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**B23-0717: EXPANDING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO
SCHOOLS ACT OF 2020**

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

July 27th, 2020, at 10am
Virtual platform

Testimony of Chelsea Coffin
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D.C. Policy Center

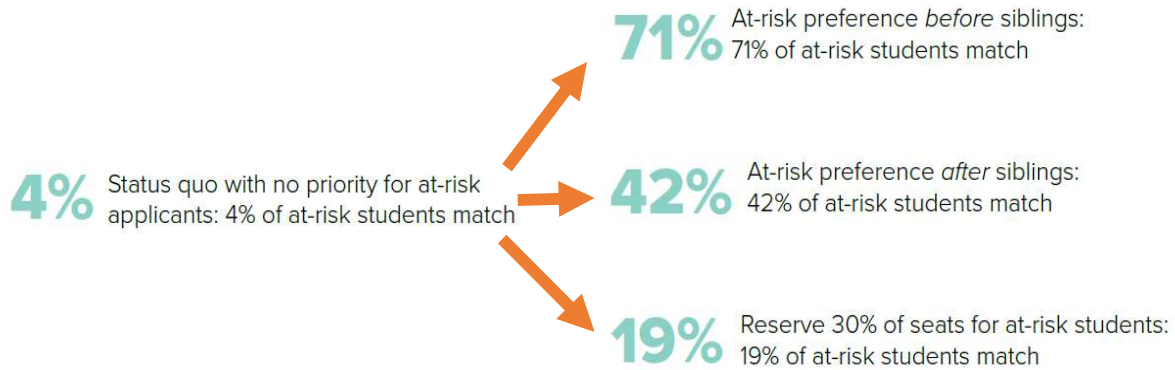
Good morning, Chairperson Mendelson, Councilmember Grosso, and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Chelsea Coffin and I am the Director of the Education Policy Initiative at the D.C. Policy Center, where our education research focuses on how schools connect to broader dynamics in the District of Columbia.

I will provide testimony on B23-0717, Expanding Equitable Access to Great Schools, based on a report we released earlier this month, [At-risk priority in D.C.'s common lottery: Potential implications for access and diversity](#). For this analysis, we analyzed data from several public charter schools that have long waitlists and that serve a low percentage of at-risk students to see how an at-risk priority might change lottery outcomes for pre-kindergarten – the most common grade for applications. We presented three scenarios: a preference before siblings, a preference after siblings, and reserving seats for at-risk applicants. We found that at these schools, a priority for at-risk students has real potential to improve access for at-risk students and increase socioeconomic diversity.

Our first key finding is that an at-risk priority can increase match rates for individual at-risk students. Among the subset of public charter schools in our sample, the average waitlist for pre-kindergarten had 287 names, compared to 70 as the city average. We estimated the average match rate in the lottery was four percent for at-risk students applying for pre-kindergarten compared to 10 percent for all students under the status quo. Match rates for at-risk students are slightly lower than for other students as siblings receive matches before other applicants – and at schools where the percentage of at-risk students is low, this means that siblings are likely to be not at-risk as well.

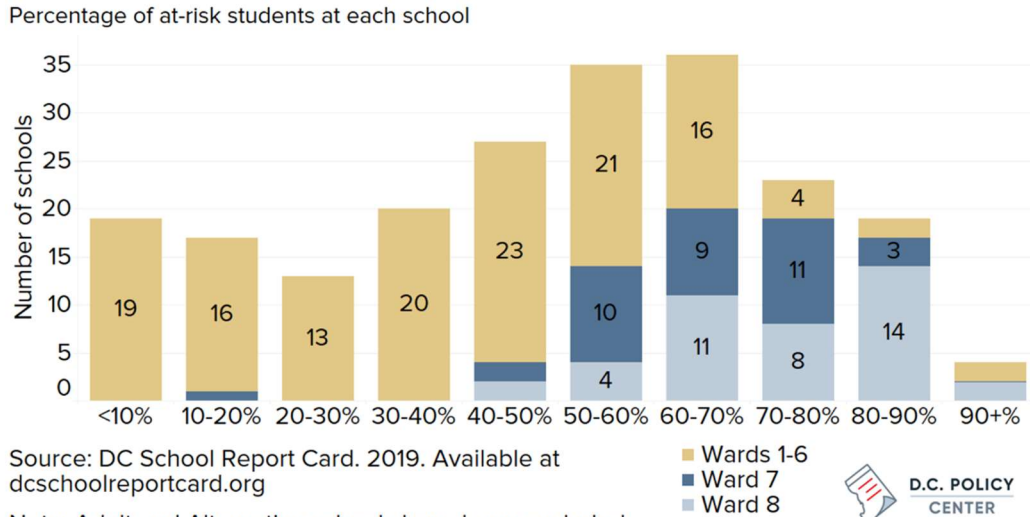
Under a priority for at-risk students, match rates could increase to as high as 71 percent if there is a preference before siblings, or 42 percent if there is a preference after siblings, or even 19 percent if a school reserves 30 percent of seats (as an

example) for at-risk applicants. Putting at-risk applicants toward the front of the line means that individual at-risk students have a much better chance to get a seat at a school they rank highly, and lowers the match rate for some other applicants.

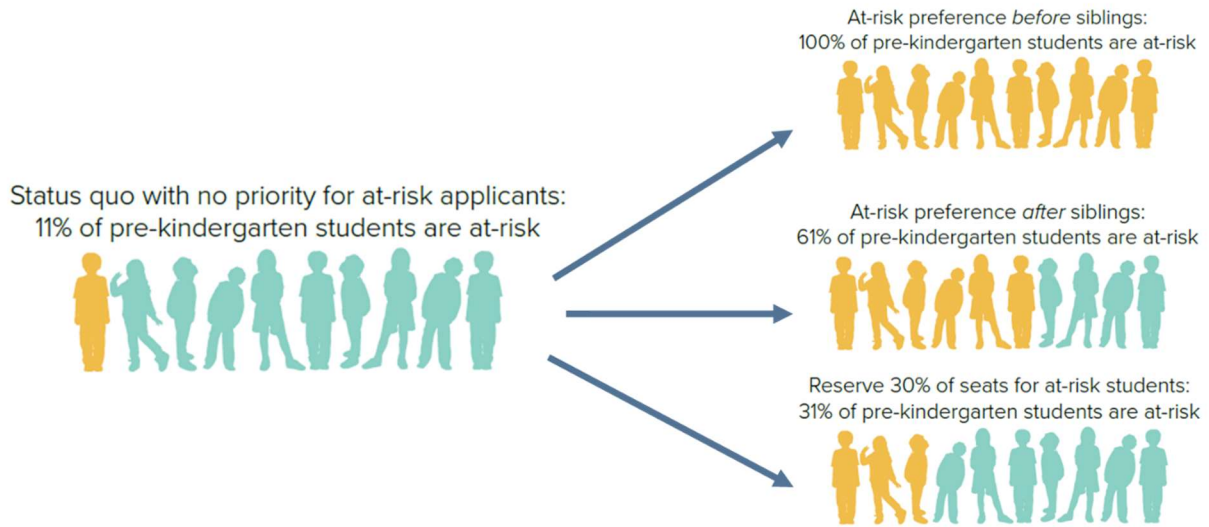


Our second key finding is that an at-risk priority has the potential to increase socioeconomic diversity at schools that serve low percentages of at-risk students.

Some research indicates that [socioeconomic diversity in schools can lead to cognitive and social benefits](#), especially if schools intentionally integrate to [create equitable and inclusive learning environments](#). A large proportion (45 percent) of D.C.’s students are considered to be at-risk. Socioeconomic diversity is extremely low at 35 schools with less than 20 percent of students who are at-risk. In our sample of public charter schools, 15 percent of students were at-risk on average.



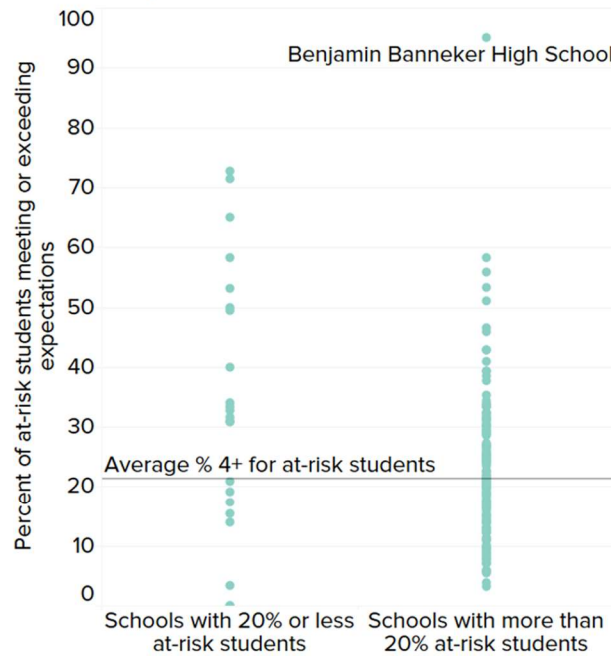
Under the status quo, we estimated that 11 percent of the incoming pre-kindergarten class would be at-risk, which could increase to as high as 100 percent if the preference for at-risk students was considered before siblings. The incoming pre-kindergarten class could be 61 percent at-risk with at-risk preference last, and 31 percent at-risk with reserving 30 percent of seats. Currently, demographics at some public charter schools can be difficult to shift if demand from not at-risk students increases faster than demand from at-risk students, or if sibling preferences reinforce existing demographics. Over time, an at-risk priority could make it easier for more at-risk applicants to match. In the first year, we estimated that the percent of students who are at-risk in all grades could increase from the current 15 percent to between 17 and 26 percent at-risk.



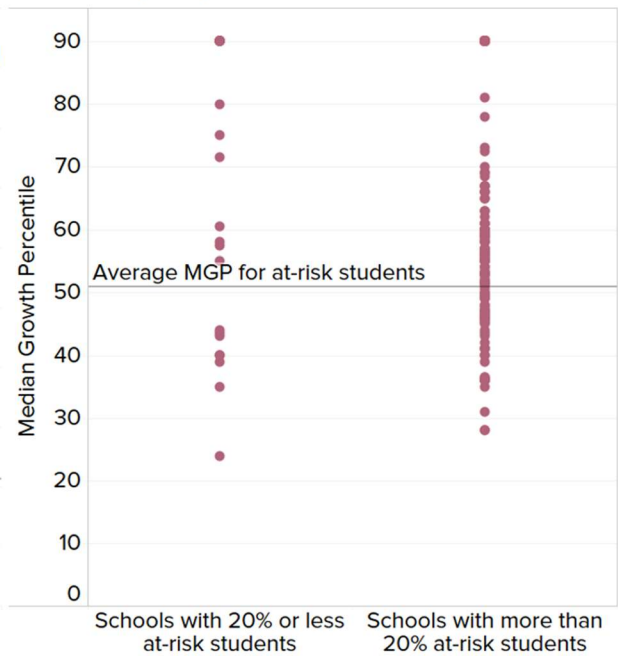
In addition to access and diversity, it is critical to consider the potential impact on learning outcomes. On average, learning outcomes in terms of growth and proficiency are better for at-risk students at schools with a low percentage of at-risk students and a high waitlist than citywide. For example, 30 percent of at-risk students meet or exceed expectations in English Language Arts (ELA) at schools serving 20 percent or less students who are at-risk compared to a city average of 21 percent for at-risk students. However, several schools where less than 20 percent of students are at-risk and where there are high waitlists have outcomes that are below the city average for their at-risk students in achievement and growth. These schools would need to reconsider their models, especially if they move toward serving more students who are at-risk.

English Learning Arts (ELA) learning outcomes for at-risk students by school characteristics, 2018-19

ELA achievement (Level 4 or higher on state assessment)



Growth in ELA, measured by Median Growth Percentile (MGP)



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE).

Note: Each dot represents a school. Dots below the line indicate schools below the average for at-risk students.

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A priority for at-risk students in the common lottery is a way to improve access to some schools for some students furthest from opportunity, and to increase socioeconomic diversity at some schools that currently serve predominantly not at-risk students. It will not improve match rates for all at-risk students, nor increase diversity at all schools. But in one of the toughest years to come as we recover from the impact of school closures, it has the potential to make real change for individual students who are at-risk and to alleviate the socioeconomic segregation that persists in some schools.

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