

STATE OF D.C. SCHOOLS

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS & SUMMARY

State of D.C. Schools is an annual systemwide overview of education in the District of Columbia. The report's main purpose is to give D.C. residents, parents, caregivers, policymakers, and other stakeholders a snapshot of the overall performance of the District's public schools.

Since the last school year, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered public education in D.C. This year's report examines how students, families, and schools navigated distance learning and discovered ways to adapt over time. The focus of the report is school year 2019-20, but some of our findings also reflect the experiences of the current 2020-21 school year.

Snapshot: Students, teachers, and schools in the pandemic

The shift to distance learning impacted **94,412 students** and **7,659 teachers** at **240 DCPS and public charter schools**:

57% of students were in pre-kindergarten and elementary school grades. These younger students likely needed more guidance from others to engage in distance learning.

18% of students were in high school grades. Some reported a lack of motivation due to distractions at home, a lack of structure, or hold-harmless policies that meant assignments could only improve grades.

8% of students were adult or alternative learners. These learners were often juggling their own education in addition to childcare or employment—and many lost their jobs at the pandemic's onset.

8% of teachers were teaching for the first time in 2019-20. Teachers reported that they had to adapt their mode of instruction and re-work their curriculum in no time at all and with little support. Some teachers accommodated parents and students by holding office hours and texting or calling after the school day.

Systemic supports during distance learning



In spring 2020, DCPS distributed up to **16,000 learning devices** and **10,000 hotspots** in addition to large scale efforts to better connect students by public charter schools and local organizations.



72 schools and non-profits hosted distribution points for **meals and groceries** throughout the city, as well as home delivery services for essential resources.

Key challenges

According to focus group data, these challenges were the most universally-repeated themes during distance learning:

Mental health

Even before the pandemic, **44% of D.C.'s children had been exposed to at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE)**. Students and parents reported new sources of stress and low levels of well-being during the pandemic.

Communication

Communication was needed to adapt to new circumstances, but it was sometimes unclear to students and parents, especially parents who did not speak English.

Digital divide




When schools initially transitioned to distance learning, approximately **one in eight District residents did not have access to a computer** or tablet in their household, and **24% of children in D.C. lacked access to broadband internet**.

Reaching students with disabilities and English learners

Despite best efforts, providing additional supports to these students was difficult virtually. The Office of the Student Advocate reported that **special education was the topic of 24% of complaints**.

Unequal barriers

While some challenges were universal, a subset of students faced additional barriers:

-  **16% of students are identified as having disabilities**, and usually receive additional services in person, including speech, occupational, or physical therapy that became more difficult to deliver remotely in many cases.
-  **13% of students are English learners**, and found it more difficult to navigate learning platforms in English to fully participate in live sessions or complete independent work.
-  **43% of students were designated as at-risk**, and early data show they experienced a greater disruption of learning (equivalent to losing 5 months of learning time in math and 4 months of learning time in reading).

Lessons learned

Despite the disruption, there have been bright spots. Teachers found ways to close communication gaps, stakeholders came together to address basic needs, and many parents engaged more in their children's learning. A few lessons could inform recovery efforts:

1. Be intentional with big changes.
2. Be innovative.
3. Focus on needs beyond the classroom.
4. Prioritize family and community engagement.

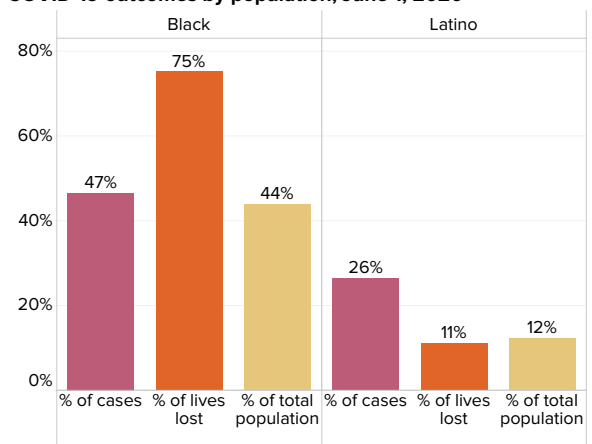
SPOTLIGHT

Health impact inequities



The health impacts of the pandemic in spring 2020 were concentrated in D.C.'s communities of color. **65% of D.C. students are Black, and 19% are Latino**. More students of color were likely directly impacted by COVID-19 infections than white students.

COVID-19 outcomes by population, June 1, 2020



- Black residents made up **47%** of COVID-19 cases, but a disproportionate **75%** of lives lost.
- Latino residents comprised **11%** of the population, but **26%** of COVID-19 cases.