



D.C. POLICY CENTER

Education Policy Initiative

**B26-0592 - LOTTERY PREFERENCE FOR FAMILIES IMPACTED BY
SCHOOL CLOSURES AMENDMENT ACT OF 2026**

July 6th, 2026

Hearing Room 412 (Track B)

John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Chelsea Coffin

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D.C. Policy Center

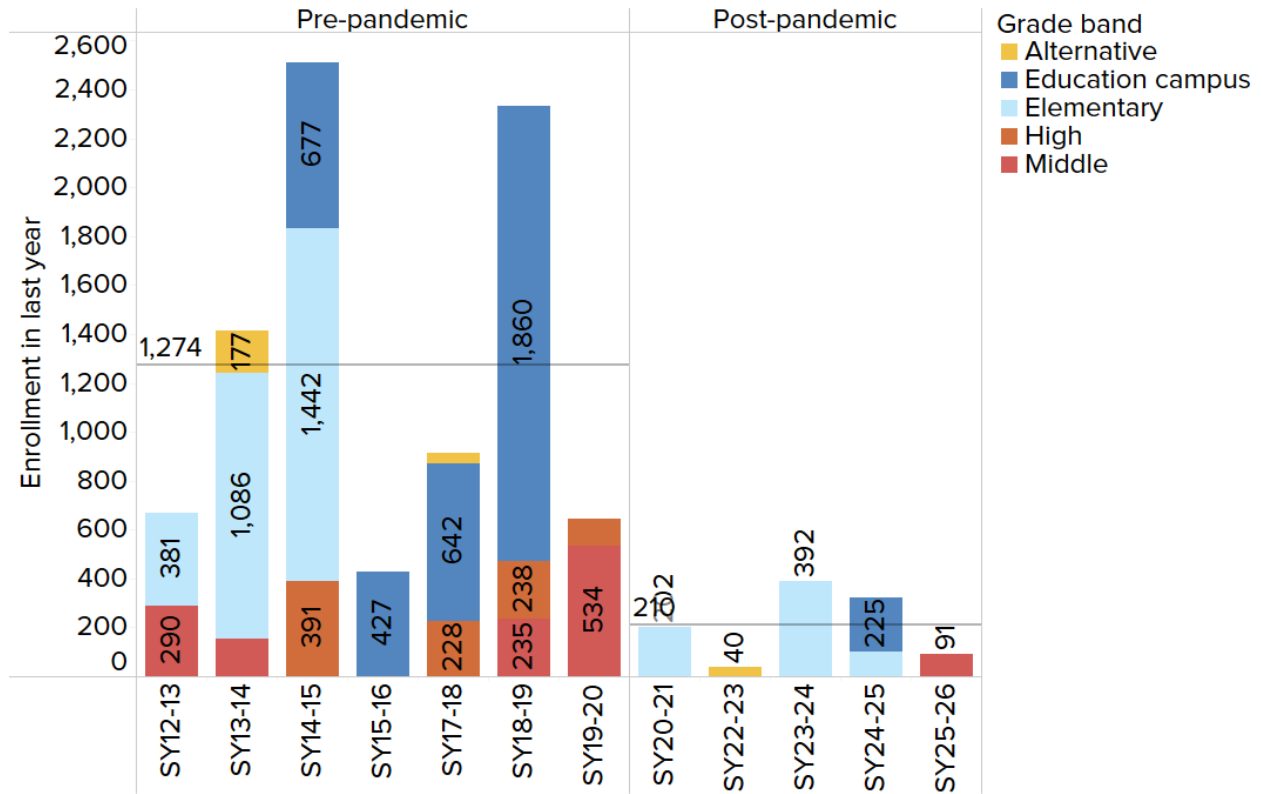
Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the

Whole. My name is Chelsea Coffin, and I am the Deputy Director of the D.C. Policy Center, an independent think tank focused on advancing policies for a growing, vibrant, and compelling District of Columbia. Today, I will highlight why and under which circumstances a lottery preference for students who attend closing schools matters, as well as potential incentives for public charter LEAs to opt in to offering this preference.

As context, this lottery preference for children who attend closing schools will likely be increasingly relevant in the coming years as the number of closures may increase.

In the past five school years since the pandemic, between one and two public charter campuses (1.4 per year) have closed in D.C., with an average enrollment of 210 students. This is lower than the pre-pandemic level of between four and five public charter campuses (4.7 per year) closing per year with an average enrollment of 1,274 students for two main reasons. First, statewide assessment results were not available for two years post-pandemic, limiting full academic accountability. Second, the DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB)'s shift to the new ASPIRE academic accountability system meant a pause in public reporting of school performance. Fully implementing ASPIRE for high-stakes accountability purposes with consistent statewide assessment results could increase public charter closures in the coming years.

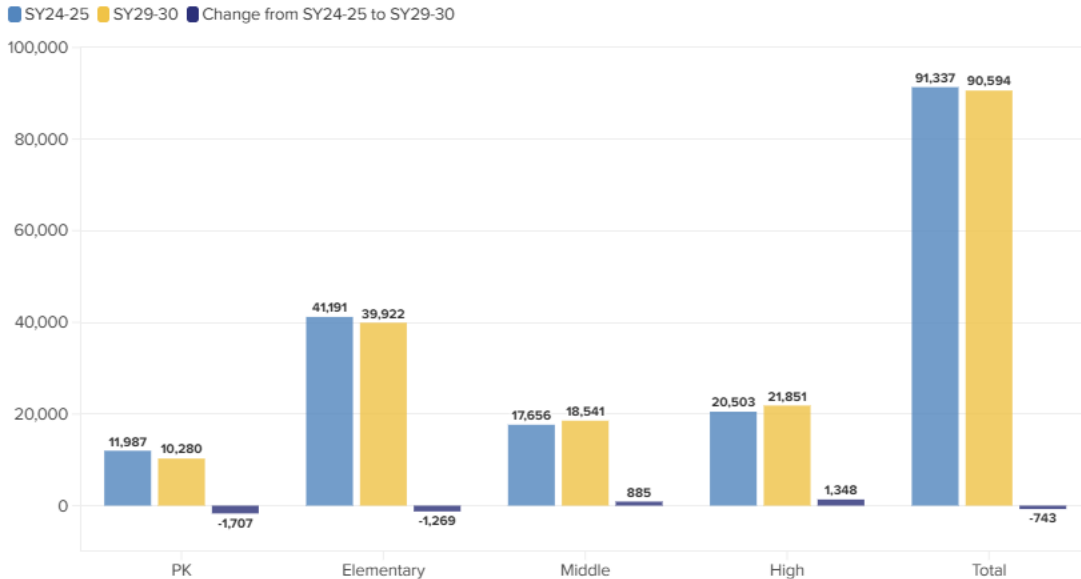
Closed public charter schools by grade band and year in D.C.



In addition to shifts in performance-based closures, potential enrollment declines in early grades could lead to financial strain. D.C. Policy Center

projections indicate an enrollment decline of around 3,000 students in pre-kindergarten and elementary school grades over the next five years, the equivalent of seven to eight elementary schools.ⁱ This could mean that some under-enrolled schools are more prone to closure due to lower revenues and increased financial pressures, especially if the per pupil funding amount increases at rates lower than inflation as projected in the financial plan.

Projected Change in Enrollment by Gradeband from SY2024-25 to SY2029-30



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Enrollment Audit FY 2025.
<https://osse.dc.gov/enrollment>
 Projected enrollment is calculated by DC Policy Center.



Even if the number of students impacted by closures hovers around 210 annually, this is still a significant number, larger than the number of students who benefit from a special education preference (fewer than 20 annually) or military preference (fewer than 50 annually). Previous D.C. Policy Center modeling on application patterns has shown that preferences like the Equitable Access preference (providing priority to students who are designated as at-risk) can have a meaningful impact on individual students,ⁱⁱ even if the impact across the system is small—as almost one-third of schools did not have waitlists in their entry grades last school year (and an estimated two-thirds had fewer than 10 names),ⁱⁱⁱ meaning a preference is not necessary to have a spot.^{iv} In addition to having a waitlist, a closure preference only matters if public charter schools are offering seats in grades outside of

entry grades and if closures are noticed well in advance of common lottery application deadlines: early February for high school and early March for elementary and middle school grades.

I close with two recommendations. First, allow public charter LEAs to opt into the preference as is the case with the other seven main types of preferences currently available in the lottery. Requiring public charter LEAs to offer this preference would be a divergence from the norm and from DCPS practices. If there is a concern that no public charter LEAs would opt in, perhaps the District could offer a one-time funding weight through the per pupil funding formula for students who attended closed schools, with approval required from DC PCSB to offer the preference (similar to the process for Equitable Access). Second, speak with DCPS to see if they are considering this preference, including at their eight citywide schools as well as their nine selective high schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions you have.

ⁱ Coffin, C., & Imran, A. (2026, March 26). *Updating D.C.'s enrollment projections: Trends, methodology, and implications*. D.C. Policy Center. <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/updating-dcs-enrollment-projections-trends-methodology-and-implications/>

ⁱⁱ In the case of Equitable Access, a preference matters at schools with waitlists, potentially increasing match rates at in-demand schools from as low as 4 percent to as high as 42 percent.

ⁱⁱⁱ D.C. Policy Center analysis of data retrieved from: My School DC. (2026). *MSDC seats and waitlist offer data* [Data visualization]. Tableau Public. https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/aaron2446/viz/MSDCSeatsandWaitlistOfferData_draft/MSDCPublicDisplay

^{iv} Coffin, C. (2020, November 18). *At-risk application patterns in D.C.'s common lottery*. D.C. Policy Center. <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/at-risk-applications/>