside of the terminal grade) reenrolled in their school in the following year, meaning that 18 percent enrolled at a different school than they did in the previous year. At-risk students, Black students, and students with disabilities left their schools more often than the average student before they completed the terminal grade.

Students also move within a school year: between October (when the official count of students is finalized) and May, 6.1 percent of students exited a school and 5.2 percent of students entered

*Reenrollment by subgroup, school year 2018-19*



Source: Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE), 2019. DC School Report Card data. Available at [dcschoolreportcard.org](https://dcschoolreportcard.org)

Note: Reenrollment is calculated as the number of students reenrolling in non-terminal grades divided by the number of students enrolled for a minimum number of days.



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PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL  
101 N STREET NW

a school in school year 2018-19. Some of these students move between public schools in D.C., while others leave for private schools or move out of the state.

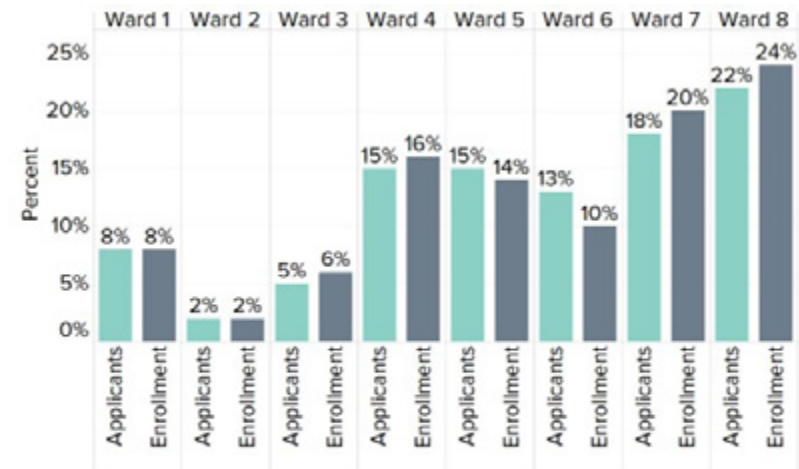
## Applicants to the common lottery represent almost a third of D.C.'s pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students.

Students in D.C. use the common lottery in their first year of public pre-kindergarten, and then later to apply to a public charter school, a DCPS school as an out-of-boundary student, or a DCPS citywide school. The common lottery allows families to rank up to 12 schools using one common application. Before 2014, there were separate lotteries for out-of-boundary and pre-kindergarten spaces at DCPS schools, spaces at public charter schools, and applications to selective DCPS high schools.

In school year 2018-19, applicants to the common lottery were the equivalent of 29 percent of pre-kindergarten through grade 12 students (although not all applicants eventually enroll in public schools). Comparing applicants to enrollment, Wards 3, 4, 7, and 8 had a lower percentage of applicants to the common lottery than students enrolled in public schools. Wards 5 and 6 had a relatively higher share of applicants than students enrolled.

In school year 2018-19, approximately 25,000 students participated in the common lottery. Of those students, roughly

*Distribution of applicants and enrolled students by ward, school year 2018-19 lottery*



Source: My School DC 2018. 2018. Lottery - Distribution of Applications by Ward. Available at [myschooldc.org](https://myschooldc.org).

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16,000 received a match on Results Day for DCPS and public charter schools. Students living in Wards 7 and 8 have higher match rates to schools they selected than students in other wards, with match rates of 73 percent and 77 percent, respectively. This means that students in Wards 7 and 8 are more likely to be able to enroll at a school they ranked in their application as compared to a student living in Ward 3, for example.

In the same year, the median waitlist for an entry grade at any school was 15 students (students can be placed on multiple





net

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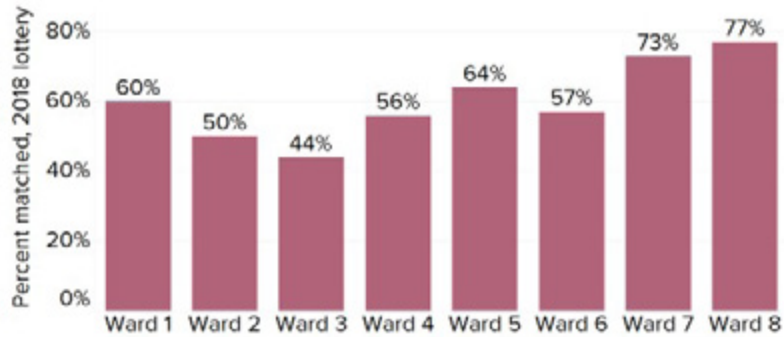
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*Percent of applicants matched to a school in the common lottery, school year 2018-19*



Source: My School DC. 2018. Match rate by ward of residence. Available at [myschooldc.org](https://myschooldc.org)

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waitlists), but waitlists varied widely in entry grades and were low at many schools. Waitlists in entry grades tend to be higher at schools with higher ratings on the state report card. In school year 2018-19, approximately 5,000 students eventually received an offer from school waitlists.

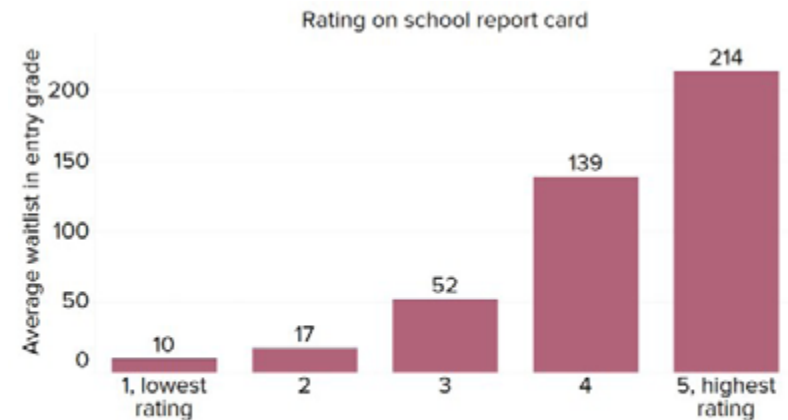
15

The median number of students on the waitlist for an entry grade at any school in school year 2018-19.

5,000

The approximate number of students who eventually received an offer from school waitlists in the same year.

*Average waitlist in entry grade by rating on school report card, school year 2018-19*



Source: My School DC. 2018. Total applications and results from 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 lotteries. Available at [myschooldc.org](https://myschooldc.org).

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# SCHOOL YEAR 2018-19 IN REVIEW

Students experience a very different public school system today in the District compared to previous cohorts, even as recently as school year 2014-15. While the District's unique public education model has been in place in parallel to improvements in learning outcomes and upticks in enrollment, much work remains to be done. Public school experiences vary greatly across the city, and across different subgroups of students. This report, *State of D.C. Schools*, is intended to provide information on what has changed for the better and what challenges remain across the District's public school landscape.

D.C.'s public schools have made tremendous progress in recent years. The profile of the city's public schools—from enrollment, to program offerings, to achievement—has evolved. Enrollment

is rising steadily, and this is no longer driven only by universal pre-kindergarten. Enrollment is growing fastest in middle school grades, which demonstrates that families are staying in the District and choosing public schools beyond elementary school years. Learning outcomes in D.C. are on the rise, with the city improving faster than both the rest of the nation and other large cities. And these gains can no longer be dismissed as a function of changing

**Learning outcomes in the District are improving faster than the rest of the nation and other large cities.**





## Disparate learning outcomes for disparate groups remain the next big challenge for the District to address.

demographics: While all students show gains on the state assessment of learning and college readiness, Latino students are making the largest leap. Importantly, graduation rates are increasing fastest for students with disabilities.

However, challenges stand in the way of allowing all students to achieve success at D.C.'s schools. Schools remain racially and ethnically segregated: Racial and ethnic diversity among D.C. public schools is low, with higher than expected concentrations of Black and white students at certain schools.

Not all parts of the city have equal access to quality schools: Wards 1, 7, and 8 have fewer schools with the highest rating on the school report card than other wards. Despite improvements, graduation rates and learning outcomes for students with disabilities remain at a low level.

Furthermore, graduation rates declined for Latino students, English learners, and at-risk students in school year 2018-19. And out-of-school suspension rates did not decrease over the previous year in a meaningful way, despite legislation intended to

ban most suspensions. Disparate learning outcomes for disparate groups remain the next big challenge for the city to address.

## Leadership changes

The city welcomed new permanent leadership at DCPS and DME in school year 2018-19, as well as two new board members of the DC Public Charter School Board:

- **Chancellor Lewis Ferebee** was confirmed in March 2019, after recently serving as Superintendent of Indianapolis Public Schools. At DCPS, he is committed to great schools in every neighborhood, more equity and transparency in budgeting, and ensuring all students are positioned for post-secondary success.
- **Deputy Mayor for Education Paul Kihn** was appointed in October 2018, previously serving as the Deputy Superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia. DME Kihn's policy priorities include reducing opportunity gaps, improving safe passage to schools, reducing absenteeism, and cross-sector collaboration.
- **Lea Crusey, founder and CEO of Allies for Educational Equity**, and **Jim Sandman, President of the Legal Services Corporation and former general counsel for DCPS**, joined the board of the DC Public Charter School Board.

## School openings and closings in 2018-19

Three new public charter schools opened as new Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in 2018-19, and three existing public charter LEAs opened new schools. One closed public charter school reopened with DCPS as its operator. Most of these

schools were located in Wards 7 and 8. Six public charter schools located in five different wards closed in 2018-19 due to academic reasons or low enrollment. Three of the six reopened in 2019-20 with a different operator.

### *School openings and closings in 2018-19*

Status		Ward	School	Enrollment in 2018-19
Opening schools	New public charter LEA	7	Digital Pioneers PCS	120
		7	Statesman College Preparatory Academy for Boys PCS	54
		1	The Family Place PCS	130
	Expansion of existing public charter LEA	7	Elsie Whitlow Stokes Community Freedom PCS - East End	134
		8	Friendship PCS - Southeast Middle School	179
		8	AppleTree Early Learning Center PCS - Parklands at THEARC	92
Closing schools	Closed public charter school reopening with DCPS as the operator	8	Excel Academy	465
	Closed	6	Cesar Chavez PCS for Public Policy - Capitol Hill	238
		1	Cesar Chavez PCS for Public Policy - Chavez Prep	235
		8	Democracy Prep Congress Height PCS	759
	Reopened with different operator	5	City Arts & Prep PCS	427
		4	Ideal Academy PCS	249
		8	Somerset Prep Academy PCS	425



## Citywide education policy changes

The **Student Fair Access to School Act** was signed into law in July 2018, limiting out-of-school suspensions in almost all instances for elementary and middle school students beginning in 2019-20 and banning out-of-school suspensions for high school students due to violating the dress code, willful defiance, or off-school activity beginning in 2020-21. It also limits the duration and cumulative length of these suspensions.

In December of 2018, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) released the first **D.C. School Report Card**. Every eligible DCPS and public charter school (aside from adult schools, alternative schools, new schools, and schools serving only early grades) received a rating based on proficiency rates, growth, attendance, re-enrollment, graduation, and other metrics for ten student subgroups.







# A LOOK AHEAD

The D.C. Council is considering the **Public School Transparency Act**, which would require public charter schools to open board meetings to the public and require schools in both sectors to be more transparent about how they use their money.

The city is examining **how and whether to adjust the foundation level of funding as well as funding for English learners and at-risk students** through its 2020 Uniform Per Student Funding Formula study. The at-risk component will examine differentiated funding by at-risk category, differential funding for schools with a

**The 2020 Uniform Per Student Funding Formula study will examine the city's foundation level of student funding.**

certain threshold of at-risk students, or funding for students who fall into more than one category of at-risk.

Beginning in spring 2020, a **research-practice partnership** will allow researchers to work together with LEAs to conduct studies that improve practice at the school level.

A **national search for the next executive director of DC PCSB** is underway in anticipation of executive director Scott Pearson stepping down in May 2020.

## New school openings in 2019-20

In school year 2019-20, two new DCPS schools opened and two new public charter schools opened to replicate existing LEAs. DCPS also opened the Coolidge Early College Academy at Coolidge High School in Ward 4. Some public charter schools that



### *New school openings in 2019-20*

Status	Ward	School
DCPS	7	Bard High School Early College DC
	4	Ida B. Wells Middle School
Public charter schools, replications	8	Lee Montessori – East End PCS
	5	Mundo Verde Bilingual PCS – Calle Ocho
Public charter schools, educating students from a closing school	8	KIPP DC – Honor Academy PCS
	8	KIPP DC – Somerset College Preparatory PCS
	5	Friendship PCS – Armstrong Middle
	4	Friendship PCS – Ideal Elementary
	4	Friendship PCS – Ideal Middle

closed in the previous year reopened under different operators and grade configurations, enrolling students from three closing schools.

## School closures after 2019-20

As of December 2019, three public charter schools are slated to close at the end of school year 2019-20:

- Cesar Chavez PCS for Public Policy – Parkside Middle School
- National Collegiate Preparatory PCHS
- SEED PCS of Washington, DC – Middle School

## New schools in the pipeline: 2020-21

One DCPS school and five new public charter schools will open in school year 2020-21:

- Stevens Early Learning Center will be DCPS' first standalone Early Learning Center with PK3 and PK4 and a 0-3 program offered in partnership with a community based organization.
- Capital Village will have an EL (Expeditionary Learning) model serving students in grades 5-8.
- Girls Global Academy will be an all-girls' program serving students in grades 9-12.
- The Sojourner Truth School will have a Montessori program

serving students in grades 6-12.

- I Dream School will be an inquiry-based, learner-centered program approach serving students in PK3-5.
- Social Justice School will have an EL (Expeditionary Learning) model focused on activism for students in grades 5-8.

## Pressing issues

Education stakeholders continue to grapple with how to best provide students with **mental health supports in schools**, including socio-emotional learning programs, trauma-informed training, and additional mental health professionals.

Every year, D.C. schools need to recruit more teachers to keep up with enrollment growth and teachers who leave. An Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) report found that D.C.'s within-school **teacher retention** rate of 70 percent was slightly lower than other urban school systems. A recent OSSE workforce report also explored this issue and identified particular areas of strength and opportunity for DC. The SBOE is seeking to better understand teacher attrition and its implications for District students and schools.

The city is increasingly thinking about the **transition from high school to college or career**. OSSE is publishing a series of reports on post-secondary access and readiness.

There is also a focus on **student safety and safe passage** to ensure that students remain safe at school as well as when they

arrive and depart from school. The city has identified seven Safe Passage Priority Areas, and school leaders in these areas meet regularly with transportation officials and law enforcement to discuss ongoing safety issues.

There is also a public campaign to improve **student attendance** through check-ins, supports for high school students, resources for school leaders, attention to transportation barriers, and connections to health care partners.

### Read more about D.C.'s public schools from the D.C. Policy Center

Find these and other original analysis on D.C.'s public schools (and other topics) at [dcpolicycenter.org](https://dcpolicycenter.org):

- *Can neighborhood characteristics explain enrollment at in-boundary schools?*
- *Will children of current Millennials become future public school students?*
- *Landscape of diversity in D.C. Public Schools*
- *Disconnect between citywide enrollment growth and neighborhood change*
- *Access to schools that level the playing field for D.C.'s at-risk students*

WORD WALL

The **EXPERT** in anything **was once** A Beginner.

Be yourself. **An ORIGINAL** is always worth more than a **3**





# DATA SOURCES

The D.C. Policy Center is grateful to present and analyze publicly available data from the following local and national sources for this report.

## DME EDSCAPE BETA

<https://edscape.dc.gov/>

This tool was launched in 2019 and provides interactive visualizations and downloadable data sets that cover the following topics: school-age population and public school students, public schools, facilities, enrollment patterns, and neighborhood factors. *State of D.C. Schools* includes information from these datasets:

- Distance to School by Grade Band and Sector
- Enrollment Flow Within and Across Wards
- Public School by Race and Ethnicity
- Public School Students by Special Need Categories
- Specialized Programs Offered by Public Schools
- Trends in Enrollment by Sector
- Where Public School Students Live
- Where Students Receiving Special Education Services Live

- Where Students At Risk of Academic Failure Live
- Where English Language Public School Students Live

## DC SCHOOL REPORT CARD

<https://dcschoolreportcard.org/>

First published for the 2017–18 school year, the OSSE DC School Report Cards give a look into all DC public schools. It provides an overall rating and more than 150 data points to communicate how a school is doing with all its students, in addition to helpful information about the school itself. *State of D.C. Schools* includes information from these datasets:

- Academic Performance
- School Environment
- STAR Framework

## OSSE ENROLLMENT AUDITS

<https://osse.dc.gov/enrollment>

Annually, OSSE conducts an enrollment audit to determine the

number of students at each public school in the District. These files contain the audited enrollment by school and grade. *State of D.C. Schools* includes information from these datasets:

- 2018-19 School Year Enrollment Audit Report Data
- 2017-18 School Year Enrollment Audit Report Data
- 2016-17 School Year Enrollment Audit Report Data
- 2015-16 School Year Enrollment Audit Report Data
- 2014-15 School Year Enrollment Audit Report Data

### U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, POPULATION ESTIMATES

<https://factfinder.census.gov/>

The Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program (PEP) produces estimates of the population for the United States, states, metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas, counties, cities, towns, as well as for Puerto Rico and its municipios. *State of D.C. Schools* includes information from these datasets:

- Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Race, Age, Race Alone or in Combination, and Hispanic Origin for the United States and States: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2018.

### NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (NAEP) RESULTS

<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/data/>

NAEP is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what students in the United States are able to achieve in mathematics, reading, science, and other subjects. It reveals trends over time and compares performance among

states, urban districts, and student demographic groups. *State of D.C. Schools* includes information from these datasets:

- 2003 NAEP Results
- 2019 NAEP Results

### THE PARTNERSHIP FOR ASSESSMENT OF READINESS FOR COLLEGE AND CAREERS (PARCC) RESULTS

<https://osse.dc.gov/page/2018-19-parcc-results-and-resources>

The PARCC assessment in English language arts and mathematics measures the knowledge and skills that matter most for students (e.g., writing, problem solving, and other fundamental skills that lead to confidence and success in English language arts and mathematics). This dataset contains the official assessment performance results for the PARCC and Multi-State Alternate Assessment tests in English language arts and mathematics and detailed information, showing multiple levels of results for specific groups of students, for all grades within a school, and for individual grades. *State of D.C. Schools* includes information from these datasets:

- Detailed 2018-19, 2017-18, and 2016-17 PARCC and MSAA Performance Results
- Detailed 2016-17, 2015-16, and 2014-15 PARCC and MSAA Performance Results

### OSSE ADJUSTED COHORT GRADUATION RATES

<https://osse.dc.gov/service/high-school-graduation-rates-0>

OSSE publishes statewide graduation rates by school for DCPS

and public charter schools. The process for reporting graduation requirements changed in school year 2017-18. At-risk graduation rates are only available for school years 2017-18 and 2018-19. *State of D.C. Schools* includes information from these datasets:

- 2018-19 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates
- 2017-18 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates
- 2016-17 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates
- 2015-16 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates
- 2014-15 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates

## MY SCHOOL DC

<https://www.myschooldc.org/>

The common lottery's data page provides aggregate information to families and schools to support data driven decisions. *State of D.C. Schools* includes information from these datasets:

- Lottery data. Distribution of applications by ward.
- Lottery data. Match rate by ward of residence.
- Total applications and results from 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 lotteries

## MAR GEOCODER

The Master Address Repository (MAR) Geocoder is a desktop application that employs D.C.'s MAR Web Services to assign a location in the form of geographic coordinates and returns other geospatial information. We used this source to assign coordinates to D.C. school addresses, so we could create a map of where schools in D.C. are located.

## OPEN DATA DC

<https://opendata.dc.gov/>

This source provides hundreds of downloadable datasets, including maps of the District. We used ward maps and neighborhood cluster maps to create visualizations.

- Ward from 2012
- Neighborhood Clusters

The D.C. Policy Center is not responsible for any errors in the underlying publicly available data.

## NOTES

The first year of reference in this report is school year 2014-15.

The grade bands referenced in this report are as follows:

- Elementary: Pre-kindergarten – 5 (unless pre-kindergarten is listed separately)
- Middle: 6 – 8
- High: 9 – 12

This report uses UPSFF grade categories and not accountability or PMF categories.





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Education Policy Initiative

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