



2020-21

STATE OF D.C. SCHOOLS



D.C. POLICY CENTER

Education Policy Initiative

About the D.C. Policy Center

The mission of the D.C. Policy Center is to arm decision makers with fact-based, unbiased, and reliable research and analyses to help create a vibrant local economy that can maximize opportunities for residents, workers, and businesses in the District of Columbia. Through objective and rigorous research and collaboration, the D.C. Policy Center develops and tests policy ideas, disseminates its findings, actively promotes policy solutions, and engages in constructive dialogue and debate.

About this report

State of D.C. Schools is an annual systemwide overview of public 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.

This report captures school year 2020-21 and how it continued to be impacted by COVID-19, with most students learning virtually for the entire school year. It also provides an update on 2021-22, when in-person learning resumed with the Herculean tasks of keeping students and teachers safe while making up for the unfinished learning from previous pandemic years.

We hope that this *State of D.C. Schools* report will help inform local education leaders and policymakers in their development of future policy decisions as we recover from COVID-19.

The views expressed in this report are those of D.C. Policy Center researchers and experts and should not be attributed to members of the D.C. Policy Center's Board of Directors or its funders.

Other reports in this series

State of D.C. Schools, 2018-19

State of D.C. Schools, 2019-20

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We are deeply grateful to the organizations that provided the photos appearing throughout this report. Except where otherwise noted, photos courtesy of the [D.C. Public Charter School Board](#), used with permission. For full photo credits, see page 62.

2020-21

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Introduction

D.C.'s public schools, both District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools, experienced a historic transformation in school year 2020-21 as the COVID-19 pandemic continued.

After a decrease in the COVID-19 case rate to approximately five cases per 100,000 in D.C. before the start of the school year, cases spiked to 47 per 100,000 residents at the high point in January 2021.¹

As availability of COVID-19 vaccines became more widespread in the spring 2020, first for adults² and, later, for everyone over the age of 12, D.C.'s case rate declined again to near five cases per 100,000 residents in May 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed every element of how schools operated. At the start of the school year, 99 percent of students were learning virtually for five days a week, and 79 percent of students were *still* doing so by the year's end. The remaining 21 percent who did return to in-person learning were likely to attend in-person for no more than three days a week, to be younger students, and to go to school in the city's more affluent wards.

This year's *State of D.C. Schools* report examines how students, families, and schools navigated virtual and hybrid learning during school year 2020-21—the first full academic year when schools operated under pandemic conditions.

The D.C. School Report Card and other publicly available data inform the report, showing what happened to enrollment, aspects of the school environment, and learning outcomes. As most learning was virtual, some metrics usually covered in the *State of D.C. Schools*—such

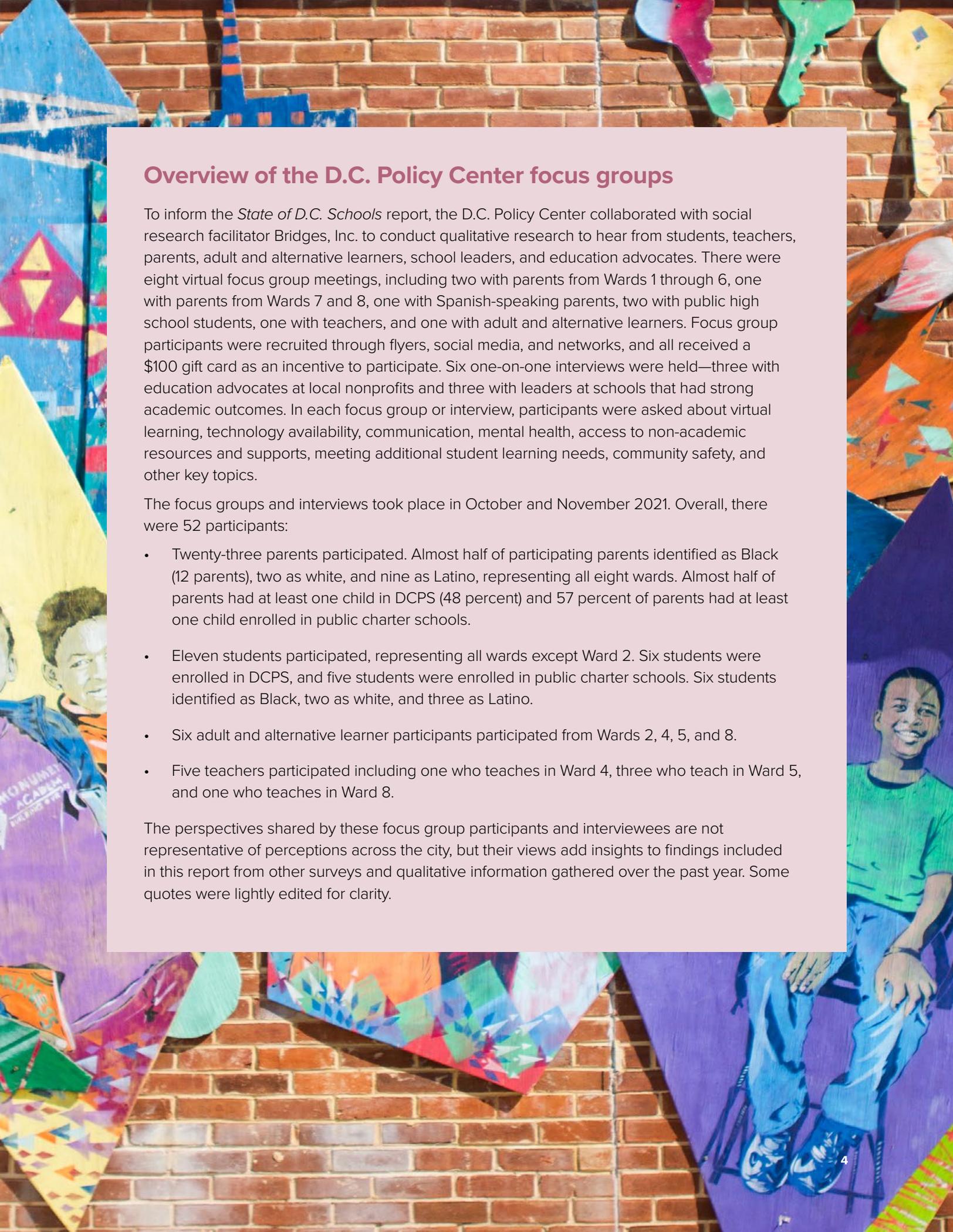
as systemwide assessment outcomes—were missing, and others, such as attendance and graduation, captured information that is not comparable to earlier years. To fill in some of these gaps, and to reflect the experiences of students, teachers, families, school leaders, and other stakeholders, this report incorporates both survey data and findings from focus group meetings conducted by the D.C. Policy Center.

Both qualitative and quantitative data show that school year 2020-21 was a year of uncertainty and challenge for school communities. Early signs show how these challenges manifested at different ages, with lower enrollment in pre-kindergarten grades, unfinished learning for elementary school students, and lower enrollment in postsecondary programs after high school graduation. In addition, students often experienced the school year differently depending on their race, location, and socioeconomic status. In majority-Black Wards 7 and 8,³ where most of the students who are designated as at-risk⁴ live, a larger

share of students remained all-virtual, as their neighborhoods contended with more COVID-19 cases, lower vaccination rates, and lower broadband internet availability. Analyses of school-level assessments show that the academic performance of schools declined during school year 2020-21, and these declines were faster among students who are designated as at-risk.

This report finds that many of the challenges associated with a shift to distance learning in school year 2019-20 (the onset of the pandemic) persisted into school year 2020-21, especially in the areas of mental health, adequate technology, and communication.

As the system shifts its attention and resources to recovery for students in D.C., this report closes with suggested metrics in the areas of student success, student supports, and community factors to track along the way, in order to better identify where resources need to be allocated to remove barriers to student achievement.



Overview of the D.C. Policy Center focus groups

To inform the *State of D.C. Schools* report, the D.C. Policy Center collaborated with social research facilitator Bridges, Inc. to conduct qualitative research to hear from students, teachers, parents, adult and alternative learners, school leaders, and education advocates. There were eight virtual focus group meetings, including two with parents from Wards 1 through 6, one with parents from Wards 7 and 8, one with Spanish-speaking parents, two with public high school students, one with teachers, and one with adult and alternative learners. Focus group participants were recruited through flyers, social media, and networks, and all received a \$100 gift card as an incentive to participate. Six one-on-one interviews were held—three with education advocates at local nonprofits and three with leaders at schools that had strong academic outcomes. In each focus group or interview, participants were asked about virtual learning, technology availability, communication, mental health, access to non-academic resources and supports, meeting additional student learning needs, community safety, and other key topics.

The focus groups and interviews took place in October and November 2021. Overall, there were 52 participants:

- Twenty-three parents participated. Almost half of participating parents identified as Black (12 parents), two as white, and nine as Latino, representing all eight wards. Almost half of parents had at least one child in DCPS (48 percent) and 57 percent of parents had at least one child enrolled in public charter schools.
- Eleven students participated, representing all wards except Ward 2. Six students were enrolled in DCPS, and five students were enrolled in public charter schools. Six students identified as Black, two as white, and three as Latino.
- Six adult and alternative learner participants participated from Wards 2, 4, 5, and 8.
- Five teachers participated including one who teaches in Ward 4, three who teach in Ward 5, and one who teaches in Ward 8.

The perspectives shared by these focus group participants and interviewees are not representative of perceptions across the city, but their views add insights to findings included in this report from other surveys and qualitative information gathered over the past year. Some quotes were lightly edited for clarity.



Student enrollment

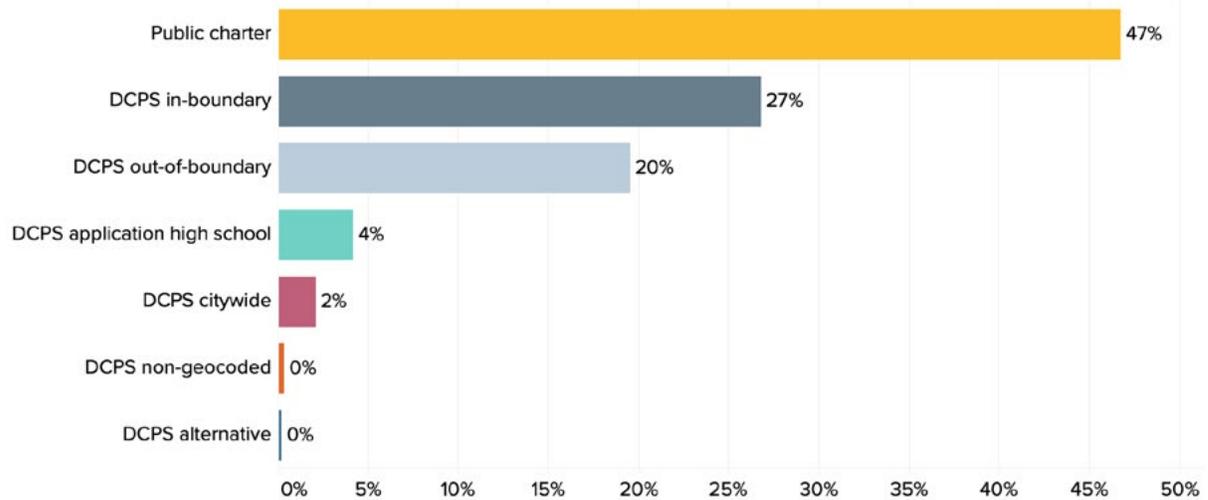
The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the continuation of virtual learning that characterized school year 2020-21 made it unlike any other and impacted student enrollment in new ways.

First, enrollment in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 stayed the same from one school year to the next, in a system that usually adds students every year. This corresponded to a declining interest in public pre-kindergarten grades, as well as fewer new students joining the system at

higher grades. Second, a larger share of students reenrolled in their school from the previous year, suggesting that students did not want to make a change during a period of uncertainty. Finally, enrollment among adult students took a significant hit as the combined stresses of work, childcare, and virtual learning made it difficult for some adult students to continue with their own education. Even with these shifts, the characteristics of enrolled students did not change much in terms of race and ethnicity or special populations.

In school year 2020-21, there were 89,292 students enrolled in pre-kindergarten to grade 12 at 231 DCPS and public charter schools: 53 percent were enrolled in DCPS schools, and 47

Figure 1. Enrollment in D.C.'s public schools by sector, school year 2020-21



Source: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. 2021. EdScape: Trends in Enrollment by Sector. Retrieved from: <https://edscape.dc.gov/>

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percent were enrolled in public charter schools. This is similar to the distribution in school year 2019-20, when 54 percent attended DCPS and 46 percent attended public charter schools. Only 27 percent of students attended their in-boundary DCPS school; 20 percent attended a DCPS school as an out-of-boundary student; and 4 percent attended a DCPS application high school.

Student characteristics

In school year 2020-21, the majority of D.C.'s public school students were children and youth of color: 65 percent of students were Black, 17 percent were Latino, 13 percent were white, and 5 percent were of other races and ethnicities. The racial and ethnic makeup of the student body changed very little from school year 2019-20, indicating that no one group of students disproportionately left D.C.'s public schools.

Wards 7 and 8 were home to more students than other wards, with 42 percent of students in pre-kindergarten to grade 12 living in these wards. Wards 7 and 8, along with Wards 4 and 5, also had relatively more COVID-19 cases by the end of the school year, which could mean that students' lives in these wards were more heavily affected by the pandemic.

Special populations

In D.C., schools receive additional funding for students who are designated as at-risk, a category that includes students who receive certain public benefits, experience homelessness, are in the foster care system, or are over-age in high school. In school year 2020-21, the share of students designated as at-risk increased to 45 percent from 43 percent in the previous school year, following three years of decreases in this metric. This increase could be due to additional

Figure 2. Race and ethnicity of D.C.'s public school students, school year 2020-21



Source: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. 2021. EdScape: Public school enrollment by race and ethnicity. Retrieved from: <https://edscape.dc.gov/>

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Figure 3. Pre-kindergarten to grade 12 enrollment by ward, school year 2020-21

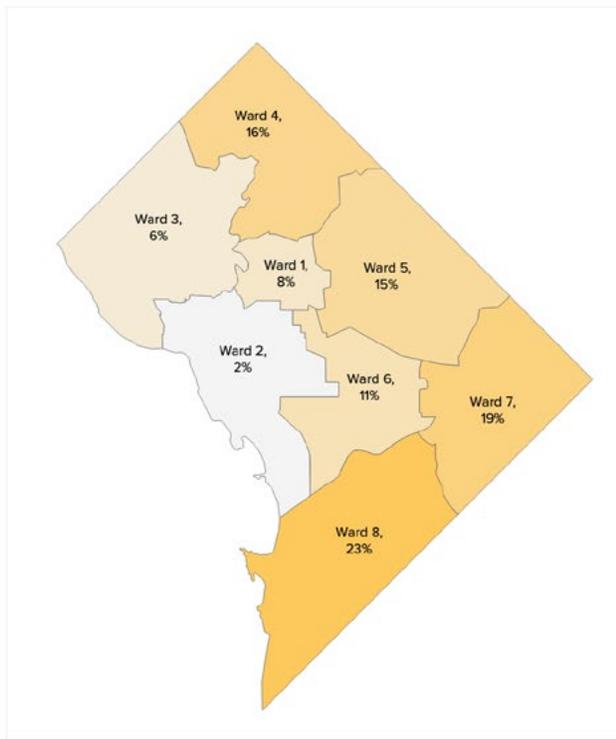
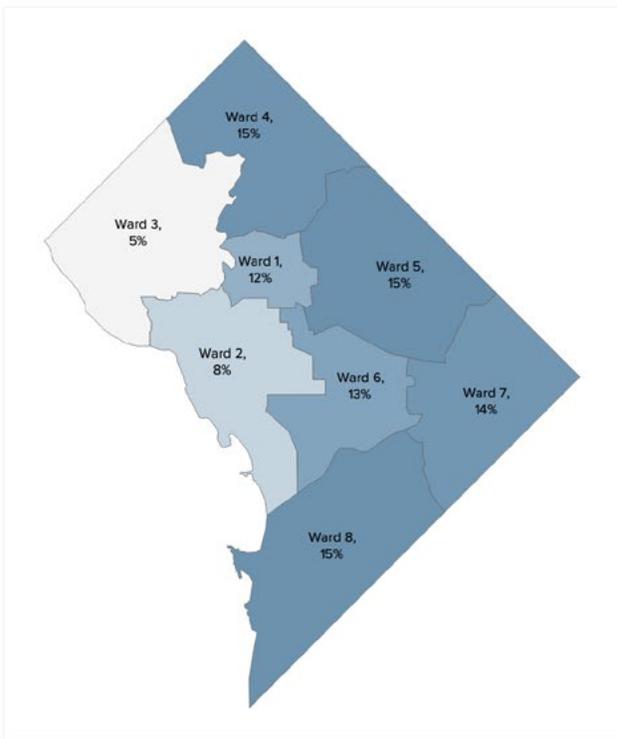


Figure 4. COVID-19 cases by ward, June 1, 2021



Source: Enrollment by student ward from Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME). 2021. EdScape: Where Public School Students Live. DME. Retrieved from <https://edscape.dc.gov/page/pop-and-students-where-public-school-students-live> and COVID-19 cases by ward from Government of the District of Columbia – Muriel Bowser, Mayor. 2021. "COVID-19 Data Overview." Retrieved from: <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/>

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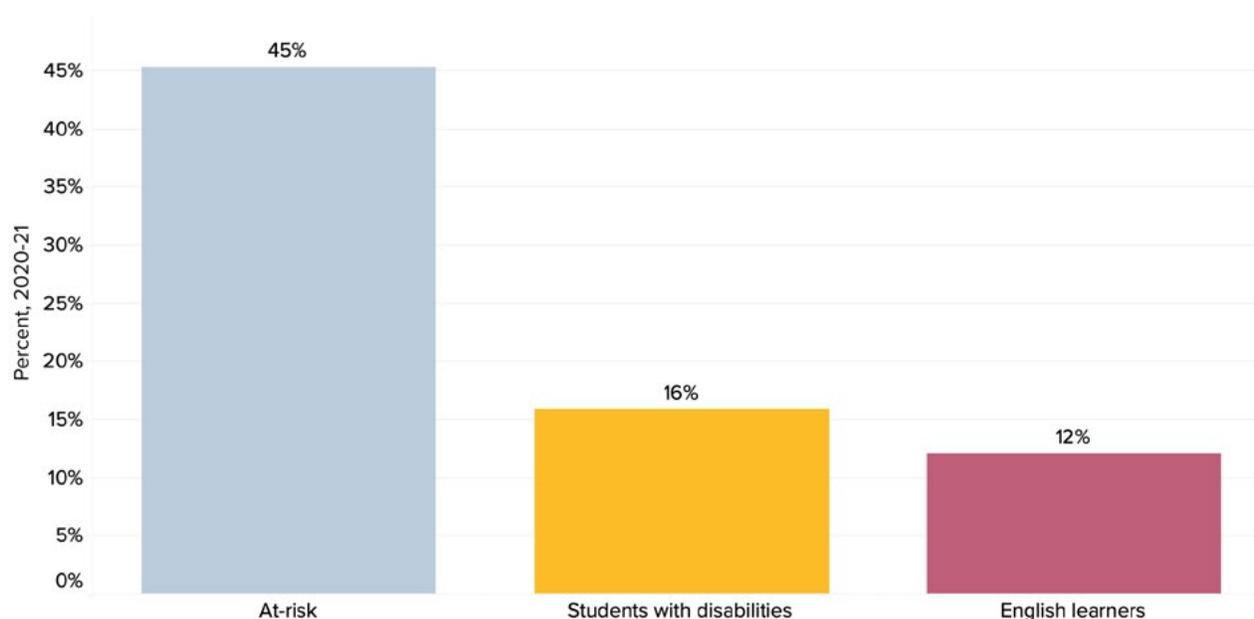
families eligible for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), with unemployment rates remaining above pre-pandemic levels a 7.2 percent in June 2021 (up 1.5 percentage points compared to June 2019 and up 2.3 percentage points compared to February 2020).⁵

The share of students with disabilities remained unchanged at 16 percent, even as these students faced increased challenges in accessing special education services in a virtual setting. Amidst public reports of immigrant families leaving D.C. during the pandemic,⁶ 12 percent of students were identified as English learners, similar to 2019-20, with some decreases in the number of English learners in pre-kindergarten through grade 1, as well as grade 9.⁷

Enrollment shifts

Although systemwide enrollment across pre-kindergarten to grade 12 was projected to increase by 4,000 students in this year,⁸ it only increased by 17 students. By grade band, there was no enrollment change in elementary grades either. However, there were some increases in middle and high school grade bands, largely reflecting past enrollment growth in earlier grades as students moved up—not necessarily students new to the system. Enrollment in the usually highly-demand pre-kindergarten grades declined for the first time by 7 percent (942 students), showing that D.C. parents opted out of what could be a challenging virtual learning environment for young students. They might

Figure 5. Characteristics of D.C.'s public school students, school year 2020-21

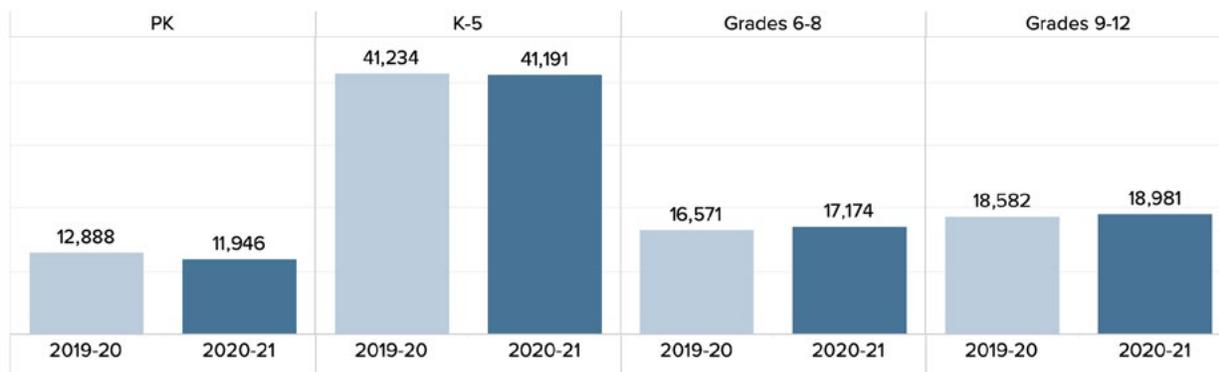


Source: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. 2021. EdScape: Public school enrollment by special need categories. Retrieved from: <https://edscape.dc.gov/>

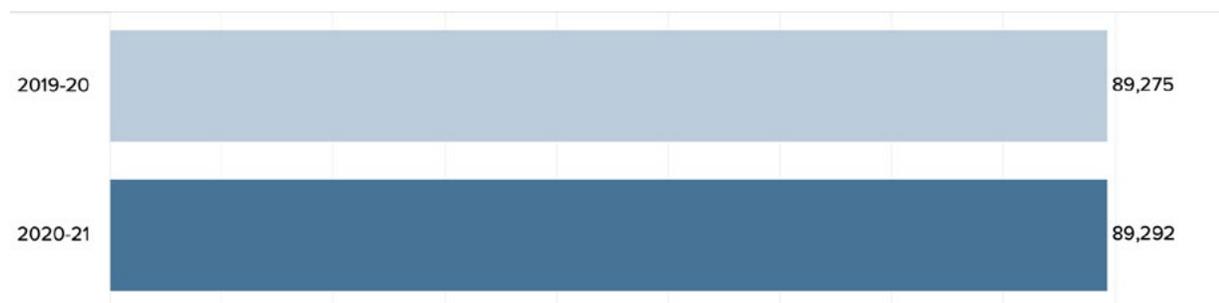
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Figure 6. Enrollment in D.C.'s public schools

Enrollment by grade band



Total enrollment in pre-kindergarten to grade 12



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2021. Enrollment audit reports for FY 2021 and FY 2020. Retrieved from: <https://osse.dc.gov/enrollment>

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have chosen childcare centers or preschools that were in-person, or they may have kept children at home with parents or other caregivers.

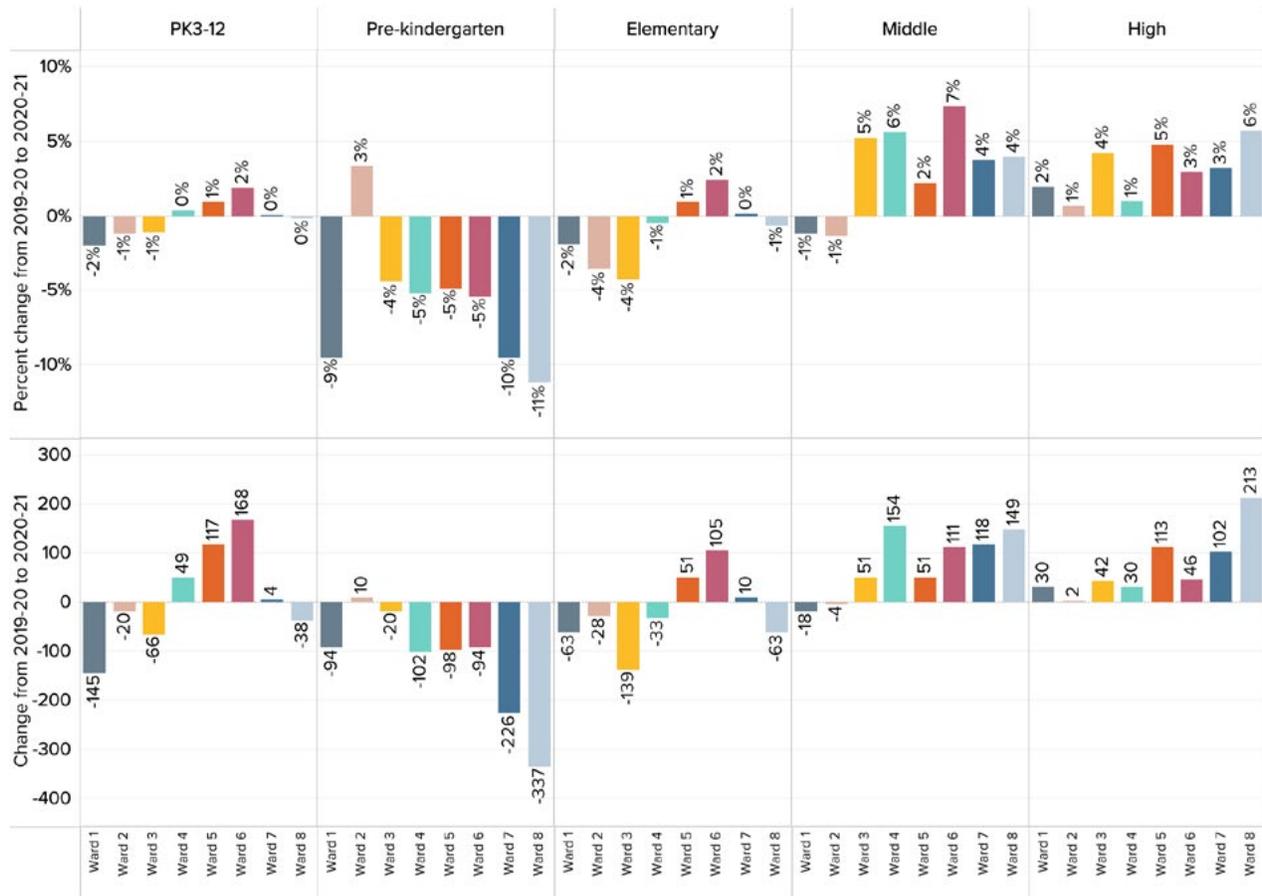
This pattern of steady enrollment numbers in upper grades is consistent with a D.C. Policy Center survey of D.C. parents, which showed that there was no huge exodus of current students to homeschooling, private schools, or out-of-state options.⁹ It is difficult to know how many students moved out of state, but there were 375 more students registered for homeschooling as of February 2021,¹⁰ and 108 more D.C. residents enrolled in private schools located in D.C.—an

increase of about 500 more students known to choose options outside of D.C.'s public schools.¹¹

Enrollment shifts by ward

These enrollment shifts played out differently based on where students lived. Student enrollment decreased by up to two percent in Wards 1, 2, and 3, where the gains in upper grades were smaller than the losses in early grades. In contrast, student enrollment increased in Wards 5 and 6, where gains in middle and high school more than offset the losses in earlier grades to generate increases of at least one

Figure 7. Enrollment changes by ward and grade, 2019-20 to 2020-21 school years



Source: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. 2021. EdScape: Where public school students live. Retrieved from <https://edscape.dc.gov/>

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Note: A new early learning school opened in Ward 2 in the 2020-21 school year.

percent. Enrollment did not change in Wards 4, 7, and 8 relative to total enrollment, with gains in higher grades balancing the losses of up to 10 percent in earlier grades.

Student movement within public schools

Amid increased uncertainty brought on by the pandemic, 86 percent of students re-enrolled at their same school as the previous year. This re-enrollment rate was four percentage points

higher than in 2018-19 (the last year with data), suggesting that students were less likely to make a change at the beginning of the 2020-21 school year. While a larger share of Black students (a six percentage point increase) and students designated as at-risk (a seven percentage point increase) returned to their schools, a smaller share of white students did so (a three percentage point decline), suggesting that white students were more likely than their peers to leave for alternatives.



Adult learners

In school year 2020-21, enrollment in D.C.'s 14 adult and alternative schools dropped sharply, by 13 percent or nearly 950 students between 2019-20 and 2020-21. Enrollment losses among adult learners were likely related to non-academic barriers such as losing a job or income. In a fall 2020 survey of approximately 1,500 adult learners at eight public charter schools, 36 percent of adult learners reported that they were unemployed, 51 percent reported losing their job at some point during the pandemic, and 30 percent reported a reduction in work hours.¹² More than 85 percent of adult learners had concerns around employment and basic needs such as physical health and housing.

Some adult learners found bright spots in virtual learning: 82 percent of those surveyed reported developing stronger digital literacy skills. In addition, many learners have expressed an appreciation for the increased flexibility that virtual learning provides, such as eliminating a commute, being able to learn from anywhere where there is Wi-Fi, and not needing to secure childcare to study (54 percent of adult learners are also parents of school age children).

In D.C. Policy Center focus groups, adult learners echoed these survey findings. They noted the advantages of virtual learning during school year 2020-21, especially the increased flexibility, easier access to learning materials, additional free time, and fewer absences from class. However, they also acknowledged that it could be challenging to stay engaged with lack of social interactions, increased distractions at home, and learning content when it was disorganized. Sometimes, virtual learning meant lower grades and false absences.

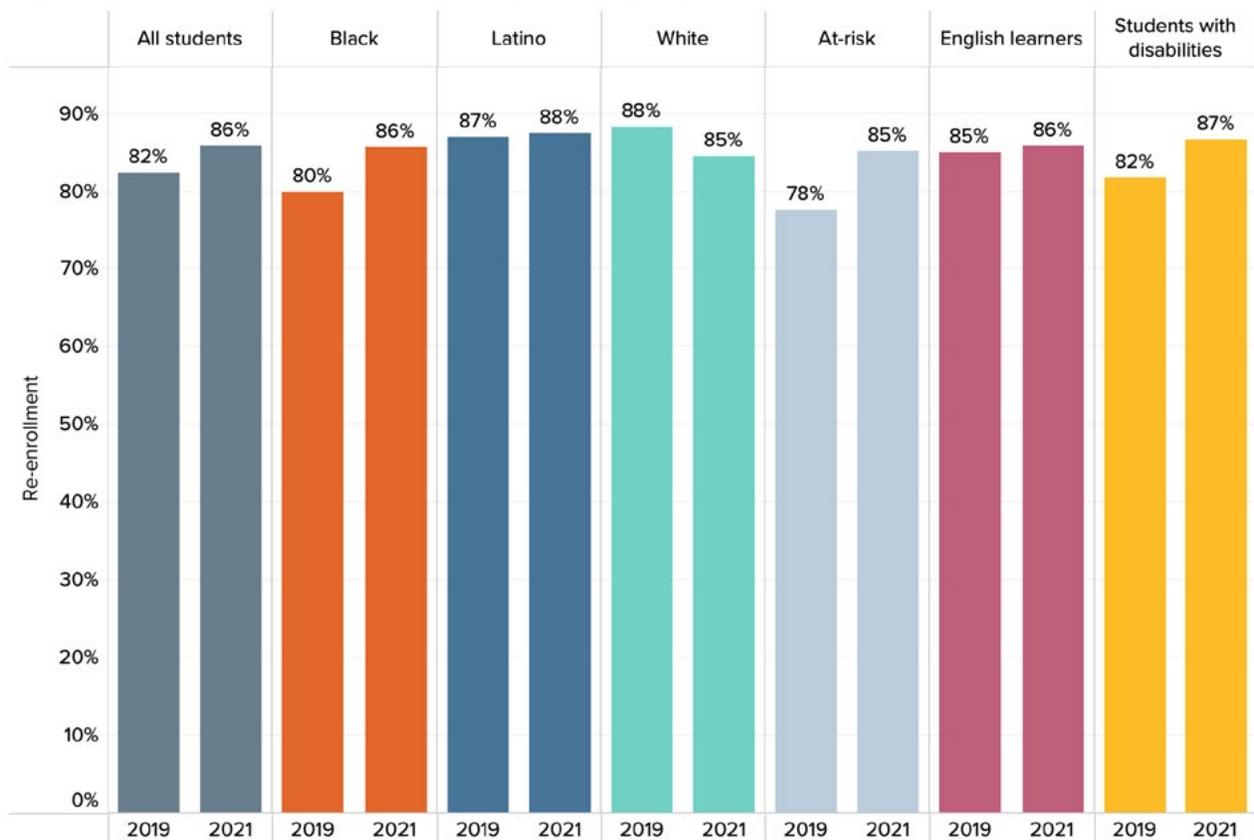
“Virtual learning was very beneficial for me, there was no negative impact. I felt calmer, I didn’t have to leave my house, and I could do all my classes at my own pace.”

—Adult and alternative learner

After the initial decision to re-enroll in the fall, movement in and out of the school system can continue throughout the entire school year: Some students switch to other public schools; some leave to enroll at another private, out-of-state, or homeschool option; some students disengage; and some new students enroll mid-year after leaving other schools. Student movement—the percentage of all students entering and exiting schools after October—shows that while more students stayed with their schools at the beginning of the school year, more students likewise entered, left, or

switched mid-year compared to other years. By May 2021, 9.8 percent of students had left their school compared to 6.1 percent in May 2019, and 7.7 percent of students entered compared to 5.2 percent in May 2019. This could mean that although more students delayed initial school changes in the fall of school year 2020-21, others might have found mid-year changes easier in a virtual learning environment, and yet others might have made changes based on how schools handled virtual learning or whether a school offered in-person learning.

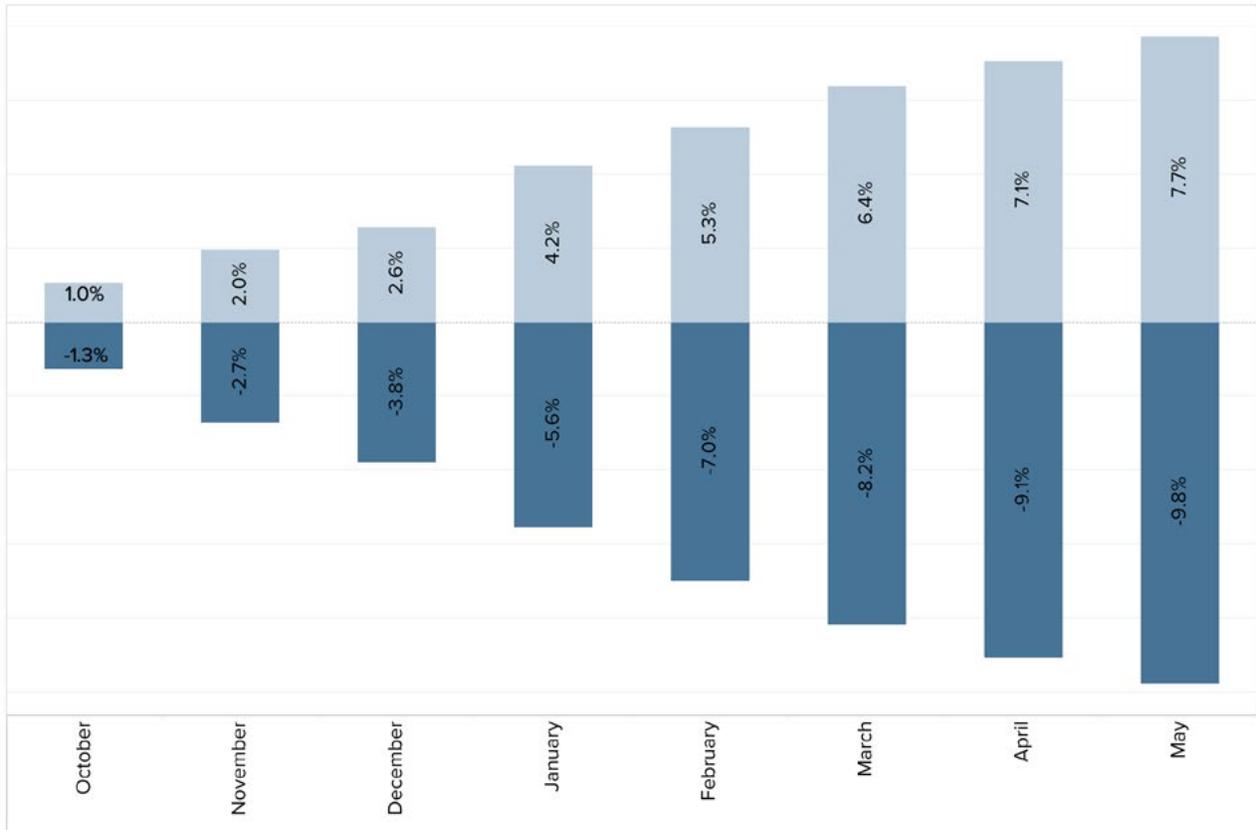
Figure 8. Re-enrollment in D.C. over time, by student group



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). School Report Card data for 2018-19 and 2020-21. Retrieved from <https://osse.dc.gov/page/dc-school-report-card-resource-library>

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Figure 9. Student movement throughout school year 2020-21 (cumulative)



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). School Report Card data for 2020-21. Retrieved from <https://osse.dc.gov/page/dc-school-report-card-resource-library>

Type of movement
■ Entry
■ Exit

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School environment

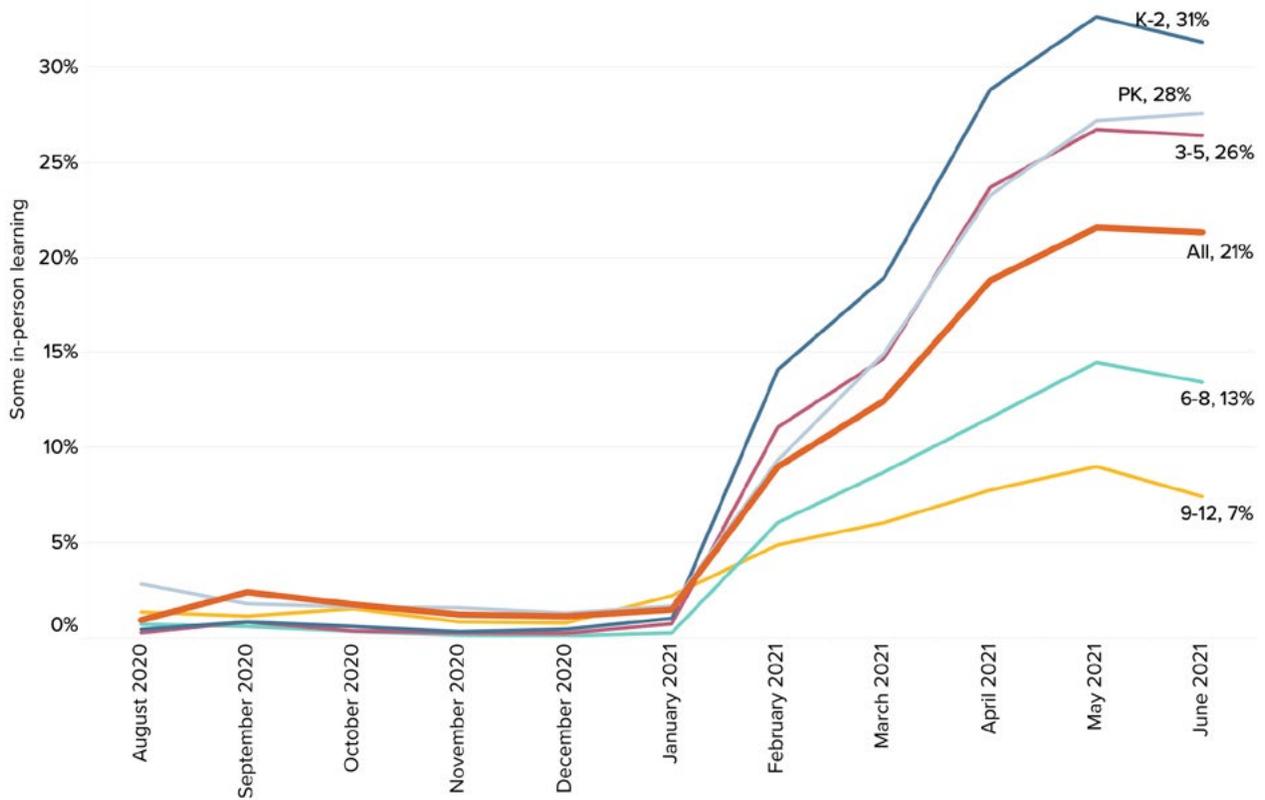
Almost all students began the school year virtually. By the end of the year, 21 percent of students were attending some school in-person, with white students and younger students most likely to return.

With most students learning virtually, there was another round of technology distribution that was more effective than the distribution in the spring of 2020. This meant that access to technology was less of an issue, but the speed of internet access and adequacy of the devices remained a challenge for some. Virtual learning during a pandemic took a toll on educators and parents alike, and school leaders indicated that they adjusted their standards and curriculum to teach a narrower selection of content.

Virtual and in-person learning

The school year began remotely, with 99 percent of students learning virtually for five days a week. Following a mayoral call for DCPS to open in-person with at least 25 percent of students, 11 percent of students had returned to some in-person learning by February 2021, with younger learners more likely to return to in-person than older students. By June 2021, 21 percent of students were attending some school in-person, with pre-kindergarten and elementary school students attending some in-person at rates two to four times higher than in-person attendance rates among middle and high school students. Possible explanations for younger learners spending more time in-person include that they may have had a more difficult time engaging in virtual learning, or that their caregivers may have greater childcare issues.

Figure 10. Percent of students with some in-person learning by grade band, 2020-21



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2021. School Report Card Data. Retrieved from <https://osse.dc.gov/dcschoolreportcard/>

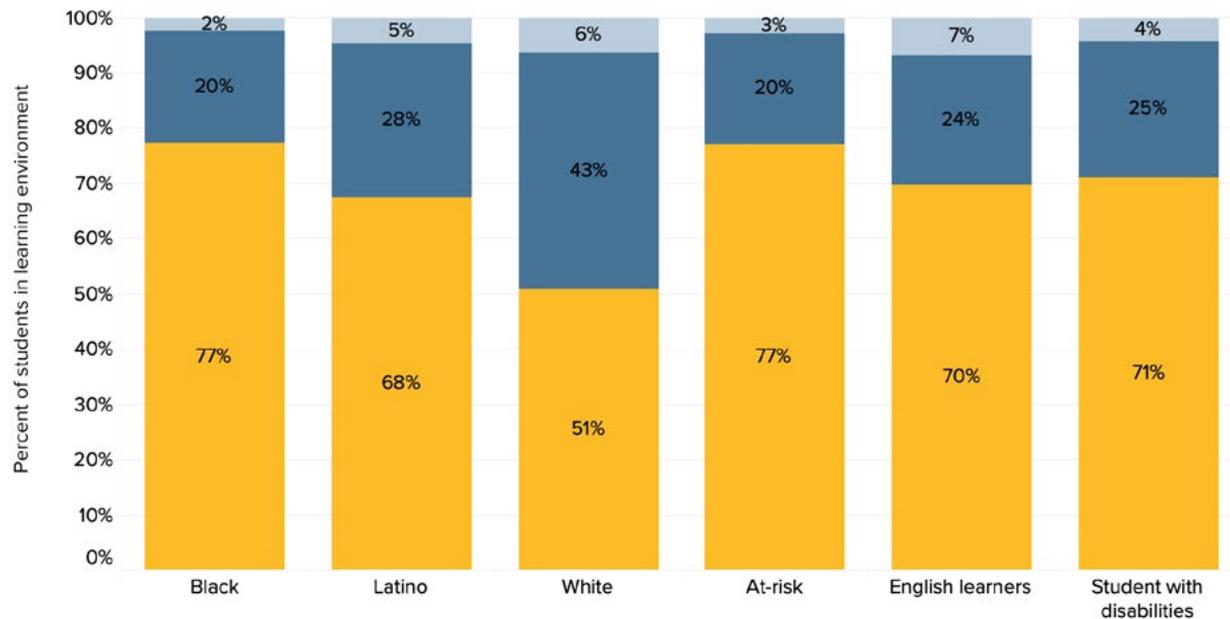
Grade Band
 All
 PK
 K-2
 3-5
 6-8
 9-12

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By student group, 77 percent of Black students and students designated as at-risk remained completely virtual, compared to 51 percent of white students, making in-person learning more common for white students. Close to 70 percent of Latino students, English learners, and students with disabilities learned entirely virtually. These in-person participation rates are aligned with the Parents Amplifying Voices in Education’s (PAVE) Fall 2020 Back to School Survey, wherein 33

percent of surveyed parents reported that, if given a hybrid option in November 2020, they would either “probably” or “definitely” send their child back to in-person. Of those surveyed, white parents were most likely to report that they would “definitely” send their child in-person if given the option (26 percent said definitely), compared to Black parents (14 percent) and Latino parents (15 percent).¹³

Figure 11. Learning environment by student group, 2020-21 school year



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2021. School Report Card Data. Retrieved from <https://osse.dc.gov/dcschoolreportcard/>

Learning environment
 ■ More than 1 day in person
 ■ 1 day or less in person
 ■ All virtual

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Technology availability

Before the pandemic, an average of 66 percent of residents in Wards 7 and 8 had access to a computer with broadband, which is lower than access in other wards and the city average of 82 percent. Building on efforts to close the digital divide in the spring of 2020, a majority of LEAs—35 of 55—planned to give devices to all students regardless of need, and the remaining 20 LEAs planned to provide devices to students who needed them for school year 2020-21. Schools also provided hotspots that supplied internet access as needed.¹⁴

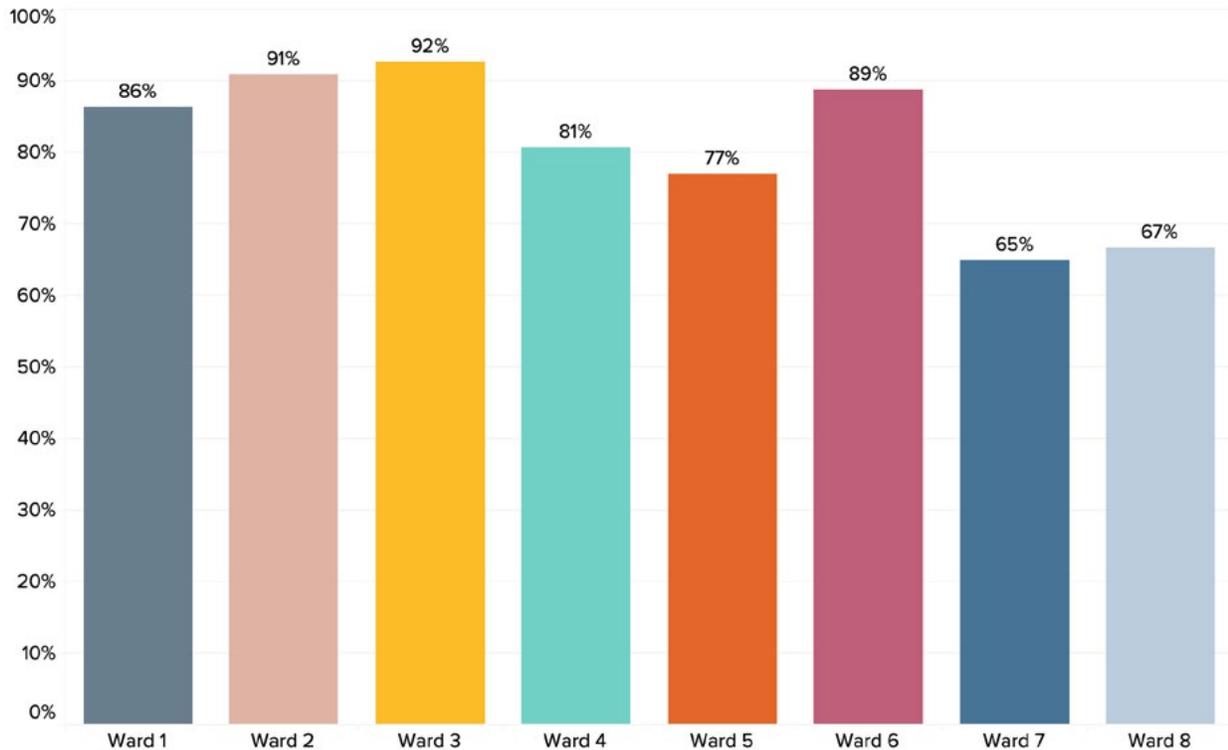
At the system level, and with the help of federal funding,¹⁵ the DC Office of the Chief Technology

Officer (OCTO), in partnership with DME and OSSE, implemented the Internet for All Initiative to connect low-income families who have children enrolled in public PK-12 schools with free residential internet services. But utilization rates were not particularly strong. As of October 2020, 4,000 households had enrolled, compared to a goal of 25,000.¹⁶

“The internet speed did not support all of us that I had in the house. It was not enough speed to accommodate four kids with schoolwork and me working from home.”

—Parent

Figure 12. Percentage of D.C. households per ward who have a computer with broadband - 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). *2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates [S2801]*. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/>

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It is difficult to assess how many students lacked devices or internet during school year 2020-21. The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) surveyed LEAs to assess students' device and internet access prior to school year 2020-21. For public charter LEAs, DME anticipated a gap of 100 devices across all LEAs (including students who would be using their previously-owned devices) and remedied this gap by connecting LEAs with gaps to the Ed Equity fund.¹⁷ While DME reported a total of 74,250 available learning devices, information is not publicly available on how devices and internet resources were distributed compared to student and family need.

Importantly, the main impediment to learning was not lack of internet access or devices, but rather the speed of internet access and adequacy of the devices. While there is no systemwide data, separate surveys of teachers, parents, and students all arrive at this conclusion: by early 2021, 76 percent of teachers surveyed across the District by the DC State Board of Education (DC SBOE) reported that their students had issues with internet access that was too slow, and 62 percent of those surveyed reported that students' devices were too slow.¹⁸ By the end of the school year, 98 percent of parents reported having access to internet, but only 59 percent reported that they were able to use the internet

when they need it without glitches, slowdowns, or getting disconnected.¹⁹ And in a survey of public charter school students conducted by EmpowerK12, 46 percent of students reported that their internet is always good enough to participate in all school activities.²⁰

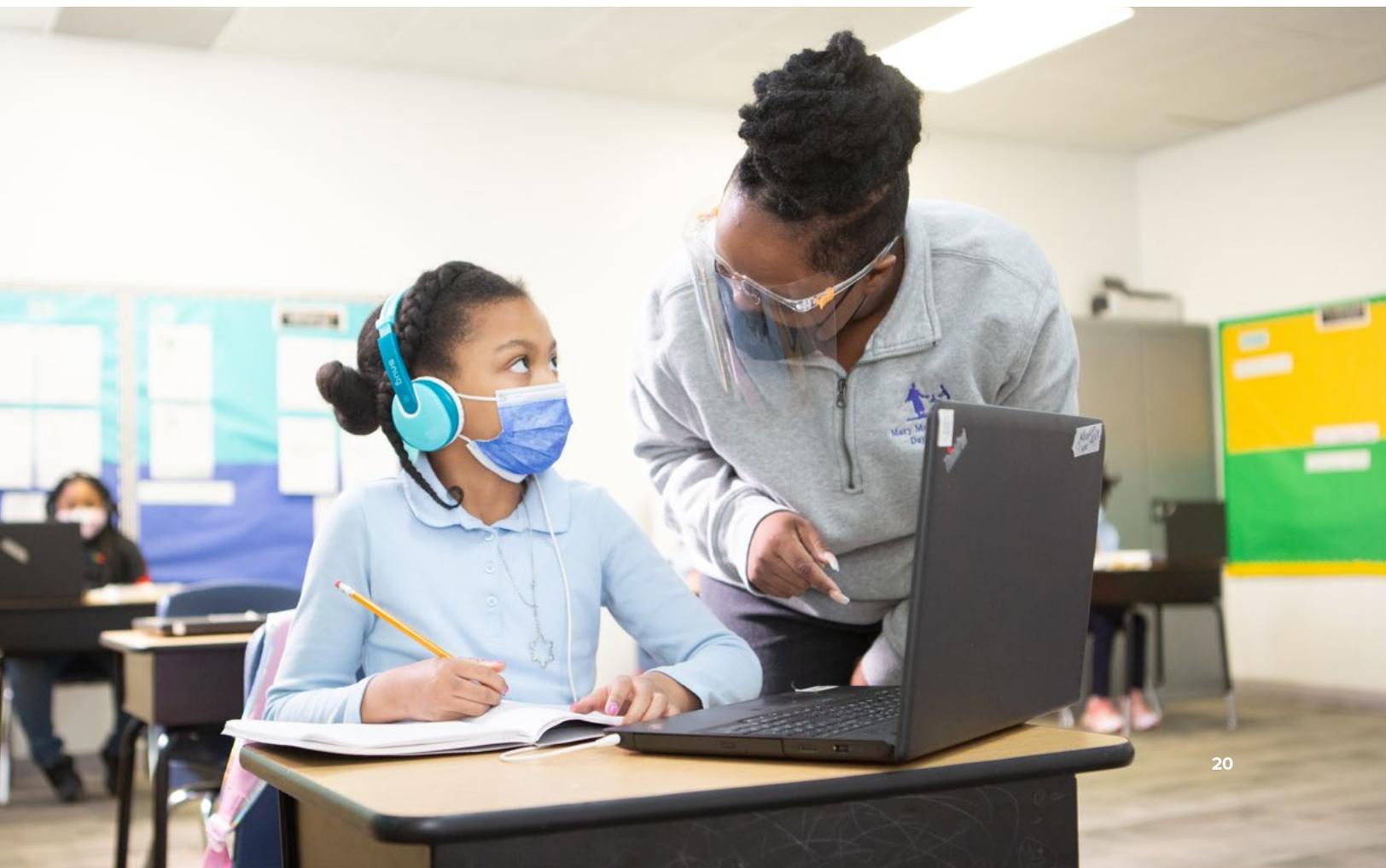
“It was really difficult for some students. We teach in Ward 8, the majority of our students lived in Ward 8. There were a lot of areas that had dead zones, where even the hotspots that were given didn’t work.”

—Teacher

High school students, parents, and teachers who participated in the D.C. Policy Center focus groups had similar experiences—some students had school-provided devices, but that did not

always translate into easy access to virtual learning. Sometimes the school-provided devices did not work, and other times, their connection was not reliable, making it difficult to submit assignments online. Some student focus group participants reported that they bought their own devices. Others reported that it was difficult to get assistance when they had trouble with their devices or internet access.

Issues with devices and internet led to concerns about attendance and students being properly counted. For many focus group participants, including both high school and adult and alternative students, logging onto class itself became a challenge and with no live support to troubleshoot, students with login difficulties had to miss class or were not counted in class even when they attended. During virtual learning, attendance policies were more flexible (for



example, DCPS's policy was that students had to sign on at least once a day), but students who struggled with internet access may have experienced broader consequences on how they were counted in class and what impact that could have on their grade.

LEAs responded to technology-related concerns from students and families by offering a variety of structured assistance programs. One school leader described drop-in technology support days where families could obtain assistance getting their devices up and running. Another school leader described drop-in and in-home technology assistance. DCPS set up a 24/7 hotline where students could receive assistance navigating online platforms and get help with their DCPS-issued device.

Teachers

Many LEAs had been planning on in-person or hybrid schedules right up to the beginning of the school year in August 2020. This meant that teachers had to quickly pivot to a virtual setting. In the D.C. Policy Center focus group, teachers shared that their lack of preparation for virtual learning and difficulty adapting their teaching materials to fit the online context made them less effective. In addition to teaching in a different environment, teachers said they had to change the way they communicated with students and parents. Some teachers shared that they were being asked to do too much amid other concerns during a pandemic, and they did not feel like they were given the right flexibility to do their job in the virtual context. They also mentioned that while school leaders tried to maintain positive





Teacher and school leader experience

15 percent of teachers were in their first year of teaching and almost one third of all teachers had more than 10 years of experience in school year 2020-21.

47 percent of school leaders across all schools had up to one year of experience.

work environments, many felt that morale was low due to the challenges of virtual learning, as well as general COVID-19 stresses (heightened levels of stress for teachers are not unique to D.C., but follow national trends).²¹

A survey conducted by DC SBOE corroborated these focus group findings. Most teachers

acknowledged that it was more difficult to provide instruction virtually: Only 32 percent of teachers reported that they felt that they could cover as much content as they did while teaching in-person.²² Seventy-nine percent of teachers reported feeling generally supported by their school's administration and 85 percent said that they had regular collaboration with other teachers. However, only 17 percent of teachers said that they had all the supports that they needed for virtual learning.²³

A general decline with job satisfaction among teachers could lead to longer-term staffing issues. In a typical year, measured from 2015 through 2020, almost one quarter of teachers leave their jobs in D.C. This attrition rate has been higher than the national average of 16 percent, as well as the average attrition rate of 19 percent across urban school districts.²⁴ The pandemic's toll on teachers is likely going to increase teacher attrition. Forty-three percent of teachers shared that they have considered leaving the teaching

profession because of the challenges of teaching.²⁵ Returning to in-person learning was also related to considering leaving the profession: In January and February 2021, 75 percent of teachers reported being either slightly or very uncomfortable with returning to in-person—with almost one fifth reporting that they would either resign or take leave if they had to return.

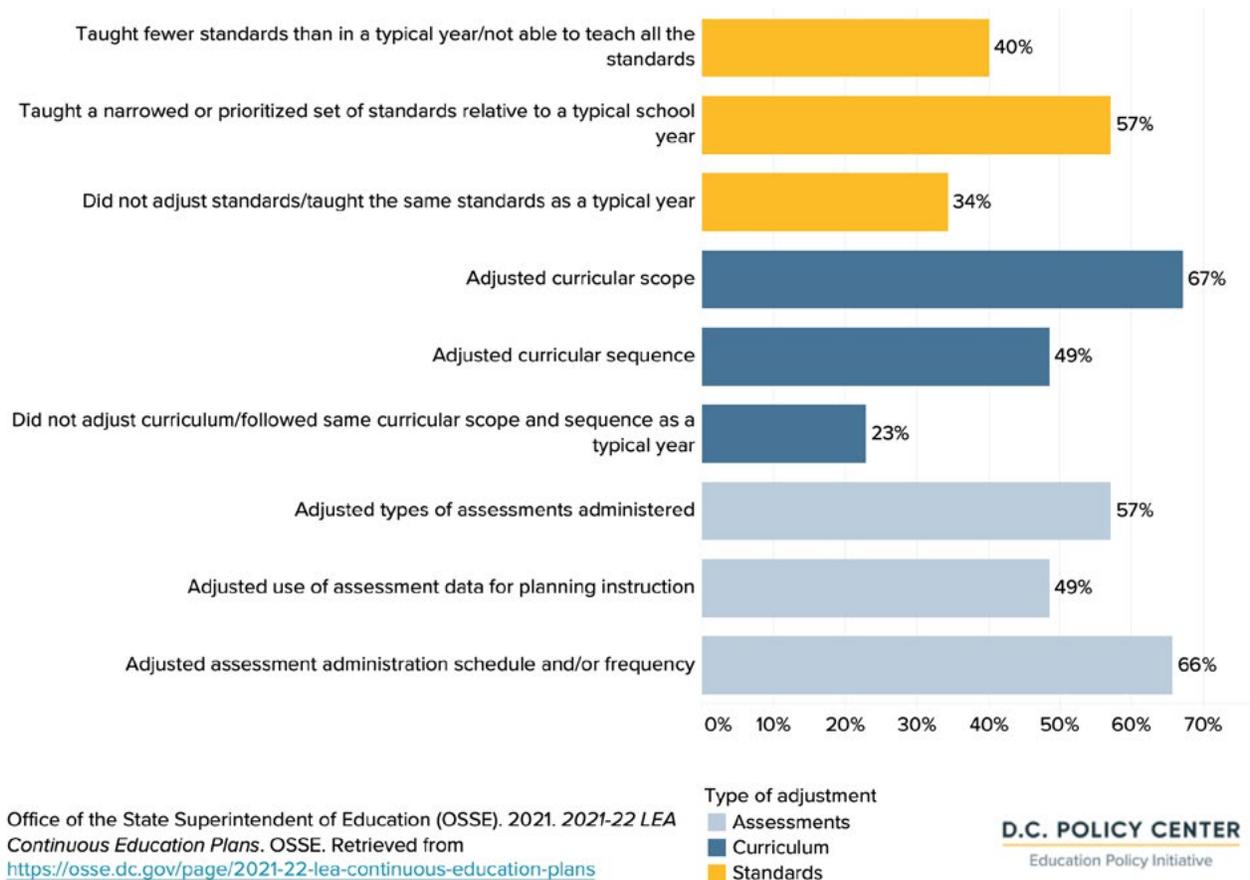
School leadership

Reacting to the experiences of distance learning in spring 2020 and the reality of a full year of

virtual learning, school leaders reported that they changed what was taught in school year 2020-21. A majority of LEAs reported that they adjusted their curricular scope (67 percent) or taught a narrower set of standards (57 percent).²⁶ At least half of LEAs changed their assessment practices as well.

In addition to changing plans for standards, curriculum, and assessments, school leaders interviewed by the D.C. Policy Center emphasized the need to pivot in order to offer different supports based on available resources

Figure 13. How LEAs adjusted approaches to standards, curriculum, and assessments in the 2020-21 school year



and student, teacher, and community needs. For those school leaders, offering supports to teachers was a top priority. One school leader described an initiative to give teachers funding to outfit a home office during virtual learning. School leaders also described trying to be more flexible in providing needed time-off when possible.

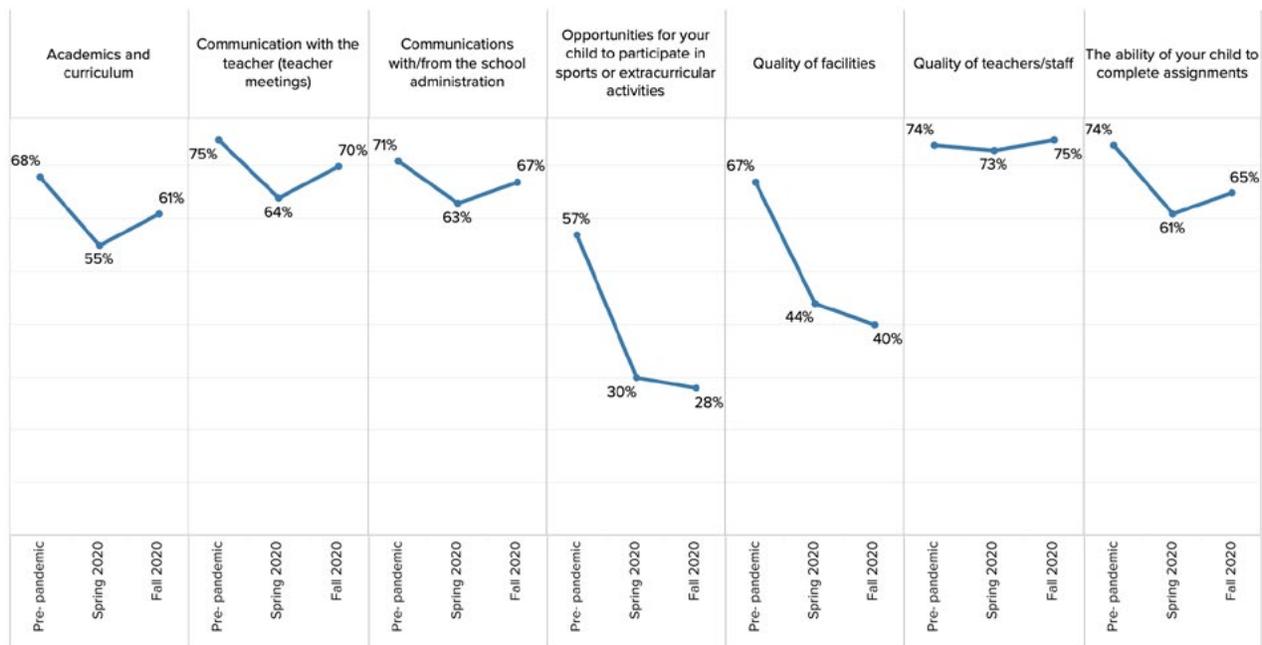
Parents and families

Virtual learning was challenging for many parents: In a 2021 end-of-school-year parent survey conducted by PAVE, 39 percent of parents mentioned managing children’s education at home as a top challenge during school year 2020-21.²⁷ In a survey conducted by the D.C. Policy Center,²⁸ just over half (58 percent) of parents reported that they were

satisfied with virtual or distance learning overall in January 2021.

Looking at D.C.’s public school parents’ perceptions of the school environment during the pandemic, satisfaction dipped in several areas in spring 2020, but had rebounded by January 2021 for academics, curriculum, classroom experiences, communications, and quality of teachers and staff. However, even one full year into the pandemic, satisfaction levels with various school aspects outside of teacher and staff quality lagged behind pre-pandemic levels. The two areas where parent satisfaction continuously declined through the pandemic were the quality of facilities—where the share of parents “very satisfied” or “extremely satisfied” shrank by 28 percentage points, and participation in sports and extracurricular activities—which was already low

Figure 14. Share of D.C. parents who are very or extremely satisfied with certain school aspects before and during the pandemic



Source: D.C. Policy Center/SSRS survey.

Spanish-speaking parents

The D.C. Policy Center engaged eight Spanish-speaking parents for a Latino-centered focus group. The challenges brought up in this group aligned with many of the other areas of interest highlighted by all parents, such as navigating virtual learning, balancing work responsibilities, and the need for additional resources. Overall, Spanish-speaking parents spoke positively about communicating with their child's school in their preferred language, and some appreciated parent-led communication streams that made more frequent use of platforms they are familiar with, such as WhatsApp.

Several parents did share that language barriers and advocating for children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) presented an additional challenge during virtual learning. Some parents felt that children with IEPs did not receive the quality and level of support that they should have received. Focus group participants generally thought that English as Second Language (ESL) services were better than those for students with IEPs.

Overall, Spanish-speaking parents shared that they thought virtual learning resulted in worse academic results for their children than in previous years. They expressed fears that the 2020-21 school year would have longer-lasting impacts, specifically limiting their children's opportunities to get into their preferred middle and high schools.

Spanish-speaking focus group participants shared that they were able to access resources from schools and community-based organizations like parenting classes, mental health support, home visiting resources, food distributions, and utility assistance (in the other focus groups, access to resources was discussed, but with less engagement than in the Spanish-speaking group). Participating Spanish-speaking parents shared that they benefited greatly from the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program and that they wish that they had access to the program earlier to better support their families.

“Al principio fue difícil porque las escuelas no estaban preparadas para dar la comida, pero casi a los 2 meses después de que se organizaron bien y si había comida, antes teníamos que buscar en lugares lejos.”

“At the beginning it was difficult because our school was not prepared to provide food, we spent two months when we did not know where to get food from.”

– Padre/Parent

“Cuando están yendo tiempo completo a la escuela, regresan a virtual y no hay como continuar con las clases, los niños vuelven a empezar la escuela, esa transición es confusa y crea un desequilibrio en los niños con IEP.”

“It's as if our children must start the school year over and over. The first day jitters kick in, and the virtual class is not a great memory for them, because they must be at home all day again. This creates an imbalance of emotions in our IEP children.”

- Padre/Parent

at 57 percent, and declined by 29 percentage points. These continued decreases in satisfaction could be due to the limited access to facilities and increased attention on ventilation, for example, and fewer extracurricular activities.

In the same D.C. Policy Center survey, most parents expressed satisfaction with communication with teachers and the school administration. They appreciated the increased flexibility in communicating with teachers especially by chat or text, but some mentioned that email was not as convenient. At the same time, these changes in communication methods sometimes became exhausting for teachers. Teachers who participated in the focus groups mentioned that this flexibility created unclear boundaries. There were also some indicators that parents and teachers were not coordinated in their communications. Parents described

delays in hearing from teachers, while teachers described families missing communications.

Overall, communication and engagement remained a challenge for some parents, and were identified as pertinent issues in over half of the 255 cases that the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education processed during school year 2020-21. In most instances, lack of communication acted as an amplifier, generally accompanying some other concern such as academic progress or attendance and truancy cases (communication was identified as the sole issue in only eight cases).²⁹ However, parents were informed about their children's academic performance: by the end of the school year, 96 percent of parents reported in a PAVE parent survey that they had received information about how their child was doing academically.³⁰





Student outcomes

Student engagement, learning, and wellbeing were difficult to measure in school year 2020-21, but seem to have been challenging.

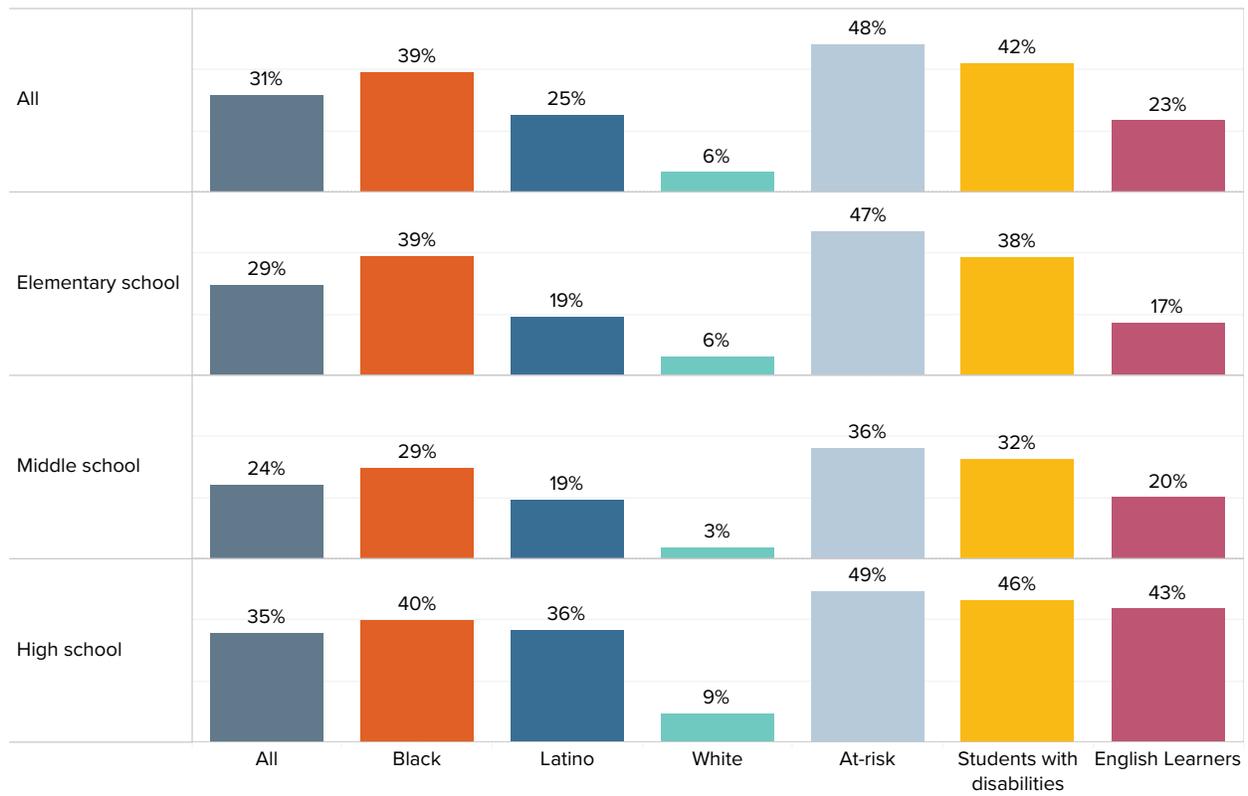
Even though D.C. adapted in-seat attendance and graduation requirements for virtual learning, 31 percent of students were chronically absent, missing 10 percent or more of the school year. With almost all students participating in virtual learning, D.C. received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education to suspend the planned spring administration of the annual statewide assessment known as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).³¹ In absence of the statewide assessment, an EmpowerK12 analysis of school-level assessments shows that the academic

performance of schools declined during school year 2020-21, and these declines were larger among students who are designated at-risk. For high school students, graduation rates increased by two percentage points, but other indicators of college and career readiness remained low. Finally, mental health was a concern for many from the perspective of high school students and parents—and some of this was related to an increase in community violence.

Student attendance

During school year 2020-21, schools had to change how they collected attendance, with almost all students participating in virtual instruction within a framework and guidance provided by OSSE. To verify virtual attendance, LEAs with a Learning Management System (LMS) required students to be authenticated by that system. Otherwise, some LEAs asked students

Figure 15. Chronic absenteeism rates by student group and grade band, school year 2020-21



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education. 2021. *D.C. School Report Card data*. OSSE. Retrieved from <https://osse.dc.gov/dcschoolreportcard/>

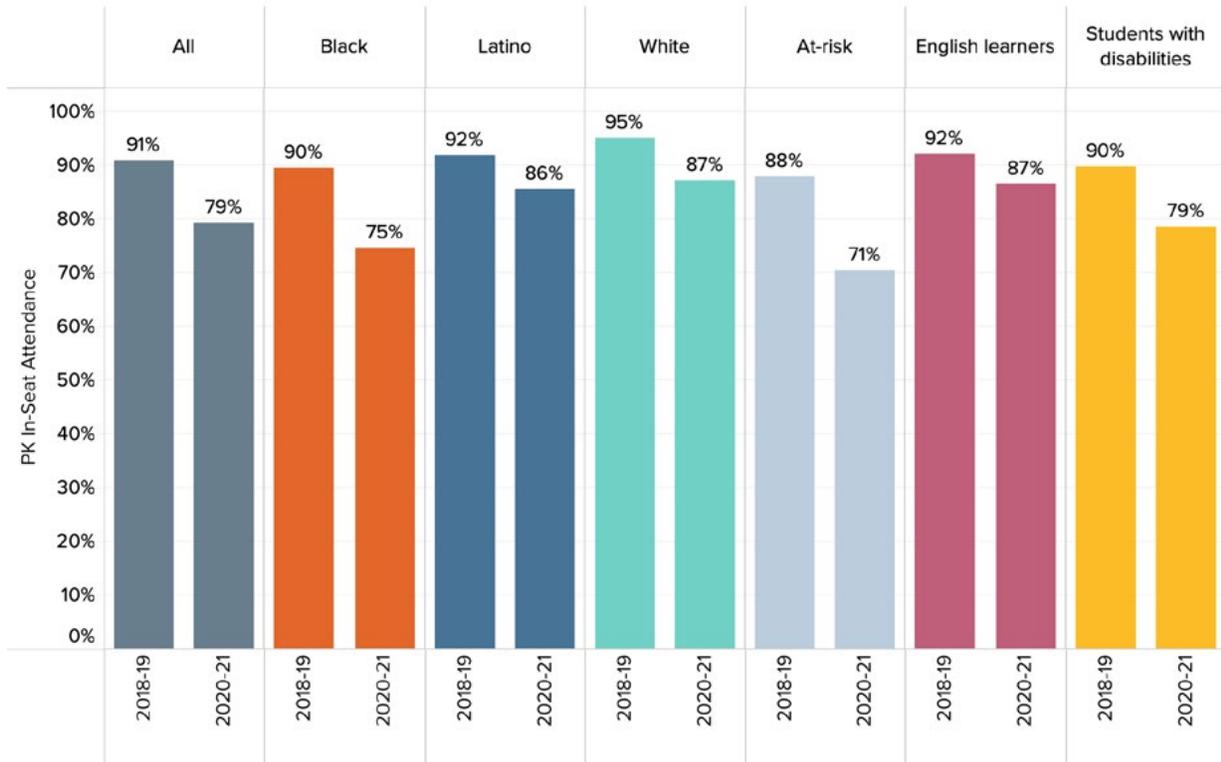
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to make direct contact with a school staff member, some asked them to complete a daily assignment, and some required both.³² With this flexible definition for attendance in school year 2020-21, the recorded attendance rate was 89.5 percent. Even so, 31 percent of students were chronically absent, missing 10 percent or more of the school year. High school students were more likely to be chronically absent (35 percent) than students in lower grades, and students designated as at-risk were more likely to be chronically absent within any grade band (almost half of elementary and high school students designated as at-risk were chronically absent).³³

Pre-kindergarten attendance

In school year 2020-21, virtual learning was more challenging for younger learners than older students, and required more direction from parents and caregivers.³⁴ There are no data on learning outcomes for pre-kindergarten students in school year 2020-21, but recorded pre-kindergarten attendance in school year 2020-21 suggests that students lost significant instruction time. During this school year, pre-kindergarten students attended school an average of eight out of every 10 days. Pre-kindergarteners who are designated as at-risk attended an average of seven out of every 10 days.

Figure 16. Pre-kindergarten attendance rates by student group, 2018-19 and 2020-21 school years



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2021. School Report Card Data. Retrieved from <https://osse.dc.gov/dcschoolreportcard/>

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Learning outcomes

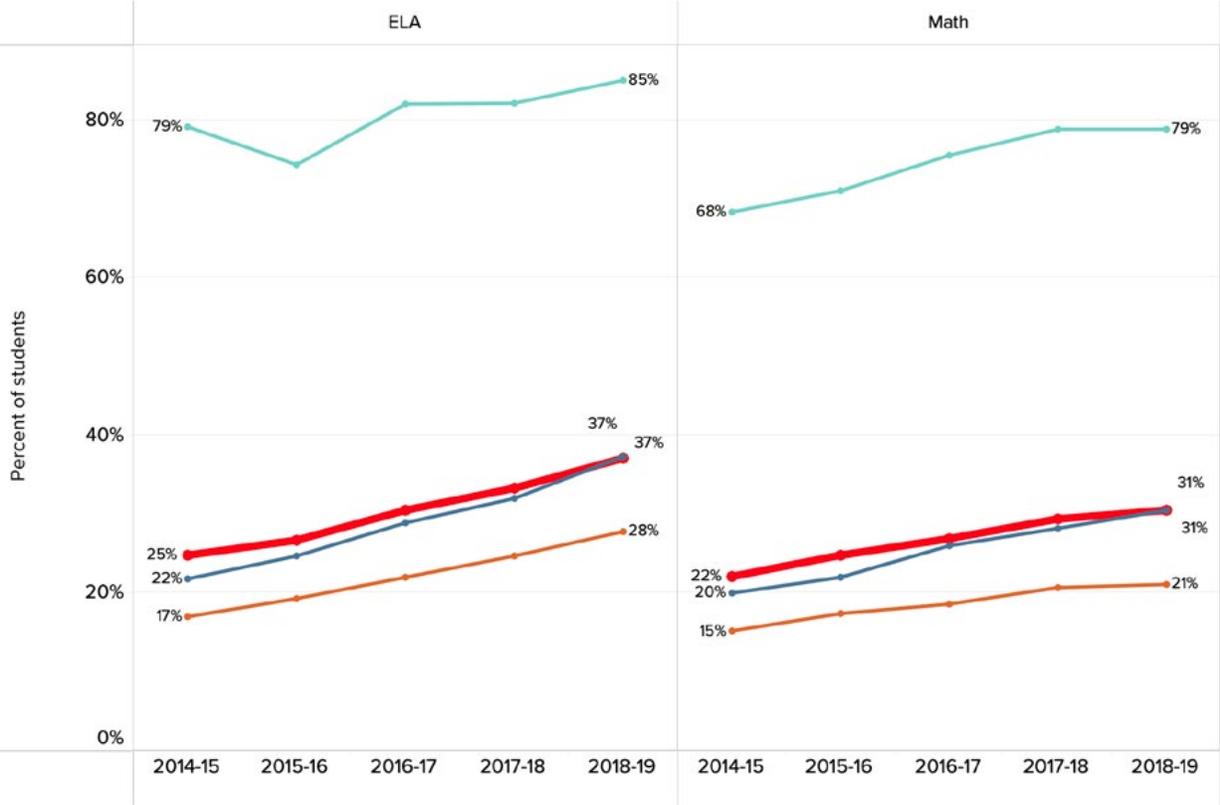
For the five years before the pandemic, learning outcomes had been improving on the state assessment, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). From 2014-15 to 2018-19, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PARCC assessment in English Language Arts (ELA) improved from 25 percent to 37 percent, and the percentage doing so in Math improved from 22 percent to 31 percent. The pandemic interrupted learning for the last four months of school year 2019-20, and D.C. did not administer a statewide assessment in the 2019-20 or 2020-21 school

years, so it is difficult to assess the systemwide impacts of learning. However, an EmpowerK12 analysis of school-level assessments shows that learning outcomes have declined during the pandemic, reversing earlier trends.

Elementary and middle school students

In the absence of a statewide assessment, almost all schools (94 percent) continued to administer their own assessments. An average of three-quarters of students participated in ELA or Math assessments at the school level, which is lower than the 95 percent participation rate that is usually required for statewide assessments at the school level.³⁵

Figure 17. Students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PARCC assessment, by race and ethnicity



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2019. School Report Card Data. Retrieved from results.osse.dc.gov

Black
Latino
White
Overall

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In the absence of statewide assessment results to gauge learning outcomes during the pandemic, EmpowerK12 compared results from these school assessments administered in the spring of school year 2020-21 to results from the spring of school year 2018-19.³⁶ Their analysis³⁷ shows that academic performance was lower in school year 2020-21 when compared to pre-pandemic years, which aligns with national trends.³⁸ Fewer early elementary students in kindergarten through grade 2 were reading on grade level: In 2019, 69 percent of this group were on or above grade level, compared to 51 percent in 2021 (an 18 percentage point drop). Declines were twice as large for kindergarten through grade 2

students designated at-risk, who experienced a 27 percentage-point decrease in reading on grade level, compared to a decrease of 13 percentage points for other students. The same analysis revealed that older students, in grades 2 through 8, learned less in 2021 than their peers had in 2019, with a nine percentile-point decline in achievement levels in ELA and a 10 percentile-point decline in Math.

High school students

Influencing some of these learning outcomes, a larger share of high school students remained in virtual learning for the entire school year, than

Figure 18. Percent of kindergarten through grade 2 students reading on grade level in EmpowerK12 sample, by student group

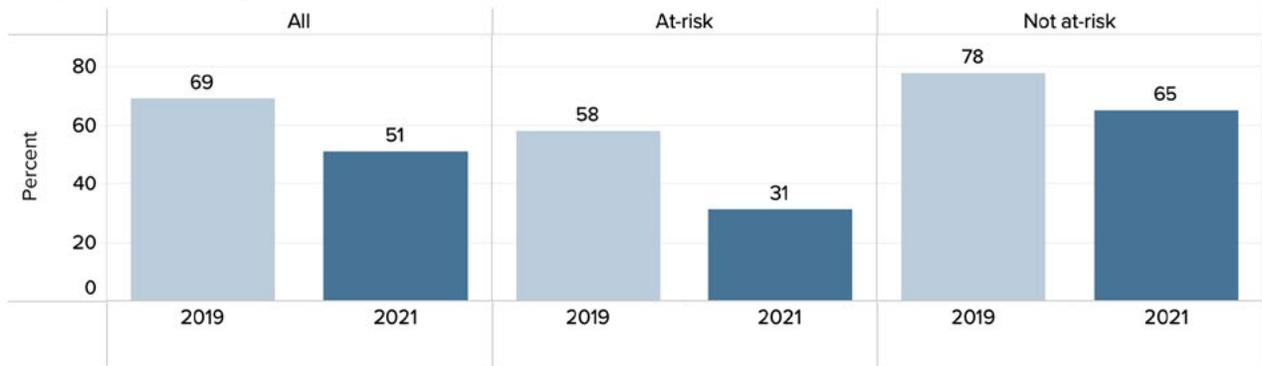
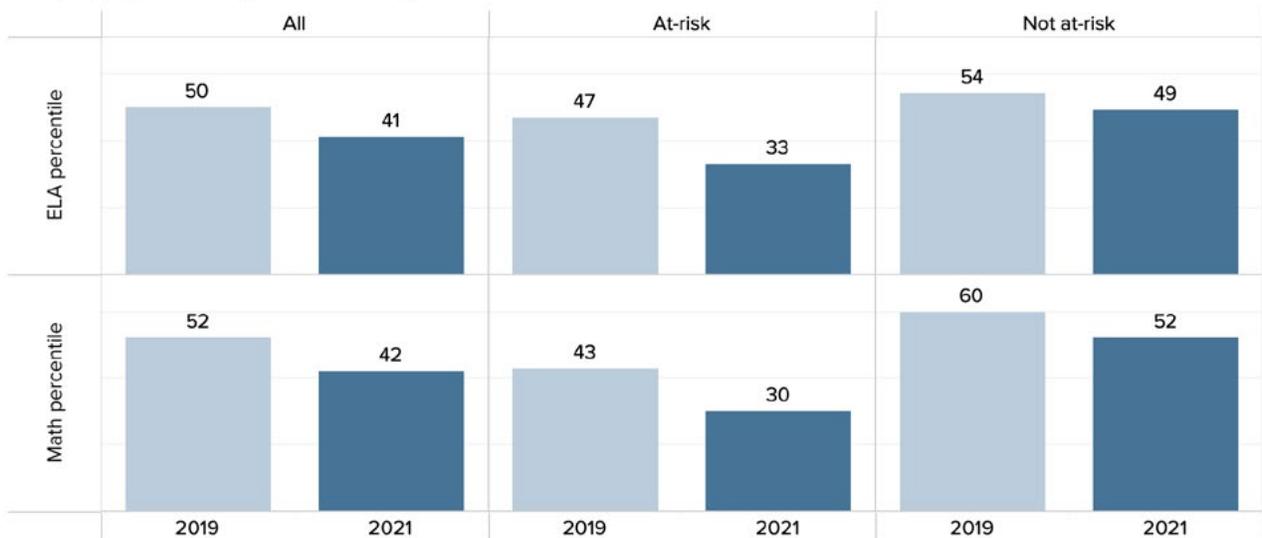


Figure 19. Median achievement percentile ranks for students in grade 2 through grade 8 in EmpowerK12 sample, by student group and subject



Source: EmpowerK12. 2021. *Update on Unfinished Learning in DC*. EmpowerK12. Retrieved from <https://www.empowerk12.org/research-source/covid-impact-achievement-dc>

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did younger students during school year 2020-21. D.C. Policy Center focus group participants from high schools across the city shared mixed experiences with virtual learning depending on the presence of distractions at home, whether students had access to suitable resources, and students' experiences with accountability.

“If I had my own room, it would be a lot easier because then I don’t get to hear my sister in class while I’m in class.”

– High school student



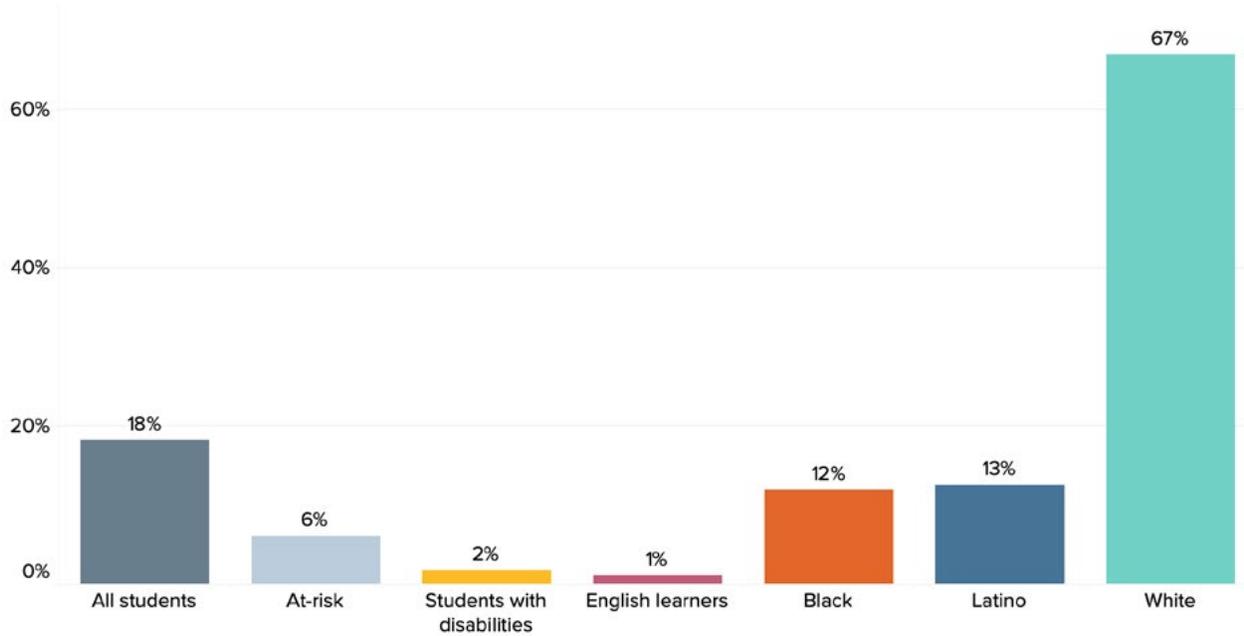
Students said that having access to additional help was a critical piece in their virtual learning. Some reported that they received less help in a virtual setting, while others found the flexibility of teachers' schedules to work in their favor. Self-regulating and learning without the structure of in-person school provided opportunities for growth for some, and challenges for others. While some students shared that they enjoyed setting their own schedule, others shared that it was difficult to keep up.

College and career readiness. Although the statewide assessment for high school students was not administered in school year 2020-21, some students participated in other assessments of college and career readiness.³⁹ Out of all the 3,564 seniors enrolled in 2020-21, 18 percent both took the SAT and met the SAT college and career ready benchmark, which represents a slight decrease from 20 percent of seniors in

school year 2018-19.⁴⁰ However, only 6 percent of students designated as at-risk were SAT college and career ready in school year 2020-21, compared to 28 percent of their not at-risk peers.

Another indicator of college and career readiness is successful participation in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB). AP and IB tests are subject-specific and are usually associated with a class offered through students' schools. Data from school year 2020-21 show that fewer students participated in these advanced classes compared to pre-pandemic years, but with comparable pass rates. AP/IB participation dropped across the board to 58 percent, from 62 percent in school year 2018-19. The decline in participation was twice as high (10 percentage points) for Latino students and English learners. With a shift in participation, 39 percent of students passed these exams, which is the same as 39 percent in the last reported year of 2018-19.

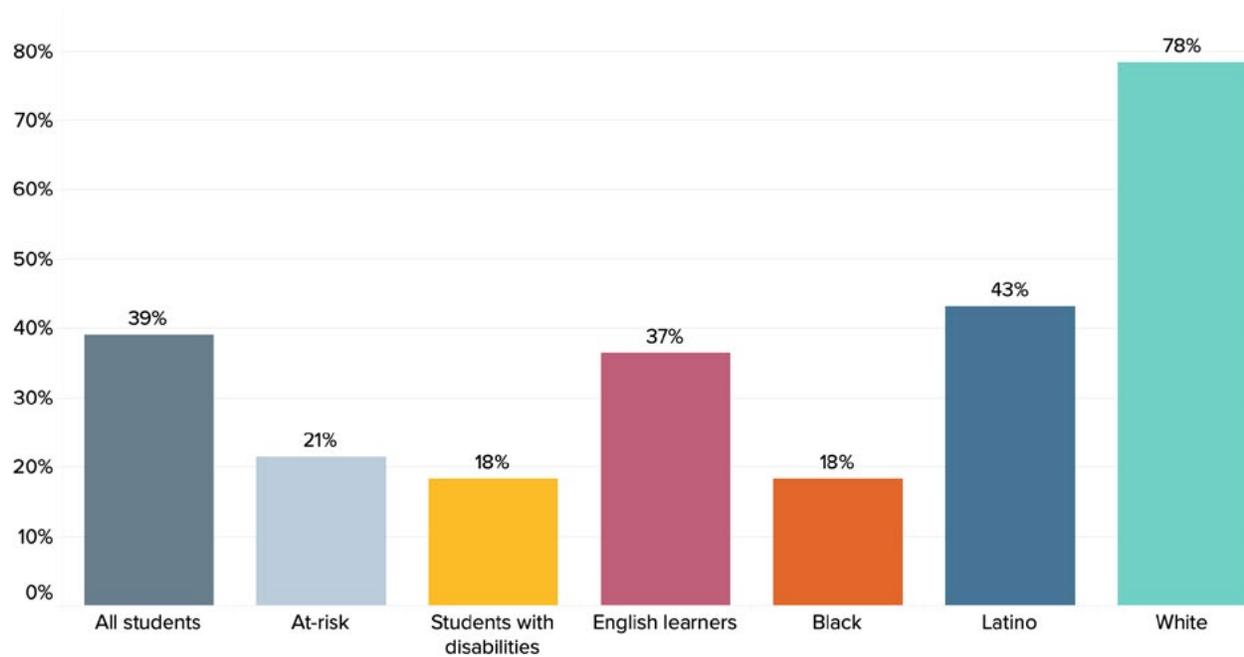
Figure 20. Percent of seniors who are SAT College/Career Ready



Source: OSSE. 2021 DC School Report Card AP, IB, and SAT Metrics. Available at: <https://osse.dc.gov/page/dc-school-report-card-resource-library>

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Figure 21. Percent of high school seniors who have passed at least one AP/IB test



Source: OSSE. 2021 DC School Report Card AP, IB, and SAT Metrics. Available at: <https://osse.dc.gov/page/dc-school-report-card-resource-library>

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Graduation. In 2020-21, the four-year graduation rate increased to 72.6 percent, continuing a trend of improving graduation rates since school year 2018-19. It is possible that graduation rate improvements are related to relaxed graduation requirements that were necessary to match the realities of remote learning: Students did not have to complete 120 hours of classroom instruction per class during the year, nor 100 hours of community service.

By subgroup, Latino students and English learners experienced the largest increase in graduation rates from 2019-20 to 2020-21, with 7 percentage points and 5 percentage points, respectively.⁴¹ The graduation rate for white students decreased by two percentage points from 2019-20 to

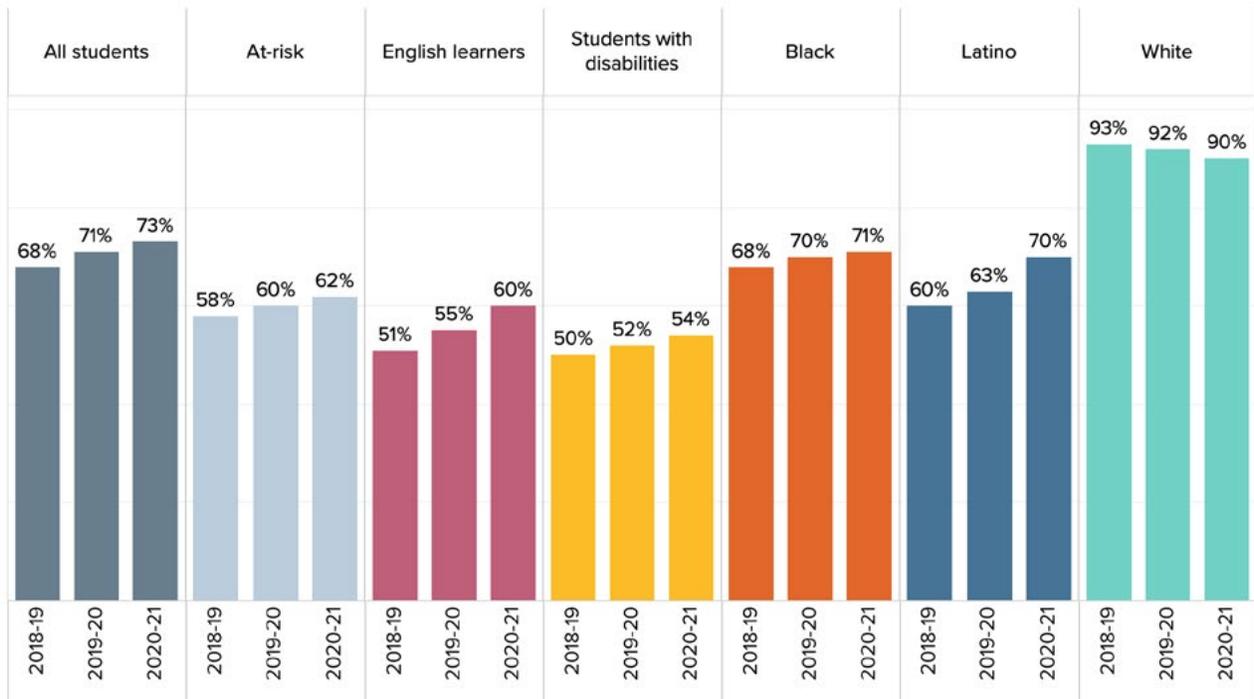
“I wasn’t paying that much attention and my grades showed that. While I wasn’t failing, it was harder for me to keep up with the work.”

—High school student

2020-21. Even with these improvements, students designated as at-risk, English learners, and students with disabilities had lower rates of graduation compared to the average rate.

Transition to postsecondary. With the uncertainties brought on by the pandemic, an increasing number of students put off their college plans. The share of students who enrolled in a postsecondary institution within six months of graduation decreased from 56 percent for 2018-19 graduates to 51 percent for 2019-20 graduates to 47 percent for 2020-21 graduates.

Figure 22. Four-year high school graduation rate by sub-group



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), 2021. School Report Card Data. Retrieved from <https://osse.dc.gov/dcschoolreportcard/>

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graduates. English learners experienced the largest drop in enrollment in postsecondary—10 percentage points—between these years. It is too soon to know postsecondary enrollment for the class that graduated in 2020-21, but as of February 2021, seniors completing FAFSA forms was down by three percentage points compared to previous year, indicating that fewer are seriously considering college (around 175 fewer applications).⁴²

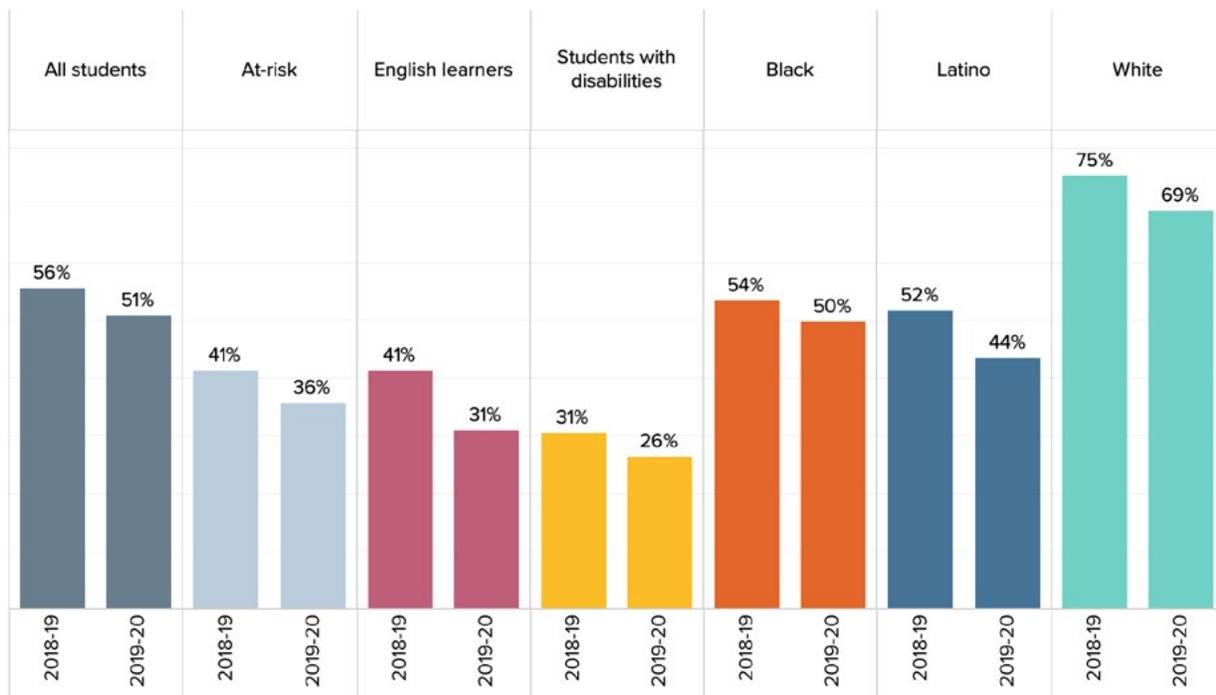
There is no information available on the transition to career, which is especially difficult to track in D.C. given its small geographic area, dispersed alumni population, and small public postsecondary system compared to other states. The D.C. Policy Center report, *Measuring*

early career outcomes in D.C.,⁴³ examined how D.C. can collect more information about the early career outcomes of former public school students, and the DC SBOE Recommendations Related to the STAR Framework and DC School Report Card (SR22-1) included an indicator for employment as a start in this direction.

“...because I wasn’t in school and there wasn’t after school stuff for me to really go to... I was able to just balance myself more and learn how to do time management.”

—High school student

Figure 23. Percent of alumni enrolled in postsecondary 6 months after graduation



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2021. School Report Card Data. Retrieved from <https://osse.dc.gov/dcschoolreportcard/>

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Black Youth Agenda⁴⁴

Before school year 2020-21, demonstrations in the summer 2020 following the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and many other Black Americans brought a renewed call for racial justice in D.C. and across the country. One of the largest protests took place in Washington, D.C., and racial justice has increasingly been on the minds of community members in the District. In a 2021 end-of-year survey of parents by PAVE, 44 percent of parents identified issues with racial inequity and injustice in our country as their top challenge (mentioned more than any other issue).⁴⁵ Students and the DC SBOE have made calls to make schools police-free, and DC SBOE is working with OSSE toward updating social studies standards to be more culturally responsive and anti-racist.

In this environment, Black Swan Academy, a non-profit that empowers Black youth through civic leadership and engagement, collaborated with middle and high school youth in D.C. to formulate its 2021 Black Youth Agenda to better show what it means to grow up as a Black person in D.C. The agenda features the following three focus areas: queer affirming learning spaces to make schools a safe space for all students; addressing violence by investing in the community and moving beyond policing; and ensuring youth, especially those facing housing instability, have the resources they need to thrive.

Photo credit: COURT, Kiya T., 12th Grade | Critical Exposure, Youth Facilitation Institute, 2020. "This picture was taken at a basketball court near my house. It's been a frequented spot for me and my brother since the beginning of quarantine, as there aren't many places to go anymore. This court is usually deserted, and I feel safe here because it's still and serene. My brother has stopped going to the court because they've recently taken the nets off of the backboard, in an effort to discourage people from coming. I stop by on my way home from bike rides so I can slow down and take a break; I never come to play basketball anyways."

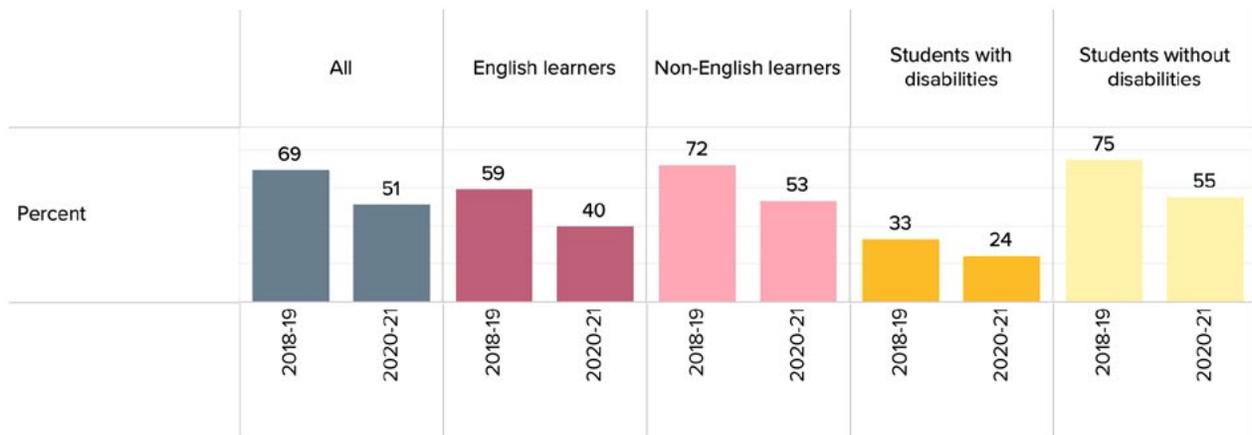
Outcomes for students with disabilities and English learners

Providing additional services to students with disabilities and English learners was a challenge during a year that primarily relied on virtual instruction. In the PAVE Back-to-School survey

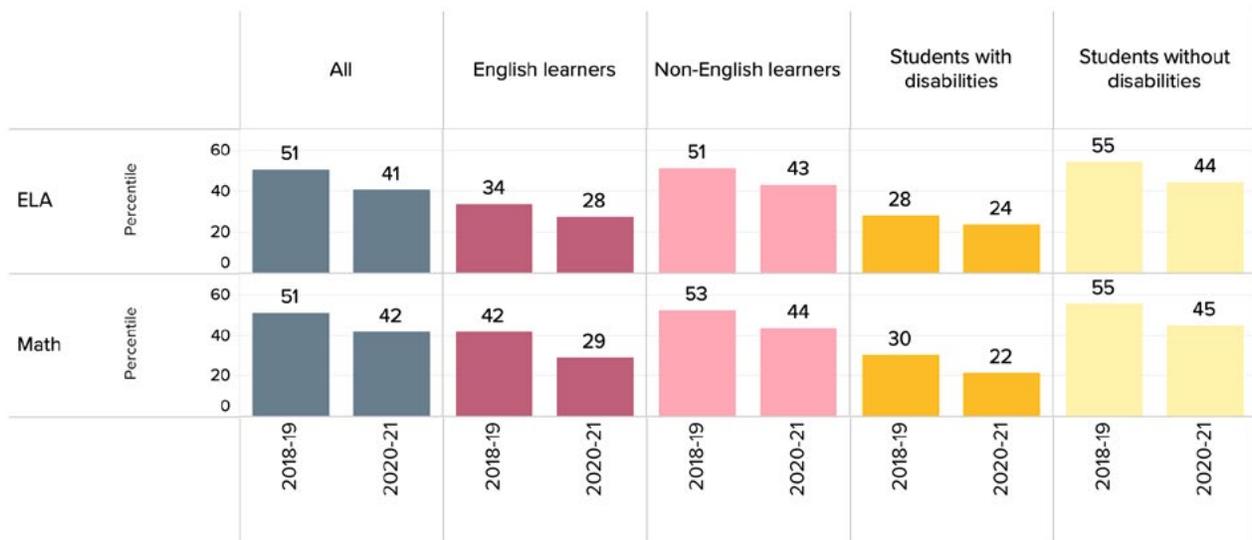
of parents in the fall 2020, parents of students with disabilities and English learners were most concerned with ensuring academic growth, achieving a well-rounded education, and getting children the services that they need during virtual learning.⁴⁶ Student assessment analyses show that these worries were well-founded:

Figure 24. EmpowerK12 sample, including English learners and students with disabilities

Reading on grade level for kindergarten through grade 2



Academic achievement percentile changes for grade 2-8



Source: EmpowerK12. 2021. *Update on Unfinished Learning in DC*. EmpowerK12. Retrieved from <https://www.empowerk12.org/research-source/covid-impact-achievement-dc>

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The EmpowerK12 analysis of student learning suggested there was more unfinished learning for students with disabilities and English learners. In the study, the average achievement percentile for students with disabilities in grades 2 through 8 dropped to 24 in ELA and 22 in Math, which represented about half the percentile for students without disabilities. For English learners in these grades, the average achievement percentile was 28 in ELA and 29 in Math, representing a larger decline than non-English learners in Math.⁴⁷

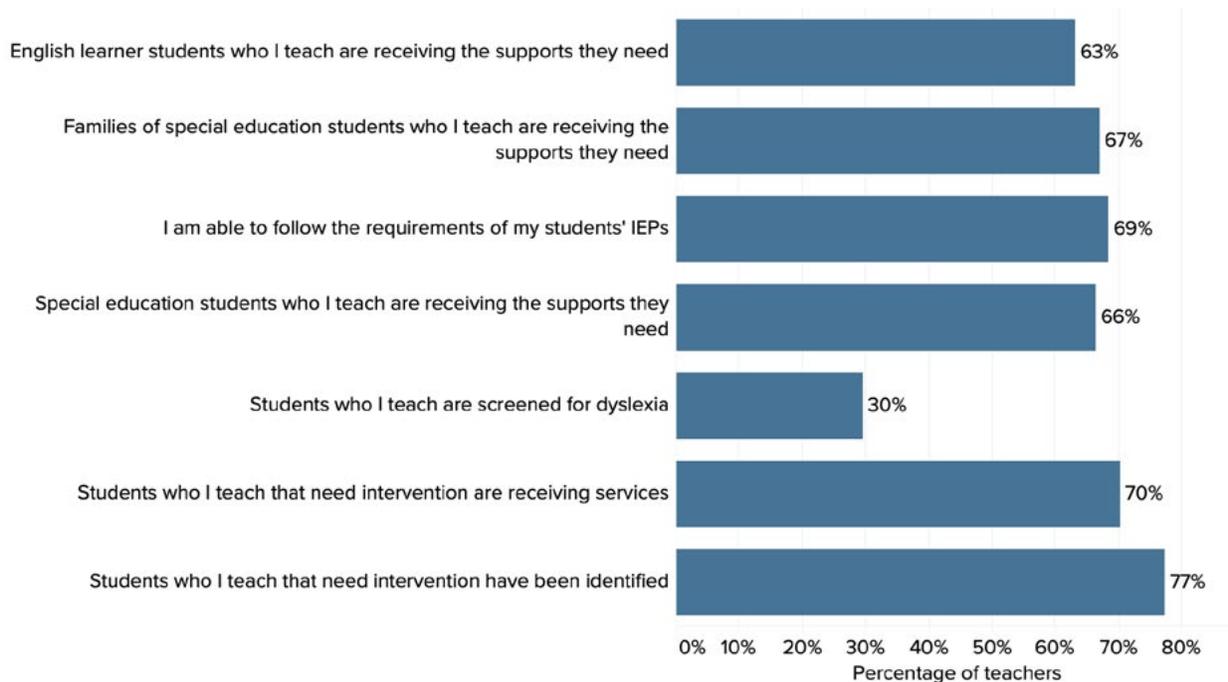
Students with disabilities. In the D.C. Policy Center focus groups and interviews, school leaders, teachers, and most parents agreed that meeting the needs of students with special needs presented a challenge. Among parents, those

“My son academically was supposed to get extra time on assignments, extra support and low homework. And because of the public nature of the Google chat, Google channels, the Google classroom, it’s like the teachers couldn’t force the technology to build in those allowances.”

—Parent

living in Wards 1 through 6 and Spanish-speaking parents were more likely to report that schools had a difficult time meeting the needs of students with disabilities, including academic supports and therapy. Some teachers, too, recognized this challenge: While 66 percent of teachers reported that students with disabilities were receiving the supports they need, 23 percent of teachers

Figure 25. Teachers reporting on needs of students during distance/virtual learning



Source: Balch, R. 2021. *D.C. State Board of Education: Teacher Survey Analysis, Spring 2021 Administration*. OSSE. Retrieved from <https://sboe.dc.gov/release/state-board-releases-results-all-teacher-survey>

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flagged issues with identifying students who need targeted academic or behavioral intervention.⁴⁸

The Office of the Student Advocate reported that special education concerns were the source of 24 percent of the calls they received from families seeking assistance during the 2020-21 school year.⁴⁹ Parents had questions about quality of services related to Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that provide specialized instruction, adapting 504 Plans⁵⁰ that provide accommodations to virtual and in-person learning, delays with initiating and completing the evaluation process, and change-of-placement notifications. The Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education also found that during the 2020-21 school year many families encountered obstacles with accessing proper special education services for their student, indicating that 71 percent of concerns for special education services were related to IEP implementation (this has been consistent over the past two years).⁵¹ Virtual learning presented unique challenges, as families had to implement IEPs at home with their children without training or professional experience, and services such as occupational therapy were particularly difficult to secure in a virtual context.

English learners. In their Continuous Education Plans for school year 2020-21, most LEAs with large concentrations of English learners indicated that they planned to use one-on-one or small group sessions with English learners.⁵² To support teachers, OSSE published strategies tailored to virtual settings, in order to increase English learners' success.⁵³

Results for the English language proficiency test (ACCESS) are not available for school year 2020-21, and qualitative data paint a mixed picture: In the D.C. Policy Center focus groups, Spanish-speaking parents mostly reported positive experiences with the ESL programs. In a survey of D.C. teachers, 63 percent of teachers said English

learner students were receiving the supports they need—indicating that many English learners needed additional resources.

“Luego los niños y yo ya aprendimos cómo usar el zoom, como incorporarse, pero había tareas que tenían que mandarse por diferentes aplicaciones como Google classroom, clever, sin que nadie te diga eso es lo que tienes que hacer, de igual manera mi nena hacía las tareas.”

“Soon enough my children and I learned how to use the Zoom, how to join meetings, and there were tasks that had to be sent by different applications such as Google classroom, clever, we had to force ourselves to learn it.”

—Padre (Parent)

Student mental health

Schools used a multitude of strategies to support their students' mental health in school year 2020-21. In the summer of 2020, teachers at 16 of 55 LEAs (which collectively enroll 69 percent of students) received additional training on integrating social-emotional learning practices into their curriculum to aid in supporting students as they navigate virtual learning. In addition, some LEAs planned to hire additional staff members to support students, some engaged external mental health organizations, and others planned to embed wellness checks within daily lessons or assign a wellness coach to each student. LEAs also planned to create systems to identify struggling students and refer them to in-house or third-party counselors who would be able to provide more targeted support if necessary.⁵⁴ The three school leaders interviewed by the D.C. Policy Center mentioned that they had to change the way that mental health services were

provided during 2020-21 to be more community-based, to be offered by different staff, or to be provided virtually.

“My mental health wasn’t in a good place. It just caused me to not log on to class, because there’s so much that I was dealing with.”

—Student

There is little data on how often students needed or received specialized mental health services, but student discussions and surveys show varying experiences—with students generally seeming to feel fine, but not always asking for help when they need it. In a winter 2021 EmpowerK12 wellbeing survey of public charter school students in grades 3 through 12,⁵⁵ 87 percent reported that they feel

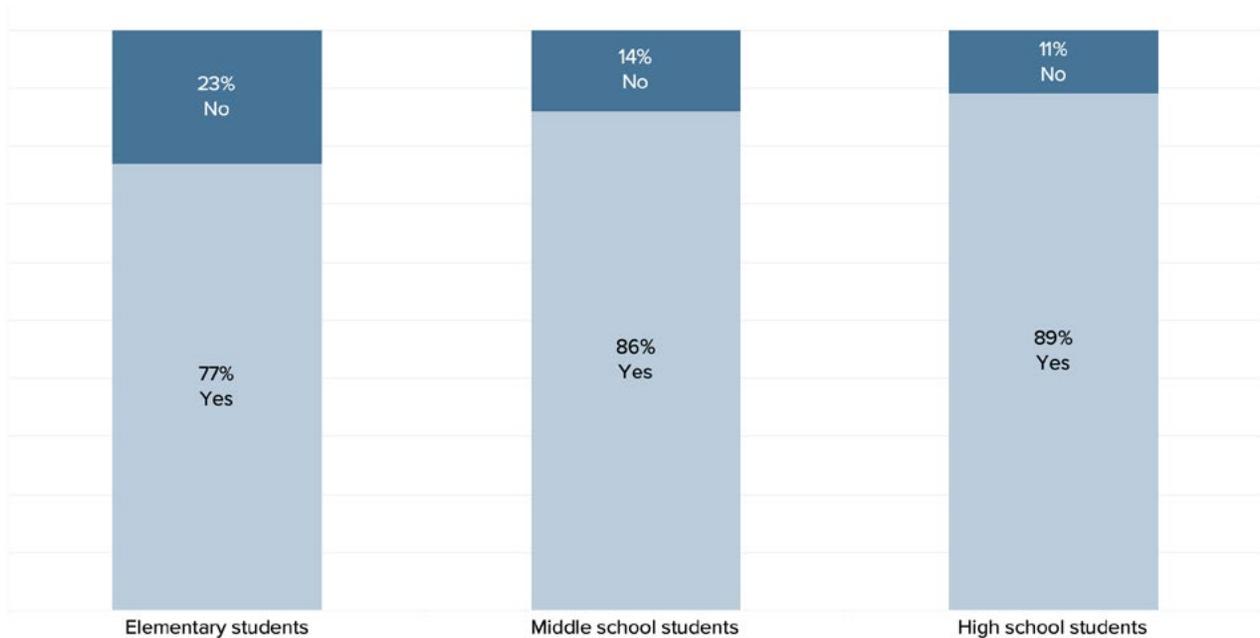
happy and 90 percent report that they feel loved, most or every day. Overall, students’ self-reports of wellbeing improved over the year: In the winter, a larger share of students reported having an adult at school they could go to for help, a smaller share reported concerns about family being exposed to COVID-19, and students expressed higher levels of confidence in being successful in school for the rest of the year.

However, the 2020-21 DC SBOE Report of the Student Advisory Committee found that mental health was a concern for many students due to loneliness, family issues, heightened anxiety, technology troubles, and excessive workload—and that these were contributing factors to lower rates of class participation, engagement, and productivity.⁵⁶ While most public charter school students who were surveyed said that there

Photo credit: SCHOOLS CLOSED. Charlene D., 12th grade | Critical Exposure, Youth Facilitation Institute, 2020. “What happened to when we were excited when schools closed? Because of winter storms and the rare times it was either too hot or too much rain. Being away from school because we simply can’t go will never be the same for me again.”



Figure 26. Are there adults at your school you can go to for help if you need it right now?



Source: EmpowerK12. 2020. *Covid-19's Impact on Student Well-Being: Mid-Year Well-Being*. Retrieved from <https://www.empowerk12.org/>

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was an adult they could go to for help if they needed it immediately, parents thought that getting help from a mental health professional could be challenging when students needed it. In PAVE's 2021 end-of-school-year parent survey, 54 percent of parents answered "yes" when asked whether their child(ren)'s school has access to a mental health professional/clinician; 41 percent replied that they weren't sure.

Although the majority of students surveyed by EmpowerK12 felt happy most days, parents who participated in D.C. Policy Center focus groups said that the pandemic and its consequences such as increased isolation, anxiety around COVID-19, and general stress of virtual learning had a negative impact on their children's mental health. Similarly, students shared that virtual learning and COVID-19 introduced or exacerbated mental health challenges. Adult and alternative learners were more likely to mention

challenges with balancing school and home life, especially if they were also caring for children.

While some parents who participated in D.C. Policy Center focus groups said that their families took advantage of the therapy available to them through schools, others found it difficult to navigate the referral process and were left seeking out private providers. Students shared specific supports that schools offered, including weekly wellness newsletters, video outreach, health and wellness meetings, and access to counselors or support groups for adult learners.

"The school provided other activities or programs to relax, like yoga. But it was hard for me to participate because I needed to be involved in the classes of my eldest child, and my smallest child was starting to walk."

—Adult learner

While some students found that they were always able to access support from counselors, others said that it was difficult to get to know someone new through a digital platform. Importantly, finding privacy was also challenging for some students who had to share space with other family members while participating in virtual therapy sessions.

Teachers in the D.C. Policy Center focus group also talked about the challenges of providing support for students who faced mental health challenges and the difficulties of addressing these challenges virtually. Schools tried to provide resources to respond to these needs, including offering teachers' support groups and flexible scheduling. In a survey of D.C. teachers, 60 percent shared that they had professional development to support students' social and emotional wellness, and 56 percent of teachers reported that they had been provided with supports for their own emotional well-being.⁵⁷ Still,

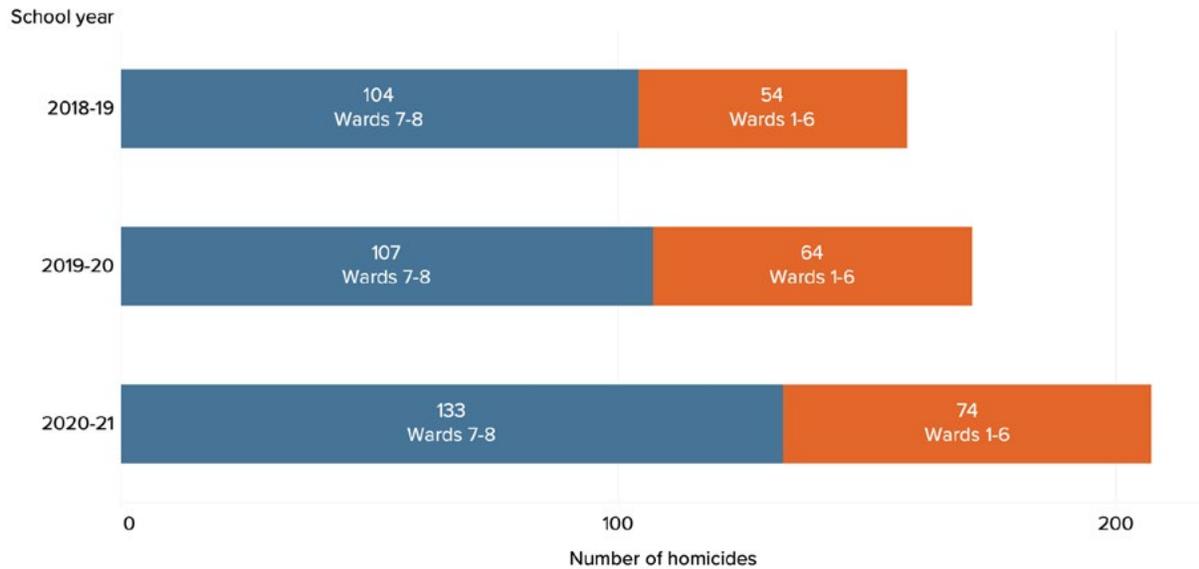
teachers in the focus group shared that the year of virtual learning took a negative toll on their mental health.

Community safety

A sharp increase in violent crimes across the city amplified concerns around neighborhood safety and mental well-being for students, families, and teachers. In school year 2020-21, the number of homicides increased by 21 percent to a total of 207 across the District. This is important to consider because of the link between community violence and mental health: Community violence can be a potentially traumatic event for children,⁵⁸ and being a victim or witness to neighborhood violence is considered an adverse childhood experience (ACE).⁵⁹ Even if children are not directly exposed to community violence, the prolonged fear of possible violence can increase stress levels for children.⁶⁰



Figure 27. Homicides in D.C., by school year and location



Source: Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO). 2021. *Crime incidents in DC*. Open Data DC. Retrieved from opendata.dc.gov

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“It got to the point that it was starting to be so much violence that they didn’t even want to leave out the house to go to school. They didn’t want to hear shootings, get shot, any of that, so they didn’t want to go outside.”

—Parent

The impacts of this increase in community violence were felt disproportionately in specific neighborhoods, as well as by race and ethnicity: 64 percent of homicides in school year 2020-21 occurred in predominately Black neighborhoods of Wards 7 and 8, and a survey of D.C. parents showed that Black and Latino respondents were four times more likely than white respondents to report that they or their children felt physically unsafe outside of their home.⁶¹

In D.C Policy Center focus groups, parents, students, teachers, and community advocates shared concerns over violence both in neighborhoods and at schools in school year 2020-21 and its impact on their and their communities’ well-being. Some participants mentioned that fear of violence led them to want to stay inside, and some students said violence made it harder to be present and engage fully in class. Others mentioned that their anxiety around crime led them to avoid public transportation or to avoid in-person school and prefer virtual learning. Teachers reported that violence experienced in communities impaired their students’ mental health as well as their own. Teachers shared that they tried to support students who had trauma experiences related to losing family members



“You can’t learn with that stuff going on in your mind or in your head or in your household, the fear of a bullet coming through your house is enough to stop you from learning.”

—Teacher

or witnessing violence. Some teachers adjusted their class structure to hold discussions or provide support for students. Students shared that such discussions in class were helpful to create a space to share concerns.

While students were largely not commuting to schools during school year 2020-21, a survey of students conducted by the Office of Student Advocate found that more than half of those surveyed before the pandemic reported feeling uncomfortable, concerned, afraid, or in danger while commuting to and from school.⁶² During the pandemic, the DC SBOE Student Advisory Committee raised violence and harassment

as a concern with returning safely to in-person school.⁶³ To counter the impact of this increase in violence, D.C.’s Safe Passage program has been engaging communities to learn more about school- and neighborhood-specific concerns and to set up designated safe routes to travel from home to school. The program recruits volunteers and businesses who can help monitor students during their commute and defuse conflicts. D.C. is also implementing a violence interruption program to target specific high-violence neighborhoods, and the D.C. School Connect program to support safe passage to and from school for areas in Wards 7 and 8 as of August 2021.

“Our teachers go down the street to the station and bus stop to make sure we get there safely.”

— High school student

Bright spots

School year 2020-21 was characterized by uncertainty, and challenges brought on by virtual learning. Still, there were marked improvements compared to spring 2020, and the school year brought plenty of bright spots, including a supportive and resourceful system and increased flexibility. Here are some bright spots mentioned by participants in the D.C. Policy Center focus groups and interviews:



Mental health

Many participants in the D.C. Policy Center focus groups mentioned that they received mental health supports when needed—an example of improvements in service provisions from the spring 2020. Schools hired additional mental health staff, initiated partnerships, and integrated social-emotional learning and wellness checks into lessons.



Technology

LEAs worked to ensure that students had learning devices and internet at home, and provided technology support, and many participants in the focus groups agreed it was an improvement over spring 2020. Many schools described the ability to provide quality asynchronous instruction as valuable, and noted that the ability to gather real-time data on student performance allowed schools to identify students sooner who might be falling behind or need targeted supports.



Flexibility

Some focus group participants appreciated the flexibility of virtual learning, which allowed students to participate on their own time, spend less time commuting, and, for adult learners, have an easier time with childcare during their classes. Other examples of flexibility included families receiving food assistance support in the form of digital coupons or vouchers that could be used to purchase food.



Communication

Several schools described how the introduction of alternative communication methods was valuable for families. For example, parent-teacher conferences were easier to access when parents and guardians could join via Zoom instead of fitting in a cross-town commute. Schools also found success in employing multiple ways to get in touch with families rather than relying on just phone/email.⁶⁴



Look ahead to school year 2021-22 and beyond

School year 2020-21 was one of the most difficult years for D.C.'s public schools, students, and their families in recent memory. Students returned to school with four fewer months of learning, and instruction was almost entirely virtual, forever shifting school norms, responsibilities, and expectations.

While there were significantly more resources available to schools and students to address the challenges of COVID-19, there were also fewer means of measuring learning outcomes and

academic progress at the state level. Even things that could be measured, such as attendance and graduation, meant something slightly different than in previous years.

In the fall 2021, DCPS and public charter schools returned to full-time in-person learning with COVID-19 health and safety measures in place, including required indoor mask-wearing for all, and required vaccination or weekly testing for teachers and staff. Additional recommendations to limit the spread of COVID-19 in schools included promoting COVID-19 vaccinations for all who are eligible, requesting all to stay home when sick, implementing physical distancing, as well as promoting hygiene, conducting asymptomatic testing, quarantining close contacts of positive cases, cleaning procedures, and improving ventilation.⁶⁵ Only a small number of students with certain health needs were eligible to continue with virtual learning, including an



Enrollment update for 2021-22

As of November 2021, there were 93,843 students enrolled in D.C.'s public schools, 11 more students than in a comparable count in school year 2020-21.⁸¹ This preliminary student count indicates that enrollment has not rebounded to pre-pandemic levels of 94,555 in school year 2019-20,⁸² and the projected growth in pre-pandemic years remains unfulfilled. Questions remain around this enrollment loss of 712 students, including whether families have opted for private schools, moved out of D.C., or are hesitant to send pre-kindergartners to school for the noncompulsory grades where enrollment dipped the most in school year 2020-21. Early grade enrollment losses are worrisome because they might be a sign of lower enrollment in future years.

estimated 700 DCPS students,⁶⁶ or approximately one percent of enrolled students.⁶⁷

Return to in-person learning this year seems to have relieved some of the pressures on families: In the fall 2021 parent survey conducted by PAVE, only 16 percent of parents reported that they found managing their children's education to be a challenge, which was a decrease from 39 percent in the spring survey.⁶⁸ In the findings, D.C. parents also reported "life becoming just a little more stable and a little easier since the Spring." Even with added safety protocols and masks, school days began to look like what they used to, making it easier to organize work, family life, and responsibilities around more defined hours.

Many schools recognize that recovery—and making up for the learning loss students experienced during the first full academic year of the pandemic—will take time. In their Continuous Education Plans for school year

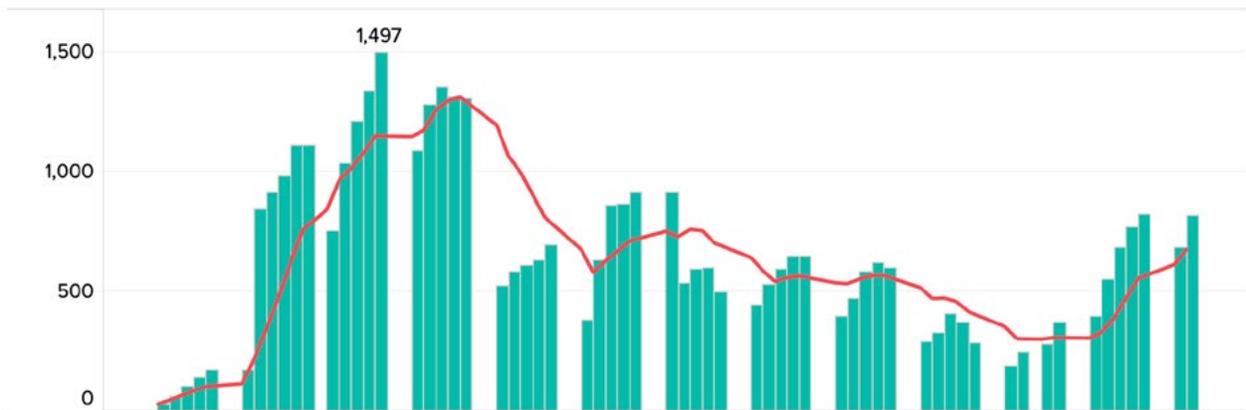
2021-22, schools described plans to accelerate learning opportunities, with at least half of LEAs adjusting their class schedules, providing after-school programming, offering summer programming, incorporating high-impact tutoring, new professional development and staff time on accelerated learning, and adding staffing.⁶⁹

COVID-19 and schools

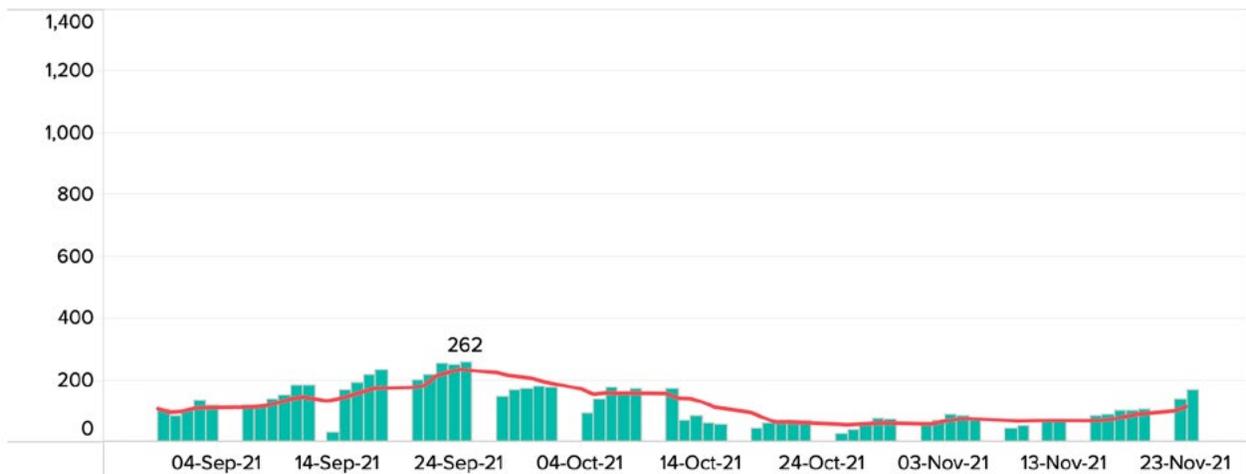
Even with the return to in-person learning, the start of school year 2021-22 was affected by COVID-19. Between August 29 and November 17, 2021, 1,679 COVID-19 cases were reported for students, teachers, and other staff in DCPS and public charter school settings, with an estimated 80 percent of cases being among students.⁷⁰ Some of these cases were reported through D.C.'s centralized testing contract, which carried out almost 70,000 tests between August 30 and November 8,⁷¹ and others were self-reported

Figure 28. D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) daily counts of quarantine

Quarantine for DCPS students who are usually participating in in-person activities



Quarantine for DCPS personnel who are usually working in-person



Source: Government of the District of Columbia. 2021. "DC Schools data."
Retrieved from <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/>

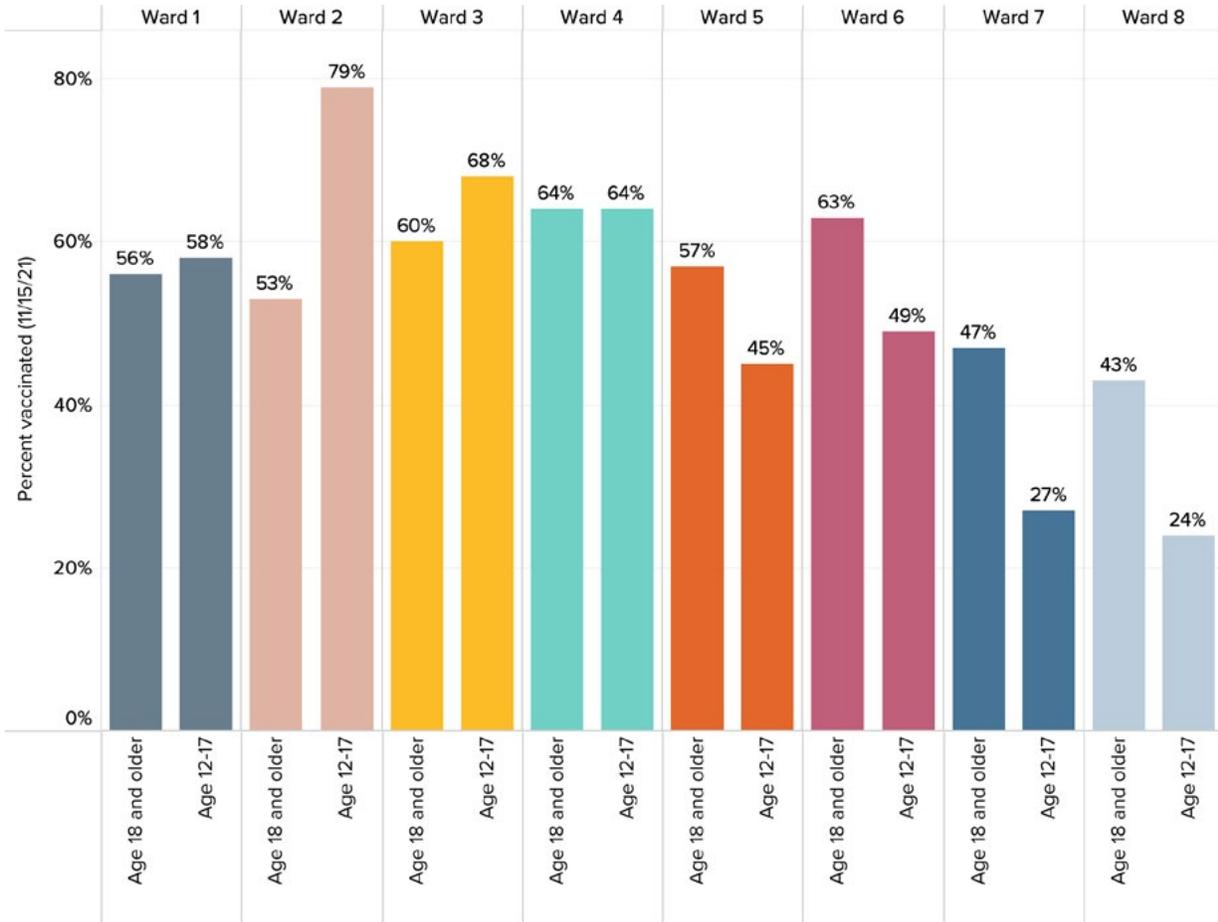
■ Currently in quarantine
■ Weekly average

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either by schools or individuals. These positive cases, in many situations, required students and teachers to quarantine: An estimated 1.3 percent of DCPS students and 2.7 percent of DCPS teachers were in quarantine on a given day in the fall 2021 (data are not available for public charter schools).⁷²

As of November 15, 2021, an estimated 74 percent of District residents 18 and over were fully vaccinated, compared to 48 percent of those aged 12 to 15. (8 percent of children aged 5 to 11 were partially vaccinated at this time.)⁷³ Coverage ranged from 60 percent or more in Wards 3, 4, and 6 to less than 50 percent in Wards 7 and 8.⁷⁴ The PAVE Fall 2021 survey also

Figure 29. Percent of D.C. population vaccinated as of November 15, 2021, by age and ward



Source: Government of the District of Columbia. 2021. "Vaccination Data." Retrieved from <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/data/vaccination>

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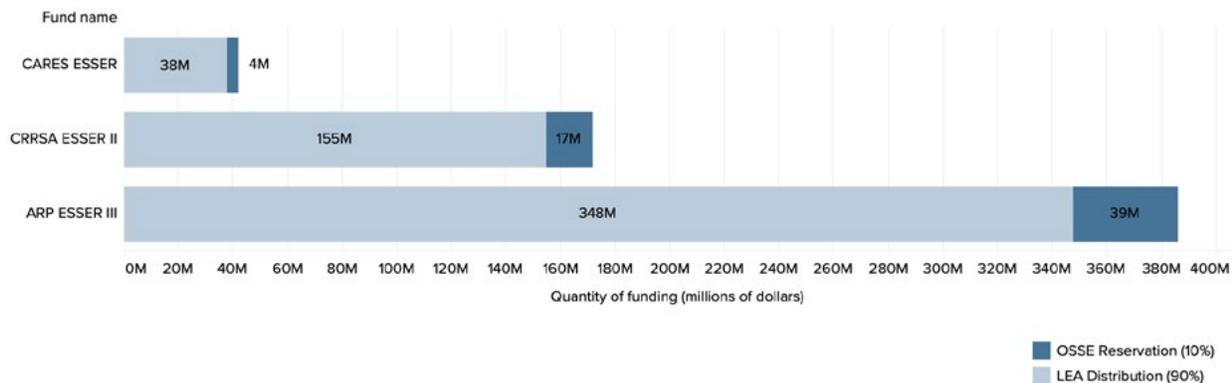
found that the vaccination rate for students who receive support services was 68 percent—lower than the 86 percent vaccination rate for those students who don't receive support services.

ESSER plans moving forward

The Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE) and schools in D.C. will receive \$600 million across three Elementary

and Secondary Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund distributions for use from March 2020 through September 2024.⁷⁵ Between March and September 2020, D.C. LEAs reported that they had already spent \$5.3 million out of the \$37.8 million from the first distribution, leaving the majority of funds to be spent in future years. There is no report at this time on ESSER spending in school year 2020-21, but 20 percent of funds to schools must be spent on addressing learning

Figure 30. Distribution of D.C.'s ESSER funds between OSSE and LEAs



Source: Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). 2020. "Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund." Available at <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/04/ESSER-Fund-State-Allocations-Table.pdf>; Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). 2021. "Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER II) Authorized by the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021." Available at https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/01/Final_ESSERII_Methodology_Table_1.5.21.pdf; Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). 2021. "American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund." Available at https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/03/FINAL_ARP-ESSER-Methodology-and-Table.pdf

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loss.⁷⁶ School districts are required to seek community input on the use of ESSER funds.

As of July 2021, top priorities citywide included safe reopening in the fall 2021, addressing the academic impact of lost instructional time, investing in summer learning, expanding afterschool programs, and supporting student staff wellbeing.⁷⁷

Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic, and over a year of virtual learning for most, brought unprecedented challenges to students, teachers, and schools in the District.

In a time of crisis when so much was out of the control of schools, families, and students, it has been difficult to focus on the longer-term goals of continuous improvements in learning, and equitable learning outcomes that uplift those students who are furthest away from opportunity.

As D.C. moves past the most severe disruptions of the pandemic into a more predictable phase, it is now time to think about how to regain what school communities—especially students, teachers, and families—have lost, and how to refocus on more equitable experiences and strong learning outcomes.

This report closes with a proposed framework for recovery, with suggested metrics to track over the next five years in the areas of student academic success, student supports, and community factors. Most of the proposed metrics are already being tracked, though some have been paused through the pandemic, and others have never been tracked (these are indicated with an asterisk). Some of these metrics can only be updated annually, while others (such as chronic absenteeism) could be considered for more frequent collection and reporting.

Given what early data show about the extent of unfinished learning, improving students'



academic success should be the cornerstone of guiding recovery in schools. The pandemic, with its health and economic shocks, and blurred lines between school and home, has also brought into focus the need to take a more intentional and holistic view of what contributes to students' academic success. Tracking a supportive school environment in the areas of mental health services, resources for students with additional needs, and teacher morale can help keep focus on what schools need to improve student success. The city should also incorporate community factors that impact schools and students, including the prevalence of COVID-19, community safety, and trust in schools.

Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic's devastating impacts will require more time, resources, deliberate planning, and importantly, monitoring of how school communities are faring. Having a common vision of what recovery in D.C.'s public schools should look like can help better target efforts and resources to areas that need them the most. It can also shine a bright light on the extent to which recovery is equitable for all student groups.

Student academic success

Schools' work to ensure students' academic success should be at the heart of recovery efforts. During the pandemic, some students

engaged less in school. The rate of chronic absenteeism—defined as a student missing at least 10 percent of the school year—was 29 percent across all public school students, and 44 percent across students designated as at-risk prior to the pandemic (school year 2018-19).⁷⁸ Even with the relaxed attendance requirements established due to virtual learning, these numbers increased to 31 percent of all students and 48 percent of students designated as at-risk over the last year.

D.C. has not conducted systemwide student testing since the beginning of the pandemic, but analysis of combined school-level assessments points to unfinished learning, especially for elementary and middle school students who are designated as at-risk. For high school students, graduation rates increased, but this did not lead to a higher rate of participation at the post-secondary level. During the 2020-21 school year, 18 percent of the senior class was assessed as college and career ready on the SAT (compared to 20 percent in school year 2018-19), and postsecondary enrollment in the fall of 2020 declined by five percentage points compared to the fall of 2019.

The District's education agencies and schools are working hard to reverse these trends. Students returned to in-person learning in school year 2021-22, which has helped increase live instruction time and connections to teachers. And while the city's multiple LEAs have their own respective initiatives to accelerate students' academic recovery, the city also established systemwide supports, including high-impact tutoring in school year 2020-21. The city allocated \$41 million in grants for the provision of tutoring, support for organizations that provide tutoring, and program evaluation that will continue over the next three years. On the transition to college and career, the FY22 budget expanded access to work-based learning, career coaches, tuition

assistance, and college transition planning.

To measure recovery in students' academic success moving forward, D.C. should track:

- Student engagement, measured through **chronic absenteeism**,
- Learning outcomes, through **achievement levels and growth** on the statewide assessment, and
- Transitions to college and career, with **postsecondary enrollment, as well as industry recognized credentials,* and earnings.***

Supportive school environment

Regaining what was lost during the pandemic in D.C.'s schools will involve much more than improving students' academic success. Making sure students are supported—with mental health resources, English learner or special education services, and energized teachers—is worthy in its own right, and will also be part of bolstering academic outcomes. Importantly, these student supports have been difficult to provide at times during the pandemic. Students have reported mental health challenges, and some don't know where to turn for help if they need it. Remote learning has been more challenging for English learners and students with disabilities, who have the largest gaps from the average achievement during the pandemic year. In addition, teachers reported experiencing low morale and plans to leave their schools: Retention was up in school year 2020-21, with 81 percent of teachers staying at their school, but then decreased in school year 2021-22 to 74 percent.⁷⁹

In school year 2021-22, the city established systemwide programs to address some of these issues. There is additional funding available for high school students who are also English learners, for example, and there is a new "grow



your own” teacher preparation pathway to encourage alumni from D.C.’s public schools to return as educators. Many schools have added to the ways that students can access mental health professionals in school year 2020-21 and are doing more to integrate mental health supports into teaching. To monitor the progress of these programs and others, D.C. should track:

- Mental health supports, with the number of **mental health professionals and wellbeing measures**,*

- Support for students with disabilities, through **IEP goal attainment**,
- English learner supports, with **exit from English learner status**, and
- Teacher morale, with **retention rates and teacher satisfaction surveys**.*

Community factors

In addition to school supports, a plan for monitoring recovery should acknowledge the

Metrics for recovery

Area	Metrics	Baseline
<i>Student academic success</i>	Student engagement measured by chronic absenteeism	31 percent of all students were chronically absent in school year 2020-21
	Learning outcomes with achievement levels and growth on the statewide assessment	PARCC results not available until 2021-22 (51 percent of early elementary students currently reading on grade level)
	Transition to college and career with postsecondary enrollment, as well as industry-recognized credentials,* and earnings*	51 percent of graduating seniors in school year 2019-20 enrolled in postsecondary within 6 months
<i>Supportive school environment</i>	Mental health supports with the number of mental health professionals and wellbeing measures , as available	Not publicly available for school year 2020-21
	Support for students with disabilities with IEP goal attainment	Not publicly available for school year 2020-21
	English learner supports with exit from English learner status	Not publicly available for school year 2020-21
	Teacher morale with retention rates and teacher satisfaction surveys*	81 percent of teachers stayed at their school in 2020-21
<i>Community factors</i>	COVID-19's impact on school through the number of in-person school days or live instructional time*	Number of in-person days not available until the close of school year 2021-22 (in the fall of 2021, 1 percent of DCPS students were in quarantine at a given time)
	Community safety with student perceptions of safety*	Black and Latino parents and caregivers were 4 times more likely to report that they or their child felt physically unsafe out of their home than white parents and caregivers
	Family and parent or caregiver trust in schools with enrollment levels, especially in early grades, and parent and caregiver satisfaction rates*	Pre-kindergarten enrollment declined by 7 percent in 2020-21; total pre-kindergarten to grade 12 enrollment was 89,292 students

**Indicates metrics that are not currently regularly collected and reported publicly for all students. These will require gathering new data or administering a new survey.*

community factors that influence students' ability to engage fully in school. During the pandemic, waves of COVID-19 cases have disrupted school operations and disproportionately impacted certain communities—Wards 7 and 8 experienced 29 percent of cases as of the end of school year 2020-21. Violent crime has also increased (homicides, for example, are up by 21 percent in school year 2020-21), and this can be a source of stress and trauma for students and school communities. The abrupt shift and the continuation of virtual learning, as well as the conversations around safe reopening of schools have eroded trust in D.C.'s schools for some parents and families; this was partly expressed through lower levels of enrollment, especially a seven percent decrease in the number of pre-kindergarten students.

D.C. is working to lower the number of COVID-19 cases in the general public and in schools, with access to vaccines, vaccination sites for students, masking requirements in schools and other establishments, and other measures. Violence interrupter and safe passage programs are part of the strategies to decrease the level of community violence. In the coming years, D.C. should keep an eye on:

- COVID-19's impact on school, through the **number of in-person school days or live instructional time**,*
- Community safety, with **student perceptions of community safety**,* and

- Family and parent or caregiver trust in schools, with **enrollment levels, especially in early grades and parent and caregiver satisfaction rates**.*

**Indicates metrics that are not currently regularly collected and reported publicly for all students. These will require gathering new data or administering a new survey.*

These suggested recovery metrics are intended to be a starting point for planning long-term recovery strategies. Most are already reported and could be easily compiled. A few would be new, and perhaps some could be collected in a new regular citywide survey of students, parents, and teachers. A framework for recovery similar to the one offered here could provide a north star for education policy decisions as we advance out of the pandemic, and in the coming years, collecting and tracking recovery these metrics offers a way to identify where successes can be celebrated and challenges can be addressed—especially between student groups.



Data and information sources

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

Adult Public Charter School Learner Survey

In May 2020, the District's adult charter schools first surveyed their adult learners. Responses were received from 1,832 adult learners from all eight wards in D.C. A follow-up survey with 14 parallel questions and eight new questions was administered December-January 2021. The Fall survey⁸⁰ received responses from 1,495 adult learners. The survey covered topics related to virtual learning, needs outside of school, and access to resources.

Black Swan Academy Youth Agenda

The Black Swan Academy developed its 2021 Black Youth Agenda in collaboration with middle and high school youth in Washington, D.C. The agenda centers the concerns of Black youth in D.C., with the purpose of informing change through public policy and youth organizing.

Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) Student Survey on unmet need and awareness

The D.C. Department of Behavioral Health, in collaboration with ChildTrends, administered a survey of D.C. public school students regarding unmet needs and awareness around available mental/behavioral health resources. Responses were received from 4,003 students.

DC State Board of Education (DC SBOE) 2021 All-Teacher Survey

The DC State Board of Education, in contract with Resonant Education, conducted a survey

of public-school teachers in D.C. during January and February 2021 to learn about teaching in virtual settings, reflections on the student experience, comfort with returning to in-person learning, needed supports, and teacher retention. Responses were received from 1,060 teachers from 185 different schools, including all DCPS schools and the majority of public charter schools. The sample is considered representative, as it matches the characteristics of the population as a whole along teacher characteristics and demographics.

DC SBOE Report of the Student Advisory Committee, 2020-21

The Student Advisory Committee (SAC) is a group of D.C. public and charter high school students that meets monthly to discuss issues pertaining to education within and without the school building and advises the DC State Board of Education based on the experiences of students in the group. Their 2020-21 report is a summary of the most important issues the SAC tackled and the recommendations the committee made.

EmpowerK12

EmpowerK12 surveyed the wellbeing of 2,500 students in grades 3 to 12. *State of D.C. Schools* includes information from these reports:

- COVID-19's Impact on Student Well-being
- Mid-Year Well-Being Update
- Update on Unfinished Learning in D.C. – Spring 2021

Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funding

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund provides emergency funds for elementary and secondary schools in response to COVID-19. Funds are awarded by the U.S. Department of Education and administered by OSSE. OSSE provides resources for grant applicants and reports funding allocations for ESSER I-CARES, ESSER II-CRRSA, and ESSER III-ARP.

Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) Completion Rate

The Federal Student Aid department within the U.S. Department of Education releases FAFSA completion and submission statuses for D.C. The D.C. Policy Center looked at the application submission rate for D.C. schools in December 2020, June 2020, February 2020, and February 2021.

Government of the District of Columbia

- The D.C. government provides information on reopening metrics, COVID-19 updates, COVID-19 guidance for schools, and vaccination data.
- The D.C. government also prepares a budget that includes projected student enrollment.

Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) EdScape

This tool was launched in 2019 and provides interactive visualizations and downloadable data sets that cover these 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:

- Where Public School Students Live
- Special Population Shares Over Time

- Race and Ethnicity of Students
- Enrollment Patterns by Sector

Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) EdSight series

EdSight is a series of briefs from the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. Each EdSight highlights a key piece of information about Washington, D.C.'s public schools, public school students, and facilities. This report mentions the following EdSight publications:

- Ensuring devices for learning at home during Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- Less than 0.5% of Tested Students and Staff Were Positive for COVID-19 Since Start of School

Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education Annual Report

The 2021 Annual Report from the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education details the cases and concerns raised by families during school year 2020-21 including: communication and engagement, special education, and academic progress. The report also includes recommendations for the State Board of Education regarding virtual school options, referral processes, and lottery equity.

Office of the Student Advocate 2021 Annual Report

The Office of the Student Advocate, housed within the D.C. State Board of Education, helps families navigate the public education system in D.C. by providing guidance and resources. The 2021 Annual Report includes data on the amount and type of requests for assistance, disaggregated by school sector, race/ethnicity, grade band, and ward.

Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) Enrollment Audits

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:

- 2020-21 School Year Enrollment and Data
- 2019-20 School Year Enrollment and Data

Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates

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:

- 2020-21 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates
- 2019-20 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates
- 2018-19 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates
- 2017-18 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates
- 2016-17 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates
- 2015-16 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates

Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) DC School Report Card

First published for school year 2017–18, the OSSE DC School Report Cards present key school-based information and STAR ratings for all D.C. public schools. The report cards provide 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:

- Aggregate Enrollment
- Alternative School Metrics

- Attendance Metrics
- Student Moving Metrics
- Learning Environment Metrics
- AP, IB, and SAT Metrics
- Graduation and College Enrollment Metrics
- Teacher and School Leader Metrics

Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) Continuous Education Plans

All Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in D.C. were required to complete Continuous Education Plans (CEPs) for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years. The plans included information on safe reopening, student and staff well-being, and accelerated learning. OSSE has also published *School Year 2020-21 OSSE Local Assessment Collection Report*, which is an overview of these plans.

PAVE surveys

Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) surveys parents in the District of Columbia to learn about their experiences with education and to inform advocacy efforts. In September 2020, the Parent Back to School Survey received responses from 939 families and covered topics related to returning to school virtually, the impact of the coronavirus, and families' future school plans. In May 2021, the Parent End of School Year Survey received responses from 628 families and followed up with families' experiences during the school year, the ongoing impact of the coronavirus, and plans for the future. The 2021 Fall Back to School Survey received responses from 630 families and aimed to understand families' experiences with their children's education.

Photo credits

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Page 37: COURT, Kiya T., 12th Grade | Critical Exposure, Youth Facilitation Institute, 2020. Used with permission. "This picture was taken at a basketball

court near my house. It's been a frequented spot for me and my brother since the beginning of quarantine, as there aren't many places to go anymore. This court is usually deserted, and I feel safe here because it's still and serene. My brother has stopped going to the court because they've recently taken the nets off of the backboard, in an effort to discourage people from coming. I stop by on my way home from bike rides so I can slow down and take a break; I never come to play basketball anyways."

Page 41: SCHOOLS CLOSED. Charlene D., 12th grade | Critical Exposure, Youth Facilitation Institute, 2020. Used with permission. "What happened to when we were excited when schools closed? Because of winter storms and the rare times it was either too hot or too much rain. Being away from school because we simply can't go will never be the same for me again."

Page 43: DC Public Charter School Board. Used with permission. Retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dcpccb/51156814149/>

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