D.C. POLICY CENTER

Education Policy Initiative

PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING

ADULT WORKFORCE EDUCATION IN THE DISTRICT

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

November 20th, 2pm

Hearing Room 412

John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Chelsea Coffin

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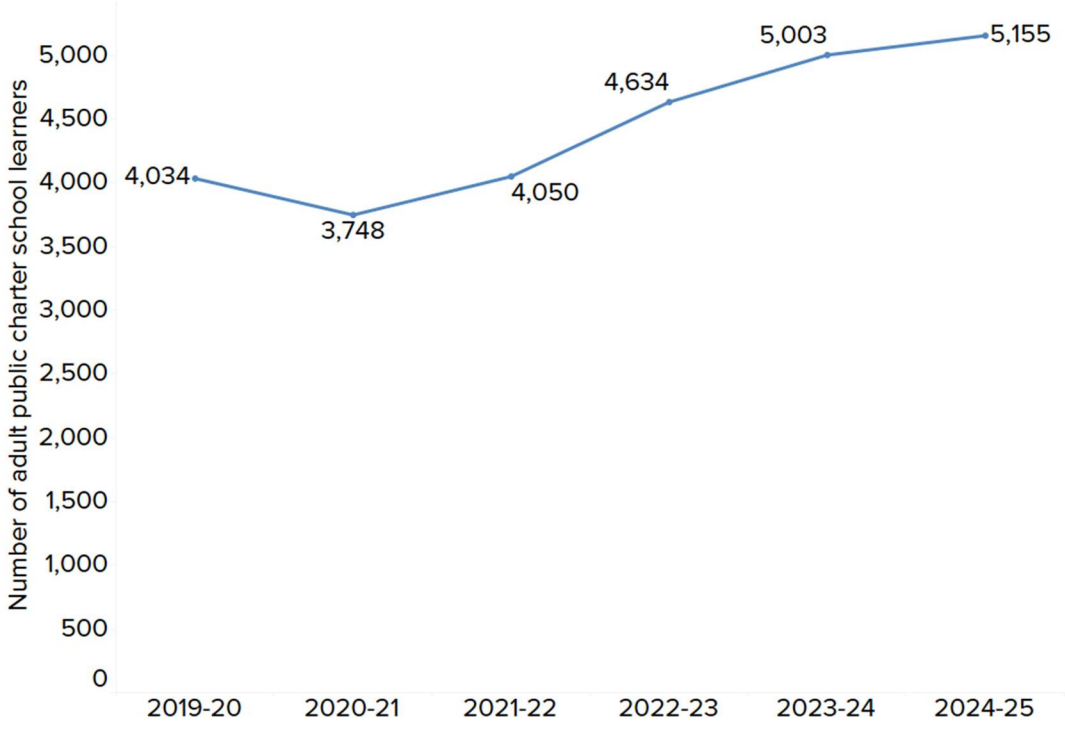
Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Chelsea Coffin, and I am the Deputy Director at the D.C. Policy Center, an independent think tank focused on advancing policies for a growing, vibrant, and compelling District of Columbia. My testimony today focuses on how adult public charter schools are part of adult workforce education in the District, summarizing findings from our report, *D.C.'s adult public charter schools: Who they serve, how they serve, and what they achieve*[i] with some updates.

D.C. is unique in offering adult public charter schools that are funded in the same way as PK-12 schools. Nine such schools in D.C. serve over 5,000 adult learners through a combination of academic and workforce supports, and connect learners to postsecondary and workforce opportunities. These schools complement other offerings at training programs and alternative schools, and represent 5 percent of all public school students. Enrollment is growing: Aside from a school year 2020-21 dip, adult learners have increased by 28 percent over pre-pandemic levels.

Enrollment in D.C.'s adult public charter schools, over time



Source: OSSE enrollment audit data.

Unlike PK-12 students, the majority of adult learners are Latino (an estimated 53 percent), followed by 44 percent of learners who are Black as of school year 2024-25. According to a 2020 survey, these schools tend to serve residents who are learning English and parents: 70 percent of adult learners reported speaking a language other than English at home and 54 percent reported being parents of school-age children in a survey. Most adult learners live Wards 4 and 8 and attend school in Ward 1.

Adult public charter schools matter for improving economic mobility in D.C. because they can provide a bridge to college, a first job, or a better job. Looking at outcomes data from school year 2021-22 or the most recent available year, at schools offering pathways to a high school equivalency certificate, a median of 71 percent of those who took a secondary credential test, such as the GED or NEDP, passed. Attaining a high school diploma can boost incomes for D.C. residents by $5,000 and open the gate to a postsecondary degree, which can boost incomes above a high school diploma by $46,000. At schools offering literacy and numeracy instruction, a median of 61 percent of enrolled learners advanced their literacy and numeracy skills. At schools offering English language instruction, a median of 64 percent of ESL learners improved their English language competency.

Adult public charter schools also offer workforce and postsecondary supports, **including helping adult learners acquire career assets that employers value and enrolling learners in credential-granting programs in healthcare, construction, and IT.** In school year 2018-19, 76 percent of adult learners who completed adult public charter schools got a job for the first time or enrolled in a postsecondary institution.

Even with this success, adult learners face many barriers to enrolling and staying enrolled, most commonly related to economic pressures and stress. In interviews, school leaders identified changing work schedules, the need to work additional hours, availability of quality childcare, housing, and transportation as common barriers for adult learners. Adult public charter schools provide a variety of supports to encourage greater persistence and to help learners navigate local resources, including rolling enrollment options, hybrid

schedules, and reenrollment opportunities for learners whose learning was interrupted; connections to food, healthcare, and childcare resources; community building within the school, sometimes bringing multiple generations together; and tools immigrant parents can use when communicating with their children's teachers.

Adult public charter schools should continue to be considered a crucial part of the adult workforce education landscape. They have strong results for a population in need of an alternative setting to attain their high school diploma, learn English, increase their literacy and numeracy skills, acquire a credential, and more—as acknowledged by the recent increase to the adult weight in the per pupil funding formula. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to any questions

[i] Coffin, C. and Rubin, J. 2023. *D.C.'s adult public charter schools: Who they serve, how they serve, and what they achieve*. D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/adult-charters/