



**D.C. POLICY**  

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**PUBLIC OVERSIGHT MEETING: LITERACY AND THE NAEP AND  
PARCC ASSESSMENTS**  
**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

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Virtual platform

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

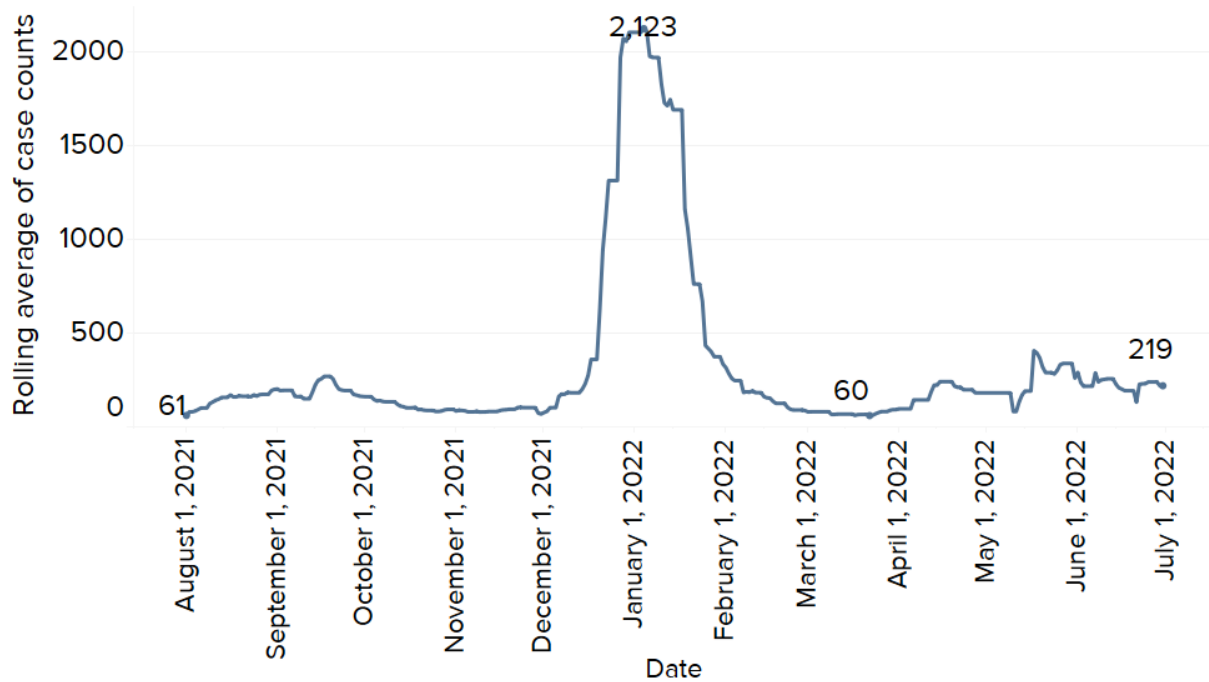
**Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole.** My name is Chelsea Coffin and I am the Director of the Education Policy Initiative at the D.C. Policy Center, an independent think tank focused on advancing policies for a growing and vibrant economy in D.C. In my testimony, I will provide a look at changes in learning outcomes by cohort to emphasize the need to focus on both math and English language arts in recovery from the pandemic as well as look at student progress longitudinally.

**School year 2021-22 marked an incredibly challenging transition back to in-person learning in D.C., after a difficult virtual school year 2020-21 and shortened school year 2019-20.** Chronic absenteeism rose to a high of 48 percent,<sup>1</sup> up from 29 percent in the last full school year of 2018-19. COVID-19 cases spiked to an average of over 2,000 new cases per day in January of 2022, which among other factors had an impact on attendance.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2022. *District of Columbia Attendance Report: School Year 2021-22*. OSSE. Retrieved from [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/a9c91dqy6nmas9t/AABD8uWvlddqnEKGlM8rMU0ta/11.30.22%20Hearing%20on%20Attendance%20Absenteeism%20and%20Truancy?dl=0&preview=OSSE+2021-22+Attendance+Report.pdf&subfolder\\_nav\\_tracking=1](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/a9c91dqy6nmas9t/AABD8uWvlddqnEKGlM8rMU0ta/11.30.22%20Hearing%20on%20Attendance%20Absenteeism%20and%20Truancy?dl=0&preview=OSSE+2021-22+Attendance+Report.pdf&subfolder_nav_tracking=1)

## COVID-19 cases in D.C. during school year 2021-22, rolling 7-day average



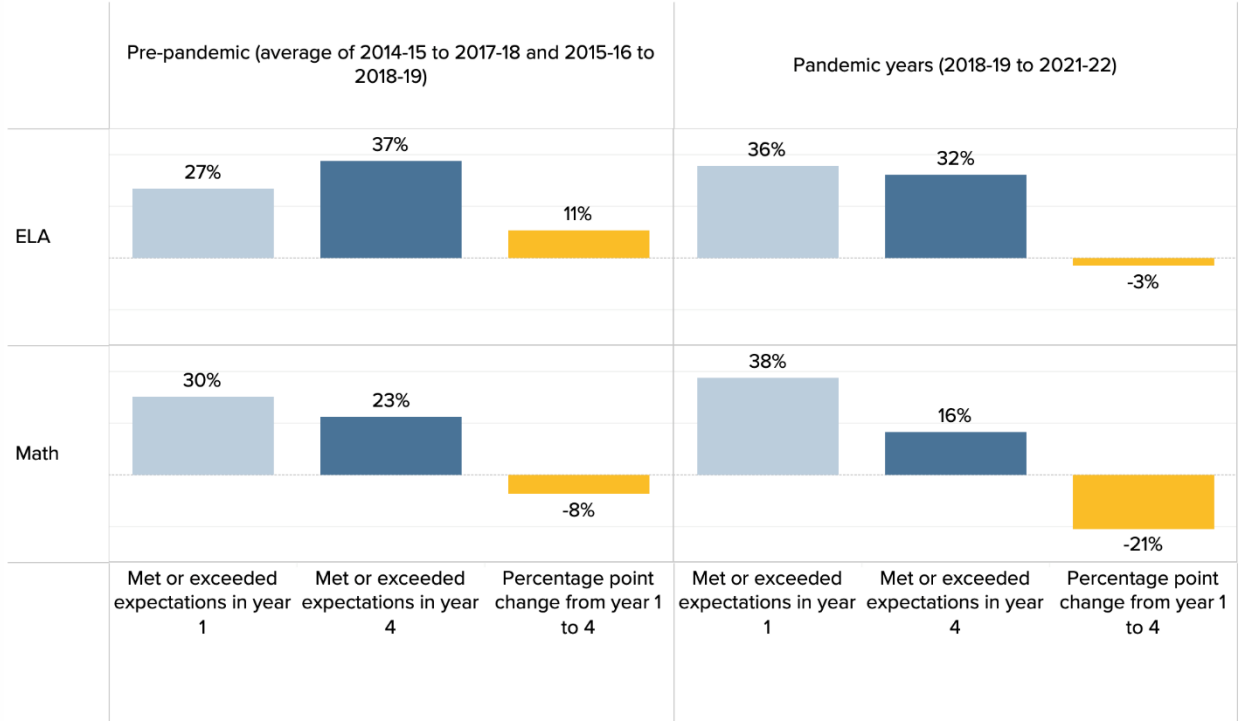
Source: The New York Times. 2022. *The New York Times COVID-19 data*. The New York Times. Retrieved from <https://github.com/ny-times/covid-19-data/tree/master/rolling-averages>

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COVID-19, absenteeism, and other factors made school year 2021-22 a tough time to catch up on learning for the system as a whole. Results from D.C.’s 2021-22 statewide PARCC assessment show declines in both English language arts (ELA) and math since the last time the test was administered in 2018-19. ELA proficiency declined from 37 percent to 31 percent (6 percentage points), and math proficiency declined from 31 percent to 19 percent (12 percentage points).

### Change in learning outcomes for D.C.'s elementary school cohort as they move to middle school

Average change from Grade 3 to Grade 6, Grade 4 to Grade 7, and Grade 5 to Grade 8



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). District of Columbia Statewide Assessment Results presentations for 2014-15, 2015-16, 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2021-22. Retrieved from <https://osse.dc.gov/page/data-and-reports-0>

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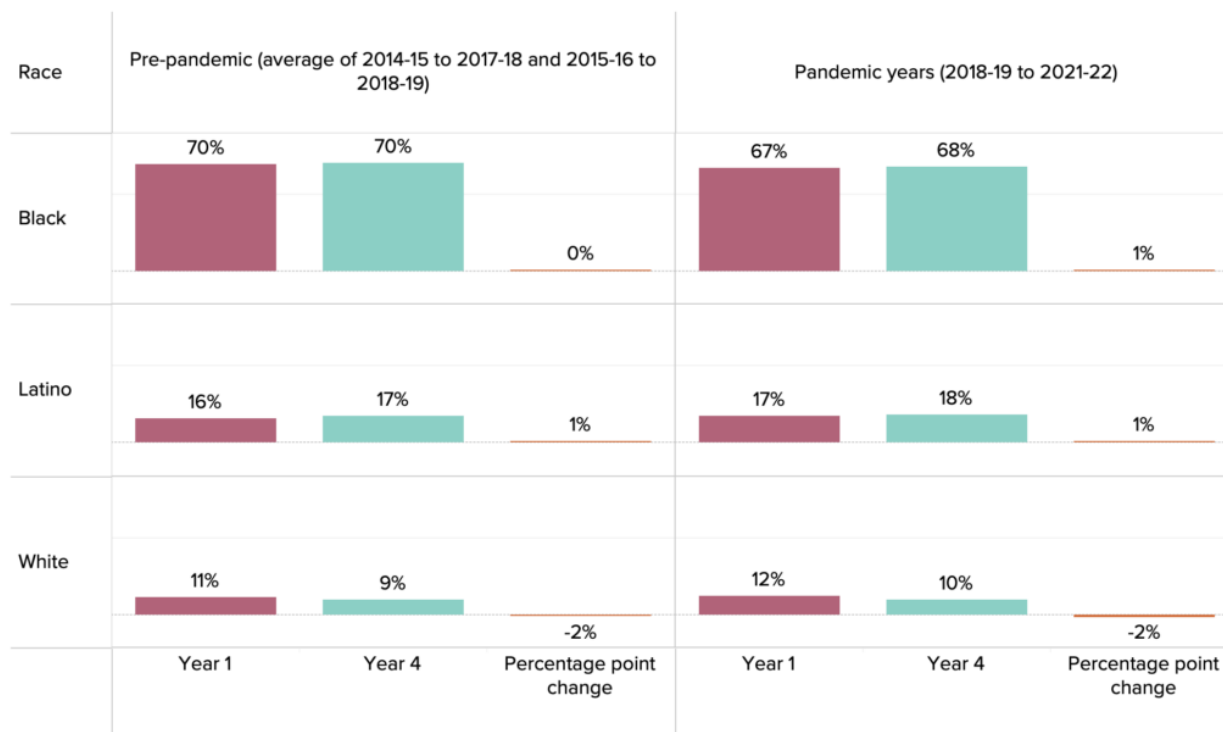
In addition to the system-level learning outcomes change, we see that learning outcomes for a cohort of students as they moved from lower to upper grades decreased by larger amounts. Generally, we would like to see an upward trend in learning outcomes, with more students meeting or exceeding expectations as they move to upper grades. However, comparing PARCC results for elementary school students (grades 3, 4, and 5) to middle school students (grades 6, 7, and 8) three years later, we see the decline by cohort is larger than the system’s decline.<sup>2</sup> Before the pandemic, when students moved from elementary to middle school over a three-year period, their learning outcomes improved, on average, 11 percentage points in ELA, but declined on average 8 percentage points in math. After the pandemic, progress in both subjects weakened for the same cohort. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations *decreased* by 3 percentage points in ELA (the

<sup>2</sup> This is a look at the publicly available data. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has looked at student-level data for those who were tested in both years, with a similar finding that students were less likely to remain or become proficient during the pandemic than in previous years in both ELA and math.

opposite of the gains experienced by previous cohorts) and decreased by 21 percentage points in math (a steeper decrease than pre-pandemic).

**Change in race and ethnicity for D.C.'s elementary school cohort as they move to middle school**

Average change from Grade 3 to Grade 6, Grade 4 to Grade 7, and Grade 5 to Grade 8



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Common Core of Data (CCD) Membership Files for 2014-15, 2015-16, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2021-22. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>

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It doesn't appear that these learning outcomes changes by cohort are shaped by demographic shifts. Although the student population has become smaller than usual, it has not shifted that much by race and ethnicity. From school year 2018-19 to school year 2021-22, this student cohort shrank by 12 percent as the elementary school students (in tested grades 3, 4, and 5 only) became middle school students (in grades 6, 7, and 8). During this same transition before the pandemic, 8 percent of these elementary school students would leave before middle school, meaning it is a 4 percentage point increase in those who leave.<sup>3</sup> By race and ethnicity, the composition of elementary school students shifted by middle school during the pandemic to be 68 percent Black (1 percentage point increase), 18 percent Latino (1 percentage point increase) and 10 percent white (2 percentage point decrease. This

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Common Core of Data (CCD) Membership Files for 2014-15, 2015-16, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2021-22. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>

is similar to shifts before the pandemic, meaning that there wasn't a huge exodus of one race or ethnicity during the pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

**Looking at changes in learning outcomes for elementary and middle school cohorts reveals a different side of the magnitude of learning loss, showing that it is not just math where students experienced a serious decline.** While learning outcomes in math declined for all students by 12 percentage points, double the amount of the decline in ELA, following cohorts of students with the publicly available data shows that there were larger than usual declines in ELA as well. Instead of an additional 11 out of 100 elementary school students meeting expectations in ELA by middle school, now 3 fewer out of 100 elementary school students meet these expectations when they are in middle school, making it important to focus on both ELA, including early literacy, and math during recovery in terms of learning after the pandemic. To examine progress, we need to look at longitudinal results for students along the way.

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

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<sup>4</sup> Data are not available by grade for students who are designated as at-risk.