

The first year of Equitable Access: An examination of common lottery outcomes for at-risk students

D.C. POLICY CENTER
Education Policy Initiative

In school year 2022-23, D.C. introduced an Equitable Access (EA) option in the common lottery for public schools.

Schools that adopt the EA option commit to prioritizing applications from students who are designated as “at-risk.” Earlier studies conducted by the D.C. Policy Center’s Education Policy Initiative showed that an EA option can increase access to schools with low at-risk enrollment shares and long waitlists, and help increase socioeconomic diversity in schools. Schools first offered an EA option in the applications for academic year 2022-23. Here is what we learned from this first year:

SCHOOLS

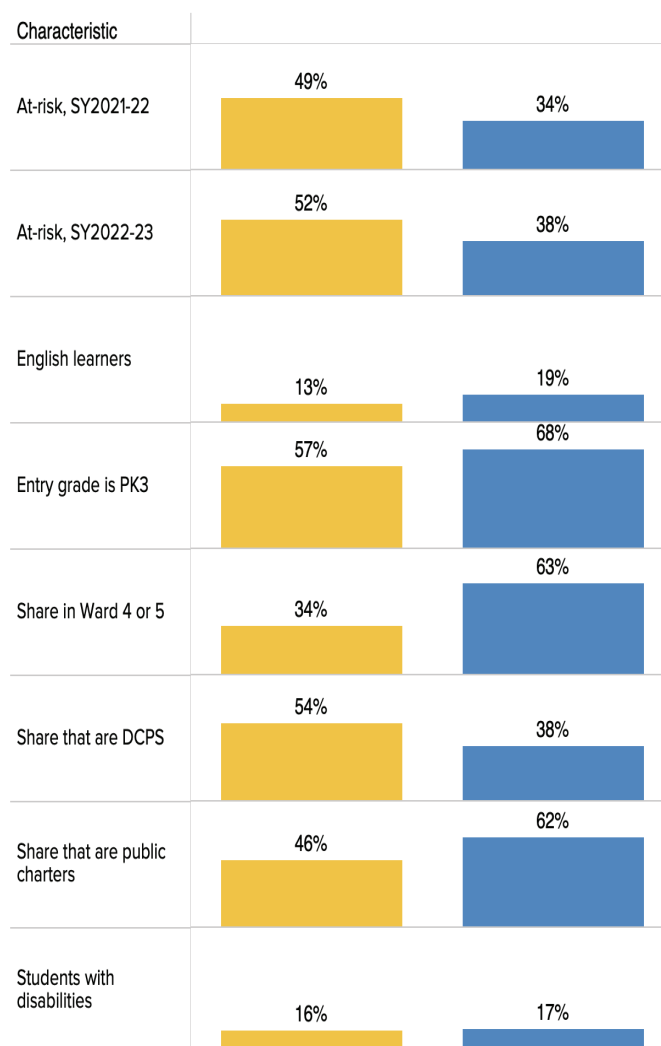
- ➔ **25 of 251** schools opted into EA in school year 2022-23.
- ➔ These schools typically enrolled a lower proportion of at-risk students at **38%** compared to the District-wide average of **52%**.
- ➔ EA schools have longer waitlists in their entry grades, with an average of **128 applicants** compared to **70 applicants** across all schools.

COMMON LOTTERY

- ➔ Of the 33,525 applicants in the common lottery, **47%** were at-risk.
- ➔ The share of common lottery applications from at-risk students increased by **more than 8 percentage points** between school years 2021-22 and 2022-23.
- ➔ Applications from at-risk students **more than doubled** across all EA schools. Schools in Wards 1, 4, 5, and 6 saw the biggest increase.
- ➔ EA matches were more likely to result in student enrollment compared to overall matches from the common lottery. **59%** of EA-matched students matriculated compared to **55%** across all seats.

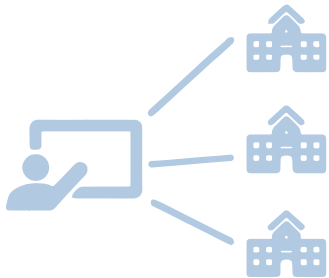
Profile of EA schools compared to all schools

School year 2022-23 unless otherwise noted



Source: D.C. Policy Center analysis of OSSE enrollment data, My School DC data, and DME’s EdScape data.

For those applying in the common lottery, schools have two primary methods to give priority to at-risk students. They can opt for an **at-risk preference** integrated into the common lottery, or they can reserve **designated seats** for at-risk students and keep these seats exclusively open for at-risk students.

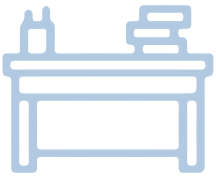


ACCESS

- Six schools filled **17%** of their seats via an EA preference in the common lottery.
- 19 schools filled, on average, **18%** of their seats, through designated seats.

DIVERSITY

- ✓ The EA option helped increase the share of students who are at-risk in their entry grades for most schools.
- ✓ **14 of the 25** EA schools had so few at-risk students (fewer than 10 at-risk students in their entry grade) in previous years that the Office of State Superintendent of Education would not even disclose the number of at-risk students.
- ✓ Eight of these schools were able to increase the share of at-risk students in their entry grade to **29%** (an average of 16 at-risk students) after adopting the EA option.



REFLECTIONS

- Schools reported that the first-year EA outcomes were in line with their goals of increasing diversity, access, or enrollment.
- Many schools offered additional resources to support at-risk students, with a plan to increase their EA enrollment goals in the following year.

YEAR TWO AND BEYOND

- ✓ Nine additional schools offered the EA option at the 2023 common lottery (Year 2 of EA).
- ✓ Preliminary analyses shows that EA matches in year 2 increased to **583**.
- ✓ The DME's Boundary and Student Assignment Study of 2023 is considering EA as one of their recommendations for schools serving a certain share of at-risk students.



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Read the full report

The First Year of Equitable Access: An examination of Common Lottery outcomes for at-risk students is available online:

dcpolicycenter.org/publications/first-year-of-equitable-access-dc/