



D.C. POLICY CENTER

Education Policy Initiative

2026 PERFORMANCE OVERSIGHT HEARING
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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Hearing Room 412 (Track B)

John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Anoosha Imran

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

My name is Anoosha Imran, and I am the Data Analyst at the D.C. Policy Center, an independent think tank focused on advancing policies for a growing, vibrant, and compelling District of Columbia. Growth in enrollment is generally seen as an indicator of system health for public schools. Higher growth means schools can receive more funding (all else staying the same) and more students mean different education models can become scalable.

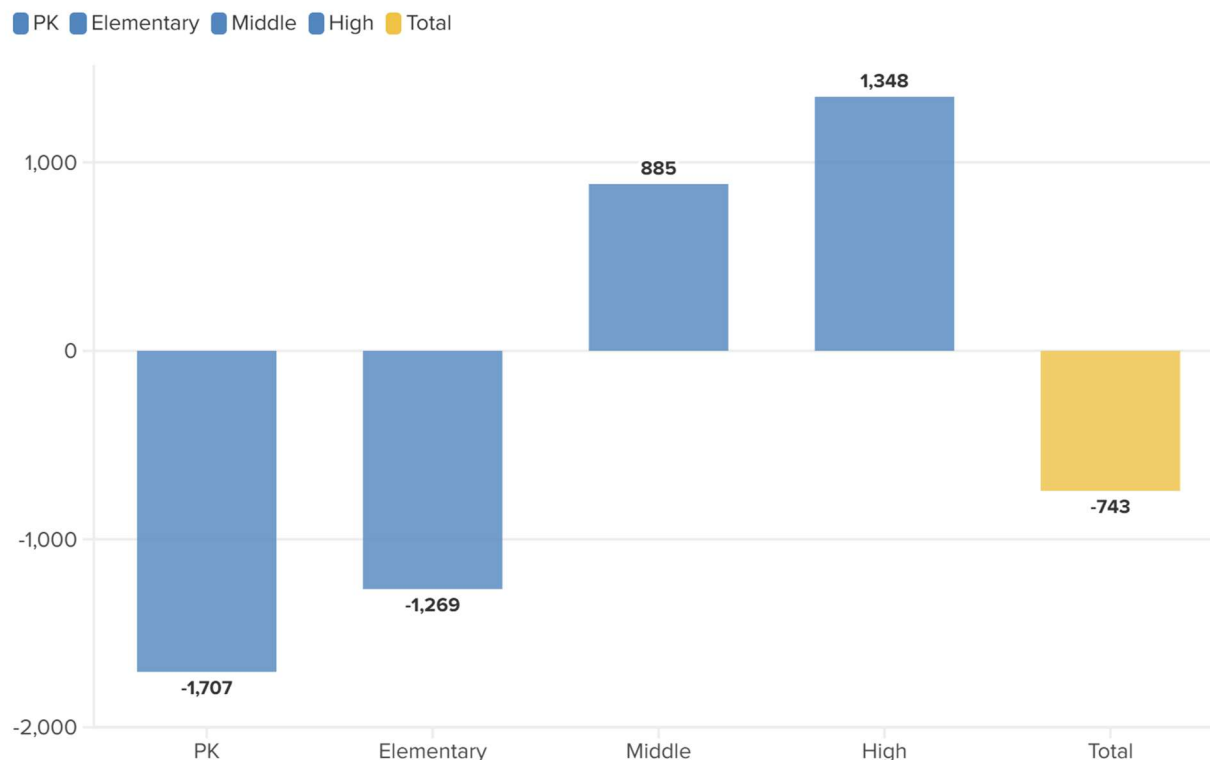
In my testimony, I am going to present the D.C. Policy Center’s 5-year enrollment projections for D.C.’s public schools. The last time these projections were developed was 2024 by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) and much has changed since then.ⁱ

D.C. has experienced strong enrollment growth over the past three school years, compared to the nation and neighboring jurisdictions.^{ii, iii} From school years 2022-23 to 2024-25, public school enrollment in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 increased by 2,809 students, growing by 3.2 percent, or an average of 1.6 percent per year. This trend remains stronger for upper grades. High school and middle school enrollment grew by approximately 9 percent and 4 percent, respectively, between school years 2022-23 and 2024-25. In contrast, growth in earlier grades was more modest, with pre-kindergarten enrollment increasing by 1.2 percent and elementary enrollment rising by 2.1 percent over the same period.

The weak growth rates among younger cohorts is now shaping the future of enrollment growth in D.C.’s public schools. The 2024 DME projections were already predicting weaker enrollment growth—a modest increase of about 276 students between school years 2024-25 and 2029-30. We now project a *decline* of 743 students over that same period. This difference is driven by births declining at even faster rates: The D.C. Policy Center’s updated birth projections show fewer projected births in D.C. over the relevant years compared to D.C.’s official projections.

Declining births are not new. Births have been decreasing steadily since 2016. What is new is that these declines have been deeper (2 to 3 percent annually) and have lasted longer (ten years in a row) than what was projected. These smaller cohorts are now moving through pre-kindergarten and elementary school.^{iv} As a result, early grades are stagnating or shrinking, while middle and high school enrollment—driven by larger, earlier cohorts—continues to grow.

D.C. Policy Center’s five-year enrollment projections (school year 2024-25 to 2029-30)



The projected decline in enrollment has significant implications for future budgets at D.C.’s public schools. Because the District allocates funding through the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF), enrollment changes translate directly into fiscal impacts, keeping available resources constant. Declines in early grades could leave some schools underutilized, while growth in secondary grades raises demand for teachers, specialized programs, and facility capacity. The system is simultaneously contracting and expanding, requiring deliberate, forward-looking planning rather than reactive adjustments.

Several broader demographic and economic factors suggest enrollment declines will be difficult to turn around over the projection period.^v Affordability, the production of family-sized units, and migration shape the number of school-aged children living in the District. While faster migration could offset the decline in births, recent data suggests that this is unlikely since domestic out-migration has remained negative since 2020. Although international migration rebounded after the pandemic, it has also recently been declining, limiting its ability to offset losses.^{vi}

Additionally, the current housing pipeline suggests slower growth ahead rather than expansion.^{vii} A strong housing pipeline reflects expectations of increased demand driven by population and household growth.

Also, employment in the District has not fully recovered from pre-pandemic levels, and potential federal workforce reductions may further dampen population growth.^{viii} A strong labor market and high levels of hiring can attract families and support demographic growth.

Finally, private school trends do not show sustained growth or contraction that would meaningfully alter public sector enrollment forecasts. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, published through DME’s EdScape portal, approximately 16 percent of students attended private schools in 2019. That number declined during the pandemic, then rebounded sharply in 2022 before moderating in 2023. There is no clear evidence of large-scale “flight” to private schools or a significant shift back to public schools.

Together, these trends suggest that D.C.’s public school enrollment is undergoing a structural transition. The Council should continue to look to the DME and Office of Planning for updated enrollment projections and births to inform strategies for alignment of facility use in early grades, like repurposing space for early childhood, adult education, or community services. Additionally, staffing policies should reflect this new enrollment reality. The District should look into aligning staffing with the updated projections to avoid over-hiring in grades that are facing sustained enrollment declines and focus on targeted investments like early literacy, multilingual learners, or special education, rather than across-the-board staffing growth.

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

ⁱ Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME). 2025. “2024 Master Facilities Plan Supplement.” DME. Retrieved from <https://dme.dc.gov/publication/2024-master-facilities-plan-supplement>

ⁱⁱ Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). 2025. “Fall Membership Build-A-Table.” Retrieved from https://p1pe.doe.virginia.gov/apex_captcha/home.do?apexTypeId=304

ⁱⁱⁱ Maryland State Department of Education. 2024. *Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender/Number of Schools*. Retrieved from <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20242025Student/2024-2025-Enrollment-By-Race-Ethnicity-Gender-A.pdf>

^{iv} Imran, Anoosha. 2025. *Chart of the week: Projecting future births and young children in D.C.* Updated February 5, 2026. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/chart-of-the-week-projecting-future-births-and-young-children-in-dc/>

^v Office of Revenue Analysis. 2026. *Economic and revenue trend reports: January 2026*. Retrieved from <https://ora-cfo.dc.gov/publication/economic-and-revenue-trend-reports-january-2026>

^{vi} Burge, Daniel. 2026. *Chart of the week: D.C.’s population growth slowed in 2025—and key trends are concerning*. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/chart-of-the-week-dc-population-growth-slowed-key-trends-concerning/>

^{vii} Office of Revenue Analysis, Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO). 2026. “Economic and Revenue Trend Reports, January 2026.” OCFO. Retrieved from <https://ora-cfo.dc.gov/publication/economic-and-revenue-trend-reports-january-2026>

^{viii} Burge, D. and Sayin, Y. 2025. “Is the District of Columbia still competitive?”. D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/is-the-district-of-columbia-still-competitive/>